

**'THE WORLD IS OPPRESSED BY MASCULINITY' : MASCULINE  
CONTAINMENT OF WOMEN AND TRANSGRESSIONS IN THE WORKS  
OF WILKIE COLLINS**

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'The world is oppressed by masculinity' : Masculine containment of women and  
transgressions in the works of Wilkie Collins

by

Sue Jordan

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis argues that Wilkie Collins demanded radical reassessment of his culture through his writing and anticipated post-modern theories of discourse, identity and gender. It will propose that Collins perceived reality as a linguistic creation, gender as a destructive evasion and truth as an elusive desire. Collins' fiction will be seen as palimpsestic narratives which, through buried texts and sub-texts, embrace a Conradian heart of darkness and pursue a non-teleological format.

I will particularly focus upon the later novels which I believe have been long neglected and undeservedly disparaged. However, this work will pursue a thematic rather than chronological approach and will study the dominant issues of discourses which fascinated Collins throughout his career. The argument will utilise Foucauldian and Lacanian philosophies and will demonstrate how Collins perceived social systems and hegemonic utterances as terrified patriarchal defences against the primordial chaos which haunted his imagination and characters.

I will specifically focus upon issues of gender and demonstrate how discourses of masculinity, both modern and Victorian, stunt individual development, suffocate women, warp human relations and ultimately destroy men themselves.

The first chapter will explore this theoretical base and introduce the various concepts of masculinity and the chief discussions pertinent to gender constructs utilised in this thesis. Within each chapter I will examine the irreparable damage inflicted upon femininity and marginalised others by masculinity and the fear and loss endured by men themselves. Collins was, however, a white, middle-class, heterosexual man who benefited from the very tenets he despised and I will thus explore the inevitable tensions this generated throughout his work.

I will reveal how the secret or truth, central to each novel, transpires to be this very phallogentric abuse and oppression and the revelation of the fragility and destructiveness of gender constructs themselves. And in exposing this Collins necessarily underscored the limits and inadequacies of language itself thus undermining the very essence of his own productivity.

## PREFACE

When I first contemplated this thesis some years ago, I was intrigued by Wilkie Collins' portrayal of women, by their disturbing blend of modernity and traditionality, defiance and acceptance. I perceived Collins as a Janus-like figure, radical in his insights and yet hankering after stability, exuding a need to know and fix what he knew was unknowable and transient. Whilst this observation remained constant upon re-reading the texts, in the mid 1990s, my focus of attention shifted. The male characters became my central area of interest. I began to reflect, perhaps due to the increasing awareness of constructions of masculinities and their impact on all spheres of life, upon how patriarchal cruelty or neglect seemed to instigate and drive the plots in all of Collins' narratives. I noted how the men destroyed the lives of others and themselves in their ceaseless pursuit of power, money or possession. I also recognised that the women were so fascinating precisely because of how they responded to, transgressed against or developed survival strategies to outwit this all-consuming male oppression. It seemed to me that Collins was very much aware of how discourses of masculinities shape society, restrict freedoms, trammel the potentials of women and, ultimately, destroy the essential man lurking behind the mask of 'manhood', a mask imposed by societal dictates and expectations.

I focus particularly on the later works which, I will argue, have been long neglected and undeservedly disparaged. It is also in these narratives that we witness Collins' most vociferous assault on phallogocentric culture and his vision of the imminent collapse of the hegemony. As these texts are little known I have provided a brief plot synopsis of those discussed in this thesis. As I did not wish to 'interrupt' the flow of the thesis I have incorporated these summaries in the Appendix.

The quotation incorporated into the title of this thesis, 'The world is oppressed by masculinity',<sup>1</sup> seemed to crystallise my feelings upon re-reading Collins' works. It is a quotation from Mary Hubbard, a perception first uttered in 1873 and one whose power and poignancy has not diminished over the intervening years. It is utilised by Michael Kimmel who, unfortunately, does not detail his source of reference. It did, however, appear most pertinent to the arguments of this thesis and I have, therefore, re-appropriated it for the title.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, 'The Contemporary "Crisis" of Masculinity in Historical Perspective'. In Brod, Harry, ed. The Making of Masculinities : The New Men's Studies (London : Allen & Unwin, 1987), p.149.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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I am grateful for the help of the Interlibrary Loan Departments at both Hull and Leicester Universities. Through these services I managed to acquire most of the material, from England and abroad, detailed in the Bibliography.

I thank the University of Cambridge Library for allowing me access to their copies of Miss or Mrs? And Other Stories in Outline, (London : Chatto & Windus, 1875) and The Yellow Tiger and Other Tales, (London : The Holerth Press, 1924).<sup>1</sup>

The Wilkie Collins Society has proved to be a constant source of up to date information, discussion and inspiration.

I thank Robert Ashley for his letter of advice and support and Kirsten Hüttner who assisted me in acquiring a copy of her book - Wilkie Collins : The Woman in White : Analysis, Reception and Literary Criticism of a Victorian Bestseller - translated into English.

And last, but by no means least, I am grateful to the British Academy who sponsored two years of study towards this thesis.

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<sup>1</sup> Recent Scholarship has rendered it doubtful that this short story was written by Collins. See Anne Lohrly, 'Wilkie Collins : Two Corrections', English Language Notes 22 (1 September 1984), pp.50-53. 'The Yellow Tiger' was originally published anonymously and included in a volume of stories by Collins. However, it was later owned by Percy Hetherington Fitzgerald and is now incorporated in his collection of works.

## INTRODUCTION - WILKIE COLLINS : AN 'ANOMIC MAN'?<sup>1</sup>

Criticism of Wilkie Collins has long been trammelled by the three 'definitive' attributes traced by Arthur Compton-Rickett in 1912. He is admired for his 'technical dexterity as a story-teller', his 'subtle sense of dramatic effect' and his 'faculty for pictorial suggestion'.<sup>2</sup> In 1982 Sue Lonoff claimed, in a similar vein, that Collins was not affected by 'inner turmoil' and that he was not a 'profound thinker nor a writer with an acting conscience'.<sup>3</sup> And yet Collins clearly did have literary ambitions and his works demonstrate a strong social and political awareness. Collins wanted his narratives to be vehicles of 'profitable enjoyment', a means of educating 'dull people'.<sup>4</sup> In his private life he shunned Victorian values and conventions and in his art he aimed to create literature that was 'daring enough to speak the truth'.<sup>5</sup> Whilst he desired popularity, and thus made major concessions to contemporary forms and expectations,<sup>6</sup> he was essentially a rebel who craved challenge and change. He

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<sup>1</sup> Clyde Franklin, quoted in Arthur Brittan, Masculinity and Power (Oxford : Blackwell, 1989), p.182. Franklin outlines four types of man : Humanist Man/Classical Man/Routinely Masculinist Man and Anomic Man. Anomic man is 'most affected by his encounter with feminism . . . it has led to an acute gender identity crisis. Anomic men are confused and anxious . . . They are continually searching for a focus for certainty and stability in a world which seems to have no clearly demarcated role for the traditional "masculine virtues"'.  
<sup>2</sup> Arthur Compton-Rickett, 'Wilkie Collins', The Bookman 42 (June 1912), pp.107-114.  
<sup>3</sup> Sue Lonoff, Wilkie Collins and his Victorian Readers : A Study in the Rhetoric of Readership (New York : AMS Press, 1982), p.95 and p.99.  
<sup>4</sup> Wilkie Collins, My Miscellanies (London : Chatto & Windus, 1885), p.108.  
<sup>5</sup> Wilkie Collins, Wilkie, Armadale (London : Smith, Elder, 1877), 'The Preface'.  
<sup>6</sup> Sue Lonoff, p.42 and p.61. And Marshall William, Wilkie Collins (New York : Twayne Publishers, 1970), p.23.



despised the 'prying eyes of prudery'<sup>7</sup> and a society which 'obstinately protests against the truth wherever the truth is painful'.<sup>8</sup>

Most modern critics now tend to see Collins' works as somewhat more complex and sophisticated texts than had hitherto been acknowledged. In an excellent analysis of Collins' works, Jenny Bourne-Taylor has demonstrated how Collins explored a range of discourses on power, identity, pathology, class and morality. This thesis will pursue a similar approach but will focus specifically upon discourses of gender, and how these constructs define, restrain, judge and distort 'acceptable' behaviour for men and women. Collins aimed, I suggest, to expose and subvert these hegemonic utterances and to undermine middle-class hypocrisy, complacency, self-delusion and ignorance. He perceived 'polite society', like Amelius Goldenheart in The Fallen Leaves, as: 'One enormous sham, and everybody in a conspiracy to take it for the real thing.'<sup>9</sup>

Collins would seem, through his art, to emulate Fosco's self-proclaimed iconoclastic role in The Woman in White:

I say what other people only think, and when the rest of the world is in a conspiracy to accept the mask for the true face, mine is the rash hand that tears off the plump pasteboard, and shows the bare bones beneath.<sup>10</sup>

Collins ostensibly aimed to expose 'national cant'<sup>11</sup> and discover the 'truth'. On a superficial level his novels could appear to be bildungsromans, quests for authentic selfhood and for a secure identity and legitimacy within a phallogentric culture. His texts may begin with the traditional cycle of complacency, or orientation, disintegrating under crisis into a state of chaos and disorder. But Collins' characters are rarely reconciled, they

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<sup>7</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'Reminiscences of a Story-Teller', Universal Review I (May-August, 1888), p.183.

<sup>8</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'The Unknown Public', Household Words 17-18 (21 August, 1858), pp.218-222.

<sup>9</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Fallen Leaves (London : Chatto & Windus, 1890), p.65.

<sup>10</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White (London : Chatto & Windus, 1888), p.182.

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remain perennially alienated from themselves and their world. Collins confronted the uncertainty and terror that haunted so many of his contemporaries. He knew that the world was random, unjust and there could be no absolute justice: 'Poetical fiddlesticks!'.<sup>12</sup> He knew that the 'truth' is whatever hegemonic authority decrees it to be and that identity is a complex, fluid phenomenon shaped by family dynamics and defined by the projections and expectations of one's society. And in recognising this Alfred Monkton dissolves into superstitious obsession and death, the Reverend Gracedieu, in The Legacy of Cain, collapses into senility and 'Poor Miss Finch' can only find sense and order in her self-imposed blindness. Collins' characters are burdened with a guilt or terror that reason cannot exorcise; they struggle futilely to free themselves from an oppressive history or a dread of the future. At the heart of his novels is a Conradian heart of darkness, an 'impenetrable darkness which enveloped all . . .'.<sup>13</sup> The Moonstone's Rosanna Spearman, Mr. Brown, of I Say No and Emma Farnaby, in The Fallen Leaves, are driven to despair and suicide through 'reality', through recognising that life is random, fragile and socially constructed. They confront the terror that permeates Victorian culture - that there is no absolute justice, divine purpose or indomitable truth. At the core of each novel is a 'terrible blank'<sup>14</sup>, an 'utter void'<sup>15</sup>, the silence which lies beyond discourse and comprehension.

In many respects Collins anticipated modern, even post-modern thoughts and it is this, I believe, which so outraged, perturbed or distressed contemporary critics. The resistance offered by Collins to hegemonic discourse could not easily be silenced or dismissed. Thus Andrew Lang viewed him as a 'man with an almost bitter sense of human unhappiness'<sup>16</sup> and Walter de la Mare observed how in Armada a whole generation is 'mown down by the motionless spectre who in Collins' world lurks unnaturally near'.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'Reminiscences . . .', p.191.

<sup>12</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Legacy of Cain (London : Chatto & Windus, 1891), p.309.

<sup>13</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Moonstone (London : Chatto & Windus, 1890), p.322.

<sup>14</sup> Wilkie Collins, Man and Wife (London : Chatto & Windus, 1875), p.183.

<sup>15</sup> Wilkie Collins, Basil p.110.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Mr Wilkie Collins' Novels'. Contemporary Review 57 (January 1890), p.20.

<sup>17</sup> Walter de la Mare, 'The Early Novels of Wilkie Collins' In ed. John Drinkwater, The 1860's (Cambridge University Press, 1932), p.93.

Collins' narratives rarely follow a teleological pattern. His 'literary labyrinths'<sup>18</sup>, and their multiplicity of textual perspectives, reflect the overcomplications of post-industrial society and our transient universe wherein nothing can be known for certain. Hence, his works abdicate authorial omniscience and reveal that there are 'many men, many opinions.'<sup>19</sup> No one perspective is given particular significance and the endings do not re-order events or resolve dilemmas. Basil is unable to face the world, Father Benwell, in The Black Robe, continues his plotting into the next generation and Mr. Galilee, in Heart and Science, cannot hold his family together. Of the future Collins could only proclaim: 'Who can tell?'<sup>20</sup>

In Collins' world language itself proves to be as illusionary, precarious and ambiguous as Mary Dermody's psychic communications in The Two Destinies, and social institutions are condemned for encouraging 'the development of selfishness on a large and respectable scale'.<sup>21</sup> Collins knew that many exist in poverty and squalor whilst others thrive in undeserved luxury,<sup>22</sup> and that Roland Cameron's mental health, in 'A Mad Marriage', can never be ascertained. Mr. Wray symbolises the fate of many of Collins' characters who are unable to break free from hegemonic discourse and accept challenge and change. He gazes out 'vacant and speechless'<sup>23</sup> at the broken fragments of his life's work and ambition. He is impotent to act and can only scream 'gone'<sup>24</sup> several times as a protest to the 'absurd make-believe'<sup>25</sup> that has constituted his existence. Reality has done Mr. Wray a 'dreadful

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<sup>18</sup> W.J. Johnston, 'Wilkie Collins and the Novelists of the Day'. Irish Monthly XIX (April 1890), pp.206-8. Also quoted in Norman Page, Wilkie Collins : The Critical Heritage (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p.205.

<sup>19</sup> Wilkie Collins, Armada p.136.

<sup>20</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Moonstone p.434 and 'The Dream Woman', Queen of Hearts (London : Chatto & Windus, 1893), p.103. Both texts end with this rhetorical question.

<sup>21</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'Bold Words by a Bachelor'. My Miscellanies p.419.

<sup>22</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'Laid Up in Lodgings'. My Miscellanies (London : Chatto & Windus, 1875), pp.199-229.

<sup>23</sup> Wilkie Collins, Mr. Wray's Cash-Box : or the Mask and the Mystery (London : Bentley, 1852), p.123.

<sup>24</sup> Mr. Wray's Cash-Box p.126.

<sup>25</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Fallen Leaves p.65.

mischievous' and must therefore be transformed into the 'troubles of a dream'.<sup>26</sup> His sanity depends upon him always imagining 'what he imagines at present' and the horror must be recalled 'gaily, as nothing but a STORY . . .'.<sup>27</sup> to entertain others. Thus, Mr. Wray ends his days ever more firmly embedded in language and history. And the self is revealed as an essentially fictive creation, the result of, and response to, an endless production of discourse.

Whilst most modern critics now tend to appreciate the complexity and modernity of Collins' art, there has been surprisingly little analysis of his treatment of gender and an even more astonishing acceptance that his post-1870 novels bear little merit. Criticism of these works has been heavily influenced by Swinburne's truism:

What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?

Some demon whispered - 'Wilkie! have a mission'.<sup>28</sup>

Collins is viewed as a writer whose power and skills underwent a sharp and dramatic decline after The Moonstone. Michael Sadleir believed that his art 'suffered severe eclipse'<sup>29</sup> and The Times Literary Supplement claimed that by the mid-80's Collins' 'sun had . . . long set'.<sup>30</sup> Althea Hayter hypothesised that illness and increasing opium dependency 'deadened' his imagination<sup>31</sup> whilst Sue Lonoff argued that Collins' work demonstrates a 'marked and immediate drop'<sup>32</sup> after Dicken's death in 1870. Catherine Peters offers a more complex explanation for this alleged decline but she also concludes that: 'He was becoming a crippled Sisyphus trundling the products of his tired brain up an increasingly

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<sup>26</sup> Mr. Wray's Cash-Box, p.132.

<sup>27</sup> Mr. Wray's Cash-Box, p.132 and p.141.

<sup>28</sup> Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Wilkie Collins'. In eds. Sir. E. Gosse and T.J. Wise. The Complete Works of A.C. Swinburne Vol. 15 (London : Heinemann, 1925), p.305. Also quoted in Norman Page, p.262.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Sadleir, 'Wilkie Collins, 1824-1889'. In Excursions in Victorian Bibliography (London : Chaundy & Cox, 1922), p.129.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted by Norman Page, p.24.

<sup>31</sup> Althea Hayter, Opium and the Romantic Imagination (London : Faber, 1968), pp.269-270.

<sup>32</sup> Sue Lonoff, p.53.

steep hill'.<sup>33</sup> Thus Collins' later fiction has, I propose, experienced long, undeserved neglect and disparagement. But one must ask by what standard this supposed decline is gauged? Whilst Collins created his most acclaimed works in the 1860s, many of his later novels compare most favourably to his work of the 1850s. I do not believe that Collins' art underwent a radical decline and in this thesis I intend to explore these texts and demonstrate how they have much to offer in understanding Collins' values, aims and philosophy as a whole. With the confidence nurtured by popularity, financial security and experience Collins appeared to have felt more able to confront the 'enormous sham', to challenge more openly the 'absurd imposture', the 'stolid solemnity of make-believe'<sup>34</sup> which he perceived as constituting middle-class discourse. Collins' later works are intended to disturb, to outrage Mrs Grundy and to make 'dull people' think. They are essentially palimpsestic narratives through which buried subtexts increasingly voice dissent and social and political concerns and in which violence and crime evolve as motifs for escalating social ills.

In this thesis I will explore Collins' approach to gender issues and examine the restraints and damage which Collins believed phallogentric culture inflicted upon both women and men. Whilst much has been written about patriarchal oppression of women, the negative impact upon men themselves has often been overlooked. I will discuss contemporary discourses of masculinity and the consequences for those who transgress, or exist beyond, its boundaries. As the nineteenth - century generated an abundance of discourses, and as Collins himself perceived gender, sexuality and morality as relativistic, socially constructed concepts, I will utilise a Foucauldian perspective when analysing these constructs. Indeed many of Collins' insights on crime, sexuality, social control and internalised oppression seem to anticipate Foucault's philosophy. However, as Foucault does not directly address issues of gender, nor fully account for the pain and terror experienced by those 'threatened' by the 'other' or unknown, I will also explore Lacanian

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<sup>33</sup> Catherine Peters, The King of Inventors : A Life of Wilkie Collins (London : Minerva, 1992), p.388.

<sup>34</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Fallen Leaves, (London : Chatto & Windus, 1890), p.65.

and post-Lacanian theories. Whilst this will be seen as only one possible discourse, or interpretation, affecting individual identity, it is most useful for understanding certain aspects of masculinity and its fear of, and consequent subjugation of, women. Much of Collins' work is, I believe, open to Lacanian analysis. It seems to reflect both a desire for the primordial oneness with the mother and a dread of regressing, of being engulfed by emotions and thus losing the self-control and independence which is so central to concepts of masculinity.

This thesis involves a complex theoretical argument which is necessarily riddled with tensions and ambiguities. There are intrinsic problems and benefits to be reaped from exploring issues of masculinity in fictional form; narrative creates, idealises or questions hegemonic utterances. And there is the inevitable ambiguity of a male writer analysing masculinity from within its experience whilst profiting from the very power he is challenging. There is also the dimension of myself, as a female, exploring masculinity from outside the experience and as a representative of the 'other' whom it is responsible for oppressing.

In Chapter One I will discuss this theoretical approach, with the tensions and conflicts it involves, and introduce key terms and concepts which will be utilised throughout the thesis. I will also, in this section, examine Collins as a Victorian writer and as an 'artist of alienation'<sup>35</sup> who felt estranged from, and enraged with, the self-deceptions, hypocrisies and artificial 'truths' with which he saw himself surrounded.

In the following six chapters I will explore the central images of, and main discourses pertaining to, Victorian concepts of masculinity in relation to Collins' narratives. I will focus upon the fate of marginalised 'others', the entrapment and moulding of women by patriarchal needs and fears and the injuries sustained by men themselves through hegemonic discourse. I will discuss Collins' works thematically and not chronologically as, I propose, major themes and ideas recur throughout his writing career. Collins' views

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<sup>35</sup> Kirk H. Beetz, 'The Other Fiction of Wilkie Collins : The Dover Editions', University of Mississippi Studies in English 2 (1981), p.112.

undoubtedly change, and fade or intensify in significance, over the forty year span in which he wrote, and I will explore these shifts in perception or emphasis within each chapter as they arise. Indeed, within each individual chapter I endeavour to discuss narratives in chronological sequence to highlight these shifts. However, I do not consider these changes to be so marked or specific as to warrant a complete chronological approach and thus create possible false or misleading boundaries.

In Collins' later fiction, as the fin de siècle drew near, his message becomes more urgent and one can sense the imminent collapse of the patriarchal order. Throughout Collins' texts characters had constructed meanings and illusions by which to live but problems result when these become inflexible, when subjective codes are presented as objective facts and used to contain, define and judge others. It is this inability to change, Collins suggested, that would increasingly breed violence, despair, poverty and crime unless addressed and tackled. It is this recognition which forms the 'motionless spectre', the force of destruction and self-destruction which 'lurks unnaturally near' in Collins' works. Collins knew that change was essential, he confronted the faults and flaws of his society and was disturbed by what he saw. But there is an inherent tension in his sub-texts. Collins benefited from the very hegemonic oppression he despised: he both desired and dreaded radical change. It is a tension which will be studied throughout this thesis. In many ways Collins was not just a rebel or an anomie in Victorian circles but an early example of Franklin's "Anomic Man". He could create a Helena Gracedieu but was alarmed by her. He depicted Mrs. Tenbruggen's (The Legacy of Cain) and Mrs. Rook's (I Say No) entrepreneurial manipulations but seemed to feel more at ease with Eunice Gracedieu and Emily Brown. Collins appeared to remain confused, anxious and in pursuit of the very certainty and truth which he knew did not exist. Life, as viewed by Collins, remained an 'impenetrable mystery' and, like Armada's Lydia Guilt, he seemed to be left saying: '. . . it means something, I wish I knew what.'<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Wilkie Collins, Armada (London : Chatto & Windus, 1895), p.495.



## **CHAPTER ONE : VICTORIAN MANLINESS AND DISCOURSES OF MASCULINITIES**

'... A ... Struggle Against Regression.'<sup>1</sup>

Masculinity is difficult to define as a concept. Peter Middleton asks : 'Is it a discourse, a power structure, a psychic economy, a history, an ideology, an identity, a behaviour, an aesthetic even?'.<sup>2</sup> In this thesis concepts of masculinities will be treated as incorporating all, and discussed in relation to all, of the above descriptions. I use the term masculinities to suggest the multiple possible social formations of the construction, its fluidity, its responsiveness to cultural changes and value-systems, and its transmutation over historical periods. I also use the plural, like Herbert Sussman, to 'counter the still pervasive essentialist view of maleness',<sup>3</sup> to deconstruct the monolithic, unitary perception of masculinity.

It is ironic that whilst history is predominantly represented as his-story, written largely by and about men, it is only recently that masculinity has become a subject of study in itself

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<sup>1</sup> James Eli Adams, 'The Banality of Transgression? : Recent Works on Masculinity'. Victorian Studies 26 (Winter 1993), p.210.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Middleton, The Inward Gaze : Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture (London : Routledge, 1992), p.152.

<sup>3</sup> Herbert Sussman, Victorian Masculinities : Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.8.

and has begun to be viewed as a construct and a central dynamic of cultural formation. However, this is no coincidence. The most powerful weapon of any discourse is to claim that it represents the 'truth', that it is 'natural'. Emmanuel Reynauld noted how the 'ABC of any patriarchal ideology . . . is to present (gender) division as being of biological, natural or divine essence.'<sup>4</sup> It attempts to mask how it exists essentially as a relational construct. Its identity is defined wholly in relation to its opposite - femininity. It is constituted by negatives and binarisms, it is what femininity is not. It is shaped by, and thrives within, men's social power and their asserted superiority over the other. Indeed, Michael Roper and John Tosh believed that 'the achievement of manhood depended on a disparagement of the feminine without and within.'<sup>5</sup> But, as masculinity is not a unitary concept, this process includes the repression of not only the feminine but of other races, classes and marginalised masculinities, e.g., the disabled, the poor, the homosexual. What Kaja Silverman aptly named 'the dominant fiction'<sup>6</sup> created a hegemonic male discourse, one pertaining solely to the middle-class, white, able-bodied, heterosexual man.

I will explore later in this chapter why men collectively colluded in sustaining this fiction, how they themselves may be damaged by this hegemony and I will explore the problematics inherent in, and particular to, Victorian discourses of masculinity. However, I will first discuss Foucault's analysis of power and Lacan's discussion on identity formation. These two theories offer powerful tools in understanding gender construction and will be the chief interpretations utilised in this thesis. I will thus introduce the basic ideas and terminology of these philosophies before moving on briefly to examine other modern theories of phallogentric culture. The initial discussion of these theories may appear somewhat simplistic but my aim is to outline the underlying concepts and themes which will re-occur, and be elaborated upon, in my later analysis of Wilkie Collins' works.

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<sup>4</sup> Emmanuel Reynauld, Holy Virility : The Social Construction of Masculinity (London : Pluto Press, 1983), p.9.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Roper and John Tosh, eds. Manful Assertions : Masculinities in Britain Since 1800 (London : Routledge, 1991), p.13.

Herbert Sussman observed how 'writing the history of Victorian masculinities along the lines of a Foucauldian history of sexuality is particularly pertinent since Victorian men themselves wrote the history of literature and art as the history of managing male desire.'<sup>7</sup> And Foucault stressed how the construction of consciousness and identity is unique to specific individuals or groups at a given historical point. This approach demands that studies of masculinities explore the multiplicities, contradictions and changes which occur in phallogentric discourse over a period of time. This is especially germane to the Victorian era which witnessed a series of dramatic social, economic, political and religious changes.

Foucault perceived language as significantly more than a matter of linguistics. Foucauldian 'knowledge' is comprised of 'social, historical and political conditions under which statements count as true or false.'<sup>8</sup> He construed discourse as a 'material condition (or set of conditions) which enables and constrains the socially productive imagination.'<sup>9</sup> Thus discourses do not merely represent the 'real' but, as McHoul suggests, are part of its production and 'discourses always function in relation to power relationships.'<sup>10</sup> Hegemonic utterances define and determine what is 'real' or natural. To Foucault the pursuit of 'truth' is a chimera and there can be nothing outside of these discursive productions. Thus attempts to discover 'truth' and liberate sexuality serve only to enclose these concepts ever more firmly within discourse and subjectivity. Nancy Armstrong, in Desire and Domestic Fiction, identified the political power which such endeavours inevitably embody. She described the 'enlightened writing paradox - the repressive hypothesis which ensures that we imagine freedom in terms of its repression',<sup>11</sup> that is as inseparable from its representation.

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<sup>6</sup> Kaja Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (London : Routledge, 1992), p.15.

<sup>7</sup> Herbert Sussman, p.10.

<sup>8</sup> A. McHoul, and W. Grace, A Foucault Primer : Discourse, Power and the Subject (Melbourne University Press, 1993), p.29.

<sup>9</sup> McHoul, p.34.

<sup>10</sup> McHoul, p.36.

<sup>11</sup> Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction : A Political History of the Novel (Oxford University Press, 1987), p.13.

Foucault suggested that freedom does not lie in the futile pursuit of 'truth' or selfhood but in understanding and resisting the ways in which we are labelled and constrained. He demonstrated how hegemonic discourse is always accompanied by possible 'points of resistance'<sup>12</sup> and how such resistance can give voice to the marginalised and disqualified knowledges. He traced how words transmit and produce power but how language simultaneously undermines and exposes this process to scrutiny. Power may shelter in silence and secrecy but these very areas, through their intrinsic ambiguity and fluidity, loosen the hegemonic hold. He believed it is possible to create 'reverse discourse' wherein the subjected subject of discourse speaks<sup>13</sup> - as long as one remains aware of the inherent dilemmas here. Indeed, when power becomes distorted into what Foucault termed an oppressive force, the resorting to intimidation or violence, it is, perhaps, an implicit recognition by the hegemony that reverse discourse is always a possibility, and that reverse discourse can become hegemonic discourse. Such a theory offers much to explain the abuses of patriarchal power detailed in Joan Smith's Misogynies.<sup>14</sup>

The discursive explosion, which occurred in the Victorian era, largely centred around sexuality. Sex was constituted as a problem of truth and enclosed 'by power in a binary system : licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden'.<sup>15</sup> The Victorians created an abundance of outlawed or 'peripheral sexualities' which existed alongside an 'imaginary dynasty of evils'.<sup>16</sup> Foucault challenged the 'Repressive Hypothesis' which surmises that the Victorians repressed sexuality. He proposed that they discussed sexuality obsessively whilst promoting it as 'the secret'.<sup>17</sup> An 'authorised vocabulary' arose wherein the law, medicine, religion, psychiatry and politics struggled to define, categorise, order and address the ethics of human sexuality. And yet the relationship of power and sex can only be negative, the role of the hegemony is to control, ban, reject, mask and conceal. If this power produces

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<sup>12</sup> M. Foucault, The History of Sexuality Vol.1 (Harmondsworth : Pelican, 1978), p.95.

<sup>13</sup> M. Foucault, p.101.

<sup>14</sup> Joan Smith, Misogynies. Reflections on Myths and Malice (London : Faber & Faber, 1989).

<sup>15</sup> M. Foucault, p.83.

<sup>16</sup> M. Foucault, p.53.

<sup>17</sup> M. Foucault, p.35.

anything it is 'absences and gaps, it overlooks elements, introduces discontinuities, separates what is joined, and marks off boundaries'.<sup>18</sup> But it is through these very gaps and discontinuities that 'the points of resistance' can 'speak'.

Foucault also argued that discourse not only constitutes 'reality' but that it simultaneously represents its opposite, an undefined Other, the 'unthought': 'The Other that is not only a brother but a twin, born, not of man, not in man, but beside him at the same time, in an identical newness, in an unavoidable dualism'.<sup>19</sup> When struggling to establish the 'truth' one inevitably confronts the fragile, subjective grounds upon which 'reality' is constructed. It is, perhaps, this fear or perception which accounts for the images of doppelgänger, other selves and ghosts which haunt Victorian fiction. It is a recognition which implies that the 'natural' is defined by the 'unnatural', the 'good' by what is 'bad'. As with masculinity itself a concept is defined by a negative other, it is limned by what it is not. Foucault also illustrated how discourses are non-linear; they are potentially discontinuous across history and do not follow a teleological path. The impact of Darwinism, and the fading faith in a divine purpose, forced the Victorians to confront the possibility of a random, unpredictable existence. Collins' novels both address and play upon this anxiety. He tends to create eschatologically subversive texts which rarely follow a teleological pattern. This is an area which will be explored throughout this thesis.

A major problem in using Foucault to analyse gender constructs is his own neglect to do so. His writing is markedly androcentric and he speaks as if power subjugates all equally. And, as Sandra Bartky exclaimed: 'To overlook the forms of subjection that engenders the feminine body is to perpetuate the silence and powerlessness of those upon whom these disciplines have been imposed'.<sup>20</sup> It is also revealing that Foucault, along with Lacan, Derrida, Barthes and Althusser, speaks in what Arthur Brittan referred to as the

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<sup>18</sup> M. Foucault, p.83.

<sup>19</sup> M. Foucault, Quoted in Arthur Brittan, Masculinity and Power (Oxford : Blackwell, 1989), p.150.

<sup>20</sup> Sandra Bartky, as quoted in J. Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault : Power and the Body (London : Routledge, 1991). p.49.

'authoritative voice . . . the male epistemological stance'.<sup>21</sup> He observed the irony with which these philosophers are based 'firmly in the tradition of the male intellectual hero' formulating their arguments in the language of 'one who knows'.<sup>22</sup>

Nonetheless I would suggest that Foucault's methods and philosophy provide feminists with useful tools with which to deconstruct gender divisions. And Foucault did highlight how the Victorians intensified the body into a site upon which to construct 'truth' - an area which is particularly germane to masculinity and to which I will return later in this chapter. He also recognised that the hysterisation of women's bodies, the socialisation of pro-creative behaviour, the pedagogization of children's sex and the psychiatrization of perverse pleasures form the four key areas in the exercise of political power over sexuality.<sup>23</sup>

Whilst Foucault claimed that all discourse is dangerous and that 'interpretation is nothing more than one discourse . . . trying to secure another within its bounds',<sup>24</sup> I will continue to explore other theories in an endeavour to further understand discursive power relationships, challenge categorisation and explore disqualified 'knowledges', the 'points of resistance'. Arthur Brittan and Victor Seidler expressed concern that discourse theory seems to deny the intensity of the emotions associated with pain, grief and desire.<sup>25</sup> Lacanian and post-Lacanian theories do offer much to address these concerns and indicate possible origins of such intensity. Whilst one should refrain from perceiving any one relationship or discourse as central to identity-formation, the 'Foucauldian need not exclude mothering theory altogether but simply deny it theoretical privilege'.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Arthur Brittan, p.148 and p.171.

<sup>22</sup> Arthur Brittan, p.148.

<sup>23</sup> M. Foucault, pp.104-105.

<sup>24</sup> M. Foucault, as quoted in A. McHoul, p.23

<sup>25</sup> Victor Seidler, as quoted in Arthur Brittan, p.51.

<sup>26</sup> J. Sawicki, p.63.

Jacques Lacan viewed language as an endless quest for the Oedipal ideal, a prelingual paradise of oneness with the mother when needs were met and language was not required. Language is thus perceived as a process of signification, a system of signals which presupposes the absence of the object signified. Hence, language is dependent upon this gap whilst promising to bridge it. In Lacanian philosophy self-identity is viewed as primordially alienated, forever in search of other selves and a lost wholeness. Initially a male is at one with the mother and can perceive no ego boundaries or individualisation. But, from the mirror-stage onwards, the male must separate from, and define himself as different to, the Other whilst still desiring the primeval oneness. And simultaneously there exists the profound but often unspoken threat from the 'Name of the Father'. To survive and be accepted as a man one must relinquish the feminine and 'wholeness' and enter the 'Symbolic Order' of language and absence. Lacan described a powerful desire to return to what Julia Kristeva termed 'the chora',<sup>27</sup> the prelingual maternal space out of which signification arises. This desire co-exists with a dread of the potency of the M/Other; a terror of rejection and isolation and a subliminal recognition of the real power of the feminine. Arnold Cooper saw masculinity as a 'hard fought renunciation of the longings for the prelapsarian idyll of childhood', and David Gilmore concluded that men's anxieties in personal relationships are inextricably linked to the fear that 'restoring the oneness with the mother will overwhelm one's independent selfhood',<sup>28</sup> that one may regress to the opposite of manliness - babyhood. In Lacanian philosophy masculinity, with all its privileges, is perceived as compensation for losing the chora. This argument is, I propose, particularly useful when discussing Collins' male characters. His 'heroes' are frequently self-alienated and wracked by self-doubt, anxiety and a sense of lost other selves. They seek acceptance and wholeness but dread rejection and engulfment; they fear losing their hard-won 'manhood' and regressing to a state of disorder, dependency and the 'madness' which results from expulsion from the Symbolic Order. This theme will be elaborated upon in each of the following chapters.

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<sup>27</sup> Julia Kristeva, quoted in Peter Middleton, p.191

However, implicit in Lacanian theory is an assumption that we do not enter a neutral but rather a prefixed, gendered universe. He depicted us as entering a 'patriarchal order in which the "law of the father" is enshrined in discourse and practice. Repression, therefore, is almost a precondition of becoming a speaking subject. The moment the male child enters the symbolic order, he denies one half of himself'.<sup>29</sup> This concept appears to run parallel to Foucault's 'unthought'. There is also a strong similarity between the mirror stage and Foucault's description of the power of 'the gaze',<sup>30</sup> the gaze of the privileged subject who looks, defines, labels and judges the inferior Other.

Lacan grounded his philosophy upon a biological discourse : men aspire to power through possessing a penis. How and why the penis is transformed into this 'privileged signifier'<sup>31</sup> is not analysed and even the process of mothering is awarded patriarchal meanings. Nonetheless, Lacan offered much to explain the masculine dread of, and need to control, female sexuality. And throughout history men seem to have been haunted by the image of the vagina dentata,<sup>32</sup> the threat of emasculation by the feminine which would exclude them eternally from the 'Name of the Father'. The chief problem is that this hypothesis tends to naturalise gender and perceive social systems as fundamentally homeostatic with thus little possibility of change. Biologically based discourses tend to see humans reacting, puppet-style, to a set of prefixed conditions. They also tend to view resistance and subjugated knowledges as perverse or forbidden. To biological and social role theorists, as James Adams noted, transgressions and marginalised masculinities can only be seen as 'failures'.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Arnold Cooper, quoted in David Gilmore, Manhood in the Making : Cultural Concepts of Masculinity (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1990), pp.28-29.

<sup>29</sup> Arthur Brittan, p.71.

<sup>30</sup> Foucault, As quoted in J. Kestner, pp.24-25 and K. Silverman, pp.125-156.

<sup>31</sup> J. Gallop, Feminism and Psychoanalysis : The Daughters' Seduction (London : MacMillans, 1982), p.xii.

<sup>32</sup> P. Hoch, White Hero, Black Beast : Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity (London : Pluto Press, 1979), p.67.



Feminist writers have expanded Lacanian thought and suggested opportunities for change. Dorothy Dinnerstein<sup>34</sup> and Nancy Chodorow<sup>35</sup> described the emergency of masculinity as dependent upon the male's experience of mothering and demand a re-assessment of, and equality in, parenting roles. A traditional mother has the power to both meet and frustrate basic needs thus instigating simultaneous feelings of fear, longing and resentment. Moreover, a boy must struggle to attain a masculine identity based upon an often absent or elusive male role model. Dinnerstein and Chodorow promulgated that men live in perpetual dread of, and rage over, a woman's power over their early lives and their ability to give birth. In this sense 'penis envy' is not seen as so potent a force as womb envy. Indeed Phyllis Chessler believed that men expounded the myth of Jesus and the crucifixion to 'prove' that they too could bleed and create life.<sup>36</sup>

The main dilemma inherent in mothering theory is that it makes women collusive in framing their own oppression. It also gives women great power which they then either neglect or abdicate. But it does offer much to explain men's dread of, and desire for, the M/Other and their all-pervasive need to control and define. And Foucault's analysis of internalised oppression, the government of the self, does partly account for the seeming contradiction in this hypothesis. However, an alternative theory is proposed by Lyn Segal who suggests, in her critique of patriarchy, that men may fear the feminine not because of the experience of an engulfing mother, but because they rightly perceive the association between femininity and powerlessness.<sup>37</sup>

In this thesis I will adopt a social constructionalist stance and demonstrate how hegemonic masculinity is sustained by collective belief and how, for the Victorians,

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<sup>33</sup> J. E. Adams, 'The Banality of Transgression? Recent Works on Masculinity', Victorian Studies 26, (1993), p.210.

<sup>34</sup> D. Dinnerstein, The Rocking of the Cradle and the Ruling of the World (London : Souvenir Press, 1978).

<sup>35</sup> N. Chodorow, The Reproduction of Mothering : Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender (Berkley : University of California Press, 1978).

<sup>36</sup> P. Chessler, About Men (London : The Women's Press, 1978), p.38 and p.47.

<sup>37</sup> L. Segal, Slow Motion : Changing Masculinities, Changing Men (London : Virago, 1990).

'manhood was not an essence but a plot, a condition whose achievement and whose maintenance forms a narrative over time'.<sup>38</sup> Like Michael Roper and John Tosh I believe that 'masculinity is never fully possessed, but must be achieved, asserted and re-negotiated' and that the 'achievement of masculinity is tenuous because power itself is in a continual process of contestation and transformation'.<sup>39</sup>

To the Victorians the Romantic concept of the self as an Aeolian harp and the quest for inspiration had lost their meaning. They no longer believed that knowledge would be revealed or instinctively comprehended; 'knowledge' to the Victorians was the result of hard-work, strenuous activity and self-discipline. And the resulting discourses gradually evolved in response to social developments, ie, industrialisation, Darwinism, war and economic depression. Early Victorian masculinity embraced the ideals of Christian morality, integrity, earnestness and fortitude. The late Victorian masculine ideal, in response to these social issues, was based upon stoicism, endurance, muscular Christianity and a 'neo-spartan virility'.<sup>40</sup>

The impact of industrialisation holds a vital key to understanding Victorian masculinities. Leslie Hall and Michael Kimmel perceived a marked distinction between precapitalist and capitalist patriarchy.<sup>41</sup> Men began to work outside of the home, they associated predominantly with other men and became largely absent from the domestic realm and child-rearing activities. A competitive masculine world arose wherein a man was defined by what he did; he must succeed in this outside world, provide for his family and act as their moral guide, albeit from a distance. Such 'success' became an increasingly problematic process as options widened. Enhanced class mobility presented more opportunities whilst extended education and later marriages prolonged admission into the

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<sup>38</sup> Sussman, p.13.

<sup>39</sup> Roper and Tosh, p.18.

<sup>40</sup> J. A. Mangan, and J. Walvin, eds. Manliness and Morality : Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940 (Manchester University Press, 1987), p.1.

male sphere. It was also a strangely isolating experience which placed the onus and anxiety wholly upon the individual : there was no ritual passage to manhood and male role models were largely absent. Indeed, Sussman surmised that the Victorians sharply defined gender mainly as a reaction to these complexities.<sup>42</sup>

Whilst femininity was perceived as a static state, a woman marries and is, masculinity was a perpetual process; it could be lost and must therefore be continually proved to exist. Sussman noted how for the Victorians there was no middle-ground, that 'the opposite of manliness was madness'.<sup>43</sup> Men looked to fathers, mentors, teachers, priests, writers, doctors and lawyers to 'learn' adult masculine wisdom. And they asserted this masculinity as a difference from, and a superiority to, other races and femininity. They created discourses to establish this 'transcendental pretence',<sup>44</sup> the 'dominant fiction' which directly contradicted the actual experience of many men. In this sense masculinity can be defined, according to David Leverenz, as a 'collective fiction transforming insecurity into strength'.<sup>45</sup> Whilst many men would be repressed or alienated by hegemonic narrative it was, and is, sustained chiefly for the simple reason that 'most men benefit from the subordination of women, and hegemonic masculinity is centrally connected with the institution of men's dominance over women'.<sup>46</sup>

Industrialisation greatly challenged this fiction. Power shifted from individuals to institutions leading to a widening depersonalisation and bureaucratisation of human relationships. In Marxist terms this led to increasing alienation, loss of personal autonomy and a disjunction between the 'facts of male power and feelings of men's private

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<sup>41</sup> L. A. Hall, Hidden Anxieties : Male Sexuality, 1900-1950 (Cambridge : Polity Press, 1991), pp.13-15 and M.S. Kimmel, 'The Contemporary "Crisis" of Masculinity in Historical Perspective'. In Harry Brod, ed. The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987.)

<sup>42</sup> H. Sussman, p.46.

<sup>43</sup> H. Sussman, p.48.

<sup>44</sup> A. Brittan, p.148.

<sup>45</sup> D. Leverenz, Manhood and the American Renaissance (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1989), p.10.

<sup>46</sup> J. A. Kestner, Masculinities in Victorian Painting (Aldershot : Scolar Press, 1995), p.22.

powerlessness'.<sup>47</sup> Manual labourers could prove physical endurance but they were not in control of their productivity or environment. Male managers could exercise control but their role was non-physical. To address the contradictions and insecurities generated by industrialisation, masculine discourses were duly re-negotiated. We are thus introduced to a series of Carlylean 'heroes' whereby managers become 'Captains of Industry' and writers become 'the Hero as Man of Letters'.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, anxiety created what Joseph Pleck referred to as 'protest masculinity'<sup>49</sup> - an over-conformist acting out of the hegemonic ideal. Ironically, as Leslie Hall perceived, the anxieties could only be relieved by further validations of the discourse and hence the perpetual reproduction of the very system which originally created them.

John Tosh shows how the domestic regime of separate spheres, wherein the mother stood for love and affection and the father represented the discipline required for survival in the outside world, created a gulf whereby women were sentimentalised and disparaged, and men respected but resented. Tosh believes that this division led to a 'particularly brittle masculinity'<sup>50</sup> which shunned emotional expression and tenderness. It is, perhaps, a sad indictment of this process that Kitchener allegedly 'preferred to be misunderstood . . . rather than suspected of human feeling'.<sup>51</sup> Homosocial bonding, the search for a male mentor and acceptance by other males, was a significant feature of masculine life. Male bonding in schools, business, clubs, politics and the military were greatly encouraged and were, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's opinion, by building 'structures for maintaining and transmitting patriarchal power'<sup>52</sup> integral to the unequal power relationships in the whole culture.

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<sup>47</sup> L. Hall, p.14.

<sup>48</sup> T. Carlyle, 'On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and The Heroic in History', in Sartor Resartus, Lectures on Heroes, Chartism and Past and Present (London : Chapman and Hall, 1888), pp.185-375.

<sup>49</sup> Joseph Pleck; quoted in Paul Hoch, p.84.

<sup>50</sup> John Tosh, 'Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class : The Family of Edward White Benson. In Roper and Tosh, p.65.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.65.

<sup>52</sup> E. K. Sedgwick, Between Men : English Literature and Male Homosexual Desire (New York : Columbia University Press, 1985), p.25.

Empire-building facilitated this bonding. In masculine fantasy the empire became 'an imaginary space where male comradeship and male hierarchies found their full scope, free from feminine ties'.<sup>53</sup> Such colonial adventures, through which men could prove their 'manliness', are another recurrent theme in Victorian literature. I will explore this later in relation to The Woman in White and The Moonstone. And yet there was a thin line to tread here. Too much domesticity was seen as dangerous, 'unmanly', but so was too much homosocial bonding. Thus, ironically, in fear of trespassing into 'forbidden' territory, such masculine exploits needed to be ever more firmly embedded in hegemonic heterosexuality. Hence, in the backdrop of these adventures tends to lurk a love-sick woman patiently awaiting the return of her 'hero'. The Frozen Deep vividly exemplifies this theme. Marginalised masculinities are silenced and yet the very act of banishment suggests its existence; the disqualified knowledge continues to haunt the margins of hegemonic utterances. Colonial discourses tend to reveal, as Graham Dawson suggests, both a fascination with, and fear of, the colonised 'other' which exists in 'narrative as a disturbing or even overtly desired presence'.<sup>54</sup>

Along with colonialism, militarism also became an intrinsic feature of the 'dominant fiction' and contributed to what Peter Stearns calls the 'self-conscious assertiveness of . . . nineteenth-century masculinity'. He suggests that : 'A certain amount of masculinity was vicarious now, the male bosom swelled with pride in reading about a frontier hero or a distant victory over some dusky tribe'.<sup>55</sup> The Victorians inhabited a military era; the period both began and ended with major wars. The image of the valiant soldier who fights to rescue home, comrades and country, abounds throughout Victorian literature. It was a romantic concept and one which ostensibly reinforced phallic power at its most extreme. The use of armour, rifles, lances and bayonets symbolised a permanent erection; masculinity in its most dominant, assertive and inviolable form. But there is an inherent

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<sup>53</sup> John Tosh, 'Domesticity and manliness . . . ' In Roper and Tosh, pp.67-68.

<sup>54</sup> Graham Dawson, 'The Blonde Bedouin'. In Roper and Tosh, p.120.

<sup>55</sup> Peter Stearns, Be a Man! Males in Modern Society (New York : Holmes & Meier, 1990), p.78.

contradiction in military discourse for men are also at their most vulnerable in war. They can be killed or maimed and their invincible erections emerge as mirages.

The decline in religious faith and the impact of Darwinism greatly contributed to the contradictions and tensions which thrived in phallocratic discourse. Manliness could no longer be seen as stable, permanent and consistent and these were the very qualities around which patriarchal ideology had been structured. A reaction of 'protest masculinity' reached fever pitch with the eulogies of the Tom Brown books and Baden-Powell's instructions to scouts. In response to threat and fear the binary perception of gender deepened and the male need to idealise and contain the M/Other increased. In the absence of an all-knowing, all-caring god there was a tendency to uphold woman as the repository of 'goodness', purity and moral 'truth'. This is crystallised in Leslie Stephen's poignant comment to his wife, 'I have not got any saints and you must not be angry if I put you in the place where my saints ought to be'.<sup>56</sup> As Bruce Woodcock remarked, this crisis of faith 'partially resolved itself in the form of a religion of personal relationships whose terms of reference were based on male prerogatives'.<sup>57</sup> The role of 'good' women was to aid, comfort and enhance men's lives. The Reverend Binney, a contemporary writer of religious articles and religious discourse, instructed women to soothe and inspire men so that 'the mighty engine of masculine life may be aided in its results and actions'.<sup>58</sup> However, there was an inevitable and irreconcilable tension between the subordinate role and the moral influence and between the maternal, domestic power and the political silence. Moreover, as Davidoff and Hall elucidate, 'idealised womanhood was asexual and chaste, yet the supreme goal for women was marriage and motherhood, conditions which publicly proclaimed sexuality'.<sup>59</sup> These tensions, and their possible consequences for both genders, will be explored further in Chapters 5 and 7.

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<sup>56</sup> Leslie Stephens, as quoted in Bruce Woodcock, Male Mythologies : John Fowles and Masculinity (Sussex : Harvester Press, 1984). p.16.

<sup>57</sup> Bruce Woodcock, p.16.

<sup>58</sup> Reverend Binney, as quoted in L. Davidoff, and C. Hall Family Fortunes : Men and Women of the English Middle-Class, 1780-1850 (Hutchinson, 1987), pp.116-118.

<sup>59</sup> Davidoff and Hall, p.322.

In relation to men's own sexuality, the hydraulic model lay at the heart of Victorian ideology. This model perceives man as a mass of innate animal passions and inchoate emotions which only a constant, rigorous, 'manly' exertion of self-discipline could control. Male sexuality was viewed as a flood or fire of destruction which could ruin both the individual and society if not contained by an iron self-will, rationality and hard labour. At the centre of this discourse is the image of the penis as a 'privileged signifier', a symbol of power and evidence that one has not been castrated. What Phillip Hodson terms 'the overburdened penis'<sup>60</sup> helped allay male anxieties and yet, as Kaja Silverman points out, this equation of the penis with phallic power is the most vulnerable part of the 'dominant fiction'.<sup>61</sup> Significantly the penis itself rarely appears in Victorian art, it is represented by invincible weapons such as spears, clubs, rifles and lancets.

In reality male sexuality was the source of much anxiety to the whole society and thus the recipient of a wealth of literature on self-management and self-control. And, as Annette Federico wryly observed, there often appears to be little difference between self-help and self-abuse in this minefield of advice.<sup>62</sup> It also underlines how, as James Adams notes, although 'men can dominate women, they require strenuous norms of manhood to sustain themselves in a perpetual struggle against regression'<sup>63</sup> - regression into the madness and primordial chaos that defines what manhood is not. It is, I believe, this very fear and struggle which lies at the epicentre of understanding discourses of masculinity.

In an era of 'discursive ferment',<sup>64</sup> when a plethora of literature instructed men and women on how to be men and women, writing and art played a fundamental part in creating and sustaining gender roles. Graham Dawson describes how 'masculine identities are lived

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<sup>60</sup> Phillip Hodson, as quoted in Arthur Brittan, p.57.

<sup>61</sup> Kaja Silverman, as quoted in J. Kestner, p.28.

<sup>62</sup> Annette R. Federico, Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : Case Western University 1988), p.18.

<sup>63</sup> James Eli Adams, 'The Banality of Transgression? : Recent Works on Masculinity'. Victorian Studies 26 (Winter 1993), p.210.

out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination'. He illustrates how such imaginings define roles, behaviour and values to enable a :

coherent sense of one's self as a "man" to be secured and recognised by others. An imagined identity . . . has real effects in the world of everyday relationships, which it invests with meaning and makes intelligible in specific ways. It organises a form that a masculine self can assume in the world . . .<sup>65</sup>

Thus, imagined identities are wish-fulfilling fantasies which become self-fulfilling prophecies. This links directly with Foucault's concept of the gaze; how the gazer is assured of control, power and hierarchy and so further empowered in his dominant role. When men view men in art they are affirmed by an ideal image to which they can aspire; the result is a 'narcissistic ego reinforcement'.<sup>66</sup> This process also connects to the Lacanian mirror-stage. It recreates a 'satisfying sense of omnipotence' reflecting the 'more perfect, more complete, more powerful ideal ego conceived in the original moment of recognition in front of the mirror'.<sup>67</sup> Nonetheless, the power of the gaze is the double-edged power of the Damocles sword for, in gazing upon the ideal, man is forcibly confronted with his own inadequacies. And in seeing his separate self or reflection he is painfully reminded of his expulsion from the prelapsarian idyll and his essential, eternal isolation.

Identity is a complex phenomenon. It is a process and never a finished product. It is the result of experience and upbringing and is dependent upon a range of social, economic, cultural and historic factors. As Jonathan Dollimore proclaimed:

Identity is a construction and . . . involves a process of exclusion, negation and repression. And this is a process which even if successful, results in an identity

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<sup>64</sup> M. Foucault, p.18 .

<sup>65</sup> Graham Dawson, 'The Blonde Bedouin'. In Roper and Tosh, p.118.

<sup>66</sup> J. Kestner, p.25.

<sup>67</sup> Laura Mulvey, as quoted in Kestner, p.25.



intrinsically unstable. This is bad news for masculinity one of whose self-conceptions is stability and whose function it is to maintain it socially and psychically.<sup>68</sup>

Darwinism, with its emphasis on change and degeneration, compounded this concern. The late Victorian reaction of muscular Christianity and neo-spartan virility became tempered with Hardy-esque 'heroes' who were ravaged by self-doubt, depression and a sense of confusion and impending doom which no discourse could quite vanquish. And the fear of the M/Other grew in proportion to this terror. Rider Haggard's *She-Who-Must-Be-Obeyed* symbolises this dread; Ayesha represents an overt recognition of potential feminine potency and the realisation that women have the choice of power to both create and dissolve the walls of the home. This recognition, and its consequences for both genders, will be examined in Chapter 7.

Harry Brod illuminates how studies of masculinity have to perform a task diametrically opposite to that of feminist critiques. The primary objective of feminist works is to 'establish the objectivity of women's experiences and thereby validate the legitimacy of women's experiences as women. Much of men's studies struggle to establish the subjectivity of men's experiences and thereby validate the legitimacy of men's experience as men'.<sup>69</sup> Hegemonic masculine discourse undoubtedly oppresses many men and patriarchal domination is bought at a very high cost. Emmanuel Reynauld notes how it is 'through his own mutilation that man establishes his dominance over women',<sup>70</sup> and Roscak promulgates that 'the woman most desperately in need of liberation is the "woman" every man has locked up in the dungeons of his own psyche'.<sup>71</sup> Marginalised masculinities exist outside of discourse and such repression, as Foucault elucidated, operates 'as a sentence

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<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, as quoted by Sallie Westwood in J. Hearn & D. Morgan, eds., Men, Masculinities and Social Theory (London : Unwin Hyman, 1990), p.58.

<sup>69</sup> Harry Brod, ed. The Making of Masculinities : The New Men's Studies (London : Allen & Unwin, 1987), p.6.

<sup>70</sup> Emmanuel Reynauld, pp.12-13.

<sup>71</sup> T. Roscak. As quoted in Paul Hoch, p.78.

to disappear . . . an injunction to silence, an affirmation of non-existence'.<sup>72</sup> The hegemony creates an extremely limited discourse: the old, the poor, the disabled, the black and gay men are effectively nullified by hegemonic utterances. At its most simplistic level Reynauld believes that men can choose to be either a 'daddy' or a 'rapist'. He claimed that every man is the potential owner of every woman and that men choose to either protect women or abuse their power; a choice which can always be reversed: 'If he cannot ask for, buy or hire her, he can always rape her, and even if he gives up his rights, he can still avail himself of them whenever he chooses'. Moreover, all men benefit from women's fear and consequent restriction of freedom: 'Man creates a reign of terror to enable him to protect: he rapes the others to be a daddy to one'.<sup>73</sup> And daddy later exacts a price; he has standards, images and values to which the 'protected' woman must adhere.

This process is aided by the male emphasis on 'rationality'. Indeed phallocratic utterances resist emotionality for the very reason that they are designed to do just that. Foucault noted how to 'gain mastery' over an issue 'in reality' it is necessary to first 'subjugate it at the level of language'.<sup>74</sup> Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar illustrated how writing is essentially a phallic occupation with the pen as a metaphoric penis.<sup>75</sup> Hence, speaking within masculine discourses presents considerable difficulties for women and marginalised others. Victor Seidler may lament that 'we are bereft of an emotional language which allows us to identify and articulate our experience',<sup>76</sup> and Eardley may regret that 'emotional illiteracy . . . is part and parcel of male socialisation',<sup>77</sup> but this very issue acts as a powerful weapon in gender warfare. McGill reflects upon how evasion of intimacy and the embracing of silence protects men from feedback that may expose fears and inadequacies.<sup>78</sup> And Peter Middleton adds that this is a strategic secrecy. Men hide

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<sup>72</sup> M. Foucault, p.4.

<sup>73</sup> Emmanuel Reynauld, pp.71-72.

<sup>74</sup> M. Foucault, p.17.

<sup>75</sup> Sandra Gilbert, and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic : The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (Yale University Press, 1979), pp.3-104.

<sup>76</sup> Victor Seidler, Unreasonable Men : Masculinity and Social Theory (London : Routledge, 1994), p.111.

<sup>77</sup> Eardley. As quoted in Peter Middleton, p.124.

<sup>78</sup> McGill. As quoted in Peter Middleton, p.121.

feelings in order to withhold information which might give others power over them'.<sup>79</sup> It also enables men to repress their own emotions. In Klaus Thewelweit's study of soldiers he concluded that men objectify victims', they kill but are 'intensely absent'.<sup>80</sup> Such secrecy and denial are intrinsically tied to the hydraulic model of male sexuality; the fear that if man is open, vulnerable or compromised he may collapse or regress into the 'inchoate flood or fire that limns the innate energy of maleness, into the gender-specific mental pathology that the Victorians saw as male hysteria or male madness'.<sup>81</sup> This process of disintegration, the terrifying descent into 'unmanliness', insanity or death, is a recurrent theme in Collins' works and will be explored, in particular, in Chapters 2 and 7.

Acquiring a 'voice' for excluded and marginalised others is a complex process which is inextricably enmeshed within the very phallocratic discourses which banishes them. Peter Middleton emphasises a need to create an 'emancipatory men's discourse'<sup>82</sup> whilst Michael Kimmel believes that the aim of men's studies is 're-vision' - a re-vision of the way we read literature, perceive men and masculine ideals and so enhance our understanding of how 'culturally - defined ideals of manhood have shaped the lives of men and frequently limited their growth or frustrated their basic needs'.<sup>83</sup> Jonathan Dollimore suggests a Foucauldian process of identifying labels and so stimulating resistance. He urges us to exploit the gaps, silences and internal tensions and contradictions to the maximum. By aiming for such 'discoherence' he hopes that meanings will be returned to circulation and therefore vulnerable to transformation and reappropriation.<sup>84</sup>

Collins appeared to see such dramatic change and reassessment as both essential and desirable; and yet he feared the outcome. He was also unable to see a way beyond language. It is ironically appropriate that his rebels 'speak' in the very language which

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<sup>79</sup> Peter Middleton, p.121.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Peter Middleton, p.194.

<sup>81</sup> Herbert Sussman, p.13.

<sup>82</sup> Peter Middleton, p.3.

<sup>83</sup> Michael Kimmel, p.298.

<sup>84</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, p.87.

contained and nullified them. Helena Gracedieu, in The Legacy of Cain, may reject hegemonic society but her defiance is expressed through religious discourse and liturgical vocabulary.<sup>85</sup> Collins did, I believe, demand a 're-vision' of his society and vividly demonstrated the hypocrisy, destructiveness and fragility of hegemonic culture, but he could not reach beyond discourse, he could not, or dare not, 'discohere'.

### Wilkie Collins : Contemporary and Victorian Perspectives

Meredith Townsend's obituary in The Spectator (1889) concluded that: 'The position of Mr. Wilkie Collins in literature was a very unusual one. He was an extremely popular writer . . . who was not very highly esteemed'.<sup>86</sup> This statement effectively encapsulates the difficulties which seem to have beset critics from the mid nineteenth century to the present day. Collins' literary career spanned over forty years - from Antonina in 1850 to Blind Love in 1889 - a longer period than most other prominent Victorian writers. The Woman in White created unprecedented excitement and gave rise to woman in white perfume, bonnets and cloaks. Smith, Elder granted the largest payment for the copyright of Armada offered to any novelist other than Dickens.<sup>87</sup> And yet critics frequently derided and marginalised his work.<sup>88</sup> His novels clearly posed distinctive critical problems, problems largely created by the perceived Victorian gap between serious literature and light reading. It was a binarism which Collins himself saw as artificial and restricting. With expanding literacy, improved education and communication and the increasing accessibility of literature for the masses, Collins hoped to appeal to both the 'Readers in General' and 'Readers in Particular', whom he referred to in the Preface to Armada. It was an ambition he was never to fulfil. As the rift between serious and popular writing grew, Collins, as Catherine Peters observed, 'who

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<sup>85</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Legacy of Cain, p.322.

<sup>86</sup> Michael W. Townsend, Spectator LXIII (28 September 1889), p.395. Quoted in Page, p.249.

<sup>87</sup> Kenneth Robinson, Wilkie Collins : A Biography (London : Davis-Poynter, 1974), p.163.

<sup>88</sup> See Norman Page, Wilkie Collins : The Critical Heritage (London : Routledge, 1974)

had always believed passionately that the two could and should be combined, found himself caught in the middle'.<sup>89</sup>

The subjectivity which inevitably informs literary analysis, is never more apparent than when reviewing the criticisms of 'Readers in Particular'. The creator of 'unwholesomeness', whose favourite characters were 'degraded wretches',<sup>90</sup> 'the lowest outcasts'<sup>91</sup> was also an 'earnest moralist'<sup>92</sup> a 'zealous moralist'.<sup>93</sup> Ernest Baker viewed Collins' characters as 'puppets with names attached'<sup>94</sup> and Anthony Trollope was unable to get rid of the 'taste of construction'<sup>95</sup> whilst Alfred Ainger promulgated that Collins was a riddle maker who was 'clever enough to win grudging admiration but not profound enough to win respect'.<sup>96</sup>

Both the Victorian and twentieth century receptions of Collins' work reflects similar wide diversity of opinion. Bradford Booth concluded that Collins 'achieved any triumph fortuitously'<sup>97</sup> and Robert Ashley argued that 'although his ambitions soared beyond mere sensationalism he rarely, if ever, emerged from the confines of melodrama'.<sup>98</sup> On the other hand, Jenny Bourne Taylor claims that Collins dissected a range of discourses and Phillip O'Neill suggests that Collins anticipated poststructuralism.<sup>99</sup> The New Magdalen, Matthew Arnold's and Hugh Walpole's favourite novel,<sup>100</sup> was dismissed by Swinburne as 'feeble, false and silly'.<sup>101</sup> Dougal MacEachen upheld The Law and the Lady as 'the most lively

<sup>89</sup> Catherine Peters, The King of Inventors : A Life of Wilkie Collins (London : Minerva, 1992), p.395.

<sup>90</sup> Unsigned Review, "The Fallen Leaves", Saturday Review XLVIII (2 August 1879) pp. 148-9. Quoted in Norman Page, p. 206.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p.206.

<sup>92</sup> J. H. Stewart, quoted in N. Page, p.224.

<sup>93</sup> Anon review. Quoted in N. Page, p.248.

<sup>94</sup> Ernest Baker, The History of the English Novel 8 (New York : Barnes & Noble, 1937), p.197.

<sup>95</sup> Anthony Trollope, from his Autobiography. Quoted in N. Page, p.223.

<sup>96</sup> Alfred Ainger, 'Mr Dicken's Amateur Theatricals : A Reminiscence'. MacMillan's Magazine 23 (1870-1), p.215.

<sup>97</sup> Bradford Booth, A. 'Wilkie Collins and the Art of Fiction'. Nineteenth-Century Fiction 6 (September 1951), p.144.

<sup>98</sup> Robert P. Ashley, 'Wilkie Collins Reconsidered'. Nineteenth-Century Fiction 4 (March 1950), p.270.

<sup>99</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor. In the Secret Theatre of Home : Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology (London : Routledge, 1988). Phillip O'Neill, Wilkie Collins : Women, Property and Propriety (London : MacMillans, 1988).

<sup>100</sup> Hugh Walpole, 'Novelists of the "Seventies"'. In ed. H. Granville Barker. The Eighteen-Seventies (Cambridge University Press, 1929), p.30.

<sup>101</sup> A. G. Swinburne, In E. Gosse and T. J. Wise, eds. The Complete Works of A. G. Swinburne 15, (London : Heineman, 1925), p.300.

and interesting'<sup>102</sup> of the later works whilst W. J. Johnston condemned it as an 'impossible' study of an intelligent 'dangerous lunatic'<sup>103</sup> and The Saturday Review as 'very dull'.<sup>104</sup> Swinburne highly rated Heart and Science<sup>105</sup> whilst R. W. Dennis believed it is the 'most contrived'.<sup>106</sup> S. M. Ellis praised The Haunted Hotel as 'very well done'<sup>107</sup> whereas Swinburne despised it as 'hideous fiction'.<sup>108</sup>

These conflicts, the passionate likes and condemnations which first greeted Collins' fiction, still tend to permeate criticism of his work - to which the long neglect of his later novels bears testimony. For a writer who was clearly ambitious to acquire critical acclaim, tackle social issues and attack 'national cant', Collins would surely have been as disappointed by many twentieth century views as he was by contemporary disdain. And yet it is apparent that the very 'inner turmoil' or philosophic bent, denied by Sue Lonoff, was detected by early critics. G. K. Chesterton noted Collins' tendency to deal 'wholly with the darker side of the soul',<sup>109</sup> Andrew Lang perceived him as a man 'whose favourite characters are at odds with the world'<sup>110</sup> and Walter de la Mare observed how Collins focussed on the 'cringing wrecks of humanity'.<sup>111</sup> And in 1980 Elena Keshokova announced that in Russia Collins was heralded as 'an indisputably talented realist writer who presented an impressive picture of the life and morals of a period in English social history', who offered a 'new approach to the portrayal of man's inner world in all its complexity'.<sup>112</sup> Collins is clearly a writer who defies labelling, whose art crosses genres, expectations and literary boundaries.

<sup>102</sup> Dougald MacEachen, 'Wilkie Collins and British Law'. Nineteenth-Century Fiction 5 (Sept. 1950), p.137.

<sup>103</sup> W.J. Johnston, 'Wilkie Collins and the Novelists of the Day'. Irish Monthly 19 (April 1891), p.205.

<sup>104</sup> Unsigned Review. , "The Law and the Lady", Saturday XXXIX (13 March 1875), pp. 357-8. Quoted in N. Page, p.203.

<sup>105</sup> Swinburne, p.301.

<sup>106</sup> R. W. Dennis, Wilkie Collins and the Conventions of the Thesis Novel (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Alabama, 1973), p.379.

<sup>107</sup> S. M. Ellis, Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others (London : Constable, 1931), p.48.

<sup>108</sup> A.G. Swinburne, p.305.

<sup>109</sup> G. K. Chesterton, The Victorian Age in Literature (New York : Holt, 1913), p130.

<sup>110</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Mr Wilkie Collins' Novels' Contemporary Review 57, (January 1890), p.20.

<sup>111</sup> Walter de la Mare, 'The Early Novels of Wilkie Collins'. In ed. J. Drinkwater The 1860's (Cambridge University Press, 1932), p.92.

<sup>112</sup> Elena Keshokova, 'The Father of the English Detective Novel'. Soviet Literature 12 (1980), p.149.

Collins was an ambitious man who cared deeply about what both 'Readers in General' and 'Readers in Particular' thought of his work. This is revealed by his often defensive, explanatory Prefaces. Indeed he saw the whole of his writing career as a bitter, isolated struggle for a new concept of realism, one based upon artistic licence of expression, the shedding of prejudices and the unmasking of 'claptrap morality'. The four cardinal principles of his literary credo are elaborated upon in 'The Letter of Dedication' to Basil. He insisted upon verisimilitude, upon a new mimesis which embraced all sides of life. But he also hoped to transcend 'everyday realities' and focus upon 'those extraordinary accidents and events which happen to few men'. Collins advocated the right to dwell upon 'scenes of crime and poverty' and defended himself as a serious artist expending 'the devotion of every moral and intellectual faculty' on each work. Collins criticised Dickens for ignoring the 'stuff concealed from Papa, stuff which raised the famous Blush, stuff registered on the Expurgatory index of the national cant'.<sup>113</sup> It was upon this very 'stuff' which Collins built his narratives.

Through Armada's Dr. Downward, Collins parodied the contemporary concept of 'good fiction', that a novel should provide a refuge from the 'painful in real life' and 'occasionally make us laugh and invariably make us comfortable'.<sup>114</sup> This is precisely what Collins refused to do, and precisely why he perturbed, outraged or alienated so many critics. Collins lived in an era which assumed the existence of a reality and a universal morality which pre-existed their creation in a literary text. In 'an age at once destitute of faith and terrified of scepticism'<sup>115</sup> such a belief reassured the reader who could become a literary detective for the meaning, the Jamesian 'figure in the carpet' or 'primal plan'. Collins subverted these expectations. In his fiction there is no 'primal plan',<sup>116</sup> no omniscient narrator and no one character who 'knows' - all is doubt, subjectivity and change. Long

<sup>113</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'Reminiscences of a Story-Teller'. The Universal Review 1 (May-August 1888), p.191.

<sup>114</sup> Wilkie Collins, Armada (London : Chatto & Windus, 1877), p.529.

<sup>115</sup> Thomas Carlyle in 'Sir Walter Scott'. Quoted in Eric Trudgill, Madonnas and Magdalens : The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes (London : Heinemann, 1976), p.24.

before Barthes and Saussure, Collins recognised that language is a material construct and reality is largely a linguistic creation. He perceived that the contemporary vision of 'realism' was necessarily 'loaded down with the most spectacular signs of fabrication'.<sup>117</sup> Phillip O'Neill claims that it is 'Wilkie Collins' contribution to nineteenth century literature that he demonstrates the process by which meaning is constructed in language.<sup>118</sup> Collins did indeed not only explore a vast range of perspectives and value-bases but he also dramatised how the written word can be rewritten, destroyed or a 'truth in itself but a lie in the conclusion to which it led'.<sup>119</sup> Mary Dermody, in The Two Destinies, can write language which self-destructs, Eustace Macallan, in The Law and the Lady, can marry under a fictitious name and in The Woman in White Laura Fairlie's 'death' can be inscribed on a tombstone, Glyde's parents' non-marriage can be entered posthumously on a register and all records can be consumed in a fire.

In 'A Petition to the Novel-Writers' Collins revealed his fear of 'dull people'<sup>120</sup> who possessed no 'Fancy or Imagination' and thus create false divisions in literature and society. Collins ironically identified with 'Disreputable Society'<sup>121</sup> and aimed to challenge 'cant' and 'bluster'. Collins became his own 'desperate man', the 'bold innovator' who subverted expectations and educated 'dull people'. Collins was an avid admirer of French writers and must have been delighted when Emile Forques claimed that Collins' 'opinions are truly liberal, hostile to the hypocrisy, arrogant prejudices and venal propensities which are the characteristic English vices of the day' and hoped that Collins would free Victorian Britain from 'provincialism and prudery'.<sup>122</sup> This is exactly what Collins himself attempted to do and, with the growing confidence and financial security which marked his popularity, strived to do more and more. What T. W. Hill perceived as a 'preoccupation with the morbid and

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<sup>116</sup> Henry James, 'The Figure in the Carpet'. In Selected Tales (The Richards Press, 1947), p.192.

<sup>117</sup> Roland Barthes, Writing Degree Zero (Hill & Wang, 1968), p.68.

<sup>118</sup> Phillip O'Neill, 'Illusion and Reality in Armadale' Essays in Poetics : The Journal of the British Neo-Formalist Circle 7 (April 1982, No.1), p.50.

<sup>119</sup> Wilkie Collins, Armadale, p.529.

<sup>120</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'A Petition to the Novel-Writers'. My Miscellanies, p.108.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Emile Forques. Quoted in Catherine Peters, pp.156-7.



horrible'<sup>123</sup> in the later fiction was Collins' refusal to 'make us comfortable' and Keshokova's 'realism'. In pre-Foucauldian days Collins realised that 'reality' is created and sustained by discourse, that 'truth' is generated by, and for, those in positions of power and that privilege, money and knowledge can 'buy' power and create further 'truths'. Like Count Fosco Collins could exclaim:

'It is truly wonderful . . . how easily Society can console itself for the worst of its shortcomings with a little bit of claptrap. The machinery it has set up for the detection of crime is miserably ineffective - and yet only invent a moral epigram, saying that it works well, and you blind everybody to its blunders, from that moment.'<sup>124</sup>

In Collins' fiction there is no unifying voice, there is only a struggle for possession of the narrative. In contrast to fantasy fiction Collins depicted, not other worlds but the 'worlds of others'.<sup>125</sup> Collins' novels represent a quest for value, meaning and order, often resulting from a crisis, but the pursuit cannot be rewarded. Any ostensible 'happy' ending is belied by the text which preceded it. The 'blank white chaos of paper',<sup>126</sup> lying on Fosco's desk, symbolises the 'impenetrable mystery' at the heart of Collins' work. It reflects, as Mark Hennelly portrays, a 'blank universe, pregnant with meaning, which each individual must construct, or reconstruct, for himself'.<sup>127</sup>

Issues of transgression, marginalised masculinities and 'disqualified' discourses become central when exploring the subjectivity of 'knowledge', the relativity of morality, the fluidity of identity and the process of disintegration. Collins' use of the epistolary structure indicates this, his multiple, diverse narrators undermine the unitary, monolithic concept of masculinity. Collins was unable to portray a Carlylean hero; his male characters are

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<sup>123</sup> T. W. Hill, 'The Late Wilkie Collins'. The Dickensian 48 (June 1952), p.115.

<sup>124</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White (London : Chatto & Windus, 1888), p.179.

<sup>125</sup> Tamar Heller, Dead Secrets : Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1992), p.165.

<sup>126</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White, p.467.

invariably weak, ineffectual, 'bad', 'mad' or physically impaired. Moreover, they are often 'saved', helped or supported by a strong, independent female character. And these women (the subjected subject of discourse) often direct the action and clearly articulate their own needs, frustrations and anger. Collins was long tired of the 'old fashioned Heroine' with the requisite 'blushing cheek' and believed that 'they have put our Hero on horseback often enough'.<sup>128</sup> And yet there is an inevitable irony in this subversion as it is Collins, a white, middle-class, heterosexual male narrator, who both created and contained the subjugated voices. There is a central problematic involved when men ally themselves with, or empathise with, women. There is a danger of them appropriating women's space and of speaking for the very gender whom they collude in oppressing whilst continuing to benefit from male power and privilege. As Bruce Woodcock illustrates in relation to John Fowles, male writers are 'the temporary consumers of the imaginary woman who offers them the salvation of the female' whilst behind the scenes 'lurks the voyeuristic male writer . . .'. It could be said of Collins, as with Fowles, that whilst showing his male characters as 'needing educating out of their maleness, the very design of the narrative reproduces the male fantasy of woman as repository of higher truth . . . the novels idealise women as the bearers of true values and at the same time allow him to exercise imaginative power over them'.<sup>129</sup> However, these very tensions and contradictions can expose fascinating insights into masculine needs, fears and desire of the 'Other' - and may reveal much about the inadequacies and paradoxes of hegemonic masculinity itself. As Middleton observes: 'Men have written plenty about themselves as men, little of it consciously'.<sup>130</sup>

Whilst Collins increasingly delineated the flaws in, and the imminent collapse of, the 'dominant fiction', he could envisage no alternative discourse. Successful women have no option but to emulate masculine behaviour and speak within phallogentric discourses.

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<sup>127</sup> Mark M. Hennelly, 'Reading Detection in *The Woman in White*'. *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 22 (Winter, 1980), p.454.

<sup>128</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'A Petition . . .', pp.112-114.

<sup>129</sup> Bruce Woodcock, *Male Mythologies : John Fowles and Masculinity* (Sussex : Harvester Press, 1984), pp.18-19.

Hence, Helena Gracedieu in The Legacy of Cain, rationalised her criminal activities and established a Cult of Pure Reason.<sup>131</sup> In the later fiction the patriarchal order is portrayed as rapidly disintegrating into chaos, inertia and ineffectual bluster and yet Collins was unable to create 'an emancipatory male discourse' or imagine a world beyond language. Significantly it is the children who succeed in breaking free from the labelling process and inhabit a strangely androcentric universe. Jicks, in Poor Miss Finch, and Zoe, in Heart and Science, are independent, care-free, resistant to societal pressures and defy all attempts to control and contain them. Collins' hopes for radical change clearly lay with future generations and, in particular, the M/Other. Similarly in The Law and the Lady, Valeria and Eustace, who are ultimately unable to release themselves from gender constructs and hegemonic expectations, place the letter containing the 'truth' in trust for their baby son. However, it is revealing that Macallan junior is never depicted whereas Zoe and Jicks are described with great energy, hope and affection. And it is Valeria's idea to leave the 'answer' for her child. The onus is very much on women to save, support and guide men into the 'new' world.

Despite all the problems inherent in analysing masculinity from within its experience, and of male writers creating women, Collins did have radical insights into, and challenges to offer, the 'transcendental pretence'. In many ways Collins was an outsider himself who could readily identify with marginalised masculinities. He was a petite, physically frail man with a bulging forehead. He was frequently ill and regularly crippled and blinded by severe gout. He was an artist who chose to write within female literary traditions<sup>132</sup> (sensation and domestic fiction). He habitually stated his disdain for accepted values, rituals and institutions and chose to live between his partner and his 'morganatic family'.<sup>133</sup> Indeed, as Benny Green declared, he was 'a man so clearly born out of his time that it is nothing short

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<sup>130</sup> Peter Middleton, The Inward Gaze : Masculinity and Subjectivity in Modern Culture (London : Routledge, 1992), p.2.

<sup>131</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Legacy of Cain, p.322.

<sup>132</sup> See Tamar Heller.

<sup>133</sup> See books listed under 'Biographies'.

of miraculous that he made himself so comfortable inside the horsehaired hothouse of Victorian society'.<sup>134</sup>

In many ways Poor Miss Finch (1872) can be seen as a synecdochic drama for all Collins' fiction. When Lucilla Finch is introduced to us she is wholly dependent upon the interpretation of others about events around her. She thus becomes a 'projection of the roles they assume as expressive of their own social experience'.<sup>135</sup> When Lucilla regains her sight she simultaneously loses her sustaining illusions, confidence and belief systems. When Lucilla is blind the world makes sense; when she absorbs the language of others she is sane. With the development of conventional sight she enters an absurd, meaningless chaos. Lucilla chooses to return to her own solipsistic universe wherein she can create her own vision and order. This does not seem to be a retreat or collapse into her former state for Lucilla can retain the knowledge and insight gained from her experience and she is financially and emotionally independent. But a self-imposed blindness is the only way she can 'escape the role that social participation has imposed upon her', it is a means of 'imposing value and meaning upon the outer world irrespective of the roles that the world in turn would demand'.<sup>136</sup> Lucilla's 'blankness' enables her to see and exist beyond discourse, definition and thus hegemonic containment.

Through his art Collins demanded Michael Kimmel's 're-vision'<sup>137</sup> - a re-vision of the way we read, behave, think and perceive social constructions. Like Kimmel, Collins recognised how culturally defined roles and structures were frustrating basic human needs, silencing many, misshaping lives and limiting individual growth and potential. He encouraged, if he could not achieve, Jonathan Dollimore's 'discoherence'<sup>138</sup> - an exploration

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<sup>134</sup> Benny Green, 'Victorian Rake and Rebel'. Spectator 7645 (4 January. 1975), p.16.

<sup>135</sup> William Marshall, Wilkie Collins (New York : Twayne, 1970), p.96.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Michael S. Kimmel, Changing Men : New Directions in Research on Men and Masculinity (Newbury Park : Sage Publications, 1987), p.298.

<sup>138</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence : Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1991), p.87.

of the incongruities, paradoxes and tensions which allow meanings to discohere and return to free circulation for reappropriation.

And Collins' creation of powerful female characters, as much as one should question this, may, in the absence of 'an emancipatory male discourse', be positive and even inevitable. L. Claridge and Elizabeth Langland propose that: 'A male writer may simply need the space of what he or his culture term feminine in which to express himself more fully . . .'.<sup>139</sup> They also pose vital questions which traditional feminist studies have hitherto neglected: 'What is it like to be a symbol of a power group, yet to find oneself self-alienated as the result of belonging to that which it is assumed one belongs to? . . . What do male writers who feel fettered by the patriarchal literary tradition do to escape a language implicitly, and often explicitly, defined as their own? . . . What "right" do men have to complain of a male-infected language?'<sup>140</sup> It is hopeful that a critical study of gender in relation to a male writer who openly expressed discomfort with, and alienation from, the 'dominant fiction', will begin recovering answers to these crucial issues.

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<sup>139</sup> L. Claridge and Elizabeth Langland, eds. Out of Bounds : Male Writers and Gender,(ed.) Criticism (Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), p.4.

<sup>140</sup> L. Claridge and Elizabeth Langland, pp.8-11.

## **CHAPTER TWO - DISCOURSES OF DESIRE : THE DESCENT INTO MADNESS**

'A man is not what he is, he is what he hides'<sup>1</sup>

Lacanian theories emphasise desire as the central dynamic in human relationships. When the subject enters the Symbolic Order he misrecognises himself as the source of meaning and control and thus attempts to achieve the coherence he believes he can embody. And through this misconstruction he embarks upon a life-long course of displacing desires. He desires to feel whole and fulfilled but desire, like language, effects only a perpetual deferral. The father, though possessing the phallus, the transcendental 'signifier', is perceived as the locus of control and unity; the goal to which all men aspire. The father is later transmuted into a whole societal structure - the Name-of-the-father or patriarchal 'law'. But the social system cannot fulfil this desire and thus desire, and the need to control, is displaced onto marginalised or excluded others. Priscilla Walton illustrates how the centred subjects of discourse are 'not whole or unified, but occupy a privileged position and work to maintain and justify that position through the control of others'.<sup>2</sup> This very exertion of power over marginalised others lends the illusion of control and coherence thus perpetuating and

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<sup>1</sup> Andre Malreaux, quoted by : Annette R. Federico, Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Case Western University, 1988), p.239.

<sup>2</sup> Priscilla L. Walton, Patriarchal Desire and Victorian Discourse : A Lacanian Reading of Anthony Trollope's Palliser Novels (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1995), p.8.

feeding the original desire. Lacan presented an intrinsically tragic ontology wherein man is driven by a primal need for completeness, to recover a lost unity. But it is a pursuit ever doomed for failure, failures which, in turn, renew and strengthen the primal desire for coherence. It is a pursuit which involves an infinite series of displaced desires and illusions of power, and one which becomes ever more firmly enmeshed in discourse.

Victorian masculinist ideology is largely based upon concepts of Cartesian humanism, a belief system that posits humans as coherent and rational beings. Smilesian self-help philosophy was grounded upon such premises; a man's self-will and sense of purpose will enable him to achieve whatever he desires. It is a belief system that exists in diametrical opposition to Lacanian thought. Victorian hegemonic masculinity can therefore be seen as a desire, an illusion to exorcise dread and uncertainty. Self-will was perceived as the force which contained the 'inchoate flood or fire that limns the innate energy of maleness' and warded off 'male hysteria and madness'.<sup>3</sup> Such exertions of 'manly' control may indeed temporarily banish or restrain 'unmanly' emotions, but they cannot expel them. Victorian men feared the unleashed passion of desire and the madness that could ensue from such loss of control. Hence, two key concerns and discourses of Victorian life were sexuality and insanity. And Collins explored these two issues repeatedly throughout his career. He desired to understand these forces, to make sense of them, and yet he was aware of the impossibility of his quest. He does, however, vividly demonstrate how displaced male desire not only silences and disenfranchises women but how it distorts and destroys men themselves. I will explore this theme of men collapsing under the burden of their own desires and ideals, by first exploring Basil in detail before moving on to the two versions of 'A Dream Woman'. The original 1858 version was re-written in 1874 - and the changes and differences evident in the later text expose Collins' increasing sense of dread and urgency, I will conclude by discussing 'The Captain and the Nymph' - a narrative published in 1887

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<sup>3</sup> Herbert Sussman, Victorian Masculinities : Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.13.

which heralds the imminent collapse of patriarchy and depicts male desire as destroying all in its wake.

Basil dramatically portrays desire as a delusion and control as an illusion. It exemplifies what may happen when self-will is lost or abandoned and man is plunged into the 'inchoate flood or fire' of 'madness'. Basil is an emasculated 'hero' who loses the struggle against regression. Basil desires the prelapsarian idyll whilst simultaneously articulating the need to 'know' and control. He cannot question or detach himself from the 'dominant fiction' and is destroyed by the inevitable tensions and contradictions his life necessarily embodies. He becomes a victim of the very rigidity, rationality and authority he is conditioned to uphold. The masculine primary text is underpinned by a feminine subtext. Despite Basil's denial and struggle for self discipline, he begins to lose control of his own life, sanity and narrative. The 'points of resistance' become more evident and subjugated voices speak louder and louder. The resulting chain of events and tragedies spring directly from the inadequacies and injustices of the 'male epistemological stance'. Basil is a novel which highlights the high emotional cost, for both sexes, of maintaining the 'transcendental pretence'.

Basil is an unusual Collinsian narrative. It is almost entirely a first-person account of one man's personal crisis, search for identity, breakdown and attempted re-valuation of himself and his world. It is a bildungsroman with a post-modern twist; it elides progress, can unveil no truth and can arrive at no conclusion. And, despite the allegorical nature of the later hunt scenes, Basil has a ring of personal authenticity, it conveys an impression of direct personal experience. In the Preface Collins acknowledged that the story is based upon 'a fact within my own knowledge'<sup>4</sup> and Walzogen, Collins' only contemporary biographer, mentioned a 'sadness'<sup>5</sup> in Collins' early life, an allusion which could possibly

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<sup>4</sup> Wilkie Collins, Basil (London : Sampson Low, 1862), p.iii, (Preface). This edition of the text will be used throughout the thesis.

<sup>5</sup> E. Von Walzogen, quoted by Catherine Peters, The King of Inventors : A Life of Wilkie Collins (London : Minerva, 1992), p.116.



relate to the intriguing question posed by Collins to Kate Dickens.<sup>6</sup> It may be that Basil is Collins' David Copperfield - a personal exorcism of dread, need and confusion. If so he did not fully succeed. Although Basil's format remains uniquely intense and personal the emotions which prompt Basil's psychic collapse permeate throughout the rest of Collins' literary canon and destroy many of Basil's successors.

Narrative can be seen as a means of attaining order, coherence and control. Thus the act of writing can be viewed as a phallic activity, an appropriation of his-story. Basil relates a failed attempt to escape history, to release oneself from the familial and cultural dynamics that shape identity. Collins perceived the family, as Jenny Bourne Taylor notes, as a 'collection of imaginary constructs and projections - a genealogical story, the asylum in which subjectivity is fundamentally shaped'.<sup>7</sup> Basil's tragedy is his inability to construct himself outside of the expectations and projections of his family. Lacan stressed that 'identity is conferred by another upon the individual, it is not worn as a priori existent. It come to the individual from outside and fills a lack, a gap, a void in being'.<sup>8</sup> Basil resists the identity imposed by his father but he remains inextricably enmeshed in hegemonic utterances. He can challenge but he cannot subvert or relinquish his privileges. Basil's history dramatises the consequences of failing to attain manhood, Basil lives beyond the text as a 'gap, a void in being'.

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted in Lawrence Ince, 'Wilkie Collins : The Intimacies of the Novels'. Wilkie Collins Society Journal 6, (1986), pp.5-13. In 1868 Caroline Graves left Collins to marry Joseph Clow. After attending to the wedding Collins apparently asked Kate Dickens : 'I suppose you could not marry a man who had . . .'. Kate allegedly halted the rest of the sentence with : 'No, I couldn't'. , (Quoted in Gladys Storey, Dickens and Daughter (London : Muller, 1939), p.214. Ince believes that this question relates to the fact that Collins already had a mistress, Martha Rudd, (p.9) and that Martha is the 'sadness' referred to by Walzogen. Caroline Graves lived with Collins for nine years prior to her marriage and returned to live with him two years later. It would seem that Collins met Martha Rudd during the two year's separation and certainly the three children were born after 1868. Much of Collins' personal life remains shrouded in mystery and the precise year of meeting Martha cannot be verified. See Francis Russell Hart, 'Wilkie Collins and the Problem of Biographical Evidence', The Victorian Newsletter 12 (Autumn 1957), pp.18-21. However, no other biographical evidence, to date, supports Ince's supposition. It is perhaps, possible that Collins referred to an incident relating to Joseph Clow and not to himself?

<sup>7</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, In the Secret Theatre of Home : Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative and Nineteenth Century Psychology (London : Routledge, 1988), p.240.

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Mallard James, in Priscilla Walton, p.43.

Basil's mother died in his infancy leaving him literally with only an ideal image - a portrait - and a keen sense of loss for which he perpetually strives to compensate. Basil's journal narrates a quest to re-create the prelingual idyll, the lost oneness, with other women. Basil's sudden, all-consuming passion for Margaret Sherwin is never adequately explained by the text or even understood by Basil himself. He is overwhelmed by a desire and a need which overthrows rationality, objectivity and 'manly' restraint. However, there is a clear distinction between need and desire. Juliet Mitchell observes how the baby needs food and the mother responds. The child thus 'learns the nature of demands and so comes to desire to satisfy her desires. Desire is therefore always a question of a significant relationship, desire is always the desire of the other'.<sup>9</sup> Priscilla Walton perceives woman as the 'ultimate site' of desire displacement in patriarchal discourse. In attempting to centre the self the 'subject displaces its desires onto a control of the other, the site which allows the subject to delineate itself through a series of distinguishing "differences"'. The woman thus emerges as the 'ultimate other which allows the system to function'.<sup>10</sup> But the phallogentric power dynamic cannot encompass woman as both subject and object and it is here that tension and conflict occurs. The men in Basil can objectify and silence the women - but only for a very limited period.

Margaret initially exists as an object of discourse, a construct upon whom Basil projects his needs and ideals. His first observation of her is almost a parody of contemporary discourse. She is 'girlish, unformed, unsettled' but exuding the 'moral' potential which 'love alone can develop, and which maternity perfects still further, when developed.' (p.30). She is innocent, as yet unknissed, but her eyes have a 'voluptuous languor' above her 'full lips' (p.30) - lips which suggest other lips and childbirth to Basil. Thus Margaret is at once transformed into his social inferior, a naive virgin and potentially loving, sexual partner and devoted mother. Furthermore, Basil can proclaim that Margaret possesses all his ideals in their 'natural place and natural size.' (p.31). He expresses a

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<sup>9</sup> Juliet Mitchell, quoted in Jane Gallop, Feminism and Psychoanalysis : The Daughter's Seduction (London : MacMillans, 1982), p.6.

patriarchal assumption, a need for order and consistency which later leads to Mrs.

Wraggle's inability, in No Name, to make an omelette as she does not possess a 'natural' thumb-size to follow the recipe.

Basil's symbolic dream underlines his dichotomous perception of women and the binarism which influenced Victorian masculinist ideology as a whole. Clara, from the 'fair hills' is 'white, and pure . . . ' (p.45) whilst Margaret emerges from the 'dark wood' with the 'eyes of a serpent' but 'lustrous . . . languid' with 'hot breath.' (pp.45-6) Basil is seduced by the 'secret recesses' and 'unfathomable depths' (p.46) of sexual desire in both the dream and real life. He rejects his era's ideal for the forbidden 'other'. But, as N. and R. Schroeder demonstrate, this dream does not offer a simple parallel to later events and it is not merely an unsophisticated, unconnected literary device. As Basil and Margaret marry, their love is not illicit, but a sexual union with Clara is forbidden. The moral certainties seemingly embedded in the allegory do not apply and it would seem to present an 'ironic parody rather than a meaningful prophecy'.<sup>11</sup> The women represent his own dread and confusion; a fear of the potency of the M/Other. The dream continues to disturb Basil who is unable to look beyond his own needs to the wider social and political issues within which his behaviour is rooted. To Basil 'the dream seems to provide wrong answers. Actually it provides no answers . . . the dream ironically illuminates the inadequacies of the social and moral conventions to which he commits himself'.<sup>12</sup> Women are not dark or fair, white or lustrous and there is no simplistic answer or ethical paradigm for Basil to discover. But Basil is unable to appreciate the only 'truth' that the dream does impart. Towards the close of his journal Basil refuses to allow Ralph to mention his unlawful 'wife' and Clara in the same sentence (p. 259). To Basil the woman from the 'fair hills' cannot be reconciled with, or even know of the existence of, the temptress from the 'dark woods'. To Basil a 'good'

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<sup>10</sup> P. Walton, pp.7-9.

<sup>11</sup> N. Schroeder and R. Schroeder 'Basil's Dream : The Failure of the Moral Paradigm in Wilkie Collins Basil'. Massachusetts Studies in English II (parts 1-2), pp.63-71.

<sup>12</sup> Schroeder and Schroeder, p.69.

woman cannot be a sexual woman and thus his vision of a 'wife' remains as lost and elusive as the ever-fading memories of his mother.

Basil's portrayal of Clara is almost a parody of the 'angel in the house' concept. He believes that all men yearn for the comfort of a 'fresh, innocent, gentle, sincere' woman who is isolated from the 'hardening influences of the world' and 'shut up from society' (p. 20). Accordingly Clara is a 'perfect Apostle-errant of the order of Reconciliation', a living reflection of their mother whose 'untiring good-nature' is devoted to 'the task of making every one happy' (p. 22). When in exile Basil idolises her as his 'guardian spirit' whose 'invisible hand of mercy' (p. 24) comforts him. Clara exists solely as yet another construct of Basil's, the incarnation of his needs and beliefs. She does not speak, she chooses to live outside of discourse. Her utter silence enables Basil's assumptions to remain unchallenged. But neither does Clara concur with phallogentric culture. Significantly she does not enter a heterosexual relationship and resists incarceration within patriarchal institutions. She chooses to live independently upon an estate inherited from a matriarchal lineage.

Basil's attempts to recreate the prelapsarian paradise spring from an erroneous assumption which results in him objectifying and disenfranchising women. Basil can 'gaze' but he does not see, he can possess but his 'knowledge' and 'power' prove to be mirages. Basil appears to be experiencing the mirror-stage of separation. Indeed the narrative structure resembles a 'womb', a once safe, known haven, out of which Basil is thrust into a new, terrifying world in which nothing can be fixed or taken for granted. Gilbert Rose perceives the relationship between the author and novel as mirroring the bond between mother and child. He claims that writing is a pursuit of the chora, the 'unconscious reminiscences of lost unity before the birth of the self and otherness'.<sup>13</sup> However, there is an inherent dilemma in a text's quest to restore a lost world of wholeness within a patriarchal

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<sup>13</sup> Gilbert Rose, 'The French Lieutenant's Woman : The Unconscious Significance of a Novel to its Author'. *American Imago* 29 (1972), p.174.

literary tradition, a form that is externally imposed. It can, perhaps, lead to the pervasive sense of alienation and of other possible selves which haunt Basil. Rose states that the 'artistic impulse is located in the space between the individual and the world (child and mother) at the point of . . . separateness' and thus resides in the hinterland between the familiar and the strange.<sup>14</sup> This is precisely what Basil encounters when he moves from the luxury of the family home to the 'wretched . . . wasteland', the 'desolateness' of Hollyoake Square (p. 32) and the surreal chase scenes with Mannion, his shadowy 'other'.

Basil cannot find compensation or coherence in the Symbolic Order. His father is successful, wealthy and respected but emotionally illiterate. He is a rational, aloof figure who guides and provides but who perceives family pedigree as the ultimate accolade and who defines his children as 'household property' (p. 8). He is an accomplished Victorian man but one of Emmanuel Reynauld's rapists who control, possess and judge others. He is the centred subject of Basil's world; despised but invincible, the locus of meaning and control to which Basil aspires. Basil may denigrate his father's pride and sense of honour but he is willing to use his privileges, his title and riches, to obtain his desires. He may construct himself as a daddy who protects women but he, like his father, judges and imposes his idea of what a woman should be. He 'rapes' Margaret, Mrs. Sherwin, Clara and his mother of their identities and, when thwarted in his desire, resorts to an all-consuming destructive and self-destructive rage.

All the significant characters in Basil adhere to different value-systems and discourses and all construct these subjectivities as objective facts. Basil's father worships hereditary nobility and places implicit trust in his son to honour this faith. Basil's marriage is thus an 'unutterable disgrace' (p. 202) a 'stain for life' (p. 190) whereas Ralph's extramarital affairs are 'convenient, reclaimable vices' (p. 190). Ralph pursues a carpe diem philosophy whilst Clara chooses to live life vicariously through male relatives. Mr. Sherwin is a Smilesian success but a tyrant 'in the secret theatre of home' (p.76). To Mannion life is a power

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

game, other men are potential rivals and all are dispensable pawns in the competition. In this narrative there are no absolutes, no certainties; there are only cross discourses, clashes of perspective, misunderstandings and silences. What is of primary significance is what Mrs. Sherwin and Margaret say too late and what Clara never says. In Basil Mannion and his father exist as marginalised subjects and the women are excluded from discourse. Mrs. Sherwin is construed as an 'insignificant obstacle' (p. 64) when silent and 'a little cracked' (p. 154) when she finally speaks. Similarly Margaret's dying utterances are transformed into 'wild words', the 'wanderings' of fever (p. 292 and p. 289).

The novel's central tragedy is the failure of communication. Victor Seidler observed how men 'talk in order to escape making an emotional contract with the reality of their experience'.<sup>15</sup> And Foucault noted how transforming desire into discourse achieves the 'effects of mastery and detachment' thus yielding 'multiple effects of displacement, intensification, re-orientation and modification of desire itself'.<sup>16</sup> Men may talk within chosen discourses but be silent upon certain issues and thus withhold 'knowledge' from the marginalised or ex-centric subjects of discourse. Basil may write and speak incessantly but he rarely actually communicates. He speaks at, not to, Clara and Margaret and hears, sees and believes exactly what he needs to have confirmed. The very structure of the novel reveals 'truth' and 'knowledge' to be fragile, artificial creations. The 'omniscient' author is, as Jenny Bourne Taylor comments, 'an unreliable narrator' who produces a discourse of the self from a 'nameless and placeless location'.<sup>17</sup> Basil writes anonymously from exile, in fear for his life and on the verge of psychic collapse. Neither Basil or his interpretations can be trusted and there is nothing outside of these articulations to trust.

In Basil language ultimately fails all the characters; there are no discourses to convey the experiences they endure. Thus, at key moments Basil loses the power of speech and

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<sup>15</sup> Victor Seidler, Unreasonable men : Masculinity and Social Theory (London : Routledge, 1994), p.3.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality. Volume One : An Introduction (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1978), p.23.

<sup>17</sup> Taylor, p.72.

his pen falters. He loses control of words and meanings and his narrative has to be resumed by strangers. Basil is predominantly a quest for literary and sexual potency<sup>18</sup> - and the 'hero' is thwarted in both pursuits. His desire for Margaret is never consummated and he loses the ability to write. Phallic activity eludes him and his vision of a literary masterpiece remains an empty mockery, like his marriage, of futile aims and passions. The wedding scene underlines the irrelevance of traditional discourse to Basil's emotions, just as the ceremony itself reflects the institutions irrelevance to Basil's desires. The words become ambiguous and meaningless to Basil who 'stammered and made mistakes in uttering the responses' (p. 96).

Mannion epitomises the inadequacies of language. Basil is perplexed by the disjunction between Mannion's facial expression and what he actually speaks. Indeed, Basil becomes obsessed with detecting the hidden meaning or 'truth' in Mannion's utterances. And his expression of this frustration could be a synecdochic description of the perplexity facing many Collinsian characters and, indeed, masculinist ideology itself : 'I felt towards him much as a man feels in a labyrinth, when every fresh failure in gaining the centre, only produces fresh obstinacy in renewing the effort to arrive at it' (p. 118). Words and rationality fail Basil as completely as the moral certainties, he saw embedded in his dream, mislead him.

Basil is, in Lacanian terms, 'primally repressed';<sup>19</sup> he is self-alienated and projects desires and other possible selves onto significant others. Basil's his-story is a perpetual struggle against regression and a desire to escape from his past. It is an endeavour which encloses him ever more firmly in discourse, as his attempt to recreate the Oedipal bond with Margaret demonstrates. It is ironically appropriate that he chooses literature as the vehicle through which to attain 'mingling closeness', a prelapsarian paradise where they can be 'angels . . . pure from the pollution of the fatal tree' (p. 103). He envisages a paradise

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<sup>18</sup> Tamar Heller, Dead Secrets : Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1992), Heller pursues this argument in depth pp.70-81.

wherein he is teacher, moral guide, provider and locus of wisdom and control. Basil imagines freedom wholly in terms of repression and his paradise is inseparable from its representation. And it is entirely an illusion and delusion. As Basil luxuriates in the 'poetry of love' (p.104) Margaret stifles her boredom and dreams of the dresses she can buy as Basil's wife. His 'transcendental signifier' proves to be a 'fallacy' revealing how, as Arthur Brittan elucidates, the phallus 'cannot carry the load of cultural prescription, it cannot conquer the world under the aegis of natural desire because, in the final analysis, desire itself is a construction'.<sup>20</sup>

Basil constructs himself as a 'Daddy' who wishes to rescue and protect Margaret. Mannion is a self-avowed 'Rapist' who desires her for a 'slave destiny' (p. 239). To Mannion she is a prize, compensation for the injustices and frustrations of his life and a means of exerting power : 'Her strong passions? - I could control them. Her obstinacy? - I could break it' (p. 240). And yet Basil can offer Margaret no more attractive a fate. Margaret is constructed by both men for possession and consumption. Basil resents her socialising with family and friends. He wants to keep her 'out of the society of her own class' until he can install her in 'the society of my own class' (p. 137). He urges her not to be 'betrayed' by 'passion' (p. 134) and intends to expostulate with her over her impropriety (p. 135). Margaret is defined, judged and contained by patriarchal desires and her relationships illustrate how, as Emmanuel Reynauld remarked, marriage 'represents a balance between daddy and a rapist; legitimate private appropriation which enables him to take a woman for his varied daily needs'.<sup>21</sup> Margaret is entrapped within a masculine ideology which decrees that 'women are passive so men can be active, unstable so men could direct and pure so men could ensure the purity of their lineage and lawful inheritance of their wealth'.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Discussed in J. Gallop, p.7.

<sup>20</sup> Arthur Brittan, Masculinity and Power (Oxford : Blackwell, 1989), p.57.

<sup>21</sup> Reynauld, Emmanuel, Holy Virility : The Social Construction of Masculinity (London : Pluto Press, 1983), p.86.

<sup>22</sup> Abeer Zahra, The Construction of Womanhood in Victorian Sensation Fiction 1860-1870 (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leeds, 1990), p.134.



Margaret's 'sin' is her rejection of this discourse whilst Clara's 'virtue' is her silent acceptance of it.

As the novel progresses Basil begins to lose control of his story and there is a struggle to take control of the narrative. He may silence and dismiss marginalised voices but he cannot banish them. Subjugated voices, the 'points of resistance' begin to resonate louder and louder telling of a 'reality' that lies beyond Basil's world. On her death-bed, with no further use for constraint or propriety, Margaret is finally liberated. And her utterances reveal her to possess a depth and insight hitherto unsuspected. She laments having had few choices or opportunities open to her and to not having access to the knowledge and power with which to resist patriarchal manipulations and control. She expresses hatred of her father for his greed, hypocrisy and violence when thwarted. She condemns Basil's weakness in not resisting their fathers and consummating their marriage and his arrogance in not seeing her as an individual, a subject of discourse. She prefers Mannion's brutal but honest aggression : ' . . . he's not ashamed of me because my father's a tradesman; he won't make believe that he's in love with me then marry me to spite the pride of his family' (p. 292). Margaret refuses to be further labelled or judged by masculine desires. She is not remorseful and insists that her 'fall' is human, common and secretly recognised and practised by many : ' . . . virtue wears it a home, in secret, and vice wears it abroad, in public' (p. 295).

Margaret is punished for her passion and transgression. She is consumed by a 'smouldering fever', dying in torment with 'parched lips' and 'clutching ..... at the empty air' (p. 291). Appropriately it is a fever caught by approaching the 'wrong' man in hospital (p. 279 and p. 285) and she succumbs to its virulence through some innate 'weakness' (p. 286). An atmosphere of 'good' and 'bad' air similarly confirms patriarchal expectations and moral platitudes. Margaret is a 'pollution' and 'a pestilence' (p. 287) from which Basil must escape into the 'pure air' (p. 284). It is an imagery which, like the dream, does not account

for the complexity of the situation. It is a symbolism which solely reflects masculine needs, rigidity and dualistic perceptions.

Margaret has forfeited the 'right' to male protection and dies abandoned in an anonymous dwelling house. And yet she remains the object of discourse, exposed to the male gaze and paternal surveillance. She remains property and prize in the male rivalry. Basil visits her at will and Mannion secretly observes her from a closet in her bedroom. Margaret is not destroyed by the fever so much as the tensions, contradictions and untenable demands inherent in her construction; she is not permitted to exist outside of discourse and phallocentric desire.

Likewise, Margaret's mother comes 'alive' close to her death. Mrs. Sherwin's life had been one of 'incessant fear and restraint' (p. 75), she had been 'crushed down past rousing' (p. 75). Mr. Sherwin's patriarchal domination had succeeded in annihilating her character. Throughout Basil and Margaret's meetings Mrs. Sherwin sits silently, a warning spectre of woman's fate in marriage. But behind her mask of despair and stillness, Mrs. Sherwin possesses greater powers of perception and intelligence than any of the male characters. And she knows that her collusion with the 'transcendental pretence' is partly responsible for Margaret's and her own oppression. She is aware that with insight and courage women can dismantle the 'dominant fiction' and thus she regrets having 'lived always in fear of others and in doubt of myself', of being 'miserably, guiltily weak, all my life' (p. 217). Mrs. Sherwin's tragedy suggests that change and empowerment are possibilities for women, possibilities that are seized and acted upon by her successors.

But it is not only women who damage themselves and others through being 'guiltily weak'. Thomas Van Essen traces how the 'elaborate machinery of the plot grows out of the low valuations of women's lives held by Basil's father and brother' and that Collins is 'misogynistic' in associating 'female sexuality with the undoing of the hero'. He claims that

the men's 'indiscretions' are 'tragedies to the women'<sup>23</sup> which Collins glosses over. But Collins clearly depicted the plights of Mrs Sherwin and her daughter as tragedies and Basil is 'undone' by his own construction of sexuality rather than by Margaret herself. Events do spring from men's egocentricity, needs and desires but Collins dramatises how they, in turn, are destroyed by their own inflexible codes. It is, indeed, the 'Name-of-the-Father' that is 'guiltily responsible' for the tragedies, tragedies which affect both genders. Mannion's father stoops to fraud and theft to mask his inadequacies whilst Basil's father allows a man to die in the name of 'honour'. It is this death which instigates the revenge plot, the death of one son and the near-death of another. Basil's primal repression appears to result largely from his father's coldness and aloofness. He desires this authority but he cannot usurp the paternal position; he cannot become the centred subject of discourse and thus possess 'real' control. Priscilla Walton notes how 'while the centre suggest to the ex-centric that inclusion is possible, it also reveals inclusion to be a 'Phallacy'<sup>24</sup> as the centre requires the margins in order to be defined as the centre. But the ex-centric subject can emulate the centre by controlling within a heterosexual relationship. Hence, control can be seen as a mode of displaced desire. In this dynamic women become the 'final reward for the margins and the system's ultimate solution for those who cannot be part of the centre and yet desire mastery'.<sup>25</sup> The power of the centred subject becomes manifest when Basil openly rebels against his father's value - system. His name and details are ripped out of the ancient Family Book and he is exiled. He exists as a 'large blank space' (pp. 203-3) in history. His father can, with one swift action, deprive him of name, wealth and identity. It is a process re-enacted in the history of Basil's alter ego - Mannion - who is also rendered poor, nameless and homeless by the actions of his father. The 'explicit language of impotence and emasculation',<sup>26</sup> observed by Thomas Van Essen, relates precisely to this, to the damage inflicted upon men by hegemonic discourse.

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Van Essen, Figuring the Father : The Paternal Thematics of Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, New Brunswick : Rutgers University, 1987), p.162 and p.179.

<sup>24</sup> P. Walton, p.8.

<sup>25</sup> P. Walton, p.9.

Basil explores a range of masculinities and finds them all to be severely flawed.

Basil's father is harsh and emotionally illiterate whilst Mannion's father is unable to guide or provide for his son. Ralph rejects the paternal code but elides any responsibility and has left a string of misery and heartbreak in his wake. Mr. Sherwin is a 'tyrant' in his home and a 'parasite' outside of it (p.62). As Basil's father perceives his children as 'household property' (p.8) so does Mr. Sherwin sell his daughter for a 'profitable bargain' (p.83). Margaret feels rejected and confused by Basil's self-imposed chastity: 'a nice husband he has been to me - a husband who waits a year!' (p.294), whilst her father despises Basil's cowardice is not confronting his father. Mannion sees life as a battle and perpetually craves power to compensate for his perceived loss and injuries. Indeed it is this very loss which motivates Mannion's lust for revenge. His emotions and plotting appear, upon first view, to be out of context or not fully explained by the narrative. But Mannion's vengeance is symbolic; it is a social, political and economic anger at a structure which has disenfranchised, humiliated and impoverished him. His fury is directed at the hypocrisies, illusions and false promises of a phallocentric culture rather than at Basil's individual crime. Mannion's wrath cannot be abated because it is primal and universal; he seeks revenge on Basil's father, his own father and all fathers for his stunted, marginalised and oppressed existence.

The exploration of the nature of masculinity, and the problem of desire, is chiefly located in the struggle between Basil and Mannion. They are doppelgangers who represent the shadowy 'other self' of each other. Mannion is a parody of the Victorian masculine ideal; he is strong, decisive and firmly suppresses all emotions so that his face is 'wholly inexpressive', an 'utter void' (pp. 110-111). He successfully pursues self-help philosophy if not from rags to riches to at least middle-class comfort. Mannion, whose very name suggest 'manly' and 'manage', can control phallic activity and temporarily takes authority of the text. But behind his blank, respectable exterior writhes a mass of repressed hatred, lust and obsession. Basil catches a glimpse of this during the storm when he hears the 'fearful

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<sup>26</sup> T. Van Essen, p.77.

crashing and roaring' above the 'dead-calm' (p. 122). Mannion's very repression intensifies his emotions which, when given release, threaten to destroy all around him. He embodies the passions and desires which Basil partly experiences but manages, chiefly, to contain within the boundaries of propriety. But when confronted with Mannion's duplicity Basil also explodes into primal fury. When he erases Mannion's face he wishes to destroy all that Mannion stands for and all the patriarchal cultural expectations which have shaped his destiny. Indeed Mannion does not exist as a whole person; he symbolises all that the Victorians were urged to control and all that they feared was man's true nature if not contained. He is psychically, and later literally, expressionless and identityless. He becomes a metaphor for hegemonic surveillance and the male gaze. He can hide in closets then evolve into an anonymous, invisible 'enemy' who follows, watches, informs and can ensure one's permanent alienation. He is simultaneously all that the Victorians promulgated and all that they dreaded. He represents the 'unthought' and the spectre of guilt, shame and fear which haunted Victorian imagination. He is the albatross which Basil mistakenly shot, the eternal retribution for unbridled passion. Indeed, Basil's journal can be seen as his mariner's confession; a recital of personal pain, humiliation and defeat which knows no end or solution.

For Basil there is no middle-ground between masculinity and madness. With the assault upon his identity and belief system he disintegrates and experiences two psychic breakdowns. He is consumed, like Mannion, by the 'fire' and 'flood' within. He confronts a 'burning void', 'lurid lava pillars' and a 'black lake of dead waters' (pp. 173-4). When Basil finally regains control he is gripped by a severe depression, by a 'dull, heavy trance of mental pain' (p. 177). In fact Basil lucidly describes the symptoms experienced by many oppressed Victorian women including Mrs. Sherwin. It seems that 'manly' restraint cannot conquer depression and breakdowns and it is revealing that no-one suggests this is possible. Basil's family accept his condition and provide him with care and support on both

occasions. It is, perhaps, an implicit recognition of the price that men pay for hegemonic power.

The final pursuit on the cliffs symbolises the struggle between passion and control, madness and sanity. Basil now rejects the 'dark wood'; he shuns the 'black, yawning hole', the 'frightful abyss' in which all raged and 'boiled' (p. 321). Mannion, Basil's primal, disinhibited self is thrown into the abyss and thus exorcised, but not without great pain and difficulty. For many weeks Basil mourns the loss and relives the 'livid, bleeding hands' (p. 327) thrashing in the hole. He grieves the death of the person he could have been, the life he could have had. Basil emerges from his ordeal self-estranged, weary and incomplete. He is unable to finish, or make sense of, his own story and it is only ten years later that he is able to add a comment to his own narrative.

In the closing pages Basil is changed beyond recognition. He is a haunted man, unable to bear memories of his own history and unable to find meaning or fulfilment in the world. He has become a passionless, predictable person living in what Phillip O'Neill refers to as a 'sexless menage'<sup>27</sup> with Clara. Moreover, he lives with his sister on their mother's property. But there is no chora or paradise regained, only sadness and dullness as he watches the 'sunset' (p. 344) of his life approach. To Basil the Symbolic Order transpires to be a Shambolic Order; he sacrifices oneness, self-unity but he cannot attain masculine privileges. He could not challenge or 're-vision' and is thus destroyed by the very patriarchal ideology he was unable to denounce or deconstruct. He exists in the 'utter void' he once feared in others, he remains a 'large blank'space' (pp.203-3) in the family album. Basil cannot make sense of his experience or integrate this knowledge into his world-view. He can find no relation between sign and referent, no reflection in the mirror with which he can identify. And it is Basil's very inflexibility, his desire to control and join the 'Name of the Father' which renders him vulnerable. Under pressure Basil can only shatter into the

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<sup>27</sup> Phillip O'Neill, Phillip, Wilkie Collins : Women, Property and Propriety (London : MacMillan, 1988), p.189.

'inchoate flood or fire' within; he can find nothing but insanity beyond the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity.

And yet there are signs of hope and opportunities for change in Basil. Characters are liberated from the trammels of propriety and able to penetrate social constructs and constraints at times of death and extremity. Basil's dream, Mannion's outpourings and Margaret and her mother's final confessions are all attempts to expose 'wretched English clap-trap'<sup>28</sup> and 'discohere'. And Ralph and Clara survive contentedly and intact by embracing independence and selfhood. No-one lives happily within the patriarchal institution of marriage in the novel. Basil's mother dies young, Mrs. Sherwin wastes away in a 'one of those ghastly heart-tragedies', (p.75) Mannion's mother becomes the impoverished widow of an executed felon and Margaret is bought and discarded. Significantly Clara resists involvement in heterosexual relationships and Ralph rejects conventional expectations and institutions. He is insouciant to the voice of 'polite' society and he alone lives in harmony, freedom and mutual respect with 'Mrs. Ralph' (p.257) - a woman he cannot or will not marry. In Basil the only hope for intimate relationships lays outside of patriarchal institutions, with Mrs. Ralph and her predecessors with their 'Letters against the restraint of the Marriage Tie' (p.14).

Patriarchal fear of the M/Other, emasculation and the obsessions or delusions into which desire can lead, are also dramatically portrayed in 'The Dream Woman'. The original story was conceived in 1858 but Collins re-wrote and radically altered the narrative in 1874. The changes made reveal much about not only Collins' developing insights and concerns but the evolving fears and beliefs of the era. In both texts the title is suggestive; both men are unable to distinguish between the ideal, dreaded or fantasy woman. In both narratives the central female exists primarily as a male construct, a projection of masculine desire,

need and expectation. She is a 'fallen' women - fallen from the hegemonic idealisation of the feminine. And in both stories the men experience the dream on their birthday - at the precise hour of birth. The scene is set for a struggle between the mother and the other (future partner) and involves fresh separation and reassessment. Both men are unable to free themselves from the primal drama and their dread of the potential potency of the M/Other overwhelms their self-will and rationality. In other vital details the narratives dramatically differ and expose the extent to which the 'dominant fiction' was perceived by Collins as losing its hegemonic grip by the 1870s.

In 1858 we are introduced to Isaac Scatchard, the 'unlucky' ostler of limited intelligence who lived for nearly four decades of his life with his mother. His story is told by a male doctor to a male landlord. Isaac sleeps through the recital of his past. Indeed his only utterances throughout the text are in his sleep when he bows down to maternal correction of his own experience (p. 83).<sup>29</sup> Isaac is a passive participant in life who has been unable to consolidate an identity beyond the family construct.

The most perturbing aspect of Isaac's dream is its reversal of gender expectations; a violent woman threatens a man and seizes temporary control. Isaac is 'struck . . . dumb' (p.88) by the contrast between his beliefs and what he actually perceives. A 'delicate, lady's hand' with beautiful, pink nails and 'delicate little fingers' approaches him with a large clasp knife used by 'labouring men' (p.87). She does not speak and expresses no emotions; she maintains a masculine reserve and determination. This subversion also accounts for the landlord's reaction, a fury which otherwise remains inexplicable: 'A murdering woman with a knife in my house!' (p.89). His exclamation underpins the assumptions of middle-class Victorian England with its belief in fixed boundaries and a controllable, predictable universe. It is a protest which anticipates Gabriel Betteridge's cry in

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<sup>28</sup> Wilkie Collins, Pall Mall Gazette (20 January 1890), p.3.



The Moonstone : 'Here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian diamond'.<sup>30</sup>

In the dream the woman seizes control of phallic power, symbolised by the knife and it is precisely this threat of reverse discourse in action which terrifies and disorients Isaac and the landlord. Isaac admits : 'I'm not my own man again . . .' (p.89). The very threat of female potency has successfully emasculated him. Mrs. Scatchard is also very perturbed and develops a superstitious dread about the date and time of the dream's occurrence. It may be surmised that what she fears is not a literal murderess but the prospect of another woman competing for the love of her son. The details which she notes about her son's vision are vague enough to apply to many women and her obsession is set to lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy. But whilst Rebecca Murdoch remains a 'dream' to Isaac and his mother, she is very much an individual with her own tragic history which is 'told over and over again in police reports . . .' (p.92). Rebecca exists outside of discourse. She represents 'disqualified knowledge' and is never permitted to utter her story. She is excluded from 'respectable' society for 'unutterable' transgressions of its boundaries; she is a Margaret Sherwin who survives beyond the 'fall'. Rebecca is 'fallen' and 'evil'; she is judged, contained and dismissed by hegemonic discourse. And yet her silent dissent, her evident misery, threatens and undermines this discourse. She has a 'sad story' (p.92) which cannot be spoken, has contemplated suicide and finds solace in the 'deadly self-oblivion of drink' (p.97). She can 'recover' her lost 'character' (p.93) only through marriage, by succumbing to the paternal 'benevolence' which prompted her original downfall. Her husband neglects her to spend time with his mother, who in turn ostracises her on the grounds of superstitious dread. Rebecca thus resumes drinking to cope with the growing marital disputes and loneliness (p.92). Collins' hints of domestic misery and abuse culminate in an assault. Rebecca's response indicates that the use of such masculine force is far from uncommon: 'No man has ever struck me twice' (p.100). Rebecca exists as a subjugated voice in a

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<sup>29</sup> 'The Dream Woman'. The Queen of Hearts (London : Chatto & Windus, 1893). This edition will be used throughout the thesis.

male-controlled narrative; a story told by her husband to his male employer who repeats it to a male doctor. And yet the force of her resistance is clear. She may be expelled from the Scatchard's world but she cannot be forgotten. She suggests that if radical change is not imminent it will be forcibly seized by the marginalised. The 'nightmare' of this prospect henceforth dominates Isaac's existence and bewilders the men to whom the story is related.

Isaac's tragedy is his inability to separate from his mother and to develop his own discourse. He accepts the maternal script as the 'truth' and the resulting fear of emasculation culminates in him being too 'afraid' to share a bed with his wife (p. 99). He spends his nights with his mother or walking the streets in an ironic parody of what Rebecca may have had to do to survive. To Mrs. Scatchard Rebecca is 'bad' but to Rebecca her mother in law is 'mad'. Isaac is unable to either reconcile or deconstruct these definitions and thus challenges neither assumption. Isaac does, in fact, act as an obstacle to communication and colludes with the delusions and expectations of others. He chooses to lead two separate existences - one with his 'mad' mother and the other with his 'evil' wife. He is destroyed by the irreconcilable conflicts and demands of his own dualistic perception of women.

Like Basil, Isaac is unable to exist outside of the 'collection of imaginary constructs and projections'<sup>31</sup> which constitute the family; his identity can only remain intact within these boundaries. When these constructs are undermined Isaac can only disintegrate into 'madness'. He struggles to secure phallic power, he attempts to grab the knife, but is prevented by his mother and wife (p.98). It is ironically appropriate that throughout the story the knife is more real to Isaac than Rebecca herself. The knife is a 'visible tangible reality' (p.98) whereas his wife is a 'ghost' (p.89) or a 'dream' (p.98). It is significant that Rebecca is only perceived as a threat when in possession of the knife and that Isaac seizes control of it shortly after his mother's death. 'The Dream-Woman' is primarily a story of one man's

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<sup>30</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Moonstone (London : Chatto & Windus, 1890), p.31.

<sup>31</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.240.

attempt to overcome his dread of the M/Other and achieve and maintain 'manliness'. It is also a story of humiliation and defeat.

But in 1858 Isaac could live in terror, lose his grip on rationality and still retain phallic power. There is a startling difference between Isaac's reaction to the dream and to reality. When Rebecca does threaten him with the knife, Isaac can immediately spring into action and physically overpower her. He constrains her, orders her expulsion from the home and 'respectable' society and has the 'last word' (p.101). In real life Rebecca is no threat; Isaac can seize control and use male privilege and power. He knows the 'secret' hiding place of phallic power (p.101), he grabs the knife and thereafter maintains it securely in his possession. And yet, like Basil, Isaac is symbolically emasculated; he has lost the will and rationality which define 'manhood'. He is haunted by nightmares and remains an outsider leading an unstable, nomadic lifestyle and unable to utter, or make sense of, his own history. For Isaac the possession of masculine privilege cannot exorcise the dread of feminine potency, the fear of the potential power of the 'other' which is denied and repressed by hegemonic discourse. It is a dread echoed in Jonathan Harker's terror of the insatiable 'hunger' of Dracula's brides and the Lady of Shallot's ability to weave spells which no man can decipher. In 'The Dream Woman' the male doctor and landlord remain perplexed and uncertain in the face of feminine force; the dream-woman may return at any time for 'Who can tell?' (p.103).

In 1874 Isaac is metamorphosised into Francis Raven in the re-worked version of 'The Dream-Woman'.<sup>32</sup> Francis is a more independent, professional man but one with far less power and far less ability or opportunity to utilise male privilege. Francis is able to relate his own story but he ultimately loses complete control of both the narrative and phallic power. Rebecca Murdoch evolves into Alicia Warlock; a woman who insists on her right to act and be heard. Her surname suggests a growing battle between the sexes and a refusal to

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<sup>32</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Frozen Deep and Other Tales* (London : Chatto & Windus, 1892). All further references will relate to this edition.

accept or comply with the 'transcendental pretence'. The increasing empowerment of woman is also reflected in the Fairbank household; the couple are depicted as happy but Mrs. Fairbank is clearly the decisive, dominant partner. And marginalised masculinities are similarly more empowered. Lisa Mathews noted how in 1858 the ostler sleeps in stables and exists outside of 'respectable' society. But by 1874 Francis enters into, and dies within, the middle-class home. The story is narrated partly by Francis himself and partly by a 'gentleman traveller'. There is no doctor or medical discourse to suggest a possible pathological perspective. Mathews concludes that violence is now openly acknowledged and enmeshed within domestic norms<sup>33</sup> - the 'murdering woman' with 'the knife' has invaded the bourgeois haven.

In this story class divisions have widened and there is an all-pervasive sense of alienation. England appears to the narrator as a 'savage island' (p.144) and the town appears to be 'desolate' and 'decaying' (p.145). It may be that because this version was initially written for an American audience Collins felt more able to express his frustrations with class boundaries, economic depression and 'national cant'. Significantly the action is swiftly moved from England to the continent where Collins appears to achieve an imaginative licence to radically alter his original text.

The narrative opens with a discourse of insanity, a construct which is swiftly subverted. Francis' utterances are 'mad talk', he has a 'vacant glitter' (p.147) in his eyes and is treated by his employer as a 'wild beast in a cage' (p.150). But upon awaking it is immediately apparent that he is intelligent, articulate and sane. A tension is thus created between a professional, capable man who can lapse into 'wildness', terror and irrationality. As the story progresses Francis increasingly loses his will or ability for self-control. But this

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<sup>33</sup> Lisa G. Mathews, *Crime and Subversion in the Later Fiction of Wilkie Collins* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leeds, 1993), p.180. I refer to this unpublished, but highly interesting and informative, doctoral thesis regularly as Lisa Mathews is one of the few academics to analyse the later novels and short stories in depth.

is not posited as a personal inadequacy. It is largely external events which instigate Francis' degeneration into 'male hysteria', events prompted by phallogentric culture itself.

The dream revelation remains the same in all details but another character is introduced into the domestic sphere. Francis' cautious mother, who fears change and sexuality, now lives with Aunt Chance, a woman who perceives all opportunities as potential sources of fulfilment. But despite having an alternative perspective Francis remains unable to 'separate' or relinquish his dualistic perception of women. He remains torn between his 'good', asexual mother and the demanding but 'fallen' Alicia. He again allows an estrangement to develop between the two women in his life and colludes with the personal 'fiction' of each thus fostering and feeding misconceptions and assumptions. He desires Alicia but he keeps her as an object of discourse, a projection of his needs. Thus, Alicia is a 'ghost' or 'dream' (p.170), she is 'hardly mortal' (p.178) and has 'bewitched' him (p.187). Alicia is 'rescued' from a quarry, symbolising her fall, but is moved directly into Mrs. Raven's home. She declines lodgings and demands immediate acceptance by 'polite' society. The 'dying embers' (p.180) of the fire suggest the vulnerability and decline of the 'home as haven' myth.

Alicia refuses to be objectified; she is an articulate and politically aware woman. She directly challenges Francis and the male privileges he represents. She openly despises men and female subservience. She can wryly comment that 'kindness has a wonderful effect on women and dogs and other domestic animals' (p.178) and can inform the lecherous Rigobert that 'I kiss all beautiful animals . . . Haven't I kissed you' (p.220). Alicia can express her anger at patriarchal abuse both verbally and physically but she cannot correct this injustice or find personal fulfilment. Like Rebecca she can 'recover' her character only through marriage and when rejected she becomes impoverished, homeless and identityless again. Alicia is dependent upon the benevolence of the very gender which

is responsible for her plight. It is, perhaps, the implicit recognition of this situation which so haunts Isaac and Francis.

In this narrative Collins appears to suggest that if women and marginalised others were not given power they would seize it, if radical change was not forthcoming it would be violently imposed. Thus in 1874, the canvas upon which the drama unfolds has become global. Aunt Chance and Mrs. Raven are Scottish, Mrs. Fairbank is French, all move to France, many visit Germany and the entire story was written in America. Collins obviously viewed the issues raised as urgent world concerns. The 'abyss' of the quarry lurks behind all the early action; an emblem of the fate of society if change was not embraced.

Francis' marriage fails due to his neglect and failure to communicate. He continues to devote himself to his mother and abdicates responsibilities of domestic and business matters to Alicia. They have no initial union of love; Alicia marries Francis as she has no other option and Francis marries to improve his social status. All is construct to Francis, he desires upward class mobility and cannot see beyond, or question, Alicia's cultivated facade. Collins also indicates that a poor, working-class man is less powerful than a 'fallen' middle-class woman : 'Fallen or not, angel or devil, it came to this - she was a lady and I was a groom' (p.183).

The threat of female violence and impending change is strongly emphasised. Alicia's knife is a 'relic' of an actual murder, (p.192) secreted away and bargained for by subversive friends. Alicia is attracted to it for the very power and violence it symbolises; it represents the possibility of revenge and escape. Like Isaac, Francis is readily able to overpower Alicia, constrain her and seize control of her knife. But he cannot utter the last word. With calm determination Alicia states: 'I meant to kill you. . . . I shall do it yet. With that knife' (p.195). And Alicia has not, and will not, tolerate male abuse : 'No man has ever struck me yet' (p.194).

Francis is unable to maintain phallic power; the knife is forcibly taken from him under arrangements made by Alicia. And Alicia successfully manages to retain the knife throughout the remaining narrative. Alicia seizes power both emotionally, leaving Francis unable to sleep in peace, and economically by embezzling money. The woman whose arms seemed to Francis like the 'wings of angels', and her smile 'the sun in heaven' (p.183), has violently broken out of hegemonic discourse and demanded empowerment. Like Robert Audley, Francis discovers a 'desolate hearth'; his desires transpire to be an 'arch-mockery . . . a diabolical delusion'.<sup>34</sup>

Francis remains haunted by terror of a woman whom he easily 'pinioned in a chair' (p.195). He dreads, like Isaac, feminine potency but he dreads specific, undreamlike female violence : 'My wife has got the knife - my wife is looking for me' (p.199). He fears direct retribution for his neglect, complacency and physical abuse. And he has lost the knife, he has forfeited phallic control. Francis' belief in the power of the M/Other is such that he knows it could conquer the most elaborate of bourgeois security systems and defeat 'fifty Rigoberts' (p.209). And indeed it does.

Nevertheless Francis' fears were largely distorted; they were a construct of his shame, guilt and inability to change. Alicia was not searching for him, she was struggling to survive by finding a livelihood in a world which had rejected her. Her discovery of him was purely fortuitous and would not have been possible if Francis had remained silent and in control. Ironically Alicia discovers him through his own utterances and demands; he is destroyed by his own loss of will. But Alicia cannot single-handedly overpower or destroy any man. Francis is finally rendered powerless by a man; a man who defines his lack of control as 'madness' and thus gags and binds him. Francis is killed by the very discourse of hegemonic masculinity within which he had hitherto existed. He loses the rationality and self-discipline which constitutes 'manhood' and is therefore 'mad' and needs restraining.

Rigobert is tried for Francis' murder but acquitted as society deems Alicia as culpable. And, as 'evil' women in Victorian fiction routinely commit suicide or go 'mad', a search is made for her in the local area and river. But Collins subverts this discourse and suggests that Alicia is likely to be thriving contentedly elsewhere. It remains uncertain who dealt the fatal blows but whoever it was escapes justice. Francis' beliefs have been symbolically silenced; the two stab wounds pierce his heart and throat. But there is no retribution for this crime; no certainty of its perpetrator and no-one 'knows' the 'truth'.

Francis is primarily a victim of masculinist ideology. He is destroyed by his own inability to live within the 'transcendental pretence' and by a male conspiracy to deceive him. The men disguise the real date and thus render Francis vulnerable to destruction at the 'true' hour of birth. The Name-of-the-Father, this suggests, irretrievably destroys the chora but offers only false promises, only illusions of control. Collins also indicates that men dismiss and silence women at their peril; if the men had listened to Mrs. Fairbanks concerns about their plot Francis would have been saved. Percy Fairbank attempts to credit Alicia with supernatural powers and deny her humanity; she is a 'ghost' or 'demon' (p.227). But his statements are belied by actual events and the narrative's 'feminine' sub-text, the subjugated voices which clamour to be heard. As Lisa Mathews observes, Alicia's surname and Francis' emphasis on ghosts 'reveals the desperation of masculine narrators to deny the existence of female criminality'.<sup>35</sup> Francis is destroyed by hegemonic discourse and the whole text exposes the extent to which patriarchal ideology damages the very gender which constructed it.

By the 1880s the collapse of the masculine hegemony was seen as imminent. In 'The Captain and the Nymph'<sup>36</sup> the central character lives in isolation and misery. Despite his

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<sup>34</sup> Mary Braddon, Lady Audley's Secret (New York : Dover, 1974), p.152 and p.241.

<sup>35</sup> L.G. Mathews, p.181.

<sup>36</sup> Wilkie Collins, Little Novels (London : Chatto & Windus, 1887). All further references will relate to this edition.



profession the Captain has lost self-control and can no longer narrate his own story. As with the other texts explored in this chapter, the Captain is destroyed by obsession and desire, by the ideals and expectations he projects onto the object of his desire. But the Captain does not only destroy himself but an entire civilisation. It is a story based in the empire but it subverts traditional colonial discourse. The Captain instigates the tragedy by projecting phallogentric discourses onto another culture. The 'forbidden island', which is 'sanctified' and 'Taboo' (p.185) to the natives, is violated by the Captain's need to 'know' and 'possess'. His greed and egocentricity is sharply contrasted with the islander's generosity, trust and acceptance of life and others. In this sense, the story can be seen as an inversion of the Garden of Eden myth. It is the Captain's masculine need to know and control which wrecks the paradise in this text.

The Captain, like his male predecessors in this chapter, falls in love with a construct of his ideal woman : 'I have seen an Angel!' (p.187). But Aimata, as her name suggests, is innocent, honest and at one with nature. And it is her very ignorance and insular existence which renders her vulnerable to abuse. She has no knowledge or experience upon which to tell whether the Captain is a 'lying demon', a 'predestined destroyer' (p.190) or a 'visible deity' (p.189). These inadequacies lead to the undoing of her whole culture. Collins implies that it is both wrong and dangerous to deny women knowledge and personal opportunities, that it is counterproductive to the needs of society.

The Captain has no such difficulty in defining Aimata. She is a 'nymph', an 'Angel' and a 'child of nature' (p.191) - but a 'child' with a 'dusky bosom' and 'red lips' (p.189). She is the hegemonic ideal who embodies innocence, childishness, an undiscovered sexuality and a proclivity to worship man. But the Captain is unable merely to respect and appreciate her qualities. He must 'own' the object of his privileged gaze and it is his attempts to seduce and possess which causes catastrophe. The whole of nature revolts against the Captain's abuse of male privilege; his intents are seen as an outrage to both colonial

'others' and women. As the Captain's passion increases a dormant volcano erupts, 'ominous flashes of fire' (p.193) taint the night sky and the life-giving lake is re-absorbed into the 'abyss' within (p.192). Tremors shake the land and sea as Aimata, facing separation from her father and home, laments: 'You have taught me what it is to be miserable' (p.194). Aimata is not an angel but an individual belonging to another culture. She cannot fit into the Captain's construct and thus disintegrates when he tries to enforce this. The island sinks into the 'obscurity from which it had emerged' with all its inhabitants (p.196) - they cannot survive an encounter with western discourse.

With the eruptions of the symbolic volcano the Captain finally loses control of his desire, his 'manliness' and collapses into 'madness' and oblivion. His 'nymph' disappears leaving only a 'mocking vision' fleeing from him over the 'empty and endless sea' (p.197). Aimata refuses to be defined and possessed - and Nature is on her side. The Captain is almost destroyed by the 'inchoate flood or fire' within. He is unable to survive the disintegration of his world-view and is left a broken, emasculated man who is unable to narrate his own his-story. The Captain is henceforth unable to form relationships or find order and meaning in his life. He ends as lonely, rejected and disempowered as many of the women labelled as 'outcasts' by patriarchal ideology.

The texts discussed in this chapter pose key questions, like the sensation genre to which they belong, to Victorian society. As Abeer Zahra asks : 'Should the loss of self-control occur so quickly and so easily in a society which prides itself on stability? Do any individuals actually enjoy the much vaunted supremacy of will and freedom of action of contemporary ideology'.<sup>37</sup> After reading these narratives such questions seem rhetorical. Collins clearly demonstrated the fragility of social structures and the artificiality and precariousness of gender constructs. And his message is unambiguous; patriarchy wrecks the lives of all and unless there is radical change power will be violently seized by the Alicia Warlocks of the world or nature itself will revolt.

Abeer Zahra concludes that : 'The age's obsessive search for signs of derangement was itself a sign of instability in the social order. The desperation with which the patriarchal establishment sought to root out any signs of disruptive behaviour revealed the depths of its own insecurities'.<sup>38</sup> Collins dramatically portrayed these insecurities and illustrated how attempts to maintain the status quo are ultimately futile and self-destructive. Like Emmanuel Reynauld he perceived how man 'reproduces all the patriarchal values, to the point of embodying the very power that oppresses him: he is in the ridiculous position of being both guarantor and victim of the system'.<sup>39</sup> This describes exactly the his-stories of Basil, Isaac, Francis and the Captain and their tragedies are their inability to understand or question this. As they lose their struggle against regression, we are presented with what Annette Federico termed a unique 'inside view of reality as experienced by the oppressors'.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> A. Zahra, p.44.

<sup>38</sup> A. Zahra, p.109.

<sup>39</sup> E. Reynauld, p.114.

<sup>40</sup> A. Federico, p.14.

### CHAPTER THREE- DISCOURSES OF CHIVALRY : THE RETURN AND DECLINE OF THE KNIGHT - ERRANT

'For the time, I *am* the man I fancy myself to be'.<sup>1</sup>

The 'dominant fiction' is an ideological 'reality', a conceptual universe created and sustained by discourse and supported by collective belief. Jacques Rancière traced how it both acts as a mirror of, and represents a category for, theorising hegemony. It is a 'reserve of images and manipulator of stories for the different modes of configuration'.<sup>2</sup> For collective belief to be maintained this faith, as Kaja Silverman demonstrates, must work not only at the level of consciousness but of fantasy, it must come 'to play at the most profound sites of the subject's formation'.<sup>3</sup> And it largely accomplishes this through Rancière's images, stories and fictive roles. The male gaze, to acquire identity, must turn inwards upon representations of itself. Graham Dawson has discussed how 'masculine identities are lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination . . . representations furnish a repertoire of cultural forms that can be drawn upon in the imagining of lived identities . . .'.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Law and the Lady (London : Chatto & Windus, 1889), p223.

<sup>2</sup> Jacques Rancière as quoted by Kaja Silverman, Male Subjectivity at the Margins (London : Routledge, 1992), p.30.

<sup>3</sup> K. Silverman, p.16.

<sup>4</sup> Graham Dawson, 'The Blonde Bedouin'. In M. Roper, M. and J. Tosh eds., Manful Assertions (London : Routledge, 1991), pp.118-119).

Such imaginings give shape, purpose and direction to the lives of men and necessarily involve elements of desire, idealisation and wish-fulfilment. Indeed, it can be claimed that it is through fantasy that we learn how to desire.<sup>5</sup>

In Victorian times, with the growing absence of fathers from the home, the significance of male mentors, literary figures and fantasy 'other selves' greatly magnified. As masculinity is a political concept, defined by its treatment of power, the idea of the heroic is, not surprisingly, often central to these fantasies. And, as Joseph Kestner illustrates, the images of the hero, knight, warrior and paternal guide 'sustains belief in the commensurability of penis and phallus, actual and symbolic order'.<sup>6</sup> But in a military era, one which began and ended with major wars and one which vociferously expanded and defended its empire, such images became endowed with new, complex values and meanings.

In 1865, in a sermon before Queen Victoria, Charles Kingsley declared : 'The age of chivalry is never past as long as there is a wrong left unredressed on earth, or a man or woman left to say "I will redress that wrong" . . .'.<sup>7</sup> In an age of increasing social problems, when 'wrongs' abounded, such a statement acted as an inspirational buglecall to would-be heroes. Carlyle's 'heroes' were depicted as embracing a chivalric code and 'fighting' was now perceived as covering struggles in all aspects of life. In literary tradition chivalry was defined, according to Mancoff, as 'the cultivation of manly virtue, incorporating a high sense of honour, a disdain for danger and death, a taste of adventure, vast compassion for those inferior in prowess or social standing, self-sacrifice and altruism . . .'.<sup>8</sup> And as such it can be seen as a constructed virtue for all Victorian 'gentlemen'.

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<sup>5</sup> K. Silverman, p16.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Kestner, Masculinity in Victorian Painting (Aldershot : Scholar Press, 1995), p.27.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Kingsley, as quoted in : Mark Girouard, The Return to Camelot : Chivalry and the English Gentleman (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1981), p.130.

<sup>8</sup> Mancoff as quoted in J.A. Kestner, p.95.

Thus, the new hero of revivalist chivalry, as Kestner suggests, was not 'an accurate reconstruction of a past ideology but an icon of modern aspiration'.<sup>9</sup> Chivalry was revamped to offer a meaningful code for the present. Modern knights fought poverty, injustice, disease - and their own desires. Moral struggles became their battlefield and self-conquest their victory. And yet it was responsible for causing, and dependent upon, the very 'wrongs' it ostensibly strived to redress. This is an area which will be explored in detail here. As patriarchy appropriated nature to justify its discourses so did it appropriate and reshape medievalism and the chivalric code. Victorian concepts of chivalry were based not on fact but on fiction, upon the Camelot created by Spenser and Malory and not upon 'the reality of feudal welfare'.<sup>10</sup> Traditionally knights were aristocrats but to the Victorians, with their Smilesian self-help doctrine, they could be any man. The emphasis shifted from hereditary privilege to concepts of personal honour and patriotism whilst also endowing morality with the 'dignity and glamour of social status . . .'.<sup>11</sup>

Herbert Sussman observes how the irreconcilable tensions and contradictions inherent in discourses of masculinities can only be harmonised through 'fictive projections into the past, future, or even the afterlife'.<sup>12</sup> The medieval knight, as a fictive projection, did indeed unite many of these discordant elements. As seen in Chapter One early ideals of Victorian manhood were founded upon physical courage, fortitude and jingoism whilst late Victorian masculinity embraced stoicism, endurance and a neo-Spartan virility. The knight could incorporate all of these 'assets'. A central issue for the male artist was protecting his artistic potency from the contamination or commodification of the marketplace,<sup>13</sup> and to be seen as 'manly' whilst working in non-physical isolation. The knight was fiercely competitive, brave, imaginative and often operated in solitude. Their world was indisputably

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<sup>9</sup> J.A. Kestner, p.95.

<sup>10</sup> Raymond Chapman, 'Medievalism and Anglo-Catholicism'. L. J. Workman, ed., Medievalism in England (Cambridge : D. S Brewer, 1992), p.179.

<sup>11</sup> M. Girouard, pp.261-262.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Sussman, Victorian Masculinities : Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.3.

<sup>13</sup> For an outline of this argument, and further references, see Tamar Heller, Dead Secrets : Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1992), p.99.

a heroic but also romantic and creative. And for the Victorian man, torn between the public world of work and the domestic sphere, the knight also provided a role-model. Knights belonged to an unquestionably male circle and yet invariably fought for, and won, their woman. Moreover knights had successfully contained the 'inchoate fire or flood' within. The knight, with his literal and symbolic armour, could be seen as the epitome of self-conquest and control.

Baden-Powell informed young males that : 'You scouts cannot do better than follow the example of your forefathers, the knights, who made the tiny British nation into one of the best and greatest that the world has ever known'.<sup>14</sup> Indeed, colonial discourse provided a new imaginative space and scope for modern knights. It created a potent ideology fusing national, personal and imperial identity. And in its treatment of power relationships it expressed the ultimate superiority of one person, nation or class over another. Imperialism suggested that people could not govern themselves but required strong rulers and strong moral codes to survive successfully. Hence, Cecil Rhodes could proclaim that : 'We are the first race in the world, and that more of the world we inhabit, the better it is for the human race'.<sup>15</sup>

The revival of medievalism not only harmonised inherent contradictions in Victorian masculinities but it also responded to a deeply felt need, a sense of loss or ennui. Medievalism represented an idealised reconstruction of the past, a lost era of romance, morality and arcadian simplicity. In an age of rapid change, industrialisation and alienation it provided a retreat to an imagined order of absolutes, to a community which worked purposefully together adhering to a basic code of 'right' and 'wrong'. Miliaris remarked that neo-medievalism was 'the reaction of the British cognoscenti to the deadening materialism of a prosperous and often heartless age', one in which the 'past seemed more alluring than

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<sup>14</sup> Baden-Powell, as quoted by J.A. Kestner, p.128.

<sup>15</sup> Cecil Rhodes, as quoted by M. Girouard, p.223.

the present or even the future'.<sup>16</sup> And Clarke observed how, in a society riddled with religious doubts, medievalism presented heroes through which to express religion in a secular form.<sup>17</sup>

In many ways medievalism was compatible with Victorian ideologies. It was based squarely on the very dichotomies we see throughout Victorian discourses - male/female, flesh/blood, order/chaos, progress/decay, civilisation/bestiality and heroism/antiheroism. It inscribes a code for the privileged classes but one which encourages valour, self-management, patriotism and altruism. Chivalry was also an essentially gendered concept. It is a code of absolutes for middle-class, white, able-bodied men and necessarily involved oppression and silencing of 'disqualified' knowledges. It is a conceptual universe which denigrates language in favour of action. Herzfield demonstrated how Victorian discourses of masculinity focus not on 'being a good man' so much as 'good at being a man'. It is an ideology built on performative excellence in which men 'prove' their 'manliness' by 'deeds that strikingly speak for themselves'.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, as Annette Federico states, 'masculine experience is virtually defined in Victorian society by just that - Experience'.<sup>19</sup>

Central to fictions of heroism and knighthood is the rescue fantasy, a fantasy which is universal and oedipal in its appeal to the masculine desire to act, dominate and be in perpetual control. The 'rescue' is never an altruistic act. Adrienne Munich illustrates how Perseus saves Andromeda 'then keeps her for sexual and dynastic purposes; obligated to her rescuer, she can neither rescue herself nor refuse his offer of marriage'.<sup>20</sup> Andromeda's plight and tears inspire pity and heroic deeds in men whilst simultaneously expressing the perceived feminine helplessness and dependence upon which masculinity is constructed.

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<sup>16</sup> Miliaris, as quoted by Liana De Girolani Cheney, Pre-Raphaelitism and Medievalism in the Arts (Lampeter : Edwin Meller Press, 1992), p.193.

<sup>17</sup> Clarke, as quoted by M. Roper and J. Tosh, p.41.

<sup>18</sup> Herzfield, as quoted by David A. Gilmore, Manhood in the Making : Culture Concepts of Masculinity (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1990), p.30.

<sup>19</sup> Annette Rose Federico, Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Case Western University, 1988), p.41.



She is 'saved' only to be contained thereafter within the very masculine desires, needs and expectations which were responsible for her situation in the first place. In 1912 Cicely Hamilton lamented that:

Chivalry is a woman's reward and yet this is not respect for an equal, but a condescension to an inferior; a condescension which expresses itself in certain rules of behaviour where non-essentials are involved.

Chivalry is thus a 'sugar-coated pill-form' of repaying debts. By a

simple process of exchange and barter outward deference on one side is given in payment for real deference and subjection on the other.<sup>21</sup>

It is a 'dominant fiction' which reconstructs self-interest as altruism and personal gain as nobility. But it is a fiction that is deeply flawed and self-defeating for a knight is, ironically, wholly dependent upon the objects of his rescue. A 'hero' can be defined as such only through the existence of inferior 'others', the marginalised. Furthermore, Munich suggests that the compulsion to rescue reflects only the rescuers own desire to be rescued,<sup>22</sup> to be released from a hegemonic ideology which is ultimately fragile, contradictory and self-destructive.

And yet chivalry could not quite unify the tensions it generated. The Victorians intensified the body itself as a site for negotiating masculinity. Foucault claimed that sexuality is largely constructed through the body's 'exploitation as an object of knowledge and an element in relationships of power'.<sup>23</sup> The knight exemplifies this process for, in the iconography of chivalry, the symbol of masculine power is 'marked by armour, which

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<sup>20</sup> Adrienne Munich, Andromeda's Chains : Gender and Interpretation in Victorian Literature and Art (New York : Columbia University Press, 1989), p.14.

<sup>21</sup> Cicely Hamilton, Marriage as a Trade (London : Chapman & Hall, 1912), pp.102-104.

<sup>22</sup> Adrienne Munich, p14.

transforms the male body into the supreme signifier of masculinity, the permanent erection'.<sup>24</sup> The body itself can thus represent the symbolic order in concrete form. And so the knight becomes the apotheosis of Pleck's 'hypermasculinity'. Armour intensifies the power and presence of the male body by magnifying it and simultaneously offering protection against both desire and the fear of emasculation.

But war, for which armour is ostensibly designed, highlights man at his most vulnerable; most subject to outside forces, mutilation and death. Kestner surmised that the Victorians resisted depicting the naked male body not only because the literal representation of the 'privileged signifier' could not bear the weight of ideological expectations, but to mask men's fundamental vulnerability.<sup>25</sup> And yet this very absence can confirm the 'transcendental presence' for the phallus, through this precise process of secrecy and mystification, becomes central to issues of power and gender. The male gaze desires to look upon images of unimpaired, invincible masculinity; to gain assurance that he has not been castrated and has been compensated for the loss of the chora. The reflection of the knight confirms this; the mirror reveals an heroic man, clad in impenetrable armour, on a quest of national and personal significance, who perpetually affirms his 'manliness' through action and noble deeds.

Nonetheless, the dread that manifests itself in the refusal to expose the 'privileged signifier' to scrutiny, cannot be exorcised. The chivalric code is dependent upon the dichotomies and marginalised others whom it creates and exploits. Jonathan Dollimore demonstrates how binarism is the 'most static of structures' and one which:

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<sup>23</sup> M. Foucault, as quoted by J.A. Kestner, p.89.

<sup>24</sup> J. A. Kestner, p.97.

<sup>25</sup> J. A. Kestner, pp.235-238.

produced internal instabilities in and through the very categories it deploys in order to clarify, divide and stabilise the world . . . the opposition us/them produces the anomaly of the internal dissident . . .<sup>26</sup>

Binarisms represent Derrida's 'violent hierarchies'.<sup>27</sup> They omit, repress and deny alternative discourses whilst heralding stasis as a metaphysical ideal. They utilise teleology; a belief in a preordained design which affirms the hegemonic world-view. Dollimore elucidates how order and chaos are 'culturally specific ideologies legitimating contingent relationships of power' by projecting disorder onto the subordinate or excluded.<sup>28</sup> Collins' fiction abounds with these 'internal dissidents'; the marginalised others who move slowly onto centre stage and demand to be heard.

And neo-medievalism does create many ex-centric subjects. It is ironic that a system which alleged to aid the poor and underprivileged actually generated a larger us/them divide. Chivalry is wholly dependent upon inequalities and stasis; its mission was reliant upon the very injustices it ostensibly sought to eradicate. Moreover chivalry projected its own values as 'natural' and gave them as a 'gift' to the victims of discourse.<sup>29</sup> It was, in practice, a code most unsuited to the complexity of, and rapid changes experienced by, Victorian social problems. As Mark Girouard notes, chivalry is best applied in simple situations.<sup>30</sup> Collins vividly dramatised the redundancy of medieval discourse to modern life; he exposed the tensions, and stripped away the illusions of control and inviolability.

Furthermore, neo-medievalism is intrinsically flawed due to the very language it utilises and this is a theme which Collins repeatedly examined. The re-using and re-shaping of discarded discourses in itself paves the way for misappropriations,

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<sup>26</sup> J. Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence : Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault (Oxford : Clarendon, 1981), p.87.

<sup>27</sup> D. Derrida, as quoted by J. Dollimore, p.109.

<sup>28</sup> J. Dollimore, p.221.

<sup>29</sup> M. Girouard, p.251.

<sup>30</sup> M. Girouard, p.227.

misinterpretations and 'internal instabilities'. Foucault reiterated that we are on unfirm ground 'when we are analysing groups of statements which, when first formulated, were distributed, divided and characterised in a quite different way: after all:

literature' and 'politics' are recent categories, which can be applied to medieval culture . . . only by retrospective hypothesis, and by an interplay of formal analogies or semantic semblances . . .<sup>31</sup>

Victorian phallogentric society adopted a system of privilege, dominance and binarism to legitimate their own quest for hegemony. But, as Dellheim argues, whilst this appropriation

superficially reinforced the authority of traditional symbols, actually it diminished the prescriptive force of the past by re-interpreting its meanings in light of progressive aspirations.<sup>32</sup>

The resulting tensions and contradictions aptly illustrate Foucault's assertion that any ostensibility unified code of discourse is actually a colloquy of 'irruptive voices'<sup>33</sup> - a fiction of order. And this is exactly what we see emerging in Collins' narratives.

Collins frequently utilised the image of the knight-errant. He initially introduced this 'imagined identity' as a 'noble hero' with a mission to redress injustices and bring romance and purpose to the angst of contemporary society. Matthew Markman returns from his self-imposed exile, in Hide and Seek, upon such a quest. But despite his proven bravery and accomplishments he remains alienated from, and disillusioned by, the hypocrisies and ills of Victorian England. His actions cannot restore Mary, recover Madonna's hearing or affect

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<sup>31</sup> M. Foucault, Archaeology of Knowledge, as quoted by R. Chapman, p.219.

<sup>32</sup> Dellheim, as quoted by L.J. Workman, p.304.

<sup>33</sup> M. Foucault, as quoted by L.J. Workman, p.221.

the bigotry and ignorance of his aunt. Markman can only survive in isolation and thus returns to the unchartered wilderness he prefers to 'civilised' society.

Collins recognised that neo-medievalism could not invigorate his culture or, indeed, offer any answer to its complexities and dilemmas. He thus began to use the knight to analyse and criticise society; to mock its own values and expectations. It is ironically appropriate that in the later fiction the only successful knight-errants are women. Collins' women regularly refuse to be 'rescued' by neo-medieval heroes but they are increasingly called upon to save 'failed' knights; men who collapse under the weight of their own hegemonic expectations. These women resist the Andromeda role and challenge societal conventions but in so doing they actually epitomise the masculine ideal; they become the ultimate nurse, moral redeemer and maternal guide for males unable to further sustain the 'transcendental pretense'.

This process is crystallised in 'A Mad Marriage'. Mary Cameron literally rescues her husband from incarceration and devotes her life to 'saving' him from the labelling and constraints of phallogentric culture. But in doing so she sacrifices her existence wholly to his needs. She demonstrates bravery, fortitude and integrity only to re-write herself as that apotheosis of patriarchal desire - the 'angel in the house'. Moreover, Mary cannot 'know' if her actions were 'right', or if Roland is 'sane', for there is nothing outside of hegemonic discourse by which to gauge such dilemmas. Despite her resistance Mary remains enmeshed within ideological parameters. Collins may not have perceived a way out of the symbolic order but he proffered a fascinating critique of its inherent tensions, contradictions and flaws. He delineated vivid illustrations of the resulting cognitive distortions and displacements whereby the chief victims of hegemonic oppression are expected to 'save' their oppressors at their own emotional cost. The objects of discourse, the others who symbolise disorder, are called upon to restore the very order which marginalises them.

The Woman in White dramatically demonstrates this process of projection and displacement - and the fragility and inadequacy of neo-medieval discourse. The novel relates Walter Hartright's rise from a 'poor drawing master'<sup>34</sup> to the father of the heir of Limmeridge. His control over his own masculinity, and over the women he encounters, are crucial to this social ascendancy. Jenny Bourne Taylor notes how the 'means and end of his gaining power are founded upon Laura's social obliteration'.<sup>35</sup> Walter's struggle for potency exemplifies how 'manliness' is constructed upon perceptions of feminine powerlessness and dependency. As Walter gains in strength and stature we witness simultaneously how Laura's 'subjective self is broken down and rebuilt through the controlling interests and perceptions of others'.<sup>36</sup>

D.A. Miller claims that Laura 'takes a nightmarish detour through the carceral ghetto on her way home, to the domestic haven where she is always felt to belong'.<sup>37</sup> But the text exposes how there is no such haven. Laura is threatened with obliteration wherever she is; 'home' and 'asylum' both pose the same dangers to, and restrictions upon, female identity. For Walter to prove his 'manhood', and seize power in the outside world, he must possess and contain Laura and become a metaphoric asylum manager. Walter actively constructs himself as a hero, a knight errant, and yet his perceptions are blatantly flawed, fragile and delusory. The narrative gradually develops into a major critique of patriarchal ideologies and the damage inflicted upon women by hegemonic discourses.

The novel opens with Walter uttering a comment laden with hegemonic expectation: 'This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve' (p.1) - a statement that is immediately subverted by subsequent events. Walter is initially as strikingly irresolute as Ann and Marian are impatient. Indeed, amongst the most

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<sup>34</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White (London : Chatto & Windus, 1888), p.323. All future references will refer to this text.

<sup>35</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, In the Secret Theatre of Home : Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology (London : Routledge, 1988), p.109.

<sup>36</sup> J. B. Taylor, p.99.

resolute, active characters in the story are Marian Halcombe, Mrs. Catherick, Mrs. Rubelle and Margaret Porscher. Thus Walter's opening remark affirms the unreliability of his perceptions; he attempts to impose upon the world what he desires to believe. And Walter's fallibility as an editor continues. He commissions the ensuing procession of narratives ostensibly to replicate the legal hearing to which the case is not entitled. It is a story that phallogentric society does not want to hear. Walter claims that he is presenting a 'chain' of revelations which will reveal the 'truth', but in reality he offers a 'continual, contradictory process of reappropriation and redefinition'.<sup>38</sup> Walter chooses what to omit, include or amend; he decides what is 'important' or the 'truth'. The narratives supposedly explore the abuse and trauma suffered by Laura - and yet Laura is not given a voice. And in a sequence of texts that allegedly unfold the 'truth' and confirm issues of identity, we learn that Walter has changed the characters' names. He transpires to be the ultimate 'asylum-keeper' who enfolds his 'inmates' within layers of discourse and rewrites their lives, identities and perceptions of 'reality'. Laura is not Laura; she remains an image, a Petrarchan ideal. Walter becomes her 'Petrarch and writes her firmly into the role of silent object of his devotion'.<sup>39</sup> Walter Hartright, who writes from the heart and whose heart is 'right', is revealed to be his own construction. He writes in retrospect, from a hegemonic stance, and can provide nothing beyond his own discourse to verify his utterances.

Walter is introduced as a 'poor drawing master' (p.323) struggling to maintain a meagre livelihood. He spends much time in female space, with his mother and sister. And when he reluctantly moves he becomes a servant, a 'harmless domestic pet' (p.46). Walter is impotent; he is acted upon rather than acting and in danger of allowing his emotions to overwhelm his rationality. He can only perceive the future as some obscure fatality and patriarchal authority as 'Omnipotent Destiny'. As a 'dark cloud' hovers over London Walter finds himself at a crossroads (p.13) where he must choose between 'manhood' and servility,

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<sup>37</sup> D. A. Miller, 'Cage aux Foies : Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*. *Representations* 14, pp.107-136.

<sup>38</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.100.

<sup>39</sup> Tamar Heller, p.115.

'masculine' action or 'feminine' passivity. Significantly he encounters a woman who blurs all boundaries, who defies categorisation and refuses to be 'known'. Anne is an 'internal dissident' who represents the 'unthought'. Walter is confused by her distress, boldness and plight and can only believe she is 'bad', 'mad' or a 'victim'. He thus exposes the limits of his conventional thinking, limits which result in him never fully comprehending the very drama he is involved in narrating. Anne could represent a 'deviant' or 'dangerous' femininity 'whose actions it was my duty, and every man's duty, mercifully to control' (p.19). The following events cannot answer this concern for Walter can only think in the very binarisms which his own experiences undermine. Similarly Walter can only recall Laura in retrospect, as an image. He depicts her, like his watercolour painting, as a 'soft pearly shadow' with hair that 'nearly melts, here and there, into the shadow of the hat' (p.34). And Laura remains insubstantial, she 'melts' in and out of shadows and exists wholly as a memory, absence or illusion. She is a heroine created by, and for, hegemonic masculinity. She is a 'blank' to be 'filled' in by male desire.<sup>40</sup>

Like Laura, Anne Catherick 'embodies the social invisibility that renders women blank pages to be inscribed by men'.<sup>41</sup> But, unlike Laura, Anne resists such definitions. She blurs the boundary between fantasy and reality and cannot be contained within either patriarchal imagination or institutions. We never know if Anne was 'mad' or if she did know the 'secret'; all is accusation and assumption. Anne appears to exist primarily as a phantom of male guilt; a living embodiment of hegemonic abuse of power and the violent oppression of the M/Other. Indeed, this emerges as the real secret of the text; men's dread and willingness to resort to Foucauldian force to exorcise this terror. All the men fear Anne's potency and knowledge but it is an unfathomable power that cannot be addressed. Anne cannot be silenced or contained and the extent of her knowledge and potency cannot be determined. Even her death cannot provide answers or stifle her power; she lives on to haunt masculine

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<sup>40</sup> Tamar Heller, p.112.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.



imagination. Anne symbolises every man's dread of the M/Other. Kofman promulgates that:

to make a dead body of a woman is to try one last time to overcome her enigmatic and ungraspable character, to fix in a definite and immotive position instability and mobility themselves.<sup>42</sup>

Inevitably this fails and Anne continues to exist, as she always did, as a spectral symbol of patriarchal guilt and anxiety.

The third half-sister, Marian, also refuses to be either possessed or marginalised. She is admired by men but dismissed as 'ugly', 'unfeminine' (p.21). Beauty, as Walter's description indicates, exists only as a masculine construct. And yet Marian's figure exudes that which cannot be allowed to endanger Laura's purity - sexuality. Peter Sucksmith proposes that Marian reflects 'that nether-face of sexuality, with other lips and other cheeks, which is secretly displaced upwards in Marian's form'.<sup>43</sup> Walter can thus resolve the hegemonic dilemma by living with both 'femininities', his Petrarchan ideal and forbidden sexuality.

The portrayal of the three half-sisters symbolises the contemporary fragmentary perception of women. Barbara Leavy suggests that Collins implied:

a kind of mass splitting in the Victorian mentality which, in order to protect its feminine ideal, had to free her of, on the one side, the sexuality and intellect of one

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<sup>42</sup> Kofman, as quoted by Diane Elam, 'White Narratology : Gender and Reference in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*'. Lloyd Davis, ed. *Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature* (Albany : State University of New York Press, 1993), p.58.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Harvey Sucksmith, 'Introduction', *The Woman in White* (London : Oxford University Press, 1975), p.xviii.

sister, and, on the other side, the maturity that comes from the confrontation with pain and suffering.<sup>44</sup>

It is significant that in this text those who are defined as 'mad' are the passive, innocent women. No-one questions the sanity of the ferocious, self seeking Mrs. Catherick, Mrs. Rubelle or Margaret Porscher. Collins appears to have believed that passivity, the unquestioning acceptance of masculine control and abuse, is as dangerous as, or tantamount to, madness.

The Woman in White exposes how Laura is systematically destroyed by men. Limmeridge, her home, is 'dominated by the wishes of an absent father'<sup>45</sup> and the valetudinarian demands of Frederick Fairlie. Fairlie manages to control through his very inadequacies, he has power but he refuses to use it. He is responsible for much that follows through this very selfishness and desire for isolation. Collins suggested that patriarchal evasion of responsibility is as dangerous to women as Glyde and Fosco's intentional abuse. The novel thus develops into a severe indictment of the 'male epistemological stance'. Walter gained his employment through a 'golden-haired barbarian of a Papa' who places mammon and respectability before emotions and 'genius' (pp.7-8). Glyde controls through violence and threats whilst Fosco subdues his wife with a 'private rod of iron' (p.171) - a 'rod' which Marian acknowledges could have successfully silenced her had she married Fosco. Indeed, Thomas Van Essen perceives Fosco as a 'parody of fatherly activities, disposing of children as he wishes'.<sup>46</sup> It is not surprising that Marian, in a protest that echoes throughout the text, destroys the myth of home as haven:

'Are you to break your heart to set his mind at ease? No man under heaven deserves these sacrifices from us women. Men! They are the enemies of our

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<sup>44</sup> Barbara Fass Leavy, 'Wilkie Collins' Cinderella : The History of Psychology and The Woman in White'. Dickens Studies Annual 10, p.130.

<sup>45</sup> J. B. Taylor, p.119.

innocence and our peace . . . they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel. And what does the best of them give us in return? . . . I'm mad when I think of it' (p.138).

It is a cry that cannot be silenced or banished and which collapses the ostensible 'happy' ending.

Limmeridge is a house of 'fair-lies'; it presents a facade of respectability which masks corruption, hypocrisies and inadequacies. The 'devoted' father and husband, Phillip Fairlie, is a philanderer, an abuser and deserter of women. He is as willing to exchange his daughter for money and status as Frederick Fairlie is willing to sacrifice all for his self-comfort. And beyond her water-colour ideal Laura herself embodies a fair-lie; the 'lie of identity, which claims that a totalising truth, based on absolutes, both exists and is discoverable'.<sup>47</sup> Significantly the fragility and madness detected in Ann and Laura is inherited from the paternal side; Marian possesses her strength from her mother. Phillip, Frederick, Glyde and Fosco represent the decline of patriarchy and the dangers and corruptions inherent in phallogocentric discourses.

To prove his 'masculinity', and acquire psychic discipline, Walter looks towards colonial discourse. Baden-Powell defined 'real men' as able to:

'understand and live out in jungles, and they can find their way anywhere . . . they know how to look after their health when far away from any doctors, are strong and plucky, and ready to face any danger . . .'<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Thomas Van Essen, *Figuring the Father: The Paternal Thematics of Wilkie Collins* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, New Jersey: Rutgers University, 1987), p.139.

<sup>47</sup> D. Elam, p.61.

<sup>48</sup> Baden-Powell, as quoted in Harry Brod, ed. *The Making of Masculinities: The New Men's Studies* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), p.149.

And this is precisely what Walter does. He re-appears in the narrative as a potent, independent man who can declare: 'In the stern school of extremity and danger my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind to rely upon itself' (p.318). Imperialism and hardship have given Walter the self-conquest and confidence to fight his personal battle - winning possession of Laura. He is now prepared to outlive his rivals and secure his Guinevere. Walter returns from his adventures on a metaphorical charger and clad in metaphorical armour. However, Walter's new-found 'manliness' is based squarely upon a constructed superiority to racial 'others' and to his colleagues who fell. Walter utilises teleology and defines his self-seeking quest as 'fate', an 'Unseen Design' (p.212). But there is nothing in the narrative to substantiate this perception; the 'design' is the planned disposal of Laura by two men and the repossession of her by another. Walter consistently appropriates nature and divinity to justify his cause and actions and yet the sub text belies his claim. Indeed, both his ally, Pesca, and his enemy, Fosco, constitute reverse colonisation<sup>49</sup> by revealing the plight of the alien 'other' within a hegemonic setting. It is the ultimate irony that in order to restore domestic harmony Walter has to enlist the help of Pesca, an Italian terrorist. As Lillian Nayder analyses Collins 'underscores the illegitimacy of an empire in which the colonised are themselves embryonic colonists'.<sup>50</sup>

Walter's 'manliness' and self-confidence increase with his growing control over Laura. As a parodic inversion of this, as Susan Balee observes, Marian's femininity, or passivity, increases after her collision with masculine force.<sup>51</sup> She is attracted to Fosco - and destroyed by him. The invasion of her room, and the reading of her diary, symbolises a psychic rape. Marian loses control of her writing, and the phallic pen, and is temporarily silenced and rendered powerless. Upon Walter's return he assumes total responsibility for Laura's recovery and assigns Marian set tasks and roles. She does not 'speak' again. Ironically her fear of Glyde's marital prerogatives transpires in, and through, Walter himself:

<sup>49</sup> Lillian Nayder, 'Agents of Empire in *The Woman in White*'. *Victorian Newsletter* 83 (Spring 1993), p.3.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup> Susan Balee, 'Wilkie Collins and Surplus Women : The Case of Marian Halcombe. *Victorian Literature and Culture* 20, 1992, pp.203-204.

'... she will be his Laura, not mine!' (p.141). Glyde fears and despises Marian, Fosco admires her but Walter marginalises and permanently silences her. She ends her days as 'the good angel of our lives' (p.494).

But Walter's perceptions are clearly erroneous. During his self-imposed exile it is Marian who rescues Laura from the asylum, who detects the plot and confronts Fairlie and the villagers. Upon Walter's return she aids Laura's recuperation, discovers Fosco's 'spy' and arranges the secret removal to another home. And she is also instrumental in restoring Walter's son to Limmeridge. Walter may choose to minimise her strength and achievements but it is evident that Marian, silent and unacknowledged, continues to be astute and active.

Walter elucidates how masculinity is firmly constructed upon a perception of a vulnerable, dependent femininity. He can declare with pride:

'In the right of her calamity . . . she was mine at last! Mine to support, to protect, to cherish, to restore . . . Mine to vindicate through all the risks and all the sacrifices- through the hopeless struggles against Rank and Power...' (p.324).

His knightly quest is competition and ownership. Like Frederick Fairlie's art treasures, Laura becomes metaphorically labelled: 'In the possession of . . . ' (p.153).

During Glyde's provocation Laura was beginning to develop some resistance and independence of thought. But with Walter she degenerates into a caricature of passivity, gratitude and an innocence based upon denial of experience. She is, under paternal benevolence, defined as 'the poor child' (p.142) to be 'amused . . . in the evenings with children's games . . . ' (p.340). She is permitted no adult, constructive role and is credited with no useful skills. She produces 'feeble sketches' which Walter patronises whilst

dismissing as 'worthless' (p.376). Walter proudly describes how she 'spoke as a child might have spoken, she showed me her thoughts as a child might have shown them' and concludes that 'she was dearer to me now than she had ever been in past times' (p.342). It is arguable, I propose, that Walter's devotion and 'care' does far more damage to Laura's identity than either Glyde's plot or the asylum.

But stereotypes ultimately fail Walter whose expectations serve only to expose, as Mary Donaghy and Pamela Perkins illustrate, 'the inadequacy of the conventional interpretation he is trying to impose on his experience'.<sup>52</sup> Walter's 'heroism' proves to be a chimera. He prides himself on his stalking skills but is followed and he falls into a blatant trap set by Glyde and is thus arrested and rendered powerless. His mission is largely successful due to the accident of the fire, Marian's powers of observation and the assistance of Mrs. Catherick. Moreover, at the apex of his success Walter is unable to challenge or resist the very patriarchal abuses he is attempting to expose. He commits perjury at Glyde's inquest and thus supports the very hegemonic discourses which sustain primogeniture, property, marital prerogatives and aristocratic privileges. Walter's desire to become a centred subject of discourse, to enter the 'transcendental pretense', is ultimately more important to him than exposing crime and establishing the 'truth' he allegedly seeks. And in sustaining the interests of phallogocentric culture Walter stoops to the very deceptions and hypocrisies he derides in others. Indeed, Walter aptly confirms Annette Federico's assertion that the 'masculine will is anti-introspective', led by what she terms 'the impulse towards anti-consciousness'.<sup>53</sup> It also demonstrates Foucault's analysis of 'choosing not to know', the 'stubborn will to non-knowledge'.<sup>54</sup>

For all Walter's 'knightly' devotion he is self-deluded and 'emotionally illiterate'. He presents us with a retrospective, rational account of his actions and achievements; one

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<sup>52</sup> Mary Donaghy, and Pamela Perkins, 'A Man's Resolution : Narrative Strategies in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*'. *Studies in the Novel* 22 (No.4, 1990), p.395.

<sup>53</sup> A. Federico, pp.98-99.

<sup>54</sup> M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, p.55.

which is contradicted by events and 'subjugated voices'. This is in marked contrast to Marian who responds directly to the drama in her diary. And one must ask why, and for whom, he prepares this 'quasi-legal document'.<sup>55</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor perceived how Walter's 'ability to determine the future by re-interpreting the past is bound up with his control over memory and time, and the ideological and fictional dissonance that this endangers'.<sup>56</sup> But narratives do slip out of Walter's tenuous control, 'internal dissidents' demand to be heard and language itself proves to be fallible. Hegemonic discourse places faith in the written and spoken word. Hence, Laura's identity in the asylum is 'proved' by a name-label which is as 'plain as print' (p.334), Glyde is extinguished by a 'sheet of living fire' (p.407), and can 'make an honest woman' (p.418) of his mother posthumously by altering a register. But Mr. Gilmore knows that the law can refute any statement made (p.98). And Walter Kendrick elucidates how villany and heroism, in The Woman in White, operate:

on the assumption that there is such a thing as a transparent text, an ordered arrangement of words and spaces which can be taken as proof of events in the world and even as substitutes for them. The corrupt texts of Glyde and Fosco are discredited only by texts gathered by Hartright. In the dense rhetorical atmosphere of the novel, characters exist as collections of signatures, register-entries, letters and laundry marks. Empty spaces tell stories and a tombstone makes a narrative'.<sup>57</sup>

But this textual chain cannot be verified anywhere; all is discourse and 'truth' transpires to be as elusive and impenetrable as the woman in white herself. Like the 'white chaos of paper' (p.467) on Fosco's desk, the narrative creates a 'blank universe pregnant with meaning which each reader must construct, reconstruct, for himself'.<sup>58</sup> The novel is ultimately a Foucauldian colloquy of 'irruptive voices' which demand 're-vision'.

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<sup>55</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.124.

<sup>56</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.125.

<sup>57</sup> Walter M. Kendrick, 'The Sensationalism of The Woman in White'. Nineteenth-Century Fiction 32 (1977), p.31.

<sup>58</sup> Mark Hennelly, 'Reading Detection in The Woman in White'. Texas Studies in Literature and Language 22 (1980), p.454.

Significantly Walter finally loses control at the close of the narrative. He does not recognise his own son and his pen begins to falter (p.494). He turns to Marian to utter the final words but Marian can have no voice in the stifling world of possession and convention created by Walter. Tamar Heller observes how the silence after Walter's last word 'emphasises the irony of his expecting to speak through a woman who has been silenced . . . the novel that has attempted to assert the potency of the male writer ends with a blank'.<sup>59</sup> Fosco, the representative of 'corrupt' masculinity, was most acclaimed for his success in petrifying bodies into stone. Walter, with his discourse of paternal benevolence, manages to similarly 'petrify' Laura and Marian. A 'Daddy' and a 'Rapist' ultimately inflict the same damage upon women. It is, as John Coates detects, The Woman in White's chief paradox that the conventional is portrayed as 'ridiculous and full of horror' whilst the 'mysterious and the disturbing are the means of hope and escape'.<sup>60</sup> Hegemonic discourses are seen as destroying all, including those who embrace them. Louis can be transformed into a 'portfolio stand' (p.119), Walter is a 'domestic pet' who is forbidden to love Laura due to his class, Pesca lives in terror from a danger which no human law can avert, and Fosco exists in dread resulting from a youthful act of impulse. And the whole plot is generated by Glyde's desperation to possess a name and legitimacy. But, as Mrs. Catherick states it was 'not his fault that his father and mother were not named. It was not his father and mother's fault either' (p.418). In The Woman in White Collins created a world that demands vital reassessment and radical change. In such a world the quest of a quixotic knight-errant is futile; he can only end up warped by, and enmeshed within, the very ills and injustices he sought to redress.

In 'Miss or Mrs?' a young woman is again exposed to violence and abuse by paternal irresponsibility. Launcelot Linzie turns knight-errant to rescue Natalie Greybrooke from the fate decreed by patriarchy. But, unlike Walter, Launcelot is a rebel who openly challenges

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<sup>59</sup> Tamar Heller, p.141.



hegemony. A latter-day knight, this suggests, can only succeed by resisting conventional expectations and operating outside of the law. Launcelot is thus a parodic inversion of his name-sake.

Natalie is promised to Richard Turlington by her father when only a child, so he can watch her 'growing up to be my wife' (p.38). He thus adopts a husband's prerogatives of demanding, forbidding and possessing long before their planned marriage. Sir Joseph is persistently described as 'weak' (pp.9, 45 and p.103) and unperceptive. He worships money, respectability and the superficial: '... he is so fond of money! He believes in nothing else' (p.40). Indeed he defines anyone who challenges this discourse as a 'lunatic' (p.40). He patronises and dismisses his daughter's alternative discourse and asserts his superior 'wisdom' and experience. He 'laughed' (p.67) at her expressed emotions and instructs Turlington not to 'attach any serious importance to what Natalie had said' (p.68).

But Sir Joseph's 'manly' confidence and resolution is built on illusion. He perceives Turlington as the epitome of success, worthiness and nobility and he dismisses Launcelot as some 'harmless domestic animal' (p.44). Sir Joseph believes the values and sentiments expressed by Natalie and Launcelot to be 'mad' but it is Turlington, whose very name suggests turmoil and torment, who represents biological degeneracy, the struggle against the feared regression to savagery. Under the prolonged pressure of his financial crisis and protracted engagement Turlington begins to collapse. Lisa Mathews has argued that he is worn down by pretence, that Collins depicted conformity to repressive codes as stimulating atavistic tendencies and repression as hastening degeneracy.<sup>61</sup> Collins openly viewed Natalie's potential fate as a tragedy and despised marriage arrangements based upon economic or dynastic purposes. It is stated that Natalie's cousin had 'sold well in the

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<sup>60</sup> John Coates, 'Techniques of Terror in *The Woman in White*'. *Durham University Journal* LX1112, (1981), p.186.

<sup>61</sup> Lisa G. Mathews, *Crime and Subversion in the Later Fiction of Wilkie Collins* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of Leeds, 1993), p.152.

marriage market' (p.72) and that 'conventional sentiment, complacently contemplated the sacrifice of one more victim on the all-devouring altar of Marriage!' (p.69).

But Launcelot intervenes on his metaphorical charger and with the aid of Lady Winwood, herself a parallel female knight-errant, subverts the paternal plans by surreptitiously possessing Natalie on the 'all-devouring altar' first. The final crisis consists of two conflicting masculine discourses in collision. Launcelot and Turlington both define each other as 'deviant' and each others' discourse as 'corrupt'. Turlington uses privilege, property, honour and defense of his home to legitimate his violence. He exists within hegemonic utterances and expresses conventional values even as he regresses into rage and irrationality. Launcelot emerges as the saviour and moral redeemer, with Sir Joseph lying 'helpless as a child' (p.173), grateful and impotent, in his arms. But Launcelot's victory is ambiguous. His actions are based wholly upon self-interest; his desire to outwit his rival, possess Natalie and prove his 'manliness' before Sir Joseph and the world. And for Launcelot to survive Turlington, and all that he stands for, must be obliterated. But, as Lisa Mathews remarks, such violence and regression is subversive and must be silenced.<sup>62</sup> Hence, Turlington's death and the preceding events are reconstructed by the media, re-written to affirm the world views of phallogentric society. Launcelot 'wins' his quest but the 'truth' remains lost in misinterpretations, repressions and omissions. Launcelot's individual victory does not, ultimately, challenge the system or provide a panacea or hope for the future. The entire drama was caused by paternal materialism and self-righteousness. But Natalie cannot challenge this. She moves directly from being the 'property' of her father to the 'all-devouring altar'. Lady Winwood's rebuke: 'You want backbone!' (p.72) continues to echo after the narrative has closed. Lady Winwood has backbone and develops her own knightly quest; but her power is derived wholly through selling 'well on the marriage market'. In 'Miss or Mrs?' backbone, resolution and defiance are seen as inadequate to the task of toppling hegemonic discourse, the 'dominant fiction' which transforms Turlington's murderous rage and regression into a tragic accident of a noble gentleman.

In The Two Destinies Collins openly acknowledged that a latter day knight cannot pursue his quest in contemporary society and the 'mysterious and disturbing', noted by Coates in The Woman in White, becomes the only reality. It may be that Collins turned away from the physical world to the human psyche and its powers' as a response to rapid change and instability. It also offers an attractive alternative to hegemonic discourse. Dame Dermody, with her Swedenborgian philosophy is, unlike George Germaine's mother, empowered to speak and act. She recognises that George's father's assertion of power and control is futile. She predicts the decline of patriarchy and, consequently, that George and Mary will be 'united . . . in defiance of all human laws, and of all human notions of right and wrong' (p.24). George's childhood with Mary is the prelapsarian idyll; the chora, which is destroyed by the Name-of-the-Father. George is violently forced to enter the Symbolic Order: 'The empty outer wilderness which was my father's world opened before me void of love and void of joy; (p.38). And yet Mr. Germaine's confident assertion of privilege and upper-class values was not justified. His 'hateful speculation' (p.39) results in 'catastrophe' and 'total collapse' (p.43) of his family's livelihood. He leaves his family with 'no home . . . no choice' (p.39), and 'helpless at the mercy of the world' (p.43). They are saved only by valuables inherited from his mother. Similarly, Mary's father 'sacrificed his daughter and he sacrificed me' (p.54) to his false sense of honour and pride. And he, too, collapses into ill-health and poverty. He ends as a 'helpless' invalid (p.58-59) who is wholly dependent upon his daughter.

Fathers are responsible for the destruction of George and Mary's lives and relationship and yet Mary can only foresee surviving, and providing for her father, by marrying. But far from providing such support and protection Van Brandt transpires to be a bigamist, coward, debt defaulter and thief who finally leaves Mary 'deserted, disgraced, ruined' (p.119). The novel explores how George and Mary can rediscover their true identities after such disillusionment and betrayal by phallogocentric culture.

The chief problem for George is his inability to relate his adolescent obsession with love for an adult woman. He cannot equate the assertive, experienced Mrs. Van Brandt with the 'frail shy little child' (p.132) of his image. For George every day is a battle between fantasy and reality, illusion and need. His Holy Grail is to find Mary Dermody and 'save' Mrs. Van Brandt, two aims he cannot reconcile. He perceives his mission as adhering to 'divine laws' and the 'law of gallantry' (p.75), 'rules' which transcend societal expectation and conventions. Appropriately he can only communicate with Mary when he temporarily loses his grip on the rational, the masculine discourses imposed upon him by his father. Similarly Mary can only relate to George when she is free of Van Brandt and social considerations. Significantly she is only free from such pressures when ill, unconscious or desperate. Her communication is thus ephemeral and short-lived. Her utterances literally dissolve leaving only a 'blank whiteness' (p.89 and p.214) and unanswered questions. It would seem that the untapped potential of the female spirit has the power to 'gaze', command and transcend everyday life, temporarily to 'freeze' reality, an act which the ensuing disbelief or lack of confidence erases.

These apparitions remain ambiguous and beyond masculine control or reasoning. And as they exist beyond his power George fears regression, that he is confronting the opposite of 'manliness' - madness. Two doctors confirm that he is the victim of 'sheer delusion' (p.278), of his 'own disordered brain' (p.282). George's mother, whose faith lies entirely with the patriarchal system, seeks a rational explanation from the pragmatic Dr. MacGlue. But Dr. MacGlue is able to accept that much of life remains 'an impenetrable mystery . . . altogether beyond my fathoming' (p.92) - an acceptance that evades most of the characters who adhere to the 'male epistemological stance'. George remains perpetually unsure if he is 'mad' or 'sane' (p.283) and is saved from suicide only by mystical female intervention, the very forces he fears are insane delusions.

George's adult life abounds in heroic efforts to rescue Mary; he nearly drowns in the river, he travels widely to meet her, he repays Van Brandt's debts and saves her from starvation. He is a knight-errant bent on 'proving' his love for Mary. But Mary is no Guinevere or Andromeda. She refuses to be saved and resists being defined as a 'victim'. George attempts to find new meanings in the 'empty wilderness' created by the Name-of-the-Father in neo-medievalism and endeavours to re-energise his world through heroic deeds. But his world is far too complex for chivalric codes to triumph; arcadian simplicity and feudal order are seen as delusions. The obverse side of chivalry is finally revealed when George recognises that his role and quest are meaningless. He rapidly regresses to a 'knight warrior',<sup>63</sup> exposing the violence, egocentricity and irrationality which lies perilously close to the veneer of 'gentlemanly conduct'. His anger reveals that George has always perceived Mary as a possession and himself as her superior. He reasons that, after saving her life, 'I had made myself master of her fate', and 'did she deserve that I should leave her free to go back . . . .' (p.324). In planning her murder George, in retrospect, perceives himself as a 'maddened man' (p.321) who succumbs to 'the viler animal instincts' (p.327) and a 'fiend' (p.324). He thus denies responsibility for his own power and emotions.

When George's fantasy fails him, when his 'imagined identity' does not attain the expected results, he collapses into the 'inchoate flood or fire' within. His existence is drained of meaning and he can see his future as only an 'utter blank' (p.327). Identity was acquired through 'fictive projections' and 'manhood' was defined by psychic discipline. But, as Herbert Sussman warns, if 'such discipline becomes too rigorous the extreme constraint of male desire will distort the male psyche and deform the very energy that powers and empowers men'.<sup>64</sup> Men are thus oppressed and destroyed by the very discourses created to ensure their domination. George's rapid disintegration indicates that self conquest and hegemonic fantasies could venture treacherously close to self-annihilation. Like Turlington, Glyde and Mannion, George discovers a new meaning in violence and destruction - one

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<sup>63</sup> L.G. Mathews, p.208.

<sup>64</sup> H. Sussman, p.3.

that is too readily dissipated. It is a tragic indictment of masculine need that these men would prefer to obliterate the woman they cannot possess rather than concede any control.

In the centre of the narrative exists George's surreal stay with the 'Master of the Books' (p.163), on an island in the Shetlands. This episode remains strangely disconnected to the main story, it is a text in itself and one which clearly belongs to the medieval world. In reverse of the Lady of Shalott legend George floats, lame and grief-stricken, to the isolated isle. It is as if George, in needing some form of escape or resolution to the complexities of his life, seeks refuge in medievalism. It would seem he believes that in order to revigorate the new order, he must return and reassess the old one.

George resides with the enigmatic Mr. and Miss. Dunross, who lead intellectually fulfilled but socially isolated lives. They are rarely seen but are eulogised by their neighbours for their nobility, selflessness and heroic conduct during an epidemic. But Miss Dunross falls prey to 'some mysterious nervous disorder which nobody understands' (p.164). Unable to bear light or touch she is held 'prisoner' (p.164) on the island, trapped within a fragile, 'wasted life . . .' (p.193). She is a faded version of the Lady of Shalott with no secret potency and no means of escape. Perpetually veiled in black, she exists wholly within darkness and shadows; she is destroyed by the light of the outside world. She represents a medieval enchantress who attracts men by her very untouchability. But her existence is depicted as a tragedy for she wants to be touched, she desires another life and possesses insight and political awareness. She is thus able to construct herself as a parody of the ideal nurse: 'You have a nurse who is an impersonal creature - a shadow among shadows; a voice to speak to you, and a hand to help you, and nothing more' (p.178).

Deprived of family and motherhood Miss Dunross transforms her cats into 'children' (p.182). In her world of shadows she has power only over her cats who enact a 'strange

mockery of human admiration'.<sup>65</sup> She symbolises the M/Other: she is a 'witch' with 'familiar spirits' (p.182), an enigma who may be adored, feared but never known or looked upon. She embodies all the desirable feminine virtues but she is insubstantial and faceless. She has no mirror reflection and cannot be connected to reality. She is the worshipped 'guardian' of her home, emitting the 'air of heaven' (p.183), but she is 'wasted with her wasting life' (p.194). She has no whole human identity. Miss Dunross exists solely in the past. She cannot move forward and thus cannot help George. She, too, is unable to connect his childhood love with a real woman. She advocates loyalty to an ideal, integrity, romance and flag-bearing. She is enmeshed within a chivalric code which eats away her life and misleads George.

George feels deep affection for Miss Dunross but he cannot love her (p.193). Miss Dunross is destroyed by her own inflexible idealism; she prefers the image to reality, seclusion to society and stasis to change. Collins finally stripped romance away from her world; by clinging to the past she decays, by refusing to embrace new, vital forces of life she dies. George cannot endorse her values or universe. As he regains his strength he feels impelled to leave. And in leaving her he rejects medievalism for modernity and passive nobility for an articulate, adaptable and independent woman. He is unable to analyse his feelings for Miss Dunross but his stay appears to replicate a womb-like experience; a return to the chora wherein desire is gratified and words are unnecessary. He discovers acceptance, love and a female space beyond rationality and language - but at too high a cost. He later discovers Miss Dunross' terrible deformity, the price paid for her altruism and solitude. Her illness and death suggest that Collins could imagine little room for medievalism in his world, he could see it offering nothing positive or constructive for the future of society. Miss Dunross never really lives so it is highly appropriate that she dies in ecstasy over an image and that: 'The moment of her supreme happiness, and the moment of her death, were one' (p.272).

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<sup>65</sup> Richard Beaton, The World is Hard on Women : Women and Marriage in the Novels of Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of Wales, 1987), p.155.

Another episode compares the barrenness and decay of the medieval isle with the waste and ruin of modern society. Again George floats in darkness, through a 'black void' (p.303) to the Zuyder Zee - an area of post-industrial desolation and despair. Arrogance and complacency have resulted in a 'Dead City . . . black, grim and dreadful' (p.304). Collins uses Enkhuisen as a moral example; he seemed to suggest that if privilege and prosperity did not continually challenge and re-invigorate themselves, and be alert to dangers and injustices, then 'progress' is as dangerous to the individual psyche as the stagnation of the Dunross' 'haven'. It is significant that it is here that George collapses into 'animal' passions.

At the sight of the flag Mary agrees to be 'rescued'. George's chivalry is finally rewarded; he can abandon violence and revert to his knightly role. But it is one which he must perform in exile for 'respectable' society will not permit him to marry a 'fallen' woman. He faces the same dilemma as Julian Gray, in The New Magdalen, and Amelius Goldenheart, in Fallen Leaves, but George's unshakeable belief in destiny allows him to 'have his cake and eat it . . . it provides an irrefutable instance of the rightness of a marriage . . . and thereby solves the problem at the heart of the Magdalen theme'.<sup>66</sup> But it is a most dissatisfactory answer which ignores the very problems and complexities raised by the narrative itself. It would seem that Collins could not see any way for George and Mary to be united, and happy, in his world. He thus resorted to a solution which is as simplistic as the chivalric code he so vehemently rejected.

In the later fiction it is women such as Mary Cameron, in a 'Mad Marriage', Eunice Gracedieu, in The Legacy of Cain, and Valeria Macallan, in The Law and the Lady, who increasingly adopt the role of 'knight-errant' to rescue fallen or disillusioned 'heroes'. But Collins appeared to find it increasingly difficult to visualise an adequate or 'worthy' hero for such a mission. This is manifest in his final novel Blind Love. Norland, with his bravery,



gallantry and romantic adventures, promises to be a neo-medieval hero but he remains reckless, irresponsible and self-seeking. He is unable to mature, he seeks immediate gratification, he can act but not think, promise but not provide. He is a Round Table Peter Pan.

In this narrative marriage itself is perceived as playing an integral part in the moral and social decline. It is Iris's very conformity and loyalty which leads to her downfall, her trust in her husband and sense of duty results in crime and despair. Mountjoy is impotent to help. He is unable to prevent the marriage and falls ill when thwarting the revenge plan. Mountjoy remains in the care of a female nurse whilst Fanny, the 'fallen' maid, assumes the knightly role. Fanny successfully saves Iris and thus moves, as Lisa Mathew observes, from being a fallen woman to a knight-errant.<sup>67</sup> Mathews believes that Collins seriously questioned the nature of morality and showed how a rigid moral code can actually weaken the existing order.<sup>68</sup> Collins demonstrated here, as throughout his fiction, the dangers of pursuing an ideal of perfection and the positives of perpetual change and re-assessment.

Collins's narratives reveal that 'fictive projections' inevitably fail to provide fulfilment and that historic 'imagined identities' cannot be transposed into the present. Whilst identity is intrinsically bound up with fantasy life such imaginings generate insurmountable conflicts. Serge Leclaire noted that the delusory and disappointing nature of masculinity springs from its reliance upon anatomy, upon an external identity, as a safeguard against emasculation.<sup>69</sup> And, as Kaja Silverman points out, the phallus is a transcendental signifier of meaning and a 'metaphor of an irreducible lack'.<sup>70</sup> The 'trying on' of fictive identities confirms the Lacanian binarism, 'your meaning or your life', or how, through fantasy, man confronts the 'unavoidable castration which every subject must experience upon entering

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<sup>66</sup> R. Beaton, p.78.

<sup>67</sup> L.G. Mathews, p.362.

<sup>68</sup> L.G. Mathews, p.365.

<sup>69</sup> Serge Leclaire, . Quoted by Kaja Silverman, p.143.

<sup>70</sup> Kaja Silverman, p.38.

the order of language or signification; its inauguration into a regime of lack'.<sup>71</sup> When imagined identities necessarily fail men are faced with their loss of essential being and their inescapable subordination to a discursive order which pre-exists them. The realisation of this instigates the collapse into the chaos, violence or nothingness which we witness in the works discussed here. Men confront the universal predicament of individual impotence and the inevitable uncertainty which constitutes the 'Name-of-the-Father'. As Regis Durand perceives the search for origin and legitimacy is futile for the 'secret of the absent father is that he, too, is a lost son'.<sup>72</sup> Ultimately the knight is an anti-hero, a fraud. He is a 'lost son' from a 'lost father' in vain pursuit of a self sustaining myth which protects him from the knowledge of his own insignificance, mortality and 'castration'.

Through his fiction Collins questioned and undermined both neo-medievalism itself and the phallogentric culture which utilised and romanticised this 'transcendental pretense'. He dramatised the inadequacies of any one moral system, and the impossibility of any historic discourse or imagined identity, to resolve the complexities of everyday existence. He aimed to 'discohere', to return meanings and values for recirculation, and demanded a radical 're-vision' of the way we view the world and of gendered behaviour. It is a sad indictment of the limits of discourse and the male imagination that the onus for doing this is placed squarely upon women. Women constitute, simultaneously, the 'points of resistance', the potential for 'reverse discourse', and the loving salvation for fading heroes. The 'angel in the house' rebels and dissolves boundaries only to become an 'angel of the world', a new global source of solace and hope for angst-ridden males.

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<sup>71</sup> K. Silverman, p.35.

<sup>72</sup> Regis Durand, as quoted by Shirley A. Stave, 'The Perfect Murder: Patterns of Repetition and Doubling in Wilkie Collins *'The Woman in White'*'. *The Dickensian* 25 (1996), p.302.

## **CHAPTER FOUR - DISCOURSES OF THE FAMILY : WHEN HOME IS NO LONGER A**

### **HAVEN**

'I am like a man born crippled'.<sup>1</sup>

Manliness and domesticity represent two key concepts of the Victorian moral universe and yet they are rarely discussed together. The binarism, upon which this moral universe was founded constructed the 'public' and the 'private' as separate, gendered spheres. Mary Poovey notes how the 'segregation of the domestic ideology created the illusion of an alternative to competition'. The domestic arena was depoliticised; women's work was re-written as 'duty', as 'emotional labour guaranteed by instinct'.<sup>2</sup> Home was perceived as a haven from the conflicting pressures, anxieties and rapid changes of society and yet it was simultaneously viewed as a microcosm of that very society; as a 'little world'<sup>3</sup> reflecting the values, ideals and order of the larger community. Man was defined by his ability to maintain his family and yet this was a supposedly private sphere, a refuge from rivalry. As the

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<sup>1</sup> Goldworthy Lowes Dickinson, as quoted in Jeffrey Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society : The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800 (London : Longman, 1989), p.105.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Poovey, Uneven Developments : The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England, (Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.10.

<sup>3</sup> L. Davidoff, and C. Hall, Family Fortunes : Men and Women of the English Middle-Classes 1780-1850 (Hutchinson, 1987), p.73.

Victorians developed marriage into a central contract, a sacred provider of stability and virtue, these contradictions became increasingly apparent and thus increasingly subject to surveillance and discourse. 'Public' man, the knightly hero, was also a family member in daily contact with women, children, emotional demands and 'points of resistance'. Walter Houghton demonstrates how the myth of home as haven was not a fact but a desperately felt need.<sup>4</sup> Domesticity embodied powerful tensions and powerful possibilities of change. It also vividly exposed the flaws in contemporary constructions of masculinity. The 'private sphere' transpired to be a political sphere, the potential creator of reverse discourse and the symbol of feminine power and demands. It also revealed the inadequacies of patriarchy, the fragility of masculine control and its growing inability to sustain its own hegemonic grip. This chapter will examine the nature of the threats to discourse of the family and the dramatic consequences which resulted from such challenges to them.

Louis Althusser depicted the family as an 'ideological state apparatus',<sup>5</sup> reproducing existing social relations of production and securing the maintenance of the present economic, ideological and sexual order. The family became pivotal to middle-class identity. It was intrinsically bound up with the ideology of 'respectability', with the way that the bourgeoisie defined itself against both the aristocracy and the working-class. The family was portrayed as an extension of the heavenly family,<sup>6</sup> as a pre-ordained and natural unit. It was seen as working together with society against 'nature, red in tooth and claw', promising culture and progress in a world of strife, dread and uncertainty. The family was thus both 'natural' and a defence against the savagery of nature. Jonathan Dollimore effectively underlines this basic paradox : culture was seen as 'opposite to nature but also rooted in nature, reflecting natural laws . . . it is at once the antithesis of nature and its natural consequence'.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind 1830-1870 (New Haven, 1957), p.348.

<sup>5</sup> Louis Althusser, as quoted in J. Weeks, p.25.

<sup>6</sup> L. Davidoff & C. Hall, p.109.

<sup>7</sup> J. Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence : Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1991), p.115.

As manhood became synonymous with maintaining national supremacy and the 'little world' of the family, anxieties about the fragility of these ideologies escalated. Patriarchal discourse responded to these concerns by becoming ever more rigid. Home became not only a refuge from, but the main weapon against, the challenges posed by the outside world. Imperial decline became associated with material and moral debauchery, of a blurring between the ideological separations upon which the Victorian ethical universe was founded. Hence, the Reverend Wilson could urge adherence to a strict, puritanical code 'for the good of your nation and your country . . . as Rome fell, other nations are falling . . .'.<sup>8</sup> And William Acton could proclaim man's dominance and virility as 'absolutely essential to the well-being of the family, and through it, of society itself'.<sup>9</sup>

But as attempts to contain and define the family thrived, the tensions and contradictions intrinsically embedded in domestic ideology became ever more apparent. Jeffrey Weeks traces how the bourgeois family was 'both the privileged location of emotionality and love, and simultaneously an effective policeman of sexual behaviour', how children's sexuality was both denied and rigorously controlled and how sex was exalted through marriage which then severely regulated its practices.<sup>10</sup> Marriage was both a private institution and one exposed to much public scrutiny. Marriage, and the concept of monogamy thus became key male strategies in upholding the 'transcendental pretence' and constructions of fatherhood. Indeed, Nicholas Edley views marriage as a collective bargaining by men to legitimate their control over their partner's sexuality and offspring.<sup>11</sup>

Whilst much has been written about the plight of the 'angel in the house' little has been

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<sup>8</sup> Reverend Wilson, as quoted in J. Weeks, p.87.

<sup>9</sup> William Acton, as quoted in J. Weeks, p.39.

<sup>10</sup> J. Weeks, p.31.

<sup>11</sup> N. Edley, and M. Wetherall, Men in Perspective : Practice, Power and Identity (London : Prentice Hall, 1995), p.123.

discussed about the dilemmas faced by the 'challenged paterfamilias'.<sup>12</sup> But, as Victor Seidler observes, masculine discourse was not created for the nourishment of men. On the contrary it established a 'world of power and subordination in which men have been forced to compete if we want to benefit'.<sup>13</sup> The male gaze may have resisted introspection but internal shudders began to be felt. Indeed, the very strength and clamour of patriarchal protests suggested the anxieties underpinning hegemonic utterances. The 'blustering certainty'<sup>14</sup> of the paterfamilias camouflaged his feared vulnerability and the tenuous process of new identities being forged. The authors of Corrupt Relations noted how crime, often involving sexual roles and relationships, became a central motif in Victorian literature and they suggest that this reflects how values, power relations and ethics were recognised as 'fraudulent in some basic way'. They conclude that 'the sense that all social relationships are fraudulent is one implication of the consuming, irrational guilt and anxiety that Pip, Esther Summerson, Arthur Clennam and John Harmon seem to inherit as their birthright'.<sup>15</sup> It is the overt realisation of such fraudulence that leads to the suicides of Emma Farnaby, in The Fallen Leaves, Rosanna Spearman, in The Moonstone, and Mr. Brown in I Say No. It may also explain the pervasive atmosphere of guilt and fear which permeates 'Mad Monkton', 'John Jago's Ghost', 'A Mad Marriage' and The Guilty River.

Men were often casualties of their own ideologies; they were damaged or destroyed by the very discourses created to ensure their superiority. Hegemonic masculinity valorised the white, able-bodied, middle-class, young, heterosexual male. There were, hence, many men it excluded, punished or vilified. It promoted 'violent hierarchies'<sup>16</sup> which judged, repressed or banished certain masculinities. Indeed, heterosexuality, as a social institution, created a

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<sup>12</sup> J.A. Kestner, . Masculinities in Victorian Painting (Aldershot : Scolar Press, 1995), Chapter 3.

<sup>13</sup> V. Seidler, Rediscovering Masculinity : Reason, Language and Sexuality (London : Routledge, 1989), p.21.

<sup>14</sup> L. Davidoff & C. Hall, p.229.

<sup>15</sup> R. Barickman, S. MacDonald, and M. Stark, Corrupt Relations : Charles Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Wilkie Collins and the Victorian Sexual System (Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.25-27.

<sup>16</sup> D. Derrida, as quoted in J. Dollimore, p.109.

'hegemony so total that it was almost compulsory'.<sup>17</sup> Foucault outlined how homosexuals were subject to a sentence 'to disappear'; the hegemonic message was 'do not appear if you do not want to disappear. Your existence will be maintained only at the cost of your nullification'.<sup>18</sup>

In the nineteenth - century sexuality, as Foucault and Judith Walkowitz have demonstrated, acquired a privileged status as a primary identity precisely because practices and meanings became disengaged from procreation. And, as sexuality developed ethical and symbolic significance, it incited a prolonged gaze from the bourgeoisie. Judith Walkowitz perceives how this gaze 'presupposes a privileged male subject whose identity was stable, coherent, autonomous'<sup>19</sup> and reflected universal laws. Middle-class society presented a transhistorical account of sexuality, an assumption of the existence of basic, eternal drives which precede culture. Nancy Armstrong illustrates how the desiring subject is used as a mechanism in fiction to consolidate middle-class identity by transforming political issues into psychological ones requiring regulation and surveillance.<sup>20</sup> And Jonathan Dollimore believes that at a time when capitalism and individualism threatened to undermine the family, psychology re-wrote its primary importance; the Oedipal complex represents the internalisation of the family as a 'natural' institution.<sup>21</sup>

The gravest threat perceived by the privileged male gaze was homosexuality. Jeffrey Weeks promulgates a theory that it was precisely because the homosexual was closest to the heterosexual norm that it became the target of sustained social oppression,<sup>22</sup> whilst Luce Irigaray proposes that the overt homosexual is so challenging because 'once the penis itself

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<sup>17</sup> Adrienne Rich, as quoted in J. Hearn, and D. Morgan, Men, Masculinities and Social Theory (London : Unwin Hyman, 1990), p.23.

<sup>18</sup> M. Foucault, The History of Sexuality : Vol. One (Harmondsworth : Pelican, 1981), p.84.

<sup>19</sup> Judith Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight : Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late Victorian London (London : Virago, 1992), p.16.

<sup>20</sup> Nancy Armstrong, as quoted in Elizabeth Langland Nobody's Angels : Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1995), p.4.

<sup>21</sup> J. Dollimore, p.208.

<sup>22</sup> J. Weeks, p. 96.

becomes merely a means of pleasure, pleasure among men, the phallus loses its power'.<sup>23</sup> The 'privileged signifier' loses its purpose, the Name-of the-Father is subverted, women cannot be controlled and the reproduction of sex within marriage can no longer be guaranteed. The homosexual invited severe censure precisely because he threatened all that hegemonic masculinity held as sacred.

Victorian men, as Donald Hall elucidates, defended themselves against fears of femininity, democracy, class and homosexuality by utilising 'essentialist notions of self-actualisation', they believed in a 'deep structure' of masculinity that existed independent of social, political and economic factors.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, so powerful was the Foucauldian 'sentence to disappear' that a homosexual was not defined as such until 1869. Moreover, the term, or recognition of existence, did not enter discourse in England until the 1880s.<sup>25</sup> And then he was labelled as 'sick' or 'deviant'. Religious discourse was replaced by legal and medical discourses; a gay man was not 'evil', he was 'ill'. Nonetheless, men's dread of 'otherness' resulted in a storm of denial, judgement and projection. And, as Klaus Thewelweit analysed, psychological conflicts can be 'externalised and at least temporarily resolved through degrading, maiming and killing perceived' others or elements that reflect the fear lurking in one's inner self.<sup>26</sup> Men needed to punish and banish as they feared what Andreas Huyssen termed 'an anxiety of contamination',<sup>27</sup> a terror of the other within oneself.

Homosexuality was silenced and medicalised but homosociability, as Eve Sedgwick discusses,<sup>28</sup> was promoted and, indeed, integral to perpetuating male power. Male-bonding is a crucial means of transmitting male power relations and generating the power-knowledge

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<sup>23</sup> Irigaray Luce, as quoted in J. Dollimore, p.250.

<sup>24</sup> Donald E. Hall, ed Muscular Christianity : Embodying the Victorian Age (Cambridge : Cambridge University Press, 1994), p.41.

<sup>25</sup> J. Weeks, p.21.

<sup>26</sup> K. Thewelweit, as quoted in Donald Hall, p.7.

<sup>27</sup> Andreas Huyssen, as quoted in Jon Thompson, Fiction, Crime and Empire. Clues to Modernity and Postmodernism (Chicago : University of Illinois Press, 1993), p.29.

<sup>28</sup> Eve Sedgwick, as quoted in J.A. Kestner, p.31.



which constitutes discourse. And yet it must be clearly distinguished from its 'deviant' counterpart. It is ironic but inevitable that as 'acceptable' forms of sexual behaviour became ever more scrutinised and defined, deviance or 'dangerous knowledge' had also to be explored and articulated. Social regulation thus made possible a 'reverse discourse'. Foucault discussed how homosexuality 'began to speak on its own behalf, to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged, often in the same vocabulary, using the same categories by which it was medically disqualified'.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Jonathan Dollimore claims that desire has been powerfully re-written as the effect of domination rather than a source of potential resistance to hegemony.<sup>30</sup> Containment and resistance work dialectically by displacing the social crisis or threat generated within, and by the dominant onto the marginalised. Thus the hegemony sustains an illusion of stability and cohesion by 'demonising' a minority; by forcefully creating a hierarchy and 'truthful' narrative.

Nonetheless, as the contradictions or threats lie within the very dominant ideology which is attempting to disclaim them, such strategies are doomed to fail. The very act of exorcism gives the 'demonised' a voice and, as with gender constructs themselves, 'deviance' and 'respectability' are relational constructs and so interdependent - 'the absolutely other is inextricably within'.<sup>31</sup> Judith Walkowitz exposes how the 'top includes that low symbolically as a primary eroticised constituent of its own fantasy life. The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity'.<sup>32</sup> Collins' narratives persistently confront this subjectivity and the dreaded other within. He explored the nature of 'deviance' and propriety and demonstrated how men are repressed, stunted and destroyed by their own flawed discourses and self-expectations.

In Collins' fictive world homes rarely provide a refuge and marriages are seldom happy. He

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<sup>29</sup> M. Foucault, p.101.

<sup>30</sup> J. Dollimore, p.44.

<sup>31</sup> J. Dollimore, p.182.

<sup>32</sup> J. Walkowitz, p.20.

focussed directly upon the abuse and neglect which can thrive within the middle-class 'sanctuary'. Collins did portray the family as a 'little world', a microcosm of society, but he made it reflect the very injustices, anxieties and changes which the hegemony endeavoured to make the home a bulwark against. Collins perceived the home as a political arena, one in which power relations can be viewed in their most distorted and brutal state. Indeed, the family is often seen to generate the very problems which it then denies or attempts to displace onto vilified others. For many Collinsian characters the family is the problem; it is their prison or asylum rather than their refuge. Laura Fairlie is incarcerated and labelled insane by her father's ignorance, her uncle's indifference and her husband's greed. Magdalen Vanstone, in No Name, is driven to poverty and despair by her father's irresponsibility, Armada's Lydia Guilt is destroyed by a series of abusive men and surrogate families whilst Midwinter knows home only as a place to be beaten and starved. One of few joyous marriages envisaged in Collins' canon is that of Magdalen's parents - who are not actually married at all.

Family life is, moreover, not seen as suitable for many individual needs. Marian Halcombe and Basil's sister resist the confinement of marital constraints whilst Herbert Linley, in The Evil Genius, finds these ties to be onerous and 'unnatural'. The 'hero' of Blind Love detests the propriety and responsibility of husbandhood whilst some characters, such as The Black Robe's Lewis Romaine, have desires which conventional relationships cannot fulfil. Other characters, such as Midwinter and Hide and Seek's Markman, have been too damaged by their childhood to recreate another 'little world'.

The home also represents the sole source of feminine power. As female demands became louder and more urgent, the construction of masculine potency began to collapse. Hegemonic supremacy began to crumble before its dread of the M/Other. In the later novels, as Lisa Mathews notes, men prove increasingly 'unable to create narratives which legitimise

the existing<sup>33</sup> social structure. As Heart and Science's Mr. Galilee flees from his home, and the Reverend Gracedieu, in The Legacy of Cain, succumbs to senility, patriarchy is seen as both failing and degenerating. And masculine potency begins to disintegrate in the outside world as men exhaust their energies in a doomed attempt to order their homes, to sustain the 'transcendental pretence' as 'reality'.

'Mad Monkton' anticipates the emphasis of the later works upon the dangers of hegemonic utterances. In this story, as Jenny Taylor illustrated, the familial decline is depicted through literal physical decay, the 'morbid stagnancy of the environment which . . . becomes both projection and cause of the hero's hypochondria'.<sup>34</sup> Monkton is unable to dissociate himself from his family's self-sustaining myths or the projected expectations of others. He is a rational, intelligent man who discovers that reason cannot confer order on life and that ratiocination cannot ward off insanity. Monkton is ultimately impotent to act or release himself from his perceived inheritance. And his inability to separate, to achieve selfhood, leads to the annihilation of himself, his family and future generations. And in Armadale we witness repressed and frustrated women flocking to Dr. Downward's sanatorium. They are desperate for a 'plunge into public life' and Dr. Downward/Le Doux's asylum, abortion clinic and backdrop for a suicide and attempted murder, is preferable to the 'secret theatre of home'. Collins knew that : 'Anything is welcome to the women which offers them any sort of harmless refuge from the established tyranny . . . that all human happiness begins and ends at home'.<sup>35</sup> That this institution can be seen as a 'harmless refuge' compared to the home is, perhaps, Collins' most severe indictment of the family. But it is an indictment which he vividly substantiated throughout his narratives - as a close reading of Man and Wife and The Black Robe will demonstrate.

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<sup>33</sup> L.G. Mathews, L.G. Crime and Subversion in the Later Fiction of Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of Leeds, 1993), p.6.

<sup>34</sup> J.B. Taylor, In the Secret Theatre of Home : Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology (London : Routledge, 1988), p.95.

<sup>35</sup> Wilkie Collins, Armadale, (London : Chatto & Windus, 1895), p.622.

R. Barickman, S. McDonald and Myra Stark declare that Collins focussed upon peripheral issues, upon localised problems rather than upon the major causes of social oppression.<sup>36</sup> I would suggest that a closer study of the later texts would contradict this claim. Man and Wife is not concerned with the idiosyncrasies of the Scottish and Irish marriage laws so much as societal oppression of women in its entirety. It is a novel which underlines the potential for male violence and cruelty. It explores patriarchal neglect and the economic, sexual and physical abuse endured by, and feared by, women. The very title indicates this theme by emphasising a female role as a secondary position to 'man'. It is a novel which, as Lisa Mathews remarks, renders the 'construct of paternal benevolence difficult to sustain'.<sup>37</sup> It overtly anticipates the decline of patriarchy. Geoffrey Delamayne's, the 'modern Hercules' (p.148), gradual collapse echoes the disintegration of the 'dominant fiction' itself. His supposedly 'vital power' (p.149) is exposed as a chimera, a mask disguising an inherent weakness.

Man and Wife reveals the 'transcendental pretence' to be just that; social structures, institutions and language itself transpire to be fragile, misleading or delusory. At one point the novel ironically states that it is 'the nature of truth to struggle to light' (p.217) - a statement which the rest of the book subverts. Reality is seen as a wholly subjective term; there is a constant struggle for whose construction of 'truth' dominates. Sir Patrick knows that the law can 'argue anything' (p.277) and thus he organises a trial for Geoffrey. Truth emerges to be whatever hegemonic discourse declares it to be. To Sir Patrick Anne Silvester is 'the noblest woman', to Mrs. Delamayne she is 'an impudent adventuress' (p.381) whilst to Geoffrey she is simply 'an immovable obstacle' (p.380) between him and his desires. Anne's mother is a 'millstone' (p.6) to her husband but Mr. Kendrew eulogises her. To Mrs. Glenarm, Geoffrey is a 'hero' (p.393), an 'angel' (p.393) whilst to Anne and her friends he is the 'vilest wretch' (p.396). Anne knows that 'I am innocent - and yet it is my fault' (p.270) whilst still perceiving

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<sup>36</sup> R. Barickman, S. MacDonald & M. Stark, p.5.

<sup>37</sup> L.G. Mathews, p.18.

herself as morally superior to Geoffrey. Bishopriggs is a rogue but one who inspires much affection and whose absence leaves 'a terrible blank' (p.183). A wall is not a wall but a mirage, a sheet of deceptive paper through which one can readily be gazed upon and murdered. A marriage certificate is 'wastepaper' (p.18) - marriage is whatever a letter, a castaway comment, an assumption or the particular legal or religious discourses of a particular country decrees it to be at any one time. Sir Patrick can exclaim : 'This is not a marriage in a novel' (p.208) but that is precisely what it is. Man and Wife, like Armada, plays with its own identity as a text. Again there is no 'string' to link the pearls', no 'primal plan'. Collins created a wholly transient, unstable and subjective world, one in which moral relativism rules and within which laws, values, definitions and 'truth' are whatever the 'dominant fiction' determine them to be.

The central theme is the patriarchal abuse of power. The original Anne and Blanch are described in economic terms, as commodities, and their careers and self-worth are defined accordingly to family wealth. Their future and well-being are dependent upon the men whom they encounter. The novel explores three abusive relationships and concludes that power is an economic asset and thus one possessed solely by men. Geoffrey's responses are echoed by, and contrasted with, the behaviour of Hester Dethridge's working-class husband 'in a way that suggests that it is the latter's gender which is morbid rather than his class'.<sup>38</sup> Joel Dethridge's desperation to secure money for drink is, ultimately, little different to Mr. Vanborough's desertion of Anne's mother for status and political advancement or Geoffrey's abandonment of Anne for wealth and family approval. The men know that money and economic and social position equate with power and thus they sacrifice all to acquire these privileges. The women are victims of the male lust for power. They are treated as pawns in male controlled, competitive games.

The double standard is made transparent. Within three days Anne is 'disgraced and

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<sup>38</sup> J. BTaylor, p.214.

broken' (p.270), reduced to a 'mere shell', a 'mockery of her former self' (p.170). But Geoffrey's responsibility in this downfall is dismissed by his family as an indiscretion, a 'foolish flirtation' (p.315). When observing this disintegration Hester knows that Anne has being 'brought to it by a man' (p.175) and Collins knows that 'time enough to cry, is time easily found in a women's existence' (p.45). What is 'moral ruin' to women, the end of a life and all claim to respectability, is purely 'money ruin' (p.49) to men, a 'ruin' that can easily be rectified by marrying a Mrs. Glenarm.

In the male pursuit of money, power and ambition, Mrs. Vanborough is a 'millstone', Anne an 'immovable obstacle' and Hester a source of cash and sadistic pleasures. Anne is ruined by polite society; as she produces Geoffrey's letter to ensure Blanche's re-acceptance by this very world she is effectively sacrificed 'in the name of morality' (p.379). It is a dilemma which radically alters the previously conventional Sir Patrick's perception of ethical obligations. He dreads the physical violence which Anne may experience whilst Anne fears sexual abuse (p.380 and p.396). The men are all aware that 'Law and Society armed her husband with his conjugal rights' (p.392) - rights which may be experienced by the women as 'outrages' (p.396). Sir Patrick acknowledges that dogs and horses have more legal protection than wives (p.158). He knows that society eulogises marriage but offers no insurance or redress; that it is 'a leap in the dark' (p.264).

As with Laura Fairlie, Anne's entrapment is mirrored by actual confinements.<sup>39</sup> She is 'imprisoned' at the Craig Fernie inn, by pregnancy, by Salt Patch's walled garden and by her own locked room. Her marital home is 'an asylum or prison' (p.386) and her husband is her gaoler (p.401). In the middle of London Anne is 'as absolutely isolated from all contact with humanity . . . as if she lay in her grave' (p.401). She is totally disempowered and led to question her sanity. She has no option but to accept the 'false appearances that surround her in the disguise of truth' (p.453); to believe that a wall is solid. Anne believed that the ultimate

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<sup>39</sup> R. Barickman, S. MacDonald & M. Stark, p.143.

'outrage' was rape but it proves to be worse. Geoffrey's creation of a hollow in the wall, a murderous cavity camouflaged by a strip of wallpaper, can be seen as a synecdoche for the vulnerability of all women. In her locked room, peacefully asleep, Anne can be 'gazed' upon, defined, judged and stifled. Geoffrey's hands can reach beyond a supposedly solid wall and suffocate her. Geoffrey is, moreover, a double rapist; he reads Hester's diary and penetrates Anne's bedroom. Patriarchal power knows nor respects, Collins suggested any boundaries in its endless pursuit of self-gratification.

But it is Hester's story which encapsulates the full horror of male abuse and feminine powerlessness. She articulates, in detail, the degradation, terror, anger and frustration to which her middle-class sisters can only allude. Collins, perhaps, deflected the most threatening parts of Anne's sexuality and resistance onto Hester. As a capable, working woman Hester had the ability to live independently but 'polite' society does not permit this, 'decent' people would not tolerate evidence of marital discord (p.426). Hence, Hester's potential is slowly whittled away and she is left with no resources and no livelihood. She is betrayed by 'respectable' society as much as she is by Joel's drunken excesses. She has no legal recourse, she can own nothing in her own name and has no escape from Joel's brutality and exploitation (p.423). Her home is a prison and a waking torment and her family are indifferent to her plight; her father refuses to communicate and she is shunned by other family members. Hester knows that 'there is no limit . . . to what a bad husband may do . . . ' (p.426) and poignantly remarks that : 'There's more that's bruised in me than what shows in my face' (p.424). Hester is totally repressed, she is allowed no outlet and thus she creates a violent Other. She is psychologically liberated by her fantasies of murder, by her other violent self who transgresses boundaries and who cannot be contained or controlled. Her desire to crush masculine hegemony manifests itself in her apparitions of her own potential; her desire to kill all men including small boys who will one day grow into 'Rapists'. She self-splits and personifies her rage and energy into a liberated alter ego; a woman who can act and seize power in the outside world. The 'unnamed horror' (p.412), experienced by Hester, is

hegemonic discourse, the 'terrible blank' of paternal evasion and denial which leaves her unarmed at the mercy of Joel's fists. She glides through the novel as a living indictment of patriarchal abuse and neglect. Thus Geoffrey is terrified of her; she is the living reproof of all that he stands for and secretly knows is wrong. The secrets exposed in Man and Wife are secrets of fraudulent relationships and of violent abuse of power - the 'crimes' which induced 'irrational' guilt and anxiety in Pip, John Harmon and Arthur Clennam.

Sir Patrick parodies male expectations of an ideal woman through Hester : 'A woman who can't talk, and a woman who can cook, is simply a woman who has arrived at absolute perfection' (p.188). And yet clearly Hester is far from such a state. She inspires fear, confusion and frustration in all who meet her. She blurs boundaries, resists authority and challenges expectations. She exists beyond discourse and images of femininity. She is simultaneously 'the extended analogue of Anne's position, and . . . the literal manifestation of a psychic response to violence and repression'.<sup>40</sup> Hester represents a living death; she lives in, but is not part of, the material world. And her dissociation is self-induced as a survival strategy; she dwells within a self-imposed numbness and dumbness. This is, I suggest, partly due to guilt, over being forced to resort to a violence which was hitherto alien to her, and partly because language has proved meaningless and futile. It is discourses which entrapped Hester, it is phallogentric utterances which imprisoned her. In 1869 Frances Power Cobbe noted that 'the property of the woman who commits murder and the property of the woman who commits matrimony, (are) dealt with alike' under English law.<sup>41</sup> Collins, Lillian Nayder surmises, suggests that if women are treated as a felon, and denied options, they 'may very well become one'.<sup>42</sup> Significantly her resistance, her feelings and chosen method of liberation, are permitted no articulation. Hence, her anguish is expressed in a 'wild litany of her own' (p.411) and she admits that : 'All human talk was nothing now to me' (p.436). In just three

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<sup>40</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.216.

<sup>41</sup> Francis Power Cobbe, as quoted by Lillian Nayder, Lillian, Wilkie Collins (New York : Twayne, 1998), p.98.

<sup>42</sup> Nayder, p.98.



days Anne is reduced to a 'mockery of her former self' and survives by imposing a 'total absence of emotion' (p.171) upon herself. Anne's plight is short-lived and largely reversible. Hester's plight is not. Hester Dethridge signifies the possible fate of all women and thus she continues to exist as a walking indictment of masculine violence and a living manifestation of its consequences.

Whilst it could be argued that Hester's final disintegration and incarceration is an example of Collins' backtracking as suppressing the potential reverse discourses embodied in Hester's and Anne's actions, it could also be viewed that Hester had always been imprisoned - in her family, in her religion, in her marriage, in her jobs and, ultimately, in an asylum. Her collapse into insanity echoes her inability to find a way forward, to move beyond masculine discourses. Elaine Showalter notes how 'madness is the impasse confronting those whom cultural conditioning has deprived of the very means of protection or self-affirmation'.<sup>43</sup> Hester has no other discourse available to her than that of insanity. Like Mary Wolstonecraft's Maria she perceives the asylum as yet another patriarchal institution; institutions which enclose all women and drive them 'mad'. And thus she can find no motive or reason to fight for either her sanity or her freedom.<sup>44</sup> Words literally fail Hester Dethridge; she ends her life with no memory, her existence a 'terrible blank'.

Moreover Man and Wife questions what constitutes 'madness'. Geoffrey's actions are mad to Anne and Sir Patrick but to polite society he is a 'young god of mythology' (p.240). Medical discourse defines the insane as 'people who have lost control over their own minds' (p.427) but Joel's loss of 'control over his own craving for strong drink . . . a frenzy beyond his own control' (p.427) is apparently not madness but a man's prerogative. Hester fears madness and the spectral other self who haunts her but she is not defined as mad until the close of the narrative. Geoffrey scorns any questioning of his physical and moral strength yet he crumbles

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<sup>43</sup> Elaine Showalter, The Female Malady : Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980 (London : Virago, 1987), p.5.

<sup>44</sup> As quoted in E. Showalter, p.1.

at the first hurdle. Madness, like truth, is exposed as a construct; a subjective valuation dependent upon self-interest, particular historic or social circumstances and the influence of hegemonic ideology. Ironically it is human laws, in this narrative, which appear as most 'mad', most beyond reason or definition. Insanity equates with the patriarchal legal discourses which ensure that Anne is married to Geoffrey on the strength of a note whilst her mother, despite an elaborate religious ceremony, is not married to Mr. Vanborough. Madness is the laws which fail to protect Hester, which leave her speechless, memoryless and enclosed within another male institution.

Man and Wife presents a major critique of propriety. Blanche and Arnold experience the only happy marriage but its fragility is revealed by the possibility that it is no marriage at all. And their wedding is 'dull' (p.257). It takes place on Ham Farm which is noted for its 'smug monotony' (p.257). The boredom and discomfort felt by all the wedding guests highlights the futility of traditions and customs, the 'oppression of senseless social prohibitions' (p.258). And Blanche is quickly disenchanted. Sir Patrick knows that she is suffering from the disease of 'Nothing to Do' (p.279) an ailment that is quite 'incurable' as Blanche is 'protected' from public life. As Anne is nearly literally suffocated so does Blanche become stifled by the 'smug monotony' of the family home. She experiences the ennui, the overwhelming sense of sameness, which destroyed Miss Mellicent in The Fallen Leaves. The 'unhappy Fatality' (p.284-5 and p.21) dreaded by Anne's mother is, in fact, the stranglehold of the 'dominant fiction', the power of the 'transcendental pretence' to enclose the marginalised within its utterances.

Collins explored the possible causes of this brutality and, in particular here, he attacked the muscular Christianity embraced by Kingsley and Hughes. A superficial reading indicates a degenerative stance; a battle by culture and training to tame the 'wild beast' (p.161) within. Geoffrey is described as a 'human animal' (p.33) and 'natural man' (p.161-2) - man without conscience or imagination, the unsocialised man. But Geoffrey has been socialised and his

fear of Hester reveals that he has a conscience. Geoffrey is moulded by a particular discourse of masculinity - one which embraces physical prowess, male-bonding and sportsmanship. Collins contemplated 'two lives', the 'surface-life of the muscles' and the 'inner life' of selfhood (p.149). He suggested that muscular Christianity advocated the first to the exclusion of the latter; that they accepted appearances as reality. Indeed, as Lillian Nayder observes, 'the strongest case against women's natural subordination is provided by "natural man" himself . . .'.<sup>45</sup> And few could perceive that the physique of a 'modern Hercules' could camouflage a deadly weakness. As Jenny Taylor argues: 'Power and strength become degenerate through turning out to be not really power and strength after all . . .'.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Vanborough commits suicide when his ambitions turn to dust and Geoffrey's arrogance or misplaced confidence leads to self-destruction. J.A. Mangan observes how sport is based upon a dynamic of separation and attachment, it encourages kinship and homosocial bonding but it also utilises competitiveness and praises individual achievement.<sup>47</sup> It embodies the paradoxes of masculinity and can provide an excuse for self-seeking behaviour and rivalry. It endorses a battlefield mentality which views all as threat and encourages self-survival at all costs. Geoffrey personifies Paul Hoch's 'protest masculinity'.<sup>48</sup> In resorting to force to achieve his aims he is overconforming to certain aspects of masculine discourse. And, as Peter Stearns notes, patriarchal tradition 'said nothing about the equation of happiness and masculinity . . . a cloying happiness could be positively dangerous'.<sup>49</sup> This is one possible explanation as to why Geoffrey and Vanborough tire so quickly in a relationship: the pursuit is all. Collins appeared to hold Victorian society as a whole to account for this damage. He seemed to lament the middle-class 'smugness', masculine complacency, public school ethos, national arrogance and empire-building which generated this competitiveness, hostility and self-interest; 'virtues' which encouraged a misplaced or erroneous confidence in the

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<sup>45</sup> L. Nayder, p. 99.

<sup>46</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.215.

<sup>47</sup> J.A. Mangan, and J. Walvin, eds. Manliness and Morality Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America 1800-1940 (Manchester University Press, 1987), p.140 and p.179.

<sup>48</sup> Paul Hoch, White Hero, Black Beast : Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity (London : Pluto Press, 1979), p.84.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Stearns, Be A Man! Males in Modern Society (London : Holmes & Meier, 1990), p.46.

hegemony.

And yet the men in Man and Wife do seem to suspect their fragility, the inner weakness which could fail them on the last lap of the race. In pondering over why intelligent women are attracted to brutal men, the narrator questioned if 'the natural condition of a woman is to find her master' (p.235) - a thesis which the novel immediately subverts. There is no 'master' for the women. All the men are weak, abusive or in fear of the M/Other. Mrs. Glenarm's perception of Geoffrey transpires to be self-delusion; a projection of her own expectations and the internalisation of hegemonic discourse. Geoffrey may fear Hester but he is unable to plan a murder without her skills and imagination. Appropriately Salt Patch is one huge monument to male fear, erected as an impenetrable stronghold against one man's dread of invasion by marginalised others. His fears of his own vulnerability are transformed into contempt for the 'demonised' minority; all those who threaten his masculine privileges. Anne does not find a master in Geoffrey, she finds a tyrant and, as Cicely Hamilton illustrated, the 'worst of evils is servility', a servility which necessarily involves the 'enforced arrest of . . . mental growth . . . despotism rules by keeping its subjects in ignorance and darkness'.<sup>50</sup>

In contrast to this relationship, Lady Lundie, Mrs. Carnegie, Mrs. Inchbare, Blanche and Blanche's mother all happily dominate within their own marriages. However, they rule by male permission, by men who choose to be 'Daddies' rather than 'Rapists'. Collins challenged the institution of marriage but he also recognised the need for divorce laws and legal protection; to ever more closely define legal discourse. As John Kucich demonstrated Collins' questions, but does not overthrow the hegemonic stance; he delineates 'both the indispensability and the tragic unreliability of legal systems . . .'.<sup>51</sup> Ironically the only way Collins could foresee how to protect future Hesters and Annes is through creating more discourse, a discourse designed by men to protect their victims from the pitfalls of this very discourse. There is little wonder that

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<sup>50</sup> Cicely Hamilton, Marriage as a Trade (London : Chapman & Hall, 1912), p.45 and p.50.

<sup>51</sup> John Kucich, The Power of Lies : Transgression in Victorian Fiction (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1994), p.84.

Hester chooses to end her days in the absence of memory and speech and that the foreign visitor, baffled by English traditions and systems, could only 'understand the English thieves' (p.351). And that Anne chooses to re-marry can be seen as yet another severe indictment of the society which left this foreigner so bemused; women's only source of power is to marry a Sir Patrick or to remain silent.

The Black Robe continues to expand these same themes. Indeed the black robe seems to refer not only to the literal Papal gown but to patriarchal 'protection' and entrapment of women as a whole. Stella Eyrecourt is enclosed within multiple male narratives. She is the creation of a male writer and subjected to the male gaze of Penrose, Benwell, Romaine, Winterfield, Lord Loring and Major Hynd. She is the subject of discourse but has no language of her own. She exists as a cipher of male desires and she internalises the projections and expectations of others. To the Loring, she is a woman sinned against, to Emma Winterfield she is a privileged member of the bourgeoisie, to Father Benwell she is a scheming, self-interested woman, to Winterfield she is a victim and to Romaine she is a potential nurse and saviour. Stella has no narrative of her past; Loring and Benwell are patriarchs who construct versions of her history and define concepts of sin and virtue. Stella's past is revealed as a series of fictions and her present is a struggle for whose truth will predominate. It is ironically appropriate, as Mathews remarks, that Loring silences Stella 'fearing that her narrative will possess some of the qualities of sensation fiction, thereby allowing Benwell to offer a far more dangerous one'.<sup>52</sup>

The Black Robe examines diverse forms of masculinities including the banished and 'unspeakable'. Benwell and Penrose represent the two sides of masculinity - the 'Daddy' and the 'Rapist'. Benwell eavesdrops, manipulates, steals letters and creates narratives to promote his own ambition. Penrose personifies paternal benevolence; he acts and manipulates for the perceived welfare of others. Benwell reflects all Fathers; he exudes

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<sup>52</sup> L.G. Mathews, p.276.

authority, self righteous and has unabounded confidence in his actions: 'What right has an obstacle to get in my way?' (p.52). The Black Robe is a study of fatherhood with the Pope and God as the ultimate fathers. It is a doomed search for adult masculine wisdom and one which inevitably leads to disillusionment, despair and the loss of self-determination.

Hegemonic discourse directs the men's behaviour and ambitions - and leads to destruction and self-annihilation. Indeed the father-figure is used by men, who fear their vulnerability, as a means of abdicating responsibility: 'I am in the hands of God now' (p.295). It is precisely such paternal evasion which causes Stella's ordeal, Laura Fairlie's plight and the anguish of poor Miss Finch.

In The Black Robe Rome performs a similar catalytic function to that of the moonstone; the Vatican stimulates the best and worst potentials in the individuals it encounters. It also exposes paternalism as a mask, a self seeking discourse which disguises its autocracy and privileges with a benevolent facade. But it is a mechanism destined to fail. In the novels of the 1880s Collins depicted a world of patriarchal decline; he delineated the gradual collapse of the hegemony. Penrose is exiled. He is sent to convert the 'savages' of Western America. He confronts 'natural' man with culture and religious discourse but he loses the battle against regression. He is saved by adopting a female role; he is the keeper of the medicines, a nurse. He has to be rescued from enslavement and returns a broken impotent man. Paternal benevolence, Collins suggested, is no longer sufficient. Penrose is largely saved by performing female duties and through Stella's devotion.

The central concern in The Black Robe is the struggle between the private and public spheres. Benwell's plans to secure Vange Abbey are pitted against the Loring's intention to marry the Abbey's owner to Stella. Penrose's love of his friend, and commitment to conversion, is pitted against the moral and domestic influence of Romaine's wife. Indeed Penrose and Stella demonstrate the 'same pure enthusiasm' (p.86) for the 'deliverance' (p.86) of Romaine from his own self-destruction. Stella sees 'deliverance' as the comfort of home

whilst Penrose believes religion and politics can save him. Thus Romaine is torn between his duty to his wife and his desire for power in the political sphere. And yet this man of ambition is impotent in both the public and the private spheres. He has no real power. He is unable to control the phallic pen, direct discourse or order his family. He sits in front of his 'blank sheet' (p.213) but is unable to write. His great work remains incomplete and his home disintegrates. In striving for control all count upon, and play upon, Romaine's intrinsic 'weakness' (p.154 and p.270). Romaine is a man tormented by remorse, self-doubt and growing fear. He is unable to find peace, define his angst or 'speak'. He is as silent and entrapped as Stella herself.

Collins hinted at the source of Romaine's malaise. From the beginning he is 'weak, wan and wasted' (p.42), he is depressed and can find little pleasure in company or society as a whole. He is attractive but is 'cold' (p.35) to women and treats them with the 'weariest indifference' (p.18). He speaks of 'my ordeal' (p.30), of committing the 'one unatoned and unpardonable sin' (p.93) and is resigned to his life 'like a prisoner submitting to a sentence that he had deserved' (p.29). He is perpetually haunted by 'the torment of the Voice' (p.93) - a voice that is androgynous, that cannot be gendered, defined or controlled. He lives in fear of vague but damning accusations. Indeed his fear of destruction becomes self-destructive. As with Monkton Romaine's dread cannot be exorcised or contained by rationality and his shame greatly exceeds his regret over the accidental death.

The Loring's uphold the hegemony. They valorise heterosexuality and the marital institution and see this as the remedy for Romaine's despair. But Romaine represents one form of masculinity to which marriage can only prove a further source of misery and frustration. Romaine internalises hegemonic expectations and believes he can be 'saved' by Stella's moral influence. He uses domesticity to quell his fears and urges - and fails. Within weeks he is openly forced to admit he was deluded; he is a 'disappointed' (p.170) man who can only treat his wife with 'contemptuous endurance' (p.215).

Lewis Romaine's plight reveals how the 'unspeakable becomes the unthinkable'.<sup>53</sup> And it is extremely difficult to move the unspeakable into consciousness and thus take a moral stance upon it. No-one can define Romaine's misery for his identity exists outside of discourse. He is seen as 'weak', 'cold' and 'indifferent' and the only 'remedies' available to him are ones which can only further self-alienate him. When the 'home as haven' myth necessarily fails Romaine he turns to the public sphere. As he is still not facing central issues, or listening to his 'inner life', Romaine is doomed to further disappointment. He is again attempting to exist through usurping the discourses of others. He fears his own impotence and thus craves the ultimate power of politics, to direct the 'destinies of nations' (p.194). And, as he has the economic assets desired by a dominant ideology, he is given such power.

Romaine may be accepted by phallogentric culture but he remains impotent and alienated. He thus adapts his own fears and experiences to a religious discourse. He relives his terror and ordeal through his sermons. He projects his own guilt and remorse onto others and transforms it into a universal, unnamed 'sin'. But the genderless voice demanding to know 'Where are you?' (p.17 and p.284) has adopted new overtones. It is the cry of the son and wife he has abandoned and the self identity he dare not admit. He buries his 'truth' among hegemonic utterances, and creates a mask of masculinity which deceives and satisfies the crowds who flock to his sermons.

Romaine's death symbolises his life. He dies from the 'complete prostration of the forces of life' (p.301). He remains in front of a 'blank sheet', unable to create his groundbreaking work or develop a new discourse. And in attempting to exist within the discourses and identities of others he destroys himself. Like Monkton he is unable to separate himself from projected expectations and interpretations, he cannot achieve selfhood. His attempts to rationalise his world render his own experience invisible for they permit his situation no voice.

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<sup>53</sup> S.K. Cornillon, ed., Images of Women in Fiction : Feminist Perspectives (Ohio : Bowling Green University Press, 1973), p.15.



He exemplifies Annette Federico's concern that in assuming a mask of hegemonic masculinity there is 'always the risk that the essential man, as in The Picture of Dorian Gray, will wither within'.<sup>54</sup> His story vividly illustrates how 'the most oppressed of all conditions is to have no words to explain the feelings and predicaments one is experiencing, while the belief systems of the dominant culture and intellectual life deny its reality'.<sup>55</sup>

Romayne is in love with Penrose. Penrose 'loves' (p.111) Romayne and Romayne cries: 'Oh, my more than friend - my brother in love!' (p.217) before words fail him and he collapses. The tone of their final parting haunts Stella for many years (p.218). Penrose is Romayne's 'best friend' (p.218). He offers a love and solace which all of Stella's efforts fail to approach. She knows that Penrose is a 'robber' (p.191) of her husband's affections and a rival to fear. Penrose is also a depressed man; estranged from himself and the world around him. He hints at a past tragedy (p.215) but cannot articulate his grief. He, too, internalises hegemonic discourse; he abdicates responsibility to a 'spiritual director' (p.238) and disguises his predicament with paternal benevolence and virtue. Both men take refuge from the conflicting demands of society and the 'inner life'. Romayne escapes to the Retreat and the all-male community at Rome whilst Penrose remains in exile. Penrose's existence is one of perpetual disguise and fear of discovery. He is a spy at Oxford, a covert convert at Vange Abbey and a missionary in America. He is never permitted openness and selfhood.

Romayne, meanwhile, discovers that homosocial bonding and chastity does not enhance artistic or personal potency. He abandons his great work and slowly regresses. He is, indeed, an 'assassin' (p.17 and p.284) of Stella's hopes, of hegemonic discourse and ultimately of himself. Like Goldworthy Lowes Dickinson, a liberal and homosexual philosopher, Romayne has internalised the 'dominant fiction' and could exclaim: 'I am like a man born crippled'.<sup>56</sup> Romayne, the text suggests, needs to see Stella as a focus of sexual

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<sup>54</sup> Annette Rose Federico, Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : Case Western University, 1988), p.248.

<sup>55</sup> Jalna Hanmer, as quoted in J. Hearn & D. Morgan, p.21.

<sup>56</sup> Goldworthy Lowes Dickinson, as quoted in J. Weeks, p.105.

disgust, an object upon which to project contempt and loathing. Judith Walkowitz notes how, in Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, the women exist on the margins as victims, observers or symbols of fear. She demonstrates how men, on their own, turn their gaze inwards and rapidly disintegrate.<sup>57</sup> This is precisely what happens to Romaine in Rome.

Collins suggested that Romaine is destroyed partly by society and partly by his own 'weakness' for, in the moral relativity of the text, all is potentially possible. All is seen as constructs, as 'blank sheets' (p.179) awaiting the touch of a pen. Emma Winterfield's confession is stolen, lost, copied and replaced by 'blank sheets'. The differentiation between true and false remorse (p.156), defined by Winterfield, is available nowhere else in the narrative. Sin, virtue, madness and truth are seen as subjective interpretations, as projections of needs and expectations. Stella is married to Romaine according to legal discourse but Benwell's religious discourse defines her as Winterfield's wife. To Rome a government law is 'an act of infidelity', a 'blasphemous profanation' (p.251). To Mrs. Eyrecourt and the Loring's Stella is a victim who was 'rescued' at the Church door. To Benwell and Romaine she is a fallen woman and to Emma she is protected only by privileges denied to her class, by lawyers who can legally proclaim Stella's innocence for a fee. To Winterfield and his family, Emma is an adventuress, a drunkard but Emma's letter reveals the depth of her love for Bernard, her pain and her fear that Winterfield fell for superficial beauty whilst despising her history. The reasons for her grief and alcoholism seem to lay firmly at the door of patriarchal neglect and bourgeois contempt for the masses. Emma's devotion is experienced by Winterfield as 'hideous fetters' (p.259) and Benwell's sacred mission is condemned by the Eyrecourts as 'fanatical cruelty' and 'Papal Aggression' (p.272).

And patriarchy is depicted as dangerous for both genders. Penrose's circumstances, as a marginalised male, echo Stella's own story. As Stella is trapped within a loveless marriage so is Penrose imprisoned by the Indians. They are both altruistic, sacrificial individuals through

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<sup>57</sup> Judith Walkowitz, p.39.

whom Collins questioned the nature of duty, the cruelty of patriarchy and the dangers of self-abandonment. David Leverenz analyses how manhood 'begins as a battlefield code' whilst womanhood begins as a 'domestic code'. But the paradox is 'that what can be socially functional can be personally disfunctional, men get killed, women get stifled'.<sup>58</sup> And this is precisely what we witness in the narratives discussed in this thesis.

Middle-class complacency, and insular notions of propriety, are seen as producing this tragedy. Thus bourgeois values and assumptions are held up for examination. The theft of Emma's letter is explained by the statement that 'mad people do strange things' (p.179) and yet the boy is defined as completely sane and lucid prior to his death. And he is largely disturbed by witnessing a duel and the death of his brother - the actions of 'sane' men. Mrs. Eyrecourt speaks for the middle-classes by refusing to discuss madness but her protest - 'I want to bury my nose among the flowers' (p.173) - reveals how the 'transcendental pretence' is responsible for abuse through its very neglect, and self-imposed blindness. 'Sane' people do much 'madder' things in The Black Robe than steal a document: Romaine participates in a fatal duel and hears voices, Winterfield is regarded as 'mad' (p.258) by his family to marry Emma, Emma drinks herself to oblivion, Penrose embarks upon a suicide mission and Winterfield seeks forgetfulness among the 'dusky daughters of Nature' (p.279). It is ironically appropriate that the Indians celebrate insanity as sacred; L'Herbier is not mad, he is a 'mysteriously inspired person' (p.294). It is appropriate that the novel closes with a struggle to define madness. Winterfield and Stella see Romaine's conversion to Catholicism as 'mad' and his reconversion to 'true happiness . . . wife and child' (p.231, p.305 and p.309) and the laws of property and primogeniture, as 'sanity'. Father Benwell decrees Romaine as 'sane' when writing a will in his favour, but perceives the destruction of this will as 'an act of madness' (p.309). All strive to legitimise their own discourses - and all fail.

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<sup>58</sup> David Leverenz, Manhood and the American Renaissance (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1989), p.73.

There is no ending to The Black Robe. Father Benwell remains undefeated and determined to convert Romaine's son. And Romaine's death-bed revelation reveals little more than the self-delusion and desperate need to belong, to find peace, that he exhibited throughout the narrative. Romaine's life exemplifies what Lacan analysed as the tragic ontology of homosexual desire, the quest for impossible self-completion:

'It is himself whom he pursues . . . The intersubjective relationship which subtends perverse desire is only sustained by the annihilation of the desire of the other, or the desire of the subject . . . in the one as in the other, this relation dissolves the being of the subject'.<sup>59</sup> Romaine has not the courage to create reverse discourse, to verbalise his role as an 'internal dissident' and thus he does indeed 'dissolve'.

It is made painfully apparent that home and family did not hold 'true happiness' for Romaine. Indeed the family brings little comfort to most of the characters. Mrs. Eyrecourt is left impoverished and wandering aimlessly from family to family. Stella is abandoned and Emma turns to alcohol. Major Hynd spends his entire existence trying to separate himself from his 'disagreeable wife and four ugly children' (p.3). Romaine's dying words, and Stella's re-marriage appear to be little more than attempts to 'bury my nose among the flowers'. However, Benwell's parting threat shows that such endeavours are both dangerous and impossible. And Romaine's cruelty, self-centredness and ignorance substantiates Reynauld's claim that the fear of homosexuality actually reveals man's awareness of his own oppressiveness, that 'he would not want a sexual relationship with someone like himself'.<sup>60</sup>

In the later fiction men are either unable to control their 'little world' and dread of the M/Other, or the family is seen as inappropriate to the individual's needs. Through entering

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<sup>59</sup> Jacques Lacan, as quoted in J. Dollimore, p.202.

<sup>60</sup> Emmanuel Reynauld, Holy Virility : The Social Construction of Masculinity (London : Pluto Press, 1983), p.56.

and examining the domestic sphere Collins challenged ideological binarism, heterosexuality, marriage and monogamy. Love is a 'lottery' and marriage a 'leap in the dark', actions supported by discourse but not by an insurance policy or guarantee. 'A Mad Marriage'<sup>61</sup> crystallises these concerns. We never know if Roland Cameron is 'mad' or if Mary is 'mad' to marry him. Roland, like Romaine, Midwinter and Markman, is the victim of patriarchal abuse and neglect. He is mistreated at school, shunned at home and incarcerated in an asylum by male relatives for his money. Home has never been a haven for Roland. And he remains impotent; his voice is silenced and he is represented wholly within, and by, the discourses of others. Mary observes his 'violent outbreaks of temper', the 'lapses into passion' and 'lapses into silence' which he 'could never succeed in controlling . . .' (p.535). She perceives the 'weary absent look' and knows that he is 'perfectly unaware of his own infirmity' (p.534). Like Thewelweit's soldiers he has dissociated himself; he is 'emotionally illiterate'. And he has lost control. He is unable to exert masculine authority or rationality over his passions. He is losing the battle against regression and exposing the 'inchoate flood or fire' within. Mary questions hegemonic discourse, arranges his escape from phallogocentric entrapment and takes him to a new home in a new country. But Mary admits doubt and confusion. She cannot fully know Roland as his face can become 'a perfect blank' (p.534). Roland exists outside of discourse. He refuses to be defined or known but his only means of resisting definition is silence, to confront the 'terrible blank' and refuse to write on the 'blank sheet' of paper.

But such resistance is non-productive and self-destructive. It is akin to the male abdication of responsibility, the patriarchal neglect which led to Laura Fairlie's incarceration, Magdalen Vanstone's poverty and Anne Silvester's suffering. It offers no future and no new utterances. It does not facilitate 're-vision' or encourage meanings to 'discohere'. Male power is seen as anachronistic, non-constructive and self-defeating. It is left to the female characters; to I Say No's Mrs. Rook, The Legacy of Cain's Mrs. Tenbruggen, and Helena Gracedieu and to

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<sup>61</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'A Mad Marriage'. In The Complete Shorter Fiction ed. Julian Thompson, (London : Robinson, 1995), pp.531-544. All further references will relate to this edition.

Madame Pratolungo in Poor Miss Finch - to create new discourses, to resist and replace. Collins' men do not resist but rather wither and decay behind their self-imposed masks of masculinity, projecting blame, anger and disgust onto the marginalised as they do so. The behaviour and dread of these men substantiates Julia Kristeva's claim that xenophobia is the inevitable consequence of discovering otherness within ourselves.<sup>62</sup> Hegemonic utterances can so be seen as essentially specular; providing a mirror to reflect its own self-image. But it is a distorting mirror constructed wholly of illusions, delusions and elusions. And the attempts to 'straighten out' the 'distorted' shapes, to manipulate identity and 'reality', results in Stella, Anne and Hester getting 'stifled' and Delamayne and Romaine getting 'killed'.

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<sup>62</sup> Julia Kristeva, as quoted in Donald Hall, p.57.

## **CHAPTER FIVE - DISCOURSES OF PURITY : MEN AND 'FALLEN' WOMEN**

'It is not differences which immobilises us, but silence. And there are so many silences to be broken'.<sup>1</sup>

Sexuality, as has been discussed in the preceding chapter, is founded upon a range of disparate bodily potentialities. It plays, as Jeffrey Weeks notes, upon bodies, functions, pleasures, sensations, anatomo-physiology and somatic localisms - diverse elements which are unified only through ideological constructions.<sup>2</sup> The nineteenth-century heralded an unprecedented proliferation of these constructions; it generated an abundance of discourses which firmly enmeshed sex within the contemporary system of power relations. And yet, ironically, sexuality was not in itself a nineteenth-century concept. The Victorians claimed to be observing divine or natural laws, defining what is 'right' or 'normal'. Inevitably this involved analysing what is 'unnatural' or 'immoral'. Thus, by the end of the century, 'pornography' had been labelled as such and 'homosexuality' had been named.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Audre Lorde, as quoted by Jana Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault : Feminism, Power and the Body (London : Routledge, 1991), p.17.

<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, Sex, Politics and Society : The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800 (London : Longman, 1989), p.4.

<sup>3</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, p.21.

Marginalised sexualities became subject to intense scrutiny, analysis and moral contemplation by the hegemony. And none received as much attention and concern as those constructs pertaining to prostitutes and 'fallen' women. Such women represented the antithesis of the Victorian heroine. They reflected the tragic, shadowy figures who haunted the margins of literature and acted as a constant reminder of the fate which awaited any woman who defied the 'dominant fiction'. To the Victorians 'prostitutes' and 'fallen women' were virtually synonymous terms and identities. Indeed, as Lynda Nead remarks, prostitution was not a fixed term, it could accommodate any female who transgressed the hegemonic boundaries.<sup>4</sup> I will therefore use these terms as interchangeable in this thesis although I will discuss one major division, perceived by nineteenth-century men, later in this chapter.

Despite the fluidity of the concept, the period produced a kaleidoscope of legislation, police statistics, Parliamentary reports, letters, articles, religious tracts and medical investigations which aimed to define 'prostitution' and create a body of 'knowledge'. A prostitute was defined as an object of inquiry; the ultimate object of the male gaze. Moreover, whilst these discourses actively constructed and contained the prostitute, they also created a 'narrative coherence'<sup>5</sup> of cause, effect and consequence. A pattern emerged whereby visible female sexuality was condemned to life-long repentance, suicide or death by disease. The hegemony effectively transformed fallen women into a social problem which could be enveloped within male control, definition and solution. It is Collins' blatant subversion of this pattern which so outraged Grundyism. His fallen women reject the 'cult of elegant penitence'<sup>6</sup> and demand the right to be accepted, understood and loved - by the very hegemony which marginalised them.

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<sup>4</sup> Lynda Nead, Myths of Sexuality: Representations of Women in Victorian Britain (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988), p.94.

<sup>5</sup> Lynda Nead, p.100.

<sup>6</sup> Eric Trudgill, Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origins and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes (London: Heinemann, 1976), p.279.



Jeffrey Weeks observes that 'what is strikingly absent in nineteenth-century thought is any concept of female sexuality which is independent of men's'.<sup>7</sup> Victorian sexuality was defined by, and for, hegemonic man. And yet, despite all the mental exertion and energy devoted to 'naturalising' the subject, definitions of fallen women remained multiple, fragmentary and inherently contradictory. This can be appreciated by examining the two chief contemporary texts on prostitution.

William Acton declared : 'What is a prostitute? She is a woman who gives for money that which she ought to give for love; who ministers to passion and lust alone, to the exclusion and extinction of all the higher qualities . . . She is a woman with half of the woman gone'.<sup>8</sup> Acton perceived the prostitute as corrupted by money and 'unnatural' urges. She is inflicted by, and the cause of, disease which she spreads indiscriminately throughout society. For Acton the only solution, to preserve the health of the community, was rigorous control and inspection of these women - by middle class men. Jill Matus aptly commented that his 'nightmare is a nation where disease spreads as women move unchecked', and where society is 'one enormous closet of prostitutes'.<sup>9</sup> The prostitute is 'unnatural' but exists everywhere. Acton's fear of female sexuality and its hidden potency becomes increasingly transparent as his discourse unfolds.

W. R. Greg's essay on prostitution also limned the female as essentially passionless. But he delineated the prostitute as a victim of her own innocence. The 'fall' became the result of 'pure unknowingness' whereby 'fond and foolish' women 'yield to please'.<sup>10</sup> In response to this problem Greg advocated further male protection and surveillance. He claimed to 'know' female nature and could thus define socially desirable behaviour as

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<sup>7</sup> Jeffrey Weeks, as quoted in Abeer Zahra, The Construction of Womanhood in Victorian Sensation Fiction 1860-1870 (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of Leeds, 1990), p.134.

<sup>8</sup> William Acton, as quoted in L. Nead, p.101.

<sup>9</sup> Jill L. Matus, Unstable Bodies : Victorian Representations of Sexuality and Maternity (Manchester University Press, 1995), pp.125-126.

<sup>10</sup> W.R. Greg, as quoted in Jill Matus, p.113.

'natural'. In Greg's narrative prescription became description 'in the hope that the former becomes the latter if one prescribes often and effectively'.<sup>11</sup>

Action perceived prostitution in terms of disease and death, a symbol of the hazards lurking below the surface and impending social disintegration, whilst Greg believed fallen women to be the hapless victims of an unequal society. Both arguments presented popular contemporary discourses, discourses which appear regularly, in various guises in works of 'fact' and fiction. But, as Lynda Nead elucidates, they are not oppositional theses. Both perceptions worked towards one goal : that of defining the prostitute as 'deviant . . . abnormal' and alienated from 'respectable society'.<sup>12</sup> And both discourses pacified masculine fear by seeing the prostitute 'as a social victim rather than as a social threat'.<sup>13</sup>

One must ask why prostitution posed such a huge threat to the Victorian male thus necessitating such control and containment? The answer lies largely in the emphasis placed upon 'home and hearth', upon domestic stability as the thermometer of national success and security. Dr. Johnson proclaimed that upon the chastity of women 'all the property in the world depends'<sup>14</sup> and Tilt could later elaborate that woman is:

the matrix in which the human statue is cast. Improve her health of body, of mind, and of heart, and the human race would advance to perfection; deteriorate her . . . and in the same ratio does it deteriorate.<sup>15</sup>

The survival of the nation, and indeed the whole human race, was seen to depend upon the stability and 'virtue' of the 'angel in the house'. Sexuality was an intrinsic component of the ideology of respectability with its emphasis upon prudence,

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<sup>11</sup> Jill Matus, p.123.

<sup>12</sup> L. Nead, p.106.

<sup>13</sup> L. Nead, p.107 and p.138.

<sup>14</sup> Dr. Samuel Johnson, as quoted in J.Weeks, p.29.

<sup>15</sup> Tilt, as quoted in L. Nead, p.92.

postponement and repression. Thus, as Weeks elucidates, sex was ideologically privatised within the institution of marriage.<sup>16</sup>

Prostitution became a 'metaphor for immorality in general; it represented a nexus of anxieties relating to class, nation and empire'.<sup>17</sup> Thus, discourses relating to female sexuality spilled out into social, economic and political arenas appropriating, as Lynda Nead demonstrates, the language of imperialism i.e. 'decline' and 'fall'.<sup>18</sup> But below the 'transcendental pretence' lay an unarticulated dread : men needed to believe in the fallen woman and her virtuous counterpart in order to sustain their hegemonic control. Nina Auerbach illustrated how the fallen woman was 'created by the neurosis of a culture that feared female sexuality and aggression . . . so enshrined a respectably sadistic cautionary tale punishing them both'.<sup>19</sup>

The fallen woman was rejected and embraced, condemned but needed. The Victorians may have medicalised, criminalised and stigmatised prostitutes but they were simultaneously accepted as an inevitable part of the social system. This can partly be related to the concept of the 'Body Politic' wherein men represented the head of the nation and home, women symbolised the heart whilst prostitutes reflected the 'various unmentionable and distasteful bodily functions'.<sup>20</sup>

Hence, William Lecky perceived the prostitute as:

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<sup>16</sup> J. Weeks, p.107.

<sup>17</sup> L. Nead, p.94.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Nina Auerbach, 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 35 (1980-1), p.31.

<sup>20</sup> Lucia Zedner, *Women, Crime and Custody in Victorian England* (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1991), p.77.

the most efficient guardian of virtue. But for her the unchallenged purity of countless homes would be polluted . . . On that one degraded and ignoble form are concentrated the passions that might have filled the world with shame.<sup>21</sup>

To Lecky men's sexual urges were powerful and 'natural' and the prostitute preserved the sanctity of the middle-class home by providing a release for masculine needs. She was seen as a necessity for male desire but irretrievably tainted by its consummation. She was the ultimate projection of men's self-loathing, his terror of the 'fire' or 'flood' within.

To Mayhew, and many Victorian men, there was little difference between a prostitute and a criminal as illicit sex was viewed as invariably leading to further vice. Mayhew proclaimed that after committing the 'one capital act of shamelessness' a woman abandoned respect and hope and thus plunged into unadulterated deviance.<sup>22</sup> Lecky and Mayhew proffer two contradictory, biological depictions of the fallen woman; one as a 'necessary drain of society's effluvia, protecting the purity of middle-class wives and daughters at the expense of her own',<sup>23</sup> the other as pathological, inherently rotten and corrupting. But despite the disparate discourses surrounding fallen women one factor, or one silence, unites them all : masculine sexual cravings are not questioned. Nead observes how 'natural male sexual desire is defined as the primary element, the demand to which female prostitution is the unnatural response'.<sup>24</sup>

Martha Vicinus elucidates how 'in the Victorian battle of the sexes, women were disarmed of the weapon of their sexuality. Gentlemen imposed unilateral disarmament upon them which they simultaneously denied doing through the theory of feminine sexual

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<sup>21</sup> W. Lecky, as quoted in Freda Adler, Sisters in Crime : The Rise of the New Female Criminal (London : McGraw-Hill, 1975), p.57.

<sup>22</sup> Mayhew, as quoted by L. Zedner, p.33.

<sup>23</sup> W. Lecky, as quoted by L. Zedner, p.77.

<sup>24</sup> L. Nead, p.97.

anaesthesia'.<sup>25</sup> It was an ideological construction which was hard to maintain for Victorian men were faced daily with the blatant contradictions inherent within their own utterances. Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall noted that 'idealised womanhood was chaste and asexual, yet the supreme goal for women was marriage and motherhood, conditions which publicly proclaim sexuality'.<sup>26</sup> Thus, sexual or 'deviant' aspects of femininity were deflected onto 'fallen' women; females who were victims or innately 'diseased'.

But amongst this marginalised group we meet another contradiction : women's sexuality was non-existent until it was awakened, at which point it became insatiable. Walter, the author of My Secret Life, knew that 'when once a female has tasted the sugar stick, it's not long before she wants another taste'.<sup>27</sup> Men both feared the denied potency of female sexuality whilst simultaneously projecting the concept of their own sexuality, as powerful and unstoppable, upon women. Fraser Harrison illustrates how the 'battlements erected for the defence of female purity were . . . consistent in immensity with the masculine concept of his own sexual powers : only the mightiest fortifications could repel so formidable an assailant'.<sup>28</sup> Male dread of female sexuality thus reconstructed it as dormant until excited by, and controlled by, masculine desire.

'Fallen' women not only symbolised men's basic need and fear, but also represented the most major transgression of patriarchal laws. Prostitutes were one of the few groups of Victorian women who lived independently in the public sphere and earned their own income. Lynda Nead observes that 'the combined associations of cash and the public sphere rendered the prostitute powerful and independent - qualities which were the unique privilege of the white middle-class male'.<sup>29</sup> And here we can see the one difference

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<sup>25</sup> Martha Vicinus, ed., Suffer and be Still : Women in the Victorian Age (London : Indiana University Press, 1972), p.163.

<sup>26</sup> Leonore Davidoff, and Catherine Hall, Family Fortunes : Men and Women of the English Middle-Class 1780-1850 (Hutchinson, 1987), p.322.

<sup>27</sup> Walter, My Secret Life, as quoted in Fraser Harrison, The Dark Angel : Aspects of Victorian Sexuality (London : Fontana, 1979), p.256.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Lynda Nead, p.95.

between Victorian perceptions of fallen women and prostitutes. The fallen woman could be a possible recipient of sympathy and charity; the very term implied that she had once been respectable but had succumbed to temptation. She could be construed as a victim of male passion whose transgression did not involve money or independence. She could still be seen as 'feminine', as powerless and reliant upon male pity and protection. The prostitute, however, is deemed beyond the reach of any such concern. Nead suggests that this is precisely because she is 'able to represent all the terms within capitalist production. She is the human labour, the object of exchange and the seller at once. She stands as worker, commodity and capitalist and blurs the categories of bourgeois economics in the same way that she tests the boundaries of bourgeois morality. That is the nature of her deviancy'.<sup>30</sup>

Nead concludes that prostitutes possess much potential political power as, if male sexuality is seen as 'an essential and immutable demand, then female prostitutes can either satisfy or frustrate this need'. They resist the laws of the marketplace and offer for sale 'something that can never be completely possessed by the buyer'.<sup>31</sup> Prostitution may also be an apt metaphor for the Victorian writer's own economic vulnerability; his work was a commodity with which he must negotiate on the marketplace. Gallagher promulgates a theory that the 'activities of authoring, of procuring illegitimate income, and of alienating oneself through prostitution seem particularly closely associated with one another'.<sup>32</sup>

The nineteenth-century was also an era when it was difficult to draw a precise line between prostitution and certain marriage arrangements. Edith Dombey lamented that : 'He has bought me . . . He has considered of his bargain . . . There is no slave in a market, there is no horse in a fair . . . so shown and offered and examined and paraded . . . as I have been'.<sup>33</sup> And in Marriage as a Trade Cicely Hamilton proclaimed that : 'Woman does not support life only in order to obtain a husband, but frequently obtains a husband only in

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<sup>30</sup> Lynda Nead, p.99.

<sup>31</sup> Lynda Nead, p.99.

<sup>32</sup> Gallagher, as quoted by Tamar Heller, Dead Secrets : Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1992), p.99.

order to support life'. She reasons that prostitutes are, therefore, 'a class which has pushed to its logical conclusion the principle that woman exists by virtue of a wage paid her in return for the possession of her person'.<sup>34</sup> This is a theme which Collins frequently exploited. Hence, No Name's Magdalen Vanstone perceives herself, as a woman who married for pecuniary self-interest, as more 'fallen' than her pregnant maid. As Alison Milhouse stresses, the central deviance of a fallen woman is that, by moving between the domestic sphere and the economic area, she revealed the 'private house as itself a marketplace'.<sup>35</sup> This is exactly what shocked Valeria McCallen, in The Law and the Lady, about Miss Hoighty's marriage to Major FitzDavid.<sup>36</sup>

The silence cast over why men desire and use prostitutes remains with us today. The Victorians appear to have accepted it as an inevitable bodily function over which a discrete veil should be drawn. It is a silence that lingers and which seems to be intrinsically wrapped up with constructions of masculinity and male emotional illiteracy. It may therefore be useful to introduce some contemporary insights at this point. These views have, I propose, concerns and emotions which were germane to Victorian men. They illuminate universal or persistent themes which can help us to understand men's fascination with, and abhorrence of, 'fallen' women. In recent interviews Peter Grayson admits that he is excited by the 'complete absence of human contact'<sup>37</sup> and David Barry confesses that he enjoys 'sex without any of the emotions' involved in a relationship. He describes an 'incredible rush of excitement' at the prospect of buying a woman in a 'hunting ground', of being a 'predator in competition with other predators, and circling your prey'.<sup>38</sup> Men, in competition with other men, can buy sex on the capitalist market; they can purchase public access to female bodies through their male privileges. They can buy the 'right' to silence, anonymity and protection from all the emotions associated with intimacy. Prostitution ultimately thrives and

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<sup>33</sup> Charles Dickens, Dombey and Son, Chapter 27.

<sup>34</sup> Cicely Hamilton, Marriage as a Trade (London : Chapman & Hall, 1912), p.12 and p.31.

<sup>35</sup> Alison Milbank, Daughters of the House : Modes of Gothic in Victorian Fiction (London : MacMillans, 1992), p.20.

<sup>36</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Law and the Lady (London : Chatto & Windus, 1913), p.425.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Grayson, 'Objects of Desire : Why is Prostitution so Maligned?' Achilles Heel 13 (1992), p.20.

survives as a problem about men, perceived masculine needs and the collective power of men through economic systems and social institutions. The guilt at the unconscious recognition of this does perhaps, manifest itself by rebounding vociferously upon the 'victim'. Collins' men do partly recognise this process and attempt to question and subvert it. However in doing so they also become victims of, and are expelled from, the very phallocentric culture to which they had hitherto belonged.

Victorian society judged, victimised, pitied and disqualified prostitutes - but they never explained them. Another 'polite' silence was drawn over why women entered this lifestyle. It is an area of silence which Collins, to the outrage of many 'Readers in Particular', focused upon and attempted to analyse. Indeed, Collins' theories on, and insights into, prostitution anticipated many modern views. He vividly portrayed how prostitutes became prostitutes predominantly through poverty, a poverty caused by wealth ending up in the hands of the very upper and middle-class men who used prostitutes. The very capitalist system, which prostitution unintentionally threatened, actually produced the profession which it then piously condemned. But it was an insight that could not enter hegemonic discourse. The 'dominant fiction' ensured that the 'deviance' reflected upon the prostitute and not the client; 'the victim had to be interpreted as the exploiter'.<sup>39</sup>

In relation to all the above issues it is not surprising to discover that most depictions of Victorian prostitutes are, as Helena Michie notes, 'strangely sexless'.<sup>40</sup> They are portrayed as personifications of sin or repentance, virtually disembodied from their physical identities. Despite the all-consuming masculine need to count, label, define and judge her, the prostitute appears essentially as a 'fundamental absence';<sup>41</sup> a physical blankness at the heart of literature. The attractions or temptations that she exuded dare not be uttered. Michie perceives the prostitute as a 'cipher of male lust . . . her sexuality and her body are

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<sup>38</sup> David Barry, 'Why I go to Prostitutes', *Cosmopolitan* (May 1996), p.120.

<sup>39</sup> Fraser Harrison, p.251.

<sup>40</sup> Helena Michie, *The Flesh-Made World : Female Figures and Women's Bodies* (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1987), p.62.



denied her as, like her mirror, she becomes a reflection of other people's desires, a blank page on which a series of men can write their narratives of her significance'.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, these patriarchal ideological constructions also delineated prostitutes as sinful, unhappy outsiders. But, as Fraser Harrison emphasised and Collins himself consistently stressed, it was 'impossible for them to rejoin that part of society from which they had never been separated'.<sup>43</sup>

Collins 'fallen' women differ significantly from many of the traditional images discussed here. They generally do not compensate for their 'deviance' by suppressing individuality; he depicted intelligent, courageous and assertive women who were most definitely not 'strangely sexless'. They belie degeneration theories; they thrive and secure promising futures. But the economic and social factors which led to their 'fall' are also vividly presented, Collins focussed upon poverty, exploitation and the corruptness of capitalism. Collins examined the link between prostitution and the institution of marriage and illustrated how people who 'fall' the lowest are often those who most tenaciously and unquestioningly uphold the patriarchal hegemony.

In Collins' works all women are portrayed as symbolically illegitimate or marginalised;<sup>44</sup> they are all estranged and abused individuals struggling to survive within a phallocentric society. This, combined with his personal<sup>45</sup> and professional interest in the subject of 'fallen' women, would suggest that the novels which explicitly address this area would rate amongst his best. However, these narratives do not quite 'work' and the reasons for this reveal both the contradictory, fragmentary perceptions of 'fallen' women which haunt Victorian imagination and from which Collins could not fully extricate himself, and the

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<sup>41</sup> Helena Michie, p.71.

<sup>42</sup> Helena Michie, p.61.

<sup>43</sup> Fraser Harrison, p.247.

<sup>44</sup> For a further discussion on illegitimacy read Nicola Justine Schutt, Nobody's Child : The Theme of Illegitimacy in the Novels of Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of York, 1990), p.213.

<sup>45</sup> For further information on Wilkie Collins' unorthodox relationships with Caroline Graves, Martha Rudd and his 'morganatic family', see 'Biographies' in the Bibliography.

obstacles placed by 'polite' society against breaking sexual 'silences'. Collins could not, I suggest, be completely honest for fear of totally alienating his readers and, as 'fallen' women are 'objectionable by definition, they cannot be endowed with personalities that might further ostracise the reader'.<sup>46</sup> Collins was surrounded by a multitude of dilemmas, doubts and obstacles in depicting a Magdalen and the result is 'an uneasy blend of defiance and defensiveness, of female and traditional type-casting, of fantasy and honesty'.<sup>47</sup> His portrayal of Magdalens developed but they remain problematic; it is a theme to which Collins returned again and again but to which he could find no easy answer. The central problem appears to be that art must have a shape while life has none, that the endings impose an artificial meaning or conclusion upon an on-going social process. As Jenny Taylor notes he 'implies that the anomolousness of the powerless is completely the product of the codes of a dominant social structure whose morbidity lies in its very power, but he ends up by reinforcing the split between purity and danger that earlier is made so ambiguous . . .'.<sup>48</sup> The denouements insist upon the very boundaries and solutions which the preceding analysis had questioned or rendered redundant. And Collins' rebels tend ultimately to be seen as 'victims' who are reconciled to the very social structures which were responsible for oppressing them in the first place.

'Fallen' women appear in most of Collins' novels and short stories. Mary Grice in Hide and Seek, dies in the opening pages but receives love and sympathy from all who briefly encounter her. Punishment is reserved for Mr. Thorpe, the 'fallen' man who had not the courage to challenge society and stand by his beliefs. Sara Leeson, in The Dead Secret, survives only in isolation; she is consumed by self torment and haunted by guilt and remorse. Richard Beaton perceives how she avoids societal punishment by punishing

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<sup>46</sup> Sue Lonoff, Wilkie Collins and his Victorian Readers : A Study in the Rhetoric of Readership (New York : A.M.S., 1982), p.151.

<sup>47</sup> Sue Lonoff, p.155.

<sup>48</sup> Jenny Taylor, In the Secret Theatre of Home : Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative and Nineteenth-Century Psychology (London : Routledge, 1988), p.213.

herself.<sup>49</sup> And yet her torment proves unfounded for when her secret is discovered she is surrounded by the love and forgiveness of her family; emotions which she spent a lifetime denying herself. Collins' most daring portrayal of a 'fallen' woman is probably Mrs. Catherick in The Woman in White. She refuses to be defined as 'fallen'; she resists the label and thus refuses to be stigmatised or marginalised. Her pride and assertion defy the rules of 'polite' society and she delights in making the clergyman bow to her. She is the forerunner of Collins' later fallen women - Mrs. Rook of I Say No, Mrs. Tenbruggen in The Legacy of Cain, 'The Dream Woman's' Alicia Warlock - women who do not accept that they have 'fallen' and thus refuse to be defined, rejected or repentant. All of these women survive to thwart societal expectations, to fracture the preconceived 'narrative coherence' set by the hegemony. Long after their 'fall' they continue to flourish in health, business and independence. I Say No is a moral story of the damage that Collins believed such hegemonic discourse inflicted upon both men and women. Sara Jethro, in deference to 'respectable' society, refuses to marry James Brown - who proceeds to kill himself in despair. The tragedy causes grief and bewilderment to the whole Brown family and leaves Sara herself in self-imposed isolation, loss and guilt. Collins' message is clear : defining 'fallen' women as irredeemably 'lost' is both wrong and destructive. His depictions work well when the 'fallen' woman is not the central character but in the novels which focus primarily upon this theme, the problems and dilemmas discussed above jeopardise the 'success' of both Collins' character portrayal and his 'moral' message.

A prostitute necessarily performs two paradoxical roles; she is committing an act of 'deviance' and independence but she is also acting to please, to gratify another person. Observed closely in fiction such behaviour may well be hard to depict realistically. Hence, to convince his readers in The New Magdalen of Mercy Merrick's 'goodness', and to win their sympathies for her plight, Collins dwelt heavily upon Mercy's 'innate nobility', her

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<sup>49</sup> Richard Beaton, 'The World is Hard on Women' : Women and Marriage in the Novels of Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of Wales, 1987), p.57.

'innate grandeur'.<sup>50</sup> She is introduced to us as a nurse devoting to caring for soldiers as war rages all around. Her attitude is in marked contrast to Grace Roseberry, her alter ego and later faked identity, who responds to events with self-interest and lack of insight. He utilised the very biological discourse which is often used to condemn 'deviant' women. He emphasised what Mercy could have been with a different family background. Indeed, Collins appeared to locate difference not between 'fallen' and 'unfallen' women, but between those who are protected by family and money and those who are not. He implied that virtue is dependent upon ignorance or luck and that all could 'fall' if placed in certain situations. Thus Mercy cries : 'It sickens me to hear of the virtues of women who have never been tempted! Where is the merit of living reputably when your life is one course of prosperity and enjoyment? Has his mother known starvation? Have his sisters been left forsaken in the street?' (p.79). Collins also stressed that sin and virtue works two ways; that society has a duty to the individual: 'I sometimes ask myself if it was all my fault. I sometimes wonder if Society had no duties towards me when I was a child selling matches in the street - when I was a hard-working girl, fainting at my needle for want of food' (p.15).

Mercy experiences, and describes vividly, the 'cult of elegant penitence',<sup>51</sup> the insurmountable obstacles which prevent her from leading a rewarding life and freeing herself from the shackles of stigmatisation. Mercy despairs that : 'Society can subscribe to reclaim me - but Society can't take me back . . . what I *am* can never alter what I was . . . the lost place is not to be regained. I can't get back!' It is a lament which is amply substantiated by Grace's and later Horace Holmcroft's, horrified rejections. But Mercy refuses the label; she 'steals' the identity of one presumed dead (Grace) and decides to 'win' approval and respect from polite society through the strengths of her own character. To Mercy the refuge, despair and her label are synonymous and she has no other option than mendacity to escape the fate laid down by this society (p.15).

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<sup>50</sup> Wilkie Collins, The New Magdalen (London : Bentley, 1874). All further references will relate to this edition.

<sup>51</sup> Eric Trudgill, Madonnas and Magdalens : The Origin and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes (London : Heinemann, 1976), p.279.

But what Mercy 'was' is never fully detailed. Collins left it, as he suggested society should do, in the past and concentrated on her present virtues. But we do know why she became a prostitute and the blame lies squarely at the door of patriarchy. Mercy is driven to desperation by poverty and starvation. She is drugged and raped by men and abandoned by her wealthy father, who is acclaimed by society for 'his many accomplishments and his refined tastes' (p.329). Whilst exposing masculine abuse Collins portrayed Mercy as a victim at the mercy of her past who drifted: 'Helplessly and hopelessly, without sin or choice of mine . . . into the life which set a mark on me for the rest of my days' (p.342). Mercy is exonerated; she did not choose to 'fall', she was forced. But this does not accord with the picture we have of Mercy : resourceful, intelligent and assertive. Neither does it explain why, after the rape, she continued to work as a prostitute. It is, I surmise, purely a device to win the reader's sympathies. But Collins does not seem to have seen this as the significant 'fall'. Her 'fall' in the novel is her decision to steal a name and an identity, a matter over which she makes a calculated decision and plays a prolonged and pro-active role. Mercy has no name, we never know her 'true' identity, and she wants a 'respectable' persona and the place in society to which she knows she is worthy. Mercy knows her own value; resists stigmatisation and actively sets out to defy the 'dominant fiction' - in her need to be accepted by it.

Despite this 'deviant' activity Mercy remains a traditional heroine in many respects; she is a potential 'angel in the house' who performs feminine duties. She is an angel of mercy; a 'guardian angel' (p.34) to the wounded soldiers whom she nurses and a devoted companion to an elderly woman. She is also 'irresistibly striking and beautiful' (p.7), a woman who arouses male desires and who dares to desire a man herself. And yet Collins' portrayal of Mercy's attractions is problematic for, as Sue Lonoff notes of his 'fallen women', by poignantly dramatising the consequences of sexual error, they appeal to the reader to be less hypocritical . . . yet by their attractions, they arouse the emotions whose consequences

they exemplify<sup>52</sup> Mercy is a 'man's woman'; with a careful mixture of beauty, vulnerability and self sacrifice she is designed specifically for male readers. For all of her assertion Mercy is a 'cipher of male lust', reflecting the desires of others. She does not exist outside of male discourse. She may see men as 'objects of horror' (p.20) but her survival depends upon cajoling and gratifying them - and believing in the very discourses which imprison her. Richard Beaton believes that The New Magdalen is a 'powerful allegory in which the various characters come to represent different attitudes and beliefs which clash over the moral issue of redemption and forgiveness', with Mercy as the 'noble villain', Grace as the 'heartless heroine', Horace as 'polite society' and Julian as 'true' Christianity. On one level this is so but Beaton's description of a battle between 'false' versus 'true' morality relies upon 'images of unequivocal guilt and innocence . . . remorse and reform',<sup>53</sup> images which Collins exposed as inherently ambiguous and complex. The New Magdalen is no simple allegory and Collins managed to dissolve the boundaries between right and wrong, sin and virtue, insider and outsider. The central irony of the novel is, as Jenny Taylor highlights, that Mercy discovers her 'true' place through imposture. The conventional, chaste heroine and intended companion possesses a 'hopelessly narrow, mean, and low nature' (p.272) whereas 'the qualities by which Mercy had won Lady Janet's love were the qualities which were Mercy's own' (p.182). And this is the crucial dilemma which can have no easy solution; an 'outcast from the streets' (p.340) has been accepted into Lady Janet's home and loved for her own 'goodness'. Moreover, Lady Janet's health and happiness depends upon Mercy's continued 'silence' and imposture.

Collins focussed upon the fragility of social identity and relationships. All the characters 'fall' in their attempts to sustain their world-view, identity or faith. In reverse of traditional discourse Lady Janet feels that her home is 'tainted' (p.294) by Grace's insensitivity; she does not need Mercy's 'true name' as she knows her 'true heart' (p.294). But she recognises that society will not permit such unorthodox views and thus she bribes,

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<sup>52</sup> Sue Lonoff, p.60.

<sup>53</sup> Richard Beaton, p.65.

cajoles and coerces others to remain 'silent'. She can mourn : 'how low I have stooped, how miserably I have degraded myself' (p.294) - in an attempt to preserve an illusion. And Grace 'stoops' to platitudes, threats and verbal abuse when thwarted in asserting her 'rights'.

Horace Holmcroft and Julian Gray represent two alternative male discourses. Horace is the voice of the hegemony, the 'transcendental pretence' who cannot understand or forgive Mercy's past life. He worships the domestic idyll; he needs faith in 'home and hearth' to survive contemporary doubts and fears. He is 'Every Victorian Man' who looks into the 'Unthought' and craves an 'angel in the house', a family : 'When I am with them I have no anxieties. I am not harassed at home by doubts of who people are, and confusion about names, and so on . . . and it ends in my feeling doubts and fears that I can't get over; doubts about you, and fears about myself' (p.321). Horace has not the moral independence or courage to accept the challenges offered by Mercy and Julian. He clings to the fragments of his beliefs and returns home. He fears 'madness' or 'unmanliness' and, indeed, his very exposure to such emotions make him disintegrate into femininity - 'womanish malice' (p.310) and resort to Foucauldian 'force', asserting 'proprietorship' (p.165) over Mercy in an attempt to maintain control.

But Collins suggested that the very home to which Horace flees is unlikely to be the perceived haven he craves; Horace's family idyll is as much of a delusion as is his love for Mercy. The only marriage encapsulated in the novel is emotionally sterile and deceptive. This echoed, Collins implied, many relationships : 'She was one of the many wives who resign themselves to be disappointed in their husbands, and he was one of the many husbands who never know what their wives really think of them' (p.334-335). There is no positive portrayal of heterosexual relationships in the novel. Lady Janet lives alone, after enduring a 'loveless marriage' (p.266), and Mercy's mother is deserted by her lover and abandoned by her family. Grace's irresponsible father leaves her alone and impoverished

and Mercy only knew men 'as objects of horror'. She also knows that many women marry not for love but for survival (p.77). Just as Lady Janet's butler is a carefully 'constructed automation' (p.116) so do all family members play a pre-set role, they act and reflect what society decrees they should be. In this sense Collins suggested that all are 'impostors', that identity and social roles are inextricable and that we all respond to the needs, desires and expectations of those around us.

Collins exposed how poverty, corruption and abuse is created by the hegemony, by the 'wrong' men, and yet his only answer is for Mercy to find the 'right' man. Julian Gray offers the alternative voice in the narrative, the discourse of 'true' Christianity. He is the 'Archdeacon of the afflicted, the Dean of the hungry, and the Bishop of the poor' (p.83) who lambasts capitalism and Podsnappery. However, he too 'stoops' to protect Mercy; he resorts to deception to safeguard his hopes and values. When aware of Mercy's imposture he persists in treating Grace as deluded and introduces a doctor in the guise of a lawyer. He also constructs Mercy into the penitent Magdalen he wants her to be : 'Be the woman whom I once spoke of . . . the woman I still have in my mind . . . who can nobly reveal the noble nature that is in her' (p.268). As Jenny Taylor suggests he 'transforms Mercy into absolute virtue by holding up an idealised image of her for her to emulate. The disguise is literally a mask rather than a metaphor for identity shaped by perception . . .'<sup>54</sup>

At the heart of the narrative, reverberating throughout the text, is the question 'Who are you? . . .' (p.221). The New Magdalen is haunted by the 'reptile' (p.237), the 'plain-clothed policeman' who is empowered to remove those defined by society as 'mad' to an asylum. The 'true' Grace Roseberry is constructed as a 'crazy impostor' (p.148), of whose 'truth' it can be declared that 'a more monstrous story never was invented' (p.129). Grace is defined by society as a 'victim of a mental delusion' (p.117) and is informed in triplicate that 'You are mad!' (p.236). Mercy has shown herself not to exist; no nurse is recalled and the labelling on her clothes 'proves' that she is Grace Roseberry. Identity is whatever social



perceptions define them to be just as 'madness' is whatever the 'dominant fiction' deems it to be. The prospect of the asylum and 'madness' terrifies all; it silences Grace and sends Horace hurrying home. Grace is only saved from Laura Fairlie's fate by Mercy's remorse and conscience; and not by social justice or law.

And yet Mercy's remorse itself is most problematic. By insisting on breaking the 'silence' she subjects Lady Janet to pain, grief and life-long loneliness. And, as Grace perceives, 'Confession loses all its horrors, and becomes quite a luxury with Mr. Julian Gray' (p.220). She prefers the discourse of Julian Gray to that of Lady Janet apparently because 'her guilty conscience owned and feared its master' (p.87). But she dare not be left alone; she pleads with Julian to be present throughout her confession to Horace as she fears she may succumb to temptation if left to her own resources. But this image does not concur with the intelligent, courageous and resourceful Mercy we have witnessed elsewhere. George Watt illustrates how Mercy 'spends all of her adult years rejected by the world around her. The minute she is accepted by that world which has treated her badly, she rejects herself'. He thus concludes that 'she is the forerunner to the modern outsider.'<sup>55</sup> It is ironic that Mercy, in despair, wishes for death not as a release from her 'fallen' state but as 'an escape from the lie of her respectability.'<sup>56</sup> And it is the discourse of Julian's 'true' Christianity which drives her to this remorse, guilt and loneliness.

Nonetheless Mercy's despair is a severe indictment upon 'polite' society and the 'cult of elegant penitence' - to Mercy the Refuge and despair are synonymous. And Collins' depiction of one of Mercy's 'sisters in adversity' (p.372) dissolves sentimentalisation and the family idyll : 'There was no beauty in *this* child; no halo of romance brightened the commonplace horror of her story. She came cringing into the room, staring stupidly at the magnificence all around her . . . a blot of mud on the splendour of the room' (p.371-2). She

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<sup>54</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.219.

<sup>55</sup> George Watt, The Fallen Woman in the Nineteenth-Century Novel (London : Croom Helm, 1984), p.112.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

stared 'vacantly' at the meaning of love and 'sister meant nothing to her mind but an older girl who was strong enough to beat her' (p.372). She is a Mercy without the experience of a caring mother, the adopted middle-class parents and the knowledge of a 'refined' father. She is the 'pet-creation of the laws of political economy', the 'savage and terrible product of a worn-out government' (p.371), for whom there is no solution. There can be no re-integration into a society to which she does not belong. The child, the refuge and the asylum remain haunting images of all that Julian Gray cannot 'cure', of the 'reality' denied by Horace and Grace and ultimately shunned by Julian and Mercy who abandon the problems of Victorian England in search of a better world. Their departure is an indication that Collins could find no answers to the problems he raised.

The narrative ends with the very middle-class tenets, values and institutions which Collins had previously depicted as so hypocritical and delusory. The only answer proffered is knowing one's 'true heart' (p.294) but the novel's own relativity has already undermined this as a possibility. With the 'proprietorship' (p.165) criticised in Horace, Julian desires to possess Mercy and 'raise you to *my* level when I make you my wife' (p.369), - an institution which has been shown as disappointing and corrupt. But first Julian must 'descend' to Mercy's level and experience the dirt, degradation and despair of the streets. In anticipation of reverse colonialism Collins portrayed London as more dangerous than Africa; the promising Green Anchor Fields are actually plagued with disease and 'infested by the most desperate and degraded set of wretches . . .' (p.383). To ensure equality in their relationship Mercy is now able to 'rescue' Julian and facilitate his 'rebirth'. They can now enjoy an equal if unorthodox relationship but must move away from England to do so, leaving behind Lady Janet, the 'sister in adversity', the Refuge and asylum. They leave because, in Julian's closing words: 'Women live, most things, in the opinions of others' (p.397). They do so because they have no choice; they are defined, observed, constructed and judged by male hegemonic discourse. They leave in search of new discourses which would allow Mercy to no longer be either an 'angel of mercy' or at the 'mercy' of her past.

And yet Mercy remains embedded within three layers of masculine discourse; she is Collins' creation of a desirable but exploited woman, she is the 'outcast' of Horace's world and 'polite' society, and she is 'the woman' whom Julian wants her to be.

The Fallen Leaves further explores the determining influences of social and economic structures upon individual identity and destiny. And the concept of the 'fall' is again widely applied to show how all, to some degree, fall from societal or self expectations. The 'fallen leaves' of the title are 'the people who have drawn blanks in the lottery of life - those people who have toiled hard after happiness, and gathered nothing but disappointment and sorrow; the friendless and the lonely . . . ' (p.37). In a capitalist society this description incorporates a majority of the population. Thus The Fallen Leaves is a polemical work exposing the dangers and corruptions of a capitalist, patriarchal world. Amelius Goldenhearts' shock and incredulity, as an outsider, when faced with Victorian England effectively underscores this hypocrisy and debasement.

In The Fallen Leaves family and personal relationships are manipulated and determined by economic objectives. John Farnaby is heralded as a 'remarkable man . . . an example to all the rest of us', who has risen by 'dint (oint) of integrity and perseverance' (p.28). In reality he seduced and impregnated his employer's daughter to enforce a marriage arrangement and later cast the child 'helpless on the world' (p.91) so that his rise to prosperity and respectability were not hindered by the presence of a 'love-child' (p.21). To the Farnabys of the world children are commodities and relationships are business transactions. As Nicola Shutt comments, the fact that Farnaby 'has a bastard to legitimate his social position is the ultimate ironic statement on male-female relationships in a corrupt world'.<sup>57</sup> Regina cannot marry for love but for over £500 a year and Mr. Ronald's eldest daughter is disinherited and ostracised for 'marrying imprudently - in a pecuniary sense' (p.2). A marriage ceremony becomes 'the Sale' (p.315) with the bridegroom 'sustained by

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<sup>57</sup> Nicola Justine Schutt, Nobody's Child : The Theme of Illegitimacy in the Novels of Charles Dickens, George Eliot and Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of York, 1990), p.213.

Art' (p.315) and the bride due to be 'mistress of the most splendid house in London' (p.315).

A direct parallel to prostitution is drawn:

There is many a poor friendless creature, driven by hunger to the streets, who has a better claim to our sympathy than that shameless girl, selling herself in the house of God (p.315).

Amelius and Sally look for beauty and romance in the church but find only hypocrisy and exploitation. There are no positive relationships in The Fallen Leaves; Old Ronald is a 'despot' who denies his family holidays and love if his desires are thwarted and Farnaby 'condemns' his wife to 'a life of wretchedness' (p.222). A 'father' is Hell-Fire, who beats and exploits Sally, and a 'mother' is Mother Sowler who steals and sells babies for profit, profit which she spends on alcohol which induces violent fits. It is not surprising that 'father' and 'mother' are terms which hold no meaning for Sally. Phoebe is used and deserted by Jervy and Emma Farnaby can envisage only a 'dull life' (p.86) for Amelius if he marries. Miss Mellicent, who is likewise abused and abandoned by her lover, describes the average middle-class life as 'one dreadful struggle to keep up appearances, and the heart-breaking monotony of an existence without change' (p.44).

Moreover, this sexual and economic exploitation of women is clearly seen as perpetrated by men. Hell-Fire may be seen as a stereotype of a modern day, a man who economically and physically abuses women for his own profit. He is an extreme form of violent masculinity, but most of the men become exploiters of women in this narrative. Old Ronald proclaims the right to arrange 'suitable' marriages for his daughters, Farnaby marries to better himself and endeavours to do likewise for Regina, Jervy lives off Phoebe's earnings and Miss Mellicent's lover steals both her money and her self-respect. In such a world prostitution appears to be a honest, preferable alternative for the 'fallen leaves'.

At the heart of the novel is Amelius' speech on socialism - a speech which renders the denouement of the narrative as artificial and unconvincing. Amelius views patriarchal institutions as 'organised systems of imposture', practising 'cruel and wicked deceptions' and representing:

one wide field of corruption and abuse . . . a callous and shocking insensibility on the part of the nation at large to the spectacle of its own demoralisation and disgrace (pp.155-6).

It is a speech guaranteed to outrage 'polite' society and lose the 'respect' of Farnaby and Regina. But Amelius goes further and questions the concepts of 'truth', 'reality' and the validity of language. He does not trust the letter of the law or the Bible as all writing is vulnerable to error, subject to fallible translations and open to 'interpolations and corruption' (p.32). Amelius can only believe in the 'spirit' of Christianity and his own 'Goldenheart'. He can offer only subjectivity, faith and love as antidotes to the abuse and corruption that he witnesses. And he offers Tadmor, the flawed, despotic community with its petty rules and arranged marriages, as an alternative mode of living. Perhaps the most severe indictment of Victorian society, as depicted here, is that Tadmor does emerge as a refreshing contrast. However, as Jenny Taylor notes, the Tadmor community is always presented as a memory or a future possibility; it never exists in the present and cannot be integrated with contemporary society.<sup>58</sup> When Amelius attempts to integrate its ideals and values he receives scorn, disbelief and abuse. Nonetheless, Tadmor is not exempt from the discourses which pervade England. Miss. Mellicent's love for a younger man is seen as preposterous and unacceptable as it defies the 'order of Nature. The men have settled it so' (p.42).

Unlike Mercy's pre-narrative existence Sally's life on the streets is vividly depicted and her role as a prostitute is made explicit. However, these descriptions are pervaded by a

strange mixture of realism and sentimentalism. Sally emerges from filth, poverty, disease and chaos to proposition Amelius but manages to appear 'artlessly virginal and innocent' (p.185). 'Robed in pure white, with her gentle blue eyes' (p.186) with a 'vacantly patient look' (p.185) she seemed as if 'she had passed through the contamination of the streets without being touched by it . . . or understanding it' (p.186). To compensate for her role Sally is delineated as childlike or misplaced; her ignorance is used to exonerate her actions, she is a potential Raphael 'angel' who has become 'lost'. She also conforms to Greg's example of 'fond and foolish' women who act out of ignorance and 'yield to please'. And Sally, like Mercy, appeals to masculine desires and a need to 'protect'. She is a character designed by, and for, a man. She appeals to a 'Daddy' who can protect her from all the 'Rapists'. The opening description firmly encloses Sally within hegemonic discourse. Innocence is a social concept and virginity a cultural icon and yet Sally is portrayed as 'naturally' good and innocent. Lloyd Davis illustrates how:

'As an ideal state, virginity would reside prior to any knowledge; yet in being recognised and valued as the virginal, it implies an extensive construct of social rules and beliefs. Virginity seems to efface the cultural and sexual system that produces it. In Foucauldian terms, the virgin body hides power-knowledge behind a pure, corporeal intactness that is itself produced by power-knowledge'.<sup>59</sup>

Sally is initially described as 'completely childlike' (p.193), a 'charming little creature' (p.197) whose intellect and moral development have been stunted by her brutal experiences. She has a 'feeble mind' (p.200) and the 'dumb fidelity of a dog' (p.205). Indeed, Amelius likens her to his pets back at Tadmor and believes that no-one could interpret her behaviour 'impurely' (p.183). These descriptions and interpretations reveal much about male discourse. In his relationships with Regina and Sally, Amelius invests much in sustaining his delusions, in not questioning his motives as he expects other men to

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<sup>58</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.234.

do. Amelius' dream reveals that his motives in caring for Sally are equivocal. He dare not look in the mirror or speak to Rufus as he fears his own repressed desires and 'innate depravity' (p.216 and p.225). He dreads his own sexuality, the 'inchoate flood or fire that limns the innate energy of maleness', desires which, if expressed, may not be containable. And this would seem to be his real motive for wishing to hasten his marriage to Regina; he perceives marriage as a legitimate outlet for lust and as a protection from 'illicit' desires. Yet his very attempts to make his relationship with Sally appear to be innocent and paternal render his 'forbidden thoughts' as sinister. Amelius' desire for Sally, as he envisages her, is close to what would now be termed pederasty and it is this that leaves the reader feeling uncomfortable. He infantilises the object of his devotion and endeavours to preserve her in eternal childhood, partially dependent upon, and adoring of, his adult strength and wisdom. And yet he projects these emotions as objective facts, as 'natural' events. Amelius' expressed desire to 'father' and protect Sally, and to construct Regina as a potential model wife, tends to confirm Annette Federico's thesis that the 'masculine will is anti-introspective, it contributes to male sexual suppression even while indulging sexual desires'. Amelius exhibits what Federico terms the 'impulse towards anti-consciousness'.<sup>60</sup>

And Amelius' desire for Sally reveals much about what Victorian men demanded from a partner. He is irritated by Regina's 'goody, goody sugarish disposition' (p.85), her 'weakly complacent good nature' (p.132), and her inability to challenge her uncle or conventions. He cries out in frustration: 'do for once have a will of your own!' (p.216). But what he really desires is for her will to be what he wishes it to be. He is attracted to Sally as a contrast to Regina and yet Sally's only desire is to be his 'servant', to devote herself to fulfilling his every need (p.202). When Regina resists Amelius' demands he thinks longingly of that 'half-witted creature of the streets . . . the grateful girl who had asked for no happier future than to be his servant, who had dropped senseless at his feet at the bare prospect of

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<sup>59</sup> Lloyd Davis, ed. Virginal Sexuality and Textuality in Victorian Literature (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), p.4.

<sup>60</sup> Annette Federico, Masculine Identity in Hardy and Gissing (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis: Case Western Reserve University, 1988), pp.98-99.

parting with him' (p.216). Amelius wants gratitude, obedience, dependence and a servant; his dreams and 'forbidden thoughts' only serve to reinforce hegemonic discourse.

Sally is presented to us wholly through Amelius' perceptions and descriptions. He perceives her as a 'child-victim' (p.247), a 'martyred creature' (p.247) with limited mental ability and arrested emotional development. But this picture does not concur with Sally's actual behaviour or actions. She defies male authority and is able to act independently and assertively, she refuses to be contained in Mrs. Payson's 'Home for Friendless Women', and she actively seeks out Amelius' address. She is clearly not happy with just being a 'servant', pupil or child to Amelius. The tears and distress which Amelius finds so unaccountable indicates her desire for a more intimate relationship. Moreover, Sally articulates her critique of patriarchal discourse. The 'cruel boys' (p.203) refused to allow her a means of earning an independent living and destroyed her tools of survival - a pattern that is repeated throughout her life. And she was punished at the refuge for challenging God : 'I don't want him up in Heaven; I want him down here' (p.203). She is unable to remember not being 'hungry or cold' (p.202), or beaten or exploited by the Hell-Fires of the world and can lament that life is full of 'cruel men when it isn't cruel boys' (p.206). When Amelius attempts to integrate her with a society to which she has never and can never, belong she can rightly inform his friend, Rufus, that he 'had better have left me where I was! I disgraced nobody, I was a burden to nobody, *there*' (p.329). Indeed, 'Simple Sally' is not as 'simple' as it suits Amelius to believe.

Phillip O'Neill elucidates how Sally is both 'white' and a 'whore'. Collins juxtaposed stereotypical representations of women and:

by showing how Sally could be contained in both stereotypes, he consequently condemns stereotypical representations of women as inadequate approximations to feminine complexity. Sally can be identified as either whore or virgin but in the sense



that she is a whole human being . . . she transcends these inadequate categorisations.<sup>61</sup>

Sally's mother is the first 'fallen leaf' shown in the narrative and she, too, defies categorisation. She is masculine and maternal; she smokes, drinks and her room contains both dumb-bells for body building and baby's clothes over which she weeps. She is denied an opportunity to enter her father's or husband's business and, thus, constructs 'Dead Consolations' (p.83), meaningless activities with which to pass the time. Her life mirrors the 'heart-breaking monotony' described by Miss Millicent.

Jenny Taylor comments on how the:

fairy-tale device of the stolen child is used to mock its own complacent expectations even as it fulfils them . . . And Mrs. Farnaby depends on the sustaining illusions of her dream of reunion even as she derides them as delusions.<sup>62</sup>

But for all of Mrs. Farnaby's hard-gained cynicism and resignation she, also, cannot bear 'reality'. When Amelius discusses the finding of Sally she cuts him short with : 'I have not waited all these miserable years for such a horrible end as that' (p.218). Her child is 'reborn' to her, delivered by Amelius during her strychnine-induced spasms in a 'gruesome parody of childbirth'.<sup>63</sup> But for Sally to mature and live with Amelius Emma Farnaby cannot survive - motherhood and fatherhood is taken over by Amelius who imposes his interpretation of these terms, his discourse, upon Sally.

All the problems explored in the novel are caused by men and yet Collins can envisage the only escape for women as meeting the 'right' man, a 'Daddy' who chooses to tackle the 'Rapists'. Without the intervention of a 'goldenheart' Sally would remain subject

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<sup>61</sup> Phillip O'Neill, Wilkie Collins : Women, Property and Propriety (London : MacMillans, 1988), p.64.

<sup>62</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.233.

to the violence of a Hell-Fire and without the aid of a 'Dean of the Afflicted' Mercy would remain isolated and guilt-ridden. The New Magdalen and The Fallen Leaves appear to confirm Greg's belief that the 'fallen woman's downward path is a marked and inevitable one . . . they are almost never rescued; escape themselves they cannot'. Collins' answer is for more men to 'rescue' the Sallys and Mercys of the world. But Mercy had 'rescued' herself; she flourished until male discourse informed her that her means of reintegration was 'wrong'. It is the equivalent of 'cruel boys' destroying Sally's fiddle; women are denied opportunities to 'rescue' themselves and condemned if they manage to find a means of survival by their own efforts. And stereotyping male violence, through a portrayal of such a character as Hell-Fire, succeeds in deflecting threatening questions away from the 'daddies'. It is a phenomenon which we still witness today and it is pertinent, at this point, to introduce recent critiques of such scapegoating or demonising. It is a knee-jerk reaction to what is viewed as excessive force or brutality and a response which offers men some guise of self-protection and self-comfort. As David Jackson has argued, perceiving some men as 'evil' or 'sex monsters' blocks all men 'from asking awkward questions about masculinity, power and violence'.<sup>64</sup> He sees this as a masking which renders much male abuse, on the continuum of violence, as invisible. Collins did not tend to do this; he portrayed all men as abusive and corrupt to some degree. But his very success in doing so seriously compromises the conclusion. A 'true heart' or a 'goldenheart' heart are not sufficient to tackle the problems he has so vividly painted and Julian and Amelius are not acting altruistically or with self-insight.

To ensure a more egalitarian relationship Amelius, like Julian, falls ill and requires the support and 'rescue' of Sally. Despite their hegemonic utterances both Amelius and Julian depend upon a woman and disintegrate in her absence. Collins depicted a 'respectable' man needing the company of a 'fallen' woman; a dilemma that was destined to outrage 'King Public'. Richard Beaton claims that Mercy and Sally have to choose between 'street

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<sup>63</sup> Richard Beaton, p.213.

life and sacrificing a man's honour - for each it requires the intervention of an outside force to rescue the victim from the social trap'.<sup>65</sup> Amelius and Sally do marry but it is hinted that they will leave the country. As Jenny Taylor notes 'the vigorous colonial can no longer vitalise the culture, but must return to colonial exile in order to survive'.<sup>66</sup> And Collins could not complete his intended sequel to the novel; the critical response to The Fallen Leaves disillusioned him and he could foresee no positive future for Amelius and Sally who, he believed, would be destroyed by society.<sup>67</sup>

Through detailing the 'fall' of each character and the corruption of a patriarchal, capitalist society, Collins made 'respectable' society 'a club so exclusive that it has no members' and 'legitimacy is the status of anyone who manages not to get caught doing anything illegitimate'.<sup>68</sup> Collins recognised that men created the very problems, temptations and desperation which led to a woman's 'fall' and then proceeded to define, contain and stigmatise her. But whilst he was rationally aware of the power of discourse he was unable to escape its clutches or see a way beyond. Like Rufus Dingwell he believed that 'the world is hard on women - and the rights of property is a darned bad reason for it!' (p.330). But, nonetheless, Mercy and Sally are designed for men; they are beautiful, vulnerable 'angels' seeking a man's protection and care - from other men. Laura Hapke believes that Collins' 'fallen' women 'can reform without having to take responsibility for themselves. It is as if he is saying that they have suffered enough and deserve the care that loving and generous husbands can provide'.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, despite the brutality, abuse and exploitation suffered by Mercy and Sally they remain 'innately noble' and 'artlessly innocent'. They contrive to be simultaneously both Greg's 'victims' and Michie's 'ciphers of male lust'. One cannot help but suspect that men needed to believe in woman's biological 'virtue'. Women are idealised

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<sup>64</sup> David Jackson, 'Silence of the Wolves. Is the Serial Killer really the Monster in the Crowd?' Achilles Heel 13 (1992), p.25.

<sup>65</sup> Richard Beaton, p.76.

<sup>66</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.237.

<sup>67</sup> For a discussion of the planned sequel see Catherine Peters, The King of Inventors : A Life of Wilkie Collins (London : Minerva, 1992), p.387 and Kenneth Robinson, Wilkie Collins : A Biography (London : Davis-Poynter, 1955), pp.264-265.

<sup>68</sup> Nicola J. Schutt, p.199 and p.208.

because the hegemony wanted to believe, as Eric Trudgill proposes, in 'the perfect purity of womanhood, to believe that ultimately whatever sinful man might do to stain her, woman's natural character was that of the Madonna'.<sup>70</sup>

But this hope is not wholly sustained by the novels discussed here. Sally and Mercy are integrated into the very middle-class tenets and values which the novel has questioned and discarded; an echelon of society to which they have never and can never belong. They thus end their fictional lives in 'limbo'; en route to an unnamable, undepictable place, a 'new world' which Collins hoped existed but which he could not envisage. And, meanwhile, Mercy's 'sister in adversity' and Miss Millicent cannot be integrated; they remain marginalised and stigmatised. One is left with the haunting images of Emma Farnaby's 'secret hell' (p.59), Mother Sowler's baby farm, the asylum and Miss Millicent's vision of the 'heartbreaking monotony' of middle-class existence.

The Evil Genius addresses many of the dilemmas of the two novels discussed above and was the most popular and financially successful of Collins' later works. Again all the characters 'fall' and three are referred to as the 'evil genius'. Indeed, it is uncertain whether the title refers to Mrs. Presty, Sydney or Randal Linley. The novel demonstrates how 'the rules of society declare that an accident of position shall decide whether love is a virtue or a crime' (p.153), and it focusses upon the untenable onus that patriarchal hegemony placed upon a woman's 'duty' to hold the family together. Catherine Linley's act of sacrifice in 'allowing' her husband to leave her for Sydney, the children's nurse, is distorted by the judge into a crime. She is publicly reprimanded for allowing the 'criminal attachment' between Herbert and Sydney to blossom, for placing 'temptation' in their way and behaving in a 'culpably indelicate manner' (p..173). She is punished for 'losing' her husband by social ostracism and the rejection of Captain Bennydeck.

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<sup>69</sup> Laura Hapke, 'He Stoops to Conquer : Redeeming the Fallen Woman in the Fiction of Dickens, Gaskell and their Contemporaries', Victorian Newsletter (Spring 1986), p.19.

Sydney succumbs to temptation largely, like Mercy and Sally, through loneliness, emotional impoverishment and male pressure. But she is able to act independently and leaves Herbert of her own volition. The men are portrayed as 'weak', riddled with doubts and fears and emotionally illiterate. Herbert laments : 'I didn't know how fond I was of Syd till I lost her; I didn't know how fond I was of my wife till I left her' (p.225). And yet what he misses is a 'pretty creature, always nicely dressed, always about the room - thinking so much of you, and so little of herself' (p.225). This is Amelius' 'servant'; a personification of gratitude, selflessness, duty and 'feminine' sacrifice.

There is a marked tension in all the novels between the perceived frailty of woman and her ascribed role as moral guardian of the domestic sphere and 'virtue'; duties which require responsibility, strength and fortitude. Women are publicly censured for 'allowing' moral decay and family disintegration to occur but are seen as vulnerable to male seduction and exploitation. It would seem that the moral influence of the 'angel in the house' becomes problematic when confronted with masculine desire'. Men clearly need to believe in strong women but fear their potency and thus imprison them in discourse. Captain Bennydeck dreads Catherine's independence and assertion. He leaves, I suspect, because she threatens hegemonic control and not due to his proclaimed religious scruples. After the 'fall' Catherine grows in resilience and assertion and Sydney develops confidence and independence - but Herbert disintegrates into illness and confusion. Whilst the novel concludes by returning to the very domestic values of which it had originally been so critical it nonetheless dramatises the complexity of male/female sexuality and heterosexual relationships and exposes male discourses to be transparently hypocritical and absurd constructions. Unlike the earlier two novels The Evil Genius ends only with the possibility of Sydney marrying Captain Bennydeck. Sydney has moved beyond the role of a victim and is left with independence and choice.

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<sup>70</sup> Eric Trudgill, p.291.

Collins returned again and again to the theme of the 'fallen' woman partly for reassurance that 'whatever sinful man might do to stain her' the woman remained innately 'good', partly out of personal interest and partly out of fantasy or desire. As Mathews has argued, the 'reformed Magdalen is a figure of fantasy, dangerously attractive on account of her past yet a figure of ideal virtue in the present'.<sup>71</sup> She is virtuous and sexually experienced. But Collins also explored the 'fall' of man and society; how patriarchal institutions and discourses created the very outcasts whom it then condemned. The problem is that Collins could find no answer in this world; he raised generalised issues to which he could offer only particularised solutions. Sally is 'rescued' and her two friends sent to a new life in Australia but the thousands of homeless and starving 'outcasts' espied by Amelius in the night market are left drowning in their poverty and chaos. And Miss Mellicent remains lonely and distressed. Mercy is 'saved' but her 'sister in adversity' is not and the asylum and refuge remain. Despite his often radical insights Collins could still be accused of being a bourgeois writer who, as Lilian Robinson details, sees:

the important events of history as the events of inner history. Suffering is portrayed as a personal struggle, experienced by the individual in isolation. Alienation becomes a heroic disease, for which there is no social remedy. Irony masks resignation to a situation one cannot alter or control<sup>72</sup>

and thus the status quo prevails.

Whilst Collins did perceive the issues he raised as political problems necessitating a political solution he could not envisage what this might be. Like Amelius, at the Socialist meeting he had only adequately prepared half of his 'speech'. He could analyse the problem but could not see a way forward. And, like Amelius' speech, the first part of the novel generates interest, empathy and emotional intrigue which the conclusion then

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<sup>71</sup> Lisa G. Mathews, Crime and Subversion in the Later Fiction of Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of Leeds, 1993), p.141.

corrodes or disappoints. His heroines remain doubly enmeshed within masculine control; their empowerment and development are curtailed and their future fulfilment is doubtful. And the Horace Holmcrofts, Hell-Fires and John Farnabys of the world remain at large - to use, exploit and brutalise other women. But, nonetheless, Collins has given us an unflinching picture of this abuse and corruption, one which is echoed a century later by the English Collective of Prostitutes:

Women are unequivocally the poorer sex. They are on the game for money. On the whole men buy and women sell . . . Men's time has a price. Women's time outside the home has a low price . . . It is not from prostitution but from poverty and the resulting powerlessness and dependence that all women need protection.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Lillian Robinson, Sex, Class and Culture (Bloomington : Indiana University Press, 1978).

<sup>73</sup> C. Jaget, Prostitutes - Our Life (Bristol : Falling Wall Press, 1980), p.215.

## CHAPTER SIX - DISCOURSES OF TRUTH : DETECTIVE FICTION

'It would cease to be a danger if we could define it'.<sup>1</sup>

The Moonstone is frequently cited as the first full-length detective novel while Robert Ashley has declared that Collins also created the first dog and first lady detective, and the first epistolary and satirical detective stories.<sup>2</sup> Some of Ashley's claims may be contentious but Collins was certainly fascinated by the concept of, and possibilities inherent in, detective fiction. It is a genre to which he turned again and again and detective themes pervade most of his narratives. Detective fiction springs from, and revolves around, epistemological questions and theories of knowledge and interpretation. It is founded upon a Foucauldian world of 'discursive ferment' and 'disqualified knowledge'. As such it crystallises Collins' central concerns; it is a form through which he could express his own fears, insights and subtly challenge the 'transcendental pretence'.

The fictional detective appears to have been created largely as a reaction to ontological insecurity and philosophic controversy. In a contingent world of fear and uncertainty he/she promised to deliver the 'truth', to reveal that there are 'no mysteries, only

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Copper Beeches'. In The Complete Adventures of Sherlock Holmes (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1984), p.321.



incorrect reasoning'.<sup>3</sup> In this sense the detective genre, in its pursuit of the 'primal plan', the 'very string that links the pearls', parallels the reading process itself. It generates a plethora of possibilities of meaning, a maze of falsehoods camouflaging the truth which only the detective, as 'super reader' or the 'ultimate semiotician',<sup>4</sup> can unravel and decipher. And yet this is a process that is necessarily riddled with paradoxes and ambiguities. Detective narratives are essentially hermeneutic activities involving a struggle for power, for the ability to assert meaning, and are thus, as Heta Pyrhören concludes, 'nothing but a radical re-appropriation and reconstruction of narrative'<sup>5</sup> by one individual. Meaning can so be defined as a strategic response, 'the most persuasive fiction'.<sup>6</sup> But it begs the question that if all is a matter of interpretation, can there be any transcendental 'truth'? It presents a Foucauldian universe in which much energy is invested in both concealing and discovering 'secrets' that are constituted by discourse in the first place. It is not surprising that detective texts have generated a multitude of literary and psychoanalytic studies, or 'persuasive fictions', thus creating a further dimension of 'discursive ferment'. Detective fiction, and the theories surrounding it, can be seen to operate on social, political, religious and psychological levels. I will briefly explore the contemporary and modern perspectives, and the tensions they inevitably embrace, before moving on to discuss in detail Collins' *The Diary of Anne Rodway*, *The Moonstone* and *The Law and the Lady*.

In an industrialised, post-Darwinian world the detective could be envisaged as a secular 'god', one who safeguarded the sanctity of life and embodied high moral values. The detective was a Carlylean Hero, the 'ablest man' who possessed 'The Seeing Eye', who 'looks through the show of things into things', who was able to 'shine like a polestar

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Ashley, 'Wilkie Collins and the Detective Story'. *Nineteenth Century Fiction* VI (1951-2), p.61.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted in G.W. Most, & W.W. Stowe, eds. *The Poetics of Murder : Detective Fiction and Literary Theory* (London : Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), p.157.

<sup>4</sup> David Trotter, 'Theory and Detective Fiction'. *Critical Quarterly* 33, (No. 2, 1991), p.67.

<sup>5</sup> Heta Pyrhören, *Murder from an Academic Angle : An Introduction to the Study of the Detective Narrative* (Columbia : Camden House, 1994), p.35.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

through chaos'<sup>7</sup> and penetrate 'the sacred mystery of the Universe'. He personified truth, knowledge and order. Indeed, the very format of detective fiction resembles a religious ritual with primordial chaos and evil reigning after a 'Fall'. It portrays absolutes of good and evil with a Father Imago figure<sup>8</sup> who understands all and metes out appropriate punishments and rewards on the Day of Judgement (the denouement). However, John Wren-Lewis perceives the genre as anti-Christian and analyses how humans, by playing 'god' and judging others, actually commit 'the fundamental perversion of human freedom against itself'.<sup>9</sup>

The detective text also adopts a classical structure and adheres to the Aristotelian ideal.<sup>10</sup> It is a new version of the morality play in which a hamartia, or fatal flaw, leads to ruin and collapse before the catharsis and the re-establishment of peace and order. But it is based firmly on elements of the Romantic tradition too. The detective can be seen as a knight-errant, an archetypal quester, in search of 'truth' and the eradication of 'evil'. He/she is an isolated individual who endures hardship, danger and suffering to promote the greater 'good'.

It is a genre which is based upon disparate elements of past literary tradition and which is essentially dependent on the past. Detective fiction's link with psychoanalysis has long been recognised. Dennis Porter calls such narrative 'an act of recovery'.<sup>11</sup> Detection tells a story in reverse; it traces problems back to their origins and recovers past meanings to remedy present ills. But it confers meaning in retrospect; it can reach the past only through narrative and interpretation. The detective's 'truth' is an illusion and delusion retrospectively imposed upon a bygone time.

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Carlyle, 'Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History', The Works of Thomas Carlyle VIV, ed. H.D. Traill, (New York : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1903), p.55, p.80, p.105, p.199 and p.202.

<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Blake, 'The Detective Story - Why?'. In Haycraft, Howard, ed., The Art of the Mystery Story (New York : Biblio and Tannen, 1976), p.400.

<sup>9</sup> John Wren-Lewis, John, 'Adam, Eve and Agatha Christie'. New Christian (16 April 1970), p.10.

<sup>10</sup> Carl Taylor Burton, The Hero as Detective, (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : Columbia University, 1973).

<sup>11</sup> Dennis Porter, 'Backward Construction and the Art of Suspense'. In Most & Stowe, p.329.

Nonetheless, on a psychological level detective fiction can be seen to provide superficial re-assurance. Geraldine Pederson-Krag believes that such narrative perpetually re-enacts the primal scene drama and responds to a 'traumatic neurosis' resulting from cultural taboos and silences.<sup>12</sup> Similarly Charles Rycroft perceives the genre as a 'manic defence' against the helplessness of childhood. He surmises that the reader is 'living a fantasy of being in omnipotent control of the internalised parents' in which the compulsive question 'whodunit?' is always answered by a self-exonerating 'Not I!' <sup>13</sup> However, such theses presuppose that the reader identifies with the detective, an assumption that may well be erroneous especially as the detective is invariably delineated as aloof and 'other'. Moreover, the detective is actually an anti-oedipal figure<sup>14</sup> who discovers only a particular guilt in a particular case and not a universal guilt or desire. The detective is both the ultimate psychologist and the ultimate potential offender. He/she is the alter ego of the criminal, a possible transgressor who chooses 'virtue'. Thus, Sherlock Holmes can predict Moriarty's next move as he will again do 'what I would do'.<sup>15</sup>

But for the detective to detect there must always be something beyond the hegemony to detect. The detective is defined against, and dependent upon, the marginalised, and 'disqualified knowledge'. Detective narrative is structured around absence and disorder; it is predicated upon a world distinguished by its total absence of stable identities and signs. Primordial chaos and the 'Unthought' lie dangerously close to the surface. And the initial loss or disruption is absolute. The offender may be apprehended and punished but the questions raised cannot be exorcised; there can be no return to symbiotic unity. The detective's quest is ultimately futile because, as Jasmine Yong Hall elucidates, 'for a

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<sup>11</sup> Dennis Porter, 'Backward Construction and the Art of Suspense'. In Most & Stowe, p.329.

<sup>12</sup> Geraldine Pederson-Krag, 'Detective Stories and the Primal Scene'. Psychoanalytic Quarterly XVIII, (1949), pp.207-214.

<sup>13</sup> Charles Rycroft, 'The Analysis of a Detective Story'. Psychoanalytic Quarterly 20 (1937), p.231.

<sup>14</sup> Charney as quoted by H. Pyrhören, p.77.

<sup>15</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Final Problem'. In The Complete Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, p.476.

detective to be a hero there must be a world beyond rational discourse',<sup>16</sup> a world which is uncontrollable and persistently intrusive. Indeed, rather than the disruption or crime being the exception in detective fiction it is the norm; peace and 'order' can be achieved only on a temporary, precarious basis. Detectives transpire to be disappointing heroes who discover only a casuistic 'truth'; which suffices in only one given case at one given point in history. They are a new version of the Wandering Jew with a never-ending mission to perform the unperformable.

On a social and political level detective fiction can, from one viewpoint, be seen as highly conservative. It assumes a shared, fixed sense of order, upholds the status quo and preserves bourgeois values and privileges. On the surface it does appear to portray, what George Grella terms, a 'benevolent and knowable Universe'<sup>17</sup> in which stasis and rationalism reign triumphant. It can be seen as the product of capitalism, texts which divert collective political action by focusing on the romance of the individual. Indeed, Gramsci suggests that detective narratives are 'sugar-coated sedatives' which, by representing absolutes and a national hero crushing an alien 'other', feed hegemonic discourses.<sup>18</sup>

However, such theories neglect the fact that the genre does not present one detective, one offender or one viewpoint. Furthermore it is premised upon the very impossibility of state justice. It recognises the failures of the legal and social structures and belongs squarely to a democratic tradition. And, as Heta Pyrhören illustrates, once the law is 'subject to multiple definitions, order also becomes relative'.<sup>19</sup> Detective fiction creates a multiplicity of interpretations concerning law and order, interpretations which may not resonate with the culture's hegemonic project.

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<sup>16</sup> Jasmine Yong-Hall, A Study in Scarlet Letters : Women and Crime in the Novels of Arthur Conan Doyle, M.E. Braddon, Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Boston, 1990), p.1.

<sup>17</sup> George Grella, 'Murder and Manners : The Formal Detective Novel'. Novel 4 (No. 1, 1970), p.48.

<sup>18</sup> Gramsci, as quoted by Heta Pyrhören, p.103.

<sup>19</sup> H. Pyrhören, p.97.

Jasmine Yong Hall observes how the Panopticon model of discipline created self-regulation and how even the overseer of the Panopticon is subject to surveillance.<sup>20</sup> The detective offers the one exception to this model; the detective is master of the discourse of truth and possesses the ultimate gaze. She argues that the genre presents a struggle between 'masculine' control, rationality and language and 'female' emotions, silence and mystery.<sup>21</sup> She demonstrates how the fear, chaos and sense of unknown generated by detective fiction are generally associated with women and notes that it is Irene Adler alone who manages to outwit Holmes. She perceives detective narrative as being intrinsically based upon gender warfare; of a rational masculinity attempting to penetrate and contain the female 'Other'. Indeed, the detective hero was traditionally depicted as male. He sees and knows all and his identity, as Maggie Humm notes, is one of 'masculine certitude' which is 'constantly being tested and which he must continually assert. His masculinity lies in self-mastery and the ability to define himself as a free agent'.<sup>22</sup> It is significant that in the 'hard-boiled' novels of the mid-twentieth-century, the detective became the 'private dick', a subliminal reference to the 'privileged signifier' associated with public action, power and bravery.

And yet the detective remains an outsider. His knowledge of 'evil' precludes him from happiness and his association with the marginalised ostracises him from intimate relationships. He can interpret signs but not anticipate or control them. He cannot reverse the pain and loss generated by the original 'disruption' - or prevent the next one from occurring. Indeed, his very existence is dependent upon a series of disruptions and losses. The superficial format of detective fiction is grossly misleading. Whilst it ostensibly trades in closure it actually raises questions, dilemmas and extratextual dimensions reaching far beyond a technical solution. An undefinable but powerful, ever-present threat hangs over the artificially imposed denouement. Gavin Lambert views Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Man in

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<sup>20</sup> Jasmine Yong-Hall, p.7.

<sup>21</sup> Jasmine Yong-Hall, pp.1-20.

<sup>22</sup> Maggie Humm, 'Feminist Detective Fiction'. In Bloom, Clive, ed. Twentieth-Century Suspense : The Thriller Comes of Age (London : MacMillan, 1990), p.248.

the Crowd' as epitomising the tensions and contradictions which haunt detective fiction :  
 'the man is hunter and hunted, victim and victimiser, on the run and in pursuit, unable to be  
 part of the crowd yet terrified of being alone'.<sup>23</sup> In other words he is everything that Dupin  
 can never remedy or decode.

Detective narratives ostensibly embrace 'masculine certitude' and the male gaze. The  
 form encodes gender-based structures of power, colludes with patriarchal institutions and is  
 founded upon the very dichotomies which fuel discourses of masculinity. It thrives upon the  
 binarism between male/female, order/disorder, law/crime, public/private, good/bad,  
 rational/emotional. Kathleen Klein thus promulgates that there is an inevitable clash  
 between a 'detective script and a woman script'.<sup>24</sup> This would certainly account for the  
 disastrous consequences befalling Marian Halcombe after her brief foray into the realm of  
 detection. However, fictional female detectives appeared long before women could  
 officially join the police force and it is rather surprising that their early popularity has not  
 attracted more attention or 'explanation'. Hayward's Mrs. Paschal stories and Andrew  
 Forrester's Mrs. Gladden in 'The Female Detective' hunted down criminals for a living from  
 at least 1864<sup>25</sup> and, between 1864 and 1901, over twenty female investigators entered, and  
 flourished in, the world of fiction. Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan have noted that there is  
 a major distinction between 'unpaid enthusiasts' and 'career' detectives;<sup>26</sup> with regard to  
 propriety it would seem that fees and femininity do not mix. Hence, Mrs. Paschal and  
 Forrester's 'female detective' frequently emphasise their femininity, cite their traditional

<sup>23</sup> Gavin Lambert, 'The Dangerous Edge'. In Winks, Robin, ed. Detective Fiction : A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey : Prentice Hall, 1980), p.51.

<sup>24</sup> Kathleen Klein, The Woman Detective : Gender and Genre (Chicago : University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.57.

<sup>25</sup> Kathleen Klein, p.18 and p.30. Klein disputes that 'The Experiences of a Lady Detective' first appeared in 1861 and argues that this is a 'ghost issue'. This claim is also supported by Pennel, Jane, 'The Female Detective : Pre and Post Women's Liberation', Clues 6, (No. 2, 1985), p.85. However, the date of 1861 is maintained by Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan, The Lady Investigators : Women Detectives and Spies in Fiction (London : Gollancz, 1981), p.15. Other female detectives included George R. Sims' Dorcas Dene, Clarence Rook's Nora Van Snoop, Catherine Pirkis' Loveday Brooke, L.T. Meades and Robert Eustace's Florence Cusack, Fergus Hume's Hagar Stanley, McDonnell Bodkin's Dora Myrl and Grant Allen's Lois Caley. For further information on these texts and characters see P. Craig and M. Cadogan, K. Klein and Humpherys' 'Who's doing it? Fifteen Years of Work on Victorian Detective Fiction'. The Dickensian 24 (1996), pp. 259-274.

female interests and stress the 'respectability' of their work. Fay Blake illustrates how the 'amateurs' are spurred into action to save their family and right past injustices before returning 'to the obscurity of their home'.<sup>27</sup> This process can be seen in Collins' 'The Diary of Anne Rodway', 'John Jago's Ghost' and in the lives of The Woman in White's Marian Halcombe and The Law and the Lady's Valeria Macallan.

But one must ask why these authors created female investigators within a format which ostensibly appears to be so masculine. Women, as the repository of their culture's needs and fears, as guardians of male peace and preserves of the home, could be expected to be concerned with any threat to the established order. It may be that women were temporarily transformed from Angels in the House to Angels of Justice with a mission to restore 'goodness', 'truth' and stasis. Eve and Pandora were deemed responsible for the original 'fall' and it might thus be seen as highly appropriate for women to deliver recompense for the transgression of their predecessors. Men may also have wished to contain and channel women's perceived potency, mystery and otherness, to deflect dread into a desire to be saved from themselves.

And yet female detectives cannot be exempt from the ambiguity that subverts the Carlylean hero; the endless quest to control the unpredictable and uncontrollable. Indeed, it may be that, because the detective proves to be ultimately so unsatisfactory as a hero, men believed it was 'safer' for women to do the work. It is significant that after the decline of the classic detective story,<sup>28</sup> as promoted by Agatha Christie, Dorothy Sayers, Margery Allingham and Ngaio Marsh, the 'hard-boiled'<sup>29</sup> narratives recognised that instability could not be contained, that all could not be deciphered and ordered. The hard-boiled detective loses power and respectability, he is haunted by angst, bitter memories and pays an

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<sup>26</sup> P. Craig & M. Cadogan, p.21.

<sup>27</sup> Fay M. Blake, 'Lady Sleuths and Women Detectives'. Turn of the Century Women 3, (No. 1, 1986), p.39.

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of this see Ronald Knox, 'A Detective Story Decalogue', pp.194-196 and S.S Van Dine. 'Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories'. Both in Howard Haycraft.

exorbitant emotional price for his skills. He knows that his reading cannot remedy the social injustices and disorder he witnesses. Like the Ancient Mariner he is destined to expose a ceaseless narrative of misery, sin, tragedy, loss and guilt. I will propose, in this chapter, that Collins' detectives anticipate their 'hard-boiled' successors. Both Collins' professional investigators and his 'unpaid enthusiasts' confront irrevocable loss, pain and ennui; they know their limitations and fallibility and are aware that all is ultimately 'an impenetrable mystery'.

The detective pursues a hermeneutic vocation and is dependent upon language to narrate his interpretations. In Collins' works a central theme is the fallibility or the misleading and often erroneous nature, of words. In detective fiction all is potentially laden with significance and all are potentially guilty. It is D. A. Miller's 'fantasy of total relevance' in which all signifiers can be fitted into an all-encompassing whole or relevant signifiers can be detected and meaning localised.<sup>30</sup> It can be seen as a yearning for the prelapsarian idyll. It is an attempt to utilise language to mask 'loss', to reunite the fragmented self and to deny the very reason for its existence. Verbalised rationality, like masculinity itself, can be seen as compensation, a means imaginatively to control the collapse of symbiotic unity. And so the detective enters the never-ending chain of signifiers which constitutes language. The long sought after 'truth' can only lie in the pre-narrated state, in the 'chora' or the 'unthought'. He desires unified totality but is faced with a gestalt in the mirror; he confronts himself as a site of fragmentation. He is so destined perpetually to strive for completeness but, as Elizabeth Grosz demonstrates, any recovered unity can only be an illusion, a construct retrospectively imposed upon the pre-mirror phase.<sup>31</sup> It is a fiction, like psychoanalysis itself, which creates further fiction to account for present pain and uncertainty. Jonathan Dollimore observes how Caliban rebels in the very language which constructs him; the utterances used to justify his enslavement! Dollimore, like Lacan, and

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<sup>29</sup> For a discussion of the hard-boiled format see Heta Pyrhören, p.34 and George Grella 'The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel'. In Robin Winks, pp.105-120.

<sup>30</sup> D.A. Miller, *D.A., The Novel and the Police*, (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1988), p.34.

<sup>31</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, *Jacques Lacan : A Feminist Introduction* (London : Routledge, 1990), p.39.



concludes that meaning is always fundamentally incomplete because of its dependency upon 'a potentially infinite relationship to what is different or absent; completion of meaning is always thereby deferred'.<sup>32</sup> This is the primary dilemma facing the detective's quest and one which subverts the very ideology of success upon which masculine discourses are so firmly founded. The fate of Solomon Weil, in Peter Ackroyd's Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem can be seen as a synecdoche for the doomed pursuit of the detective. Solomon can perceive a world of 'hidden correspondence and signs' and make 'a cabbala out of the music hall'.<sup>33</sup> But Jane Quig is tortured and murdered as he ruminates and he cannot foresee or prevent his own death. His severed 'privileged signifier' is left, mutilated and purposeless, upon his book of knowledge : the ultimate symbol of the impotent detective.

It is not, as Robert Ashley has suggested, a 'happy accident'<sup>34</sup> that Collins is heralded as the 'father of the detective novel'.<sup>35</sup> Such a concept, offering a wealth of new opportunities to explore marginalised issues and the subjectivity of language and perception, would most certainly have appealed to him. Collins recognised that 'reality' and meaning are linguistic creations and that attempting to 'conceptualise the process of meaning . . . turns the very process into its antithesis - "structure"'.<sup>36</sup> In this sense he radically fails the 'Ellery Queen yardstick'<sup>37</sup> and disqualifies himself from the 'Detective Club' with its sharply defined parameters.<sup>38</sup> Collins' novels end with an 'impenetrable mystery', they emphasise the 'utter blank' and stress - the unanswerable question which haunts human-kind - 'Who can tell?'<sup>39</sup> His detectives, with their world-weary resignation and keen sense of tragedy, anticipate the 'hard-boiled' private eyes. He relinquished authorial omniscience and refuses to reassure or to return to a delusory sense of order or stasis.

<sup>32</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, Sexual Dissidence : Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault (Oxford : Clarendon Press, 1991), p.109 and p.254.

<sup>33</sup> Peter Ackroyd, Dan Leno and the Limehouse Golem (London : Minerva, 1994), p.66.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Ashley, p.61.

<sup>35</sup> Wilkie Collins is named as such by T. S. Eliot, T.S., 'Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens' In Ian Watt, ed. The Victorian Novel (London : Oxford University Press, 1971), p.136 and by E. Keshokova, 'The Father of the English Detective Novel', Soviet Literature 12 (1980), pp.149-153.

<sup>36</sup> Steven Earnshaw, Generation of Meaning : The Direction of Literary Theory (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leicester, 1994), p.16.

<sup>37</sup> Robert Ashley, p.47.

<sup>38</sup> R. Knox and SS.Van Dine.

Whilst the 'most persuasive fiction' may temporarily reign it is clearly perceived as one of several possible interpretations and the sub-text raises questions, doubts and fears which cannot be dismissed. This can be appreciated by a close study of 'Anne Rodway's Diary', The Moonstone and The Law and the Lady.

'The Diary of Anne Rodway', written in 1859, may depict an 'unpaid enthusiast' who investigates out of love, but what Anne actually discovers is radical and cannot be resolved by the technical denouement. The 'real' crime, detected by Anne, is the prevalence and intensity of male violence and abuse of patriarchal privilege. And this knowledge develops into a central theme, or 'secret' unveiled, in all of Collins' detective narratives.

The story was first included in The Queen of Hearts<sup>40</sup> anthology and the preamble indicates the seriousness of the area to be discussed. The group, who gather nightly for a recital of a story, sense a growing unease as this text is introduced. Griffith retreats from the light to a 'dim corner' (p.305) to hide his 'anxious face' (p.305). The gathering is 'sad and silent' (p.305) whilst outside inclement weather rages and 'night advanced' (p.305). The group's 'positions at the table were altered now' as if 'we had instinctively broken up already' (p.306). It is a picture that suggests imminent social change, disintegration and conflict.

Anne's diary opens with declarations of love for her fiance, concern for his suffering whilst looking for employment overseas, and denial of her own feelings: "women..., learn,... to be more patient than men' (p.307). It is a statement belied by the very fact that she needs to write a diary as an outlet for her emotions and the kind description of her own toil, expectation and bleak existence. Anne may have 'learnt' patience and self sacrifice but she is still able to criticise social structures and question male authority. She replies to the vicar's sermon on accepting the status quo and social inequality with the pertinent rejoinder

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<sup>39</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Moonstone p.434 and 'The Dream-Woman', p.103.

that '... I think I should have understood him better if I had not been very hungry at the time, in consequence of my own station in life being nothing but a Plain Needlewoman' (p.308). Ann knows how society defines and misuses her, but her journal makes it clear that she does not accept it or believe, as the vicar promulgates, that 'all things are ordered for the best' (p.308). Her subsequent investigation reveals the grave erroneousness of the vicar's philosophy.

The plight of Mary Mallinson, Anne's friend, colleague and co-lodger can be seen as a paradigm for the 'crime' unearthed by the story. Mary's mother 'ran away from home' (p.310) and died. The reason for her flight is evident when we learn more about Mary's father who was 'always drunk' and always beating me' (p.310). Mary's brother is abroad and out of contact and her 'sweetheart' reflects 'the saddest part of her sad story' (p.310). Significantly it is a story that remains untold as its telling would cause 'unnecessary pain' (p.310) to both Anne and Mary. Mary's life is plighted by male cruelty, neglect and irresponsibility. Her death is caused by the very same factors.

In Collins' literary world detecting is often seen as a preferable vocation for a woman than the monotony of being an 'Angel' in a traditional Victorian 'house'. At the outset of her investigations, Anne states that she could bear any 'trial' and face any dangers but dreads the return of a depressed Robert and having to comfort a 'helpless, broken-down man' (p.311). Her detection literally saves her from the soul-destroying tedium of the conventional woman's role. Marian Halcombe and Valeria MacCallan later experience the same exhilaration, challenge and escape in what Gabriel Betteridge aptly names 'detective fever'.<sup>41</sup>

After the physical assault, by an unknown male on her return home, Mary becomes a 'poor suffering angel', lying 'white and still and helpless' (p.314). Indeed she becomes the

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<sup>40</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Queen of Hearts*, (London : Chatto & Windus, 1893), This edition will be used throughout this thesis.

Victorian ideal of womanhood which is, perhaps, why the men see little wrong in her condition and dismiss or 'interrupt' Anne's suspicions (p.318). It is left to a woman to challenge authority's verdict and avenge an outrage caused by men, and then failed to be detected by masculine authority. Anne demonstrates considerable political insight; she alone treats Dusty Sal with respect as an individual and she attacks the landlord as an 'inhuman wretch who owns the house, and lives in idleness on the high rents he wrings from poor people like us' (p.315). But Anne has to use patriarchal authority to protect her and influence the landlord. The beadle, with his 'great cocked hat' and 'long cane' (p.321) symbolises this patriarchal privilege. He describes the landlord as 'unmanly' (p.322) whilst thumping his cane on the floor and emphasising the duties of a 'Christian Gentleman'. He is a 'daddy' confronting a 'rapist'. Throughout the story Anne can confront and escape the 'rapists' but she is reliant upon the good-will of the 'daddies'.

The 'old, rotten, dingy strip' of tie (p.315) found clutched in Mary's hand, after the attack, is an actual clue to the crime but it also runs as a symbolic motif throughout the narrative. It is a flaccid, soiled, phallic image reflecting the corrupt, dying patriarchal order and the abuse and oppression which haunts this tale. Mary dies fighting male violence, gripping part of the 'privileged signifier', which breaks away into her hand. It is 'black', 'deadened with dirt' and 'stained' (p.315) and causes Anne to be overwhelmed with a 'chill' and utter terror (p.315). It is also 'jagged' and 'torn violently' thus suggesting Collins' concern that if inequality and abuse were not directly addressed they would be brutally forced upon the hegemony. The 'foul means' (p.315), which petrify Anne, underlines the exploitation, rage and violence to which all single women in a city are prey, including Anne herself.

Appropriately Anne dreams of the tie - which leads her through the 'Valley of the Shadow of Death' (p.324) - and hints that she will discover the 'truth'. Indeed the tie, or what it represents, is the 'truth'. Phallic symbolism abounds in the story to reflect the extent

of male power and abuse. It is Anne's search for candles which leads her to the tie. Horlick spends his time smoking a pipe whilst the beadle struts around with a 'cocked hat' and 'cane'. And it is a marital row which enables Ann to discover the owner of the tie. It was sold for much needed money by 'a poor creature with a lazy brute of a husband, who lets his wife do all the work while he spends all the money' (p.326); a tale told with empathy by a woman in exactly the same situation. It is one of the 'many sad stories in real life' 'with which Anne is familiar' (p.314). Throughout the Diary Anne elicits sisterly confessions from other women who suffer poverty, brutality and exploitation. And yet to gain her end Anne must confront, bribe or cajole male assistance. Anne may claim that her 'bold words' to Horlick issued 'without my own will or taking any part in them' (p.328) but they actually spring from her own potential self, the self untrammelled by contemporary male expectations.

After the return of Robert the story metamorphosises into a romance and Anne vividly demonstrates Foucault's concept of the 'government of the self'. Her language becomes emotive; people are 'monsters' and 'wild beasts' (p.333). And she accepts Robert's evaluation of her actions, allowing her investigation to be dismissed as 'the hand of Providence' (p.332). She falls to her knees and 'worships' Robert for listening to her and showing 'pity' (p.330). She admits that she must now rest and hand the case over to him as her 'strength and resolution had been hardly taxed already' (p.331), although we had no sign of this until Robert, with the force of masculine authority, declares it to be the case.

And yet Robert cannot minimise Anne's findings and there is no remedy offered for the injustices she unveils. The true secret she discovers is the full extent of male abuse of power and 'domestic' violence. And Noah Trustcott, a name which implies trust and religious virtues, is the worst offender. The dangers are all-pervasive for the characters have interchangeable roles; all is perceived as a matter of social accident. Anne could be

in any of the other women's situations and Robert, like Mary's father, could fall prey to a Noah Trustcott.

The conclusion limits Anne's development and she regresses from a self-reliant, capable person to someone who needs a 'rest' and prostrates herself with gratitude for male kindness. Moreover, the very discoveries related by the Diary make her future happiness, as a wife, far from certain. Significantly, although the story occurred several years before its narration, the Diary remains in Anne's family name as a record of her own feelings and actions. However, the irony is that Anne remains trebly enclosed within male texts. Her story is actually created by a male writer and a copy of her Diary, presented and read by a male vicar (a figure representing the very authority she had earlier disparaged), is made by and given by her husband. Barickman, McDonald and Stark claimed that Collins could find no 'middle ground between the passivity that causes disintegration and the activity punished by social ostracism'.<sup>42</sup> This story does indeed substantiate this claim. It is left to Valeria Macallan, whom I shall discuss later, to move closer to this 'middle ground'.

In 'The Diary of Anne Rodway' other people's worlds, values and perspectives continually impose themselves upon Anne, who is ultimately unable to escape the 'dominant fiction'. However, it is in The Moonstone that Collins begins to experiment elaborately with detective fiction as a form for exploring issues of perception and subjectivity.<sup>43</sup> In both narratives the epistolary structure reflects the fragmentation of the world and the multiplicity of viewpoints. But in The Moonstone it is depicted as a blatant artifice for Franklin Blake is both the editor and the 'master voice'.<sup>44</sup> He controls what is included, changed and omitted. And Blake is in the interesting position of being both detective and criminal. There is much that he initially does not know and dreads. Indeed,

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<sup>42</sup> R. Barickman, S. McDonald, and M. Stark, Corrupt Relations : Charles Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Wilkie Collins and the Victorian Sexual System (New York : Columbia University Press, 1982), p.131.

<sup>43</sup> D.A. Hutter , 'Dismemberment and Articulation in Our Mutual Friend'. Dickens Studies Annual 11, (1984), p.138. This argument, and its effect upon Dickens, is discussed in this article.

<sup>44</sup> D.A., Miller, p.54.

into the realm of language, self-unity and rationality. Jasmine Yong-Hall observes how this concept of language as a unifying force, that all can be recalled and 'blanks' can be filled in' by the recall of others, is a recurrent theme in the novel.<sup>45</sup> It is also one belied by the central images of the narrative; the jewel, the Shivering Sands and Jennings, the ultimate 'filler in' of gaps whose own story is a 'blank' (p.428 and p.516). And the most significant 'silence' of all is Rachel Verinder herself who offers no personal contribution. Parallel to Blake's quest to make language reveal all runs a theme of silence and buried writing represented by Rachel's refusal to speak, Rosanna's submerged letter and Jennings's untold history.

As with the earlier story it is patriarchal violence and abuse which initiates the action. John Hemcastle's bloody theft of the moonstone and desire for familial revenge instigate the tragedies that ensue. As John Reed ironically notes, Hemcastle's plunder is viewed as 'respectable trade' whereas Rosanna's petty theft results in irreparable damage to her character and life.<sup>46</sup> Indeed, the novel embraces an ongoing analogy between sexual and imperial domination and, as Tamar Heller observes, both Hemcastle's and Blake's 'theft' of the jewel reflect physical or sexual violation.<sup>47</sup> The sexual symbolism of the smeared paint on the bedroom door, and the smudge on Blake's nightshirt, are clear. Rachel watches in silent, helpless horror as her most precious possession is taken from her - never to be recovered. The loss and pain is absolute and cannot be restored by language. Jasmine Yong-Hall demonstrates how the first consequence of this loss is that all the women lose their characters, are locked out of their bedrooms and placed under male suspicion. She concludes that the women are perceived as a secret to be penetrated by male investigations and that Rachel's silence is a survival strategy, a means of keeping herself

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<sup>44</sup> D.A., Miller, p.54.

<sup>45</sup> Jasmine Yong-Hall, p.124.

<sup>46</sup> John Reed, 'English Imperialism and the Unacknowledged Crime of The Moonstone'. Clio 2, (1973), p.284.

<sup>47</sup> Tamar Heller, Dead Secrets : Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1992), p.145.

out of dominant discourse.<sup>48</sup> Yong-Hall perceives Blake as self-divided between an investigatory male self and an unknown female self, the 'other' which he tries to return to masculine language and control.<sup>49</sup> Similarly Jenny Taylor emphasises how the loss of the jewel precipitates anxiety and a disruption in social and sexual relations. She concludes that it needs to be restored primarily for 'what its lack signifies, socially and sexually, within the family'.<sup>50</sup>

The Shivering Sands and the moonstone are depicted as female symbols; they represent the M/Other and female resistance to hegemonic control. The moon (long associated with femininity) stone appears perfect but it is illusory. It glows 'darkly' and has a 'flaw' in the 'very heart' of it (p.35). As John Reed perceives, its significance 'lies in its misappropriation. Because it is so desired by men, it signifies men's greed'. It is a 'sign of England's imperial depredations - the symbol of a national rather than a personal crime' and is thus 'a broad indictment of an entire way of life'.<sup>51</sup> It is an indictment of the masculine need to take, control and possess, both economically and emotionally. Rosanna explicitly stresses the connection between theft and sexual exploitation. She recalls that she was in prison 'because I was a thief. I was a thief, because my mother went on the streets when I was quite a little girl' (p.289). The moonstone seems to act as a moral lodestone; it is not dangerous when appreciated for its spiritual value and beauty but it is fatal if treated as property and degraded. Jenny Taylor has elucidated how the jewel is the 'apotheosis of the means by which meaning, desire and value are created out of projection, displacement and transference . . . It is the signifier, the object of desire, it disrupts the distinction between literal and figural'.<sup>52</sup> As such it is a vivid symbol of contemporary sexual relationships.

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<sup>48</sup> Jasmine Yong-Hall, p.19, p.161 and p.134.

<sup>49</sup> Jasmine Yong-Hall, p.1.

<sup>50</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of the Home : Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London : Routledge, 1988), p.174.

<sup>51</sup> John Reed, p.286 and p.288.

<sup>52</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.195.



R. P. Laidlaw views the Shivering Sands as a yet more terrifying image of the potency of the M/Other.<sup>53</sup> Its 'unfathomable' depths (p.58) and shivering golden brown face envelope Rosanna forever and bring Blake close to death. Rosanna saw it reflecting the plight of the poor and exploited. She perceives 'hundreds of suffocating people under it - all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and lower in the dreadful deeps!', an image which suggests incarceration but also possible revolt (p.24). There is little wonder that Blake, as a white, middle-class male, finds the Sands so disturbing. The Sands, which consume Rosanna and her unrequited passion, symbolise the omnivorousness of thwarted female desire, it embodies the passions and rages of the marginalised, those excluded from privileged discourse. Tamar Heller has commented upon how Blake, with great trepidation and dread of emasculation, manages to penetrate the 'secret' cleft with his stick.<sup>54</sup> But although Blake may still be able to use his privileged signifier to penetrate the M/Other he cannot contain, control or even understand it. He is unable to read the letter directly and unable to comprehend the essence of Rosanna's utterances even when read to him. He cannot stop the sand's quivering passions or curb Lucy's contempt and rage. He is, thus, unable to 'gaze' upon the sands. Rosanna, by daring to 'gaze' and desire without masculine permission, symbolically and emotionally castrates Blake. She lives up to her name - Spear man - and has partially usurped the male privileges of the 'gaze' and the possession of knowledge which she refuses to share. The 'secrets' of both the sands and the jewel ultimately resist male investigation.

But, despite belonging to the masculine realm, language also ultimately resists male investigation. As with psychoanalytic discourse The Moonstone attempts to re-interpret the past; to address problems in the present by tracing them to their origin and 'explaining' their cause. In so doing it moves through a multiplicity of perceptions, values and philosophies. Jenny Taylor claims that it attempts to redefine what constitutes knowledge and experience, that it challenges discursive boundaries and that it is a 'novel of remembering', (of how the

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<sup>53</sup> R. P. Laidlaw, R.P., 'Awful Images and Associations : A Study of Wilkie Collins' The Moonstone'. Southern Review 9 (Nov. 1976), pp.211-227.

unconscious past can be reclaimed) and a 'novel of forgetting' (of buried writing, silence and concealment).<sup>55</sup> As such it is an excellent example of detective fiction as the 'art of framing lies'<sup>56</sup> and of a denouement as 'the most persuasive fiction'.

And Jennings offers 'the most persuasive fiction', he offers what everyone wants to hear. Jasmine Yong-Hall details how Jennings perceives language as being able to unite Blake's fragmented personality; how he sees Blake as divided 'only into those parts which are written, and those parts which are waiting to be written'.<sup>57</sup> Jennings is the 'ultimate semiotician'; he can construct an entire history from broken words and empty spaces. He can write over the 'scripts' of others and fill in blanks. And yet his 'truth' remains just that - a construction. And one that produces only paradoxes; Blake is guilty but also innocent. Tamar Heller observes how his 'innocence' is only a matter of social construction; he committed the theft but only to 'protect' his fiancée and such male protection is legitimate in the eyes of 'polite' society.<sup>58</sup> Anthea Trodd sees his vindication as a 'success in equivocation . . . He is addicted, but only respectably, to tobacco. He steals but only under the influence of drugs. He leaves one girl hysterical in her bedroom and another drowning in the Shivering Sands, but none of this reflects upon him.'<sup>59</sup> Indeed, Limping Lucy's fury at male privilege and insensitivity appears most justified.

Lisa Mathews believes that the theft of the moonstone symbolises the relationship between men and women and is a metaphor for the oppression of women through ideology. She claims that both Rosanna and Rachel are destroyed by masculine discourses; that they are marginalised and denied their 'otherness'. Rosanna, when she is not invisible to the men, is the subject of scorn, pity or contempt whilst Rachel is 'reduced by the masculine narratives of Cuff and Blake to something readily understandable. Her actions have been

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<sup>54</sup> Tamar Heller, p.150.

<sup>55</sup> J.B. Taylor, pp.175-176.

<sup>56</sup> Dorothy Sayers, As quoted by Jasmine Yong-Hall, p.11.

<sup>57</sup> Jasmine Yong-Hall, p.151.

<sup>58</sup> Tamar Heller, p.146.

<sup>59</sup> Anthea Trodd, 'The Introduction', *The Moonstone* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p xix.

explained and ordered in conformity with masculine discourses on femininity'.<sup>60</sup> Thus, during the final scenes, Rachel accepts her own 'invisibility', she watches silently from behind a door and accepts Blake as a legitimate 'protector'.

Mathews defines The Moonstone as 'a spiritual odyssey for Blake in which his faith in established discourses has been challenged and survived'.<sup>61</sup> He triumphantly constructs himself as an innocent, trustworthy, 'Christian Gentleman'. Towards the latter part of the narrative the three main patriarchal figures - Blake, Jennings and Cuff - actively conspire to manipulate discourse towards this end. Initially Blake's 'masculinity' is in question. Indeed it is declared that Rachel has 'unmanned' (p.140) him; he loses his sense of pleasure in phallic symbols (cigars), loses control over his desire (entry into the bedroom) and over his own actions. He attempts the traditional activity of asserting his 'manliness' abroad but to no avail. He returns as lost, confused and self-divided as Betteridge's initial description of him (p.40). He does not know himself and has little control over either his own behaviour or that of others. The search in the sands begins his transformation. He is both terrified of the sands, of the all-consuming female desire which he can never control, and excited by the prospect of penetrating its secret with his stick. And yet, as Jasmine Yong-Hall observes, the 'truth' he unearths is paradoxical - he discovers that the 'female' secret lies buried within himself. And in penetrating this secret Blake 'both asserts his masculinity and loses his masculinity. He himself becomes the object of penetration'.<sup>62</sup> To regain control, to enter the Symbolic Order, Blake must re-experience the original trauma, the act which exploded his world and instigated his disintegration. And only language can accomplish this.

Indeed, The Moonstone embraces two models of detection; the original cognitive analysis and the later active manipulation of data, the shaping of events to legitimate discourse. Cuff is the forerunner of hard-boiled detectives who, world-weary and cynical,

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<sup>60</sup> Lisa G. Mathews, Crime and Subversion in the Later Fiction of Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Leeds, 1993), p.80.

<sup>61</sup> L.G. Mathews, p.84.

<sup>62</sup> Jasmine Yong-Hall, p.144.

laments having to traverse 'the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world' (p.92). Thomas Van Essen dismisses Cuffs 'entire presence as a species of red herring'<sup>63</sup> and yet the very red herrings introduced by Cuff expose ideological assumptions. D. A. Miller perceives the novel as a radical example of social discipline for it successfully dispenses with the detective to create 'a social power for which no-one is responsible'. He notes how each character becomes a 'detective' within their designed role; Bruff as a lawyer, Jennings as a psychologist, Dr Candy as a doctor and Cuff as a policeman.<sup>64</sup> And yet the disillusioned, completely fallible Cuff returns and becomes animated and active in helping Jennings's experiment 'prove' the desired result. The 'social power' imagined by Miller needs to be actively manipulated by patriarchal figures. Jennings demonstrates how men construct and arrange discourse to ensure that the 'dominant fiction' is believed. And Blake edits the whole narrative, choosing what is fact, relevant or appropriate for disclosure. The structure, as William Marshall has commented, resembles a series of mirrors in which parts of truths, and parts of characters, are reflected but none are reflected fully.<sup>65</sup>

Rachel declares that 'I want to have something to do with it, even in the unimportant character of a mere looker-on' (p.386). But this is precisely what she is throughout the story. She moves from a helpless spectator, to 'silence', to willingly accepting her invisibility and Blake as her 'legitimate' male protector. Indeed, the only female who contributes directly to the narrative is Miss Clack who, with her female friends, spend their time cutting down men's trousers to fit boys.<sup>66</sup> The Moonstone is haunted by such fear of emasculation and the potency of the M/Other; it is as if the narrative dare not give women any direct 'voice'; as if it fears that women may utter the 'truth' about masculine weakness and inadequacy.

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<sup>63</sup> Thomas Van Essen, Figuring the Father : The Paternal Thematics of Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, New Brunswick : Rutgers University, 1987), p.225.

<sup>64</sup> D.A. Miller, pp.48-49.

<sup>65</sup> William Marshall, Wilkie Collins (New York : Twayne Publishers, 1970), p.81.

<sup>66</sup> Sue Lonoff, Wilkie Collins and his Victorian Readers : A Study in the Rhetoric of Readership (New York : AMS Press, 1982), p.206.

And yet the ultimate secret disclosed by the novel is that there is no secret. Cuff, probably fiction's most fallible detective, was originally correct when he concluded that 'Nobody has stolen the diamond' (p.98). All is paradox and uncertainty. Blake is innocent and guilty, thief and detective. Ablewhite, the ultimate abuser of women, did and did not steal the jewel and Jennings's dramatic reconstruction remains just that. On a radical level The Moonstone demonstrates that there is no 'truth' to find, only subjectivity and 'the most persuasive fiction'. The novel searches for a world beyond discourse and does not find it. Blake knows that 'whole thing is essentially a matter of the past' (p.328) - the past that is the central concern of detective fiction and psychoanalysis. And yet The Moonstone vividly exemplifies how such a pursuit is self-defeating. Jennings, the ultimate interpreter, is the personification of this self doomed quest. As Jenny Taylor remarks, he operates at the point at which differences and binarism breaks down;<sup>67</sup> he is rational and irrational, he is of mixed race, and a man who openly declares that he is partly female! (p.343). He can fill in the blanks of others and enable Blake to enter the Symbolic Order but he himself remains a mystery; his experience lies outside of discourse as an eternal absence. Like Rosanna he allows his history to be buried with him; there is no way to decode the 'truth' of Jennings just as there is no remedy for his plight. As a detective he plays a paradoxical role; he 'defers rather than fixes meaning, uncovering mysteries only to suggest that others stay covered up'.<sup>68</sup> Rosanna, Jennings, the jewel, the Shivering Sands and the Indians symbolise all that can never be traced back by 'rational' means to 'natural' causes, all that can never enter the successful denouement of a Holmes, Poirot or Wimsey story. The Moonstone is haunted by the powerful untold stories of outsiders, of 'disqualified knowledges' that are silenced but cannot be banished.

The narrative encourages us to distrust closure and thus The Moonstone has two endings. The 'masculine' ending is imposed by Cuff, Bruff and Blake and Jennings. Here the hegemonic discourses have been challenged but survived and all alternative voices

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<sup>67</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.192.

<sup>68</sup> Tamar Heller, p.142.

have been silenced. But the 'feminine' ending in India embraces uncertainty, ambiguity and 'otherness'. The Moonstone ends with 'no end'; moral certainty is seen as a product of ignorance and further mysteries are seen as inevitable. And of these one can only ask 'Who can tell!' (p.434) - a statement which, significantly, is an exclaimed fact and not a question. The frequent references to Robinson Crusoe also confirm this 'ending'. Heta Pyrhören notes how detective fiction regularly uses quotations, references and other texts as 'borrowed signs', as if to indicate the fluidity of language and reality and the dubiousness of literary control, how one text can readily 'take over' another.<sup>69</sup> The Moonstone dramatically undermines Grella's 'knowable Universe' and can offer no 'sugar coated sedative'.

By the 1870's Collins appeared to be unable to create narratives which even superficially support the hegemony or 'dominant fiction'. The Law and the Lady is an iconoclastic work in which a woman retains power and knowledge, is the object of her own gaze, and in which men are either inadequate or blatant parodies of masculinity. The lofty headings are in themselves parodies for there is no 'paradise' to lose and one is certainly not regained. The Law and the Lady embraces interpretative indeterminacy, moral ambiguity and the imminent disintegration of the social order. Jenny Taylor has noted how it questions 'What is the law? and what is a Lady'<sup>70</sup> and, as Gavin Lambert remarked, it envisages law as 'an arena for games of truth'<sup>71</sup> to be enacted. Each character attempts to assert their own value base and enclose others within their own perspective - and each fails. It also offers us a rare glimpse into the 'boudoir' of Victorian married life; it offers an explicit critique of the institution of marriage and the imbalance of power which it upheld. The 'truth' it purportedly seeks is the truth of male/female relationships and of desire; both thwarted and fulfilled. It questions the very concepts 'masculine' and 'feminine' and the definition and perception of 'deviance'. And it 'focuses on the contest over meaning and

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<sup>69</sup> H. Pyrhören, p.36.

<sup>70</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, 'Introduction'. The Law and the Lady (Oxford : University Press : World Classics Series, 1992) p.xiv.

<sup>71</sup> Gavin Lambert, The Dangerous Edge (New York : Grossman, 1976), p.3.

power that is bound up with the reconstruction and representation of the past'.<sup>72</sup> As such it is an ambitious novel which crystallises many of Collins' central theories and concerns.

The novel opens with a bleak representation of a marriage ceremony conducted by the Reverend Starkweather. Appropriately it takes place on a 'heavy and damp day' in 'one of the dreary quarters of London' (p.2).<sup>73</sup> Valeria Macallan demonstrates immediate confusion over her name and identity; a confusion which only deepens when she discovers that her husband's alleged surname is not his 'real' name he is Macallan not Woodville. The marriage service, and Eustace Macallan himself, emphasise wifely obedience and subservience. And the entire resulting action is the product of Valeria's inability to accept this. It is her disobedience which instigates the investigation, and this very disobedience which actually saves their marriage. Collins appeared to suggest that passivity and conformity can be dangerous or self-destructive responses.

Traditionally Victorian wives would only become acquainted with their husbands after marriage. Hence, Lisa Mathews has suggested that Valeria's 'detective activity is a metaphor for the discovery of Macallan's inner self'.<sup>74</sup> As Valeria 'detects' the weakness, dishonesty and 'emotional illiteracy' below Eustace's veneer of a 'Christian Gentleman', he can no longer simulate and, thus, physically and emotionally withdraws. Indeed, the real 'secret' that Valeria discovers is the emotional inadequacy of men. As she insists on a relationship of openness, sharing and mutual respect, Eustace quickly degenerates into a parody of patriarchy : 'A good wife should know better than to pry into affairs of her husband's with which she has no concern' (p.50). This statement of masculine privilege now rings stilted, meaningless and gains no credence from either Valeria or the reader. Valeria knows she is 'cruelly used' (p.34), in an 'unendurable position' (p.50) and that Eustace's protestations of privilege are 'cowardly, contemptible lies' (p.30). After only three

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<sup>72</sup> J.B.Taylor, 'Introduction', p.xiv.

<sup>73</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Law and the Lady* (London : Chatto & Windus, 1889). All further references to this text relate to the above edition.

<sup>74</sup> Lisa G. Mathews, p.187.

days of marriage Valeria can no longer bear to be 'absolutely alone with him, in the narrow limits of a vessel' (p.31), an image which extends far beyond the literal vessel, and has to cancel her honeymoon plans. Macallan becomes a play on 'callous' as Valeria laments 'he chilled me, he froze me' (p.102).

In seeking the cause of Eustace's coldness and emotional withdrawal, Valeria, despite her resolve, courage and complete confidence in her own ability, cannot act alone. Throughout the narrative she must cajole, persuade and pander to the whims of men; men who, despite their inadequacies, hold power and knowledge. She must accept Benjamin's benevolent paternalism, Mr. Playmore's dismissive patronism, Major FitzDavid's flirtation and, ultimately, Misserimus Dexter's sexual assault. Indeed, Valeria acts against a backdrop of homosocial bonding and must 'penetrate' the knowledge held by a network of her husband's friends upon whose good will she depends. The very fact she is able to create dissension amongst Eustace's friends, and manipulate knowledge out of them despite their resistance, underlines the fragility of the 'transcendental pretence'. But, despite the inherent weakness of the patriarchal order, men can still resort to Foucauldian 'repressive power' whereby actual lack of power results in a display of force. Misserimus Dexter exercises the ultimate male power when he assaults Valeria; it is a powerful reminder of the dangers to which an independent woman is exposed and underscores how 'sexuality is a weapon which men can utilise to subjugate and degrade women'.

The Law and the Lady explores five relationships and examines the nature of, and consequences of, misplaced desire. Of these the marriage of Major FitzDavid and Miss Hoighty, with its clear economic motive, is perhaps the most honest and the most fulfilling to the parties concerned. Major FitzDavid's emotional needs are met and Miss Hoighty can declare : 'Here I am, provided for - and there's all my family provided for . . . I'm a good daughter and sister... See how I'm dressed; look at the furniture. I haven't played my cards badly, have I?' (p.425). Miss Hoighty exposes the material need and financial



considerations which 'secretly' featured in many marriage arrangements and which polite society ignored. It is, perhaps, this very recognition which so outrages Valeria.

At the other extreme Misserimus Dexter and his servant, Ariel, enact a parody of contemporary marriage; an extreme illustration of inequality with Dexter physically and emotionally abusing Ariel, moulding her into a 'willing' 'slave' and demonstrating patriarchal power and privilege in its most disturbing form. In between these extremes are Eustace's relationships with three women : Sara, Helena and Valeria. The 'crushing sense of disenchantment and despair' (p.29) which overwhelms Valeria so early in her marriage, foreshadows the fate of her predecessors. What Valeria discovers, during the course of her detective activities, about Eustace's treatment of his previous partners reveals much about both Eustace himself and societal expectations of husbands and wives. Valeria's detective activity saves her from this despair, from 'the trial' of patience and fortitude<sup>75</sup> feared by Anne Rodway. In the face of her husband's desertion, and the universal ridicule of her plans, Valeria can state that she is 'a new woman with a new mind' (p.185), and that she can 'see my way' (p.185). After Eustace's illness, when Valeria ostensibly abandons her project, she feels stifled by 'the quiet monotonous round' (p.386) of their lives and, thus, resorts to further 'disobedience' to complete her 'grand enterprise' (p.375). On one level Valeria may conform to Kathleen Klein and Fay Blake's definition of an 'unpaid enthusiast' who detects to save her family before retiring back into domestic obscurity. But Valeria uses her detection to unearth 'truths' about contemporary relationships and as a means of self-development and self-survival. She discovers a potential self untrammelled by convention; she is able to indulge in the resourcefulness, encounters and adventures which are denied to her in any other available roles and for any other motive than the 'respectable' one of restoring her husband's character.

Valeria engages in detection not only for Eustace but for herself; to establish a name and an identity. After the initial confusion over the marriage register Valeria discovers that

her name is neither Brinton or Woodville. Like Magdalen Vanstone, in No Name, Valeria fears that she has 'no name' and may thus be 'nobody'.<sup>76</sup> The landlady voices this dread : 'You are neither maid, wife, nor widow. You are worse than nothing . . . ' (p.36). Jenny Taylor traces how Valeria attempts to legitimise herself, to 'provide herself with a full selfhood within a given set of symbolic meanings and social conventions - in other words, within the law'.<sup>77</sup> And to accomplish this she must trace current problems back to their origin; the past needs to be reconstructed and psychic identities of 'absent' characters need to be decoded. Valeria needs to confront Eustace's relationships with Sara and Helena. The 'double story of the marriages in the present and in the past act as inverted reflections of each other, each deconstructing the meaning of the other'. Moreover, Valeria's search for fixed meanings and identities demonstrates only 'how tenuous and indeterminate both her own and her predecessors selves really are'.<sup>78</sup>

The documents and correspondence exchanged during Sara and Eustace's marriage reveal the fragility, subjectivity and uncertainty of 'truth'. They also state much about contemporary heterosexual relations. Sara, in her loneliness and grief, writes prolifically. She keeps a diary, composes poetry 'despairing about herself and wondering why she had ever been born' (p.130), and communicates her anguish to female confidantes. The one unmarried friend defines Eustace as 'a cold-blooded brute', finds his 'polite neglect and contempt' painful beyond endurance and entreats Sara to seek a separation with, of course, the aid of a male friend (p.160). But Sara's plight does not surprise her two married friends, both of whom see Eustace's behaviour as typical of men in general. One recommends resistance but the other, the latter upheld by the Law and patriarchal society as 'worthy and sensible' (p.161), advocates that the 'secret happiness for us women is to be found . . . (in) exercise of restraint and resignation' (p.160). The friend concludes that he is

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<sup>75</sup> The Queen of Hearts, p.311.

<sup>76</sup> Wilkie Collins, No Name (London : Smith, Elder, 1866).

<sup>77</sup> J.B. Taylor, 'Introduction', p.xiv.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

'cold' and 'wrong' but that he is not '*designedly* cold and cruel', that men's love 'does not last' and that women 'expect too much from their husbands' (p.159).

The three parallel letters written by male friends to Eustace suggest sport, travel and other forms of escape or distraction activity as an appropriate remedy for marital discord. Together the letters represent a multiplicity of disparate views, values and distorted perceptions, they portray profound conflict and pain that no detective can decode or remedy. And, moreover, the 'truth' remains as elusive as ever. The very journal which condemns Eustace in court, and drives Sara to suicide, is dismissed by Mrs. Macallan as 'a libel upon his character', an impulsive outpouring of 'rash words' (p.170) in the midst of despair. Sara's poems are dismissed as 'nonsense' (p.130) by the nurse and the court decides which letters are 'worthy' (p.161). And Sara's own final letter, in which she conveys her feelings and suicidal intentions to the world, is stolen, discarded, buried, scientifically reconstructed - only to be 're-buried'. Just as Sara had been neglected, and rendered invisible during her life, so she is treated in death; her final outpourings of sacrifice and devotion are thrown out into the dust-heap of her own home. Sara is 'killed' by hegemonic discourse and her death can be seen as the ultimate self-sacrifice and act of obedience. Eustace declares that Sara is 'the unhappy creature who is a burden on my life' (p.168), an 'utterly distasteful obstacle' (p.164 and p.406) and that 'the effort of my life is *not* to notice her...' (p.164). Sara responds by removing the 'burden' that is her existence; by making herself permanently invisible. As Valeria later discovers, obedience to a man can be dangerous if not fatal.

Moreover, Sara's letter remains incomplete, a 'scattered wreck' (p.410), full of blanks which patriarchal figures later write over 'to complete the sense, in harmony with the writer's intention' (p.400). Sara's letter is defined by these men as a 'deplorable and shocking document' (p.399) which would best have remained in the dust-heap. In 'mercy to the memory of the unhappy writer' (p.399) the men wish to 'rebury' the missive - the very letter

which Sara died wishing her husband to read. In death Sara is as neglected, dismissed and misunderstood as she ever was in life. And Helena, her 'rival', fares little better. She too is rejected by Eustace who, again, runs away. He 'had not resolution enough to face' (p.420), a woman who had witnessed his 'public degradation' (p.420).

When Valeria is left alone in Major FitzDavid's library to discover the 'truth' Collins created D. A. Miller's 'fantasy of total relevance'. All is saturated with possible meaning and the detective, as the 'ultimate interpreter', must hunt for the relevant signifiers, one that can localise meaning or envelop all into a 'complete and all-encompassing order'.<sup>79</sup> And yet this transpires to be an illusion, there is no 'order' and all significance is subjective. It is the broken vase, the result of premarital dispute and sexual jealousy, which leads Valeria to the 'truth'. But it is an ambiguous, disturbing 'truth'. For Eustace is, symbolically, a 'poisoner' (p.104) whose coldness, neglect and contempt devastated Helena and led Sara to despair and self destruction. The very letter which legally vindicates Eustace morally implicates him in his wife's death. The 'spectre' of doubt and fear which Eustace believed would destroy his relationship with Valeria cannot be vanquished, one cannot help suspecting that Valeria's belief in Eustace has been irreparably 'poisoned' by what she has read. Eustace's 'materials for a domestic hell' (p.104) transpire not to be suspected murder but hegemonic repression and evasion - and the dread and boredom that it inspires for all.

And yet what Valeria has read is open to multiple interpretations; written words can be buried, glued together in a different order or discounted as 'rash' or 'nonsense'. The whole novel, like the description of Eustace's diary, contains 'dangerous domestic secrets in the locked up pages' (p.416), the secret that man is 'essentially weak' (p.200) and unable to love a woman with respect, warmth and honesty. But, on a more radical level, what Valeria discovers is that there is no 'truth'; like the 'white chaos of paper' on Fosco's desk, the investigations indicate a 'blank universe pregnant with ever-elusive meanings' but revealing nothing. It is a Foucauldian 'discursive ferment' in which an illusion is created of something

important being concealed. Much energy is invested in both maintaining the 'transcendental pretence' and in discovering the 'secret'; a secret that is constituted by discourse in the first place. Language has revealed only a further 'absence'; that which is irretrievably lost in the dust-heap.

In demonstrating 'truth as the 'most persuasive fiction', Miserrimus Dexter plays a fundamental role. Dexter successfully evades fixed meanings and descriptions. He is masculine and feminine. He is an 'unusually handsome, and an unusually well-made man . . . the perfection of strength and grace' (p.175). And yet he is a 'half of a man' (p.175) a 'half man, half monkey' (p.181, p.212 and p.360) who lacks the 'privileged signifier'. Thus he is also the object of the privileged gaze, the recipient, like Sara, of scorn and 'laughter' (p.174). He is 'effeminate' with 'long silky hair' and 'the eyes and hands of a beautiful woman' (p.175), but with the hirsute facial adornments which proclaim masculinity. In Dexter we directly witness masculinity as a 'plot'. He substantiates Roper's claim that 'masculinity is never fully possessed, but must perpetually be achieved, asserted and re-negotiated'.<sup>80</sup> He dramatically illustrates Jonathan Dollimore's perception of identity as a 'construction involving a process of exclusion, negation and repression' and thus, 'intrinsically unstable'. Dexter is imaginatively Napoleon and Shakespeare, he is Everyman's romantic concept of himself. He is able to 'give the word', 'issue my commands' and 'nations tremble'. He can proclaim that: 'poets sing my praise in immortal verse' (pp.210-211).

Dexter exults in the power of language. He lives an entirely solipsistic existence, 'some fantastic heaven of his own making' (p.267), and believes language can create 'truths', identities and immortality. In The Law and the Lady he is the 'ultimate interpreter' who can declare 'I play the parts of all the heroes that ever lived ... For the time, I *am* the man I fancy myself to be' (p.223). Dexter's Dionysian imagination knows no limits. He

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<sup>79</sup> D.A. Miller, p.34.

perceives himself as a romantic hero in a quest for an authenticity stifled by society. He self-consciously does what Collins suggested that all men do - attempt to create a coherent sense of self. His 'excesses' only further illuminate the 'norms' which he transgresses. Valeria thus denies that he is 'mad' recognising that he 'openly expresses . . . thoughts and feelings which most of us are ashamed of as weaknesses, and which we keep to ourselves accordingly; (p.226). But, Dexter cannot discriminate, choose or commit, he randomly plays the part of 'all the heroes' and is 'gazed' upon and defined by others as 'mad' (p.213) or a 'wild animal; (p.211) (p.207). He becomes increasingly out of control, his 'brains boil in . . . (his) head' (p.226). His romantic self glorification is encircled by bleak industrialisation and his castle is stranded in a barren wasteland. His songs convey no sense to Valeria and, as Jenny Taylor has observed, he undermines objective mimesis by 'retelling all version of events as yet another kind of story'. Dexter personifies the hydraulic model of masculinity in which only vigorous self-control contains 'the inchoate chaos', the 'flood' or 'fire' within. He also partly substantiates Ellis and Lambrosco's biological discourse wherein the body becomes a 'legible text' which can 'explain the mystery of human violence independent from political circumstances'.<sup>81</sup> The regular references to a 'monkey' link Dexter to a Darwinian theory of evolution but one with no teleological development. Dexter is a 'daddy' and 'rapist' combined; he steals the letter, assaults Valeria but he is not seen as wholly 'bad' and he inspires great devotion from Ariel and the gardener (p.313 and 418). His actions are the result of thwarted passion and wounded pride; the very factors which motivate Eustace's 'coldness' and rejection. And it is a sad indictment of the plight of women that Dexter and Sara identify with each other. Dexter empathises with Sara's isolated, shunned existence and Sara pities Dexter, 'being that next worse thing myself to a deformity - a plain woman' (p.402). Both are denied legitimacy by hegemonic discourse and are excluded as an 'utterly distasteful obstacle' (p.406). Both are Jonathan Dollimore's 'internal dissidents'<sup>82</sup> the

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<sup>80</sup> M. Roper, & J. Tosh, eds. Manful Assertions : Masculinities in Britain Since 1800 (London : Routledge, 1991), p.18.

<sup>81</sup> Ronald R. Thomas, 'Minding the Body Politic : The Romance of Science and the Revision of History in Victorian Detective Fiction'. Victorian Literature and Culture 19 (1991), p.248.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Dollimore, p.87.

inevitable by-products of a hegemony which creates outsiders and defines itself on negatives, on what it is not.

Barickman, McDonald and Stark believe that in this novel 'the terms masculine and feminine have become evasions rather than descriptions'.<sup>83</sup> Valeria is taller than Eustace, who limps and needs a crutch. Both physically and emotionally Valeria achieves what all the male characters were unable to accomplish whilst Mrs. Macallan can only say, of the 'essentially weak' Eustace, that: 'My poor wretched son - he takes after his father; he isn't the least like me!' (p.201). Sara, with her 'muddy, blotchy complexion' (p.130) and ultimate devotion is an 'obstacle' but one with the power to seduce Macallan and haunt the remainder of his life. Dexter experiences sexual passion but is a 'fantastic and frightening spectacle of male, female and animal qualities whilst Ariel exhibits complete female self-subjugation and devotion within a masculine physique. The novel appears to move towards Jonathan Dollimore's goal of 'discohering'; to returning meanings and representations to circulation for re-assessment and re-appropriation.

Dexter also personifies men's worst fear - madness and the regression into primordial chaos. The 'advancing eclipse of the brain' (p.356) occurs as he relates various narratives of his history. As he had earlier sung songs which Valeria was unable to decipher so his final 'story' initially appears to 'set interpretation at defiance' (p.362). But out of Dexter's 'story' Valeria finally finds her way to Sara's 'story' which, in turn, is re-written then suppressed. Dexter finally becomes 'mad' when he can no longer control language, when he can no longer match experience to words and thus construct 'reality'. He disintegrates into an absence the 'blank' out of which the necessity for language originally arose.

Valeria criticises the patriarchal judicial system for reaching 'a lame and impotent conclusion' (p.184)) - a critique that extends far beyond the court case. But this description could well fit the end of the novel. At the very point of success Valeria abandons her 'grand

enterprise' at Eustace's bequest and surrenders to the 'expertise' of Mr. Playmore, who goes on to demonstrate how he has solved her investigations. Indeed, he explains events in terms of the very 'dominant fictions' which the subtext subverts. It would seem that, at this stage, Collins could perceive no way forward for a Valeria Macallan in his world. It would appear that Valeria is confused and perturbed by the inadequacies and flaws she herself detects in hegemonic discourses, that she finds her discoveries to be too threatening and thus takes refuge in the ideology of domesticity. And yet this is not quite the case and raises the question of what is 'strength' and what is 'political'? Nancy Armstrong has argued that the domestic is political; that women have much power within the home and family<sup>84</sup> and that this is a political arena of equal significance as that of the public arena. John Kucich suggests that focusing on individual personal relationships reinforces the status quo and detracts from subversive political activity.<sup>85</sup> I believe that Valeria does find the 'middle ground' between the 'passivity' that 'disintegrates' character and the 'activity' which results in 'social ostracism'. She does not relinquish the power and knowledge gained. She talks of 'holding cards' in a 'darkly doubtful game' (p.329) and does not disclose her 'secret' to Eustace. Her detective activity confirms her own identity in much more than reclaiming a surname, and restores the necessary balance of respect and power in her marriage. She succumbs to a 'quiet monotony' but she makes it impossible for Eustace to patronise or dismiss her again.

And yet one cannot believe that Valeria will find happiness with Eustace - a man who 'was not hero enough to face' (p.265) the crisis of his life. Collins could create a strong, independent woman but he seemed unable to envisage a strong man who was 'worthy' of such a character. Hence, in the Preface, he commented that we are not 'always in the habit . . . of bestowing our love on the objects which are the most deserving of it . . . ' (Preface). This apology is echoed in the conclusion by Valeria who asks us to 'think kindly of Eustace,

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<sup>83</sup> R. Barickman, S McDonald and M. Stark, p.120.

<sup>84</sup> Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction : A Political History of the Novel (Oxford University Press, 1987).



for my sake' and condone the 'follies and errors of my husband's life' (p.429). Thus Valeria ironically fulfils Dorothy Sayer's definition of a detective as 'the protector of the weak'. The end of the narrative embodies yet further paradoxes. Valeria 'buys' dependence by acting independently, she feigns conjugal 'obedience' by a slack, casuistic use of 'truth' and brings a sense of peace and order into Eustace's life by enclosing within herself the disorder and partial 'truths' revealed by her investigations. She has 'disqualified knowledge' but is an 'Angel of Justice' who, in Ruskinian ideology, 'embroiders men's fortunes'.<sup>86</sup> There is little wonder that Valeria is unable to resolve those tensions and the incompatible demands made upon her. She thus leaves the decision-making, and the confronting of the very complex issues which she herself unearthed, to the next generation.

Collins could never envisage a detective as a secular 'god', 'The Seeing Eye'. To Collins there could be no 'new Übermensch'<sup>87</sup>, or new hero, to remedy social ills and no 'ultimate interpreter' or transcendental truth; all is subjectivity, unreliability and construction. By the 1870's Collins could no longer even ostensibly create narratives to support hegemonic discourses. The Law and the Lady embodies no Walter Hartright, Franklin Blake or Eza Jennings, no character who can claim 'to know'; only parodies of masculinity, uncertainty, loss and pain. The hard-boiled detective novel is well-anticipated; there is no 'benevolent, knowable Universe', no 'sugar-coated sedative', no-one to blame or claim responsibility. There is no escape from language, construction, or from the absence or loss that these utterances signify.

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<sup>85</sup> John Kucich, Repression in Victorian Literature : Charlotte Brontë, George Eliot and Charles Dickens (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1987).

<sup>86</sup> John Ruskin, 'The Ethics of the Dust' 1866. Quoted by Ronald Pearsall, The Worm in the Bud : The World of Victorian Sexuality (London : Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1969), p.84.

<sup>87</sup> Otto Penzler, ed. The Great Detectives (Boston : Little, Brown, 1978), p.xiii.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN - DISCOURSES OF CRIME : MASCULINE CONTAINMENT OF FEMALE**

### **'DEVIANCE'**

'How can the truth of sick subject ever be told?'<sup>1</sup>

Rirchard Altick observes how 'murder had a part in (Victorian) imaginative lives that was far out of proportion to its actual incidence'<sup>2</sup>. And of these imaginings violent crimes committed by women created the strongest sense of dread and intrigue. They inspired a terror, as Virginia Morris has noted, 'out of all proportion to the actual threat they posed to society'.<sup>3</sup> This focus on crime by the hegemony was inevitable as criminality is essentially a conflict between order and disorder; it represents the heartland of power, domination and patriarchal control. Social control, as Foucault analysed, is maintained through the marginalisation and medicalisation of 'deviancy'; discourses which divert attention from tolerated 'abnormalities' within 'normal' social interaction.<sup>4</sup> 'Deviancy' is controlled, and norms are established, by the

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<sup>1</sup> M. Foucault, as quoted by A. McHoul A. and W. Grace, A Foucault Primer : Discourse, Power and the Subject (Melbourne University Press, 1983), p.25.

<sup>2</sup> R.D. Altick, Victorian Studies in Scarlet (New York : W. Norton, 1970), p.281.

<sup>3</sup> V.B. Morris, Double Jeopardy : Women Who Kill in Victorian Fiction (Lexington : University Press of Kentucky, 1990), p.27.

<sup>4</sup> M. Foucault, as analysed by J. Sawicki, Disciplining Foucault : Femininism, Power and the Body (London : Routledge, 1991), p.39.

process of identifying, observing and treating the 'deviant' as deviant. It is a process created and sustained by the 'dominant fiction', and it is the central subject of the hegemonic male gaze.

Women are defined by, and enclosed within, masculine discourses of deviancy. Female criminals personify the most profound anxieties of patriarchy and tend to be harshly judged and punished for arousing this disruption, for transgressing hegemonic ideals. And here lies the crucial gender difference embodied within the discourse of deviancy : men may break the law but they do not simultaneously breach the boundaries of masculinity. Indeed, many 'manly' attributes, such as aggression, competitiveness and individual enterprise are closely allied to 'deviance'.<sup>5</sup> But a woman who 'offends' forsakes her sexual identity, she loses her 'femininity'. I use the present tense intentionally for this process is still evident today. Myra Hindley was transformed into a 'fiend', a 'monster' whilst Beverly Allit was named 'the Angel of Death'.<sup>6</sup> The syllogism is, as Bronwyn Naylor illustrates, that 'real women do not commit crimes, so a woman who does commit a crime is not truly a woman'.<sup>7</sup>

However, in the Victorian period discourses of deviancy were not only divided by ideological constructions of gender but epistemological questions of what was 'natural'. Charles Kingsley could declare that woman was 'the teacher, the natural and therefore divine guide, purifier and inspirer of men'.<sup>8</sup> And John Ruskin could celebrate the self-abnegating female to whom 'all must be right or nothing is. She must be enduringly, incorruptably good; instinctively, infallibly wise - wise not for self-development but for self-renunciation'.<sup>9</sup> Such proclamations of what is

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<sup>5</sup> Maggie Wykes, 'Passion, Marriage and Murder : Analysing the Press Discourse'. In R.E. Dobash, R.P. Dobash, and L. Noaks, eds. Gender and Crime (Cardiff : University of Wales Press, 1995), p.69.

<sup>6</sup> Bronwyn Naylor, 'Women's Crime and Media Coverage : Making Explanations'. In R.E. Dobash, R.P. Dobash and L. Noaks, p.88..

<sup>7</sup> B. Naylor, as quoted by R.E. Dobash, R.P. Dobash and L. Noaks, p.89.

<sup>8</sup> Charles Kingsley, as quoted by A. Morris, Women, Crime and Criminal Justice (Oxford : Blackwell, 1987), p.49.

<sup>9</sup> John Ruskin, as quoted by R. Barickman, S. MacDonald, and M. Stark, Corrupt Relations : Charles Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Wilkie Collins and the Victorian Sexual System (New York : Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.9-10.

'natural' or 'right' may well read as masculine wish-fulfilment but they informed the response to, and treatment of, female deviancy. The immense popularity of, and disturbance generated by, sensation fiction underscored this process.

The sensation genre illuminates both masculine insecurities and the anxieties engendered by biological discourses. Contemporary critics condemned the genre for depicting 'us as a crawling set of worms', as 'wasps, toads and maggots'.<sup>10</sup> They defined sensationalism as a 'virus . . . haunting the sinks and sewers of society'.<sup>11</sup> Criticism abounded in such imagery of disease and bestiality. It was a reaction to the focus placed by sensation literature upon passion, irrationality and loss of self-control. Its themes breached social boundaries and the very tenets upon which masculinity was founded. But it also questioned the nature of femininity; it revolved around women who chose to transgress patriarchal laws. For women there was no middle-ground; they were 'angels' or 'monsters', feminine or non-human. Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* lamented the dichotomous perception, which rendered 'A good woman . . . a queer thing; half-doll and half-angel. While a bad woman is always a fiend'.<sup>12</sup> And this is a binarism which we see, despite the challenges embodied in the sensation genre, repeated again and again.

Indeed, sensationalism can be seen on one level, as moralistic and conservative. It also exemplifies how art can be a more effective vehicle for punishing transgressors than life. Lady Audley dies in an asylum whilst *East Lynne's* Isabel Vane is emotionally crippled by the burden of her remorse and repentance. And, as Nancy Armstrong argues, if conflicts, tensions and 'cultural materials are contained within the body of a deranged woman, all threats of social disruption suddenly lose their political meaning and are just as suddenly

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<sup>10</sup> Frances Power Cobbe, as quoted by Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar : Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton University Press, 1980), p.39.

<sup>11</sup> H.F. Chorley, as quoted by Norman Page, ed. *Wilkie Collins : The Critical Heritage* (London : Routledge, 1974), pp.147-148.

<sup>12</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Shirley* (Harmondsworth : Penguin, 1978), p.343.

quelled'.<sup>13</sup> Lady Audley is not bad, she is mad; a victim of hereditary monomania. Thus, one label is exchanged for another and by pathologising and minimising women's 'deviance', masculine insecurities are dissipated and political implications are silenced.

This is an argument elaborated upon by Ann Cvetkovich who suggests that, by constructing a discourse of affect, sensationalism becomes 'part of the discursive apparatus', an integral part of the Foucauldian disciplinary structure. She noted how discipline, as opposed to punishment, is 'powerful precisely because it functions as though it were natural rather than imposed'.<sup>14</sup> Sensation is associated with the female body and the female's 'natural' ability to experience excess emotion. Hence, feelings are transformed into individual problems and a political threat is metamorphosed into sexual anxiety. She claims that sensation fiction generated a dread of castration which assured men that the loss or pain was wholly female.

And yet male terror, on a political and personal level, was evidently not diffused. The main problem with Ann Cvetkovich's thesis is that she perceives the domestic sphere as non-political. But to the Victorian male the family was of paramount political importance; it was the barometer of social stability and incubator of future generations. It was through personal relationships that man sustained and confirmed his hegemonic control. And the family was thus heralded as 'the archetype of the state . . . the happiness and goodness of society are always . . . dependent upon the purity of domestic life'.<sup>15</sup> The outrage, discomfort, excitement and moral condemnation incited by the sensation genre confirms that it did, indeed, proffer a radical critique of society. It was a 'sign of desperation and dissent',<sup>16</sup> a symptom of resistance which questioned Victorian values, exposed ideological assumptions and subverted concepts of self-control and individual coherence. It perceived systems and beliefs

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<sup>13</sup> Nancy Armstrong, Desire and Domestic Fiction : A Political History of the Novel (Oxford University Press, 1987), p.185.

<sup>14</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, Mixed Feelings : Femininism, Mass Culture and Victorian Sensationalism (New Brunswick : Rutgers University Press, 1992), p.25 and p.30.

<sup>15</sup> W. Lecky, as quoted by A. Morris, p.58.

<sup>16</sup> A. Morris, p.36.

to be the constructs that they were and it revealed the home as haven myth to be precisely that. Sensationalism did not ultimately follow a teleological pattern; as with detective fiction it is dependent upon disruption and the unpredictable, and the loss or pain it generates is irrevocable. Isabel may die and Lady Audley may be incarcerated but the challenges and disorder which precede their fate cannot be readily dismissed. Richard Altick comments how 'Murder most foul was now committed in surroundings most familiar',<sup>17</sup> and committed by those who were assigned the role of nursing and nurturing tired and bruised masculinities. Winifred Hughes observes that 'the domestic ideal may prove worse than empty; the angel in the hearth may turn out to be an incubus'.<sup>18</sup>

Sensation fiction's primary challenge was that it exposed contemporary discourses to be illusions and delusions; the products of male needs and desires. It anticipated reverse discourse and gave voice to Jonathan Dollimore's 'internal dissidents'. It highlighted societal and legal flaws, demonstrated control as tenuous, identity and meaning as fluid and played upon the relativity of 'good' and 'evil'. It provided a radical critique not, as Abeer Zahra illustrates, by 'eschewing contemporary ideologies but by enlarging and heightening them, exploiting them to their full measure until their inadequacy and internal contradictions become manifest'.<sup>19</sup> As such it provided a parody of Victorian expectations and prescribed modes of behaviour. By exaggerating and disrupting these assumptions it underscored the irreconcilable tensions and absurdities inherent in these constructs.

Sensationalism, like detective fiction, revolves around the secrets of the M/Other. Indeed, the sensation heroine can be seen as the counterpart of the male detective; the mystery that eludes masculine investigation and hegemonic control. If detective narrative emulates the process of psychoanalysis by re-ordering our perceptions of the past through language,

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<sup>17</sup> R. D. Altick, p.70.

<sup>18</sup> W. Hughes, W., p.45.

<sup>19</sup> Abeer Zahra, The Construction of Womanhood in Victorian Sensation Fiction 1860-1870 (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of Leeds, 1990), p.208.

sensation fiction can be seen as psychoanalysis in reverse; labelling, shaping and manipulating our perception of the present, future and the 'natural'.<sup>20</sup> As such it can be utilised as a vehicle for either promulgating or disrupting ideologies of gender. However, sensation texts do not internalise the control of the parents or proffer any illusory sense of rationality or order. The terrified child within can discover no defence and no exorcism of guilt. The sensation writer may read objective appearances as question marks and insist on hidden signs below the respectable exterior, but they present no master of the discourse of truth, there is no 'all-seeing Eye'.

It is, perhaps, the fear that constructed knowledge may be precisely that which led to male demands becoming more dogmatic and to the growing obsession with 'unnatural' femininity both inside and outside of authorial imaginations. The contradictions inherent in the dichotomous perception of Victorian woman became manifest in the sensation genre. A woman was physically weak but morally superior, a wife and mother but chaste, a guardian overseeing a haven but in need of perpetual male surveillance. It was 'natural' for a woman to be virtuous but she required 'step by step instructions on the arts and crafts of femininity'.<sup>21</sup> This leads, inevitably, to a central contradiction in the portrayal of female criminals : they are 'too good to be criminals and not good enough to be real criminals'.<sup>22</sup>

It is these very contradictions which bear testimony to the implicit power endowed upon women. The irreconcilable tensions create the pervasive sense of something not known, something beyond masculine control, which haunts sensation fiction. As Nina Auerbach elucidates, the Victorian

loveable woman . . . was a silent and self-disinherited mutilate, the fullness of whose

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<sup>20</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, pp.27-28.

<sup>21</sup> M. Ferguson, quoted by A. Morris, p.105.

<sup>22</sup> A. Morris, p.49.

extraordinary and dangerous being might at any moment return through violence. The taboos that encased the Victorian woman contained hidden tributes to her disruptive powers.<sup>23</sup>

The very act of immuring and denigrating women indicates recognition of their potential intelligence and power, an awareness crystallised in Rider Haggard's Ayesha who 'has the power not merely to create the walls of the home, but to dissolve them along with all the boundaries masculine civilisation calls immutable'.<sup>24</sup> And this is exactly what sensation heroines achieve; they defy labelling, resist hegemonic discourses and expose the hypocrisy and vulnerability of a culture which demanded that its chief victims were also its saviours at the cost of their own desires and lives.

But despite this implicit tribute, sensation narratives, on a psychological level, re-emphasised the original process of oppression. Michelle Massé, in a feminist re-appropriation of the theories of Geraldine Pederson-Krag and Charles Rycroft, claims that sensation creates regression and repetition of trauma, 'the stuff of analysis itself', to women.<sup>25</sup> She perceives the primal trauma as the denial of female autonomy, the incarceration within his-story and concludes that the 'uncanny is not just the familiar but the familial, and the horror from which the heroine cannot escape is the limitation of her identity to a mirror for the self-representations of father and husband'. There was no escape from this trauma, located in the real world, for 'the gender expectations that deny her identity are woven into the very fabric of her culture, which perpetuates her trauma while denying its existence'. Thus, sensation fiction could ultimately offer no escape from hegemonic discourse, only a 'repetition and exploration of the traumatic denial of identity found there'.<sup>26</sup> And this is precisely what we see in the

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<sup>23</sup> Nina Auerbach, Women and Demon : The Life of a Victorian Myth (London : Harvard University Press, 1982), p.8.

<sup>24</sup> Nina Auerbach, p.61.

<sup>25</sup> Michelle Massé, 'Gothic Repetition : Husbands, Horrors and Things That Go Bump in the Night', Signs 15 (4, 1990), p.683.

<sup>26</sup> M. Massé, pp.681-688.



earlier works of Collins. Basil's Mrs. Sherwin and Margaret are destroyed by this 'traumatic denial' - a patriarchal silence and resistance which later leads to the deaths of The Dead Secret's Sarah Leeson, Hide and Seek's Mary Grice and Armada's Lydia Guilt. It was such his-story, such oppression, which was directly responsible for the plights and sufferings of Laura Fairlie, Ann Catherick, Rosanna Spearman, Rachel Verinder, Ann Sylvester, Hester Dethridge and Eustace Macallan's two wives.

It was a 'traumatic denial' which was also to be found in economic, legal and political systems. In Victorian times women had no legal identity, no economic empowerment, beyond their husbands or fathers. They were not only punished for transgressing the hegemonic ideal but were literally judged by men. Until 1919 no female jurors or legal representatives were permitted. Moreover, the judge and jury were comprised wholly of 'relatively prosperous men with a vested interest in the status quo'.<sup>27</sup> The Victorians thereby constructed a degenerate, criminal underclass as the chief source of disorder. Biological discourses wrote over the economic, social and political factors which underpinned crime. However, it is these very factors which Collins, like other sensation writers, focussed upon. He illustrated how the law drives women to lawlessness, how women commit crimes for self-protection or to maintain self-respect and how offending can be a means of coping with untenable situations or resolving domestic problems which lie beyond the concerns of patriarchal law. Collins persistently used crime as a metaphor for resistance. He rejected biological discourses and dwelt upon the effects of environmentalism. He portrayed premeditated violence and transgression in fine detail and yet his 'deviant' women cannot be seen as morally reprehensible. He appeared to perceive the female criminal as a product of, and sad indictment of, a corrupt, abusive phallogentric system.

Throughout his career Collins' sensation heroines became increasingly more able, confident and powerful. Goisvintha disrupts Antonina's narrative with her grief, anger and

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<sup>27</sup> V.B. Morris, p.45.

violence but she does not survive. The patriarchal order is seen as in decline but Goisvintha dies impaled upon a phallic symbol. Lydia Guilt refuses to be labelled and spends her entire life plotting and dissembling but she is ultimately destroyed by her own conscience and capacity for love. But Collins' later heroines do not succumb to any such 'feminine' qualities; they survive triumphantly. They thrive as 'whole' and confident women able to act independently and assertively. Having separated from her husband and children, and surrounded herself by books, Heart and Science's Mrs. Galilee can relax and declare 'At last, I am a happy woman!'<sup>28</sup> And Mrs Rook, of I Say No, offers a paradigm of the later heroine's lives. A self-avowed feminist, who openly despises the weakness and gullibility of men, she drinks, steals and has illicit affairs. But she perceives herself as 'honest' because she openly acts upon the passions and temptations which she believes all experience. Her deathbed confession contains no real repentance and serves only an utilitarian purpose. After a 'miracle' recovery she constructs herself as a medical peripatetic phenomenon thus acquiring an independent source of livelihood which enables her to leave the husband whom she despises as her inferior. Parodying the traditional sensation format, the novel ends with Mrs. Rook flourishing in business and personal happiness, lamenting only that she would never 'be more prepared for heaven'<sup>29</sup> than after her mock-repentance.

The activities of Collins' 'deviant' women are generally portrayed as intelligent, appropriate responses to a corrupt, hypocritical, patriarchal society; a structure which leaves them with few options and little recourse to the law. Collins' female transgressors do not express anger, dissent psychosomatically or fall prey to the 'female malady'. In his fictional world it is men like The Woman in White's Philip Fairlie, Miles Mirabel of I Say No and The Legacy of Cain's Abel Gracedieu, who succumb to a sickly ennui. It is Ovid Vere (Heart and Science) and Philip LeFrank (John Jago's Ghost) who are debilitated by the stresses of life and require lengthy convalescence. Collins' women, in the later fiction, find or create alternative modes

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<sup>28</sup> Wilkie Collins, Heart and Science (London : Chatto & Windus, 1917), p.334.

<sup>29</sup> Wilkie Collins, I Say No (London : Chatto & Windus, 1894), p.320.

of behaviour and discover peace and meaning within themselves rather than in socially prescribed roles. His women gain in strength and determination as his men fade into malaise, apathy and 'peaceable imbecility'.<sup>30</sup> The implication is clear : men are not able to rise to the challenges and changes demanded of them and disintegrate along with the value-system they hitherto decreed as immutable. And this is not portrayed negatively. Mrs. Galilee provides an attractive and dynamic alternative to the haunted, morbid Miss Minerva, the frivolous Fanny and timorous, childlike Carmina whose illness, a 'complicated hysterical disturbance which . . . simulate(s) paralysis',<sup>31</sup> differs little from her healthy disposition. Similarly Mrs. Rook is a welcome contrast to the self-righteous piety of Emily Brown and the destructive ethical rigidity of Sara Jethro. I will explore the developments in Collins' fiction by analysing in detail and in chronological order three texts which focus on 'deviant' women - Armada, Jezebel's Daughter and The Legacy of Cain.

Alison Milbank claims that Collins utilised the 'male Gothic', that his purpose is 'Sadean' and that his 'invasion of the domestic house and its subsequent demystification are one means of making its female inmates sexually available', that they 'collapse into passive conformity'.<sup>32</sup> The later novels, in particular, belie this claim. Poor Miss Finch's Madame Pratolungo, The Legacy of Cain's Mrs. Tenbruggen and Helena Gracedieu, I Say No's Mrs. Rook and Heart and Science's Mrs. Galilee far from fit this description; their fates are unique and they are most certainly not sexually available. They are self-avowed feminists who disdain men and prosper successfully on their own terms. If Collins often mocks Mrs. Galilee's materialistic, wholly rational world-view, he does not banish it from the text. Indeed, she is given a personal paradise; an intellectual equivalent of Ferndean. His women do not, as Milbank declares, fail to defeat masculine hegemony and thus give 'pleasure by . . .

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<sup>30</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Legacy of Cain (London : Chatto & Windus, 1891), p.310. Further references to this text will relate to this edition.

<sup>31</sup> Heart and Science p278.

<sup>32</sup> Alison Milbank, Daughters of the House : Modes of Gothic in Victorian Fiction (London : MacMillans, 1992), p.14.

reassuring reassertion of conservation values'.<sup>33</sup> All the women noted above flourish in their self-created endeavours and enterprises. However they are necessarily, as creations of a male writer, fixed within a 'textual and moral confine that is his linguistic equivalent of the patriarchal house'.<sup>34</sup> This is the inevitable 'double-bind' outlined in Chapter One : women are created and idealised but simultaneously imaginatively appropriated and consumed by the male writer who exercises ultimate power over them. As such the heroines become the direct product of the author's own needs, values and fears. But if Collins' 'deviant' women, in their desire to be Clytemnestras rather than Iphigenias, often usurp male definitions of power and masculine behaviour it does, perhaps, reflect the limited options available to them. The 'transcendental pretence' was all-pervasive and women have only masculine created and controlled language through which to express themselves. As Margaret Shaw concludes

Our image of violence is based on that of male violence - macho, tough, aggressive : we have no ways of conceptualising violence by women except in terms of its unnaturalness.<sup>35</sup>

Prior to the emergence of Lydia Gwilt, Collins' 'deviant' females tended to be depicted primarily as victims. The Dead Secret's Sarah Leeson is entrapped within a self-tormented, haunted existence and even the later Hester Dethridge, in Man and Wife, dwells within a self-imposed silence and isolation. Their experiences lie beyond hegemonic discourses and, thus, their identities and lives remain largely unheard and unseen. As Joanna Russ has proclaimed, the 'heroine's suffering is the principal action of the story because it is the only action she can perform',<sup>36</sup> attempts at escape only reveal what 'cannot be evaded or exorcised by her efforts'.<sup>37</sup> The main themes of what Tamar Heller terms the 'female

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<sup>33</sup> A. Milbank, p.15.

<sup>34</sup> A. Milbank, p.52.

<sup>35</sup> Margaret Shaw, 'Conceptualising Violence by Women'. In: R.E Dobash, R.P. Dobash and L. Noaks, p.122.

<sup>36</sup> Joanna Russ, as quoted by Michelle Massè, pp.688-689, (*italics in original*).

<sup>37</sup> Michelle Massè, p.689.

Gothic',<sup>38</sup> the unspeakable, the sense of being buried alive and denied a legitimate identity, lie beyond patriarchal language and thus must be 'acted out in a mimed display of horror'.<sup>39</sup> When these heroines attempt to articulate their plight their utterances are often unheard, misconstrued or dismissed as 'madness'.

Collins' later female transgressors break out of this silence, isolation and self-destruction but they do so largely by hijacking patriarchal discourse and emulating masculine traits of aggression, competitiveness and 'emotional illiteracy'. They find a way beyond domestic boundaries but at a very high cost; a cost that reveals the all-pervasiveness of masculine ideology and the difficulties inherent in discovering a gender neutral language and modes of behaviour. However, Foucault claimed that freedom is not to be found in 'truth' or in the self but in discovering ways of resisting being labelled and categorised by the dominant culture.<sup>40</sup> And this is precisely what Collins' female criminals do; they refuse to be treated, observed or labelled as 'deviant'.

Armadale is probably Collins' most iconoclastic work. He took over two years to complete it, 'a good deal longer than any other book',<sup>41</sup> and claimed, in the Preface, that it was a novel 'daring enough to speak the truth',<sup>42</sup> that it 'oversteps, in more than one direction,' the expectations of Grundy and Victorian 'propriety'. Although Armadale does not so much 'speak' the 'truth' as challenge through its buried texts, images and marginalised discourses it is, on a literary, social and ontological level, a radically subversive text.<sup>43</sup> The picnic party is as 'dull' as a 'wedding party' (p.223), marriage is a 'contract', with 'no mention of love', ending

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<sup>38</sup> Tamar Heller, Dead Secrets : Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1992).

<sup>39</sup> Michelle Massé, p.691.

<sup>40</sup> M. Foucault, as analysed by J. Sawicki, p.27.

<sup>41</sup> Kenneth Robinson, Kenneth, Wilkie Collins : A Biography, (London : Davis-Poynter, 1974), p.173.

<sup>42</sup> Wilkie Collins, Armadale (London : Chatto & Windus, 1895). This edition will be used throughout this thesis.

<sup>43</sup> For a further discussion on the subversiveness of Armadale read Phillip O'Neill, 'Illusion and Reality in Wilkie Collins' Armadale'. Essays in Poetics 7 (Nº.1, 1982), pp.42-60.

in a 'Publication and a Void' (pp.404-446) whilst love is 'ridiculous' (p.48), 'religion is a farce' (p.234) and church bells emit only a 'jangling racket which drives me mad' (p.405). It depicts a universe that makes U.C. Knoepfmacher's 'amoral, counterworld' of sensation fiction an attractive alternative to 'polite' society.<sup>44</sup> Lydia, Mrs. Oldershaw and Dr. Downward provide a welcome, 'honest' contrast to the self-obsessed, pompous Pentecosts, the hypocritical Gorgons and the 'identical families' of Thorpe-Ambrose whom Allan visits and fails to impress (pp.192-194).

Armadale depicts a society corrupted and distorted by patriarchal greed, lust and rivalry. It portrays all human structures as phallogentric constructs; constructs which have become delusory and meaningless. Phillip O'Neill illustrates how Collins created a wholly tenuous world in which nothing is 'naturalised but appears as a necessary thing, a construction with no essence'.<sup>45</sup> Paradise Place is a slum, criminals live in All-Saints terrace, Fairweather Vale houses an abortion clinic and an asylum and Dr. Downward/Le Doux is 'one of those carefully constructed physicians with the necessary clothes' in whom people 'implicitly trust' (p.330). At the heart of Armadale is an official document

There, in black and white, was the registered evidence of the marriage, which was at once a truth in itself, and a lie in the conclusion to which it led! (p.529).

It is a world in which Lydia can be 'Proved not to be *myself*' (p.275) and the Ladies Toilette Repository thrives by knowing that 'impression is all'. Mrs. Oldershaw survives by recognising that men respond to outsign signs and, thus, dissembles the appearances desired by the 'dominant fiction'. Like Macbeth, whose text it persistently echoes<sup>46</sup>, Armadale

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<sup>44</sup> U.C. Knoepfmacher, 'The Counterworld of Victorian Fiction and The Woman in White'. In J.H. Buckley, ed. The Worlds of Victorian Fiction, (Cambridge : Harvard University Press, 1975), p.353.

<sup>45</sup> Phillip O'Neill, p.51.

<sup>46</sup> S.A. Jordan, Wilkie Collins, The Victorian Iconoclast : A Study of Armadale (Unpublished M.A. Dissertation : University of Hull, 1984), pp.21-23.

demonstrates how 'There's no art/To find the mind's construction in the face'.<sup>47</sup>

The entire plot of Armada springs from masculine rivalry and aggression. Midwinter's father falls in love with a miniature image of a woman whom he decides to possess. When the woman falls in love with his rival he is unable to accept this and kills the rival in a rage of self-righteous anger. And the rival is inspired not by love but by revenge for his disinheritance; he rages at losing his wealth and title. The woman, who defies both her father and would-be husband, is seen as 'deviant'. Reverend Brock is saddened and succumbs to a debilitating illness after learning of her deception. Her 'outrage' upon patriarchal society is henceforth kept a secret from her son lest it destroy his 'sacred memory' (p.661) of her. The whole confession scene appears to be a parody of the ways in which as Barickman, MacDonald and Stark suggest, 'conventional society uses courtship to mask brutal competition for money and power', a parody in which 'the woman and the money seem to be interchangeable symbols of power'.<sup>48</sup> Appropriately the rest of the novel continues to mock traditional courtships. Lydia learns the art of flirting and seduction from Mother Oldershaw and fully understands the ploys, wiles and games played by the 'respectable' Miss Milroy (pp.419-420). Collins implied that femininity is learnt and not 'natural'; that it is a protean, relativistic construct. And in responding to these games and appearances the men do, indeed, appear to be 'boobies' (p.153 and p.419) or 'rattle - pated fools' (p.275) who do not understand either the world they live in or themselves.

The overcomplication of the plot reflects the overcomplication of contemporary social structures whilst the maze of bizarre, frenetic incidents parodies the continued sham which Collins perceives as society. Armada embodies an orgy of domestic dissension and disintegration which seriously questions the validity of patriarchal values and the laws of primogeniture. Allan's grandfather disowned his father for not complying with his wishes and

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<sup>47</sup> Macbeth : Act 1, Scene IV, 12-13.

<sup>48</sup> R. Barickman, S. MacDonald and M. Stark, p.131.

transferred his property, fortune and name to a distant relative he had never met. This inevitably led to anger, hatred and rivalry. Midwinter's father murdered his best friend and dies estranged from his devoted wife and remains obsessed with a literal idealised image of femininity. Allan's mother dies disinherited and ostracised by the whole of her family whilst Bashwood is emotionally and financially crippled by an alcoholic wife and profligate son. Lydia is rejected by a series of surrogate parents and partners whilst Midwinter's childhood memories consist of being horsewhipped, locked in lumber rooms and dressed in rags. The Milroy's fairy-tale cottage is 'embittered by a household misery' (p.189) that has no solution and Mr. Pedgift has witnessed 'in thousands and thousands of cases, the remorseless disinheriting of nearest and dearest relations, the unnatural breaking up of sacred family ties, the deplorable severance of old and firm friendships . . .' (p.461). Armada portrays the 'home as haven' myth as precisely that; it envisages the imminent collapse of the 'transcendental pretence' and of the family - the primary institution through which patriarchy replicates itself. The opening of Dr. Downward's clinic highlights the emotional poverty and repression created by the 'dominant fiction'

In the miserable monotony of the lives led by a large section of the middle classes of England, anything is welcome to the women which offers them any sort of harmless refuge from the established tyranny of the principle that all human happiness begins and ends at home (p.622).

It is most revealing that for Collins an asylum for the 'insane' becomes a 'harmless refuge' for the shattered nerves and boredom of the 'Angel in the House'.

Armada also focuses upon the damage that the phallogocentric system inflicts upon male identity. Allan's father is denied his identity; his name and livelihood are passed to a stranger due to a paternal whim. The absurdity of patriarchal inheritance is depicted by the proliferation of five Allan Armadales in the book. Barickman, McDonald and Stark proclaim



that Midwinter is as 'disinherited' as Magdalen Vanstone or Ann Catherick and conclude that Collins perceived how the 'lust for power the system arouses in its sons can be as destructive to true identity as the helpless passivity it inculcates in its daughters'.<sup>49</sup> Midwinter has experienced a past as full of abuse, neglect, suffering and poverty as that described by Lydia. He can bitterly state that he has seen 'something of Society; I have helped to fill its stomach and black its boots' (p.85).

In Armada no-one is certain of their 'real' identity. Indeed the very name seems to symbolise social disorder; it has a blighting effect similar to that of the moonstone or the Chancery suit. Jenny Taylor has noted how Armadale symbolises 'a name without an identity' and not an 'identity that has been rendered problematic by the loss of name. It is a blank space standing for a property that has no real owner'. It represents the 'displacement of significance' and 'nothing but significance'.<sup>50</sup> The desire to be or to claim a name results only in further imposture suggesting that there is little difference between the self and other, reality and imposture. Lydia could be the 'daughter of a costermonger or a Duke' (p.511) she begins life as a shadow in a dream and has had several names while Mother Oldershaw becomes Mrs. Mandeville in a 'respectable' area and Dr. Downward becomes Dr. LeDoux of Fairweather Vale. Allan Armadale is the son of Fergus Ingleby alias Allan Armadale and Ozias Midwinter is also an Allan Armadale, the son of Allan Armadale alias Mr. Wrentmore. The two living Allan Armadales, the fair and the dark, are counterparts or alter egos. It is a world in which all, in different circumstances, could be each other. If Neelie had been 'cast helpless on the world' she could be a Lydia and if Allan had suffered at the hands of Mr. Neal he could have been a Midwinter. Mrs. Milroy was once attractive and happy and Lydia was once trusting and selfless. Collins revealed how environment effects all; how identity is arbitrarily created and can be changed by laudanum, chemistry and Dr. Downward's asylum.

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<sup>49</sup> R. Barickman, S. MacDonald and M. Stark, p.139.

<sup>50</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, In the Secret Theatre of Home : Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology (London : Routledge, 1988), pp.152-153.

Winifred Hughes claims that Destiny has no moral content in the sensation novel, that 'accident is canonised in place of system' reflecting a world in which there is 'no way to learn the rules'.<sup>51</sup> Armada explores the 'Great Doubts' (p.40) that haunt Victorian imagination. It asks 'Is there a Fatality that follows men in the dark?' (p.97), are 'the sins of fathers . . . visited on the child?' (p.40) and 'Are we masters of our own destinies?' (p.40). (Doubts which by their very terminology exclude woman from governing her own fate!) But the novel provides no answer; each reader must 'interpret as the bent of their own minds incline them' (p.662, the Appendix). The main thesis of Armada is 'many men, many opinions' (p.136) and 'if we talked till dooms-day, we should not agree' (p.145). And the central image is the major's unpredictable clock. Peter Thoms envisages the mock-Strasbourg clock as a 'suggestive and unsettling paradigm'<sup>52</sup> reflecting a gulf between maker and creation; a carefully constructed order that refuses to follow its constructed order. It is as fallible and beyond patriarchal control as all the constructs and institutions created by men in Armada prove ultimately to be. In this sense telling stories, creating and controlling one's own identity, becomes a form of 'psychic survival'. Whilst the men cling to a power they do not have it is the women who recognise this and survive by creating constructs.

Midwinter inherits a confession of patriarchal lust, violence, obsession and greed as his birthright. The ensuing plot is an exploration of if, or how, he can avoid duplicating this tragedy and survive to establish new meanings for masculinity. He remains unsure, self-tormented, self divided and fearful. He cannot enter the Symbolic Order or acquire full selfhood without the assistance of the M/Other. Lydia begins life as a 'wicked' maid (p.27 and p.40) in the patriarchal confession and a 'Shadow' (p.135 and p.257) in a male-created dream. She is 'wicked' for successfully emulating a man's handwriting but she is also a fragmented

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<sup>51</sup> Winifred Hughes, p.63.

<sup>52</sup> Peter Thoms, The Windings of the Labyrinth : Quest and Structure in the Major Works of Wilkie Collins, (Athens : Ohio University Press, 1992), p.134.

'shadow' who has been used, abused and denied an opportunity to fulfil her potential. However, from a 'maid' and a 'shadow' in the past, Lydia storms into the present and begins to control both the story and the men in it. She symbolises everything that men want and fear as she creates a 'strange fascination of terror and delight' (p.367). Lydia can simulate the desired mixture of the 'voluptuous and the modest' (p.367), refinement and seduction. But she is also a forceful, intelligent person; one who represents herself and who resists patriarchal labels and boundaries. Thus, to Allan, Mr Pedgift and the Gorgons she is not a 'lady' (p.358). Lydia can be defined as a 'heroine . . . a Joan of Arc . . . a martyr' (p.344) and 'an adventuress of the worst-class; an undeniably worthless and dangerous woman' (p.350). In the eyes of masculine authority she has forfeited, by being 'unnatural', her claim to femininity. Hence, she is a 'tigress' (p.353) with 'snaky' movements. Lydia's past remains largely a blank but Collins can state that it was a 'story infinitely less revolting, and yet infinitely more terrible' (p.334) than Allan could imagine. She is not a 'pitiable victim' (p.334) of one abusive man but a serial victim, one of many such women who are exposed to a lifetime of neglect, abuse and degradation from a patriarchal system which then marginalises them. The narrative implicitly suggests that 'polite' society feeds off those it casts out; it produces the very 'deviants' whom it then 'piously condemns'.<sup>53</sup> It demonstrates how poverty, desperation and stagnation can crush will and how Manuel can survive by blackmailing 'respectable' society with their own 'criminality'. In Armada 'evil' is attached to no one, definable source and humans have the 'free will to self-destruct'<sup>54</sup> - it is a universe which exists far beyond masculine rationality and control.

Lydia is so disturbing precisely because she represents herself and is 'daring enough to speak the truth'. But Lydia perceives herself as 'thrown back helpless on my own miserable life' (p.435), on 'a past too horrible to be thought of' (p.442). She is a 'lost woman' (p.422) unless she can secure 'a name and a position' (p.429). And for all her contriving Lydia can

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<sup>53</sup> R. Barickman, S. MacDonald and M. Stark, p.139.

<sup>54</sup> Winifred Hughes, p.65.

only envisage doing this through marriage. She openly despises men, is haunted by her past experiences of brutality. She 'shudders' (p.409) when close to them and cries: 'Am I fool enough to be thinking of him in that way' (p.378). Lydia knows that to care, to show affection to a man, leaves her vulnerable to the abuse and neglect she suffered at the hands of Waldron and Manuel. She also knows that there is no other option - she must control or be controlled. And yet she can only gain control and power through men; by game-playing and simulating what they desire. There is a marked irony in Lydia planning to be Allan's widow without ever being his wife.<sup>55</sup> It is Lydia's personal ideal; a name and wealth without the encumbrance of a 'rattle-pated fool' which necessarily went with these privileges. Virginia Morris observes how, as 'intensely as she wants independence, she repeatedly surrenders it because she can imagine no way to survive on her own'.<sup>56</sup>

And yet despite all of Lydia's resourceful and elaborate planning she is a 'strikingly unsuccessful criminal'.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately Lydia only has power when she is dissembling and deceiving. Her undoing, as she herself predicted, occurs when she falls in love and, thus, makes herself vulnerable to masculine abuse. As Midwinter's wife she is once again a 'pitiable victim'. Ironically she is destroyed when she tries to fulfil the traditional role she had previously so successfully emulated. And, as Jenny Taylor comments, she 'finds the sheer boredom and wifely dependence to be the falsest role of all'.<sup>58</sup> Lydia can lament: 'How happy I was in the first days that followed our marriage, and how happy I made *him*!'. Only two months have passed, and that time is a bygone time already!' (p.532), and: '...I am more lonely than ever, though my husband is sitting writing in the next room to me' (p.532). Her diary has become her 'second self' (p.532). Her despair echoes that experienced by Sara McCallan and Valeria and shows the markedly different gender expectations of marriage. To Victorian men the thrill laid in the 'chase', the 'hunt'. There was no discourse of how to

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<sup>55</sup> V.B. Morris, p.113.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.170.

behave within marriage, after the 'courtship' ends. Peter Stearns notes how patriarchal tradition says 'nothing about an equation of manhood and happiness. Pride, yes, occasional fierce joy, but a cloying happiness could be positively dangerous'.<sup>59</sup> The very qualities which Lydia, Valeria and Sara desire in a relationship are the very qualities which are so threatening to 'manhood'. It is indeed a 'contract' ending in a 'void'. Lydia's only remaining fantasy of marriage is 'having a husband to vex and a child to beat' (p.142), - a situation lived out by Mrs. Milroy and the Neals.

Armadale's epistolary structure gives a voice 'to outsiders and implies an aesthetics of multiplicity over an aesthetic unity that signifies the hegemony of male dominated society'.<sup>60</sup> The letters between Lydia and Mrs. Oldershaw represent a striking piece of social satire capturing the worldly wisdom and 'smooth varnish of Cant' (p.571). Hence, Mrs. Oldershaw acts 'on principle' in deceiving Reverend Brock and declares that 'such cunning' is 'unbecoming in a member of the sacred profession' (p.204). Their discourses are firmly founded upon the hypocrisies of polite society and it is highly apt that Mrs. Oldershaw delivers the final 'sermon'. In their counterworld 'Mother Oldershaw' is 'mother' to Lydia just as a 'half-bred gypsy . . . a drunkard, a ruffian, and a thief' (p.83) offers Midwinter a 'new father, a new family and a new name' (p.82). The original Ozias Midwinter is 'the best friend I ever had' (p.83) and the only friend Lydia appears to have is Mrs. Oldershaw. Lydia and Mrs. Oldershaw parody a mother-daughter relationship and its associated sentiments. Mrs. Oldershaw feigned concern and sympathy camouflages greed and a desire to 'match' Lydia to a wealthy man. She is a Mrs. Bennett without scruples or boundaries.

Lydia's power lies largely in her knowledge of her past, of his-story. She recognises 'the deviance that lies beneath, and is often produced by, society's restrictive definitions of what is

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<sup>59</sup> Peter Stearns, Be A Man! Males in Modern Society (London : Holmes & Meier, 1990), p.46.

<sup>60</sup> Tamar Heller, p.37.

normal'<sup>61</sup> and that 'femininity' is an acquired art. But Alison Milbank has also discussed how, 'as the virginal sirens maintain their seductive power by their inaccessibility, so Lydia Guilt can only keep her hold on her admirers until she accepts them'. She 'has her day of plots and stratagems but is then destroyed'.<sup>62</sup> Jenny Taylor perceives Lydia as 'the figure of all-embracing, disarming, and suffocating female power - in whom fear of the father and his legacy of male violence becomes transformed into the threat of the castrating woman'.<sup>63</sup> Whilst this is partly so the political implications of Lydia's 'deviance' are not entirely submerged. Lydia is clearly depicted as the product of, and victim of, a corrupt, abusive patriarchal system. Her 'undoing' is to allow herself to be vulnerable, to be a feeling subject, and controlled by man. As her name implies Lydia is destroyed by 'guilt' and 'gilt' - by succumbing to the very emotions she had successfully dissembled.

Lydia is defined in many different ways by the male characters - a 'snake', a 'tigress', a 'fallen woman', a 'pitiable victim', an 'adventuress' - and yet despite the plethora of crimes springing from male behaviour there is a distinct paucity of negative labels for men. This lack, to Maggie Wykes, indicates 'the extent to which language encodes the view of the world from a masculine position with women the subordinate object requiring labelling as "other" and "lesser" than male'.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, violence by women offers not only human drama and emotions but sexualised drama and emotion, stressing that gender, as well as legal, expectations have been breached. Lydia survives by preying upon, and constructing herself upon, masculine desires. She is consistently portrayed as a physical, sexual presence; the object of the male 'gaze'.

And yet Lydia, self-revealed in her diary, is a lonely, self-tormented person who finds no peace without laudanum, grinds her teeth in her sleep (p.154) who 'wearily' (p.378) undresses

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<sup>61</sup> R. Barickman, S. MacDonald and M. Stark, p.134.

<sup>62</sup> Alison Milbank, p.46.

<sup>63</sup> J.B. Taylor, p.167.

<sup>64</sup> Maggie Wykes, 'Passion, Marriage and Murder. In R.E. Dobash, R.P. Dobash & L. Noaks, p.68.

and finds only an 'alien' identity reflected in her mirror. She is literally frightened and surprised by her own shadow (p.428) and she is unable to recognise her own presence. Like a character in a Jean Rhys novel she is perennially self-estranged. She walks through London with a 'kind of dull, numbed feeling' which blocks out all sensation of bodily fatigue (p.593) 'and imagines her past' 'as if some other person had figured' (p.594). Lydia cannot exist as a complete person in Victorian society; as an orphan she is marginalised and outcast and as a woman she is denied access to independence and the public sphere. Pedgift can exclaim 'What a wonderful lawyer she would have made if she had been a man' (p.351), but she has no outlet for her intellect and creativity other than her 'deviance'. Thus, after dealing with the violent Manuel, she cries that he 'made me feel more like myself again' (p.557) and, when planning the disposal of Allan, she declares that 'Here I am, running headlong into a frightful risk - and I never was in better spirits in my life!' (p.451).

Lydia persistently disrupts expectation and refuses to be bound by hegemonic discourse. She states that 'We all know that a lady has no passions' (p.540), whilst displaying vehement passion. She proclaims how 'Some brute of a man says that no woman can keep two trains of ideas in her mind at the same-time' (pp.205-6) whilst dramatically disproving the myth with her actions. And she halts Dr. Downward's sexist assumptions with: 'Never mind the sex' (p.580). But still she cannot survive without playing on these very sexist assumptions. And ultimately she cannot survive at all. Lydia has to utilise patriarchal language and masculine modes of behaviour - rivalry, intimidation, extortion and violence - ones which result in her self-alienation. She can find no other language or behaviour available to a 'deviant' woman. There is little surprise that when Bashwood mutters violent deprecations against Lydia a passing group of women retort: 'Whatever she did, she served you right!' (p.456).

There are many 'blanks' in Armada and these are invariably blanks in the women's lives. Lydia's past is never fully disclosed and complete silence hangs over what drove Mrs. Bashwood to drink and what Mrs. Pedgift and her daughter do while Pedgift Elder and Junior

are on picnic parties or drinking in 'Our Hotel' (p.348). Allan and Neelie remain ignorant of Mrs. Armadale's one act of defiance. And this 'crime' is seen as 'more horrible than the man's crime of cheating another man - even when the latter leads to murder'.<sup>65</sup> Allan's innocence and unfounded optimism is based on his ignorance of this but it is an 'innocence that has fed, however unknowingly, on his mother's total self-sacrifice'.<sup>66</sup> There is little wonder that the women, 'poor souls' . . . 'had seized the golden opportunity of a plunge into public life' (p.622); that they seek excitement and stimulation in Dr. Downward's asylum. Armadale confirms Michelle Massé's thesis of the traumatic denial of female identity in sensation fiction; that 'what is gives the lie to what they (women) are told should be, and they are haunted by this discrepancy'.<sup>67</sup>

In such a world Lydia's suicide may well be seen as a positive, triumphant act of defiance; a final act of rebellion against a society in which she can have no place. Lydia's lost potential is reflected in her death - 'she was lovely and womanly once more' (p.652). But these were the very qualities which would have rendered her perpetually vulnerable to Waldron's whip, Manuel's deception or the boredom and repression which drives 'poor souls' to Dr. Downward for intellectual 'treats'. As Alison Milbank suggests 'a world in which the control of writing constitutes patriarchal authority, retreat into blankness may be the only possible liberation from its reach'.<sup>68</sup>

There can be no end to the questions and issues raised in Armadale and the imposed conclusion reads as an implicit satire of traditional expectations. Midwinter remains self-tormented whilst Allan and Neelie thrive in their ignorance. Midwinter concludes in the liturgical language discredited throughout the rest of the novel and Allan plans his wedding after marriage has consistently been portrayed as a defunct institution, a 'Publication and a

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<sup>65</sup> R. Barickman, S. MacDonald and M. Stark, p.139.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Michelle Massé, p.688.

<sup>68</sup> Alison Milbank, p.79.



Void'. And Allan's original elopement plans would have duplicated his mother's 'crime'. Neelie, with Allan's encouragement, would have committed the very same 'sin' which all are so anxious to prevent Allan from knowing his mother committed. There is little wonder that Lydia kills herself, Mrs. Bashwood drinks, Mrs. Milroy rages, Mrs. Pedgift remains invisible and Mrs. Oldershaw gives the 'last sermon'. Her readiness to confuse Christianity and cosmetics suggests a 'rotteness' at the very essence of social constructions.<sup>69</sup>

Keith Reierstad has noted how sensation heroines rarely have mothers.<sup>70</sup> To Victorians 'mothering' was a sacred concept associated with images of devotion, duty and self-abnegation; qualities which ensured that sensation heroines must be orphans and not the product of, or linked to, such altruistic duty. G.J. Masciarotte analyses how sensation narrative

reconfigures maternity as the moment of subjective insecurity. In doing this it does not negate or supplant the law of the father; it offers the maternal as the supplementary production of patriarchy. As such, the maternal is then constructed in the symbolic register as an unfixed signifier.<sup>71</sup>

It thus questions primal separation, the source of the constructed self and examines the irrecoverably fragmented personality. Collins, however, did create 'deviant' women who have mothers. He also presented a 'criminal' woman who is a mother and whose offending is motivated by the very maternal duties and considerations urged upon her by society.

In Jezebel's Daughter Collins explored what could happen if the obligations of motherhood

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas Boyle, Black Swine in the Sewers of Hampstead : Beneath the Surface of Victorian Sensationalism (London : Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), p.173.

<sup>70</sup> Keith B. Reierstad, The Demon in the House: or, The Domestication of the Gothic in the Novels of Wilkie Collins (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of Pennsylvania, 1976), p.100.

<sup>71</sup> G.J. Masciarotte, G.J., 'Madonna with Child and Another Child and Still Another Child'. Discourse Journal for Theoretical Studies in Media and Culture 14 (1, 1992), p.106.

are threatened by outside forces and asks if a woman can justifiably resort to illegal means to procure the security and happiness of her family. Ironically the only obstacle to her daughter's happiness is Madame Fontaine's own reputation for mendacity, fiscal recklessness and illicit liaisons. The novel is not about the daughter at all, who is a 'harmself, insignificant creature'<sup>72</sup> who excites little interest, but about the nature of a 'Jezebel'. The narrative traces the career of two widows; one a mother who inherits little from the husband she despised, the other childless but who inherits wealth, a business and adopts a surrogate son. Mrs. Wagner, the English childless widow, has feminist sympathies; she opens the novel by enrolling women into her London office and concludes the text by employing German women in the Frankfurt branch. In between she challenges masculine authority both in the business and at Bedlam, issues orders to male employees and leads a full, stimulating life. But it is a life she has earned through, and being given by, her husband.

Madame Fontaine has no such outlet for her resourcefulness and intelligence as her letters to her friend, Julie, reveal. Like Lydia Guilt she usurps patriarchal language and power in order to represent herself. And like Lydia she finds an outlet and relief for her emotions through self-expression. The woman, whom masculine society defines as 'evil' and 'deviant', defines herself as a miserable, 'wretched creature' (p.93), forced to 'live a life of deceit, and feign respect and regard for a man whom I despise with my whole heart' (p.92). She experiences a numbing 'apathy', a sense that 'the life I lead is slowly crushing my energies', making her recoil' . . . from the thought of myself and my existence' (p.93). Like Lydia she is isolated, self-estranged and alienated from her own 'reflection'. Through marriage Madame Fontaine had hoped to live vicariously, to acquire power and status through her husband's career and social circle. She envies her husband's academic post and career options and it is her exclusion, her very frustration and thwarted ambition, which informs her actions. Her 'weak' (p.91) husband, who prefers homosocial bonding and chemistry to a relationship or

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<sup>72</sup> Wilkie Collins, Jezebel's Daughter (London : Chatto & Windus, 1887), p.85. All further references to this novel will relate to this edition.

career, does not allow her to live vicariously. Madame Fontaine feels she is living with a 'machine' (p.93) who is oblivious to her desires, needs and anger. Thus, she confides in Julie: 'Power - oh, if I had the power to make the fury that consumes me felt! The curse of our sex is its helplessness' (p.92). She can, at this stage, envisage no outlet for her rage and no possible fulfilment for her cerebral cravings. The only power she hears of women attaining is through reading the trials of famous female criminals. The only way she can imagine having a personal impact upon the public sphere, and making her anger felt, is through violence.

This is a serious indictment upon the world in which she lives. Madame Fontaine can only be a closet intellectual who digests her husband's knowledge second-hand and in private. The fact that she has to learn indirectly and secretly through her perceived inferior adds fuel to her rage. She thus learns to admire and empathise with the female criminal who becomes

morally intoxicated with the sense of her own tremendous power. A mere human creature - only a woman, Julie! - armed with the means of secretly dealing death with her, wherever she goes - ' (p.96).

But Madame Fontaine, despite her elaborate scheming, does not fatally poison anyone. Like Lydia she is a 'strikingly unsuccessful criminal'. Her pleasure consists largely of imaginary power, of fantasy killings. Ironically the Alexandria Wine (with a female name) produces symptoms in the chauvinistic Mr. Keller which remarkably resemble the 'female malady', a 'mysterious wasting of vital powers' (p.115) with no visible cause. It is an ailment akin to that which afflicted Madame Fontaine herself as a stagnating 'Angel in the House'.

Mrs. Wagner and Madame Fontaine are the chief sources of action, force and rationality in the novel. Mr. Keller is reactionary, upholds ideological assumptions and clings to the status quo. Mr. Engelman loves obsessively and literally pines away when thwarted. Frith is 'one of the many men who absolutely need being henpecked' (p.158) whilst Jack Straw parodies

female obedience and self abnegation by sleeping on doormats, performing menial duties and cherishing Mrs. Wagner's every instruction. And the ending is presented by David Glenney, an employee who is absent for much of the action and whose perception of events may well be distorted, the product of projected needs or fantasies.

Nonetheless the conclusion is somewhat contrived and simplistic. Madame Fontaine, who has not been rewarded by her husband with a constructive outlet for her ambitions, can find no place in the world and is literally destroyed by her own scheming, poisoned by that which she designed for another. As with all sensation heroines she loses her femininity; she has 'snaky' movements and is a 'tigress' (p.183). But she also loves Minna devotedly and this love regularly shines out and transforms her (pp.182-3). As with all Collins' 'deviant' women she has the potential to be a 'good' wife and mother; a potential that is crushed by poverty, stagnation and the demands of the 'dominant fiction'. Madame Fontaine is symbolically 'poisoned' by the hegemonic discourses of the Kellers, Englemans and Glenneys of the world. As with the actual depiction of her life the text imaginatively contains, punishes then banishes her.

Professor Fontaine left everything in his will to 'my beloved wife . . . the one person in the world whom I can implicitly trust...' (p.34). He was obviously so absorbed in his work that he was insensitive to her despair and view of him as an 'Animated Mummy' (p.93). Like all the other male characters in the narrative he is self deluded and ignorant; he sees and hears what he wants or expects to see and hear, expectations that are squarely founded on the patriarchal construction which he plays an intrinsic part in upholding. Collins implicitly criticised this male myopia and expressed his fear that if society does not change, does not give power and recognition to the Lydias and Madame Fontaines of the world, power will be violently seized. The fact that Madame Fontaine expresses herself through masculine discourse and masculine modes of behaviour is both a sign that she has no other option and an authorial fear that masculine aggression and rivalry will destroy all if not challenged from

within its experience. But Collins, like his female creation, could see no way forward. He began by exploring the symbolic power of motherhood for good or evil. But, he discovered that motherhood, like 'good' and 'evil', is a subjective, relativistic patriarchal concept. Madame Fontaine is a 'good' mother who raises a 'good' daughter. She can self-justify her crimes and resists being labelled or categorised. She is both a product of, and undermined by, the very 'transcendental pretence' which constructs her. Ironically she is killed by the Looking Glass Drops; a man-made poison which induces paralysis and ultimately death. It delivers the final destruction of the reflection in the mirror and ensure that the fantasy of a return to the prelapsarian idyll is as irretrievably lost as the Captain's paradise isle.

In The Legacy of Cain, the last full-length novel that Collins completed, 'deviant' women have found a way beyond suicide, death or 'blankness'. They have little option for by this time the masculine hegemony was in a state of complete disintegration. There is no longer even a myth of male protection; at times of crisis men abruptly abdicate responsibility, fall conveniently ill or lapse into 'peaceable imbecility' (p.310). The novel ostensibly questions Darwinism versus environmental theories; it asks if identities are 'formed by the accidental influences which happen to be around them' or if character is 'inherited from . . . parents' (p.14). But, it is a palimpsestic work which, through the buried text and the letters and diaries of the marginalised, questions much more. It explores ideological assumptions, gender constructions and the inadequacy and limitation of language. It challenges the very discourses which constitute the 'dominant fiction', approaches Dollimore's 'discohering', revision, and subverts gender role expectations.

The narrative opens with a criminal woman who, like Madame Fontaine, is a devoted mother. She is seen wholly as the object of the male 'gaze'. She is defined, judged and condemned by hegemonic discourse. She is given no identity, no his-story; she is portrayed as Every Criminal Woman and named only 'the Prisoner', the 'Murderess' and the 'condemned wretch' (p.3). She is 'inhuman' (p.11) with an 'evil smile' (p.17). She has forfeited her right to

womanhood by her own violence and breach of domestic boundaries. And yet her story remains a 'blank'. She killed the husband who was notorious for his 'profligate habits' and 'violent temper' (p.2) and who leaves his only child in the care of the dubious Miss Chance. There is a constant repetition of the word 'impenetrable' (p.9 and p.16) by the men who are bewildered and disturbed by her violence and who are unable to comprehend her actions. They are perplexed by her 'infernal self-possession' (p.24) rejection of traditional solaces and 'unfeminine' detailed questions about the execution. Her further breaches in the code of femininity define her, in the eyes of patriarchal authority, as exceptionally 'wicked' (p.18). Collins created a world in which men and women share no common language; in which women have no words to convey their experiences and men are unable to comprehend the 'otherness' which lies beyond their discourses.

That Collins, unlike his male characters, did feel sympathy for 'the condemned wretch' is evident from the ensuing narrative in which all the major characters are driven, by extreme distress, to some form of attempted murder. Helena poisons Phillip but she also, by destroying Eunice's innocence, trust and vitality, 'committed the worst of murders – 'she' killed in me all that made life worth living' (p.148). Eunice, without her father's intervention, would have suffocated Helena and she faces a persistent struggle not to make another successful attempt. Abel Gracedieu, the Abel whose kindly influence is designed to counteract the 'mark of Cain', is tempted to kill himself, attempts to kill the Governor in a jealous frenzy and 'kills' the image he takes to actually be his wife under an outbreak of delusion. And both Miss Jillgall and the Governor express violent anger against Helena.

The Reverend and the Governor are persistently termed as such and represent the collapsing male hegemony. The socially promised male guardian/protector transpires to be purely a 'fiction', a 'transcendental pretence'. Indeed, it is the very failure of masculine values that exposes the women to misery and despair. The Reverend's 'cowardly weakness' (p.156) is largely responsible for the tragedy of his family. When confronted with intense sibling

rivalry, distress and domestic dissension he conveniently falls ill and develops amnesia. At the crisis of their lives he is unable to comprehend, support or direct his daughters. He thus withdraws into his own room and into his own solipsistic universe. For the rest of the narrative his family 'protect' him and conceal the 'truth' and further pain from him. Similarly the Governor fails to comprehend the 'Prisoner', is impotent to affect the action or Helena's plot and, at the climax of events, falls ill with gout and leaves to convalesce.

The men's perception of women is simplistic and dualistic. When this construction begins to collapse they are unable to cope and disintegrate along with their created ideals. When the Reverend discovers that his wife was an independent thinking and acting individual whom he never really knew he cries: 'Was my wife heartless? Was the angel of my life deceitful?' (p.172). Mrs. Gracedieu is instantaneously transformed from 'an angel on earth' to a 'Wretch! Fiend! Harlot!' (p.227) for there is nothing in between that a woman can be, she can only fall from a pedestal to the ground. Reverend Gracedieu's frenzy is a parody of masculine self-delusion. Unable to accept the tensions and conflicts inherent in his own erroneous value-system he dissolves into permanent senile dementia, a 'wreck of a man' (p.310). He becomes one of the marginalised, exiled from the very discourses to which he had hitherto prescribed. His fate symbolises the destiny of the patriarchal order which, Collins suggested, also chose selective amnesia, myopia and evasion of responsibility above challenge and change.

The prolific, intimate outpourings of the two sisters are, as with Lydia and Madame Fontaine, a usurping of an essentially male activity; a seizing of the metaphoric 'privileged signifier' and the power that is associated with it. Ironically it is the Reverend himself, who forbids the reading of novels and expends much energy insulating his family from the outside world, who encourages them to keep diaries. The domestic details and religious meditations which he expects them to note are rapidly replaced by personal confessions which out-sensationalise the very novels he forbids to enter his house. Indeed, it may well be that his

very desire to protect them from knowledge and the public sphere which incites the situation. As Collins indicated throughout his work innocence based on ignorance is dangerous. The Gracedieu sisters are conditioned to subdue their own identities, deny passions and have little interest in the outside world. They are left with no knowledge or resources to cope when the 'external' impinges upon their private life. Helena has no frame of reference for 'evil' or 'appropriate' patterns of courtship beyond her father's rigid piety. As in the schoolroom catechism scene she self-righteously and automatically repeats moral judgements and subjective terminology without any rational meaning informing the patriarchal language which she utilises. Her Diary abounds in words such as 'sin', 'deceit' and 'malicious', but they are distorted from their usual context and forced to fit into Helena's amoral, solipsistic vision; a vision self created in response to the empty, narrow world of the home in which she never felt at home. Her sole outlet for intellectual expression is being her father's housekeeper; a role which she jealously guards (p.132). Her only possible escape is through marriage and she seizes upon this hope with all the competitiveness, energy and commitment that she had hitherto expended on her domestic duties.

Trapped within male ideological expectations, with only the inadequate discourses inherited from her father with which to express herself, Helena becomes increasingly socially ostracised and can only retire yet further into the self-righteousness which she also learnt from her father. Helena and Eunice can be seen as alter egos; the two diverse modes of behaviour open to women, both of which are equally as debilitating. If Helena's 'Worship of Pure Reason' (p.322) misses much that is valuable in human relationships and makes her as 'emotionally illiterate' as the men, Eunice's passivity, her 'gentle uncomplaining sadness' (p.193) renders her far more vulnerable to suffering, abuse and a repeat of her mother's tragedy.

With the total disintegration of the masculine hegemony men's salvation is seen to lie in women's strength and devotion. With no 'Angel in the House' to care for him the Governor



falls ill and finds comfort through a surrogate daughter. The Reverend, who discovers that his 'angel' is an 'incubus', collapses into the 'madness' that lies on the other side of 'manliness'; the regression feared by all men. And yet the very qualities which men so ostensibly desire they are actually unable to detect; they cannot separate reality from appearance or a Eunice from a Helena. And fathers are unable to provide models or direction for their children; the Reverend retreats into infancy and Mr. Dunboyne buries himself in books and refuses to be 'disturbed' (p.211). The men's inadequacy directly contributes, as in all of Collins' work, to tragedy and female suffering. As the Governor exclaims: 'Such weakness as that . . . is a vice in itself. It has led already... to the saddest results' (p.174).

And the sibling rivalry is over a man who closely resembles the Reverend and, presumably, the 'Prisoner's' husband. Phillip Dunboyne has 'nothing absolutely wicked in him - but . . . a nature so perilously weak . . . it might drift into wickedness unless a stronger nature was at hand to hold it back' (p.313). And such is Eunice's role. But, like the Governor, we are not convinced that Eunice should or could be this 'stronger nature'. As Helena herself noted, she alone had the necessary strength and resolve to guide Philip through life. And yet she despises him as 'weak' and her inferior. It is a sad indictment of their world that the sister's only escape from their father's house is through a Philip Dunboyne or that Collins could not create a 'hero' suitable for his Lydias, Helenas and Eunices. The end offers little hope that Eunice will not experience as much marital distress as her mother only to discover that she has no legal redress and that her options are even more limited than they were at the rectory.

The Legacy of Cain insists upon radical reassessment, change and new discourses. It becomes a huge social indictment that intelligent, resourceful women can only usurp masculine definitions of power and language. By rejecting traditional female qualities Helena can only ape what she perceives in the public domain - competitiveness, jealousy, aggression. She escapes to a new world but she can only construct herself as another Reverend Gracedieu, uttering new 'orations' for a new 'religion' (p.322). She embraces, and

makes into a faith, the very rationality upon which masculinity is so squarely founded. She escapes from her female role but only to be an 'inferior man'; a continued object of derision and the male 'gaze'.

It is Mrs. Tenbruggen, the former Miss Chance who believed in inherited destiny, who manages to control her own fate and create new space and freedom. She becomes a 'lucrative celebrity' as a masseuse earning her living by 'twisting, turning and pinching the flesh of credulous persons' (p.212). Symbolically, like Lydia and Helena, she survives by dissembling, by using men's naiveté and myopia, by being and giving what they desire. She buys freedom from her husband by being a successful Mrs. Oldershaw. In this world such dealing and simulating is women's only chance to survive independently. As Helena asks: 'What chance . . . do the men give us of making our lives with them endurable, except by deceit!' (p.262). Collins, like his women, appears to find no other answer. The characters in The Legacy of Cain appear, like Matthew Arnold, to be trapped 'between two worlds', 'One dying, the other powerless to be born'.<sup>73</sup> Male ideology has degenerated into meaningless 'sermons' and judgmental terminology which suffices no-one's needs. The epistolary method reflects the multiplicity of perspectives and values that exist within one family home. All use the same words but with different meanings. Their letters and diaries expose no shared value-base and no common ground upon which to base discussions. Like Mr. Hawbury they could state: 'we could talk until doomsday and we would not agree'. Words such as 'evil', 'unnatural' and 'duty' abound but they have become meaningless; they are wholly subjective, relativistic terms.

The central 'secret' or 'sensation' of The Legacy of Cain is precisely this, the inadequacy of patriarchal discourses and language to describe or develop human experience. The isolation and despair which haunts Helena is 'found in the failure of words, spoken or written, to answer

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<sup>73</sup> Matthew Arnold, 'Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse'. Selected Poems and Prose (London : Dent, 1978), p.102.

their purpose so that we can trust them, in our attempts to communicate with each other' (p.184). Her 'misinterpreted words', and 'the impotence of human language to speak for itself' (p.183) leads Helena to realise 'what a solitary creature . . . the human being really is in the teeming world that he inhabits!' (p.183). And yet Helena herself edits Philip's letters, passes them to others for 'comment', abridges them to highlight the 'important' parts, adds notes as to the 'correct' interpretation and judges them on their 'honour' and 'perception'. The futility and complexity of communication is manifest. Letters and statements can be stolen, destroyed, altered or discredited, speech can be misconstrued and memories can be obliterated. And communication totally breaks down as each attempts to 'protect' the other from the 'truth'. The Governor conceals the Reverend's violent outburst from Eunice and Miss Jillgall, the Reverend conceals age and identity from his daughters, the sisters hide their feelings and despair from their father, Mrs. Gracedieu conceals her anger and frustration from her husband whilst Mrs. Tenbruggen survives by deceiving everyone she meets. It is highly appropriate that the devastation of the Reverend's home, the disintegration of his value-system and his children's tragedy, 'passed over him like a wet sponge over a slate' (p.310).

A linguistic 'reality' can be rapidly erased when confronted with 'resistance', internal dissidents who cannot be silenced. In this pluralistic, complex world the Reverend's 'peaceable imbecility' is partly to be envied and 'deviance' can be seen as an apt, rational response. The Legacy of Cain discovers that there is no legacy of Cain and that Cain's 'sin' is of questionable and ambivalent significance. What is clearly seen as a 'sin' is the Reverend's and Philip's 'cowardly weakness' and the masculine inadequacy and evasion of responsibility which exposes women to misery, degradation and repression. The Symbolic Order has become a Shambolic Disorder; signifiers now point only to an absence, an absence filled only with a 'wreck of a man' (p.310) mindlessly playing with broken toys. And, as Foucault declared, madness 'provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to

question itself'.<sup>74</sup>

The 'Christian Remembrancer' noted how 'extravagant and unnatural' the sensation genre could be but perceived this as 'an impatience of old restraints, and a craving for some fundamental change in the workings of society'. That by breaching taboos, sensation 'disturbs the reader's sense of the stability of things and opens a new untried vista of what might be'<sup>75</sup> In other words, sensation narratives could be social purpose novels in disguise and its real aim could be to 'discohere', to return meanings and constructions for circulation. As Ann Cvetkovich observes it represented a reality that cannot be acknowledge by the dominant culture or a fantasy necessitated by the impossibility of constructing realistic solutions to social problems.<sup>76</sup>

It depicted the conflicts, contradictions and dilemmas inherent in hegemonic discourse but it could not envisage a way forward, an 'escape'. But sensationalism did resist providing any safe rational ending. It embodied 'discontinuous knowledge' and was a non-teleological genre which, ultimately, did not succeed in quelling anxieties or displacing insecurities onto a 'Medusa' figure.

The dread and disruption it generated was absolute and could have no 'end'. Collins was aware of this and exploited the potentials of sensationalism to the full. The men in Collins' sensation novels, like the Reverend Gracedieu, are 'afraid of the women' (p.188) but are more afraid of what they represent - the M/Other, the 'blanks', the mystery. That is all that men try to define and control and all that they are ultimately unable to define or control. And whilst Collins' sensation heroines are contained within a masculine text and forced to usurp

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<sup>74</sup> M. Foucault, as quoted by Chiara Briganti, 'Gothic Maidens and Sensation Women : Lady Audley's Journey from the Ruined Mansion to the Madhouse'. Victorian Literature and Culture 19 (1991), p.199.

<sup>75</sup> The Christian Remembrance, as quoted by Keith Reierstad, (The Demon in the House), p.112.

<sup>76</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, p.7.

patriarchal language and behaviour this is consistently seen as a social indictment. Foucault proclaimed that freedom is not to be found in the self or the 'truth' but in discovering means of resisting the process of labelling and categorisation. And this is precisely what Collins' 'deviant' women accomplish; by resisting male definitions and boundaries they achieve the only 'freedom' possible in their world. The Countess of Narona, in 'The Haunted Hotel', may spend her life as a victim of male ambition, desire and moral condemnation but she dies as the 'heroine of her own life-story', the author of her world and detective of her own crime.<sup>77</sup> The men may choose to dismiss her play as fiction but her narrative, ending in a blank no-one can fill, continues to haunt all who read it. And the mechanical breathing of the corpse suggests growing female power and resistance to the 'dominant fiction'. The Countess, Lydia, Mrs. Fontaine and Helena may be contained but they cannot be vanquished - like the woman in white they live on in male imaginations, a symbol of the potency of the M/Other and the world beyond rationality and human control.

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<sup>77</sup> Alison Milbank, p.47.

### **CONCLUSION - LANGUAGE : AN ELUSIVE BUT INVINCIBLE POWER**

Throughout his writing career Collins persistently illustrated how contemporary social structures, the 'transcendental pretence', could not satisfy basic human needs for creativity, growth and emotional fulfilment. He demonstrated how seldom individual desire could be integrated with available social roles and how many, in fearful recognition of this, clung ever more tenaciously to these very structures. Collins despised the 'insular notions of propriety'<sup>1</sup> which stunt compassion and acceptance and lambasted those entrapped within their 'own narrow limits'.<sup>2</sup> However, Collins also went much further and indicated, through submerged texts and sub-texts, how the 'dominant fiction' actually irreparably damaged, or destroyed, those it attempted to contain. He exposed how the quest for authentic selfhood is an on-going process, a process dependent upon a chain of constructs and signifiers which can never be either verified or stilled. He ventured beyond the 'absurd make-believe' of polite society and confronted the uncertainty, transience and the 'utter void' which lay beyond 'cant' or discourse. He revealed the system to be ultimately a terrified patriarchal defence; a defence against the dread of the M/Other, the unknown and man's own impotency and insignificance. The male violence and oppression which haunts Collins' narratives, the destructive masculine need to know and control, aptly confirms Phyllis

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White (London : Chatto & Windus, 1888), p.5.

<sup>2</sup> Wilkie Collins, Heart and Science (London : Chatto & Windus, 1917), p.298.

Chesler's belief that 'repressed and unresolved uterus envy is a dangerous emotion'.<sup>3</sup>

Indeed, Collins' fiction vividly portrays how:

Man said : I have it. In the beginning, there was the Word. I will tell a fabulous lie so often and with such force that everyone will believe it. Soon, no-one will even notice the deception.<sup>4</sup>

However, Collins' characters often suspect such deception and fear that they do indeed exist within 'one enormous Sham'. Others, like Mrs. Rook and Mrs. Tenbruggen, thrive on manipulating these very delusions. No Name's Captain Wragge flourishes by doing precisely this; he packages personations and illusions to cater for human vanity and expectation. The authors of Corrupt Relations suggest that Wragge, along with Percival Glyde, the Lammles, Tigg, William Dorrit and Becky Sharp, symbolise the fraudulence, the 'terrible blank', which laid at 'the heart of Victorian relationships . . . the nothing they live on satirises a social void that goes far beyond economic relationships'.<sup>5</sup> They conclude that economic swindles and grandiose business plans occupied such a large place in Victorian literature precisely because they were an 'emblem for the most basic relationships that held the culture together'.<sup>6</sup>

The tragic repercussions of this fraudulence, the wastage of human life and potential, became ever more apparent in Collins' later fiction. His sense of pain, loss and misery appears to have become more intense with maturity or the approach to the fine de siècle. Collins knew all was construct, that there was no way to access the 'Unthought', but he was also acutely aware of the dread and pain which underpinned discourse and which can only be palely and falsely represented by it. Collins knew, like Graham Swift, that history is the:

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<sup>3</sup> Phyllis Chesler, About Men (London : The Women's Press, 1978), p.38.

<sup>4</sup> P. Chesler, p.41.

<sup>5</sup> R. Barickman, S. MacDonald, and Myra Stark, Corrupt Relations : Charles Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Wilkie Collins and the Victorian Sexual System (New York : Columbia University Press, 1982), pp.27-28.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

'...Grand Narrative, the filler of vacuums, the dispeller of fears of the dark', a construct to impose meaning and order. But he was also conscious that: '... all the stories were once real ... All the stories were once a feeling in the guts.'<sup>7</sup>

The irony, humour and symbolism which pervades No Name is, unfortunately, somewhat diluted in the later works. These novels focus unrelentingly on the imminent collapse of the hegemony, threatened or real violence and the tragedies of many individual lives. But whilst Collins vividly detailed abuse and oppression, and the ever-reverberating consequences of these, he was less able to perceive a way forward, a possible solution to the wrongs and horrors he so dramatically depicted. Nicolas Rance has commented on this paradox, that Collins' 'missionary impulse was linked with a newly pessimistic social perception'. He argues that these works are haunted by a sense that 'great things can't happen' and that Collins combined 'a virulence about contemporary society in its every aspect with overt aims which are modestly reformist'.<sup>8</sup> However, the flaws and ills highlighted by Collins could have no answer; any technical denouement could only appear as mechanical and disappointing. Collins' real 'endings' are in the symbolic realm - in the untold stories which Rosanna and Jennings take to their graves, in Mr. Wray's and Abel Gracedieu's collapse into senility, in the disappearance of Alicia Warlock and the incarceration of Hester Dethridge. Collins acknowledged the 'impenetrable mystery' at the heart of human existence and refused to transform political and epistemological questions into the plight of the individual and thus quell, romanticise or pathologise universe concerns. The issues raised remain as political, ontological or philosophical fears and queries which demand exploration and continue to haunt any ostensibly 'happy' conclusion.

And issues of gender, in Collins' work, demand radical reassessment. He illustrated how masculine privilege is not only responsible for the abuse of the marginalised but how, in turn, it warps and destroys itself. In the later fiction men are rendered impotent and self

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<sup>7</sup> Graham Swift, Waterland (London : Picadilly, 1983), p.53 and p.257.



destructive in the face of this knowledge. In Heart and Science Ovid Vere is debilitated by life and work whilst 'three weak men'<sup>9</sup> are left with the power and means to dictate the future welfare of others. Mr. Null embodies the passivity, fragility and inertia which characterises the later male characters. He 'submitted to the force of events as a cabbage leaf submits to the teeth of a rabbit'.<sup>10</sup> This is the despair, incapacity or abdication of responsibility which drove Mr. Brown to suicide, which instigated the breakdown of Rev. Gracedieu and which left Eustace MacCallan in chosen ignorance of his own his-story. Collins was keenly aware of the damage inflicted upon men themselves by the phallogentric system but it was a damage so pervasive and deep-rooted that, like Mr. Wray's mask, it cannot be restored. Men are too shaped by, or distorted by, the very structures they created for self-benefit to re-vision or to create new masks or shapes. This task is left to the Jicks and Zoes of the Collinsian world; female children who resist hegemonic utterances and refuse to be contained. And it is the women - Helena Gracedieu, Mrs. Galilee, Mrs. Rook and Mrs. Tenbruggen - who achieve success and autonomy and who attempt to 'discohere', and establish new discourses.

Whilst there is the argument that Collins imaginatively appropriated his female characters and looked towards women to save men at their own emotional cost, there is also the perspective offered by L. Claridge and Elizabeth Langland in Chapter One.<sup>11</sup> Collins may have needed, in order to express himself as a whole being, to utilise what is termed as 'female space'. He may have required an imaginative realm beyond that which tradition gave him and he may have felt alienated from the very power group to which it was assumed he belonged. A close study of his narratives suggests that he was, ultimately, 'an artist of alienation'<sup>12</sup> who, like Magdalen Vanstone, lived in a variety of skins and adopted a

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Rance, Wilkie Collins and Other Sensation Novelists : Walking the Moral Hospital (London : MacMillans, 1991), p.62.

<sup>9</sup> Heart and Science, p.298.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> L. Claridge, and E. Langland, eds. Out of Bounds : Male Writers and Gender (ed) Criticism (Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1990), pp.8-11.

<sup>12</sup> Kirk H. Beetz, 'The Other Fiction of Wilkie Collins : The Dover Editions', University of Mississippi Studies in English 2 (1981), p.112.

number of personas. In his works gender does, indeed, become an evasion rather than description.<sup>13</sup> Theodore Rosack declared that the 'woman' most 'in need of liberation is the 'woman' every man has locked up in the dungeons of his own psyche' but recognised that 'its undoing might well produce the most cataclysmic reinterpretation of the sexual roles and of sexual 'normalcy' in all human history'.<sup>14</sup> Collins also appreciated this and that many of his privileges as a white, middle-class, heterosexual man would be lost or threatened by such upheaval. But he also knew, despite fears and reservations, that there was no peaceful alternative. The fates of Lewis Romaine, Abel Gracedieu, Mr. Brown, Ezra Jennings, Mr. Wray, Ronald Cameron and Francis Raven demonstrate that hegemonic control is maintained at too high a cost. Collins knew that there many silences to be broken, many misunderstandings to heal and many ills to be rectified. Like Aung San Sull Kyi he believed that: 'We have to choose between dialogue and utter devastation'.<sup>15</sup>

But here we confront a crucial dilemma - Collins could only attack 'the dominant fiction' with words and his only perception of salvation is through language. Language has, like the M/Other it defends itself against, the power to both build and dissolve discourse, boundaries and expectations. It can perpetuate hegemonic ideologies or undermine them but it possesses only itself as a weapon for destruction or tool for creation. Language is primarily, in Lacanian terms, a compensation for loss, a means of deflecting pain and gaining an illusion of power and unity. But there are no words to describe many experiences or the horrors which lie beyond hegemonic control. Thus, Abel Gracedieu ceases to speak, Rachel Verinder never speaks, Hester finds no meaning in talk and Romaine is deprived of any language to describe his desires. And yet Collins must utilise this very language, discourse created and controlled by the hegemony, both to analyse the problem and to challenge from within the experience. Collins persistently exposed language as precarious, misleading and open to corruption and yet this was his only tool.

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<sup>13</sup> Corrupt Relations, p.120.

<sup>14</sup> Theodore Rosack, as quoted by Paul Hoch, White Hero, Black Beast : Racism, Sexism and the Mask of Masculinity (London : Pluto Press, 1979), p.78.

<sup>15</sup> Aung San Sull Kyi, as quoted in She (December 1995), p.15.

Collins aims were, ultimately, contradictory and self-defeating. He struggled to find a truth, an answer he knew did not exist and he endeavoured to expose the dangers and hypocrisies of constructs through engaging the very discourse he feared and despised. And he attempted to reveal the corruptibility of words through language. In this sense Collins' career echoes Mr. Wray's frantic but futile efforts to restore his shattered mask. He is surrounded by fragments, all meaningless out of context, but he can only hope to piece them together in a familiar shape, the old form which is all he knows. But the original shape was a forgery, an illusion of authenticity which had endured irreparable damage. Mr. Wray's fevered activities are thus 'utterly fruitless', a 'miserably hopeless task' but one which he persists in 'anxiously continuing . . . in spite of failure'.<sup>16</sup> It is his life's work, his only vehicle of expression and his sole source of meaning.

It is a dilemma which Collins struggled to resolve and which, inevitably, underscores this thesis. Steven Eamshaw has analysed how attempts to 'conceptualise the process of meaning . . . turns the very process into its antithesis - "structure"'.<sup>17</sup> A narrative, despite offering insights and perceiving itself as part of an on-going dialogue, is a finished item, a structure derived from other structures and founded upon dominant discourses. Novels and theses are static constructs; they are self-defeated even as they attempt to provide an on-going dialectic. They are doomed to tackle the problem of language 'with the problem itself as the only tool . . .'.<sup>18</sup> This is a crucial dilemma elucidated by Foucault in The Archaeology of Knowledge :

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<sup>16</sup> Wilkie Collins, Mr. Wray's Cash-Box : or The Mask and the Mystery (London : Bentley, 1852), p.123.

<sup>17</sup> Steven Eamshaw, Generations of Meaning : The Direction of Literary Theory (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis : University of Leicester, 1994), p.16.

<sup>18</sup> Steven Eamshaw, p.17.

. . . it is not possible for us to describe our own archive, since it is from within these rules that we speak, since it is that which gives to what we can say . . . its modes of appearance.<sup>19</sup>

All we can do is recognise and resist the means by which we are labelled, categorised and contained - and aim to 're-vision' and 'discohere'. And this is, I believe, exactly what Collins strove to achieve. As words are stolen, lost, replaced, written over or reappropriated all we are left with is the 'white chaos of paper' generated by Fosco, a chaos symbolising a 'blank universe, pregnant with meaning, which each individual must construct, or reconstruct, for himself'.<sup>20</sup> The terminology utilised here, the gender specifically and the image of fecundity, is ironic, appropriate and a fitting end for a thesis which, like Collins' texts themselves, could not liberate itself from the tools and structure it attempted to criticise.

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<sup>19</sup> M. Foucault, as quoted by Elizabeth Langland, Nobody's Angels : Middle-Class Women and Domestic Ideology in Victorian Culture (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1995), p.20.

<sup>20</sup> Mark M. Hennelly, 'Reading Detection in The Woman in White', Texas Studies in Literature and Language 22 (Winter 1980), p.454.

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