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Editors' Note

We are very pleased to bring you the articles and reviews in this year's *Journal*. The three essays included reveal the continued significance of gender studies to scholarship on the Victorian novel, sensation fiction in particular, and the complex cultural insights that this intersection makes possible. In his analysis of *Armadale*, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas considers the function of cosmetics and fashion as both feminine weapons of subversion and the means of investigating and controlling women, focusing especially on the motif of the mirror and its ability to inspire the transgressive plots of Lydia Gwilt while also "framing" her. Patricia Pulham examines the issue of masquerade in *The Law and the Lady* as well as the textual instabilities and "disorderly femininity" that masquerade allows. In Pulham's view, the transgressive uncertainties of social and sexual identity mirror the interpretive uncertainties of the text, as Collins challenges the seeming authority of the "facts," only to reimpose narrative and social order at the conclusion of the novel. Turning from Collins to Braddon, the third essay, by Andrew Mangham, highlights the contradictions and inconsistencies that informed mid-Victorian constructions of hysteria. Mangham examines the relation between this "part-ideological construct" and the culture that produced it, and shows how Braddon used formulations of hysteria to critique the marginalization of women and, particularly, subjective accounts of their "pathology," to look beyond the "social division of labour" that proves "as problematic and pathological as hysteria itself."

The reviews included in this issue, taken together, provide a survey of recent work on Collins and his contemporaries, from monographs on the single author to encyclopedic guides to Victorian fiction. Catherine Peters discusses Alexander Grinstein's *Wilkie Collins: Man of Mystery and Imagination* (2003); Lyn Pykett considers and compares three companions to the Victorian novel, published by Greenwood Press (2002), Blackwell (2002) and Cambridge University Press (2001); Norman Vance examines Carolyn Oulton's *Literature and Religion in Mid-Victorian England* (2003); and Graham Law reviews Broadview's *Blind Love*, edited by Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox (2003). The appearance of Collins's little-known last novel in a scholarly edition, as well as his evident significance to Victorian fiction generally in the sweeping companions to the field, suggest that Collins studies remain in a vigorous and flourishing state. The essays in the present volume also testify to that fact. We hope you enjoy reading the volume.

Lillian Nayder
Graham Law

Madame Rachel's Enamel: Fatal Secrets of Victorian Sensational Mirrors

Laurence Talairach-Vielmas
University of Toulouse-Le Mirail

> FRAMPTON'S PILL OF HEALTH
>
> Price 1*s*. 11*d*. and 2*s*. 9*d*. per box
>
> This excellent family medicine is the most effective remedy for indigestion, bilious and liver complaints, sick headache, loss of appetite, drowsiness, giddiness, spasms, and all disorders of the stomach and bowels; and for elderly people, or where an occasional aperient is required, nothing can be better adapted.
>
> For FEMALES these pills are truly excellent, removing all obstructions, the distressing headache so prevalent with the sex, depression of spirits, dullness of sight, nervous affections, blotches, pimples, and sallowness of the skin, and give a healthy, juvenile bloom to the complexion.
>
> Sold by all medicine vendors. Observe "Thomas Prout, 229, Strand, London," on the Government Stamp.
>
> ("The Englishwoman's Advertiser")

If few of us have heard of it today, Frampton's Pill of Health was nevertheless part and parcel of the Victorian scene, its advertisements in magazines and newspapers being found among many others for quack medicines seeking to deceive credulous customers with their wondrous powers. What is at stake here, though, is not so much the efficacy of Frampton's pill as such but the way in which this advertisement conflates the fields of medicine and cosmetology, and genders the product according to its different audiences. In fact, Frampton's Pill resonates with ideological meaning: remedying the female skin (claiming to cleanse and improve the complexion), the female mind, and the female body (renewing menstruation by dislodging "obstructions"), the pill and its advertisement highlight a definition of femininity which this article will investigate. Throughout the nineteenth

century, the idea of "womanliness" underwent significant changes. Focusing on one of Wilkie Collins's novels, *Armadale*, which works to disrupt dominant discourses on femininity as it journeys through beauty parlours and medical institutions, I will examine the invisible scripts dictating traditional gender roles and consider how the novel positions its female characters within a patriarchal economy. As we will see, *Armadale* manifestly investigates the limits of female aestheticization, reworking the language of advertising to show the extent to which consumer culture empowered women and changed them into threatening Victorian *femmes fatales*.

Shopping Around: the Victorian lady and the fashionable stage

> "You go to the tea-shop, and get your moist sugar. You take it on the understanding that it *is* moist sugar. But it isn't anything of the sort. It's a compound of adulterations made up to look like sugar. You shut your eyes to that awkward fact, and swallow your adulterated mess in various articles of food […] You go to the marriage-shop, and get a wife. You take her on the understanding – let us say – that she has lovely yellow hair, that she has an exquisite complexion, that her figure is the perfection of plumpness, and that she is just tall enough to carry the plumpness off. You bring her home; and you discover that it's the old story of the sugar again. You wife is an adulterated article. Her lovely yellow hair is – dye. Her exquisite skin is – pearl powder. Her plumpness is – padding. And three inches of her height are – in the boot-maker's heels. Shut your eyes and swallow your adulterated wife as you swallow your adulterated sugar – and, I tell you again, you are one of the few men who can try the marriage experiment with a fair chance of success."
>
> (Collins, *Man and Wife*, 94-95)

As Sir Patrick argues in *Man and Wife*, the Victorian marketplace in the 1860s was an ambiguous semiotic site where appearances hardly ever matched reality.[1] As a booming consumer society, Britain was revamped into a *theatrum mundi* inhabited by performing actors and actresses concealed beneath masks and costumes. In an era of shows and exhibitions, the shop windows displayed the latest fashionable products, which guaranteed the transformation of the plainest woman into the perfect lady. Sir Patrick's "adulterated wife" may well indeed have just come out of one of the many beauty salons selling miraculous cosmetics and promising that their clients would be "Beautiful for Ever." Quack nostrums were publicized everywhere.[2]

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[1] Adulteration was common throughout the nineteenth century due to lack of state regulation, and dangerous additives were introduced in all kinds of foodstuffs, from beer to dairy products, as well as in drugs (see Altick).

[2] The practices of Captain Wragge in Collins's *No Name* provide a typical example of the widespread use of advertisements in the quack-medicine trade: "They can't get rid of me and my Pill – they must take us. There is not a single form of appeal in the whole range of human advertisement, which I am not making to the unfortunate public at this moment. Hire the last new novel – there I am, inside the boards of the book. Send for the last new Song – the instant you open the leaves, I drop out of it. Take a cab – I fly in at the window, in red.

Dr James's Pills for the Complexion promised women ethereal beauty, whilst Parr's Life Pills even claimed to grant eternal life. Madame Rachel sold her "Arabian Bath," her "Magnetic Rock Dew Water of Sahara," her Arabian perfume mouth wash, and other creams, soaps, hair washes, elixirs, or ointments. While enamelling the face and removing wrinkles, Madame Rachel, otherwise Sarah Rachel Leverson (or Levison), professed to make women look young again, though at an extortionate price (see "Madame Rachel," 322-24; and Altick, 540-45).

As a sensational example of the widespread objectification of the female body in the Victorian period, Madame Rachel's practices and her products allow us a clear insight into the constitution of the female self as a "commodity spectacle" (Richards, 196), shaped by corsets, trendy hairstyles or pills of all sorts. Rachel's career started shortly after 1859, when she was stricken with fever and had to shave off her locks. One of the doctors of King's College Hospital gave her a lotion to make her hair grow again rapidly, and furnished her as well with the recipe. This particular product helped her start a commercial career in New Bond Street, where the three-times married woman opened up a shop in the 1860s. Her first attempt as an enameller was under-capitalized and sent her to Whitecross Street Prison for debt. But she was again in business in 1862, and very successful by 1863, as her shop-front and pamphlet "Beautiful for Ever" attracted gullible female customers. Yet the effects of her miraculous rejuvenators (mere mixtures of carbonate of lead, starch, Fuller's earth, hydrochloric acid and distilled water) and baths of bran and water did not last. She was tried at the Old Bailey in 1867 for swindling a client, undertaking to make her young again in order for her to charm a nobleman. Not just a swindler, Rachel was also suspected of providing a front for blackmailing and procuring, and perhaps even of operating an abortionist racket at her shop.

Madame Rachel's fraudulent experiments with female bodies enable us to grasp the changes in the construction of womanliness in the second half of the nineteenth century. As Margaret Beetham argues, the new Victorian feminine ideal tended to be "centred on appearance and dress," thereby "threaten[ing] to rewrite not only class distinctions but a definition of femininity in terms of the domestic and the moral" (Beetham, 78). Consumer society had made dangerously fragile the clear ideological line separating morally dubious female figures from ideally virtuous ones. In the 1860s the Victorian ideal was more and more self-made, seeking public exhibition; it was therefore far less "natural" and, as a result, more likely to verge on waywardness. In this way, Coventry Patmore's Angel in the House came hazardously close to the equivocal figure of the actress or even the blatant one of the prostitute.

Buy a box of tooth-powder at the chemist's – I wrap it up for you, in blue […] The place in which my Pill is made, is an advertisement in itself. I have got one of the largest shops in London" (Collins *No Name*, 710-11).

Significant examples of the power of female fashion to blur the boundaries between contradictory constructions of womanhood could be found in the sensational trials of the time. In the 1850s, as Mary S. Hartman has shown, the murder cases of Marie Lafarge and Euphémie Lacoste in France, and of Madeleine Smith in Britain, all involved arsenic intake, thus locating criminality in typically feminine cosmetic practices. The consumption of arsenic was prevalent in the Victorian period. It was used to improve appearance, giving full and rounded shapes and a blooming complexion and could be found in many tonics (see "The Narcotics We Indulge In," 687-90). Madeleine Smith, for example, accused of poisoning her lover by putting arsenic in his food, claimed to have bought arsenic to use in a face-wash for her complexion. Lacoste used a cure-all, Fowler's Solution, a mixture of oil of lavender, cinnamon and arsenic. Modes of female education and of training in "fine ladyism" often came into question during the trials (Hartman, 57). Such practices were often denounced for teaching girls deception so as to remain competitive in the marriage market. According to Hartman, Smith was an avid reader of women's magazines and knew how to emulate the stereotype of the respectable and dutiful schoolgirl. In her *liaison* with L'Angelier while engaged to marry a more socially suitable party, she was deliberately "acting out a romantic drama with herself in the leading role" (65). Even in the courtroom, Smith's skills in role-playing could be read in her display of ladylike manners, her "fashionable clothes," and her "most attractive appearance" (Unsigned article in the *Spectator*, 27), which impressed the jury and almost cleared her of the murder charge: Smith's physical appearance acted as a visual evidence of her innocence, leading to the equivocal verdict of "Not Proven."

As these examples show, female fashion and female role-play mingled, fusing polarized versions of femininity. Thus the image of the fashionable Victorian lady gradually became an apt means to question traditional gender definitions. The figure seems indeed to have inspired the popular literature of the time. Allotting the main roles to heroines eager to satisfy their own ambitious desires, sensational narratives were based on female characters well bred in the art of dressing, masquerading at all times to hide their identities and fool rich suitors. In the world of sensation fiction, female characters change dresses as they change names, and perform new parts while the male detectives try to decipher their real identities.[3] Here, indeed, is the main interest of most sensational stories: to grasp the characters' role-play and unmask their identities, thus engaging in a narrative strip-tease.

Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon are the sensational authors whose narratives most clearly play upon the theme of the sham lady, embedding it within mysteries which demand the detective's decoding of the

[3] The relevance of the theme of theatricality is even more striking as the novels themselves tend to be structured as plays: some of the novels are divided into scenes instead of chapters. For a study of sensational theatricality, see Litvak.

artful heroine and her construction. In their novels, the figure of the woman-actress appears to engage current definitions of the feminine. In Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), for instance, the whole narrative focuses on the character of Lucy Audley, who mimics the domestic ideal to conceal her identity as bigamist and murderess. Even though Lucy Audley is naturally beautiful, Braddon repeatedly evokes Madame Rachel in describing her,[4] thus providing clues to her eponymous heroine's usurped identity. In her boudoir, crammed with bottles of perfume, hair-brushes and other womanly contrivances, Lucy Audley changes dresses as the detective comes closer to the truth. Thus, creams and female accessories become incriminating motifs pointing both at the actress and at the fashionable lady. Similarly, *Aurora Floyd* (1863) uses the figure of the stage actress to intimate the heroine's potential duplicity: Aurora's mother is an actress of limited talent, hired in part to exhibit her body on the dirty boards of a stage in order to please the male audience, when she is spotted by her future husband, Sir Archibald Floyd. Typically, the actress's dirty spangles are expected to taint the daughter's fate, leaving an unfeminine and improper tinge on the heroine, who is in danger of becoming a "fast" woman. In the same way, in Collins's *No Name* (1862), Magdalen Vanstone is an actress, but she plays her parts not only on the stage but also in real life, using paints and cosmetics to alter her face and complexion whilst wigs, bonnets and padded cloaks disguise her body.

Featuring actresses or female characters playing parts, all these novels heighten the paradoxical construction of womanhood, so perfectly illustrated by the actress herself. Simultaneously embodying feminine beauty and female fashion, the actress breaks out of the woman's sphere in working on the public stage. In her study of Victorian actresses, Tracy Davis analyses how women of the theatre, stigmatized by their exhibitionism and sexual desirability, violated traditional standards and yet matched to perfection expectations of womanliness (105). Records of the money actresses spent on their wardrobes testify to the bond between them and the world of fashion, and inevitably mark the professional actress "as a social adventuress, flaunting her beauty to accrue influence and wealth," like the *demi-mondaine* or the prostitute (Davis 32, 85). In Collins's *Armadale* (1866), the narrative, revolving around the twin themes of female duplicity and role-play, blurs significantly the divide between antagonistic models of femininity. In this novel in particular, readers are

[4] For example, the detective defines femininity in the following terms: "Imagine all the women of England elevated to the high level of masculine intellectuality; superior to crinoline; above pearl powder and Mrs. Rachel Levison" (Braddon *Lady Audley's Secret*, 223). The narrator also underlines woman's duplicitous nature by referring to the artificiality of Leverson's cosmetics: "[A lady's maid] knows when the ivory complexion is bought and paid for – when the pearly teeth are foreign substances fashioned by the dentist – when the glossy plaits are the relics of the dead, rather than the property of the living; and she knows other and more sacred secrets than these. She knows when the sweet smile is more false than Madame Levison's enamel, and far less enduring – when the words that issue from between gates of borrowed pearl are more disguised and painted than the lips which help to shape them" (336).

granted access to the backstage of feminine construction where the epitome of womanliness and the socially inferior actress become one and the same. By displaying Lydia Gwilt's correspondence with her personal adviser, Mrs Oldershaw, who is modelled on Rachel Leverson, as well as Lydia's own diary to which she confides her murderous plots and her multiple identities, *Armadale* offers a survey of duplicitous female practices. Women's appearances become the leitmotiv of the detective narrative, and the criminal woman, whose looks deceive and charm the beholder, takes us into the artful world of pretence and acting. As the reader is led into the universe of women's secrets, three main accessories appear fundamental to the creation or recreation of women's beauty: cosmetics, clothes, and mirrors. If cosmetics point overtly at female duplicity, clothes and mirrors undermine more radically the construction of femininity. The glass in particular, as a site of surveillance which shapes and controls the image of woman as surface, and prevents her escape, quickly comes to encompass a criminal and spectacular femininity. As the favourite accomplice to female aestheticization, the mirror simultaneously frames *and* reveals the fraud, turning the domestic boudoir into a secret room behind the scenes or a perverse beauty parlour designed to fashion *femmes fatales*.

Fashioning the Commodity Woman: women's magazines and fashion-victims

As is generally the case with Collins's fiction, the thematics of *Armadale* are mediated through minor characters. In *No Name* Mrs Wragge serves as the naive fashion-victim who takes advertising leaflets to bed and becomes hysterical whenever she hears the word "shop," while in *Armadale* the character of a jealous middle-class wife whose looks have faded humorously presents the dangers of the changing definitions of womanliness. Mrs Milroy, vainly trying to look younger by applying thick layers of make-up or using fashionable frills and flounces to reshape her femininity, acts as a foil to the heroine while anchoring the character of Lydia Gwilt in a consumer culture obsessed with women's looks and appearances:

> It was the face of a woman who had once been handsome, and who was still, so far as years went, in the prime of her life. […] The utter wreck of her beauty was made a wreck horrible to behold, by her desperate efforts to conceal the sight of it from her own eyes, from the eyes of her husband and child, from the eyes of even the doctor who attended her, and whose business it was to penetrate to the truth. Her head, from which the greater part of her hair had fallen off, would have been less shocking to see than the hideously youthful wig, by which she tried to hide the loss. No deterioration of her complexion, no wrinkling of her skin, could have been so dreadful to look at as the rouge that lay thick on her cheeks, and the white enamel plastered on her forehead. The delicate lace, and the bright trimming on her dressing-gown, the ribbons in her cap, and the rings on her bony fingers, all intended to draw the eye away from the change that had passed over her, directed the eye to it on the contrary […]. An illustrated book of the fashions, in which women were represented exhibiting their

> finery by means of the free use of their limbs, lay on the bed from which she had not moved for years, without being lifted by her nurse. A hand-glass was placed with the book so that she could reach it easily.
>
> (Collins *Armadale*, 311-12)

Contributing to the novel's debate on the definition of femininity that the plot draws upon, this scene manifestly denounces Mrs Milroy for her grotesque masquerade and turns the sacrosanct Victorian hearth into a stage. Ironically enough, the caricature of the woman who has overused make-up and costume seems to underscore the slippery borderline between the respectable middle-class mother and the Girl of the Period, "who dies her hair and paints her face, whose sole aim is unbounded luxury and whose dress is the chief object of such thought and intellect as she possesses" (Linton, 339-40). Nonetheless, Collins's debunking of female self-fashinoing does not simply show how the private domestic world overlaps with the modern public world of sensuous female exhibitions. More importantly, it exposes the underside of woman's objectification. Mrs Milroy's use of cosmetics to improve her appearance is turned back upon itself, showing the reverse side of women's attempts at self-definition. The more Mrs Milroy tries to control her reflection, the more her image slips and cracks. Hence, as this example suggests, instead of empowering women, their aestheticization and objectification may sometimes yield power to others rather than enabling them to wield it themselves.

Collins's play on cosmetics in *Armadale* is thus two-fold. Simultaneously blurring and enhancing the divide between the natural and the artful woman, cosmetics can invisibly ensure woman's subservience to the male order. With its portrait of a domestic invalid, confined in bed and magnifying female passivity, *Armadale* highlights cosmetics as both dangerous weapons *and* policing tools. In a novel where the naturally beautiful heroine relies on a beauty specialist to stage her theatrical parts, Collins uses cosmetics and fashion to investigate and challenge the heroine's claims to self-definition.

Unlike Mrs Milroy, who fails to hide the ravages of time, Lydia Gwilt knows how to "trad[e] on [her] good looks" (Collins *Armadale*, 435), and manipulates female aestheticism to her advantage. Gwilt is a genuine villainess, a plotting actress whose sole ambition in life is to secure financial independence through marriage. Like Braddon's Lucy Audley, Lydia Gwilt wears dresses as so many stage costumes and plays with her mirror to exhibit her sensuality. In addition, the narrative depends on Gwilt's concealment of her age, since her true identity must remain unknown if she is to make her fortune by marrying one of the two Allan Armadales. Yet, interestingly enough, although modelled on Madeleine Smith,[5] Collins's heroine is unwilling to

[5] The recurrence of allusions to the case of Madeleine Smith in Collins's novels testifies to the links between sensation fiction and contemporary news which Richard Altick draws attention to in *The Presence of the Present*. In *Armadale*, Lydia Gwilt's trial overtly draws on Smith's. The references to Madame Rachel and her beauty parlour advance the

follow her accomplice's advice recommending cosmetic application. Collins had already pointed to make-up as a practice in *No Name*, where Captain Wragge applies paint to Magdalen Vanstone's neck to conceal the two moles which give away her true identity. But *Armadale* reveals more significantly the art of woman's masquerade. As a matter of fact, *Armadale*'s most striking feature lies in the way the novel displays female correspondence as a means to denounce role-playing. The first appearance of the heroine is managed by means of an exchange of letters between herself and Mrs Oldershaw in which the two characters share their plans. Through feminine writing, the construction of femininity is disclosed, with the beauty parlour and the female boudoir as main loci of fraud. Drawing ambiguous links between the private domestic sphere and the public commercial site, the novel conflates female theatricality and impersonation with female appearance and its improvement: the domestic woman hence becomes both fashionable artifact and skilled astress.

The confusion of spheres in fact is triggered by Collins's allusions to Madame Rachel. Mrs Oldershaw, writing her letters from her beauty parlour, the Ladies' Toilette Repository, imparts a transgressive feminine fragrance to the narrative. While Oldershaw, like Rachel Leverson, hides disgraceful wrinkles, "making up battered old faces and worn-out old figures to look like new" (160), the narrative connects women's looks with female treachery. For even before Lydia Gwilt has appeared, Oldershaw's letter mentions Lydia's plan of marrying Armadale to gain his fortune, and promises her success if she follows a few pieces of advice to improve her appearance. Thus the correspondence between the two women sets up a space where daring female advice can be requested and given. That the advice should particularly revolve around the themes of clothes and make-up reinforces the relevance of Oldershaw's salon in the detective narrative. Dresses and creams are turned into criminal accomplices contrived to mould femininity:

> If you follow my advice about dressing, and use one or two of my applications privately, I guarantee to put you back three years more. I will forfeit all the money I shall have to advance to you in this matter, if, when I have ground you young again in my wonderful mill, you look more than seven-and-twenty in any man's eyes living – except, of course, when you wake anxious in the small hours of the morning; and then, my dear, you will be old and ugly in the retirement of your own room, and it won't matter.
>
> (Collins *Armadale*, 160-61)

While Oldershaw exposes female duplicity by enhancing the dramatic gap between public appearance and private reality, her hyperbolic rhetoric ("I guarantee," "I will forfeit all the money I have") and striking metaphorical images ("I have ground you young again in my wonderful mill") also sound explicitly theatrical. As in the women's magazines of the time (see Beetham),

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comparison, as we shall see. As E.S. Dallas noted generally in his review of *Lady Audley's Secret*, sensation narrative tended to draw its scenarios from the criminal courts, recycling those "mysteries that every now and then fill the newspapers" (Dallas, 8).

artful femininity is here publicized as both subversive and normative: designed by cosmetics and dresses, the female body is forged and framed by Oldershaw's advice, reduced to pearl powder and objectified as an artwork. Seen from this perspective, Gwilt – who has been invisible so far – is shaped as a female magazine reader: she is given a voice and may write to the editor, but Oldershaw's letter fashions her as a commodified woman who exists, in part, by and through the cosmetics and dresses she buys. The characterization of Oldershaw and the significance of her salon in the criminal narrative simultaneously signal Gwilt's duplicitous power and potential villainy and limit her chances of success. The arsenal of female villainy frames as it transforms woman, changing her into a puppet in the hands of the beauty specialist.

As a matter of fact, Gwilt's indirect presentation as a commodified doll is sustained later on in the text when Bashwood's son recounts Gwilt's story. Her past becomes a discourse of fashion:

> Miss Gwilt's story begins […] in the market-place at Thorpe Ambrose. One day, something like a quarter of a century ago, a travelling quack-doctor, who dealt in perfumery as well as medicines, came to the town, with his cart, and exhibited, as a living excellence of his washes and hair-oils and so on, a pretty little girl, with a beautiful complexion and wonderful hair. His name was Oldershaw. He had a wife, who helped him in the perfumery part of his business, and who carried it on by herself after his death.
>
> (Collins *Armadale*, 520-21)

Connected to the market-place as she is to a woman who sells beauty products, Lydia Gwilt exhibits the deceitful aspects of femininity. Even if the quack doctor's miraculous washes and hair-oils have never been tried on the naturally beautiful young girl, Gwilt is defined against the backdrop of consumer discourse and makes explicit womanliness as a fiction and woman as a born actress. Fashioned as a spectacle, as a commodity produced by art and chemistry, she becomes a walking advertisement. As Lori Anne Loeb demonstrates, Victorian advertisements linked consumer culture with the sham lady playing parts. According to Loeb, if "advertisements were thought to advance fraudulent claims; to promote products of poor quality," they also reflected the social ideal: "[t]he advertisement suggested that with the acquisition of creams to whiten the complexion, fringes to improve the coiffure, and corsets to mold the female figure it was possible to create the illusion of the 'perfect lady,' a beacon of Victorian affluence" (10).[6] Once again, the fraudulent and the ideal are superimposed, and the advertised female body is structured like a poster: a mere surface ruled by a set of visual codes.

As usual with sensation fiction, however, Gwilt's portrait constantly blurs the line between natural and artificial femininity, suggesting that the

[6] Note how Oldershaw is an expert at spotting advertisements, which may suggest her own relationship with them: "I take in *The Times* regularly; and you may trust my wary eye not to miss the right advertisement" (168).

natural version can be even more dangerous when it matches artfully constructed models. Loeb argues that the advertisers' models copied "artists who intended to construct a view of the antique world in which the aspiring middle class could see themselves reflected" (35) – artists such as Frederic Leighton or Alma-Tadema, for example. In a similar way, Gwilt is described as a classical goddess:

> This woman's forehead was low, upright and broad towards the temples; […] her eyes […] were of that purely blue colour, without a tinge in it of grey or green, so often presented to our admiration in pictures and books, so rarely met with in the living face. […] The lines of this woman's nose bent neither outward nor inward: it was the straight delicately moulded nose […] of the ancient statues and busts. […] Her chin, round and dimpled, was pure of the slightest blemish in every part of it, and perfectly in line with her forehead to the end.
>
> (Collins *Armadale*, 277)

Whether Collins is referring to fashion magazines is unclear, but Gwilt's taintless body meets the demands of their codes of advertising. By refusing to betray inner depravity, her outward classical perfection enables her to evade all kinds of physiognomical or phrenological readings. The enigma of her image is precisely that it is so naturally smooth and unblemished that it points more to the world of make-believe and advertising than to un-constructed femininity. For Gwilt systematically refuses to let cosmetics control her image: "Keep your odious powders and paints and washes for the spotted shoulders of your customers; not one of them shall touch my skin, I promise you" (162). Ambiguously positioned at the heart of a consumer culture but denying the scripts of feminine cosmetology, Gwilt attempts to secure her identity and her autonomy, plotting her financial independence with the help of her mirror only. Used in a grotesque vignette, the glass becomes the leitmotiv of the murderous plot. Indeed, while Lydia Gwilt condemns the artificiality of cosmetics, the mirror is turned into a technical adviser in her criminal plots, a tool designed to inspire her when she devises her new roles. Instead of framing and controlling a reflection of woman, the panoptical motif which haunts many a Victorian narrative and symbolizes the surveillance of woman reveals criminal depths and spectacular stories whose parts the heroine will soon willingly play.

Lydia Gwilt's Murderous Accomplice: the voice of the magic glass

> *Armadale* […] gives for its heroine a woman fouler than the refuse of the streets, who has lived to the ripe age of thirty-five, and through the horrors of forgery, murder, theft, bigamy, gaol, and attempted suicide, without any trace being left on her beauty.
>
> (Unsigned review of *Armadale*, *Spectator*)

Armadale shocked contemporary critics by dissociating physical features from moral character, thus allowing cosmetics and costumes that conceal female sins to fulfill a subversive function. Dresses pace the plot, functioning as disguises that confuse investigators and inspire deception.

Gwilt's first plan consists in exchanging her dress with that of Oldershaw's maid to escape Mr Brock. Then, Gwilt's idly going through her dresses leads her to reread some old letters and furnishes her with her next scheme (Collins *Armadale*, 444). But dresses can also incriminate. Towards the end of the novel, when Gwilt goes to the milliner's to kill time by trying on her summer dress, the dress gives Gwilt away, since Scotland Yard detectives trace her to the shop: "The cleverest women lose the use of their wits in nine cases out of ten, where there's a new dress in the case – and even Miss Gwilt was rash enough to go back" (518). Similarly, Mrs Milroy, in trying to discover Gwilt's identity, bribes her maid with clothes (318). Gwilt's use of make-up and her apparently genuine beauty are also double edged. Setting his story against a background of beauty salons, Collins confuses the natural and the artful woman, revealing the woman without make-up as "the worse woman morally" (313), a paradox which is largely conveyed by the ambivalent motif of the mirror. The mirror simultaneously fashions sham femininity and incarcerates womanhood in an ideal two-dimensional image. It fixes and disrupts categories, suggesting that the beautiful reflection may be severed from its owner. In this way, the glass appears to serve the same function as make-up, polishing faces into seamless surfaces *and* hinting at artifice. Whilst Oldershaw promotes make-up and lures credulous female customers to buy her wares, Gwilt turns the glass into a criminal adviser which prompts her to commit sins.

"Am I handsome enough today?" she asks (428), like the Wicked Stepmother in *Snow White*. Gwilt uses her mirror both to reflect her beauty and check the advances of passing time, and to imagine new stories: "I must go and ask my glass how I look. I must rouse my invention, and make up my little domestic romance" (489). As in the fairy tale, the mirror becomes the site which encapsulates treacherous female nature, inspiring Gwilt with new plots and reflecting woman as an actress staging the scenes of her life. Inviting female display, the mirror also enhances the objectification of Gwilt's body. Relevant to our discussion here is the feminist reading of the Wicked Stepmother and the mirror's voice by Gilbert and Gubar (36-40). For Gilbert and Gubar, the magic looking-glass is a cultural weapon that enforces patriarchal sentences on women and locks them up in "crystal prisons" (36-37). The Queen's obsession with her own reflection suggests less the woman's self-absorption and narcissicism than it discloses the King's appraising gaze. As Gilbert and Gubar posit, "his, surely, is the voice of the looking-glass, the patriarchal voice of judgment that rules the Queen's – and every woman's – self-evaluation" (38). Arguing that the Queen both abides by and tries to escape the patriarchal voice of the mirror, Gilbert and Gubar read her as an actress subjected to the stage-manager's directions yet eager to stage her own independence, playing deceptive parts and inventing new means to murder Snow White. Ironically, the Queen's anxiety over her own loss of physical attractiveness is displaced onto Snow White, her mirror image, with the murder plot reflecting Snow White's "training" in femininity before marriage. The very plots the Queen invents – especially the poisoned comb, the suffocating set of tight laces, and the poisoned apple cooked in a secret kitchen – all turn

out to be weapons in the arsenal of feminine cosmetology. Thus the wicked actress, like a Madame Rachel who adds arsenic to her lotions, in fact merely reenacts the controlled male scripts she wanted to wipe off the surface of the glass: Snow White is crystallized by the glass coffin, murdered by her own aestheticization.

In *Armadale*, however, Gwilt does not seek to murder Snow White (that is, another version of herself). Unlike the Queen, she projects the sadistic voice of the mirror onto the two male protagonists, and plots to kill the two Armadales. She will marry Midwinter under his real name, kill Allan to claim his fortune, and then break Midwinter's heart by denying she is his wife. Hence Gwilt intends to undermine the patriarchal ideology expressed by the voice in the mirror. However, like the Wicked Stepmother in *Snow White*, Gwilt is led to multiply her plots. Her three vain attempts at murder convey a message about femininity which Gwilt refuses to hear.

First, in a revised version of the poisoned apple plot, Gwilt tries to poison Armadale by pouring a dose of arsenic in his brandy. The scene is fraught with references to the case of Madeleine Smith. Given Gwilt's relationship with Oldershaw, who supplies her with laudanum, we may speculate that the arsenic she uses comes from Oldershaw's beauty parlour, drawing an even stronger parallel between Gwilt and the alleged murderess. But as fate would have it, Armadale is allergic to brandy and faints before swallowing it. Gwilt's trick casts doubt on her innocence when Midwinter recognizes one of the murder scenes from Allan's dream: "I saw her touch the Shadow of the Man with one hand, and give him a glass with the other. He took the glass, and handed it to me. At the moment when I put it to my lips, a deadly faintness came over me" (Collins *Armadale*, 563). Not only does Midwinter's hand hold the poisoned glass, but the dream manuscript also intimates the heroine's guilt: she becomes the Shadow of the Woman in Allan's prophetic dream, as if the male text had captured the shape of her body and engraved it on the paper. Like the mirror in *Snow White*, which fixes female beauty and frames femininity the better to enforce patriarchy's sentences, the dream manuscript traps the murderess, coercing woman's subservience and hinting at her inevitable failure in a male-dominated world.

Having failed in her poisoning plan, Gwilt then asks her former lover Manuel to embark on Armadale's ship and drown him. Once again, her criminal plot depends on male hands and is bound to fail, all the more so because it merely reenacts the father's murder scene a generation before. The woman's murderous design can never be achieved; she cannot hold the pen to write the end of the story. Male texts only serve to capture Gwilt, dictating and imposing her fate and silencing her voice. After putting on her "widow's costume from head to foot" in order to play "[her] new character" (594), and turning "to the glass" to check the effect (599), Gwilt hears that Armadale has escaped unscathed. While the glass marks the woman's failure as a plotter, the arch-actress still cannot decipher the male narrative located there. As if mesmerized by her own reflection and too confidently convinced of her

seductive powers, she blindly devises her ultimate plot: to trap Armadale in Dr Downward's (or Le Doux's) sanatorium – an institution meant to cure neurasthenic female patients – and use one of the doctor's gases to murder Armadale while he sleeps.

The attempted murder in the sanatorium is the most telling one since it encapsulates the patriarchal precepts Gwilt has tried to evade and that keep haunting her. Gwilt intends to turn Downward's disciplinary establishment to her advantage, using the doctor to kill Armadale. The glass once more inspires her (619), and Downward agrees to give her his aid on condition that she stays in his sanatorium "in the character of a Patient" (618) and impersonates his "First Inmate" (636).

Downward's establishment hosts female patients suffering from "Shattered nerves – domestic anxiety" (636). The sanatorium uncannily recalls Oldershaw's beauty parlour,[7] since both impose Victorian gender ideologies under the guise of improving women's bodies or curing them of their ailments. But fashioning and framing the female body is now in the hands of the medical institution. If women were in part enabled to engage in an artful masquerade whilst invisibly enacting patriarchal scripts in Oldershaw's salon, they are unambiguously and unquestioningly monitored in Downward's sanatorium. Its panoptical architecture carefully separates every room from the next and every floor from the one above; the rooms can all be observed, opened and oxygenated by the quack physician. Poisons and gases are used to heal the patients. Like Oldershaw's cosmetics which "grind" female flesh, Downward's poisons subdue unruly womanhood;[8] and pseudo-chemistry even more powerfully controls the definition of woman.

Mirroring Oldershaw and her enamelling establishment, Downward, the stereotypical Victorian quack, foregrounds medicine as a stage show ruled by a market economy. His sanatorium smelling of "damp plaster and new varnish" (587), is a monstrous product of capitalism, advertised during his "Visitors'

[7] In Pimlico, Oldershaw's salon and Downward's office are part of the same building, and the suggestion that Downward may be an abortionist strengthens his links with Madame Rachel's fictional twin: "At one side was the shop-door, having more red curtains behind the glazed part of it, and bearing a brass plate on the wooden part of it, inscribed with the name of 'Oldershaw.' On the other side was a private door, with a bell marked Professional; and another brass plate, indicating a medical occupant on this side of the house, for the name on it was 'Doctor Downward.' If even brick and mortar spoke yet, the brick and mortar here said plainly, 'We have got our secrets inside, and we mean to keep them'" (Collins *Armadale*, 340). As we have seen with the example of Frampton's Pill, cosmetics and medicines intended for the female body all hinted at female sexuality. The pill's power to renew menstruation suggests that the pill acted as an abortifacient (see Porter *Quacks*, 132).

[8] The world of free-market medicine was associated with sexually improper behaviour. Some patches and cure-alls (most containing arsenic, which was also believed to be an aphrodisiac) were meant to conceal or cure venereal infections (Hartman, 40; Porter *Bodies*, 78). Humorously enough, Oldershaw's former name, Mrs Mandeville, may recall Bernard Mandeville and his *Treatise on the Hypochondriak and Hysteric Diseases* (1730), in which he encouraged sexual fulfilment.

day[s]" (635) and attracting "spectators" (635). In his Dispensary, where he prepares such mixtures as "Our Stout Friend," Downward displays the placebo-drugs preferred by quack doctors.[9] Supposedly, "Our Stout Friend" is a harmless liquid which produces a poisonous gas when brought into contact with "a certain common mineral substance" (642). But Collins undermines any belief we might have in the efficacy of Downward's well-advertised and well-labelled product when the narrative depicts him changing the contents of the flask and filling the bottle with water and "certain chemical liquids" (632) to create a "carefully-coloured imitation" (642). With his dubious nostrums, Downward thus appears a male version of the cosmetics dealer, enticing gullible women with wondrous products and promises of escape from domesticity, the better to mould them in accordance with Victorian gender ideologies.

In *Armadale*, both the beauty parlour and the medical establishment highlight the dangers of woman's aestheticization and commodification. Tempted by the promise of subversive power or by proposed days of rest from the demands of domesticity, women constantly come under the yoke of patriarchy. Mrs Wragge, in *No Name*, could well testify to the imprisoning power of medicalized readings of femininity: her portrait is engraved on all the wrappers of her husband's miraculous Pill. Efforts to improve or heal the female body thus imprint the marks of patriarchal ideology upon it. A "commodity spectacle," the female body is constantly subjected to social scrutiny, or, in Foucault's terms to "omnipresent surveillance" (24). The fatalistic structure of Collins's plot functions as a warning against female waywardness in a male-dominated society. Captured within the precast scenarios "dreamt" by men, Gwilt can but abide by their dictates and enact woman's prescribed roles. Consequently, Gwilt's criminal experiments in chemistry are bound to fail. Gwilt is in fact naively led to obey the doctor's orders, since Downward has already prepared the deadly fumigation with which she will try to kill Armadale. Far from escaping the patriarchal voice of the mirror, Gwilt signs her own death warrant by choosing the sanatorium as her last murder scene. Midwinter and Armadale have exchanged rooms and the deadly fumes she lets out through the funnel is killing the man she loves. Her last role is the most melodramatic of all; Gwilt saves Midwinter before locking herself up in the poisoned room. The plot invokes the whole paraphernalia of

[9] The patent medicine men were all charlatan-physicians who made pills, tinctures, or potions of all sorts and asked for a government patent to keep their trade secrets (see Richards, 169). After the Apothecaries Act of 1815, which specified that qualified apothecaries should be in possession of a licence issued by the Society of Apothecaries (involving courses, experience and examination), general practitioners still complained about unfair competition from unqualified druggists and quacks. One of these unqualified druggists and quacks, Downward reminds us of the lack of governmental regulation of medical practice and the sharp division within the profession. Eventually, the Medical Act of 1858 created a single public register for all legally recognized practitioners. It then became illegal for those who were not on the Medical Register to claim to be medical practitioners, although they could still legally practice healing (see Porter *Disease*, 47-48).

female duplicity the better to underline its limits: the female actress is after all the victim of fate, or rather, a mere puppet in the hands of patriarchy.

* * *

Using typically sensational motifs and the theme of female treachery, Collins's novel furthers the genre's investigation of its spectacular society. Whether women visit the beauty parlour, or the milliner, or the doctor, the male gaze distinguishes the actress from the lady even as the female characters collapse the difference between the two. A few years later, Collins again examines the commodification of women and its consequences, in a novel in which an ugly lady commits suicide through an overdose of arsenic. With woman's complexion as the main motif of *The Law and the Lady* (1875), Collins once more shows us the dangers that await women within the looking-glass of Victorian domesticity yet treats the question of male responsibility for these perils with more ambiguity than he does in *Armadale*, reaching the verdict of "Not Proven."

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Textual/Sexual Masquerades: Reading the Body in *The Law and the Lady*

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In recent years a number of Wilkie Collins's lesser-known works have been republished, among them *The Law and the Lady* which initially appeared in the *Graphic* and was subsequently published by Chatto and Windus in three volumes in 1875. It is a novel which seems to have received little critical attention despite offering a dramatic story line, an intrepid amateur lady detective, and a fascinating cast of characters whose social and sexual identities are continually in flux. This essay aims to explore the textual and sexual worlds of *The Law and the Lady*, which, I claim, revolve around the issue of masquerade: the text itself functions as a form of novelistic masquerade offering a subversive "free space" which is characterised by a disorderly femininity. I will argue that in this novel we, as readers, are required to "read" and interpret the bodies (both textual and physical) with which we are presented and that these are always feminized, potentially dangerous, and therefore, ultimately, in need of regulation and restraint.

The Law and the Lady, like so many of its predecessors, hinges on mysteries hidden in the domestic space. Shortly after her marriage to Eustace Woodville, Valeria Brinton, the novel's main protagonist, discovers that her husband's true name is Macallan, a fact he has concealed in order to prevent her from discovering that he has been married before, and tried for the murder of his first wife in the Scottish courts which delivered the inconclusive verdict of "Not Proven." The narrative, written by Valeria, re-presents the evidence given at the trial, follows her detective trail as she attempts to unravel the mysteries surrounding Sara Macallan's death, and introduces the reader to a range of eccentric characters which include the wheelchair-bound Misserimus Dexter, his taciturn cousin Ariel, Valeria's family clerk, Benjamin, and the flirtatious lady-killer, Major Fitz-David. Playing with legal evidence in various forms, *The Law and the Lady* highlights the instability inherent in the process of reading and interpretation. It foregrounds the association between detecting and reading that is to be found in detective fiction, which often manifests itself in the genre's self-conscious intertextuality. Other, more private, textual forms such as letters, journals, and diaries, also play a significant part in the construction of the narrative: the marriage register, letters, Eustace's diary, the operatic "texts" of *La Sonnambula* and *Domino Noir*, Misserimus Dexter's story-telling, Benjamin's *Enigmas* and Sara Macallan's suicide note, all have their function both in the development of Collins's tale, and in the apparent

resolution of what is ostensibly the novel's central mystery - did or did not Eustace Macallan kill his first wife? But perhaps the most interesting instabilities in the text stem from the masquerades which inform Collins's novel. In the text, Collins himself "masquerades" as a woman, employing the narrative voice of "Valeria Macallan;" and the story itself "masks" another beneath its words for critics have been quick to point out the similarity between Eustace Macallan's fictional trial and that of the notorious Scottish case of Madeleine Smith in 1857 which was widely reported in the press.[1] Yet one might argue that the most disturbing "mask" belongs to the character of Valeria herself.

From the moment Valeria signs her name incorrectly in the marriage register, her identity is uncertain. Who is Valeria? Is she Valeria Brinton? Valeria Woodville? or Valeria Macallan? Moreover, Valeria herself changes her name at will according to her purpose. She does so when she meets Lady Clarinda as "Mrs Woodville." Although this is perfectly acceptable within the context of the story, it is nevertheless disturbing in Valeria's autobiography. A genre which is meant to present the self and authenticate the narrative is undermined by the shifting nature of its subject and, by implication, its text. It is perhaps necessary, then, to question not only the representation of Valeria, but also those texts, such as the transcript of Eustace's trial, which she presents for our consideration. Interestingly, Valeria herself uses textual evidence to support the validity of this document. She writes:

> Turning to the second page of the Trial, I found a Note, assuring the reader of the absolute correctness of the Report of the proceedings. The compiler described himself as having enjoyed certain privileges. Thus, the presiding Judge had himself revised his charge to the jury. And again, the chief lawyers for the prosecution and the defence, following the Judge's example, had revised their speeches, for, and against the prisoner. Lastly, particular care had been taken to secure a literally correct report of the evidence given by the various witnesses. It was some relief to me to discover this Note, and to be satisfied at the outset that the Story of the Trial was, in every particular, fully and truly told.
>
> (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 124)

However, this apparent assertion of the truth is, as Jessica Maynard observes, undermined by the content of the note itself:

> How [she asks] are we to read the fact that judge and advocates have "revised" their speeches? Could they, in checking for errors, have also altered what they originally said, albeit inadvertently? With each "revision," the distance between this transcription and the original speeches which it attempts to reproduce only widens.
>
> (Maynard, 191)

[1] For a full discussion of the similarities, see Taylor, xix-xx

That the transcript's veracity is called into question by our own and not Valeria's reading of the text leads us to reexamine the validity of her own narrative and, if we look closely, we find that Valeria, too, manipulates this text. She refuses, for example, to quote the Indictment in full so that we may see it for ourselves, and informs us:

> I shall not copy the uncouth language, full of needless repetitions (and, if I know anything of the subject, not guiltless of bad grammar as well), in which my innocent husband was solemnly and falsely accused of poisoning his first wife. The less there is of that false and hateful Indictment on this page, the better and truer the page will look to *my* eyes.
>
> (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 125)

The rest of the trial record receives similar treatment. It is condensed in Valeria's mind into three main questions – Did the Woman Die Poisoned? Who Poisoned her? and, What was his Motive? and the information we are given is correspondingly curtailed. Similarly, she edits the evidence given by Dexter at the trial, telling us that "One question, and one question only" will she repeat in the text (178). Valeria's revision of the trial highlights the instability of her own autobiographical writing which, as we discover later when Misserimus Dexter recounts his experiences at Gleninch in "Autobiographical Style," can be a form adopted at will to tell a story. Furthermore, it is somewhat disconcerting to find in the last pages of the novel that Valeria writes, "from memory, unassisted by notes or diaries," for "memory" is a notoriously unreliable faculty (399). A text which is represented as "factual" is, in fact, Valeria's own subjective view masquerading as truth.

In this novel, these ambiguities seem to contaminate the very nature of language itself. Words and names become unstable, harbouring multiple meanings: the "trial" also functions as a "trail"; Eustace's diary, which contains the guilty thoughts that "will hang him", has the words "My Diary" inscribed in "gilt" letters on its cover (157; 146). Names, too, become ambivalent, often bearing or implying double definitions. Valeria's name, suggestive of "strength and resolution" (Taylor, 420), is coupled with surnames that place her in a state of liminality, for Woodville is Eustace's assumed name, and Macallan bears a stain that is not fully erased by the end of the novel. Dexter's name is apparently appropriate. He explains its significance to the crowd at the trial: "My name, 'Miserrimus,' means, in Latin, 'most unhappy.' It was given to me by my father, in allusion to the deformity [...] with which it was my misfortune to be born" (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 174). Yet Dexter's surname proves appropriate for other reasons too. As well as being Latin for "right," (as in right and left), it is also a pun on "writer": a teller of stories, a weaver of lies (Taylor, 425). The anagrammatic name of Sara Macallan's nurse, Christina Ormsay, suggests that she could "say more," and in Helena Beauly's name we are reminded of Helen of Troy and of the standard of beauty that costs Sara Macallan her life.

Social and Sexual Masquerades

These textual "masquerades" are echoed in Collins's novel by a number of physical masquerades which destabilize perceptions of character and purpose. In its representation of a textual space in which impulse and excess seem to rule and in which surfaces are deceptive, the dizzying microcosm of *The Law and the Lady* recalls the world of the eighteenth-century masquerade which, in Collins's text, makes a brief but, arguably, crucial appearance. During Valeria's interview with Lady Clarinda, the latter provides us with an account of Helena Beauly's escapade whilst at Gleninch which, significantly, she is prompted to recall when she hears the operatic strains of the *Domino Noir*.[2] She tells us:

> One evening [Mrs Beauly] was engaged to dine with some English friends visiting Edinburgh. The same night – also in Edinburgh – there was a masked ball, [...] The ball [...] was reported to be not at all a reputable affair. All sorts of amusing people were to be there. Ladies of doubtful virtue, you know; and gentlemen on the outlying limits of society, and so on. Helena's friends had contrived to get cards, and were going, in spite of the objections – in the strictest incognito, of course; trusting to their masks. And Helena herself was bent on going with them, if she could only manage it without being discovered at Gleninch. Mr Macallan was one of the strait-laced people who disapproved of the ball [...] When the time came for going back to Gleninch, what do you think Helena did? She sent her maid back in the carriage instead of herself! Phoebe was dressed in her mistress's cloak and bonnet and veil.
>
> (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 267)

In her essay "The Carnivalization of Eighteenth-Century English Narrative", Terry Castle notes that the inclusion of a masquerade scene was common in the early novel and employed by the author as a site of danger which could be righteously condemned, thus heightening the moral tone of the story. However, as Castle goes on to point out, "masked [...] behind a textual facade of moralism and ideological decorum" such a scene is "powerfully subversive nonetheless" (*The Female Thermometer,* 102). In Collins's novel, the inclusion of a masquerade, albeit at a narrative remove, may seem anachronistic. As Castle states, "by the late eighteenth century" the "masquerade set piece [had] all but vanished from the topography of the English novel" (*The Female Thermometer,*117).[3] So why does Collins choose to include such an incident in

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[2] The domino was a "neutral costume." This simple loose cloak totally envelops the body in its folds and, often worn with a mask, obscures the shape and sex of the person beneath – see Castle *Masquerade and Civilization*, 59. Like the figure of Helena herself, the domino is compelling in its mystery, but often transmits no message at all.

[3] Castle suggests that, in the nineteenth-century novel, crowd or mob scenes replace the masquerade as sites of "collective transgression" (Castle *The Female Thermometer*, 118). I would argue that, in the claustrophobic interior atmosphere of *The Law and the Lady*, such a

this text? The answer may lie in the role played by the masquerade in his predecessors' works.[4] According to Castle, in these novels

> the masquerade, the emblem of universal transformation, is linked to the pleasurable processes of narrative transformation [...] Besides being a symbolic epitome of plot – the embedded imago of a world of metamorphosis and fluidity – the masquerade is typically a perpretator too: a dense kernel of human relations out of which are born the myriad transactions of the narrative [...] The scene may thus be considered a master trope of semantic destabilization [...] the masquerade episode introduces a curious instability into the would-be orderly cosmos of the eighteenth-century English novel. Its moral indeterminacy is paradigmatic; its saturnalian assault on the taxonomies and hierarchies – established fixities of every sort – is the prerequisite, often enough, to a general collapse of the fictional world.
>
> (Castle *The Female Thermometer*, 103)

The masquerade set piece, then, despite its apparent containment within a specified place and time, has repurcussions, as its moral and social transgressions seemingly seep into the narrative world outside, often with subversive consequences. One might argue that, appearing over halfway into *The Law and the Lady*, Helena Beauly's attendance at a masquerade can have no significant implications for the main story. However, it is important to remember that the event itself precedes the time-frame of the narrative, and one might therefore suggest that the social and sexual instabilities in Collins's novel follow in its wake. Here it certainly seems that the travesties of Helena Beauly's masquerade have spilled over into the "external" social world of the text, a sphere in which the boundaries of class, gender, and identity should be clearly demarcated.[5] If we look closely at the description of the masquerade in the text, it is clear that many of the concerns of the novel, including disguise, female transgression, and class mobility are expressed: the ball is not

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scene would seem incongruous, whereas the inclusion of a masquerade heightens and mirrors the tension in the text.

[4] Castle (*Masquerade and Civilization,* 115) observes that important masquerade scenes appear in, among other works, Defoe's *Roxana* (1724), Richardson's *Pamela* Part 2 (1741), Fielding's *Tom Jones* (1749), Cleland's *Memoirs of a Woman of Pleasure* (1749), and Elizabeth Inchbald's *A Simple Story* (1791).

[5] The incident recalls other instances of a similar nature to be encountered in such novels as Collins's *The Moonstone* and in Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, in which the arbitrary nature of class is underlined. In *The Moonstone* Rosanna Spearman writes in her letter to Franklin Blake, "Suppose you put Miss Rachel into a servant's dress, and took her ornaments off - ? [...] it does stir one up to hear Miss Rachel called pretty, when one knows all the time that it's her dress that does it" (350). In *Lady Audley's Secret*, the narrator comments that Lucy Audley's maid, Phoebe, on her wedding day, "arrayed in a rustling silk of delicate grey, that had been worn about half a dozen times by her mistress, looked, as the few spectators of the ceremony remarked, quite the lady" (110).

"reputable" and is likely to be attended by "Ladies of doubtful virtue" and "gentlemen on the outlying limits of society." Helena herself attends "incognito" and exchanges her clothes with those of Phoebe, her maid. In Collins's novel, as in those of his eighteenth-century counterparts, the masquerade is associated with sexual impurity, and entry into a space of "moral instability" (Castle *The Female Thermometer*, 107). It is a space in which, as Castle observes, "the high and the low, the virtuous and the vicious" are involved in potential "liaisons dangeureuses" (109). In addition, unmentioned yet implicit in Collins's use of the masquerade scene, are those shifts in gender and gendered behaviour which unbalance the world of *The Law and the Lady*. As Castle points out, "the masquerade frequently coincides with a peculiar reversal of [...] conventional male-female power relations" which display themselves not only in costume, but also in conduct (111).

In Collins's novel we have ample examples of both types of gender reversal. In contrast to Eustace's feminine passivity, Valeria chooses to act in order to clear his name and to legitimate her own. Although her intention places her in a position of moral rectitude in keeping with the strictures of what Lyn Pykett calls "the proper feminine," her decision to take matters into her own hands negates that position. The "proper" feminine stands for "order, control, regulation, propriety, domesticity," the "improper" feminine for "chaos, uncontrollability, impropriety, sexuality" (Pykett, 209). Valeria's impulsive-ness, impropriety, and her social, as well as financial independence are often noted in the text. In a scene where she begs for Major Fitz-David's help, she recalls, "In the reckless impulse of the moment, I snatched his hand and raised it to my lips" (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 63). Later, replying to Eustace's farewell letter, she writes with a similar "masculine" insistence:

> "I love you - and I won't give you up. No! As long as I live, I mean to live as your wife."
>
> "Does this surprise you? It surprises me. If another woman wrote in this manner to a man who had behaved to her as you have behaved, I should be quite at a loss to account for her conduct. I am quite at a loss to account for my own conduct. I ought to hate you – and yet I can't help loving you. I am ashamed of myself; but so it is."
>
> (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 115)

Moreover, rejecting Eustace's offer of half his income for as long as he lives, Valeria refuses to touch "a farthing of his money" (118). Her transgressions are duly noted: Fitz-David responds to her gesture as if he had received "an electric shock" (63), and of her letter to Eustace, Benjamin exclaims, "It seems the rashest letter that ever was written [...] Oh, dear me, what a letter from a wife to a husband!" (117). Discovering her intentions to remain independent, and her decision to turn detective, her uncle cries, "God help her! [...] The poor thing's troubles have turned her brain!" (120). Her desire for autonomy, it seems, must be figured as madness.

Interestingly, Valeria's "improper" femininity also harbours other implications, for, as Pykett points out, "A woman who resisted the dominant definitions was held to be 'unwomanly' [...] [or] unsexed - the member of an indeterminate sex" (14). In addition, Valeria's plan to turn detective functions as a transgressive penetration of a masculine domain for, in Britain, the female detective remained a fictional figure until the 1920s when women were first admitted to the CID in that capacity. However, as Lillian Nayder has noted, in Collins's text Valeria is not alone in violating the codes of traditional femininity: Dexter's adoring cousin, Ariel, in spite of being submissive to the point of masochism, also comes under the heading of "improper" feminine.[6] She is represented as physically masculine. She could be mistaken "for a man in the dark" (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 203). She has a "rough, deep voice," which Valeria "should certainly never have supposed to be the voice of a woman" and she wears, "a man's hat", "a man's pilot jacket [...] and a man's heavy laced boots" (203; 210). Her "proper" femininity, if such we may call it, is reserved for the domestic space in which her animation and unquestioning compliance in Dexter's presence functions as an ironic and disturbing version of the behaviour required of the perfect wife in Victorian society.

And it is not only femininity that is questioned in this novel. In *The Law and the Lady*, "masculinity" is a similarly debatable term. Misserimus Dexter bears feminine features: "His large, clear blue eyes, and his long, delicate white hands, were like the eyes and hands of a beautiful woman" (173). Dexter's femininity is underlined when he tells us that he is "capable of hysterics" (218), for "hysteria," as we all know, is supposedly a female malady. He is adept at womanly pursuits: he embroiders with "the patient and nimble dexterity of an accomplished needlewoman" (236). Furthermore, his primal excesses link him to John Kemble's image of the "improper" feminine. In an article published in the *British and Foreign Quarterly Review* voicing his opposition to the Child Custody Bill of 1837, Kemble sees women as "so many wild beasts" whose lusts and licentiousness run riot "when you have unbarred their cages" (cited in Pykett, 56). It is perhaps Dexter's tendency to openly express, as Valeria observes, "in a very reckless and boisterous way - thoughts and feelings which most of us are ashamed of as weaknesses, and which we keep to ourselves accordingly" (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 221), that leads Benjamin to call him "a maundering mad monster who ought to be kept in a cage" (324): a figure reminiscent of the wild and unruly women of Kemble's imagination. But perhaps the most crucial facet of his feminization in the text is his physical body for, as Nayder points out, we are led to suspect that, despite his erotic yearnings, "the 'absolute' absence of Dexter's legs signifies another, more private, deformity" (Nayder, 64).

This feminization manifests itself most noticeably in Dexter's love of costume. He enjoys the process of dressing. His "flowing locks" and "long

[6] See the discussion of sexual ambiguities in *The Law and the Lady* in Nayder, 63-64. See also O'Fallon, 237-8.

silky beard" are combed, brushed and oiled by the faithful Ariel (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 210). It is clear that he relishes his sartorial eccentricity. His costumes range from the simplicity of a chef's uniform and the elegance of a black velvet jacket and lace ruffles, to an outlandish ensemble of "pink quilted silk" which he accesorizes with gold bracelets (232). He states clearly his position on the question of male beauty, explaining to Valeria that he despises

> "… the brutish contempt for beauty and the mean dread of expense which degrade a gentleman's costume to black cloth, and limit a gentleman's ornaments to a finger ring, in the age I live in. I like to be bright and beautiful, especially when brightness and beauty visit me."
>
> (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 232)

His desire, then, it appears, is to be a mirror reflection of feminine beauty. Arguably, Eustace and Major Fitz-David are also feminized. Eustace's chosen role in the war is not that of the hero, but that of the nurse, and his role in the text is predominantly passive. Fitz-David's successes with the opposite sex seem to be due, in part at least, to his feminine traits. His female friends can consult him on such particular matters as the quality of antique lace, and his interest in the feminine pursuit of self-beautification is evident in his own brown wig, and his "well-painted eyebrows" (189).

Cosmetic Alterity and Conflated Identity

Fitz-David's use of cosmetics and Dexter's vanity and love of fancy-dress perform a dual function. Both men are feminized by what are considered female frivolities, yet both also use those frivolities to construct or indicate alternative identities, to "masquerade" as other selves. Stripped of cosmetics, the Major is no longer a British Don-Juan. When Valeria sees him without them after his marriage to the "future Queen of Song," he is unrecognizable: Valeria "hardly knew him again. He had lost all his pretensions to youth; he had become, hopelessly and undisguisedly, an old man" (408). Dexter's superficial transformations are echoed in his psychic transmutations. He changes identity as often as he changes his clothes. At times he is Napoleon, at others Nelson or Shakespeare.

These shifts in identity are echoed in the female characters in the text. Intending to meet Fitz-David for the first time, Valeria is careful to choose a becoming dress, and employs her chambermaid's cosmetic artistry in order to create a pleasing persona. The latter's "box of paints and powders" endows Valeria's skin with "a false fairness," her cheeks with "a false colour" and her eyes with "a false brightness" (57). The result is experienced as an alternative subjectivity: Valeria writes, "From the moment when I had resigned myself into the hands of the chambermaid, I seemed in some strange way to have lost

my ordinary identity – to have stepped out of my own character" (57-8).[7] This cosmetic transformation of Valeria into "another" woman highlights the apparent interchangeability of women in Collins's novel, in which feminine identities become conflated as a result of shared characteristics. For Fitz-David, Valeria resembles several other women of his wide female acquaintance. She is like Lady Clarinda in her "firmness" and her "tenacity of purpose", and she has the "same creamy paleness" as another of his female admirers (193; 194). Recalling a dinner party at Fitz-David's home, Valeria writes that the Major was "always detecting resemblances" between the ladies that were present (262). Moreover, as both Dexter and Playmore observe, Valeria resembles another woman: there is something in Valeria's figure, pose, or movement, that reminds them of Sara Macallan. Besides these overt references to the interrelationship between the women in the text, there are other similarities which remain implicit. Valeria inescapably merges with Sara, for she too – at least unofficially – is "Mrs Macallan" (Nayder, 65), and Valeria also functions as a double for Helena Beauly, replacing her as the object of Eustace's affection. In addition, there are parallels between Sara Macallan and Dexter's cousin Ariel. Both are perceived as ugly and each loves her man faithfully, but in vain.

Male characters are similarly conflated. Eustace and Dexter both adopt other names at will. Both were, willingly or otherwise, Sara Macallan's suitors and, later, both desire Valeria. It is suggestive that Eustace and Dexter never appear together in the text, although we may conjecture that they were both present at the trial. When Dexter is at his most active, persuading Valeria of Helena Beauly's guilt, Eustace lies in a state of delirium. Equally, just as Dexter descends into his final stupor, Eustace recovers. Dexter also seems to usurp the conjugal position relinquished by Eustace in his relationships with both Sara and Valeria. On Sara's deathbed, it is Dexter and not Eustace who mourns her, and Valeria's pregnancy becomes apparent only after her erotic encounter with Dexter, in which he catches her hands in his, and devours them "with kisses": caresses that it is the husband's prerogative to bestow (299). In Collins's novel, it seems that we enter a masquerade-like world in which sexual, social, and psychic boundaries are equally uncertain.

[7] The notions of cosmetic disguise suggested by Valeria recall similar discussions in Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, in which Lucy Audley shows that she is well aware of the role played by cosmetics in the construction of identity. When her maid, Phoebe, dismisses Lucy's suggestion that they share a superficial similarity, with the observation that Lucy is a beauty and she is but "a poor plain creature," Lucy disagrees and says, "Not at all, Phoebe, [...] You *are* like me, and your features are very nice, it is only colour that you want [...] Why, with a bottle of hair dye, such as we see advertised in the papers, and a pot of rouge, you'd be as good-looking as I any day, Phoebe." (58).

It is perhaps fitting that the linguistic instability of the text is echoed, as we have seen, in a corresponding ambivalence in the class, gender, and identity of characters in *The Law and the Lady*, for this is a "sensation" novel – a definition "borrowed from the contemporary theatre's 'sensation drama' after which the novels were named" (Rance, 3). This perhaps explains its concern with make-up and with masquerade, whether rhetorical or physical. In the light of this connection with the theatre, it is interesting to observe that Valeria herself "stages" her life. Her memories are tableaux which she recreates as her mind wanders backward and shows her "another picture in the golden gallery of the past" (15). But this association with the stage highlights other instabilities in the text. As in eighteenth-century masquerade balls, theatrical costume can be used to symbolize or to disguise. The body and its clothing become texts to be read, and, like texts, they can be manipulated. One can be read as we choose, or others may read us as *they* choose so that we are interpreted or misinterpreted. It seems significant, therefore, that, in *The Law and the Lady*, masquerade seeps into everyday life and poses significant problems of interpretation. This suggests that the instabilities we accept so readily in the theatre or in the controlled space of the masquerade, become anxieties when they are experienced in the "real" world represented in the novel. Arguably, these tensions relate specifically to the question of urban unknowability. In the eighteenth-century novel the masquerade often operates as a metaphor for the heroine's first contact with the corruption of the town (Castle *The Female Thermometer*, 106), and it performs a similar function in *The Law and the Lady*. By the nineteenth century this concern with the dangers of urbanization manifests itself in a preoccupation with identification and classification. In *Body Work: Objects of Desire in Modern Narrative,* Peter Brooks observes that during this period

> … societies become more concerned with the identification of individuals within the group especially in the undifferentiated mass of city dwellers. The identification of malefactors and marginals, such as prostitutes, was an obsessive issue; prostitutes were inscribed on police registers and given a "card" if they were streetwalkers, a "number" if they were in a brothel.
>
> (Brooks, 25)

In the light of Brooks's comments it seems that, in the nineteenth century, unknowability and its attendant anxieties often centred on the figure of the unruly woman. Fears that, in the eighteenth-century, were concentrated on maintaining the purity of women, shift, in the nineteenth century, to a dread that women themselves might be the primary cause of corruption in mysterious and alluring disguise.[8] The demystification and control of femininity therefore becomes a primary concern. In *The Law and the Lady* such anxieties are clearly

[8] Such dread, of course, finds its most powerful public expression in the debate leading to the passing of the Contagious Diseases Acts in the later 1860s.

located in the feminine body, for those who use cosmetics and/or masquerade are either women or feminized.

Given the widespread nature of such fears, it is unsurprising that the sensation novel should frequently locate its central, and often criminal, mystery in a female body. In Collins's *The Moonstone*, Rachel Verinder and Rosanna Spearman hold the key to the jewel's disappearance; in Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, the connection between Lucy Audley and the supposedly dead Helen Talboys reveals Lucy's duplicity; and, in *The Law and the Lady*, the truth resides in Sara Macallan's body, and is dependent on Valeria's female body for its exhumation. This focus on the female body has narrative implications. In these three texts, as in many others of the genre, narrative desire, that is the desire to discover the truth and to reach the novel's denouement, is, arguably, linked to sexual desire for it is the female body which must be investigated and revealed.

Peter Brooks notes that, psychoanalytically, the "desire to know is constructed from sexual desire and curiosity" (5). This suggests that, in the sensation novel, the body, which is our primary source of curiosity as children, may be linked to the text and to our drive to decipher and uncover the mysteries between its covers. In Collins's novel, this model of narrative curiosity is emphasized by the concentrated gaze on the female body, and by the fact that the truth resides in a woman's corpse. Significantly, the faculty of sight is often linked to truth and "Truth" is often personified as female. As Brooks remarks:

> Sight is the sense that represents the whole epistemological project; it is conceived to be the most objective and objectivizing of the senses, that which best allows an inspection of reality that produces truth. "I see," in our common usage, is equivalent to "I know."
>
> (Brooks, 96)

Yet, as Brooks points out, truth is often masked and "is not of easy access; it often is represented as veiled, latent, or covered, so that the discovery of truth becomes a process of unveiling, laying bare, or denuding" (96). Moreover, that which is to be "looked at, denuded, unveiled, has been repeatedly personified as female: Truth as goddess, as sphinx, or as woman herself" (96).

In *The Law and the Lady*, the crucial act of "unveiling" or "denuding" is transposed, I suggest, from Sara Macallan's body onto the text of her final letter. But the letter form itself has interesting associations with the female body for, since the sixteenth century, "when the familiar letter was first thought of as a literary form, male commentators have noted that the epistolary genre seemed particularly suited to the female voice" (Goldsmith, vii). Letter-writing, then, is seemingly perceived as a fundamentally feminine activity. More specifically the letter form is usually associated with female sexuality: it stands "metonymically in the place of the figure of the desiring woman" (Watson, 16):

often symbolizing "that folded, secret place which is always open to violent intrusion" (Eagleton, 54).[9]

The Bad and the Beautiful

In *The Law and the Lady*, then, the search for truth leads directly to the "unveiled" female body (symbolically figured by the letter). However, this search brings its own dangers, for this body represents a significant danger to the male gaze, recalling that first sight of the apparently castrated maternal body and its terrifying wound. In her celebrated essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," Laura Mulvey suggests that the male psyche can avert this threat in two ways:

> The male unconscious has two avenues of escape from this castration anxiety: preoccupation with the re-enactment of the original trauma (investigating the woman, demystifying her mystery), counterbalanced by the devaluation, punishment or saving of a guilty object [...] or else complete disavowal of castration by the substitution of a fetish object or turning the represented figure itself into a fetish so that it becomes reassuring rather than dangerous.
>
> (Mulvey, 13-14)

This second option, which Mulvey terms "fetishistic scopophilia," builds up the beauty of the object, "transforming it into something satisfying in itself" (14). In the light of Mulvey's theory, the importance of feminine beauty in *The Law and the Lady* compels further examination. It seems significant that Sara Macallan's ugliness excludes her from the field of vision. In her final letter she tells how she would not have committed suicide had Eustace deigned to look at her. She writes, "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. I let you go without saying a word" (393). Sara's words to Eustace recall those of Rosanna Spearman to Franklin Blake in *The Moonstone*. In a letter she confesses her unrequited love for Blake and tells him, "I tried - oh, dear, how I tried - to get you to look at me. If you had known the mortification of your never taking any notice of me, you would have pitied me perhaps, and have given me a look now and then to live on" (349). But like Eustace, Franklin Blake refuses to bestow his gaze on Rosanna even after her death. Having read only part of her letter, he passes it to Betteredge saying, "If there is anything in it that I *must* look at, you can tell me as you go on" (353).

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[9] This traditional association of the female letter with the female body is most clearly expressed in Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa: The History of a Young Lady* (1747-8), in which Clarissa's physical and emotional distress is displayed in her letters. Those most closely linked to her physical body are the letters written following her rape: these are rent in two, mirroring the violent assault, or "Scratched through," "defaced" (890), echoing the identity crisis induced by her ordeal, for in one of them she declares, "I shall never be myself again" (895).

Tamar Heller (156) suggests that Blake's refusal to look at Rosanna or her letter is linked to the class divide. However, this does not apply in Eustace's case and I would argue that this refusal to look at the "ugly" woman is embedded in a far more primal fear. If we accept that both Rosanna Spearman and Sara Macallan are repositories of the truth, that their letters are in some way representative of the naked female body, then their "ugliness" can be linked to Mulvey's theory. In the light of this formulation, each becomes a form of Medusa who threatens the male with castration, and whose ugly looks can petrify and kill. It seems significant that, in Sara's case, the only man who offers her his gaze is Dexter, who has nothing to fear as he is arguably already castrated. Yet, according to Mulvey (14), the male gaze often mitigates this threat by substituting "a fetish object" that is a beautiful ideal, so that paradoxically, beauty becomes "the very image of death, castration and repression which it is designed to block out and to occult."

Earlier in this essay I suggested that both Valeria and Sara, despite their differences, are posited as doubles in the text both because Dexter detects certain similarities between them, and because Eustace, in marrying Valeria, has made her a second Mrs Eustace Macallan. Elizabeth Bronfen notes that when such a substitution occurs and the difference between the two women is foregrounded, "the double affirms the first woman's death" (Bronfen, 327). Sara's "ugliness," then, is displaced by Valeria's beauty, which must allay the threat posed by Sara's body. If we look at descriptions of Valeria, we often find that she depicts herself framed in a mirror. Shortly after her marriage, Valeria stops to see how she looks "in the glass over the vestry fireplace" (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 10). She watches in the glass as she is transformed by the chambermaid's art before she visits Major Fitz-David, and later, she checks her looks in the mirror in Dexter's ante-room when she visits him a second time. Although not conventionally beautiful (she lacks the "popular yellow hair and the popular painted cheeks") Valeria is nevertheless presented as a beauty (10). She gives pleasure to those who look at her and she is associated with the classical beauty of Venus, whose hairstyle she favours, and bears comparison with those objets d'art, "the Venus Milo and the Venus Callipyge," that grace the Major's home (77). Valeria, then, functions as a form of fetish. Like the locks of hair in Fitz-David's collection, she, too, "symbolizes" the body of a woman. Being a fetishized ideal, she can be looked at with safety. As Bronfen points out,

> Beautification and aestheticisation mitigate a direct threat by severing image from its context or reference [...] as in the myth of Medusa, [...] a direct glance at the woman's head turns the viewer into stone while the head reflected in the mirror can be gazed at with impunity.
>
> (Bronfen, 121-2)

While symbolising the Medusan danger of Sara Macallan's ugliness, Valeria's image in the mirror is an idealized image. In *The Law and the Lady* it seems that ugliness must masquerade as beauty in order to moderate the threat implicit in the female body.

Reimposing the Law

According to Kathleen O'Fallon, females, beautiful or otherwise, caused Collins both excitement and concern. She identifies Valeria as one in a series of intrepid heroines by whom Collins "became increasingly intrigued" (229). She argues that Collins "seems to have admired women and wished to promote them to heroic status – or at least centrality" (229). However, this interest had an adverse effect on his male characters. O'Fallon writes:

> … even as Collins steadily moves forward in his experimentation with new kinds of heroines, he appears to be very uneasy about the consequent mixing of traditional gender roles. Collins' uneasiness with the new gender roles that he creates may result from his apparent inability to find satisfactory roles for his male characters once he has strengthened the women: the men seem to lapse into impotence or villainy, and readers are left wondering why such interesting, capable women would have anything to do with them. But he may also have been made uneasy by a recognition of the radical nature of his literary project: he was tampering with values at the very heart of Victorian society.
>
> (O'Fallon, 229-30)

It is perhaps because of these dual concerns that Valeria writes, in retrospect, from the confines of domestication. By the time she writes, she is ensconced in her home "with no interests, no pleasures, out of [her] husband's room" (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 373): she is a wife once more, and a mother to Eustace's child – a domestic ideal. The masquerade-like freedom which Valeria is allowed to experience in the novel proves to be, like all other masquerades, an organized and controlled affair of short duration that ends in a return to patriarchal law. The "law" with which the lady is coupled in the novel's title is, it seems, as much a social as a forensic law.

However, there is another female body in the text that requires examination. Sara's letter, standing metonymically for her body, is constructed and controlled by the law and by science, for it is Mr Playmore, Benjamin, and the young chemist, who put it together and fill in the gaps where necessary. In the fourth paragraph they are "obliged to supply lost words in no less than three places" and in the "ninth, tenth, and seventeenth paragraphs the same proceeding was, in a greater or less degree, found to be necessary" (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 390). In recreating its fragments as they choose, in inserting their own text, I would argue, they protect themselves by "disguising" Sara's meaning with their own: thus they refuse to look at the truth and, by implication, at Sara's naked female body for, as Peter Brooks points out, the "moment of complete nakedness, if it is ever reached, most often is represented by silence, ellipsis" (Brooks, 19). Therefore, it is perhaps those gaps that are most significant, for if Sara's letter symbolizes her corpse "disinterred from [...] [its] foul tomb" (Collins *The Law and the Lady*, 396), the gaps in her text signify those orifices of her Medusan body that are most dangerous, those that threaten to devour and castrate the male spectator. In Collins's novels it appears that this castration is already dangerously in process for, as O'Fallon

points out, his male characters are already rendered impotent by his empowered females. The danger of such castration is perhaps even more threatening in *The Law and the Lady*: a text in which the novel's "transsexual" author writes in autobiographical mode masquerading as a woman. It is unsurprising, then, that Sara, like Valeria, is safely "sealed" away. Her letter, if it is ever read, will lie in the hands of Eustace's son and heir. The novel's ending ensures that order is restored, and that those taking part in its textual and sexual masquerades are contained by convention: the "law" is indeed once more in control of the "lady."

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Hysterical Fictions: Mid-Nineteenth-Century Medical Constructions of Hysteria and the Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon

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Mid-Victorian constructions of hysteria were defined by inconsistency and contradiction.[1] The period's medical writers would often categorise and diagnose the condition by process of elimination, explaining what it was *not* rather than what it was. In their influential treatises on insanity of the 1830s, for example, both Jean Étienne Esquirol (149, 151, 162) and James Cowles Prichard (157) addressed the issue by differentiating the condition from epilepsy. In 1864, Frederick Skey (32), one of the era's main specialists in the area, admitted in reference to one of his patients: "I had no doubt whatever that it would prove to be a case of hysteria. It appeared obvious that it must be so, simply because it was most improbable that it could be any other disease." Psychiatric accounts of specific symptoms would similarly follow this method of discrimination by characterising the hysterical state as a deviation from standard modes of behaviour or an excess of normative levels of feeling. In a lecture "On the Pathology and Treatment of Hysteria," delivered in 1866, Julius Althaus claimed that:

> All symptoms of hysteria have their prototype in those vital actions by which grief, terror, disappointment, and other painful emotions and affections, are manifested under ordinary circumstances, and which become signs of hysteria as soon as they attain a certain degree of intensity. […] Tell [a] woman suddenly that the house is on fire, or that she has lost a near

[1] Although the main sources for my historical material are nineteenth-century medical treatises and journals, a number of interesting studies on hysteria have appeared in recent years including, most notably, Showalter *The Female Malady*, Showalter *Hystories*, Micale, and Veith. On hysteria and Victorian literature, see both Small, and Wood. My definition of "hysterial fictions" as texts both fictional and non-fictional that engage with Victorian medical constructions of hysteria through thematic interest, form and motivation, contrasts with Mary Poovey's use of the term "hysterical text." With reference to *Jane Eyre*, Poovey (141) argues that "[b]ecause there was no permissible plot in the nineteenth century for a woman's anger [...] the body of the text symptomatically acts out what cannot make its way into the psychologically realist narrative," namely Jane's aggression towards other characters in the novel.

> relation, and you may be sure to observe some of or all the following symptoms. She perceives a feeling of constriction in the epigastrium, oppression on the chest, and palpitations of the heart; a lump seems to rise in her throat and gives a feeling of suffocation; she loses the power over her legs, so that she is for the moment unable to move; and she wrings the hands in a spasmodic manner.
>
> (Althaus, 245)

Seven years previously, another physician, W. Camps, had written of the condition in the following way:

> There is observed in such an increased susceptibility to impressions, a great rapidity of movements. […] There supervene[s] excessive restlessness of the body generally, so that, when out of bed the patient [is] almost always in bodily action, seldom or never sitting, frequently not even when at meals; in motion whilst standing, and very frequently walking hurriedly about in various apartments of the house.
>
> (Camps, 234)

Following the trend set by Esquirol and Prichard's theories of partial and obsession-based psychological disorders earlier in the century, mid-Victorian definitions of hysteria like these reveal a central preoccupation with excessive and fragmented forms of behaviour. In 1855, James Davey combined hysteria with "monomania" – Esquirol's term for the mental condition in which the individual is excessively fixated on a single object – to coin the hybrid term "hysteromania." Davey noted that "no class of patients manifest a more continuous and perverse moral sense than this one" (675). Although Davey's term never entered into scientific or popular currency, it is nevertheless illustrative of how the Victorian concept of hysteria was heavily influenced by the era's psychiatric engagements with the idea of immoderation. Clinical attempts to describe the symptoms and nature of the condition in this way also reveal that a metonymic connection existed between its symptomatology and the hysterical mind itself; both are distinguished as fragmentary, manifold in variety and changeable.

Althaus, for example, noticed the condition's "infinite variety of symptoms," adding:

> We find that their multitude and apparent incongruity have perplexed and bewildered observers […] Rivière called hysteria not a simple, but a thousandfold disease. Sydenham asserted that the forms of Proteus and the colours of the chameleon were not more various than the divers aspects under which hysteria presented itself; and Hofmann said that hysteria was not a disease, but a host of diseases.
>
> (Althaus, 245)

The disorder's medical "observers" thus mimicked the pathological status of their patients in becoming "perplexed" and "bewildered" by the protean nature of the "thousandfold disease." In this article, I argue that such multiplicity and incongruity is essential to understanding Victorian medical classifications of hysteria. Recent studies of the Victorian medical treatment of women have tended to interpret that "treatment" as providing the male population with an

alternative method of regulating women.[2] By promoting an idea of the "demon medical profession," such interpretations, I argue, are too simplistic and hardly begin to appreciate the complexity of the nineteenth century's clinical examinations of femininity. I aim to show, for example, how clinical accounts of hysteria, in particular, expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with the social marginalization of women and a genuine desire to treat a condition that they perceived as real. These same texts, however, simultaneously supported the era's limitations on female experience through their suggested methods of cure. Rather than being an unequivocal attempt to keep women in their place, however, this was the result of an inability to see beyond the hegemonic influence of the period's ideology of separate spheres. As a ubiquitous concept that was constantly under revision and redefinition, hysteria was comprehended and employed in a multitude of formats throughout the century. In the later stages of my article, I concentrate on the popular fiction of the same era to explore the more subversive potential of the same set of ideas. Mary Braddon's novels, I will suggest, fully exploited the protean nature of hysteria, both as a sensational catalyst for her melodramatic plots and as a method of underscoring the pathological, unbalanced nature of the condition and the ideological forces it partly upheld.

As a part-ideological construct, hysteria cannot be considered as separate from the economic and political ambitions of the age, or from the division of labour and the doctrine of separate spheres that those ambitions underwrote. The economical and political values invested in the condition are perhaps most apparent in the idea, often expressed by medical writers on the subject, that hysteria – thought to have reached "little epidemic" status by mid-century (Gairdner, 429) – was not unrelated to the cultural status and class divisions of the age. As has been well-established in recent years, middle and upper class Victorian women, the malady's main sufferers, were intellectually and physically excluded from the public arena and expected instead to safeguard the nation's moral wealth in the separate, iconic sphere of home. Not only did the nineteenth-century wife appear to rationalise any suspect business endeavours of her husband, by keeping his moral life apparently secluded from those operations, but she also became a visible signifier of his wealth and success. Languishing at home in her silks and lace, not required to work because of her husband's financial security, the middle or upper class woman became a living testimony of her husband's achievements.[3] As a result, the era's medical texts would not infrequently associate the "ornamental members of society" (Skey *Hysteria*, 64), who did suffer from hysteria, with cultural decadence and over-civilisation. In Esquirol's *Mental Maladies*, for example, the author claims that there are a higher number of hysterical women in France than in England, and suggests:

> The vices of education adopted by our young ladies, the preference given to acquirements purely ornamental […] and want of occupation; are causes

[2] Showalter's *The Female Malady* is a prime example, but see also Moscucci.

[3] For a discussion of this idea in relation to *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), see Langland.

> sufficient to render insanity most frequent among our women. […] Without doubt, civilization occasions disease, and augments the number of the sick, because, by multiplying the means of enjoyment, it causes some to live too well, and too fast.
>
> (Esquirol, 36, 42)

Drawing on the era's psychiatric obsessions with excessive behaviour, Esquirol argues that the greater number of insane French women is an indication that his nation has developed "too well, and too fast."

By mid century, such connections between hysteria and class economy, though immovable, were drawn even more sardonically. In 1866, for example, Skey delivered a series of six lectures on the disorder to the students of St. Bartholomew's Hospital in which he claimed that:

> People without compulsory occupation, who lead a life of both bodily and mental inactivity – people whose means are sufficiently ample to indulge in, and who can purchase, the luxury of illness, the daily visit of the physician, and, not the least, the sympathy of friends – these real comforts come home to the hearts of those ornamental members of society who are living examples of an intense sensibility, whether morbid or genuine, who can afford to be ill, and will not make the effort to be well. […] A poor man cannot afford this indulgence, and so he throws the sensations aside by mental resolution.
>
> (Skey *Hysteria*, 64-5)

That same year, this cynical portrait of hysteria as a "luxury" prevailing in "those who can afford to be ill," was repeated and extended by Julius Althaus, who also argued that the malady:

> … is frequent in the higher classes of society, in ladies who lead an artificial life, who do nothing, whose every wish or whim is often gratified as soon as formed, and who are very apt to go into hysterics at the slightest provocation or contrariety. For them, real honest work, the pursuance of an object in life, such as the education of children or such charitable undertaking, is often the best cure.
>
> (Althaus, 246)

Despite their obvious contempt for the idle lifestyles of wealthy women, both Skey and Althaus leave the ideological status of those lifestyles markedly unchallenged. Althaus recommends, for example, that hysterical women perform characteristically feminine duties, like the "education of children" or a "charitable undertaking," as suitable methods of recovery. While Skey's scathing tone aims to mock those "without compulsory occupation," his lecture nevertheless neglects to suggest any alternatives to their valetudinarian existences. Hence, while mid-Victorian medical writers like Skey and Althaus expressed some awareness of (and frustration with) the cultural and economical foundations of hysteria's etiology, their lack of suggested alternatives to women's inoccupation also reveals an incapacity to see beyond the impetus of those traditional social structures.

In his 1853 book, *On the Pathology and Treatment of Hysteria,* Robert Brudenell Carter reveals how the period's medical negotiations of womanhood

were similarly unable to ignore completely the traditional idea that women, like their mother Eve, were inherently sexual creatures. He writes, for example:

> If the relative power of the emotion against the sexes be compared in the present day, even without including the erotic passion, it seems to be considerably greater in the woman than in the man, partly from the natural conformation which causes the former to feel, under circumstances where the latter thinks; and partly because the woman is more often under the necessity of endeavouring to conceal her feelings. But when sexual desire is taken into the account, it will add immensely to the forces bearing upon the female, who is much under its dominion; and who, if unmarried and chaste, is compelled to restrain every manifestation of its sway.
>
> (Carter, 33)

Carter's argument here exemplifies the essentially contradictory and inconsistent nature of the period's medical classifications of hysteria. On the one hand, he appears to launch an attack on the contemporary social inculcations that kept female sexuality concealed and controlled, considering female roles, as did Althaus and Skey, as the direct causes of the condition; yet, on the other hand, the influence of the Victorian ideology of the division of labour reappears in his contention that it is the role of the woman to "feel," while the man's is to "think." While Carter's argument demonstrates a degree of discontent with the narrow social position of women, it is still unable to separate that contention from the ideological belief that men and women have widely different motivating emotions, which, in the female, are of a fundamentally sexual character. What also emerges from his argument is an indication of how the potentially liberating recognition of women's "necessity of endeavouring to conceal [their] feelings" merged with the traditional concept of women as excessively sexual, to form the idea of hysteria as a pressurised, volcanic sexuality – rendered all the more explosive because of those cultural barriers that "restrain[ed] every manifestation in its sway."

As the origins of the word "hysteria" illustrate, the characteristic that had remained constant throughout the disorder's nosological history was its firm links with female sexuality through medical obsessions with the uterus. Althaus observed how, prior to the mid-nineteenth century:

> Pressure of the uterus upon the various organs of the body was considered to be the mainspring of all the sufferings of hysterical patients. Where there was a feeling of suffocation, it must be due to the uterus compressing the throat and the bronchial tubes; coma and lethargy in hysterical women proceeded from the womb squeezing the blood-vessels travelling towards the brain; palpitations arose from the uterus worrying the heart; and if there were a feeling of pain and constriction in the epigastrium, it must again be the womb engaged in a relentless attack on the liver.
>
> (Althaus, 245)

By the mid century, such direct links between the wandering uterus and hysteria were being discredited. One correspondent to *The Lancet* observed, in 1853, for example, how it was "a mistake to designate by a uterine name a disease which is not of uterine origin" (Hovell, 219), and the period's most

important studies were eager to demonstrate that men could also suffer from the disorder, although rather more rarely than women.[4] Paradoxically, while such considerations of hysteria appeared to discount any *direct* links between the uterus and the disorder, the menstrual cycle, as cause, symptom and cure of the condition, seems to have grown in theoretical importance. Althaus, who had dismissed earlier clinical emphases on the womb also claimed in the same lecture that "hysterical attacks occur almost always after [among other things] sudden suppression of the menstrual flow," adding that "in all cases of hysteria, we must take care that the ordinary functions of life, especially menstruation and alimentation, should be in proper order" (Althaus: 247, 248). Carter also wrote about "faulty menstruation" that:

> It will be found that, although affections of this kind often arise consecutively to hysteria, still that women suffering from them are more liable than others, *cæteris paribus,* to be the subjects of the disorder.
>
> (Carter, 36)

Studies like Carter's often made little or no distinction between "menstrual" and "mental." As Prichard had suggested:

> Sudden suppressions of the catamenia are frequently followed by disease of the nervous system of various kinds. Females […] undergoing powerful excitements, experience a suppression of the catamenia, followed in some instances immediately by fits of epilepsy or hysteria, the attacks of which are so sudden as to illustrate the connexion of cause and effect.
>
> (Prichard, 157)

Like their predecessors, then, mid-Victorian medical writers believed that the course of hysteria was biologically determined by uterine processes. The difference lay in the theory of a psychosomatic connection between the obstructed menstrual flow and a pressurised volcanic hysterical energy. While not solely Victorian in origin, this connection was characteristic of that era's belief in the disorder's links with the contemporary social statuses of women, which allowed no legitimate outlet for emotional and sexual energy. The suppressed catamenial cycle, it was believed, both biologically instigated and metonymically signified a tense, pathological state that would eventually culminate in an excessive bursting forth of hysterics.

Victorian methods of "curing" hysteria were heavily influenced by this perceived explosive sexuality. Besides the reestablishment of the menstrual flow and gruesome "treatments" like Isaak Baker Brown's clitoridectomy,[5] it was believed that an intense surveillance was one of the most successful methods of controlling and anticipating the sexual and emotional immoderations central to hysteria's causality. By keeping excessive female

[4] See, for example, Skey *Hysteria*, Second Lecture, and Carter, 82.

[5] This aimed to cure hysteria by "excis[ing] the clitoris" as that "train of nervous disorders is entirely dependent on peripheral irritation (brought on by abnormal practices) of the pudic nerve, especially of that branch of the nerve which is distributed to the clitoris" (Unsigned Review, 485). For a historical study of clitoridectomy, see Showalter *The Female Malady*, 75-8.

emotion, especially when of a sexual character, in constant check, medical professionals (and the male population generally) could prevent and cure hysteria through the utilisation of a watchful supervision. As Althaus remarked (246), no woman was exempt from the onset of hysteria "since the disease indiscriminately invades women of all kinds," and Carter (58) observed the "extraordinary development of cunning by means of which hysterical women often carry out most complicated systems of deception, and succeed in baffling the watchfulness, even of very close observers." The physician had to be prepared, it seemed, to enter into a potentially intense investigative contest with the hysterical woman; to simultaneously anticipate and control her turbulent sexuality through his specialist observation. In the preface to his 1860 treatise *On the Obscure Diseases of the Brain and Disorders of the Mind,* Forbes Winslow warns "the practitioner of medicine, that he is not only to watch with the greatest of vigilance for the approach of all head affections, but, if possible, to anticipate their stealthy advance." (Winslow, ix-x).

Hence, the mid-nineteenth-century's medical negotiations of hysteria were not unmindful of women's limited social roles, which they acknowledged as allowing the female population no suitable outlet for powerful emotions, especially those of a sexual nature. The lack of suggestions for alternative roles for women, however, and the recommendation of an intense surveillance of all hysterical, and potentially hysterical, cases, reveal how these medical studies were unable, in many ways, to look beyond their culture's hegemonic constructions of femininity. The curative measures they employed, though often well intentioned, tended to serve as alternative methods of discipline and control, supporting the ideological roles that their practitioners had also sought to vilify.

Nevertheless, the multifaceted nature of hysteria, a nature it derived from its elusive, indefinite and ever-provisional meaning, ensured that it was experienced, interpreted and defined in a myriad of contradictory ways throughout the century. Male medical theorists were therefore not alone in their considerations of the condition: the female sensation novelists of the 1860s, in particular, were "cognizant of the protean metamorphoses of hysteria" (Coulson, 483). Concentrating on two of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's less well-known novels, I now argue that such fictional appropriations of the subject as hers present another "anomalous shape which the hysterical affection can assume" (Coulson, 483), this time, however, a shape that launches a much more successful attack on the Victorian marginalization of women than we see in operation in the concurrent, non-fictional material.

Victorian critical reactions to the sensation novel drew on the same categories that medical writers employed to define the symptoms of hysteria. As Sally Shuttleworth has observed (192), "The sensation fiction of the 1860s shared with the emerging science of Victorian psychiatry a preoccupation with psychological excess." This is certainly apparent in the often cited review by H. L. Mansel, who argued in 1863 that:

> … sensation novels must be recognised as a great fact in the literature of the day, and a fact whose significance is by no means of an agreeable kind. Regarding these works merely as an efflorescence, as an eruption indicative of the state of the health of the body in which they appear, the existence of an impure or a silly crop of novels, and the fact that they are eagerly read, are by no means favourable symptoms of the conditions of the body of society. But it is easier to detect the disease than to suggest the remedy.
>
> (Mansel, 512)

Almost reaching fever pitch themselves, Mansel's comments appear to replicate the images used by the medical textbooks with which his piece in the *Quarterly Review* shared a social space. His characterisation of sensation fiction as a psychosomatic, venereal disease, signifying the moral degradation of the society in which it is read, fully exemplifies the tone and main concerns of the period's theories on hysteria. Sensation novels, he claimed, were "both the effect and the cause" of a "wide-spread corruption" (Mansel, 482-3). Forbes Winslow, despite presenting Wilkie Collins, the "Father of Sensation," with a signed copy of his book *Obscure Diseases* (Baker, 160), concurred with Mansel, extending the point even further to suggest that the "moral contamination" at the heart of the hysterical epidemic was partly due to the "perusal of vicious books, sensation novels […] surreptitiously taken into the nursery" (Winslow, 157).

Sensation novels and non-fictional books on the "little epidemic" apparently raging through the female population, thus form an important part of each other's historical contextualization. Mary Braddon's novels, which, along with those of Collins and Mrs Henry Wood, instigated the sensation phenomenon, were produced in feverish haste. Braddon could write a novel in six weeks and admitted to Edward Bulwer-Lytton that: "I know that my writing teems with errors, absurdities, contradictions, and inconsistencies; but I have never written a line that has not been written against time – sometimes with the printer waiting outside the door" (cited in Hughes, 120-1). With reference to two of the four novels she wrote in the year 1863 alone, namely *Eleanor's Victory* and *John Marchmont's Legacy*, I argue that some of these "contradictions" and "inconsistencies" result from her literary appropriation of the period's medical ideas on hysteria, which, as we have seen, teemed with such incongruities. Braddon's fiction often exploited the period's hysterical concepts, and, through the remarkable characterisations of Eleanor Vane and Olivia Marchmont, in particular, offer a subtle and stealthy expose of the same images' flaws and weaknesses.

Eleanor's Victory is the story of a woman resolved on revenge. After losing the money that was meant for his daughter's education in a card game with a young English artist called Launcelot Darrell, the eponymous heroine's father, George Vane, commits suicide in the opening stages of the book. The plot's main trajectory is Eleanor's attempt to avenge his death by causing Launcelot to be disinherited by his wealthy uncle, Maurice de Crespigny. Aged just fifteen at the time of her father's death, Eleanor is at a critical time in her life, according to the medical texts, as "between fifteen and twenty years of age,

hysteria is most frequent in consequence of the radical change which the nervous system undergoes during that period" (Althaus, 247). Even before she learns that her father is dead, Eleanor experiences her first hysterical paroxysm brought on by his disappearance:

> Her thoughts rambled on in a strange confusion until they grew bewildering; her brain became dizzy with perpetual repetitions of the same idea; when she lifted her head – her poor, weary, burning, heavy head, which seemed a leaden weight that it was almost impossible to raise – and looked from the window, the street below reeled beneath her eyes, the floor upon which she knelt seemed sinking with her into some deep gulf of blackness and horror. A thousand conflicting sounds – not the morning noises of the waking city – hissed and buzzed, and roared and thundered in her ears, growing louder and louder and louder, until they all melted away in the fast-gathering darkness.
>
> (Braddon *Eleanor's Victory,* I, 106)

Shortly after this fit, her friends consult "an English doctor" who delivers the following diagnosis:

> The anxiety and suspense have overtaxed her brain. Anything would be better than that this overstrained state of the mind should continue. Her constitution will rally after a shock; but with her highly nervous and imaginative nature, everything is to be dreaded from prolonged mental irritation.
>
> (Braddon *Eleanor's Victory,* I, 106-7)

According to this diagnosis, which draws directly on the images used by the medical texts and their symptomatology of hysteria, Eleanor's adolescent and impressionable mind is unequal to the excessive worry caused by her father's disappearance. She consequently lapses into a state of extreme "confusion," fragmentation ("a thousand conflicting sounds") and experiences a complete loss of volition.

Shortly after hearing that her father is dead, and the manner in which he died, however, Eleanor's hysteria transforms itself from the "terrible bursts of grief – grief that was loud and passionate in proportion to the impulsive vehemence of Eleanor Vane's character" (I, 113), into a rigid obsession with revenge:

> "Tell me the truth," she cried vehemently, "did my father kill himself?"
>
> "It is feared that he did, Eleanor."
>
> The pale face grew a shade white, and the trembling frame became suddenly rigid. […]
>
> "Sooner or later [says Eleanor] I swear to be revenged upon [Launcelot] for my father's cruel death."
>
> "Eleanor, Eleanor!" cried the Signora: "is this womanly? Is this Christian-like?"
>
> The girl turned upon her. There was almost a supernatural light, now, in the dilated grey eyes. […] She looked, in her desperate resolution and virginal beauty, like some young martyr in the middle ages waiting to be led to the rack.

> "I don't know whether it is womanly or Christian-like," she said, "but I know that it is henceforward the purpose of my life, and that it is stronger than myself."
>
> (Braddon *Eleanor's Victory,* I, 117, 123)

Eleanor's mental condition here demonstrates all the monomaniacal and excessive characteristics of the mid-nineteenth century's medical descriptions of hysteria. Her uncontrollable sobbing, choking sensations and trembling continue throughout the novel but are henceforth combined, and not unrelated to, a "desperate resolution" that is "stronger," as Eleanor admits, "than myself." Lyn Pykett (84) has observed how, "it is Eleanor's own deliberate concealments which sustain – and provide the necessary complications for – the narrative trajectory." Indeed, following the murderous exploits of Lady Audley and the passions of Aurora Floyd, Braddon's readers would scarcely have been satisfied with the story of a heroine whose actions remain within the realms of rationality or the usual round of dull, domestic duties. Expanding on Pykett's argument, I argue that the rendering of Eleanor Vane as hysterical, or – perhaps more accurately – hysteromaniacal, equips Braddon with the melodramatic means to drive her novel onward at a feverish pace and to develop her hallmark sensational style. It is unlikely to be coincidental, therefore, that the key scenes in Eleanor's revenge scheme are also her most hysterical. In one such episode, she and her confidant, Richard Thornton, scour through the sketchbook of Launcelot Darrell for clues of his instrumentality in the death of George Vane. Richard, himself an artist, believes that "whatever falsehoods [Launcelot] may impose upon his fellow-men, his sketch-book will tell the truth" (II, 35). He is not mistaken as the search uncovers a sketch of the card game in which George lost the money for his daughter's education. The discovery triggers the following reaction from Eleanor:

> Eleanor stood behind [Richard], erect and statuesque, with her hand grasping the back of his chair, a pale Nemesis bent on revenge and destruction. […] Looking round at the pale young face, Richard saw how terrible was the struggle in the girl's breast, and how likely she was at any moment to betray herself.
>
> "Eleanor," he whispered, "if you want to carry this business to the end, you must keep your secret. Launcelot Darrell is coming this way. Remember that an artist is quick to observe. There is the plot of a tragedy in your face at the moment."
>
> (Braddon *Eleanor's Victory,* II, 47)

With a storm of volcanic passion raging within, yet with a calm exterior bent on cunning and deceit, Eleanor becomes the typical hysterical woman, as the Victorian medical institution characterised her. In a later scene, one that is even more pivotal to Eleanor's revenge, the symptoms of Eleanor's hysteria are drawn much more clearly. Entering the shabby Parisian lodgings of a criminal who holds a will, written by Maurice de Crespigny, that disinherits Launcelot, Eleanor and her half-witted companion, Major Lennard, find the man in a state of "delirium tremens," raving from the effects of alcohol. Believing this is to be the annihilation of all chances to avenge her father's death, Eleanor's "fortitude

had given way before this new and most cruel disappointment. She covered her face with her hands, and sobbed aloud." Had the details of the succeeding scene been written as a case study in one of the era's medical textbooks, it would not have been out of place:

> Major Lennard was very much distressed at this unexpected collapse upon the part of his chief. He was very big, and rather stupid. […] He looked piteously at Eleanor, as she sat sobbing passionately, half unconscious of his presence, forgetful of everything except that this last hope had failed her. […] Her sobs grew every moment louder and more hysterical. […] The sobbing grew louder; and [the Major] felt that it was imperatively necessary that something energetic should be done in this crisis. A thought flashed upon him as he looked hopelessly round the room, and in another moment he had seized a small white crockery ware jug from the Frenchman's toilet table, and launched its contents at Eleanor's head.
>
> This was a […] master-stroke. The girl looked up with her head dripping, but with her courage revived by the shock her senses had received.
>
> (Braddon *Eleanor's Victory,* II, 296-8)

The traditional, gendered positions of the man as doer and the woman as the done-to re-emerge in this extraordinary scene played by a delirious drunkard, an idiot and a hysterical woman. The sudden dousing with cold water was considered by mid-nineteenth-century medics to be one of the most effective methods of curing hysteria. "In hysterical attacks," Althaus admits, "I prefer a drenching with cold water" (248). Although his choice of words leaves it somewhat ambiguous, it is safe to assume that Althaus is speaking in reference to his patients' "hysterical attacks," and not his own.

Eleanor's "mad" (I, 132) and "unwomanly" (I, 162) revenge not only drives her into these scenes of hysterical action, but also steers her into marriage with the wealthy lawyer Gilbert Monckton. Like Wilkie Collins's Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name* (1862), who marries her unloved cousin Noel as a means of recovering her father's lost fortune, Eleanor Vane becomes better equipped to enact *her* revenge by marrying Gilbert. She accepts his offer of marriage, yet "she only regarded him as an instrument which might happen to be of use to her" (I, 295). While Gilbert is declaring his undying love for Eleanor:

> She tried to listen, she tried to understand; but she could not. The one idea which held possession of her mind, kept that mind locked against every other impression. […] No trace of womanly confusion, or natural coquetry, betrayed itself in her manner. Pale and absorbed she held out her hand, and offered up her Future as a small and unconsidered matter, when set against the one idea of her life – the promise to her dead father.
>
> (Braddon *Eleanor's Victory,* I, 306)

The same excessive, Hamlet-like desire for revenge that drives *No Name* and the early scenes of *Eleanor's Victory* becomes the catalyst for the main plot in the second volume of the latter novel, which hinges on the loveless marriage between Eleanor and Gilbert.

After her wedding, the small, emotional indications of hysteria that Eleanor is unable to conceal are not lost upon her husband who has "a lawyer's powers of penetration and habit of observation" (I, 302). On one occasion, for example, Eleanor is about to ask Gilbert if he has seen Launcelot:

> "And you have seen —— ?"
>
> She stopped suddenly. Launcelot Darrell's name had risen to her lips, but she checked herself before uttering it, lest she should betray her eager interest in him. […] Gilbert Monckton, watching his wife's face […] had perceived the hesitation with which she had asked this question. […] Eleanor was incapable of dissimulation, and her disappointment betrayed itself in her face. […] Sudden blushes lit up Eleanor Monckton's cheeks like a flaming fire.
>
> (Braddon *Eleanor's Victory,* I, 338-9)

Braddon's readers know that Eleanor's "eager interest," and the reason she betrays so much emotion when Launcelot is referred to, is due to her "vengeful hatred of the young man" (I, 338), but Gilbert, looking on, becomes obsessed with interpreting these outward signs of his wife's emotions:

> He had loved and trusted this girl. He had seen innocence and candour beaming in her face, and he had dared to believe in her; and from the very hour of her marriage a horrible transformation had taken place in this frank and fearless creature. A hundred changes of expression, all equally mysterious to him, had converted the face he loved into a wearisome and incomprehensible enigma, which it was the torment of his life to endeavour vainly and hopelessly to guess.
>
> (Braddon *Eleanor's Victory,* II, 82-3)

Gilbert's ardent gaze on his wife's face is clearly drawn from the larger, contemporary medical idea that hysteria was an energy that needed to be anticipated and controlled by "the greatest of vigilance." The interpretation that Gilbert gives to Eleanor's hysterical symptoms also echoes the tenor of the medical books by misconstruing them as sexual. He thinks: "her agitation, her tears, her confusion, all betray the truth. Her heart has never been mine. […] Her love is Launcelot Darrell's" (II, 111). Like his medical counterparts, the lawyer assumes that the root of all hysterical agitation in women is of a concealed, sexually excessive character.

Braddon's novel not only discounts this association by revealing it to be incorrect in the case of Eleanor Vane (whose agitation is caused by hatred, not desire), but *Eleanor's Victory* also demonstrates how the supposedly objective observation of hysteria is itself subjective, obsessive and pathological. In the second volume of the text, the main hysteromaniac is not Eleanor but Gilbert. Having been jilted as a young man and no doubt influenced by the Victorian idea that all women are potential Eves, Gilbert becomes excessively watchful and suspicious of his wife. His jealousy is repeatedly characterised as an insidious demon that warps his ability to interpret clearly:

> The insidious imp which the lawyer had made his bosom companion of late, at this moment transformed itself into a raging demon, and gnawed ravenously at the vitals of its master. […] The ravenous demon's tooth grew

> sharper than usual when Eleanor said this. […] Every circumstance […] was very clear to him now, by the aid of a pair of spectacles lent him by the jealous demon his familiar. […] There is something remarkable in the persistency with which the sufferer from that terrible disease called jealousy strives to aggravate the causes of his torture.
>
> (Braddon *Eleanor's Victory,* I, 340-2)

In this passage, and many others like it, the novel reveals the subjective and masochistic nature of male interpretations of female mental pathology. The metaphorical spectacles lent to Gilbert by his demon do not make things clearer but mislead him, being tinted with mistaken, preconceived ideas of women as excessively sexually charged. The hysterical, obsessive nature of Gilbert's interpretation of his wife's hysterical symptoms is aptly underscored by the final sentence of the above quotation, which characterises Gilbert's fears as self-propelled, "aggravate[d]" and "disease[d]." As in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), where Robert Audley's attempt to prove Lady Audley insane becomes itself obsessive and monomaniacal, *Eleanor's Victory* similarly suggests, through the characterisation of Gilbert's demons, that the supposedly objective observers of hysteria are themselves the most hysterical. The medical obsessions with a concealed female sexuality as the cause and aggravation of the disorder are, it seems, the result of a "demon familiar," a hysteromania in the male psyche.

These connections between hysteria and a real or perceived hidden sexual desire are explored even more ardently in Braddon's next work, *John Marchmont's Legacy*. Braddon had already started writing this novel before she had fully completed *Eleanor's Victory* and disclosed, at the time, that "I have tried to draw […] at least one character more original than any of my usual run of heroes & heroines."[6] This character, Olivia Marchmont, is one of the era's most extraordinary fictional renderings of its medicalised images of womanhood. Like her forerunner, Eleanor Vane, Olivia exhibits symptoms of hysteria throughout the novel. Unlike the earlier text, however, *John Marchmont's Legacy* appears, on the surface at least, to accept the alleged sexual foundations of the malady, as Olivia's "madness" stems from her frustrated desires for her cousin Edward:

> She had loved Edward Arundel with all the strength of her soul; she had wasted a world of intellect and passion upon this bright-haired boy. This foolish, grovelling madness had been the blight of her life. […] If her life had been a wider one, this wasted love would, perhaps have shrunk into its proper insignificance: she would have loved, and suffered and recovered; as so many of us recover from this common epidemic. But all the volcanic forces of an impetuous nature, concentrated into one narrow focus, wasted themselves upon this one feeling, until that which should have been a sentiment became a madness.
>
> (Braddon *John Marchmont's Legacy,* 86)

[6] Cited in Toru Sasaki and Norman Page's Introduction to Braddon *John Marchmont's Legacy,* xv.

This depiction of Olivia's mind clearly draws on the supposed "epidemic," "volcanic" and excessive nature of hysteria, as well as on the relationship it was believed to have had with the narrow lifestyle of middle-class women. As with her earlier text, Braddon uses these non-fictional ideas to create and animate a sensational narrative. Olivia's passionate desire for her cousin leads to a hatred for her stepdaughter Mary who is Edward's chosen bride. Olivia consequently allows Paul Marchmont to imprison Mary in a boathouse and usurp her estate. In this novel, however, Braddon also uses sensational techniques to highlight the links that existed between male bourgeois advancement and the pathology of hysteria. Exploiting the medical opinion that hysterical women were supposedly of an impressionable and vulnerable nature, Olivia is characterised as a "fitting tool" for those who desire to exploit her:

> Blind and forgetful of everything in the hideous egotism of her despair, what was Olivia Marchmont but a fitting tool, a plastic and easily-moulded instrument, in the hands of unscrupulous people, whose hard intellects had never been beaten into confused shapelessness in the fiery furnace of passion?
>
> (Braddon *John Marchmont's Legacy,* 198)

As Olivia is Mary Marchmont's guardian, and Mary stands between Paul and a considerable fortune, it is in his best interests to exploit this vulnerability. An artist like Launcelot Darrell, Paul therefore attempts to penetrate Olivia's mind and acquaint himself with the cause of her hysteromania:

> He took his dissecting-knife and went to work at an intellectual autopsy. He anatomised the wretched woman's soul. He made her tell her secret, and bare her tortured breast before him; now wringing some hasty word from her impatience, now entrapping her into some admission, – if only so much as a defiant look, a sudden lowering of the dark brows, an involuntary compression of the lips. He *made* her reveal herself to him.
>
> (Braddon *John Marchmont's Legacy,* 219; italics in original)

As with the uterine theories of hysteria, this episode makes no distinction between body and mind, as is apparent from its suggestive use of medical, post-mortem imagery. The passage is also weirdly sexual, as Paul "*made* [Olivia] reveal herself" and "bare her tortured breast." The use of the term "entrapping her" also underscores how sexual, psychological revelation becomes a way in which women are controlled and contained by their male, medical observers. Discovering Olivia's secret, Paul is subsequently able to exacerbate her hatred for Mary until she relinquishes her role as guardian and allows him to rise from his Bohemian obscurity and attain the station of the Lord of Marchmont Towers.

Towards the end of the novel, however, the tables are turned and Olivia becomes instrumental in Paul's fall from this elevated position. Believing his wife Mary to be dead, Edward plans to marry Belinda Lawford. Olivia, on hearing of his intended betrothal, resolves to inform her cousin that his wife (who has given birth to his son) is still alive. In a chapter aptly titled "The Turning of the Tide," the omniscient narrator relinquishes all use of

medical terminology to Paul who attempts to silence Olivia by using it to warn other characters against her accusations. He claims:

> There is no knowing what may be attempted by a madwoman, driven mad by a jealousy in itself almost as terrible as madness. […] What has not been done by unhappy creatures in this woman's state of mind? Every day we read of such things in newspapers – deeds of horror at which the blood grows cold in our veins. […] I come to tell you that a desperate woman has sworn to hinder to-morrow's marriage. Heaven knows what she may do in her jealous frenzy!
>
> (Braddon *John Marchmont's Legacy,* 414)

The success of Paul's attempt is only short-lived, however, as Olivia, considering herself now sane ("mad until today […] but not mad today", 423) storms in on the marriage ceremony armed with the irrefutable testimony of Mary and her child who are waiting nearby. The plot of *John Marchmont's Legacy* thus melodramatically fictionalises the early Victorian connections between the fiscal development of the emerging bourgeoisie and the medical constructions of hysteria. Whereas the refined, hysterically prone, domestic angel signified and safeguarded the nation's moral and economic wealth in the ideological division of spheres, Braddon's novel draws these connections much more deliberately and schematically, since Paul's monetary successes are inseparable from the pathologising of Olivia as hysterical.

Another concurrence between *John Marchmont's Legacy* and medical studies of hysteria emerges in the novel's representation of Olivia's nefarious and hysterical actions as related to her limited role as a woman in Victorian society. Olivia's sexuality, combined with her narrow, domestic existence, is directly linked to her hysterical paroxysms. With the shadow of Elizabeth Garrett, first ever female physician in Britain, looming large over the public psyche at the time Braddon wrote this novel, it is not surprising to find a reference to Garrett's American counterparts:

> The narrow life to which [Olivia] doomed herself, the self-immolation which she called duty, left her a prey to this one thought. Her work was not enough for her. Her powerful mind wasted and shrivelled for want of worthy employment. […] If Olivia Marchmont could have gone to America, and entered herself amongst the feminine professors of law or medicine, – if she could have turned field-preacher, like simple Dinah Morris, or set up a printing press in Bloomsbury, or even written a novel, – I think she might have been saved. The superabundant energy of her mind would have found a new object. As it was, she did none of these things. She had only dreamt one dream, and by force of perpetual repetition the dream had become a madness.
>
> (Braddon *John Marchmont's Legacy,* 135-6)

In this passage, Olivia's sexuality is closely aligned to professional ambition; her incapacity to find an outlet for either converts them into "madness." Later, such connections are made more forcibly still when Olivia meets Lavinia Weston, Paul's sister and a doctor's wife. Lavinia, believing Olivia to be suffering from hysteria, suggests that:

> … a doctor's wife may often be useful when a doctor is himself out of place. There are little nervous ailments – depression of spirits, mental uneasiness – from which women, and sensitive women, suffer acutely, and which perhaps a woman's more refined nature alone can thoroughly comprehend. […] Weston is a good simple-hearted creature, but he knows as much about a woman's mind as he does of an Aeolian harp. […] These medical men watch us in the agonies of hysteria; they hear our sighs, they see our tears, and in their awkwardness and ignorance they prescribe commonplace remedies out of the pharmacopoeia.
>
> (Braddon *John Marchmont's Legacy,* 196)

The objectivity and competence of male, medical interpretation of hysteria is again brought under question. Lavinia draws on the unbalanced observational tendencies of medical men like her husband to champion women as the correct and most qualified experts in hysterical conditions. It is hardly accidental, therefore, that this call for female psychiatric expertise, and the disparagement of *male* medical ability, is followed, almost immediately, by a disparagement of the *male* concept of hysteria: Olivia claims, "I am not subject to any fine-ladylike hysteria, I can assure you, Mrs Weston" (197).

Braddon's *John Marchmont's Legacy* thus draws similar conclusions to the medical scribes who had noticed a connection between the hysterical epidemic and the social marginalization of women. Leading to hysterical outbursts like Olivia's, the social division of labour, Braddon seems to suggest, is as problematic and pathological as hysteria itself. Medical authors like Julius Althaus and Robert Brudenell Carter, however, do not suggest any *alternative* roles for women beyond the domestic space. Braddon's text emphatically does. The novel puts forward the idea that women ought to be considered as potential doctors, lawyers, preachers and earnest writers. This is a claim that differs widely from Althaus's suggestion that the occupations adopted to cure hysteria ought to be the education of children and charity work – both of which Olivia pursues in the novel, and both of which serve only to exacerbate her explosive mental condition. Robert Brudenell Carter had identified the *type* of concealed emotions in women as exclusively female in character. Women, he argued, *felt* while men *thought.* The feelings that constantly place Olivia Marchmont on the verge of hysteria, however, are not female in character but, if gendered at all, would be male – no doubt the very same ambitions that drove medical writers such as Carter. Like her clinical contemporaries, Braddon is able, through the concept of hysteria, to expose (and express discontent with) the social limitations on female experience. Unlike their medical counterparts, however, Braddon's novels demonstrate an ability to see beyond the Victorian division of labour, the "demon familiar" that had warped and constrained many of the male, non-fictional considerations of the same idea. In its suggestion that women could make successful doctors and lawyers, *John Marchmont's Legacy* takes one step further than the medical books, suggesting that the only successful method of preventing and curing hysteria is by granting women free play in the public, as well as private, sphere.

* * *

The mid-Victorian medical literature on hysteria and the sensation novels of the 1860s were thus both, in many ways, hysterical fictions. "Hysterical" in subject matter, tone and motivation, they offer a significant snapshot of the workings of the period's medical interpretations of female identity as ideologically restricted. Ubiquitous, multidimensional, undefined and indefinable, "hysteria" is itself a significant expose of the workings of the Victorian ideological economy/economical ideology as a network of preconception and contradiction. Yet, through its integration into popular literature, hysteria could also supply a cross-section of the faults upon which it was partly constructed and act as a platform for more subversive calls for female emancipation.

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Alexander Grinstein, MD. *Wilkie Collins: Man of Mystery and Imagination*. Madison, CT: International Universities Press, Inc, 2003. pp. x + 272. ISBN 0-8236-6681-6.

Alexander Grinstein's book is avowedly a Freudian case-history rather than a biography. Convinced that Collins's works are full of personal revelations of psychological problems repeated as themes in his writing, he places more weight on interpretation of the writing, than on examining the facts of the life. Though this might seem to the uninitiated a back-to-front approach, the justification is that Collins's work reveals a fantasy autobiography, in particular of his childhood, and that the real-life situation is of secondary importance. The *loci classici* for such psychobiographies are Freud's papers on artists and writers: examples are *Leonardo and a Memory of his Childhood*, which diagnoses childhood enuresis from a study of Leonardo's drawings, and "Dostoevsky and Parricide."

Psychoanalytic readings of Collins's novels have yielded interesting interpretations, adding layers of significance to stories dismissed by Victorian critics as crude sensation. Freudian readings of *The Moonstone* by Charles Rycroft and others illuminate Victorian attitudes to sex, and reveal underlying structures of which Collins was almost certainly unaware. But they do not attempt to tie the issues raised to Collins's personal psychobiography. I find Grinstein's narrower approach reductive, diminishing the inventiveness of the fiction, the variety and interest of the life and the complexity of the man. To read Collins's novels and stories merely as ways of dealing with personal problems is to misunderstand the complicated web of personal, social, literary and practical issues with which any author who writes to make a living is faced.

From his readings of Collins's fiction and journalism, Grinstein creates a "Wilkie Collins" who is an "aim-inhibited" homosexual, someone who prefers the company of other men to that of women, and claims Collins had a "contempt and hatred of the female sex" which reaches its apogee in *Armadale.* Grinstein cites in evidence the transgressive women characters such as Lydia Gwilt, Magdalen Vanstone and Anne Silvester, and makes much of the humorous article by Collins, "Bold Words by a Bachelor," taking from it the message that a covert homosexuality is the reason for Collins's lifelong refusal to marry.

Grinstein's Wilkie Collins is frightened of his parents, his mother as well as his father, furiously jealous of his younger brother and haunted by his own "deformity." Grinstein much exaggerates Collins's slight physical peculiarities, such as his small hands and feet. Rather than being ashamed of these, Collins's letters suggest he was amused by being able to wear women's shoes and gloves. He certainly enjoyed wearing flamboyant and

unconventional clothes, and Grinstein perhaps misses a trick in not discussing his fascination with disguise.

Grinstein places enormous weight on Oedipal conflicts within Collins's writings, seeing him as suffering from a lifelong obsession with his parents and his relationship to them that he repeatedly attempted to exorcise in his writings. The many psychologically disturbed characters in the stories and novels are taken as expressions of Collins's own mental problems.

Grinstein's portrait of a deformed, bitter misogynist, eaten up with Oedipal conflicts and fraternal jealousy, seems unimaginably far from the Wilkie Collins known to his friends and revealed by his letters. "He … was …the gentlest and most kind-hearted of men" according to his sister-in-law Kate. Other women friends found him unusually appreciative, for his class and generation, of their company, and a delightful and easy companion. Caroline Graves would never have returned to him, abandoning her brief second marriage, and remained to cherish him for the rest of his life, if he had not been an affectionate and life-enhancing companion. Her daughter Carrie, for whom he was a substitute father, adored him. Collins's portrayals of transgressive women seem to me to mirror his own delight in breaking the rules, rather than expressing "fear and hatred." His sensation novels shocked by their questioning of social structures, as the attacks by reviewers make clear. Lyn Pykett's *The Improper Feminine* (1992) finds in them an expression of a new mood of feminism. Collins was certainly not an orthodox feminist, but neither was he a misogynist.

Collins undoubtedly had his inner demons, some of them caused by his painful rheumatic condition and consequent opium dependence, but he was the product not only of his family situation, important as this may have been, but of the wider culture in which he lived. By Grinstein's yardstick, virtually every Victorian man could be characterised as an "aim-inhibited homosexual." To assume that all the oppressive father-figures in Collins's novels are attacks on his own father ignores the structure of Victorian society, against which Collins and others were protesting. One might as well argue that Mr Murdstone, as well as Mr Micawber, was a portrait of Dickens's father. The social and literary history of the early nineteenth century, as well as Collins's own testimony that he had experienced a happy childhood, show that William Collins's Evangelical piety was not extreme or unusual for its time. No-one who has read the complete text of his letters to his children could think that he was a "stern and unrelenting … harsh, forbidding" father. His overriding characteristic was, rather, an inhibiting anxiety, social and financial, and a consequent conventionality and snobbery. Wilkie Collins did react against this from an early age, reverting to the more happy-go-lucky unconventionality of both his grandfathers. His novella *A Rogue's Life*, which owes much to William Collins Senior's odd book *Memoirs of a Picture,* gives the clearest expression to his view of his father's limitations. I believe that marriage came to symbolise the ultimate bourgeois restriction, and that it was this, rather than any dislike or

fear of women, or Oedipal attachment to his mother, that prevented him from marrying.

Collins wrote of his father's work that he excluded from his genre paintings of the life of the English rural poor "the fierce miseries, or the coarse contentions which form the darker tragedy of humble life" in favour of "scenes of quiet pathos." Wilkie made it his life's work to redress the balance; describing the darker aspects of society that his father could not face because of the poverty and uncertainty of his own upbringing. Wilkie, with his more favoured and comfortable middle-class childhood, could reject his father's limitations. His conflicts with his father were not unconscious and Oedipal, but overt and expressed. Also his relationship with his younger brother was not the jealousy that Grinstein assumes. Charles Collins inherited the anxiety gene from his father in double measure. He was, for most of his relatively short life, physically and mentally frail, suffering from depression and an exaggerated sense of sin. His lack of confidence in his own abilities became so inhibiting that he had to give up painting, for which he had considerable talent, and turn to writing, at which he was mediocre, in emulation of his brother. Far from feeling jealous of him, Wilkie was protective, if sometimes slightly contemptuous.

In order to arrive at his conclusions Grinstein has read Collins's works conscientiously, wading through the novels and stories and producing plot-summaries for virtually all of them. This is never an easy task for Collins's complicated novels. However he is not familiar with the context in which much of Collins's writing was produced. For example, he assumes that all the sections of *The Wreck of the "Golden Mary",* the *Household Words* Christmas number for 1856, were written either by Dickens or Collins. He therefore attributes to Collins four stories and a poem actually written by other members of the *Household Words* stable.

There are a number of important studies that address some of the contextual questions that Grinstein ignores; among them Sue Lonoff's 1982 study, *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers,* and Lillian Nayder's *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship* (2002). Other critics have shown the effect of social and political forces, literary preferences, friendships, painting, theatre, and journalism on Collins as a writer. He was always alert to the zeitgeist, and the popularity of "social problem" fiction and plays in the later nineteenth century, and his friendship with Charles Reade (not mentioned by Grinstein) had more to do with the subject matter of Collins's later fiction than his personal experiences. Grinstein writes in connection with *The New Magdalen* that "we do know of his own sexual exploits with prostitutes" – but in fact there is no direct evidence of any such exploits, nor is it true that "Collins was driven to involve himself in sexual relations with women who had been 'degraded' in some way." I find Grinstein's conclusion about this novel – that it was "a way of expressing his own unconscious wish to rescue a woman (his mother) from a life of sin" – absurd.

Grinstein, in spite of his depth of knowledge of psychoanalytic theory, is a naïve reader, who assumes that Collins's central male characters express his own opinions, fears and prejudices. He has nothing to say about Collins's frequent use of a female narrator, and his success at using the female voice. Here Collins seems to me to outstrip Dickens, who rarely uses a female voice which is not either submissive or crazy. Collins's identification with women, particularly women categorised by Victorian society as "bad," is surely worthy of Doctor Grinstein's attention. They were not merely objects (according to Grinstein, objects of his scorn and hatred) but very much part of his internal fantasy life. Life was for Wilkie Collins, as for Louis MacNeice, "crazier and more of it than we think, / Incorrigibly plural." That is why his work endures.

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(1) William Baker and Kenneth Womack, eds. *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2002. pp. xii + 445. ISBN 0313314071. (2) Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing, eds. *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2002. pp. xii + 513. ISBN 063122064X. (3) Deirdre David, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. pp. xx + 267. ISBN 0521641500.

The volumes under review are but three examples of the plethora of recent collections of essays by divers hands on individual authors, genres, periods or movements which seek to guide modern readers (and particularly modern students and their beleaguered teachers) through the newly remapped terrain of literary studies. Each of these three companions to the Victorian novel consists of new essays by writers with established or growing scholarly reputations, and includes useful and up-to-date advice on further reading. Each book addresses a slightly different audience. The Greenwood presents itself as a reference tool, and its thirty-two relatively short essays are offered as "an introductory guide to the Victorian novel, particularly in terms of the genre's historical and cultural implications" (xi). To this end Baker and Womack divide their companion into five sections: "Victorian Literary Contexts" (with chapters on the emergence of the Victorian novel, periodicals and syndication, book publishing and the literary marketplace, and illustrators and illustration); "Victorian Cultural Contexts" (with chapters on the political novel, the "sociological contexts" of the novel, and – successively – faith and religion, philosophy, science and the scientist, law, and intoxication and the Victorian novel); "Victorian Genres;" "Major Authors of the Victorian Era" (who turn out to be Charlotte and Anne Brontë, Dickens, Eliot – who gets two chapters – Hardy, Thackeray, Trollope, Meredith, Elizabeth Gaskell and Collins), and "Contemporary Critical Approaches to the Victorian Novel." Brantlinger and

Thesig offer the twenty-six rather longer chapters of their Blackwell companion as a repository of "contextual and critical information about the entire range of British fiction published during the Victorian period," which is aimed at "students, teachers, and general readers at all levels." Their book is divided into three parts: "Historical Contexts and Cultural Issues" (with chapters on publishing, education and literacy, money, the economy and social class, psychology, empire, religion, science, technology and information, the legal world and politics, gender, visual culture and the stage); "Forms of the Victorian Novel," and (the cumbersomely but informatively titled final part) "Victorian and Modern Theories of the Novel and the Reception of Novels and Novelists Then and Now." Of the three companions Deirdre David's (to which I have contributed an essay) is the shortest, is least like a work of reference, and is, perhaps, the least introductory. It is not divided into sections, and is less compendious in its approach, consisting as it does of eleven topic-based essays which collectively combine (according to the brief blurb which precedes the title page) the "literary study of the nineteenth-century novel as a form" with "an analysis of the material aspects of its readership and production," and "a series of thematic and contextual perspectives that examine Victorian fiction in the light of social and cultural concerns relevant both to the period itself and to the direction of current literary and cultural studies."

All three companions seek to offer (as the introduction to the Blackwell volume puts it) "original, accessible chapters written from current critical and theoretical perspectives," and by and large they all succeed in doing this. Collectively they offer a useful perspective on the nature of the field of nineteenth-century fiction studies at the beginning of the twenty-first century. What do they have in common in the ways in which they define the field and the topics they address? All three offer a sophisticated analysis of the material conditions of the novel's production and distribution, of its various readerships (and of nineteenth-century debates about novel readers and the evils or benefits of novel-reading). In all three the novel's inter-relationships with issues of gender, race, empire, sexuality, various forms of policing, and the professionalization and specialization of Victorian culture are very much to the fore, but new light is also thrown on more familiar topics such as the novel's links with science, technology, psychology and religion. All three are prominently concerned with those fictional sub-genres which grabbed the attention of students of the Victorian novel in the latter third of the twentieth century – detective fiction, the gothic, sensation fiction, ghost stories, science fiction and the fantastic, and children's fiction. However, they do not neglect the sub-genres which preoccupied critics in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century: the condition-of-England and social problem novel, the regional or provincial novel, the bildungsroman, and the historical novel all receive fresh treatment.

Both the Greenwood and the Blackwell companions contain sections on specific late twentieth-century approaches to the Victorian novel: Greenwood has chapters on Postcolonial and Feminist readings, and Blackwell has a chapter on "Modern and Postmodern Theories of Prose Fiction" and

another on the reception of Charlotte Brontë, Dickens, Eliot and Hardy which includes their reception by twentieth-century critics. In the Cambridge companion, on the other hand, late-twentieth century preoccupations and reading practices are implicit in the topics chosen and the approaches taken in the essays. As well as foregrounding late twentieth-century theoretically informed critical approaches, all three volumes engage with Victorian theories of fiction: Joseph Childers contributes a piece on "Victorian Theories of the Novel" to Blackwell; the Cambridge volume includes quite a densely argued essay by Linda Shires on "The aesthetics of the Victorian novel: form, subjectivity, ideology," and Greenwood has essays on "Philosophy and the Victorian Literary Aesthetic" (Martin Bidney) and "George Eliot's Reading Revolution and the Mythical School of Criticism" (William R. McKelvy). Blackwell is the only one of these companions to concern itself with the twentieth-century afterlife of Victorian fiction – in Joss Marsh and Kamilla Elliott's essay on "The Victorian Novel in Film and on Television" and Anne Humpherys's short but lively piece on twentieth-century interrogations of and negotiations with the forms of Victorian fiction, "The Afterlife of the Victorian Novel: novels about novels." In the Cambridge companion Robert Weisbuch (in "Dickens, Melville, and a Tale of Two Countries") offers a distinctive slant on the afterlife of the Victorian novel in his exploration of the literary relations between British and American novelists of the nineteenth century, which focuses on the ways in which "American writers in the mid-nineteenth century enacted a second war of independence in their major writings."

What particular interest do these companions to Victorian fiction hold for students of Wilkie Collins? In all three volumes Collins is something of a strolling player. He crops up in the context of discussions of genre fiction – the sensation novel, the detective novel and gothic romance. As the author of *Antonina* he also features in John Bowen's sprightly introduction to the historical novel in Blackwell. Elsewhere he appears as a commentator on the literary scene and the changing literary marketplace, and as someone involved in new forms of literary circulation (see Graham Law's chapter on "Periodicals and Syndication" in Greenwood). His awareness of different audiences is touched on in references to his work for the theatre (both as a playwright and as an adaptor of his own novels for stage production), and his reading tours. His interests in the law, criminality, psychology and mesmerism are variously noted, and his engagements with empire and his attitudes to race are briefly explored (by Lillian Nayder in Greenwood and Patrick Brantlinger in Cambridge). John Kucich reiterates his view of Collins's novels as being symptomatic of the rivalry and mistrust between scientific and literary professionals (in both Blackwell and Cambridge).

Only the Greenwood volume devotes an entire chapter to Collins – the final chapter in the section on "Major Authors of the Victorian Era" – which examines his challenges to Pre-Raphaelite gender constructs. In this chapter Sophia Andres uses *The Woman in White* as a vehicle to demonstrate her case that in his earlier fiction at least Collins was engaged in a debate with the Pre-Raphaelite painters over their representations of gender. Andres argues that in

order to understand Collins's subversion of Victorian gender stereotypes it is necessary to understand how he engaged with and transformed the attempts by Pre-Raphaelite artists to revise stereotypical representations of gender. Andres's suggestion that we read Collins's presentation of Walter Hartright's initial meeting with Anne Catherick as a transformation of Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* is rather speculative ("it is entirely possible that Collins had this painting in mind…"). More persuasive is her suggestion that his representation of Marian at the time of Walter's first encounter with her is "consciously Pre-Raphaelite," and that Marian is a "composite Pre-Raphaelite figure" who closely resembles the dark Venuses of Dante Gabriel Rossetti, whilst also being a more active and independent version of John Everett Millais's *Mariana*. Laura Fairlie, on the other hand, is represented in the style favoured by Sir Joshua Reynolds, as part of Collins's strategy (Andres suggests) to indicate to his readers that hers is an outdated ideal of femininity. Collins's representations of masculinity are similarly said to be refracted through painterly models. Not only does Sir Percival Glyde's Christian name hark back to a chivalric masculine ideal which his conduct belies, but Collins's representation of him in key scenes is said to invoke some of Rossetti's paintings of medieval knights in a deliberate attempt to evoke "a chivalric construct of masculinity only to deconstruct it." Andres concludes that the ways in which Collins evokes and redraws Pre-Raphaelite paintings should be seen as his version of the Pre-Raphaelite project to provoke their audience to reconsider what was decorous or "correct" in both art and life (as Susan Casteras has argued in "Pre-Raphaelite Challenges to Victorian Canons of Beauty" in *The Huntington Library Quarterly*, 55 [1992]).

This last essay offers a good example of one of the main differences between Greenwood and the other volumes reviewed here. Of the three companions Greenwood is the one that is most focused on individual texts, and on the authors and texts that are most likely to feature on undergraduate literature courses. As my summary of Andres's essay might indicate, the approach taken by the Greenwood essayists is not always simply that of a basic introduction to an author or text. Nevertheless, Greenwood is most likely to be useful to undergraduates and those taking survey courses. Blackwell is likely to be even more useful to undergraduates (and to those of their teachers who suddenly find themselves having to take some classes on a/the Victorian novel and need to get themselves up to speed on its social and cultural contexts, and on recent critical approaches). Blackwell is also likely to be very attractive to the general reader who wants to find out more about the Victorian novel. As a contributor to the Cambridge volume I should perhaps refrain from making a value judgement on it, but it does seem to me that whilst its coverage is more limited than Blackwell (and perhaps Greenwood too) its essays are more closely argued and are more likely to engage the advanced undergraduate or the postgraduate student.

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Carolyn W. de la L. Oulton. *Literature and Religion in Mid-Victorian England.* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. pp. xii + 221. ISBN 0-333-99337-3.

The Pope has just canonised three nineteenth-century missionaries, but no-one had seriously expected to see St Charles Dickens or St Wilkie Collins, who are the main focus of this book. The combination of unconventional sexual arrangements in their lives and manifest exasperation with aspects of Evangelical religion in their work has not encouraged readers to take them seriously as religious writers. But it was not always thus. In 1861 the liberal Catholic Lord Acton wrote about Dickens's religion and *Great Expectations* in a letter to a friend, observing that "Certain Germans of the last century remind me of Dickens as to religion. They saw 'no divine part of Christianity' but divinified humanity or humanised religion … ."

Carolyn Oulton does not mention Acton, and would in any case probably disagree with this vaguely Unitarian construction of Dickens's outlook, but she has performed a valuable service for students of Dickens and Collins by demonstrating that there is a serious and sustained engagement with religious matters in their work. Caricatures of Evangelical excess embodied in Dickens's Mrs Jellyby or Collins's Miss Clack might signal disillusionment with the Christian religion, or they might signal a deeply if unconventionally Christian concern that vital religious truth is in danger of being lost or travestied in the hands (and mouths) of silly Christians. Oulton's thoughtful and detailed work persuades us that it is the latter. She analyses selected illustrative texts carefully and is alert to personal tension and complexity. As she points out, Collins had had an Evangelical upbringing and knew almost too much about the uses and abuses of doctrines such as original sin and eternal punishment from which he dissented, but his optimistic confidence in benign providence available to all was grounded in a sense of the value of each individual soul which was itself Evangelical in origin. Even Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale* is reclaimed from a career of successful criminality and allowed a good end, which invites us to suspend judgement. Oulton demonstrates how Evangelical narrative motifs such as illness leading to religious renewal are harnessed and transformed both in the case of Magdalen Vanstone in Collins's *No Name* and Pip in *Great Expectations*. Oulton also identifies and accommodates apparent contradiction: Dickens mercilessly lampooned Evangelical philanthropy yet supported it during the 1848 cholera epidemic; he condemned Evangelical attitudes to children yet supported the work of the Ragged Schools; he rejected Evanglical harshness but could be harshly judgmental, particularly in relation to adult criminals, and he was not above occasional rhetorical dependence on the latent melodrama of its theology of death and judgement, perdition and redemption. She is particularly good on complex negotiations in Dickens and Collins of the non-Evangelical, bluffly affirmative "manly Christianity" or "Christian manliness" popularised by Kingsley and Hughes in the 1850s, pointing out that it can also be applied to

women such as the redoubtable Marian in *The Woman in White*. The reading of *Tale of Two Cities* in terms of vengeance and reconciliation and the Evangelical doctrine of vicarious atonement is persuasive. So is the exploration of humane alternatives to the unattractive dogma of total depravity, and a useful distinction is drawn between Collins's tendency to rely on divine mercy and human perfectibility and Dickens's sterner belief in salvation – if at all – through individual atonement and expiation.

But Oulton is less effective in her handling of religious and ecclesiastical contexts. Dickens's withdrawal from Unitarianism after briefly attending a Unitarian chapel is mentioned, but it is not really made clear in what ways his extremely liberal and idiosyncratic version of Anglicanism differs from Unitarianism. Nor is it apparent that Dickensian religion is really adequately described by the expression "Broad Church faith," which, strictly speaking, implies inclusive neo-Coleridgean ideas on ecclesiastical polity.

Other religiously-concerned writers of the period wander through the text almost at random, mainly for purposes of comparison with Dickens and Collins. George Eliot's more radical quarrel with conventional religion and her rather different critique of Evangelicalism are her passport into the present book, but Mrs Gaskell is nowhere to be found, though her liberal treatment of social issues in a religious context brings her rather closer to Kingsley and to Dickens, who commissioned some of her shorter fiction. Newman appears briefly from time to time, but there is no recognition of the ultimately Evangelical antecedents of his religious thought or of the eccentricity within an English context of religious positions Newman would have insisted were orthodox. Evangelicalism is made to cover a multitude of excesses and absurdities, not all of which can fairly be laid exclusively at its door, but there is no indication of different phases of the movement or differences between Methodist and Calvinist evangelicalism. Evangelical attitudes are illustrated from sources which can appear randomly selected because their particular appropriateness is not explained or justified. Dean Mansel is introduced as if he was a representative of normative divinity instead of a theological extremist whose work was condemned both by John Stuart Mill and by the liberal theologian F.D. Maurice with whose Christian socialism (a term not mentioned in the book) the Dickens of *Hard Times* had considerable sympathy. That once-controversial symposium of Victorian liberal divinity *Essays and Reviews* is treated as if its only significant contributor was Benjamin Jowett, but Dickens's positive response to it seems to pick up on ideas developed in the first essay by Frederick Temple, future Archbishop of Canterbury.

The folly of those who dismiss or trivialise Dickensian religion is quite properly rebuked, but beyond that there is relatively little sense of coherent sustained debate with or within the critical tradition. Many critics are quoted, sometimes, irritatingly, without being named in the main text so their pronouncements seem curiously impersonal and oracular, but this is usually just to provide crutches for the discussion and to make local and specific points.

There are also a few trivial lapses. A teacher in *David Copperfield* (1849-50) is described as "reminiscent" of Dr Arnold in *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857). A rather meagre index (less than two pages) contrives to credit Charles Kingsley rather than his friend Thomas Hughes with authorship of *Tom Brown's Schooldays* though the attribution is perfectly clear and correct in the main text.

But there is much to be grateful for. French criticism of English fiction in the mid-nineteenth century was sometimes shrewder and more sardonically detached than English reviewing and Paul Forgues and Emile Montégut are quoted here to good effect. Oulton delivers us from clear and present danger because we are at risk of losing any sense of the pervasive presence and power of religion in ostensibly secular Victorian fiction not only as subject matter but as a determinant of narrative form.

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Wilkie Collins. *Blind Love*, ed. Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox. Peterboroough, ONT: Broadview Press, 2003. Series: Broadview Literary Texts. pp. 465. ISBN 155111447X.

The story of the composition of Wilkie Collins's final work is almost as striking as that found in the novel itself. In the spring of 1887, soon after completing the revisions to the short stories collected in *Little Novels* and with several months left before he needed to start work on *The Legacy of Cain* for Tillotsons, Collins began to plan a new fifteen-part serial. Provisionally entitled "Iris," this was to be a romantic tale of political intrigue set in Paris during the second exile of Napoleon following his defeat at Waterloo. However, the author's health problems which were exacerbated by the summer heat, plus the difficulties of finding a periodical willing to accept a story of such awkward length, forced Collins to lay the work aside in late July with only one third completed. In December of the same year, at lunch with Nina and Fred Lehmann, he heard the inside story of an ingenious insurance fraud from the lawyer Horace Pym and appropriated it for future fictional use. By May 1888 *The Legacy of Cain* was complete, reports of the von Scheurer insurance trial had appeared in the press, and Collins's agent A.P. Watt had made a deal for his next serial. This was to be a story in twenty parts for John Dicks's penny paper *Bow Bells*. With Dicks's popular readership in mind, Collins economically determined to tack on the tale of the insurance fraud case to the existing fifteen chapters of "Iris," at the same time shifting the setting of the prologue from the court of Louis XVIII to rural Ireland during the "Land War" of 1879-1882. The initial working title was "His Money? Or His Life" in celebration of the insurance plot but this was soon changed to "The Lord Harry," after the tale's devil-may-care protagonist. Despite having to hand both

the manuscript of "Iris" and Horace Pym's detailed von Scheurer scenario, with his health failing on all fronts, Collins made slow progress on the story and the beginning of the serial run had to be pushed back. Shaken up in a cab collision in the winter, he had only written two-thirds of the narrative by the spring of 1889. A crisis was then looming in the form of Collins's *next* serial which was scheduled to start in the *Illustrated London News* in July. The crisis was averted by Watt's persuading Dicks to defer his demands (permanently as it turned out), and to let the *ILN* take "The Lord Harry." Serving a rather more select middle-class audience, the owners of the *ILN* detected a hint of blasphemy in the existing title and forced the switch to *Blind Love*. More significantly, the change of periodical venue involved a shift to a serial in twenty-six parts, which necessitated a good deal of rejigging of the instalments. Collins then made the decision to dictate a detailed scenario of the unwritten chapters of the novel, primarily for his own use and that of the illustrator. However, the massive stoke that he suffered at the end of June ensured that he would not complete the story himself, so that the little black book containing the scenario was passed to Collins's colleague Walter Besant. During his long series of collaborations with James Rice, Besant had had plenty of practice at turning plot summaries into narrative fiction, so on Collins's death in September he was able to make a workmanlike job of completing the novel from Chapter 49. The fact that the novel exists at all is thus a tribute to the tenacious professionalism of Wilkie Collins as an author.

This new edition of *Blind Love* by Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox represents the fourth Collins novel to appear in the Broadview Literary Texts series. Three of these are lesser-known late works – the present volume, plus my own edition of *The Evil Genius* and that of *Heart and Science* by Steve Farmer, who also produced a fine edition of *The Moonstone* (reviewed in the *Journal* in 1999). The distinctive feature of the Broadview editions is the cornucopia of contemporary documents which accompany the texts of the novels, with the aim of encouraging students to read them in the material and discursive contexts in which they were first produced. Bachman and Cox's *Blind Love* is exemplary in this respect. First and foremost, though, we have an impeccably edited text based on the Chatto and Windus three-volume edition of 1890 with Walter Besant's preface, and accompanied by the original Forestier illustrations drawn for the *ILN*. Then we have the editors' commentary found not only in the lengthy introduction but also in the explanatory footnotes to the novel. (Since the text in fact presents few difficulties for the modern reader, these are relatively few in number. Even so one or two struck me as rather tangential to the narrative itself – a lengthy paragraph on the importation of Cheddar cheese in Chapter 6 being a case in point.) At the end of the volume we are given eight substantial appendices, with half concerning the composition of the novel: Horace Pym's notes on the von Scheurer case and reports of the trial in the *Times*, plus extracts from both the manuscript of "Iris" and the little black book. In addition there are not only records of the novel's reception (in the form of obituaries as well as reviews), but also materials reflecting the novel's engagement with the "Irish Question"

(including cartoons from *Punch*) and the "Woman Question" (in the form of Mrs Beeton's strictures on the duties of the lady's maid). The relevance of all these documents is clearly outlined in the editors' introduction.

The only significant doubt concerning the present edition is whether Collins's last novel can bear the weight of this substantial critical apparatus. Against the rich tapestry of contextual material poor Wilkie's last desperate effort can begin to look rather threadbare. As reflected in their discussion of Collins's position in the debates on Home Rule for Ireland and the emancipation of women, the editors themselves seem rather divided on the quality of the novel. In the area of race and empire, they conclude that Lord Harry "embodies practically every stereotypical Celtic vice" (22) and thus that the novel as a whole works crudely to justify "Britain's continued rule over Ireland" (21). As regards gender, however, the novel's three main female characters (Iris Henley, Fanny Mere, and Mrs Vimpany) are presented as victims of "the patriarchal power structure … [who] refuse to submit to their destiny" (30), so that the novel is read as "Wilkie Collins's final challenge to a Victorian domestic ideology that perpetuated gender inequalities" (23). On the face of it, such contradictory attitudes to questions of hierarchy seem unlikely to be found in the same narrative. For me the truth of the matter lies between these two extremes. The encounter between the "Saxon" Hugh Mountjoy and the "Celt" Lord Harry, rivals for the heroine's affections, is presented in a far from one-sided way, and Iris Henley's consistent preference for the latter must have some ideological significance. At the same time, while Iris, Mrs Vimpany, and, especially, Fanny clearly are distant relations of strong Collins heroines like Marian Halcombe, it seems something of an overstatement to read the end of the novel as a celebration of the three women's finding "happiness and fulfillment with each other in isolation from the patriarchical power structure" (31). After all, Fanny remains the lady's maid, Mrs Vimpany becomes the housekeeper, and the Scottish villa where they hide from the world is owned by Hugh Mountjoy, to whom Iris finally gives her hand in the Epilogue which follows Lord Harry's assassination. "She has one secret – and only one – which she keeps from her husband. In her desk she preserves a lock of Lord Harry's hair. Why? I know not. Blind Love doth never wholly die." This is how Besant brought the narrative to a close, though we know that the final words in Wilkie's little black book were slightly different. There, not for the first time in the story sounding a remarkably untransgressive note, he wrote: "Blind love to the last! How like a woman!"

But in the end these are issues on which readers can judge for themselves. The outstanding advantage of the Broadview edition of *Blind Love* is that it marshals ample evidence for us to draw our own conclusions. The publishers and editors are to be congratulated on making Wilkie Collins's final novel available in such an attractive and engaging form.

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Wilkie Collins Society Journal

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