

MASOCHISTIC PLEASURES OF DETECTION
IN THE SENSATION NOVELS OF WILKIE COLLINS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes and accounts for the mixed emotional responses to three Wilkie Collins novels: *The Dead Secret* (1857), *The Woman in White* (1860), and *The Law and the Lady* (1875). Contemporary reviews of these novels, in addition to Collins's comments on the reception of his works, suggest that these novels elicited both positive and negative emotions in readers who took a "masochistic" pleasure in reading frustrating and often terrifying texts. What makes reading Collins's novels "masochistic" is not simply the author's incorporation of the sublime aesthetic and a domesticated version of the gothic; detection is masochistic because, in the role of detective, the reader is placed simultaneously in the uncomfortable and even untenable position of disciplinarian (ferreting out secrets and restoring moral order) and of transgressor (reading secret diaries, adopting disguises, eavesdropping, and spying). Collins's novels frequently portray scenes of masochistic reading, in which the characters serve as models for the actual reader of the novel. Collins's characters, faced with the impossibilities of detection or interpretation resulting from the instability of text, mimic the reader's own frustrating interpretive activities. Detection that relies on the text as dependable evidence becomes a psychologically painful activity when texts do not open themselves up to easy interpretation.

In addition to the mixed emotional responses produced by the acts of detection in the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins, the act of reading novels generally (and the sensation novel in particular) has produced strong emotional responses in both literary critics and non-literary observers. Because of critics' insistence on the taboo nature of these texts, some readers might well have experienced feelings of shame. I shall argue that the historical context of sensation novel adds an additionally masochistic "layer" or dimension to the reading of these novels. If sensation novels were considered guilty pleasures in of themselves, separate from the guilty

pleasures of detection and interpretation of private secrets and criminal activities within the narratives, the guilty pleasure of reading sensation novels would reinforce the reader's position as transgressor, in addition to his or her position as snooping amateur detective.

My project engages existing scholarly works while approaching the subject of emotional responses to literary interpretation (mimicked by the detection in which the novels' characters are engaged), and while looking at the affective combination of pleasure, terror, anticipation, and guilt, and its role in the popularity of Collins's novels. This study employs contemporary and historical theories of emotion and masochism as well as scholarship on detective fiction to explain why detection in Collins's novels is masochistically pleasurable for both readers and characters.

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my love Aaron, my sister Lindsay, and my mother. Without their unfailing confidence, support, and enthusiasm, the completion of this project would not have been possible.

CHAPTER ONE:

INTRODUCTION

Of the three successive waves of gothic literature, only the first (1790s–1820s) and the last (1890s) are characterized by exotic, bizarre and remote settings, which are safely removed from the commonplace events of readers' everyday lives. During the second wave, writers such as Wilkie Collins used a different approach and effectively created the new gothic sub-genre of the sensation novel, in which the gothic invades the homely sphere of the realist or domestic novel.¹ Patrick Brantlinger defines the sensation novel as “a minor subgenre of British fiction that flourished in the 1860s,” which focused on crime and detection in “apparently proper . . . domestic settings” (“What” 1). Victorian critics used the word *sensation* to connote “some extraordinary shock or thrill to the reader’s nervous system” (Brantlinger, *Reading* 143).² Authors included Wilkie Collins, Elizabeth Braddon, Ellen Wood, and Rhoda Broughton (among others); they were fortunate enough to create some of the “best selling novels of the entire nineteenth century” (Pykett, *Sensation Novel* 5).

This study analyzes and accounts for the mixed emotional responses to three Wilkie Collins novels: *The Dead Secret* (1857), *The Woman in White* (1860), and *The Law and the Lady* (1875). Contemporary reviews of these novels, in addition to Collins’s comments on the reception of his works, suggest that these novels elicited both positive and negative emotions in readers who took a “masochistic” pleasure in reading frustrating and often terrifying texts.³ What makes reading Collins’s novels “masochistic” is not simply his incorporation of the sublime aesthetic and a domesticated version of the gothic; detection is masochistic because, in the role of detective, the reader is placed simultaneously in the uncomfortable and even untenable position of disciplinarian (ferreting out secrets and restoring moral order) and of transgressor (reading secret

diaries, adopting disguises, eavesdropping, and spying). Collins's novels frequently portray scenes of masochistic reading, in which the characters serve as models for the actual reader of the novel. Collins's characters, faced with the impossibilities of detection or interpretation resulting from the instability of text, mimic the reader's own frustrating interpretive activities. Detection that relies on the text as dependable evidence becomes a psychologically painful activity when texts reveal themselves to be ambiguous. Collins manipulates readers' emotional responses to entrap his readers into solving mysteries which are not always solvable.⁴

In addition to the mixed emotional responses produced by the acts of detection in the sensation novels of Wilkie Collins, the act of reading novels generally (and the sensation novel in particular) has produced strong emotional responses in both literary critics and non-literary observers.⁵ Those who were critical of the sensation novel consisted of well-known public figures and moralists (including the Archbishop of York), medical experts (including Alexander Bain), and literary critics (including Margaret Oliphant).⁶ In newspapers, magazines, books, and public speeches, these and other individuals often cited conventional Victorian gender ideology by arguing that women (the sensation genre's assumed audience) in particular were highly susceptible to emotional stimuli, and that such reading was both dangerous and shameful. Because of critics' insistence on the taboo nature of these texts, some readers might well have experienced feelings of shame. I shall argue that the historical context of sensation novel adds an additionally masochistic "layer" or dimension to the reading of these novels. If sensation novels were considered guilty pleasures in and of themselves, separate from the guilty pleasures of detection and interpretation of private secrets and criminal activities within the narratives, the guilty pleasure of reading sensation novels would reinforce the reader's position as transgressor, in addition to his or her position as snooping amateur detective.

Contemporary scholarship on masochism in literature and on the development of the detective story provides the conceptual framework through which one can address the popularity of Collins's novels in the face of widespread criticism of the sensation genre. Given the continuing popularity of the gothic, one might argue that the shame or guilt associated with reading gothic or sensation novels becomes enjoyable in and of itself. Perhaps because of critics' insistence on the immorality of such reading, guilt is such an integral part of the reading experience that it is a pleasurable sensation which makes novels more popular, not less.⁷

There has been a great deal of recent scholarly interest in the history and reception of gothic and sensation novels and in the figure of the woman reader, but there have been few studies that position the processes of detection and interpretive reading as inherently masochistic.⁸ My project engages existing scholarly works while approaching the subject of emotional responses to literary interpretation (mimicked by the detection in which the novel's characters are engaged), and while looking at the affective combination of pleasure, terror, anticipation, and guilt, and its role in the popularity of Collins's novels. This study employs contemporary and historical theories of emotion and masochism as well as scholarship on detective fiction to explain why detection in Collins's novels is masochistically pleasurable for both readers and characters.

In this introductory chapter, I shall outline the theoretical framework of my analysis of three Wilkie Collins novels—*The Dead Secret*, *The Woman in White*, and *The Law and the Lady*—looking at scholarship on masochism, the sublime, the uncanny, and detective fiction. I shall then provide the historical context for my project, in which I shall consider theories of emotion, their relation to female readership, and their relation to the reception of gothic novels from the mid-eighteenth century to the late-nineteenth century. Finally, I shall situate Wilkie Collins's work within this wider theoretical context by examining how Collins reinforces his reader's

sense of anxiety and guilt over consuming taboo texts by submitting his readers to the guilty pleasures of detection and interpretation of private secrets and criminal activities within the narratives, as well as the psychologically painful activity of attempting to interpret the uninterpretable.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines masochism as “the urge to derive pleasure . . . from one’s own pain or humiliation; the pursuit of such pleasure,” or the “deliberate pursuit of or enthusiasm for an activity that appears to be painful, frustrating, or tedious.” What is unknown or uncertain provokes anxiety but also sustains the reader’s interest: “[R]eaders of suspenseful plots take pleasure in the very anxiety that events to come may not fit their expectations or fulfill their desires” (Levine 9). If readers are able to derive pleasure from fearful, frustrating, and possibly shameful experiences (if, as I suggest, readers occupy the positions of both transgressor and disciplinarian), we might argue that, by reading terrifying and suspenseful narratives, readers gratify themselves through self-administered literary suffering.

Many scholarly definitions and explorations of masochistic phenomena are based in a psychoanalytic framework, such as the works of Sigmund Freud, Jessica Benjamin, Shirley Panken, and Michelle Massé. Although these works are important to any study of masochism in general, they are less relevant for my project because they tend to view masochism mainly as a sexual practice, based largely on Freud’s early definition of masochism as “sadism turned round upon the self, which serves as surrogate for the sexual partner” (Panken 18). Freud’s later work on masochism in his essay “The Economic Problem of Masochism” is more relevant. His development of the category of “moral masochism,” which he defines as a “norm of behaviour” rather than a strictly sexual practice (275), maintains the association between guilt and punishment which is central to Freud’s conception of masochism without insisting on sex and

sexuality.⁹ Many feminist psychoanalytic analyses do not move beyond their focus on women as masochistic subjects.¹⁰ While I am interested in the role of the woman reader, I do not want to use scholarly work on masochism as a way of approaching Collins's texts from a feminist perspective; I want to focus instead on how detection and interpretation in and of sensation novels is emotionally masochistic for readers of both genders.

Anna Jones's article on masochism in Wilkie Collins's *No Name* is especially useful because it explores masochism in relation to *Victorian* readers. Her conception of the "sensation reader . . . does not depend on describing an imaginary reader's 'response' to the novel, but in defining an 'ideal' reader who is *posited* by the text itself" (196-197). According to her description, such an ideal Victorian reader is familiar both with conventional Victorian gender ideology and with "questions of Woman's agency and rights"; s/he occupies a somewhat tenuous position because although s/he is "well-conditioned to respond to the affective stimuli of the sensation novel" s/he is "deeply suspicious" of the sensation genre (197). This reader (as Jones suggests) is both "well-disciplined and deviant" in his or her enjoyment and distrust of the sensation novel (196), and thus prone to masochistic sentiments related to the guilty pleasures of sensational reading. In my analysis of Collins's manipulation of readers' responses, I shall be imagining a similar "ideal reader," whose characteristics and preferences will be additionally informed by contemporary reviews of Collins's novels and by Collins's own comments on his readers. Jones's methodology, centred on her notion of an "ideal reader," opens a space for the inclusion of some key concepts from reader-response theory without necessitating a catalogue of evidence of actual readers' responses.¹¹

Jones also argues that all narratives are masochistic to some degree: "at some level any act of reading implies a relinquishing of control to the text. To pick up a novel and read is to consent

to submit to its affective power and to collaborate in the production of our selves as disciplined reading subjects” (210). Her essay emphasizes how authors use “rhetorical framing,” or narrative, to control readers’ emotional responses. As I shall argue, it is in part Collins’s “rhetorical framing” that makes reading his sensation novels masochistic.

The notion that emotion or affect can function as a method of directing readers’ responses to texts is central to my argument. In her study of the “feminist politics of affect” (1), Ann Cvetkovich argues that readers of sensation novels such as *The Woman in White* “who are excited by the sensational lure of [the novels’] mysteries are provided with the experiences of affect that are ultimately regulated and controlled” (7). Cvetkovich suggests that the emotional responses evoked by sensation novels are “safe” because they are controlled by the author. I shall argue that it is precisely the author’s assumed control over readers’ emotions that makes the texts masochistic. Incorporating Cvetkovich’s notion of affective regulation, Jones defines affect as “the control a novel exerts over its reader—the means by which the reader’s emotions and sympathies are ‘produced, regulated, and controlled’ by the text” (205). Jones emphasizes that narrative control of readerly anticipation is closely connected with masochism, which Gilles Deleuze defines as “a state of waiting” (Jones 206). The rhetorical framing of the text forces readers into this “state of waiting,” in which they experience the excitement of the unravelling mystery, and the painful suspense of waiting for it to unfold.

Anticipation plays a key role in masochistic acts of reading. In her discussion of psychologist Theodor Reik’s theories, Panken states that “the masochist does not accept punishment and humiliation but rather anticipates them” (40). A sensation novel reader anticipates both the pleasurable resolution of the mystery and the torturous suspense of the text’s rhetorical framing. In *Serious Pleasures of Suspense*, Caroline Levine emphasizes the “anxious delay between the

excitement of conjecture and the appearance of more certain knowledge,” which functions in Victorian literature (6). Although Levine implies that suspense is not masochistic by linking it to “joy” rather than “torture” (9), it is this “anxious delay” which makes anticipation masochistic. It is my argument that suspense, or *anticipation*, in Collins’s novels is both torturous and joyful, and therefore masochistic.

Freud emphasizes the connection between transgression and its punishment by associating masochism with “a sense of guilt” (“Masochism” 277); the “torture” of masochism functions as punishment for the (pleasurable, transgressive) crimes of the masochist. Masochism is “a need which is satisfied by punishment and suffering,” and this need is based on the “consciousness of guilt” and the “anxiety” of the ego (Freud 282, 280). Ellen Rosenman arrives at a similar conclusion when she defines masochism as “a negotiating tool in which pain is not the price of a chosen desire that violates a moral or ideological norm. The masochist pursues a forbidden pleasure or agency but arranges to suffer for it, and therefore maintains moral credibility. Suffering may function not only as a strategy but as a ruse, a cover for pleasure or power” (23-24). In this study, I want to connect the concept of suffering as a “cover for pleasure or power” with reluctant performances of eavesdropping, snooping, and spying by characters acting as detectives, and with the reader’s own transgressive complicity. Nick Mansfield makes an analogous connection between anticipation and guilt in his analysis of Reik’s work on masochism. Since masochism involves forbidden pleasures and the anticipation of punishment, Mansfield argues that “masochism, therefore, is all about the control of anticipation” (25).

Mansfield’s analysis of masochism draws a strong connection between masochism and the sublime, both of which associate pleasure with pain. Mansfield argues that the sublime “is not possible” without masochism, and vice versa: “masochism and the sublime depend upon and

condition one another. The sublime produces a masochistic experience for the subject, and the subject can only live out the impossibilities of masochism in the sublime” (29, 31).

If, as Mansfield suggests, a study of masochism is impossible without a consideration of the sublime, we must consider briefly Burke’s work on the sublime, one of several pre-Victorian attempts to explain why negative emotional responses provide a pleasurable experience for readers.¹² In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke argues that when we read, we achieve sensations of fear and pleasure through sympathetic characters and through the evocative power of words: “we take an extraordinary part in the passions of others . . . we are easily affected and brought into sympathy by any tokens which are shewn of them; and there are no tokens which can express all the circumstances of most passions so fully as words” (158).¹³ Elsewhere, he explains the strange combination of fear and pleasure produced by certain kinds of reading: “I conceive we must have a delight or pleasure of some species or other in contemplating [the misfortunes and pains of others]” (42). Although Burke does not look at a particularly wide array of emotional responses to language and literature, his *Philosophical Enquiry* represents an early attempt to account for *mixed emotional responses to literature*, which lie at the heart of this project.¹⁴

In his article “Gothic Sublimity,” David B. Morris argues that Burke’s eighteenth-century theory of the sublime is inadequate when applied to the gothic genre, since Burke’s definition of terror is based on “a narrow, mechanical account of bodily processes” (301). He suggests that Burke’s *Philosophical Enquiry* should be supplemented by Sigmund Freud’s work on the uncanny, in which terror has a psychological and emotional component in addition to its physical manifestations. Although Burke’s descriptions of “bodily processes” are relevant to a study of

reader responses to the sensation novel, Morris's argument that Freud's "The Uncanny" is an essential supplement to Burke's work is persuasive.

Burke does not examine the function of suspense or anticipation (emotional responses which are at play in my analysis of masochistic reading), and so Freud's work on the uncanny does help to explain the appeal of suspense. At the outset of his treatise, Freud argues that the uncanny constitutes "that species of the frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (620). Freud's essay on the uncanny is particularly useful for any study of the sensation novel, in which the domestic or homely (*heimlich*) setting becomes "unhomely" (*unheimlich*), or uncanny, as secret actions are revealed to the reader which should have remained hidden. The domestic sphere of sensation novels is an uncanny space—something familiar which becomes frightening when associated with intrigue and crime.

Freud notes that the term "uncanny" sometimes denotes "[c]oncealed, kept from sight" (622). As Levine argues in *The Serious Pleasures of Suspense*, many Victorian novels "flaunt their secrets" (2), and sensation novels in particular were known as "novels with a secret." By "[c]onspicuously withholding crucial pieces of knowledge," such texts are sure to "invite the ravenous readerly curiosity we call 'suspense'" (2). In addition to withholding knowledge, authors of uncanny narratives have what Freud (referring to story-tellers in general) describes as "a peculiarly directive power over us," especially when they create a narrator who "pretends to move in the world of common reality. In this case he [i.e. the author] accepts as well all the conditions operating to produce uncanny feelings in real life; and . . . he can even increase his effect and multiply it far beyond what could happen in reality, by bringing about events which never or very rarely happen in fact" ("Uncanny" 641). Collins's novels self-consciously occupy this space of "uncanny" realism; for instance, the anonymous reviewer of *The Woman in White*

in the *Saturday Review* notes that Collins “interweaves with mystery incident just sufficiently probable not to be extravagant” (Bachman & Cox 629). Incorporating Freud’s and Levine’s statements, I want to suggest that the emotional and/or psychological “masochism” involving the enjoyment of texts whose rhetorical framing is based on readerly anticipation might be regarded as a submission to the narrative and affective power of the author.

In *The Delights of Terror*, Heller expands on Freud’s work by investigating why uncanny texts are so appealing; since the sensation novel falls largely under the uncanny genre (according to Tzvetan Todorov’s definition), Heller’s examination of the uncanny helps to evaluate the appeal of sensation fiction.¹⁵ He devises his own set of sub-genre categories, based largely on Todorov’s definitions in *The Fantastic*, as well as on his own definitions of horror and terror: “uncanny horror stories; horror thrillers; and terror fantasies” (10). According to Heller’s arrangement, Collins’s sensation novels tend to fall under the category of “uncanny horror stories,” which “offer the reader the opportunity to pretend to experience extreme mental and physical states by identifying with characters who undergo such experiences. Stories of this type form part, though not necessarily all, of Todorov’s uncanny genre” (10). However, I would argue that not all the “extreme mental and physical states” experienced by the reader are imaginary and based solely on the reader’s identification with the characters in the novel. Because Collins’s novels place his readers in the uncomfortable and insecure position of detective, interpreting texts which reveal themselves to be fallible and even deceitful, the mental anguish his readers experience is at least partly real. Heller suggests that “the most frightening . . . tales turn the screw just a little, entangling the implied reader in the ambiguities and hesitations that extend beyond the end of the reading of the text” (13). Collins “turn[s] the

screw” with his readers, not by leading them to hesitate between uncanny and marvelous interpretations of his narrative, but by inviting them to interpret the un-interpretable.

My definition of masochism concerns mixed emotional responses to texts and to the interpretation of texts; reader-response theory’s concepts of the “implied reader” and the “actualization” of text are thus useful for my project. Terry Heller’s methodology is based largely on the reader-response theories of Roman Ingarden and Wolfgang Iser; it incorporates the concept of the implied reader and his or her “actualization” (Iser 106) of narrative, in which the interaction between the author’s creation and the reader’s reception make up the *text*. What interests me are Wilkie Collins’s efforts to create “a schematized set of instructions” within the text for the actualization or interpretation of the work as a whole (Heller 1).

Jones’s “ideal [sensation] reader” is similar to Iser’s concept of the “implied reader,” which Heller adopts for his study of the Fantastic: “The text includes instructions for the creation of the appropriate reader for that text . . . The implied reader comes into being in the process of filling gaps, of making connections between the always underdetermined presented elements” (Heller 4). In the context of uncanny and/or fantastic genres, the implied reader becomes an *entrapped* reader, “suspended between alternate readings” (195). Collins structures his narratives so that the “sensation reader” (as described by Jones) becomes an entrapped reader, caught in the ambiguities of the texts within the novels, and of the novels themselves. A sensation novel is arguably “best” when the reader is constantly anticipating what will happen next, and “when it involves readers in it as completely as possible without their forgetting that it is a work of art and interacting with it as if it were reality” (Heller 3). The involvement of the reader was in part what Victorian critics of the genre objected to; at the same time, the text’s ability to draw in the reader is what makes such reading enjoyable.

George N. Dove incorporates reader-response theory into his analysis of the detective genre; he argues that “the reader cannot be excluded from the definition of the tale of detection” (1). Peter Thoms echoes Dove’s reader-centred perspective when he suggests that the “process of [narrative] construction becomes the very subject of [early detective fiction]” (1). These two studies reveal an essential similarity between the detective and sensation genres: both are self-conscious of their own “construction.”¹⁶ Many of Collins’s novels contain texts, documents, and transcripts within the narrative, thereby drawing attention to the novels’ textuality. Whereas detective stories’ self-reflexivity tends to reassure the reader that the conventions of the genre will be adhered to, Collins’s novels disturb the reader, calling into question the reliability of the narratives themselves by demonstrating that texts within the novels are ambiguous (difficult or impossible to interpret) and vulnerable (to misinterpretation or manipulation).

I am especially interested in examining what Tony Hilfer calls the “more torturous [or *masochistic*] satisfactions” (1; emphasis added) of Collins’s novels, with regard to interpretive difficulties and guilty pleasures. Gregory Forter argues that the process of detection is what is pleasurable in hard-boiled detective fiction, not the “end-pleasure” of narrative closure or resolution (1), and that even the process of detection is “bound up with the pain of an interpretive dissatisfaction” (5). In *Detection and Its Designs*, Peter Thoms suggests that “detection rebounds upon its practitioners . . . as a system of surveillance they helped create” (3). He states, “detection is internalized so that the individual embodies a system of regulation, being both the oppressive law and its transgressor” (6). The reader of Collins’s novels is both detective and criminal: as detective, characters and readers represent both the system of disciplinary regulation and the transgressors who must be disciplined. If literary masochism involves mixed emotional responses to fiction, Collins’s readers both give and receive emotional “punishment.”

Although D. A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* is not about the detective genre per se, his analysis of "policing power" (within and without the institution of the police) in the nineteenth-century novel (2) informs my definition of masochistic detection. Miller argues that discipline functions in the Victorian novel according to class distinctions or boundaries; the police are concerned with "delinquency" (3), which we might define as the "petty" crimes of the lower classes (13), whereas the middle- and upper-class worlds (which the sensation novel usually occupies) are governed by "an alternative power of regulation" (7), which includes the family unit (1), the amateur detective, and the forces of "public opinion" and "social humiliation" (14). Miller argues that non-traditional disciplinary power leads to "endless self-examination" (18), so that participants in the "alternative power of regulation" police themselves as well as others. The amateur detectives of Collins's novels participate in this "alternative power of regulation," and by so doing they become both disciplinarians and transgressors.

As detectives engaged in textual interpretation, Collins's readers and characters must engage in morally suspect activities such as snooping, spying, and eavesdropping. In *Eavesdropping in the Novel from Austen to Proust*, Ann Gaylin's comparison of interpretation and eavesdropping suggests that the kinds of interpretations in which the reader or "secret listener" engages are morally questionable (8): "eavesdropping dramatizes some of the fundamental issues that inform our hermeneutic and epistemological efforts. A non-consensual, deceptive activity, it introduces intriguing moral questions about human interaction and subjectivity, since eavesdropping always depends on discovering connections among other people" (1). Because eavesdropping "acts out both the urge to know and the fear of others knowing" (5), we might argue that Collins's readers also experience the masochistic, guilty pleasures of delving into private secrets while fearing their own discovery.

Earlier I suggested that the historical context of the sensation novel adds an additionally masochistic “layer” or dimension to the reading of these novels. If sensation novels were considered guilty pleasures in and of themselves, in addition to the guilty pleasures of detection and interpretation of private secrets and criminal activities within the narratives, this view would reinforce the reader’s position as transgressor, in addition to his or her position as snooping amateur detective. In this section, I shall discuss the context of the sensation novel as it applies to my reading of Collins’s novels: Victorian theories of emotion; nineteenth-century views of the novel in general and the sensation novel in particular; and the category of the “woman reader.”

Psychology in the Victorian period was not an established discipline (Vrettos 69). Most theories of how the mind functioned were based on the principle of association: according to this model, the human mind begins as a “blank slate,” which then “receive[s] sensations, conceive[s] ideas of sensations, and eventually associate[s] those ideas on the basis of resemblance, contiguity, and causation” (70). Victorian degeneration theory, which argues that “the human species was suffering from an intellectual, physical, and moral decline, and becoming increasingly enfeebled,” might be regarded as a pessimistic take on the theory of association (77), since one could worsen one’s mental development through negative “associations.” In the mid to late nineteenth century, Herbert Spencer devoted considerable effort to “explaining how dangerous the emotions are and how strongly they can hinder rational thought and action” (Stedman 131). As women were generally regarded as excessively affective, many believed that the consumption of “thrilling” fictions could have a detrimental effect on women’s mental state.

In *The Emotions and the Will* (1859), Alexander Bain examined (among other things) the subject of emotionally charged reading through a mixture of psychological, physiological, and philosophical methodology.¹⁷ According to Bain, the novel is “the greatest elaboration of the

pleasures of ideal pursuit, [and] is also the occasion for the greatest excesses in this mode of excitement” (196). He continues: “The concentration of the mental stream upon artificial ends is so overdone [that the] temporary suspension and lull that we experience in a chase for objects of moderate desire [is replaced by] a series of devices for alternating suspense and issue for the greatest length of time without fatigue” (Bain 196-197). As Nicholas Dames argues, the “consideration of the novel . . . in the work of Bain become[s] expressed as . . . a wave-theory of novelistic affect [which] reorients us from a world of fiction as an engine for the production of knowledge to a world of fiction as a machine for the production of affect” (Dames, “Wave-Theories” 210). Bain argued that the “seeming contradiction or paradox in the passion of terror” is an extension of the method by which pain may be used to cause pleasure (Bain 91).¹⁸ If apprehension of “ideal pain” is “the grand procuring cause of the sentiment of fear,” a novel producing a great deal of anxiety and suspense in its readers would be likely to provoke the most “ideal” fear (Bain 74). The combination of anxiety and suspense is “ideal” in that no physical harm ever comes to readers, and yet the experience of reading suspenseful novels provokes the “sentiment of fear.” Bain’s concept of “ideal” fear resembles the kind of masochistic pleasure I am interested in exploring; the crucial difference between the two concepts is that Bain’s “ideal” fear is composed of only two emotional responses (pleasure and fear); it does not address emotional responses to literature such as frustration, guilt, or shame.

Psychological and physiological approaches to the novel developed in conjunction with the increasing readership and criticism of the genre. In the late eighteenth century, circulating libraries facilitated the rapid spread of the novel, and of particular fictional works “to which the moralists and often the reviewers objected” (John Taylor 21). In the nineteenth century, as readership increased and the novel became “an undeniable part of Victorian culture” (Childers

414). Critics of the novel tended to be concerned with what Margaret Oliphant termed the “glorious confusion of all morality,” while still more conservative opponents of the genre regarded “all reading for amusement, particularly on the part of the new middle-class public,” as equally disconcerting (Oliphant, “Novels” 170; John Taylor 101). Given the popular Victorian belief in “the affective powers of what was read,” it comes as no surprise that the moralists and critics who opposed the novel regarded women as “the persons most susceptible to the inordinate sensibility which was generally accredited with being the worst type of poison contained in this dangerous plant” (John Taylor 94, 52). Since, as Nicola Diane Thompson points out, most reviewers remained anonymous and “often used the pronoun ‘we,’ the individuality of particular critics . . . was replaced by anonymous, oracular voices which seemed to speak with the authority of Culture behind them” (4). One example of this kind of authoritative rhetoric is Alfred Austin’s alarmist essay on “The Vice of Reading”: “[W]e are unable to dispel the conviction that Reading . . . has become a downright vice . . . a softening, demoralizing, relaxing practice, which, if persisted in, will end by enfeebling the minds of men and women, making flabby the fibre of their bodies, and undermining the vigour of nations” (251). Austin appears to condemn all novels as dangerous reading; his real criticism, however, is of books “which neither confer information which is worth having, nor lift the spiritual part of us up to loftier regions, nor, by judicious diversion, refreshen [sic] the mind for further serious efforts” (251). Although he does not refer to sensation novels specifically, many other critics of “reading for amusement” did.

Attacks on mid-Victorian sensation works denounced in particular the “eagerness [for] physical sensation” expressed by fans of the genre (“Novels” 258). Sensation novels, according to Margaret Oliphant in *Blackwood’s Magazine*, “deprive [their] readers of their lawful rest,” and are delivered to audiences through the “violent stimulant of serial publication—of *weekly*

publication, with its necessity for frequent and rapid recurrence of piquant situation and startling incident” (“Sensation Novels” 565, 568; emphasis in original). In 1864, the Archbishop of York attacked sensation fiction for “exciting in the mind some deep feeling of overwrought interest by the means of some terrible passion or crime” (“Archbishop” 9). One year earlier, an anonymous writer for Dickens’s periodical *All the Year Round* wrote that the “unnatural appetite for sensation . . . is a diseased craving [and] an unwholesome fancy” (“Not a New Sensation” 517).

The content of these reviews and the fact that the sensation genre was “perceived as a feminine phenomenon regardless of the gender of the particular sensation writer” suggest that critics were concerned about the sensation genre’s largely female (so they supposed) audience (Pykett, *Sensation Novel* 41). In their attacks on the genre, moralists and critics of popular fiction played on the popular Victorian stereotype of the “woman reader,” a woman who loves tales of terror and excitement but who is unable to control her emotional responses. They argued that certain kinds of books “could arouse a female’s sexual impulses, drain her vital energies, damage her mental and reproductive health, divorce her attention from her maternal and domestic duties, undermine her self-control, and rot her mind, leading to ruination” (Golden 22). Some accused female novel-readers of abandoning their domestic duties; others spurned such reading “which is one of the chief amusements of . . . women and unoccupied persons,” suggesting that they (the critics) preferred to occupy their time with more serious matters (John Taylor 56; “Novels” 257).

The decision of sensation authors to emphasize the middle-class home as the centre of crime “roused a furious debate in the press about the suggestiveness of their representation of domestic life” (Trodd 3). The domestic setting of the sensation novel was in fact one of the genre’s “selling points”; as Winifred Hughes suggests, the appeal of the sensation novel was “not to the

terror of the unknown, of the vaguely suggested and barely imagined, but to the even more terrifying terror of the familiar” (8). In addition, the “homely” and yet uncanny setting of the sensation novel may have enabled its female readers to subvert the association of women with the domestic sphere. In *“Improper” Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*, Lyn Pykett distinguishes between two nineteenth-century female figures: the “proper feminine” (the “angel in the house”) and the “improper feminine” (24). The latter, which Pykett defines as “the domestic ideal’s dangerous other,” was also the heroine of many sensation novels. One fear of critics and moralists was an identification of women readers with this “improper feminine” figure, who might quit the domestic sphere to seek adventure or to assist a loved one (as is the case in many of Collins’s novels).¹⁹

In addition to considering Victorian responses to the sensation genre, this study will incorporate the considerable work done on the sensation genre in general and on Wilkie Collins in particular.²⁰ There are three studies of Wilkie Collins’s work that are especially relevant to my study. The first is D. A. Miller’s *The Novel and the Police* (1988), which I have already discussed in this chapter. The second is Jenny Bourne Taylor’s *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology*. Taylor argues that the sensation novel “came to be perceived as the ‘bad object’ of mid-nineteenth-century culture by being read, *qua* cultural object, through a framework of physiological psychology”; she analyzes this genre in the context of “fears about the effects of ‘sensation’ on individual readers with longer-term evolutionary anxieties about cultural crisis and collective nervous decline” (20). Finally, Sue Lonoff’s *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship* concerns the relationship between Wilkie Collins and his readers. Lonoff argues that “Collins tended to compose with an invisible reader at his elbow, an imaginary sympathizer who

cried when he cried, laughed when he laughed, and shivered with horror when he shivered” (66). I shall connect this compositional tendency of Collins’s with Freud’s notion that authors have a “directive power over us” (“Uncanny” 641) to suggest that sensation authors have the ability to provoke and control particular emotional responses in their readers through the use of suspense, ambiguity, and characters whose detective work mimics that of the readers themselves.

I have opted not to examine the role of detection in *The Moonstone* (1868) because this particular novel contains professional as well as amateur detectives; I want to focus on novels in which the amateur detective characters serve as doubles for the reader. I have chosen to examine three Collins novels that “flaunt their secrets” (Levine 2). Since *The Woman in White* (1860) is generally regarded as the first sensation novel, I feel it must be included in any analysis of Collins’s work. *The Dead Secret* (1857) was written before the sensation craze, but it clearly participates in the genre with its emphasis on domestic crime, hidden secrets, and detection. Although *The Law and the Lady* (1875) was written after the sensation craze, it develops further the concept of masochistic detection.

In the following chapters, I shall analyze how Collins’s novels condition particular emotional responses in readers, paying particular attention to the parallel position of characters that function as detectives within the text and readers who act as detectives while interpreting the text. I shall consider the reception of each novel, as well as the wider debate over the merits of sensation fiction and the continuing popularity of the gothic genre, and the question of how Collins produced multiple emotional responses from his readers in the context of this debate.

The chapter on *The Dead Secret* (1857) provides a brief analysis of Collins’s use of “uncanny” and “domesticated gothic” settings to provoke responses of unease from readers. The central focus of this chapter is Collins’s manipulation of readerly anticipation, particularly

through the involvement of readers in the unravelling of the mystery and though teaching them how to detect and/or interpret his text (what I shall call “didactic detection”). Using Anna Jones’s definition of affect as “the control a novel exerts over its reader” (205), I shall argue that Collins’s novel attempts to situate the reader in a position of masochistic submission to the author and his text.

The subsequent chapter will examine how detection in *The Woman in White* (1860) is essentially (and problematically) text-based, and how both characters’ and readers’ reliance on text proves frustrating when texts (within the novel and the novel itself) prove to be unreliable. Incorporating the work of D. A. Miller, Peter Thoms, and Ann Gaylin, I shall argue that the reader of *The Woman and White* becomes both disciplinarian and transgressor.

Finally, in the chapter on *The Law and the Lady* (1875), I shall suggest that Valeria, the detective figure in the novel, dominates others and is herself dominated in her quest for knowledge and rejection of blissful ignorance. By both seeking and withholding knowledge, Valeria comes to represent the sensation genre itself, which, as Levine says of the Victorian novel in general, is notorious for “withholding crucial pieces of knowledge” (2). In *The Law and the Lady*, the desire for knowledge and the possession of knowledge are equally masochistic.

DIDACTIC DETECTIVES: INSTRUCTING READERS IN *THE DEAD SECRET* (1857)

The Dead Secret was one of the first of Collins's novels to be published in serial instalments.²¹ It had a mixed reception: some critics, such as the anonymous reviewer of *Lippincott's Magazine*, felt the *The Dead Secret* displayed "the wonderful skill of the author in constructing and unfolding a plot," but others agreed with Margaret Oliphant's assessment of the novel as "a dreary web" (Page 180; Oliphant 569). We can account for some of these mixed reviews by examining Collins's authorial style: although he does occasionally leave readers to "detect" for themselves (after having instructed them in the arts of detection and interpretation), Collins frequently manipulates readers' responses to the text. In the introduction to the Oxford edition of *The Dead Secret*, Ira B. Nadel notes that Charles Dickens urged Collins "not to control the reader too strongly" (xiii). As he explains in his preface to the 1861 edition of *The Dead Secret*, Collins appears to have been torn between Dickens's advice and his own desire to produce "a sustained work of fiction" that his readers would find highly engaging (5).

The "masochistic nature of detection" in *The Dead Secret* lies in Collins's determination to dominate his readers; to become engaged in the story is to be dominated by Collins's efforts to direct readers' emotional responses. Rather than creating a "[m]asochistic fantasy" that allows the spectator to shift himself or herself from the position of one who passively submits to the position of one who controls and directs the infliction of pain, Collins forces the reader into a paradoxical position of both passivity and activity.²² Collins's attempts to magnify readers' feelings of anticipation and terror (as well as pleasure) by involving readers more deeply in his uncanny narrative and his apparent efforts to teach readers how to interpret his text place the reader in the more passive position of one who accepts Collins's authorial power. Nonetheless,

the reader is not helpless before the endless machinations of the author, since s/he is able to use the tools provided by Collins to take the interpretation of the novel and the detection of the secret into his or her own hands.

This chapter will analyze *The Dead Secret* to see how Collins attempts to provoke various positive and negative emotional responses in his readers, blending the trepidation of anticipation with the pleasures of detection. Using Anna Jones's definition of affect as "the control a novel exerts over its reader" (205) and her argument that "at some level any act of reading implies a relinquishing of control to the text" (210), I shall suggest that Collins's novel attempts to situate the reader in a position of masochistic submission to the author and his text, yearning for clues to the mystery's solution but forced to wait for Collins to provide them in his own time.²³ This chapter will examine Collins's use of the uncanny yet "homely" atmosphere of what I will call the "domesticated gothic," and his view that readers' anticipation is essential to their engagement with the story: as he states in the 1861 preface, "I thought it most desirable to let the effect of the story depend on *expectation* rather than surprise" (5; emphasis added). I will discuss Collins's attempts to instruct the reader how to read his text through an examination of the various characters that function as didactic tools for the reader. The masochistic frustrations and pleasures of detection are enhanced by Collins's emphasis on readerly anticipation, and enable what Andrea Henderson calls a "deferral of gratification" (8)—a prolonging of frustrating and yet pleasurable suspense. Finally, I will discuss detection as a "guilty pleasure," particularly for women readers, who detect and interpret despite frequent patriarchal reproaches.

THE UNCANNY, THE GOTHIC, AND THE ROLE OF ANTICIPATION

Collins's manipulation of readerly anticipation is essential to the masochistic pleasure of reading *The Dead Secret*, because of the strong relationship between anticipation and masochism,

which Mansfield and Panken have identified.²⁴ In her discussion of Collins's *No Name*, Anna Jones suggests that "the reader's suspense is produced (and painfully sustained) by frozen scenes of anticipation" (205). If anticipation is an essential component of masochism, it is also an essential component of suspense in literature, as Levine argues: "[r]eaders of suspenseful plots take pleasure in the very anxiety that events to come may not fit their expectations" (9). In *The Dead Secret*, the reader may use his or her imagination to increase feelings of anticipation and terror; the more the reader uses his or her imagination to predict what will come next, the more terrifying (and exciting) the novel becomes. Using Freud's treatise on the uncanny, I shall show how Collins's incorporation of gothic elements into his novel sets readers on edge by provoking readers' expectations of the gothic genre.²⁵ At the same time, because these gothic elements are situated in familiar, domestic settings, Collins confuses reader expectations. Lonoff argues that Collins habitually "grounded the sensational elements in a thoroughly domestic setting, familiar to his readers in its homely outlines if not in its particulars" (82). Rather than setting his story in a distant and mysterious past, in *The Dead Secret* Collins uses specific dates and locations to give readers the sense that their familiar domestic sphere has been darkened by the conventions of turn-of-the-century gothic narratives. Gothic texts are notable for their remote and uncanny settings: old castles, dilapidated mansions, isolated abbeys, and gloomy crypts. By integrating traditionally gothic elements such as the isolated and supposedly haunted family estate of Porthgenna Tower into an otherwise domestically situated novel, Collins juxtaposes sublime surroundings against scenes of familial tranquility.²⁶ He combines "the mundane and the mysterious, the terrifying and the reassuring" so that the subversion of everyday life becomes "the starting-point of nearly all his plots" (Lonoff 94).

One example of the subversion of everyday life is the figure of Sarah, a lady's maid with a secret past and an uncanny aspect. This character serves the same function as Porthgenna Tower, providing elements of the gothic genre to put readers on edge; she is also a masochistic reader who mimics Collins's readers. At first glance, this domestic servant is hardly a terrifying figure in comparison with the evil monks and rapacious lords of late eighteenth-century gothic novels. Although she initially appears to be a familiar figure, she soon becomes "unfamiliar," or uncanny. Collins's use of the uncanny is part of a larger effort to manipulate readers' emotions by appealing "not to the terror of the unknown . . . but to the even more terrifying terror of the familiar" (Hughes 8). The narrator depicts Sarah as having inexplicably grey hair, "large, startled, black eyes," and a habit of "whisper[ing] affrightedly to herself" (12, 13). He then describes her as "a woman whom it was impossible to look at without a feeling of curiosity, if not of interest" (Collins, *Dead* 10). By beginning his sketch of Sarah with a description of the unsatisfied curiosity with which observers regard her, Collins piques our interest and then sustains it with revelations of Sarah's unusual and disturbing characteristics.

Sarah's presence enhances the uncanny atmosphere of the novel by virtue of her unnatural appearance and behaviour, and leads the reader to anticipate that Sarah's character will be associated with uncanny events in the novel.²⁷ If we return to Freud's additional explanations for the existence of the uncanny, we see that Sarah's character encompasses a number of "uncanny" elements. For instance, Freud maintains that the term *uncanny* sometimes denotes "[c]oncealed, kept from sight, so that others do not get to know of or about it, withheld from others" (Freud 622). Sarah is an accessory to the creation of the secret, and she is also the character who is the most terrified of its discovery. The "dead secret" of Rosamond's true identity arguably belongs to that genre of the uncanny "that ought to have remained secret and hidden but has come to

light” (623). Collins plays with the idea of the “dead secret” by revealing some information to the reader while preventing the entire secret from “coming to light” until almost the end of the novel, so that the reader is continually anticipating the secret’s disclosure in a kind of masochistic waiting game.

Sarah’s association with insanity further contributes to the uncanny quality of her character. Her continuing psychological decline in the second half of the novel is a fundamental part of Collins’s apparent efforts to infuse his text with traditionally gothic elements. There is no positive indication that Sarah’s character is indeed insane, but according to Freud, the “uncanny effect of madness” (636) requires only the “manifestations of insanity” (625); in other words, to be uncanny Sarah needs only to *appear* insane. Sarah’s association with insanity is strengthened by her tendency to become overexcited. In the mid-Victorian period, excessive emotion was often cited as a cause or symptom of insanity, particularly in female patients; for instance, James Cowles Prichard argued that a major symptom of moral insanity is “a morbid perversion of the natural feelings [and] affections” (quoted in Bucknill & Tuke 259).²⁸ Finally, a number of characters in Collins’s novel believe or fear that Sarah is mentally unbalanced. After spending an evening with Mrs. Jazeph (Sarah’s alias and married name), Rosamond suddenly realizes that “[a]ll that was unaccountable in [Sarah’s] behaviour . . . every one of her strange actions (otherwise incomprehensible) became intelligible in a moment on that one dreadful supposition that she was mad” (Collins, *Dead* 126). It is not clear whether Collins’s portrayal is intended to indicate a tendency towards madness or simply a hyper-sensitivity to overexcitement, but Sarah’s behaviour is sufficiently unusual to warrant at least an association with insanity in the mind of the Victorian reader.

In addition to contributing to the uncanny, gothic atmosphere of the novel, Sarah's tendency to overreact to emotionally charged stimuli highlights the connection between over-excitement and reading. Sarah provides a commentary on the figure of the Victorian woman reader by modelling how such a reader might respond to sensational texts.²⁹ One instance of such reading is the scene in which Sarah hides the letter containing the secret in the Myrtle Room, reading it over before hiding it in a drawer: "[S]he took the sheet of note-paper from its place of concealment in her bosom—shuddering, when she drew it out, as if the mere contact of it hurt her—placed it open on her little dressing-table, and fixed her eyes eagerly on the lines which the note contained" (23). This excerpt could quite easily be a description of a woman deeply engaged in a sensation novel—afraid to read on yet unable to stop, and still afraid even when she has finished reading. This passage contains a depiction of masochistic reading, in the sense that Sarah is "eager" for the pain involved in reading the letter, which "hurt[s] her" even as she handles it. This scene also emphasizes the connection between anticipation and masochistic reading: by shuddering when she removes the letter from her dress, Sarah anticipates the emotional pain of reading the letter.

DIDACTIC DETECTION AND READER PARTICIPATION

Collins appears to want his readers to participate as much as possible in the unravelling of the mystery, and so he teaches them how to detect and/or interpret his text through what I shall call "didactic detection." In *Wilkie Collins and his Victorian Readers*, Lonoff maintains that the author "capitalized on his readers' fascination with crime and criminal lives, on their interest in the processes of detection [by creating] mysteries that he challenged his readers to solve, if they could, before he provided the keys" (Lonoff 109). If we return to the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of masochism as the "deliberate pursuit of or enthusiasm for an activity

that appears to be painful, frustrating, or tedious,” detection (on the part of the reader as well as on the part of the novel’s characters), when limited by an omniscient author, is a masochistic endeavour. In this section, I shall examine Collins’s apparent efforts to direct diverse readers’ experiences or “actualizations” of the text in certain pre-determined directions.³⁰ Using characters to “model” the activities involved in detection, Collins attempts to create what Heller refers to as “a schematized set of instructions” for the interpretation of the novel (1). By increasing reader involvement in the unravelling of the plot, Collins increases his readers’ immersion in the narrative, and consequently their emotional involvement in the story. As I suggested in the previous chapter, a sensation novel is “best” when the reader is constantly anticipating what will happen next, and “when it involves readers in it as completely as possible without their forgetting that it is a work of art and interacting with it as if it were reality” (Heller 3). Greater reader involvement in the narrative means that the author has a greater ability to manipulate reader’s emotional responses.

Lonoff maintains that “Collins tended to compose with an invisible reader at his elbow,” and that his “[p]refaces, letters, and miscellaneous pieces suggest that . . . he thought of readers as a manipulable mass” (66, 67). He does not appear to trust his readers to find these clues without his help, so he devises ways to “instruct” the reader in the arts of detection, surveillance, and snooping. In the first chapter of Book Two, Collins introduces us to an “observant stranger” through whose eyes we are permitted to look, almost as if peering through a keyhole to observe what transpires on the other side of the door: “if any observant stranger had happened to be standing in some unnoticed corner of the churchyard, and to be looking about him with sharp eyes, he would probably have been the witness of proceedings which might have led him to believe that there was a conspiracy going on in Long Beckley” (38). This “observant stranger”

observes the body language of all individuals passing by, simultaneously providing implicit instructions to the reader to do the same. After a few pages, Collins dispenses with this stranger: “Leaving . . . the visionary stranger of these pages to vanish out of them in any direction that he pleases—let us follow Doctor Chennery to the vicarage breakfast-table, and hear what he has to say about his professional exertions of the morning in the familiar atmosphere of his own family circle” (40). Collins’s “observant stranger” plays only a small part in the story, but it is a crucial part: he instructs the reader how to observe, detect, and deduce as the narrative unfolds. Once Collins writes the stranger out of the narrative, he then invites the reader to accompany him in the stranger’s place: “let *us* follow Doctor Chennery . . . and hear what he has to say” (emphasis added). Here, Collins situates the reader in the role of detective.

Collins also uses his protagonist Rosamond to situate the reader in the role of the detective by using her as a didactic tool (much like the “observant stranger”) to show the reader how to decipher his text. Like Jane Austen’s Catherine Moreland, Rosamond is anxious to find mysteries in her own country and time.³¹ The very thought of discovering something mysterious excites her greatly: “I never saw anything of that ruinous north side of the house—and I do so dote on old rooms. . . . I prophesy that we shall see ghosts, and find treasures, and hear mysterious noises—and, oh heavens! what clouds of dust we shall have to go through. Pouf! the very *anticipation* of them chokes me already!” (Collins, *Dead* 77; emphasis added). This is the sort of anticipation of both fear and excitement that Collins seems to want his readers to feel.

As the novel progresses, Rosamond becomes, like the reader, a detective attempting to solve a mystery. Rosamond reveals her deductive abilities while teaching us how to solve the mystery ourselves. For instance, when she reaches the Myrtle Room, she does not know that the secret is contained in a letter, so when she begins to search for the secret, she has to deduce in what form

it might be: “We thought . . . that the mystery of the Myrtle Room might be connected with hidden valuables that had been stolen, or hidden papers that ought to have been destroyed, or hidden stains and traces of some crime, which even a chair or a table might betray. Shall we examine the furniture here?” (266). As the reader learns how to recognize clues and develop theories, s/he becomes more deeply involved in the narrative. By Book Three, both Rosamond and (one assumes) the reader are “more curious than ever to see [Porthgenna Tower] again,” and “[its] uninhabited rooms . . . than to see the Seven Wonders of the World” (95, 124).

In her efforts to locate the secret, Rosamond writes to Mr. Munder and Mrs. Pentreath, the steward and housekeeper of Porthgenna Tower. Her response to the letter sent from Mr. Munder and Mrs. Pentreath further enables our identification with Rosamond because we are both engaged in the acts of reading and interpreting:

[T]he letter, with all its faults and absurdities, was read by Mrs. Frankland with the deepest interest. . . . The fresh element of complication imparted to the thickening mystery of Mrs. Jazeph and the Myrtle Room, by the entrance of the foreign stranger on the scene, and by his intimate connexion with the extraordinary proceedings that had taken place in the house, fairly baffled them all. The letter was read again and again; was critically dissected paragraph by paragraph [and] was carefully annotated. (225-226)

Rosamond and her companions are engaged in the same activities as are we—interpretation, reading, and rereading. After extensive analysis, Rosamond and her husband pronounce the letter “to be the most mysterious and bewildering document that mortal pen had ever produced” (226). The characters’ bewilderment mimics the reader’s own interpretive uncertainty; it would

seem that Collins's intention in writing *The Dead Secret* is to torment his characters and readers alike with unintelligible clues to maintain their interest but to prevent them from discovering the truth of the mystery until the end of the narrative. Detection and interpretation become masochistic endeavours when the evidence is indecipherable (or, at least, difficult to decipher until Collins provides the reader with the information required to for its interpretation) and the desire to solve the mystery increases with each chapter.

In addition to employing similar interpretive strategies as Collins's readers, Rosamond experiences similar emotional responses to her reading material. One such response I shall describe as a kind of "literary paralysis": if the reader were sufficiently involved, or immersed, in the text, s/he might experience a sensation of being unable to "put down" his or her book, as s/he was rendered immobile by the affective power of the narrative. In *The Dead Secret*, Rosamond displays all the symptoms of this inability to move or speak:

Line by line, and word by word, she read through the writing . . .

When she had come to the end of the third page, the hand in which she held the letter dropped to her side, and she turned her head slowly toward Leonard. In that position she stood . . . with the fatal letter crumpled up in her cold fingers, looking steadfastly, speechlessly, breathlessly at her blind husband. (275)

While reading the letter, Rosamond digests the contents so intensely that she is completely unaware of her surroundings; when she has finished, the terror resulting from the contents of the "fatal letter" lengthens her "literary paralysis." Once she has recovered from her discovery of the secret, Rosamond "rereads" her account of the preceding narrative: "We know now why she warned me so anxiously not to go into the Myrtle Room. Who can say what she must have

suffered when she came as a stranger to my bedside?” (289). If Rosamond is a didactic tool for Collins’s readers, her behaviour in this passage encourages the reader to revisit the novel in search of clues missed during the first reading, and to repeat the painful pleasures of detection. Collins’s efforts to teach readers how to interpret his text serves to involve the reader more deeply in his narrative, and to increase readers’ feelings of anticipation and pleasure.

MASOCHISTIC DETECTION AND THE GUILTY PLEASURES OF READING

Collins’s characters seem designed to teach the reader how to engage with his uncanny text, particularly with regards to emotional responses to reading. Thus far we have looked at Collins’s attempts to provoke enthusiasm for thrilling discoveries and fearful anticipation of what will come next, but Collins’s novel also addresses emotional discomfort and even shame in connection with reading and detection. Since men and women continued to read sensation stories despite widespread criticism of the genre, I argue that the historical context of the sensation novel adds an additionally masochistic dimension to the reading of these novels. Moralists and critics argued that the desire for excessive emotional stimulation through reading was unnatural and unhealthy; for instance, one anonymous writer for *All the Year Round* suggested that the “unnatural appetite for sensation . . . is a diseased craving [and] an unwholesome fancy” (“Not a New Sensation” 517). Women in particular were singled out for reading sensation stories, and were sometimes accused of being addicted to such novels.³² In her work on the woman reader, Kate Flint points out the two contradictory arguments behind regulating women’s readings: “First, the argument ran, certain texts might corrupt her innocent mind. . . . Second, it was often put forward that she, as woman, was peculiarly susceptible to emotionally provocative material” (22). Reading sensation novels could thus be described as a “guilty pleasure”—an enjoyable yet shameful activity. If we accept Freud’s definition of

masochism as something which “creates a temptation to perform ‘sinful’ actions, which must be expiated by the reproaches of the sadistic conscience . . . or by chastisement from [a] parental power” (“Masochism” 283), then reading sensation novels is indeed a masochistic pleasure.³³

Like the Victorian woman reader whose enjoyment of sensational novels was opposed by critics and moralists, Rosamond is discouraged from allowing herself to become over-stimulated through activities such as reading. She receives lectures from various male characters in *The Dead Secret*, beginning with Mr. Orridge (a doctor), who “expatiate[s] on the evils of overexcitement” (Collins, *Dead* 122). The opposition to overexcitement from sensation reading seems to have failed (given the popularity of the genre throughout the nineteenth century), and Mr. Orridge is no exception: “His remonstrances, however, would have produced very little effect, even if Rosamond had allowed him to continue them” (123). Rosamond’s husband has similar concerns with regards to Rosamond’s nerves. When Rosamond reacts to a course of action proposed by her husband by “walk[ing] agitatedly up and down the room,” he responds by taking her pulse and regretting his actions: “I wish I had waited until tomorrow morning before I told you my idea about Mrs. Jazeph . . . I have agitated you to no purpose whatever, and have spoiled your chance of a good night’s rest” (248). In *The Dead Secret*, Mr. Frankland and Mr. Orridge represent those engaged in what Flint describes as “paternalistic surveillance” of women’s reading (4).

As some Victorian critics suggested, women readers might suffer both physically and mentally from the overexcitement of certain genres. Although it seems obvious that Collins was a supporter of the sensation genre (since he helped to develop it), in a number of passages of *The Dead Secret*, he appears to illustrate the potential dangers faced by women exposed to various forms of emotional excitement—like the kind found in sensation novels. For instance,

Rosamond seems to be physically affected by her frightening experience with Mrs. Jazeph: “On entering Mrs. Frankland's room, the doctor saw at a glance that she had been altered for the worse by the events of the past evening. . . . Her eyes looked dim and weary, her skin was dry, her pulse was irregular. It was plain that she had passed a wakeful night, and that her mind was not at ease” (133). Although the memory of Mrs. Jazeph’s uncanny words frightens her, she continues to dwell upon them, admitting that she has “thought of nothing else” and that her heart “is beating quicker than usual only with saying them over. . . . They are such very strange, startling *words*” (136; emphasis added). Later, Rosamond experiences a kind of relapse as a result of similarities between present and past fears: “As she turned her head once more towards the bed, a momentary chill crept over her. She trembled a little, partly at the sensation itself, partly at the recollection it aroused of that other chill which had struck her in the solitude of the Myrtle Room” (344). In these passages, Collins appears to suggest that there is truly a potential for damage as a result of emotional encounters. By emphasizing the potential dangers of reading “sensational” texts and undergoing emotionally charged experiences, Collins seems to remind readers of the reasons why some critics considered the sensation novel hazardous, emphasizing the taboo nature of the sensation genre to increase the “guilty pleasures” of reading.

In other passages, Collins seems to argue against the idea that highly affective reading can cause lasting injury. While attempting to discover Sarah’s whereabouts in London, Rosamond falls prey to a “depression of spirit” produced by “the doubt and suspense of the past week” (303). Although Rosamond is susceptible to suspense, the narrative suggests that such anxiety actually enhances one’s ability to observe minute details: when Uncle Joseph returns to give the Trevertons news of Sarah, “Rosamond's observation, *stimulated by anxiety*, detected a change in his look and manner the moment he appeared” (309; emphasis added). Although Collins

acknowledges some criticisms of sensation reading in *The Dead Secret* through certain male characters (Mr. Treverton, Mr. Orridge), at least one of his protagonists has the capacity to recover from her fear. When the Franklands finally arrive at Porthgenna Tower, Rosamond conveys her desire to begin searching for clues as soon as possible: “[N]ow we are on the spot I feel as if we had driven the mystery into its last hiding-place. We are actually in the house that holds the Secret. . . . But don't let us stop on this cold landing. Which way are we to go next?” (243). Although it was only a few moments ago that she was “nervously pressing her husband’s arm” (242), Rosamond is now more eager than ever to continue her investigation of the mystery. As she informs her husband, she has every intention of “continuing our journey to Porthgenna the moment I am allowed to travel, and [of] leaving no stone unturned when we get there until we have discovered whether there is or is not any room in the old house that ever was known, at any time of its existence, by the name of the Myrtle Room” (138). Should she find such a room, she states, “Am I not a woman? And have I not been forbidden to enter the Myrtle Room? . . . Do you know so little of my half of humanity as to doubt what I should do the moment the room was discovered? My darling, as a matter of course, I should walk into it immediately” (138). Despite Rosamond’s admission that she has been “dreadfully frightened” (128), she has every intention of continuing her detective work until the mystery is solved. If Rosamond is sometimes overcome by fear or anxiety, she soon regains control of her emotions, and recognizes that “there is nothing to alarm [her], nothing (except one’s own fancy) that suggests an idea of danger of any kind” (263). If Collins did indeed compose his novels with “an invisible reader at his elbow” (Lonoff 66), perhaps, in addition to her function as model reader and detective, Rosamond provides a means through which to comment on Collins’s own readers by demonstrating an ideal (female) reader’s response to his work. Collins thus critiques the

Victorian notion of the “woman reader,” who is particularly susceptible to emotional excess, and who enjoys the excessively emotional responses provoked by sensation fiction.

CONCLUSIONS

Despite Collins’s apparent efforts to create an uncanny atmosphere, contemporary critics of his novels argued that the secret was so overemphasized and its revelation so overdrawn as to make it anything but uncanny. In an unsigned review entitled “Novels and Novelists of the Day,” Alexander Smith suggested that while “Mr. Collins can hide a secret better than any man . . . when once the secret is discovered, when once the mystery is unravelled, his books collapse at once, their interest perishes, they are flat as conundrums to which you have the answers” (Page 140-141). In his Preface to the 1861 edition of *The Dead Secret*, Collins acknowledges these negative evaluations of his work: “I was blamed for allowing the ‘Secret’ to glimmer on the reader at an early period of the story, instead of keeping it in total darkness till the end” (5). In his defence, Collins explains that he intended “to let the effect of the story depend on expectation rather than surprise; believing that the reader would be all the more interested in watching the progress of ‘Rosamond’ and her husband towards the discovery of the Secret” (5-6). Rather than ambushing the reader with shock and surprise, Collins manipulates the readers’ tendency to anticipate subsequent events in the narrative, and teases them with false clues and vague statements, attempting to increase readers’ sense of apprehension and suspense.

Although we cannot know for certain the extent to which this device (the early revelation of the secret’s existence) was successful, Collins does claim that, “[s]o far as I am enabled to judge, from the opinions which reached me through various channels, this peculiar treatment of the narrative presented one of the special attractions of the book to a large variety of readers” (6). It

is true that this assessment contradicts some reviewers' evaluation of *The Dead Secret*; however, not all reviewers thought of the novel as "a dreary web" (Oliphant 569). One anonymous reviewer of *The Dead Secret* in the *Saturday Review* seems to have appreciated (or at least understood) Collins's attempts to increase suspense: "As the secret is plainly discernible in the very opening of the book, the interest of the story hangs not upon the nature of the secret, but upon the mode in which it is discovered. The ingenuity of the author is shown in devising a great many plausible incidents, by which the searchers shall be alternately brought a step nearer to the discovery, and then removed a step from it" (Page 71). He concludes: "[W]e feel at the end of each chapter that we are one step nearer the end of the search, and yet the movement is so slow that it seems as if the paper would never be found" (72). This reviewer highlights the torturous frustration of getting closer and closer to the discovery of the secret while the author continually creates obstacles to block the reader's progress. Although the presence of the secret is "plainly discernible in the very opening of the book," as our anonymous critic points out, Collins does not reveal the exact nature of the secret, nor does he show us precisely where Sarah has hidden it until almost the end of the novel.

Bearing in mind Collins's extensive manipulation of his readers to sustain interest and excitement in his narrative, if we recall Freud's assertion that authors of uncanny narratives have "a peculiarly directive power over us" (641), we might argue that the emotional and/or psychological "masochism" involving the enjoyment of terrifying texts is effectively a submission to the narrative and affective power of the author. The final affective component of the strange emotional mixture provoked by *The Dead Secret* is the unease or even shame of allowing one's emotions to be provoked and manipulated by the author of the text, beyond the bounds of self-government, and the guilty pleasures of clandestine reading.

CHAPTER THREE:

MASOCHISTIC DETECTION IN A METATEXTUAL TEXT: MIXED EMOTIONAL RESPONSES TO LANGUAGE IN *THE WOMAN IN WHITE* (1860)

The Woman in White represents in many ways a continuation of Collins's earlier work as exemplified by his earlier novel, *The Dead Secret*. Collins persists in his use of the homely yet uncanny setting of the "domesticated gothic," and in his manipulation of readers' emotional responses to and involvement in his narrative.³⁴ In a 1860 letter to Collins, Charles Dickens praised *The Woman in White* as "a very great advance on all [his] former writing," but renewed his criticism of Collins's earlier novels by commenting on Collins's tendency to "give an audience credit for nothing, which necessarily involves the forcing of points on their attention, and which [they] resent when they find it out" (Bachman & Cox 627).³⁵ What makes *The Woman in White* different from Collins's previous work is the way he manipulates his readers. Drawing on the work of D. A. Miller and Peter Thoms, I shall argue that in the role of detective, the reader of *The Woman and White* becomes both disciplinarian and transgressor. In *Detection and Its Designs*, Thoms argues that "detection is internalized so that the individual embodies a system of regulation, being both the oppressive law and its transgressor" (6). The reader of Collins's novels is both detective and criminal: in their role of literary detective, individual characters and readers represent both the system of disciplinary regulation and the transgressors who must be disciplined. Thoms's statement complements Miller's argument in *The Novel and the Police*. Miller suggests that discipline functions in the Victorian novel according to class distinctions; the middle- and upper-class spheres of the sensation novel are governed by "an alternative power of regulation" (7), which includes the amateur detective, as well as the forces of "public opinion" and "social humiliation" (14). The amateur detectives of Collins's novels participate in this "alternative power of regulation," and by so doing they become both

disciplinarians (enforcing regulation and “social humiliation”) and transgressors (engaged in socially disreputable and even criminal activities to unravel the novel’s mysteries). As detectives, readers of (and characters within) the novel must endure the shame of performing deviant activities to experience the (masochistic) pleasures of solving the novel’s mysteries.

To enjoy the pleasure of interpreting texts, readers of and characters within the novel must also endure the frustrations of failed interpretations; detection and interpretation are thus masochistic endeavours. The rhetorical framing of Collins’s narrative is suggestive of a courtroom drama with its presentation of a succession of written statements by characters in the novel. In his preface to *La Femme en Blanc* (1861), Collins explains that he decided on the form of the courtroom narrative following a personal experience with the proceedings of a criminal case in London: “As each [witness] rose to provide his portion of personal involvement, and as . . . each separate link was connected to the others to form an incontrovertible chain of evidence, I felt my attention was being increasingly ensnared; I could see that the same was happening to those close around me” (Bachman & Cox 621).³⁶ The masochistic qualities of detection and interpretation in *The Woman in White* are directly linked to Collins’s use of courtroom-style narrative, in which characters provide written statements of their knowledge. The “ensnared” reader mimics the protagonists of the novel as they attempt to interpret this collection of written documents, many of which are ultimately impossible to interpret. In their introduction to *The Woman in White*, Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox comment on “the instability of meaning and *interpretation* that pervades the novel” (19; emphasis added). Bachman and Cox are referring to questions of insanity and identity; I shall apply their observation to the question of text and language, themes which are equally pervasive, though not so well studied.³⁷

In *The Woman in White*, as in *The Dead Secret*, detection and interpretation are largely text-based. The problem (and the masochistic pleasure) lies in the fact that both written documents and transcripts of oral conversations are distressingly fallible, so that the pleasures of solving the novel's mysteries are inseparable from the frustrations and anxieties of struggling to make sense of inaccessible and unreliable texts. The reader of *The Woman in White* is encouraged to participate in the unravelling of the mysteries of the novel. In the novel's preamble, we read that "[a]s the Judge might once have heard [the story], so the Reader shall hear it now" (49). The reader is thus placed in the position of an honoured and experienced judge, who has been called upon to assess a narrative which "trace[s] the course of one complete series of events, by making the persons who have been most closely connected with them, at each successive state, relate their own experience, word for word" (50). In a novel where extraordinary emphasis is placed on the importance of presenting evidence "word for word," and where social identity and mental instability (as Bachman and Cox note) depend on the inherent reliability of such evidence, both oral language and written text are alarmingly inadequate.

In *The Woman in White*, language is open to varying interpretations, vulnerable to prying eyes and ears as well as to distortion and forgery, and it is sometimes simply impossible to interpret. The novel also contains failures of language, and alarming absences of text. In addition to placing the reader in the position of judge, Collins draws a parallel between the reader and the fictional characters who are similarly engaged in the interpretation of text and language. He highlights the emotional stakes involved in detecting through language: many characters have highly emotional responses to both written and spoken language, and some characters are overcome by their emotional responses to text/language. Some texts are acquired through surreptitious means, and the characters are forced to swallow their discomfort in order to

continue their masochistic detections—much like the reader who must endure the discomforts (while enjoying the pleasures) of reading a sensation novel.

A METATEXTUAL TEXT

Sue Lonoff argues that Collins “sensed the potential of the novel as game” (108), and suggests that he “plays with the reader” and “plays with the text as a text” (117). These comments are especially relevant to a study of *The Woman in White*, given the novel’s reliance on and problematization of written documents and transcripts of oral conversations. There are several letters that also become part of the narrative, as well as the various statements of personal experience which make up the novel.³⁸ The first element of the “game” that Collins plays with his readers is forcing them to be always aware that they are reading and interpreting a textual document. As readers become more involved in the detection of the novel’s secrets and in the frustrating yet pleasurable interpretation of the written documents presented by the novel’s narrator, the reader is lured into a masochistic—pleasurable and yet disagreeable and even distasteful—activity. This textual awareness begins with the novel’s preamble, in which Hartright explains that the narrative is composed of a series of records written by “persons who can speak to the circumstances under notice from their own knowledge” (50). At the very beginning of the novel, written and spoken language are not only placed on equal standing, but are at times conflated. The multiple narrators do not write of their own experience, they “speak” of it; Hartright invites the reader not to read the story, but to “hear it” as “the Judge might once have heard it” (49). Collins’s attention to both written and spoken language is important, since many of the documents (on which we must rely to restore Laura Fairlie’s identity) are transcriptions (albeit edited by Hartright) of conversations between characters.

As Beckwith and Reed have suggested, Marian's diary is highly self-referential, and it serves to impress upon the reader the immediacy of the text.³⁹ In many instances, she discusses both the experiences of writing, and of re-reading what she has written. Early in her narrative, when she attempts to convince herself that Sir Percival Glyde is "a very handsome and a very agreeable man," the difficulty she has in committing these words to paper reinforces our consciousness of the fact that she is writing as we are reading: "There! I have written it down, at last, and I am glad it's over" (215). Collins further emphasizes Marian's diary's self-awareness by showing us that we are reading as she is reading what she has written. When we read, "It is strange to look back at this latest entry in my journal," we are forced to identify with Marian as a fellow reader, since we are reading the same text at the same time (211). We sympathise with her character's mixed emotional responses to reading and writing, which are both enjoyable and difficult or even painful (as indicated by her phrase, "I'm glad it's over").

Fosco's confession is arguably the most self-referential because it is preceded by an extensive first-hand description of his writing process: "He wrote with great noise and rapidity, in so large and bold a hand, and with such wide spaces between the lines, that he reached the bottom of the slip in not more than two minutes certainly from the time when he started at the top. Each slip as he finished it, was paged, and tossed over his shoulder, out of his way, on the floor" (586). Having finished the manuscript, Fosco "read[s] the manuscript to [Hartright], with loud theatrical emphasis and profuse theatrical gesticulation" (587). Following this remarkable introduction to Fosco's narrative, Collins forces the reader to wait until the following serial instalment for the Count's confession while anticipating what information might be contained in this document. The confession itself is full of theatrical asides to the reader—for instance, when Fosco "enter[s] a necessary protest, and correct[s] a lamentable error" (594) concerning the use of his "vast

chemical resources” against Anne Catherick and Marian Halcolmbe (595). While the narratives of Hartright and Marian recognize themselves as textual documents, Fosco’s confession proclaims itself as “a remarkable document” (604). If Collins’s reader fails to notice the significance of written documents while reading the accounts of Hartright and Marian, s/he cannot fail to perceive the importance of such documents following Fosco’s (written) confession.

TEXTUAL FALLIBILITY

Winifred Hughes argues that, for Hartright, the “final design” of these assembled documents reflects “an ultimate world order” (140). Hartright’s perspective is based on his belief that written documents are substantial and solid proof, and Hughes is correct to reject his “interpretation” by stating that “the design of the novel has not been imposed by any divine power, only by Hartright’s wishful thinking; it cannot in the end be said to reflect any universal order or morality or justice” (143). The second element of Collins’s “game” is that while he suggests to the reader that the assembled documents embody order and knowable truth, he simultaneously undermines this suggestion by emphasizing the fallibility and vulnerability of both written documents and spoken words. Throughout the novel, Collins emphasizes our reliance on textual accuracy, in particular by using the phrase “word for word,” and other similar phrases.⁴⁰ Given their acceptance of the suggestion that the written evidence presented in the novel is dependable, characters’ and readers’ reliance on text proves frustrating when these texts are revealed to be unreliable (vulnerable to distortion, disappearance, and ambiguity). To enjoy the pleasure of interpreting texts, one must endure the anxieties and frustrations of attempting to extract meaning from ambiguous and distorted texts; by entrapping his readers into interpreting such documents, Collins lures them into engaging in masochistic detection.

In addition to the emphasis on the accuracy of written records, the premise of *The Woman in White* insists on the notion that written documents function as indisputable proof. At the end of the novel, the reassertion of Laura Fairlie's identity is accomplished through the reading of "a plain narrative of the conspiracy," along with "a statement of the practical contradiction which facts offered to the assertion of Laura's death" (608). Two of the documents in question are a "certified . . . true" copy of "the evidence of [the proprietor of the livery stable's] order-book and the evidence of his driver" (606). Hartright refers to these documents as "the irresistible weapon of plain fact," without ever considering the possibility of human error in noting the date or time of Laura Fairlie's journey in the order book.⁴¹

Alison Milbank suggests that "the novel is full of signs and seeming clues that fail to yield answers" (68). More concretely, the novel is full of *texts* which refuse to offer themselves up to interpretation, and some texts that are simply unreadable. While the reader is invited to share Hartright's belief in the reliability of written documents and transcripts of spoken words by the premise of the novel, Collins challenges this belief by revealing examples of texts which are incorrect, unreliable, or simply nonexistent. The "Narrative of the Doctor," a certificate of Laura Fairlie's death (414), and the "Narrative of the Tombstone" (415) are clearly incorrect, and by the end of the story, all the novel's major characters have agreed on this point. Other "narratives" are not so obviously inaccurate, but they are not entirely reliable. Marian, Laura, and Hartright rely on Marian's diary to provide them with accurate information. Milbank argues that "in a narrative full of false and misleading documents," Marian's diary is "an objective means of expression in a textual battle" (74). At first this statement rings true, but following Marian's illness and the discovery of her diary by Fosco, the diary becomes only another example of a subjective text that is both fallible and vulnerable. At what point does Marian's

narrative cease to be reliable? At the moment when her writing becomes illegible, or before? Has Fosco in any way altered the diary entries, in addition to adding a postscript at the end? Collins implies that these questions cannot be answered, and their unanswerability calls into question the reliability of her written account.

In addition to inaccurate and unreliable texts, the absence of text pervades the novel. As MacDonagh and Smith note, for example, “the evidence [of Sir Percival’s forgery and illegitimacy] in a novel full of texts, is the absence of text, a gap” (276). For Hartright, the discovery of this absence is both exciting and alarming: “Nothing! Not a vestige of the entry which recorded the marriage of Sir Felix Glyde and Cecilia Jane Elster, in the register of the church. . . . [T]here was a blank space—a space evidently left because it was too narrow to contain the entry of the marriages of the two brothers, which in the copy, as in the original, occupied the top of the next page. That space told the whole story!” (507-8). The evidence of Percival’s forgery is not the only instance of an alarming (and yet thrilling) absence of text in the novel; other examples include Count Fosco’s “official-looking” correspondence from the continent (345-46), the legal document that Sir Percival orders Laura Fairlie to sign but not to read, and the substitution of Marian’s letter to Gilmore’s partner for “a blank sheet of note paper” (361).⁴² In *The Woman in White*, a novel based on the premise that written documents are infallible, the inability to interpret text, the existence of clearly inaccurate or suspiciously unreliable texts, and the occasional absence of text, alarm and excite the novel’s characters and readers. Collins’s novel thus prompts masochistic or mixed emotional readerly responses.

Equally alarming is the vulnerability of text to distortion, erasure, and theft, and the fact that steps taken to ensure the safety of written documents often fail. When Marian returns to her letter to the Fairlie family solicitor, which she had left in the post-bag, she discovers that “the

envelope opened on the instant, without sticking or tearing” (277). She suggests as possible explanations that she “had fastened it insufficiently” or that “there might have been some defect in the adhesive gum”; a third possibility, which Marian refuses to put into words and which we (the readers) think is the most likely, is that the letter has been opened and read by Fosco. When Marian receives a reply from the family solicitor’s office, she instructs the messenger “to say that I understand the letter, and that I am very much obliged” (290). Even this short oral communication is vulnerable to prying ears: “Exactly at the moment when I was speaking those words, holding the letter open in my hand, Count Fosco turned the corner of the lane from the high road, and stood before me as if he had sprung up out of the earth.” Realizing the vulnerability of correspondence left in the post-bag at Blackwater Park, Marian arranges to send two letters (one to the family solicitor, and one to Mr. Fairlie) by messenger, but the messenger is intercepted by Mrs. Fosco, and one of the letters is exchanged for a blank piece of notepaper. Marian later fears for the safety of her journal, and even her writing materials which bear traces of her words. Rather than being “distorted” (321), Marian’s suspicions are completely justified when we learn that Fosco “obtained access” to her journal “by clandestine means” (592).⁴³ Throughout the novel, protagonists and antagonists are involved in a linguistic game of hide and seek, in which each side attempts to discover the written and verbal correspondence of the other, and in which no words are ever safe from prying eyes and ears.

In a novel full of narrative gaps, deliberate misdirections, and unreliable textual evidence, the only possible gratification possible for a reader/detective is what Andrea K. Henderson refers to as “deferral of gratification” (8).⁴⁴ Henderson argues that Romantic heroes “are attracted most to those people who keep them in suspense, dominate them, and even humiliate them” (1-2). With *The Woman in White*, readers are similarly “attracted” to a text (or series of texts) that “keep[s]

them in suspense, dominate[s] them, and even humiliate[s] them”; they are engaged in masochistic detection and interpretation, much like the characters within the novel. *The Woman in White* is full of scenes of frustrated interpretation and detection. The very first example of “detection” consists of Marian’s largely fruitless reading of her mother’s letters: “I have spent all the morning looking over my mother’s letters; and I have made no discoveries yet. . . . I have three packets still left, and you may confidently rely on my spending the whole evening over them” (88-89). Our response to Marian’s lack of discoveries is echoed by Hartright’s comment: “Here, then, was one of my anticipations of the morning still unfulfilled” (89). Marian does discover Anne Catherick’s name after going through almost all of her mother’s letters; however, once Hartright sees the physical similarities between Anne and Laura, the letter becomes “useless” (99). Following the discovery of her name, Hartright and Marian undergo largely “useless investigations” in their quest for information about Anne Catherick, which uncover more questions than answers (121).⁴⁵

According to Ann Cvetkovich’s analysis of sensation fiction, the genre manipulates readers’ affective responses as well as their suspicions: “The readers who are excited by the sensational lure of [the novels’] mysteries are provided with experiences of affect that are ultimately regulated and controlled” (*Mixed Feelings* 7). Cvetkovich’s argument overlooks the fact that not all the novel’s mysteries are solved owing to the absence of adequate textual evidence. Her point concerning the regulation and control of readers’ emotional responses is valid, since Collins appears to use affective responses to his novel to manipulate the manner in which his readers engage with his narrative. By forcing the reader and the characters to rely on unreliable documents, Collins provokes highly emotional responses to both reading and writing.

MIXED AFFECTIVE RESPONSES TO TEXT

The sensation novel's propensity for soliciting nervous responses was of great concern to contemporary reviewers of *The Woman in White*. In her criticism of the then-emerging sensation genre, Margaret Oliphant was particularly concerned about "frequent and rapid recurrence of piquant situation and startling incident" in serial publications (Bachman & Cox 642). Collins apparently hoped to inspire the same kinds of intensely emotional responses in his readers as we see in his characters; as D. A. Miller points out, the reader of Collins's text "identif[ies] with the nerve-wracked figures [within the novel] who carry forward the activity of our own deciphering" ("Cage Aux Folles" 110). In her examination of "affectively charged scenes" ("Ghostlier Determinations" 32), Cvetkovich similarly emphasizes the physiological nature of "sensational responses," which she argues "are central to the quasi-legal procedure of uncovering the secrets that crop up everywhere in the novel. Characters are alerted to the presence of a mystery by their own bodily sensations of fear, excitement, and suspense" (25). In his study of readers' responses to the sensation genre, Miller highlights the physiological elements of "sensation," and the fact that the genre "address[es] itself primarily to the sympathetic nervous system, where it grounds its characteristic adrenalin effects: accelerated heart rate and respiration, increased blood pressure, and the pallor resulting from vasoconstriction" ("Cage Aux Folles" 107), which, as he correctly points out, affects "all the novel's principal characters" as well as the reader (109). For Miller, it is this physiological element of sensation novels that makes reading them masochistic (although he does not use this word): he describes them as "domineering texts, whose power is literally proved upon our pulses" (107). Miller also argues that the reader accepts for fact things that are only suggested to him/her because "they validate the sensations they make him feel" (115). Pointing to the suspiciously loose seal on Marian's letter, he argues that "we take it firmly

for granted” that Fosco opens and reseals the letter. I would argue instead that our uncertainty regarding the cause of the loose seal adds to our excitement, particularly given the novel’s larger theme of textual uncertainty that seems both to excite and to discourage its characters. These emotional aspects of masochistic reading—excitement, uncertainty, frustration—complement Miller’s description of the physiological domination of the genre.

In *The Woman in White*, characters’ affective responses to the evocative power of *words* reflect Collins’s view of the relationship between the written language of the novel and the reader.⁴⁶ Walter Hartright often figures as an emotionally unstable reader, which is ironic given his authorial power of control over the narrative. When Hartright reads Anne Catherick’s anonymous letter, his emotional response brings him close to mental instability: “Those words and the doubt which had just escaped me as to the sanity of the writer of the letter, acting together on my mind, suggested an idea, which I was literally afraid to express openly, or even to encourage secretly. I began to doubt whether my own faculties were not in danger of losing their balance” (118). When he enquires about the accuracy of statements made against Sir Percival in the letter, Marian reprimands him for allowing the contents of the note to “influence” him: “Mr. Hartright! I hope you are not unjust enough to let that infamous letter influence you?” (120). Hartright feels “the blood rush into [his] cheeks” as he is overcome with shame; as Tamar Heller suggests, this anonymous letter is “an embarrassingly influential text for him” (127). Hartright seems equally affected by written and spoken words: while eavesdropping on a conversation between Anne Catherick and Mrs. Clements, he states, “These words strung up my attention to a pitch of expectation that was almost painful” (129). His description of “painful” expectation represents the kind of masochistic reading in which the reader yearns to know more despite the emotional “pain” caused by excessive anticipation and suspense.

Hartright is not the only emotional reader in the novel. Laura Fairlie is one example of a potential woman reader who must be spared the emotional trauma of “sensations.” Marian describes her half-sister as “rather nervous and sensitive” (78). She deliberately avoids informing Laura of the information she finds in her mother’s letters because she fears Laura will be unduly upset by the mystery. This view is confirmed after Marian receives the anonymous letter from Anne Catherick: Marian tells us, “That letter . . . has so agitated and alarmed [Laura] that I have had the greatest possible difficulty in composing her” (115). The author of an anonymous review in the *Saturday Review* suggests that *The Woman in White* “makes the female reader shudder” (Bachman & Cox 631). This image of the emotionally vulnerable woman reader thus echoes the portrayal of female (as well as male) characters within the novel itself.⁴⁷

A final emotional component of masochistic reading and detection is the shame related to textual spying and snooping. Ellen Bayuk Rosenman argues that “masochism is a negotiating tool in which pain is the price of a chosen desire that violates a moral or ideological norm. The masochist pursues a forbidden pleasure or agency but arranges to suffer for it, and therefore maintains moral credibility” (24-25). Rosenman’s argument is particularly compelling when applied to the reluctant performances of degrading or shameful activities such as snooping, spying, and eavesdropping in *The Woman in White*. Although Hartright insists that “It is miserable and sickening to descend to deceit, even of the most harmless kind” (112), he and other characters in the novel must endure the “miserable” discomfort of deceit, since the premise of the novel’s plot is based around the discovery of secrets through the interpretation of written and spoken words. Later in the novel, Hartright rejects the possibility of adopting a disguise, despite the advantages of being unrecognizable to his enemies: “there was something so repellent to me in the idea—something so meanly like the common herd of spies and informers in the

mere act of adopting a disguise—that I dismissed the question from consideration, almost as soon as it had risen in my mind” (483). Although Hartright shows disdain for disguise because of its association with “common” deception, he nevertheless engages in other dishonourable activities such as eavesdropping and blackmail. In *Eavesdropping in the Novel from Austen to Proust*, Ann Gaylin’s comparison of interpretation and eavesdropping suggests that the kinds of interpretations in which the reader or “secret listener” engages are morally questionable (8). Since eavesdropping “acts out both the urge to know and the fear of others knowing” (5), sensation novel readers could experience the masochistic pleasures of delving into private secrets while fearing their own discovery (by patriarchal or parental figures) as guilty readers.

When Hartright decides to listen in on a conversation between Anne Catherick and Mrs. Clements in the Limmeridge churchyard, he pauses to consider the shame of what he is about to do: “After some little hesitation, caused by a natural reluctance to conceal myself, indispensable as that concealment was to the object in view, I had resolved on entering the porch [of the church]” (129). To justify his dishonourable activities, Hartright insists on his discomfort and hesitation as “a cover” for the “pleasure” and “power” of covert surveillance. Marian’s first experience of eavesdropping is prefaced by an acknowledgement that “it was very wrong and very discreditable to listen” (248). Towards the end of her narrative, Marian must again “sanction the act to [her] own conscience” (334), before she undertakes to eavesdrop on Fosco’s highly secretive conversation with Sir Percival. Audrey Caming Fein argues that “Marian’s acts of deception are so contrary to her character that her physical and mental health must suffer” (58). If we place Marian’s experiences in the context of Rosenman’s argument, we might argue that Marian’s suffering serves to cover her pleasure in deception and detection.

Rosenman's examination of the relationship between suffering and "forbidden pleasure[s]" (24) may also be applied to our own guilty reading. Beckwith and Reed argue that reading Marian's diary amounts to snooping, since (as they point out) for a long time "the reader would have been left in doubt as to whether Marian spoke through her diary by choice or by necessity" (305). Marian refers to her diary as "these private pages of mine" (233), suggesting that they are not intended for public consumption. Like the characters within the novel, we too are shamefully reduced to snooping, eavesdropping, and spying. D. A. Miller connects the idea of the "secret self" with the privacy of reading, and argues that "novel reading takes for granted the existence of a space in which the reading subject remains safe from the surveillance, suspicion [and] reading . . . of others" ("Cage Aux Folles" 116).⁴⁸ I would argue instead that, particularly when we are reading a novel whose characters are both engaged in and discovered through surveillance, the reader's fear of discovery, mingled with the discomfort of spying and snooping, is part of the mixed affective response of readers to the sensation novel.

Collins plays upon the Victorian reader's fear of detection by including several scenes in which private reading or writing is discovered. A secret note to Laura which Anne Catherick hides in the sand is easily discovered by Sir Percival. When he finds Laura reading the note, he tells her, "I have read it. I dug it up out of the sand two hours since, and buried it again, and wrote the word above it again, and left it ready to your hands. You can't lie yourself out of the scrape now. You saw Anne Catherick in secret yesterday; and you have got her letter in your hand at this moment. I have not caught *her* yet; but I have caught *you*" (316-317). Laura is thus "caught" reading what she should not; if the Victorian reader (of taboo genres such as the sensation novel) shared Laura's position of clandestine reading, s/he might be particularly alarmed when Laura is discovered. According to Lonoff, Fosco's unexpected postscript to

Marian's diary has a similar emotional effect: its purpose is to "elicit apprehension—fear of Fosco, fear for Marian and Laura, excitement as to what will happen next" (126). Fosco's uninvited narrative, I would argue, also elicits fear of our own discovery. Audrey Caming Fein describes Fosco's postscript as a "humiliating act of patriarchal authority" (62); in this way, Fosco (like Percival) represents an authority figure who censures clandestine reading or writing.

CONCLUSIONS

The Woman in White entraps the reader into performing what prove to be nearly impossible tasks. S/he is encouraged to participate in the unravelling of a mystery by sifting through a vast series of documents and transcripts, considering each one in the objective manner of a judge. Collins's manipulation of readers' emotional responses to the text makes their objectivity unfeasible, while his insistence on and problematization of the dependability of text places readers in the paradoxical position of having to rely on problematic sources of information and to interpret sometimes incomprehensible or absent documents.⁴⁹ At the same time, Collins emphasizes the reader's sense that s/he is engaged in a clandestine activity, much like the characters in the novel who must endure their distaste for snooping and spying while simultaneously having to guard against their foes who are engaged in the same activities. These more subtle narrative techniques appear to have been vastly more popular than those Collins employed in his earlier work. In his anonymous review in *The Times*, E. S. Dallas grudgingly acknowledges that the novel's narrative structure enhances suspense, since Collins refuses to divulge any piece of information until the reader's anticipation and curiosity are sufficiently stimulated: "The affectation of ignorance in almost every page is a prime necessity of his novel, and this ignorance works up into a stimulant of curiosity" (Bachman & Cox 635).

Many reviewers' comments also highlight the masochistic elements of detection in *The Woman in White*. Dallas reprimands "the author, who usurps a somewhat tyrannical sway over both characters and incidents" (Bachman & Cox 638), and complains that throughout the novel Collins is "continually making us feel our ignorance and throwing us at the proper moment a few crumbs of comfort" (634). The anonymous critic from the *Saturday Review* also reluctantly admits Collins's hold over the reader: "We have spent some exciting hours over the charade, and have been at least obliged to come to [the author] in despair for the solution" (Bachman & Cox 628). Hennelly argues that the "painful pleasures" (89) of detection derive from the reader's realization that "there are always mysteries in extratextual life which he can never detect" (103); while this may be true, I would argue that the act of reading sensation novels is inherently masochistic, or painfully pleasurable, an interpretation that is borne out by contemporary critical responses to *The Woman in White*. Lonoff suggests that the critics undervalued Collins's "adroit manipulation of the reader's attention" (56). Given Winifred Hughes's argument that ambiguity was not as appealing for the Victorians as it is for modernists, it seems likely that critics also resented Collins's authorial manipulations.⁵⁰ For the Victorian reader, the contrast between the thrilling pleasure of mysteries and the ambiguities of text that pervade the novel would make for a highly masochistic reading. In Collins's novels, masochistic responses to text are produced by the interplay between the author's manipulation of readers' emotional responses and the cultural context of the sensation genre, in which reading unsavoury novels was considered distasteful and even degrading. Critics' insistence on the immorality of sensation novels was thus an integral part of the reading experience, since the guilty pleasure of reading sensation novels would have reinforced the reader's position as transgressor.

CHAPTER FOUR:

**CONCLUSION: KNOWLEDGE, SUFFERING, AND MASOCHISTIC DETECTION
IN *THE LAW AND THE LADY* (1875)**

Robert P. Ashley points to the similarities between *The Law and the Lady* and *The Woman in White* as evidence of Collins's "literary decline into the [eighteen-]seventies" (55). I would argue instead that *The Law and the Lady* is a significant novel, as it develops the notion of masochistic literary detection beyond its treatment in *The Dead Secret* and *The Woman in White*. Revisiting Miller's analysis of disciplinary power in the nineteenth-century novel in *The Novel and the Police*, and Thoms's suggestion in *Detection and Its Designs* that "detection is internalized so that the individual embodies a system of regulation, being both the oppressive law and its transgressor" (6), I shall argue that, according to Collins, pursuing justice from outside the parameters of the law as an amateur detective is a frustrating and even masochistic task. Collins's amateur detective Valeria is both a disciplinarian and a transgressor. She resembles Anna Jones's "ideal" sensation reader, who is both "well-disciplined and deviant" in his or her enjoyment and distrust of the sensation novel (196), and prone to masochistic sentiments related to the guilty pleasures of sensational reading.

In *The Law and the Lady*, Collins not only addresses the masochistic nature of amateur detection but also, more significantly, he explores the masochistic aspects of a desire for knowledge—a desire which comprises the essence of detection and of suspenseful reading. In this concluding chapter, I shall explore the links between suffering and the desire for knowledge. After realizing that her new husband married her under a false name, Valeria disregards her husband's directive and seeks out knowledge—the knowledge of her husband's secret past, and the knowledge required to prove her husband's innocence the poisoning of his first wife. By

refusing to “submit” to the verdict of “not proven” (which neither exonerates nor condemns the accused) or to the mental anguish of her uncertainty, Valeria substitutes suffering of one kind for another: her knowledge of her husband’s past life and of the truth behind his first wife’s death brings as much suffering as did her ignorance and desire to know. By both seeking and ultimately withholding knowledge (she convinces Eustace not to read his wife’s suicide letter), Valeria represents the sensation genre, which is notorious for “withholding crucial pieces of knowledge” (Levine 2). At the same time, Valeria’s desire for knowledge mimics the sensation reader’s feelings of anticipation and curiosity. Jessica Benjamin suggests that masochistic individuals “participate in their own submission” (8); like Valeria, the reader of *The Law and the Lady* chooses to suffer the frustration and shame and also to experience the pleasure of solving the novel’s mysteries. *The Law and the Lady* participates in the theme of masochistic detection present in *The Dead Secret* and *The Woman in White*; at the same time, the novel develops this theme by concentrating on issues of ignorance, suspense, and the desire for knowledge.

LITERARY DETECTION AS MASOCHISTIC

Detection in Collins’s novels is “literary” in two senses: first, detection is carried out within the novel by characters who mimic the reader’s activity; second, this detection often consists of interpreting written documents and transcripts of oral conversations. In *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers*, Sue Lonoff describes Collins’s “textual playfulness” (127), and argues that *The Law and the Lady* is one of several novels in which Collins plays with different narrators and narrative techniques (127-8). Like *The Dead Secret* and *The Woman in White*, *The Law and the Lady* contains what Lonoff describes as “interior texts” (128), or texts within the text of the novel which serve to call attention to the novel’s textuality and to the characters’ struggles to

interpret texts. Many such “interior texts” are hidden or buried, and must first be discovered in order to be interpreted, such as the papers Valeria discovers in a secret compartment in the bottom of her husband’s dressing case (24-25), the copy of Eustace Macallan’s trial, which has fallen behind a bookcase in Major Fitz-David’s library (93), and the fragments of Sara Macallan’s suicide letter, buried in the dust-heap at Gleninch. Characters frequently remind the reader of his or her own active engagement with Collins’s text. Dexter’s attention to styles of narration (255) calls attention to the novel’s textuality; at one point in his discussion of Valeria’s investigation, he exclaims, “What a plot for a novel!” (259).⁵¹ Benjamin’s preference for “cheap periodical[s]” and for “guessing one of the weekly ‘Enigmas’ which the Editor presented to his readers” (284) draws the reader’s attention not only to the novel’s textuality but to its function as a literary puzzle, which the reader should attempt to solve. Ann Gaylin argues that “the urge to know is not confined to the . . . detective or the spy but, rather, is universal to human experience. Some of us may wish to be detectives, but we are all readers” (18). Collins’s reference to literary enigmas and linguistic puzzles suggests that the detective is a reader, and vice versa.

As in *The Dead Secret* and *The Woman in White*, characters in *The Law and the Lady* mimic the reader in scenes of masochistic reading in which the characters (like the reader) struggle to interpret (or locate) written documents. Early in the novel, Valeria (as narrator) reproduces a letter in which Major Fitz-David confirms that “Eustace Woodville . . . is a gentleman by birth and position” (19). Valeria’s interpretation is literal and simplistic: she states, “If *I* had written for information about [Eustace] . . . it would have been plain enough for me” (19). Valeria’s uncle reads the letter in quite a different manner: “There is something under the surface in connexion with Mr. Woodville, or with his family, to which Major Fitz-David is not at liberty to allude. *Properly interpreted* . . . that letter is a warning” (20; emphasis added). This short letter

is the first “interior text” within the novel, and although it is brief and seemingly to the point, different characters/readers produce drastically different analyses of its contents and meaning.

As in Collins’s earlier novels, “literary” detection is frustrated by ambiguous, unreliable, or absent texts. Janice Allan describes Valeria’s investigation as one “dominated by the undecidability of writing” (53). The frustrations of interpretation manifest themselves early in the novel, as Valeria struggles to interpret her husband’s wish that she refrain from looking into his past life:

[T]he only words which really produced an impression on my mind were the words . . . which he had spoken to himself. He had said: ‘Nothing, of course, *or she would not be here.*’ If I had found out some other truth besides the truth about the name, would it have prevented me from ever returning to my husband? Was that what he meant? Did the sort of discovery that he contemplated, mean something so dreadful that it would have parted us at once and for ever? I stood by his chair in silence; and tried to find the answer to those terrible questions. (53; emphasis in original)

Like Rosamond in *The Dead Secret* and Marian in *The Woman in White*, Valeria employs the methodology of a literary scholar engaged in a close reading of a text, mimicking the reader’s own interpretation of the narrative. Valeria identifies a phrase that strikes her as being particularly ambiguous, and she attempts to tease out a possible meaning. Much of *The Law and the Lady* is taken up with textual analysis.⁵² In chapter XXI, Valeria analyzes Mrs. Beaul’s letter to Eustace (included in the written account of Eustace’s trial), which she argues “offers . . . trustworthy evidence to show the state of the woman’s mind when she paid her visit to Gleninch”

(185). Like a critical reader, Valeria quotes from the letter to support her analysis and interprets the tone of the letter to be “the language of a woman shamelessly and furiously in love with a man—not her husband” (185). Valeria’s analysis of the trial transcript is significant because it highlights the similarities between literary interpretation and detection. In “The Detective as Reader: Narrative and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction,” Peter Hühn discusses the detective as literary interpreter: “The continual rearrangement and reinterpretation of clues is . . . the basic method of reading and understanding unfamiliar texts—commonly called the ‘hermeneutic circle,’ which involves devising interpretive patterns to integrate signs and then using new signs to modify and adjust these patterns accordingly” (455).

Untrustworthy written documents and undecipherable textual evidence are a concern for both Valeria and the reader, since both are engaged in “literary” detection; however, the unreliability of Valeria’s narration makes the reader’s task of solving the novel’s mysteries before the final chapter both pleasurable and frustrating (and thus masochistic). It is never made clear why Valeria feels compelled to write this narrative, so we do not know what motivates her character or what her narrative biases might be.⁵³ Whereas the “evidence” presented in the narrative of *The Woman in White* is based on carefully considered recollections and meticulous diary entries (so we are told by the narrator, Hartright), at the very end of *The Law and the Lady*, Collins reveals that Valeria “write[s] from memory, unassisted by notes or diaries” (399), which calls into question the reliability of her narrative.⁵⁴ Valeria’s account of the trial is especially problematic: she assures the reader (and herself) that “particular care had been taken to secure a literally correct report of the evidence given by the various witnesses” (124), but we soon learn that she (or rather Collins) has omitted and altered portions of the transcript.⁵⁵ In *The Law and the Lady*, the narrator provides us with abridged and reconstructed versions of the documents

which exist in the fictional world of the novel. Collins provides the reader with only enough information to become interested in the novel's mysteries, without giving us the satisfaction of feeling as if we have access to all relevant evidence.⁵⁶ If masochism consists of "deliberate pursuit of or enthusiasm for an activity that appears to be painful, frustrating, or tedious" (OED), literary detection in and of *The Law and the Lady* is certainly a masochistic undertaking.

THE DETECTIVE: DISCIPLINARIAN AND DEVIANT

In *Detection and Its Designs*, Peter Thoms argues that "detection [in nineteenth-century fiction] is internalized so that the individual embodies a system of regulation, being both the oppressive law and its transgressor" (6). Similarly, in *The Novel and the Police*, D. A. Miller argues that non-traditional disciplinary power leads to "endless self-examination" (18), so that those who pursue justice from outside the parameters of the law police themselves as well as others. The amateur detectives of Collins's novels—including Valeria in *The Law and the Lady*—participate in this "alternative power of regulation," and by so doing they become both disciplinarians and transgressors.⁵⁷ In addition, the reader of Collins's novels is both detective and criminal: as detectives, characters and readers represent both the system of disciplinary regulation and the transgressors who must be disciplined. Finally, as Jones suggests, the reader "posited by [Collins's] text" (197) is both "well-conditioned to respond to the affective stimuli of the sensation novel," and "deeply suspicious" of the sensation genre (197). This reader is "well-disciplined and deviant" in his or her enjoyment and distrust of the sensation novel (196), and thus prone to masochistic sentiments related to the guilty pleasures of sensational reading.

Miller suggests that the spheres of the middle and upper classes in Victorian fiction are governed by "an alternative power of regulation" (7), which includes the family unit (1), the

amateur detective, and the forces of “public opinion” and “social humiliation” (14). In *The Law and the Lady*, the law has failed to vindicate or condemn Eustace Macallan, but the forces of “public opinion” and “social humiliation” judge him to be guilty. Valeria, who “vow[s] to devote [her] life to the sacred object of vindicating [her] husband’s innocence” (Collins 183), takes on the role of amateur detective, another alternative “policing” force. Mr Playmore’s comment that “[t]he light which the whole machinery of the Law was unable to throw on the poisoning case at Gleninch, has been accidentally let in on it, by a Lady who refuses to listen to reason and who insists on having her own way” (277), highlights the opposition between the “machinery of the Law” and the amateur (woman) detective who operates outside it.

Not only does Valeria work outside the institutions of the law and the police, but as a detective engaged in distasteful activities (albeit with good intentions), she also works outside of, and in opposition to, the forces of “public opinion” and “social humiliation.” Anthea Trodd argues that the police (in novels and in Victorian culture generally) are associated with the “world of subterfuge and surveillance” (436); indeed, the author of an unsigned article in *The Times* (1845) criticized the police force’s use of plain-clothed officers, and argued that “there was, and always will be, something repugnant to the English mind in the bare idea of espionage” (4). If the professional members of the police force are tainted by their association with “subterfuge and surveillance,” the amateur detective working outside the law would be even more “repugnant.” The anonymous author of “Novels” in *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* emphasizes the distasteful and transgressive nature of detection by suggesting that one of the “faults of popular fiction” is “its tendency to detectivism [and] criminalism” (170). In the course of the article, the writer reassures the reader that “we have no real intention . . . of carrying you back in review over your sensation novels, or waking up again your exhausted interest in *those*

personages, male and female, with whom you would certainly permit yourself or your family to associate only in print" (170; emphasis added). However moral the motives of amateur detectives may be, their association with "detectivism" and "criminalism" categorizes them as disreputable and socially outcast. As a result, detection becomes masochistic: to enjoy the pleasures of solving mysteries and vindicating the innocent, the detective (and the reader) must endure the frustrations of interpreting evidence and the shame of engaging in socially unacceptable activities.

Valeria's investigation recalls the unacceptable activities of Marian and Hartright in *The Woman in White*, as well as that of Rosamond in *The Dead Secret*: in all three novels, the amateur detectives place themselves in the uncomfortable and even untenable position of disciplinarian (ferreting out secrets and restoring moral order) and of transgressor (reading secret diaries, adopting disguises, eavesdropping, and spying). Collins's readers are implicated in these activities because they, too, are reading confidential documents and "listening in" (or "reading in") on private conversations. In *The Law and the Lady*, Valeria snoops through her husband's private papers (25), she visits Major Fitz-David under her false married name (58), and she uses her feminine influence on the Major to coax him into revealing her husband's secret. Mrs. Macallan warns Valeria that she will "risk [her] reputation and [her] happiness" by pursuing the legal case against Eustace (198); this warning is repeated by other characters throughout the novel. Valeria refers to the novel as her "shameful confession," and includes herself in the "Prayer Book category" of "miserable sinners" (362). This shame is the result of Valeria's association with the impropriety of detection (and of the transgression of her marriage vow to "submit" to her husband's wishes), and its effect is to remind the reader of his or her own involvement in these duplicitous activities.

THE DEVIANT DETECTIVE AND THE WOMAN READER

Audrey Caming Fein argues that female detectives are “especially transgressive” (92).⁵⁸ The author of an unsigned review of *The Law and the Lady* in *The Examiner* criticizes Valeria as a “prying, vain, obstinate woman, who occasionally loses her ordinary identity, and steps out of her own character” (415); perhaps the author feels Valeria’s character is inconsistent because it is inconceivable that a “bride and young mother” (415), as he describes her, could be both the “angel in the house” and a worldly detective. The author goes on to disparage the “low moral tone attributed to some of the female characters,” calling it a “blemish [which] pervades the whole story, and amounts to a libel on the female sex” (415). Clearly, the shameful, disreputable nature of detective work has a negative impact on female characters.⁵⁹

The “especially transgressive” qualities of fictional female detectives are significant because many readers of sensation fiction were supposed to be women. For the “woman reader,” Collins’s fiction is arguably more masochistic, since the guilty pleasures of detection and interpretation of private secrets and criminal activities within the narratives, in addition to the guilty pleasure of reading sensation novels, were greater for Victorian women. Critics of popular fiction played on the Victorian stereotype of the “woman reader,” a woman who loves tales of terror and excitement but who is unable to control her emotional responses.⁶⁰ As we saw earlier, they argued that certain kinds of books “could arouse a female’s sexual impulses, drain her vital energies, damage her mental and reproductive health, divorce her attention from her maternal and domestic duties, undermine her self-control, and rot her mind, leading to ruination” (Golden 22). If we compare these “symptoms” to Valeria’s physical and emotional responses to reading, we see that she represents, in many respects, a stereotypically emotional and excitable woman reader.⁶¹ When Valeria reads a letter from Benjamin containing the news that the fragments of

Sara Macallan's letter have been found, she is "obliged to wait and let [her] overpowering agitation subside, before [she] could read any more" (374). This is a scene of masochistic reading, much like the passage in *The Dead Secret* in which Sarah hides the letter containing the secret in the Myrtle Room, reading it over before hiding it in a drawer. Sara Macallan's letter is so emotionally distressing that it causes a physical reaction, but Valeria's desire to know its contents is so great that she chooses to endure the physical (and emotional) suffering of reading.

Valeria's reading (as part of her investigation) is also masochistic in part because it is transgressive.⁶² As Lisa Marie Dresner points out, in the course of the novel, Valeria comes up against a series of individuals who represent "various institutions of patriarchy" (37) in their criticism of her investigation. Eustace Macallan's character recalls Mr. Orridge (a doctor) and Mr. Frankland (Rosamond's husband), who attempt to curtail Rosamond's enthusiasm for detection in *The Dead Secret*. When Valeria revisits her desire to know more about her husband's past life, he tells her, "I thought we had agreed, Valeria, not to return to that subject again. . . . You only distress yourself and distress me" (45). Here, Eustace seems to be concerned that Valeria will be unable to handle this emotional "distress." Later, he seems more interested in curailing Valeria's rampant curiosity: "If you could control your curiosity . . . we might live happily enough. I thought I had married a woman who was superior to the vulgar failings of her sex" (54). In these two passages, Eustace alludes to the Victorian assumption of women's susceptibility to "vulgar" curiosity and emotional over-excitement.

Benjamin, Mr. Playmore, Major Fitz-David, and her uncle (the Vicar) also represent patriarchal authorities who attempt to dissuade Valeria from pursuing knowledge of Eustace's past.⁶³ Benjamin begs her to "do nothing rash" (51), and declares that "the new generation is beyond [his] fathoming" (117). Major Fitz-David warns Valeria, "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 your husband's secret!" (75). Valeria's uncle declares that "[t]he poor thing's troubles have turned her brain" (120). He disapproves of her proposal to analyze the transcript of Eustace's trial, saying that it is "[n]ice reading for a young woman" and that that she "will be wanting a batch of nasty French novels next" (121). This last passage makes an explicit connection between certain kinds of reading and detection: both are "nasty" in the sense of being socially unacceptable, and thus unsuitable for "a young woman."

As in *The Dead Secret* and *The Woman in White*, male critics in *The Law and the Lady* are unable to persuade the female protagonist to give up her investigation. Valeria describes how she "felt [her]self blush for [her] own headstrong resistance" (284), but she is not ashamed enough to abandon her investigation. She suggests that her obstinate personality is to blame for her shameful rejection of sound (male) advice: "[M]y husband's terrible warning . . . produced no deterrent effect on my mind: it only stimulated my resolution to discover what he was hiding from me" (55). Her claim that she has no inkling of "how other women might have acted in [her] place" might be a subtle joke on the part of Collins, since, in *The Dead Secret*, when Rosamond's husband inquires if she plans to search the supposedly haunted sections of their mansion in Cornwall, she exclaims, "Am I not a woman?" (138), suggesting that it is in women's nature to be excessively curious.

KNOWLEDGE, IGNORANCE, SUFFERING

Valeria's curiosity and desire to solve the mystery are greater than her shame at being a (woman) detective. In *Serious Pleasures of Suspense*, Levine emphasizes the "anxious delay between the excitement of conjecture and the appearance of more certain knowledge," which

functions in Victorian literature (6). It is this “anxious delay” which makes anticipation and suspense masochistic. Collins connects anticipation with the desire to know, which is the essence of detection and of suspenseful reading. In *The Law and the Lady*, knowledge brings as much suffering as ignorance and the desire to know. J. M. Allan suggests that “the thematic preoccupations and formal considerations of nineteenth-century detective fiction” are characterized by “a new emphasis on the unknowable or strange that comes to be figured as mystery” (45). In her quest for knowledge and her ultimate withholding of knowledge (she convinces Eustace not to read his first wife’s suicide letter) Valeria represents the sensation genre, which is notorious for “withholding crucial pieces of knowledge” (Levine 2).⁶⁴

Collins emphasizes the theme of knowledge, ignorance, and suffering by alluding to the biblical story of Adam and Eve.⁶⁵ In her discussion of Collins’s allusions to the story of Adam and Eve, Lonoff argues that the “major theme” of *The Law and the Lady* is “disobedience—or rather, the paradoxical nature of a woman’s disobedience. . . . [D]isobedience places this devoted wife in an ambiguous position, and instead of choosing between knowledge and duty, she resorts to a form of deceit” (149). Kathleen O’Fallon compares several of Collins’s heroines with Eve: “the most important of Collins’s heroines are fallen in the sense that they are the daughters of Eve, postlapsarian women with minds of their own and the strength of character to insist they be allowed to use them. They share with Eve the activity of mind and assertiveness that causes her to taste the fruit of forbidden knowledge” (228). The comparison of Valeria to Eve highlights the theme of ignorance and (the desire for) knowledge: “Eve was, after all, the first bride to make a mistake. She disobeyed the law of God and her husband by refusing to be kept in ignorance” (233).

The belief that “ignorance is bliss” and that knowledge can only bring suffering is held by the same characters who represent the patriarchal critics of detection and emotionally evocative reading. Eustace Macallan’s advice to Valeria establishes a direct link between happiness and (lack of) knowledge: to frighten her away from potentially dangerous knowledge, he tells her, “if you ever discover what I am now keeping from your knowledge—from that moment you live a life of torture; your tranquillity is gone. Your days will be days of terror; your nights will be full of horrid dreams—through no fault of mine, mind!” (54). Eustace maintains his belief in the benefits of ignorance even after Valeria discovers his secret, and assures her of her loyalty: “As long as you were ignorant [of my past], the possibilities of happiness were always within our reach” (106). When Valeria has at last obtained proof of her husband’s innocence in the poisoning of Sara Macallan, Eustace agrees not to read his first wife’s suicide letter, believing he will be happier if he remains in ignorance—a belief which Valeria encourages.⁶⁶

Valeria’s response to the notion that ignorance brings happiness and knowledge brings despair is to feel that the suspense of curiosity and anticipation, fuelled by ignorance, is “simply unendurable” (47).⁶⁷ Even after Valeria is finally convinced to give up her investigations, she still longs to unravel the mystery: “I still felt secret longings, in those dangerous moments when I was left to myself, to know whether the search for the torn letter had, or had not, taken place. What wayward creatures we are! With everything that a woman could want to make her happy, I was ready to put that happiness in peril, rather than remain ignorant of what was going on at Gleninch!” (373-74). In this passage, it is the desire for knowledge (rather than its pursuit through detection) that is “wayward,” or transgressive.

Towards the end of the novel, it seems clear that the suffering of having knowledge is preferable to the suffering of ignorance. From the onset of her investigation, Valeria decides that

anything is better than the psychological anguish of ignorance and suspense: “I left [Mrs. Macallan’s] house, positively resolved, *come what might of it*, to discover the secret which the mother and son were hiding from me” (43; emphasis added). As Lonoff suggests, “Valeria gains knowledge of Eustace’s past at the temporary cost of her domestic bliss, but her fall is fortunate, in that it enables her to save her marriage and her husband’s peace of mind” (135). Once Valeria has read the contents of Eustace’s first wife’s suicide letter, she reflects on the knowledge she has gained: “I had devoted my life to the attainment of one object; and that object I had gained. There, on the table before me, lay the triumphant vindication of my husband’s innocence; and . . . my one hope was that he might never see it! My one desire was to hide it from the public view!” (395) Despite her horror at the contents of Sara Macallan’s suicide letter, Valeria’s suffering ironically makes possible the peace of mind she enjoys at the end of the novel.

DOMINATION AND SUBMISSION: A QUESTION OF AGENCY

Because Valeria ultimately gives up her investigation to return to the domestic sphere as wife and mother, Lonoff argues that Valeria’s “rebellion ends in submission” (167). Similarly, Audrey Caming Fein compares Valeria to Rosamond in *The Dead Secret*, and argues that the fact that both women are “punished” for their “disobedience” to their husbands indicates “Collins’s ultimate validation of traditional gender roles” (83). In fact, submission is a major theme of *The Law and the Lady*. The novel begins with “subjection,” as Valeria’s uncle reads the end of the Marriage Service of the Church of England: “For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands; even as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (7). Lonoff and O’Fallon point to this passage in relation to the theme of disobedience, but the theme of submission is equally

prevalent in *The Law and the Lady*, particularly since Collins makes frequent use of the word “submit,” especially with reference to the legal verdict of “not proven.”⁶⁸ Once Valeria discovers that her husband was tried for the murder of his first wife, she argues that “[as] dreadful as the discovery had been, I would rather have made it, and suffer under it, as I was suffering now, than to have been kept in the dark” (98). Collins emphasizes the fact that Valeria chooses her suffering (or at least, chooses between two kinds of suffering—ignorance or knowledge); the question is, does the reader choose his or her own suffering, or is s/he entrapped by Collins’s narratives?

As we have seen, Jones defines readerly affect as “the control a novel exerts over its reader” (205), and argues that all narratives are masochistic to some degree (210).⁶⁹ In addition to “withholding knowledge” (Levine 2), authors of sensation fiction have “a peculiarly directive power over us” (Freud, “Uncanny” 641). The author of an unsigned review of *The Law and the Lady* in the *Saturday Review* argues that Collins “wins his audience . . . by the promise of telling them a secret, but when they are caught he does not quite so quickly let them go” (Page 203). To what extent, then, does a sensation author such as Collins have the power to provoke and control particular emotional responses in their readers through the use of suspense, ambiguity, and characters whose detective work mimics that of the readers themselves?

Ellen Rosenman argues that the masochist “pursues a forbidden pleasure or agency but arranges to suffer for it, and therefore maintains moral credibility” (23-24). According to this argument, the masochist chooses to suffer as “a cover” (24) for the pleasure of acting as detectives—a transgressive activity in which the reader is implicated.⁷⁰ Collins may direct his readers’ emotional responses once they begin to read, but the choice to begin reading is theirs. Gregory Forter makes a similar observation in his study of the “hard-boiled” detective novel. He

writes, “[T]he end-pleasure of narrative meaning is replaced by a pleasure in the ravishing image of an irrepressibly murderous violence. . . . [W]e solicit [this violence], call it into being, *submit to it*, not just as the condition but as the very convulsiveness of an utterly in(sub)ordinate enjoyment” (1; emphasis added). Although there are considerable differences between “hard-boiled” detective novels and Victorian sensation fiction, the thrilling and yet frustrating activity of attempting to solve a mystery when the author has no intention of allowing the reader to discover the solution to the mystery a moment too soon is common to both genres. In both the detective story and the sensation novel, the reader “solicit[s]” and “submit[s] to” the masochistic pleasure of the text.

In the first chapter of this study, I avoided focusing on definitions of masochism that emphasized its role in sexual fantasies; I would like to bring sex back into the equation as a possible avenue for further study. Might it be possible to think of masochism—particularly metaphorical or psychological masochism—as a kind of auto-erotism or masturbation? Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick suggests that “in the context of hierarchically oppressive relations between genders and between sexualities, masturbation can seem to offer—not least as an analogy to writing—a reservoir of potentially utopian metaphors and energies for independence, self-possession, and a rapture that may owe relatively little to political or interpersonal abjection” (821). Given the separate spheres gender ideology of the Victorian period, reading illicit literature for the heterogeneous combination of emotions that the act of reading produces seems like the kind of auto-eroticism that Sedgwick associates with “independence, self-possession, and . . . rapture.” Masochistic reading is about the conscious *choice* to engage in a transgressive, frustrating, frightening, shameful, yet pleasurable activity.

NOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

¹ Although it can be argued that there is little in Collins's novels that could be defined as "realist" in the sense of "realist fiction," Collins frequently emphasized the plausibility of the events in his novels. In his preface to the 1860 three-volume edition of *The Woman in White*, Collins maintains that he has filled the story with "hundreds of little 'connecting links,' of trifling value in themselves, but of the utmost importance in maintaining the smoothness, the reality, and the probability of the entire narrative" (Bachman & Cox 619).

In 1865, Henry James commented on the domestication of the gothic: "To Mr. Collins belongs the credit of having introduced into fiction those more mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries that are at our own doors . . . And there is no doubt that these were infinitely the more terrible" (quoted in Taylor 1). The sensation novel brought the frightening aspects of the gothic to readers' "own doors."

² For the purposes of my argument, I am using the word *critic* to mean "One who pronounces judgement on any thing or person; *esp.* one who passes severe or unfavourable judgement," rather than "One skilful in judging of the qualities and merits of literary or artistic works" (*Oxford English Dictionary Online*). I shall clarify further what I mean by "critic" or "opponent" later in this introduction, when I discuss the context of the sensation novel's development and early reception.

³ My basic definition of masochistic reading is reading which produces mixed emotional responses (both positive and negative); I will provide a more detailed explanation later in this introductory chapter.

⁴ For instance, the minor mystery of Fosco's "official-looking" correspondence (Collins 345-46) in *The Woman in White* is never resolved. See note 41.

⁵ Here, I give a brief summary of the kinds of critical responses provoked by the emergence of the sensation novel, and by its predecessor, the gothic novel. I will provide a more substantial account of the historical context of the sensation novel and its reception later in this introductory chapter.

⁶ See "The Archbishop of York on Works of Fiction," *The Times* 25019, Column A (2 Nov 1864), 9.

See Alexander. Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: John W Parker & Son, West Strand, 1859), Electronic reproduction, PsycBooks EBook Collection (Washington, DC: American Psychological Association, 2005); see also Nicholas Dames, "Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies: The Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories," *Victorian Studies* 42.6 (Winter 2004), 206-216.

See Margaret Oliphant, "Novels," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 623.102 (September 1867), 257-280, and "Sensation Novels," *Blackwood's Magazine* 91 (May 1962), 564-84.

⁷ By "pleasurable sensation" I mean a positive emotional response.

⁸ The only two studies which associate detection and masochism are Gregory Forter's "Criminal Pleasures, Pleasurable Crime" (*Style* 29.3) and Peter Thoms's chapter on "Authority and Submission in *The Hound of the Baskervilles*," in *Detection and Its Designs: Narrative and Power in 19th-Century Detective Fiction*.

⁹ Andrea K. Henderson's recent work, *Romanticism and the Painful Pleasures of Modern Life*, is similarly useful for my project because she focuses mainly on the socio-economic nature of masochistic desire, rather than solely on its sexual component (although she considers this element as well). She notes that "the desire of . . . heroes and heroines of Romantic literature would seem to be precisely for the painful nonsatisfaction of desire: they are attracted most to those people who keep them in suspense, dominate them, and even humiliate them" (1-2). Although she refers here to characters rather than readers, her concept of the "painful nonsatisfaction of desire" and her emphasis on suspense, domination, and humiliation are useful for the establishment of a definition of masochism that does not depend on sexual relations or psychoanalytic theory. Henderson discusses the "suspenseful, sublime pleasures of self-abnegation" of speculative consumerism, in which "the consumer develops obsessive attachment to idealized objects of desire that are imagined to be capable of providing infinite satisfaction even as they withhold that satisfaction" (5, 23). Although Henderson's study is mainly concerned with the Romantic period and the "the political and economic origins and repercussions of the Romantic fascination of individual desire" (6), her study highlights the importance of suspense to what she calls the "deferral of gratification" (8), which is integral to the sensation genre. The novels of Wilkie Collins encourage a different kind of speculation from what Henderson

describes: the detection of hidden secrets, the revelation of which is repeatedly deferred (and occasionally, though rarely, deferred indefinitely).

¹⁰ For instance, while Jessica Benjamin questions the tendency to associate domination with masculinity and submission with femininity, she is ultimately focused on domination as a relationship between the genders, and does not ever take gender *out* of the equation. In her psychoanalytic feminist exploration of the relationship between masochism and the gothic heroine, Michelle Massé argues that the gothic is based on a “premise of domination” (9), and defines masochism as “the learned behaviour of the oppressed” (45). She argues that the appeal of the gothic novel is that it functions as a “[m]asochistic fantasy” which allows the spectator to shift herself from the position of one who passively submits to one who controls and directs the infliction of pain (47). Although Marianne Noble’s approach to masochism differs from Massé’s in that it is not psychoanalytic in nature, both authors regard the masochism associated with women’s literature as a strategy to resist physical, cultural, or other forms of oppression. In addition, both authors connect masochism with female sexuality; for instance, Noble argues that “violent images and tropes [in American sentimental literature] serve as the language of erotic [female] desire” (13).

¹¹ Reader-response theory is also important to discussions of detective fiction and the uncanny; I will return to these theoretical perspectives in the course of this introductory chapter.

¹² Early attempts to account for mixed emotional responses to literature (and theatre) include Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Longinus’s *On the Sublime*; later examinations of mixed emotional responses to literature include John Aikin and Anna Laetitia Aikin Barbauld’s essay “On the Pleasure Derived from Objects of Terror” (1775), which suggests that readers will suffer the “pain of suspense” to quench their “irresistible desire of satisfying curiosity” (123). Although Aikin and Barbauld’s basic premise—that “the pain of suspense, and the irresistible desire of satisfying curiosity, when once raised, will account for our eagerness to go quite through an adventure, though we suffer actual pain during the whole course of it” (123—is useful for this project, I would argue that their analysis is somewhat simplistic. They suggest that “We rather chuse to suffer the smart pang of a violent emotion than the uneasy craving of an unsatisfied desire” (123); it is my contention that Collins’s novels aim to make the reader suffer both the “smart pang[s] of . . . violent emotion” and the “uneasy craving[s] of . . . unsatisfied desire[s].”

¹³ The Oxford World’s Classics edition of *A Philosophical Enquiry*, which I will be using, is based on the second edition of Burke’s text, published in 1759.

¹⁴ Burke focuses mainly on fear, pleasure, and sympathy; he does discuss emotions such as guilt, shame, curiosity, anticipation, or anxiety—all of which are important to my discussion of masochism.

¹⁵ According to Todorov’s schema of terror genres, the fantastic exists in a space between the uncanny (which does not include supernatural elements) and the marvellous (which does include supernatural elements). If it is not clear to the reader whether the strange occurrences in a narrative are supernatural, the story is either fantastic-uncanny or fantastic-marvellous, based on what the reader determines to be the case once s/he has finished reading. If s/he continues to hesitate between these two interpretations, the narrative is purely fantastic. A narrative of “events [is] related which may be readily accounted for by the laws of reason, but which [is] . . . incredible, extraordinary, shocking, singular, disturbing or unexpected,” provoking in both the characters and the reader “a reaction similar to that which works of the fantastic have made familiar,” is not fantastic because there is no hesitation; it is simply uncanny (46). I would argue that, according to Todorov’s schema, the sensation novel lies between the uncanny and fantastic-uncanny genres.

¹⁶ The difference between the sensation novel and the detective story is that the former is arguably designed to create anxiety and the latter is designed to relieve anxiety. The explanation for this apparent contradiction is the conventionality of the detective genre: experienced readers recognize the various conventions of the detective genre in each detective story they read, so that “the recognition of the pattern is reassuring and free of stress” (Dove 24). In contrast, the hallmarks of Collins’s novels are ambiguity and impossibilities of interpretation. According to Dove, although the reader engages passively in attempting to discover who done it, s/he is not an active participant in the detection around which the genre is centred. However true this may be for contemporary readers of detective stories, Dove’s argument does not apply to the works of Wilkie Collins. If Collins uses elements of what we now refer to as detective fiction, his readers would not have been experienced in the “modes” of detective fiction because the genre was then in its infancy. The certainty of recognizing generic conventions did not exist.

Dove and Thoms are not the only scholars who have identified the metatextual aspect of detective fiction. In his essay on “The Typology of Detective Fiction,” Todorov points out that the narrator of a detective story will often

acknowledge in some way that s/he is “writing a book” (45); similarly, S. E. Sweeney argues that “all detective stories refer, if only obliquely, to their own fictionality and their own interpretation” (3).

¹⁷ Bain was not the only Victorian who theorized about what Dames refers to as the “psychological process[es] of novel reading [and] novel consumption” (*Physiology* 3). In *The Physiology of the Novel*, Dames identifies a group of men and women, literary critics and “men of science,” whose collective writings make up a pre-Jamesean theory of the novel, which focused on “a processual, affective, reader-centred methodology” of Victorian novel consumption (10). In the course of his introduction, Dames identifies a point that is central to my project: as scholars, we cannot know how most Victorians read and responded to novels, but “we can know how they were thought to have read,” that is, how Victorians thought Victorian readers read (7). It is not my intention to use actual reader experiences (which are impossible to reproduce) to establish my argument that Collins’s novels elicit masochistic or mixed emotional readerly responses; instead, my focus is on contemporary assessments of Collins’s novels by Victorian reviewers and critics (and by Collins himself), and how the novels themselves solicit particular kinds of emotional responses.

¹⁸ Bain states, “In such cases the shock of suffering is accompanied with certain collaterals of an opposite nature; and it may also be so arranged that the pain may be just enough to stimulate a copious wave of agreeable emotion. . . . But it is in the sympathetic terrors that the sting of pain is extracted, and only the pleasurable stimulus left behind. In proportion as the reality of evil is removed far from ourselves, we are at liberty to join in the excitement produced by the expression of fear” (91-92)

¹⁹ Of course, women were not alone in enjoying the clandestine pleasures of “sensational” reading. The author of an 1867 article entitled “Novels” begins with an *ubi sunt* lament for the time when “[m]en did not snatch the guilty volume out of sight when any innocent creature drew nigh, or mature women lock up the book with which they condescended to amuse themselves” (257). This passage suggests that men, too, enjoyed the taboo nature of “guilty volume[s]”, and even the “paternalistic surveillance” (Flint 4) that accompanied the act of reading them.

²⁰ Of the studies that do not focus entirely on Wilkie Collins, there are a number in which his novels feature prominently. Many of these studies focus particularly on the sensation genre and the various contexts in which it became popular; examples include Pykett’s general introduction *The Sensation Novel from The Woman in White to The Moonstone*, Hughes’s *The Maniac in the Cellar*, Rance’s *Wilkie Collins and Other Sensation Novelists*, and Harrison and Fantina’s *Victorian Sensations*. Others, such as Milbank’s *Daughters of the House*, place some of Collins’s works within the larger context of Victorian literature. There are also several collections of essays employing a variety of critical perspectives on the works of Wilkie Collins, such as *Wilkie Collins: Contemporary Critical Essays*, edited by Pykett, *Wilkie Collins to the Forefront*, edited by Smith and Terry, and the more recent *Reality’s Dark Light*, edited by Bachman and Cox, as well as Mangham’s *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays*.

NOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

²¹ It ran twenty-three weeks, from 3 January to 18 June, in the 1857 volume of Dickens’s weekly periodical *Household Words*, and was subsequently issued in book format.

²² This constitutes the appeal of the gothic novel according to Michelle Massé (47).

²³ For a further discussion of Jones’s argument, see chapter one.

²⁴ See chapter one.

²⁵ Although the sensation genre was in its infancy at the time Collins wrote *The Dead Secret*, his readers would have been very familiar with its predecessor, the gothic genre, and its conventions).

²⁶ *The Dead Secret* is saturated with domestic scenes turned gothic by “dim light” or “general obscurity” (13). For instance, Porthgenna Tower has the “feudal look” common to earlier gothic novels; all that remains of the original, “strongly fortified” edifice is a “ruinous wall” and a “heavy, low tower” (Collins, *Dead* 58, 29). The most gothic area of the Porthgenna estate is the location of the secret—the uninhabited north side of the mansion. Evidently long-uninhabited, bordered by a “weedy, deserted garden,” spotted with broken and dust-covered windows and shutters, and embellished by “untrained ivy [and] rank vegetation growing in fissures of the stone-work” and

“festoons of spiders' webs,” this part of Porthgenna Tower provides a stark contrast to the rest of the building (30-31).

²⁷ Given her superstitious nature and her “unnatural” appearance—her unnaturally grey hair, her “large, startled, black eyes,” and her habit of “whisper[ing] affrightedly to herself”—it seems safe to say that she is a decidedly uncanny individual, and that her presence contributes to the generally uncanny atmosphere of Porthgenna Tower (Collins 12, 13). By refusing to provide an explanation for Sarah’s odd appearance until almost the end of the novel, Collins enhances the uncanny aspect of this character.

²⁸ In *The Passions; or Mind and Matter* (1848), John Gideon Millingen argues that “In woman, the concentration of her feelings . . . adds to their intensity; and like a smouldering fire that has at last got vent, her passions, when no longer trammelled by conventional propriety, burst forth in unquenchable violence. Insanity frequently offers a sad proof of this fact” (169).

²⁹ I use the word “sensational” here to mean “aiming at violently exciting effects” (OED)

³⁰ The term actualization comes from reader-response theory; according to Wolfgang Iser, the process of “actualization” (106) consists of the interaction between the author’s creation and the reader’s reception, which make up the *text*. This concept is discussed in slightly more detail in chapter one of this thesis.

³¹ Catherine Moreland is the principle character of Austen’s *Northanger Abbey* (1818).

³² In *Images of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction*, Catherine J. Golden maintains that “[t]he tropes of consumption and addiction can be seen as a logical extension of the biological and medical arguments [against reading],” and that “[o]pponents feared that the practice of turning to fiction for pleasure or escape from the realities of domestic life was in itself addictive” (36).

³³ The potential “chastisement” for readers of sensation novels might have consisted of a verbal reprimand, or of confiscation of the novel in question. In *The Woman Reader 1837-1914*, Kate Flint suggests that numerous accounts of reading in the Victorian period contained “prohibitions, warnings, and censorships” (209). According to her research, “[s]ome of these controls [over what was, or was not, considered suitable reading] were generically determined, demonstrating, especially, the distrust of novels” (201). In some cases, male relatives “could impose their taste through pointed teasing [of women’s reading materials]” (202).

NOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

³⁴ There has been considerable scholarly work done on the gothic elements of *The Woman in White*. See Bernstein’s “Reading Blackwater Park: Gothicism, Narrative, and Ideology in *The Woman in White*,” Griffin’s “The Yellow Mask, the Black Robe, and the Woman in White: Wilkie Collins, Anti-Catholic Discourse, and the Sensation Novel,” Fu’s “Re-Imag(in)ing (Fe)male Subjectivities in *The Woman in White*,” and Hendershot’s “A Sensation Novel’s Appropriation of the Terror-Gothic: Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White*.”

³⁵ Although Collins’s strategy of the secret apparent from the onset of the story succeeded in maintaining readerly interest, his approach to *The Woman in White* indicates that he took heed of reviewers’ comments, and used alternative narrative strategies to heighten readers’ mixed emotional (or *masochistic*) responses to the novel.

³⁶ *La Femme en Blanc*, a French edition of *The Woman in White* for which Collins wrote a new preface, was published in 1861.

³⁷ The explicit textuality of *The Woman in White* has not gone unnoticed in scholarly studies of Collins’s works. The focus of Tamar Heller’s book, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic*, is on the image of “buried writing” (1), which is “affiliated with a thematic of secrecy, transgression, and illegitimacy” (2). She argues that both Fosco and Hartright can be read as examples of male editorial power, and like many scholars, Heller suggests that Anne Catherick is a blank page or “palimpsest on which are inscribed the traces of symbolic meanings that encompass not only gender but also class and history itself” (119). In her eagerness to use “buried writing” and writing in general as metaphors through which to engage in a Marxist-feminist analysis of *The Woman in White*, Heller largely overlooks the importance of writing or text in its non-metaphorical sense, which is the focus of this

study. Another important study is Gwendolyn MacDonagh and Jonathan Smith's essay, "Fill Up All the Gaps: Narrative and Illegitimacy in *The Woman in White*," which emphasizes the connections between narrative, writing, identity, and illegitimacy. In particular, MacDonagh and Smith highlight the similarities between the novel's two villains—Percival and Fosco—and the two author figures—Hartright and Collins: "As a person who fills blank spaces with writing because gaps expose his identity, Percival is a writer, a constructor of narratives. His villainy, then, links him not only with Fosco, who toward the end of the novel constructs a narrative in similar fashion, but also with both Walter Hartright and Collins himself, for all four men collect and arrange documents and fill up gaps with writing" (275). MacDonagh and Smith's reading, in which distinctions between heroism and villainy collapse, is directly relevant to this chapter, which will further develop the problematic nature of writing and language. In Walter M. Kendrick's article "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*," the author argues that the novel "derives its sensations from the tricks with its own nature as a text" (34). Kendrick briefly points out that the trust in the transparency of text comes out of "the faith of mid-Victorian realism"; Collins participates in the realist genre (albeit in a limited manner) by emphasizing the plausibility of his sensation(al) narrative. Kendrick contends that *The Woman in White* "violates" this realistic "faith," because it plays on sensational themes and yet demands to be read "as if it were realistic" (22). This chapter will further develop Kendrick's arguments by examining the novel's dependence on the objective, truthful nature of text, which Collins endorses (by emphasizing detection's dependence on the accuracy of written documents) and problematizes (by revealing the vulnerability and unreliability of texts in the novel). That identity in *The Woman in White* is both falsified and proven/reasserted through written documents and spoken statements suggests that realism's trust in the transparency of text is tenuous at best.

³⁸ Since there are so many letters in the novel, I will limit my comments to a few of particular significance. We are almost always given a description of the letter being delivered before we are able to read its contents. The first example in the novel is the anonymous letter from Anne Catherick, which is hand delivered and "addressed, in a strange handwriting, to Miss Fairlie" (115). We see the letter pass on its way to the addressee, and later we hear from Marian the contents of the letter: "That letter is an anonymous letter—a vile attempt to injure Sir Percival Glyde in my sister's estimation. It has . . . agitated and alarmed her" (115). It is only once we are acquainted with the mystery surrounding the letter and with the disturbing effect it has had on Laura Fairlie that we are allowed to read the contents. The letter returns again when Hartright accuses Anne Catherick of writing the letter (134-139), and yet again when Marian informs Mr. Gilmore of its existence (151). If we compare Anne's letter to Mrs. Catherick's correspondence with Marian, we see that the latter is similarly preceded by an extended discussion in which Sir Percival politely but firmly insists that Marian write to request an account from "the mother of [Anne Catherick] to ask for her testimony in support of the explanation which I have just offered to you" (164). The arrival of Mrs. Catherick's reply is described by Hartright as "an event" (168), which ascribes more importance of the letter than its brief contents might otherwise suggest. As with Anne Catherick's letter, we hear about Mrs. Catherick's correspondence much later in the novel, when Marian reminds us that "her note is still in my possession, the note in answer to that letter about her unhappy daughter which Sir Percival obliged me to write" (233). In both cases, multiple references to the same letter reinforce the reader's appreciation of the textual nature of the document. Mrs. Catherick's second letter (this time, addressed to Hartright) is not prefaced by any extended discussion of its author or its contents; her efforts to disguise her authorship of the letter have the somewhat ironic consequence of drawing more attention to the document. She writes, "Any attempted reference to this letter will be quite useless—I am determined not to acknowledge having written it" (536). As with her daughter's earlier anonymous letter, Mrs. Catherick's communication with Hartright draws attention to itself as a written object by denying its own authorship.

³⁹ Beckwith and Reed argue that diaries are "immersed in their own present: the author *is* writing" (303). While this is true, I would argue that Marian's diary is not the only self-referential narrative in the novel. Not long into Hartright's initial narrative, he breaks off to make a comment about how his writing affects him physically: "One word! The little familiar word that is on everybody's lips, every hour in the day. Oh me! and I tremble, now, when I write it" (66). If Hartright's aim in assembling the narratives and documents which make up the novel is merely to inform the reader of all necessary facts pertinent to the re-establishing of Laura's identity, this statement can have no practical purpose. If we read this passage as part of Collins's sustained attempt to force the reader's recognition of the narrative as a textual document, however, it does serve a purpose.³⁹ As with Marian's diary Hartright's narrative manipulates the reader's mixed emotional responses to the text, since s/he experiences the thrilling pleasure of reading this sensation(al) text and sympathizes with Hartright's frightful reaction to writing.

Other statements of personal experience, in which the narrative voice is taken up by various individuals, are still more self-conscious than Hartright's narrative. The account given by Mr. Gilmore, the Fairlie family solicitor, is

bookended by explanations of how he came to be writing. He begins with a statement that is more than adequate, given that Hartright's preamble to the narrative as a whole is sufficient to explain the way the narrative alternates between various voices: "I write these lines at the request of my friend, Mr. Walter Hartright. They are intended to convey a description of certain events which seriously affected Miss Fairlie's interests, and which took place after the period of Mr. Hartright's departure from Limmeridge House...." (159). Having finished his account, Gilmore again refers to his part in the overall narrative project of the novel: "My personal share in the events of the family story extends no farther than the point which I have just reached. Other pens than mine will describe the strange circumstances which are now shortly to follow" (190).

⁴⁰ Following Hartright's first meeting with Anne Catherick, he recounts his experiences as exactly as possible: "I at once related the circumstances under which I had met the woman in which, exactly as they had occurred; and I repeated what she had said to me about Mrs. Fairlie and Limmeridge House, word for word" (78). Much later in the novel, when Laura explains to Marian how she found Anne Catherick's note in the sand, she regretfully admits that she can only recall the general contents of the letter: "In substance I can [remember it], Marian. It was very short. You would have remembered it, word for word" (315). Although Laura is revealed to be a somewhat unreliable source of information, her comments bolster our confidence in Marian's reliability: Marian would have "remembered it, word for word." Shortly after this conversation, Marian overhears an important conversation between Sir Percival and Count Fosco, and again insists on her ability to memorize the exchange of words exactly as it occurred: "That sentence of the Count's was the first which my attention was ready enough to master, exactly as it was spoken. From this point, with certain breaks and interruptions, my whole interest fixed breathlessly on the conversation; and I followed it word for word" (338). One assumes, then, if she could follow the conversation "word for word" at the time it took place, that she has recorded it with similar accuracy in her diary. We should note, however, that this is only an assumption, and it is undermined by Marian's admission of "certain breaks and interruptions" in her concentration. A final example of this insistence on the accuracy of transcription is Hartright's inclusion of Mrs. Catherick's anonymous letter: before Hartright explains the contents of the letter, he asserts "I copy it exactly, word for word" (525). Like Marian in the previous example, Hartright employs a redundancy of expression, using both the word "exactly" and the phrase "word for word" to insist on the accuracy of his account. That Hartright includes both phrases, which have essentially the same meaning, indicates the importance of textual accuracy in the novel.

⁴¹ Another document presented at the hearing at the end of the novel is a letter from Sir Percival, noting the date of Laura's arrival in London. This document is obtained after Hartright entraps Fosco into providing a "proof" of Laura's identity. Fosco's response is more a question than an answer: "You call a letter from my late lamented friend, informing me of the day and hour of his wife's arrival in London, written, signed, and dated by himself, a proof, I suppose?" (584). Given that Hartright has already proven to us that Sir Percival forged his parent's marriage registration, can we really trust a letter "written, signed, and dated" by him? Fosco's manner of response, in only "suppose[ing]" that this letter will constitute "proof," further calls into question Hartright's assumption that written documents are both infallible and trustworthy. Earlier in the novel, Collins alludes to the Book of Life as infallible documentary evidence: "If the recording angel had come down from heaven to confirm [Marian], and had opened his book to my mortal eyes, the recording angel would not have convinced me" (120). Hartright includes this biblical allusion in his commentary to indicate that not even the most convincing proof, the Book of Life, would convince him of the impeccability of Sir Percival's character; that he denies this metaphorical written proof, helps to undermine the belief in the infallibility of text that the Book of Life embodies represents.

⁴² Much earlier in the novel, Marian describes Count Fosco's "correspondence with people on the Continent," most of which "have all sorts of odd stamps on them," and one of which has "a huge, official-looking seal on it" (345-346). Marian cannot reconcile her interpretation of these envelopes, that Fosco must be "in correspondence with his government," with her earlier assumption that Fosco "may be a political exile" (246). This mystery is never resolved with absolute certainty; as the novel progresses, we suspect that Fosco is a spy for his own government, but because neither Marian nor the reader is ever able to read these letters, we are left with an absence of text which simultaneously frustrates and intrigues, even after the narrative has ended. Another examples in the novel of "unreadable" texts is the legal document that Laura Fairlie is almost forced to sign without having read its contents. Like Fosco's official-looking letters, we can assume that the document contains a text which might be in some way revealing, but Collins prevents us from ever accessing this text. A final example of a disturbing absence of text is the substitution of Marian's letter to Gilmore's partner for "a blank sheet of note paper," which suggests to the recipient's "restless legal mind that the letter had been tampered with" (361). Because we are privy to all of

Marian's efforts to ensure that the letter would reach its destination without being discovered or destroyed, this particular absence of text is arguably the most alarming.

⁴³ We should note, however, that Fosco is both a criminal and a victim where eavesdropping and snooping are concerned. His conversation with Sir Percival, which Fosco postpones until "the light is out of that window, and . . . I have had one little look at the rooms on each side of the library, and a peep at the staircase as well," is recorded by Marian in her diary despite all precautions taken (334).

⁴⁴ Audrey Caming Fein argues that Collins follows the "fair-play rule," in which the detective or protagonist shares with the reader all the information and clues s/he discovers as soon as they become known, and that this structure gives Collins's narrative "credibility" (42). In fact, both Collins and his in-text stand-in Hartright maintain authorial power by deliberately withholding information. Hartright denies the reader certain information which he deems to be irrelevant to our inquiry; of course, we have no way of knowing whether this information is irrelevant unless we are able to judge for ourselves. Collins deliberately withholds essential information so as to create narrative gaps which the reader is compelled to fill, to the extent that Perkins and Donaghy argue that the relationship between the reader and narrator is one of "narrative secrecy" (394). It is not until the end of the novel that we are able to fill these gaps: "the narrative that Fosco writes itself fills in the crucial gap in Walter's case for re-establishing Laura's identity This gap in turn results from other textual and narrative gaps [such as] Marian's illness and resulting break in her diary entries" (MacDonagh and Smith 278).

By withholding information and enforcing "narrative secrecy," Collins increases readerly suspicion, adding to his readers' mixed emotional responses to his text. Perkins and Donaghy argue that "every narrative in the novel" is characterized by a "hermeneutics of suspicion and surveillance" (392); Hennelly makes a similar argument in suggesting that the reader of *The Woman in White* comes to suspect everyone and everything (98). Collins takes advantage of the readerly suspicion he creates by including suggestive and ultimately misleading instances of foreshadowing. Alison Milbank points out that Collins's ominous description of the lake at Blackwater Park is a red herring too, since nothing of significance ever transpires there (68). When Hartright first meets Mrs. Vesey at Limmeridge House, his description of her is highly suggestive: "Surely a mild, a compliant, an unutterably tranquil and harmless old lady? But enough, perhaps, for the present, of Mrs. Vesey" (88). Hartright's attempt to convince himself that Mrs. Vesey is "harmless" makes us suspect her of being the opposite, but this suspicion is never realised. Hartright's initial interpretation of Sir Percival's secret as the "common, too common, story of a man's treachery and a woman's frailty" (471) has a similar effect: by leading the reader's suspicions in an erroneous direction, Collins increases our surprise when the real "secret" is discovered. More importantly, given the novel's problematization of the reader's reliance on written documents and transcripts, Collins's attempts at misdirection make us question our own logic, as well as that of the novel's characters on whom we rely to provide us with accurate, "word for word" accounts of their experiences. The fact that we continue to detect and interpret in the hope of solving the novel's mysteries suggests that the frustrations and anxieties of detection and interpretation are still pleasurable to some degree; this combination of pleasure, anxiety, frustration, and other negative emotions is the masochistic affective response I seek to study.

Earlier in the novel, Marian has a premonition that Laura's marriage will be prevented: "A persistent idea has been forcing itself on my attention, ever since last night, that something will yet happen to prevent the marriage" (217). At this point in the novel, we trust Marian's intuition and interpretation of events; her "persistent idea" leads us to anticipate that some event or circumstance will delay if not stop the wedding. Like Hartright's suspicion of Mrs. Vesey, and his interpretation of Percival's secret, Marian's premonition is designed to mislead the reader. D. A. Miller argues that although the reader is supposedly placed in the position of both judge and jury at the onset of the novel, "nothing could be less judicial, or judicious, than the actual hermeneutical practice of the reader of this novel whose technology of nervous stimulation . . . has him repeatedly jumping to unproven conclusions" (114). U. C. Knoepfelmacher makes a similar argument: "we become engaged in the narrative, not as impartial and objective judges but as subjective participants in a mystery" (62). Whether readers jump to conclusions, or are simply left to wallow in their inability to interpret the various textual documents that make up the novel, Miller's observation indirectly points out that the very format of the novel, in which the reader is asked to judge the veracity and plausibility of the narrative, is itself a misdirection.

⁴⁵ Following Laura's meeting with Anne, both we and the novel's characters are disappointed yet again, since we are unable to discover Sir Percival's secret: "The one thing certain was, that we had failed again on the brink of discovery—failed utterly and irretrievably, unless Anne Catherick kept her appointment at the boat-house, for the

next day” (301). To our great disappointment, Laura and Anne never meet again. What Collins (and Hartright) neglect to inform us is that we would have “failed” even if Anne and Laura had met, since we discover at the end of the novel that Anne never knew the details of Percival’s secret.

⁴⁶ In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke argues that, when reading, sensations of fear and pleasure are achieved through sympathetic characters and, more significantly, through the evocative power of *words*: “we take an extraordinary part in the passions of others . . . we are easily affected and brought into sympathy by any tokens which are shewn [sic] of them; and there are no tokens which can express all the circumstances of most passions so fully as words” (158).

⁴⁷ The similarities between Laura and Anne extend to their emotional vulnerability to language. In Anne’s case, we see the power of words both to calm and alarm. When Hartright discovers Anne cleaning the tombstone of the late Mrs. Fairlie, he is able to overcome her initial reaction of alarm with language: “Slowly, the purpose of my words seemed to force its way through the confusion and agitation of her mind” (134). In the ensuing conversation between Anne and Hartright, we learn that Anne’s continuing devotion to the memory of Mrs. Fairlie is based largely on the kindness she expressed through language: after recounting Mrs. Fairlie’s kind remarks, Anne muses, “I suppose I remember them because they were kind” (135). Despite the evidence of the power of language over Anne’s mental state, Hartright does not initially realize that he must choose his words carefully; one misspoken sentence “literally petrified her” (137). Following her alarm, Hartright finally realises the power of language over her, and uses it to pacify her: “I spoke distinctly, so that Anne Catherick might hear and understand me: and I saw that the words and their meaning had reached her” (140). Anne is also susceptible to the evocative power of written language: at the Todd’s farm, she suffers an “attack” of faintness, which Mrs. Todd connects “with something [Anne] was reading” (145).

Surprisingly, even Marian Halcombe is vulnerable to uneasy emotional responses to words (as opposed to actual experiences). She suggests that Anne Catherick’s letter might have had an undue influence on her opinion of Sir Percival, although she is not sure: “Does that letter of Anne Catherick’s still leave a lurking distrust in my mind, in spite of Sir Percival’s explanation, and of the proof in my possession of the truth of it? I cannot account for the state of my own feelings” (212). Here, Marian refers to two letters: the anonymous letter from Anne Catherick, which has led Marian to suspect Percival of some unnamed wrongdoing, and the letter she receives from Mrs. Catherick, which supposedly acts as “proof” of Percival’s account of his connection with the Cathericks. Marian is particularly alarmed by absence of text, or rather spoken words. At one point in the novel, she believes a conversation between Fosco and Percival to “be of . . . importance to both [Laura and I] to know what they were saying to each other at that moment—and not one word of it could, by any possibility, reach my ears” (292). She is so agitated by her inability to interpret their words, that she paces about, “till the oppression of [her] suspense half maddened [her].” D. A. Miller argues that Marian “literally writes herself into a fever” (“Cage Aux Folles” 109), following the “feverish strain and excitement of all [her] faculties” while eavesdropping on Fosco and Percival’s conversation (Collins 350). The evocative power of both written and spoken words incapacitates her; we do not hear from Marian in her own voice again during the remainder of the novel.

⁴⁸ The notion of the “secret self” is raised a few times in *The Woman in White*. Marian, while contemplating the inscrutable Mrs. Fosco’s character, wonders “[h]ow far she is really reformed or deteriorated in her secret self” since her marriage to the Count (239). Much later in the novel, Pesca applies the notion of the secret self to refugees like himself: “Laugh at [the refugee], distrust him, open your eyes in wonder at that secret self which smoulders in him . . . but judge [him] not!” (569-570).

⁴⁹ Peter Hühn argues that readers of and detectives in hard-boiled detective novels have lost faith that meaning can eventually be restored that there is an “objective truth” (466); in *The Woman in White*, Collins appears to anticipate the pessimistic and cynical ideological position of later detective fiction.

⁵⁰ Hughes argument is as follows: “Faced with unprecedented change, the Victorians were looking for solutions; ambiguity did not have the same attraction for them as it has for us” (14).

NOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

⁵¹ For discussions of Dexter as an authorial figure, see Cothran 204-6 and Lonoff 116.

⁵² Indeed, Chapters XI (“The Story of the Trial: The Preliminaries”) to XX (“The End of the Trial”) constitute an extended reading and analysis of Eustace Macallan’s trial.

⁵³ Valeria admits at the outset to omitting the title-page of the trial, because it “holds up to public ignominy of [her] husband’s name” (124); she also paraphrases the Indictment against the Prisoner because she cannot bring herself to “copy the uncouth language . . . in which [her] husband was solemnly and falsely accused of poisoning his first wife” (125). However else Valeria’s narration may be biased, it is clearly biased in favour of her husband.

⁵⁴ Collins has her include embarrassing moments, such as when she tears out pages of the trial “which contained the speech for the prosecution” and tramples them under her feet (179), but he does not have her include the entirety of certain conversations, such as the one between her and Mrs. Macallan, of which Valeria “only present[s] a brief abstract” (201). These inconsistencies call into question Valeria’s reliability as a narrator; although they could also be used as evidence of Collins’s waning writing skills.

⁵⁵ At the end of chapter XI, Valeria suggests that the Report of the Trial “resolved itself . . . into three great Questions” (126); it is unclear if the trial was originally presented according to these three questions, or if someone—either Valeria (as narrator) or the writer of the trial transcript—has rearranged the trial proceedings to fit into this format.

⁵⁶ Jacobson suggests that Playmore’s “nervous footnotes” (121) call into question the entirety and reliability of the suicide letter, the reconstruction of which Valeria records second-hand (by the time the letter is recovered she is no longer directing the investigation).

⁵⁷ As discussed in chapter 3.

⁵⁸ Fein suggests that the talents and skills required of detectives are seen as unfeminine (unbecoming in women), in addition to being disreputable and distasteful. Karin Kay Jacobson makes the same point when she quotes Michelle Slung’s introduction to *Experiences of Loveday Brooke, Lady Detective*, who argues that snooping, spying, and the like were “antithetical to what was considered proper feminine breeding” in the Victorian period (Jacobson 32). Anthea Trodd, who argues that the police detective and the lady have opposing relationships to “the sanctuary of the home,” since the former is an “intruder” of the domestic sanctuary, whereas the latter is its representative (435). The detective and the lady are thus antithetical figures; as a result, a woman detective is a paradoxical and problematic figure. In *“Improper” Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*, Lyn Pykett distinguishes between the “proper feminine” (or “angel in the house”) and the “improper feminine” (the “domestic ideal’s dangerous other”) (24). Collins’s Valeria is one such “improper feminine” figure, as she quits the domestic sphere to engage in an extra-legal investigation, and by doing so “risk[s her] reputation and [her] happiness” (Collins 198).

⁵⁹ Valeria is not the only woman who compromises her reputation by engaging in shameful activities: the landlady who discovers that Valeria married her husband under a false name informs Valeria that she has “degraded [her]self as a gentlewoman” and “forfeited [her] own self-respect” (39) by following Mrs. Macallan “every step of the way to her own door” (40).

⁶⁰ According to this description, Valeria is characteristically feminine, since she is susceptible to excessive emotional responses, particularly when her curiosity is aroused: “I must have been more or less than woman if . . . my curiosity had not been wrought to the highest pitch, by the extraordinary conduct of my husband’s mother when Eustace presented me to her. What was the secret of her despising him, and pitying me? . . . The foremost interest of my life was not the interest of penetrating these mysteries. Walk? I was in such a fever of expectation that I felt as if I could have walked to the world’s end, if I could only keep my husband by my side, and question him on the way!” (30). Valeria’s “fever of expectation” is likely a metaphorical description of her emotional state; in other passages, Valeria’s emotional responses have physical symptoms. When Major Fitz-David informs Valeria that a clue to her husband’s secret is located in his library, she states that “My head began to swim; my heart throbbed violently. I tried to speak; it was in vain; the effort almost choked me” (73). She becomes so over-excited that she is unable to stand and must sit down. She has a similar reaction to her emotionally-charged interview with Dexter:

“It was not until some hours after I had left him, that I really began to feel how my nerves had been tried by all that I had seen and heard, during my visit at his house. I started at the slightest noises; I dreamed of dreadful things; I was ready to cry without reason, at one moment, and to fly into a passion without reason, at another” (261). In fact, it takes several days before Valeria is “restored to [her] customary health” (262). At the very end of the novel, she attributes “those signs of exhaustion which have surprised my medical attendant” to “Anxiety and Suspense” (410). Collins’s capitalization of these two terms emphasizes their significance: the mental and physical effects of anxiety and suspense—the very affective responses he seems to want to provoke in his readers—are not to be taken lightly.

⁶¹ Ariel and Dexter could also be seen as emotional readers. Valeria describes Dexter as having “an over-excited imagination” (222), and Ariel’s “great delight” is to listen to Dexter tell stories. As Dexter informs Valeria, “I puzzle her to the verge of distraction; and the more I confuse her, the better she likes the story” (213). For a further discussion of Ariel as a woman reader, see Jacobson 108-11.

⁶² Transgression, and the guilt experienced by the transgressor, are essential components of masochism generally, and of my definition of masochistic detection (in which readers/detectives occupy the positions of both transgressor and disciplinarian). For instance, Freud’s conception of masochism in “The Economic Problem of Masochism” depends on the association of guilt with punishment. Similarly, Rosenman defines masochism as “a negotiating tool in which pain is not the price of a chosen desire that violates a moral or ideological norm” (23). For an extended discussion of transgression and masochism, see chapter one.

⁶³ One character who attempts to stop Valeria from pursuing her investigation cannot rightly be described as “patriarchal”: according to Sue Lonoff, Catherine Macallan (Valeria’s mother-in-law) also represents “the righteous, restraining forc[e] of society, law, and convention” (166).

⁶⁴ Noël Carroll argues that “[a]ll narratives might be thought to involve the desire to know—the desire to know at least the outcome of the interaction of the forces made salient in the plot” (5)

⁶⁵ He also does so by repeating the words “knowledge” (or “know”) and “ignorance” throughout the novel.

⁶⁶ A number of scholars have discussed Eustace’s problematic gendered position here. Although in the beginning of the novel he functions as a patriarchal authority, towards the end of the novel his character becomes increasingly effeminate. As Jenny Bourne Taylor suggests in her introduction to *The Law and the Lady*, he is “unable to uphold the codes of patriarchal authority” and “collapses into a ridiculous parody of masculinity in attempting to do so” (xiv). Eustace is not the only character whose gender is ambiguous, however; the character of Miserrimus Dexter has often been described as an androgynous figure, “a chaotic mixture of male and female gender characteristics” (O’Fallon 232). Finally, in her article on questions of gender in *The Law and the Lady*, O’Fallon suggests that the conflict between Valeria and Eustace is “embodied” by Valeria herself: “The masculine Valeria is determined to carry out her quest for knowledge, but the feminine Valeria desires love and family stability” (234).

⁶⁷ In fact, Valeria uses the word “unendurable” multiple times (48; 54).

⁶⁸ For instance, Eustace tells Valeria that after “the greatest lawyers” failed to vindicate him, “we can only submit [to the verdict]” (107). Valeria states repeatedly that she “refuse[s] to submit to the Scotch Verdict” (240) and to “the opinion of the Scotch Jury” (241). She also “submit[s]” to Mrs. Macallan’s refusal to reveal Eustace’s secret, and to Dexter’s summons in the form of a whistle (43, 228). Towards the end of the novel, Valeria gives up her investigation (312), and is then in the position of having to submit to the decision of Mr. Playmore “to go on or give up” (369).

⁶⁹ See chapter one.

⁷⁰ Similarly, In the introduction to his book *The Mastery of Submission* (which contains the analysis of Freud’s essay on masochism), Noyes emphasizes that the “controlled” environment of the masochistic fantasy, in which “the masochist makes sure that the person who administers the beatings knows the rules of the game and when to stop” (4), suggests to us that masochism is a genre complete with conventions and audience expectations.

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