

FEAR OF DETECTION: ANXIETY, EVIDENCE, AND DEFORMITY IN  
WILKIE COLLINS'S DETECTIVE FICTION

by

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A THESIS

IN

ENGLISH

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of Texas Tech University in  
Partial Fulfillment of  
the Requirements for  
the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like first to thank Dr. Sean Grass for his guidance in this thesis project. His time, patience, advice, and encouragement to keep writing have been invaluable to me during my two years at Texas Tech. He has challenged me to think about Victorian sensation and detective literature in new ways and to ask myself difficult and probing questions about the texts I study. The time I have spent under his direction—in graduate seminars and weekly thesis meetings—is time I believe to have been instrumental in the development of my literary analysis and writing. I would also like to thank Dr. Miles Kimball for his enthusiasm in serving on a literature committee and showing interest in my project.

During my entire college education, I have never had such a close group of girlfriends as I have had here at Texas Tech. Emily, Stephanie, Jamie, Sara, Erin, Trish, Esther, and Carrie—thank you for all of the hugs, laughter, e-mails, coffee dates, and opportunities to relieve some stress! Most importantly, I want to thank Scott Strovas for leading me to this wonderful school and wherever else life takes us from here. I am glad that he and I were able to go through this thesis-writing process together, because—like every other part of my life—I do not think I would have handled it very well without him.

I am blessed to have a supportive family sticking beside me through my graduate studies. To my father and mother, Sammy and Julia O'Dell, my sister, Christy Lopez, my brother-in-law, Nick Lopez, and my grandparents: I do not show my thanks often enough,

but I am truly grateful for your confidence in me and your immeasurable love. I dedicate this thesis to you.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

“Now, what I want is, Facts,” begins Charles Dickens’s *Hard Times* (1854), “Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else. You can form the minds of reasoning animals upon Facts: nothing else will ever be of any service to them” (Dickens 5). Rooted in the Victorian impulse to collect, observe, and classify, Thomas Gradgrind expresses what we might call the mid-Victorian temper. But *Hard Times* is a sustained critique of Gradgrind’s narrow-mindedness against intuition and the beautiful things in life—a transition away from the sensitivity of the previous romantic generation. The transitions that took place during the Victorian era earmarked it in literary history as a period of enlightened apprehension. Each discovery prompted another, instigating an insatiable appetite for knowledge and advancement. Demand on the printing press rose drastically with an ever expanding reading public, the railroad boomed from city to city, and the Scotland Yard Metropolitan Police created a new sphere of forensic investigation that extended their role well beyond traditional preventative policing.<sup>1</sup> Every deviation from the social norm was scrutinized for an explanation, which eventually translated to a national obsession for facts. This fact obsession permeates nineteenth-century literature and acts as a vehicle for Victorian readers’ curiosity. The industrial age was also a more literate age with the wide publication of more affordable newspapers, novels, autobiographies, pamphlets, serials, catalogs, and other literary forms.<sup>2</sup> These

publications, typically available in inexpensive formats and sold by street vendors and on railway stops, allowed for a more expansive circulation of new ideas. Readers could act as investigators of these new ideas, fostering both capitalism and national curiosity. The Victorians, though, extended too many of their familiar scientific and economic knowledge bases during the middle of the nineteenth century, with Charles Darwin and Karl Marx triggering great unease about discovery. Literal biblical authority and the timeline of creation, thrown into question by Darwin's research and the work of his predecessors and contemporaries,<sup>3</sup> not only caused a growing rift between science and faith but also heightened tension between Christian evangelicals and Anglo-Catholics. Victorian authors started using more religious imagery and allusions in mainstream literature, reflecting the rise of social friction as the evangelicals fought to keep a cultural stronghold over dissenters.<sup>4</sup> The secular movements of social progress and the subsequent "crisis of faith" in Victorian England did not cause the national obsession for facts or progress to fade, but it did elicit a return to a more conservative base.

As the coexistence of scientific progress and religious evangelicalism implies, Victorian Britain was notorious for valuing contradictory trends. For today's reader, the label "Victorian" suggests conservative views of social class and gender, while at the same time evoking the idea of great technological, industrial, and scientific advance and religious instability. Victoria's reign witnessed seven decades of obsessive scholarship and invention; her subjects were data collectors and classifiers, taxonomists, manufacturers, engineers, architects, surveyors, and sociologists, all using modern logic and reasoning in their trades. By the time the queen had reached adulthood, a national

obsession with gathering information was firmly underway, the roots of this practice having been established during the Enlightenment. Detective fiction, which arrived on the scene shortly after the detective branch of police was formed, advanced out of a body of Victorian sensation literature that centered on the practice of making observations and drawing logical conclusions. Before Sir Arthur Conan Doyle introduced the impenetrable Sherlock Holmes to Victorians, authors like Wilkie Collins aptly perceived the paradox of anxious conservatism amid scientific progress and gave it a substantial voice in detective fiction. Collins's novels often teeter between their fixation on evidence and shrinking from detection. In this sense, his work rests at the uncomfortable center of England's fact obsession during the last half of the nineteenth-century.

Mary Poovey's recent critical work traces the history of fact-gathering and the transition of the fact's role in social sciences like economics and business. In her efforts to answer the question "What are facts?" Poovey argues that the definition depends on the context in which facts are used (1). Because "some people think of facts as evidence that has been gathered in the light of—and thus in some sense *for*—a theory or hypothesis," Poovey claims that "facts can never be isolated from contexts, nor can they be immune from the assumptions that inform theories" (1). There is a clear connection between this argument and the reasoning behind the 1842 creation of the Detective Department in London. The police recognized that the social, economic, and scientific contexts of crime were essential parts of discovery, so men were enlisted to practice investigative skills in these areas which led in turn to the detective field of scientific criminology (Thomas 24-5). The human instinct to gather clues (so as to piece together



the past) reflects the ongoing concerns of a forensic-minded, fact-obsessed British society.

The influence of Francis Bacon's writings on seventeenth-century noble society inspired much of the interest in the contextuality of facts. By contesting the reformative benefits of introspection, Bacon critiqued contemporary science and intellectual work. He encouraged those around him to do empirical research, engaging physically in tests and studies, rather than merely apply logical thinking to readily acceptable (but possibly erroneous) truths of the past. Bacon's texts show that there is no substitute for observation; discovery comes from relying on observable detail and evidence (like detective logic) through empirical study. He believed that one must find the facts through research and study rather than coming to them through introspection. *The New Atlantis* (1627), Bacon's fictional account of a utopian society, showcases the possibilities of scientific research and its potential impact on civilization, though Bacon connects the society's discoveries explicitly to the blessings of Christianity. Bacon's utopia, Bensalem, is founded on "the knowledge of Causes, and the secret motions of things; and the enlarging of the bounds of Human Empire, to the effecting of all things possible" (70). This pivotal work of seventeenth-century fiction paved the way for many other critiques of stolid contemplation and pushed for practical research. Bacon instigated a cry for action that could only begin by making use of facts and discovery. J. Weinberger writes, "the ancients' preference for contemplation over practical application caused them to have contempt for the evidence of experience and the practical arts. [...] Bacon's restoration of human knowledge was novel because it presented a wholly new

understanding of man's place in nature" (vii-viii). The utopian context of Baconian empirical fact-gathering and knowledge-consumption, a tangible rather than philosophical path to learning, led other writers to consider the British Empire's potential of achieving similar ideals outside of fiction.

At a lexicographical level, the British obsession with collecting facts climaxed with Samuel Johnson's *A Dictionary of the English Language* (1755). This seven-year project, which Johnson undertook almost single-handedly, consists of over 40,000 words and 114,000 quotations. Johnson's hope to "fix" the language's tendency to change with each century was not completely in vain, for although he was "heckled...mercilessly" by some, most critics could not ignore the merits of the *Dictionary*, which was the first standardized collection of English words (Noyes 175). Most complaints arose from the incompleteness of the collection, but Gertrude E. Noyes details other significant critiques of the work and notes that the "criticism...was fused with current controversy on various topics" (176). For instance, "Could a language be 'fixed,' and, if so, should that responsibility be taken by an individual rather than an academy? Should the word list of a presumably national dictionary be all-inclusive or selective, serving as an arbiter of usage?" (Noyes 176). Such questions were great concerns for eighteenth-century Britons. The development of fact collection from the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was plagued by divisive opinions about who should control the research and findings; contemporary critics pressed for more progress *and* more jurisdiction over that same progress. Those hungry for systematic, orderly information quite possibly were those criticizing the authority of the system, a development that foreshadows the movement

toward the more conservative fact obsession of the nineteenth-century. The nation's people saw value in the work Johnson had completed, but they also questioned the authority of the creator of such a work.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (*OED*) faced similar challenges, but on a much larger scale and time frame. The creators of the dictionary did not claim to have individual scholarly authority; instead, they planned for the dictionary to *be* the new authority. The new collection of words needed to be “an inventory of *all* known English words,” with “meanings and senses ... to be found from the close reading of *all* of known published English literature” (Winchester 42). The original plan for a new dictionary, dreamed by Dean Trench and six other Oxford scholars, was so astronomical in size that from the beginning they decided to hire thousands of readers to assist (Winchester 44). This 414,825-word, seven-decade collaboration of thousands of readers and compilers was finished in 1928, the project having been in the making since 1860. At its inception, the original team of seven agreed that “this dictionary idea sounded like a scheme that was on just the titanic scale which Victorian Britain seemed these days to be taking in its stride”:

Victorian Britain [...] represented an attitude suffused with near-absolute self-confidence and greatness of ambition. [...] A brand new dictionary of what was, after all, the very language of all this greatness and moral suasion and muscularly Christian goodness, and a language that had been founded and nurtured in the Britain that was doing it—the idea seemed no more and no less than a natural successor to all of these other majestic ventures of iron and steam and fired brick. (Winchester 42-3)

Although the idea for the *OED* germinated from a small group of aristocratic men wildly confident about the need for and success of this project, the actual philosophy behind the

task was conservative. They understood that a language cannot be “fixed,” only inventoried and collated as a transitive entity. Though striving obsessively to collect and notate “the meaning of *everything*,” the authors of the dictionary from the beginning understood that the work’s authority was derived from its historical comprehensiveness, not its attribution of one definition to one word (Winchester 40-3). Some still wondered whether the making of a complete dictionary was possible. But one thing was clear: the collecting and gathering, even of unprecedented amounts of facts, only leads to the need and obsession for more—which, at the time of the *OED*’s development was a fundamental trait of Victorianism.

Thomas Carlyle instigated equally heated debates with his philosophical treatise on social conditions and faith, *Sartor Resartus* (1833-34). Louis James writes of *Sartor Resartus*, “With its puns, speculations, flights of fancy and recurrent images of light and dark, heat and cold, it embodied Carlyle’s sense of a fragmented age” (155). This seminal work not only marked the transition from Romanticism to Victorianism but also roused its readers to action. “Produce! Produce!” Carlyle writes in “The Everlasting Yea,” “Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it in God’s name! ’Tis the utmost thou hast in thee; out with it then” (149). Carlyle’s argument that the old system of belief has died gives a voice to other contemporary Britons and Americans fighting for political and religious reform. Also, Carlyle voices the idea that “Wonder...is the basis of Worship: the reign of Wonder is perennial, indestructible in Man [...] Thought without Reverence is barren, perhaps poisonous” (53). Thus, Carlyle fashioned a sense of necessary curiosity within the scope of “Conduct”, or accomplishment (148). In

Carlyle's view, the Victorian era was *designed* to be a breeding ground of industry and fact gathering, as foretold by the major writers leading up to the period.

Certainly the new Victorian economy depended heavily on the spread and classification of information. Poovey identifies the double-entry bookkeeping manual as "one of the earliest systems to privilege both things in themselves (the objects and money the merchant traded) and a formal system of writing numbers that transformed representations of things into usable facts" (29). She describes double-entry bookkeeping as a tool that "made mercantile writing particularly attractive to the natural philosophers of the seventeenth century, who sought models for the knowledge they claimed to produce" (Poovey 12). Her discussion follows the development of fact use into the Victorian era, concluding with arithmetic and rhetoric during the 1830s. England's obsession with facts is well-documented and diverse in practice. Science, math, language, economics, and many other fields developed rapidly under the Stuart and Hanover monarchies. In the nineteenth-century, texts became a more common—and hence a more problematic—medium for distributing information. That textual information (such as in fliers, pamphlets, and newspapers) was easily obtainable was still a relatively new concept. Some Victorians were still getting used to the fact that machines could make paper in bulk, or that they could buy factory-made tables instead of hand-crafted ones (Erickson 6-7). Everything was easier and faster, and society as a whole became obsessed with wanting more. Lee Erickson goes as far as to call these trends "threats," specifically relating print technology to the problematic authority of texts (13). Advances in communication technology like the fax machine (1843), Morse Code (1844) and the

electronic telegraph (1858) also hastened the spread of ideas.<sup>5</sup> Victorians wanted information; scientists and philosophers wanted to solve the mysteries of the unknown.

But this appetite for facts led to a fear of facts when this enthusiasm became an attempt to explain away God, Nature, and moral humanism with science, math, and industry. Important figures such as Charles Darwin, Henry Mayhew, and Thomas Henry Huxley prompted major changes in nineteenth-century research, giving rise to new forms of critical thinking and debate. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859) caused legendary upset to religious conservatives of the day. What started out on the *Beagle* expedition as meticulous classifications of each species grew into an argument for the slow but constant evolution of the earth's geologic form and all of its plant and animal inhabitants. Darwin "tirelessly collected data from others and conducted his own observations and experiments," which gave him credibility that set him apart from many of his predecessors and contemporaries (Porter and Graham vii). Darwin's texts are not entirely absent of contradiction, though, since his frequent imagery of Empire and power coexists with passages in which he unifies Europeans as a "species" with the peoples they govern. Darwin's text "sought to unite the species in a single epic narrative that culminated in the contemporary European" (Armstrong 99). This concerned those who aimed to differentiate humans within the animal kingdom and justify a social (rather than merely biological) hierarchy of power. The continual collection of data over many decades allowed Darwin to examine and re-examine his claims, expanding or reversing them where necessary. Although the controversy of his evolutionary research provoked

retaliation from traditionalists, Darwin's methodology is quintessentially Victorian—empirical, disciplined, and persistent.

But if Victorians were endlessly inquisitive about their geological and biological origins, they were no less so about their contemporary world and the people in it. The literate middle and upper classes were especially curious about the poor, and the literature of the age demonstrates that curiosity. As James Eli Adams writes:

A more pointedly sociological imagination of the poor begins to enter the novel in the 1840s, as the sheer remoteness of their world from comfortable Victorian life made them the objects of “urban investigation”, a quasi-anthropological mode of study most influentially represented by Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861-2). (64)

Mayhew's study was the first sociological survey of London meant to categorize people in order to classify the poverty and homelessness typical to many neighborhoods. One byproduct of gathering this data was having a body of facts to compare to determine a sense of normality or standard. The *Oxford English Dictionary* records that the word “normal,” though used slightly earlier, developed into its common meaning during the early nineteenth century (“Normal”).<sup>6</sup> The Statistical Society of London (later known as the Royal Statistical Society) was founded during this same period in 1834. Before studies of classification, there was no empirical data on which to base concepts of normality, or for that matter, abnormality. These statistical developments worked as necessary precursors to Mayhew's pragmatic studies in London. Mayhew's work was fictionalized by “social problem” novelists like Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell, whose “depictions of the poor also betray an element of prurient fascination, as if they allowed novelists to imagine forms of psychological extremity that could not be

accommodated by middle-class settings” (Adams 65). Mayhew’s survey revealed not only the unspeakable conditions of the slums but also the middle class’s voyeuristic interest in the lower class. Victorians voiced a marketplace demand for details—even shocking details—about the dregs of society, and Mayhew’s survey helped whet the appetite for this type of research.

Although Thomas Henry Huxley earned his reputation as a promoter of Darwin’s evolutionary theories, he was a student of all sciences and uncompromising on the issue of materiality. Drawing on Mayhew’s style of voyeuristic inquisitiveness and Darwin’s incessant classifications, Huxley’s main focus was gathering evidence of tangible, earthly material on which to build his claims. Huxley studied medicine as a young man and ended up writing aggressive attacks on Christianity in the 1860s because he could not find evidence to support the existence of God. He writes, “[t]hat which Agnostics deny, and repudiate as immoral, is the [...] doctrine, that there are propositions which men ought to believe, without logically satisfactory evidence” (Huxley 193). In addition to his Agnostic beliefs and firm demand for facts and evidence, Huxley expanded and exaggerated Darwin’s more moderate evolutionary claims and “postulated that humanity was descended from the ape-kind with no special, providential design or morality attaching to the species” (Kitson 170). Even though Huxley’s advances in scientific research were monumental, the backlash against some of his more controversial claims was extensive. Nineteenth-century scientists and scholars produced such startling data that some Victorians were provoked to rethink their obsession with explanations for



everything. Some of them determined that they would rather not have access to scientific data that would undermine their conservative beliefs.

Sensation fiction arouses many equally provoking doubts about human nature and fact obsession, calling into question problematic assumptions about crime, insanity, gender roles, and the sanctity of domestic space. Patrick Brantlinger argues, “the introduction of mystery into a novel form that seems otherwise to follow the conventions of domestic realism posed disturbing questions” (3). This genre, often described as a blurred mixture of Gothic<sup>7</sup> romance and realism, responds to the Victorian obsession with facts by exposing the consequences of asking too many questions or peeking behind the wrong doors. In the simplest sense, the major consequence is finding out information that is unattractive or troubling, something that the interrogator would rather not know.

Unlike the Gothic novels isolated in castles or forests, sensation plots require a domestic home or familiar urban setting in which to plant mystery. Victorian critics complained of the moral apathy or even degeneracy of sensation fiction, insisting that the portrayal of sex, bigamy, and murder in such novels was a disreputable exaggeration of vice and had no place in mainstream literature (Brantlinger 9-10). In contrast, Brantlinger argues that “sensation novels posed difficulties for their writers as well as their first readers. Murders and conspiracies do not lurk down every dark street, in the shadows of every dark house. Or do they? Newspapers suggested otherwise, and how could a sensation novelist who imitated the newspapers fail to be realistic?” (11). The subjects of sensational literature mirrored actual social fixations, which set critics at an uncomfortable (and hypocritically

distanced) stance against the provocative texts, not wanting to admit to the distasteful tendencies of mid-nineteenth-century England.

Although detective fiction is commonly considered a subgenre of sensation, it is distinguished from sensation because it depends explicitly upon methodical inductive reasoning and a detective character whose goal is to discover the identity of a criminal and bring him or her to justice. Though this branch of sensation, too, provoked criticisms that it was putting immorality on display, the detective became a staple of 1860s fiction and “multipl[ied] in the crime-fraught novels of the 1870s” (James 63). The Victorian fascination with detection, though, may be justified from a legal standpoint, whereas sensation’s “justice” only sometimes involves professional jurisdiction. Both sensational mysteries and detective mysteries aim for a common goal of *demystifying* the conflict in order to reach a satisfying resolution. They want to resolve conflict but often fail to follow it through to the end. Detectives, though notable ostensibly for their reasoning skills, may end up knowing even less than the reader (Brantlinger 19). Though regarded typically as the first detective novelist in English, Wilkie Collins deliberately concludes his detective fiction with more questions than answers, which reads as a reaction against the fact obsession that pervaded Victorian culture and literature. Rather than allow his detective fiction to center on solving the crime, he plants impediments in the way of the solution. Partly, this is a necessary characteristic of suspense, but Collins’s contradictory impulses to champion *and* prevent detection must be understood, too, as a calculated literary response to the fact obsession that characterized mid-Victorian England.

Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) and *The Law and the Lady* (1875) expose Victorian anxieties surrounding class, race, and deformity in order to protest the idea that knowledge is universally more desirable than ignorance. He publicizes troubling biases about marginalized groups, not embracing generic stereotypes but not fully discarding them, either. Collins instead portrays passionate characters with distinct differences (such as Rosanna Spearman and Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone* and Miserrimus Dexter and Ariel in *The Law and the Lady*) and chooses to follow their peculiarities all the way through a text until the brink of detection. Then he abandons their aberrant and extraordinary potential in favor of conventional logic and reason. In this sense, Collins's attempt to prevent the detection of crime symbolizes something much larger. Victorians were distressed over the Darwinian inquiry that attempted to explain away faith-based elements of their lives. The pull of science to rationalize God and supernatural elements—to make belief in a higher or unearthly power unnecessary—in exchange for scientific evidence came at the price of a widespread dread of such knowledge. If science has the ability, or at least the looming potential, to answer all questions, it leaves no space for faith. Through these texts, Collins argues that the consequences of fact obsession are far more psychologically disturbing than the consequences of leaving mysteries unsolved, because the implication is that a solution removes the possibility of faith, in God and in the essence of unseen things. For example, in *The Moonstone*, Collins refuses to give his narrators interpretive authority over the evidence they see with their own eyes, which leads to an inability to decipher the true meaning of clues and actions. Collins's subversion of visual experience breaks down logical signifier-signified interpretations,

rendering detective ambitions futile; the obstruction of accurate visual interpretations consequently reinstates a need for faith. In *The Law and the Lady*, Collins relies on gothic detection to unsettle faith in legal justice, but also makes a final rational decision—clearly within the confines of the law—that sometimes the lack of tangible criminality may be even more disturbing than general suspicion. He points to a danger in detection, as even the representatives of the law prefer to rely on unstable testimonies rather than facts.

Deformity plays a significant role in both texts, which is evidenced symbolically by the deformity of crime and the inability to identify it within the jurisdiction of the law. Collins's deformed characters have the misfortune of visible physical differences paired with emotional instabilities that are together misconstrued as incriminating evidence. Though Collins vindicates his deformed characters from criminal culpability, he allows their buried texts to highlight their faults and misunderstandings. Collins's return to the Gothic is the key to his prevention of detection. He revives the labyrinths and hidden keys within the dark spaces of the mind. His deliberate link between criminality and deformity demonstrates that the nature of the connection is too disturbing to detect and the depths of mental aberration too frightening to reveal. Collins's incorporation of the Gothic into his efforts to prevent detection aim at the preservation of mystery, and arguably, the preservation of a Gothic-like faith in things unseen, and a fortified suspension of disbelief. Though his novels continually point to a more modern age and ideology, Collins succeeds in reminding his audience of the more attractive option of faith and religious certainty, or at least the possibility of such things. His discomfort with

the answer to Poovey's question, "What are facts?" arises in his unwillingness to compose facts and evidence as stable entities. The result is a shameless portrayal of the inevitable failure of detection.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For more on the Victorian printing boom, see Richard Altick's *The English Common Reader* (1957), J. A. Sutherland's *Victorian Novelists and Publishers* (1976), and Lee Erickson's *The Economy of Literary Form: English Literature and the Industrialization of publishing, 1800-1850* (1996). Also Baker and Womack (especially 15-37). See Ian Ousby's *Bloodhounds of Heaven: The Detective in English Fiction from Godwin to Doyle* (1976) for more details on detective police and their early role in literature.

<sup>2</sup> In *Victorian News and Newspapers*, Lucy Brown notes that between 1871 and 1971, the number of authors, editors, journalists, reporters and shorthand writers in England and Wales had grown by 339%, evidence that the writing of news texts had become as important an industry as reading had become a necessary medium for knowledge (38).

<sup>3</sup> J. Arthur Thomson's chapter, "Darwin's Predecessors," in A. C. Seward's *Darwin and Modern Science* (1909) provides a detailed biography of the philosophers and scientists leading up to Darwin's evolutionary theory. Though he writes, "[b]esides Buffon, Erasmus Darwin, Lamarck, Treviranus, and Goethe, there were other 'pioneers of evolution,' whose views have been often discussed and appraised," these are the ones he emphasizes as key influences (Thomson 13). He adds with evidence from Darwin's autobiography, "The only thinker to whom Darwin was directly indebted, so far as the theory of Natural Selection is concerned, was Malthus" (Thomson 13). The University of Cambridge collection of Darwin's letters exhibits his scientific and social connections to Robert Chambers and especially Charles Lyell.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Wheeler's companion to religious studies in Victorian literature may be found in O'Gorman 180-201. Another helpful discussion on faith and religion in nineteenth-century novels by Nancy Cervetti may be found in Baker and Womack 83-97.

<sup>5</sup> At the time of its invention by Alexander Bain of Scotland, the fax machine was called an "automatic electrochemical recording telegraph" (Costigan 2).

<sup>6</sup> The mathematical roots of "normal" were also formed during this time. Carl Friedrich Gauss's development of "normal distribution" gave rise to "normal equations," or "simultaneous linear equations whose solution delivers the least squares estimates of the unknown coefficients" (Stigler 415). According to Stigler, mathematicians still argue over why Gauss used the term "normal" or even how he was using it because he gave no explanation of his choice (415).

<sup>7</sup> I have chosen to capitalize "Gothic" when referring to Gothic romanticism as a formal era of literature, (though the sources I draw from vary in their usage of capitalization). When used to describe a characteristic or quality of a person or passage, I

opt for lowercase usage. Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay always uses a lowercase “gothic” when pairing it with “detection”, and I have maintained her grammatical choices in source quotations and references in the subsequent chapters.

## CHAPTER II

### SEEING IS BELIEVING:

#### THE PROBLEM OF VISUAL EVIDENCE IN *THE MOONSTONE*

Franklin Blake's deeply personal investment in finding his cousin's Moonstone pervades his narrative and seems to confirm his apparent innocence of the theft. Franklin vows, "If time, pains, and money can do it, I will lay my hand on the thief who took the Moonstone."—I had left London, with those words on my lips" (318). But after finding the nightgown that Rosanna has concealed, he writes one of the most surprising sentences of the novel, "I had penetrated the secret which the quicksand had kept from every other living creature. And, on the unanswerable evidence of the paint-stain, I had discovered Myself as the Thief" (318). These shocking words leave the reader—and Franklin himself—perplexed about the role of evidence in the case of the Moonstone's disappearance. The characters are wholly devoted to the visual clues they commit to memory, and the disconnection between how something appears and what it indicates causes a serious fracture in the reliability of visual signs like the nightgown bearing Franklin's name. Collins's problematic subversion of the novel's detection causes the major characters of this narrative to contradict each other's interpretations of evidence and culpability.

One common acknowledgement that most critics make about Collins's literary uses of "evidence" is that he researched famous detective cases after which he could model his story. Robert Ashley explains that Collins drew on the infamous "Constance



Kent or Road case” (91), and Sue Lonoff points out that “Franklin Blake’s hidden nightgown would have recalled the evidence in the Road Murder Case, for it was only three years earlier [...] that Constance Kent had confessed to the murder and to destroying her bloodstained nightgown” (180).<sup>1</sup> From early points in his composition of *The Moonstone* (1868), Collins makes many social and cultural allusions—to names, places, or events most of his contemporary readers would have grasped quickly (the Siege of Seringapatam or the Koh-i-Noor diamond). In other words, the brilliant contemporary allusions in the text may have called to mind a familiar picture for Collins’s readers. Lonoff, in a very thorough analysis of Collins’s audience, argues, “*The Moonstone* is initially a novel of the 1860s and draws on topics of period interest to produce its most memorable effects” (174). It is probable that Collins’s contemporary audience tried actively to solve the mystery because they already felt connected to the case; the readers recognized cultural references that provoked memories relating to the plot or characters (Lonoff 180-3). It is surprising, in fact, that more of Collins’s Victorian readers did not predict the ending since, as Lonoff writes, “[w]hen [sources] remained recognizable, like the clue of the paint-stained nightgown, they prompted the sense of déjà vu” (183). Nevertheless, although Collins uses cultural icons and recognizable images to relate to his audience, the narrative of the diamond’s theft does not evoke this same visual memory process; the audience cannot predict the plot from memory because the significations are no longer straightforward. For example, Franklin’s nightgown signifies *theft* instead of *guilt*, a vital distinction in this text. Entirely reliant on evidence

available only to each narrator, the characters fashion new meanings from the clues rather than seeking out the truth inherent in the image.

When critics have discussed the problematic nature of visual evidence in the novel, they have tended to pair it with an assessment of the narrative structure, treating the two as one troubled entity. Albert D. Hutter opened this subject to critique, arguing that “[n]ot only are the objective and the rational called into question by the subjective and intuitive vision of the detective, but they are made to appear as two faces of the same coin,” which “forc[es the reader] to build a rational solution from the distorted and fragmented visions of his individual narrators” (192). Jenny Bourne Taylor extends this idea of duality in *The Moonstone*, writing that the novel is simultaneously about forgetting and remembering, “loss and ...restoration,” and hidden and revealed consciousness, which furthers her argument that “Collins’s most ambitious exploration of social and psychic identity [is] a study in ambiguity itself” (176-181). Sidestepping this ambiguity of consciousness, Tamar Heller instead concentrates on the tension between Gothic and detective fiction, though linking it to the problem of visibility (143). Most recently, Sean Grass argues about the debilitating practice of staring, which the characters cannot overcome because *The Moonstone*’s “great detective and narrative misfortune that its characters trust so entirely to what they see” (Grass 97). Numerous readings underline the value of analyzing narrative structure in conjunction with the visual evidence, but what has yet to be done is to identify the irreconcilable gap between observable evidence and truth as the basis for the subjectivity of the narratives.

In *The Moonstone*, the visual evidence repeatedly obscures the facts of the case and intentions of characters, which in turn undermines thoroughly the reliability of the novel's evidence and what it signifies. Readers presuming that the narratives are trustworthy because they depend upon popular cultural references end up being misled by seemingly straightforward clues. More significantly, Collins misleads his own characters in their search for the thief. In *The Moonstone*, visual clues do not denote their true meaning, which means that images characters consider to be evidence fail to produce the appropriate conclusions about what they mean. The problem occurs not in the necessary act of interpretation, which would imply one "correct" way to use evidence, but in the inability of visuals to be interpreted accurately because of the seer's state of mind. Collins prevents his characters from solving the crime and detecting the truth about the theft by causing an irreparable rift between the observable evidence and the characters' interpretations of that same evidence. The unreliability of visual experience that fractures the authority of the narratives in *The Moonstone* is not coincidental; rather, it is a deliberate device Collins uses to intensify suspense and keep the characters from accurate detection.

The false detection centers on marginalized characters in such a way that class, race, and physical disability become key signifiers of misleading incriminating evidence. Arthur Asa Berger claims that humans "communicate through images. Visual communication is a central aspect of our lives, and much of this communication is done indirectly, through symbolic means" (1). Although one "can be misled by a visual phenomenon," Berger writes, one's "visual experiences are tied, directly and intimately,

to [his or her] intellectual and emotional ones,” which causes belief to be derived directly from sight (15, 17). In *The Moonstone*, each character believes strictly in what he or she sees, and the visual experience is connected to intellect and emotion. The difficulty of this connection is that one's trust in the visual experience causes suspicion to fall on innocent characters, which means in turn that the narrative subverts interpretation in ways that problematize the role of evidence. Stated more plainly, Collins provides recognizable signs of guilt and innocence (clues of characterization and traditional narrative movement) but matches them with unexpected conclusions and revelations of truth. Neither the characters in the novel nor the readers expect the conclusions because of their distance from logical interpretations of the visual evidence.

Collins's characters have the utmost faith in the visual realm. In this novel, visual experience fails to produce reliable knowledge because visual experience is translated into information that does not equate to usable comprehension. Collins leads readers of *The Moonstone* to follow their instincts and interpretations of what they see at the beginning of the text. Collins sets the tone for his work through his “Prologue”. The purpose of the narrative for the writer “is to explain the motive which has induced [him] to refuse the right hand of friendship to [his] cousin, John Herncastle” (3). Instead of proving Herncastle's guilt and motive, though, the writer admits, “I have not only no proof that he killed the two men at the door; I cannot even declare that he killed the third man inside [...] for I cannot say that my own eyes saw the deed committed” (8). As Grass states, “the story that the narrator tells is only explicitly about these crimes; implicitly, it is about failed surveillance and narrative inadequacy, a story that explains his motive by

resorting to a radically incomplete account of Herncastle's rapacity and supposed wrongdoing" (98). This does not prevent him from accusing his cousin of the theft and murders, though, because he is "not only persuaded of Herncastle's guilt" but also believes that the diamond will cause trouble in the hands of its future possessors (8).

Collins places sight above all else in terms of evidence. More specifically, he establishes in the "Prologue" an essential trope of sight as evidence in order to force the concept of sight as the ultimate clue and evidence of the crime as the truth. In order to take the characters' personal interpretations seriously, the reader must acknowledge Collins's deliberate attempt to make "proof" equate to "sight". The maneuver sets the stage for Collins's later subversion of visual evidence. As Alexander Welsh puts it, "since the reader's attention is directed relentlessly to the solution of the mystery," he or she must depend on the author's clues from the very beginning of the story (like any good detective fiction reader), unaware that the clues are actually deceptions (216). Still, the reader knows that *somebody* must be wrong, because there are far too many discrepancies in the various interpretations. Philip O'Neill's compelling example, that "Superintendent Seegrave [...] reads the clues [...] in one way only to have his opinion shattered and our trust in him destroyed when the great Sergeant Cuff reinterprets the same clues in a completely different way," reminds the reader of the constant subjectivity of authority in visuals (11).

Franklin, when coercing Betteredge into taking part in the narrative, describes Herncastle's cousin's letter as "an old family paper, which relates the necessary particulars on the authority of an eye-witness" (12). Again, the diction points towards

“seeing is believing” as a necessary and authoritative mantra. Thus, Franklin explains the complications involved in revealing the Moonstone’s history; he says, “the idea is that we should all write the story of the Moonstone in turn—as far as our own personal experience extends, and no farther” (12). Collins imposes these stipulations on his characters in order to present each narrative as an eye-witness account of the crime. As long as the reader understands the different personalities and worldviews of each narrator, he or she must also acknowledge that the presentation of the visuals correlates to the presentation of belief. As Welsh writes, “Individual testimony is [...] important to *The Moonstone* [...] because of the insistence on different points of view and on the difficulty of representation” (217). However, the individual testimony still will not allow for the characters’ visual experience to prevail, because Collins uses interpretive leads that do not logically match the visual experience. The multiple, unreliable narratives “carry on the characteristic Gothic reflection on narrative that questions and unsettles their readerly solidarities” (Garrett 106). Peter Garrett writes, “[i]nstead of directly opposing alternative versions, they insinuate them by leading us to mistrust the authority of their narrative voices, the completeness of their supposedly full statements” (106). The “narrative voices” are *voicing* the story from what they see individually. The unsettled nature of the text allows each narrator to believe fully in his or her version of the misleading visual evidence, eventually contributing to the overall failure of logical detection.

One of Collins’s 1868 reviewers complained that “there is no story at all, and that the characters are mere puppets, grouped with more or less art around the thing the

conjurer wishes to conceal until the time comes for displaying it” (Page 174). On the contrary, the characters are very much in control of their belief system and unwilling to let others persuade them. They know what they see, and their beliefs correlate directly to these visual experiences. The characters are not in despair about *what* to believe, because they automatically trust their interpretation of the visual evidence; rather, they are in despair about what they already *do* believe based on prior knowledge and visual memory. The characters are much less worried about how to interpret evidence than they are about prior knowledge that leads them to certain assumptions. Lady Verinder sees very little having to do with the theft of the diamond; instead, she contemplates the late Colonel Herncastle’s intentions. Betteredge narrates, “I could see that she took the blackest view possible of the Colonel’s motives, and that she was bent on getting the Moonstone out of her daughter’s possession at the first opportunity” (68). Her preconceptions lead to an assumption, which in turn makes her a suspect, too. Most of the characters’ assumptions (one of the products of arbitrary clues) are based on the pairing of prior knowledge with visual detection.

Throughout the novel, both Rosanna and Rachel are susceptible to Collins’s troubled visual experience. For Rosanna, the key clue is Franklin’s paint-smudged nightgown, which points to his guilt as the detected concept in which she believes. In addition to the nightgown, Rosanna interprets what she has seen in Franklin’s actions as an indication of his thievery. She writes in her suicide letter, “I made up my mind, on the spot, that you had shown yourself the busiest of anybody in fetching the police, as a blind to deceive us all; and that the hand which had taken Miss Rachel’s jewel could by no

possibility be any other hand than yours” (327). Her visual experience could “by no possibility” signify anything else. Rachel’s visual experience is even more problematic, as described in Franklin’s narrative. Rachel sees Franklin reaching into the Indian cabinet and removing her jewel, which, to her, signifies his guilt unquestionably. Bearing this sight along with Franklin’s detective work is too much for her. She exclaims to Franklin, “I heard that you—you!!!—were the foremost person in the house in fetching the police [...] I don’t believe a word you have said” (360-1). Rachel argues with Franklin when he confronts her a year later about her behavior. She cries, “You stole [the diamond]—I saw you! You affected to help the police—I saw you! You pledged the Diamond to the money-lender in London—I am sure of it!” (360-1). Rachel articulates her train of thought, which exposes the exact point at which her interpretation breaks down from a visual standpoint. She knows that she *saw* Franklin take the diamond and work with the police, two contradictory visual experiences, and it is this contradiction that leads her to be “sure” that Franklin sold the diamond in London, even without proof of sight. Franklin’s rush to call the police, what Rachel calls the “proof of [his] horrible falseness,” is exactly that which Rosanna used to interpret his guilt. Neither woman is in the right state of mind to understand the meaning of his actions, and each interprets these actions differently. Collins allows these two very different women to be both right and wrong, which is the most original element of *The Moonstone*’s plot. The breakdown occurs with the interpretations. Rather than posing the argument that these women are mistaken about what they see, Collins instead employs the unsignifiable truth, a truth that cannot be determined by visual signs or evidence. In the case of Rachel’s and Rosanna’s visual



experiences, the unsignifiable truth is that Franklin's possession of the Moonstone does not equate to his guilt.

This type of assumed connection between evidence and truth is subverted and detached from expectation on several other occasions. Suspicions of Rosanna's guilt fill a sizable portion of Betteredge's narrative, although she never once touched the stone, much less stole it. Assumptions about Rosanna's guilt arise from her behavior; or, the false visual "proof" of her guilt is based on the interpretation of how the house-servants and residents see her act. Sergeant Cuff tells Betteredge at one point, "I'm degraded in my own estimation—I have let Rosanna Spearman puzzle me" (137). Cuff realizes that the visual evidence that he and the other housemates have gathered does not add up to a sensible conclusion. He does not believe that Rosanna has stolen the diamond or hidden it in the Shivering Sands, yet he cannot bring himself to clear her name with Betteredge. Welsh argues that this is because Cuff's "train of circumstances derails completely at the point of intersection with his other, false, conclusion that the heroine and daughter of the house still possesses the diamond" (222). Cuff is unique to the story in that he does not depend on the evidence-interpretation-detection cycle to make his judgments; rather, he makes erroneous assumptions and cannot solve the mystery because of them. Cuff explains his reasoning to Betteredge:

Rosanna has her own reasons for suspecting her own things; she takes the first opportunity of getting to her room, finds the paint-stain on her nightgown...gets the materials for making a new petticoat or nightgown, makes it alone in her room...lights a fire, I say, to dry and iron the substitute dress...and is at this moment occupied in making away with it, in some convenient place, on that lonely bit of beach ahead of us. (127)

The assumptions he makes about the case prevent him from thinking about visual clues as neutral signals. Since his mind is already made up, Cuff is unable to bridge the gap between image and meaning. However, even the characters most attuned to what the logical interpretation should be are incorrect because the truth about the case is unrecognizable. Rosanna's version of the truth—just like Cuff's—is shocking, not just because of her bold language toward Franklin, but because the conclusion has been suspended from the reader by the tricky twist in plot. Rosanna divulges her version in her suicide letter, which further problematizes the role of evidence because the writer is no longer able to vouch for her testimony.

Rosanna's actions (and consequently the suspicion heaped upon her) are one culmination of the misleading testimonies of the narratives. Rosanna's flawed logic, the interpretation of Franklin's guilt and theft of the Moonstone, leads her to proceed rashly which, in turn, leads most of those living in the Verinder house to suspect her of either the theft of the diamond or of acting as an accomplice. Even after Franklin discovers his nightgown hidden in the Shivering Sands, he continues to hope that Rosanna's letter will reveal her guilt (and the nightgown as a false clue). He refers to her letter as "the miserable woman's confession, which related to [himself]," and feels a certain bitterness toward her for writing so audaciously about Rachel and the suspicions of his own guilt (325). Franklin's shocking find at the beach—"on the unanswerable evidence of the paint-stain, I had discovered Myself as the Thief"—again reiterates Collins's insistence that his characters need to think of the visual as truth (318).

Franklin, who has no recollection of the diamond's theft, obediently accepts the role of thief solely based on visual evidence, though he hopes ardently that Rosanna's letter will exculpate him. Franklin's submissive acceptance of his guilt contradicts his memory and knowledge of the night in question, but the visual evidence convinces him to adopt the logical conclusion—that he stole the diamond. Franklin only retreats from this interpretation for a brief moment while Betteredge reads Rosanna's letter for him, but he comes quickly to regret “the aspersion which [he] had thoughtlessly cast on her memory” and renews his faith in the incriminating evidence (325). The “abominable impossibility [...] confronts [him] as an undeniable fact,” as shocking as it seems (319). Even when Betteredge calls the nightgown “a liar,” Franklin admits “[t]his comforting view of the matter was not the view that presented itself to my mind” (319). Franklin is the third character to accept this conclusion, but he is the only one who is not misled by the visuals. That is, Franklin literally took the diamond, and he adopts this belief, but he does not think of himself as *guilty*. He does not know his intentions or motives for the theft, because he cannot remember, but the key difference is that he does not assume that he had a dishonest motive. Rachel's and Rosanna's erroneous assumptions in this regard, meanwhile, point them to erroneous conclusions (and ultimately cause Rosanna to take her own life). Rachel's assumptions lead her to confine herself to her beliefs, both ashamed that Franklin would take advantage of her and angry that he would hide the alleged truth.

The characters' various conclusions and assumptions create dilemmas in the text that all may be traced back to the “seeing is believing” mantra. Jonas F. Soltis exposes

the problems of blurring the distinctions among seeing, knowing, and believing. He argues that “[s]ome knowledge appropriate to what is being seen must be utilized by the one doing the seeing,” and “[a] true belief about what is seen grounded on the knowledge so utilized must be acquired by the one doing the seeing” (Soltis 75). Collins does not create either of these natural inclinations or curiosities in Rachel’s character. In fact, Rachel goes out of her way physically not to gain knowledge about what she saw in her bedroom the night of the theft. Several other characters discover the identity of the diamond thief long before they discover that Rachel already knows it is Franklin. Because she purposely remains ignorant of Franklin’s reason for taking the diamond, her visual evidence is meaningless and is superseded by the other narratives. This is partly due to what Soltis calls “embellishment producing knowledge,” which “adds to and/or ornaments the bare perception giving it a fuller significance and meaning to the one doing the seeing” (88). Rachel’s prior knowledge about Franklin’s debts causes her to exaggerate the motive of Franklin’s theft. Only because she is aware of Franklin’s need for money does she assume that he needs the Moonstone to pay his debts. Experiencing the shame and shock of the offense simultaneously, and pairing the tumultuous emotion with her knowledge of Franklin’s monetary needs, Rachel perceives that Franklin would rather steal from her in the night than humble himself before her. In addition to feeling violated by the theft, the embellishment of Rachel’s perception leaves her hurt and confused about Franklin’s behavior, although she never questions it.

Franklin’s patriarchal supervision of the collective text has significant disadvantages for Rachel in that, when she finally explains her anger and logic for

accusing him, *he* maintains control of her dialogue in the retelling. Rachel, the only character with potential visual authority over the theft—since even Franklin does not see himself steal the jewel—is silenced repeatedly by the men around her. Interestingly, Collins does not even allow Rachel's letter to survive in Franklin's narrative the way that Rosanna's does. One critic notes the irony of the fact that Collins leaves Rachel out of the narrating group: "On the basis of circumstantial evidence—[circumstantial because] no eyewitness to any crime has come forward—Sergeant Cuff concludes that Rachel has only pretended to miss the diamond and that she intends to raise money on it, to pay [her] debts" (Welsh 219). Because Rachel, the only eyewitness in the entire novel, has no say in the direction of the narrative, this leads (very purposely on Collins's part) to a refraction of the facts (Welsh 219). The omission of Rachel's testimony has less of an effect on the reader than may be generally acknowledged, because regardless of what her first-hand experiences would have related to the reader, they do not signify the logical conclusions about the intentions of Franklin's actions.

Although any detective story is incomplete without suspense, Collins creates this suspense differently from his Gothic predecessors. Rather than relying entirely on the Gothic's tradition of mistaken identity and uneasy supernatural influence, Collins instead combines the mystery of identity with false evidence and interpretations. This combination allows *The Moonstone* to incorporate the dreadfulness of suspecting a loved one of deception while shaping this dread within a forensic economy. This design instigates a distrust of detection—cheeky, considering that Collins's was the first detective novel to be written in England—and a general attitude of apprehension towards

any solution of the mystery. Like Collins's later detective fiction, especially *The Law and the Lady*, this novel acts as a reaction against detection rather than a story concerning it. The characters who use visual evidence as a tool in their inductive reasoning will always fail to detect the true history of the crime. Because Rosanna and Rachel adopt a false identity for Franklin, the reader feels suspended between visual evidence, assumptions, and a truth that cannot be explained by experience. Collins breaks from his Gothic predecessors by using unsignifiable truths instead of supernatural influences, which transfers anxiety from that which is incredible (spirits, ghosts, hauntings, etc.) to that which is apparently indisputable (Franklin's theft, Rosanna's strange behavior, and Rachel's secrecy). The horror of Gothic still exists, but the realism provided by rational visual experiences gives this and his other texts an element of plausibility that epitomizes suspense in sensation. Consequently, the major body of Collins's sensation fiction relies on characters' misinterpretations of readily credible evidence, which allows for more surprises, deviations from expectation, and shocking revelations.

The ways in which Collins embeds misleading incriminating evidence in the form of cultural stereotype demands attention, because he utilizes Gothic characterization techniques—specifically by elaborating difference—in order to deceive his characters and readers. Class, race, and physical disability play key roles in the way of leading the focus away from truth. Critics have accused Collins of combining prejudiced and subversive views in his fiction, because—although he subverts the stereotypes and exculpates any suspicion that may be placed on these unfortunate groups—he still uses marginalized characters to initiate wariness in the protagonists and readers. Lillian

Nayder argues that, in the case of Collins's treatment of the Indians, he "partly obscures the injuries suffered by the conquered peoples and discredits as well as acknowledges their desire for self-rule" (101-2). In other words, although Collins recognizes the "deplorable excesses" of mistreatment, he continues to marginalize their authority (6).

Martha Stoddard Holmes illustrates the stereotype of especially the disabled woman during Collins's life, writing,

Most Victorian literature [...] produces the consistent message that disability, almost by definition, removes or diverts a young woman from the normative sexual economy. Whatever social status or significance she gains, these narratives assert, she will not gain it from marriage. Or, if she is one of the lucky ones who marry, she will become a wife under circumstances as particular and even peculiar as disability itself seems to nondisabled culture. (61)

Collins differs from his Victorian counterparts by allowing his disabled women to speak their minds; more intriguing, he gives them prominent positions in his fiction, sometimes even allowing them to hold the protagonist's role, as the blind Lucilla Finch does in *Poor Miss Finch* (1872). Still, though Collins fights the norm in order to give disabled women exceptional roles, he "subscribes to conventional, sentimentalized views of bodily 'affliction,' and shares other writers' exoticizing/pathologizing tendency with regard to disabled sexuality" (Holmes 61). In these ways, Collins both exalts and subverts his marginalized characters, forcing them into the spotlight but never giving them the authority of the normal or conventional.

Collins uses very deliberate socio-economic stratifications in drawing his characters. Although the lower-middle class usually was considered an uncontrollable socio-economic group in Victorian fiction, servants "represented a controllable and therefore safe social element" (Bedell 22). Servants in *The Moonstone* are differentiated

from their employers, just like in any other Victorian domestic text, but—even more interestingly—they are distinguished from each other. In the Verinder home, Betteredge has worked his way up to the top of the service ladder. Below him there are cooks, washers, stablemen, groundsmen, gardeners, and other miscellaneous servants.

Betteredge and Penelope have the inside edge on the goings-on in the Verinder family because of their work with Lady Verinder and Rachel. Collins instills in the grandfatherly Betteredge a discriminatory eye and thus characterizes him as predisposed to certain class biases.

Especially when Betteredge narrates the history of Rosanna's admittance into the Verinder household, he holds certain socio-economic shortcomings as evidence against her even as he cares for her and pursues her affection. He describes Rosanna as plain-faced, modest, and quiet, though "there was just a dash of something that wasn't like a housemaid, and that *was* like a lady, about her. [...] the other women pounced on it like lightning the first day she came into the house, and said (which was most unjust) that Rosanna Spearman gave herself airs" (26). Collins "gives airs" to Rosanna in other ways, too; one critic writing about class distinctions in English detective fiction notes that Rosanna "writes her moving farewell letter in standard English, considered a more dignified and serious form of expression than dialect," though Franklin and Betteredge are more appalled by her letter than impressed by it (Bedell 19). Although Betteredge acknowledges the "unjust" biases of the other housemaids, he narrates his knowledge of Rosanna in such a way that it is impossible to think of her as one of them. Instead, he concentrates on her oddities, her shortcomings, and her need for solitude and distance.



Betteredge further marginalizes Rosanna by deeming her affection for Franklin Blake laughable. He writes,

You have heard of beautiful young ladies falling in love at first sight, and have thought it natural enough. But a housemaid out of a reformatory, with a plain face and a deformed shoulder, falling in love, at first sight, with a gentleman who comes on a visit to her mistress's house, match me that, in the way of absurdity, out of any story-book in Christendom, if you can! I laughed till the tears rolled down my cheeks. (51)

Of course his daughter calls him "cruel" for his laughter and dismisses her father's "merriment," but the effect on the reader is permanent (51). Betteredge's inability to consider Rosanna as un-marginalized enables his later belief in her guilt. These pieces of evidence, which are comprised of Rosanna's plainness, deformity, past transgressions, and low social station, lead Betteredge to the interpretation of her present criminality. The Victorian stereotype of the servant class in this situation reinforces the interpretation and further complicates Rosanna's attempts to catch Franklin's attention. The class barrier causes Rosanna's attempts to save Franklin to look like vain attempts to escape culpability herself. Again, Collins's visual evidence is almost always misleading; paired with Victorian cultural stereotypes, it is subjective and deceptive.

Racial stereotypes are even more complex than ones of class in *The Moonstone*. Collins presents much liminality in the way of determining the race of his characters. Betteredge refuses to talk to the Brahmins who visit the Verinder house, though they "spoke English, and...exhibited, I must own, the most elegant manners" (20). In fact, precisely because the Indians show "manners [that] are superior to [his] own," Betteredge distrusts them (21). He ventures to save face by stating, "I am [...] the last person in the world to distrust another person because he happens to be a few shades darker than

myself,” but the implication remains that Betteredge does not want to give them the opportunity to steal from the Verinders, which he believes is a good possibility if he lets them in the house (21). Betteredge may have been justified in suspecting the Indians of pretending to be jugglers for shady reasons, but once again, the visual experience combined with racial stereotype encourages an incorrect conclusion. Betteredge assumes the logical interpretation of the Indians as thieves, whereas Collins later reveals that they were trying to recover property that was stolen from them.

Other than the three Brahmins, who we already know are foreigners in the country, no characters have verifiable racial differences; instead, their otherness is insinuated. Collins uses physical otherness in some of his British characters to obscure the British/Indian dichotomy. For example, Mr. Murthwaite is initially described as a “celebrated Indian traveler... a long, lean, wiry, brown, silent man” (71). Like his marginalization of Rosanna, who likes her solitude, Collins allows this unique figure, though celebrated, to be marginalized (both in experience and color) and othered in comparison to the guests at Rachel’s birthday dinner. Murthwaite’s Indian explorations place him almost as much on the periphery as are the juggling Brahmins. Ezra Jennings also occupies a racially-othered position in the narrative, although his race is never verified. Jennings straddles many boundaries that are usually easy to separate in Victorian fiction. Jennings wears both a “gipsy complexion” and a “grayish paleness” as he relates his background to Blake, which confuses his entitlement to both British and non-British ethnicity (386). Also, his “startling white and black hair” makes him an anomaly among physically and racially distinct characters (386). He is under no

suspicion for committing a crime in relation to the Verinder's situation, but he is automatically suspect for his differences and idiosyncrasies and—like Rosanna—for former suspicions (386-8). That Jennings is responsible for the exposure of the mystery's details is a useful, though problematic, compositional element. Collins is able to keep his major characters deluded by the undeterminable truths of visual evidence while motivating psychological projects for the family stranger. Collins subverts the reader's expectations about Jennings until the end of Jennings's life. Jennings dies in obscurity, just as he came into the story, and his success and personal secrets are buried with him.

Disability holds a unique place among visual evidence in *The Moonstone* because of its specific application to women. Often, Collins aligns disability and passion in such characters. Rosanna and Limping Lucy exemplify both traits. Albert D. Hutter writes,

Several of the women in the novel are seen as strong willed and hurtful, like Rachel; violent, like Limping Lucy; even deadly, like the symbolic tide or the moonstone itself. Rosanna Spearman is most clearly identified as a man-killer by her explicit last name, and she identifies herself in turn with the sands that suffocate hundreds of people. (204)

Although this sense of Rosanna as a “man-killer” may be extreme, the main idea of her passion is unmistakable. Hutter continues, “[Rosanna] finally merges with the quicksand in death, strengthening the symbolic connection between the deadly sands and unrequited passion” (204). This moment also strengthens the guarantee that Rosanna's hopelessness is derived at least partly from her deformity. She knows that Franklin will never reciprocate her feelings, so she goes to the extreme of disabling her passion through death. The reader is never sure whether Franklin's indifference toward the girl is based on her deformity or her low station, but what is clear is that Rosanna's attempts to hide in

her shawl or in the shrubbery walk fail to hide her deformity. Franklin, Cuff, and Betteredge spy her in the shrubbery, the servants observe her wander off to the sands, and Cuff sees her trek over to Cobb's Hole. Rosanna is often overlooked when she tries to stand out as a sympathetic individual, but she is always seen when she attempts to hide. She cannot hide her deformed shoulder; she can, though, hide her pain in the sands, finally gaining Franklin's attention as a martyr rather than a misshapen nuisance.

Limping Lucy's physical deformity provokes others' reactions in two distinct ways. Some feel sorry for her misfortune but do not feel enough to show pity or offer assistance. Mrs. Yolland even "ma[kes] some apologies for her daughter's odd behavior" (312). Others read the physical difference as a marker of mental aberration. For instance, Franklin's forthright conclusion about Lucy's mental stability after she yells at him on the beach is that she must be crazy, and he goes as far as to say that the "one interpretation that I could put on her conduct has, no doubt, been anticipated by everybody" (313). Rather than take Lucy seriously, Franklin insists on marginalizing her opinions and heart-felt passions. Her attempt to redeem Rosanna's name and situation is lost on Franklin, who has no patience for a strangely impertinent handicapped girl. The visual clue of Lucy's passion leads to the assumed madness; the conclusion is substantiated by Franklin's stereotype of the disabled woman, so he insults her sincerity further.

The women of the novel play major roles in Collins's active subversion of detection. Both Rachel and Rosanna *see* proof that Franklin takes the diamond, but their collective mistake is believing the "taking" to be the crime. Because these women rely on

sight and deduce Franklin's guilt based solely on this element, the mystery continues long after the blame is admitted. This repeated theme of mistaking sight for knowledge delineates Collins's attempt to resuscitate in detective fiction the anxieties of both Romantic identity confusion and fact obsession. If a character cannot depend on his or her own eyes for knowledge, nor depend on the visual evidence to conclude with an interpretation concept, then knowledge must come from faith or another less stable realm. Collins forces his readers into this subjective state, as well, by reducing the amount of "knowledge" in the text to information that can be conveyed by one (presumably fallible) narrator at a time.

What turns out to be the most significant result of failed detection is that the crime is solved—from a legal standpoint, at least—but the mystery of incrimination never is. Collins's engagement with class barriers, racial ambiguity, and physical deformity never culminates in a logical way, unlike his treatment of Rachel and Franklin, whose lives seem destined to be lived out happily ever after. Those Collins uses in his method of suspense as false suspects literally fall out of the plot once he has unraveled enough of the story. The disadvantaged characters disappear in order to leave unanswered the questions of their previous connections with incrimination. For example, Collins highlights the final story of the Indians back in their homeland with the recovered Moonstone, but the three Brahmins are not allowed to return to their former way of life. They are simultaneously shunned and celebrated by their people as three men who have forfeited their caste for the honor of the gods, and they must disappear from their homeland for their sacrifice. Back in England, the racially-indistinct Ezra Jennings

disappears from the narrative as obscurely as he arrives. The reader is left without a satisfying end for Jennings because he dies and is buried in an unmarked grave with all of his writings. Nobody will ever find or read Jennings's psychological research the way Franklin uncovered Rosanna's suicide letter. The reader comes to the conclusion that Jennings's writings are *too* perceptive for a plot founded on false evidence and incriminating evidence, unlike Rosanna's letter, which furthers the confusion. Also, these writings might tread too far into matters of psychological aberration, giving rise to questions about a traditionally Gothic trait that this novel wants to leave unanswered. His burial in obscurity furthers the inference that Jennings's visual experience needs to be covered up to prevent any more detection from occurring in the novel.

Those with deformities seem to disappear, too, in order to smooth the way to the unraveling of the mystery. Rosanna commits suicide by jumping into the quicksand, which is not taken nearly as seriously as a death in a household would be normally. Rather than dying as Godfrey does in murder, she takes her own life—concurrently incriminating and exculpating herself from the theft. Her self-murder owes indirectly to a man she loves: she chooses to take her own life, but she does so because of Franklin's indifference toward her. Her letter speaks for her from her sandy grave, but her significant role in the novel (as a suspect, servant, or sexually-motivated woman) essentially is never spoken of again once her letter is read. Lucy Yolland is silenced even more abruptly when Franklin assumes her insanity after she yells at him. Collins writes, “with those parting words she limped away from me at the top of her speed,” and Lucy is removed effectively from the novel (313). Though Lucy gives Franklin the “key” to the

theft, the letter that pinpoints him as the only logical suspect, Collins does not allow her to play any part in the novel unsupervised by patriarchal control.

The height of Collins's attempts to destabilize detection occurs really in his least fortunate characters rather than in his account of crime, and he problematizes such characters thoroughly by allowing their functions as evidence to disappear with them. As leads disappear, so do the possibilities for detection. This reads as a reaction against not only professional detective practice and amateur sleuthing but also against attaining knowledge about troublesome issues like crime, class, race, and physical impairment. Fact obsession—or what Betteredge labels “detective fever”—is a major *problem* for Collins, not just a plot device. The reader concludes that the marginalized characters are only out on the periphery because of the thoroughly failed attempt to detect the roots of their differences. Murthwaite's narrative ends the novel by pointing to the future, remarking, “[s]o the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time” (482). Collins leaves the reader with these lines not to finalize the story, but to warn of the consequences of visual detection and the great obsession with facts that they imply. The Moonstone is restored to its rightful home, and Rachel and Franklin are reunited in peace, matrimony, and pregnancy. However, the daunting closing image of repetition and cycles supersedes the customarily positive solution of restoring or reuniting. As Murthwaite writes of the Moonstone's future, “Who can tell?” (482). What is most mysterious in the novel disappears into the cracks of the narrative, not because of any satisfying explanation, but because of a deliberate attempt to erase the residue of the novel's faulty visual signs. *The Moonstone's* ominous ending is Collins's last declaration

of the necessary failure of detection, which is needed to keep hidden the truly disturbing corners of Victorian society.



Notes

<sup>1</sup> The most obvious similarity between the Constance Kent case and *The Moonstone* is the fact that the detective suspected a young woman as the criminal based on his understanding of visual evidence, but retired from the case before solving it, just like Sergeant Cuff (Ashley 92).

CHAPTER III

“YOU *MUST* GIVE UP”:

THE RHETORIC OF PROTEST IN *THE LAW AND THE LADY*

Just six days after marrying his new wife, Eustace Macallan of Wilkie Collins's *The Law and the Lady* pleads with her to cease looking for clues regarding his past. He tries to scare her away from the truth, exclaiming, “Valeria! if you ever discover what I am now keeping from your knowledge—from that moment you live a life of torture [...] if you stir a step further in this matter there is an end of your happiness for the rest of your life!” (54-5). Valeria insists on acting as an amateur detective despite Eustace's threats. Opposing numerous gender and domestic roles of her time period, Valeria courageously takes Eustace's murder trial into her own hands—in spite of relentless discouragement—in the hope of vindicating his blemished honor. As a proper Victorian woman, Valeria should never behave this way. A young bride in the 1870s would have been expected to obey her husband and uphold propriety in the domestic sphere. Valeria challenges her husband's authority by practicing detection against his wishes, and in the process she manages to unearth shocking details that the law never would have discovered without her supposed indiscretion.

Wilkie Collins is the master of suspense—the master at revealing one significant clue at a time. He takes his time, painstakingly, to unravel the mystery at his own pace. Some critics claim that Collins's methodical creation of suspense allows the readers to make informed hypotheses about the identity of the criminal, either putting them in the

role of detective, police, or jury. But whether granting readers privileged access to forensic evidence was Collins's goal is difficult to determine, because Collins repeatedly sprinkles false leads in with reliable hunches. Although suspense in modern mysteries is now a celebrated and well-anticipated stock characteristic of detection, Collins was writing at a time when the genre was still young and malleable—before, in fact, it was a recognizable genre at all. The red herring signifying a false lead, now a staple in mysteries, was a relatively new device, and new enough not to be taken for granted. The factor of suspense in Collins's detective plots is often woven into the narratives so well that the reader comes to question the nature of the original mystery. Is it the criminal one is trying to find, or the crime one is trying to reconstruct? Did a crime even take place? For a reader of Collins's fiction, half of the thrill is figuring out what the mystery actually is. Collins's novels may tend often to drag out to anticlimactic conclusions, but the continual discovery of new mystery keeps the reader engaged and perplexed throughout.

Such is the case in Collins's *The Law and the Lady*. The first volume of this three-volume text could be considered a miniature mystery in itself, as the newly-married protagonist, Valeria, must solve a small-scale case of mistaken identity in order to figure out what the much larger mystery (an unsolved murder) entails; in fact, the nature of the clues requires a solution to the mystery of identity before Valeria can discover that there was even a murder. This story-within-a-story, mystery-within-a-mystery pattern continues throughout the novel, and Valeria must unwrap these layers to detect the real mystery, dodging false leads and corrupt evidence all the while. The paradox of this detective narrative is that the entire mystery collapses without resolution at the novel's

end: although Valeria determines that her husband is not a poisoner and murderer (her steadfast goal throughout the narrative), she chooses to keep from him the details of his first wife's death. No court verdict is overturned. No legal hearing takes place. Valeria completely sidesteps the legal system and refocuses her attention on her family rather than vindicate her husband's name fully, which contradicts her professed intentions during her detective work. Ironically, she must conceal rather than reveal her husband's innocence in order to protect his feelings. At the conclusion, the reader is left with several layers of mystery still intact, though arguably the case has been solved.

By regarding *The Law and the Lady* as detective layers, one sees that the goal of this novel is never really detection at all, but rather the preservation of mystery. Collins poses an alternate Victorian-Gothic option to absolute truth; he writes to uphold the circular ideas that mystery is ultimately more attractive than scientific reason, and that the Gothicism from which Victorian sensation evolved is the key to detection. Collins plants both physical and psychological impediments in the case in order to leave concealed the Gothic features of death and deformity. Françoise Dupeyron-Lafay wrote the earliest major discussion of gothic detection in this novel, which she defines as a hybrid "mixture of sensational elements, detection and gothic themes and patterns" (142). Detecting crime in this novel requires, consequently, blending reason and passion as well as insanity and deformity so as to blur the boundary of gothic detection and solve the case. What is ultimately at stake in detection, the novel suggests, is this contest between gothic and rational detection. Collecting evidence about a crime leads a detective to attempt to construct the *design* and *cause* of wrongdoing, which rationalizes the offense rather than

criminalizes it. The very action of rational detection debilitates Coleridge's Romantic prescription for the "shadows of imagination," which is the "willing suspension of disbelief" (490). More simply, rational detection renders disbelief unnecessary, because each step of the case is solidified by logic. On the other hand, sensation fiction—and especially Collins's works—needs to retain authority over the reader in order for devices of suspense to work successfully. Collins collapses the authority of inductive reasoning by protesting rational detection.

Repeatedly in *The Law and the Lady*, and almost to excess, Valeria hears the same arguments against her attempts to resolve her husband's case, the rhetoric of protest functioning as the antagonists' engine of complacency. But here the resistance to detection is treated differently than in *The Moonstone*, for *The Law and the Lady* subjects this mysterious complacency to forensic examination. *The Moonstone* showcases silent witnesses, secrets, and the false interpretations of visual evidence. In contrast, *The Law and the Lady* gives a substantial voice to each key player, even including the law clerk who composed the proceedings of the court case. Rather than having too many silences, like *The Moonstone*, *The Law and the Lady* has too many voices. Valeria proves to have more stamina for detection than Sergeant Cuff has in *The Moonstone*, because she solves the case not merely by making assumptions and inferences based on visual evidence, but rather by actively piecing together fragmented and seemingly illogical clues from conversations. In doing this, she must decide consciously which voices speak the truth and which dissemble and deceive.

*The Law and the Lady* belongs to that group of Collins's novels written after the sensational 1860s; like the others, this novel has virtually been ignored critically, with scholars choosing instead to concentrate on the earlier works. Dupeyron-Lafay calls this gaping hole in Collins criticism an "incomprehensible absence" and argues that *The Law and the Lady* and "*I Say No*" (1884) are Collins's "two most interesting" later works (142). Collins's 1870s and 1880s novels lack the originality and innovation, some claim, of novels such as *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone*, which raised him suddenly from literary obscurity and made his name a household word. Although Robert Ashley wrote in 1952, that "If Sergeant Cuff is one of English's first detectives, Valeria Macallan is one of its first detectivettes" (122), few critics have capitalized on the significance of *The Law and the Lady*'s female detective. But some of Collins's readers, at least, are starting finally to acknowledge the literary singularity of this text among his later novels.

Until recently, *The Law and the Lady* was grouped awkwardly with Collins's less successful "social protest" or "thesis" novels, all written during the last two decades of his life. While some critics remark the elements of social protest in this text, they misunderstand the nature of the protest. Ashley writes of this problematic label:

Superficially, *The Law and the Lady* (1875) might seem to be a protest against the verdict of "not proven," by which a jury in Scotland declares its inability to decide the guilt or innocence of an accused person. But if Collins ever intended *The Law and the Lady* to be a problem novel, he became too absorbed in an exciting narrative to carry out his intention. The plot is not shaped to prove the general injustice of the Scotch verdict, but rather to create a sensational narrative of events growing out of a particular instance of a Scotch verdict. (121)

Some of the novel's remonstrance, though, cannot be accounted for by noting Collins's preoccupation with plot or by suggesting that the novel's primary aim is to fashion a narrative entirely from the originary point of a Scotch verdict. On the contrary, the Scotch verdict remains significant to the novel, and especially because it functions significantly in the preservation of mystery that is at the heart of *The Law and the Lady*.

The "Not Proven" decision of the jury creates an ambiguous line between guilt and innocence, which forces those who accept the Scotch verdict to admit the gray version of "justice" served to Eustace Macallan. Janice M. Allan explains the gray area as analogous to traditional law and order. She writes, "[Eustace] is therefore both/neither innocent and/nor guilty. [...] Written from the perspective of law and order, such a [trial] report would traditionally function as a revelatory reconstruction designed to produce order and meaning. Yet, as presented by Collins, it is another site of undecidability" (Allan 47). Rosanna Cavallaro supplements this idea, stating, "So far from representing law as an instrument of closure and understanding, Collins offers a procedural outcome—neither guilty nor innocent—that is intolerable for its indeterminacy" (9). Rather than simply voicing the injustice of the Scotch verdict through his heroine's narration, Collins instead voices her unwillingness to accept her peers' complacency regarding the "intolerable" verdict, thus performing what he practiced inadequately in *The Moonstone*. Rachel Verinder's silence in that novel temporarily consigns the detection of the crime to inadequate and misleading evidence. Valeria, though subjected to Eustace's departure (which reads much like Rachel's voiceless obstinacy), refuses to let the truth disappear with him. Collins rearranges the narration of knowledge in this novel to accommodate

two distinct types of voice (protest and determination), while arousing an atmosphere of suspense and anxiety to juxtapose the logic of detection against a female intuition that he aligns with gothic forms of detection. *The Law and the Lady*, though centered on a mysterious murder case, is a subversion of the stereotypical detective genre and is primarily a narrative about the ways in which traditional Victorian stereotypes prevent and protest detection. Collins articulates Victorian anxieties by voicing his characters with a rhetoric of protest against detecting anything about the disturbing nature of deformity and criminality. Collins's protagonist, Valeria, must use gothic detection in order to work around the protest and maneuver the fragments of evidence presented by Miserrimus Dexter, only switching to rational detection after exhausting Dexter as a useful source.

Valeria is determined to do what is necessary to regain the loyalty of her husband by proving him innocent. Those closest to her—including her husband—are the only obstacles in her way. Valeria's motives are clear, even though Collins feels as though he has to justify her actions in his prefaced "NOTE" (3). Valeria knows that saving her marriage depends on her success in solving the mystery, which hardly requires Collins's explanation. This "motive [of absolving a husband,] which was frequently [used] to prompt female sleuths into action" in detective fiction of the period "made [women's] incursions into non-domestic and possibly dubious male preserves respectable—especially if the women in question acted as unpaid enthusiasts rather than career detectives" (Craig and Cadogan 21). Preempting any rhetoric of protest among his



readers, Collins does not take any chances with Valeria's reputation and uses his preface to convince the readers of her good intentions, whether it is necessary or not.

But Collins does succeed in his "NOTE" at differentiating between the "actions of human beings" and the "laws of pure reason" (3), which mark distinct but "by no means interchangeable" boundaries according to Dupeyron-Lafay (143). As she writes, "Collins's 'Lady' would therefore embody the gothic (non-rational) side and 'the Law' would stand for detection (pure reason), with the introduction of the gender perspective so frequent in gothic studies" (143). The rhetoric of protest takes on rational qualities of "the Law" and belittles Valeria's ambitions as irrational. Meanwhile, the true needs of the reader remain unsatisfied. One naturally wants to know why everyone insists upon leaving the case "Not Proven." The language of Valeria's family and friends is filled with unexplained warnings and threats that strike a disturbing chord with the reader.

The rhetorical strategies of Eustace, his mother, Benjamin, and Major Fitz-David grow more insistent as the storyline progresses. Mrs. Macallan implores Valeria, "If you value your peace of mind, and the happiness of your life to come, abstain from attempting to know more than you know now" (43). This same message is reiterated, nearly "word for word," by Valeria's old family friend, Benjamin (47). He counsels, "Leave things as they are, my dear. In the interest of your own peace of mind, be satisfied with your husband's affection"—advice that comes from a man who has no knowledge of the truth and therefore has nothing obvious to hide from his young companion (47). Major Fitz-David completes the trio of protests with the warning, "If you have any doubt about your capacity to sustain a shock which will strike you to the soul, for God's sake

give up the idea of finding out about your husband's secret, at once and for ever!" (75).

These narratives of protest imply that the discovery of truth—not the commission of crime or the unusual Scotch verdict—is the worst possible scenario.

Collins combines rhetoric of panic *and* protest as Eustace commands Valeria to curb her curiosities. Eustace exclaims,

Valeria! if you ever discover what I am now keeping from your knowledge—from that moment you live a life of torture; your tranquility is gone. Your days will be days of terror; your nights will be full of horrid dreams [...] if you stir a step further in this matter there is an end of your happiness for the rest of your life! (54-5)

Kathleen O'Fallon writes of Eustace, "To his dismay, [Valeria] sets out to prove his innocence and clear his name" (235). To his *horror* his wife sets out, one might even say. When Valeria makes up her mind to exculpate her husband, the rhetoric of the other characters remains unjustifiably defensive. Even though Valeria hopes to save her husband and marriage, two respectable missions, she is dissuaded and discouraged by those she trusts. After relaying her plans to her uncle, Doctor Starkweather, he lashes out at Valeria: "you are conceited enough to think that you can succeed where the greatest lawyers in Scotland have failed. *They* couldn't prove this man's innocence, all working together. And *you* are going to prove it single-handed?" (120-1). The rhetoric of protest in each of these seemingly disparate situations reveals a pattern of Victorian anxiety that erupts around the risk of certainty. There was a sense of safety in the Scotch verdict: Eustace was kept alive by the "Not Proven" verdict, but nobody felt concerned about a different killer on the loose. "Not Proven" indicates a sense of inconsequentiality because of the complacency it invokes. Except for Valeria, the characters tend to prefer ignorance

to knowledge. Collins characterizes Valeria's only support group as antagonists with an agenda of preserving mystery. Their reasons center on not wanting to get to the bottom of the psychological abnormality that presumably underpins both criminality and deformity.

By voicing his characters with this rhetoric of protest, Collins's novel works actively to discourage detection, whatever its stated intention. The protests fall into two main categories. The first is against Valeria's practice as a detective. Valeria's friends and family remonstrate unsuccessfully against her unfeminine meddlings in a judicial murder case. Cavallaro states, "This investigation is against the express wishes of all—husband, family, friends—who see Valeria as precluded from that task by her status as a woman and a wife" (6). But while the gender dichotomy is problematized in this novel, the protests against Valeria's detective endeavors are less about gender roles and more about the disturbing nature of incriminating evidence and the disconcerting authority material evidence holds over conservative Victorian convictions. In traditional detection, the reasoning required to determine the innocence of the wrongly accused is indistinguishable from that required to determine guilt. At the same time, it is a logic that legitimates the crime as a premeditated, rational activity, regardless of its illegality. Valeria's participation in this type of reasoning is feared by her more conservative counterparts (including the law) because her methodology gives a voice to the crime, fragmented by the time that has passed.

The second category of protest deals with Valeria's "inappropriate" meetings with Miserrimus Dexter, who provides her with many of the questionable leads and clues even as he remains an exceptionally unusual figure: wildly charismatic, often insane, and

confined to a wheelchair because of a physical deformity. He is most often remembered as “a quintessentially gothic character, and a grotesque one” (Dupeyron-Lafay 145). Literally, Dexter is half of a man. His role in the murder case is shocking and subversive by any measure, but it is most significant because of Collins’s depiction of insanity in conjunction with deformity. The minor characters continuously discourage Valeria from dealing with a mentally unstable (and also physically unstable) deformed man. She is warned by her peers of the potential danger in visiting and befriending the mad Dexter, even though they know that he probably possesses the information Valeria needs to solve the mystery. One of the most interesting characters in all of Collins’s fiction is subjected to intense scrutiny from several quarters, particularly because “Dexter lacks the healthy body and sound mind so valued in Victorian culture” (Rosner 10). Dexter, “whose physical deformity would ordinarily signal his complete unreliability as a witness,” is Valeria’s primary source for information (Cavallaro 17). The warnings regarding his behavior center on his unpredictability—or, in forensic terms, the undetectability of his psyche. The deformity acts as a barrier between normal social interaction and the irrationality needed to unravel the mystery of how Sara Macallan died. Valeria must cross this barrier in order to obtain information from Dexter, because no other character will stop protesting long enough to help her prove Eustace’s innocence.

The antagonists can easily substitute rash judgments for viable excuses because the end desire is the same: to leave undetected what may disturb the status quo. The scientific advances of the nineteenth century were in many instances causing matters of religion and faith to be explained away. Like Shelley’s *Frankenstein*, detective fiction

had the opportunity to explain evil motive and bodily dysfunction. However, Collins's sensation fiction relies on older Gothic tropes to prevent the rationalizing effects of inductive reasoning about human abnormalities. Collins's rhetoric leaves shaky Victorian convictions intact while giving the criminal and the handicapped voices with which to speak.

The moral circumstance of Dexter's physical deformity is (potentially) too disturbing, so the antagonists argue that it is better for a young woman to leave him alone. They justify this bias against the physical indicators of his identity by arguing that Dexter's grotesque body signifies his underlying mental condition. When Valeria asks her friend Major Fitz-David to introduce her to Dexter, he exclaims, "[t]he man is mad! [...] In all England you could not have picked out a person more essentially unfit to be introduced to a lady—to a young lady especially—than Dexter. Have you heard of his horrible deformity?" (191). When Valeria answers in the affirmative, and remarks that "it doesn't daunt [her]," Fitz-David retorts, "[d]oesn't daunt you! My dear lady, the man's mind is as deformed as his body" (191). The major's answer implies confusion about which is more alarming—Dexter's crippled body, or his mental state. But clearly, though "The man is mad," the "horrible deformity" is why he is "essentially unfit" to meet Valeria. The psychological imbalance only serves to take attention away from the more likely reason Fitz-David wants Valeria to stay away from Dexter—his grotesque half-body. At one point, when Dexter fears that he may have given too much information to the woman detective, he joins his voice to the rhetoric of protest that pervades other characters' warnings. "There is no alternative left but to accept the facts as they are, and

to stir no further in the matter of the poisoning at Gleninch," he cries. "It is childish to dispute plain conclusions. You *must* give up" (296). Dexter's unease with his own participation in the detective case complicates the presentation of his own weaknesses. His awareness of Valeria's determination to gather clues about his deviant past influences him to protest along with the antagonists.

The presence of a murder case at the heart of this novel aligns Dexter's deformed body with a deep psychological, even criminal, abnormality—the kind of abnormality that prompts people to poisonings and suicides, and that the majority of society would rather not investigate too closely for the sake of an inconvenient Scotch verdict of "Not Proven." The language of Valeria's confidants suggests that there is much more at stake than her husband's honor. They protest throughout the novel, even before—and especially before, in Eustace's case—Valeria knows that he has been tried for murder. Furthermore, as Kathleen O'Fallon argues, Eustace is "surely one of the most completely worthless of [Collins's] men" (231-2), a remark that Michael Diamond echoes by writing, "Valeria is 'a far better man' than her feeble husband, Eustace. That she is so deeply in love with him is the least credible aspect of the novel" (216). Patricia Craig and Mary Cadogan call him a "spineless individual whose charm for Valeria and for women in general, though frequently mentioned in the narrative, is never quite convincing" (21). Collins's disinterest in Eustace's embarrassing function as a husband or domestic patriarch provides further evidence that the novel is not about him but rather the woman strong enough to love, fight for, and exonerate an undeserving man. Even more impressive is her ability to remain steadfast amid disapproval. She is continually

obstructed in her search for answers. The constructive tool of the rhetoric of protest, implemented by Collins into nearly every conversation in which Valeria takes part, impels Valeria to gothic detection while at the same time disturbing the reader's faith in rational detection.

The Victorian anxiety about pin-pointing a criminal's intentions, or worse yet, rationalizing them, compares to their unease around the disabled and deformed. Mary Rosner's criticism on this novel explains the foundation of Victorian concern about physical abnormalities. Relying on contemporary sources such as Charles Darwin, Henry Maudsley, and George Gould and Walter Pyle, Rosner details the nineteenth-century fascination with "monstrosit[ies]" and describes the deformed as the guinea pigs of both teratology and medical intrigue (9). Rosner writes, "[f]iction writers like Wilkie Collins took advantage of the monstrous as a site of multiple and disturbing responses" (10). Kate Flint agrees, stating, "Wilkie Collins's fiction repeatedly foregrounds a number of individuals who are challenged in their relationship to the material world," namely the disabled or deformed (153). Valeria's bizarre encounters with Dexter epitomize the theme of deformed layers in the text, because each of her conversations with him is riddled with true statements that are destabilized at the moment of their utterance by his psychological imbalance. Although Valeria does not stereotype Dexter for his handicap or mental aberration, she forces herself to be cautious and attentive in his company due to her general unease regarding his disclosures.

For Victorians, the potential actions of the cripple are like those of the criminal because physical mutation was still thought to be psychologically initiated. Flint argues

that Dexter's "physical limitations are to an extent compensated for by extraordinary mental capacities" as an artist, poet, and musician (156). While Flint makes a strong argument, she fails to acknowledge the depth of Dexter's mental illness, instead describing him as "imaginative," "a serious performer," and "no freak-show exhibit" (156). Collins distinctly associates Dexter with crazed antics, and they are a significant part of his characterization. Flint is correct, though, to note that Dexter's physical limitations are more problematic than his bouts of insanity. She writes, "Collins sets out to show that there is no clear dividing line between the disabled and the normal-bodied, however much appearances may suggest—sometimes startlingly—the contrary" (156). The antagonists protest Valeria's relationship with Dexter on account of his body, demarcating "normal" from "abnormal" and creating boundaries for Valeria to stay within.

The half-man's gruesome body, firmly beyond the accepted social boundaries for a young woman, is as disturbing as the man who may have killed his wife. Valeria's visits with Dexter and her participation in detection are intended for the same goal: to prove the innocence of her husband. Consequently, the antagonists' rhetoric of protest against these two actions is directly related, and the language indicates that the protest is an indulgence in ambiguity. The Scotch verdict—which they all strain to keep intact—in any other context would be a *lack* of verdict. Literally, Eustace's criminality is proven to be "Not Proven," so that the case closes by acknowledging formally the inadequacy of detection. Collins's text insists that the preservation of mystery, and as a result the reader's "willing suspension of disbelief," is consistently safer than solving the crime,



and it does so by making ambiguity function as a calculated response on the part of the authorities, a legally and socially legitimate refusal to get to the bottom of things. In this sense, Collins displays in his antagonists a socially authorized fear of detection that nearly equates to a fear of rationality. "The detective novel, as a literary genre," argues Cavallaro, "has traditionally presupposed a legal culture in which the guilty can be identified and their crimes satisfyingly punished. [...However,] Collins signals at the novel's outset that established legal institutions have failed" (1, 9). They have not been removed, though, from the forensic economy, which allows him to introduce characters who are complicit in this failure and unable or unwilling to envision other options.

Further evidence to support *The Law and the Lady's* preservation of mystery is the discovery that no crime occurred, since the cause of death was suicide. This act of self-murder not only problematizes the duality of guilt and innocence but also reiterates the ambiguity of murder. Eustace, the reader determines at the conclusion, is liable only *indirectly* for Sara's death, though he was the motivation. Never is the reader given the indication that Eustace is completely blameless (just as the Scotch verdict claimed, though for different reasons), though he is obviously not a murderer. Cavallaro posits that Collins's purpose "is to resolve ambiguity into certainty," but the novel does not support such a reading explicitly or implicitly. Instead, the purpose is to present the *attraction* of ambiguity over certainty, which mirrors the contemporary period's backlash against Darwinian rationalism and absolute classifications about man's origins (Larson 134). The characters surrounding the headstrong Valeria display deep-seeded fears of knowing too much, and they act on these fears by protesting adamantly. Although no one seems to

believe that Valeria's husband is guilty of the murder of his first wife, neither does anyone want to know *who is*. Ironically, neither *can* anyone know who is guilty without practicing gothic detection.

Valeria's unconventionality and willingness to approach the case using alternative methods gives her an edge over the attorneys. Valeria adopts gothic detective methods when dealing with Dexter because they are more successful than using inductive reasoning alone. Dupeyron-Lafay frames the novel's transition from detection to gothic this way:

Indeed, [Valeria] initially uses rational methods of investigation (observation, induction, piecing together scattered elements, etc.) and restores the causal chain single-handedly until chapter xxi. Then, the inquiry reaches a dead end and shifts into another dimension once Dexter enters the stage, actually becoming 'gothic' detection. Yet, though the non-rational takes over, the law and more 'orthodox' methods of detection remain in the background and move to the foreground again, especially in the final chapters. (142)

As a consequence, Valeria's strategies shift considerably during the course of the novel.

Drawing on earlier criticism of sensation fiction and female and domestic gothic in Victorian fiction, Dupeyron-Lufay constructs her argument in opposition to Tamar Heller's claim that Collins transformed "the gothic [...] into detective fiction," which implies that these are two wholly separate narrative modes (143).<sup>1</sup> Dupeyron-Lufay instead writes that though "[y]oking these apparently antinomic and incompatible terms—gothic and detection—leads to a form of oxymoron," *The Law and the Lady* depends on the "coexistence of gothic and detection as simultaneous and complementary forces" (143). Accordingly, Valeria as a woman under specific social constraints must necessarily use a mixture of rational and irrational methods to circumvent the rigidity of

the law. Drawing on Dupeyron-Lufay's foundation to this claim, the reader must accept that gothic detection, or a conscious regression from logic and reason back to faith in supernatural means or a "suspension of disbelief," is the only way Valeria can succeed where the law cannot.

The preservation of mystery in *The Law and the Lady* relies heavily on the amalgamation of Gothic themes and detective tropes as a unified "gothic detection" genre, but the mixture of these two forms of sensation within the plot has a deeper significance, too. Early in the mystery, Valeria voices her willingness to step out of convention to gather evidence. She reads the court case transcript meticulously ("Nice reading for a young woman!" Her uncle says, "You will be wanting a batch of nasty French novels next" [121]) and uses a step-by-step approach to answer three necessary questions about the death: "First Question—Did the Woman Die Poisoned?" (126), "Second Question—Who Poisoned Her?" (141), and "Third Question—What was his Motive?" (153). Even during her reading, though, Valeria admits her shortcomings when it comes to the logical approach, confessing her jealousy of Mrs. Beaully; impatience with Schoolcraft and Lorrie for using Eustace's private diary against him in court; and inexplicable partiality for Miserrimus Dexter, whose transcribed personality is charismatic, boisterous, and seemingly trustworthy. Valeria's intuitive biases kick in, instigating an irrational gravitation toward emotional sleuthing, which gives her the motivation to make discoveries through channels legal representatives would never use.

Valeria's choices speak volumes about her priorities and anxieties. The most significant characteristic of Collins's Gothic/detection combination is the self-policing

Valeria must exercise to maintain control of both approaches. Because of the favorable depiction of Dexter in the court transcript, Valeria chooses—amid protests from her family and friends—to visit him and ask him about the case. Even after meeting him for the first time and witnessing his wild interpretations of Napoleon, Shakespeare, and Nelson, Valeria shocks Mrs. Macallan by expressing her wishes to see him again (206, 222). Dexter's romantic fantasies translate into strength and imagination in Valeria's mind. "I believe he really can be of use to me," she declares to her mother-in-law (222). Mrs. Macallan, though, understands Valeria's inexperience with detective work and realizes that, rather than interviewing Dexter as a man of the law would, Valeria intends to "take him into [her] confidence," relying on circumstantial evidence and intuition rather than the logic of the law (222). Valeria divulges her feelings about visiting Dexter again, saying, "I dare say it is a risk; but I must run risks. I know I am not prudent; but prudence won't help a woman in my position, with my end to gain" (222). By admitting these anxieties and dismissing them, Valeria shifts firmly from orthodox legal practice to gothic detection. The high stakes of losing her marriage motivate her to act intuitively rather than rationally, and to act also impulsively, spontaneously, and passionately. "To help her husband," Craig and Cadogan state, "Valeria braves all this, and the hideousness of Dexter's house, more than once" (22). Valeria's self-policing, then, comes in a non-traditional form; she must police herself against a natural unease about her methods.

At their second meeting, Dexter takes advantage of Valeria's emotional investment in the case, projecting culpability onto Mrs. Beaulieu as soon as he discovers Valeria's jealousy of the beautiful woman (250-1). From the excitement of naming a

suspect, Dexter announces, “My brains are beginning to boil again in my head!” confirming Valeria’s fears about his instable mental state (259). “The old madness seized on him again,” Valeria narrates, “I made for the door, to secure my retreat in case of necessity” (259). Valeria purposely puts herself in a certainly disgraceful and potentially dangerous situation to find out about the suspected murderer, which goes against traditional detective themes in literature. Sidney Poger and Tony Magistrate differentiate between horror and detective tropes, and *The Law and the Lady* fits more clearly in the former category in their scheme because of Valeria’s lack of control over the situation and Dexter’s unpredictable spells. They write:

[In detection, n]o matter how horrible the crime, the detective is there to take charge of the situation. [...In horror], unlike the women who dominated Gothic romance novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the contemporary female must survive the rampaging monster largely without hope of a male rescuer. (141, 146)

Based on this pattern of horror versus detection in literature, Collins’s creation of danger for Valeria is both modern and horrific. Valeria “must survive” her meetings with Dexter “largely without hope of a male rescuer”—specifically her husband, the man *she* must rescue from an unfair verdict.

Although Valeria’s “indictment” of Mrs. Beauly is short-lived (251), the irrationality of her detective work—an investigation based on passion rather than reason—allows the young woman to make surprising discoveries left undetected by Eustace’s attorneys and the Scottish police. Valeria comes to realize the value of information about the poisonings and the people staying at Gleninch at the time of Sara’s death as she continues to mull over her visits with Dexter to piece together her

memories—and his—as evidence. Since the facts do not speak for themselves and cannot be determined from deductive reasoning, and since inductive reasoning puts unnatural constraints on her female intuition, Valeria moves fluidly between rational and gothic detection, using whichever method suits her needs at the time. In *The Law and the Lady*, gothic detection is the only avenue to some of the most deeply hidden clues (specifically Sara's concealed suicide letter, torn to pieces long ago and buried in the dust heap), which is what requires Valeria to continue her relationship with Dexter. This again relates to the horror genre, because “if the victim did not proceed into looking where he or she should not, then the monster might never have been released in the first place” (Poger and Magistrale 148). One can refer to Valeria as both the detective and the victim because of the situations into which she willingly puts herself. Essentially, she allows herself to be victimized for the sake of gathering evidence to save her husband. Despite her antagonists' rhetoric of protest, Valeria *must* break the rules of conventional detective practice or the case can never be solved and her marriage will be over.

Through the course of the novel, Dexter's mental capacity weakens. Unable to deal healthily with the death of his beloved Sara and trapped inside a grotesque body and dilapidated house, Dexter's mental function fragments into visions, stories, dramatic interpretations, and fleeting thoughts about the past. But even during this fragmentation, Valeria holds onto hope that Dexter will hold the key to detection. That is, she holds onto this hope until she discovers that Dexter really *did* hold the key—the physical key—that unlocked Sara's sickroom, which places the blame more securely on him than on anyone else and scares Valeria from visiting him alone again. Once the “monster” is released,

Valeria retreats from the gothic detective practices, even relinquishing the case temporarily to Mr. Playmore and Benjamin.

Collins's antagonistic characters represent both a gender bias and a complete, if unfounded, trust in the law. Valeria, though, shows throughout the text that a woman in love can accomplish larger feats than any government. One of the most satisfying passages in the novel comes when the attorney finally realizes this. Awed at the amount of information Valeria has gleaned from Dexter, Playmore writes to pose the benefits (and necessary new risks) of another round of unconventionality. He states, "in all human likelihood you prove your husband's innocence by the discovery of the truth," but "not even with your reward in view, can I find it in my conscience to advise you to risk what you must risk, if you see Miserrimus Dexter again" (316). The discovery depends not on honest questioning and legal practices, but on Valeria's resurgence into gothic detection. Playmore writes,

You have innocently aroused in Miserrimus Dexter a feeling towards you [...] which has evidently had its effect on Dexter's morbid mind. [...] let me only remind you that he has shown himself (as a consequence of your influence over him) to be incapable [...] of thinking before he speaks, while he is in your presence. [...] it is highly probable, that he may betray himself far more seriously than he has betrayed himself yet, if you give him the opportunity. (316)

Valeria ignores Playmore's warnings, even though she is well acquainted with the danger involved in meeting Dexter for more information. "I did not possess Mr. Playmore's judicial mind," she writes in her journal, "[m]y resolution [...] to see Miserrimus Dexter again, was settled before I had read his letter to the end" (317). With one rash decision, Valeria employs gothic detective practices one last time to try to save Eustace.

To the horror of her peers (especially Benjamin) Valeria uses Dexter's demented stream-of-consciousness narratives to piece together the clues of Sara's death. Dexter's fragmented story acts as one of many texts in the novel that must be deciphered. His diseased mind causes his narratives to read as disturbing and mutilated texts. During one of his nonsensical narratives, Valeria wonders, "[w]as [Dexter] unconsciously pursuing his faint and fragmentary recollections of a past time at Gleninch, under the delusion that he was going on with the story?" (344). She continues, "[w]as the truth, the dreadful truth, glimmering on me dimly, through the awful shadow cast before it by the advancing eclipse of the brain?" (344). Dexter's final words, which "seemed to set interpretation at defiance," turn into the evidence that will eventually lead to the solution once logic is applied (349). Although Benjamin, Mr. Playmore, and a team of employees end up piecing together the hidden suicide letter at Gleninch (which absolves Eustace from murder but not responsibility), leaving Valeria awaiting news anxiously at home in England, they are indebted to her intuition in solving the case and credit her for the discoveries made. Once Dexter's text is transcribed and deciphered, his elevated importance to the detection drops out of the novel, as do the gothic customs needed to piece together an irrational text.

In *The Law and the Lady*, Valeria sidesteps traditional legal conventions and creates her own hybrid blend of instinct and logic, which pairs womanly persuasion and intelligence with faith in the paranormal circumstances surrounding the "murder" case. Valeria redefines detection to suit her own needs in order to solve the mystery *outside* of the rigid borders of rationality, but within reaching distance of induction when she needs



the firmer guidance of the law. Because of the fractured nature of this case (with multiple mysteries and dead ends interwoven), Valeria discovers that gothic detection only goes so far; the case cannot be solved entirely through gothic means. A logical process of critical thinking must be applied to the gothic-derived evidence once it is available. "What I suffered," Valeria writes, "what Eustace thought of me, does not matter. Nothing matters now but the facts" (386). This is a severe transition from her earlier refusal to think logically about witnesses, evidence, or her safety.

Although Valeria solves the case, the conclusion of the novel presents more questions than answers about the disturbing nature of evidence. Even after Sara's suicide by arsenic has been confessed through her farewell letter, Mr. Playmore and Eustace's mother continue to protest. Playmore insists that "the last person living who ought [...] to be allowed to see" the suicide letter is Eustace (382). After hearing protests for so long throughout the case, Valeria finally adopts this same rhetoric for herself, suddenly scared to death of the results of her own detective work. It is, for Valeria, an agonizing paradox:

I had devoted my life to the attainment of one object; and that object I had gathered. [...] There, on the table before me, lay the triumphant vindication of my husband's innocence; and, in mercy to him, in mercy to the memory of his dear wife, my one hope was that he might never see it! My one desire was to hide it from the public view! (395)

Valeria must set aside her hope of rectifying the "Not Proven" verdict in order to extract herself from the dreadful suggestions of the evidence. Her husband, her foremost concern in the text, had behaved with an indifference that caused his first wife to kill herself. Although the suicide acquits Eustace from a legal obligation regarding the death, the apparent motivations of the suicide are directed clearly at Valeria's husband. Valeria

implores the reader to “think kindly of Eustace, for [her] sake,” but the reader is never convinced entirely that Valeria can set aside the contents of the letter mentally, even if she does so physically (413). Eustace is given the choice of whether to read the letter, but it is not an objective choice; Valeria convinces him that “[he will] be acting mercifully and tenderly towards the memory of [his late] wife,” and “making some little atonement for any pain that [he] may have caused her to suffer in her lifetime” (412). There can be no atonement, since Sara died a miserable, lonely death, and Valeria’s pretenses about any such reparation speak boldly about her marital anxieties. The wife, newly reunited with the father of her newborn son, is consumed solely with hiding the implicit blame. She feels responsible for the outcome of the case (and, essentially, for concealing the legal allegations), since it was she who—despite earnest protest—collected the scattered evidence and raised the truth from the fragments.

Miserrimus Dexter’s death at the conclusion of the narrative has equally disturbing implications, and the reader is obliged to look away from the deformed man’s pain just as Valeria does, since she is absent at the time of his death (407). She pities him, as the narrative admits many times, but she is afraid of the depths of his physical and mental abnormalities. “So that strange and many-sided life,” she muses, “with its guilt and its misery, its fitful flashes of poetry and humour, its fantastic gaiety, cruelty, and vanity—ran its destined course, and faded out like a dream!” (407). By relegating Dexter’s life to a dream, she confines the senselessness of Dexter’s life to a safe place. Because dreams are not entirely interpretable, she can catalog the insanity as a psychological breakdown rather than as an acceptable form of daily living. During his

life, Valeria is forced to endure Dexter's deformity and dementia in order to gather evidence stored away in Dexter's fuzzy memory, but she cannot bear his company—or transcribe his gothic disability—a moment longer than necessary.

In order to make sense of these Victorian anxieties about criminality and deformity, Collins made conscious decisions about preserving the mystery at the conclusion of the novel. Dexter is the only character who knows the whole story of Sara's death, but he is silenced long before that text is pieced together again with men's glue and tools. Even after part of his spoken narrative is deciphered, Valeria must fill in the incomprehensible portions with assumptions. Likewise, after Sara's suicide letter is reconstructed, Benjamin and Mr. Playmore must use prior clues to figure out the context and its meaning, filling in holes "with what appeared to be the meaning of the writer" (390). Everything "detected" by Valeria and her helpers could have been unveiled by Dexter, had his illness not obstructed his narratives, or had Valeria been willing to continue to sift through the disconcerting stories. Collins gestures to a modern view of psychology in his expression that there are some things one cannot know. Although the reader presumes Dexter possessed all of the evidence for the entire case, Collins is *not willing* to disclose Dexter's entire narrative. The depths of Dexter's disabilities and emotions are too disturbing to relate in their entirety. The nature of the novel's ending is so problematic and unfinished that Collins must have steered deliberately away from finality in order to preserve his audience's tacit protest against disturbing information.

In "The Guilty Vicarage," W. H. Auden writes, "[i]n the detective story the audience does not know the truth at all; one of the actors—the murderer—does; and the

detective, of [her] own free will, discovers and reveals what the murderer, of [her] own free will, tries to conceal” (401). Collins subverts these expected detective tropes in *The Law and the Lady*. The murderer (Sara) does not try to conceal her death, but rather writes to explain it in very vivid language. It is the detective who must conceal what the murderer has revealed about herself. Collins’s exploration of these deviances signifies his uneasiness regarding the material that might be detected.

*The Law and the Lady* abandons gothic detection at its conclusion in favor of the safety of inductive reasoning—a gesture toward rationality that set the stage for Doyle and his Sherlock Holmes and established for detective literature “a characteristic atmosphere and narrative pattern” (Craig and Cadogan 12). Before these conventions were established, however, Collins used this genre, and more specifically this text, to work through a deep discomfort with the origins of disability and criminality, treating them almost indistinguishably throughout a majority of the narrative. The insistent push for answers meets its end with ample evidence to solve the case, but even the solution is trivialized for the sake of preserving the unknown and the comfort therein.

Unlike in *The Moonstone* where problematic visual interpretations render detection nearly impossible, the rhetoric of protest in *The Law and the Lady* combats not the goal of detection but rather the finality of detection. It is not that these characters do not want justice to be served; they simply fear that the truth about criminals is worse than suspicion of them. Likewise, there is something distinctly terrifying about understanding twisted minds or bodies—much better not to know, to leave them at the margins of hermeneutic work. The preservation of mystery in *The Law and the Lady* allows Collins

to preserve the sanctity of Victorian unrest concerning the unknown realm of abnormality. Though the method of inquiry transfers from gothic detection to rational detection near the novel's end, the Gothic revival is ever apparent in the conclusion. The essence of Collins's revival of Gothic tropes is firmly to assert that there are places inquiry should not go and spaces detection cannot penetrate. Collins's rhetoric of protest against detection, then, finds its greatest challenge in the fact-obsessed Victorian readers, to whom he writes, "if you ever discover what I am now keeping from your knowledge—from that moment you live a life of torture" (54).

Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dupeyron-Lufay draws from Tamar Heller's *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (1992); Alison Milbank's *Daughters of the House: Modes of the Gothic in Victorian Fiction* (1992), Julian Wolfreys's and Ruth Robbins's collection *Victorian Gothic: Literary and Cultural Manifestations in the Nineteenth Century* (2000), and Winifred Hughes's *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (1980).

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