Wilkie Collins Society Journal

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Wilkie Collins Society Journal

The *Wilkie Collins Society Journal* is an annual volume, sponsored jointly by the Wilkie Collins Society and the Wilkie Collins Society of North America, and is dedicated to original scholarly essays and reviews of publications relating to Wilkie Collins, his writings, and his culture.

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The editors invite articles (not more than 6,000 words) or notes (not more than 2,500 words) which should be sent to one of the postal addresses provided below. All manuscripts should follow the *MLA Style Manual*, and be submitted on a standard computer diskette (MS-DOS Format, with Microsoft Word or Word Perfect) plus one paper copy, and should not be under consideration for publication elsewhere. Please note that the e-mail addresses provided should be used for enquiries only, not for submissions.

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Wilkie Collins Society Journal

New Series, Volume 4, 2001

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Editors' Note

This year's issue of the *Wilkie Collins Society Journal* foregrounds the importance of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Victorian studies generally and to Collins studies in particular, with Natalie Kapetanios's comparative approach to the subject of hunger and closure in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and Collins's *Armadale*, and Richard S. Albright's article on depictions of writing in Braddon's fiction. Emma Liggins's essay on the intertwined constructions of gender and suicide focuses on Collins's crime fiction, while also revealing the complex relationship between his representation of "wayward women" and those in mid-Victorian suicide reports. With their original and diverse approaches to sensation and crime fiction, these articles testify to the flourishing state of Collins studies, as do the numerous reviews of recent books relevant to Collins that are included in this issue. As these reviews make clear, Collins's growing importance to Victorian studies derives from various sources, and includes the significance of his works to Victorian publishing history, to conceptions of class identity and domestic violence, to the genre of detective fiction and the development of forensic science, and to the discourse of empire and geopolitics. We hope you enjoy reading this collection.

Lillian Nayder
Graham Law

is not a single mention of Régis Messac's monumental *Le "Detective Novel" et l'influence de la pensée scientifique* (1929), which—though it obviously belongs to a very different intellectual universe—can make a claim to have been the first work of modern scholarship to stake out the ground that Thomas maps so precisely here. But perhaps, with so much already on offer, it might seem mere greed to ask for more.

Graham Law
Waseda University

Recent and Forthcoming Books
among those to be reviewed in the following issue of the

WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY JOURNAL

Phyllis Weliver
Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900:
Representations of Music, Science and Gender
in the Leisured Home.
Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, January 2001
Hardcover ISBN: 0-7546-0126-9 340 pages $79.95

Lillian Nayder
Unequal Partners:
Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship.
Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, January 2002
Hardcover ISBN: 0-8014-3925-6 248 pages $35.00

~~Articles~~

Her Resolution to Die: "Wayward Women" and Constructions of Suicide in Wilkie Collins's Crime Fiction

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Nineteenth-century representations of female suicide exposed a series of contradictory links between women's waywardness and social class. Whilst suicide reports in the mid-Victorian press tended to emphasize social and medical readings of the crime, Wilkie Collins used the genres of sensation fiction and detective fiction to explore the connections between crime, gender and class, focussing particularly on the sexuality of the suicidal woman. Lyn Pykett has noted the subversive potential of his fiction in terms of its blurring of gender boundaries, so that his "bold, assertive and/or devious and scheming heroines and villainesses" slip between "vulnerable, dependent femininity" and its "disruptive" counterpart (20, 14, 17). In their discussions of his interest in crime and gender, however, most critics have largely ignored his examination of suicidal women, preferring to focus on women who attempt murder, fraud, adultery or bigamy. Collins's fascination with suicide is indicative of a wider interest in the conventions of crime reporting in the press, and the inclusion of such sensational material became part of his project to extend the limits of what was acceptable in bourgeois fiction. Drawing on contemporary crime reports, he also attempted to think beyond social and medical explanations of female suicide, as his fiction suggests that the links between femininity, sexual frustration and the suicidal impulse must also be examined.

Mid-Victorian suicide reports and wayward femininity

Collins's novels then draw upon and rewrite contemporary crime reports from the press, which aimed to "explain" female suicide primarily in terms of social deprivation and temporary insanity. Polarized versions of suicide organized around stereotypes of gendered behaviour and anxieties prevailed, as statistically men killed themselves through worries over employment or money, whereas women reacted to sexual or emotional

problems (Anderson, 196). However, women's problems were also often to do with money rather than men. A high proportion of female suicides were young, working-class women, particularly servant girls; explanations such as "misery and privation" (*Illustrated Police News*, 4 June 1870, 3) or being short of money and "in want of food" (*Illustrated Police News*, 20 Feb 1864, 3) were common. Unregulated female sexuality was sometimes emphasized in the reports, which could then reinforce social policies for regulating female waywardness. Entrenched associations between suicide and the fallen woman, popularized in high art, cheap fiction and melodramas, also influenced styles of reporting. A series of famous paintings, such as G.F. Watts's "Found Drowned" (1850), depicted drowned women as erotic spectacles and thus promoted the "seduction to suicide" mythology, which had become "almost clichéd" by the end of the 1860s (Nead, 188, 190-1). Reports increasingly commented on the mental states of women and used telling phrases such as "in a low desponding state of mind" and "her mind weakened" to describe the disposition of suicides; some ended their lives after being advised by doctors to travel for health reasons. Shifts in the definition of insanity, which came to mean "psychological disturbance of a certain kind, rather than brain disease," made it much easier for criminal women to be classified as insane by mid-century, and this had far-reaching effects on legal verdicts (Smith, 149; Gates, 13-14). The "weak" state of women's minds and bodies could then be linked to emotional distress of various kinds, so that narratives of suicide could also reveal women's dissatisfaction with their domestic or marital roles or femininity in general. As Lucia Zedner has argued, female crime at mid-century was considered in relation to "deviance from femininity," as contemporary reports and articles illustrated "the tendency to assess female crime not according to the act committed or the damage done but according to how far a woman's behaviour contravened the norms of femininity" (28).

Whilst crime reports then cited lack of money, derangement, sexual irregularity and dissatisfaction with femininity as possible explanations for female suicide, the wider connections between crime, gender, class and female sexuality were rarely explored. A comparison between two cases of suicide by drowning demonstrates the contradictory messages such reports offered. The first case is the death of Sarah Tubb, taken from a *Times* report of 1835:

> It appeared that she was the daughter of respectable parents residing at Hackney, and for several months had been addressed by a young man named Hinsby, who, under promises of marriage, effected her ruin. Such conduct deeply affected the deceased, and finding herself *enceinte*, she absconded from her home, and terminated her existence by drowning herself. After wandering about apparently in great distress of mind, she was observed by a gentleman to throw herself into the river. Hinsby was severely reprimanded

> by the coroner and jury, and a verdict was returned, "That the deceased drowned herself while in a state of temporary derangement."
>
> (*The Times*, 23 Mar 1835, 4)

The associations of suicide with unwanted pregnancy had a place in the popular imagination as Olive Anderson has pointed out, although she maintains that such assumptions were contradicted by coroners' reports, which found relatively few female suicides to be pregnant (57, 59). As drowning was generally believed to be the "prostitute's way out," Sarah Tubb's respectability cannot be accounted for, so class issues are diverted onto medico-legal explanations. The verdict of "temporary derangement" nullifies the narrative of female agency; if the woman had been in the right state of mind, it is implied, she would have had second thoughts. In a similar case in the *Illustrated Police News* of 1870, a thirteen-year-old servant, Jane Johnson, "an attractive girl" who had been "taken notice of by gentlemen," is "found drowned" (29 Jan 1870, 4), though medical explanations for her behaviour are never explored. The medical examination reveals that she had been seduced but was not pregnant, which, combined with evidence from other witnesses, lead the coroner to conclude that "no doubt she was fond of gadding about" and "probably … was averse to work." Perhaps it is her working-class status and sexual precocity which preclude the medical explanation; although Sarah Tubb's pregnancy might be seen as a more comprehensible reason for committing suicide than Jane's dislike of work, her respectability has to be linked to derangement in order to pre-empt discussion of female suicide in the middle classes. Medicalized readings could then rob the act of its social resonances, typically stressing the diminished responsibility of the criminal woman (Smith, 149, 159).

It is also important to consider the different kinds of crime reporting in circulation at mid-century. Although daily newspapers such as *The Times* had become more sensationalized by the 1860s, popular weeklies such as the *Illustrated Police News*, established in 1864, with its lurid illustrated cover and melodramatic style of reporting, fed the public's appetite for scandalous narratives, which can be directly linked to the development of sensation fiction. Anderson suggests that suicide reports aimed at the new lower-middle classes concentrated on "domestic pathos," and that the "uniquely varied readership" of the mid-nineteenth century *Times* "was offered a worldly wise handling which emphasized the odd and the curious" (217). Reporters for *The Times* were less likely to comment on the sexual proclivities of the women involved, often providing shorter reports, which focussed on women's dissatisfaction with their marital roles. In an account of the "Extraordinary Suicide" of Mrs Grenshaw, a barrister's wife (31 May 1864, 12), we are told that whilst her husband has spent the day at the races, returning home "for the purpose of entertaining a party of friends," Mrs

Grenshaw has thrown herself and her child in front of a train on the way to visit relatives. The trend for mothers to commit suicide with their children underlines women's emotional investment in the family and potential anxieties surrounding their roles as wives and mothers. By contrast the *Illustrated London Clipper* of 1874 ran the story of a drunken Bristol prostitute who had taken laudanum after a "fit of depression consequent upon drink" (12 Dec 1874, 3). The woman was featured on the cover in a low-cut dress with no shoes on, gasping for breath, with a terrified client in the bed behind her; the report reinforced the point that "she was not alone" when she was discovered. Such titillating accounts provided a sensationalized alternative to the "domestic pathos" *of The Times*, demonstrating the different narratives of femininity which underpinned mid-century suicide reports.

Another significant aspect of these narratives of femininity was their commentary on female anger, often interpreted as derangement or waywardness rather than as a sign of women's dissatisfactions with their roles. The treatment of the suicidal tendencies of a young domestic servant described in *The Times* of January 1864 bears out these assertions. The "Wilful Woman" refusing to eat or move from the covered passage of a tollgate in Gainsborough is tested for insanity, "for in the event of her being pronounced deranged, the relieving officer would have the power to remove her by force, but, on an examination taking place, no evidence of insanity could be detected" (26 Jan 1864, 9). Arguably, it is only because her suicide attempt is prevented that she escapes the label; her history of suicide attempts, "fits of anger" and "a most ungovernable temper" can then be attributed to wilfulness, and the alternative explanation of female dissatisfaction edited out. Suicide is then potentially concealed because of the narrative of female anger which it may publicize; threats to the social order are dissipated by the control of women's violent inclinations. Moreover, no attempts were made to examine the links between this anger or dissatisfaction and women's social positions; as both servants and more respectable women exhibited this behaviour, it was taken to be indicative of a particular kind of femininity which might foster suicidal tendencies, rather than anything to do with class. The two women charged by the police for attempting to take their own lives in July 1861 were of contrasting social groups, but were specifically figured as representative by their unconventional behaviour. The class differences between the two women are then elided, as their suicide attempts brand them as "wayward women," reacting against a set of social restrictions common to all women. Ellen Greenwood who had taken laudanum was "well-known to the police" having been "several times charged at this court as a disorderly prostitute" (*The Times*, 29 July 1861, 11). The other woman being charged, Ann Herring, is from a "highly respectable family." The reporter's explanation that the parents "had done all they could to keep her at home; but she was very wayward and would not stop with them" privileges feminine waywardness over respectable femininity as an explanation for suicide. No

connection is established between respectability and the suicidal impulse; rather, Ann Herring becomes tainted with the judgement passed on Ellen Greenwood, as her waywardness is an alternative manifestation of the prostitute's disorder. Two short reports in the *Illustrated Police News* in 1874 about the drowning of respectably dressed women also failed to reconcile preconceptions about female suicide with middle-class femininity; no possible explanation is offered for why one of these "determined" women might be "crying bitterly, and … in a very excited state" (3 Jan 1874, 2; see also 20 June 1874, 3), though unusually, since it wasn't a very sensational case, she was pictured on the front cover of the issue in her distracted state on the Thames Embankment. At a time when the families of suicides, particularly those from respectable families, tried as hard as possible to conceal them (Jalland, 70), the social stigma of the crime and the potential narrative of class dissatisfaction are separated out from the middle class.

With his first-hand knowledge of the legal system and his developing interest in the female criminal, Collins made an important contribution to these debates about the causes of female suicide. In the following section I argue that his fiction of the 1860s and 1870s incorporated key developments in medico-legal perceptions of the crime, casting doubt on dominant mythologies of femininity authorized by contemporary crime reports. Changes in the law regarding suicide over the century reflected a growing leniency towards perpetrators, who came to be regarded and classified in terms of mental illness or responses to the changing urban environment rather than sin and criminality. From the 1860s onwards suicide was perceived to be more of a social problem than a crime (Gates, 60). Collins also refused to accept the labelling of suicidal women as simply mad or sexually indiscreet, addressing issues such as the connections between respectability and the suicidal impulse, and the psychology of servant girls, which contemporary crime reports usually avoided. The detective plot also enabled the reworking of ideologies of female sexuality by allowing suicidal women to tell their own stories. The narratives of female anger and dissatisfaction provided for the reader attempt to locate female waywardness or derangement in the social conditions of both servants and respectable women, complicating social and medical explanations for the crime.

Collins's portrayal of female suicides

In his fiction Collins focuses on suicides which elude easy interpretation in terms of class or sanity, highlighting the ways in which women's violence exposes their dissatisfaction with middle-class marriage as well as their unacknowledged sexual desires. His characteristic use of women's letters, diaries and testimonies alongside supposedly more "authoritative" and controlled male narratives ensures that their dissatisfaction is not always

mediated through male narrators. However, women's narratives are frequently "edited" and hence distorted before the reader has access to them, as detectives and members of the family conspire to produce acceptable versions of femininity. Gates suggests that suicide as a topic appealed to Collins "both because it was subversive and because it was an ultimate test of character" (Gates, 57), bringing into play questions of motivation, concealment and secrecy which were essential to the sensation text and detective fiction.[1] It also allowed him to focus on the links between femininity and appearance. Women's anxieties about their looks are frequently cited as a contributory factor to their decisions to kill themselves as the lack of male appreciation of the female body precipitates violence. Questions of social identity, however, can never be entirely excluded from classifications of the crime, as the suicidal impulse jars with contemporary codes of middle-class femininity.

In *The Moonstone* (1868), Rosanna Spearman's working-class credentials seem to perpetuate many of the assumptions about the social causes of the suicidal impulse: she is a prostitute's daughter with a criminal past, now working in domestic service. However, like many of Collins's women, her social identity is not fixed, as she has "just a dash of something that wasn't like a housemaid, and that *was* like a lady, about her" (55). Yet her death seems to underline her social position rather than question it, as if she has internalized the codes of the popular reading of her class–Jane Johnson, the servant girl "found drowned," also appears to have been influenced by sensational stories about women in distress (*Illustrated Police News*, 29 Jan 1870, 4). Though Rosanna Spearman has not been seduced, she has been sexually rejected by Franklin Blake and is obsessed with his "indifference" to her: we are told "it never seemed to occur to him to waste a look on Rosanna's plain face" (92). Despite this comment on the invisibility of Victorian servants and the futility of cross-class desire, her actions have to be explained in terms of wayward femininity, rather than class dissatisfaction. Servants may play crucial roles in crime plots in terms of providing clues and testimonies, but they are still treated as nobodies within the Victorian household and their sexualities either ignored or misunderstood (Trodd, 8, 66). Avoiding an examination of the sexuality of servants, both the police and Rosanna herself seek to explain her "mysterious conduct" in terms of derangement and feminine irrationality: "Is such madness as this to be accounted for?" (376). Rosanna's suicidal impulse should also be linked to the accusation of theft and the threat of exposure of her criminal past; similar cases in the press detail the suicide

[1] Gates claims that Collins became more interested in the issue of male suicide as he got older, particularly after the suicide of his close friend, the artist Edward Matthew Ward. Her analysis includes a discussion of the novel *"I Say No"*, published in three volumes in 1884, which deals with the concealment of the suicide of a man suffering from unrequited love.

attempts of "disorderly" women imprisoned for theft or felony (*Illustrated Police News*, 19 Feb 1870, 30 May 1874, 3). Although the official explanation is derangement, Collins also characteristically draws our attention to the social causes involved, implying that Rosanna's suicide comments on her anomalous position as an ex-criminal servant girl.

Where Collins deviates more obviously from the conventions of the crime report is in his inclusion of a detailed suicide note offering the woman's own explanation of her death, a technique he was to utilize in other novels to question contemporary interpretations of the act. Rather than endorsing perceptions of suicide as an entirely social problem, his examination of women's narratives and their misinterpretations implied that violence against the self could be read as an act of female defiance and a pertinent comment on women's experiences of sexual rejection and frustration. This subtext is endorsed by Betteredge who observes that the suicide note allows her to "speak for herself" (361) after being constantly classified by others. Rosanna's note seems on the surface to tell a predictable tale of class inferiority and jealousy of her pretty employer, yet it develops to detail the feelings of "degradation" and "loneliness" of a crippled ex-criminal trying to be a "reformed woman" and hence stranded between clashing versions of femininity. She ponders "which it would be hardest to do . . . to bear Mr Franklin Blake's indifference to me, or to jump into the quicksand and end it for ever in that way?" (374). Although the reader is aware of her feelings from reading the note in its entirety, Franklin himself is able to bear neither her recriminations nor her desire and only reads half of the narrative, signalling men's failure to confront the links between suicide and femininity.[2] Trodd argues that this is a typical scenario in Collins's crime fiction where "upper-class young men do their best to distance themselves from the nightmare narratives of the female servants, putting them away, giving them to other people to read" (86). She claims that such "genteel characters" offer "a behavioural guide to the reader" who should react to such sensational stories by "rejecting them, reading them selectively, [and] refusing the narrators their desired response" (95). However, this does not take sufficient account of the gendered implications of the rejections of such "nightmare narratives" of female distress. I would suggest that, far from encouraging readers to adopt the male stance of cruel

[2] Catherine Peters (310) has noted the changes in the manuscript version of this scene, which imply that Collins is trying to alert the reader to Blake's indifference. Originally Blake is overcome by remorse; part of the deleted passage reads: "I had cast on another – for all I knew as innocent as I was – the unendurable slur that had been cast on me. And there was the answer of the woman whose memory I had slandered. 'I love you'." Peters suggests that "the published version, by omitting this, reduces Blake's insight, making him a harder and less sympathetic character . . . His inability to confront the reality of Rosanna's love makes the reader indignant, and is meant to."

indifference to women's suicidal impulses, Collins is in effect urging them to reconsider medico-legal explanations of the crime and to consider the alternative explanations of class dissatisfaction or sexual rejection. Rosanna's case suggests that the suicides of servant girls do not always adhere to the stereotypes of sensational narratives, but may reveal alternative accounts of working-class female sexuality.

Women's voices are then employed to contest notions of suicide as motivated solely by derangement and to prompt a reexamination of the uncertainties of female social and sexual identity. As Margaret Higonnet has argued, "To take one's life is to force others to read one's death" (68), not to signal one's loss of sanity. In *Armadale* (1866) and *The Law and the Lady* (1875), the deaths of middle-class women need to be read in terms of the relationship between respectability, female desire and the suicidal impulse. Lydia, the criminal heroine of *Armadale*, has risen from her lowly origins as a lady's maid through a career of fraud and bigamy to become the wife of the middle-class Midwinter, intending to use him as a pawn in her latest scheme. Her transgressive nature is however checked by her love for her husband as "the strong, resourceful, independent woman is made vulnerable and dependent by sexual desire and romantic love" (Pykett, 27). Lydia's nature is marked both by her criminal intentions and her uncontrollable sexuality, making her a prime candidate for feminine waywardness. By staging her own suicide by drowning, she draws on sensational narratives of men's perfidy: "Does a woman not love, when the man's hardness to her drives her to drown herself?" (490). But her rehearsal of the role of prostitute-victim is not convincing, as it jars with her respectable appearance: "though most respectably dressed, she had nevertheless described herself as being 'in distress'" and persisted in "telling a commonplace story, which was manifestly an invention" (80). The middle-class suicidal woman, however wayward, threatens received conceptions of respectable behaviour and her story then becomes distorted, as the public refuses to confront the combination of "respectability" and "distress".

Expectations about suicide and femininity are however endorsed in the conclusion of the novel where Lydia's death is represented in terms of medical control of female wilfulness. Far from achieving the great murder that has been her motivating force throughout *Armadale*, her final scene is a successful staging of her own death, a triumph in a different kind of crime. The female suicide is a more acceptable model of the criminal woman than the murderess. As Lydia's restlessness is channelled into suicide, it gradually coalesces with the madness she must dissemble in Doctor le Doux's Sanatorium. As Higonnet argues, "to medicalize suicide is to feminize it" (70), where the suicidal female body can be read as a sign of woman's passivity and tenuous grip on selfhood. Although this might seem to contradict Collins's attitudes to medical explanations of suicide, it seems that he is exploring the ease with which women's dissatisfactions can be

(mis)read as derangement, which can then be regulated. In both Collins's novels, the use of poisons such as laudanum and arsenic is given a specifically feminine appeal. Both Lydia and Sara in *The Law and the Lady* take sleeping-draughts or laudanum to calm their nerves; Sara is confined to her bed for most of the novel, suffering from a rheumatic complaint which requires constant medication. The overdoses of poison they take can be seen as a "cure" for female waywardness, which will keep them quiet. As Lydia accepts Dr le Doux's invitation, she enters the Sanatorium "in the most unimpeachable of all possible characters . . . in the character of a Patient" (618). The doctor gambles on the female appropriation of this role; Lydia's boast, "I shall be your patient in earnest! . . . I shall be the maddest of the mad" (631) sounds ominous in the context of earlier textual evidence of behaviour that could be labelled as "deranged." Moreover, the doctor's cursory summary of Lydia's situation to one of the visitors—"Shattered nerves—domestic anxiety . . . Sweet woman! sad case!" (636)—depicts her as a stereotypical female suicide, suffering from nervous illness, a much more plausible story than the revelation that she is planning to murder a man she will claim was her husband. Taking medication was always seized on in crime reports as evidence of "temporary insanity" or mental illness; Collins is then illustrating some of the ways in which female suicide was medicalized.

However, in order to counter such readings, Collins also locates the female suicidal impulse within women's marital dissatisfactions, focussing here on the sexuality of the middle-class woman edited out of contemporary crime reports. Like Rosanna, Sara in *The Law and the Lady* is obsessed with her appearance, categorizing herself as "that next worst thing myself to a deformity – a plain woman" (388). The fear of arousing male disgust is seen as an important aspect of her suicidal tendencies and her final wish, that she had been a "prettier woman" (394) poignantly evokes the cultural obsession with female beauty as a guarantor of sexual fulfilment. What partly precipitates her death is the fact that she has been cruelly given her husband's diary by her admirer, Miserrimus Dexter, to fuel her distrust of Eustace, the implication being that if wives were to gain access to their husband's secret thoughts, they would kill themselves. The diary then reveals the secret of Eustace's sexual disgust for Sara, encouraging her to believe that she has failed to live up to the requirements of a "good wife" and therefore destroying her faith in her sexual identity.[3] It is also significant that the connection between suicide and insanity seems to have weakened by this stage, as Sara's mental state is not classified in terms of madness. Her nurse testifies that she has a "detestable temper" which was

[3] In her reading of the novel, Jenny Bourne Taylor comments on the ambiguity of Sara's character and notes her similarities with Rosanna Spearman. She argues that both women are disturbing because they represent "passionate female sexuality that is not the object of male desire" (Collins, *The Law and the Lady*, xxi-ii).

"made still more irritable by unhappiness in her married life" (128), where it is the anger at the behaviour of men rather than women's mental instabilities which is being recognized as a possible explanation for the act. This may reflect shifts in public opinion towards greater tolerance of suicides and awareness of alternative classifications than insanity. Like the angry and bad-tempered women described in some suicide reports, Sara seems to be exhibiting symptoms of depression, a term actually cited in several cases from the 1870s (*Illustrated London Clipper*, 12 Dec 1874, 3; *Illustrated Police News*, 8 Jan 1870, 4). This was often coupled with the verdict that such women were of "an unsound state of mind," that is, suffering from mental illness, rather than being certifiably insane, as developments in psychiatry contributed to new ways of classifying suicidal women.

By 1875, Collins was also reflecting changes in perceptions of suicide by stressing the determination and anger of the female suicide. Sara's death in *The Law and the Lady* is represented as an attempt to secure her husband's desire, a sacrifice made easy in the knowledge of unrequited love. The suicide note earnestly solicits his gaze, imploring him to look at the dead body of a woman his eyes have always avoided:

> The poison will have its use at last. It might have failed to improve my complexion. It will not fail to relieve you of your ugly wife. Don't let me be examined after death. Show this letter to the doctor who attends me. It will tell him that I have committed suicide; it will prevent any innocent person from being suspected of poisoning me. I want nobody to be blamed or punished … You have just gone, after giving me my composing draught. My courage failed me at the sight of you. I thought to myself, "If he looks at me kindly, I will confess what I have done, and let him save my life." You never looked at me at all. You only looked at the medicine.
>
> (Collins, *The Law and the Lady*, 392-3)

In this scenario the husband's gaze is privileged over its medical equivalent as Sara shrinks from the prying eyes of the attending doctor. There is an underlying suggestion that she does not desire to be subjected to a post-mortem to ascertain the cause of death, so that her note is designed to remove such a legal requirement and preserve the appearance of the body. Lydia, too, imagines the viewing of her dead body by men: "Shall I jump out? No, it disfigures one so, and the coroner's inquest lets so many people see it" (434). By taking a very high dosage of a poison meant to improve the appearance, the text suggests that Sara believes her body will at last be noticed, "The poison will have its use." Later in the suicide note she writes of "my resolution to die" (393) using the word Collins deployed throughout his fiction to symbolize self-will and determination. Female suicides in the press were often described as "determined" or "deliberate," reinforcing the

idea of female agency and anger, rather than waywardness. This implies that, notwithstanding medical readings, female suicide could be valorized as an important act of self-assertion, a sign of female dissatisfaction.

Concealing female suicide

And yet this greater tolerance is also often only achieved through misrepresentation, as women's suicides were still perceived to be scandalous occurrences, which needed to be concealed. Medical readings of female suicide as accidental occur in Gustave Flaubert's influential novel, *Madame Bovary* (1857), as Emma Bovary's act of self-destruction is represented as a domestic accident—that of mistaking arsenic for sugar—in order to minimize the risk of scandal and social stigma. As female suicides were constantly misrepresented as murders, accidental deaths or deaths from natural causes and illnesses, the interpretation of the woman's life necessitated by the act is often distorted. When, in *Armadale*, Lydia's body is discovered in the Sanatorium, her story has also been changed and her death medicalized, her suicide note retained by Midwinter and thus kept from public knowledge:

> There is not the least doubt that the miserable woman (however she might have come by her death) was found dead - that a coroner's inquest inquired into the circumstances—that the evidence showed her to have entered the house as a patient—and that the medical investigation ended in discovering that she had died of apoplexy.
>
> (Collins, *Armadale*, 671)

In this extract the circumstances and evidence are structured around her entrance into the Sanatorium as a "patient" and the medical diagnosis of apoplexy. The suicide note which cites marital dissatisfaction as a major cause of her death is never publicised but retained by a remorseful husband —though it is significant that the addressee of the note does read it in its entirety in this instance. Collins's interest in the suicides of married women ensures that Lydia's posthumous advice to Midwinter locates her death in the recognition of her inadequacy as a wife and her inability to rise above her lower social origins:

> Forget me, my darling, in the love of a better woman than I am. I might, perhaps have been that better woman myself, if I had not lived a miserable life before you met with me.
>
> (Collins, *Armadale*, 665-6)

The use of the adjective "miserable" in both the explanation of her death and the note expresses her status as both victim and working-class woman. It is in part a confession of Lydia's criminal tendencies and her admission that they are inappropriate for marriage: "you will know what a wretch you married when you married the woman who writes these lines" (666). Paradoxically, the explanation reinforces the class-based assumptions Collins sought to deconstruct, as if her death does fix her into her forgotten social identity. The potential links between respectability and suicide are given scant attention, as the self-murder of respectable women could not easily be assimilated into received ideas of female behaviour.

The categorization of the death as a suicide is also avoided for Sara. The plot revolves around Valeria's desire to disprove that her husband murdered his first wife and the unsettling of gender categories produced by the revelation that Sara poisoned herself. As the reconstruction of Sara's suicide note provides the true explanation, she becomes complicit in the silencing of the scandal of female suicide: "my one desire was to hide it from the public view!" (395). As Barbara Gates has attested, "The true secret of [the novel] is that rejection in love followed by suicide is a verdict more terrible than murder not proven" (57). As in *The Moonstone*, women's "nightmare narratives" are only discovered and pieced together by detectives who then become instrumental in concealing the implications of their discoveries, dismissing the evidence of women's anger, desire and emotional distress in order to preserve ideologies of wayward femininity. Eustace takes his second wife's advice and never reads Sara's final pleas for forgiveness and recognition, remaining untouched by her anger. Both novels then imply that the narratives of women's suicidal impulses and the connections between middle-class marriage and the loss of female identity are hidden from the public view so that the threat of "disruptive" femininity can be contained (Pykett, 22).[4]

Rather than offering the expected comment on the sexual irregularities of lower-class women, fictional representations of female suicides often expressed women's dissatisfactions and anger, which medicine and the law struggled to explain. The difficulties of interpreting the deaths of all three women in Collins's novels testify to the inadequacies of explaining the act of violence purely in terms of class or insanity. Serving to undermine prevalent assumptions about the wayward femininity of suicidal women, Collins's plots address issues around respectability, the experience of servants, middle-class marriage, and depression, responding to changes in ways of thinking about self-destruction. It was perhaps his

[4] This is adapted from Pykett's argument about *The Woman in White*, in which she suggests that the conclusions of his texts typically function by "containing disruptive femininity." This means that transgressive women, who refuse to honour the boundaries of the proper feminine, are kept under control.

focus on the suicidal impulses of respectable women which was most radical; as Gates argues, "[he] was sensational because he pointed out to the bourgeoisie that suicide among them was more pervasive than they cared to believe" (59). Unlike the silent women who are the subjects of the sensationalized narratives in the press, Collins's women are given the chance to tell their own stories in the detailed suicide notes, despite attempts to conceal the evidence of their crimes.

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Hunger for Closure in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale*

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In the mid-nineteenth century, in an attempt to regulate the behavior of the newly enlarged novel-reading population, one of the ways literary critics in England discussed reading was to conceptualize it in terms of eating.[1] The problem critics were addressing was that people were both writing and reading novels compulsively, and the urgency with which critics reacted to this phenomenon was commensurate with the reading public's fervor for the next installment or volume of the latest commercial success. The sensation novel posed a particular problem for critics, who acted as moral guardians. The prevailing argument circulating in periodicals in the 1860s was that the sensation novel's lack of moral substance would leave the reader hungry for another novel, and that the sensation novel would therefore predominate as the public's preferred genre of reading. In other words, critics feared that since readers "devoured" novels that did not "nourish," they would "hunger for another" of the same kind ("The Vice of Reading," 253).

In this essay, I argue that the eating tropes that recur in Victorian criticism of the sensation novel were more than merely a convenient means for critics to express the sensation novel's moral shortcomings. By examining Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861-62) and Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* (1864-66), I suggest that the language of hunger captures a subtlety of the way in which sensation novels were written: they tend to leave readers' expectations for closure unfulfilled. While critics appealed to eating tropes in order to constrain readers' preferences for sensation novels, in their fiction Braddon and Collins used this very metaphorical language based in hunger, I suggest, in an effort to *inspire* in readers longings for plot details. They did so by using associations related to eating as part of a larger system of formal organization; that is, they

[1] For a general theoretical discussion of the metaphor of reading as eating, see Radway. For Victorian considerations of this metaphor, see Flint or Gilbert. In addition to offering a comprehensive inquiry into Victorian critics' belief in the addictive and diseased qualities of the sensation novel, Gilbert offers a reevaluation of the generic organization of *Lady Audley's Secret*.

made the development of plot dependent, in large part, upon eating scenes and used the ingestion of food as a plot device for figuring the intake of knowledge. An analysis of Braddon's and Collins's novels within the framework of Victorian critics' use of eating tropes illuminates an important relationship between literary critical discourse and novelistic practice. For at issue in both genres was the reading public's imagination, a faculty that critics and novelists alike attempted to capture.

The important difference between literary critical and novelistic concerns, however, is that the insatiable hunger that critics were identifying as a problem with the content of the sensation novel was a function of the narrative structure of deferral that the practice of serialization made both possible and profitable for novelists. It was in Braddon's and Collins's economic best interest to maintain and renew readers' curiosity, which they figured as hunger, both during the serialization of individual novels and throughout their *oeuvre*. In suggesting that Braddon and Collins developed the trope of hunger as a narrative technique in response to the exigencies and opportunities of serialization, this essay contributes to recent work on Victorian publication history.[2] First, I discuss *Lady Audley's Secret* as a seminal sensation novel regarding the trope of hunger in order to suggest that Braddon and her critics, in their different ways, shared an assumption about reading. Later in the essay, I argue that by the time Collins wrote *Armadale*, when the critical discourse of reading as eating was circulating widely in periodicals, hunger had not only become a predominant trope in writing *about* the sensation novel but also a convention of the genre.

"The taste [for sensation novels] grows on that which feeds it"

"Intoxicating Reading," *English Woman's Journal*

Braddon was certainly aware of her contemporaries' use of a discourse relating to eating to discuss popular fiction. At times, in her letters and journal articles vindicating popular fiction, Braddon herself uses language related to eating. In an often-quoted letter to Bulwer-Lytton she recognizes the difficulties of "reconciling literary values with market demands" (Robinson, 112):

> I have learnt to look at everything in a mercantile sense, & to write solely for the circulating library reader, whose palette [sic] requires strong meat, & is not very particular as to the quality thereof.
>
> ([May 1863], reprinted in Wolff, 14)

[2] For a discussion of Braddon's publication strategies, see Carnell and Law, who point out that Braddon's productivity was not simply a matter of financial necessity. For a discussion of Collins and the practice of serialization, see Law.

Through both deferring closure and selectively providing closure, Braddon, an author of over eighty novels, capitalizes on one of the assumptions about reading behind critics' fear that readers would have an insatiable hunger for sensation novels: the idea that an individual novel is part of something greater than itself. As Linda Hughes and Michael Lund point out in *The Victorian Serial*, it was very likely that Victorian readers were reading more than one novel at once; furthermore, "each individual text in its separate monthly part, single volume, or periodical installment was surrounded by other stories" (9). Braddon uses the manifold nature of Victorian reading practices to her advantage, as a strategy to keep readers interested in not only her next installment of *Lady Audley's Secret* but also in her next novel. Considering *Lady Audley's Secret* according to Braddon's assumptions about reading enables me to reevaluate the critical commonplace that the novel ends inadequately.

By repeating promised eating scenes that seem designed to facilitate closure, Braddon borrows the connotations of hunger for food and satiety of appetite to figure the process of gaining knowledge about stories.[3] Early in *Lady Audley's Secret*, one of the secrets that the novel strives to disclose—who is Lady Audley and what has she done?—is on the verge of being narrated by means of a proposed dinner at Audley Court. The invited guests are Robert Audley and his friend George Talboys, who are staying at an inn in the town of Audley. When Sir Michael invites the two men over for dinner, Lady Audley lazily echoes his suggestion: "You will come and dine with us to-morrow, and bring your interesting friend?" (55). As the word "to-morrow" indicates, Lady Audley desperately wants to put off meeting Robert's "interesting friend," particularly under the watchful eyes of her family. For at the proposed collective meal at Audley Court, George would see that his wife Helen Talboys has taken a new identity as Lucy Audley, and the other characters—and the reader—would realize that Lady Audley is a bigamist. However, Lady Audley's life as an upper-class woman depends upon her secret being kept from the Audley family; the "advantageous match" that she has made with Sir Michael has ensured her "no more dependence, no more drudgery, no more humiliations" (12). Furthermore, she is enamored of the fine things she has acquired through her marriage—things such as clothing, art, and jewelry.[4] Lady Audley therefore must avoid this dinner, which her husband, Sir Michael, repeatedly proposes. Paradoxically, deferral is an immediate means by which she can avoid arousing suspicion.

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[3] Narrative theorists in general, as well as critics discussing this novel in particular, have conceptualized readers' and characters' drive for closure in terms of desire. See Gilbert, "Madness", or Nemesvari.

[4] For a discussion of Lady Audley as consumer, see Montwieler.

Like Lady Audley, Braddon's narrative needs to delay this dinner. For Braddon, however, deferral works because it *creates* suspicion and, at the same time, creates a story to tell. If the dinner at Audley Court were to occur, the story of Lady Audley's identity would be told in the first volume of the novel, and there would be no need for a continued story. In contemporary critical language, since it would "answer the specified narrative question," the secret is what D.A. Miller would call a "nonnarratable element" because of its "incapacity to generate a story" (5). In economic terms, this revelation would inhibit the possibility of Braddon's selling future installments and further volumes. Therefore, in order to ensure that the dinner will not take place as planned, that Lady Audley's life as an upper-class woman will remain intact, and that the narrative will continue, Braddon has Lady Audley instigate a plan by which she will receive during breakfast a telegram calling her away from town the day of the dinner. Lady Audley's plan having been carried out successfully, Braddon indicates: "So the dinner at Audley Court was postponed, and Miss Alicia had to wait still longer for an introduction to the handsome young widower, Mr. George Talboys" (61). The postponement of the dinner and, consequently, of the formal, public introduction of George and Lady Audley, means that the reader will have "to wait still longer" for closure. As Braddon is well aware, in the paradigm she establishes, the hunger, or curiosity, that begins with the deferral of the proposed dinner leads to even more hunger for the characters and the reader.

"What could there be so extraordinary in the simple fact of a gentleman being late for his dinner?"

Landlord at the Sun Inn, *Lady Audley's Secret*

Since the proposed dinner at Audley Court does not take place, someone needs to take steps to expose the secret the dinner would have revealed. The person who does so, Robert, loves dinners. In fact, it is Robert's hearty appetite that is partially responsible for leading him to Audley Court and for bringing George to the site of the narrative action. Throughout the course of the novel, Braddon narrates Robert's conversion from eater to investigator largely by means of his changing appetite;[5] she structures the many scenes in which Robert is faced with a choice between eating and finding knowledge about Lady Audley and George such that Robert at first halfheartedly confronts food and then eagerly turns to his pursuit of knowledge. Since, as Patrick Brantlinger points out, "once detection begins, the information supplied to the reader tends to be reduced to the information discovered by the detective" (45), the reader's experience of coming to know the novel's secrets parallels Robert's

[5] For a discussion of Robert's developing identity as a barrister, see Petch.

investigation. Robert eventually becomes so involved in the pursuit of facts that he prefers gratifying his curiosity to satisfying his appetite, and his experience of trying to discover the secret becomes associated with hunger and its extreme form, starvation. This metaphorical substitution of reading for eating suggests that while Robert has lost his appetite for food, he nonetheless retains an intense appetite. As the *OED* records, the word "anorexia," which in its most common usage means want of appetite, has an alternative meaning: "to reach after, to desire." As a metaphorical anorexic, Robert "reach[es] after," or hungers for, knowledge regarding George's fate. The identification that Braddon creates between Robert and the reader is the key to her metaphorical system, for it tells the reader how to feel: the reader should feel as Robert feels—hungry—for this is a trope for wanting more knowledge.

The metaphor of hunger is, however, something that Braddon experiments with at a price. To make use of it successfully, she must appear to provide the reader with a definitive answer to the question of Lady Audley's mysterious behavior regarding the dinner. She does so in the final pages of the novel when Lady Audley finally confesses "the story of [her] life" to Sir Michael and Robert in the library at dinner time (347). To the extent that this timing symbolically transforms the details that Lady Audley provides into food, it suggests that the reader's hunger is being satisfied. After all, Lady Audley discloses quite a bit: she reveals that her mother was mad, that she married George, that she feigned her identity, that she faked her death, and that she believes she killed George. Yet secrecy and hunger are nonetheless intertwined, this time through the experience of Alicia, who anxiously awaits the family in the dining room. Alicia remarks: "Is papa coming to dinner? . . . I'm so hungry; and poor Tomlins has sent up three times to say the fish will be spoiled" (360). This dinner-time confession provides an incomplete, or fragmented, denouement to the novel. While it addresses questions about Lady Audley's identity, it does not fill all of the narrative lacks, especially the crucial matter of George's fate.[6]

The rest of the story is left for George himself to narrate over a shared meal with Robert in a chapter entitled "Restored." During this meal, the final complete meal of the novel, George supplies the missing pieces of the story: how he escaped from the well and where he has been all these months. As the parallel between George's presence and this shared meal suggests, Robert is no longer hungry; his patient hunger is rewarded by George, knowledge, and food simultaneously. To emphasize further the satiety in Robert's story, the final chapter jumps forward two years from the shared meal between Robert and George to a reunion of the principal

6 Many sensation novels employ this strategy of providing a semblance of closure to the novel's primary mysteries, at the same time leaving an undercurrent of unanswered questions about larger concepts such as gender, fate, or madness.

characters of the novel in a "fairy cottage" (445). The concluding domestic image of Clara and Alicia summoning the gentlemen to "drink tea, and eat strawberries and cream upon the lawn" demonstrates that in Robert's circle of friends and family no one is left hungry (446). Moreover, the alignment throughout the novel between the reader's appetite and Robert's encourages the reader to feel satisfied as well.

The logic of hunger—in which an absence can be filled by the presence of what was missing—may seem to simplify the logic of narrative suspense. If hunger can suddenly go away after a meal, are there limitations to a narrative paradigm drawn from associations related to eating? The answer is that hunger does not simply disappear. Rather, according to the language that Victorian critics used, hunger for the sensation novel is ever-renewing—much to their dismay. The author of "Penny Fiction" reflects the notion that the sensation novel as a genre tends toward problematic closure in the following remark: "the popular appetite for it seems to be practically inexhaustible" (164). This conception of hunger speaks to a complexity in the closure of *Lady Audley's Secret*, which is also a function of Braddon's elaborate plotting. Just as the narrative structure works through a network of substitutions between eating and knowing, this final chapter fulfills one appetite, or story, at the expense of another. Braddon satiates Robert's hunger and completes his story. But with respect to Lady Audley's story, the reader's hunger remains.[7] Lady Audley's death of *maladie de langueur*, or wasting disease, not only symbolizes the lingering hunger in her story but also constitutes an insufficiently narrated plot event.

In skipping ahead two years and presenting the domestic rewards of Robert's investigative efforts, Braddon elides Lady Audley's experience at Villebrumeuse, the *maison de santé* to which Robert brings her after her confession. Although Braddon accounts in advance for this lapse in narration—"However verbose I may be in my description of her feelings, I can never describe a tithe of her thoughts or her sufferings" (314)—contemporary critics of the novel have not found this reasoning satisfying. As Chiara Briganti explains, "even though the mystery of George's disappearance has been solved . . . the mystery continues to circulate" ("Gothic Maidens," 189). This continued circulation of mystery, beyond the confines of this individual novel, is effective for Braddon, for if readers wanted to know more about Lady Audley's feelings, thoughts, and sufferings they could read *Aurora Floyd*, which she was working on while finishing *Lady Audley's Secret*. In his survey of the sensation genre, H.L. Mansel crystallizes the idea that a writer's characters are interchangeable:

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[7] Pamela Gilbert makes a similar observation in "Madness and Civilization: Generic Opposition in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*." She suggests that Braddon's focus on Robert's narrative occludes Lady Audley's experience.

"Aurora Floyd, as a character, is tame after Lady Audley. The 'beautiful fiend,' intensely wicked, but romantic from the very intensity of her wickedness, has degenerated into a fast young lady, full of stable talk . . ." (492). Even as Mansel writes to contrast the heroines, he assumes that one character easily metamorphoses into another.

Braddon conveys the premise motivating this conception of character, the idea that stories or books blend together. In further defense of her refusal to describe Lady Audley's feelings, she explains:

> She suffered agonies that would fill closely printed volumes, bulky with a thousand pages, in that one horrible night. She underwent volumes of anguish, and doubt, and perplexity; sometimes repeating the same chapters of her torments over and over again; sometimes hurrying through a thousand pages of her misery without one pause, without one moment of breathing time.
>
> (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 314)

This passage raises issues that are important to the success of Braddon's works: secrecy, repetition, and rapidity. By figuring Lady Audley as a book filled with repetitions, Braddon implies that if the reader picks up another "closely printed volume" he or she may come closer to the secret. The repetitive nature of her novels' plots is Braddon's tool for promising to feed the appetite left unsatiated; perhaps the next time the reader will pick up on something that explains part of a previous work. The rehashing of plots, from one's own works, others' works, and newspapers, is another object of the Victorians' criticisms of the sensation novel. Mansel scoffs at the simple recipe for sensation-novel writing:

> Let him only keep an eye on the criminal reports of the daily newspapers. . . . Then, before the public interest has had time to cool, let him serve up the exciting viands in a réchauffé with a proper amount of fictitious seasoning.
>
> (Mansel, 501)

Mansel uses the image of re-seasoned "viands" in a "réchauffé," what we could call leftovers, to suggest that what readers actually need, and should want, is fresh food, cooked slowly and carefully.

Braddon, however, prefers rapid production, even and especially if it involves reheating plot twists and character types. The writer of an essay entitled "The Vice of Reading," published in *Temple Bar* in 1874, articulates a connection between prolific writing and hunger, which helps

explain Braddon's writing practices. The writer explains the problem with popular fiction:

> But the mischief is, it is produced in the most prolific manner, and it is not read merely, it is devoured. People do not wait to read it until they are tired, overworked, and jaded, or till holiday time comes round. They rush to the circulating libraries for it the moment it is announced, apply for it, clamour for it, and never rest until they are devoting themselves to its perusal. Having finished it, they hunger for another.
>
> ("The Vice of Reading," 253)

While a premise of most Victorian criticism was that there was something about the content of the sensation novel that makes it unsatisfying for the reader, the *Temple Bar* writer offers another possibility, that the conditions under which sensation novels were written could affect readers' experiences. By suggesting a vital relationship between the writer's production and the reader's consumption, he goes so far as to imply that the writer's productivity in fact incites the public's ravenousness. If that is the case, then Braddon, a notoriously prolific writer, is in luck. "Without one pause, without one moment of breathing time," Braddon, like Lady Audley, will "repeat the same chapters . . . over and over again," and her readers will be waiting, hungry, shillings in hand.

"Is any feast so good as that which we imagine?"

E.S. Dallas, *The Gay Science*

In 1865, Bishop Thirlwall makes an observation similar to the *Temple Bar* writer's when he reacts to an installment of Collins's *Armadale*, which was serialized in *Cornhill Magazine* (1864-66): "On the whole, I consider this class of novels as an unhappy invention, creating an insatiable demand which must be met by less and less wholesome food" (145-46). The Bishop's suggestion that the quality of sensation novels is degenerative may seem to imply that they are "less and less" satisfying. On the whole, however, that is not the case. As I have shown, the very problem is just how appetizing the sensation novel is for the English readership—the fact that, after reading a novel like *Lady Audley's Secret*, the reader will keep hungering for more sensation novels. One of the paradoxes of the sensation novel that both *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Armadale* exploit is that sensation novels are appetizing precisely because they do not satisfy.

A critic from *The Westminster Review* suggests that one of the reasons *Armadale* is unsatisfying is that it is a meal whose ingredients are all too recognizable. After comparing *Armadale*'s offenses to those of *Lady Audley's Secret*—a tactic that exemplifies critics' tendency to consider

sensation novels as a group—the critic discusses the way in which Collins's "story" is "put together":

> Mr. Wilkie Collins informs us that he has very properly spared no pains in ensuring accuracy on all questions of Law, Medicine, and Chemistry. But we must add it is not artistic to tell this to the reader. *The process of watching our dinner being cooked takes away our appetite.*
>
> (Unsigned review, *Westminster Review*, 159-60, emphasis added)

The critic uses a cooking metaphor to suggest that *Armadale* is one of Collins's most contrived novels, or a novel that exposes its methodology, a complaint that surfaces in criticism then and now.[8] Assuming that the public shares his quirks of appetite, he admonishes the review reader: this book *will* take away your appetite. As the often-quoted fact that the publisher did not regain his outlay on *Armadale* indicates, the reading public certainly did not have as much interest in it as for a novel such as *Lady Audley's Secret*.[9]

Yet, given that the remark this critic refers to is included in Collins's appendix to the novel, his suggestion that Collins's exposure of his cooking process has an effect on one's reading experience is problematic. This comment seems more likely to refer to what makes the structure of *Armadale* different from other popular sensation novels, the fact that it reveals its primary secret right away. In taking for granted that readers will also lose their hunger for food when they see it prepared in front of them, *The Westminster Review* critic raises the idea that if something is present, whether a secret or a meal, then one's desire for it is absent. As I have shown, in piquing the reader's hunger by teasing the reader with dinner, Braddon bases the narrative structure of *Lady Audley's Secret* upon the assumption that hunger derives from absence. Collins, in contrast, may seem to leave little to the reader's imagination or appetite, for he provides the reader early on with two documents that foretell what is to come—Mr. Armadale's letter and Allan's dream manuscript—both of which he figures as food. However, these two documents nevertheless play a crucial role in creating suspense, as is apparent in Collins's organization of the serialized form of the novel, where he ends at least a quarter of the twenty

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8 While Sue Lonoff suggests that *Armadale* has "obtrusive mechanics of plot" (120), and Winifred Hughes deems it "surely one of the most over-plotted novels in English literature" (155), Peter Thoms contends that *Armadale* is innovative for its self-consciousness about its design.

9 Lonoff provides several possible reasons for *Armadale*'s lack of commercial success: Collins's use of omniscient narration, frankness about sexuality, excessive plotting, and decision to serialize in an upper-middle class publication.

installments by referring to written documents such as letters and diary entries.[10]

Early in the novel, Collins associates storytelling with eating and secret disclosure with feeding by means of a structural substitution of story for food. Right before Mr. Neal starts reading Allan Armadale, Senior's letter containing the secret of his life, which is the secret of the larger narrative, a dinner bell rings (27). Appropriately, Mrs. Armadale, who is not permitted to hear the reading of the letter, has a "hungering suspense" for it. This manuscript feeds both the characters and the readers the secret story of Mr. Armadale's past—how he murdered his namesake, Allan Armadale—and, by suggesting that past crimes can ramify into the future, establishes the grounds for the novel's suspense. The rest of Midwinter's life, and the rest of the novel, will be affected by the father's plea: "Never let the two Allan Armadales meet in this world: never, never, never!" (48). For Midwinter will continually struggle with the possibly dangerous implications of tampering with fate, and the novel will keep raising the question of whether Midwinter will heed his father's warning. *Armadale*'s interest, then, stems from what *will* or *might* happen in the future when or if the principal characters reach a full understanding of the significance of what happened in the past.[11] In other words, the novel's suspense depends upon the reader's ability to imagine the future possibilities. By using meals as symbolic forms for the disclosure of the two documents, Collins, in effect, provides the reader with a menu that details the meals to come and, in doing so, encourages the reader to imagine how the food he provides will taste for the characters.

"The next serious question . . . the question of breakfast"

Allan, *Armadale*

Throughout the novel, Collins uses eating scenes to frustrate the revelation of Midwinter's secret and, consequently, to intensify the reader's appetite for knowledge. On several occasions, Allan is so consumed by his hunger that he allows it to interfere with Midwinter's attempts to discuss his origins. When "Midwinter stepped out from the shadow, and came nearer to Allan than he had come yet," rather than talk of "the past and future," as Midwinter would like to, Allan asks Midwinter if he has

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10 For example, installment number one ends with Mr. Armadale's letter placed "in the post" and, similarly, number two ends with Mr. Armadale's son, Ozias Midwinter, putting the same letter, which was posted nineteen years earlier, on the table for Mr. Brock to read (*Cornhill Magazine*, November, December 1864).

11 As Jenny Bourne Taylor explains in "*Armadale*: The Sensitive Subject as Palimpsest," the plot "depends for its sensation on fulfilling the very expectations that have been rendered problematic" (150).

considered the "next serious question…the question of breakfast" (130-31). Not only does Allan's interest in satisfying his present bodily needs prevent Midwinter from disclosing his family secret but it also keeps the reader hungry for the answer to the question that drives the narrative forward: what will happen if Allan finds out who Midwinter is?[12]

Collins narrates the "strange contrast of character between" Allan and Midwinter in a description of their behavior at breakfast:

> One of them sat at the well-spread table, hungry and happy; ranging from dish to dish, and declaring that he had never made such a breakfast in his life. The other sat apart at the window; his cup thanklessly deserted before it was empty, his meat left ungraciously half eaten on his plate.
>
> (Collins, *Armadale*, 139)

Taken within the context of the plot's development, Allan's and Midwinter's relationship to food translates into the subtleties of their ability to find, or in Midwinter's case, to reveal the secrets of the story. For example, when Allan receives a letter informing him that he has inherited Thorpe-Ambrose, the family estate, he finishes breakfast before reading the letter (77). When Midwinter, in contrast, receives important correspondence regarding Miss Gwilt, the novel's villainess, he is late for breakfast (208). More concerned with the pursuit of knowledge than he is with food, Midwinter "deserts" his meal when he has important questions to think about. Sue Lonoff has noted that one of Collins's "most effective techniques is to create counterparts or doubles for his readers in the text, characters whose activities correspond or intersect with those of the audience" (121). In *Armadale*, Midwinter is the reader's double, for, like the reader, he is hungry not for food but for knowledge. Moreover, Midwinter's consistent attempts to reveal his past to Allan enact the reader's curiosity about what will happen if Midwinter tempts fate.[13]

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[12] Allan does eventually become curious about something other than the way food tastes. Regarding Miss Gwilt's past, "curiosity filled him, which he half-longed and half-dreaded to satisfy" (344). On one occasion, he even forgets about breakfast while thinking about the scandal surrounding her. However, his interest is confined to details regarding her story, and, since he does not know that the two stories intersect, he therefore still does not seek knowledge about Midwinter.

[13] David Blair makes a similar observation in his article, "Wilkie Collins and the Crisis of Suspense." He writes: "Midwinter's interest in only what pertains to his anticipated doom is an extreme correlative for the reader's voraciousness for a resolution" (40-1). Throughout his article, Blair uses language related to eating to conceptualize the reader's curiosity, without explicit reference to *Armadale*'s structure or metaphors.

In this same breakfast scene, the metamorphosis of appetite for food into appetite for knowledge, which takes place for both Midwinter and the reader, occurs symbolically. Just as the document relating to the past—Allan Armadale, Senior's, letter—is read as the dinner bell rings, the document relating to the future—the dream manuscript—also becomes associated with a meal. When the dream manuscript is spread on the breakfast-table for Mr. Hawbury to interpret, it slides into the position habitually occupied by food (141). Like the father's letter, the dream-manuscript serves as a warning of what is going to occur in the future. Fed to the characters and the reader in hypothetical form, it remains to be experienced, or tasted. While Midwinter considers the epistemological implications of the dream, Allan tries to blame his dream on a "badly-cooked supper" (117). If the dream does not result from indigestion, then the question that arises is whether it is a result of a supernatural force such as fate, a possibility that Allan refuses to contemplate.[14] His insistence that his dream is a product of the food he has eaten suggests that his body-centered value system conflicts with his ability to interpret the novel's mysteries.

Allan's consistent attempts to use food to hinder discussion about anything "serious" have a parallel in Collins's method of revealing to the characters the novel's secondary secret, that of Miss Gwilt's identity. Although Allan and Midwinter do not know that Miss Gwilt is the maid who was responsible for carrying out the deceit that ruined both of their fathers' lives, Collins has let the reader in on this secret. He has not, however, told the reader the entire story of her past. In another breakfast scene, James Bashwood, the amateur detective who investigates Miss Gwilt's past, uses his appetite to taunt his father, who waits anxiously for the news his son has found. After telling his father that he has the "whole story of her life" in his hands, James warns: "I hav'n't done breakfast yet. . . . Gently does it, my dear sir." When his father responds, "I can't wait!" James continues: "If you'll sit down again, I'll tell you. If you won't, I shall confine myself to my breakfast" (519). As the elder Mr. Bashwood waits, James torments him with a cruel display of the knowledge he possesses: "Bashwood the younger finished his breakfast slowly, out of pure bravado; lit a cigar, with the utmost deliberation; looked at his father, and, seeing him still as immovably patient as ever, opened the black bag at last, and spread the papers on the table" (520). Once Collins provides the reader with the papers spread on the breakfast-table, the hunger inspired by James's deferred revelation intensifies. For, since Collins once again presents the food to the reader but does not yet allow the principal characters to taste it, he encourages the reader to imagine what Miss Gwilt is capable of doing.

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14 For a discussion of interpretations of the dream manuscript in relation to Victorian psychological discourse, see Taylor.

Having gradually refocused the suspense generated from the Midwinter-Armadale identity story to the Miss Gwilt story, Collins ensures that the story that takes place in the present of the narrative achieves final closure; at the end of the novel the reader learns that Miss Gwilt is dead. At the same time, however, the abrupt ending of this villainess's life of crime and secrecy by means of suicide resembles the strategy by which Braddon ends Lady Audley's story. In both cases, the heroine's death provides something that resembles closure even though the ending does not answer all of the reader's potential questions. Emphasizing the indeterminacy of the ending, Collins confirms that Midwinter's secret has been preserved; he does so through three perspectives: Midwinter's, the narrator's, and Allan's. When Allan asks: "Who knows what great things may happen before you and I are many years older?", Midwinter answers "Who *need* know" (677). Collins, I suggest, knew exactly "who *need* know": the reader.

Collins preserves suspense even after the novel ends by leaving the two morsels of food—Mr. Armadale, Senior's, letter and the dream manuscript—untasted and undigested. As he explains in his appendix, he leaves the reader the task of imagining what will happen in the future:

> My readers will perceive that I have purposely left them, with reference to the Dream in this story, in the position which they would occupy in the case of a dream in real life—they are free to interpret it by the natural or the supernatural theory, as the bent of their own minds may incline them.
>
> (Collins, *Armadale*, 678)

As Collins's reference to a choice between "the natural or the supernatural theory" suggests, what the reader is capable of imagining depends upon his or her interpretation of the major question that Collins leaves unanswered, that of the "Great Doubt—the doubt whether we are, or are not, the masters of our own destinies" (48). Even as the novel's peaceful ending undermines the power of fate in affecting Midwinter's and Allan's future, the possibility remains that fate will intervene eventually.

Aside from Peter Thoms, who sees this fatalistic ambiguity as the point of *Armadale*, most twentieth-century critics have found the ending of *Armadale* problematic.[15] David Blair would explain the unsatisfying resolution that Collins provides in terms of "a crisis for the identity of the novel" (37). He suggests that "Midwinter and Armadale . . . enact a crisis

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15 Caroline Reitz, for example, interprets critics' discomfort with the instability of the ending of *Armadale* as a function of the form in which twentieth-century critics read the novel and suggests that the peripheral text accompanying the original serialized form of the novel addresses the larger colonial questions the novel raises (93).

between two novels," in which Midwinter is aligned with classic suspense and Armadale is aligned with light romantic comedy, and that "the reader's expectations derive from his sense of the type of novel he is reading" (41). I want to suggest that the problem that Blair sees as indicative of an identity crisis for the novel gets to the very heart of the novel's identity as a sensation novel. Even though nothing sensational happens to Midwinter and Allan—no murders, no poisonings, no catastrophes—conventions of the sensation novel predominate in the reader's imagination by their very absence. The absence of a sensational outcome to Midwinter and Allan's story fosters the convention that I am arguing has become a hallmark of the genre, the tendency to end inadequately and to leave the reader hungry. Collins's failure to fulfill the reader's expectations for sensation ensures that the exercise of the reader's imaginative faculty, a curiosity that is likened to hunger, will exceed the limits of this individual novel. The reader's insatiable hunger is thus not simply an accident of content but rather a triumph of a form that regularizes continuation both on the level of individual parts and entire novels.

The fatalistic structure of the novel—in which past fears determine the course of the future and in which the name Allan Armadale circulates outside the confines of an individual's life—is regenerative in much the same way that "hungering suspense" for the implications of Mr. Armadale's secret is ever-renewing throughout and beyond the novel. As the revelation of the two fatal messages during meal times suggests, the narrative functions of fate and hunger are similar. Collins brings together these two themes in Miss Gwilt's letters and diary entries, which offer clues to the interconnectedness of fate and hunger in the novel's structure. In a chapter entitled "Lurking Mischief," Miss Gwilt, the self-proclaimed prime-mover of the plot (426), explains a difference in tone in one of her letters: "I wrote the first time, after a horrible night. I write, this time, after a ride on horseback, a tumbler of claret, and the breast of a chicken. Is that explanation enough? Please say Yes—for I want to go back to my piano" (166). To the extent that Miss Gwilt's letters are affected by what she eats, her writing offers a metacommentary on Collins's narrative structure and the ways in which the plot hinges on what is revealed during meal times.

While the above example makes the relationship between food and writing seem coincidental, in a diary entry Miss Gwilt explains how she conscientiously uses food as a way of gauging what will occur in her future with Midwinter. In a chapter entitled "She Knows the Truth," Miss Gwilt writes:

> I never longed in my life as I longed to see him again, and put these questions to him. I got quite superstitious about it as the day drew on. They gave me a sweetbread and cherry pudding for dinner. I actually tried if he would come back by the stones in the plate! He will, he won't, he will, he won't—and so on. It ended in 'he won't.' I rang the bell, and had the things

> taken away. I contradicted Destiny quite fiercely. I said, 'He will!' and I waited at home for him.
>
> (Collins, *Armadale*, 413)

Here, food is directly implicated in both writing and plot outcome, as it is throughout *Armadale*, especially since Miss Gwilt uses her dinner to penetrate the mysteries of fate. At the same time, her symbolic gesture of having the cherry stones removed from the table and contradicting "Destiny" attenuates the role of both principles that organize the novel, fate and hunger; the clearing of the plate clears the way for the reader's interpretation. Since Collins leaves the central narrative question inadequately answered, after finishing the novel, the hungry reader, like Miss Gwilt, can sit down with a plate of cherry stones and imagine whether Midwinter will ever tell Allan his secret: "he will, he won't, he will, he won't—and so on." The potential significance that Collins lends to the cherry stones in this scene encapsulates a concept that critics of the sensation novel were reacting to: writing that is fruitless can generate further expectations by means of its promise of future food. By closing inadequately, *Armadale*, like *Lady Audley's Secret*, contains the seed for another story to grow—and for another appetite to hunger.

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"A twisted piece of paper . . . half-burned upon the hearthrug": Depictions of Writing in *Lady Audley's Secret*

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A familiar device in Gothic fiction is the fragmented manuscript, conveying a narrative marred by ellipses, a tale within a tale that must be reconstructed by the protagonist (and the reader) into a coherent account. These manuscripts provide details crucial to resolving questions of identity—details about murders or usurpations of property. Critics such as David Punter have long noted the Gothic's influence on both the Newgate novel of the 1830s and 1840s and the sensation novel of the 1860s (Punter, 214-20). It is therefore not surprising that the novel of sensation often relies on the reconstruction of past events by means of hidden or damaged written evidence. In the novels of Wilkie Collins, this written evidence is often buried, as Tamar Heller notes in her fascinating study.[1] Mary Elizabeth Braddon, too, frequently employs a motif of damaged or distorted writing. In the typical Gothic novel, however, the physical damage has been caused by the passage of time—the manuscripts are often decades or even centuries old when they are discovered; in Braddon's novels such alterations are usually wilful and designed to conceal past transgressions.

Robert Audley, the detective figure in *Lady Audley's Secret*, must reconstruct the true history of Lady Audley, who has married his uncle, out of a sequence of written evidence—newspapers, letters, telegrams, book inscriptions, grave inscriptions, and even luggage labels. These traces are subject both to concealment and a range of damaging alterations, including tearing, burning, and adulteration with dirt or grease. Yet despite all these attempts to alter or erase written evidence, Robert Audley ultimately succeeds in constructing the narrative of Lady Audley's movements that determines her identity. Similarly, Eleanor Vane in *Eleanor's Victory*

[1] Heller observes that images of buried writing by authors either female or having "a 'female' constitution" abound in Collins's novels, and argues that they are associated with "social and textual marginality" (1). She suggests that "[t]he image of buried writing could well stand for Collins' own literary reputation, since critics . . . have been discovering his previously marginalized works" (4). Here I want to take a rather different approach with regard to Braddon's distorted texts.

attempts to come to terms with her father's death in a gaming house by constructing the meaning of his suicide note, torn from top to bottom, with the remaining fragment missing the ends of his sentences. Eleanor keeps this torn note with her as she pursues her investigation in the face of the opposition of her friends, who question whether such an activity is "womanly or Christian-like" (71). For Eleanor, the fact that her father's death was the result of suicide is less important than determining the identities of those who swindled him and thus precipitated his death. George Vane has written a text that his daughter can read only incompletely. His narrative is fragmented and "very wildly and incoherently worded" (69), and she must create coherence. In the same way, the fateful marriage license in *Aurora Floyd*, proof of Aurora's bigamy, is "folded double" and concealed in the lining of her first husband's waistcoat (252). After his murder, the license is discovered to be "so much blood-stained as to be undecipherable" (302).

What do these images signify—these torn, folded, spindled, mutilated and stained writings, all of which prove significant to the resolution of the plot as well as the solution to the crime? This essay will explore the recurring images of damaged writing in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's fiction and will suggest that these images encode a series of discourses: on sensation fiction (including discourses by Braddon as well as by her critics); on the integrity of material evidence and its role in solving crimes; and on representation, including writing as deferred presence. Although the emphasis of this essay is placed on *Lady Audley's Secret*, other Braddon novels from the 1860s will be briefly considered.

Much contemporary criticism of Victorian sensation fiction expressed concerns about its lurid details of murder, bigamy and other crimes, often committed by the married women who presided over the domestic sphere. Many critics saw sensation fiction as threatening, not just to literature, but to the moral integrity of society. H.L. Mansel's often-cited 1863 review of two dozen sensation novels expresses the typical view:

> Excitement, and excitement alone, seems to be the great end at which they [the writers] aim. . . And as excitement, even when harmless in kind, cannot be continually produced without becoming morbid in degree, works of this class manifest themselves as belonging, some more, some less, but all to some extent, to the morbid phenomena of literature—indications of a wide-spread corruption, of which they are in part both the effect and the cause; called into existence to supply the cravings of a diseased appetite, and contributing themselves to foster the disease, and to stimulate the want which they supply.
>
> (Mansel, 482-3)

Kate Flint (277) quotes an unnamed critic, also writing in 1863, who expressed fears "about women's mental impressionability" and complained

that sensation novels "drugged thought and reason" and adversely affected women's nerves. Such fiction could "open out a picture of life free from all the perhaps irksome checks that confine their own existence."[2]

This was the contemporary response to novels such as Collins's *The Woman in White*, Mrs. Henry Wood's *East Lynne* and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, which Jonathan Loesberg (115) credits with founding the genre of sensation fiction in the early 1860s. Ann Cvetkovich (15-16) has shown that, in addition to the popularity of the circulating libraries, a marked increase in serial publication between 1820 and 1860, together with an influx of melodramatic material from lower-class publications, caused anxiety among critics about a decline in literary value. These concerns were doubtless exacerbated by the lurid reports of divorces appearing in newspapers after the passage of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, noted by both Kate Flint and Thomas Boyle (Flint, 280; Boyle, 109-10). Braddon was certainly aware of these concerns. Writing to her mentor, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, in December 1862, she observed wryly:

> I do an immense deal of work which nobody ever hears of, for Half penny & penny journals. This work is most piratical stuff, & would make your hair stand on end, if you were to see it. The amount of crime, treachery, murder, slow poisoning, & general infamy required by the Half penny reader is something terrible. I am just going to do a little paracide *[sic]* for this week's supply.
>
> (Wolff, "'Devoted Discipline'", 130)[3]

I want to argue in this essay that, in her early novels, Braddon articulated her response to contemporary critical concerns about popular writing through her depiction of written communication—fiction, newspapers, the telegraph and letters. Later, after 1863, her response would take the form of a new strategy of composition, but during 1861-2 her complex and conflicting views on the act of writing are encoded within the novels themselves.

At the time of *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon was writing to support herself and her mother, serializing her novels in magazines, and was on her way to a successful career as a novelist (Wolff, *Sensational Victorian*, chs.

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[2] Flint cites the *Christian Remembrancer* 46 (1863). However, Ann Cvetkovich (210n5) gives the source of the same passage as *The Living Age* 78 (22 Aug 1863).

[3] In fact, as Jacqueline Howard has suggested (45), Braddon's "piratical stuff" is part of what M.M. Bakhtin terms "the diversity of social speech types" that comprise the novel. These include: "social dialects, characteristic group behavior, professional jargons, generic languages, languages of generations and age groups, tendentious languages, languages of the authorities, of various circles and of passing fashions, languages that serve the specific sociopolitical purposes of the day, even of the hour" (Bakhtin, 262-3).

3-4; Carnell, ch. 3). While Braddon seems to have enjoyed her commercial success, she also had aesthetic aspirations, attempting to write both sensation and "serious" fiction, and was apparently sensitive to the critics who derided both her work and the genre itself. Writing to her mentor, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, on 16 January 1866, she complains, "'I believe that if I listened to the howling of the critics and abandoned what they call sensation I should sink into the dullest namby-pambyism'"(Wolff, "'Devoted Discipline'", 130). A few years earlier (on 13 April 1863), she had written to him, "'I fear I shall never write a *genial* novel. The minute I abandon melodrama, & strong, coarse painting in blacks & whites, I am quite lost & at sea'" (13). Yet, referring to the circulating library members, she confessed to Bulwer-Lytton: "'I want to serve two masters. I want to be artistic & to please *you.* I want to be sensational & to please Mudie's subscribers'" (14). Her writing strategy from 1863-5 is thus self-consciously dialogic, engaging two distinct audiences by writing two novels each year, "deprecating one of the pair and pinning on the other her hope for literary recognition" (Wolff, *Sensational Victorian*, 158).[4] I suggest that the prototype for Braddon's dialogic strategy was her articulation of her conflicting views of writing within the same novel, particularly (and appropriately) her two early "bigamy novels" *(Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*). These views are expressed in the discourses on written communication—fiction, newspapers, the telegraph and letters—that pervade these novels.

Walter M. Kendrick (21) notes that one of the aspects of sensation fiction that outraged mid-Victorian critics "came from their perception that the value of the elements in such a novel depended primarily, like that of links in a chain, on their relation to other elements in the same novel." This principle of plotting is what Loesberg calls "inevitable sequence" (117). In *Lady Audley's Secret,* writing both comprises circumstantial evidence and documents its existence. Robert Audley calls circumstantial evidence:

> "that wonderful fabric which is built out of straws collected at every point of the compass, and which is yet strong enough to hang a man. Upon what infinitesimal trifles may sometimes hang the whole secret of some wicked mystery, inexplicable heretofore to the wisest upon the earth! A scrap of paper, a shred of some torn garment, the button off a coat, a word dropped

[4] The novels that she esteemed during this period were *John Marchmont's Legacy*, *The Doctor's Wife* and *The Lady's Mile.* The "deprecated" novels were *Eleanor's Victory*, *Henry Dunbar* and *Only a Clod.* But Braddon could not always predict either the popular or critical response to her novels. *Henry Dunbar*, which she called "the sloppily told story of a murderer's adventure," proved one of her greatest financial successes. And *Eleanor's Victory*, which "bitterly disappointed" her (Wolff, "'Devoted Disciple"' 17) was praised by the *Saturday Review,* which saw it as her best novel *(*Wolff, *Sensational Victorian,* 158).

> incautiously from the over-opening of a door, a shadow on a window-blind, the accuracy of a moment tested by one of Benson's watches—a thousand circumstances so slight as to be forgotten by the criminal, but links of iron in the wonderful chain forged by the science of the detective officer. . ."
>
> (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 81)

Robert's fascination with circumstantial evidence is in accord with what Richard D. Altick calls "the prevailing temper of the time," which he characterizes as "positivistic, scientific, rationalist" (78). For example, Altick points out that:

> there was serious scientific interest in the faces and heads of famous criminals. For the devotees of the then-fashionable branches of physiognomy and phrenology, death masks and casts were taken of the heads of executed murderers. . . The *doyen* of the phrenologists, George Combe, made a cast of [the notorious mass-murderer, William] Burke's head, reporting, *inter al.*, that his bump of amativeness was "very large," that of destructiveness "very large," that of benevolence "large," and of conscientiousness "rather large," although that of wit was "deficient."
>
> (Altick, 64)

But the scientific establishment was divided over these practices, the debate often being conducted in the newspapers (Altick, 65), even as the sensationally detailed news coverage of the Palmer trial in 1856 had shaken public confidence in the medical establishment. That Palmer, a trained surgeon, had apparently carried out a number of murders by poisoning was unnerving enough, but the conflicting testimony by several medical experts at the coroner's inquest was even more unsettling (Boyle, 63-76). Such conflicts subject the façade of objective truth to a multitude of minute fractures.

In Braddon's sensation novels, we see signs of this in the way that writing, while apparently occupying a privileged position, often embodies its own contradictions. As a form of representation, writing is curiously subject to distortion. Sometimes written information is unreliable or misleading; sometimes it has been physically damaged; and sometimes it has been concealed. Events often turn on the presence or absence of a piece of writing, and its interpretation by the characters. These "messages," and their interpretation, are seen to be highly problematic, and Braddon often exploits the comedic possibilities. The correct interpretation is not always associated with class or intelligence. When *Aurora Floyd's* Steeve Hargraves ("the Softy") discovers the fateful marriage license in Conyers's waistcoat, he has considerable difficulty in reading the paper, but eventually comprehends its import. This is conveyed in a passage that parodies the process whereby signs are assembled and meaning synthesized:

> Elean He leaned over the light with his elbows on the table and read the contents of this paper, slowly and laboriously, following every word with his thick forefinger, sometimes stopping a long time upon one syllable, sometimes trying back half a line or so, but always plodding patiently with his ugly forefinger.
>
> When he came to the last word, he burst suddenly into a loud chuckle, as if he had just succeeded in guessing that difficult enigma which had puzzled him all the evening.
>
> "I know it all now," he said. "I can put it all together now. His words; and hers; and the mooney. I can put it all together and make out t' meaning of it."
>
> (Braddon, *Aurora Floyd*, 252)

What adds to the irony of this passage is the realization that, at this point, "the Softy" knows more than the reader; though it may be possible to guess, we do not know for certain what it is that Hargraves has just read.

Difficulties inherent in interpretation are illustrated by George Talboys's Australian venture, which also refracts a series of discourses on writing as deferred presence. George leaves his wife and child to make his fortune, writing "a few brief lines, which told her that I never had loved her better than now, when I seemed to desert her." George's abandonment of his family is not consistent with the love expressed by his written words, an incongruity he notes, and, once at sea, he does not write a line to her for three and a half years, until his last night in Sydney. George explains "I could not write and tell her that I was fighting hard with despair and death" (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 15), as if writing were fit only for good news. But for George writing is a cruel mistress. At the coffee house where he expects to meet his wife, he refuses to believe that there is no letter from her, and has the waiter check the incoming letters again. Upon hearing once more that there is no letter, "George's face blanched to a deadly whiteness" (24). The absence of the sender has been revealed and intensified by the absence of a letter from her, and it is the confirmation of this absence that provokes a *physical* reaction in George (the absence of blood in his face). Thus he is already in despair when he "mechanically" takes up "a greasy *Times* newspaper of the day before from a heap of journals," staring blankly at the same paragraph for some time "before his dazed brain took in its full meaning," i.e., that his wife Helen is dead (24-25). Now he has had confirmation of disaster from both the absence and the presence of writing. The newspaper is a day old; it is greasy, lying ignominiously on a pile of "journals," all qualities attesting to its ephemeral nature. He picks it up only "mechanically," and stares at the paragraph without comprehending it for some time. The article in question is a representation of death. And, as we learn later, the information contained in the article is false. Even a news item, a death notice, can be faked.

A strikingly similar incident occurs in *Aurora Floyd,* when Aurora reads the story of her jockey husband's supposed death in a copy of *Bell's Life,* which is characterized as "dirty . . . crumpled, and beer-stained, and emitting rank odours of inferior tobacco" (73). In both novels, Braddon emphasizes the very physicality of these pieces of writing—the way they look and feel and smell testifies to their material presence in the world, to their *reality,* and yet the information they convey is entirely false. Even detective Grimstone's notes of witness interviews in *Aurora Floyd,* which are presumably accurate since they help him to solve the crime, are recorded in a "greasy little memorandum book" (420).

Given such examples of the unreliability and even distastefulness of written communications, it is not surprising that, at times, characters cannot decide what to do with them. Alicia Audley's reply to Robert's request to visit Audley Court, written "in an indignant running hand," informs Robert that he and George are not welcome. Robert "twist[s] the letter into a pipe-light for his big meerschaum," and is about to burn it in the grate, when:

> changing his mind, [he] deliberately unfolded it, and smoothed the crumpled paper in his hand.
>
> "Poor little Alicia!" he said, thoughtfully; "it's rather hard to treat her letter so cavalierly—I'll keep it;" upon which Mr. Robert Audley put the note back into its envelope, and afterward thrust it into a pigeon-hole in his office desk, marked *important.*
>
> (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret,* 34)

This passage whimsically illustrates the instability of textual interpretation. In the space of a moment, Alicia's letter goes from being fit only to light his pipe to being classified *important;* yet, at the same time, it is pigeon-holed, a term already taking on connotations of bureaucratic process.[5]

A pipe-light that really *does* prove important appears in chapter 12 of *Lady Audley's Secret.* Robert, visiting Georgey and his grandfather, is looking for something with which to light his cigar, when he discerns "[a] twisted piece of paper . . . half burned upon the hearthrug" (63). This paper

[5] This is far from being an anachronistic interpretation. The *OED,* besides giving several definitions for the noun form of *pigeon-hole,* gives four meanings for the verb form. The earliest, whose example dates from 1848, means to divide into pigeon holes; the latest, dating from 1870, refers to a process of classification; but two other definitions are particularly intriguing and almost exactly contemporaneous with *Lady Audley's Secret:* to delay by filing away for future reference (1861; the example is from the *Saturday Review* for 20 July ["We do not doubt that Lord Lyveden, by duly pigeon-holing the complaint, added another to the long list of his public services in that line"]); and a rare usage, "[t]o deposit (a corpse) in a columbarium" (1858).

is revealed to be a telegraphic message, the date and name of the sender having been burned away, whose remaining contents are, "—alboys came to last night, and left by the mail for London, on his way to Liverpool, whence he was to sail for Sydney." Robert responds to this cryptic message by exclaiming, "My God . . . what is the meaning of this? I shall go to Liverpool to-night, and make inquiries there!" The message carries meaning, but because it is mangled and incomplete, it must, like all signifiers, be interpreted in the context of other information, just as "the Softy" had to interpret the marriage license in the context of "[h]is words . . . and hers . . . and the mooney." This time, the elevation of a piece of paper from a virtual match to an *important* document (and from a fragile, half-burned fragment to an iron link of evidence) is not ironic. Robert subsequently begins to compile a written record, called *"Journal of Facts connected with the Disappearance of George Talboys, inclusive of Facts which have no apparent Relation to that Circumstance."* The journal is written "in short, detached sentences, which he numbered as he wrote":

> In spite of the troubled state of his mind, he was rather inclined to be proud of the official appearance of this heading. He sat for some time looking at it with affection, and with the feather of the pen in his mouth. "Upon my word," he said, "I begin to think that I ought to have pursued my profession, instead of dawdling my life away as I have done."
>
> (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 67-8)

It is the title of the document alone—its "official" appearance—that provokes this self-congratulation, but for Robert, this is progress. For five years, his name has been "inscribed in the law-list" as a barrister, even "painted upon one of the doors in Figtree Court" (21). Yet even as one kind of writing represents him as a barrister, he has never fulfilled the professional requirements of that position, as he has never "had a brief, or tried to get a brief, or even wished to have a brief." But now Robert is going to take positive action. Beneath the proud title of his signifying process, he subsequently lists fifteen items that document the mystery of George's disappearance, writing "with great deliberation," pausing many times for reflection and to make editorial changes. But when he has completed this task, he places this paper alongside Alicia's letter in the pigeon-hole marked *"important."* The proximity of Alicia's letter to his *Journal of Facts* taints the latter, or at least undercuts its importance.

The multivalent nature of written evidence is reinforced in chapter 19, entitled "The Writing in the Book," when Robert examines the contents of his friend's trunk in an effort to solve the mystery of his disappearance. Besides a few garments, most of the items in the trunk are various forms of writing, and the narrator repeatedly uses terms that suggest decay and ephemerality. There are:

> old play-bills, whose biggest letters spelled the names of actors who are dead and gone; old perfume-bottles, fragrant with essences, whose fashion had passed away; neat little parcels of letters, each carefully labeled with the name of the writer; fragments of old newspapers; and a little heap of shabby, dilapidated books, each of which tumbled into as many pieces as a pack of cards in Robert's incautious hand.
>
> (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 101)

These items are characterized as a "mass of worthless litter, each scrap of which had once had its separate purpose." But the purpose is absent; these are for the most part empty signifiers, whose signifieds no longer exist. Also absent is the packet of letters from George's wife that Robert had hoped to find. He looks for clues among George's "no very brilliant collection of literature"—*Tom Jones, Don Juan,* Greek and Latin texts, "a French pamphlet on the cavalry sword-exercise" and a mysterious "fat book in a faded gilt and crimson cover" (102). Thus, in addition to what Bakhtin would call *heteroglossia,* or the novel's profusion of voices (those of the characters and the narrator, uttered in dialogic relationship with Braddon's society, including journalists, the reading public and the critics) and of genres (including telegrams, letters, obituaries and grave markers) we see the *polyglossia* (many tongues) of French, Greek and Latin texts (Bakhtin, 50-1, 61-5). Here the multitude of languages and genres suggests incomprehensibility, empty signifiers. The books are tattered and faded, the cover of *Tom Jones* hanging by a thread. The narrator draws out the suspense, forcing us to wait while the housekeeper clears away the remains of Robert's meal. As we wait, Robert, addicted to the "yellow-papered fictions" of French novels, notes that he now finds them "stale and profitless" in comparison to the excitement of the real mystery he is working to solve, the tattered books of George's that await him in the corner of the room, and even the vision of "his uncle's wife's golden curls."

The revealing evidence of Lady Audley's past life is not contained in the text of the books themselves, but in an inscription in her hand, and the description of this discovery is couched in heavy irony. The fatal evidence is in an *annual* from 1845, the engravings faded and mildewed, "the costumes grotesque and outlandish; the simpering beauties faded and commonplace" (103). Robert has to cut apart the pages to reveal Helen Maldon's inscription, for they are stuck together, presumably from mildew. The book is thrice-used, originally an award for "habits of order" and "obedience" to authorities—an ironic gift for a bigamist and (attempted) murderer—a faded hand-me-down whose representations of female beauty seem to invite comparison to the vibrant Pre-Raphaelite portrait of Lady Audley. Even this contrast subtly underscores the larger problem of representation to which the discourses on written evidence belong. Chiara Briganti points out that the portrait is "misleading," since "the abundance of crimson, its pre-raphaelite pouting lips, bespeak of a passionate nature, of burning sexuality," and yet Lady Audley reveals no signs of an active

sexuality (Briganti, 201).[6] Yet the painting, like the mildewed annual, is another link to "that fatal chain" of circumstantial evidence that will convict the young wife of Robert's uncle (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 102).

George's letter to Clara, written three weeks after his marriage, constitutes both another link in the chain of evidence and another discourse on representation. The letter contains a detailed description of George's wife, "a description in which every feature was minutely catalogued" (138). Braddon seems to parody the issue of representation in several ways. First, *catalogued* suggests a rational, scientific process, not an affair of the heart, an incongruity Robert notes after he has read the letter three times. Braddon also clearly means us to recall the painting once more. But she distances herself from the written description of the woman, which her narrator never gives us directly; the narrator only tells us how complete it is, how it contains "every feature . . . every grace of form or beauty of expression . . . every charm of manner." We don't see the representation; we only hear about it, and it sounds suspiciously perfect. The resemblance is troubling for Robert. He knows that this written description carries death—George's, as he believes, and therefore probably Lady Audley's also. Reflecting that if George could have known how his lovingly detailed description would ultimately be used, "'surely his hand would have fallen paralyzed by horror"' (138).

More fatal physical evidence is provided by Helen's hatbox, left behind with Miss Tonks. The hatbox bears "scraps of railway labels and addresses which were pasted here and there upon the box," (157) written representations of journeys. Like much of the other written evidence in the novel, these too have been distorted, battered and torn by travel, but Robert recognizes from a foreign label and the letters "TURI" that the box has been to Turin, Italy. (Like Eleanor Vane's father's suicide note, the ends are absent and must be supplied.) Removing some of the labels with a sponge, he is able to determine "enough to convince [his] uncle that he has married a designing and infamous woman" (157).

The novel questions the concept of writing as deferred presence by demonstrating that Lady Audley's presence will not be deferred, at least in the hands of a skilled detective who can reconstruct the past. More written links attest to this. The date of Helen's departure from Wildernsea is established by her letter to her father, enclosed in his letter to his landlady, Mrs. Barkamb, who notes that she has "the whole business [of his indebtedness] in black and white." Mrs. Barkamb's mahogany desk

[6] Briganti also observes that Lady Audley's rooms at Audley Court are where she is most often depicted, Braddon placing "great emphasis on Lady Audley's physical situation in the house," yet notes that "on the two occasions when this space is subjected to the gaze of others, she is absent" (20).

"suffer[s] from a plethora of documents, which oozed out of it in every direction. Letters, receipts, bills, inventories and tax-papers were mingled in hopeless confusion"(164), a description nearly duplicated in Mellish's "littered paraphernalia of account-books, bills, receipts, and price-lists" in *Aurora Floyd* (262). Helen has left behind what we would now call a "paper trail," but it is confused and chaotic, requiring organization and interpretation.

Further undercutting all these links in Robert's fatal chain is the implication that, once again, written "evidence" is not always reliable. It can be manufactured, as is the inscription on the headstone, ironically by George Talboys and Robert Audley themselves:

> Sacred to the Memory of
> HELEN,
> THE BELOVED WIFE OF GEORGE TALBOYS,
> Who departed this life
> August 24th, 1857, aged 22,
> Deeply regretted by her sorrowing Husband.
> (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 29)

This is a fascinating message. It corresponds to, and seems to corroborate, the death notice in *The Times*. Someone is indeed buried there, but not the person signified by the inscription. Helen Talboys's presence in the grave has been deferred. Even the sentiment itself is ambiguous: What is the subject of "regretted"? Her death, presumably, but the syntax admits other possibilities, and further subverts the stability and reliability of the language.

Just as writings such as the headstone inscription do not always point *to* the right person, messages in *Lady Audley's Secret* are not always *from* the persons to whom they are attributed. When Lady Audley learns that Robert and George have arrived in Essex, she has Phoebe Marks send her the telegraphic message purporting to be from her former schoolmistress, Mrs. Vincent, that precipitates her sudden departure and delays her discovery (39-40). It is only much later, as Robert painstakingly retraces her movements to establish his chain of evidence, that he learns from Mrs. Vincent that she never sent a "telegraphic dispatch." Nor did the illness the message described exist at all (154). During that interview, Robert also learns that the former Lucy Graham subverted the practice of using written references to secure employment: "Miss Graham waived the question of salary; I could not do less than waive the question of reference" (155). By declining to negotiate the financial terms of her employment, in effect she purchases both her employment and favorable references that can be used for subsequent identification and character establishment—appropriately enough, the Victorians called a letter of reference a *character*.

The letters written by George Talboys as he was preparing to depart for Australia, after he was nearly murdered by Lady Audley, raise a number of questions and illustrate Braddon's skill at exploring the implications of written communications. First, the letters did not arrive at their destinations when they were supposed to: Robert had already departed and Luke Marks had no forwarding address. (Marks has no marks to represent Robert.) The letters establish that George is alive, but Luke realizes that they also would undermine his plans for Luke and Phoebe to get "started in life by [Phoebe's] missus" (278), so he withholds them. When the dying Luke finally turns the letters over to Robert, the barrister at first is reluctant to read them because he does not recognize the handwriting, and he questions Marks's motives. "'Suppose you read 'em first,' said Mr. Marks, 'and ask me questions about them afterwards'" (272). The letters purport to be written by George, but are not in the handwriting that Robert knows so well. The handwriting is distorted, since it was written with George's left hand, his right having been broken by Lady Audley. By themselves, they cannot attest to George's presence (and hence the fact that he is alive). But this absence is filled by Luke Marks's swearing to the authenticity of the letters, his death-bed confession presumably reinforcing his veracity. Luke's claimed presence when the letters were written provides the missing attribute of *presence* that writing lacks. Braddon even subverts all the *sinister* characteristics of left-handedness, and the delay in the letters' delivery makes possible most of the events of the novel.

As he did when he reacted with disbelief to George's left-handed letters, Robert frequently responds to the physical *appearance* of a letter without regard to its contents. We see two examples of this when he receives letters from Clara. In the first instance, Clara's letter forwarding two of George's letters, the narrator tells us that "[h]e contemplated the envelope for some minutes before opening it—not in any wonder as to his correspondent, for the letter bore the postmark of Grange Heath . . . but in that lazy dreaminess which was a part of his character" (138). In the second example, much later in the novel, Robert's response is even more dramatic:

> There were three letters waiting for Mr. Audley at his chambers. One was from Sir Michael, and another from Alicia. The third was addressed in a hand the young barrister knew only too well, though he had seen it but once before. His face flushed redly at the sight of the superscription, and he took the letter in his hand, carefully and tenderly, as if it had been a living thing, and sentient to his touch. He turned it over and over in his hands, looking at the crest upon the envelope, at the post-mark, at the color of the paper, and then put it into the bosom of his waistcoat with a strange smile upon his face.
>
> (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret*, 260)

Robert's fetishistic response to Clara's letters recalls his earlier response to

Lady Audley's letter, which the narrator described as "a pretty, fairy-like note, written on shining paper of a peculiar creamy hue":

> "What a pretty hand she writes!" said Robert, as his cousin folded the note.
>
> "Yes, it is pretty, is it not? Look at it, Robert."
>
> She [Alicia] put the letter into his hand, and he contemplated it lazily for a few minutes . . .
>
> "It is the prettiest, most coquettish little hand I ever saw . . ."
>
> (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret,* 43)

Robert's preoccupation with the physical characteristics of writing are in marked contrast to its other network of associations, as mentioned previously: dirt, grease, ashes, beer and the rankness of "inferior tobacco." These two conflicting sets of associations add to the discursive tension that characterizes writing throughout the novel.[7]

A final example of Robert's fetish for the physical appearance of letters is the arrival of "a black-edged letter, written upon foreign paper" (Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret,* 286). This letter announces, and thus represents, the death of "a certain Madame Taylor." Lady Audley is finally dead, but the reader's assurance of this is troubled by the pattern of unreliability that has characterized previous written evidence of death, and is heightened by the curious remoteness of the evidence, the last written evidence in the novel. Lady Audley has had so many identities—Helen Maldon, Helen Talboys, Lucy Graham, Lady Audley, Madame Taylor—all of which have been supported by written evidence. We literally do not know what to call her; she is never what she seems, always the trickster figure. In fact, there was more "evidence" of Helen Talboys's death than of that of Madame Taylor.

Ann Cvetkovich (50) suggests that "sensationalism derives its power

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[7] In fact, the sensory detail used to describe the letters of Clara and Lady Audley may have originated in Braddon's childhood fascination with the materials of writing. As she writes in "My First Novel" (19):

> Far back in the distinctness of childish memories I see a little girl who has lately learnt to write, who has lately been given a beautiful brand-new mahogany desk, with a red velvet slope, and a glass ink-bottle . . . Very proud is the little girl, with the Kenwigs pigtails and the Kenwigs frills, of that mahogany desk, and its infinite capacities for literary labour, above all, gem of gems, its stick of variegated sealing-wax, brown, speckled with gold, and its little glass seal with an intaglio representing two doves—Pliny's doves, perhaps, famous in mosaic, only the little girl had never heard of Pliny . . .
>
> Armed with that desk and its supply of stationery, Mary Elizabeth Braddon—very fond of writing her name at full length . . . began that pilgrimage on the broad high road of fiction. . . .

from rendering concrete or visible what would otherwise be hidden; the image of the beautiful and transgressive woman becomes sensational when we know that she is evil and we both see and don't see her criminality in her appearance." At the end of the novel, Lady Audley is not present and we do not *see* her death; it is only a letter from a foreign land and its black edge that we see, a representation of the death of "*a certain* Madame Taylor" (emphasis added).

Despite Robert Audley's belief in "that wonderful fabric" of circumstantial evidence in *Lady Audley's Secret,* the fabric, like many of the books, letters and telegraphic messages in the novel, is subject to the ravages of fire, wrinkling and mildew. It is also subject to deception, concealment and misinterpretation. These ambiguities seem consistent with what Jenny Bourne Taylor calls "the absence of any stable reference point for defining insanity." Taylor notes that "Lucy's 'insanity' is both the revelation of a truth and an extension of her ability to continually transform herself, confound the distinction between appearance and reality" (11-2). If such a distinction can be so confounded, then it is no wonder that the attempt to construct a model of reality through a series of written representations is so fraught with uncertainty. These written representations can be twisted into pipe-lights, or they can be marked *important* (and subsequently pigeon-holed).

In exploring the limitations, not just of genre, but of language itself, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, like her mercurial heroine, is also able to transform herself. Even this early in her career as a novelist, even in so unabashedly sensational a novel as *Lady Audley's Secret,* she confounds the distinction between the artistic and the sensational, a distinction she playfully engages and ultimately transcends.

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~~Reviews~~

Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001. pp. x + 202. (ISBN 0-333-77666-6).

Deborah Wynne is concerned with both the material production of fiction and the experience of reading. In this informative study of the sensation novel in the 1860s, she reminds us that these two things are closely inter-related, and in ways which make *our* reading of Victorian novels quite different from the ways in which they were read by their first readers. More often than not the twenty-first century "reader" of a Victorian novel will first encounter it, as did many of its first "readers", in the form of a dramatic adaptation—although in our case the adaptation will be for the screen (small or large), rather than the stage. If we consume the novel in a printed version, it will usually be in the form of a single paperback volume—with an attractive cover adorned with a still from the screen version, or a reproduction of a suitable nineteenth-century painting—which we may polish off in as many or as few sittings as we choose. However, in the nineteenth century, and especially in the 1860s, many novels would first have been encountered in "tantalising portions" in the pages of family magazines, those weekly or monthly miscellanies which ran serialized versions of one, two, or more novels alongside poems, short stories, and essays on various subjects, for the entertainment and instruction of their middle-class or upwardly mobile working class readers.

These Family magazines, like all periodicals, Wynne argues, "exist as sites of simultaneity in that they present a cluster of apparently unrelated texts at the same point in time and space, all having the potential to be read in relation to each other" (20). Was this potential realized, and, if so, with what results? Wynne inclines to the view that readers did 'sample all the different texts on offer', rather than singling out one or two features and ignoring the rest. Her evidence is, in part, intuitive: she thinks it likely that Victorian readers would have read everything in a particular issue of a magazine on the grounds that this was an age of thrift and recycling, and, in a period of relatively expensive print, they would have wanted to drain every drop of entertainment potential from each issue of the magazine purchased. She also adduces internal and (occasionally) external textual evidence to demonstrate that some editors—notably Dickens—deliberately orchestrated the contents of individual issues of a magazine around the lead serial. The result of the realization of the magazines' potential for simultaneity was a particular form of intertextuality and a particular mode

of reading which Wynne explores by means of a careful and often illuminating analysis of seven sensation novels in the context of the periodical texts in which they first appeared.

Collins and Dickens are the central figures in Wynne's study, which suggests that their joint work for *All The Year Round* played a (perhaps *the*) leading role in developing a "discourse of sensation" in the 1860s. Chapter 2 links the sensational import and impact of *The Woman in White* to its "interaction" with the sensational journalism of Dickens's *All The Year Round* which reinforced Collins's narrative with further stories of wrongful imprisonment, and articles on the treatment of the insane, the health and safety of the modern middle classes, and the rise of the gentleman criminal and the "solitary clever detective" (54). Chapter 4 looks more closely at Dickens's work as an editor, and reads *Great Expectations* both as a sensation novel which sought to capitalize on Collins's success, and in the context of *All The Year Round's* construction of a sensationalist discourse around the natural selection debates and other "anxiety stories" related to origins and degeneration. Chapter 5 shows how Dickens as the "conductor" of *All The Year Round*, sought to intensify both the sensationalism and the realism of Collins's *No Name* by supporting its main themes with essays on the plight of young girls living "outside the shelter of the respectable family" (99), and on theories of race and degeneracy. Chapter 8, on the other hand, looks at the different intertextual readings of the sensational *Armadale* that were offered by its appearance in the upmarket *Cornhill Magazine*, alongside the domestic realism of Gaskell's *Wives and Daughters*, and, subsequently, Trollope's *The Claverings*—a juxtaposition which brings into sharp focus the hybridity of the sensation novel, and its particular mixture of "middle-class domestic realism and lowbrow melodrama" (165).

Wynne also sheds fresh light on a number of other successful sensation novels which have been much discussed in the recent revival of critical interest in this genre. By relocating *East Lynne* in its original context in the pages of the *New Monthly Magazine*, a periodical with a largely male readership, Wynne challenges some recent feminist readings of this novel and offers an interesting reading of its class positioning—as resolutely, if politely championing middle-class values. An examination of *Once A Week's* "sophisticated approach towards cultural analysis in its discussions of literature, art, and the theatre" (114-5), underpins a persuasive discussion of Braddon's "spirited defence of melodrama and sensation fiction" (114) in *Eleanor's Victory.* A mercifully brief chapter on Charles Reade's *Very Hard Cash* in the context of *All The Year Round* gives a few reasons why this novel was even less successful as a serial that it was in its revised volume form.

Although this book only focuses on one aspect of Collins's oeuvre it will be of great interest to students of his work, throwing fresh light on the nature of his achievement as a sensation novelist. It also has much to say to

students of nineteenth-century fiction more generally, as well as to students of the periodical press. Sensation novels were sometimes criticised by their first reviewers for being "newspaper novels". This book succeeds in clarifying the nature of the links between the sensation fiction of the 1860s and some aspects of contemporary journalism, by demonstrating how sensation fiction was "shaped and defined by its periodical publishing space" (168). In doing so it also begins to sketch in a lateral mode of reading in which the nineteenth-century reader learned (or was led by an editorial conductor) to dance through apparently "disconnected items of temporary intelligence" (C.H. Butterworth, quoted on p.13), in a way which "extended the boundaries of the serial novel by encouraging the reader's engagement with its accompanying texts" (168).

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Christopher GoGwilt, *The Fiction of Geopolitics: Afterimages of Culture, from Wilkie Collins to Alfred Hitchcock*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000. pp. xiii + 265. (ISBN 0-804-73726-6).

In the argument of this book, "twentieth-century paradigms of geopolitics" relate to nineteenth-century concepts of culture (3), and the title points to the idea that "discourses of geopolitics are constituted and sustained through essentially fictive forms" (7). The "fictive forms" that sustain geopolitics here are both novelistic and cinematic, and GoGwilt studies novels by Wilkie Collins (*The Moonstone*) and Olive Schreiner (*The Story of an African Farm)*, before moving on to writings by and portraits of R.B. Cunningham-Graham and a final chapter on sabotage in Joseph Conrad and Alfred Hitchcock. The author of *The Invention of the West: Joseph Conrad and the Double-Mapping of Europe and Empire* (Stanford, 1995), GoGwilt is particularly interesting on images associated with cartography and geography, and his first chapter, which treats the probably unfamiliar but important figures of H.J. Mackinder, Friedrich Ratzel, and Elisée Reclus, will reward readers interested in a different way of approaching nineteenth-century culture. GoGwilt is also to be thanked for good discussions of Schreiner, who is only now gaining some of the critical attention that she deserves, and of Cunningham-Graham, another relatively unknown character. Wilkie Collins's *Moonstone*, in fact, is probably the most canonical and most familiar work under inspection here, so productive has been the machinery of Wilkie Collins studies in the last ten years. Since the focus of this Journal is on Wilkie Collins, it is on that chapter that I will

primarily center this review, although I will certainly encourage the reader to have a look at GoGwilt's opening chapter on "the geopolitical image," which makes for an interesting comparison to the brilliant use of maps in Franco Moretti's *Atlas of the European Novel: 1800-1900* (Verso, 1998).

At "the heart of the overall argument," as GoGwilt puts it, is an emphasis on the visual image: this "provides the opportunity for reexamination of the long 'ocularcentric' tradition of European enlightenment thinking" (7). Thus GoGwilt aligns his project with that of Jonathan Crary, in *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the Nineteenth Century* (MIT: 1996).[1] Crary's main predecessors in his extraordinarily detailed and wide-ranging work are Foucault and Benjamin—the two outstanding pioneers, perhaps, in the field of nineteenth-century visuality. GoGwilt's methodology is more eclectic, less theoretical, in comparison with Crary. In his chapter on Collins, GoGwilt begins with a brief discussion of "culture" in Matthew Arnold and then lingers over a painting by David Wilkie, *Sir David Baird Discovering the Body of the Sultan Tippoo Sahib, after having captured Seringapatam* (1790). David Wilkie is Wilkie Collins's godfather, after whom he was christened, so we have both a family and a thematic connection from this picture to the book. Painters and painting are touched on frequently in Collins, not surprisingly, since his father, William Collins, was also a painter, and Collins's first book writes his father's memoirs (1848). GoGwilt treats well the role of the "paint-stain" in *The Moonstone*, the smear of paint that implicates Franklin Blake in the theft, but he is more interested in the "stain" than the "paint," the "blot" on culture—a "story of dirty linen," as D.A. Miller calls it.[2] One might, however, have pursued the "painterly" dimensions of the novel further, regarding the "smear of paint" as not only a metaphor for scandal but as a species of allegory on aesthetics. Readings of *The Moonstone* which foreground and provide the particularities of British imperialism already, in effect, regard the book as an allegory, and so one might read the allegory both ways, pursuing the interchangeable figures of politics (stain) and aesthetics (paint) with equal diligence.[3] The aesthetics of the sensation novel work away from the monumental and towards the impressionistic, so that one might think further about the "decoration of the door," which occupies so much of our attention in the first part of the novel, and link that image perhaps with

[1] Page references to *The Moonstone* in the text refer to Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (New York: Bantam, 1982). Another recent discussion of the visual in the nineteenth century is Kate Flint, *The Victorians and the Visual Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000).

[2] D.A. Miller, "From *roman policier* to *roman-police*: Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*" in *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1988) 34.

[3] The readable grammar of political allegory in Collins' "romance" (following on Scott) is emphasized by Ian Duncan, "*The Moonstone*, the Victorian Novel, and Imperialist Panic," *Modern Langauge Quarterly* 55 (1994) 298-9.

notions of memory, or Franklin Blake's complete lack of memory ("I threw a dozen portraits, at least, of the man with the piebald hair . . . into the wastebasket" [335]. It is not surprising that Collins's novels will blur and blot Arnoldian divisions of culture, since they do not so much look back to the pastoral scenes of his father as look ahead (with a more melodramatic aspect) to the expressions of moment and light in Whistler (whose *Nocturne in Black and Gold: The Falling Rocket* was regarded by Ruskin as "flinging a pot of paint in the public's face").

I have argued elsewhere that the study of nineteenth-century visuality would benefit by focusing on architecture and interior design over against our current tendency to look at the pre-cinematic.[4] GoGwilt rightly, I think, situates *The Moonstone* in the tradition of a "country-house novel," as related in Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*. GoGwilt writes, "as with Collins's other novels of the 1860s, the social space of the English country house provides a prime location for plotting troubled family legacies" (62). As a student of the visual and the territorial, GoGwilt could, once again, much more rigorously pursue the associations of interior space in *The Moonstone*. Not only is the "boudoir" with its decorated door an object to which the narrative returns, so is the library ("'What might you want in the library at this time of day?' I inquired" [86]). As D.A. Miller points out, in detective fiction "the layout of the country house [is] frequently given in all the exactitude of a diagram," and every room in *The Moonstone* radiates with memory and significance. "I wish certain parts of the house to be reopened, and to be furnished, exactly as they were furnished at this time last year" (381), commands Ezra Jennings, in order to re-create the original crime scene. GoGwilt could do more, then, to help us to envision maps of the Victorian household, which are just as weighted, figurative, and "geopolitical" as the maps of Europe. In his attention to interior design, as with painting, a more focused approach to Victorian visuality might have been more productive.

GoGwilt's chapter on *The Moonstone* is a good discussion, but not as detailed, focused, and original as essays by D.A. Miller, Tamar Heller, and Ian Duncan.[5] Other parts of GoGwilt's book do help us organize and see things differently, but his *Moonstone*, in the end, seems a little too familiar. Collins is a clearly a central figure in the multiple discourses of Victorian visual culture and there is still much interesting work to be done in this new and developing field.

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[4] Steve Dillon, "Victorian Interior," *Modern Language Quarterly* 62 (2001) 83-115.

[5] Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale UP, 1992).

Graham Law, *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press*. Basingstoke, Hampshire/New York: Palgrave, 2000. pp. xxii + 300. (ISBN 0-333-76019-0 / 0-312-23574-7)

Because much primary material concerning newspaper fiction in the Victorian period did not survive, because no archival survey is ever complete, and because definitions of genre are not universal, Graham Law has rigorously, precisely, and consistently qualified every assertion he makes in this book. And yet *Serializing Fiction in the Victorian Press* has irreversibly recast the shape of literary history in the nineteenth century.

This book corrects the traditional history of the novel in the nineteenth century, which has been organized by volume publication. As Law points out, that critical choice has misrepresented the reading of fiction in that time: "It now seems likely that, for almost the whole of the Victorian period, a significant majority of 'original' novels published as books had appeared previously in monthly or weekly instalments, as independent numbers, in magazines, or in the pages of the newspapers that are our particular interest here" (13). Especially unrecognized and unmeasured have been the serial novels placed in provincial newspapers by emerging syndicates: "Indeed, it seems likely that virtually every community in Britain would have been served by some form of newspaper consistently featuring fiction material before the end of the century" (181). For the interest of this journal, we should note that "Mary Braddon and Wilkie Collins were the two Victorian novelists of name who sold their work to syndicates of provincial newspapers earliest and most consistently" (170).

Law defines his subject precisely: "Above all this book is concerned with the nature and role of the provincial fiction syndicates, and the reasons for their rise and demise" (34). And his thesis fits this subject within established scholarship: "the syndication of serial fiction in newspapers represents an important but overlooked transitional phrase between the 'Gentlemanly Publishing' of the mid-century, with its cloth-covered volumes and literary monthlies, and the mass-market magazines and paperbacks of the turn of the century" (34). Because Collins is a central figure in this "overlooked transitional phrase," we are encouraged by Law's book to rethink his contribution to the history of the Victorian novel.

Law begins his sweeping study by sketching a more pervasive use of serialization in the eighteenth century than is often acknowledged and then moves to installment publication in the Victorian period, which he divides into three overlapping periods: early (1830s to 1850s), middle (1850s to 1870s), and late (1870s to 1890s) (14). The impetus for the trend of publishing fiction in periodicals is the elimination of 'Taxes on Knowledge,' with one of the largest effects coming "in the provincial press, where there was an explosion of new newspapers" (31). Law presents the data of serialization in more than a dozen detailed tables (thirty pages of

which appear in the appendix), acknowledging that "in the end this book remains more closely attached to the tradition of empirical study of the development of the publishing industry, the reading public, and popular fiction by such scholars such as Graham Pollard, Richard Altick and Louis James" (xiv) than to more theoretical studies (i.e., Norman Feltes's *Modes of Production of Victorian Novels*). There are also ten pages of illustrations showing authors and sample pages of newspapers with fiction.

The central figure in Law's study is W.F. Tillotson, who with John Maxwell in 1873 "created the first syndicate of British provincial newspapers systematically covering most of the country for new work by an author with a reputation already established in the metropolitan book market" (43). The Fiction Bureau set a "trend which would lead to an entirely new phase in the periodical publication of Victorian fiction" (43). Collins was perhaps "the biggest catch" in the 1870s for the Bolton firm, one of "a new group of established metropolitan authors who had no formal connection with John Maxwell, and who were a cut above the general run of his protégés" (77). Such organizations as the Fiction Bureau provided new outlets for authors. Law traces the dynamic local contexts in which novels appeared (rivalry between the *Sheffield Independent* and the *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, for instance) in order to understand national trends. He concludes, for instance, that "newspapers, both generically and individually, must be seen to create as much as to discover their readership" (126). Drawing evidence from surges in sales and from reader correspondence, Law concludes that serialization in provincial newspapers meant reaching many more readers than volume publication, "over half a million sales in Britain alone" (131). Though not all might read the fiction, it would be "rash for us not to assume that the large circulation figures for the weeklies run by Tillotsons and W.C. Leng and Co. themselves, and for those of many of their clients, indicated a large and enthusiastic following for much of the fiction they were offering" (136-7). Among other aspects of increasing trade in fiction taken up by Law are: the influence of Scottish developments on the English provincial newspaper market (especially the career of writer David Pae), the importance of new juvenile and female markets, and the expansion of colonial outlets.

While it is often assumed editors and publishers of installment works forced writers to abandon artistic standards, Law contends that "the most consistent pressures exerted on the later Victorian novelist by the mode of initial publication in newspapers were generic" (200), that is, adapting to the traditions of sensation, mystery, or adventure fiction, not to the demands of editors or publishers. Even the famous case of Thomas Hardy's *Tess*, reconsidered here by Law, suggests that, if "provincial syndicators, and the journals they served, were less likely to tamper with texts to avoid giving offense to prudish readers, they seem at the same time to have been far more likely to do so by adding a veneer of sensationalism, by deleting material perceived as tedious, or simply by making pragmatic changes

according to pressures of space" (195). The role of gender in publishing is not dramatically altered by Law's research. For instance, in "the weekly news-miscellanies becoming common by the 1870s, there is a growing recognition of females readers, but often as belonging [in] a separate sphere, meriting specific women's pages and features" (141).

Later in the century, competition to syndicates led to expansion abroad: Tillotsons "seems to have established regular business relations with eight American newspapers by late 1885" (73), as well as ties to Australian, Canadian, and European newspapers. The competition faced by syndicates, which was in some ways healthy for the industry, included: authors working out their own arrangements with newspapers; rival syndicates like Cassell, Leaders, and the National Press Agency; American syndicates offering American writers in England (and British writers in America); literary agents like A. P. Watt, who, for instance, arranged for newspaper syndication of Collins' *Heart and Science* in 1882 and *"I Say No"* the following year, both simultaneously with appearances in metropolitan monthly magazines.

Wilkie Collins broke ground in the complexity of contracts he developed with syndicates, taking on such matters as simultaneous release, regional limitations, and colonial syndication (167-8). In fact, his attention to such detail can be considered a phase in the development of the literary agent, who negotiated such rights for authors. Law admits that Collins turned to syndication for money; yet he "was also attracted by the idea of escaping the Grundyism of the London editors, library proprietors, and reviewers, and directly addressing a new mass reading public measured in hundreds rather than tens of thousands" (171). Still, Collins viewed people like Tillotson as beneath him in class and education. "The tensions visible in the intercourse between Collins or his representative and the popular newspaper syndicators and proprietors are symptoms not only of the growing divide between romantic and professional views of authorship, and between 'gentlemanly' and 'commercial' modes of fiction production, but also of Collins's confusion as to which side of the divide he was on" (176).

Law does not ignore the limitations of the provincial newspaper format or the syndication process; but he sees the demise of these entities in the late 1880s as also involving loss: "While the provincial syndicates had permitted a range of narrative modes and themes, the shift of the balance of power back to the metropolitan press encouraged a considerable narrowing and hardening of the dominant modes of serial fiction" (214). Rather than "narrowing" or "hardening" current scholarship, Law's book opens up for new scrutiny an important transitional period in the history of the novel and provides a wealth of new information about authors reaching audiences with serial fiction in the Victorian Age.

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Marlene Tromp, *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain*. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000. pp. 288. (ISBN 0-8139-1949-5).

> "I was alone with him, Marian—his cruel hand was bruising my arm—what could I do?"
>
> "Is the mark on your arm still? Let me see it."
>
> "Why do you want to see it?
>
> "I want to see it, Laura, because our endurance must end, and our resistance must begin today. That mark is a weapon to strike him with. Let me see it now—I may have to swear to it at some future time."

Every Collins scholar and fan has already read this passage from Marian Halcombe's diary in *The Woman in White*, probably—given our age of highly publicized cases of domestic violence—without stopping for a thick analysis. For one thing, no details vivify the bruise on the page. But what did it mean to Victorian readers for Lady Laura Glyde, gentlewoman, to expose a bruise inflicted by her upper-class husband? In what other social, legal, and literary conversations did this scene participate? How did the fact of this scene's occurrence in a "sensation" novel affect its cultural significance? Marlene Tromp's *The Private Rod* builds a multi-layered and eloquent answer to these wide-ranging questions. The book explores the relationships between violence in the "real" domestic life of the Victorian middle classes and its representations in fiction and the law, asserting that "[s]ensation fiction … participated in, shaped, and was shaped by the political-legal debates of the era … over what was real, what was legislatable." It shows that that this interplay among sensation novel, realist novel, and law gradually changed what could be imagined in fiction and articulated in law about physical violence within married life (71). As well as providing material for Victorian scholarship on gender, class, and genre, this study wants to make us think about how we continue to imagine and legislate against marital violence in the present century.

Tromp frames her discussion of two key sensation novels (*The Woman in White* and Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*) with chapters on other works that prepare the way for sensation and (after the 1860s) mark its impact on literary and legal culture. *Oliver Twist* makes a bridge between the *Newgate Calendar* and sensation fiction, dramatizing and humanizing violence against working-class women and marking fiction as a space for the critique of laws that failed to protect them. Dickens's narrative of Nancy's redemption, however, is anchored to "her monetary worth to her social betters," and part of the value of her visible, beaten body is its ability to locate and naturalize violence in a realm apart from the upper and middle classes (16). The bodies of gentlewomen are kept invisible and thus unimaginable as vulnerable to marital abuse.

All this changes in the novels of Collins and Braddon, which explore the real and the legislatable within middle- and upper-class marital violence. The Lady Caroline Norton case and other public events had drawn attention to the insufficiency of legal protection for abused married women; the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 evaded the problem by figuring the violent husband as a drunken, brutal, working-class man and this representational narrowness limited its protection of middle and upper-class women.

The Woman in White (1860) breaks open this law's figuration of marital violence, primarily through the character of Sir Percival Glyde, a brutal but (supposedly) aristocratic husband. Tromp's discussion anatomizes the novel's psycho-social portrait of marital violence, exposing how complex and indirect are sensation fiction's messages about marriage, violence, and class. When Glyde turns out to be illegitimate, for example, one has to ask with what class identity he bruises his wife, especially when his brutality locates him in the working classes, "the only kind of violent man Parliament defined" (73). Tromp deepens the issue of class instability, and its effect on Glyde himself, through her reading of the shifts in his ability to perform his assumed social role with each turn of the plot. Tromp eloquently contrasts the public bruise as figure for Glyde's inability to manage his place in the circuits of domestic and financial power with Count Fosco's chillingly expert use of the "private rod."

But Tromp is also original in her reframing of the middle-class English hero Walter Hartright as a third variety of violent man. Neither a corrupt aristocrat (albeit a fake one), nor an "odious foreigner," this gentle wielder of paintbrushes and pens and defender of women is himself a creature of violence. Walter's violence, however, does not register as relevant because it is performed in condoned social contexts: while he is traversing the wilds of Central America, or protecting English gentlewomen. Most provocatively, Tromp offers a critical reading of Walter's attempt to save Glyde from the fire in the chancel, arguing that his actions serve rather to make that death inevitable; he thus participates in Glyde's execution. So, while *The Woman in White* returns the gentlewoman's body to textual visibility, publicizes her vulnerability to marital violence, and posts an active critique of the Divorce Laws, Tromp shows how the novel works to "screen [Walter's] violence and label the violence of others as illegitimate" (97). Amid its disruptions of the imagined "real" of the domestic lives of gentlewomen, the novel preserves "the sanctity of middle-class identity" by marking all the perpetrators of marital violence as belonging to a criminal caste that transcends nationality but not social class (17).

This shoring up of the middle-class home, of course, is never complete in a sensation novel. A final section, "(Wo)manly Anger," addresses the fantasies of violent justice on the part of women characters, notably Marian Halcombe. Marian's anger falls within her consistent coding as a "masculine" woman (who even carries a "manly umbrella,"

significant amid the recurrent canes and whips in the novels discussed). It nonetheless represents "the potential for violence in other women characters as a response to the violence enacted on them" (101). Emblematic of the suggestive (because just real enough to take seriously) excess of the sensation novel, characters like Marian make "the threat of women's access to power" visible, proposing "alternative ways of enacting and responding to violence in the home" and new ways of imagining gentlewomen (101-2).

The outright "dangerous" woman is the focus of the next chapter's discussion of *Aurora Floyd* (1863), which (like other early Braddon novels) features middle-class women characters explicitly associated with retributive violence against husbands and fiancés. Tromp reads *Aurora Floyd* with and against the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1857-70, whose rhetoric the novel replicates "imperfectly," enough to complicate the questions of where danger originates and what are the gender and social identities of its victims. (It would be fascinating to bring this chapter's insights to bear on *Armadale* and other fictions of dangerous women by Wilkie Collins.)

Realist fiction's representations of marital violence, Tromp argues, were indelibly marked by sensation fiction. Oliphant's *Salem Chapel* and Eliot's *Daniel Deronda*, for example, are written against sensation but clearly invoke its techniques. While the relationship between the sensational and the real is not a new theme, Tromp's contributions make significant inroads into discussions of exactly what that generic relationship is. Rather than reading *Salem Chapel*'s sensation subplot as interfering with the realist one, Tromp argues that "Oliphant's use of language, madness, and the woman's body offers us the means to see both realism and the undefiled middle class contaminated by sensation," indicating that the generic boundaries (on which many critics still base their analyses of Collins) are considerably blurred by the time of this novel (18). Tromp's impressive reading of *Daniel Deronda* culminates the analysis of how sensation transformed realism. Eliot's portrayal of Grandcourt's gentlemanly violence solidifies the imagining of marital violence in fashionable homes as a reality. Eliot portrays his violence as a perceptual and expressive problem for Gwendolen (and the courts) that Gwendolen can only articulate in the linguistic and performative space of madness; this is not an example of moments of failed realism but rather testimony that "the real itself must be read and understood through the sensational" (19).

The conclusion looks at the late-century Clitheroe Decision, a marital rights case that, Tromp argues, not only reveals the continuing cultural tensions about how to imagine and interpret evidence of marital violence, but also marks the changes from the mid-century:

> Sensation participated in the evolution of the discourses regarding the domestic space, sexuality, and violence, and, by contaminating realism, by

> revealing the fissures in its logic … redefined what was identified as realism, along with Victorian "truths" about marital violence. (242)

Tromp's discussions of law and literature are fullest and most historically particular in the chapters on Collins and Braddon. A more sustained focus on these "mutually constitutive discourses," which would exceed the space of this already ambitious volume, might include the multiple and productive interconnections between the two professions and their discourses (often in the same body, as in the case of Collins and Stevenson). The discussions of empire (a natural, considering the date of 1857, shared by the Matrimonial Causes Act and the Sepoy Rebellion) and the performance of gender (fleshed out with reference to Judith Butler) are other examples of provocative threads that emerge and recede, inviting the reader to take them up elsewhere (or wait for Tromp to write more).

The book's strongest feature is Tromp's inspired and nuanced readings of scenes of subtle and explicit violence in Victorian sensation fiction: Laura's bruises, Aurora Leigh's beating of the stablehand Softy, Gwendolen Harleth's whipping of the rhododendron as she talks to the physically restrained and terrifying Grandcourt—and her sharp and provocative connections between these scenes and the larger cultural patterns in which they participate. The book articulates how violence within a "gentle" marriage was a linguistic and representational problem for individuals, novelists, and the law, but also how the production of words had and has the potential to change the problem of marital violence. Sensation novels, Tromp argues, exposed and disturbed the invisible scripts of violence in the "gentle" home. As well as creating a space, language, and narrative framework in which women readers might place and articulate their own experiences, the sensation novel contributed to a process of re-imagining that changed not only the novel but also the law.

The book exhorts contemporary critics to participate in the continued re-imagining of this and other social issues. "There are no innocent words," Tromp reminds us, nor texts that live in an ideology-free zone (1). When we position the sensation novel as a site where no serious traffic in ideology takes place, we contribute to the continuing "invisibility of some cultural, intellectual, and fictional patterns," among them the naturalization of marital violence (2). Tromp's productive denaturalization of the fictions of marital violence, the relationships between sensation and realism, and the conversations between fiction, the law, and the critics will interest a wide range of readers, including those interested in exploring another rich layer in Collins's fiction.

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Ronald R. Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999 [2000]. pp. xviii + 341. (ISBN 0-521-65303-7).

Ronald Thomas begins playfully enough, with acknowledgments to colleagues who are likened to a series of "equally culpable suspects" in a mystery story and with a dedication to his "partner in life if not in crime" (xvii, xviii). But readers will quickly recognize in this book a weighty contribution to the acclaimed interdisciplinary series, the Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-Century Literature and Culture, under the general editorship of Gillian Beer. Thomas, it is true, offers us "a series of investigations" (4) of paradigmatic instances of fictional detection reflecting both British and American traditions, from Poe's "Murders in the Rue Morgue" (1841) to Christie's *Murder on the Orient Express* (1934), but not in the form of a looseleaf literary casebook. Rather the investigations are tightly bound together by the concern with developments in forensic technology over the same period, and the legal and political ramifications of their role in "reading the symptoms of criminal pathology in the individual body and the social body" (3). The theoretical debts are, above all, to Michel Foucault:

> The centrality of the detective narrative for the nineteenth century is based on its crucial role in the process of making and monitoring the modern subject. (8)

and to Benedict Anderson:

> Anglo-American detective fiction appears in a post-revolutionary environment when the heroic status of the rebel or the criminal is transferred to the detective and the police. Since these narratives generally involve the identification of some criminal singled out as a distinct "other" who poses a threat to a new sense of the social order, they must also be seen as part of the history of nationalist discourse during a critical period of the nineteenth century. (10)

Thomas, however, leaves quite a bit of room for literary manouevre by distancing his approach from that of critics who see the ideological function of the detective as "singular and monolithic". In contrast to, most notably, Franco Moretti in "Clues" (from *Signs Taken for Wonders*, 1983) and D.A. Miller in *The Novel and the Police* (1988), Thomas insists that "detective literature both reinforces and resists the disciplinary regime which it represents" (14).

The narratives discussed reveal interpretations of the category of detective fiction both narrow (Poe, Doyle, Christie, Chandler) and broad (Dickens, Hawthorne, Twain, Conrad). They reflect three distinct stages of development—the emergence of the form in the mid-Victorian decades, its hardening into a popular genre around the turn of the century, and finally its parody and contestation between the wars. Yet the overarching structure of

this book is determined not by these moments but by the development of three key "devices of truth"—the lie detector, the mug shot, and the fingerprint. In some of the narratives analyzed, the use of the devices is reflected directly, as in the portraits which play such an important part in the plot of both Dickens's *Bleak House* and Doyle's "A Scandal in Bohemia." Here, as we might expect given the author's track record in the fields of photography and film, Thomas is especially sharp. In other narratives the operation of these devices is shown to be strangely foreshadowed, as when Poe's "Tell-Tale Heart" (1843) finds a "bizarre mechanical incarnation" in Cesare Lombroso's polygraph fifty years later (21), or when the bloody fingerprint in Doyle's *A Study in Scarlet* (1887) briefly anticipates the introduction of this system of identification by the metropolitan police in 1894.

The chapter on "The letter of the law in *The Woman in White*," naturally of particular interest to readers of the *Wilkie Collins Society Journal*, falls into the section devoted to the lie detector. Though "no mechanical devices are used to detect the network of lies" pervading Collins's novel, the reliance on "the machinery of the Law", which Walter Hartright announces in his prefatory remarks to the narrative, is seen to prefigure their operation (59). Thomas's thesis is that, in this novel, as indeed in all sensation novels, "[i]nterrogations into the moral 'character' and motivations of suspicious persons . . . gradually give way to investigations into their 'identity'" (59-60). (This helps to explain why the English literary establishment exhibited so much anxiety about the emergence of sensation fiction and directed its anger especially against its perceived "failures in the area of character development" [62]) The shift towards the understanding of subjectivity in terms of physical embodiment requires the presentation of documents recording the history of the body—certificates of birth, marriage, and death, and so on. These in turn demand a new class of professionals to endorse them—like the "solicitor of great experience in his profession" to whom, in his own preface, Collins claims to have submitted the proofs of the novel for vetting before publication. Thus *The Woman in White* bears witness to a moment when the machinery of authority starts to expand beyond "the identification of criminals to all of us" (60).

Thomas's study is thus a rich and complex one to which it is difficult to do full justice in the space available here. However, I cannot conclude without expressing a slight feeling of regret that this volume does not talk more about the French contribution to the development of detection and detective fiction. By offering a comparative as well as an interdisciplinary approach, by focussing not on two but three "national traditions" (7), this very good book might have been made even better. The forensic work of Bertillon in Paris is discussed at some length, but there is no attempt to focus on the detective narratives of, say, Balzac, Gaboriau, or Leblanc, and their relations to the French "disciplinary regime." More surprisingly, there

is not a single mention of Régis Messac's monumental *Le "Detective Novel" et l'influence de la pensée scientifique* (1929), which—though it obviously belongs to a very different intellectual universe—can make a claim to have been the first work of modern scholarship to stake out the ground that Thomas maps so precisely here. But perhaps, with so much already on offer, it might seem mere greed to ask for more.

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Recent and Forthcoming Books
among those to be reviewed in the following issue of the

Wilkie Collins Society Journal

Phyllis Weliver
Women Musicians in Victorian Fiction, 1860-1900:
Representations of Music, Science and Gender
in the Leisured Home.
Burlington, Vermont: Ashgate, January 2001
Hardcover ISBN: 0-7546-0126-9 340 pages $79.95

Lillian Nayder
Unequal Partners:
Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship.
Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, January 2002
Hardcover ISBN: 0-8014-3925-6 248 pages $35.00

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