Sex, crimes, and common sense: framing femininity from sensation to sexology

Elisabeth Ann Shane
University of Iowa

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SEX, CRIMES, AND COMMON SENSE:
FRAMING FEMININITY FROM SENSATION TO SEXOLOGY

by
Elisabeth Ann Shane

An Abstract
Of a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa.

July 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Teresa Mangum
ABSTRACT

My dissertation tracks the production of "common sense" about female sexuality and psychology in nineteenth-century sensational British literature. I move from the sensation novel’s heyday, represented by Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), through the fin-de-siècle Gothic literary revival with Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1895), and conclude with a reading of the representation of aberrant female sexuality in the emergent science of nineteenth-century sexology. For Victorian readers, few things could have seemed further removed from sensation literature—from lurid crime novels to sordid news stories to sexualized science—than common sense. Yet, my project illustrates the role of sensational literature in provoking the dark millennial fantasies that passed as common sense and often animated theories of femininity expressed in late-Victorian science. Common sense retains its rhetorical force through the assumption that its premises arise naturally and apply universally. But if we take a historical view, a troubling pattern emerges: common sense has often worked to preserve reactionary views of femininity. For example, in the nineteenth century, common sense led medical professionals to the belief that a woman's reproductive system left her constitutionally more susceptible to "hysteria."

I define common sense as the product of the frequent iteration of a particular train of associative logic that results in the naturalization and legitimation of claims about reality, even if those claims are both sensationalized and arbitrary. The rhetorical force of common sense requires the perpetual obscuration of its origins. The elusive and frustrating quality of common sense as a cognitive category derives from its ability, in Stuart Hall's words, to "represent itself as the 'traditional wisdom or truth of the ages,'"
[when] in fact, it is deeply a product of history, 'part of the historical process''
("Gramsci's Relevance" 431). Hall describes this type of associative relationship between disparate figures often exemplified in the logic of common sense as "an articulation."

What Hall refers to as an "articulation" might also be called, when viewed through the lens of literary theory, a “metonymic chain,” wherein the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it becomes linked, articulated. Both terms—articulation and metonymic chain—effectively describe the illusion of necessary correspondence in mere arbitrary association.

My translation of this cultural phenomenon into the framework of literary analysis allows for a precise description of the rhetorical transformations involved in conjuring common sense. With frequent iteration, metonymic association may appear to be based on some more substantial similarity—not circumstantial, but necessary; not the product of sensationalism, but the inevitable conclusion derived from and constituting common sense. Common sense regarding female sexuality has frequently been preserved through sensationalism; but paradoxically, sensationalism is often most effective when its characteristic paranoia seems somehow self-evidently justified, even rational. In other words, sensationalism works best to consolidate the paranoid patterns of associative logic informing the nineteenth-century figuration of femininity when it appears not to be working at all—when sensationalism takes on the weight of common sense.

Abstract Approved:

____________________________________________________________________
Thesis Supervisor

____________________________________________________________________
Title and Department

____________________________________________________________________
Date
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FRAMING FEMININITY FROM SENSATION TO SEXOLOGY

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English in the Graduate College of The University of Iowa

July 2012

Thesis Supervisor: Professor Teresa Mangum
Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

PH.D. THESIS

This is to certify that the Ph. D. thesis of

Elisabeth Ann Shane

has been approved by the Examining Committee for the thesis requirement for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in English at the July 2012 graduation.

Thesis Committee:

Teresa Mangum

Garrett Stewart

Dave Wittenberg

Mary Lou Emery

Aimee Carrillo Rowe
For my Parents,
Peter Shane
and
Martha Chamallas
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   Frontispiece to The Moonstone. A Novel. With Many Illustrations. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1868. The illustrations are attributed to William S. L. Jewett and Charles G. Bush. By permission of the Morris L. Parrish Collection, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library................................................................. 44

2. "Let me pour out the water," she whispered.
   Frontispiece to The Moonstone: A Romance. A New Edition. London: Chatto & Windus, 1876. Illustrated by George Du Maurier and F.A. Fraser. By permission of the Morris L. Parrish Collection, Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library................................................................. 45

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INTRODUCTION

A class of literature has grown up around us, usurping in many respects, intentionally or unintentionally, a portion of the preacher's office, playing no inconsiderable part in moulding the minds and forming the habits and tastes of its generation; and doing so principally, we had almost said exclusively, by "preaching to the nerves."

H.L. Mansel, "Sensation Novels"

To Mr. Collins belongs the credit of having introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors... Instead of the terrors of Udolpho, we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful country-house and the busy London lodgings. And there is no doubt that these were infinitely the more terrible.

Henry James, "Miss Braddon"

Following the publication of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), Wilkie Collins's *No Name* (1862), and a slew of other "bigamy novels" which marked the height of the sensation novel's popularity, Henry Longueville Mansel was moved to lament the influence of this literary form on impressionable readers, with its tendency to "preach to the nerves instead of the judgment" ("Sensation Novels" 482). Nineteenth-century sensational literature departs thematically from earlier crime-focused genres by presenting stories of corruption within the middle-class home. The sensation novel is in multiple senses a generic hybrid: a mélange of melodrama, domestic realism, gothic romance, and crime news. Sensation fiction sparked a vitriolic critical response as it circulated "promiscuously" from the kitchen to the drawing room, collapsing the boundaries of high and low literature. For Mansel, the ever-growing popularity of "works of this class" was a sign of "widespread corruption... both the effect and the cause; called into existence to supply the cravings of a diseased appetite, and contributing
themselves to foster the disease and to stimulate the want which they supply"(483). From the remove of more than a century and half, it becomes harder to see why Mansel was so alarmed. Even if the sensation novelists were responsible for violating the sanctity of the middle-class domicile—for ripping plots of murder, false identity, and bigamy from the headlines—these crimes pale in comparison to the scenes of violence which proliferate in popular culture today. And Mansel was not alone in his opinion.

Shortly after the appearance of Wilkie Collins's genre pioneering *The Woman in White* (1860) and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, the vastly popular British humor magazine, *Punch*, published a satirical press release announcing the commencement of a new journal, "The Sensation Times, And Chronicle of Excitement." Characteristically caustic, the parody betrays the same cultural anxieties shaping Mansel's review:

This Journal will be devoted chiefly to the following objects; namely, Harrowing the Mind, Making the Flesh Creep, Causing the Hair to Stand on End, Giving Shocks to the Nervous System, Destroying Conventional Moralities, and generally Unfitting the Public for the Prosaic Avocations of Life. ("Sensation Times")

The article underscores the deleterious influence of sensation fiction on "conventional morality" even further as *The Sensation Times* publicizes its intention to provide "a large sum, under the name of a subscription . . . to the Society for the Suppression of Vice, in order to ensure its non-interference with the forthcoming tale." While *Punch's* insinuation that periodicals linked with sensation fiction may have been in the practice of using bribes to evade censorship is somewhat extreme, literary critics often targeted sensation novelists for their alleged role in denigrating the moral integrity of their readers and the aesthetic quality of British literature as a whole. Critics even went so far as to impugn the moral fiber of best-selling novelists, like Braddon, casting aspersion on the tenuous
ground that her plots betrayed the author's "acquaintance with a very low type of female character" (Rae 190). And yet, at least on first glance, Mansel seems to have chastised in vain; one might imagine him rolling in his proverbial grave only thirty years later when Bram Stoker's Dracula advanced upon the literary stage, making Lady Audley's coquetry seem like child's play compared with the "adamantine voluptuousness" of Lucy Westenra in all her undead glory.

If the socially subversive potential of sensation fiction might be measured merely in terms of the quality and quantity of shocks administered to the reader during the course of the novel, then certainly late-Victorian gothic novels would have presented a greater threat to the stability of British domestic ideology than their sensationalist literary predecessors. But the social work of a novel cannot be measured in such simplistic

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1 My conception of nineteenth-century middle-class morality is informed by Jeffrey Weeks's study of the forces shaping "modern sexuality" in Sex, Politics, and Society. According to Weeks, the ideals of home and family offered an "important social cement" at a time of political anxiety for the rising bourgeoisie, who had become "from the 1830s politically influential but often morally anxious, particularly under the impact of political instability and economic uncertainty" (28). The espousal of domestic ideology worked to define the middle class against the immorality of the aristocracy and the working classes, but this emphasis on the family and home was also economically motivated. This domestic ideal (contained within the "ideology of respectability") prescribed power relations within the home and positioned "female sexuality as secondary, and deriving from the maternal instinct" (27). Policing female sexuality became foundational to the notion of middle-class respectability. Female chastity not only protected a man's property from coming under the control of an "illegitimate" child, it also "ensured the loyalty of his sons who might be business partners, and of his daughters who might be essential in marriage alliances" (30).

In Uneven Developments, Mary Poovey expands on this account, arguing that the "rhetorical separation of spheres and the image of domesticated, feminized morality were crucial to the consolidation of bourgeois power partly because linking morality to a figure (rhetorically) immune to the self-interest and competition integral to economic success preserved virtue without inhibiting productivity" (10). The "domestic ideal" was preserved from the competition which characterized the public sphere and accordingly operated "as the prize that inspired hard work, for a prosperous family was the goal represented as desirable and available to everyman" (10). Poovey describes how the often noted paradoxical characterization of women as both the "angel of the house" and as "sexualized, susceptible, and fallen," is the result of women's centrality to domestic bourgeois ideology. That women were both "dependent" and in need of protection (or control) offered justification for women's exclusion from the public sphere and for their subordinated status in the home and in society (11). Medical models of femininity also express this contradictory logic, using women's reproductive difference as evidence of their maternal instinct, their feckless nature, and their dangerous sexuality (11). Other influential discussions of the role of bourgeois ideology in shaping Victorian female sexuality include: Judith Walkowitz, City of Dreadful Delight, 15-41; Nina Auerbach, The Woman and the Demon, 63-108; and Eric Trudgill, Madonnas and Magdalens;
terms. One must also take into account the way sensationalism structures the reader’s response toward those narrative figures who threaten the disruption of traditional social narratives. For this reason, it strikes me as plausible that, while Mansel might have objected to the fin de siècle gothic on grounds that it seeks to elicit from the reader a visceral response, rather than a cerebral reflection, he might still have reserved his harshest judgment for his contemporaries. For among the various spectacles of femininity present in the trajectory of sensation literature I trace—from the sensation novel’s heyday, through the fin-de-siècle gothic literary revival with Bram Stoker’s Dracula (1895), culminating in a reading of the representation of aberrant female sexuality in the emergent science of nineteenth-century sexology—the female figures who ultimately pose the greatest threat to established conceptions of sex and gender come from Collins and Braddon, not Stoker or Richard Von Krafft-Ebing.

The sexology excluded, the literature of my dissertation captured the attention of a large popular audience and became something of a cultural "sensation," verging, in some cases, on scandal. But, while the sexology lays claim to a more specialized readership, the portraits of female sexuality generated by Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and even Freud reflect the same rhetorical structures used to produce the ubiquitous figuration of fatal femininity circulating through fin de siècle gothic literature. 2 This reactionary

Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, ed., Family Fortunes. More recently, John Tosh has challenged the gendered terms in which the system of separate spheres is typically conceived to argue that domesticity was central to the conception of middle-class "manliness" and that system of separate spheres has been "more dogmatically asserted by modern scholars then it ever was by the Victorian"(77). However, while A Man’s Place provides a useful counterpoint to previous scholarship on this topic, it continues to work from the premise that the ideal of domesticity was drawn in contrast to the competition and aggression which characterized the world outside the home. Even if, as Tosh argues, the gendered separation of spheres was more rhetorical than actual, these rhetorical effects had far reaching consequences as the ideal of domesticity shaped and was shaped by men and women of the middle-class.

2 Drawing on Michel Foucault’s work on the medicalization of sex in the nineteenth century, Rebecca Stott
impulse, the result of the increasingly shifting domestic and international landscape, finds its clearest expression in the proliferation of degeneration theory at the fin de siècle. As anxiety regarding the spread of moral and physical "degeneration" grew to a fever pitch toward the turn of the nineteenth century, diagnosing signs of degeneration within the individual became the stuff of common sense.

**Conjuring Common Sense**

By definition, *common sense* refers to a set of beliefs, the truth of which is self-evident, held in common by people regardless of time and place. Common sense comes to bear in understanding the appropriate behavior within and in response to any given situation, to comprehending cause and effect, and to identifying our place within and effectively navigating social and personal relationships. Common sense typically provides the unspoken premises by which conclusions drawn regarding more epistemological and moral issues are judged. But if we take the historical view, a troubling pattern emerges: common sense has often worked to preserve reactionary views of femininity against the progress of feminist principles. In the nineteenth century,
common sense led medical professionals to the belief that a woman's reproductive system left her constitutionally more susceptible to "hysteria" than men (Showalter 55). In the contemporary moment, common sense still dictates that a woman's outward physical presentation reliably manifests her sexual and political orientation. In fact, we owe this long enduring stereotype to one of the nineteenth century's leading theorists of human sexuality, Richard Von Krafft-Ebing. The sexologist is credited with the earliest formulation, in his comprehensive study of human sexualities, of the "mannish-lesbian"/feminist (Smith-Rosenberg 272). The lasting power of this figuration attests to the psychological force underwriting its arbitrary associative logic. The supposed "mannish" appearance of the lesbian and the feminist operates then and now as shorthand for a list of pejorative associations: physical insufficiency, unnatural aggressiveness, and degeneracy.

For the purposes of my project, I define common sense as the product of the frequent iteration of a particular train of associative logic that results in the naturalization and legitimation of claims about reality, even if those claims are both sensationalized and arbitrary. Or to think of it another way, as certain narratives are reproduced in popular literature they become familiar, allowing readers to quickly intuit the narrative trajectory even if they are not acquainted with the specifics of the story. This may lead the reader to believe that the source of this narrative intuition is common sense when in fact, it merely a form of narrative indoctrination. For example, in the "lesbian love murder" narratives which circulated widely in the nineteenth-century popular press and sexological studies, the masculinity of the women accused of committing an act of violence was often emphasized by contrast to the femininity of her often less consistently
affectionate partner. This narrative repetition produces the illusion of common sense in the belief that female masculinity is both a sign of same sex female desire and latent criminal tendencies.

Stuart Hall uses the term "articulation" to convey this type of associative relationship between disparate figures often exemplified in the logic of common sense. What Hall refers to as "articulation" might also be called, when viewed through the lens of literary theory, a “metonymic chain,” wherein the literal term for one thing is applied to another with which it has become closely associated. (Take for example, the familiar substitution of the "crown" for the "king.") Both terms—articulation and metonymic chain—effectively describe the illusion of necessary correspondence in mere arbitrary association. My translation of this cultural phenomenon into the framework of literary analysis allows for a precise description of the rhetorical transformations involved in conjuring "common sense." With frequent iteration, metonymic association may appear to be based on some more substantial similarity—not circumstantial, but necessary; not the product of sensationalism, but the inevitable conclusions derived from and constituting "common sense."

The rhetorical force of common sense requires the perpetual obfuscation of its origins. As with any illusion, the power of common sense requires that the sleight of hand involved in its production pass unnoticed. The elusive and frustrating quality of common sense as a cognitive category derives from its ability, in Stuart Hall's words, to "represent itself as the 'traditional wisdom or truth of the ages,' [when] in fact, it is deeply a product of history, 'part of the historical process'" ("Gramsci's Relevance" 431). For nineteenth-century readers, few things could have seemed further removed from
sensation literature—from lurid crime novels to sordid news stories to sexualized science—than common sense. Yet, my project will illustrate the role of sensational literature in provoking the dark millennial fantasies passing as common sense and so often animating theories of femininity expressed in late-Victorian science.

Critics like Elaine Showalter, Natalie Schroeder, Jenny Bourne Taylor, Helen Small, and Rebecca Stott move beyond fiction to examine the influence of nonliterary sources such as the press (crime news, in particular) and contemporary scientific theories on representations of female sexuality in sensational literature. My project reverses this strategy, using the rhetorical structure of "common sense" to discuss the way certain patterns of associative logic become culturally hard-wired. By employing the concept of common sense I am able to provide a coherent account of how sensational literature informs nineteenth-century scientific models of femininity. My dissertation provides a model for tracking the influence of common sense conceptions on a literary narrative, as well as a method for demonstrating how the logical gaps and incongruities of the text may be invested in producing common sense out of sensationalized beliefs, such as the claim that all overtly sexual women possess latent criminal potential.

"Blank Spaces" and the Sensation Reader

In order to understand the role of sensational literature in shaping common sense, it is necessary not only to isolate and schematize the rhetorical patterns that gave shape to nineteenth-century models of femininity and to recover the relevant historical narratives informing and activated by the primary text, but also to develop a theory of reading that accounts for the way literature engages and informs readers' conceptions of common sense. To achieve this final objective, I draw upon the body of "reader response" criticism
to show not only that the text, in the words of Garrett Stewart, "recruits the very reading it requires," but that this recruitment involves prompting the reader's response to those specific moments in the text which activate common sense figurations regarding female sexuality and psychology (12). /4

Sensational fiction has been particularly effective in manipulating the reader because, just as the name implies, it seeks to evoke an intense emotional (possibly even physical) response. The genre exploits those aspects of the human experience that simultaneously fascinate and terrify, in equal parts thrill and shock, capitalizing on the reader's desire for sensation. By promising to satisfy (or at the very least pique) this desire, sensational literature holds its audience in thrall. But as I will explore, readers pursue the sources of pleasure presented by sensational literature at their own risk. As Ross Chambers puts it plainly, "To change what people desire is, in the long run, the way to change without violence the way things are" (xii). Of course, this change may not necessarily be in the service of promoting a more just or egalitarian society. In fact, as I

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/4 Since the 1980s, this body of literature has grown so vast, that I think it helpful here to specify those critical frameworks in this vein I have found most helpful in my own work. While works like Richard Altick's *The Common Reader* and Patrick Brantlinger's *The Reading Lesson* have been immensely useful in recovering a sense of the historical reader who encountered the sensational literature I explore in my dissertation, I am less interested in the question "who was reading" and more focused on how the literature trained (or at the very least encouraged) its readers to process the various figurations of femininity they encountered. In this way, I am more influenced by those approaches that emphasize the ways in which the text seeks to control its reading—Michael Riffaterre, Wolfgang Iser, Hans-Robert Jauss, Garrett Stewart—but also by the feminist interventions of Kate Flint and Elaine Showalter. The following anthologies of reader response criticism have proved instrumental in orienting myself within this body of literature: Andrew Bennet's *Readers and Reading*, Susan Suleiman and Inge Crossman's *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, and Jane Tomkins's, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*. Elizabeth Freund's *Return of the Reader* provides a critical overview of the field from its departure from New Criticism to the various theorizations of the relationship of the reader to the text offered by Jonathan Culler, Stanley Fish, Norman Holland, and Wolfgang Iser. More recently, reader-response theory and its related field of reception study have been combined with a cultural studies approach to further explore the political and historical dimensions of the text. In this critical vein see: James L. Machor and Philip Goldstein, ed. *Reception Study: From Literary Theory to Cultural Studies*; Patrocinio P. Schweickart and Elizabeth A. Flynn, ed. *Reading Sites: Social Difference and Reader Response*. 
will demonstrate, where the midcentury sensation novel highlighted the arbitrary nature of long-held cultural beliefs, *fin-de-siècle* sensational narratives evoked the reader's horror in the service of preserving and perpetuating reactionary conceptions of female psychology.

Taking the lesson from Stewart, my project turns toward a trajectory of sensational literature to argue that sensationalism plays a crucial role in structuring the response of its contemporary audience to certain categories of common sense. Stewart's work has directed my own reading toward the moments where the text figures not only the reader but the act of reading: "As member of an audience, your private reading—along with that of every other reader—is actually convoked and restaged, put in service to the text" (8). As readers we find ourselves, "implicated by apostrophe or by proxy, by address or by dramatized scenes of reading, . . . deliberately drafted by the text, written with. In the closed circuit of conscripted response, your input is a predigested function of the text's output—digested in advance by rhetorical mention or by narrative episode" (8). However, where Stewart rejects Wolfgang Iser's version of reader response theory for its tendency to "tame the more volatile reader you find yourself asked to be," "the implied reader who simply secures meaning by anchoring its preestablished codes," I have found in Iser’s approach a useful, if in some ways undeveloped, description of the function of common sense in a literary work (11).

Iser's "blank spaces"—the logical gaps and spaces of indeterminacy present in a text—mark the logical leaps founded on a presumption of shared common knowledge,

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5 In developing a theory of reading sensational literature, I have been influenced by Stewart's notion of "conscripted response" as developed in his expansive survey of the figure of the reader (and reading), *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. 
but also the rhetorical work involved in transforming sensationalized associations into common sense. These "blank spaces" illuminate the implicit (culturally loaded) logic informing the narrative. According to Iser, "blanks indicate that the different segments and patterns of the text are to be connected even though the text itself does not say so. They are the unseen joints of the text, and as they mark off schemata and textual perspectives from one another, they simultaneously prompt acts of ideation on the reader's part" (112). In *The Act of Reading*, Iser expands upon the theoretical framework articulated in *The Implied Reader*, to argue that the reader's interaction with the text—the projection of meaning into the areas of indeterminacy, the textual "gaps"—inspires a process of ideation previously "alien" to the reader. For Iser, literary texts negotiate their contemporary systems of thought in order to achieve "the imaginary correction of deficient realities" (85). The reader, in turn, inhabits and activates multiple and divergent perspectives within the text and, in the process, begins to see familiar "thought systems" through a new and critical light (87).

Iser's conception of the literary text's function is far more optimistic than my own, and most critics would probably now agree that Iser's model is untenable if taken to be universal. However, Iser points to a crucial dynamic involved in the ideological work

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6 Stanley Fish's review of *The Act of Reading*, "Why no one is Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," remains one of the most provocative critiques of Iser's theory. In particular, Fish attacks Iser on the ground that his pluralistic approach to reading, the "contention . . . that while a literary text is distinguished by its openness to a number of readings, it is not open to any and all readings" rests on an untenable distinction between "the determinate and the indeterminate" (3-6). In other words, Fish contends that it is impossible to isolate the "given" aspects of a text, those "textual segments" that precede the encounter with the reader, from the assumptions and meanings the reader brings to bear. For Fish, there is nothing determinate in the text from which we may begin the process of analysis; everything is indeterminate as it is interpreted by the reader, shaped by the reader's ideologically informed perceptions. Pushing this point further, Fish argues that, without positing certain determinate textual segments, it becomes impossible to say that "the reader's activities are constrained by something they do not produce" (6). And from here, Iser's claim to the transformative influence of the text upon the reader's world view is likewise rendered incoherent. Fish has a point; however, if we were to accept Fish's indeterminacy, then in Elizabeth Freund's words, "without a
performed by the text. These "blank" spaces can remain blank only because what might have required spelling out at one point can now go clearly expressed without actually being articulated. In this way, the "blank spaces" of a text provide a map of common sense—for once patterns of associations become sufficiently entrenched in a social system, the connective tissue linking two disparate figures can be elided.

But these "blank spaces" also point us to narratives which must be excluded from the middle-class world of the Victorian novel. These are narratives which, if made explicit, would render nineteenth-century conventional morality patently bankrupt. Here again, Iser anticipates this argument without grounding his observation sufficiently in the historical fabric of the text to make his claims entirely convincing. Iser identifies this latter type of "blank space" as a form of "negation." Capturing the paradoxical quality of the impression (both present and absent) these "negations" or, as I would say, elided narratives, bear upon the text. Iser describes how "the various types of negation invoke familiar and determinate elements or knowledge only to cancel them out. What is cancelled, however, remains in view" ("Text and Reader" 112).

This process of negation becomes most instructive in those rare instances where we can actually witness a key term in a logical sequence drop out. This sort of negation may suggest either that the connection between the two outer terms is so familiar that the third term is no longer necessary or, alternatively, that the author is at least implying that

trigger ("something to be interpreted") no act of interpretation can take place" (151). To my mind, Fish's model also reduces the political relevancy of literary criticism considerably (maybe even absolutely) as the politics of the text become indistinguishable from the politics of the reader. Of course, the reader informs the meaning of the text, but close rhetorical analysis can yield a strong case for the way literature seeks to control its own reading. And as I will show, the effects of sensational reading on the evolution of models of femininity in the nineteenth century cannot be denied.
this is the case. For example, during the latter part of the nineteenth century any expression of same-sex female desire became a sign of a latent criminal impulse, typically expressed in a jealous rage. The media coverage surrounding the 1892 Memphis, Tennessee murder case involving Freda Ward and her former girlfriend Alice Mitchell displays the rhetorical manipulations involved in transforming Alice Mitchell into a criminal type, conflating Alice’s sexuality with her criminal behavior. Blurring the line between Alice’s homosexuality and her pathological obsession with Freda Ward, one headline out of New Orleans reads: “The Mad Murderess: Strange Infatuation of Alice Mitchell for Her Young Girl Victim.” The headline renders the substance of Alice’s “strangeness” ambiguous, implying that no clarification is necessary, as the one strangeness—her sexuality—can be read as the sign of the other, her murderous jealousy. Another headline from a Chicago paper features a similar slippage between the mental derangement that led Alice to murder and her homosexual desire: “Thought Her Queer: Second Day of the Trial of Alice Mitchell.” “Queer,” like “strange,” covers the range of Alice’s unconventional behavior and, through the ambiguity, collapses her sexuality and criminality. In these accounts, the "strange" or, more accurately, psychotic tendencies specific to Alice Mitchell that led her from sexual desire to murder are occluded. As a result of this textual negation, there appears to be an inextricable causal connection between female homosexuality and violent behavior. This rhetorical maneuver actively recruits the reader in affirming and perpetuating the common sense association of same-sex female desire and latent criminality.

The portentous bearing of the female figures who recur throughout sensational literature also signals the effects of displacement. For example, imperial anxiety is
displaced onto gender roles, transforming the fear about the declining empire into a panic about the changing social and political status of women. The underlying anxiety is masked through the process of displacement, which while it remains partly concealed, is still detectable through the psychological force it lends to the now overdetermined figuration of femininity. These figures are "overdetermined" in the sense that they signify in a multivalent fashion; through them, the reader encounters a constellation of associated narratives. For example, the presence of a *femme fatale* may allude simultaneously to the media account of a female criminal, the medical theory of puerperal insanity, and the characteristic physical traits of female criminal offenders as detailed in the pseudoscientific field of criminal anthropology. If the later forms of sensational British literature disguise the process of overdetermination which lends their depiction of fatal femininity its most sinister expression, the sensation novel reverses the effects of condensation, by gesturing toward the instability of these familiar sensational figurations.

More than most literary forms, sensational literature promises to indulge the reader in the guilty pleasure of abandoning oneself to extended meditation on—sometimes even an identification with—the transgressive, aberrant, even criminal, elements of society. It is for this reason that sensational literature has always had to defend itself against the charge of moral corruption. Because sensational literature retains such potential manipulative force over its audience, it occupies a central role in the

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7 In *Dear Reader*, Garrett Stewart accounts for the myriad cultural narratives Dracula—an "elusive signified of a rampant signifying energy"—bodies forth. "Ferociously overdetermined", Dracula is "a kind of negative or reverse image of British imperialism . . . . the transmitter of a kind of 'venereal' infection that figures an epidemic of sexual 'decadence' and biological degeneration. . . . Furthermore, in his sapping the will of his already passive female victims, his very modus vivendi represents a fantasized escape from, while in the end a heightened vulnerability to, the independent energies of the New Woman. . . . And in his powers of telepathy, he is the necromantic counterpart of the new telegraphic and phonographic technologies of electrically displaced origin which labor together to outmode and obliterate him" (379).
production of cultural standards, beliefs, and assumptions. But as I will go on to demonstrate, the novels produced by Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon during the height of the sensation novel's popularity reveal the potential for sensational literature to dismantle the ossified forms of common sense that conflated biological sex with prescribed social behaviors.

So, my claim is not that sensationalism is inevitably reactionary, working on its readers to perpetuate traditional and repressive moral frameworks, although often, this is the case. By tracking the history of sensational literature from the mid-nineteenth toward the turn of the twentieth century, we can see sensationalism beginning to work in concert with an anxious imperialist, misogynist agenda to shore up a traditional conception of Britishness against increasing pressure for social change. In this way, the social role of sensationalism serves as a sort of political barometer. In brief moments of progressive social change, sensationalism allows readers to access narratives that have been silenced and rendered incoherent to the extent they contradict the dominant cultural narrative. But as the latter half of the nineteenth century reveals, these short windows of cultural liberation are typically followed by, and even co-exist with, long periods of conservative backlash and the consolidation of the status quo. My argument can also be backed up by history. As Sophia Rosenfeld reveals in her recent study on the subject, common sense typically remains out of the public eye and "generally only comes out of the shadows and draws attention to itself at moments of perceived crisis or collapsing consensus"(24).  

8 Rosenfeld's study approaches the question of common sense from a historian's (rather than a literary critic's) perspective. Where I look to popular literature as a powerful source of "popular wisdom," Rosenfeld's study focuses on political treatises used toward the obfuscation of partisan politics and demagoguery.
Perhaps the most famous example of this version of common sense remains Thomas Paine's powerful evocation of the concept as the basis on which to argue for American independence from the British empire.\footnote{For detailed discussion of the role of common sense in galvanizing revolutionary war see: Rosenfeld, 136-180.}

The mid-nineteenth century stood witness to progress as the passage of the *Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act* (1857) and the *Married Women's Property Act* (1870) began to make small but significant incursions against the long standing rule of coverture.\footnote{One necessary caveat: the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 offered a legal revision to a system that had become unpalatable to the general public. It did make divorce more widely available, making it possible for some women to find a means of redress from a bad marriage. On the other hand, the Act also preserved the sexist logic underpinning the system of coverture it replaced. Prior to its passage, only the very wealthy were able to obtain "separation from bed and board"; after its passage the newly established divorce court had the authority to grant parties "judicial separation." However, the Act did perpetuate a double standard for married men and women. While men were simply required to prove their wives had committed adultery, women had to prove adultery accompanied by the extra provocations of desertion, rape, cruelty, incest, sodomy, or bestiality (Perkin 303).} But this period is marked also by the passage of the notorious *Contagious Disease Acts* (1864). These Acts allowed for the forced hospitalization of any woman suspected of prostitution, effectively shouldering women with the sole responsibility for the transmission of sexual diseases. The Acts further stigmatized the female prostitute, who represented in herself, not insignificantly, a rare instance of female financial autonomy at a historical moment where the means of gainful employment for women of the working classes were severely limited. And even as women more frequently voiced their dissenting political opinions, making headway in the previously restricted public arenas of higher education, politics and science, it was well into the twentieth century before women achieved universal suffrage. The slow work of political progress is a clear indication of the efficacy of conservative, antifeminist forces. There are obvious parallels
between the growing strength and organization of the women's movement and the increasingly monstrous manifestations of female sexuality and psychology emerging not only in the realm of gothic literature, but in the field of sexual science. And while scholars have marked these parallels, they have yet to produce a coherent account of how sensational literature helped to produce and perpetuate the common sense conceptions of femininity that shaped medical models of female psychology and which continue to inform popular beliefs in the present moment.

**Reading for the Sensation Plot**

The shift in the cultural role of sensationalism—from dismantling to concretizing categories of common sense—is traceable through the way the text manages the reader’s desire for sensation. Sensational literature consistently draws upon the reader’s fascination with figures beyond the pale of polite society and with narratives of corruption and deviant desire. But as we approach the turn of the century, sensational literature seems increasingly unwilling to allow the reader to explore these aspects of the human experience unchecked. The face of social transgression grows more evil, less human, more positively monstrous. And while the *fin de siècle* gothic indulges our morbid fascinations, it simultaneously polices the lines of identification and pleasure

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11 For a reading of *Dracula* as a direct response to the figure of the New Woman, see: Ledger 94-118; Senf 33-49; Craft 216-42; Case 1-19; Stevenson 139-149, Spear 179-192. There is also, of course, Stephen Arata’s reading of *Dracula* as the manifestation of imperial anxiety—the nightmare of "reverse colonization"—which marked this crisis moment for the British Empire (107-133). For a discussion of the *femme fatale* as a figure arising from anxieties of degeneration and invasion that marked the crisis moment for the British Empire at the *fin de siècle* see: Stott. In *Sexual Anarchy*, Showalter provides a broader discussion of the emergence of feminism against oppositional forces at the turn of the century. For example, the subversion of vestigial British and American sex/gender systems embodied by the figure of the New Woman and the male aesthete met with measures intended to consolidate and police traditional conceptions of sex and gender in the form of “social purity campaigns, a renewed sense of public moral concern, and demands, often successful, for restrictive legislation and censorship” (3).
more rigorously than its sensational predecessors. Here, I am again alluding to Stewart and his "gothic of reading," the self-reflective textual effect which reveals the reader to herself "not as an ontological perversion (deformed double, devolving portrait, mesmeric alter ego, sepulchral bat-man), but as fascinated by all such aberrations to the point of self-disfiguring (self-decentering) perversity" (359). According to Stewart, the late-Victorian gothic novels thematize the act of reading, with all its "libidinal investment," and in this way:

You are made to fear the lurking morbidity of your reading. Just a little. Just enough. It is exactly the metatextual gothic of reading, in short, which keeps the reading of gothic from the rank escapism it so obviously courts on the open market. Such parables disinfect the same emotive sore spots they have stung into recognition. (392)

And while I agree with Stewart to a large extent, when we contrast the mode of textual instruction exercised by the gothic to the mid-century sensation novel, it becomes apparent that Stewart has understated the violence with which these "parables" work to contain the subversive potential of the reader's identification with the various gothic bodies populating the text.

More than "just a little," these novels seek to inspire the fear and paranoia informing fin de siècle portraits of female sexuality as monstrous, aggressive, violent, and of course threatening to healthy British masculinity. If we catch a glimpse of ourselves in The Moonstone as the wide-eyed errand boy—Gooseberry—failing to disguise our "exultation" at the scene of the crime, we receive only the slightest remonstrance for this breach of decorum. But to become too much absorbed by scandalous narratives in the late-Victorian gothic is to suffer a transformation so extreme that the only possible conclusion remaining is a violent and painful death. The threat of contagion is never far
removed from any text that orients its willing readers toward socially proscribed persons and desires. But, where Collins and Braddon exploit these dangerous alliances in the service of revealing cracks in the foundation of Victorian domesticity, their gothic successors go to extreme lengths to illustrate the dangerous repercussions attending this sort of unscrupulous fraternization. When Lucy Westenra's "vampiric" sexual tendencies are literalized in her monstrous transformation, the only "cure," kindly performed by her circle of (former) admirers, is to cut off her head and drive a stake through her heart. Along with Lucy, the reader will also find any impure thoughts aroused by the text thoroughly exorcised.

The stakes involved in this regulation of the reader's response to and relationship with the sensationalized portraits of femininity—from mid-century onward—become emphatically clear in the sexological studies produced around the turn of the century. By the end of the century, the role of sensationalism in literature has shifted dramatically. The mid-century sensation novel invites the reader to consider how social conventions have been often touted as a law of nature, blurring the line between arbitrary assumptions based on social prejudice and immutable truths based on sound deduction. By contrast, at the turn of the century, sensational literature ceases to inspire the reader's critical reflection on categories of common sense, but instead passes off paranoid fantasies in the guise of scientific objectivity derived from common sense and so-called biological "evidence."

Studies of the sensation novel have tended to occupy either of two camps: champions of the genre for its subversion of conventional bourgeois values versus critics of the sensation novel as yet another vehicle for disciplinary power. D.A. Miller provides
a masterful case in support of the latter position in *The Novel and the Police*, in which he contends that the sensation novel ultimately animates subversive energies only to enact the disciplinary process whereby these disruptive currents are (often violently) suppressed. In contrast, critics seeking to defend the “subversive” potential of sensation fiction generally take an approach to the systems of power represented in the novel that is more historical than Miller's. In this critical vein, key studies such as Lyn Pykett’s *The “Improper” Feminine: The Women’s Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing*, Kate Flint's *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914*, Marlene Tromp’s *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain*, and Winifred Hughes’s *The Maniac in the Cellar*, work to demonstrate the sensation novel’s subtle engagement with, and subversion of, the cultural assumptions informing a relevant legal, medical, scientific, social, or political context.12

Misidentifying the source of pleasures in sensational texts has led critics, perhaps Miller most notably, to the conclusion that sensational novels evoke the reader's panic regarding the subversion of traditional gender roles only to offer, in the form of a consolation prize, the pacifying pleasure of seeing the status quo violently reinstated. According to Miller, the primary task of the latter half of Collins's first foray into the genre, *The Woman in White*, "is the dissolution of sensation in the achievement of decided meaning" (165). This concretization of meaning, for Miller, involves the

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consolidation of gender norms in the "heterosexual ménage whose happy picture concludes [the novel]" (165). The identity of the sensation novel under Miller's framework becomes downright paradoxical for, through the domestication of deviant impulses in the dénouement, the sensation novel ultimately betrays its "wish to abolish itself: to abandon the grotesque aberrations of character and situation that have typified its representation" (166).

The first two chapters of my dissertation challenge Miller's claim that the early sensational narrative resolves around a "decided meaning" which affirms a traditional moral framework (165). Miller's pronouncements on the sensation novel have been greatly influential. Critics have frequently recapitulated his emphasis on the conservative implications of the concluding domestic scenes of these novels, arguing that writers like Collins, who may at first appear to challenge conventional morality, must ultimately be read as affirming the legitimacy of both that morality and the legal systems—such as coverture—through which it is enforced.

Readers of the sensation genre seek out these narratives for pleasure—specifically, for the pleasure of being shocked and thrilled in an encounter with figures who transgress established legal and moral codes. Miller also isolates this dynamic of reading as genre-defining, but we draw different conclusions from this similar observation. Unlike most other literary genres, the sensation novel's primary objective is to elicit a visceral response from the reader. According to Miller, as readers:

We remain unseen, of course, but not untouched: our bodies are rocked by the same "positive personal shocks" as the characters' are said to be. For us, these shocks have the ambivalent character of being both an untroubled pleasure (with a certain "male" adventurism we read the sensation novel in order to have them) and a less tame and more painful jouissance (with a certain "female" helplessness
we often protest that we can't bear them, though we do when they keep coming). (163)

The reader, in Miller's account, becomes psychologically unhinged, rattled by the constant stream of shocking encounters, ultimately panicking with the realization that he has become hysterical, a feminized "creature of the of the 'nerves'"(163). And it is here, with his reliance on the nineteenth-century trope par excellence for female psychology—hysteria—that Miller and I part ways.

Hysteria does function as a key trope in the sensation novel, often implicitly and in a metaleptical fashion, but that is not to say that Collins or Braddon preserve hysteria as a coherent medical diagnosis. The scandalous suggestion at the heart of many of these novels is of course that the line between sanity and insanity is not objectively, but culturally determined. For example, of *Lady Audley's Secret*, Elaine Showalter observes that while "Braddon teases the reader with the explanation that Lady Audley's insanity is latent and intermittent, coming on her only in moments of stress. . . . As every woman reader must have sensed, Lady Audley's real secret is that she is *sane* and, moreover, representative" (167). Illuminating the dark places of psychology, Collins and Braddon orient the reader towards those narratives covered by the blanket diagnosis. By accessing these narratives, the reader animates certain illicit energies in the text—energies in excess of proper femininity and the social mores of the Victorian middle class more generally. But I remain unconvinced that the thrills attending these sensational encounters should bring the reader to the point of hysteria—unless, by “hysterical,” we mean merely that the reader encounters in herself excitement that breaches the line of feminine decorum. And in this case the reader will experience the close of the narrative unsatisfying, the repression and containment of these sensational currents, ineffectual.
Many critics emphasize the conservative implications of the conclusion typical to the sensation novel—the culmination of the marriage plot—to argue that ultimately these novels presented no challenge to traditional conceptions of femininity. I resist this prioritization of the novel's domestic conclusion on the ground that the sources of greatest pleasure for the reader in the sensation novel are those moments that allow the reader to access illicit narratives—textual energies that render the logic informing traditional conceptions of gender and sexuality incoherent. These moments threaten to derail the marriage plot and, even where they do not quite succeed, wreak sufficient foundational damage to undermine the reader's sense of satisfaction in this familiar final scene. Indeed the divergence, maybe even deviance, of the sensation plot from that of domestic realism becomes all the more clear when contrasted with the model of narrative desire Peter Brooks develops to describe the nineteenth-century realist novel. Taking Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* as a form of narrative theory, Brooks argues that the literary plot, like Freud’s living organisms, evinces a dynamic akin to the "death drive":

The self-preservative instincts function to assure that the organism shall follow its own path to death, to ward off any ways of returning to the inorganic which are not imminent to the organism itself. In other words, “the organism wishes to die only in its own fashion.” It must struggle against events (dangers) that would help it to achieve its goal to rapidly—by a kind of short-circuit. (Brooks 102)

For Brooks, narrative "short-circuits" arise in the form of possible, but in one way or another, unsuitable endings. Pip marrying the object of his long unrequited affection, Estella, presents one such "short-circuit" because, as events unfold, we learn that their relation more closely approximates brother and sister than husband and wife (Brooks 128). As the possibility of the "short-circuit" generates a certain "textual energy, . . . the reader experiences the fear—excitation—of the improper end" (109). But for Brooks, the
sort of excitement associated with the possibility of a narrative short-circuit is always a
pleasure subordinated to the satisfaction of the proper ending.

In the way of explanation for his hierarchy of narrative pleasure, Brooks suggests
that the dynamics of plot closely mirror the trajectory of the male orgasm: a prolonged
period of excitation leading to a final climactic moment. Brooks even goes so far as to
liken a "short-circuit" in the plot to "premature ejaculation" (109). While he may have
intended merely to be playful here, the metaphor is revealing; under this model, any
deviation from the conventional Victorian plot will provoke anxiety in the reader. If we
read a bit further into the sexual metaphor, these deviations—like the failure to perform
sexually—may provoke a crisis of masculinity. I might be inclined to agree in the context
of the sensational novel, but I do not share Brooks's sense that the deviant pleasures
presented by the plot ought to be sacrificed to the consolidation (and consummation) of
gender roles through the culmination of the marriage plot. Indeed, I argue that The
Moonstone and Lady Audley's Secret deny the reader any complacent "satisfaction of the
proper ending" by undercutting the logic of the moral system on which this sort of ending
rests. Quite the opposite, the ending strikes the reader as unsatisfying given that the
domestic ideal it seeks to invoke rings hollow.

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The following chapters track the role of sensationalism in both creating and
reinforcing a common sense of female psychology whose effects become evident not
only in fiction, but also in journalism and medical literature. From nineteenth-century
sensational literature, I develop a theory of reader response to demonstrate the way these
texts manipulate the reader's desire in order to variously expose the arbitrary associations
on which common sense depends, but also (and perhaps this dynamic feels more familiar) to hide that arbitrariness and naturalize its manifestations.

My first chapter begins with Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*, a novel T.S. Eliot declared to be the first and greatest English detective novel. Thanks in part to Eliot but also to Collins's contemporaries, *The Moonstone* has long enjoyed a position of primacy in the trajectory of detective fiction. And yet, as this chapter unfolds, I reveal the way in which identifying the novel solely as a work of detective fiction proves false, because the sensational stimulation in *The Moonstone* ultimately leads to the implosion of the detective genre. The unconscious theft of the Moonstone diamond animates illicit narratives. As a result, this central event resists full exposure and containment. By diffusing criminality and the associated guilt throughout and across the novel—implicating even the reader—the sensational narrative collapses the very binaries of “innocence” and “guilt,” “criminal” and “detective” on which the epistemological system of the detective novel is based. Collins animates the tension between the two generic modes of the novel—the detective plot and the sensation narrative—to disrupt the time-worn patterns of association that give rise to what passed then, and perhaps passes still, as "common sense" about female psychology and sexuality.

Even if, like Henry James, we credit Wilkie Collins for inventing the sensation novel, the next place of honor belongs to Mary Elizabeth Braddon—Collins's disciple (perhaps in name only), and the “Queen of the Circulating Libraries.” Braddon occupies a privileged position in literary history as the first and most successful female sensation novelist, responding to *The Woman in White* (1860) with her breakout bestseller, *Lady Audley's Secret*. Feminist scholarship—beginning with Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of*
Their Own (1977)—has claimed the importance of the sensation novel in challenging long-entrenched views of female psychology and sexuality. In particular, critics have championed Lady Audley's Secret for challenging the foundation of the nineteenth-century feminine ideal. But this sort of argument, while in some ways compelling, privileges the moments when Braddon challenges social convention without accounting for her novel's more conservative impulses. Like Collins, Braddon typically concludes her narratives with the apparent reassertion of traditional domestic values.

But where Braddon's novels fail to articulate an indisputably feminist agenda or to display the characteristic didacticism which marks the later New Woman novels, they still demonstrate the potential of the sensational narrative to invite the reader to critically reconsider commonly accepted beliefs—in this case, common sense conceptions of female psychology. Braddon's novel begins where the domestic nineteenth-century novel often ended, with the (second) marriage of Sir Michael Audley to his neighbor's governess, Lucy Graham. As the detective plot unfolds, Braddon's reader, instructed in the method circumstantial evidence, works to reconstruct the series of events surrounding the disappearance of the childhood friend of Sir Michael Audley's nephew, Robert. But, in a manner distinct and yet with a result akin to The Moonstone, Braddon's narrative ultimately frustrates the reader's attempts to solve the case. The field of evidence becomes crowded with possible leads in the form of doubled feminine figures; these doubles animate various narratives, both popular and submerged, which inform the notorious protagonist, Lady Audley. And even as the novel's conclusion works to contain the radically destabilizing potential of this associational logic galvanized by the detective plot, its most sensational implications resist absorption into the vision of middle-class
domesticity presented in the novel's closing scenes.

In the third chapter, I turn to examine the impact of Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1901) on common sense regarding female criminality and sexuality. From *Dracula*, the figure of Lucy Westenra emerges as a quintessential *femme fatale*. Lucy's neck bears the characteristic marking of the vampire, but we never witness the bite; as a result, ambiguity surrounds the causal relationship in the process of becoming a vampire. The novel produces this ontological ambiguity in order to perpetuate and exacerbate contemporary views regarding the radical instability of female nature; under this logic, the encounter with the vampire brings only latent impulses to the surface. The narrative exploits this physiological uncertainty to perpetuate the sensational terror that all female sexuality is monstrous, threatening to render the British man a debased specimen of his former glory. Stoker's rhetorical slippage enacts the same anxious rhetoric that likewise informs the portrait of female sexuality in nineteenth-century sexology.

The fourth chapter documents the way common sense—learned from sensationalism—is transformed into the medical theories of femininity espoused by Victorian sexologists Richard von Kraft-Ebbing, Havelock Ellis, and Sigmund Freud. By applying a rigorous rhetorical analysis to figures of femininity represented in this emerging sexual science, I expose the influence of sensational literature on nineteenth-century sexological theories of femininity—the wellspring from which many present-day conceptions derive. This section tracks the specific rhetorical machinations involved in producing the illusion of indexical correspondence between sexuality and criminality through reiterated metonymies in theories of female homosexuality. In contrast to an index, which is tangibly correlated with the object to which it refers, metonymy has a
culturally constructed relationship to its referent. In nineteenth-century sexology, anxious metonymic logic informs theories of female homosexuality. Through repeated metonymic associations, sexology correlates female homosexuality with moral and physical degeneration. For example, Krafft-Ebing’s work yokes together disparate female "types"—the prostitute, the nymphomaniac, the female homosexual—as figures of degeneration. Concretizing degeneration by making it physiologically evident, Krafft-Ebing naturalizes the association of these female "types" in a biologically determined phylogeny. Even after Ellis and Freud formally abdicated degeneration theory, it continued to actuate their models of female sexuality. The rhetorical position of degeneration shifts from an overt to a covert function in their studies, explaining why Ellis resists the degeneration theory of homosexuality while preserving explicit associations of the female homosexual with Krafft-Ebing’s "degenerate" female types. In Freud, the metonymic associations animating his theory of female homosexuality are only indirectly discernible through their disruptive effects.

This trajectory of sensational literature reflects the extent to which sensationalism and the sorts of plain wisdom informing nineteenth-century views of femininity became inextricably intertwined. Common sense regarding female sexuality has frequently been preserved through sensationalism; but paradoxically, sensationalism is often most effective when its characteristic paranoia seems somehow self-evidently justified, even rational. In other words, sensationalism works best to consolidate the paranoid patterns of associative logic informing the nineteenth-century figuration of femininity when it appears not to be working at all—when sensationalism takes on the weight of common sense.
CHAPTER I

"CAUGHT IN THE VORTEX OF HIS PLOT":
GUilt BEYOND DETECTION IN WILKIE COLLINS'S THE MOONSTONE

In the face of disappointing library "subscription lists" for The Moonstone, Wilkie Collins remained optimistic about the success of his new novel. A letter to his publisher offers the contemporary reader a glimpse into the nineteenth-century literary economy shaped, and to a great extent influenced, by Collins's work. The author dismisses the subscription list as indicative of nothing "more important than the timidity of the Libraries--and possibly the poverty of the Libraries as well." Collins assures William Tinsley—whose publishing firm achieved its first success with Lady Audley's Secret (1862)—that these numbers can't help but increase once:

The book has had time to get talked about. . . If [Mr: erased] Mudie is right in believing 500 to be a sufficient supply--then (judging from past experience) three fourths of my readers have deserted me! I, for one, won't believe this. ("To William Tinsley")

Apparently a believer that there is no such thing as bad press, Collins claims not to "attach much importance to the Reviews--Except as advertisements which are inserted for nothing" ("To William Tinsley"). Collins's letter attests to a canny indifference to various critics. It also gestures toward a theory of sensation literature which foregrounds its

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1 Because the cost of three-volume novels precluded their purchase by most members of the middle class, readers typically turned to lending libraries to supply their literary needs. Charles Mudie's Select Library, established in 1842, was the largest and most powerful of these institutions and has been credited with perpetuating the three-volume novel even as nineteenth-century publishing houses attempted to move away from this expensive form toward a single, more affordable one-volume edition. Much to the dismay of many nineteenth-century authors, Mudie held great sway over the literary economy. Positioning himself as an arbiter of taste, Mudie's inclusion of a novel among the ranks of his library marked the work as morally and artistically worthy of consumption by his reading public. Based on his assessment of the quality and potential popularity of a novel, he would purchase copies accordingly (making his initial valuation something of a self-fulfilling prophecy). For an extended discussion of Mudie's manipulation of, and influence over, the nineteenth-century literary economy see: Roberts.
contagious potential as it circulates widely—some might even say, promiscuously—across a diverse reading public, communicating its characteristic nervous energy from the page to the reader. Staking the eventual success of *The Moonstone* on this genre-defining ripple effect, Collins claims: "If this book does what my other books have done, in the way of stimulating the first circle of readers among which it falls—that circle will widen to a certainty" ("Letter to William Tinsley"). He certainly wasn't wrong.

Collins revises the familiar spatial metaphor—a circle of readers—by highlighting the force of "stimulation," a figure which holds out the promise (or even the threat) of intoxication. Nervous stimulation, both artificially induced and naturally occurring, is both thematically central to *The Moonstone* and to the critical discussions surrounding the sensation novel during its heyday in the 1860s. It is the hidden (or at least frequently misunderstood) stimulant properties of opium that animate the central theft and mystery of the novel by precipitating the fateful somnambulist movements of the protagonist, Franklin Blake. And acting like a stimulating agent, the sensation novel is remarkable in part because, in D.A. Miller words, it "offers us one of the first instances of modern literature to address itself primarily to the sympathetic nervous system" (147). With this assessment, many of Collins's nineteenth-century critics agree. For example, in an unsigned review published at the height of the trend, H.L. Mansel attacks the genre for a litany of aesthetic sins, among them, "preaching to the nerves instead of the judgment" (483). Less condemnatory of the various shocks and thrills that writers like Collins deliver to the reader, Geraldine Jewsbury diagnoses the desire to consume the "later portion" of *The Moonstone* with hedonistic abandon as the inevitable effect of enduring a weekly diet of parsimoniously allotted "tantalizing portions." In a gustatory metaphor that
flirts with the sexual, Jewsbury predicts that Collins's loyal readers will "throw themselves headlong upon the latter portion of the third volume, now that the end is really come, and devour it without rest or pause; to take any deliberate breaking-time is quite out of the question, and we promise them a surprise that will find the most experienced novel-reader unprepared" (106).

There is a distinct type of gratification involved in this mode of feverish page turning. But, as Jewsbury goes on to explain, the "reward" Collins holds out to his reader is greater than the initial satisfaction achieved in witnessing the "unravelment of the puzzle." Collins’s meticulous plotting also offers a more cerebral form of pleasure. Once the preliminary excitement has worn down, Jewsbury recommends that her audience:

read the book over again from the beginning, and they will see, what on a first perusal they were too engrossed to observe, the carefully elaborate workmanship, and the wonderful construction of the story; the admirable manner in which every circumstance and incident is fitted together, and the skill with which the secret is kept to the last. (106)

The careful concealment of the novel's "secret"—the facts surrounding the disappearance of the Moonstone diamond—might also be described as the detective plot. The reader who adheres to Jewsbury's advice mimics the work of the detective by returning to the scene of the crime and calmly tracing the sequence of events in order to gain a fuller understanding of how "every circumstance and incident" fit together.

While Jewsbury might well have bestowed similar praise on Collins's earlier forays into the sensation genre, *The Moonstone* distinguishes itself by incorporating the detective into scenes of sensational criminality and psychological aberration set against the backdrop of Lady Verinder's Yorkshire estate. The detective and the sensation novels are related through a shared fascination with the criminal elements of society, but they
diverge in the way the narrative engages the reader. As Jewsbury's review renders apparent, Collins’s novel engenders two distinct, and even contradictory, modes of reading: the frenzied consumption of the sensational narrative and the sober appreciation of the subtle machinations of the detective plot.

While Jewsbury seems to accept the value of both types of reading experiences The Moonstone inspires, an anonymous reviewer for The Times laments how the novel's sensationalism distracts the reader, impairing her capacity for a rational assessment of the mystery. For this reviewer, the novel's sensational effects overwhelm the reader, impeding her ability to maintain a calmly detached relationship to the narrative:

[Collins's] readers, probably far too soon for their retention of the scientific placidity necessary for the due weighing of the principles laid down in his preface, if they ever read it, will be caught in the vortex of his plot. The essence and secret of sensational novel-writing is to keep flashing a metaphorical bullseye up the particular dark archways where the thief is not lurking; to make the circumstances agree with one given explanation, which is not the true one; and to disguise as long as possible the fact that they agree also with a perfectly different conclusion. (3 October 1868)

This reviewer makes explicit what Jewsbury implies: the reader, mesmerized by sensationalism, at least in the first sitting, will surely fail to maintain the "scientific placidity" required even of the arm-chair detective. And while I don't share this reviewer's apparent exasperation with the manipulative power of Collins's novel, I do agree that The Moonstone does not seek to train or indoctrinate its readers in the logic underwriting the principles of detection.

The Moonstone has long enjoyed primacy in the trajectory of detective fiction among literary critics, not the least being T.S. Eliot who famously declared the novel: "the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels." And yet, identifying the novel as a work of detective fiction proves something of a "red herring,"
because the sensational stimulation in *The Moonstone* ultimately leads to the implosion of the detective novel. Franklin's unconscious theft of the large yellow diamond—occurring some fifty years after the initial colonial plunder—paradoxically propels and forestalls the work of detection.\(^2\) Because the sensational scene of the theft stimulates illicit, submerged, even counterfactual narratives, this event resists containment, resists full exposure, and resists narration. By diffusing criminality and the associated guilt throughout and across the novel—implicating even the reader—the sensational narrative collapses the very binaries of “innocence” and “guilt,” “criminal” and “detective” on which the epistemological system of the detective novel is based.

This generic dissonance is thematized in Collins’s novel through the theft of the Moonstone diamond, a rare gem valued at £30,000, stolen from India by John Herncastle during a colonial mission and willed to his niece, Rachel Verinder. Her cousin and soon-to-be fiancé, Franklin Blake, is charged with delivering the diamond to Rachel upon her eighteenth birthday. Quite happy with the inheritance and unwilling to part with her new possession for even a single night, Rachel declines to store it in secure lodgings but instead fatefuly places the diamond in an unlocked Indian cabinet in her sitting room. The next morning, the diamond is discovered missing. This second theft of the Moonstone motivates the novel’s detective plot, opening the British country home first to the bumbling Superintendent Seegrave and then to the more systematic inquiries of

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\(^2\) To similar effect, Lonoff argues that the novel, even against Collins's intentions, in employing "multiple narration" as the vehicle to expose the "truth" surrounding this disappearance of the diamond, anticipates the modern literary turn "in which truth is perceived as conjectural and relative and point-of-view becomes a major issue" (159). Beller makes a similar argument about the epistemological crisis staged in Collins's novel, but goes on to add that, "in this way, the detection process in *The Moonstone* embodies the sense of ontological doubt and crisis of traditional absolutes that was emerging during the mid-nineteenth century" (53). Grass approaches the topic from a slightly different angle to argue that the novel stages the failure of the criminal investigation and the insufficiency of Victorian surveillance to "produce knowledge about the crime" (98).
Sergeant Cuff.

Under Cuff’s supervision, the investigation gets under way with the discovery of an incriminating smear on the newly varnished door to Rachel’s sitting room. After gathering the relevant pieces of information, Cuff makes the first break in the case, deducing that the damage must have occurred sometime after midnight but before three in the morning. It follows that, if the person found in possession of the paint-smeared article of clothing cannot plausibly account for the accident, as Cuff expresses it: “You haven’t far to look for the hand that has got the diamond” (164). We do not discover until more than halfway through the novel, however, that the diamond has actually been stolen by Franklin himself in an opium-induced somnambulism episode. Even more surprisingly, we come to find that Rachel has known the identity of the thief all along but, unaware of Franklin’s somnambulism condition and deeply disturbed by her lover’s perceived betrayal, she has remained silent.

Also staying in the house is the handsome and genteel philanthropist, Godfrey Ablewhite. When Ablewhite watches Franklin take the diamond, and sees Rachel observe Franklin, he seizes the opportunity to steal the diamond for himself from Franklin while Franklin remains unconscious. The mystery remains unsolved until, with the help of Dr. Ezra Jennings—assistant to the family physician, Dr. Candy—Franklin learns of his opiate-induced wanderings and, ultimately, of Albewhite’s hand in the theft. The novel is presented as the construction of the case after the fact and posed as the recital of these events, constituted through multiple narratives solicited from the various persons directly or indirectly involved with the theft. The narratives are gathered by Franklin who feels that the “whole story ought, in the interests of truth, be placed on record in writing” (60).
Recent critical responses to *The Moonstone* have tended to place too much emphasis on the conventionality of *The Moonstone*’s dénouement—the culmination of the marriage plot between Rachel and Franklin—overlooking the way in which the sensational scenes continue to undermine the restoration of bourgeois moral order even in the novel's final chapters. These scenes exist in excess of the progression of the detective plot, literally interrupting the progress of the investigation. But they also work to disperse and diffuse illicit energies throughout the text, rendering the detective narrative incoherent (or at the very least insufficient). *The Moonstone*’s sensational moments create an associative pattern of thought in the reader that makes apparent the insufficiency of a conventional detective narrative (as represented in sections "authored" by Sergeant Cuff) to account for the sequence of events set in motion by the theft of the Moonstone diamond.

The novel’s sensational scenes often seem out of tune within the testimonial structure and tone of the narrative. In fact, they render ambiguous the issues of criminality and guilt central to the case. These moments work to inspire a pattern of associations in the mind of the reader that allows her to access the submerged, unsanctioned narratives of the text, narratives which work against the bourgeois morality reasserted with the consolidation of property and domestic values staged in the novel's

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3 For critical readings of *The Moonstone* that emphasize the reinstitution of conventional bourgeois values at the novel’s conclusion, see: Miller 33-57, Swartz, and Nayder, *Wilkie Collins*, 115-125.

4 Other critical studies of *The Moonstone* have described the way in which the facts of the case become more hazy, and the familiar binaries on which they rest (domestic/foreign, detective/criminal, innocent/guilty) less firm, as the narrative progresses. From this, Heller argues that Collins launches a critique of British imperialism as *The Moonstone* "breaks down the terms of . . . imperialist ideology" by revealing the extent to which "the seemingly opposed realms of exotic (wild) and English (domestic) permeate each other" (145). In "The 'Shivering Sands' of Reality," Roberts likewise locates Collins's critique of British imperialism in the novel's indeterminate epistemology.
denouement. The reader's complicity in the circulation of illicit narratives is in part a result of the generic promise held out by the sensation novel, because the sensation reader seeks out for pleasure the experience of discomfort—the horror, for example, attending an account of murder committed within the supposed security the middle-class home. The sensation novel would cease to exist as sensation novel—simply becoming domestic realism—if it failed to make good on the promise to deliver shocks and thrills. *The Moonstone* makes us self-conscious of our voyeurism—like Gooseberry, the young boy employed by the Verinders' good-hearted lawyer, Mr. Bruff—we find ourselves witnessing "robbery" with a "high delight," and "murder" with "a keener relish still," sensing there might be "something hideous" in our "enjoyment of the scene," and pleased that unlike our young friend, there is no one to take us "by the two shoulders and put [us] out of the room" (520). That the readers of sensation fiction would wind up so many wide-eyed Gooseberrys—reveling in the spectacle of morbidity and the disintegration of domestic stability—is, of course, what Collins's nineteenth-century critics most feared. And perhaps to some extent they were not wrong; this reorientation toward the sensational is dangerous. Not because it threatens to render its consumers wasted, hedonistic, and irrational hysterics, but because the pleasure afforded in sensation fiction creates new space for social critique.

**Nineteenth-Century Psychology and Theories of the Unconscious**

Collins animates the tension between the two generic modes of the novel to disrupt associative trains of logic that give rise to what passed then, and perhaps passes still, as common sense about female psychology and sexuality. As it happens, our entree into the novel requires we follow the lead of the protagonist, Franklin Blake, and suspend
our "common sense." The larger narrative is framed through a story of colonial plunder involving Franklin's uncle, Colonel Herncastle, who during the British storming of Seringapatam, plunders the palace, violently taking possession of the legendary Moonstone diamond. After his return, Herncastle remains haunted by "the belief that neither he nor his precious jewel was safe in any house, in any quarter of the globe, which they occupied together" (90). In an effort to preserve his safety against these perceived threats, Herncastle writes to Franklin's father, Mr. Blake, requesting that the jewel be placed under his control, secured "in any place especially guarded and set apart . . . for safe custody" (91). In return, Herncastle offers to provide the legal documents necessary to prove Franklin's father's title to a Dukedom. At a prearranged time each year the Colonel would write "simply stating the fact that he was a living man at that date"; if the letter failed to arrive, it would indicate that the Colonel had been murdered. In that event, Mr. Blake was to send the diamond to Amsterdam were it would be but into several parts.

According to Franklin, his father "was quite willing to take the ridiculous responsibility imposed on him—all the more readily that it involved no trouble to himself" (91). However, Mr. Blake placed no stake in the Colonel's fears and "brought the invaluable faculty, called common sense, to bear on the Colonel's letter" (91). Not only does Mr. Blake doubt the authenticity of the diamond, but knowing that "the Colonel had been a notorious opium-eater for years past," he deems their complicated arrangement the result of a paranoid fantasy, and entirely unnecessary, since after all, "this was the nineteenth century, and any man in his sense had only to apply to the police" (90). But even in the face of this skepticism, Mr. Blake acquiesces, since
"accepting a matter of opium as a matter of fact" was the most expedient course to possession of the Colonel's papers (91). Franklin, however, sees the situation differently: "Not possessing my father's excellent common sense . . . I believe the colonel's life was threatened, exactly as the Colonel said" (93). As the novel progresses the reader is likewise urged to abandon common sense not just in accepting the Colonel's conspiracy theory, but in allowing that "matters of opium" and "matters of fact" might not present as stark a binary as Mr. Blake's common sense would dictate. Indeed, Franklin must return to an opium-induced somnambulist state in order to grasp the events surrounding the diamond's disappearance. And as the bungled preliminary investigations of Superintendent Seegrave and the insufficiency of Sergeant Cuff's detective work make apparent, "applying to the police" in this matter proves less helpful than "any man in his sense" might have initially supposed.

In ways I will go on to describe, *The Moonstone* demonstrates the insufficiency of common sense to solve the case of the Moonstone diamond, and indicates to the contrary that the narrative surrounding the disappearance of the diamond can only be reconstructed by bringing to light the machinations of the unconscious mind and its hidden trains of associative logic. Nineteenth-century psychology was largely preoccupied with the concept of association and the way memory (both conscious and unconscious) is organized in associative patterns. By alluding to the theories of the unconscious mind which inform the research of Ezra Jennings, and by foregrounding the process of associative patterning involved in the construction of familiar social narratives, Collins actively positions his novel in conversation with nineteenth-century psychology. In particular, theories of mesmerism and the unconscious mind become crucial to
unraveling the mystery of the Moonstone's disappearance. The scientific framework Collins constructs is notable both in the way it highlights the novelist's fascination with the workings of the unconscious—a theme which recurs with frequency throughout Collins's oeuvre—and for its eclecticism. When Ezra Jennings proposes to recreate the same physiological and social circumstances of the evening of the theft in order to reproduce the series of events that led to Franklin's unconscious theft of the diamond, he cites the work of William Carpenter and John Elliotson in support of his hypothesis. Jenny Bourne Taylor's study of the role of nineteenth-century psychology in Collins's sensation fiction details the divergent careers represented by each of these two men. Where Carpenter was widely respected for his work in the field of mainstream physiological psychology, Elliotson's long-time promotion of the fringe pseudoscience of mesmerism led to his resignation from University College and his professional marginalization (Taylor 58; 183). But, like Jennings, these two scientific figures from either end of the professional spectrum posit the existence of the unconscious, even as they differ on the origin and substance of this psychic space.

The structure of the unconscious, as articulated by Carpenter, provides the basis for Jennings’s experiment and Franklin's vindication, but also offers a model for understanding the psychological force generated by the various sensational episodes of the novel which punctuate the detective plot. Carpenter's theory of the mind begins from the now untenable premise "that any Idea which has once passed through the Mind may be thus reproduced, at however long an interval, through the instrumentality of suggestive

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5 For detailed discussion of how Victorian writers incorporated into their work and reflected upon nineteenth-century theories of "unconscious cerebration" pioneered by William Carpenter, see: Ryan. For a book-length study of British psychology, see: Rylance.
action” (429). In other words, these "lost parcels" of memory may be recovered through the systematic application of association; it is possible to "awaken" unconscious or "dormant" memories indirectly through the initiation of patterns of associated ideas. Following this logic, Carpenter offers the following series of spatial metaphors to describe our cognitive structure and the possibility for recovering ideas that have long remained submerged:

Ideas are thus linked in "trains" or "series". . . like the branch lines of a railway or the ramifications of an artery, so, it is considered, an idea which has been "hidden in the obscure recesses of the mind" for years—perhaps for a lifetime,—and which seems to have completely faded out of the conscious Memory . . . may be reproduced, as by the touching of a spring, through a nexus of suggestions. (430)

As a model of cognitive psychology this theory of memory has long been abandoned. But it continues to offer explanatory power as a visual metaphor for the way ideas become clustered in a pattern of association that tends to retain the same type of regularity as the "branch lines of a railway" or the "ramifications of an artery." And although we may doubt the ability to bring unconscious memories to light, it is clear that, by activating a "nexus of suggestions," one may inspire further unarticulated chains of thought. This associative progression may be propelled through the logic of common sense as even a single phrase—for example, "fallen woman"—animates a familiar narrative regarding female sexuality and psychology. Carpenter's metaphors capture this dynamic quality of narrative; once a narrative is actuated, it becomes difficult to deviate from previously laid tracks.

Carpenter's theory of memory draws on the Associationist model of psychology which has its origins in Aristotle and John Locke, but was more fully developed in the eighteenth century by David Hartley. The theory is based on the belief that ideas are
stored in and may be recalled from memory based on the principle of association, sometimes referred to as "suggestion." The implication of the spontaneous and reflexive nature of mental associations became an object of debate in the nineteenth century in terms of the role of the will over the "automatic tendencies" of the mind (Carpenter 97). Collins's novel engages in this debate, as Jennings's experiment sets out to bring unconscious mental activity to light through the power of suggestion. But also, as I will go on to explore, the novel evokes the "unnarratable" through the mechanism of suggestion, challenging conventional patterns of association around the concepts of female sexuality and psychology. But the effectivity of sensationalism in reorienting the reader toward those suppressed cultural narratives depends in part on the reader's susceptibility to sensation. The best reader of sensation fiction—and this is perhaps what Collins's critics feared—is one who is more easily moved by sensational scenes, quick to thrill, and thrill-seeking. Perhaps then, it is no coincidence that Franklin presents himself as the ideal reader. Already susceptible to nervous excitement, Franklin is quick to catch the detective fever, but also quickly overwhelmed by the excitement. The ideal sensation novel reader might be described as someone who is easily stimulated, but also who seeks out stimulation. Even the most cursory investigation into Collins's biography indicates that the author fits nicely into this category. Indeed, Collins’s relationship to chemical stimulation reveals that he often had recourse to stimulants for their salutary effects. Perhaps Collins translated this personal inclination into his art; a healthy dose of stimulation is sometimes necessary to ward off the deleterious mental effects resulting from the constant exposure to unvarying social scripts.
The Sensation Reader: 
Tracing the Influence of Stimulants on Character

In the preface to the first edition of the novel, Collins describes his object in composing *The Moonstone* as an attempt to “trace the influence of character on circumstances” (47). Collins makes clear in the preface his view that it is the “conduct of a young girl” which “supplies the foundation” of the novel. However, we can also understand Franklin’s *character* as animating the narrative. His nervous constitution and the fractured composition of his character, embodied in his somnambulist excursion, lead to the Moonstone's theft and the subsequent detective work. Franklin’s identity crisis, which proves central to the unfolding events, is dramatized through his somnambulism—literally, his waking self is completely estranged from his sleeping self. In the novel, Franklin's nervousness is attributed to symptoms of tobacco withdrawal. Long accustomed to smoking cigars, Franklin quits cold turkey, after Rachel confesses to "hat[ing] the stale smell of it in his clothes” (112). The sacrifice costs him the possibility of achieving a good night's rest "for want of the composing effect of the tobacco to which he was used," and he subsequently appeared each morning "looking so haggard and worn, that Miss Rachel herself begged him to take to his cigars again” (112).

We might interpret Franklin's insomnia, and his susceptibility to these sorts of nervous disorders as symptoms of modernity—the physical effects of modern technology and society on the British subject. But it is also possible to read Collins's own physical volatility inscribed in his protagonist's nervous decomposition. In her biography of Collins, Catherine Peters persuasively links Collins’s experiences “at this time of severe

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6 Along these lines, Nicholas Daly argues that the nervousness pervading sensation fiction, and which characterizes a figure like Franklin Blake, can be located historically within the “technological revolutions of the nineteenth century” and the dizzyingly fast pace of modern life (Daly 468).
pain and deep unhappiness” to the character of Ezra Jennings, the piebald-haired doctor who likewise suffers from chronic pain and opium addiction (304). But we must recognize also that Collins's personal acquaintance with nervous disorders informs his characterization of Franklin Blake. In a letter to his intimate friend and doctor, Francis Carr Beard, Collins describes withdrawal symptoms from laudanum, on which he depended in large quantities for relief from the chronic pain he suffered from gout.

Desiring Beard’s immediate attention, Collins writes in the hope of obtaining a laudanum prescription as soon as possible and without the necessity of waiting for Beard to see him in person. Collins complains: "My stomach and nerves are terribly out of order again."

He recounts the nervous symptoms that led him to seek relief in laudanum, leaving him unable to sleep throughout the night:

> Yesterday at 1 o'clock p.m I had to give up work with a deadly "all-overish" [faintness] which sent me to the [h]andy bottle. No confusion in my brains – but a sickness, faintness, and universal trembling – startled by the slightest noise – more nervous twittering last night, little sleep – sick feeling and taste of copper – I seem to digest after dinner pretty well – but at night, or toward the small hours I wake as if I had got drunk. (October 10, 1862)

Evidence suggests that Beard, who was also employed as Charles Dickens's family doctor, prescribed laudanum to Collins for pain relief. Collins's correspondence testifies to the fact that the author incurred periodic attacks of gout in his feet and eyes so severe that they prevented him working and even leaving his bed (Peters 240).

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7 Caroline Peters transcribes the phrase "handy bottle"—which I take as a reference to laudanum—as "brandy bottle" in her biography of Wilkie Collins. However, careful inspection and comparison of the author’s “h” to other examples in his correspondence suggests that Collins did intend an "h".

8 In a letter to Beard in January, 1863, Collins complains: “Today the gout has seized on my left foot, without leaving my right. I am so utterly crippled that I cannot even get downstairs into the dining room. both feet in pain—both feet nearly helpless” (January 30 1863). Peters describes how Collins suffered from painful occurrences of rheumatic gout for over twenty years; by 1871, Collins's eyes were at times so
protagonist Franklin, Collins suffered from a nervous constitution and sleepless nights.

Also, like Franklin, Collins was an "inveterate smoker"; in a short letter, he describes tobacco's ameliorative effects:

When I am ill (I am suffering from gout at this very moment) tobacco is the best friend that my irritable nerves possess. When I am well, but exhausted for the time by a hard day's work, tobacco nerves and composes me. There is my evidence in two words. When a man allows himself to become a glutton in the matter of smoking tobacco, he suffers for it; and if he becomes a glutton in the matter of eating meat, he just as certainly suffers in another way. When I read learned attacks on the practice of smoking, I feel indebted to the writer—he adds largely to the relish of my cigar. (Study and Stimulants 36)

Collins’s contribution to this survey on The Use of Intoxicants and Narcotics in Relation to Intellectual Life, maintains a certain irreverence with respect to a subject on which he was more than just casually acquainted. This sort of gallows humor seems perfectly in tune for a writer of the type of fiction that critics warned readers was both addictive and injurious. Franklin's cigar habit is clearly drawn from the model of Collins's personal experience. Along these lines, Collins might just as easily have described his novel as an attempt to "trace the influence of stimulants on character," as Collins's "nervous twitterings," both motivating and resulting from indulgence in various stimulants, infect his characters and his willing audience alike.

Beyond the insinuation that Franklin's nerves are inherently out of order, the novel explains his somnambulism as resulting from a combination of withdrawal symptoms from tobacco and the (frequently disregarded) stimulant activity of the laudanum Dr. Candy secretly administers to Franklin's nightcap of brandy and water. But these artificial stimulants have further reaching effects: Franklin's confrontation with the

violently inflamed that, on one occasion, Charles Kent described them as "literally enormous bags of blood" (33).
evidence of the autonomous activity of his unconscious self provokes the second occurrence (after the unconscious theft of the diamond) of his psychological dissociation. While acting in the role of detective, Franklin identifies himself as the criminal with the posthumous assistance of the troubled housemaid, Rosanna Spearman. Rosanna's strange behavior preceding her suicide initially leads Sergeant Cuff and Franklin to implicate her falsely in the theft of the diamond. Following the clues provided by a letter delivered after Rosanna’s suicide by her close companion, Limping Lucy, Franklin and the Verinders’ head servant, Gabriel Betteredge, return to the “Shivering Sands”—an expanse of quicksand along the shore of the Yorkshire coast. Rosanna's letter directs the men to a small box, secured by a length of chain and buried by the quicksand. When Franklin uncovers the box, he finds his own nightgown, with the tell-tale paint stain, along with a letter from Rosanna explaining her behavior.

Franklin’s confrontation with evidence of his incontrovertible guilt provokes a psychological dissociation rendered at the level of narrative. Not only does the discovery place Franklin at the scene of the crime, but this return of repressed evidence engenders a psychological response in Franklin that mirrors his mental state on the night of the theft. Offering a word on his “own sensations,” Franklin concludes that “the shock inflicted on me completely suspended my thinking and feeling power” (378). The narrative style dramatizes this psychological dissociation, as Franklin recalls:

Of what was said between us on the beach, I have not the faintest recollection. The first place in which I can now see myself again plainly is the plantation of firs. Betteredge and I are walking back together to the house; and Betteredge is telling me that I shall be able to face it, and he will be able to face it, when we

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9 For an earlier reading of the sands as the id, see: Taylor 198. Other critics have read the sands as a threatening expression of female sexuality; see: Hutter, Heller 251.
have had a glass of grog. (378)

The psychological rupture is represented through the narrative rupture; the narrative temporality is interrupted in Franklin’s divergence from the simple past verb tense—“we walked back together to the house”—to the present progressive—“Betteredge and I are walking back to together to the house.” The shift to the present progressive represents an action that took place in the past of Franklin’s transcription of the event as if it were happening in the present. The verbal shift dramatizes the eruption of repressed—literally buried—sensational events of the past into the present, visually suggesting Franklin’s psychological division as he becomes a detached observer of himself and of the events that followed the revelation.

Franklin’s encounter with the contents of the box buried in the Shivering Sands dramatizes the implosion of the detective narrative as the boundary between detective and criminal crumbles, exposing the complicity of the detective in the crime he seeks to uncover. And yet, this experience of gazing self-reflexively into the dark places of psychology when set within the framework of the sensation novel is attended with the thrill of being perversely entertained (not merely horrified) by the encounter. In this way, the novel trains the reader to anticipate (with pleasure) these sensational encounters, breeding something akin to what Betteredge frequently refers to as "detective fever."

Betteredge's expression for his own insatiable desire to uncover the facts and identify the persons involved in the disappearance of the Moonstone diamond is suggestive of the interaction between the two generic modes of the novel. His "feverish" anticipation recalls the language associated with the sensation novel—the breathless consumption of the final installments of novel Jewsbury describes. Or in the words of another reviewer,
"Those who admire the spectacle of ingenuity in the . . . power of bringing home to the imagination the dreariness and terror of dreary and terrible scenes, should seek, and will find, it in *The Moonstone*” (*The Times*, 3 October 1868).

This "detective fever" propels the forward progress of the criminal investigation, at the same time compromising the detective's ability to proceed in a rational and systematic fashion. The phrase nicely captures the oppositional modes of reading engendered by the novel. This highly contagious condition foregrounds tension between the reader's feverish excitement in witnessing the eruption of submerged sensational narratives from beneath the seemingly placid surface of the middle-class home and the steady work of the detective to identify and contain illicit elements in a coherent narrative of guilt and innocence.

The most fully realized embodiment of "detective fever" comes at the precise point where the boundary between detective and criminal dissolves as Franklin uncovers the materials buried in the quicksand. In the moments preceding the portentous discovery, Franklin becomes nervous and suffers from the nightmarish fantasy of Rosanna rising from her early grave. Kneeling on a rock, Franklin positions his face "within a few feet of the surface of the quicksand." Franklin recalls:

> The sight of it so near me, still disturbed at intervals by its hideous shivering fit, shook my nerves for the moment. A horrible fancy that the dead woman might appear on the scene of her suicide, to assist my search—an unutterable dread of seeing her rise through the heaving surface of the sand, and point to the place—forced itself into my mind, and turned me cold in the warm sunlight. I own I closed my eyes at the moment when the point of the stick first entered the quicksand. (375)

But unlike Franklin, the sensation reader is thrilled with the possibility of Rosanna's ghostly return. And in a sense our desire is partially satiated. Rosanna's letter punctuates
Franklin's chapter, and, subverting the narrative structure, her rogue narrative is posthumously delivered.

**Suppressed Sexual Histories and the "Fallen Woman"**

In her confessional letter, Rosanna reveals how Franklin's nightgown came to be under her possession and the factors informing her decision to hide the evidence of Franklin's guilt in the quicksand. But the suicide note also allows the reader a brief glimpse into Rosanna's life story. Through the bare outline of Rosanna's existence before she began working as a servant in the Verinder household, the reader encounters evidence of historically repressed social and sexual histories. The letter reiterates what we have already been told: Rosanna came to Lady Verinder from a woman's reformatory where she was placed after having been convicted of stealing. But unlike Betteredge's account of Rosanna's past, the letter reveals how she came to be a thief; she explains:

I was a thief, because my mother went on the streets when I was quite a little girl. My mother went on the street, because the gentleman who was my father deserted her. There is no need to tell such a common story as this, at any length. It is told quite often enough in the newspapers. (381)

Even in this moment of revelation, euphemism covers the features of Rosanna's past that occupy an "unnarratable" space within a novel published, like *The Moonstone*, in the Victorian family magazine, *All the Year Round*. The gaudily attired, unattended female figure of the urban "streets" recurs with near obsessive frequency in the Victorian period. The prostitute occupied a highly contested and contradictory, but nonetheless central position in nineteenth-century debates regarding women as social actors in the home and in the public sphere. In multiple senses, the prostitute became associated with the threat of contagion. By mimicking the fashion of London's upper classes, prostitutes marked themselves apart from other members of the city's working poor. The implicit social
critique expressed through the act of cross-class dressing went generally unacknowledged. But from the twenty-first century perspective, the irony cannot be missed. Perhaps because the illusion of middle-class respectability was too convincing—at least from a distance—social commentators feared that impressionable young women would be lured into this life of vice, seduced by the promise of material luxury. 

(Prostitution, Walkowitz 26). But the prostitute embodied more than the threat of moral corruption. The menace of contagion is rendered quite literal in nineteenth-century medical and legal treatment of the prostitute who, in Elaine Showalter’s words, became “the agent of corruption and contamination, whose putrid body bred stench and disease” (Sexual Anarchy 193).

In response to high levels of venereal disease within the military, the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864, amended in 1867 and 1869, enforced a policy of mandatory registration and hospitalization among prostitutes, but left their male clients unaccountable for the spread of disease (Walkowitz, Prostitution 72). The Act itself echoes the euphemistic language that circulated around prostitution and the question of female sexuality more generally. While the sole target of the act was the female prostitute, concretizing a sexual double standard that refused to hold men responsible for their sexual actions, the title of the Act represents her only indirectly through her association with contagious disease. The ability to name the prostitute metonymically by reference to contagious disease—without even the necessity of specifying the disease—speaks to the frequency with which this conflation was iterated in popular culture, to the point of making the connection a matter of common sense.

As the embodiment of the dark underworld of the modern city, this female figure
was also used to define the boundaries of middle-class femininity. In her extended look at the construction of modern London, Judith Walkowitz describes how the prostitute functioned as "a logo of the divided city itself." Victorian portraits of the London landscape frequently contrasted the "elegantly attired streetwalkers who perambulated around the fashionable shopping districts, to the impoverished women—the "kneetremblers" and "Round-the-corner-Sallies"—committing 'acts of indecency' in the ill-lit back alleys and courts of the city slum" (Dreadful Delight 21). In her various guises, the prostitute became a defining feature of the modern urban landscape and was made to stand "in stark opposition to the classical elite bodies of female civil statuary that graced the city squares: they were female grotesques, evocative of the chaos and illicit secrets of the labyrinthine city" (Dreadful Delight 22). Rosanna's letter alludes to her intimacy with this strictly enforced social dichotomy. She has inherited the feeling of social ostracism experienced by her mother, as her criminal history and physical disability leave indelible markers that preclude her full inclusion into respectable bourgeois society. This mutually defining social juxtaposition is also recalled through Rosanna's relationship to Rachel; it is the suspicion cast upon Rosanna regarding the theft of the diamond that preserves Rachel's innocence. And yet, this contrast also emphasizes the vulnerability of both women to the force of the "fallen woman" narrative, which ascribes guilt by (arbitrary) association.10

This instance of "buried writing," in Tamar Heller's words, thematizes the social marginality of the prostitute, whose individual story has been supplanted with the

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10 Mark Mossman likewise examines the chain of signification involved in Collins's representation of the normalizing gaze directed toward Rosanna Spearman's physical difference: "The facts of Rosanna's past—that she has a criminal history in London—further develop the perceptual link between the physical status of her body and the morality of her inner 'self' and outer actions" (489).
narrative of predatory female sexuality. The recovery of Rosanna's letter at the Shivering Sands, Heller argues, functions as "an allegory of reading . . . comment[ing] on the fate of Collins’s own art. . . . As the detective plot of The Moonstone unfolds, Collins does what Rosanna does with her letter before Franklin reads it: buries his social criticism so deep that the reader can only with difficulty dig it out again" (Heller 257). But Heller does not take into account the way the reader's orientation toward Rosanna's letter diverges from Franklin's; our encounter with this bit of "buried writing" must be understood not merely as an "allegory for reading" in general, but as an allegory for reading the sensation novel in particular.

Franklin's response to Rosanna's narrative is "unaffected surprise" followed by "sincere distress"; but the reaction of the reader—as a consumer of sensational literature—is more complex. For the thrill of the sensation novel derives from shattering the social narratives on which middle-class morality rests. Our response diverges from Franklin who threatens to relegate Rosanna's narrative to silence once more; half-way through her letter, he refuses to keep reading, handing the document to Betteredge with the injunction to "read the rest for yourself" (385). The terms of Franklin's "distress" are indeed ambiguous. On the one hand, he confesses his "true regret" for "the aspersion . . . thoughtlessly cast on her memory"; but he appears even more distressed at the liberty she takes as a servant in impugning the intentions of those she serves (385). And yet, even if Franklin recoils at Rosanna's "first suspicion" after finding the proof that "he was in Miss Rachel's sitting-room between twelve [at] night, and three [in the] morning," the sensation reader is eager to read the rest of her letter for ourselves (384). Like Rosanna's letter, the sensation genre garnered a willing readership by exposing the cracks in the
veneer of middle-class morality; perhaps this is why its critics worried so much that these novels would circulate "promiscuously" from the kitchen to the drawing room, collapsing the boundaries of high and low literature.

In witnessing the disruptive emergence of Rosanna's historically submerged narrative, the reader encounters the boundaries of narrative, a concept Miller defines as the “unnarratable”—that which, within its historical and social context, is beyond the threshold of the novel’s representation, subjects that “literally cannot be mentioned” (Narrative 4-5). By drawing the reader's attention to this cultural elision, Collins throws into relief the insufficiency of the detective narrative (and the epistemological system on which is rests) to contain the multiple counter-narratives stimulated by Franklin's somnambulist theft. Having drawn the reader's attention to these buried narratives, Collins makes the paucity of Sergeant Cuff's ultimate account of the diamond theft all the more palpable. Cuff's account is the fullest depiction offered by the novel of the events leading to the disappearance of the diamond from the Verinder household and the gem's passage, under the care of Godfrey Ablewhite, into the hands of the money lender Septimus Luker. But even still, it comes across as thin and insufficient. As the "sixth narrative" of eight (not including the epilogue), even the position of Detective Cuff's account within the novel suggests its inability to occupy the space of the "final word" in the history of the Moonstone diamond.

"Nobody will talk common sense": Reading Rachel's Silence

Even before the facts of the case are "fully" disclosed by Cuff, we learn that Rachel has known the identity of the thief all along having herself witnessed Franklin take the diamond from the cupboard. The novel explains Rachel’s silence as a testament
to the profundity of her love for Franklin. Because she is unwilling to confront her fiancé with this perceived betrayal, she remains unaware that Franklin was unconscious when he wandered into her sitting room in the middle of the night, and believes the theft to be an act of desperation driven by outstanding debt. So ashamed that she could continue to love a man who had proved himself so unworthy of her most esteemed affection, Rachel decides to remain silent, risking the suspicion of the police as to her own involvement in the diamond's disappearance.

But this account of Rachel's behavior is unsatisfying. Rachel's sense of shame seems radically out of proportion. Even if her love for Franklin made it impossible for her to give him up to the police, why would it also preclude the possibility of confronting her lover, either in the moment or after the fact? As one of Collins's contemporary reviewers from *The Spectator* puts it, Rachel seems merely to be:

> An impulsive girl, generally slanging somebody, whose single specialty seems to be that, believing her love had stolen her diamond, she hates him and loves him both at once, but neither taxes him with the offence nor pardons him for committing it, a heroine who seems to have been borrowed from one of those old novels where everybody is miserable because nobody will talk common sense for five minutes. ("Unsigned Review," 25 July 1868)

On one level, this description aptly captures Rachel's frustrating behavior, but it fails to attend to the psychological dimension of the theft. By taking the detective's account of Rachel's behavior at face value, this reading misses the way Rachel’s silence speaks to the limits of narrative possibilities.

Earlier scholarship has addressed this issue by reference to the symbolic significance of the theft. Along these lines, Albert Hutter states the case plainly: “What is stolen from Rachel is both the actual gem and her symbolic virginity. . . . If we see the taking of the jewel only in its most literal meaning, then we cannot understand Rachel’s
behavior” (184). For Hutter, Rachel's "ambiguous" and even "incriminating" behavior is "resolved when we regard Franklin's action both as a literal theft and as a symbolic seduction which leads to confusion, ambivalence, and finally, to marriage and a child” (185). Rachel's immobilizing terror in this instant rehearses the trauma of the "primal scene"; according to Hutter, Rachel's response to Franklin's unconscious theft fits into a larger pattern associated with a deep seated "fear of intercourse” (188). Hutter makes a convincing case; we must attend to the signification of the crime beyond its literal meaning. The psychological implications of the crime preclude Rachel's ability (like Franklin's) to narrate the event. Yet, we need not interpret the sexual connotations of the theft in such traditional terms.

We do well to remember that, though Franklin may have stolen Rachel’s *symbolic* virginity, he has left her actual virginity intact. With this in mind, we can imagine alternatively that Rachel is responding not merely to the fact that Franklin enters her bedroom in the middle of the night to steal her diamond, but that her diamond is the only thing he is apparently interesting in stealing. We might consider Rachel's ambiguous response to the theft as resulting from the recognition of her own illicit sexual desire—she is at once terrified at its presence and angered by its frustration. Even Rosanna expresses extreme disbelief when she learns the real object of Franklin’s late-night excursion. When she learns that the stain on Franklin's nightgown is not necessarily the sign of his sexual transgression, she confesses:

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11 Hutter: 201. For similar readings of the Moonstone as Rachel’s virginity, see: Rycroft 119, Lawson 61-79.

12 For other readings of the colonial significance of the theft and the opium, see: Willey, Free, Pykett 155-164.
My head whirled round, and my thoughts were in dreadful confusion. In the midst of it all, something in my mind whispered to me that the smear on your nightgown might have a meaning entirely different to the meaning which I had given to it up to that time. (387)

Rosanna, like Rachel, is more disturbed by the idea that the object of Franklin's late-night visit to his fiancé's boudoir was to obtain possession of the large yellow diamond rather than to steal some of Rachel's physical affection before the wedding date.

Hutter's psychoanalytic reading works analogously to the detective’s investigation by seeking to bring what had previously remained obscure into focus in an effort to fix and concretize meaning. This interpretive method seeks to contain the sensational event within a stable psychological paradigm. By reading the scene of the theft through this framework, Hutter simultaneously validates the Victorian logic of this psycho-sexual model. Franklin's symbolic "seduction," in Hutter's reading, works to obfuscate the more violent connotations of the theft which do not linger far beneath the surface of the text. Franklin's act carries the distinct suggestion of sexual violence, a category of assault not always recognized within the bonds of marriage and certainly not represented within the middle-class home. The seduction narrative masks the man's sexual aggression as romantic as opposed to violent. But at the same time, it also makes it impossible for a woman to have consensual pre-marital sexual relations without feeling deeply ashamed by her lapse in self-control. When Franklin finally confronts Rachel with her silence, she explains: "I could do nothing. I was petrified. I couldn't speak, I couldn't call out, I couldn't even move to shut my door" (415). Rachel's silence in the face of Franklin's "theft" is overdetermined; for this reason, I am not suggesting that it is possible to fix a single significance to her silence. Rather, her silence gestures to the limits of sexual narratives available to middle-class women.
Within the conscripted space of Victorian femininity, there is no coherent position from which Rachel might narrate the events. She is petrified in that she is fixed between two mutually reifying cultural narratives—the domestic angel and the fallen woman—that inform her presence in the novel and preclude the possibility of her speaking out when Franklin enters her private sitting room in the middle of the night. Of course, "petrified" also connotes fear. However, Collins's readers have been too quick to assign significance to this fear in ways that affirm common sense about female sexuality, both at the time and to some extent in the present moment. The source of Rachel's fear need not be read as only Franklin's sexual desire, or as the threat of sexual violence under the guise of marital duty. It is possible to understand Rachel responding to her own unsanctioned sexual desire—unsanctioned, because it exists outside of marriage and because, in this instance, it may possibly exceed Franklin's own desire. But more generally, Rachel's desire is unsanctioned because nineteenth-century popular and medical theories of femininity, with few exceptions, viewed any active display of female sexuality as a sign of an underlying pathology. This reading certainly provides an equally, if not more plausible, explanation for Rachel's seemingly disproportionate sense of shame and complicity and allows us to avoid leaning too heavily on the double standard of Victorian sexual morality to explain Rachel's behavior.

If we were to read the scene of the theft within the framework of the "seduction" narrative, Rachel's shame derives from her complicity in Franklin's theft—she fails to

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13 This medical view of female sexuality is most dramatically expressed in nineteenth-century theories and treatments of "nymphomania"—a term that encompasses a range of active displays of female sexuality. Showalter provides an extended discussion of surgical treatment for female psychological disorders ranging from "nymphomania" to the desire for divorce. See, in particular, 74-79. For further discussion of the use of gynecological surgery in cases of sexual disorder, see: Moscussi 108-109: 131-132, and Scull. For a extended discussion of the history of diagnosis and treatment of nymphomania, see: Groneman.
prevent her fiancé from taking the gem (aka, her chastity), an item that would likely fall under his possession after the two become married. But this account allows the "symbolic significance" of the diamond to overwhelm the logic of the narrative. The scene becomes allegorical, but Rachel's actions outside the allegorical logic are no longer coherent. Her shame makes sense only if she conflates the diamond with her virginity—anything less and her response is unintelligible. While it is not outside the realm of possibility that Collins would sacrifice the psychological realism of a character in service of symbolism, this is not the only possible or even most credible interpretation.

Even after Sergeant Cuff obtains all the facts surrounding the case, his "testimony" recorded in the final portion of the novel fails to sufficiently capture the psychological dimensions of the diamond "theft." Cuff's account of the events surrounding the disappearance of the diamond is twice mediated; he hears the story from Mr. Septimus Luker, the money-lender in London, who heard the story from Godfrey Ablewhite. Finding himself deeply in debt, Ablewhite took the stone to Luker in the hope of obtaining a loan against its value. According to Ablewhite, after secretly "slipping the laudanum into [Franklin's] brandy-and-water, he wished [Franklin] good-night, and went into his own room" (528). Ablewhite was unable to sleep—kept awake by "money-troubles"—so when Franklin rose from bed in the next room, he likewise left his bed and "looked into [Franklin's] room to see what was the matter" (528). Ablewhite grew

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14 Jennifer Swartz reads the theft and Rachel’s subsequent silence as dramatizing the transition from *femme sole*, a single woman, to the legally vanquished *femme covert*. If Rachel balks at Franklin’s appropriation of her diamond before their marriage, she will be silenced by the letter of the law when, as her husband, he is legally deemed the sole protector of her personal property under the system of coverture. Coverture effectually erased the identity and legal voice of married women, declaring the legal identity of a *femme covert* to be one with the legal identity of her husband (165).
concerned that "that the laudanum had taken some effect on [Franklin], which had not been foreseen by the doctor, any more than by himself. For fear of an accident happening, he followed [Franklin] softly to see what [he] would do” (528). He continued to follow Franklin's movements unseen, watching as Franklin entered Rachel's sitting room leaving the door slightly ajar behind him:

[Ablewhite] looked through the crevice thus produced, between the door and the post, before he entered into the room himself. In that position, he not only detected [Franklin] in taking the Diamond out of the drawer—he also detected Miss Verinder, silently watching [him] from her bedroom, through her open door. His own eyes satisfied him that she saw [Franklin] take the Diamond, too. (529)

Ablewhite’s explanation is at best incomplete. If Ablewhite were actually concerned about an “accident,” he would more likely have attempted to guide Franklin back to his room rather than merely follow Franklin as a quiet witness. Second, Ablewhite (like Rosanna) would most likely have attributed the motive of Franklin’s late-night entry into Rachel’s room to something other than his intention to reclaim the diamond. From here, it certainly requires no real stretch of the imagination to read Ablewhite’s impulse to watch Franklin surreptitiously in Rachel’s room as sexually charged. We are also reminded that the opiated Franklin, and not Rachel, is the primary object of Ablewhite’s covert gaze. This triangle of homoerotically inflected desire captured in the somnambulist moment all but excludes Rachel from the formation—unless, à la Hutter, we conflate her body with the diamond. Rachel's silence marks the limits of narrative within the space of the Victorian novel, even of the sensational variety. The theft animates sexually charged undercurrents, diffusing illicit energy—and from the vantage point of a traditional moral framework, also guilt—across the narrative. If we sense the insufficiency of the detective's story, we have already become complicit with the various "guilty" parties in
recognizing the failure of the cognitive categories imposed by the detective to contain the illicit energies activated at the scene of the theft.

We are certainly reminded of the insufficiency of certain stock cultural figurations when Sergeant Cuff leans on the familiar narrative of the "fallen woman" in an effort to uncover the events surrounding the disappearance of the Moonstone diamond and to ascribe guilt accordingly. This notorious figuration recurs with distressing frequency throughout the Victorian period, to the extent that the fallen woman becomes, as Nina Auerbach most aptly describes, "so pervasive an image that it takes on the status of a shared cultural mythology" (29). The familiarity of the story allows the category of "fallenness" to be activated implicitly, drawing on the reader's common sense associations to supply the missing pieces in the narrative trajectory. "Fallen" operates euphemistically as a catch-all term for any sexual transgression, but it also metonymically slides into all senses of deviation from social convention.  

Most typically, the defining characteristic of the "fallen woman" in literature and in art is the intensity of her shame. And, because the text and the fallen woman most often remain silent regarding the sexual act precipitating the "fall," her shame becomes the retrospective sign of (or narrative shorthand for) sexual transgression. And from here, we can piece together the metaleptic progression that comprises the figure of the "fallen woman" as one metonymic association slides quickly into the next. A woman's enigmatic silence in the face of accusation indicates her shame, and her shame becomes the sign of

15 In her extended study on the topic of fallenness in Victorian women's writing, Deborah Logan makes a similar claim: "The prominence of the period's middle-class sexual ideology, defined in terms of angels, madonnas, and magdalens, even when its inadequacy to experience was evident, manifests itself in a powerful code of ethics that categorizes deviancy in any form (this includes all women of other classes and races) as fallenness" (9).
her sexual corruption. Collins manipulates the reader's common sense by offering the narrative of the "fallen woman" to explain the mysterious turn of events involving the Moonstone. This false lead invites readers to reflect on their quickness to ascribe guilt categorically, but the novel accomplishes more than this challenge to gender stereotypes. The sensational scenes in the novel orient the reader against a traditional moral framework founded on common sense about femininity by training the reader in the pleasure of witnessing the disruption of these familiar narratives.

**Female Criminality and the Myth of Moral Management**

The theme of female sexual corruption is one Collins also explores in several of his earlier works that deploy transgressive female sexuality as embodied in the figure of the *femme fatale*. Two years prior to *The Moonstone*, Collins published *Armadale* (1866), a sensation novel which followed the lives of two estranged cousins—both named Allan Armadale—and their relationship with the red-haired temptress, Lydia Gwilt. On his deathbed, the father of one Allan Armadale reveals to his son that he murdered the father of Allan’s cousin, and he predicts tragedy will ensue should the two Allan Armadales ever meet. Many years pass, and the murderer’s son, in an attempt to escape his abusive childhood, assumes the name Ozias Midwinter. With the shadow of his father’s prophecy hanging over his head, he becomes a close companion to his cousin Allan, who has fallen in love with Miss Milroy, the sixteen-year-old daughter of one of his tenants. Miss Milroy’s governess, Lydia Gwilt, hopes to undermine Allan’s affections for her young pupil because she would like to marry Allan herself and have his wealth.

Lydia's sexuality works surreptitiously to ensnare its male targets; the mesmerizing quality of her physical appearance and the grace of her movements seduce
without breaking her ladylike character. Readers are invited to let their gaze linger, as they watch along with Midwinter as Lydia’s “magnificent hair flashed crimson in the candle-light” (383). Lydia exudes an intense sensuality:

In the lightest word she said, in the least thing she did, there was something that gently solicited the heart of the man who sat with her. Perfectly modest in her manner, possessed to perfection of the graceful restraints and refinements of a lady, she had all the allures that feast the eye, all the siren invitations that seduce the sense—a subtle suggestiveness in her silence, and a sexual sorcery in her smile. (383)

Lydia is in many ways a classic *femme fatale*—she is driven (at least initially) by the desire to steal the Armadale fortune. After she fails in her attempt to seduce Allan Armadale way from the quintessentially innocent (and insipid) Miss Milroy, she sets her designs on Midwinter. Her plan involves marrying Midwinter under his legal name, Armadale, killing Allan, and then returning to the Armadale estate to claim her fortune, marriage certificate in hand. This plan, too, is ultimately foiled, in part because she finds herself deeply in love with Midwinter and in part because she exposes herself through her unsuccessful attempt on Armadale's life.

But even in her villainy, Lydia takes center stage. And much to the concern of nineteenth-century critics, she continuously inspires the reader's sympathetic identification, as we access Lydia's private thoughts and emotions through the narrative of events recorded in her diary. In the extended sections of the novel devoted to "Miss Gwilt's Diary," we learn of the manipulation, abuse, and heartbreak she endured in the past, which have influenced her present character. As Lydia's first husband, a wealthy Englishman. Mr. Waldron, became increasingly jealous and suspicious of his wife's affection, they moved to his "lonely old house . . . among the Yorkshire moors, and there he shut his wife and himself up from every living creature, except his servants and his
dogs” (526). Things go from bad to worse, when Lydia becomes acquainted and ultimately infatuated with Captain Manuel—a "native of Cuba and (according to his own account) an ex-officer of the Spanish navy”—while living under her husband's domestic tyranny. At this point, Waldron's suspicions escalate to a fever pitch, and in an effort to subdue his wife, he strikes her "across the face with his riding whip” (527).

In this rare depiction of domestic violence in the middle-class home, Collins challenges the legally sanctioned narrative of bourgeois domesticity which positioned domestic violence as a problem exclusive to the working classes. The legal rhetoric circulating around the passage of the 1857 Divorce Act, which extended the right to seek divorce to women who had suffered physical abuse at the hands of their husbands, frequently justified the law in terms of the brutality of working-class men (Tromp 73). In Marlene Tromp's extended study of representations of marital violence in the sensation novel, she describes the way working-class men became associated with drunkenness and brutality and working-class women with "infidelity and dissolution [which] forced their husbands into drunkenness and abuse” (73). By animating this widely circulating cultural rhetoric through the scene of domestic violence in Lydia Gwilt's past, Collins subtly challenges this legally sanctioned common sense surrounding domestic violence.

*Armadale* provides another example of the way sensation fiction works, according to Tromp, as a counterpoint to the figure of the “dangerous woman”—plaguing her husband in marriage or threatening her customer with disease—which informed the legal debates surrounding the Divorce Act of 1857 and the Contagious Disease Acts. Lydia Gwilt is both threatening to and threatened by the men with whom she becomes involved. Lydia's first murderous action—she poisons Waldron in the hopes of eloping with
Captain Manuel—appears within the framework of the novel as at least partly an act of self-defense. After Captain Manuel secures Lydia's inherited fortune, he absconds with her money, leaving Lydia so despairing, she attempts to take her own life. Lydia Gwilt arises from the same cultural moment in which the figure of the prostitute—an overtly sexual female figure—was legally transformed into a **femme fatale**, a figure of fatal femininity that threatened the moral and physical corruption of the middle-class home. But by complicating the reader's response to and the narrative function of the "dangerous woman," Collins resists this type of social scapegoating. Even as Collins activates the **femme fatale** in his construction of Lydia Gwilt, he challenges the logic animating this recurring Victorian figure as she appears in both literary and legal contexts.

In *Armadale*, as with *The Moonstone*, Collins makes the reader aware of the pleasure to be obtained in witnessing the agitation of the calm surface of bourgeois domesticity. Lydia's final efforts to secure to the Armadale fortune involve her conspiracy with the nefarious Dr. Downward. The doctor embodies the duplicity he practices. Outwardly appearing in the guise of a serious and respectable medical professional, Downward apparently makes his living by exploiting the too easily won trust of women:

> If the expression may be pardoned, he was one of those carefully constructed physicians in whom the public—especially the female public—implicitly trust. He had the necessary bald head, the necessary double eyeglass, the necessary black clothes, and the necessary blandness of manner, all complete. His voice was soothing, his ways were deliberate, his smile was confidential. (341)

Downward's medical specialty is not indicated on the "door-plate" outside his office at the end of an isolated dead-end street, but the implication is that the doctor works as an abortionist (341). When we next encounter the doctor in the later portion of the novel, he
has changed his name, his address and his specialty. Dr. Downward's latest venture, undertaken as Dr. Le Doux, is a sanatorium for the "reception of nervous invalids," a clear parody of the moral management institution popularized by John Connolly (585). This method of psychological treatment relied on the re-creation of the middle-class domestic space in an effort to instill a sense of tranquility in patients prone to nervous agitation, and its depiction offers a brief moment of comic relief before the melodramatic finale of the novel.

With more than a hint of comedic irony, Le Doux informs his visitors that all necessary measures have been taken to ensure his patients' rest and calm; this care extends even to the selection of books made available to his residents. In a moment clearly intended to target Collins's more censorious critics, Le Doux announces that any "English novelist" who truly understands "our purer modern taste, our higher modern morality" will consequently limit himself to "doing exactly two things for us, when he writes us a book. All we want of him is—occasionally to make us laugh; and invariably to make us comfortable” (637). But while Le Doux endorses this form of artistic censorship for his nervous invalids, it is clear that his guests have come to the sanatorium on a thrill-seeking mission, even if they attempt to disguise their most transparent motivations. Collins describes the spectators who have gathered outside the hospital in their attempt to escape "the miserable monotony of the lives led by a large section of the middle classes of England": “anything is welcome to the women which offers them any sort of harmless refuge from the established tyranny of the principle that all human happiness begins and ends at home” (635). It is not clear that the crowd gathered outside of Le Doux's sanatorium appreciates the irony of the situation—escaping the tyrannical
monotony of the domestic sphere in order to witness the institutionalization of domestic bliss.

During the mid-nineteenth century, the myth of “self-help” was fiercely perpetuated against increasing evidence of the impossibility of transcending poverty through the force of will and hard work alone (Rance 117). This vastly popular mythology also underpinned the shift in psychiatric medicine toward a system of moral management as opposed to physical treatment. The term "moral" signifies in multiple ways; “moral” gestures to the cause of insanity as mental (as opposed to physical), along with the further implication that mental disorders were frequently the result of a fundamental flaw in the individual's moral constitution (Rance 117). In order to be cured, the patient would have to internalize the codes of decorum and the values of the Victorian middle-class home, a bastion of moral virtue (Taylor 31). This intentional mirroring effect is one Collins repeatedly exploits in his novels; often, the distance between an asylum for the mentally disturbed and the asylum of the middle-class home becomes irreparably collapsed.¹⁶

By associating the work of moral management with a figure like Dr. Downward, Collins not so subtly suggests the fraudulence involved in conflating psychological health with the internalization of middle-class social norms. The bulk of Le Doux's audience is women:

Harmoniously united by the two common objects which they all had in view—in the first place, to look at each other, and in the second place, to look at the Sanatorium—they streamed in neatly dressed procession through the doctor's dreary iron gates, with a thin varnish over them of assumed superiority to all unlady-like excitement, most significant and most pitiable to see! (635)

¹⁶ For an extended consideration of Collins's critique of the moral management system, see: Taylor.
In this moment, sensation readers may catch a glimpse of themselves in an unflattering light. But on second glance, these women do not operate as stand-ins for the reader. Unlike Collins’s reader, Le Doux's audience has attempted, albeit unsuccessfully, to disguise its desire for sensation in an effort to preserve a more ladylike comportment. And unlike Gooseberry, these women earn the narrator's scorn for their hypocritical posturing. In an effort to conceal their own nervous excitement, these spectators attempt to preserve the precarious distinction between themselves and the residents of the sanatorium. This distinction requires that the audience fail to recognize the duplicity informing the spectacle. As Le Doux's brief literary discussion reveals, the sensation novel works in opposition to the progress of the asylum. Perhaps this is because, in recognizing the pleasure we derive from giving ourselves over to "an unlady-like excitement," we encounter our own proximity to Le Doux's "nervous invalids." The scene at the sanatorium highlights the arbitrary distinction between the spectator and the patient. Collins encourages the reader to critically reevaluate the social logic frequently informing nineteenth-century theories of hysteria—in particular, the common sense surrounding female psychology and sexuality.

Certain of Collins's contemporary reviews expressed concern regarding Armadale’s failure to adhere to and impose a traditional moral framework upon its readers. One particularly negative review in the Athenaeum identifies Lydia Gwilt as "one of the most hardened female villains whose devices and desires have ever blackened fiction" and finds fault with the novel on the count that Lydia proves to be its most interesting character (733). For this critic, the mastery of Collins's intricate plotting proves no saving grace: "With all his art in piling up events, Mr. Collins cannot but be
said to have failed in a story of which the centre and in which the only being who excites curiosity is such a creature as this” (733). Lydia's transgressions, however, do not go unpunished. In the novel's dramatic finale, Lydia sacrifices her own life to preserve her husband from an early death at the hands of the unscrupulous Dr. Downward. But this untimely death is not sufficient to contain her charismatic appeal. More damning than sympathy (at least from the perspective of some of Collins's contemporary readers), is the extent to which Lydia's particular combination of criminality and charisma renders the reader more than sympathetic; thrilled by her transgressions, the reader becomes complicit in her nefarious scheming. This relationship has the potential to inspire a moral conflict in the reader—we at once recognize Lydia's misdeeds, while at the same time sympathizing with her motivations to commit these illicit acts. This conflict renders apparent the insufficiency of such carefully guarded categories of femininity—the fallen woman or the femme fatale—to capture a figure as complex as Lydia Gwilt.

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In Armadale, Collins successfully exploits the tension between the reader's (most likely traditionally oriented) moral compass and the seductive power of Lydia Gwilt, to challenge the logic informing such gendered paradigms as the fallen women and the femme fatale. But in The Moonstone, Collins stages this moral crisis in generic terms, enacting the implosion of the detective plot (and its associated epistemological framework) in the sensation novel. This generic tension takes on a visual form if we compare two different editions of The Moonstone: the first American edition of the novel published in 1868 by Harper & Brothers and a "new" edition issued in London by Chatto & Windus in 1876. Several of Collins's novels were circulated in cheap editions. But
priced at two dollars for the cloth bound volume, both the Harper's and Chatto & Windus editions were marketed toward Collins's middle-class readers. The Harper's frontispiece depicts three men—ostensibly, Ezra Jennings, Gabriel Betteredge, and the family lawyer, Mr. Bruff—gathered around a small table and preparing the mixture of opium and water to be administered to Franklin Blake (fig. 1). A young woman also stands at the table with her hand on a jug of water. She faces the three men—her face visible only in profile. The caption reads: "'Let me pour out the water,' she whispered." This illustration depicts Jennings's experiment, his attempt to recreate the circumstances surrounding the night of the diamond's disappearance in order to prove his theory that Franklin came into possession of the diamond while in an opium-induced trace. This scene is at the heart of the sensational narrative, and fittingly, the gaze of all three men is directed toward the opium as Jennings measures out the precise dose.

Visually, this frontispiece suggests the correspondence between the embodiment of British middle-class femininity—Rachel Verinder—and the opium. Captioned below the illustration, Rachel expresses her desire to become actively involved in the experiment by adding the water to the opium necessary to prepare the tincture. The caption highlights Rachel's presence in this intimate scene, but also signals her relegation to a passive role. Even though she is the subject of the sensation narrative (and the subject of the caption), her face remains partially obscured, her back to the audience. The caption voices her desire to be included in the activity of the small circle of men who stand apart from her—united by the darkness of their suits, in contrast to the whiteness of her gown, and separated from her by the small table. Like the opium—the subject of the experimenter's gaze—she is a figure onto which narratives are projected, narratives that
reveal more about the anxious nature of British masculinity than anything else. But the caption emphasizes her dissatisfaction with this social position, the insufficiency of which the reader is subtly encouraged to take under consideration. In a novel that brings to light the hidden effects of stimulation on character, this illustration highlights the sensational side of this generically hybrid novel.

In contrast, the frontispiece of the Chatto & Windus edition frames *The Moonstone* in terms of the detective plot (fig. 2). This edition is the product of Chatto & Windus's purchase of the exclusive rights to Collins's earlier novels in 1873 (Peters 370). "Carefully printed on creamy paper and tastefully bound in cloth," this edition features illustrations by the noted Victorian artist and novelist George du Maurier, as well as by F.A. Fraser, who also illustrated *Great Expectations*. The scene pictured appears much earlier in the novel, at the commencement of the official detective investigation with the arrival of Sergeant Cuff at the Verinder Estate. Finding Superintendent Seegrave sorely unequipped for the task at hand, Franklin invites Cuff to assist with the case. The illustration captures something of Cuff's demeanor, as his gaze fixes steadily on the figure of Rachel Verinder in a manner suggestive of Betteredge's description: "His eyes, of a steely light grey, had a very disconcerting trick, when they encountered your eyes, of looking as if they expected something more from you than you were aware of yourself" (155). The extreme distance between the two central figures signifies the rigid formality informing the encounter. This frontispiece conveys none of the conspiratorial intimacy of the Harper's edition; instead, we might be witnessing the interrogation of a principal suspect in the crime. Rachel's posture is upright—maybe even defensive—as she occupies the gaze of the several men who have gathered to witness the conversation. The
contrast between her figure and that of the young man—probably Franklin Blake—who casually rests his leg upon a chair further suggests that Rachel is the object of investigation in this theatric tableau.

Perhaps in this later moment, after the heyday of the sensation novel and during the rise of detective fiction, Collins's publishers thought it more prudent to position *The Moonstone* in the context of its detective plot. Or maybe his publishers sensed that, with piquing imperial anxieties toward the turn of the century, readers would be less inclined to abandon themselves to the thrill of witnessing traditional social narratives unravel in the novel's various sensation episodes. Collins betrays a tendency toward increasing didacticism in his later years; maybe he began to prefer the tendencies of the detective plot to fix and isolate meaning as opposed to the messiness of his sensation novels. In any case, these two frontispieces highlight in stark terms the divergent generic modes of *The Moonstone*, a tension Collins ultimately exploits to enact the disintegration of the detective's logic as his readers, sometimes even despite their best intentions, find themselves "caught within the vortex of his plot."
Figure 1: "Do you think a Young Lady's advice worth having?"

Figure 2: "Let me pour out the water," she whispered.

CHAPTER II
BEHIND THE SCENES OF BRADDON'S SENSATION NOVEL

Behind the Scenes of Literature

Even after the success of *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) earned Mary Elizabeth Braddon the title "Queen of the Circulating Libraries," her correspondence reveals an abiding ambivalence towards both the sensation fiction that made her famous and its generic originator, Wilkie Collins. Decades after the publication of *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon notably remarked: "I always say I owe 'Lady Audley's Secret' to 'The Woman in White.' Wilkie Collins is assuredly my literary father. My admiration for 'the Woman in White' inspired me with the idea of 'Lady Audley' as a novel of construction and character" (Hatton 213). But Braddon was not quite as devoted a disciple as this confession—made in the latter part of her long career—might suggest.

Braddon saw herself as much as Collins’s competitor as his student. Shortly after publishing *The Doctor's Wife* (1864)—a novel she hoped would demonstrate her abilities beyond the sphere of sensational literature, but which failed to gain the same degree of popularity as her sensation writing—Braddon wrote to her mentor, the novelist and politician Edward Bulwer Lytton. Braddon informs Lytton: "My next story is to begin in *Temple Bar* in January, if I live—& is to be sensation, for Wilkie Collins in *Cornhill* will be a most powerful oponent [sic] & I can only fight him with his own weapons—mystery, crime, & c." ("Devoted Disciple" 26). But, despite her express determination to fight Collins with his own arsenal, Braddon's letters, unlike Collins's personal correspondence, betray a dissatisfaction with sensation fiction as a vehicle of literary expression.
The popularity of Braddon's early sensation fiction—*Lady Audley's Secret*, *Aurora Floyd* (1863), *Eleanor's Victory* (1863), and *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1863)—enabled Braddon to provide comfortably for both herself and her mother (Wolff 136). In 1863, Braddon boasts of the generous terms of her contract for *Aurora Floyd* and *Lady Audley's Secret* with Tinsley Brothers publishing house in a letter to Lytton:

> The two I am now doing are both sold, I think at the highest rate to be screwed out of a publisher for the class of book I can write. . . . The Messrs Tinsley, who are young people quite new in the trade, are to give me 2,000 for a two years license to print each of the novels, after which time the copyrights are to revert to me. I don't think they could give me more with any chance of obtaining a profit themselves. (qtd. in "Devoted Disciple" 13)

Speaking with the confidence of a professional author, Braddon's casual frankness regarding financial negotiations gives the reader a sense of her ability to negotiate the literary marketplace effectively.

And yet, Braddon remained critical of the middle-class literary taste to which sensation fiction catered, feeling that her true artistic potential was repeatedly sacrificed to pecuniary necessity (Wolff 136). A letter to Bulwer Lytton composed only a month later suggests that the shine of her professional victory had dulled, leaving Braddon lamenting the very tastes of her library readership from which she has derived such benefit. She writes: "The 'behind the scenes' of literature has in a manner demoralised me. I have learnt to look at everything in a mercantile sense, & write solely for the circulating library reader, whose palette [sic] requires strong meat, & is not very particular as to the quality thereof" (qtd. in "Devoted Disciple" 14). Braddon's slip highlights the devolution of the artistic "palette," the aesthetic integrity of which must be sacrificed to the unsophisticated "palate" of the eager consumer. By using the image "behind the scenes" to convey her new perspective on the publishing industry, Braddon associates her career
in sensation fiction with her earlier involvement in the theater—she had worked for several years as an actress before attempting to earn her living in literature. Her experience "behind the scenes" has been demoralizing in the sense that Braddon has come to realize and perhaps even resign herself to the fact that her readers' demand for formulaic sensation fiction, for practical reasons, must constrain her artistic ambitions. But Braddon's familiarity with the wheeling and dealing of the publishing industry has also been demoralizing to the extent she has felt its influence to be morally corruptive. This second sense of “demoralize” is reinforced by Braddon's choice of metaphor; her sentence captures the controversy surrounding Braddon's professional past, as both spaces—the theater and the literary market—exist, as Braddon seems to be very much aware, outside the pale of proper Victorian femininity. Just as Braddon's contemporary critics drew on her controversial past in order to impugn her literary career, in the very logic of her sentence the illicit associations of the stage intrude upon the realm of literary publishing.

Braddon's professional ambivalences may be traceable to the fact that her personal life often mirrored her fiction. Her striving to move beyond the sensation novel may have been as much a function of her desire to avoid the conflation of her personal life with her writing as it was a consequence of her artistic tastes. The decision to become an actress undoubtedly left Braddon vulnerable to the moral opprobrium of a society that discerned a suspicious resemblance between the actress and the prostitute because of their public circulation and financial autonomy.¹ With this in mind, it is not

¹ For further discussion of the conflation of these two female figures in the nineteenth-century popular imagination, see: Davis, 69-86; Davis’s study also explores the veracity of this conflation in quantifiable terms, concluding—despite the assertion of Henry Mayhew in his 1861 ethnographic study, London Labor
surprising that Braddon pursued her theatrical career under the alias, Mary Seyton.

Even after Braddon left the stage, her life remained unconventional, and her relationship to John Maxwell exposed her to public scandal. In the words of Braddon's biographer, Robert Wolff: "Maxwell bought periodicals, experimented with them, combined them, sold them, and started new ones. He was always restless and often successful" (80). Maxwell's periodical experiments ranged from "shoddy little cheap ones," including "the short-lived Robin Goodfellow (in which Lady Audley's Secret was born and died abruptly, only to be revived elsewhere)" to magazines "large and lavishly produced and designed to be read by the middle and upper classes" (Wolff 80). Most successful among these more highbrow publications were Temple Bar and Belgravia, for the latter of which Braddon acted as editor for ten years (Wolff 80).

Working closely together, Braddon and John Maxwell also lived for many years as husband and wife, even while he was still married to Mary Anne Crowley (Wolff 103). Eventually, the two were legally wed in 1874, following Mary Anne's death. According to Jennifer Carnell's more recent biography of Braddon, Maxwell and Mary Anne had "separated, due, apparently, to the mental instability of his wife"; however, while it was commonly believed around "literary London that she spent the rest of her life, insane, in an asylum, it seems more likely that she returned to Ireland in the care of her family as her brother-in-law later stated" (115). Whatever Mary Anne’s mental state, Maxwell clearly believed her unwell; reportedly, in response to inquiries made by a professional acquaintance regarding his wife's health, Maxwell replied, "She is defunct" (Mayo 217, and the London Poor, that the "ballet girls’ bad reputation was well deserved in most cases"—that there is little documentation of women who "simultaneously pursued careers in the theatre and prostitution" (78-80).
But, even if Braddon was confident in Maxwell's assessment of his wife's mental health, she and Maxwell hesitated to present themselves publicly as a married couple (Wolff 106).

Despite their caution, scandal found Braddon and Maxwell when Mary Anne's death notice circulated through multiple national newspapers; as many of Braddon's friends and acquaintances mistook the author for the late Mrs. Maxwell, Braddon may have found her life too closely mirroring her fiction for comfort. To this we are left guessing, in part because Braddon destroyed nearly all her correspondence with Maxwell documenting the course of their thirty-four-year-long partnership. Writing in her diary shortly after Maxwell's death, Braddon records: "Burning M[axwell]'s letters afternoon" (Wolff 97). While it is impossible to know Braddon's motivations, the decision to repress this aspect of her personal history is not out of character and suggests that, even as she did not allow social convention to fully constrict her personal life and professional career, she remained sensitive to the public's moral censure.²

² The sense of conflict and ambivalence that permeated Braddon’s life and writing has not always been fully recognized by her twentieth century readers. Feminist literary critics—beginning with Elaine Showalter in A Literature of Their Own (1977)—have claimed the importance of the sensation novel in challenging long-entrenched views of female psychology and sexuality.² For Showalter, the popularity of the sensation novel reflects the “skill with which [the authors] articulated the fantasies of their readers, fantasies that they themselves fervently shared” (159). The sensation novel becomes, for Showalter, a vehicle for the woman reader's vicarious expression of her dissatisfaction in her current social role:

These women novelists made a powerful appeal to the female audience by subverting the traditions of feminine fiction to suit their own imaginative impulses, by expressing a wide range of suppressed female emotions, and by tapping and satisfying fantasies of protest and escape. (159)

Within this counter-narrative of Victorian femininity, Mary Elizabeth Braddon features prominently. Building on Showalter's work, Lyn Pykett argues that Lady Audley's Secret challenges the foundation of the nineteenth-century feminine ideal. Lady Audley's graceful feminine charm and skillful navigation of the upper-class Victorian household suggest that “the respectable ideal, or proper feminine, may simply be a form of acting, just one role among other possible roles” (91). Braddon's Lady Audley threatens to give the lie to the commonly held belief that Victorian femininity was the product of female biology rather than socially determined logic, by "rais[ing] the spectre that femininity is itself duplicitous, and that it involves deception and dissembling" (91).

But these arguments, while still in some ways compelling, privilege the moments where Braddon challenges social convention without accounting for her novel's more conservative impulses. Like Collins's,
The details of Braddon’s biography remind us that her relationship with Maxwell was in large part responsible for her entrée "behind the scenes of literature" and involved much more than just her exposure to the machinery of the literary marketplace. Her sense of demoralization becomes all the more understandable, if we consider that she left her theatrical career to pursue more "respectable" employment, only to find her reputation, more than ever, an open target for social censure. But even as Braddon expresses her resentment of the sacrifice of her aesthetic ideals in the interest of commercial success, her novels testify to her awareness regarding her readers' fascination with scandal in the private lives of others.

Indeed, *Lady Audley's Secret* begins where most Victorian novels end, after the second marriage of Michael Audley to the neighbor’s governess, Lucy Graham. Rather than closing the bedroom door of the newly married couple against the prying eyes of the reader as in the typical dénouement of the Victorian marriage plot novel, *Lady Audley's Secret* invites the reader to play the part of the detective and violate the sanctity of the middle-class home. Trained in the theory of circumstantial evidence, the reader catches "detective fever" from Braddon's protagonist, Robert Audley, and works feverishly to reconstruct the narrative surrounding the disappearance of George Talboys. As the

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3 Anthea Trodd describes how, for nineteenth-century detractors of the sensation novel like Margaret Oliphant, the sensation novel represented "a literary institutionalisation of the habits of mind of the new police force" (436). (The Metropolitan Police Force was established in 1829 by Prime Minister, Robert Peel.) However, Trodd argues to the contrary, that "the threat posed by the police to the privacy and autonomy of the middle-class home was countered in many novels by the insistence that domestic affairs could be managed and redeemed within the home, . . . by genteel amateur investigation" (459). While Trodd provides a useful discussion of the recurring class clash figured through the encounter of the police with the Lady of the house, her argument fails to account for the way Braddon suggests the corruption involved in the private handling of Lady Audley's fate.
narrative undercuts Robert's narrative authority, it would seem that the student surpasses the teacher; and yet, the narrative ultimately frustrates the reader's attempts to solve the case by flooding the field of evidence with possible leads in the form of doubled figures, some genetic, some intertextual, some gothic. These textual doubles orient the reader toward those narratives, both popular and submerged, which give shape to Braddon's charismatic but nonetheless ill-fated female protagonist, Lady Audley. And even as the novel's conclusion seems to arrest the radically destabilizing potential of an associational logic galvanized, but no longer controlled, by the gentleman-turned-amateur-detective, Robert Audley, its most sensational implications resist absorption into the vision of middle-class domesticity presented in the novel's closing scenes.

**The Theory of Circumstantial Evidence**

We are cast as spectators of Braddon's protagonist; we are fascinated, maybe even seduced by Lady Audley, but she remains a mystery to us, in part, because we are denied narrative access to her innermost thoughts. We first encounter the new wife of Michael Audley through the various impressions of her character gleaned from inhabitants of Audley Court and its surrounding village:

*Every one* loved, admired, and praised her. . . . the verger at the church who ushered her into the surgeon's pew; the vicar who saw the soft blue eyes uplifted to his face as he preached his simple sermon; the porter from the railway-station who brought her sometimes a letter or a parcel, and who never looked for reward from her; her employer; his visitors; her pupils; the servants; *everybody*, high and low, united in declaring that Lucy Graham was the sweetest girl that ever lived. (*emphasis mine, 48*)

The narrator's introduction of Lady Audley seems to be engaged in the rhetorical work of consensus building; that Lucy Graham is the "sweetest girl that ever lived" is common sense, a view held by the entire community.
Of course, as the novel progresses, we are led to challenge this popular belief, among many others. Lady Audley appears to embody the ideal of Victorian femininity, but we begin to suspect that she is far from angelic. From Robert Audley's detective work, we learn that before she became Lucy Graham, she was living a life of poverty as Helen Talboys. Abandoned by her first (and only legitimate) husband, George Talboys, and left to care for their son and her dissolute father, Helen—believing her husband deceased—decides to change her identity and strike out on her own. By fabricating references, she is able to secure a job as the Dawsons' governess, and from there, the affections of Michael Audley. All seems to be going smoothly until she learns that her husband is alive and has returned to England after a long sojourn in Australia. Her luck turns worse still when her nephew by marriage, Robert Audley, turns up at Audley Court to visit his uncle, accompanied by an old school friend, none other than George Talboys. Mid-way through this visit, George suddenly disappears, piquing Robert's concern and ultimately his suspicions as to Lady Audley's role in George's sudden departure. George's disappearance sparks a detective plot which spans the next several hundred pages, culminating in a confrontation between Robert and his aunt. Robert's revelation of his discoveries regarding her past life prompts Lady Audley to confess not only to her role in George's disappearance, but also to the hereditary madness which runs down her maternal line. Following this astounding revelation, Robert quickly has Lady Audley committed to a foreign insane asylum where she lives out the rest of her short life. The final twist, just another turn of the screw for the fated Lady Audley, is George's reappearance. It would seem Lady Audley's attempt to murder her first husband by pushing him down a well has proved unsuccessful; he emerges badly injured, but not permanently wounded.
Like *The Moonstone*, *Lady Audley's Secret* trains the reader in the logic of
detection. More specifically, Robert Audley introduces the concept of "circumstantial
evidence," inviting the reader to work with him to solve the mystery of George Talboys's
disappearance. In an attempt to impress Lady Audley with his investigative prowess,
Robert launches into a lengthy discussion of the "theory of circumstantial evidence”
(152). And in his account of the process through which various, seemingly unrelated
circumstances point unswervingly at a particular conclusion, Robert also provides the
reader with a metaphor for the construction of common sense:

Circumstantial evidence . . . that wonderful fabric which is built out of straws
collected at every point of the compass, and which is yet strong enough to hang a man. Upon what infinitesimal trifles may sometimes hang the whole secret of
some wicked mystery, inexplicable heretofore to the wisest upon the earth! A
scrap of paper; a shred of some torn garment; the button off a coat; a word
dropped incautiously from the over-cautious lips of guilt; the fragment of a letter;
the shutting or opening of a door; a shadow on a window-blind; the accuracy of a
moment; a thousand circumstances so light as to be forgotten by the criminal, but
links of steel in the wonderful chain forged by the science of the detective officer;
and lo! the gallows is built up; the solemn bell tolls through the dismal grey of the
early morning; the drop creaks under the guilty feet; and the penalty of crime is
paid. (152)

When various "infinitesimal trifles" or circumstances are positioned in a narrative—"a
scrap of paper," "a shred of some torn garment"—each becomes a proverbial "shred of
evidence" upon which the detective may "hang" the case, or even the suspect. The
narrative concretizes the relationship between these circumstances, possibly creating the
illusion of cause and effect relationships and even the inevitability of its own progression.
The narrative trajectory appears as "links of steel in the wonderful chain forged by . . .
science," but the possibility remains that all we are actually encountering is one potential
story constructed from arbitrary circumstances, where another might appear just as
plausible in its stead. The theory of circumstantial evidence transforms seemingly random
circumstances—mere "trifles"—surrounding the case into evidence linking a particular person with the series of events under investigation.

Of course, while certain circumstances may well indicate the actual events surrounding a crime, this is not always the case. Either way, what is first merely an associative relationship derived from the principle of contiguity—certain events or objects become associated with a case through their proximity, without necessarily possessing any real causal or explanatory power—transforms into a particular type of metaphorical correspondence. Circumstances become evidence which occupies a synecdochical relationship to a larger body of evidence and to the crime itself. For example, a "scrap of paper" may indicate conspiracy between various parties; in this way, the paper stands in a metaphorical relationship to the larger crime. This slippage of metonymy into metaphors continues as a "body of evidence," once merely associated with the suspect, becomes inextricably connected with the criminal—the "body of evidence" personifies the criminal. The evidence testifies to the actions of the perpetrator and from these actions, the portrait of the criminal is derived.

Robert's morose depiction of the force of circumstantial evidence to condemn any party identified as guilty has its intended effect on the seemingly unflappable Lady Audley. Hearing this account, her face turns from its "natural colour" to a "ghastly ashen grey," and she loses consciousness (153). Through Robert's meditation on the process of circumstantial evidence, Braddon suggests to the reader the close intimacy between "associative logic" and moral condemnation. And as certain narratives become more familiar, even less circumstantial evidence may be required before the "gallows is built up."
The common sense conceptions informing Victorian notions of femininity are produced from circumstance in a rhetorically analogous manner. For example, as multiple women are observed to suffer in varying degrees from some type of psychological disturbance, femininity becomes culturally associated with hysteria. Medical psychology transforms this metonymic association into an essentializing metaphor which, at its most extreme, suggests that femininity is merely the personification of hysteria, and experts bring biological “evidence” to bear in justifying this diagnosis. Out of mere circumstances, these rhetorical transformations produce the "links of steel in the wonderful chain forged by science." The metaphor of the steel chain is apt, as it points not only to the seemingly unbreakable quality of the logical patterns that give rise to common sense, but also to the manner in which these chains have severely constricted women in both public and private spheres. It is no wonder Lady Audley pales in contemplation of the moral force wielded through the manipulation of circumstance, recognizing in Robert's speech the logic which at any moment might be used to justify her commitment to an insane asylum.

"Bygone Horrors": The Trial of Maria Manning

The narrative becomes increasingly crowded with doubled figures as it progresses, and the reader, trained in the associational logic from which Robert's method of detection is derived, must consider whether the doubling effect (in any given case) is evidential or if the likeness is merely circumstantial. For example, Robert Audley's investigative musings direct us to the novel's first embodied double, Maria Manning. Robert ultimately eschews the significance of his seemingly intuitive connection between the Maria Manning and Lady Audley, in favor of preserving the model of passive
femininity. After visiting the Southampton home of George's father-in-law, Captain Maldon, Robert begins to suspect Lady Audley of being in some sort of conspiracy with the old man surrounding George's fate. Robert returns to Audley Court and confronts his aunt with his suspicions by way of alluding to the real murder case of Maria and Frederick Manning. By introducing this sensational, yet real-world story into her fiction, Braddon intensifies the novel's thrill factor in making the plot appear more plausible by comparison.

If earlier scenes have worked to orient the reader toward the history of violence lingering just beneath the surface of respectability, then the allusion to Maria Manning and her husband Frederick reminds the reader that this phenomenon is not solely confined to fiction. Alluding to his darkest suspicions regarding George's whereabouts, Robert muses:

My friend might have been made away within this very inn, stabbed to death upon this hearth-stone on which I now stand, and I might stay here for a twelve-month, and go away at the last as ignorant of his fate as if I had never crossed the threshold. . . . If I were to go to-morrow into that common-place, plebeian, eight-roomed house in which Maria Manning and her husband murdered their guest, I should have no awful prescience of that bygone horror. (170)

The 1849 Manning murder—referred to popularly in the press as "The Bermondsey Horror"—quickly became a media sensation due to its brutal and deeply personal nature. Former lovers, Maria Manning and Patrick O'Connor, remained intimate even after Maria's marriage to Frederick Manning. On the night of his death, O'Connor was invited to have dinner with the Mannings in their home. No food was ever served. Instead, O'Connor was shot in the head and beaten to death with a crow bar. He was then bound, covered in quicklime, and buried beneath the kitchen floor. Mirroring the tendency of the press, Frederick takes a backseat in Robert's morbid fantasy to the figure of Frederick’s
wife, Maria. Maria Manning enthralled the media, as the questionable nature of her relationship with O'Connor piqued public attention. Unlike her husband, she earned a place in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, and she inspired a novelized account of her life, Robert Huish's *The Progress of Crime; or, The Authentic Memoirs of Maria Manning* (1849).

But as much as the newspaper coverage of the case betrays a growing fascination with Maria, it simultaneously evinces anxiety about arousing public sympathy toward this captivating figure who continued to profess her innocence even up to the moment of her execution. Even as the newspapers contradicted earlier accounts of Maria's personal appearance—declaring that, while "she was very neatly dressed, and from her easy and graceful manner she is evidently a person who has mixed a good deal in society,” “[s]he is not . . . by any means what may be styled beautiful, as some of the papers have asserted”—she continued to hold an audience in thrall ("Murder in Bermondsey"). The trial and her hanging drew a large audience from both sexes, much to the consternation of one reader of *The Era*, who asks incredulously: "Could it be believed that while the awful sentence of death was being passed at the Old Bailey on a female, others of her sex were, by the aid of double opera-glasses, watching the misery of mind of the wretched criminal at the bar?" ("The Bermondsey Murder"). Like Maria Manning, Braddon's sensational heroine retains a dangerous ability to seduce her female audience beyond the bounds of propriety.

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4 Randa Helfield examines the parallel rhetoric waged against the sensation novel and nineteenth-century trials for murder by poison to argue that, even as the novel and the trial intended the "presentation of shocking accounts of murder as part of a larger effort to restore justice and morality," by "exposing people to narratives about poison, both sensation trials and sensation dramas became themselves potential corrupters of innocence" (178). In the eyes of the literary and cultural critic, both the criminal trial and sensational literature threatened to unsex the female members of the audience, as "this poison could infect the minds and morals of the women who were exposed to it, and make them poisoners as well" (178).
It comes as no surprise that the Manning case would have struck Braddon's fancy, as the means the couple took to dispose of the body suggests a metaphor for the sensation novel: a criminal history tenuously concealed by the veneer of respectable Victorian domesticity. The press portrays Maria as a grotesque distortion of genteel femininity; beautiful, well groomed and fashionable, Maria becomes the lure in the fatal plot against Patrick O'Connor. Indeed, the ruse devised by the Mannings—inviting O'Connor to dinner—trades on the seemingly innocuous image of middle-class domesticity in order to take their victim off guard. But perhaps it was the mythology surrounding Maria Manning, even more than the actual facts of the case, which provided Braddon's inspiration. As Robert Audley's speech clearly indicates, the most memorable aspect of the entire case is the image of the corpse of O'Connor buried beneath the Mannings' kitchen floor. The gruesome tableau was quickly capitalized upon by the press, even prompting the rumor that Maria had actually prepared dinner over O'Connor's dead body. To grizzly effect, the *New Wonderful Magazine* features a long account of the murder and the trial including various illustrations of the Manning kitchen, one of which features "the fireplace where a goose was roasted on the day of the murder, by Mrs. Manning" (264).  

While this detail is likely apocryphal—the only "goose" cooked on that day was O'Connor's (and arguably the Mannings’ as well)—it is easy to see how the actual circumstances surrounding the case would lend themselves to this sort of morbid extrapolation.

However much truth actually adheres to this feature of the Manning murder, it

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5 This version of the events also appears in “The Murder of Mr. O'Connor in London”; the author emphasizes "the extraordinary nerve of the Mannings, particularly the female" who purportedly demonstrated her cold-hearted audacity "when she roasted a goose over the spot, where her murdered paramour was lying."
likely inspired Lady Audley's deft performance of graceful femininity over the tea table after her attempted murder of her first husband, George Talboys. This performance, as the narrator invites the reader to observe, is at once mesmerizing and hollow. Lady Audley appears through Robert's eyes "very pretty and innocent, seated behind the graceful group of delicate opal china and glittering silver" (242). This doubling effect engenders an association between the two female figures, leading the reader to infer that Lady Audley may be something of a "Maria Manning type." Braddon draws with sensational effect on this monstrous image of female agency, which deviated so conspicuously from the construction of married womanhood under the law. By linking Lady Audley to Maria, Braddon leaves open the possibility that, like Maria, Lady Audley acted as a rational, independent agent when she abandoned her role as mother and wife in order to obtain wealth and luxury.

Both Maria Manning and Lady Audley appear dangerously aware of the power of feminine charm over their victims. This may be the reason that the press covering the Manning murder, while initially sympathetic, turned quickly against Maria. Her short-

__6__ As of yet, critics have noted but not taken into account the full implication of this association. In an essay on the "sensational" in sensation fiction, Patrick Brantlinger briefly acknowledges Braddon's allusion to the Manning case, claiming that "the reference to Maria Manning emphasizes the credibility of such a character as Lady Audley, who is herself an incarnation of this creed" (39). For Brantlinger, the allusion to the Manning murder is merely the stuff of generic convention—an attempt on Braddon's part to preserve the plausibility of the narrative against the charge of its absurdity.

__7__ This version of femininity can be derived from the Parliamentary debates surrounding divorce marriage; as Mary Poovey demonstrates, objections to divorce or the possibility for sexual equality raised during the course of these debates rest on the naturalization of gender relations. Gender difference was legitimized on the basis of biology: "female nature, which was governed by maternal instinct, was supposedly noncompetitive, nonaggressive, and self-sacrificing—that is, internally consistent and not alienated; male nature, the counterpart, was competitive, aggressive, and acquisitive" (Poovey 77). Although Poovey does not put it in these terms, this conflation of behavior with biology to consolidate gender roles points to the transformation of arbitrary associations into common sense. In addition to the Parliamentary debates, I have also turned to the media coverage surrounding the Manning case as a source of popular conceptions (and misconceptions) about the legal system of coverture and female criminality.
lived favor in the press might be tracked through so facile a detail as the description of her physical appearance. As Maria falls further from grace so, too, do the markers of outward attractiveness, the "neat dress" and "easy and graceful manner" which identified her as a person of some cultural refinement. Subsequent accounts of Maria both during the time of her apprehension and at the trial describe her appearance as "flashy," taken to wearing "somewhat gaudy colors." London's *The Era* even suggests that, while Maria presented "no pattern of virtue," her "showy" presentation may have landed her the job as a "lady's maid in a nobleman's family . . . while many a poor, and deserving, and better-qualified English girl, pines for want of common nourishment, or stitches shirts at four shillings a dozen" ("Last of the Mannings"). The article makes explicit the already implicit insinuation that, in aping the fashions of the upper classes, Maria is like the prostitute whose heavily worn, yet lavishly styled, brightly colored clothing marks her in the crowd.

But Maria's offenses do not end with her unlicensed crossing of clearly defined class boundaries—a crime, of course, in which Lady Audley shares. Most disturbing to the reporter for *The Era* is the fact that Maria, like the prostitute, bears no visible signs of her shame as she appears to the public eye:

The prostitute walks unblushingly along the thoroughfare, but not with more assurance than her fallen sister can enter the presence of those who live a life of propriety. Were there not those—was there not *one*—who knew more of the character of Maria DeRoux than she exhibited before her mistress? ("Last of the Mannings")

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On this point, Katherine Montwieler argues that Braddon's novel forwards "a subversive political vision that belies the novel's superficial condemnation of class transgressions" by "showing poor women how to affect gentility, and once they have accomplished this goal, how to perfect it" (43). Montwieler builds on Matus's crucial observation that what "seems primarily to be the matter with Lady Audley is that she threatens to violate class boundaries and exclusions, and to get away with appropriating social power beyond her entitlement" (48).
Braddon and other novelists exploit this same cultural paranoia evident in the press—the threat of "the worm within"—in the sensation novel. Like Lady Audley, Maria infiltrates the "life of propriety" undetected. It seems, at least for this reporter, that it is the ease with which Maria carried off her performance of respectable femininity that is most troubling.

Indeed, at least within the space of this journalistic account, Maria is not on trial for murder so much as for sexual misconduct; one must suppose that, when he refers to Maria as a prostitute’s "fallen sister," the author is alluding to Maria's romantic involvement with Patrick O'Connor prior to her marriage with Frederick. This conflation of Maria's sexual transgressions with her violent acts provides possible insight into Maria's difficulty in successfully casting herself as the unwitting victim of her husband's jealousy-fueled, murderous plots. During her defense, Maria argues, with some genuine logical force, that she had little motive to kill Patrick O'Connor. In her final address to the court, Maria confesses:

Mr O'Connor was more to me than my husband. He was a friend and brother to me ever since I came to this country. I knew him for seven years. He wanted to marry me, and I ought to have been married to him. . . . I am not guilty of the murder of Mr O'Connor. If I had wished to commit murder I would not have attempted the life of the only friend I had in the world—a man who would have made me his wife in a week if I had been a widow. (qtd. in "Conviction of the Mannings and Sentence")

While Maria's response to Patrick's death was arguably suggestive less of grief than opportunism, it would still stand to reason that her husband had more cause than Maria to want Patrick dead. Either way, as the article in The Era implies, Maria would have done
better to play the part of the devoted wife than the unrequited love of the deceased.\textsuperscript{10}

The Manning trial brought the legal system of coverture into the spotlight; various newspapers reprinted the coroner's testimony in which he discussed in somewhat uncertain terms whether Maria might be able to evade conviction under the law of coverture. Reportedly, the coroner claimed that the:

question might be raised in law as to this woman being married; but where the wife takes a very active part, the husband being present, then the wife may by law be chargeable with the crime, if the evidence established that point, notwithstanding her coverture. He would leave it to the jury to determine whether Mrs. Manning was not equally guilty in the commission of the crime as her husband. ("The Murder of Mr. O' Connor")

Citing Sir Matthew Hale's extremely influential legal treatise, \textit{The History of the Pleas of the Crown} (1736), a letter to the editor of the \textit{Times} attempts to clarify the coroner's statement. The author refers the editor to the following passage from \textit{Pleas of the Crown}:

"But if \textit{a femme covert} commit a theft of her own voluntary act, or by the bare command of her husband, or be guilty of treason, murder, or robbery, in company with, or by coercion of her husband, she is punishable as much as if she were sole" ("Mrs. Manning"). This discrepancy between the coroner's testimony and Hale's treatise speaks

\footnote{9 Evidence against Maria for the murder of O'Connor was tenuous at best, and her motive remains unclear given the intimacy of her relationship with the victim, her estrangement from her husband, and the likelihood that she would have had continued access to O'Connor's property as his mistress. Reflecting on the facts of the case, it seems entirely possible that Maria made the best of a bad situation and, after learning of O'Connor's death, took possession of the keys to his house and removed his valuable property. Albert Borowitz makes an extended case for this interpretation of the events leading up to and following the death of Patrick O'Connor, pointing to the plausibility that Fred committed the murder without Maria's assistance (318).}

\footnote{10 Helfield explores how the representation of female murderers in the courtroom and the newspapers reflects the nineteenth-century preoccupation with proper femininity. The presentation of these women reflects an eagerness and anxiety to make the behavior of the defendant conform to the traditional model of femininity, even when evidence pointed starkly to the contrary (163).}
to the long and sometimes contradictory history of coverture in England. The lingering doubt "in the public mind," to which the author of the letter in the *Times* refers, reveals not only the ambiguities arising out of the British common law system, but the extent to which the Manning case brought the issue of female agency under the law to the foreground of public discussion. Viewed in this light, the eagerness of Frederick Manning's counsel to rest the sole blame on Maria appears to be a strategy intended to prevent Maria from benefiting from any legal loophole the system of coverture might provide. The marital relationship between Maria and Frederick threatened to falsify the legalized fiction of marital unity and the ideal of self-sacrificing Victorian femininity. Reading Lady Audley as a Maria Manning type illuminates the extent to which both women are ultimately punished less for their violent actions than for the ways in which the dangerous femininity that both women embody threatens to "unman" the men with which they become most closely associated. During the course of the trial, Serjeant Charles Wilkins addressed the jury in Frederick Manning’s defense, attempting to persuade his audience that "the female prisoner Manning premeditated, planned, and

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11 Certain methodological difficulties arise in discussing the history of British law because it includes three distinct (sometimes contradictory) systems: common law, statute law, and case law (Poovey 53). In the case of coverture, the issue is complicated as the law affected persons among the working and upper classes differently. For most working-class women, common law was thought to provide sufficient protection of a woman's person and property as both were "covered" in their entirety by her husband. However, under equity law, a woman's father might establish a separate estate to be held for the woman "under trust" and outside the control of her husband; but because of the high cost of contracting a lawyer to negotiate this type of marriage settlement, this form of protection was the exclusive reserve of women of the middle and upper classes (Doggett 38).

12 Albert Borowitz makes an extended case for this interpretation of the events leading up to and following the death of Patrick O'Connor, pointing to the plausibility that Fred committed the murder without Maria's assistance (318).

13 Mary Poovey describes the role of sexual difference and separate spheres on a larger scale, arguing that one strategy for fixing women's identity relied on subordinating "all other differences among women" to the "binary opposition between the sexes." The definition of womanhood must be carefully policed since, "the epistemological term woman could guarantee men's identity only if difference was fixed" (80).
concocted the murder, and that she made her husband her dupe and instrument for that purpose” (qtd. in "The Bermondsey Murder," 5 October 1849). For evidence of his version of the events, Wilkins leans heavily on Frederick's indiscretion when purchasing the murder weapon—a crow bar—and the lime used to precipitate the disintegration of O’Connor’s body. If Frederick had in fact sought lime and a crow bar with the intent of using these objects to murder O'Connor and to dispose of his body, and not as Wilkins contends, merely at the suggestion of Maria, he would have found less public and traceable ways to come by these items. Frederick appears thoroughly emasculated during the course of his trial; in the narrative provided by the defense, he is first cuckolded, then manipulated by his wife, who seeks to bring both her former lover and her husband to an early demise.

By linking her fictional creation to a media sensation, Braddon intervenes in a specific cultural conversation regarding the representation of female agency within the context of a criminal trial. The nineteenth century witnessed significant changes regarding the representation and prosecution of violent crime, particularly crimes that would fall under the scope of domestic violence. Granting that the Manning murder technically does not fall under the domestic violence heading, it is helpful to consider the trial in this context because the same shift in the construction of British femininity and masculinity that impacted the legal construction of marriage and domestic violence likewise affected the outcome of several headline cases involving female murderesses. Prior to the Victorian era, cases of domestic violence were rarely subject to criminal investigation, and when they were, indictments were infrequent, even in cases where
physical violence proved fatal. By contrast, Victoria's reign saw an increase in the numbers of men prosecuted for criminal violence against their female partners. The treatment of women was often heralded as a defining marker of civilized society, but unfortunately, as recent studies bring to light, this idealization of Victorian womanhood left little possibility for the expression of female agency and autonomy—not to mention that the emerging version of British masculinity grew out of the same racist logic which fueled England's imperial violence. Throughout the nineteenth century, British masculinity was increasingly defined against foreign expressions of masculinity thought to be more violent and misogynistic.

In this light, the conviction and execution of Maria Manning is the exception that proves the rule, the rule being that the ideal of Victorian femininity left little room for the possibility of female agency. This was a gap that some women—especially those considered middle class—were able to exploit in order literally to get away with murder.

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14 Martin Wiener provides extensive statistics to support this claim, explaining that "non-fatal domestic violence only occasionally entered eighteenth-century court records, and when it did, it was almost always at the lowest level, that of petty sessions" (149). In the rare instance where the criminal charge of murder or manslaughter was brought against the husband, indictment was rare and even in the face of glaring evidence, men went free (151). Maeve Doggett documents a similar trend in her extensive study of "wife beating" in Victorian England. Doggett argues the acceptance of the "power principle"—a husband's right to physically control his wife—lay at the heart of the system of coverture, and consequently, worked to justify a long history of marital violence. Doggett demonstrates the way in which a man remained immune to the laws of the state within the jurisdiction of his home. In her survey of various cases from the eighteenth-century through much of the nineteenth-century, Doggett lays bare the various ways in which "a husband was free to control his wife's behaviour" (57). If Wiener demonstrates the various ways domestic violence was becoming less tolerated by the law, Doggett represents the extent to which the courts continued to allow men to exercise their authority unchecked within the household. According to Doggett, through the nineteenth century, a husband’s control over wife went virtually uncensored by the law: "He could imprison her or force intercourse upon her with impunity. If she committed adultery she signed her own death warrant: the law recognised that he was partially justified in killing her by reducing the charge to manslaughter" (57).

15 The new national identity, Martin Wiener describes—"involved both self-control and care for the weaker sex, restraints upon violence, and protection of women"—and was continually defined against the "savagery" exhibited by foreign men (239).
In Mary Hartman's study of nineteenth-century female murderesses, she concludes that, of the thirteen cases she examines, those women who were most successful in avoiding the condemnation of the court were able to gain their legal immunity by personifying the feminine ideal. Hartman describes these cases as displaying the extent to which the "prevailing images of women not only were internalized and acted upon by the accused murderers themselves, but also how their judges, both inside and outside the courtrooms, were mesmerized by the popular stereotypes" (261). Those women were able to perform respectable femininity successfully, embodying "the new image of blameless and pure middle-class maiden," and were ultimately "accorded popular approval as irresponsible young ladies victimized by male inferiors" (Hartman 261).

Other women found reprieve from execution by pleading insanity; this verdict had the added convenience of allowing the court to punish women for their crimes without having to recognize the defendants as autonomous agents, acting on motives of anger, aggression, or revenge. As Jill Newton Ainsley's statistical analysis of the prevalence of insanity acquittals for murder demonstrates, from 1830 to 1901, women on trial for murder on the whole found much greater success than did men in obtaining acquittal on the basis of insanity. And, as Ainsley demonstrates, the frequency with which women

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16 Randa Helfield tracks a similar phenomenon in cases of involving female murderers. Helfield demonstrates the way the representation of these women in the courtroom and in the news reflect "Victorian society's fears of women who did not behave in traditionally 'feminine' ways, and its desire to reconstruct their behavior so as to make it conform to more acceptable gender stereotypes" (163). Helfield illustrates how the defense in all three high profile cases she explores rested on transforming the defendant from a villain into a victim—a strategy that, even in the face of glaring evidence to the contrary, proved most effective.

17 According to Ainsley: "28 per cent of women charged with murder pleaded insanity; 91 per cent of those women were successful (thus 25 per cent of women's murderers were attributed to insanity), and murder charges comprised 77 per cent of women's insanity pleas. Among men, 21 per cent of those charged with murder pleaded insanity, 51 per cent were successful (thus only 15 per cent of men's murders were blamed on insanity), and murder charges comprised 60 per cent of men's insanity pleas. The vast majority of
were acquitted for murder on the grounds of insanity worked only to solidify the medical logic justifying these decisions. Prominent medical psychologists like Henry Maudsley identified women's reproductive systems as the cause of insanity (both temporary and permanent), making it all the easier to view a glaringly unfeminine act like murder as the erratic act of a madwoman. In turn, the number of women (in contrast to men) found innocent of murder on grounds of insanity provided a further basis for the belief that insanity was more prevalent among members of the female sex (Ainsley 42).

But even further, the method used to determine insanity in the courtroom was often far from scientific in any expert sense; as Roger Smith describes, medical psychologists frequently employed "commonsense criteria" in the courtroom to determine the sanity of the defendant (62). For example, in cases involving women who murdered their own children, grounds for insanity were often met on the basis that murder ran so contrary to a woman's maternal instincts that the defendant must have been insane at the time of the event.18 Given this legal context, Maria Manning’s failure to escape execution is striking. While it is impossible to say definitively why her defense proved unsuccessful, she clearly failed where others had managed to succeed in

women who sought an insanity acquittal received one: 87 per cent of women's insanity pleas were accepted, compared to only 59 per cent of men's insanity pleas. Thus 10 per cent of women and 5 per cent of men placed on trial for murder, attempted murder, manslaughter, or assault were acquitted on grounds of insanity” (42). Martin Wiener traces the same trend in his study of marital violence in Victorian England: “The second half of the century saw a decline in the prosecution of women for serious crimes, a larger decline in their conviction, and a still larger decline in the length of their prison sentences. As for the number of women executed, it fell almost to nothing. The one figure that did rise for women (even more than for men) was that of insanity verdicts. If it was easier to see men as bad, it was correspondingly easier to see women as mad” (Wiener 133).

18 For example, Ainsley points to the case of Eleanor Bell who was brought trial after stabbing her ten-year-old son to death; according to an article published in the Times, the judge determined the defendant insane based on the fact that, before the murder, she had always treated her son affectionately (44).
personifying victimized femininity. This seems to be partly the result of her sexual involvement with the victim, but also a consequence of her asserting her psychological autonomy. Her main line of defense, though reasonable, rests on the divergence of her husband's desires from her own. It is also safe to assume Maria's foreignness aggravated her predicament; the French were regarded as a source of corruption—often in the form of sexually explicit novels—preying on the minds of innocent British subjects. Perhaps for all of these reasons, Maria was executed in a moment where significantly fewer women faced the scaffold.

The fullest implications of Robert's veiled accusation are left unstated. If the historical narrative continues to inform the reader's conception of Braddon's protagonist, it must be covertly so, as this association poses a direct challenge to the commonly maintained belief in women's inherent passivity, a belief often invoked in the Victorian defense of separate private and public spheres. The nineteenth-century literary critic, E.S. Dallas, criticized Lady Audley's Secret for its false and unnatural portrayal of women. According to Dallas, unlike the life of Lady Audley, "the life of women cannot well be described as a life of action. When women are thus put forward to lead the action of a plot, they must be urged into a false position. To get vigorous action they are described as rushing into crime, and doing masculine deeds"(297). Natalie and Ronald Schroeder cite Dallas’s verdict as exemplifying the belief, commonly held among Victorians, that "a woman's life or experience cannot generate a plot" (38). Moreover, this feminine ideal precludes women from carrying out a deviant plot of their own devising without falling into hysterics. And while Lady Audley occasionally loses her composure, for the most part, as Schroeder argues, her gender-defying coolness under pressure "challenges
directly the conviction that the distinct and separate characters and roles of men and women (their separate spheres) are grounded in biological—not social—differences” (39). This challenge was certainly not lost on the editors of *Punch*. Following the publication and vast success of *Lady Audley's Secret*, *Punch* includes a cartoon which features a lady's maid placing a woman's wig featuring Lady Audley's characteristic curly locks on an otherwise bald man wearing a dress and requiring a shave (Figure 3). The caption reads: Lady's Audley's Secret. The satirist here appeals to the reader's common sense conception of female psychology; if Lady Audley fails to manifest this feminine ideal, then it follows she must not actually be a woman. In my final chapter on late-Victorian sexology, I will more closely examine the popular association of female masculinity and criminality, but here, *Punch*, as usual, can be relied upon to make plain the reactionary impulses shaping Victorian popular culture. It would seem that Robert raises the specter of the culturally loaded Manning case, only to abandon it in deference to the common sense conception of femininity, and in favor of a narrative which would divest Lady Audley of the authority to methodically plot her way up the socioeconomic ladder.

"The only inheritance I had to expect from my mother"

Braddon subtly indicates the degree to which Robert's detective work is guided by the common sense belief in women's subservience and susceptibility to hysteria, but the narrative invites the reader to pursue her own evidentiary associations through the various doubled female figures she encounters. Robert eventually follows his selective mode of circumstantial evidence to the conclusion that Lady Audley, unlike Maria Manning, is ultimately more mad than bad. Yet, by presenting the reader with multiple plausible, yet
contradictory, narratives constructed out of the theory of circumstantial evidence, Braddon indicates the possibility that some associations may in fact be merely arbitrary, sensationalized narratives disguised as detective science.

In the dénouement, we are presented the genetic doubling of Lady Audley in her estranged young mother. Lady Audley is estranged from her mother at an early age, but, as she confesses to Robert—after admitting to her role in George's disappearance—she learned the secret of her mother's condition when she was ten years old. Her father brought her to a "mad-house," where she encountered a woman whose outward physical appearance and manner closely echo her own description. Contrary to her expectations, Lady Audley finds her mother:

no raving, straight-waistcoated maniac, guarded by zealous gaolers; but a golden-haired, blue-eyed, girlish creature, who seemed as frivolous as a butterfly, and who skipped towards us with her yellow curls decorated with natural flowers, and saluted us with radiant smiles, and gay, ceaseless chatter. (359)

In an earlier moment in the novel, Lady Audley is described in nearly identical terms as "very pretty [but] rather a childish beauty though, with large clear blue eyes, and pale golden ringlets, that fall in a feathery shower over her throat and shoulders" (277). Like her mother, Lady Audley is "frivolous" in manner, "childlike" both in her appearance and comportment. The resemblance between the two figures grows stronger in the course of Lady Audley's confession, as she describes her mother's psychological deterioration in conjunction with her own descent into madness. According to Lady Audley, her mother's madness "was a hereditary disease transmitted to her from her mother, who had died mad. She, my mother, had been, or had appeared sane up to the hour of my birth; but from that hour her intellect had decayed, until she had become what I saw her" (359). It would seem that Mrs. Maldon suffers from "puerperal mania," a condition which Lady
Audley claims she has also inherited. This turn of events, Showalter argues, closely echoes a case study produced by the English psychiatrist John Conolly, in which a "sensitive woman, whose mother had been insane, became deranged and melancholic almost as soon as her poor little child came into the world of want” (qtd. in "Female Malady"). As Jill Matus describes, this diagnosis accounted for "about ten per cent of asylum inmates, and could range from anything like mild melancholia to incurable psychosis" (342). Popular medical opinion maintained that women in the post-partum stage were more susceptible to insanity (Matus 342).

This textual doubling is redoubled by an intertextual association; Mrs. Maldon's condition mirrors the even more famous Victorian literary example of insanity passing down the maternal line in Jane Eyre (1857). According to Rochester, the insanity of his wife, Bertha, was passed down from her mother; here, Brontë is drawing upon the widely held belief that not only were women more prone to insanity but, as Showalter explains, "since the reproductive system was the source of mental illness in women, women were the prime carriers of madness, twice as likely to transmit it as were fathers” (67).

When Lady Audley says to Robert that, after learning of her mother's psychological condition, she realized "the only inheritance I had to expect from my mother was—insanity," she is

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19 For further discussion of the historical context surrounding Mrs. Maldon's and her daughter's psychological condition, see: Schroeder, 54-62; Matus.

20 Jill Matus takes issue with this point, arguing that Lady Audley's "fictional predecessor is not so much mad Berta in Jane Eyre, the deranged animal, of giant propensities, but rather someone like Dora Spenlow [David Copperfield] the angel who (had she lived to become a mother) might have had the same balancing trouble with her mind as she has with the household accounts” (342). It is true that Lady Audley's symptoms do not square with Bertha Mason's violent outbursts, but then again, her experiment with arson at the Castle Inn suggests she may in fact be closer to this model of feminine psychological disorder than to the hapless Spenlow.

21 In support of this claim, Showalter cites the British alienist Andrew Wynter, who writes in The Borderlands of Insanity (1875): “It is agreed by all alienist physicians that girls are far more likely to inherit insanity from their mothers than from the other parent” (67).
testifying to the popularity of the belief that psychological disorders passed down the maternal line.

The widely credited medical belief that women were more susceptible to nervous disorders was based on a fundamental confusion of associative and causal relationships, where arbitrary associations were taken as a sufficient basis from which to draw essential correspondences. This rhetorical sleight of hand creates the illusion of common sense in the belief that female biology must precipitate or, at the very least, leave women more susceptible to hysteria which was itself a catch-all term associated with an absurdly wide range of behaviors from jealousy and distraction to depression and intense anxiety. Hysteria became then not only a feminine disease, but a disease so closely associated with the female body that it would suggest the female body and mind were, by virtue of being female, inherently flawed. As with any unstable chemical compound, with women there is always the latent potential for explosion (or hysterical outburst), given the right conditions.

Following his mode of circumstantial evidence, Robert reveals Lady Audley's "true" identity, her role in George's disappearance, and the secret of her family history which precipitated these events. Within this logical framework, the psychological condition of Lady Audley's mother is transformed from a mere unfortunate circumstance into evidence. As evidence, the fact of Mrs. Maldon's insanity takes on a special

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22Helen Small outlines the way in which the "traits ascribed to hysteria increased markedly in range and number during both the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. By the end of that period the hysteric had carte blanche when it came to self-expression. She could possess any (and would likely give signs of several) of the following characteristics: a nervous temperament, violent and unstable emotions, depression, excitement, poor attention space, disturbed intellect, disturbed will, deficient judgment, dependency, immaturity, egocentricity, attention-seeking, deceitfulness, theatricality, stimulation, jealousy, fearfulness, and irritability" (17). It was not until World War I, and the resulting high rates of "shell-shock" observable among enlisted men, that hysteria ceased to be classified as a primarily female disease (Small 17).
relevance to the case as it possesses an explanatory power in the recreation of events surrounding George's disappearance. In this account, Lady Audley's anger is rendered incoherent. Her criminal behavior does not signify her desperate frustration with a social system that would leave her dependent on an absentee husband with no means of improving her financial situation, but instead becomes simply the erratic actions of a madwoman.  

But just as soon as we are directed toward this narrative resolution, Braddon begins to undercut this version of Lady Audley and the implications of her crime by creating ambiguity around the actual state of Lady Audley's mental health. First, she reveals Lady Audley's fluency in popular psychological rhetoric to suggest that Lady Audley is merely performing insanity, just as she has performed proper femininity, to distract her audience from her criminal behavior. Finding herself backed into a corner by her nephew, Lady Audley goes on the defensive, attempting to convince her husband that Robert has lost his mind. Lady Audley's tone diverges dramatically from her usual "frivolous" manner as she calmly conveys her reasoning for thinking Robert insane. She poses the following question to her husband: "What is the first appalling sign of mental aberration?" And in response to her own query, she answers:

The mind becomes stationary; the brain stagnates; the current of the mind resolves itself in a monotone. As the waters of a tideless pool putrefy by reason of their stagnation, the mind becomes turbid and corrupt through lack of action; and perpetual reflection upon one subject resolves itself into monomania. (301)

While "the big words sounded strange" coming from Lady Audley's "rosy lips," she

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23 See Matus for further discussion of how the diagnosis of Lady Audley's insanity works to "displace the economic and class issues already raised in the novel and to deflect their uncomfortable implications" (334).
demonstrates in this moment a depth of intellect previously unseen, as well as a fluency in the language of popular psychology. And even while this scheme proves unsuccessful, it leaves open the possibility that, in her final desperation, she would employ a similar strategy to evade punishment for her crimes. Either way, she finds a much more willing audience in trying to convince others of her own insanity, in part because it allows the Audleys to avoid public scandal, but also because it allows common sense conceptions of femininity and masculinity to remain undisturbed.

Lady Audley is not the only one to raise suspicions regarding the status of Robert's masculinity and mental health; Robert himself seems to lose the strength of his convictions as he wonders if his tireless investigations have been inspired by "monition or monomania" (271). The suggestion that Robert embodies another of the novel's feminine (or at least effeminate) doubles lurks just beneath the surface of the text. Before Robert is inspired to play the part of the amateur detective, he is characterized as "rather a curious fellow" by virtue of his dandified tastes—he prefers "smoking his German pipe, and reading French novels" to exerting himself as a barrister—and his "listless, dawdling, indifferent, irresolute manner" (71). Indeed, Robert's sanity and masculinity hang in the balance of Lady Audley's guilt. Braddon emphasizes the fine, even indiscernible line that separates sanity from insanity, creating an epistemological instability which undercuts the credibility of Dr. Mosgrave's diagnosis of Lady Audley and the ethicality of her subsequent confinement.

Through Robert, Braddon invites the reader to view the theory of circumstantial

24 Richard Nemesvari famously traces the sexual implications of Robert's dress and behavior and homoerotic undertones of his relationship with George. More recently, Jennifer Kushnier provides important critical context for understanding the significance behind Robert’s and George’s attendance of Eton boarding school.
evidence in a critical light. In a weak moment, Robert wonders:

What if this chain of evidence which I have constructed link by link is woven out of my own folly? What if this edifice of horror and suspicion is a mere collection of crotchets—the nervous fancies of a hypochondriacal bachelor? (271)

In this moment of self-doubt, Robert conveys the method and manner by which the illusion of causal relationships is constructed out of the paranoid fantasies of "hypochondriacal bachelors." The moral authority Robert assumes through his role as detective and executor of his uncle's wishes rests on the coherency of the logic by which he condemns Lady Audley and confines her to an insane asylum. While Robert doubts his sanity in pursuing his aunt so relentlessly based on a series of potentially unrelated circumstances, the narrator underscores Robert's concerns, impressing the reader with the fragility of human psychology: "There is nothing so delicate, so fragile as that invisible balance upon which the mind is always trembling. Mad to-day and sane to-morrow" (407).

More than just Lady Audley's guilt is at stake for Robert; he finds new energy and a more masculine vigor in his detective work, but the authority of his new-found social position, as Braddon emphasizes, rests on a tenuous foundation. If Robert proves madder than his aunt, the gendered system of common sense he draws upon in order to have Lady Audley confined to an insane asylum will be exposed as spurious and arbitrary. As I have attempted to demonstrate, this logic—the theory of circumstantial evidence—is both analogous to, and guided by nineteenth-century common sense conceptions of the female mind and body. Under this logic, Lady Audley's illicit behavior implies that she is like her mother, naturalizing the popular Victorian model of femininity which rendered any calculated, rational act of female transgression all but incomprehensible.
Lady Audley's madness is necessary, then, not only to protect the Audley name from public scandal and Robert Audley's new-found moral authority, but also to preserve the reigning model of Victorian femininity. This becomes increasingly apparent by virtue of the ambiguity of Dr. Mosgrave's diagnosis. Robert initially conceals the fact of Lady Audley's attempt at murder in presenting the case to the doctor, who in turn provides the clearly unsatisfactory diagnosis that "there is no evidence of madness in anything that she had done. . . . She employed intelligent means, and she carried out a conspiracy which required coolness and deliberation in its execution" (383). Dr. Mosgrave is aware, however, of the role Robert desires him to play in this transaction. He apologizes in advance for the unhelpfulness of this initial diagnosis; having heard Robert's censored version of events, he replies: "I fear that I shall not be of any use to you . . . I do not believe that she is mad" (383). But, when Robert reveals Lady Audley's attempt at murder, Mosgrave changes his tune declaring: "There is latent insanity! Insanity which might never appear; or which might appear only once or twice in a lifetime" (385). And with this "insight," Dr. Mosgrave and Robert strike upon the logical loophole that will allow them to confine Lady Audley to an insane asylum and avoid public scandal. Under the popular nineteenth-century model of female psychology, however, Dr. Mosgrave's assessment could as easily be extended to any member of the female sex.

If vague, this diagnosis proves no less necessary in preserving the binary definitions of Victorian masculinity and femininity. If Lady Audley attempted to murder her husband with her rational faculties intact, one is forced to reassess the image of innocent and vulnerable femininity through which British masculinity, and even national identity, is derived. By declaring Lady Audley insane, Robert and Dr. Mosgrave attempt
to control the significance of her rebellion. Granted this course of action allows Lady Audley to escape the scaffold, we are not meant to regard her punishment as an act of mercy. In an effort to assure Robert that Lady Audley will prove no more of a threat to society in the asylum than she would in prison, Dr. Mosgrove offers the following morbid metaphor: "If you were to dig a grave for her in the nearest churchyard and bury her alive in it, you could not more safely shut her from the world and all worldly associations" (386). By replacing the death sentence with confinement in an asylum, Braddon effectively collapses the distance between these two disciplinary mechanisms, suggesting that the so called "moral management" system is just a modernized version of capital punishment. And as a disciplinary system, it is perhaps more effective, because it does not rely on spectacles of power that can prove unwieldy—as the execution of Maria Manning so clearly illustrates—but works to render acts of rebellion invisible and incoherent.25 Lady Audley's behavior is absorbed into a cognitive framework that transforms acts of resistance into evidence which testifies, in turn, to the inherently unstable nature of female psychology and thereby reinforces already established social narratives.

In rendering ambiguous both the status of Dr. Mosgrave's diagnosis and the credibility of Robert's detective work, Braddon leaves open the possibility that earlier instances of doubled figures might still be incorporated in the reader's chain of circumstantial evidence. And while critics like D.A. Miller have influentially argued that

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25 Chase and Levinson make a similar argument about the way Dr. Mosgrave's diagnosis seeks to contain the political implications of Lady Audley's actions: "The name 'madness' marks her revolt as an anomaly; no longer an intelligible response to suffocating constraint, it is a 'hereditary taint,' a diagnosis that safely particularizes her wild abandonment of wifely duty" (208).
the pleasure of the sensation novel rests in the "absorption" and dissipation of its "shocks," I argue that this reading of the sensation novel insists on the arbitrary prioritization of Robert's constricted form of circumstantial evidence over the other patterns of associative logic clearly operating throughout the narrative (164). For Miller, the sensation novel threatens to disrupt the status quo only temporarily, but ultimately naturalizes middle-class morality through the "dissolution of sensation in the achievement of decided meaning" (165). But in the case of *Lady Audley's Secret*, Miller’s argument privileges Robert's detective narrative over the circumstantial evidence gathered by the reader. This in and of itself might not present an issue, but, at key moments, the narrator seems invested in undermining the narrative that Robert constructs. Rather than achieving any "decided meaning," Braddon's novel preserves a thrilling undecidedness around the question of Lady Audley's sanity.

**We Might Have Mistaken the Bride for a Ghost:**
**Scenes of Marital Cruelty**

When the implications of this central ambiguity are drawn out, *Lady Audley's Secret* reveals itself as a meditation on female agency. Lady Audley is either the passive victim of insanity inherited through her mother's side, or the mastermind of an ambitious plot to obtain power and wealth. Evoking the gothic origins of the sensation novel through Lady Audley's ghostly double, her handmaid Phoebe, Braddon gestures toward the latter possibility. Like Mrs. Maldon, Phoebe closely resembles Lady Audley in outward appearance. But this "likeness" presents itself in a most eerie fashion; it is not a

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26Elizabeth Steere likewise identifies Phoebe as the gothic double of her mistress; however, Steere maintains that Phoebe is literally demonic, controlling Lady Audley through her telepathic powers: "Phoebe is not merely a failed duplication of her mistress, but is an integral and instigative character who acts as her mistress's dark doppelganger and Svengali-like influencer" (303).
"striking likeness; a stranger might have seen them both together, and yet have failed to remark it" (138). It is a resemblance that registers only in "dim and shadowy lights"—an atmosphere suggestive of phantasmagoric illusions or supernatural apparitions. This shadowy realm is, of course, suggestive also of the dark recesses of the mind, where thoughts are present only through vague suggestion, beyond the sharp focus which is characteristic of conscious thought. It is in this liminal space, in "certain dim and shadowy lights," where "meeting Phoebe Marks gliding softly through the dark oak passages of the court, or under the shrouded avenues in the garden, you might have easily mistaken her for my lady" (138).

The most distinctive characteristic of Phoebe's appearance is the absence of distinction. Her complexion resembles her Lady's except that, where Lady Audley's features are highlighted through a pleasant contrast in coloring—her hair "yellow shot with gold," her "eyebrows and eyelashes are dark brown," her complexion "pink and rosy"—Phoebe fades into a sort of colorless obscurity. Phoebe's outward appearance blends together into a "sickly grey": "not one tinge of crimson flushed the waxen whiteness of her cheeks; not one shadow of brown redeemed the pale insipidity of her eyebrows and eyelashes; not one glimmer of gold or auburn relieved the dull flaxen of her hair" (65). Even on her wedding day, dressed in one of Lady Audley's silk gowns, she appears specter-like:

A very dim and shadowy lady; vague of outline, and faint of colouring; with eyes, hair, complexion, and dress all melting into such pale and uncertain shades that, in the obscure light of the foggy November morning, a superstitious stranger might have mistaken the bride for the ghost of some other bride, dead and buried in the vaults below the church. (143)

As Lady Audley's shadowy double, Phoebe personifies the obfuscation of female agency
under the system of legal coverture. This process of erasure, by which a single woman was transformed into a *femme covert* whose person and legal identity were "covered" by her husband, is not only visually rendered though Phoebe's appearance but thematized through her marriage to Luke Marks. Luke Marks proves a brutal specimen of masculinity; he is unintelligent and a violent drunk. Not subtly in Luke, Braddon evokes the portrait of the brutish, working-class man. Luke is a "big, broad-shouldered, stupid-looking clodhopper": "Rosy-cheeked, red-haired, and bull-necked, he was not unlike one of the stout oxen grazing in the meadows round about the Court" (66). In this description of working-class marriage, Braddon echoes contemporary conceptions of domestic violence, a phenomenon thought to be an issue beyond the pale of middle-class marriage. And yet, as I will show, by yoking the figure of Lady Audley to Phoebe Marks, Braddon brings the threat of domestic violence into the middle-class home. In doing so, Braddon challenges the common sense conceptions of domestic violence which informed debates surrounding the passage of the 1857 Divorce Act.

*Lady Audley's Secret* emerges in a transitional moment in the legal history of marriage. Only five years prior to the novel’s publication, the Matrimonial Causes Act

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27 Tromp cites the parliamentary debates surrounding the Divorce Act for Victorian conceptions of working-class masculinity. Where middle and upper class men were not thought to present the threat of violence to their wives, working-class men by contrast were perceived as "drunken, profligate husbands" prone to brutal acts of violence (73).

28 In her extended study of the legal history of "wife beating" and marriage law, Maeve Doggett provides significant evidence, including nineteenth century studies of marital violence, to support the view that physical cruelty was thought to be a problem exclusive to the working classes (120). Marlene Tromp's work on the representation of domestic violence in sensation fiction works from the same premise to argue that, by introducing to "Victorian Britain a language of sexual violence in the middle and upper classes," the sensation novel "participated in a transformation of the terms of the legal debates and ultimately disrupted the Victorian vision of violence" (8).
was passed by Parliament. The 1857 Act established a divorce court, shifting authority on this issue from an ecclesiastical to a civil authority. While the Act did not put men and women on an even playing field—men were able to obtain a divorce on the grounds of adultery while women were required to prove both cruelty and adultery—it did allow for persons to obtain a judicial divorce as opposed to what would now be considered a legal separation, divorce *a mensa et thoro* (from table and bed). In the face of growing evidence presented in divorce court proceedings, it became increasingly difficult to maintain the view that marital violence was restricted to the working classes. Phoebe confesses to Lady Audley in a moment of intimacy that she is too afraid to break off her engagement to Luke for fear of how he might respond. The physical failure of Phoebe's voice in the moment of refusing Luke's claim upon her before the marriage becomes a legal reality after their vow:

> There have been times when I've made up the very sentence I meant to say to him, telling him that I couldn't keep my faith with him; but the words have died upon my lips, and I've sat looking at him, with a choking sensation in my throat that wouldn't let me speak. I daren't refuse to marry him. I've often watched and watched him, as he has sat slicing away at a hedge-stake with his great clasp-knife, till I have thought that it is just such men as he who have decoyed their sweethearts into lonely places, and murdered them for being false to their word. (141)

The history of marital violence among the working classes is a bleak one; even into the nineteenth century, the courts reveal a willingness to forgive wife-beating and even murder as the unavoidable result of provocation and marital discord. But Lady Audley,

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29 Braddon's first patron was John Gilby, a man with a controlling personality who also fancied himself a legitimate suitor. Gilby became increasingly jealous of Braddon's relationship to Maxwell, and shortly after he informed her of his discovery of Maxwell's first wife, the two broke ties. It is likely that Gilby learned of Mary Crowley through the publisher, Frederick Greenwood—Gilby only ever referred to his source by the initials "F.G." However, because Gilby's anonymous source was not likely someone intimately connected to Maxwell, Wolff concludes, the fact of Maxwell's marriage was more than likely something of common knowledge (Wolff 102).
somewhat uncharacteristically, responds as the voice of reason.

In this moment, as with Lady Audley’s lecture on monomania, the reader witnesses a depth of knowledge in the protagonist which suggests that her frivolous manner may be a calculated performance. Lady Audley confronts Phoebe with an irresistible logic. She puts the case plainly: "If murder is in him," Phoebe would be no "safer as his wife. If you thwarted him, or made him jealous; if he wanted to marry another woman, or to get hold of some poor, pitiful bit of money of yours, couldn't he murder you then?" (141). Lady Audley's advice suggests her own acquaintance with this sort of domestic narrative, a familiarity which is further underscored by the signs of physical violence she herself bears on her wrist after her encounter with George. When Robert notices the "four slender, purple marks, such as might have been made by the four fingers of a powerful hand that had grasped the delicate wrist a shade too roughly," Lady Audley claims the marks were actually the result of own doing. But her excuse proves transparent: "A narrow ribbon, bound tightly, might have left some such marks" except that "across one of the faint purple marks there was a darker tinge, as if a ring worn on one of these strong and cruel fingers had been ground into the tender flesh" (123). If Phoebe confesses that she lives under the threat of violence by her husband, it is, in fact, Lady Audley who bears the marks of physical cruelty. And while there is a difference between grabbing someone too tightly by the wrist and the type of mistreatment Phoebe fears, the incident creates an association between the two unhappy unions. By associating Phoebe with Lady Audley, Braddon challenges the assumption that women's social status will protect them from marital cruelty; and further, the narrative associates the kinds of ill
treatment each woman suffered in marriage, thus widening the category of "marital cruelty" to include more than physical abuse.

Schroeder puts George's neglect and eventual abandonment of his wife in context; even after the passage of the Divorce Act, George's actions would not have been sufficient cause for divorce. However, Braddon's contemporaries, and it would appear Braddon herself, had identified the issue of spousal neglect as crucial to the cause of marital reform (34). Following this logic, we might read Lady Audley's violence against her husband as a form of self-defense; just as Phoebe has little hope to find protection from her husband under the law, unable to achieve separation from her husband under the terms set by the Divorce Act, Lady Audley seeks to preserve herself against her husband's claim to her person.

Braddon uses the double to create associational patterns to a similar purpose in the sensational novel she began composing when Robin Goodfellow magazine folded in 1861 and the serialization of Lady Audley's Secret was thus interrupted. With the discontinuance of the magazine, Braddon assumed Lady Audley's Secret would be left unfinished and unpublished in its entirety and so began work on Aurora Floyd (1863). But Braddon had underestimated the investment of her readership, and after receiving many letters from the public, the serialization of her first novel resumed in Six Penny Magazine (Wolff 5). When Braddon commenced work on Aurora Floyd, she "did not mean to finish 'Lady A.'"; this intention shows to the extent that the two novels feature very similar plots (Wolff 4). Bigamy novels both, the chief divergence between the two works is that, where Lady Audley is guilty and made to suffer for her sins, Aurora Floyd—similarly charged with murdering her husband—proves innocent and, once
vindicated, is allowed to live happily ever after. Unlike Lady Audley, Aurora is a black-haired beauty and the beloved daughter of Archibald Floyd, a prominent Scottish banker. Spoiled by an indulgent father, Aurora "emerged from the nursery" with a "very decided tendency to become what is called 'fast'" (62). In others words, Aurora acted "fearless," defying social conventions and the bounds of feminine propriety. She also grew impulsive and, against her father's wishes, married a scoundrel, James Conyers, who she comes to realize has married her not for love, but for money. With this knowledge, Aurora breaks free of the marriage, promising to pay Conyers in exchange for his silence.

When Aurora reads of Conyers’s death in a newspaper, she believes she is free to remarry (unaware that the death notice will ultimately prove false). She marries a "big empty-headed" Yorkshire man, John Mellish, and goes to live on the Mellish estate with her beloved elderly mastiff, Bow-Wow.

Under the employ of John Mellish is a "softy"—Steeve Hargraves—to whom Aurora takes an instant dislike. In a scene that has received much critical discussion, Aurora horse-whips Steeve after he violently kicks Bow-Wow with his "iron bound clog" (193). Witnessing this act of cruelty, Aurora herself reacts violently. She "sprang upon him like a beautiful tigress, and, catching the collar of his fustian jacket in her slight hands, rooted him to the spot upon which he stood" (193). But Aurora's unchecked, and decidedly unladylike, aggression continues, as: "she disengaged her right hand from his collar, and rained a shower of blows upon his clumsy shoulders with her slender whip; a mere toy, with emeralds set in its golden head, but stinging like a rod of flexible steel in that little hand" (193). John's response to Aurora's violence is perplexing; he chastises Aurora for acting out of turn in whipping Steeve, not because he condemns this sort of
violence, but because it was "her duty to let me do it for her" (195). He subsequently whips Steeve himself and relieves him of his duties as "stable hand," but not before paying him two years’ salary.

Marlene Tromp explores this scene in her study of the sensation novel and marital violence in the nineteenth century, arguing that John's behavior suggests a complicity between the two men. This association is further underscored by striking similarities between the two characters: both men are of athletic build and more inclined toward "common matters" than intellectual endeavor (115). Tromp is also able to demonstrate convincingly how the narrative "grafts the dog to Aurora"; the implications of this doubling effect cuts across the conventionally held beliefs about domestic violence in the nineteenth century (Tromp 151). By linking Bow-Wow to Aurora, Braddon suggests the potential for violence within the middle-class home—a space commonly believed to be safe against a category of behavior typically relegated to the working classes. As I have demonstrated, these narrative doublings destabilize the various assumptions on which the novel's final portrait of middle-class domesticity rests. Within the space of the sensation novel, these doubles are no longer ghostly, but then again they are no less haunting than their gothic forbears, as they threaten to expose the naturalized gender roles which structure society as the artificial constructs of “hypochondriacal bachelors.”

"The Good People All Happy and at Peace"

_Lady Audley's Secret_ ends nearly as it began, with a marriage and picaresque vision of tranquil domesticity; and yet, given the lingering doubts the reader may hold regarding the demise of Braddon's protagonist, the ending rings hollow. We encounter Robert Audley, living with his wife—George's sister—and their small child. George has
made a full recovery and is a frequent visitor to Mr. Audley's "fairy cottage . . . a fantastical dwelling-place of rustic woodwork, whose latticed windows look out upon the river" (445). This retreat into the realm of the fantastic—the fairy tale—strikes a discordant note within the established generic framework of the sensation novel so characterized by its expression of modernity and the psychology of the modern subject. More so, as this final episode "At Peace" seems positively tongue-in-cheek following, as it does so closely, after Lady Audley's final chapter, "Buried Alive."

Moreover, Braddon draws attention to the banality of the novel's final scenes; the narrator interjects with a playful appeal: "I hope no one will take objection to my story because the end of it leaves the good people all happy and at peace" (46). But even these final words create a doubling effect, echoing as they do an early description of the country landscape, the bucolic appearance of which disguises a history of terrible crimes. Before Robert has even begun to suspect there is something amiss about his uncle's young and beautiful new wife, and before George’s mysterious disappearance and the commencement of the detective plot proper, the following image cues the reader into the generic mode of the novel:

We hear every day of murders committed in the country. Brutal and treacherous murders; slow, protracted agonies from poisons administered by some kindred hand; sudden and violent deaths by cruel blows, inflicted with a stake cut from some spreading oak, whose very shadow promised—peace. In the country of which I write, I have been shown a meadow in which, on a quiet summer Sunday evening, a young farmer murdered the girl who had loved and trusted him; and

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Nicholas Daly argues in *Literature, Technology, and Modernity* that, in fact, the sensation novel trained and acclimated readers to the chaos and hectic pace of modern life (10-56); Eva Badowska argues that Braddon's novel, like Stoker's *Dracula*, represented "nineteenth century up-to-date with a vengeance because it betokened the rising awareness of modernity's tendency toward rapid obsolescence" (157); Aeron Haynie likewise notices the generic departure signaled at the end of the novel as it offers "an even more remote and unrealistic vision of rural, preindustrial England" than we are treated to in the initial picaresque depiction of Audley Court.
yet even now, with the stain of that foul deed upon it, the aspect of the spot is—
*peace*. No crime has ever been committed in the worst rookeries about Seven
Dials that has not been also done in the face of that sweet rustic calm which still,
in spite of all, we look on with a tender, half-mournful yearning, and associate
with—*peace*. (*emphasis mine*, 92)

This moment is emblematic of the sensation novel as it violently yokes together domestic
realism with scenes of crime and violence, forecasting the various shocks and thrills
associated with the disruption—even destruction—of middle-class domesticity. This
scene trains the reader to view the world as the consumer of sensation fiction, to expect
happy surfaces to give way to criminal depths. If Robert's chain of circumstantial
evidence merely affirms what he is already predisposed to believe, the narrative's series
of feminine doubles leads the reader, no less infected with "detective fever" than Robert,
against the grain of commonly received conceptions of female psychology. Even as the
narrator insists that the conclusion leaves the "good people . . . at peace," the reader is
still seeing double, reminded "the face of that sweet rustic calm" may belie a history of
"foul deeds."

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Whether or not the various doubles suggested by Braddon's personal life ever left the
author with a sense of unease akin to the sort of ambivalence that the conclusion of *Lady
Audley's Secret* inspires in the reader, it is impossible to know. But just four years prior to
Braddon's success with *Lady Audley's Secret*, her mentor, frequent correspondent, and the
novel's dedicatee, Edward Bulwer Lytton, had his wife, Rosina, confined to an insane
asylum after she threatened to injure his political career by publicly complaining that she
had been ill-treated by her husband (Blain 211). Not only had Rosina endured physical
and psychological abuse at the hands of her husband, but Edward worked also to
blackball his wife's literary career. Using his influence as an established and successful author, Edward kept publishers from printing her novels, seeking to silence his wife and secure his financial sovereignty over her (Blain 229). It must certainly have occurred to Braddon that Bulwer Lytton might have served her in a similar manner by using his clout in the literary world to impede Braddon's success. Evidence in this vein is also suggested by the manner in which Rosina resembles Lady Audley.\textsuperscript{31} Not only were both women forcibly confined to an insane asylum, but, in both cases, the issue of sanity proves less important to their commitment than a male desire to prevent them from creating a public scandal. In a letter to a friend, Rosina writes of her husband's abuse; defending herself against the charge that it is in "bad taste" to make her grievances public, she writes: "Exposure is the only thing that complex monster dreads, and consequently the only check I have upon him" (quoted in Blain 219). But when Braddon writes to her mentor concerning the final scenes of her novel, she does not betray the slightest hint that she has made the connection in her own mind, or that Bulwer Lytton might be reminded by her novel of his own personal scandals. Instead, she distances herself from her creation by confessing that the entire work had been written under the weight of a pressing deadline, leaving little time to confirm the plausibility of Lady Audley's demise:

\begin{quote}
I wrote the third & some part of the second vol of "Lady A." in less than a fortnight, & had the printer at me all the time. I had no one to consult about 'Maisons de Santé' & it was only when the book was printed that I heard from a lady whose husband was an inmate of such a house, that what I had done abroad was more impossible than it would have been at home. (qtd. in "Devoted Disciple" 12)
\end{quote}

It is possible, like the majority of respectable Victorian society, that Braddon simply dismissed Rosina and her grievances as the incoherent ramblings of a madwoman. And

\textsuperscript{31} For an extended discussion of these correspondences see: Tomailuolo, 2-40; Matus, 347-351.
so, perhaps, she saw no reason for caution in presenting Bulwer Lytton with her fictional creation, a woman whose insanity is quite conveniently posited in place of a criminal verdict. But Braddon's plea of ignorance is doubly surprising here because, as I have already mentioned, Bulwer Lytton was not the only significant man and professional mentor in her life to have a wife confined in an insane asylum.

Whether it ever occurred to Braddon that, with less luck and professional savvy she might have found herself in the place of Rosina or Mary Anne, we have no evidence that she confronted either of their husbands about their possible injustices or about the exploitation of common sense regarding female psychology as inherently unstable. These correspondences may explain why Braddon's novels are often haunted by various feminine doubles, creating associational patterns that prove contagious, perhaps more contagious than the author liked or even realized. These renegade narratives refuse to be contained or covered by the scenes of conventional middle-class morality celebrated in the novel's dénouement. The best that can be done is to bury these doubts alive, hoping that with time they will eventually pass away as if by maladie de lâgeur.
Figure 3: "Lady Audley Secret." *Punch, or the London Charivari*. 16 May 1863: 19
CHAPTER III

"YOUR GIRLS THAT YOU ALL LOVE ARE MINE ALREADY": FEMALE CRIMINALITY IN BRAM STOKER'S DRACULA AND THE LAIR OF THE WHITE WORM

In his pioneering scientific study of sexuality, *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), Richard Von Krafft-Ebing slips from the scientific register to heightened tones reminiscent of the Jeremiad to describe the threat of the nymphomaniac:

Woe unto the man who falls into the meshes of such an insatiable nymphomaniac, whose sexual appetite is never appeased. Heavy neurasthenia and impotence are the inevitable consequences. These unfortunate women disseminate the spirit of lewdness, demoralize their surroundings, become a danger to boys, and are liable to corrupt girls also, for there are homosexual nymphomaniacs as well. (324)

The influence of Krafft-Ebing on Bram Stoker's conceptualization of the vampire is manifest; replace "nymphomaniac" for "vampire" and we have the plot of *Dracula* (1897)—from the opening scenes of Harker in the castle, to Lucy's transformation and her subsequent stalking of the Hampstead Heath's young children. In Krafft-Ebing's account, the nymphomaniac is contagious, as she threatens the corruption of others and leaves those unfortunate men who "fall into her meshes" effectively feminized as they are rendered passive and hysterical as a result. Through the progression of the sentence, Krafft-Ebing enacts the unsettling of traditional gender roles; as the man becomes neurasthenic (hysterical) and impotent, the woman usurps the role of "dissemination," until the man is written out of the sexual equation with the emergence of the same-sex female couple.¹ Stoker literalizes the monstrous bearing of Krafft-Ebing's nymphomaniac

¹ While he does not refer to Krafft-Ebing, Christopher Craft's essay, "Kiss me With Those Red Lips" closely examines Dracula in the context of the "characteristic, if hyperbolic, instance of Victorian anxiety over the potential fluidity of gender role" (112). Stephanie Demetrakopoulos also explores the vacillation
in his female vampire whose powerful (blood) lust and "wanton voluptuousness" threaten to overwhelm her male victim, leaving him powerless in her wake. The palpable anxiety manifest in Krafft-Ebing's overwrought depiction of the threat of communicable corruption embodied by the nymphomaniac stimulates Bram Stoker's subsequent gothic narratives. In Dracula, the literalization of Krafft-Ebing's monstrous figurations of female sexuality works to concretize, even naturalize associative patterns, which, as I will demonstrate in the final chapter, eventually come to function as common sense in both medical and popular representations of female homosexuality.

Even those among Bram Stoker's nineteenth-century readers who objected to Dracula on the grounds that it violated the standards of good taste were forced to admit that the novel "grips the attention; though its perusal is at times very like hard labor, it is a labor from which nobody would will rest till it is achieved." From contemporary reviews it would appear that readers were mostly fascinated and less often offended, even as they warned that Dracula would likely "be answerable for many a bad dream" ("Books Worth Reading" 258). Most compelling of all for the majority of Stoker's critics both then and in the present moment are those scenes that feature the monstrous transformation of good Victorian women into aggressively "voluptuous" vampires. Not only did Stoker's Victorian reviewers identify the female vampire as "all the more

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2 This is not to imply that Stoker did not also meet with some formidable criticism as well. Most notably, the Athenaeum saw fault in the structure of the narrative and found the novel "highly sensational, but . . . wanting in the constructive art as well as in the higher literary sense." This deficit results, in the opinion of the reviewer, in the novel reading "at times like a mere series of grotesquely incredible events." Even while the review is willing to concede that there are "better moments that show more power," these moments "are never productive of the tremor such subjects evoke under the hand of a master." This review is also quoted by David Seed, "The Narrative Structure of Dracula," 61.
dangerous because she allures men by her fatal beauty of form and face," they deemed this metamorphosis the most terrible of the many "creeps" the reader encounters ("Dracula" 9). For these readers, who may be taken to represent the tendencies of a great many others, the terror of Dracula derives not from the threat of death but of contagion. As one critic puts the case: "Most terrible of all is the effective use he makes of the vampire superstition that whoever dies after being bitten by the blood-sucking demon, however pure and true and beautiful, becomes in turn a vampire, only to be released by an awful process of exorcism" ("Literature" 2). This writer clearly has the fates of the once "pure and beautiful" Lucy Westenra and Mina Harker (née, Murray) in mind as the victims of the "blood-sucking demon" whose metamorphoses testify to the veracity of "superstition." And while this reviewer’s account remains firmly within the fantastic parameters explicitly specified by the novel, others gesture toward those terrors of the natural world which might lend Stoker's vampire the power to frighten more intensely: "Count Dracula is a vampire of the most malignant and dangerous kind. The worst of it is he carries contagion with him” ("Literature" 2). This review testifies to the ease with which Dracula's condition might be read through a medical lens as a figure for contagious disease.

**The Flaw of Femininity:**
**Diagnosing Dracula's Narrative Contagion**

Because Dracula's characters often seem to hesitate at the precipice of abstract figuration, contagion becomes a central trope animating the narrative both thematically and formally. Not only is the integrity of the various bodies which populate the novel consistently violated—penetrated by the vampire's teeth, a wooden stake, the surgeon's needle—at a formal level, the lines that demarcate individual characters begin to blur.
This effect becomes most apparent through the study of *Dracula*'s two female protagonists, Lucy and Mina. Both women occupy central positions within the progression of the plot. Because Dracula, at least once he finds himself in England, targets only female victims, it is through Mina and Lucy that we witness and come to understand the transformative power of, and social threat presented by, the vampire's bite. And even as each woman comes to a very different fate—unlike Mina, Lucy's life cannot be saved, but only her soul redeemed through violent exorcism—they ultimately seem less to be two discrete persons but a single figurative function operating across two characters. They jointly embody the threat posed to traditionally constructed British masculinity by a female sexuality that deviates from the socially prescribed norm. Just as contagious disease violates the integrity of the physical body, transforming the discrete into the continuous, the characters of Lucy and Mina collapse into one another, emerging as a single dangerous figuration.

As it happens, the two most central female characters of the novel seemed to blur together in Stoker's mind throughout the process of composition. Stoker's handwritten notes for *Dracula* reflect several instances in which the author confuses Mina and Lucy. The most striking occurrence comes with Stoker's outline for what would become the memorable scene where Mina discovers Lucy after Lucy has wandered in her sleep to a

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3 Here, I am influenced by Roland Barthes’s distinction between "character" and "figure" as elucidated in *S/Z*. Barthes defines character: "When identical semes [i.e. units of meaning] traverse the same proper name several times and appear to settle upon it, a character is created. Thus, the character is a product of combinations: the combination is relatively stable (denoted by the recurrence of the semes) and more or less complex (involving more or less congruent, more or less contradictory figures); this complexity determines the character’s ‘personality,’ which is just as much a combination as the odor of a dish or the bouquet of a wine” (67). By contrast, "The figure is altogether different; it is not a combination of semes concentrated in a legal Name, nor can biography, psychology, or time encompass it: it is an illegal, impersonal, anachronistic configuration of symbolic relationships" (68).
bench within the ruins of the Whitby Abbey, perched upon the East Cliff, high above the seaside town. It is here that we bear witness to Dracula's first attack through the retrospective record Mina provides in her journal. Much critical attention has been paid to this moment and the significant fact that this is not the first time Lucy has been known to sleepwalk. Because the habit precedes Dracula's manifestation in England, it follows from the logic of the narrative that her earlier nighttime excursions were likely not at Dracula's behest. But in the brief space of Stoker's notes, the two women blend into a single figure as: "Mina wakes suddenly & miss her - goes in pursuit sees something white something dark in the moonlight in old churchyard on cliff - seems like man - then wolf - then seem to fly - follows - finds Mina in sleep on bench - wound in throat & brooch covered with blood" (51). Strangely, as it is written, the brief narrative contained in the note is incoherent; it doesn't make sense that Mina would wake in the middle of the night, and "miss her [Lucy]" only to walk to the churchyard to discover herself asleep on the bench. But there is significance in what might be taken at first glance as a careless misnomer. Even in this most crucial scene, a scene which one might argue establishes a crucial division between the two women of the novel, Lucy slips into Mina as the two women blend together into a single female figure in the author's mind.

The threat of aberrant female sexuality dramatized by the Lucy-Mina configuration in *Dracula* replicates an anxious rhetoric on that subject that is characteristic of the emerging late-nineteenth century medical science of sexology. *Dracula* reinforces an association of female desire with criminality and disease that is implicitly treated as common sense. *Dracula* perpetuates this implicit logic of latency by maintaining an ambiguous ontology of vampirism. Indeed, Lucy's sleepwalking habits
certainly leave her more vulnerable to Dracula's nighttime attacks. But the novel suggests the possibility that Lucy is susceptible to the vampire not only because her sleepwalking habit leaves her physically exposed, but more profoundly because it renders her predisposed to vampirism.4

An entry from Mina's journal, recorded during her residence at Whitby—the small seaside town on the Yorkshire coast where Dracula first touches land—establishes precedent for Lucy's midnight wanderings. Mina confesses to her growing uneasiness born of the fact that she has yet to hear from Jonathan with the exception of a single line penned at Castle Dracula, and: “Then, too, Lucy, although she is so well, has lately taken to her old habit of walking in her sleep” (105). Lucy's mother evidently shares Mina's concern regarding the recurrence of this late night pastime. In an effort to protect Lucy, Mina writes: "We have decided that I am to lock the door of our room every night. Mrs Westenra has got an idea that sleep-walkers always go out on roofs of houses and along the edges of cliffs, and then get suddenly wakened and fall over with a despairing cry that echoes all over the place” (105). Even if Mrs. Westenra's fears first appear somewhat fanciful, they prove nearly prophetic, when Mina finds Lucy has wandered to their favorite sitting spot near the edge of a cliff overlooking Whitby harbor.

4 Ernest Fontana makes a similar point as he argues that "Dracula selects as his victims those persons among the more evolved races who are, unknown to themselves, kindred to him; that is, who contain the innate biological and psychological potential of savage reversion" (25). Under this scheme, Lucy qualifies; according to the Lombrosian system, "the born criminal is an epileptic" as "the anatomical and psychological characteristics of the criminal and the epileptic are identical" (25). Lucy is linked to the figure of the born criminal by her somnambulism, which was considered by Lombroso to be a symptom associated with epilepsy (26). Fontana's argument, however, does not touch on the ambiguity in the text regarding who has the potential to become a vampire, nor does he consider the implications of Renfield's human death.
At this spot, Lucy first falls prey to Dracula, but Mina is not in close enough range to see the bite, leaving the origin of Lucy's subsequent sickness somewhat ambiguous. As Mina approaches Lucy, she sees through the shadows as "something dark stood behind the seat where the white figure shone, and bent over it" (125). As she approaches more closely, Mina is able to discern "the seat and the white figure"; but also "something, long and black, bending over the half-reclining white figure. I called in fright, ‘Lucy! Lucy!’ and something raised a head, and from where I was I could see a white face and red, gleaming eyes” (125). But this is as close as Mina comes to witnessing the actual bite. As a result, she mistakenly identifies "the two little red points like pin-pricks" she notices on Lucy's neck as the result of her own "clumsy" handling of the safety-pin she used to fasten a scarf around Lucy's neck before escorting her friend back home (127). After this fateful evening, Mina polices Lucy's behavior more carefully, and yet Mina records that, even after Lucy seemed to fall into a restful sleep, "twice during the night I was wakened by Lucy trying to get out. She seemed, even in her sleep, to be a little impatient at finding the door shut, and went back to bed under a sort of protest” (128). At this point in the narrative, we are meant to understand that Dracula has obtained hypnotic control over his victim and that, when she attempts to leave the bedroom at night, she is responding to his call.

But because the sleepwalking habit precedes Dracula's arrival on the scene and his involvement in Lucy's life, Dracula's influence over Lucy seems merely to intensify, rather than wholly transform, certain preexisting traits of her personality. Lucy sleep-walks prior to the vampire bite; the habit recurs with renewed frequency afterwards. Lucy is something of a coquette before her vampiric encounter—famously declaring, after
receiving three marriage proposals in just one day, that it ought to be permissible for "a girl to marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble" (91). After joining the ranks of the undead, Lucy startles her once devoted fiancé with her display of "voluptuous wantonness" (249). I'll return to this dimension of Lucy's character, but for now it is enough to notice that the narrative muddies the causality involved in her vampiric transformation. As a consequence, the narrative suggests that Lucy contained a latent monstrous potential that was fully realized only after Dracula's arrival.

The narrative remains conspicuously quiet regarding Dracula's motivation in selecting Lucy as his victim. If this initial attack is merely, as Christopher Craft has influentially suggested, the first manifestation of Dracula's desire to "fuse with a male" which is "always postponed and never directly enacted . . . find[ing] evasive fulfillment in an important series of heterosexual displacements," then it seems strange that he selects Lucy over Mina, given Mina's more immediate proximity to the initial object of Dracula's desire—Jonathan Harker (109). We aren't offered any explanation for Dracula's interest or even awareness of Lucy, but this omission suggests that this information may go unstated because the reader will quickly reconstruct the implicit logical pattern which positions Lucy as Dracula's natural target, and because Mina and Lucy serve the same narrative function, even if they are drawn as two separate characters.

This narrative blank space tacitly perpetuates the widely recognized association between symptoms of hysteria and sexual aberrations, silently insisting upon the veracity of the then common-sense assumption that the female reproductive system left women inherently more susceptible to psychological disorders than their male counterparts. Lucy's sleepwalking habit draws upon an existing association between somnambulism
and hysteria. Notably, Stoker takes a page from his predecessor in sensation, Wilkie Collins, in creating a protagonist who suffers from this culturally charged and sexually loaded condition. But where Collins's novel only ever gestures toward the contours of a self composed of those hidden impulses that animate such nighttime activity, Stoker graphically depicts Lucy's dark double in the vampire, concretizing the association of illicit female sexuality and monstrosity.

Stoker's description of Lucy's condition seems to be informed by the psychological theories of the prominent British physiologist William Carpenter and the French neurologist Jean Martin Charcot. In his extended study of Stoker's oeuvre, William Hughes makes a convincing case for the influence of Carpenter and Charcot on Stoker's construction of Lucy. At the time, sleepwalking was frequently associated with the condition of hysteria; on this point, Hughes cites one of Carpenter's case studies published in his *Principles of Mental Physiology* (1874), involving a "young lady of highly nervous temperament . . . in which all the severest forms of hysterical disorder had successively presented themselves. The state of Somnambulism usually supervened in this case upon the waking state; instead of arising, as it more commonly does, out of the condition of ordinary sleep" (154). Sleepwalking suggests hysteria, and hysteria, the nineteenth-century catch-all diagnosis, carries a vast number of connotations—most notably, the sort of overt sexuality Lucy displays after her vampiric transformation (Hughes 153). It also should be noted that, through her hysterical condition, Lucy might

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5 Also see Glover for a discussion of the influence of Carpenter's theory of "unconscious cerebration," a term which "filter[ed] into ordinary educated discourse" from the specialized discourse of psychological medicine, on Stoker and other varied nineteenth-century novelists such as Henry James and H.G. Wells (71-81).
be seen merely to enact the diseased potential latent in the female condition. For, as Elaine Showalter among others has demonstrated, the symptoms of hysteria and female biology had become so closely linked in medical writing and the popular imagination that hysteria could be termed merely the manifestation of the inherent "flaw of femininity."\(^6\)

In the second iteration of this narrative of monstrous female transformation, Mina becomes Dracula's target, and, while Mina is ultimately preserved from the vampiric fate of her friend, her susceptibility to the vampire bite implicitly affirms the same associative chain animated by Lucy's vampiric conversion. Much critical debate has ensued regarding Mina's relationship to the emergent nineteenth-century political figure—the New Woman.\(^7\) And while Mina does appear to be associated with aspects of New Womanhood in terms of her education and career aspirations, these qualities are ultimately muted by her maternal role. Indeed, it seems that her vampiric inclinations must be exorcised in order that she be transformed into the idolized feminine figure, the "brave and gallant" mother of a son (419). Van Helsing deems Mina's intellect a sign of

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6 For a detailed discussion of the social and political implications of this familiar nineteenth-century diagnosis, see: Showalter *The Female Malady*. Helen Small notes that it wasn't until the prevalence of male shell-shock victims in WWI that hysteria stopped being considered "an essentially female condition" (17). Janet Oppenheim also emphasizes the prevalence of the gendered biological model in the medical discourse on hysteria.

7 Prescott and Giorgio provide a useful gloss on the diverging critical views regarding Mina's New Woman status, as they explore the "cultural anxieties" during this historical moment when "a long-standing ideological conception of proper femininity comes under suspicious attack" (487). Critics such as Sally Ledger, Sally Kline, and Anne Cranny Francis have rejected readings of Mina which view her as anything beyond "a woman who, firmly rooted in the maternal paradigm, settles for the 'ideal' of middle-class Victorian womanhood" (New Woman 105). Carol Senf sees Mina "comfortable" with "certain qualities often associated with the New Woman" in terms of her education and career aspirations, but rejecting "the forwardness and the sexual openness of the New Woman writers" ("Stoker's Response to the New Woman" 36). Accordingly, Senf argues that "Stoker helps to characterize his heroine by her discomfort at this [sexual] frankness" (37). To the contrary, David Glover argues that Mina's relationship to the New Woman is more complex and "hard to place... Mina needs to be read as more than one version of the feminine, an unmoored sign of change as well as a firm attempt to hold the line against the New Woman" (97). I am inclined toward Glover's reading to some extent; however, Mina's maternal transformation at the end of the novel suggests that her narrative function primarily belongs to the latter category he describes.
underlying masculinity declaring: "She has man's brain—a brain that a man should have were he much gifted—and woman's heart" (274). Where Lucy's too forward sexuality is termed masculine in the various schemas perpetuated by nineteenth-century sexology, Mina's intellect renders her similarly masculine. As I discuss in the final chapter, this deviation from conventional femininity became closely associated with criminality. In this way Mina's man-brain, like Lucy's sleepwalking, becomes a sign of her latent monstrous potential. In this respect, Dracula seems to know Mina better than she knows herself; he makes allusion to her resentment against the men who would exclude her from their trust by evoking the chivalric ideal of masculinity which must necessarily relegate women to the passive subservience of male desire. Dracula boasts: "And you, their best beloved one, are now to me, flesh of my flesh; blood of my blood; kin of my kin . . . You shall be avenged in turn; for not one of them but shall minister to your need" (328). The motivating desire behind Mina's retribution is left perplexingly ambiguous—another narrative blank space. This elision leaves open the troubling possibility that there exists an implicit affinity between Mina's and Dracula's desires, even if these desires remain unrealized on Mina's behalf prior to her vampiric encounter.

Stoker's narrative never makes these connections explicit, never declares that women are those most likely (or able) to transform into vampires because there is something vampiric about women to begin with. Never in all of Van Helsing and Seward's discussion of the nature of the vampire in scientific, medicalized terms is the connection between Lucy's hysterical tendencies and her monstrous metamorphosis plainly explained. But these associations nevertheless guide the narrative logic, operating through the blank spaces of the text. That Lucy's sleepwalking habit is likely a symptom
or even forerunner of hysteria and that this tendency might at any moment be made manifest through indecorous displays of sexual desire—making her like the female vampires even before she has been bitten—is allowed to go unstated because this chain of connections ought to be understood implicitly. Or at least, I argue, this is what the blank space of the narrative implies and, accordingly, trains the reader to infer. By leaving the chain of causality which precipitates Lucy's transformation a blank—in a narrative which at the outset declares "all needless matters have been eliminated so that a history almost at variance with the possibilities of later-day belief may stand forth as simple fact"—Dracula suggests that these causal relationships are needless to describe because they are already manifest (29).

Transfusions, Trephining, and Other Ghastly Operations of Modern Science

The causal ambiguity perpetuated by the novel becomes even more stark when we consider those instances where the vampire passes over what seem to be the most expedient victims—specifically, Renfield and Harker. The novel never makes explicit the logic informing Dracula's choice of victims. In fact, even though Dracula's highly sexualized attacks seem to be consistently heterosexual, when the female vampires threaten Harker, Dracula wards them off by declaring: "This man belongs to me!" (70). Christopher Craft offers one explanation for this apparent narrative contradiction in terms of displacement and diffusion. For Craft: "Dracula's desire to fuse with a male, most explicitly evoked when Harker cuts himself shaving, subtly and dangerously suffuses this text. Always postponed and never directly enacted, this desire finds evasive fulfillment in an important series of heterosexual displacements" (110). But more than this, the novel literalizes anxious figures informing sexology. In reading the scene exclusively in terms
of the male homosexual panic it produces, Craft elides the implications of the episode in terms of female sexuality as it concretizes the common sense notion that all overt displays of female sexuality are monstrous aberrations, criminal in nature.

Even when Dracula does not bite, he still draws blood. Twice, Dracula's aggression is mirrored by an equally gruesome and invasive medical procedure. This repetition not only brings to the fore the implicit narrative logic which determines who harbors the potential to be turned into a vampire, it also works to cast suspicion toward certain aspects of modernity. Renfield, for example, promises his allegiance to Dracula, declaring from his cell in Dr. Seward's asylum: "I am here to do your bidding, Master. I am your slave, and you will reward me, for I shall be faithful. I have worshipped you long and afar off" (137). But, however willing his potential servant, Dracula neglects to bring Renfield under his wing; instead, he leaves Renfield fatally injured, "lying on the floor on his left side in a glittering pool of blood" (315). As if to add insult to injury, Dracula doesn't deign to dine on Renfield's blood, but instead removes himself from the scene to the Harkers's bedroom. Renfield is quite the worse for the attack: "His back is broken," and "both his right arm and leg and the whole side of his face are paralyzed" (315). What follows for Renfield echoes the scene of blood transfusion which occurs subsequent to Van Helsing's discovery of Lucy's radically anemic condition.

The replication of events—Dracula's attack followed by a medical intervention involving the victim's blood supply—highlights a silence on the part of the narrative regarding who is capable of being transformed into a vampire. As Lucy's condition becomes increasingly dire, Dr. Seward and Van Helsing make a house call. Seward records Lucy's much worsened condition: "She was ghastly, chalkily pale. The red
seemed to have gone even from her lips and gums, and the bones of her face stood out prominently. Her breathing was painful to see or hear” (156). Her appearance prompts Van Helsing to undergo the first of four blood transfusions in an effort to preserve Lucy's life. In preparation, Van Helsing removes the necessary instruments from his bag containing "the ghastly paraphernalia of [this] beneficial trade," declaring the blood of Lucy's fiancé, Arthur Holmwood, to be "so pure that we need not defibrinate it” (158). While blood transfusions had been attempted in centuries prior, Carol Senf reminds us that "transfusions were rarely practiced until 1909 when the Austrian-American immunologist Karl Landsteiner discovered different blood groups and made the practice safer” (22). In conducting the blood transfusion, Van Helsing is working at the avant-garde of modern science, and Stoker in constructing this scene must have "done his own medical homework” (Senf 22). But, of course, these blood transfusions and, by extension, modern science ultimately fail to preserve Lucy from her diabolical fate.

The same sequence of action is closely approximated in Van Helsing's treatment of Renfield. From Stoker's detailed notes on the novel, we learn that, in preparation for composing this narrative episode, the author consulted a case study produced by his older brother, Sir William Thornley Stoker, a prominent brain surgeon (Notes 81). Stoker's notes include a memo composed by William, describing how "injury to the side of the head above <and behind> the ear would produce symptoms in the opposite side of the body” (ibid). Stoker puts this information to direct use in his description of Renfield's

8 In "Growing Old: Age," Teresa Mangum points to this scene as indicative of a larger "motif in vampire-manqué tales" of the period: "The title character of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 'Good Lady Ducayne' (The Stand, 1896) hires a doctor to use the new and dangerous technology of blood transfusion to milk the veins of young women. These writers . . . were merely exaggerating experimental medical practices of the day, such as injections of crushed animal testicles, which promised to rejuvenate youth, vitality, and sexual performance, or the still extremely dangerous transfusion of blood” (107).
injuries: blood pools under his head on the left side, and his right side suffers partial paralysis (315). Even further, Van Helsing goes on to perform the same invasive operation William describes to clear a blood clot in Renfield's brain. William writes:

"Trephining to remove the depressed bone, or to give the surgeon opportunity to remove the blood clot might give instant relief" (83). Observing Renfield's condition, Van Helsing concludes, "We must reduce the pressure and get back to normal conditions as far as can be . . . The suffusion of the brain will increase quickly, so we must trephine at once or it may be too late" (316).

In both the scene from Lucy's bedroom and from Renfield's cell, Stoker has pitted new (and dangerous) medical technology against the brute atavistic force of Dracula. The motif is clear: modernity versus antiquity. But, as Van Helsing would be the first to admit, "There are always mysteries in life" (229). The tools of modern science are not always sufficient to navigate and contain such "mysteries." This seems to be the case with Renfield, although neither Dr. Seward nor Van Helsing deem it necessary to linger for Renfield's dying words. At least, we must assume they are final, for the last we hear of Renfield is Dr. Seward's observation that Renfield's "voice was becoming fainter and his breath more stertorous" (321). Even the medical term used to capture the quality of Renfield's breath—stertorous—is repeated from Lucy's dying scenes, further aligning the two episodes. And yet with Renfield, unlike the case with Lucy, Van Helsing and company appear to remain unconcerned that he might transform and become like the master whose arrival he so long anticipated. Toward reconciling this seeming inconsistency, the novel offers the implicit answer that such a fate for Renfield need not be considered because Renfield, unlike Lucy, is not the vampire type. Even if Renfield is
feminized by virtue of his hysteric temperament and passive position as a committed patient at Seward's asylum, he is saved from a fate like Lucy's by virtue of his biological masculinity.

With every vampire encounter, there is a clear repetition of theme and narrative action which throws into relief the underlying logic guiding the narrative—a logic which readers must implicitly, even intuitively, accept if they are to make sense of the narrative. Moving back to the earlier portion of the novel, the extent of Harker's trials at Castle Dracula function as a blank space, the implications of which inform the significance of Mina's partial and Lucy's full transformation. Embarking on his first assignment as a newly promoted "full-blown solicitor," Harker heads to Transylvania to "explain the purchase of a London estate to a foreigner" (45). After staying in the castle for some time, Harker begins to realize he is being held prisoner by Dracula. Shortly after this realization, Dracula absconds with Harker's clothing, leaving his house guest to the fate of Dracula's ominous female cohort. Eventually, Harker makes his harrowing escape, but not before he finds himself left "alone in the castle with those awful women" (85).^9

^9 My reading of this episode is informed by Christopher Craft's engaging piece, "Kiss Me With Those Red Lips." Craft plainly asserts that "Dracula's ungratified desire to vamp Harker is fulfilled instead by his three vampiric daughters, whose anatomical femininity permits, because it masks the silently interdicted homoerotic embrace between Harker and the Count" (110). In her article, "Vampiric Seduction," Dejan Kuzmanovic goes so far as to argue that Harker is bitten by Dracula after his encounter with the weird sisters. She writes: "Although Harker never makes it clear in his diary whether Dracula has feasted on him or not, there are several reasons to believe that Dracula has sucked Harker's blood. We never learn what happens after Dracula saves the fainted Harker from the vampiric women and takes him to his room, but when Harker wakes up and before he flees the castle he ventures to Dracula's room only to find him in his coffin bloated with blood and rejuvenated. . . . Obviously, Dracula has feasted on somebody, and since there are no other humans in the castle and Dracula's leaving the castle that night is not mentioned, it is fair to conclude that Harker has become Dracula's victim" (418). Other critics have strongly disagreed with Craft's reading, and it is true there is no explicit depiction of this instance of vamping in the narrative. For example, William Hughes writes: "There is no evidence in the novel to support Christopher Craft's contention that Harker was attacked by the three female vampires following the Count's departure. Indeed, Harker's decision to scale the wall at the close of Chapter Four appears to be prompted by his desire to avoid such a fate. Harker's neurosis, therefore, can be considered medically conventional rather than occult..."
Harker's encounter with the three female vampires who also inhabit Castle Dracula, undoubtedly one of the novel's most memorable scenes, is recorded in Harker's journal, a travelogue whose importance I will discuss further below. But here, I want to consider the implications of Harker's apparent immunity to the vampire bite—immunity at least to the degree that, unlike his wife, he seems in no risk of losing his soul to the ranks of the undead.

The novel invites this comparison through the repetition of a certain cinema-ready vision of the vampire materializing through the mist. After seeing Dracula make his way, lizard-like, down the outside wall of the castle, Harker decides to wait by the window to witness the Count's return. Before long, he begins "to notice that there were some quaint little specks floating in the rays of the moonlight. They were like the tiniest grains of dust, and they whirled round and gathered in clusters in a nebulous sort of way" (77). He becomes hypnotized by the vision: "Quicker and quicker danced the dust, and the moonbeams seemed to quiver as they went by me into the mass of gloom beyond." He remains watching in this trance-like state until the "phantom shapes, which were becoming gradually materialized from the moonbeams, were those of the three ghostly women to whom I was doomed" (77). Even after this second encounter with the vampire women, Harker remains in the castle for nearly a week before he makes his escape. The next we hear of Harker, he is under the care of the "hospital of St Joseph and Ste Mary Buda-Pesth" where he has been "for nearly six weeks, suffering from a violent brain
fever” (134). According to Sister Agatha, who writes to Mina on behalf of Jonathan, "who is himself not strong enough to write," even after Harker’s extended period of hospitalization, "he will require some few weeks' rest in our sanatorium in the hills” (134).

The extent of Harker's injuries are never specified beyond the vague diagnosis of "brain fever," and further, we cannot be certain if this diagnosis is meant to be accepted in a figurative or more literal sense. What would be now recognized as meningitis was diagnosed at the time as "brain fever." Patients experiencing a raised temperature in conjunction with a severe headache and delirium were thought to be suffering from inflammation of the brain due to an excess of pressure (Oppenheim 118). The only symptom Harker speaks of to Mina after the fact is "madness," but, given the duration of his hospitalization—a course of treatment clearly demarcated from his period of "rest" in the sanatorium—we might fairly guess that the Victorian diagnosis of "brain fever" is meant in its most literal form. And as it happens, the most common treatment for this condition, as was the case with any number of diseases thought to be the result of cerebral inflammation, was bloodletting from the head either through venesection or with leeches (ibid). So, even if no one drew Harker's blood at the castle, someone probably did at the hospital. In this way, Harker's experience originates a recurring narrative pattern: after every bloodletting committed by Dracula or one in his cohort, another follows, this time under the auspices of modern science.

This theme and variation suggest that there is something inhuman, and even ghastly, about these medical procedures—as invasive and unnatural as the vampire attack itself. On first consideration, this uneasiness with the forefront of modern medicine seems
out of place in a novel where the forces of modern technology—the telegraph, the phonograph, the railway, and shorthand transcriptions—are pitted against the monstrous vestiges of antiquity. And yet, this association between vampiric and medical bloodletting extends beyond the scope of modern medicine to infect the modern condition as a whole. Along with the new method of medical science represented by Van Helsing's various intravenous interventions, Stoker's novel engages the emergent sciences of sexology, criminology, and evolutionism. Kelly Hurley's study of the gothic literary revival, in which Stoker's novel features prominently, begins with the premise that the nineteenth-century fin-de-siècle witnessed the disintegration and destabilization of “human identity” amid new scientific models that posited a “materialist reality” where “no transcendent meaningfulness anchors the chaotic fluctuability of the material universe” (9). This non-telic world view informing the modern condition manifests itself in the gothic text as “a general anxiety about that nature of human identity” (5). So, while Dracula suggests the power of modern science against the primitive forces of antiquity, it still registers a certain squeamishness, sometimes intensifying to a violent repulsion, from certain features of modernity. Glynnis Byron describes this sort of ambivalence with regard to scientific advancement in Stoker's novels, an ambivalence which resonates across his oeuvre:

Science is not only a set of reassuring discourses, suggesting that what is transgressive can be contained, but also a set of potentially disturbing discourses, in itself a transgressive force that . . . takes us into new realms and opens up shadowy arenas of being in which comforting categories and accepted truths being to dissolve. (50)

Critics often diverge on the question regarding Stoker's attitude toward the emergent scientific fields which continually crop up in his writings. For example, articles by Allison Case and Regnia Gagnier both argue that Dracula is a novel which celebrates the triumph of science against the dark primitive forces of the past. Other critics such as Joel Feimer have demonstrated the ways in which Stoker's novel testifies to
Of course, there are also clear political dimensions to this reconsideration of conventional beliefs regarding human nature; controversies surrounding the nature of female sexuality and psychology stand at the fore of Stoker's novel. Reading *Dracula* in conjunction with his later novella, *The Lair of the White Worm* (1911), throws into relief the patterns of association which inform Stoker's representation of female sexuality.

**Lady Arabella's Secret:**
**The Ambiguous Ontology of Stoker's White Worm**

The same causal equivocation surrounds the similar—if even more overdetermined—figuration of threatening female sexuality Stoker constructs in his final literary endeavor, *The Lair of the White Worm*. The aristocratic beauty Lady Arabella March threatens to consume the inhabitants of Derbyshire until she is exposed as an antediluvian monster and destroyed by Adam Salton, a paragon of staunch British masculinity, and his family friend, the "local geologist and natural historian" Sir Nathanial de Salis (17). The title of the novel is somewhat misleading as Lady Arabella is not so much a worm but a gigantic snake. However, Sir Nathanial quickly clarifies what at first appears to be merely a misnomer: "In the dawn of the language, the word 'worm' had a somewhat different meaning from that in use to-day. It was an adaptation of the Anglo-Saxon 'wyrm,' meaning a dragon or snake; or from the Gothic 'waurms,' a serpent; or the Icelandic 'ormur,' or the German 'wurm'” (40). Unclear, however, is how Lady

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the insufficiency of science and “rational skepticism” in the face of supernatural forces. For other discussions of the role of science in Stoker's writing, see: Ernest Fontana, "Lombrosso's Criminal Man and Stoker's *Dracula*"; Rosemary Jann, "Saved by Science? The Mixed Messages of Stoker's *Dracula*”; Daniel Pick, "Terrors of the Night: Dracula and ‘Degeneration’ in the Later Nineteenth Century.” For a useful overview of Stoker's use of contemporary science in his fiction, see: Senf, *Dracula and The Lair of the White Worm,* and *Science and Social Science*; William Hughes, *Beyond Dracula*; Diane Long Hoeveler, "Objectifying Anxieties: Scientific ideologies in Bram Stoker's *Dracula* and *The Lair of the White Worm.*"
Arabella came to be the White Worm; a causal ambiguity surrounding Lady Arabella’s monstrous transformation resembles the uncertainties surrounding the targeting of Lucy Westenra in *Dracula*.

Like Lucy, Lady Arabella holds a seductive power over men even in her human form. When Salton first encounters her, he is immediately struck by her outward allure. Indeed, Lady Arabella's costume recalls something of the "white lawn frock" in which Lucy appears postmortem, in the graveyard, much to the astonishment of her fiancé. Lady Arabella is also "clad in some kind of soft white stuff." But Lady Arabella is less sweet and more daring in her presentation than Lucy; her dress "clung close to her form, showing to the full every movement of her sinuous figure. She wore a close-fitting cap of some fine fur of dazzling white" (29). Clearly something of a temptress, Lady Arabella is closely associated with the serpent both in form and figure. Here, even the most casual reader couldn't fail to recognize Stoker's heavy-handed symbolism. Lady Arabella might as well be wearing a snake around her neck and speaking in hisses rather than words: "Coiled round her white throat was a large necklace of emeralds, whose profusion of colour dazzled when the sun shone on them. Her voice was peculiar, very low and sweet, and so soft that the dominant note was of sibilation" (29). Even in this brief description, we see Stoker evoking the familiar biblical metaphor. But Lady Arabella is not merely serpent-like in a figurative sense as she schemes and uses her powers of seduction to manipulate the men around her; as it turns out, she is also the White Worm who has recently been terrorizing the inhabitants of Derbyshire. Much like her predecessor Lucy, Lady Arabella targets children, and Salton has the misfortune of stumbling upon one of her most recent victims. He finds "the body of a child by the roadside," and, upon closer
examination, he "notice[s] on her neck some marks that looked like those of teeth" (59). But the account the narrative provides as to how Lady Arabella has come to be this vampirical snake is a bit fuzzy.

The narrative seems to remain undecided as to whether Lady Arabella has evolved out of the antediluvian "wyrm" after thousands of years or whether the White Worm has somehow come to inhabit Lady Arabella's body. In support of the latter theory, Sir Nathanial comes to the conclusion that:

The foul White Worm obtained control of [Lady Arabella's] body, just as her soul was leaving its earthly tenement—that would explain the sudden revival of energy, the strange and inexplicable craving for maiming and killing. . . . The once beautiful human body of Lady Arabella is under the control of this ghastly White Worm. (61-62)

In this account, Lady Arabella is merely the latest victim of the White Worm, who seems to possess the sort of supernatural power needed to transmogrify from snake into human. But even as we accept this explanation of Lady Arabella's origins, a few chapters later we find Salton hypothesizing, in accordance with Sir Nathanial's beliefs, that the White Worm of their present moment is in fact the product of evolutionary development over thousands of years. In this version, the White Worm is a monster whose origin dates back to "the early days of the world," a time, apparently, when "there were monsters who were so vast that they could exist for thousands of years" (132). Some of these monsters may have survived through the "Christian Era" and "progressed intellectually in process of time" (132). One such creature "lived in the Marsh of the East, and came up to a cave in Diana's Grove, which was also called the Lair of the White Worm"; it eventually "may have grown into, or something like, [a] human being" (132). So it would seem that Lady Arabella has evolved out of the antediluvian monster.
But even here the account gets murky, and Salton seems intent on hedging his bets. Riding the fence between literalism and metaphor, Salton concludes his discourse on the evolution of the worm by declaring: "Lady Arabella March is of snake nature. She has committed crimes to our knowledge. She retains something of the vast strength of her primal being—can see in the dark—has the eyes of a snake” (132). Salton's reference to crimes Lady Arabella has committed as evidence of her "snake nature" seems to imply that she is snake-like in the metaphorical sense. However, the next line takes a more literal stance, claiming that Lady Arabella is biologically akin to the prehistoric monster. Collapsing the distinction between chance and necessary association, the novel entertains a fundamental contradiction: on the one hand, Lady Arabella's body is merely the vehicle opportunistically, yet arbitrarily selected for the Worm's malicious designs, but on the other, she also represents the latest evolution of the prehistoric monster. These competing accounts of the relationship of Lady Arabella to the White Worm leave the figure of Lady Arabella inherently unstable. In one scenario, Lady Arabella ceases to exist when the worm inhabits the body upon the moment of her death; in the second version, there is teleological certainty—Lady Arabella is the White Worm in its latest evolutionary progression.11

Beyond even this fundamental contradiction, at one point in the narrative Salton and Sir Nathanial stumble across the monster concealed in the "well-hole" at Diana's Grove; what they encounter seems in fact to be a gigantic snake. In an overwhelmingly

11 The ambiguity surrounding Lady Arabella's relationship to the White Worm raises a host of other questions, several of which Glennis Byron articulates: "Has the worm somehow evolved into a human form, as is suggested in the chapter 'Metabolism', or, as is suggested at other moments, has the worm possessed Arabella's body? In either case, how can it still revert to its worm form, particularly if, as they claim, it has no supernatural powers? What happens to Arabella when the worm is in worm form? When she leaps into the well-hold, does she turn into the worm, or are they both in the well-hold?” (53).
phallic scene, the men catch a glimpse of the monster emerging from above the tree tops; from a distance the men see "what seemed to be a long white pole. . . . The lower part was hidden by the trees which lay between, but they could follow the tall white shaft and the duplicate green lights [the eyes of the monster] which topped it" (143). The two men approach the monster to find "that the hidden mass at the base of the shaft was composed of vast coils of the great serpent’s body, forming a base from which the upright mass rose” (143). This encounter with the monster begs the question: where does Lady Arabella go when the snake reverts back to its original form? But the narrative doesn't seem concerned with these sorts of questions, and here, Stoker appears to have sacrificed verisimilitude altogether for the sake of a rather heavy-handed metaphor: Lady Arabella's physical appearance may be undeniably feminine, but this is merely to disguise a deeply deviant and masculine nature.

In evoking the association between masculine women and criminality, Stoker is drawing on the pseudoscientific field of criminal anthropology. This science emerged in the nineteenth-century with the publication of *Criminal Man* (1876) by Cesare Lombroso, sometimes called the "father of criminology” (Leps 6). Marie-Christie Leps describes how this new science "established the criminal as an object of scientific investigation, thereby aligning criminality with other social problems like poverty or disease, which according to the positivistic belief in progress, could be grasped, contained, and ameliorated by scientific advances” (2). It is not surprising then that Stoker, whose novels evince a certain anxiety to control and contain the criminal element of society, would be drawn into this discourse which claims to use a method of scientific classification to identify the "criminal type" even before any actual crime has been committed. And, if
one were especially eager to maintain the gender and racial status quo characteristic of their time, the studies produced by this new science possess the added benefit of preserving existing power structures as "all and any divergence from the white male bourgeois norm could serve to clarify criminality" (50). As Leps meticulously reveals, this science primarily relied upon inductive reasoning, the aim of which was "less to prove the truth of an argument than to stage it: to represent its validity by an illuminating example which will strike the receiver as so obvious that it will provoke an immediate recognition rather than a reasoned acceptance" (51). Leps indicates those moments in the criminological writings of Lombroso and the French sociologist, Gabriel Tarde, where the reader is asked to assess the validity of an argument based merely on what common sense dictates. In this manner, "scientific criminology was thus elaborated from the grounds of the verisimilar, the commonly acceptable, and its truth value was a coefficient of its relevance to its audience's need and expectations" (48). Stoker's narrative mirrors the logical structure informing criminal anthropology by validating and concretizing those associational patterns which accord with common sense views of femininity and by recapitulating the racialized hierarchies central to social Darwinist sciences, like criminal anthropology.

Nineteenth-century criminal anthropology lent new credibility to old racist and sexist stereotypes, reaffirming long-entrenched beliefs about the inferior intellect of women and racially marginalized groups under the pretense of scientific method. For example, under this new schema, women’s smaller cranium size became the sign of “inherited stigmata,” signifying inferior intelligence and latent criminal tendency (Stott
As Rebecca Stott explains, the rhetoric of criminal anthropology used the language of evolutionary science to credit "racist and sexist generalisations"; and as a result, "woman became increasingly ranked with the black, the savage, and with the animal: and given a low position on the evolutionary ladder by virtue of her cranium size" (24). Even further, any display of sexual energy beyond the pale of proper Victorian femininity was classed as a sign of atavism, rendering any deviation from conventional sexual behavior pathological and by association, racialized. The Lair of the White Worm deploys this rhetoric in its characterization of Lady Arabella and Oolanga—the "African servant" of Edgar Caswell, heir to the other large estate in the region—and legitimizes the associational patterns informing criminal anthropology by gesturing toward the "natural" affinity between these two figures. Not only is Oolanga hasty to proclaim his love and devotion to Lady Arabella, the two figures are characterized as emotionally bankrupt and driven by selfish schemes. In some newer editions of the short novel, the overt racism has been exorcised by the editor. But in the original, we find Oolanga described as an "unreformed, unsoftened savage, and inherent in it were all the hideous possibilities of a lost, devil-ridden child of the forest and swamp" (31). Here, Stoker employs the familiar nineteenth-century trope which casts colonial figures and regions in what Anne McClintock describes as an "anachronistic space," a “prehistoric, atavistic and irrational” archaic locale, “inherently out of place in the historical time of modernity” (40). In this

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14 For example, the narrator describes Oolanga as radically limited in his emotional capacity; he was "distinctly a utilitarian, and as he could not understand anyone feeling grief except for his own suffering, pain, or for the loss of money, he could not understand anyone simulating such an emotion except for show intended to deceive" (104).
manner, the western narrative of progress and civilization is preserved by defining itself against the primitive, chaotic colonial space, continually inscribed outside the forward march of Western history.

*The Lair of the White Worm* works to strengthen the network of associations informing criminal anthropology, the most central being that any deviation from normative behavior or even white bourgeois masculinity, may be read as a sign of latent deviancy. The novel merely dramatizes and literalizes metaphors implicit in the sciences of sexology and criminal anthropology, with clear political implications. The instability of Lady Arabella's identity comes to the fore once again as Salton and Sir Nathanial strategize her demise. In the discussion which follows, Sir Nathanial maintains two contradictory premises with regard to their common enemy: Lady Arabella is a woman and therefore feminine in nature, and Lady Arabella is a monstrous, prehistoric snake. Sir Nathanial confesses: "I never thought that fighting an antediluvian monster would be such a complicated job." But he goes on to say:

This one is a woman, with all a woman's wit, combined with the heartlessness of a *cocotte* and the want of principle of a suffragette. . . . That is so—but being feminine, she will probably over-reach herself. Now, Adam, it strikes me that, as we have to protect ourselves and others against feminine nature, our strong game will be to play our masculine against her feminine. (135)

The damning associational pattern at work in Stoker's narrative is now made plain with the rather unexpected insertion of an emergent social figure in the nineteenth-century public domain, the "suffragette." This allusion to the Women's Movement is made even stranger by the fact that Lady Arabella seems less interested in political enfranchisement and social autonomy than making an advantageous marriage to rid herself of the embarrassment of financial debt. In fact, we learn that this financial strain is the
motivating factor in Lady Arabella’s campaign of seduction. For "her debts, always pressing, were growing to an embarrassing amount. The only hope she had of comfort in life was a good marriage; but the good marriage on which she had fixed her eye did not seem to move quickly enough—indeed, it did not seem to move at all—in the right direction” (88). Yet again Stoker seems more than willing to forego the coherency of the narrative in order to cast suspicion on any woman who breaks with social convention.

To this end, the narrative works to associate female masculinity (remember the large white protrusion above the forest), criminality, overt sexuality, prostitution, and feminism, with the monstrous figure of the White Worm. And even beyond this train of damning associations, it becomes clear that the figure of Oolanga functions in the narrative not merely to activate the racist rhetoric of criminal anthropology for the sake of preserving the sanctity of white middle-class masculinity, but also to further damage the character of the suffragist by associating her figure with the amoral atavism represented by Castell's devious African servant. As a result, Lady Arabella has become overdetermined; host to more than just the cannibalistic White Worm, she is the site where multiple anxious social narratives collide, inspiring the paranoid thought that any woman potentially retains such latent monstrous potential.

Albeit in a slightly more subtle fashion, Stoker draws upon criminal anthropology to evoke a similar chain of associations in Dracula. Indeed, in one of the stranger moments of the novel, Seward records as Van Helsing prompts Mina to analyze the Count according to the classificatory system developed by Max Nordau and Lombroso. Mina reveals her familiarity with nineteenth-century theories of criminality and degeneration, describing the Count as "a criminal and of criminal type. Nordau and
Lombroso would so classify him, and qua criminal he is of imperfectly formed mind” (383). Mina's familiarity with Nordau would likely not have surprised the nineteenth-century reader, as his theory of degeneration was brought to bear against Oscar Wilde in the media coverage of the charges leveled against the author in court (Arata 3). Nordau, who was himself in fact a novelist, is credited with bringing degeneration theory into the realm of popular discussion, arguing that evidence of the moral degeneration of an author might be diagnosed from his literary productions.15 Drawing on Lombroso's "born criminal" type, Van Helsing, as recorded in Seward's diary, predicts that Dracula's limited intellectual powers will eventually allow the Crew of Light to triumph over the vampire:

The criminal always work at one crime—that is the true criminal who seems predestinate to crime, and who will of none other. This criminal has not full man-brain. He is clever and cunning and resourceful; but he be not of man-stature as to brain. He be of child-brain in much. (382)

Of course, diagnosing the Count as the criminal type does not prompt anyone to call the police. However, this translation of the occult into the language of evolutionary science solidifies the implicit connection between improper femininity and criminality. Under this logic, there is nothing supernatural about the threat presented by overt displays of female sexuality; such displays merely signify latent criminality and a compromised intellect. This association between criminality and those displays of female sexual desire that diverge from social convention continues, as the final section of my dissertation exposes, to covertly inform the theories of female sexuality into the twentieth-century.

"Some longing and at the same time some deadly fear"

Critics have frequently used Stoker's depiction of Lucy and Mina as a way into

15 For an extended discussion of Nordau's views on degeneration and literature, see Arata: 11-32.
the author's elusive biography and personal politics. This line of inquiry into *Dracula* is tempting, not the least because it is nearly impossible not to draw inferences from the connections between the author and his namesake—the esteemed professor (and medical doctor) Abraham Van Helsing. In this vein, it is Van Helsing's reaction to the resting female vampire which best conveys the manner in which Stoker’s narrative structures the reader's response to these voluptuous monsters. Upon arriving at Dracula's castle, Van Helsing locates the graves of the three vampire women Harker encountered during his earlier and involuntarily extended stay at the castle. Van Helsing plans to eradicate these "weird sisters" in their sleep but is almost put off from his task; for as he gazes upon his first victim, who "lay in her Vampire sleep, so full of life and voluptuous beauty . . . I shudder as though I have come to do murder." Finding himself so "moved to a yearning for delay which seemed to paralyse my faculties," he reflects that in her sexual fascination lies the female vampire's power over her potential male victims (411). Van Helsing's brief memoranda—his only direct contribution to the narrative—recall the hypnotic power the female vampire possesses, such that:

> Many a man who set forth to do such a task as mine, found at the last his heart fail him, and then his nerve. So he delay, and delay, and delay, till the mere beauty and the fascination of the wanton Un-Dead have hypnotize him; and he remain on, and on, till sunset come, and the Vampire sleep be over. Then the beautiful eyes of the fair woman open and look love, and the voluptuous mouth present to a kiss—and man is weak. (411)

Van Helsing's fantasy echoes Jonathan Harker's terrifying vision of the "weird sisters" at the castle, a scene that we might safely imagine—from the number of times it recurs in Stoker's notes on *Dracula* as "the kiss"—harnesses the sort of illicit sexual energies which galvanized Stoker's conception of the novel. Van Helsing's entranced, yet horrified and ultimately violent reaction to overt expressions of female sexuality may very well
offer a key to the author's own view of the matter and, by extension, his feeling about the emerging social figure—the New Woman.

The narrative works to inspire a vicarious anxiety in the reader that female sexuality has the power to render men impotent, feminized, and hysterical. This fear is figured through the threat of vampiric contagion—translating the sometimes sensational rhetoric of sexology into the trappings of the gothic novel. And given the macabre quality of some of the case studies published in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, very little conversion would have been required by Stoker if, in fact, he did find inspiration in its pages. For a potential source for the variety of sadism Dracula and his cohorts enact, Diane Hoeveler points to the infamous case of Sergeant Bertrand who was prone to commit sadistic acts against animals and human corpses (9). According to Krafft-Ebing's case study, Bertrand, overcome with the impulse to commit these horrible acts—a feeling which was accompanied "with headache and palpitation of the heart"—would find himself in a graveyard where he then "dug up the bod[y] with his hands . . . cut it up with a sword or pocket-knife, tore out the entrails, and then masturbated" (Krafft-Ebing 67).

While the notoriety of the Bertrand case makes Stoker's familiarity with its contents more plausible; there is a case study which has so far been passed over by Stoker's critics which, I argue, even more strongly presents itself as a possible source for Stoker's female vampire.16 This case involves "sadism in a woman" and is unusual on this account according to Krafft-Ebing because:

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16 Diane Hoeveler makes the case that Stoker was likely familiar with the fictionalized version of the Bertrand case as "it is certain that he was familiar with the texts that were generated by the case, most notably G.W.M. Reynolds's Mysteries of the Court of London, sequel to the Mysteries of London (1847-1856), both fictionalizations of the Bertrand story and set in a London plagued by the activities of 'Melmoth the Monster Man'" (10).
Sadism, in which the need of subjugation of the opposite sex forms a constituent element, in accordance with its nature represents a pathological intensification of the masculine sexual character; in the second place, the obstacles which oppose the expression of this monstrous impulse are, of course, much greater for woman than for man. (85)

It follows that sadism in a woman not only entails "antipathic sexual behavior" but also a sort of gender inversion, as it reflects a "pathological intensification of the masculine sexual character." This caveat is followed by "Case 48," which involves "a married man" who displays "numerous scars of cuts on his arms. He told their origin as follows: When he wished to approach his wife, who was young and somewhat 'nervous,' he first had to make a cut in his arm. Then she would suck the wound and during the act become violently excited sexually" (85). Krafft-Ebing provides the reader with this further comment: "This case recalls the widespread legend of the vampires, the origin of which may perhaps be referred to such sadistic facts" (85). While it is impossible to know if Stoker was acquainted with this particular case of sadism, it certainly requires no stretch of the imagination to see Lucy Westenra as the "young and somewhat 'nervous' bride," given to taking blood from her fiancé in a sexualized context. Regardless, this case reflects the same pattern of associative logic which links female masculinity and violent behavior manifest in Dracula and, even more stark, in Lair of the White Worm.

However, where Krafft-Ebing remains at a clinical remove from the subjects populating his case studies, sometimes pausing, as with the case of the nymphomaniac, to offer a stern warning against the dangers of this femme fatale, Stoker's narrative invites the reader into her "meshes" through the eyes of Jonathan Harker. Through Harker, the reader experiences the terrifying pleasure of being seduced by the vampire. The moment
of the "kiss" recurs almost obsessively throughout Stoker's notes, and, unlike other aspects of the plot which Stoker changed dramatically by the time of the novel's publication, this scene seems to have been realized just in the way the author first imagined. The second page of Stoker's notes sketches the various bits of information conveyed in Harker's letters to Mina during his tenure at Castle Dracula. Stoker writes: "Young man goes out ◦ sees girls ◦ one tries to kiss him not on lips but throat ◦ Old Count interferes – rage & fury diabolical – This man belongs to me I want him” (17). The second instance appears several pages later as part of a list detailing the lawyer’s letters. The scene is again described: "arrive the castle Loneliness ◦ the Kiss – ‘this man belongs to me’” (29). The final version of the scene outlined in Stoker's notes offers slightly more detail, and again the Count's warning appears verbatim: "stay in the castle pending arrival of answers to letter. Left alone – a prisoner – the books – sorts Virgilianae – the visitors – it is a dream – woman stoops to kiss him – terror of death – suddenly Count turns her away – ‘This man belongs to me’” (39). As this extended scene appears in the novel, Harker has wandered out of the confines of his room and into "a wing of the castle further to the right than the rooms I knew and a story lower down” (66). Having brought his diary with him, Harker settles down to write "at a little oak table where in old times possibly some fair lady sat to pen, with much thought and many blushes, her ill-spelt love-letter” (67). Harker's flight of fancy foreshadows the more radical inversion of conventional gender roles in the subsequent scene.  

17 Charles E. Prescott and Grace A. Giogio read this "languorous fantasy of passive femininity" Harker entertains as the “wish fulfillment of his own chivalric ideal” (488). And while it certainly is, the narrative allows the reader to glean through the mirroring of action—Harker writes a sort of love letter to his fiancée where he imagines other young ladies have written before—a collapse of the gender binary Harker envisions, leading proleptically into the following scene.
Harker realizes he has drifted off to sleep only to awaken and find that he is no longer alone in the room; what follows invites the reader to vicariously experience the seductive force of the vampire.\textsuperscript{18} The passage is worth quoting at length, as the narrative rhythm and overt sexuality of the scene actively work to control the reader's response to these "weird sisters." Harker wakes from his dream to the presence of "three young women, ladies by their dress and manner":

All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear. I felt in my heart a wicked, burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips. . . . I was afraid to raise my eyelids, but looked out and saw perfectly under the lashes. The fair girl went on her knees, and bent over me, fairly gloating. . . . Lower and lower went her head as the lips went below the range of my mouth and chin and seemed about to fasten on my throat. Then she paused, and I could hear the churning sound of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips, and could feel the hot breath on my neck. Then the skin of my throat began to tingle as one's flesh does when the hand that is to tickle it approaches nearer—nearer. I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the super-sensitive skin of my throat, and the hard dents of two sharp teeth, just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in languorous ecstasy and waited—waited with beating heart. (70)

This scene captures what Garrett Stewart refers to as the "gothic of reading," where the "conscripted reader" is made to self-reflexively consider themselves as a reader drawn by, and into, the text, appearing "not as an ontological perversion (deformed double, devolving portrait, mesmeric alter ego, sepulchral bat-man), but as fascinated by all such aberrations to the point of self-disfiguring (self-decentering) perversity" (359). As readers, we become aware of ourselves growing dangerously fascinated with the

\textsuperscript{18} Christopher Craft identifies Harker's passivity in his encounter with the "weird sisters" as a reversal of conventional Victorian gender roles: "Immobilized by the competing imperatives of 'wicked desire' and 'deadly fear,' Harker awaits an erotic fulfillment that entails both the dissolution of the boundaries of the self and the thorough subversion of conventional Victorian gender codes, which constrained the mobility of sexual desire and varieties of genital behavior by according to the more active male the right and responsibility of vigorous appetite, while requiring the more passive female to 'suffer and be still'" (108).
encroaching female form, passively awaiting her "kiss." To encourage this response, the narrative progress stutters, there is repetition—"nearer—nearer"—then several close-up "shots" of the "fair girl" following Harker's eye-line and slowing the action. This scene is more sexually explicit than anything published in the sensation novels pioneered by Collins, even if it is hard to tell as much from the various scandalized critical responses to those earlier works. Stoker has basically translated a scene from a brothel into the language of the occult.

However, where Stoker’s novel may be more overtly sexual than his literary progenitor Collins, *Dracula* concretizes rather than challenges established narratives about female sexuality. Where *The Moonstone* reorients the reader toward submerged narratives of female sexual desire rendered incoherent by master social narratives, Stoker's narrative remains focalized through a masculine perspective. This encounter with the female vampire, albeit exciting, never strays from the anxious male perspective that perceives an active female sexuality as always monstrous (and even more so in this instance for not being ashamed of its own monstrosity). So, while I might agree with Craft that the scene subverts conventional gender codes to the extent Harker and the reader remain passive in the face of the awesome sexual force embodied by the female vampire, it does not interrupt the associational pattern informing the common sense conception of femininity which dictates any overt display of sexual desire to be the sign of latent criminality.

In fact, Stoker’s narrative works to solidify and perpetuate the logic that renders any active display of female sexuality pathological, the sign of latent criminality and moral degeneration. After Lucy's transformation, we hear of her through excerpts taken
from the *Westminster Gazette*, documenting the abduction of various young children playing in the Hampstead Heath. The newspaper reports that, while "in all these cases the children were too young to give any properly intelligible account of themselves. . . . the consensus of their excuses is that they had been with a 'bloofer lady'" (214). Critics have noted the way this fictionalized newspaper account of Lucy's misdoings is reminiscent of the press surrounding two major crime stories which circulated through the daily London news at the time: Jack the Ripper and W.T. Stead's "Maiden Tribute to Modern Babylon." While both avenues are worth exploring, for the purposes of my argument, the connection between the "bloofer lady" reports and Stead's sexposé are most illuminating; Lucy’s threat, as it is presented by the press, carries implicit connotations of both sexual predation and child exploitation.

Most disturbing, the young children whom Lucy seems to lure away with the intention of sucking their blood seem to suffer from a sort of Stockholm Syndrome, so enamored have they become by their captor. Not only do the children revel in pretending to be the "bloofer lady" themselves, enjoying the pantomime to the extent that "even Ellen Terry could not be so winningly attractive as some of these grubby-faced little children pretend—and even imagine themselves—to be," they long to be with her after she has gone (214). Leslie Minot explores the parallels between the *Westminster Gazette* coverage of the "bloofer lady" and Stead's "Maiden Tribute," which uncovered to

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19 For instance, Nicolas Rance provides a compelling case to the effect that the Jack the Ripper case, more than the Wilde Trial, was preoccupying the author as he composed *Dracula* (440). Judith Walkowitz's account of the Ripper Press in *City of Dreadful Delight* bears close resemblance to the children's play at being the "bloofer lady"; according to Stoker's fictional report, "To see some of the tiny tots pretending to be the 'bloofer lady' is supremely funny" (214). Walkowitz describes the radical impact of the Ripper press on the popular imagination: "The ripper drama invested male domination with a powerful mystique; it encouraged little boys in working-class Poplar and suburban Tunbridge wells to intimate and torment girls by playing at Jack the Ripper" (220).
sensational effect the prevalence of child prostitution in London; she reveals that Lucy closely resembles the figure of the procurress—the seemingly respectable woman used to recruit young girls into prostitution in Stead’s account (211).

Stead’s ultimately successful campaign earned the author a jail sentence of three months for the abduction and indecent assault of Eliza Armstrong. In a misguided attempt to substantiate his claims regarding the prevalence of child prostitution in London, Stead—with the aid of Rebecca Jarrett, a former prostitute holding a position at the Salvation Army—"purchased" thirteen-year-old Eliza from her mother with the ostensible purpose of selling Eliza into prostitution. From the records of this illicit transaction emerges the figure of the sexually predatory woman, a new literary type of *femme fatale*. Unlike her literary predecessors, who mark wealthy, love-struck men as the targets of their malicious schemes, this new, highly sexualized feminine type victimizes young women. The influence of "Maiden Tribute" on Stoker's narrative is clear as the hypersexualized Lucy uses her beauty to seduce her young victims. She becomes both morally and physically contagious, like the prostitute with whom she has become associated. She not only corrupts young minds as they seek to imitate her sexual allure, she, like Dracula, ostensibly carries the contagion with her bite, transforming her young victims into just so many degenerate criminals.

"A narrative wildly and even grotesquely impossible with the semblance of truth"

Should any wayward reader fail to feel more parts horror than attraction in the face of the female vampire, the incredibly graphic violence surrounding Lucy's final vampire death works to channel sexual desire into violent rage. When Seward faces his former lover now transformed into the vampire, he—and the rest of the "crew of light"—
undergoes a parallel transformation. As a result of witnessing Lucy's "sweetness turned to adamantine, heartless cruelty, and [her] purity to voluptuous wantonness," Seward's "own heart grew cold as ice" (250). But where Lucy's heartlessness is a sign of her monstrosity, Seward’s inward cruelty—he confesses "had she then to be killed, I could have done it with savage delight "—accompanied by Arthur's supreme brutality, is glossed as heroic, even God-like in its transcendent force. The narrative works to alienate the reader from Lucy; she is divested of her proper name as she becomes, "The Thing in the coffin [that] writhed" (254). The graphic nature and grotesque details of the scene work to elicit a visceral response from the reader which even trumps the moment in Dracula's castle with the "weird sisters." We bear witness to Lucy's violent demise:

A hideous, blood-curdling screech came from the opened red lips. The body shook and quivered and twisted in wild contortions; the sharp white teeth champed together till the lips were cut, and the mouth was smeared with a crimson foam. But Arthur never faltered. He looked like a figure of Thor as his untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake, whilst the blood from the pierced heart welled and spurted up around it. (254)

This scene of sexualized violence, frequently referred to by critics as a symbolic gang rape, works to firmly position the reader behind the staunch misogynist masculine gaze as it is directed toward the threatening figure of the femme fatale. With this ceremonial act of violence, the narrative voice becomes less individual and more diffused. The gaps in perspective between the various members of the "crew of light" diminish. Seward recalls how the "high duty" which shone on Arthur's face "gave us courage, so that our voices

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20 Carol Senf points to this scene in the novel as that which first piqued her concern regarding "Stoker's treatment of his women characters": "Horrified by the sadism with which they dispatched their friend Lucy Westenra (and I remain horrified by that scene, which still seems more like a gang rape and mutilation than like the destruction of a social threat)" (11). Craft likewise points to the intense nature of the sexualized punishment the "crew of light" exacts against Lucy: "The murderous phallicism of this passage clearly punishes Lucy for her transgression of van Helsing's gender code, as she finally receives a penetration adequate to insure her future quiescence" (122).
seemed to ring through the little vault” (*emphasis mine*, 254). This tableau—the men squared against a common (feminized) enemy, as they incant the "prayer for the dead" in unison—offers a figure for the shifting narrative structure, which converges into a unified perspective as the narrative progresses.

This effect is further revealed if we examine *Dracula*’s narrative structure in conjunction with that of Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868). On first consideration, Stoker's narrative structure bears close resemblance to Collins's, a fact that was not lost on Stoker's nineteenth-century readers either. From the distance of thirty some years, Collins's stock seems to have risen at least enough so that the comparison between Stoker's latest work to that of the "king of sensational novelists" can be taken as unabashedly positive. One writer, from the Glasgow *Herald*, clearly a fan of both novels, remarks that: "The reader is held with a spell similar to that of Wilkie Collins's 'Moonstone,' and indeed in many ways the form of narrative by diaries and letters and extracts from newspapers nearly fitted into each other recalls Wilkie Collins's style" (10 June 1897). Both narratives weave together multiple "documents" under the auspices of reconstructing an event: the disappearance of the large Moonstone on the one hand, and the aggressions of a vampire against the city of London on the other. But Stoker's nineteenth-century critics go further to suggest that this narrative form somehow lends credibility to the otherwise fantastic tale:

With something closely akin to genius Mr. Stoker manages to invest a narrative wildly and even grotesquely impossible with the semblance of truth. He adopts the system much affected by the king of sensational novelists, Wilkie Collins, of making each of the characters tell by diary or letter the incidents with which he or she is most intimately acquainted, and thus gives something of the authenticity of contemporary documentary evidence to the entire story. (21 June 1897)

According to this critic, the multiple perspectives seemingly represented throughout the
narrative recall the fragmentary nature of testimonial evidence, which only when taken as a whole provide the reader with a full account of events. However, as I argued in Chapter One, as the narrative progresses in Collins's novel, we are left with a sense of the insufficiency of the detective plot to isolate and contain the illicit energies unleashed through the novel's sensational episodes. Through the novel's blanks spaces—in particular Rachel's silence—we encounter those unsanctioned subterranean narratives which work to subtly unravel the neatness of the conventional master narratives on which the detective's logic rests.

The fragmentary nature of Collins's narrative emphasizes the fragmentary quality of knowledge. As we progress through the novel, we are left with a sense of the inadequacy of existing social and personal narratives, and in this way, the novel begins to chip away at concretized forms of common sense surrounding female psychology and sexual desire. The novel orients the reader toward those blank spaces in the narrative, and as a result, marks the limits of the nineteenth-century middle-class narrative. Those blank spaces in turn become magnified, rendering the logic of the detective plot incoherent. But even as the narrative structure of *Dracula* may appear to closely resemble *The Moonstone*, the two novels function quite differently. In terms of narrative structure, where the multiple perspectives generated by Collins's narrative ultimately expose the incoherency of common sense notions of femininity, as Stoker's novel progresses, the multiple narrative voices collapse into one which works to concretize commonly held beliefs about female sexuality and psychology. In particular, the novel activates fears of moral and cultural degeneration in the figure of the female vampire, solidifying associations of overt and same-sex female desire with criminality and prostitution.
The novel opens with the journal of Jonathan Harker, who has been recently promoted from "solicitor's clerk" to "full-blown solicitor," and is traveling from London to Transylvania with the purpose of assisting Count Dracula in the purchase of British real estate. Harker's journal reads like a typical nineteenth-century travelogue. He describes the landscape, takes interest in local delicacies, and complains of the irregularity of the train schedule. But Harker's travelogue quickly takes a turn toward the gothic when he discovers himself to be something of a prisoner in Dracula's castle. For Harker, alone with the Count and three very aggressive female vampires, Castle Dracula proves to be a very lonely place. But this generic transition merely intensifies the objectifying western gaze characteristic of the travelogue—a focalization which remains predominant throughout the narrative. The narrative continues to work carefully to police the division between narrative subject and object; what is foreign to the implied (and actively recruited) reader may be fascinating, but, just in the way Van Helsing describes, it is a fascination mixed with and eventually overwhelmed by horror and alienation.

While at first consideration it would appear as if an alternative narrative perspective is offered through Lucy and Mina's correspondence with one another, this exception ultimately proves the rule. Their narrative exchange quickly comes to a close, and Dr. John Seward's entries become more lengthy and frequent; indeed, the narrative puts increasing distance between the reader and the interior mental landscape of the two

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21 For example, several critics including Diane Long Hoeveler, note the correspondences between the case study of Sergeant Francois Bertrand published in *Pyschopathia Sexualis* and Stoker's characterization of the vampire in *Dracula*. Hoeveler describes this "most infamous case study of vampirism"; it seems as if Bertrand possessed "the unfortunate habit—between February 1847 and March 1849—of digging up dead bodies and hacking them to pieces while he 'covered [them] with kisses and pressed [them] wildly to my heart'" (9). While Hoeveler attests to the fact that there is no way to be positive that Stoker was familiar with the case study, we do know that he was acquainted with several works of fiction based upon the Bertrand case which subsequently appeared.
women. This distance mirrors the male protagonists' widening emotional detachment from the women they love as Lucy and Mina are transformed from their former innocence into "voluptuous wantonness" (250). For the most part, the record of the events following the initial encounter with Dracula is relayed first by Harker and later by Dr. Seward. After Harker documents his experiences traveling in the Carpathian mountains and as a resident as Castle Dracula, Seward’s record of the trials and travails of the "crew of light"—a band of brothers comprising Mina's husband, Lucy's former suitors (Seward, Arthur Holmwood, and the Texan Quincy Morris), and Seward's mentor, Professor Van Helsing—dominates the narrative. It should be noted that, while Seward's entries appear almost twice as frequently as any of the other narratives, it is Mina who is responsible for their typewritten state. Seward maintains his diary with a phonograph from which Mina transcribes the typewritten account the reader is provided (262). In fact, we are made to understand that Mina has transcribed a majority of the documents, since Harker reflects at the novel's conclusion "that in all the mass of material of which the record is composed, there is hardly one authentic document. Nothing but a mass of typewriting, except the later notebooks of Mina and Seward and myself, and Van Helsing's memorandum” (419). But even as the entries are mediated through Mina's hands, there is nothing to suggest she has executed any significant editorial control over the documents. This activity, characteristic of Mina's industrious, useful nature, as well as her employment as an "assistant schoolmistress" prior to her marriage with Jonathan, has led many critics to view Mina as something of a New Woman. But for all this, Mina's role in the novel is

22 There are many extensive treatments of the New Woman and her representation in literature. Among the most notable are: Cunningham, Ledger, and Pykett. In this critical vein, Garrett Stewart demonstrates the
primarily as the vehicle for the circulation of male narratives; her creative power is constrained to motherhood. And after she becomes infected, her function is further reduced as she becomes nearly identical to the phonograph from which she had previously transcribed. Under a hypnotic spell produced by Professor Van Helsing, she becomes the mechanism through which Dracula's sensations are recorded and reproduced for the "crew of light."

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But for all this, the overdetermination of the figure of the vampire remains the most prominent (and forceful) narrative technique by which Stoker directs the reader's response. By overdetermination, I mean that multiple social narratives intersect at the site of the vampire. The effect of this confluence of anxious cultural currents in a single figure is not only to imbue the figure with a terrifying aspect, but to naturalize the association of various social narratives in a way that suggests a causal relationship between phenomena where likely the connection is purely arbitrary.

For example, in his influential study of the late gothic novel, Stephen Arata moves from the premise that the historical moment—Britain at the fin-de-siècle—was marked by a profound sense of decline and that this perception of irreparable loss was “cast into narrative.” This sense of imminent degeneration is manifest in some of the period’s most prominent authors: Robert Louis Stevenson, Oscar Wilde, Bram Stoker, Arthur Conan Doyle, Rider Haggard, John Addington Symonds, and Rudyard Kipling (to name a few). But most central to Arata’s argument is the impact on the British imaginary way in which Mina's view of the sexually forward habits of the New Woman reflect her acquaintance with the New Woman novels.
of degeneration theory—a theory, Arata argues, that was ultimately so prevalent that it functioned as “less a coherent system than a form of common sense” (3). Inspired by Arata's work, I have moved from this observation to examine the rhetorical figures used to produce the illusion of common sense in the various types of cultural diagnostics informed by degeneration theory.

Arata is, of course, not alone in noticing the projection of imperial anxieties onto the monsters of the fin de siècle novel. Rebecca Stott's study of the period locates the late-Victorian femme fatale—a predatory woman “characterized above all by her effect upon men”—at the intersection of the anxious discourses of degeneration and invasion that marked this crisis moment for the British Empire (viii). Like Arata, Stott argues that this historical moment is marked by an increased fascination and fear of the “Other,” a fear and fascination that inspired what she terms “an expansionism of fear” evident in the new modes of scientific classification (27). Defined in terms of her position relative to normative Victorian womanhood and anxious British masculinity, the femme fatale threatens to defile her sexual object, to render him impotent and to seductively “draw the male down into that Other world” (38). The figure of the female vampire quite simply literalizes the threat embodied by the femme fatale, but also reveals the extent to which, as Stott and others have argued, narratives of empire and sexuality had become tightly imbricated and mutually reinforcing by the turn of the century.

Dracula vivifies the threat of the female vampire by activating a cluster of anxious social narratives. Stoker naturalizes patterns of association which equate female sexuality with criminality, forces which threaten both British masculinity and the empire as a whole. Firmly policing the blank spaces of the narrative, the novel conjures the
illusion of common sense in narratives which remain "wildly and even grotesquely impossible." But perhaps paradoxically, even as *Dracula* may be read as a story of cultural regeneration (a lá Arata), it is not a story meant to lull its readers into complacency regarding the shifting cultural landscape associated with modernity. Rather, it works to perpetuate the sort of palpable paranoia that fuels Krafft-Ebing's diatribe against the nymphomaniac and Freud's confidence that homosexuality in a woman will also be detectable through outward signs of masculinity. Dracula's power (as character and narrative figure) rests in his mutability, for in Dracula multiple (even contradictory) narratives collide. In this way, even as Van Helsing and Mina diagnose the vampire according to Lombroso's model, he, of course, evades such application of natural laws.  

The narrative works toward the mystification of this "threat"; Dracula is most ominous when he appears as a white mist, creeping through the "joinings of the door" into the sanctity of Mina's bedroom. In this haunting scene, Stoker enacts the process of condensation, the convergence of multiple narratives in a single figure, which animates the monster. "Kept in the dark" by the men for her own safety as they plot Dracula's demise, Mina recounts for her diary the atmospheric effects preceding Dracula's visit to her room. The vampire appears as a white mist; lying in her bed, in a sort of hypnotic trance, Mina watches as:

> The mist grew thicker and thicker . . . like smoke—or with the white energy of

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23 Here, my reading diverges from David Seed who maintains that that synthesis of the various accounts contains the threat of the vampire by making him "better known, better defined, and therefore the easier to resist." Seed goes on to explain: "The less Dracula is formulated, the more of a threat he represents. Once the different accounts have been put together, Dracula begins to diminish in stature. He turns out to be subject to Nature's laws (though only some of them) and to be a disappointingly conventional embodiment of Nordau's and Lombroso's criminal type" (74)
boiling water—pouring in, not through the window, but through the joinings of the door. It got thicker and thicker till it seemed as if it became concentrated into a sort of pillar of cloud in the room, through the top of which I could see the light of the gas shining like a red eye. (275)

This image might easily be read as the figure of degeneration, as multiple narratives of deviant sexual desire and aberrant psychology form a cluster of associations which converge in the nebulous condition—"degeneracy." This nightmarish vision of the vampiric contagion is most threatening because it cannot be contained; it slips easily across boundaries, violating the domestic center—the bedroom—of the sanctified middle-class home. But, of course, as Dracula suggests, the real threat to British masculinity has always already remained within; in Dracula's words, "the girls that you love are mine already," for feminine nature, the narrative insists, has always cultivated this monstrous potential.
In April 2009, in Toronto, Canada, twenty-four-year old Ashleigh Pechaluk and her lover, thirty-six-year old Nicola Puddicombe, stood trial for conspiring to murder Puddicombe’s boyfriend of eleven years, Dennis Hoy, who was just thirty-six at the time of his death in October, 2006.¹ The prosecution alleged that Pechaluk entered Hoy’s bedroom at night and killed him by striking him several times in the head with an axe. The motive was presumed to be both financial, as Puddicombe stood to inherit $250,000 from Hoy’s life insurance and pension policies, and romantic, since Hoy’s absence would allow the two women to marry and raise children. Both women pleaded “not guilty.”

Given the gruesome manner of Hoy's death, it is not surprising that local tabloid-style newspapers and the Canadian national press closely covered the case. Notable, however, is the way the case circulated within the press as the “Lesbian Axe-Murder,” featuring such headlines as: “Trials in the Lesbian Axe-Murder Case Continues,” “Crown Sees Lesbian Jealousy in Axe-Murder,” and “Love Triangle Alleged in Axe-Murder Trial.”

These headlines suggest a cause and effect relationship between the defendants' sexuality and their criminal behavior: “lesbian jealousy,” unlike other types of jealousy, is cast within the logic of the headline as a sufficient cause for murder. During the trial, Pechaluk’s private diary entries, love letters, and a Valentine’s Day card given out of season were brought into the courtroom as evidence of the longstanding romantic

¹ Ashleigh Pechaluk was ultimately acquitted; Nicola Puddicombe was convicted for the murder of Dennis Hoy. For more details surrounding the outcome of the trial see: Appleby.
relationship between the two women, inspiring this headline in *The Toronto Sun*: “Murder Trial Jury Sees Axe, Lesbian Love Notes” (Pazzano). The equation suggested here—axe plus lesbian love notes equals murder—is disturbing, but it is nothing new. The correlation of lesbian desire with criminal violence displayed in the Toronto headline testifies to the legacy of three prominent figures of nineteenth and early twentieth-century sexual science—Richard Von Krafft-Ebing, Havelock Ellis, and Sigmund Freud. By bringing the sensationalized depictions of female sexuality circulating in nineteenth-century popular culture under the framework of sexual science, Krafft-Ebing legitimates and naturalizes the association of same-sex female desire, latent criminality, and murderous intent. This network of associations is replicated and amplified in Stoker's literalization of the metaphor implicit in Krafft-Ebing's sexology: there is something monstrous about any display of female sexuality which exceeds the bounds of traditionally conceived femininity. And, as the sensationalized logic of degeneration theory moves from the specialized realm of sexual science through popular literature, the patterns of association it produces around the category of female sexuality take on the form of common sense. These patterns of association, made explicit by Krafft-Ebing and Stoker, become so deeply engrained in the cultural imaginary that they may operate implicitly in the theories of female homosexuality developed later by Ellis and Freud.

"Imitating Alice Mitchell"

More than a century prior to the Puddicombe and Pechaluk trials, in Memphis, Tennessee, another case involving two young women captivated the local press. Nineteen-year-old Alice Mitchell faced charges for the murder of her recently estranged lover, Freda Ward. After Freda’s sister interfered with the two young women's plans to
elope, Alice became deeply depressed. One afternoon, Alice and her friend, Lillie Johnson, went for a drive down Freda’s street in the hopes of catching a glimpse of Alice’s former lover. In the company of Lillie and her nephew, Alice waited in the buggy outside Freda’s house until Freda emerged. When Freda finally came outside accompanied by her sister, Alice first followed them in her buggy for a distance, but then left the vehicle; Alice caught up with Freda on foot, and slit Freda’s throat with her father's razor stolen days earlier. The premeditated murder, committed in broad daylight, involving two daughters of Memphis’s comfortable white middle-class, captivated the local and national media.

As with the Pechaluk-Puddicombe case, the headlines emphasized the role of Alice’s sexuality in the murder, equating her sexuality with her criminal behavior. Out of the New Orleans, Daily Picayune picked up the story under the headline: “The Mad Murderess: Strange Infatuation of Alice Mitchell for Her Young Girl Victim,” blurring the line between Alice’s homosexuality and her pathological obsession with Freda Ward ("The Mad Murderess" 2). The headline renders the substance of Alice’s “strangeness” ambiguous: does the strangeness in “strange infatuation” refer to Alice’s sexual desire for another woman or to her fatal possessiveness of Freda? The ambiguity implies that no clarification is necessary, as the one strangeness—her sexuality—can be read as the sign of the other, her murderous jealousy. A Chicago press headline features a similar slippage between the pathological obsession that led Alice to murder and her homosexual

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desire: “Thought Her Queer: Second Day of the Trial of Alice Mitchell.” Queer, like strange, covers the range of Alice’s unconventional behavior, and through the ambiguity, collapses her sexuality and criminality.

The account of the murder provided by the press, as in the later sexological studies of Richard von Krafft-Ebing and Havelock Ellis, transformed the individual players into a new psychological type, precipitating an anxious rhetoric that obscured distinctions among various cases involving same-sex female desire. For example, a Kansas newspaper deemed the elopement of Addie Phillips and Minnie Hubbard, "More Unnatural Love.” Ignoring the total absence of violence in this affair, the paper added the subtitle, “Two Girls in Memphis Follow the Example of Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward.” Also in 1892, an Ohio case involving Annie Bryant and Mary Megrue became linked to the Mitchell-Ward murder, through the headline: “Imitating Alice Mitchell: A Young Cincinnati Woman Wants to Marry a Salesgirl.” Unlike Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward, Bryant and Megrue were never romantically involved, but, after meeting in the store where Megrue was employed, Bryant become deeply infatuated and “threatened to kill Miss Mary Megrue, a pretty salesgirl in the fashionable jewelry store of Oskamp & Notling, unless the other immediately married her” ("Imitating Alice Mitchell"). These “imitation” cases circulated widely in the press at the time, and we might speculate with some confidence that, if the Pechaluk-Puddicombe incident had occurred within the years immediately following the Mitchell-Ward case, the headlines would have identified the murder as another “Mitchell-Ward” affair, positioning Petchaluk as “Another Alice Mitchell,” despite salient differences between the two events.

By blurring distinctions between multiple occurrences of same-sex female
desire—some resulting in violence, but others simply involving plans to live as a married couple—these stories display a version of the metonymic slide informing the portrait of female homosexuality in nineteenth-century sexology. The elopement of Addie Phillips and Minnie Hubbard, and even the Bryant-Megrue incident, are only tenuously linked to the Alice Mitchell case; while all three cases involve the expression of same-sex female desire, key differences have been elided by the popular press. There is no evidence of violent intentions in the Phillips-Hubbard case; and in the Bryant-Megrue case, there is the absence of any mutual affection, and anything other than empty threats. But through the process of a metonymic exchange—the substitution of one signifier for another with which it has become associated (for example, Addie Phillips and Minnie Hubbard for Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward)—subsequent cases became linked to the Mitchell-Ward murder.

The circulation of the Mitchell-Ward case and subsequent “imitation cases” in the press is exceptionally instructive because it stages chronologically the rhetorical transformation of two women—both of whom happened to be homosexual—into a “sexual type” invested with a latent criminal tendency. This metamorphosis is the effect of metalepsis—a figural chain based on the principle of repeated metonymical substitution. As Harold Bloom succinctly describes: “In a metalepsis, a word is substituted metonymically for a word in the previous trope, so that a metalepsis can be called, maddeningly but accurately, a metonymy of a metonymy” (102). The chain begins with the sensational murder of Ward by Mitchell. As the facts of the case circulate, Alice Mitchell comes to be something of a household name, and a byword for “lesbian murderer”—in other words, her name becomes a metonymy for this “type” of
murder. The metonymical chain continues in the reportage of subsequent cases involving variable displays of same-sex female desire. Addie Phillips, for instance, is transformed into another “Alice Mitchell” through the same principle of metonymical substitution—one female homosexual is substituted for another—but this “metonymy of a metonymy” infects Addie, who remains innocent of any violent action or intent, with the potential for murderous criminality.

The metalepsis implicitly transfers Mitchell’s guilt onto Phillips (and all other female homosexuals), and in this rhetorical progression, we witness the pathologisation of same-sex female desire. The metalepsis produces the illusion of an indexical correspondence in metonymic association. The tenuous association of subsequent cases involving same-sex female desire with the Mitchell-Ward murder takes on the aspect of a more profound correlation: lesbian desire becomes an index of latent criminality. As metonymy creates the impression of an indexical correspondence, this metonymic slide threatens to render all same-sex female desire murderous, all lesbian lovers as possible Alice Mitchells. This progression of newspaper headlines allows for the rare opportunity to witness the chronological production of common sense through the naturalization of arbitrary and sensationalized associations, as Alice Mitchell becomes not only a household name, but popular shorthand for the murderous potential latent in any woman who manifests sexual desire for another woman.

In the subsequent pages, I will trace the rhetorical machinations involved in producing the illusion of indexical correspondence through the reiteration of metonymy in theories of female homosexuality: from sensationalism to science, from anxious metonymies to common sense. In contrast to an index, which is tangibly correlated with
the object to which it refers—smoke is an index of fire, thunder and lightning are indices of an impending storm, fever and nausea of the flu—metonymy typically bears merely a culturally constructed relationship to its referent. ³ The distinction between metonymic association and a more profound correspondence is sometimes apparent, but can become blurry when the terms of the association are culturally fraught and emotionally laden. A desire to preserve the existing gender codes drives the initial anxious metonymic associations articulated through many of the theories of female sexuality produced by nineteenth-century sexologists; by provoking a visceral response regarding the disruption of the status quo, the essentially arbitrary nature of metonymy's associative principle goes unrecognized. By reiterating a certain trajectory of associative logic with regard to female sexuality, nineteenth-century sexology often worked to associate female homosexuality with moral and physical degeneration.

The varied iterations of the case of Alice Mitchell—from the popular press to the sexological tome—provide the reader with the opportunity to witness the translation of the sensationalized headline into the scientific register characteristic of the sexological study, and the transformation of Alice Mitchell from historical person into a sexual type. Krafft-Ebing analyzes the "following facts" surrounding the case elicited during the trial, under the heading: "A sexually inverted girl kills the girl she loves because she was rejected" (388). Even in the space of the heading, Krafft-Ebing converts Alice Mitchell into an anonymous sexual type—"sexual inverted girl"—silently, but no less forcefully, ³ For example, Barbara Johnson discusses the controversy surrounding the expression “Legionnaires’s disease” as a clear and somewhat comical instance of the confusion of metonymy for metaphor: “While the name of the disease derives solely from the contingent fact that its first victims were at an American Legion Convention, and is thus a metonym, the fear that it will take on a metaphoric color—that a belief in some natural connection or similarity may thereby be propagated between Legionnaires and the disease—has led spokesmen for the Legionnaires to attempt to have the malady renamed” (157).
positioning her "inversion" in a causal relationship to her crime. As the legal case
described in its extensive newspaper coverage becomes a case study, it is framed by
Krafft-Ebing’s theory of "congenital sexual inversion," a sexual type which the sexologist
identifies "as a functional sign of degeneration, and as a partial manifestation of a neuro-
(psycho-) pathic state, in most cases hereditary” (223).

This theory prompts Krafft-Ebing not only to search out and identify the various
psychological disorders manifest in the subject's family tree, but to isolate signs of
psychological degeneration in the subject’s physical appearance. Of Mitchell's family
history, Krafft-Ebing claims:

Alice inherited the taint from her mother—an uncle and several cousins in the
first degree were insane—the mother herself was psychopathic, had post partum
psychosis after each confinement, the worst attack following the birth of the
seventh child, i.e., Alice, now a prisoner—afterwards she declined mentally,
suffering from persecutory dementia. (388)

Like myriad case histories published in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, this history of the mental
health of the Mitchell family posits a causal relationship between hereditary nervous
disorders and sexual inversion. The case study emphasizes Alice's relative masculinity;
during her childhood, she gravitated away from "girl's games" and toward the pastimes of
boys, "spinning tops, playing baseball and football, or shooting targets," even riding her
horse "astraddle on its back like a boy, without a saddle" (389). These indications of
Alice's masculine nature, in conjunction with the account of her idiosyncratic
physiognomy, works to confirm Krafft-Ebing's theory that congenital sexual inversion is
a sign of degeneration:

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Margaret Gibson also describes how these "degenerative fears" led Krafft-Ebing’s American
contemporary James Kiernan, to "scrutinize patients' heredity for such traits as insanity or alcoholism" (85).
Alice was nineteen years of age, of medium height, not pretty. The face was
cildlike and “almost too small for her size,” and asymmetrical, the right facial
side was more developed than the left, the nose “of striking irregularity,” the eye
piercing. She was left-handed. (388)

Krafft-Ebing's description of Alice's early behavioral tendencies and physical appearance
reveals the influence of the classification system developed by the Italian criminal
anthropologist Cesare Lombroso who, in *L'uomo Delinquente (Criminal Man)* documented
the various characteristics associated with the "born female criminal" type.⁵ Lombroso
would later devote an entire volume to the study of female criminality, but from his
preliminary investigations into the subject, he remarks: "The only conclusion about the
physiognomy of criminal women that I can draw from my sample is that female criminals
tend to be masculine” (55). And among the list of the various telltale traits which
concludes Lombroso's section on criminal women, the significance of Alice's
asymmetrical face and small head becomes apparent: "The average head size of criminals
never reaches the size of healthy men,” and "Criminal skulls present frequent asymmetry,
although less often than among the insane" (56).

That Alice's face bears the physical signs of degeneration remains implicit,
suggesting that Krafft-Ebing's readers would have found the significance of his
description self-evident. But even after Havelock Ellis and Arthur Symonds officially
renounced the degeneration theory of sexual inversion, the specter of degeneration theory
continues to shape the Alice Mitchell case study. When the case reappears in the pages of
*Sexual Inversion*, the implicit logic remains intact:

She was a typical invert of a very pronounced kind. Her mother had been insane

⁵ The 1878 edition of Lombroso's study is listed under the "literature" consulted for the major section of
*Psychopathia Sexualis*, "General Pathology" (416).
and had homicidal impulses. She herself was considered unbalanced, and was masculine in her habits from her earliest years. Her face was obviously unsymmetrical and she had an appearance of youthfulness below her age. (201)

Ellis and Symonds's account of the case is much more concise than the version Krafft-Ebing offers, but offers what seems to be a distillation of the most relevant facts surrounding the case; from the sensational press through the pages of nineteenth-century sexology, Alice Mitchell is been transformed from the "Mad Murderess" to a "typical invert."

Psychical Hermaphroditism or the "Mythic Mannish Lesbian"

Krafft-Ebing's highly influential Psychopathia Sexualis (1886) has been credited with introducing the long enduring figure of the mannish lesbian through the concept of "psychical hermaphroditism," an "extreme grade of degenerative homosexuality" in which "the woman of this type possesses of the feminine qualities only the genital organs; thought, sentiment, action, even external appearance are those of a man" (264). 6 Krafft-Ebing was not the first, however, to conceptualize homosexuality as the result of a

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6 Carol Smith-Rosenberg argues that this is indeed one of Krafft-Ebing’s more powerful legacies, still palpable in contemporary representations of feminism:

Krafft-Ebing made gender inversion physiologically manifest. The women who “aped” men’s roles looked like men. . . . Krafft-Ebing, through the creation of a new medico-sexual category, the Mannish Lesbian, linked women’s rejection of traditional gender roles and their demands for social and economic equality to cross-dressing, sexual perversion, and borderline hermaphroditism. (272)

Critical views diverge, however, on whether this association between female homosexuality and masculinity was more oppressive or liberating. For example, in her well-read article, “The Mythic Mannish Lesbian,” Esther Newton argues that, contrary to the contemporary feminist attitude toward this stereotype, writers like Radclyffe Hall may have found in this model of female inversion a way "to break out of the asexual model of romantic friendship" (560).

However, the primary concern of this chapter is the process through which degeneration theory become absorbed into common sense and the rhetorical machinations involved in perpetuating the metonymic associations justified through degeneration theory after the theory had been abandoned. This is not to deny that the legacy of sexology has been something of a double-edged sword, in that its readers have also found its representations of homosexuality liberating as well as constrictive.
male brain encased within a female body; here, the sexologist reflects the influence of Karl Ulrichs, who advocated the cause of homosexual rights and coined the term "urning" to express his belief that male homosexuality was the result of a woman's soul trapped within a man's body (and vice versa). Ulrichs’s work inspired subsequent conversions on sexual inversion. Like Ulrichs, Krafft-Ebing argued that sexual inversion could be inborn, but unlike his predecessor, Krafft-Ebing viewed homosexuality as a sign of degeneration.

In Krafft-Ebing’s theory of female sexuality, disparate female types become yoked together through the figure of degeneration. \textit{Psychopathia Sexualis} posits prostitution, nymphomania, and female homosexuality as the external signs of an internally degenerative nature. Krafft-Ebing distinguishes between "acquired" and "congenital" homosexuality; however, he maintains that without a latent predisposition, “no case has yet been demonstrated in which perversity has been transformed into perversion—i.e. into an inversion of the sexual instinct” (190). Elaborating upon this claim in a note, Krafft-Ebing explains: "An \textit{untainted} male may be raised ever so much

\footnote{For a detailed history of the conceptualization of lesbianism as a male brain housed in a women's body and the implications of this theory on controversies surrounding women's rights and higher education see: Gibson. For a fuller discussion of the work of Ulrichs, see: Hekma.}

\footnote{Here Krafft-Ebing also makes a clear departure from the prior work of Karl Friedrich Otto Westphal whose "systematic consideration of the manifestation in question, which he defined as 'congenital reversal of the sexual feeling, with consciousness of the abnormality of the manifestation'" in an article on "contrary sexual feeling," leaves "it undecided as to whether antipathic sexual feeling is a symptom of neuropathic or of a psychopathic condition, or whether it may occur as an isolated manifestation" (Krafft-Ebing 223). In other words, Westphal left open to debate whether homosexuality might occur independently of other pathologies, as Ulrich's maintained (Hekma 225).}

\footnote{I am working from the first edition of \textit{Psychopathia Sexualis}. However, even while Krafft-Ebing later abandoned the theory that congenital inversion was a sign of degeneration, the associative patterns established in his first edition remain intact and continue to inform the subsequent writings of Ellis and Freud.}
like a female, and a female like a male, but they will not become homo-sexual. *The natural disposition is the determining condition; not education and other accidental circumstances like seduction*” (425). Krafft-Ebing distinguishes among four types of "congenital" homosexuality which "presents various degrees of development":

1. Traces of heterosexual, with predominating homosexual, instinct (psycho-sexual hermaphroditism).
2. There exists inclination only toward the same sex (homosexuality).
3. The entire mental existence is altered to correspond with the abnormal sexual instinct (effemination and viraginity)
4. The form of the body approaches that which corresponds to the abnormal sexual instinct (hermaphroditism and pseudo-hermaphroditism). (222)

However, all the “anomalies of the sexual functions” detailed in this extended study are classified as “signs of an inherited diseased condition of the central nervous system (‘functional signs of degeneration’)” (32).

A variety of social Darwinism, degeneration theory diagnoses the physical signs of moral decline. In the extensively read tract, *Degeneration* (1895), Max Nordau synthesizes this pervasive scientific theory, identifying degeneracy as moral dissolution (broadly defined) and the inability of an organism to “continuously subsist and propagate itself, like one that is healthy” (16). Degeneration theory, like the theories of female homosexuality it informed, confuses metonymical association with indexical correlation. As deviation from the norm slides into "deviancy," degeneration theory transforms this chance association into necessity; as a result, divergence from social convention—regardless of the direction—becomes a symptom, an index, of moral and physical corruption. Under this logic, in their various modes of deviation, the prostitute, the nymphomaniac, the female homosexual, and the female criminal all evince signs of degeneration and therefore present evidence of an underlying physical and moral
corruption.

In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the indexical structure is explicit: female homosexuality is a symptom of degeneracy. Krafft-Ebing concretizes and legitimates degeneration theory by making signs of degeneration physiologically evident. As a result, the study naturalizes the socially constructed associative logic linking the three figures of aberrant female sexuality cited above into a biologically determined phylogeny of related deviant female types; the drift of metonymical associations is fixed (and legitimated) by indexical reference to an underlying biological correspondence, even with "acquired" cases of homosexuality. The figure of degeneration fuels the metonymic association of the nymphomaniac with the female homosexual that is in turn taken as an indexical correlation: female homosexuality is an index for nymphomania and vice versa.

To this end, Krafft-Ebing identifies the presence of excessive sexuality—nymphomania—as the cause of “homosexual love in women,” often in circumstances of constricted contact with the opposite sex—“inmates of prisons, daughters of the high classes of society who are guarded so very carefully in their relations with men, or are afraid of impregnation” (263). Krafft-Ebing puts the case plainly: “Hypersexuality” often leads:

> For want of something better, to homosexual intercourse (inmates of prisons, daughters of the high classes of society who are guarded so very carefully in their relations with men, or are afraid of impregnation, —this latter group is very numerous). Frequently female servants are the seducers, or lady friends with perverse sexual inclinations, and lady teachers in seminaries. (263)

Under this model, female homosexuality is a potential side-effect, under certain situations, of an overactive sex drive. Here, congenital or “constitutional hypersexuality” leads to an “acquired” homosexuality; in positing this connection between female
homosexuality and nymphomania, Krafft-Ebing reduces these two figures in a
synecdochical fashion to the most "deviant" part of the female body—deviant, because
the clitoris, even through its very presence, defies the imperative that female sexual
pleasure be dependent upon and defined through male sexual desire. As Lucy Bland
describes: “One of the most consistent medical characterizations of the anatomy of the
lesbian was the claim of an unusually large clitoris,” the physical sign of the deviant and
excessive sexuality also associated with the nymphomaniac (184). Kraft-Ebbing
confuses metaphor with science; in taking synecdoche as biology, he concludes that
female homosexual desire is less discriminating than heterosexual urges.

**Sexual Inversion and the Specter of Degeneration Theory**

Even after the later sexological studies of Havelock Ellis and Freud formally abandon
degeneration theory in its most apocalyptic expression, the specter of degeneration
continues to actuate the metaleptical rhetoric structuring these subsequent models of
female sexuality. The rhetorical position of degeneration shifts from an overt to a covert
function explaining why, in his sexological tome, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*
(1898), Ellis resists the degeneration theory of homosexuality and yet preserves Krafft-
Ebing’s explicit associations of the female homosexual with the prostitute, the
nymphomaniac, and the criminal. This disappearing act constitutes something of a
rhetorical *tour de force*; the metalepsis naturalizes the sensational discourse surrounding
the figuration of female homosexuality in the service of preserving traditional gender
roles against the disruptive presence of active female sexuality.

Degeneration functions as the unarticulated guiding principle in the theory of
female homosexuality Ellis presents. Indeed, by the *fin-de-siècle*, as Stephen Arata
demonstrates, degeneration theory had so saturated the British imaginary that it functioned “less as a coherent system than a form of common sense” (3). This rhetorical shift is evident in Ellis (and Freud) where the principles and methods popularized by degeneration theory no longer appear as an overt premise put forth by the theorist, who may even claim outright to reject the theory. Ellis goes as far as to identify the problems arising from the popularity of the concept, asserting his sense that “strictly speaking, the invert is degenerate; he has fallen away from the genus. So is the color-blind person” (emphasis mine, 320). But he then qualifies this claim, because the technical sense of “degeneration” has been lost in the promiscuous popular usage of the term:

It is undesirable to call these modifications “stigmata of degeneration,” a term which threatens to disappear from scientific terminology, to become a mere term of literary and journalistic abuse. So much may be said concerning a conception or phrase of which far too much has been made in popular literature. At the best it remains vague and unfitted for scientific use. It is now widely recognized that we gain little by describing inversion as degeneration. (321)

In other words, Ellis confirms Arata’s sense that late-Victorian concept of degeneration operates less as a scientific theory and more as a matter of common sense. For Ellis, the degenerate nature of homosexuality is on the one hand undeniable; however, homosexuality, like “color-blindness,” Ellis seems to want to suggest, should be considered like any other physical abnormality and not morally condemned. But even in this analogy, "sexual inversion" still carries a sense of moral corruption, as “fallen”—in the sense of diverging from the norm—metonymically slides into the biblical and devolutionary condition of “fallenness” in relation to a moral and physiological ideal.  

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10 It should be noted here that this analogy did not originate with Ellis and was in fact the contribution of John Addington Symonds. Indeed, as Ellis describes in his correspondence with Symonds, he found the more apt comparison might be to "regard sexual inversion as a psychic abnormality in just the same way as coloured hearing is" ("Havelock Ellis to John Addington Symonds," also quoted in Chiara Beccalossi 215).
This metonymic slippage enacts the same rhetorical transformation as the degeneration theory Ellis is describing, even as he attempts to use “degeneration” in its scientific sense, eugenicist connotations intrude. The popular conception of degeneration is so rhetorically potent at the fin-de-siècle that Ellis need not even evoke the concept explicitly. The figure of degeneration can now go without saying, and yet still be powerfully conveyed to the reader in the metaleptical logic of Ellis’s and Freud’s sexual theories.

Like Krafft-Ebing before him, Ellis attributes the high instance of female homosexuality among prostitutes to the “character of the prostitute’s relations with men” (212). According to Ellis, the “professional character” of the prostitute’s sexual encounters decreases the “possibility of sexual satisfaction.” Even “at the best,” these relationships “lack the sense of social equality, the feeling of possession, and scope for the exercise of feminine affection and devotion” (212). In other words, there is no potential for romantic connection between a prostitute and her client, and, as a result, “the prostitute must usually be forced to find [this intimacy] either in a ‘bully’ or in another woman” (212). Ellis expands this psychological model to argue that a congenital predisposition to homosexuality is also frequently present among prostitutes, since “in a

Indeed, the result of this collaboration is striking as it suggests even more strongly that Ellis sought to move away from the association of inversion with degeneration, and yet the insidious influence of degeneration theory, so deeply absorbed into common sense conceptions of sexuality, remains discernible.

Krafft-Ebing extends his phylogenesis of hypersexuality from the female homosexual to the prostitute, in describing a process by which hypersexuality leads some women to homosexuality and others to prostitution and then to homosexuality. In this narrative, women of “gross sensuality” working in prostitution, with “very frequent occurrence,” become “disgusted with the intercourse with perverse and impotent men by whom they are used for the performance of the most revolting sexual acts” and as a result “seek compensation in the sympathetic embrace of persons of their own sex” (263).
very large number of cases, prostitutes show in slight or more marked degree many of the
signs of neurotic heredity.” This observation leads Ellis to conclude that “it would not be
surprising if they present the germs of homosexuality in an unusually high degree” (212).
Ellis presses the association between the female homosexual and the prostitute even
further, and in the following assertion we can indirectly read the figure of degeneration
informing this metaleptical chain:

It must be borne in mind that, in a very large number of cases, prostitutes show in
slight or more marked degree many of the signs of neurotic heredity, and it would
not be surprising if they present the germs of homosexuality in an unusually high
degree. The life of the prostitute may well develop such latent germs; and so we
have an undue tendency to homosexuality, just as we have it among criminals.
(212)

In support of the claim that prostitutes frequently display "the signs of neurotic heredity,"
Ellis cites Lombroso and Ferrero's *The Female Offender* in support of the view that the
prostitute may be "regarded as a special type, analogous to the instinctive criminal”
(212). And while he is not explicit about how “the life of the prostitute” or the criminal is
particularly conducive to the progression of any “latent germs” of homosexuality, we
may infer Ellis means to imply that the moral lassitude of the social climate of both
prostitutes and criminals allows for the expression of illicit sexual energies that, in more
morally stringent circumstances, would remain repressed.

In the evolution of the metonymic cluster of deviant female types from Krafft-
Ebing to Ellis, we can see the formation of a long-enduring rhetoric linking disparate
female figures on the basis of their *excessive* sexuality. But two points here should not
go unnoticed. First, while female homosexuality exists *in excess* of the nineteenth-
century normative social paradigm, it is not inevitably, as Krafft-Ebing would suggest,
insatiable or excessive, like that of the nymphomaniac. Second, even casual reflection on
the social history of prostitution in the nineteenth century reveals that women turned to prostitution largely for economic, as opposed to sexual, reasons. Yet Krafft-Ebing and Ellis transform tenuous cultural associations into indexical correlations. In this model, no actual sex act or crime need transpire to confirm the inherent criminality of the female homosexual. The logic of latency positions prostitution and other criminal behavior as indices of latent homosexuality and, in a facile reversal, female homosexuality may also be diagnosed as a sign of latent criminality and nymphomania.

Elaborating on what he takes to be a fundamental relationship between female criminality and homosexuality, Ellis claims that homosexuality in women (unlike men) has more frequently “led to crimes of violence” (201). This statistic is striking because “the part taken by women generally in open criminality, and especially in crimes of violence, is small as compared with men” (201). And yet, Ellis continues, “in the homosexual field, as we might have anticipated, the conditions are to some extent reversed” (201). The female homosexual, in Ellis’s view, presents the perfect storm of psychological traits to impel women to criminal behavior: “Inverted women, who may retain their feminine emotionality combined with some degree of infantile impulsiveness and masculine energy, present a favorable soil for the seed of passional crimes, under those conditions of jealousy and allied emotions which must so often enter the invert’s life” (201). In this light, criminal behavior emanates from the underlying psychological complex of the female homosexual. Her criminal behavior is immanent, even organic—the seeds of “passional crime” flourish in the “favorable soil” of her emotional

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12 Walkowitz presents an extensive argument along these lines. The severely limited financial opportunities available to working women often made the relative autonomy available through prostitution seem “the best of a series of unattractive alternatives” (31).
constitution. Ellis deploys naturalistic figurations to convey the essential nature of female homosexuality as tending towards criminality—a rhetorical move reminiscent of the sensationalized headlines surrounding the Mitchell-Ward case. In an effort to provide evidence in support of this claim, Ellis reminds us not only of the widely circulating facts surrounding the Mitchell-Ward murder, but goes on to cite several other sensational accounts of similar crimes of passion, perpetrated by female homosexuals.

Portending murderous deeds, lesbian jealousy features prominently in all four cases Ellis cites to illustrate the latent criminal tendencies of homosexual women. “There have been numerous cases in America more recently,” Ellis claims, which follow the basic model of the Mitchell-Ward murder typified in the press. The first case involves “the ‘Tiller Sisters,’ two quintroons, who for many years had acted together under that name in cheap theaters” (201). As in the story of Alice Mitchell and Freda Ward, the relationship of the “Tiller Sisters” (sisters, presumably, only in name) features a romantic asymmetry that eventually culminates in the jealous rage of the disappointed party: “One, who was an invert, with a horror of men dating from early girlhood, was sexually attached to the other, who was without inborn inversion, and was eventually induced by a man to leave the invert. The latter, overcome by jealousy, broke into the apartment of the couple and shot the man dead” (201). Ellis then turns to "another later case in Chicago" involving a "Russian girl of 22, named Anna Rubinowitch." This case reveals a similar pattern of romantic intimacy and murderous jealousy: "Anna Rubinowitch, shot from motives of jealousy another Russian girl to whom she had been devoted from childhood, and then fatally shot herself” (202). The relationship between the two young women continued "until Anna's 'sweetheart' began to show herself susceptible to the advances of
a male wooer. This aroused uncontrollable jealousy in Anna” (202). The final cases follow a similar trajectory: one woman actively pursues her female love interest; the love interest in turn is sometimes receptive to these overtures, but vacillates in her affection, and ultimately rejects her female lover in favor of a male suitor, inspiring violence on the part of the jilted partner.

In her extended analysis of the popular press and medical discourses surrounding the Mitchell-Ward case, Lisa Duggan argues that the basic structure of the “lesbian love murder narratives” follows the model developed in Mitchell-Ward case, and features four essential structural elements:

(1) a contrast between the masculine woman and her feminine partner; (2) a love triangle organizing competition between the masculine woman and a “normal” man over the loyalty of the feminine woman; (3) a marriage plan, often triggering conflict with female domestic or institutional authorities, and (4) violence. (*Sapphic Slashers* 134)

The narratives Ellis recounts testify to the aptness of Duggan’s model. In preserving this essential structure, these narratives actively pathologize same-sex female desire as violently possessive in relation to its passive, more feminine victims. Expanding on Duggan’s paradigm, I argue that, within these nineteenth-century narratives, “jealousy” functions as the central trope representing the atavistic and degenerative status of same-sex female desire: a primitive impulse with aggressive tendencies unchecked by the morality of civil society.

To a large extent, Krafft-Ebing and Ellis are primarily concerned with the criminally suspect, more masculine partner in the same-sex female couple who is marked both physically and psychologically as anomalous in relation to the rest of her sex. Krafft-Ebing’s treatment of female homosexuality catalogues the range of visible
masculinity from a clearly marked masculine appearance and deportment, to outwardly invisible internal signs of a masculine physiology. Presenting something of a how-to-guide for recognizing homosexual women, Krafft-Ebing assures the reader that “careful observation among the ladies of large cities soon convinces one that homosexuality is by no means a rarity” (263). Tell-tale signs include: “females wearing their hair short, or who dress in the fashion of men, or pursue the sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances; also in opera singers and actresses, who appear in male attire on the stage by preference” (263). This idiosyncratic list gestures toward the emergence of the figure of the New Woman—who eschewed traditional female fashion and behavior and who keeps company, as it were, with the actress, whose moral and social status has long been the object of moral suspicion.13 Projecting his uneasiness about the political implications signaled by the change in women’s fashion, Krafft-Ebing displaces this social anxiety onto the figure of the female homosexual.

Even in the absence of visible physical traits, according to Krafft-Ebing, female homosexuals generally evince “masculine” behavioral tendencies and are often, but not always, externally marked: "Psychico-hermaphrodisic and many homosexual women do not betray their anomaly by external appearances nor by masculine sexual characteristics” (263). For a moment it seems that Krafft-Ebing is willing to entertain the notion that homosexuality and gender inversion may not always be firmly intertwined, but this exception is quickly followed by the following citation: "Remarkable, however it

13 For a discussion of sexology’s conflation of lesbianism and feminism see: Faderman, 239-53. Smith-Rosenberg also provides an extended discussion of Krafft-Ebing’s role in perpetuating the image of the New Woman as a “Mannish Lesbian”—a figure that diverged radically from the self-image of the “genteel Edwardian” first generation New Women. Smith-Rosenberg, 272-274.
is that Dr. Flatau (Moll, op. cit., p.334) in examining the larynx of twenty-three homosexual women found in several of them a decidedly masculine formation” (264).

Here Krafft-Ebing betrays his unwillingness to concede, even as he recognizes evidence to the contrary, that female homosexuality is not necessarily linked to an underlying masculinity (264). Krafft-Ebing’s impact is evident on Freud even thirty years later, as Freud, like his predecessor, takes sociologically defined masculine behavior in childhood as evidence of an underlying homosexual predisposition. The female homosexual, according to Krafft-Ebing, will show behavioral signs at a very young age, as she may “chiefly be found in the haunts of boys” (264). Her competitive tendency in childhood—“she is the rival in their [boys’] play, preferring the rocking-horse, playing at soldiers, etc., to dolls and other girlish occupations”—also suggests an early form of the New Woman’s professional and political aspirations outside the bounds of women’s traditional domestic sphere.

Even while Ellis challenges Krafft-Ebing’s conviction that a “masculine” appearance in women can usually be interpreted as the effect of homosexuality, he still betrays a similar impulse to locate gendered behavioral patterns in biological difference. Keeping in mind the female homosexual’s frequent necessity for discretion, Ellis explains that:

[the female homosexual] may not be, and frequently is not, what would be called a ‘mannish’ woman, for the latter may imitate men on grounds of taste and habit unconnected with sexual perversion. While in the inverted woman the masculine traits are part of an organic instinct which she by no means always wishes to accentuate. (223)

Even as Ellis considers how social pressures may deter a woman from violating the norms of gendered behavior, he continues to locate female homosexuality in a physically
marked “masculinity.” Ellis indicates patterns of hair growth as a reliable index of sexual preference among women:

There seems little doubt that inverted women frequently tend to show minor anomalies of the piliferous system and especially slight hypertrichosis [excessive hair growth] and a masculine distribution of hair. Thus in a very typical case of inversion in an Italian girl of 19 who dressed as a man and ran away from home, the down on the arms and legs was marked to an unusual extent, and there was very abundant hair in the armpits and on the pubes, with a tendency to the masculine distribution. (253)

Never elaborating on how a “masculine distribution” of hair is distinguished from a feminine distribution, Ellis leaves us to imagine from this short anecdote that some other factor besides sheer quantity is involved in the assessment. In this scientific revision of the “bearded lady,” Ellis uses biology to concretize social categories, and to this end transforms the metonymic relationship between sociologically and biologically defined masculinity into an indexical structure: “masculine” behavior becomes a symptom of biological masculinity, whether it be detectable in the voice box or the distribution of armpit hair.

The metonymic associations of female masculinity extend far beyond the model of female homosexuality in nineteenth-century sexology; examination of this body of medical literature in conjunction with a concurrent publication in the field of criminal anthropology reveals the loaded meaning of female “masculinity” in these sexual theories. Published just after the appearance of Nordau’s apocalyptic tract, Degeneration (1892), The Female Offender (1895) is the work of two Italian criminologists, Cesare Lombroso and William Ferrero. After extended cataloging and examination of the facial and cranial structures displayed by the “born-criminal”—a female degenerate type—the criminologists conclude: “In general the moral physiognomy of the born female criminal
approximates strongly to that of the male” (187). Lombroso and Ferrero refer to the physical masculinity of the female criminal as the biological analogue of her “masculine” psychology: “[She] is excessively erotic, weak in maternal feeling, inclined to dissipation, astute and audacious, and dominates weaker beings sometimes by suggestion, at others by muscular force; while her love of violent exercise, her vices, and even her dress, increase her resemblance to the sterner sex” (187). Marked with all the vices of the “sterner sex,” the female offender is more dangerous and cruel than even her male counterpart; Lombroso and Ferrero add that, in addition “to [their] virile characteristics are often the worst qualities of woman: namely, an excessive desire for revenge, cunning, cruelty, love of dress, and untruthfulness” (187). The female offender’s masculine performance, however, always remains at the level of degenerative imitation. While the criminologists brand her as visibly masculine, they simultaneously work to protect the sacred sphere of male privilege from these “audacious” impersonators. This is tricky work since a convincing masculine presentation in a woman could potentially give the lie to a sex-gender system founded on the presumption of essential sexual difference. To this end, the pathological masculinity of these female offenders is always undercut by evidence of their essentially feminine nature. This same dynamic clearly informs Bram Stoker's personification of the antediluvian monster, the White Worm, as the aristocratic Lady Arabella March.

**Sexual Aberrations:**
**Female Sexuality in Freud's Three Essays on Sexuality and "A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman"**

The same degenerative figure of female masculinity generating the metonymic slide linking prostitutes, nymphomaniacs, female homosexuals, and the class of violent
criminals detailed in Lombroso and Ferrero’s study informs Freud’s treatment of female homosexuality in *Three Essays on Sexuality* (1905) and “A Case of Homosexuality in a Woman” (1920). Even as Freud rejects degeneration-based models of homosexuality, he preserves the metaleptic logic constructed by Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and nineteenth-century criminal anthropology. Where the links in the several metonymic chains informing the figuration of female homosexuality are plainly evident in Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, they linger beneath the surface of the text in Freud, and are discernible only indirectly through their disruptive effects on his theories of sexuality. The progress Freud makes in his theory of male homosexuality and the impasse he reaches at the site of female homosexuality can be explained as his ability, on one hand, and his failure, on the other, to recognize and disrupt the illusion of indexical correlation in metonymic association.

The sophistication of Freud's analytic framework as introduced in his work on the interpretation of dreams makes it doubly astounding that the strikingly asymmetrical model of homosexuality presented in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* is so clearly marked by the effects of displacement (the transference of “psychical energy” from the original source to another object) and overdetermination (the result of an intense *condensation* of multiple thoughts in a single figure) (*Interpretation of Dreams* 313). *Three Essays* develops a theory of male homosexuality, so-called “inversion,” which departs from the old model of “deviant” sexual behavior as the consequence of a fundamental gender inversion and moves toward a more progressive conception of homosexuality defined in terms of same-sex object choice without the necessary correlation of gender performance. Freud boldly throws aside the old bugbear, “degeneration”; marking a clear departure from Krafft-Ebing and Ellis, he states plainly:
“Inverts cannot be regarded as degenerate” (4). Even if Freud hangs on to the vestigial label—inversion—and remains unimaginative when it comes to the possible permutations of gender performance within homosexual couples, he is quite clear that: “[t]here can be no doubt that a large proportion of male inverts retain the mental quality of masculinity, that they possess relatively few of the secondary characters of the opposite sex and that what they look for in their sexual object are in fact feminine mental traits” (10). Freud reaches back to “[Ancient] Greece, where the most masculine men were numbered among the inverts” to justify his views (10).

But if we expect to find parallel progress in his theory of female homosexuality, we will be quickly disappointed. We encounter only a single sentence following an extended discussion of male homosexuality, on the “active [female] invert.” Freud simply asserts that, unlike their male counterparts for whom gender and sexual object choice must be independently considered, “active [female] inverts exhibit masculine characteristics, both physical and mental, with peculiar frequency and look for femininity in the sexual objects” (11). If the extreme brevity of Freud’s discussion of the female homosexual in *Three Essays* immediately suggests evidence of condensation, the persistence of her masculine aspect and the suggestion of her predatory nature betray the effects of overdetermination. Freud dismisses the theory of “psychical hermaphroditism” in cases of male homosexuality—only to maintain that “it is only in inverted women that character-inversion of this kind can be looked for with any regularity” (8).

The image of the female homosexual appears in Freud’s theory as a single unified figure, where what we encounter is in fact the metonymic constellation constructed in the pages of Krafft-Ebing and Ellis. The branches of her deviant phylogeny are no longer
visible, but the influence of these familiar metonymies is evident in the illogical character
of her figuration. Freud concludes his puzzling and brief discussion of female
homosexuality with the frank admission that “a closer knowledge of the facts might
reveal greater variety” (11). But when Freud returns to this query with fifteen more years
of case work under his belt, he holds on to the basic equation of masculinity with female
homosexuality in “Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman,” even while
he vacillates regarding the validity of this antiquated conflation.

The only extended case study of a woman Freud completed after *Dora* (1905)
features a young woman—a “beautiful and clever girl of eighteen, belonging to a family
of good standing”—who comes to Freud after causing her parents much grief through her
intimate involvement with a “questionable lady” ten years her senior. Six months prior to
her presence in Freud’s office, the young woman attempted suicide, after encountering
her father in the street while in the company of her lover, by throwing herself “over a
wall down the side of a cutting on to the suburban railway line” (“Case of
Homosexuality” 243). Before beginning his analysis of the details of the young woman’s
personal history, Freud urges those of his readers “unversed in psychoanalysis” not to
make the mistake of placing undue significance on the physical characteristics of his
patient. He then qualifies this statement, remarking that, in homosexual women, though
not in homosexual men, “bodily and mental traits belonging to the opposite sex are apt to
coincide” (“Case of Homosexuality” 249). This equivocal rhetoric continues in his
physical description of the patient; he reiterates the fact that she is “a beautiful and well-
made girl,” but adds: “[She] had, it is true, her father’s tall figure, and her facial features
were sharp rather than soft and girlish” (“Case of Homosexuality” 249). She otherwise
manifests “no obvious deviation from the feminine physical type,” but Freud, like the “unversed” reader, reveals a tendency to read any masculine physical traits as signs of sexual inversion.

In addition to these revelatory physical characteristics, Freud’s patient also displays mental “masculinity” to the extent that she “assumes the masculine” part in her relationship with the older woman; she takes on the active role of the “lover” in contrast to the narcissistic, passive role of the “beloved” ("Case of Homosexuality" 249). But even prior to this display of “masculine” behavior, the young woman, upon further analysis, reveals “from her childhood, a strongly marked ‘masculinity complex’” in her determination to “enjoy the same freedom as a boy” and her constant readiness for “romping and fighting”—in other words, “she was in fact a feminist” ("Case of Homosexuality" 262).

In this telling political blunder, Freud, perhaps inadvertently, reveals the stakes of his theory of female sexuality in general, and female homosexuality in particular. Even while Freud is careful to distinguish among three different senses of the terms “masculine” and “feminine”—"attitudinal" (merely denoting "active" and "passive," respectively), "biological," and "sociological"—these socially loaded categories are mutually reinforcing, and work to naturalize the correlation of passivity with biological femininity (Three Essays fn.1, 85-86). As Helene Cixous has influentially demonstrated, the binary logic involved in the active/passive coupling inevitably involves a hierarchy that enforces and sustains “male privilege”: “Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is treated by coupling it with the opposition, activity/passivity” (64). This binary opposition has become so closely linked to sexual difference, as is clearly the case
in Freudian theory, that, “either woman is passive or she does not exist. What is left of her is unthinkable, unthought” (64). In other words, a woman is either passive or she ceases to be a woman; she is masculine in all three senses of the term. The figuration of the female homosexual in nineteenth-century sexology illustrates the way the slippage between attitudinal and sociologically defined masculinity is concretized by reference to physical traces of masculinity. The indexical correlation of sociological and biological masculinity is a self-fulfilling diagnosis: evidence of “masculine” behavior prompts a hunt for physical masculinity (and given the breadth of this physical category, what is sought will generally be found), and any physical traces of masculinity in the subject reaffirm the conflation of activity with socially proscribed “masculinity.” Freud’s young female patient is the active subject in the relationship; she is the pursuant, the lover, and, as a “tom-boy” in her youth, her “masculinity” is sociologically defined. But the resemblance she bears to her father later in life—her tall stature and sharp features—evokes the category of biological masculinity, reifying the “masculine” quality of her behavior.

Even while Freud positions himself against the degeneration theory of homosexuality, he continues to reinforce traditional social frameworks by locating sexual “deviancy” on (and in) the body.14 Freud’s theory of female sexuality employs a

14 George Chauncey describes this phenomenon in the shift from the "sexual inversion" to "homosexuality." Chauncey distinguishes between the two terms as follows: "while 'sexual inversion' referred to an inversion in the full range of gender characteristics, 'homosexuality,' precisely understood, referred only to the narrower issue of homosexual object choice, and did not necessarily imply gender or sexual role inversion" (124). Indeed one of Freud's major innovations, Chauncey argues, was to distinguish between sexual aim (active vs. passive) and sexual object (123). However, when it came to women, "Freud, like Ellis and the whole of turn-of-the-century sexology, continued to assert that 'character inversion' was a regular feature of female inversion, although no longer maintaining that this was true of male inverts" (Chauncey 125). However, Chauncey does not account for the way this hangover of the inversion model preserves the
methodology analogous to degeneration theory, as both seek to correlate aberrant behavior to aberrant physical development. Freud takes great pains in *Three Essays* to provide a biological basis for the nineteenth-century normative view of female sexuality, as he details the physical transformations involved in the transition of female sexuality from the active “masculine” form of infancy and childhood to the passive form of adulthood. According to Freud, this transformation from the active “masculine” libido to repressive passive sexuality is biologically hardwired. Women’s sexual maturity is defined through the successful transference of erotic energy from the clitoris—the erotic zone that predominates in infancy—to the “new leading zone” of the vagina, the dominant location of erotic stimulation for the rest of her adult life (*Three Essays* 87). A young girl’s early sexuality, according to Freud, is principally autoerotic, involving the clitoris—an erotic zone “homologous to the masculine genital zone of the glans penis”—and therefore “of a wholly masculine character” (*Three Essays* 85). The sexuality of the female child is “masculine” not just because the clitoris reminds Freud of the penis, but also because the female child’s “masturbatory manifestations of sexuality” involve the active search for pleasure—the trademark of the libidinal impulse—and the libido, as an instinctual drive, is by definition active and accordingly “invariably and necessarily of a masculine nature” (*Three Essays* 85). Freud’s herculean effort to theorize away the presence of active female sexuality—unavoidably present at infancy—requires and perpetuates the naturalization and internalization of cultural forces. Freud effectively elides the weight of social convention and traditional morality in the rhetorical structures informed by degeneration theory (i.e. the extent to which the degenerative character of female homosexuals remained a tacit, common sense assumption).
development of female sexuality by obfuscating the motivating source of repression.

Nature takes its course in Freud’s radically asymmetrical model of sexual development:

“Puberty, which brings about so great an accession of libido in boys, is marked in girls by a fresh wave of repression, in which it is precisely clitoridal sexuality that is affected.

What is thus overtaken by repression is a piece of masculine sexuality” (*Three Essays* 86). The euphemistic and naturalistic metaphor Freud uses to describe the young girl’s experience during puberty disguises societal pressures. This model not only reaffirms the traditional model of femininity by yoking biological femininity to passivity (attitudinal femininity), it relegates female sexual pleasure to an auxiliary role. After the transference of erotic zones is completed, the once intrinsic sexual value of the clitoris is replaced by merely a relational utility. Opting again for figuration, Freud describes the sexual utility of the formerly leading zone as “transmitting the excitation to the female sexual parts just as—to use a simile—pine shavings can be kindled in order to set a log of harder wood on fire” (*Three Essays* 87). Freud shows his hand (or something like that) in this utilitarian portrait of deadwood/female anatomy. In the place of female sexual pleasure, we find only the male anatomy implicitly described: the more substantial “log,” kindled by the ephemeral spark of the woman’s sexual organ. The development of female sexuality as Freud describes it is clearly modeled after male desire. To borrow a phrase from Luce Irigaray, in his theory of female sexuality, Freud is exposed “as a card-carrying member of an ‘ideology’ that he never questions” (28). The result is a model of human sexuality in which “sexual pleasure known as masculine is the paradigm for all sexual pleasure, to which all representations of pleasure can but defer in reference, support and submission” (Irigaray 28).
To this end, the *coup-de-grâce* of Freud’s relegation of female sexual pleasure to the service of male desire is his theory of female anesthesia. Before the exchange of erotogenic zones can take place, Freud claims that “a certain period of time must often elapse during which the young woman is anaesthetic [at the vaginal orifice].” This medical rhetoric registers in increasingly ominous tones, as Freud warns that, “this anesthesia may become permanent if the clitoridal zone *refuses to abandon* its excitability” (*emphasis mine*, *Three Essays* 87). The trajectory of women’s sexual development into maturity must follow the subjugation of the clitoris, the personification of female rebellion which threatens not to "abandon" a state of "childish masculinity" and instead to continue to freely enjoy the bodily pleasures of childhood (*Three Essays* 87). Freud’s warning about the perils of prolonged clitoral sensitivity reads more like a threat when we consider the history of medical treatment for nymphomania, the general diagnosis of the woman who refuses to abandon her “excitability.” Clitoridectomy and other gynecological surgeries were performed by American and British medical specialists throughout the nineteenth century as cures for sexual disorders.\(^{15}\)

Freud’s model of female sexuality expends great energy to collapse the categories of sociological and biological femininity, and to pathologize any display active of female sexuality. The desire to guard traditional gender roles against the potentially disruptive presence of autonomous female sexual pleasure is evident in Freud’s persistent figuration of the “active female invert” as both psychologically—and as I will demonstrate—

\(^{15}\) Elaine Showalter provides an extended discussion of surgical treatment for female psychological disorders ranging from “nymphomania” to the desire for divorce in: *The Female Malady*, 74-79. For further discussion of the use of gynecological surgery in cases of sexual disorder see: Moscucci, 31-32; Andrew Scull, "The Clitoridectomy Craze." For an extended discussion of the history of diagnosis and treatment of nymphomania, see: Groneman.
physically masculine, but the effects of displacement and overdetermination are also present in the implausible account Freud provides of her more feminine partner. In Freud’s asymmetrical representation of the same-sex female couple, the sexual object of the “active invert” is defined by her passive femininity. In portraying the active female homosexual as both masculine and sexually aggressive in seeking a passive sexual object, Freud echoes the anxious cautionary tales circulated around the Mitchell-Ward case about the vulnerability of all women to same-sex seduction. Duggan argues that the “femininity,” the normalcy, of the female homosexual’s partner produced intense social anxiety because, unlike the masculine lesbian, “she could not be distinguished from among the general throng of ordinary ‘normal’ women” (Sapphic Slashers 29). As the sensational narratives of same-sex female desire reveal, the actions of the feminine partner are unpredictable: she might elope with her female lover or simply abandon the relationship for a male suitor. Accordingly, Duggan explains, “she became the figure of potential instability and betrayal located in the position of any woman, located alongside the foregrounded image of the fixed, identifiable, deviant lesbian” (Sapphic Slashers 29).

Put another way, the passive partner, like the “active invert,” is overdetermined; in Freud, she is the site where anxious narratives about the potential seduction and corruption of any and all innocent young women converge.

The figure of the female homosexual overwhelms this dominant paradigm of sexual relations; her active sexuality is not only beyond the pale of Freud’s model of female sexual development, her presence testifies to the cultural (as opposed to natural) cause of female sexual repression. If she can seize the active role in the courtship drama and play her part successfully, she also gives the lie to any biological justification of sex-
specific social performance. In other words, the presence of the female homosexual reveals that what is presented as biological correspondence is nothing other than socially constructed metonymical association. The figure of the female homosexual consequently becomes the site for displaced anxiety surrounding female sexuality and the threat active female sexuality presents to traditional narratives of sexual difference and gendered social systems. Discussions of the female homosexual in nineteenth-century sexology evince a clear desire to contain her subversive (and socially contagious) sexual energy by pathologizing and typifying the aberrant female figure.

The threat of contagion marks the sexological and popular figurations of “deviant” female sexuality; in *Psychopathia Sexualis*, the metonymic drift of moral and physical corruption across each of several disparate aberrant female sexual types rhetorically enacts the same process of contamination Krafft-Ebing anxiously describes. In particularly elevated language, the sexologist calls us to witness the deleterious effects of the nymphomaniac on any man unlucky enough to fall her victim:

> Woe unto the man who falls into the meshes of such an insatiable nymphomaniac, whose sexual appetite is never appeased. Heavy neurasthenia and impotence are the inevitable consequences. These unfortunate women disseminate the spirit of lewdness, demoralize their surroundings, become a danger to boys, and are liable to corrupt girls also, for there are homosexual nymphomaniacs as well. (324)

The nymphomaniac presents a direct threat to virile masculinity; the man ensnared by this sexually insatiable woman is irresistibly and inevitably emasculated.  

> Not only is he impotent as a result of her “sexual appetite,” but, from prolonged exposure, he

16 Freud explains women’s greater predisposition to hysteria in biological terms: “The fact that women change their leading erotogenic zone” (from the clitoris to the vagina), “together with the wave of repression at puberty, which, as it were, puts aside their childish masculinity, are the chief determinants of the greater proneness of women to neurosis and especially hysteria *(Three Essays 87)*. For other critical discussions of the gendered inflection of “hysteria,” see: Showalter, Oppenheim, and Small.
contracts “neurasthenia,” a form of hysteria, which is a nervous disease generally associated with women. Krafft-Ebing stages the nymphomaniac’s unnatural usurpation of the masculine sexual role; as she widely *disseminates* her moral corruption, the impotence of her sexual partner is rendered inevitable. The anxiety underwriting this cautionary tale is palpable: no one is safe from her corruptive influence “for there are homosexual nymphomaniacs as well.” This latter figure suggests something of a redundancy when we recall that nymphomania is included in Krafft-Ebing’s catalogue of frequent causes of female homosexuality. Indeed, the fear of predatory lesbians taking advantage of young girls in the space of same-sex institutions (boarding schools, prisons, convents, and even workplaces) fueled the push to extend the Criminal Law Amendments of 1885 to cover “acts of indecency by females” (Doan 202-205).

The ambiguous sexuality of the more “feminine” partner often positioned as the sexual target of the female homosexual, coupled with the general belief in female naïveté and sexual vulnerability, compounded the perceived threat of contagion as all women could be potentially seduced. The difficulty of isolating expressions of same-sex female desire in the more fluid context of female relations further spurred nineteenth-century sexologists to devise modes of “detection” by locating sexual deviancy on the female body in the telltale signs of biological “masculinity.”

Ellis describes the complications of “detection” as three-fold: first, women tend to be more emotionally intimate with each other than men, making it more difficult for an outsider “to suspect the existence of any

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17 Historically, female homosexuality has flown relatively under the legal radar; where sodomy was a punishable crime in nineteenth-century England and other parts of Europe, expressions of same-sex female desire remained off the books at the turn of the century. The legal history of Germany and England reflects the difficulty of punishing female homosexuality as a result of the complexities involved in linking it to a discrete criminal sexual act analogous to sodomy (Matysik 41).
abnormal passion”; second, women are generally estranged from their sexuality, and manifest “extreme ignorance and extreme reticence . . . regarding any abnormal or even normal manifestation of their sexual life”; and last, but not least, women tend to be less willing than men to “reveal the nature of . . . intimate experience,” even in the form of an anonymous confession (204).

Even after degeneration theory had been rejected with respect to nineteenth-century theories of female homosexuality, the methodological structure was preserved, and the legacy of degenerationist panic continues to shadow contemporary depictions of lesbian love and desire. From Kraft-Ebbing to Ellis to Freud, social deviation was continually traced back to an underlying biological disturbance, located on the physical body, whose surface could be read as a sign of existing, and even latent wayward tendencies. Reflecting the enduring potency of degeneration rhetoric, Freud’s depiction of the female homosexual is overdetermined. She is the site where metonymically associated narratives of female masculinity, fueled through displaced anxiety regarding the subversive potential of an active female sexuality, converge and coalesce, creating the illusion of an indexical correspondence between physical and psychological “masculinity.”

"Sacrificed to Censorship": Unnarratable Desire in Dora

If Freud’s Three Theories of Sexuality represents the most dramatic representation of the effects of displacement and overdetermination in the radically condensed, enigmatic figure of female homosexuality, Dora offers the clearest illustration of the unnarratable quality of female homosexuality within Freud’s sexual paradigm. The subject of the case study, Ida Bauer—alias, “Dora”—comes to Freud manifesting
symptoms of severe psychological disorder including the occasional temporary “loss of consciousness” accompanied by amnesia and the composition of a suicide note (later discovered by her parents). Freud ingeniously traces Dora’s "hysterical" symptoms back to a traumatic scene of seduction involving Herr K., a friend of the family and the husband of her father’s mistress—Frau K. Herr K. actively pursues Dora from the time she is fourteen—the culmination of these several confrontations happens while Dora is on a summer vacation with the K.’s and her father at the lakes in the Alps. Freud leaves aside what seems a very plausible explanation for Dora’s subsequent psychological disturbance—her profound fear of, and disgust at, Herr K.’s sexual aggression and her father’s tacit avowal of the older man’s advances as the “price of his tolerating the relations between her father and his wife [Frau K.]” (50). He instead attributes Dora’s hysteria to profound romantic disappointment, for following his rejection at the lakes, Herr K. ceases all further sexual advances toward Dora. This imagined affection for Herr K. is intensified through displaced affection for her father whose love she jealously covets.

After spinning this intricate narrative, Freud pauses to “consider a further complication” that would have been entirely elided if he “were a man of letters engaged upon the creation of a mental state like this for a short story, instead of being a medical man engaged upon its dissection” (Three Essays 77). This “complication” radically disrupts the narrative of female sexuality Freud has since been constructing; in Freud’s eyes, “it can only serve to obscure and efface the outlines of the fine poetic conflict which we have been able to ascribe to Dora” (77). Dora’s hysterical symptoms are overdetermined even further than the conventional narrative of displaced Oedipal desire.
would allow: “For behind Dora’s supervalent train of thought which was concerned with her father’s relations with Frau K. there lay concealed a feeling of jealousy which had that lady as its object—a feeling, that is, which could only be based upon an affection on Dora’s part for one of her own sex” (77). Even as he concedes its presence, there is no space for female homosexuality within the logic of Freud’s narrative, and after this brief allusion, this renegade text remains relegated to the footnotes.

But as Freud’s extended caveat reveals, even the slightest subordinated suggestion of female homosexuality threatens the irreparable destruction of the “fine poetic conflict” Freud weaves out of repressed heterosexual desire. The doctor laments this sacrifice of his art to medical objectivity, for “this element would rightly fall a sacrifice to the censorship of a writer, for he, after all, simplifies and abstracts when he appears in the character of a psychologist” (77). Even if we interpret these lines after the fashion of Stephen Marcus, as just one among many instances of Freud’s “sly unliterariness,” we remain confronted in Dora’s case with the limitations of this “character of a psychologist,” and reminded how much must be “sacrificed to censorship” in the cause of preserving the integrity of traditional sexual narratives (69).

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The hangover of degeneration theory in representations of female homosexuality from Havelock Ellis through Sigmund Freud becomes evident through the persistent association of gender inversion with female homosexuality even as this model has been revised in the case of male homosexuality. It would seem that not only did Lombroso’s conclusion “that female criminals tend to be masculine” inform nineteenth-century sexology, the inversion of this premise—masculine women tend to be criminals—has
proved equally enduring (55). Female masculinity comes to operate as shorthand for moral and physical degeneration, the metaleptical result of the metonymic chain inherited from Krafft-Ebbing which associates female homosexuality, masculinity, and degeneration. The watermark of degeneration theory is discernible in the models of female sexuality developed by Havelock Ellis and Sigmund Freud, through the pattern of logical inconsistencies informing their discussion of female homosexuality.

Shifting forward now to the contemporary moment, we recognize the time-worn narratives of lesbian criminality continuing to inform the media depictions of Nicole Puddicombe and her partner, Ashleigh Pechaluk. Pechaluk was ultimately acquitted for the crime of murdering Puddicombe's boyfriend, Dennis Hoy. Puddicombe, however, was found guilty and sentenced to life imprisonment (Pazzano, "Guilty Verdict"). The outcome of the case may have been different had the police not neglected to inform Pechaluk of her right to an attorney during the course of their extended questioning. After over twenty hours of maintaining her innocence, Pechaluk confessed her part in the murder. However, because the police violated Pechaluk's right to legal counsel, the confession was ruled inadmissible. The headlines circulating around the outcome of the trial were, however, still quick to condemn Pechaluk—for example, "Woman Acquitted in Axe Murder Confessed to Cops"—even while recounting in the body of the article that "this statement was ruled inadmissible" (although not always making clear why the jury never heard the confession). As a result of the confession being ruled inadmissible, the two women were tried separately for the murder of Dennis Hoy, even as the court continued to allege "twin motives" for the defendants: "The prosecution alleged the two women planned to kill Hoy because they had fallen in love and he stood in their way.
Puddicombe has an additional financial motive: she was the beneficiary of Hoy's life insurance policy and pension plan” (Powell).

Puddicombe's defense, however, attempted to weave an alternate account of the events surrounding Hoy's untimely death and, with this object in mind, evoked a narrative of murderous lesbian jealousy reminiscent of those circulating in nineteenth-century sexology and the popular press. The facts of the case remain unclear; the prosecution charged the women for working in concert against Hoy, a man whom, the prosecution alleged, Pechaluk believed to have been "abusive and cruel toward Puddicombe," and from whose death Puddicombe stood to gain financially. Puddicombe's trial took place after Pechaluk's acquittal, but "Puddicombe's lawyer Richard Stern accused Pechaluk during the [cross-examination] of being a master manipulator who worked alone to kill her lesbian lover's boyfriend” (Pazzano "Guilty Verdict"). Throughout the trial, Stern maintained that "Pechaluk is a 'disturbed person,' who, obsessed with Puddicombe, cooked up the scheme, told a couple of friends, and delivered the fatal blows with his client's knowledge" (Powell). In Stern's narrative, Pachaluk "manipulates" Puddicombe's affections, turning her against her boyfriend and then killing him in a possessive rage.

Stern's narrative closely recalls the late-nineteenth-century narratives of lesbian jealousy and murder which circulated in the popular press and sexologist studies, with the exception being that the person being targeted is not the partner vacillating between hetero- and homosexual relationships, but the male member of the ill-fated love triangle. Still, the characterization of Pechaluk's affection as "obsessive" and pathological reiterates the dominant trope of the nineteenth-century lesbian murder narratives. And it would seem that Puddicombe's defense believed this line of argument would be more
compelling than the suggestion that Pechaluk acted without her partner's knowledge to protect her partner whom she believed to be trapped in an abusive and dangerous relationship. Stern's story ultimately proved unconvincing to the jury, and yet his narrative attempts to appeal to its audience through the same logic implicitly informing the headlines surrounding the case: “Murder Trial Jury Sees Axe, Lesbian Love Notes,” or “Crown Sees Lesbian Jealousy in Axe-Murder.” Even after Pechaluk's acquittal, it seems as if the press, and Puddicombe's own attorney, were eager to trade on a long history of arbitrary associations taken as common sense and pronounce Pechaluk yet "Another Alice Mitchell."
CONCLUSION

IMMORAL INFLUENCES:
RADCLYFFE HALL’S THE WELL OF LONELINESS
AND THE LEGACY OF SEXOLOGY

The foundation of the bourgeois statement of fact is *common sense*, that is, truth when it stops on the arbitrary order of him who speaks it.

Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*

The insidious quality of common sense is brought to the fore in Radclyffe Hall's trailblazing portrait of female homosexuality, *The Well of Loneliness* (1928), published in London, then quickly banned under the charge of obscenity. Hall's novel dramatizes the difficulty of breaking common sense conceptions of femininity, so closely imbricated in popular forms of nineteenth-century literature. Much to the continued annoyance of her twentieth and twenty-first century readers, Hall's conception of female homosexuality relies on the gendered scripts underwriting middle-class domestic narratives.¹ Yet, *The Well* continues to claim a prominent position in feminist literary studies, even against the wishes of many of Hall’s readers. In a now famous discussion of the figure of the "mannish lesbian" embodied by Stephen Gordon, Esther Newton glosses *The Well's* consistently vexed reception by contemporary feminist readers:

Unable to wish Radclyffe Hall away . . . our feminist scholars have lectured, excused, or patronized her. Radclyffe Hall, they declare, was an unwitting dupe of the misogynist doctors' attack on feminist romantic friendships. Or, cursed with a pessimistic temperament and brainwashed by Catholicism, Hall parroted society's condemnation of lesbians. The "real" Radclyffe Hall lesbian novel, this argument

¹ For an overview of critical responses to *The Well of Loneliness*, see: Palatable Poison, 1-25. For responses to *The Well* which critique its expression of female homosexuality as merely affirming the gendered status quo, and challenge its prominent position in the cannon of lesbian fiction see: Lillian Faderman and Ann Williams, "Radclyffe Hall and the Lesbian Image"; and Catherine R. Stimpson; Faderman, *Surpassing the Love of Men*, 322-323.
And yet, *The Well of Loneliness* retains a central position in feminist literary history as the first lesbian novel in English. And so, for the radical work Hall sought to do toward dismantling the various common sense conceptions of femininity which rendered the expression of same-sex female desire incoherent, this novel seems in many ways a natural place to turn to explore the legacy of common sense forged in the pages of nineteenth-century sensational literature.

Hall's novel may be read as a meditation on the impact of sexual science on its human subject; this is indeed a vexed inheritance, and not one that may be reduced to either "repressive" or "liberating." *The Well* foregrounds the process through which the text constructs the reader as a sexualized subject. The mutually formative interaction between the subject and the text in the act of reading, particularly as it pertains to the production of common sense conceptions of female psychology, remains the larger concern of the preceding chapters. By attending to the way sensational literature prompts certain trains of associative logic that then inform popular systems of belief, I have shown both how sensational literature has the potential to disrupt the various cultural narratives which would construct the feminine subject as psychologically fragile and sexually passive, but also how it seems more often to work toward the preservation of this gendered paradigm.

What Hall's novel reveals is the degree to which the sensationalized feminine figurations crafted in the nineteenth century have so thoroughly saturated popular forms of fiction that, even as Hall attempts to give expression to a subjectivity obfuscated and
rendered silent by dominant social narratives, her protagonist—and, by extension, the author—find themselves relegated to the margins. Stephen Gordon is the female child of Sir Phillip and Anna Gordon, raised in the cloistered comfort of the Morton estate near Upton-on-Severn. As her parents had convinced themselves long before the time of Stephen's birth that their first-born would be a boy, they found themselves unable to accept that their "narrow-hipped, wide-shouldered little tadpole of a baby," was not a son but a daughter. In this state of denial, and even though "Anna felt doubtful" and the "Vicar said that it was rather unusual," Stephen remained Stephen, baptized "Stephen Mary Olivia Gertrude" (13). This initial gender confusion, of course, merely foreshadows Stephen's more masculine tendencies—dressing up like "young Nelson" (the famous naval officer whose portrait adorned the wall at Morton), riding astride rather than side saddle, and preferring sport and the company of men to the more sedate feminine pastimes of the drawing room.

But all this is not to mention the most radically masculine aspect of Stephen's generally unconventional behavior, expressed through the traditionally masculine role she assumes in her personal relationships with other women. Eventually, Stephen reveals the nature of her relationship to Angela Crossby, the maligned American wife of the heir to The Grange, a neighboring estate to Morton. Stephen describes her feeling for Angela in the most traditional terms of heterosexual union: "As my father loved you, I loved. As a man loves a woman, that was how I loved—protectively, like my father" (201).

For Stephen, however, her romantic affection toward Angela is indicative not only of sexual orientation, but an underlying gender dysphoria: "If I loved her the way a man loves a woman, it's because I can't feel that I am a woman. All my life I've never felt
like a woman, and you know it—you say you've always disliked me, that you've always felt a strange physical repulsion” (201). Echoing the theories of female sexuality articulated by nineteenth-century sexual science, Stephen's homosexuality, in Hall's novel, becomes nearly synonymous with her masculinity. In this way, Stephen's homosexual desire is retrofitted to the existing domestic narrative of the realist novel. Yet, the authenticity of Stephen's masculinity is constantly being undercut by her detractors. Stephen's mother had always felt a nagging antagonism toward her own daughter, sensing something of "an outrage" in her daughter's remarkable likeness to Sir Phillip, "as though the poor, innocent seven-year-old Stephen were in some way a caricature of Sir Philip; a blemished, unworthy, maimed reproduction” (15). The most painful moments of Stephen's childhood and adolescence occur when her outward masculinity is exposed as a comedic, sometimes even pathetic caricature of the genuine article; I will return to the implications of these narrative episodes, but, for the present, I want to focus on how The Well dramatizes the consistent marginalization of narratives of same-sex female desire as they are rendered unintelligible when considered through the framework of conventional gender codes.

Stephen's first encounter with the Krafft-Ebing sexological tome, housed on a lower shelf in her father's study, renders the typically subtle and implicit process by which the text shapes the reader's subjectivity, blunt and explicit. Shortly after Stephen has explained to her disapproving mother the nature of her relationship to Angela, she wanders into the study of her now long-deceased father, "as though drawn there by some strong natal instinct” (203). There, for the first time, she discovers that, even while he kept silent, her father had long ago realized the nature of his daughter's sexuality.
Unlocking his "special bookcase," her eyes wander until:

She noticed that on a shelf near the bottom was a row of books standing behind the others; the next moment she had one of these in her hand, and was looking at the name of the author: Krafft-Ebing--she had never heard of that author before. All the same she opened the battered old book, then she looked more closely, for there on its margins were notes in her father's small, scholarly hand and she saw that her own name appeared in those notes. (203)

Sir Phillip's marginalia replicate the function of Havelock Ellis's commentary which prefaces Hall's novel. Brief as it is, Ellis's commentary frames the novel as a contribution to the scientific study of sex. Ellis declares that *The Well* "possesses a notable psychological and sociological significance." Ellis also advances the canonically significant claim that, "So far as I know, it is the first English novel which presents, in a completely faithful and uncompromising form, one particular aspect of sexual life as it exists among us to-day." Ellis's prefatory remarks position Hall's semi-autobiographical novel as yet another case study, collected by the sexologist for the purpose of classifying and categorizing human desire.

This framing effect is mirrored by Sir Phillip's marginal inscription of his daughter into the pages of his sexological tomes. Earlier in the novel, we bear witness to Sir Philip reading the work of Karl Ulrichs:

Alone in that grave-looking, quiet study, he would unlock a drawer in his ample desk, and would get out a slim volume recently acquired, and would read and reread it in silence. The author was a German, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, and reading, Sir Philip's eyes would grow puzzled; then groping for a pencil he would make little notes all along the immaculate margins. (26)

Unlike Ellis and Krafft-Ebing, Ulrichs was not a medical psychologist, but he was one of the first writers to defend homosexual love against charges of moral corruption and criminality. Ellis provides a brief biography of this pioneering figure in his *Study of Sexual Inversion*, describing how "for many years Ulrichs was alone in his efforts to gain
scientific recognition for congenital homosexuality” (68). Ulrichs coined the phrase "uranian or urning" and "regarded uranism, or homosexual love, as a congenital abnormality by which a female soul had become united with a male body” (Ellis 68).

Ulrichs’s work circulated widely, and his influence on subsequent scientific models of male and female homosexuality is certainly tangible. Hall's choice to draw on and frame her narrative through the work of nineteenth-century sexologists, as opposed to the more contemporary twentieth century psychological theories developed by Freud, is striking. Indeed, this choice—combined with the Hall's decision to write in the tradition of the nineteenth-century realist novel—gives the work an antiquated feeling even in the moment of its publication, and even as the narrative subject remains cutting-edge.

Indeed, Ellis's words may provide the paratext, but it is most apparently the much earlier work of Krafft-Ebing and Karl Ulrichs which provide the intertext informing the figure of Stephen Gordon.²

In this way, Hall's novel attests to the enduring influence of the model of female inversion espoused by the sexologists, a model that frequently linked sexual variance and gender deviation. And, while Freud sought to revise this model in the case of male

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² Drawing on George Chauncey's discussion of the shift in conceptualization of sexual variance from the sexologists to the psychoanalysts, Laura Green attributes this out-of-date quality in The Well to Hall's intentional blurring of the explanation behind Stephen's sexual difference; Hall seems to allude to both the theories of congenital inversion espoused by the sexologists, and to the Freudian conception of homosexuality thought to be primarily psychological in origin. Green argues that Hall's vacillation between the two models may have "helped to make Stephen available as an object for identification to successive, and differently situated, generations of readers and critics, who may have identified with those representations selectively." And that also, "the novel's quite visible struggle to create an identity for its protagonist, and the indeterminacy arising from the heterogeneity of the materials brought to bear, raise the question of whether identities can be represented as anything but constructed and indeterminate" (280). While I find Green's argument provocative, it seems to miss the extent to which the novel demonstrates the insidiousness of the heterosexual logic in the domestic realist novel, and even in theories of homosexuality which continue even into the twentieth century to associate and pathologize same-sex female desire as inherently masculine.
homosexuality, arguing that sexual object choice did not necessarily correlate with effeminate behavior, he was less able to divorce gender from sexual orientation in his discussion of female homosexuality.\(^3\) This hangover of the inversion model in the context of same-sex female desire attests not only to the deeply entrenched nature of conventional conceptions of femininity, but also to the impact of degeneration theory. Even as degeneration theory was nominally abandoned, the metonymical chain it inspired linking female homosexuality with latent criminality, though sometimes only implicit, remained largely intact and operated as a form of common sense.

In a manner akin to the way gender inversion was taken as a sign of sexual variance (and vice versa), the significance of Stephen's queerness—a term which recurs more than fifty times in reference to the protagonist—remains somewhat ambiguous as it slips easily from its literal to its more colloquial denotation. Stephen is repeatedly described as queer by the various staff members of the Gordon household, partly because, in the words of Miss Collins, the housemaid, she was given to "always dressing herself up and play-acting," but also because, as the cook, Mrs. Wilson, observes, Stephen was "quite different from other young ladies—she's got none of their pretty little ways" (20). But where Mrs. Wilson is merely disapproving, Stephen's aunt, Mrs. Antrim, has more serious misgivings regarding Stephen's "queerness"; accordingly:

Could Mrs. Antrim have ignored Stephen Gordon's existence, she would almost certainly have done so. She disliked the girl; she had always disliked her; what

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\(^3\) Chauncey offers some discussion of the uneven development of theories of male and female homosexuality; even as "homosexuality" replaced the term "sexual inversion" at the turn of the century, "the change in the focus" from sexual object choice to gender inversion "was slower and more complicated in the case of women. As with men, sexual object choice became relatively more important than character inversion, but doctors were less willing—perhaps culturally less able—to distinguish a woman's behavior in sexual relations from other aspects of her gender role" (124).
she called Stephen's 'queerness' aroused her suspicion—she was never quite clear as to what she suspected, but felt sure that it must be something outlandish. (91)

For Mrs. Antrim, it seems, the most disturbing among all of Stephen's unconventional behaviors is her refusal to ride "side-saddle," eschewing the more feminine custom for her preference to ride astride. Her own daughter, Violet, a "terrified creature of muslins and ribbons," of course, was trained to "side saddle" (41). The thought of Stephen deviating from the established norm prompts Mrs. Antrim's to declare: "A young woman of her age to ride like a man, I call it preposterous" (91). Through Mrs. Antrim's perspective, the significance of Stephen's "queerness" slips from merely idiosyncratic to sexually suspect behavior.

Stephen's decision to "ride astride" is not so subtly sexually loaded; not only did Stephen decide to rechristen the horse "Collins," after the object of her first infatuation, a young housemaid at Morton, the physical act of horseback riding remains a potential source of autoerotic pleasure. Along similar lines, Mary Armstrong argues that a central aspect of Stephen's sexual identity is figured through her preferred riding style. By riding astride, Stephen not only "defies her gender role" but given the "potential sexual stimulation inherent for a woman riding astride," Stephen's actions "reveal her determined pursuit of sexual delight, a resolve confirmed by her satisfaction in the ride and the unremitting panic of others" (Armstrong 53). Mrs. Antrim is certainly not the only one among Stephen's spectators disturbed by the protagonist's disregard for gendered custom. In a scene to which I will return, Colonel Antrim, her husband, goes to some lengths to make Stephen feel ashamed for any pleasure she derives from her equine pastime. However, for now, it is enough to see that Stephen's queerness acts as a floating
signifier which yokes together Stephen's unconventional appearance and athleticism to her desire for sexual and romantic involvement with other women.

As the novel progresses, Stephen's queerness comes to mimic more closely the model of sexual inversion set forth by the nineteenth-century sexologists. After she moves from her native home, relocating to Paris to pursue her writing career after the war, her childhood tendencies gain fuller expression and her outward presentation grows increasingly masculine. We encounter Stephen somewhat transformed from her "two long years of exile." Her face:

Had grown much thinner and more determined, some might have said that the face had hardened, for the mouth was less ardent and much less gentle, and the lip now drooped at the corners. The strong rather massive line of the jaw looked aggressive these days by reason of its thinness. Her hair was quite short. In a mood of defiance she had suddenly walked off to the barber's one morning and made him crop it close like a man's. And mightily did this fashion become her, for now the fine shape of her head was unmarred by the stiff clumpy plait in the nape of her neck. (210)

Here, Stephen's appearance closely reproduces the portrait of female homosexuality Krafft-Ebing offers as he maintains that "among the ladies of large cities . . . homosexuality is by no means a rarity": "Uranism may nearly always be suspected in females wearing their hair short, or who dress in the fashion of men, or pursue the sports and pastimes of their male acquaintances" (263). Hall imitates Krafft-Ebing's portrait of "congenital inversion" even in the detailed depiction of Stephen's hands, which bear witness to the young author's smoking habit: "The fingers of the hand that slowly emerged from her jacket pocket were heavily stained with nicotine—she was now a voracious smoker" (210). For Krafft-Ebing, smoking may be ranked among the number of "rough boyish manners" affected by homosexual women: "At times smoking and drinking are cultivated even with a passion" (264). But the extent of Hall's replication of
Krafft-Ebing's figuration of female homosexuality goes even further, reflecting not only the sexologist's influence, but the now common sense association of female homosexuality and criminal jealousy.

From Lucy's vampiric transformation and the White Worm's ambiguous ontology, to Alice White's fatal attraction, the illusion of a common sense association between latent criminality and any display of female sexual desire which exceeds the bounds of convention is actively preserved. Stoker's novel trains the reader in this pattern of association by engaging the reader in the task of constructing anxious narratives of fatal female sexuality out of a suggestive sequence of monstrous figurations and blank narrative spaces. This process becomes even more transparent through the progression of newspaper headlines surrounding the Mitchell Ward case. And, if we had lingering doubts that "lesbian jealousy" had become a familiar literary trope by the turn of the century, its key role in the development of Hall's protagonist, Stephen Gordon, testifies to the extent that this associative logic, learned from sensation fiction, has become ingrained in the mythology of the mannish lesbian.

The object of Stephen's first crush is a housemaid, Collins. And while there is no evidence that Stephen's feelings are requited, Collins is sometimes inclined toward displays of affection and friendship. For example, she confides in Stephen the pain she suffers on account of her "housemaid's knee" and even offers Stephen a kiss for recompense after lying to save face in front of the household nurse (21). Perhaps moved by the young girl's apparent devotion, Collins grows somewhat more affectionate, and "Stephen basked in much surreptitious petting, and her love for Collins grew daily." (24). But eventually, Collins turns her affections elsewhere, and for Stephen the results are
disastrous. "Puzzling over Collins, who had been avoiding her for days," Stephen "wandered to an old potting-shed" and there came across the reason for Collins’s recent distraction. She watches unobserved an intimate moment between Collins and Henry, the footman: "Henry caught Collins roughly by the wrists, and he dragged her toward him, still handling her roughly, and he kissed her full on the lips” (28). Echoing Alice's murderous jealousy in the face of her broken engagement to Freda, Stephen reacts violently to the sight of this stolen kiss:

[Her] head felt suddenly hot and dizzy, she was filled with a blind, uncomprehending rage; she wanted to cry out, but her voice failed completely, so that all she could do was to splutter. But the very next moment she had seized a broken flower-pot and had hurled it hard and straight at the footman. It struck him in the face, cutting open his cheek, down which the blood trickled slowly. (28)

Stephen's violent impulse activates the now familiar narrative of lesbian jealousy, a narrative which consistently worked to emphasize the aggressive and even criminal tendencies of the more masculine partner, in contrast to the passive femininity of the object of her affection. In the ways I discuss in the previous chapter, this narrative is linked with the "problem" of the more feminine partner of the same-sex relationship.

The same-sex partner of the masculine woman proved something of a stumbling block for Freud and his predecessors, as they attempted to preserve the traditional heterosexual paradigm in which active masculinity is balanced by passive femininity, while still maintaining that female homosexuality was most frequently accompanied by a masculine physical appearance and psychological disposition. As a result, a certain paranoia informs the characterization of the passive feminine partner, whose behavior is often characterized as vacillating and unpredictable. Popular accounts insisted that the feminine partner might well have gone on to become involved in a heterosexual
relationship had she not been seduced and overpowered by the desires of her masculine partner.

This narrative of seduction is twice reproduced by Hall, first in her account of Stephen's seduction of Angela Crossby (her first real romantic partner), and second, at the end of the novel. In a fit of despair, Stephen's long-term partner Mary declares that, had it not been for Stephen, she "could have loved Martin Hallam," a man with whom Stephen had been acquainted since her adolescence (431). Stephen befriends Angela, a former American actress and the new wife of Ralph Crossby. We learn that the Crossbys resent the match because of Angela’s previous profession and because her "curious hair . . . cut just to the lobes of her ears . . . gave grounds for suspicion" (131). When Stephen begins to make romantic overtures toward her new friend, Angela is first resistant but eventually she yields. And in one of the more sexually charged scenes of the novel, we bear witness to their first kiss:

Angela moved a step nearer to Stephen, then another, until their hands were touching. And all that she was, and all that she had been and would be again, perhaps even to-morrow, was fused at the moment into one mighty impulse, one imperative need, and that need was Stephen. Stephen's need was now hers, by sheer force of its blind and uncomprehending will to appeasement. Then Stephen took Angela into her arms, and she kissed her full on the lips, as a lover. (146)

In this scene, Stephen's desire is characterized as overwhelming and contagious, and Angela, though a willing partner, remains technically passive as her own volition is merely the extension of Stephen's "need." This passage is indicative of Hall's struggle to convey same-sex female desire through the confines of existing heterosexual narratives entrenched in Victorian categories of common sense regarding the nature of female sexuality. Even in this frank groundbreaking depiction of the expression of romantic love and sexual desire between two women, there is no narrative space for Angela's sexual
desire. In order to become legible, active female sexual desire must be presented as inherently masculine.

And yet, even if Hall's novel is limited by its preservation of conventional gender scripts, it forces the reader to confront the inadequacy and narrative limits of popular forms of nineteenth-century literature to fully convey, as Ellis puts it, "one particular aspect of sexual life." We encounter the migration of sensationalized patterns of associative logic into the very grain of the realist narrative, so that Hall's portrait of female homosexuality becomes muddled by its narrative frame, saturated as it is with Victorian common sense conceptions of femininity. Beyond the ways I have documented above, evidence of this distortion may be found in the type of emotional response Hall seeks to elicit from her reader. As several generations of readers have expressed, the reader may identify with Stephen, however, the terms of this identification are often the mutual experience of anguish and shame. Perhaps most notorious here are the scenes from the Parisian bar, Alec's—"that meeting-place of the most miserable of all those who comprised the miserable army"—which Stephen frequents on occasion (387).

But I would like to turn instead to an earlier moment in the narrative that is striking because it marks the first and only time the narrative point of view shifts from third into a second-person address. In this sexually charged scene from Stephen's childhood, she demonstrates her riding prowess to an audience of her relatives. Her uncle Colonel Antrim ensures, however, that Stephen's sense of self-content will be short-lived. Antrim wonders aloud whether it is safe for Stephen to ride astride, being of the view that "girl children [cannot] get the grip astride; they aren't built for it, haven't the necessary muscle" (41). Stephen, already deeply moved by the injustice her uncle commits in
drawing no distinction between her own athletic abilities and that of her cousin, Angela, "that small, flabby lump who squealed if you pinched her," is sent into a spiral of self-loathing. While Antrim assuages his own lingering doubt, conceding that, "still she'll stick on by balance," for Stephen:

The words rankled, oh, very deeply they rankled . . . She had fat, wobbly legs too, just like a rag doll—and you, Stephen, had been compared to Violet! Ridiculous of course, and yet all of a sudden you felt less impressive in your fine riding breeches. You felt—well, not foolish exactly, but self-conscious—not quite at your ease, a little bit wrong. It was almost as though you were playing at young Nelson again, were only pretending. (41)

This apostrophe first attaches itself directly to Stephen, but then becomes more ambiguously directed toward both the protagonist and the reader, who is called to vicariously experience Stephen's self consciousness and embarrassment. Readers have diverged on the impact of the terms of the reader's identification with Stephen and the overwhelming despair of the protagonist. Catherine Stimpson, among others, has criticized the novel for the sense of anguish it imparts to the reader, writing that this narrative of self-hatred "gives the homosexual, particularly the lesbian, riddling images of pity, self-pity, and of terror in greater measure than it consoles" (369). Eager to move past the stereotypes activated by Hall's novel, readers have expressed their impatience with its canonical persistence; in Terry Castle’s words: "Oh, god, not again: The Well of Fucking Loneliness. When will the nightmare stop?" (394). But even if Castle's frustration with Hall is understandable given how Hall thematizes narrative failure and the need for a new narrative form to capture the psychological landscape of the modern subject, it certainly bears revisiting.

In the novel’s tragic conclusion, Hall stages the breakdown of the nineteenth-century domestic narrative. Moving out of the realist register into a style that approaches
the stream of consciousness characteristic of the modernist narrative, Hall captures the psychological turmoil of her protagonist as she faces the loss of her long term partner, Mary Llewellyn, to her old friend Martin. In this moment, Hall gestures to the limiting framework of the domestic novel where feminine rage becomes encoded in hysterical outburst (think of Lady Audley's secret). And yet, Stephen's nightmarish and hysterical vision contains the seeds of the uncanny realization of the Freudian subject; what was once thought to be removed and foreign to the self is revealed to have been merely estranged, alienated but not distinct. In her hysterical hallucination, Stephen finds escape at least temporarily from the logic of the domestic narrative. We encounter the nightmarish revision of the traditional denouement as Stephen is consumed by:

Rockets of pain, burning rockets of pain, their pain, her pain, all welded together into one great consuming agony. Rockets of pain that shot up and burst, dropping scorching tears of fire on the spirit, her pain, their pain . . . all the misery at Alec's. . . . In their madness to become articulate through her, they were tearing her to pieces, getting her under. They were everywhere now, cutting off her retreat; neither bolts nor bars would avail to save her. The walls fell down and crumbled before them; at the cry of their suffering the walls fell and crumbled. . . . They possessed her. Her barren womb became fruitful—it ached with its fearful and sterile burden. It ached with the fierce yet helpless children who would clamour in vain for their right to salvation. (437)

This passage signals a distinct stylistic shift from the conventions of the nineteenth-century novel thematized in the breakdown of structures—the transformation of the discrete and unified self as it collapses into the other, represented here as the dejected masses at Alec's, "the battered remnants of men whom their fellow men had at last stamped under” (387). In this new mode of psychological realism, we witness the implosion of the typical conclusion of the nineteenth-century realist novel—the tableau of middle-class domesticity featuring a happily married heterosexual couple and their recent offspring. And yet, in the world of the novel, the only redemption held out for the
protagonist is shared suffering; if it means the end of loneliness, it certainly does not herald the end of pain. This potential is also held out to the reader who vicariously experiences Stephen's anguish; in this way, the scene might be taken as an idealized version of reader response embedded in the narrative.

Even if late-twentieth and twenty-first century readers find *The Well* outmoded, even when viewed in the context of its contemporary moment, it was certainly radical enough to earn the notice of the court, which subsequently declared the novel to be "obscene" and ordered its immediate destruction ("Novel Condemned"). Considering that there is nothing more sexually explicit in Hall's novel than in the various case studies Kraft-Ebing presents in his *Psychopathia Sexualis*, which circulated beyond its intended specialized audience, it is all the more striking that the court saw it necessary to ban Hall's novel. However, Hall's novel is written in the style of popular fiction intended for a mass audience, and, unlike Krafft-Ebing, Hall actively attempts to inspire an identificatory connection between the reader and her protagonist. But what concerned the magistrate most was not the majority of Hall's potential readers, but a very specific type: "those whose minds are open to such immoral influences and in whose hands publications of this sort may fall" ("Condemned Novel"). Virginia Woolf makes the absurdity of such a doctrine stark in her essay on the censorship of fiction: "As the law stands at present, a police magistrate has the right to destroy as obscene any book which he thinks likely to corrupt the mind of any reader who is liable to be corrupted" (446). And yet, it was not because the content of Hall's novel was too graphic on the topic of homosexual relationships, but because it was too subtly suggestive that the court deemed

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4 For an extended discussion of the popular circulation of *Psychopathia Sexualis*, see Heike Bauer.
the novel obscene. As the coverage of the trial published in *The Times* makes clear: "The mere fact that the book dealt with unnatural offences between women would not in itself make it an obscene libel" ("Novel Condemned"). In the opinion of the Attorney General, it was the implicit work of the novel that made it so morally dangerous: "This is more subtle, demoralizing, corrosive, corruptive, than anything that was ever written. . . . I hardly need ask what is the picture conjured up to minds that are open to immoral influence" ("Condemned Novel").

It is hard not to wish Hall had interjected here to ask how the Attorney General could be sure what such morally lax readers are bound to imagine if he did not in fact number among such readers himself. But the tacit absurdities of the obscenity test and the Attorney General’s reasoning aside, he confirms what sensation novelists like Collins and Braddon already knew, that once the willing, thrill-seeking reader (one open to such “immoral influences”) becomes oriented toward unnarratable, unsanctioned social narratives, the cracks and fissures in dominant social narratives grow increasingly wide, and the common sense foundation of existing categories of knowledge less stable.

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The tenacity of various common sense conceptions relies in large part on their circulation in popular literary narratives. Common sense becomes imbricated in certain narrative structures, as various familiar narratives—for example, the domestic narrative popularized by the nineteenth-century realist novel, which inevitably culminates in marriage—concretize certain common sense conceptions. Or take the case of an alternative to the conventional marriage plot in the "lesbian love murder" narratives circulating widely in the nineteenth-century press and pioneering sexological studies. In a
manner I describe in the final chapter, these narratives almost invariably emphasize the masculinity of the woman accused of committing an act of violence against her more feminine (and often less consistently affectionate) partner. The unvarying trajectory of this narrative works to create the illusion of common sense in the belief that female masculinity is both a sign of same sex female desire and latent criminal tendencies.

Literary narratives have the potential to produce common sense because, in order to construct a coherent narrative out of the various discrete circumstances surrounding an event, whether fictional or actual, it is necessary to posit, or at the very least imply, certain causal relationships. And as particular narratives become familiar, the reader is able to intuit the narrative trajectory before the entire sequence of events has unfolded. For example, even before Stoker reveals the true nature of Lady Arabella's identity, we may predict, from her ostentatious costume and coquettish appeals, her narrative role as the mercenary *femme fatale* who will attempt to seduce the male hero away from his naïf sweetheart.

With repetition, this narrative trajectory and the pattern of associative logic which it excites become familiar—so familiar, in fact, that they may even be recollected through a type of narrative shorthand. That one of Braddon's more radical innovations lay in making her villainess blonde suggests that even reference to the protagonist’s hair color was enough to galvanize a chain of associations that would lead readers to draw conclusions, one way or another, as to the character of the protagonist. In this way, literary narratives produce the illusion of a narrative intuition that seems to originate with the reader. However, in the ways I've shown, this “intuition” is often merely an effect
produced by the text, prompting readers to believe that their insight is based in common sense, not arbitrary association.

Common sense is inscribed through the blank spaces of the text—those causal links and associative leaps that are left implicit. The various sensational narratives I have examined in the preceding chapters activate certain associative patterns with regard to female sexuality and psychology. However, there is a decisive shift from the mid-century sensation novel to the turn-of-the-century gothic novel involving the status of common sense conceptions of femininity. Even as the narrative form of Dracula reflects the influence of The Moonstone—both novels feature multiple narratives and varying testimonies surrounding a single mysterious event—in Dracula, Stoker reformulates the narrative function of the blank spaces. Collins highlights the insufficiency of a conventional detective narrative (as represented in sections "authored" by Sergeant Cuff) to account for the sequence of events set in motion by the theft of the Moonstone diamond, inviting the reader to reflect on the inadequacy of such common sense conceptions of femininity to fill the blank spaces of the text (for example, Rachel's silence). To the contrast, Dracula exploits the logical gaps of the text to perpetuate the common sense conception that any overt expression of female sexuality is inherently monstrous. And by reading nineteenth-century sexology in tandem with the late-Victorian gothic novel, I have illustrated how even as sexology lays claim to a more specialized readership, the portraits of female sexuality generated by Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and even Freud, often reflect the same metaleptic structures used to produce the ubiquitous figuration of fatal femininity circulating through fin de siècle gothic literature.

Perhaps Bram Stoker says it best, as he comes out unabashedly in favor of literary
censorship: "The measure and method of that restraint have to be ascertained by experience, and in some measure by experiment, for if we wait till experience, following a simple course of laissez faire, has learned the worst that can happen, at least a part of the protective force of common sense is thrown away” (435). But as the legal history of The Well of Loneliness attests, even the strictest censor may fail to preserve categories of common sense once they have been repeatedly exposed as specious and arbitrary. As Havelock Ellis astutely puts the case: "No one would read a book because the Home Secretary commends it; there is a vast public to read a book because he condemns it” (479). From The Moonstone and Lady's Audley's Secret to myriad case studies compiled by Krafft-Ebing, Ellis, and Freud, readers have been drawn to explore the "dark places of psychology," to see behind the respectable facade, to investigate "those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors” (James 593).
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