Wilkie Collins and the Politics of Adaptation on the Victorian Stage

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Abstract

As the sensation novel was reclaimed by literary critics and cultural historians as a legitimate site of academic inquiry in the mid-twentieth century, Wilkie Collins's canonical works became the topic of much scholarly interest. His works have consistently been identified as the locus of a plethora of narrative and formal innovations that have irrevocably shaped how we understand both the Victorian novel and its successors. As this thesis will demonstrate, however, Collins's writing for the stage – in particular dramatising his own novels – had a more significant influence on his career than has previously been acknowledged. By reading those dramatic works alongside their novelistic versions and against the landscape of Victorian theatre, this thesis refines our understanding of this canonical novelist while also demonstrating the interrelatedness of the novel and the stage for Victorian readers, writers, audiences, and critics.

The central proposition of this thesis is that our understanding of cultural production in the nineteenth century has been shaped by literary criticism's insistent focus on the novel, and that research attuned to the amorphous formal boundaries that characterised the careers of Victorian writers reveals the mutually constitutive relationship between the novel and the theatre. In offering a chronological account of Collins's theatrical writing, this thesis demonstrates how the social, psychological, and political complexity woven into the fabric of his novels gets adapted, repurposed, and represented in their dramatic versions, revealing both their narrative complexity and investment in the social and political ethos of Collins's England.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge that the land on which I have completed much of this thesis is the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'kéha. As a settler scholar of history, it is important to recognise how historicising struggles must go together with actively fighting against a system that has and continues to dispossess First Nations peoples of both their land and their right to self-determination.

Not unlike the collaborative spirit of the nineteenth-century stage, this thesis would have been impossible without the support and guidance of a wide-ranging group of people. Above all, I would like to acknowledge the unwavering support of my supervisor, Sos Eltis, without whom this thesis simply would not exist. She has been a thorough and generous reader, a demanding interlocutor, and an inspiring thinker. Her presence is felt on every single one of these pages, and it is impossible to quantify the debt of gratitude which any of the depth or breadth of this thesis owes her. She has given me both the courage to explore exciting ideas and the ability to translate my excitement into scholarly work. There could not have been a more supportive, generous, and instructive supervisor for this project.

I began work on this thesis as an undergraduate at McGill University, where I first learned who Wilkie Collins was and what Victorian studies entailed. My thanks go to Tabitha Sparks, whose encouragement in the early stages of this project proved indispensable in giving me the confidence to undertake future research. At the University of Toronto, it was the sage wisdom of Andrea Charise and Hao Li that encouraged me to take this leap of faith.

I will forever be indebted to the intellectual community at Oxford, where I felt both myself and my ideas flourish in tandem. This would have been an undoubtedly poorer work without the thoughtful conversations I shared with many friends and colleagues, sometimes at seminars over several cups of English Faculty coffee, and, at innumerable other times, over those happiest of happenstance moments that Oxford produces so effortlessly. I would particularly like to thank Daniel Abdalla, Lauren Cullen, Gabriela Minden, and Hannah Greenstreet for giving me unselfish guidance and support, without which writing this thesis would have been immeasurably more difficult.

This work has benefitted immensely from conversations had at a wide variety of scholarly conferences and seminars. The British Association for Victorian Studies, the Oxford Theatre and Performance Studies network, and the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English have given me ample opportunity to discuss various stages of work in progress with an incredible and thought-provoking group of scholars. I reserve special thanks for the Nineteenth-Century Theatre Caucus, whose presence within the North American Victorian Studies Association brought my scholarship to life in more ways than one.

Finally, I extend my most heartfelt thanks to my family, who have served as a constant reminder of the life outside of work: to my mother, Antoinette, and to my father, Nino, for showing me the importance of generosity, kindness, and hard work; to my brother, Anthony, for being my first and best friend; and to Kassandra, who, in addition to being my sister in spirit over the years, is now my sister-in-law.

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Introduction
The Divorce of Fiction and Drama

In 1890, when George Moore was arguing for the creation of an independent English theatre free from the overdetermining economic concerns of the commercial London stage, he modelled his ideal theatre on the French Théâtre Libre. He claimed that such a theatre in England, financed not by ticket sales but by subscribers, would produce only plays 'which a manager of a regular theatre will not produce, not because they are bad, but because he thinks there is no money in them'.[1] The issue, for Moore, was the provenance of such plays. Inundated with farces and melodramas, presided over by despotic actor-managers, and navigating an increasingly commercialised business model, the English stage had, in Moore's view, demonstrated an inability to produce or attract native playwriting talent. Such talent did exist, however; it simply did not write for the stage. 'Were I the founder of the Théâtre Libre', wrote Moore, 'I would apply to all the novelists: gold is found in the most unexpected places'.[2]

While novelists often saw their work adapted to the stage throughout the nineteenth century (Dickens, scandalised by a pirated adaptation of *Oliver Twist*, famously had to lie down in his box at the Surrey Theatre to avoid witnessing the ending), novelists adapting their own work or writing

[1] George Moore, *Impressions and Opinions* (Brentano's: New York, 1913), 176. Originally published in *The Hawk,* 8 July 1890.
[2] Ibid., 181.

original plays for the theatre, as Moore's comment suggests, remained a relatively rare practice.[3] The career of Wilkie Collins, now best remembered as one of the progenitors of the sensation fiction that dominated the 1860s and 70s as well as the detective novel, inhabits a crucial intersection between forms in the nineteenth century. He regularly adapted his own work for the stage and wrote sixteen plays during his lifetime; twelve of these are adaptations of novels or short stories, and the other four are original dramas. Collins is simultaneously representative of adaptation as a mode of cultural production that spanned the nineteenth century and unique among his canonical Victorian contemporaries in that he actively participated in that mode of production himself.

By locating Collins's dramatic writing against the backdrop of his prolific career and the wider cultural sphere of the nineteenth century, I hope to refine our understanding of this canonical novelist while also demonstrating the interrelatedness of the novel and the stage for Victorian readers, writers, audiences, and critics. The central proposition of this thesis is that our understanding of cultural production in the nineteenth century has been shaped by literary criticism's insistent focus on the novel and that research attuned to the amorphous formal boundaries that characterised the careers of Victorian writers reveals the mutually constitutive relationship between the novel and the theatre. This thesis also suggests possible reconsiderations of other 'minor' Victorian novelists such as Charles Reade, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and Moore himself, each of whom wrote prolifically for both the page and the stage.

While this thesis draws from and speaks to a diverse array of critical fields, its most immediate contribution is to the many critical assessments of Wilkie Collins's career, especially those that emerged at the end of the twentieth century as sensation fiction was revalorised as a topic of academic study. These important critical interventions spawned dozens of articles, monographs, and

[3] John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens, Volume the First: 1812–1842* (Chapman and Hall: London, 1872), 152.

the foundation of both the Wilkie Collins Society and journal, all of which positioned Collins as a purveyor of sensation fiction and an integral force in shaping the literary conventions of mid-Victorian England.[4] I use the term 'mid-Victorian' deliberately; while this thesis considers Collins's participation in the late-Victorian culture industry, critical attention paid to his work has typically focused on his early writing and rehearsed the familiar criticism that characterises the arc of his career as one of decline.

Catherine Peters's seminal biography of Collins frames his dramatic career as having 'a major and deleterious effect on his fiction'.[5] Positioning his theatrical endeavours in opposition to and therefore detracting from his novel-writing career is a familiar stance in criticism of Collins. This binary endures in the partitioning of literary criticism and the implicit hierarchy that imbues the novel with a cultural and intellectual cachet that is absent from the theatre. In working on this thesis, I have attempted to move beyond these hierarchies and consider how a holistic approach to Collins's career reveals aspects of nineteenth-century cultural production that remain invisible in the atomised nature of literary criticism. The point is not simply that Collins's dramatic endeavours informed his novel-writing; it is that those dramatic endeavours and his other written work – and here I include his short stories, journalism, and essays – mutually constitute each other. I expand on Franco Moretti's definition of canon formation centred around novels, which he sees as 'crucial to any social account of literature', by highlighting the shared set of assumptions, gestures, and conventions that worked across genre and form in Collins's career.[6] This study also elaborates on

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[4] See, for example, Sue Lonoff, *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship* (AMS Press: New York, 1982); Peter Thoms, *The Windings of the Labyrinth: Quest and Structure in the Major Novels of Wilkie Collins* (Ohio University Press: Athens, 1992); Andrew Gasson, *Wilkie Collins: An Illustrated Guide* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998); Maria Bachman and Don Richard Cox (eds), *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins* (University of Tennessee Press: Knoxville, 2003); Jenny Bourne Taylor (ed), *The Cambridge Companion To Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006); Andrew Mangham (ed), *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing: Newcastle, 2007).

[5] Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (Secker & Warburg: London, 1991), 314.

[6] Franco Moretti, 'The Slaughterhouse of Literature', *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly*, 61:1 (March 2000), 209.

Margaret Cohen's notion of the 'great unread', a body of literature either unavailable to or ignored by scholars, by emphasising the centrality of the theatre in the daily lives of Victorian readers and writers: indeed, the 'great unread' is a phrase equally adept at describing the vast majority of nineteenth-century plays, even the most successful of which remain forgotten and are rarely – if ever – revived.[7]

Of the wide-ranging and interdisciplinary critical attention that has been paid to Collins's works over the course of several decades, few acknowledge the existence of his dramatic adaptations and theatrical writing more generally. Studies that do, moreover, tend to consider his dramatic writing as either an interesting but ultimately inconsequential artefact in a career that was primarily concerned with writing novels, or as actually having a damaging effect on his more important novel-writing career. Lyn Pykett, for example, has noted that 'Collins sometimes seemed to suggest that he became a novelist rather than a playwright simply because he was writing at a time when the novel was in the ascendant in England and the drama and theatre were in decline'.[8] The assumption that Collins 'became a novelist rather than a playwright' is the critical framework against which this thesis argues. For Collins, who wrote sixteen plays in his lifetime, the two authorial identities were not mutually exclusive, but were rather two aspects of a career that spanned fiction, drama, journalism, and long form essays. This thesis aims to reconfigure our understanding of this canonical 'novelist' by embracing a mode of literary criticism that both upends traditional hierarchies between 'high' and 'low' culture and considers writing novels to be coextensive with (and not separate from) writing plays.

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[7] Margaret Cohen, *The Sentimental Education of the Novel* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1999), 23; see also Margaret Cohen, 'Narratology in the Archive of Literature', *Representations*, 108:1 (2009), 51-75.
[8] Lyn Pykett, *Wilkie Collins* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005), 95.

At least part of the reason for the lack of critical attention paid to Collins's dramatic writing is the lack of readily available source material. While many of his novels are continuously being reprinted in new, affordable, and accessible scholarly and commercial editions, the plays themselves remain scattered across libraries and archives on both sides of the Atlantic. The dramatic adaptations of his novels have been most consistently acknowledged in the critical introductions to those novels' numerous scholarly editions, where they are considered as little more than interesting anecdotes which illustrate the superior artistry of the novel form. In their introduction to *The Woman in White*, for example, Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox write that the novel's complex elements 'are all drastically compromised by a stage adaptation that relies on banal dialogue, one-dimensional characters, and an overly-simplified, unsensational plot'.[9] 'In the translation of *No Name* to the stage', writes Virginia Blain, 'the almost caricatured aspects of its art were emphasized, while the subtleties that reside in the detail were lost'.[10] One notable exception is the Broadview edition of *The Moonstone*, which reprints both its dramatic adaptation and contextual information as pertinent appendix material.[11] Nevertheless, this thesis foregrounds Collins's dramatic adaptations in an attempt to assert their significance as more than moderately interesting asides or relevant appendix material, and to illustrate the wider connections between novelistic and dramatic production in the nineteenth century.

The absence of Collins's dramatic writing from both the critical and popular imagination cannot, however, be solely attributed to a lack of textual resources. Literary critics and cultural historians have often echoed inherited assumptions about the novel's primary importance in the nineteenth century, and, in isolating Collins's novels from their dramatic adaptations, have

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[9] Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox, Introduction to *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins (Broadview Press: Peterborough, 1999), 34-35.
[10] Virginia Blain, Introduction to *No Name* by Wilkie Collins (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008), xii-xiii.
[11] Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone*, edited by Steve Farmer (Broadview Press: Peterborough 1999), 606-713.

reproduced an understanding of his theatrical works which detracts from his more significant novel-writing career. Richard Pearson, for instance, in writing about *The Moonstone*'s dramatic adaptation, claims that 'Collins risked his literary identity on a dramatic career that could confound his reputation. The jewel in his own literary crown was compromised and sullied by this very association'.[12] Similarly, Jim Davis has argued that in Collins's plays,

> ideas about masculinity, repression, the social situation of women and insanity, which are seriously examined in the novels, are continually subsumed into plot devices or simplified in characterisation in the plays. Despite his desire to breathe new life into the theatre of his time, Collins could not break free of some of the limitations imposed by melodramatic conventions. […] His novels, despite reliance on melodramatic conventions, break through these restrictions and achieve considerable depth. His plays and dramatisations, on the other hand, are more limited: they retain the melodramatic conventions but often jettison the depth.[13]

In contrast to this, Janice Norwood is one of the few critics to see in Collins's adaptation of *The Woman in White* an embryonic indication of the psychologised drama of the late nineteenth century.[14] While this thesis does not make an argument for the quality of Collins's dramatic adaptations, which were met with varying degrees of critical and popular success, it illustrates the centrality of dramatic writing in a career that has typically been remembered and studied for its significant contributions to the development of the novel form. In doing so, this thesis reconfigures both our critical assumptions regarding Collins's career and the relationship between the novel and the theatre for Victorian readers, writers, audiences, and critics.

Collins's reputation as a writer unafraid of embracing controversial topics and innovative narrative modes has engendered many critical evaluations of the relationship between his work and a

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[12] Richard Pearson, '"Twin-sisters" and "Theatrical Thieves": Wilkie Collins and the Dramatic Adaptation of *The Moonstone*' in Mangham, *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays*, 220; see also Richard Pearson, *Victorian Writers and the Stage: The Plays of Dickens, Browning, Collins and Tennyson* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2015).
[13] Jim Davis, 'Collins and the Theatre' in Jenny Bourne Taylor (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006), 178-79.
[14] Janice Norwood, 'Sensation Drama? Collins's Stage Adaptation of *The Woman in White*', in Mangham, *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays*, 222-36.

wide variety of social and political issues. Feminist criticism has found Collins's works, which often interrogate assumptions about Victorian social and sexual mores, to engage with ongoing conversations concerning gender, sexuality, and marriage.[15] His oeuvre, in particular texts such as *Armadale* and *The Moonstone* which contextualise their plots within Britain's imperial context, have enabled critics to locate Collins's works within the field of postcolonial studies.[16] Many of Collins's most popular works feature characters whose bodies exist outside normative standards, such as the physically androgynous Marian Halcombe or the bedridden Misserimus Dexter, which has proved fruitful to scholars working in the medical humanities and disability studies.[17] The frequent recurrence to legal contexts in Collins's corpus of work and its emphasis on crime and justice has also interested scholars working at the intersection of law and Victorian studies.[18] Though Collins's novels have long interested scholars for the depth of their ideological explorations, his dramatic works have tended to be understood as works devoid of politics, written to line Collins's pockets without the dogma present in his novels. This thesis seeks to redress this understanding by

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[15] Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1992); Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2007), chapter 4; Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine, and Victorian Popular Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008), chapter 5; Jennifer Hedgecock, *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat* (Cambria Press: Amherst, 2008), chapter 3; Nina Attwood, *The Prostitute's Body: Rewriting Prostitution in Victorian Britain* (Pickering & Chatto: London, 2011), chapter 4.

[16] Christopher GoGwilt, *The Fiction of Geopolitics: Afterimages of Culture, from Wilkie Collins to Alfred Hitchcock* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 2000); Caroline Reitz, *Detecting the Nation: Fictions of Detection and the Imperial Venture* (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 2004), chapter 3; Sarah Salih, *Representing Mixed Race in Jamaica and England from the Abolition Era to the Present* (Routledge: London, 2011), chapter 4.

[17] Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (Routledge: London, 1988); Noel Jackson, *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge University Press: 2008), chapter 6; Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins, Medicine, and the Gothic* (University of Wales Press: Cardiff, 2009); Jennifer Esmail, *Reading Victorian Deafness: Signs and Sounds in Victorian Literature and Culture* (Ohio University Press: Athens, 2013), chapter 2; Heidi Logan, *Sensational Deviance: Disability in Nineteenth-Century Sensation Fiction* (Routledge: London, 2019); Kylee-Anne Hingston, *Articulating Bodies: The Narrative Form of Disability and Illness in Victorian Fiction* (Liverpool University Press: Liverpool, 2020), especially chapter 3.

[18] Ayelet Ben-Yishai, *Common Precedents: The Presentness of the Past in Victorian Law and Fiction* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013), chapter 4; Monica F. Cohen, *Pirating Fictions: Ownership and Creativity in Nineteenth-Century Popular Culture* (University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville, 2017).

highlighting how Collins's dramatic writing is implicated in the same political and ideological conversations which have been the topic of scholarly attention for decades.

That Collins's theatrical works, which make up a significant portion of his corpus, remain chronically understudied is all the more surprising given his lifelong affinity and admiration for the theatre. Collins's mother, Harriet Collins, nearly took up a professional engagement at the Theatre Royal, Bath, before she opted to take the then decidedly more respectable position of governess, an anecdote that would not be out of place in one of his novels.[19] The French influence that his dramatic writing would later demonstrate is hinted at in his theatregoing habits, which spanned his life in London to his travels in Paris, where he first saw Mademoiselle Rachel perform in 1844.[20] In London, moreover, Collins saw performances of Boucicault's *The Corsican Brothers* (Princess's, 1852) and G. H. Lewes's *The Game of Speculation* (Lyceum, 1852), both adaptations of French works, as well as Delphine de Girardin's *La joie fait peur* and Louis Clapisson's *La Promise* (both at St. James's, 1854).[21] A brief period of work as dramatic reviewer for the *Leader* in 1854-5 introduced him to London's West End in a professional capacity. In the late 1840s, before his career as a novelist began, the Collins family household in Blandford Square held a number of amateur theatricals featuring a host of prominent Pre-Raphaelite artists, from John Everett Millais to William Holman Hunt. It was in an 1851 production of Edward Bulwer Lytton's *Not So Bad As We Seem* by the Guild of Literature and Art that Collins, who played a valet, first met Charles Dickens, a friendship that would prove foundational for his career.[22] On a trip to Paris in 1855, Collins and Dickens saw

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[19] Pykett, *Collins*, 3.
[20] Graham Law and Andrew Maunder, *Wilkie Collins: A Literary Life* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2008), 101.
[21] William Baker, *A Wilkie Collins Chronology* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2007), 49, 69.
[22] Jim Davis, 'Collins and the Theatre' in Taylor, *Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, 168; see also Andrew Lycett, *Wilkie Collins: A Life of Sensation* (Hutchinson: London, 2013), 82-85; Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 2002).

Frédérick Lemaître in *Thirty Years of a Gambler's Life*, 'which they both considered the theatrical experience of a lifetime'.[23]

Collins's interest in the theatre, however, was not limited to his position as audience member or participant in amateur theatricals. In 1862, for example, he wrote:

> I have written no other Drama since [*The Red Vial*], and my literary success has been entirely won as a novelist. If I had been a Frenchman – with such a public to write for, such rewards to win, and such actors to interpret me, as the French stage presents – all the stories I have written from "Antonina" to "The Woman in White" would have been told in dramatic form. Whether their success as plays would have been equal to their success as novels, it is not for me to decide; *But if I know anything of my own faculty, it is a dramatic one*.[24]

Collins's theatrical writing began with his 1850 play *A Court Duel*, a translation of a French melodrama performed on behalf of MP Sidney Herbert's Female Emigration Fund. Between 1855 and 1860, Collins wrote four more plays: *The Lighthouse* (Olympic, 1857), *The Frozen Deep* (Tavistock House, 1857), *The Red Vial* (Olympic, 1858), and *A Message from the Sea* (1860). It was not until 1866, with his dramatic version of *Armadale*, that Collins began writing adaptations of his plays alongside their novelistic counterparts. The practice of privately printing a dramatic version of a novel and producing a single 'copyright performance', as I discuss below, was Collins's preferred method for protecting his exclusive right to dramatise his own work in the intricate legal context of emergent copyright legislation. It is for this reason, then, that one of the limitations of this thesis is temporal. While Collins's relationship with the theatre began during his childhood on visits to Rome, because this study is concerned with the interrelationship between the novel and the stage, I emphasise those works staged post-1870 when Collins's dramatic career began to yield financial and critical success. While *No Thoroughfare*, an adaptation of the 1867 Christmas number for *All the Year Round*, was

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[23] Peters, *The King of Inventors*, 164.
[24] Wilkie Collins, 'To Unknown Recipient, 21 March 1862' in William Baker and William M. Clarke (eds), *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, 2 vols. (Macmillan Press: Basingstoke, 1999), 208.

Collins's first success in the theatre, its status as a collaborative effort with Dickens is outside the scope of this study.

In the latter portion of his career, Collins, who was already suffering from the demands of the periodical press, found simultaneously producing both a novel and a play to be a demanding practice. Even though it was through serialised publication that Collins initially earned his success – and he preferred weekly publishing over Dickens's monthly instalments – he remained critical of the practice throughout his career. While writing *The Woman in White*, he described the effort of keeping up with weekly instalments as 'more easily imagined than described', and in a letter to Anne Procter, the woman to whom that novel was dedicated, he wrote that he had 'been tied to *The Woman in White*'s petticoat string, like a dog to his kennel', later referring to the practice of periodical publishing as an act of 'solitary confinement' and elsewhere as 'infernal'.[25] Writing to his mother regarding an ill family member, he told her 'if only she would write a serial story, she would find it impossible to be ill long – the printers would not allow it!'[26] Even towards the end of his career, Collins described himself as a 'hunted man' in a letter to his literary agent A.P. Watt, claiming that he was plagued by 'demands for weekly parts'.[27] In 1873, when two of Collins's plays – *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen* – would be produced simultaneously, Collins wrote to William Holman Hunt and complained about the process of writing a novel and a play alongside each other:

> Two plays on "Man and Wife" are all ready to compete with <u>my</u> play in the country theatres – and I am obliged to make arrangements with the Bancrofts to meet this competition <u>instantly</u> – or I shall get nothing by "Man and Wife", as performed in the country theatres. […] I am obliged to dramatise the novel I am now writing, <u>against time</u> – and bring it out […] forthwith in London.[28]

[25] Wilkie Collins, 'To E.M. Ward, 7 January 1860', 'To Anne Procter, 23 July 1860', in *Letters I*, 179-80; 195.
[26] Wilkie Collins, 'To Harriet Collins, 18 July 1864', in ibid., 247-48.
[27] Wilkie Collins, 'To A.P. Watt, 29 October 1885', in *Letters II*, 487.
[28] Wilkie Collins, 'To William Holman Hunt, 11 March 1873', in ibid., 363.

In his private correspondence, Collins was unyieldingly critical of the periodical press. In his public-facing writing, however, he tended to soften the language and tone he used to describe his writing practice as he did in, for example, the preface to the second edition of *The Moonstone*, published in 1871 – the same year his version of *The Woman in White* was first staged at The Olympic. When *The Moonstone* was initially serialised in 1868, Collins's mother fell ill and his dependence on opium increased. In spite of the emotional and physical turmoil brought on by these events, however, Collins wrote that he had his 'duty to the public still to bear in mind'.[29] The preface goes on to note that readers on both sides of the Atlantic eagerly anticipated the weekly instalments of his story, and he therefore had to set aside his own personal circumstances in order to supply *Household Words* with its weekly episodes. Collins concludes the preface by offering a statement that is striking in its stark contrast to the criticisms he voiced against periodical publishing in his private correspondence:

> I only look back now at the blessed relief which my occupation (forced as it was) brought to my mind. The art which had been always the pride and the pleasure of my life, became now more than ever 'its own exceeding great reward'. I doubt if I should have lived to write another book, if the responsibility of the weekly publication of this story had not forced me to rally my sinking energies of body and mind – to dry my useless tears, and to conquer my merciless pains.[30]

That Collins held such differing opinions of the periodical press in public and private contexts suggests that he had a vested interest in portraying an image of artistic authority even as his mental and physical health suffered while he worked.

Collins's interest in the theatre also influenced several pieces of journalism he wrote while working for Dickens's periodicals *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*. In 'Dramatic Grub Street', Collins assumes the persona of a fictional writer and asks: 'I can get good English poems, histories, biographies, novels, essays, travels, criticisms, all of the present time. Why can I not get good

[29] Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (Chancellor Press: London, 1994), 2.
[30] Ibid.

English dramas of the present time as well?'[31] The remainder of the essay places Collins precisely within the critical landscape anxious about the future of a native and contemporary English drama: 'Of one thing I am certain, that there is no want of a large and a ready audience for original English plays, possessing genuine dramatic merit, and appealing, as forcibly as our best novels do, to the tastes, the interests, and the sympathies of our own time.'[32] In subsequent essays, Collins wrote polemically about a wide variety of topics related to the theatre, including what he perceived as substandard accommodations in theatres, the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain's Office, the practice of closing music halls on Sundays, and the use of gas lighting in theatres.[33] In the same way that critics have drawn insightful connections between Collins's journalism and his novels – in particular his anxiety about writing for an 'Unknown Public' – this study brings his evident concern about the state of English theatre to bear on his wider career.[34]

One of the most important factors underwriting adaptation in the nineteenth century was the failure of the legal system – both in England and beyond – to adequately address the burgeoning practice of dramatic adaptation. While the 1710 Statute of Anne, or the Copyright Act of 1710, was the first intervention in the complex and muddied history of British copyright that continued into the twentieth century (and indeed prevails even today), the specific situation of dramatic copyright was not addressed until over a century later, when suggestions made by the 1832 Select Committee into the Drama would be taken up in the 1833 Dramatic Authors Act, allowing playwrights to claim

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[31] Wilkie Collins, 'Dramatic Grub Street: Explored in Two Letters', *Household Words*, 17 (6 March 1858), 265.
[32] Ibid., 266.
[33] Wilkie Collins, 'A Breach of British Privilege', *Household Words*, 19 (19 March 1859), 361-64; 'Occasional Register', *All the Year Round*, 1 (14 May 1859), 64-66; 'Managers and Music Halls', *All the Year Round*, 4 (23 March 1861), 558-61. Collins's unpublished 1881 essay 'The Air and the Audience: Considerations on the Atmospheric Influences of Theatres' was reprinted in *The Mask*: 'The Use of Gas in Theatres: An Essay by Wilkie Collins (1881) with a Foreword by John Balance', *The Mask*, 10.4 (1924), 163-67.
[34] Wilkie Collins, 'The Unknown Public', *Household Words*, 18 (21 August 1858).

copyright of their dramatic works.[35] The 1842 Copyright Act would officially extend copyright to dramatic works, a fact that would become all the more important the following year when the 1843 Theatres Act removed the exclusive patents of Covent Garden and Drury Lane to perform spoken drama.[36] As the West End expanded its capability to serve a larger number of patrons at an increasing number of theatres, the demand for plays accordingly swelled. As John Russell Stephens notes, a large portion of this demand was met by such a large number of adaptations from French plays that to 'an uncomfortable degree the London stage became an outpost of the Parisian'.[37]

It was not until the 1860s, however, that legislation would begin to address 'an area of copyright obscurity which was the cause of much ill-feeling between novelists and playwrights, namely, dramatised versions of novels, which were in effect immune from the law on copyright'.[38] Because this 'obscure' area of copyright law was governed as much by legislation as it was by legal precedent, it was only in the 1863 case *Tinsley v. Lacy* that the law was clarified: in order for a novelist to protect their exclusive right to represent a novel dramatically, they had to first write a dramatic version and produce a brief 'copyright performance'.[39] The copyright performance was, from then on, a single performance of a given play, nominally open to the public but usually given only to invited guests and with minimal accoutrements, produced in order to secure an author's dramatic

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[35] For a complete history of the 1832 Select Committee, see Kate Newey, 'The 1832 Select Committee' in *The Oxford Handbook of the Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832*, edited by Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2014), 140-155.

[36] See Dewey Ganzel, 'Patent Wrongs and Patent Theatres: Drama and Law in the Early Nineteenth Century', *PMLA*, 76:4 (September 1961), 384-96; Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London 1770-1840* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2007).

[37] John Russell Stephens, *The Profession of the Playwright: British Theatre 1800-1900* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1991), 103.

[38] Ibid., 97; see also Catherine Seville, *The Internationalisation of Copyright Law: Books, Buccaneers, and the Black Flag in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006).

[39] In this case, publisher William Tinsley claimed infringement of his copyright on Mary Elizabeth Braddon's novels *Aurora Floyd* and *Lady Audley's Secret* by Thomas Hailes Lacy, who had published William Suter's dramatised versions of those novels. The court ruled that Lacy had indeed infringed on Tinsley's copyright not because Suter had adapted Braddon's novels, but because Lacy had published them.

copyright.[40] Collins, from the publication of his 1866 novel *Armadale* onwards, would, for novels he intended to eventually dramatise, write an adaptation of those novels, privately print them, and produce a single copyright performance.

In outlining the key legal context of issues regarding dramatic copyright, however, this thesis moves beyond readings of Collins's dramatic works that have typically understood them to be overdetermined by their role in protecting his exclusive right to represent his works dramatically. While it is true, especially in the period after 1866 when Collins began producing his novels and their respective dramatic versions simultaneously, that his dramatic versions protected his works from stage piracy, this study pushes against the attendant corollary that these works are primarily legal, and therefore not cultural, artefacts.[41] This study's subordination of copyright concerns to the cultural, artistic, social, and political contexts of Collins's dramatic works echoes recent scholarship on nineteenth-century theatre that has resisted reductive understandings of the stage which prioritise its substantial legal apparatus: censorship, piracy, and international and domestic copyright. While the legal framework of the stage inevitably shaped its trajectory in the nineteenth century, I have attempted to consider the non-legal dynamics of Collins's dramatic writing in concert with, and not as ancillary to, its legal context.

Over the course of the last several decades, scholars of Victorian theatre have demonstrated the theatre to be not a niche entertainment, but rather a central organ of social, political, and cultural activity in the nineteenth century.[42] Its cross-class appeal and rapidly expanding availability ensured

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[40] See Derek Miller, 'Performative Performances: A History and Theory of the "Copyright Performance"', *Theatre Journal*, 64:2 (2012), 161-77.

[41] See, for example, Sundeep Bisla, *Wilkie Collins & Copyright: Artistic Ownership in the Age of the Borderless World* (Ohio State University Press: Columbus, 2013), which is an in-depth study of Collins's complex relationship to literary copyright, but nevertheless sidesteps any discussion of his lifelong concern with dramatic copyright legislation.

[42] See, for example, Jacky Bratton, *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1991); Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage, 1800-1914* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2000); Tracy C. Davis and Peter Holland (eds), *The Performing Century: Nineteenth-Century Theatre's History*

that theatre as an institution embodied, reflected, and responded to the widespread makeup of its audiences and participants.[43] The pioneering work of scholars such as Allardyce Nicoll, George Rowell, Russell Jackson, and Michael Booth has allowed for important incursions into the field of nineteenth-century theatre, and subsequent critical re-evaluations have demonstrated the Victorian stage to be a site 'that was thriving, multiplying and serving ever-increasing numbers of spectators'.[44]

This thesis considers how Tracy Davis's characterisation of nineteenth-century repertoire as 'the cultural lingua franca' of Victorian audiences and theatre practitioners also informs other avenues of cultural production and consumption, both in the nineteenth century and into the twentieth.[45] It broadens the scope of research that has typically leveraged theatre as a prism through which we can understand the novel without also acknowledging its complex and central position in the Victorian cultural sphere.[46] It also complements David Kurnick's recent discussion of 'the novelistic turn to and away from the living theater [as] not a punctual event but [as] an ongoing aspect of novelistic development' by widening that discussion beyond the limitations of 'novelistic development'.[47] In building on the work of these scholars, therefore, I am deliberately avoiding replicating a teleological framework that prioritises understanding and analysing the novel at the expense of the theatre. That the theatre was so closely enmeshed with the writing and reading of

(Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2007); Jacky Bratton, *The Making of the West End Stage* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2011); Matthew Wilson Smith, *The Nervous Stage: Nineteenth-Century Neuroscience and the Birth of Modern Theatre* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2018).

[43] Jim Davis and Victor Emeljanow, *Reflecting the Audience: London Theatregoing, 1840-1880* (University of Iowa Press: Iowa City, 2001).

[44] Jacky Bratton, *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003), 15; Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, 6 vols. (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1952-59); George Rowell, *The Victorian Theatre: A Survey* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1967); Russell Jackson, *Victorian Theatre: The Theatre in Its Time* (New Amsterdam: Franklin, 1994); Michael Booth, *Theatre in the Victorian Age* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1991).

[45] Tracy C. Davis, 'Nineteenth-Century Repertoire', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 36:2 (December 2009), 24.

[46] See, for example, Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1992).

[47] David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2012), 2.

novels in the nineteenth century is significant not solely because of what it tells us about the novel, but rather what it illuminates about the wider Victorian culture industry.

In many ways, any study of 'adaptation' is also a study of definitions, and, depending on how one defines adaptation, it has existed at least as long as the written word. Constraining the limits of this capacious definition, then, is where this thesis begins: what constitutes the difference between adaptation and, for example, translation? Reproduction? Transliteration? Appropriation? These questions have been explored by many scholars in several studies spanning the theoretical and historical spectrum, beginning with George Bluestone's seminal 1957 study *Novels into Film* which signalled the foundation of what has now become a long list of critical and theoretical analyses of adaptation as a mode of cultural production. A distinct attention to film – as the title of Bluestone's book suggests – has also characterised much of the critical attention devoted to adaptation.[48] It is perhaps unsurprising, given the ubiquity of adaptation in the Anglophone cultural landscape since the inception of cinema, that theories of adaptation have flourished in the fields of film and media studies. The vast majority of recent work on adaptation has therefore been overwhelmingly concerned with the adaptation of classic novels onscreen, either in film or television.

Many critics working under the broad theoretical umbrella of 'adaptation studies' acknowledge the crosspollination between the nineteenth-century novel and various modern forms of cultural production but continue to take as axiomatic the notion that adaptation is a largely retrospective practice. As the critical discipline of adaptation studies emerged from the beginnings of

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[48] See, for example, Dudley Andrew, 'The Well-Worn Muse: Adaptation in Film History and Theory' in *Narrative Strategies: Original Essays in Film and Prose Fiction*, edited by Syndy M. Conger and Janice R. Welsch (Western Illinois University: Macomb, 1980); Seymour Chatman, 'What Novels Can Do That Films Can't (and Vice Versa)' *Critical Inquiry*, 7:1 (1980), 121-140; Ben Brewster and Lea Jacobs, *Theatre to Cinema: Stage Pictorialism and the Early Feature Film* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1997); Brian McFarlane, *Novel to Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1996); Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo (eds), *A Companion to Literature and Film* (Blackwell: Oxford, 2004; Thomas M. Leitch, *Film Adaptation and its Discontents: From* Gone with the Wind *to* The Passion of the Christ (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore, 2007; Deborah Cartmell and Imelda Wheelan (eds), *Screen Adaptation: Impure Cinema* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2010).

film theory, the adaptation of 'classic' novels into film came to be understood as necessarily reaching into a historical past, however distant.[49] Conversely, scholars working in studies of the long nineteenth century have considered adaptation strictly within the historical confines of that century, but have tended to do so without also staking a claim in the wider sphere of adaptation studies.[50] What emerges from these parallel critical fields is a tension between the broad theorization of adaptation as a cultural process mediated by history (the backwards gaze of adapting a classic novel) and an understanding of adaptation as a historically contingent mode of production (Victorian writers adapting work in the Victorian period). The theoretical framework of this thesis joins the rigorous historiography typical of studies of adaptation in the nineteenth century with the extensive theoretical backdrop of adaptation studies more broadly. While this study deviates from some of adaptation studies' central debates concerning questions of authorship and temporality because Collins was adapting his own work during his lifetime even as his novels were being published by the periodical press, it echoes Simone Murray's claim that adaptations are significant 'not so much for their intricate ideological encodings, but for the way they illuminate the contexts of their own production'.[51] The perspective afforded by a thorough examination of Collins's multimodal career highlights the economic, social, and political dynamics of Victorian cultural production in a way that discussions narrowly demarcated as strictly 'novel', 'theatre', or 'film' studies do not.

The disciplinary atomisation of adaptation studies has also led to a number of competing frameworks which defend and assert the value of the film adaptation, the theatrical adaptation, the

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[49] See, for example, Vachel Lindsay, *The Art of the Moving Picture* (The Macmillan Company: New York, 1915); Sergei Eisenstein, 'Dickens, Griffith, and the Film To-Day', in *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, edited by Jay Leyda (D. Dobson: London, 1949); A. Nicholas Vardac, *Stage to Screen: Theatrical Origins of Early Film: David Garrick to D. W. Griffith* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1949).

[50] See, for example, Philip H. Bolton, *Dickens Dramatized* (Mansell: London, 1987); Philip Cox, *Reading Adaptations: Novels and Verse Narratives on the Stage, 1790-1840* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 2000).

[51] Simone Murray, *The Adaptation Industry: The Cultural Economy of Contemporary Literary Adaptation* (Routledge: London, 2012), 5.

novelization, and the myriad other media into and through which texts circulate. Such studies are rarely concerned with the history of adaptation as a process and are more squarely focused on adaptation as it emerged in the early cinematic works of the twentieth century. Indeed, one gets the sense throughout these many critical re-evaluations that the practice of adaptation which endures today originated with early filmmakers and not with the playwrights of the nineteenth-century stage. In much the same way that critics working within adaptation studies have defended the academic merit of studying films adapted from novels since the early twentieth century, this thesis suggests that a more nuanced understanding of adaptation as it was practiced throughout the nineteenth century reorients the way we consider modern forms of the same practice.

This study responds to Kamilla Elliott's recent claim that adaptation studies 'needs more macroscopic and more microscopic studies' and deliberately avoids replicating 'the hierarchical relationship that case studies maintain between theorization and adaptation: one in which theorization decrees, while case studies support, illustrate, and defer to it'.[52] Collins's career is representative of the wider adaptive practices of the nineteenth century, but this study resists deploying disparate case studies – adaptation studies' most prevalent methodology – because considering the career of a single writer registers the gradually evolving relationship between writing for the novel and the stage. The field of adaptation studies, however, continues to privilege filmic understandings of adaptation at the expense of considering the wider cultural sphere of the nineteenth century out of which adaptation emerged. Elliott, for example, in reading Edward Bulwer-Lytton's criticism of dramatic adaptation, replicates the teleological framework that proliferates in studies of adaptation by claiming that he 'forged a prototype for the subsequent twentieth-century maxim that good films can only be made from bad novels'.[53] Her study, *Theorizing*

[52] Kamilla Elliott, *Theorizing Adaptation* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2020), 8, 9.
[53] Ibid., 57.

Adaptation (2020), later claims that nineteenth-century adaptation 'outraged Collins and other members of the bourgeoisie because it did not recognize class distinctions', an argument that fundamentally misreads Collins's frustration with adaptations of French plays as a criticism of adaptation more generally.[54] Elliott's otherwise perceptive study echoes the blurred boundary between international and domestic adaptation that adaptation studies as a theoretical framework continuously reasserts. Research attuned to the widespread practice of writers dramatising English novels for performance onstage can sharpen the currently nebulous critical boundaries separating international and domestic adaptation.

The narrative of decline that attended the theatre in the final quarter of the nineteenth century was at odds with both its enduring popularity and its upward social mobility. The incompatibility of the precarious economic situation that underwrote the English stage at the end of the nineteenth century with the lofty, artistic aspirations of its many commentators was a familiar refrain in literary periodicals. Locating Collins's dramatic writing within the context of what would become the intense criticism the stage faced in the 1890s reveals many of the class, social, and artistic tensions between the popular stage and the perceived lack of a 'literary', aesthetic drama. William Archer, writing in the *Fortnightly Review* in the last decade of the nineteenth century, couched his criticism of English playwrights in sarcastic religiosity: 'Never was Messiah more eagerly awaited. We are all on tiptoe, with our trumpets at our lips, ready to hail his advent. And yet he comes not.'[55]

A writer for the *Quarterly Review*, for example, projected a nostalgia for the imagined excellence of an erstwhile English theatre onto Henry Irving's hugely popular management of the Lyceum: 'It is to the existence of a yearning for something more worthy of the traditional glories of the English stage, something more abreast of the true culture of the time, that Mr. Irving largely

[54] Ibid., 85.
[55] William Archer, 'The Free Stage and the New Drama', *Fortnightly Review*, 50 (November 1891), 663.

owes the immense success which has attended his management at the Lyceum.'[56] In a pair of essays entitled 'The Stage in Relation to Literature,' Lord Lytton responded to the commentator in the *Quarterly Review* by identifying the issue that the theatre faced as one of authorship: 'between playwrights who are not poets or thinkers, and thinkers and poets who cannot write actable plays, the British stage derives from our contemporary literature no intellectual nutriment, and our literary genius receives from the stage no dramatic inspiration.'[57]

The divide between writers who wrote for publication in novels and those who wrote for the stage formed the ideological terrain on which these arguments played out in literary periodicals and newspapers. In 1892, the *Pall Mall Gazette* ran a series of essays titled 'Why I Don't Write Plays' and solicited the contributions of several major novelists. Among them were Thomas Hardy, Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and Moore himself. The questions posed by the *Pall Mall Gazette* to those novelists are themselves indicative of the perceived divide between the stage and other forms of literature. They inquired:

> (1) Whether you regard the present divorce of fiction from the drama as beneficial or inimical to the best interests of literature and of the stage;
> (2) Whether you, yourself, have at any time had, or now have, any desire to exercise your gifts in the production of plays as well as of novels; and, if not,
> (3) Why you consider the novel the better or more convenient means for bringing your ideas before the public whom you address.[58]

The responses to these prompts fall within two broad categories, the first of which is artistic concern. Hardy, for example, rehearsed familiar arguments expounding the formal limitations of the stage as opposed to the novel: 'the novel affords scope for getting nearer to the heart and meaning of things than does the play, [… in which] the presentation of human passions is subordinated to the presentation of mountains, cities, clothes, furniture, plate, jewels, and other real and sham-real

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[56] *Quarterly Review* (April 1883), 381.
[57] Lord Lytton, 'The Stage in Relation to Literature', *Fortnightly Review*, 34 (July 1883), 15.
[58] *Pall Mall Gazette* (31 August 1892), 1.

appurtenances, to the neglect of […] action and emotions.'[59] Braddon's response echoes Hardy's: 'Many of my early literary attempts were made in dramatic form, but the far wider scope afforded by the novel, with its fascinating elements of mystery and suspense – elements almost impossible in a stage play – make novel-writing a much more agreeable form of literary work.'[60] In his own response, Moore argued 'that the narrative form permits the novelist to put his best thoughts and his most accomplished art into his work,' whereas the dramatic form demonstrates a 'disregard for every kind of moral sequence and the violent dislocation of the inevitable course of human action'.[61]

William Edward Norris – a largely forgotten writer responsible for over five dozen novels over the course of his lifetime – voiced his distrust in the ability of novelists to write for the stage: 'I do not believe that the average novelist – the novelist whose works are supposed to be read by "the lesser public" – could hope to escape being rendered publicly ridiculous were he to essay the suggested feat.'[62] Arthur Quiller-Couch, a literary critic who wrote several novels along with publishing multiple editions of Shakespeare's works for Cambridge University Press, argued that 'when I desire – as we all desire at times – to cast a situation into dramatic form I find myself a beginner again, tied up in a new set of conventions. […] To be original at four-and-twenty is within most men's competence; but in my humble opinion your only title to triumph over conventions in any art is that you have mastered them.'[63] For Quiller-Couch, the problem was one of expertise; novelists could not write for the stage, as Archer and Moore urged them to do, because they were trained in the publishing fields of the periodical press, not the stage. Margaret L. Woods, who also responded to the *Pall Mall Gazette*'s prompts, agreed insofar as her own career was concerned: 'There is nothing I should like better than to write a play, did I feel myself possessed of the

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[59] Ibid.
[60] *Pall Mall Gazette* (5 September 1892), 3.
[61] *Pall Mall Gazette* (7 September 1892), 3.
[62] Ibid., 2.
[63] *Pall Mall Gazette* (2 September 1892), 2.

necessary knowledge and powers.'[64] MP and novelist Justin McCarthy echoed Woods's sentiment: 'I am convinced that I have not in myself the slightest dramatic capacity, and that if under present conditions I am to appeal to the story-loving public at all it must be through the medium of the novel and not of the play.' The Australian émigré and novelist Mrs. Campbell Praed wrote strikingly about her own inability to write for the stage: 'I feel as though I were only pulling the strings of marionette performers, and am forced to realize that a scene which presented itself to my mind as dramatic in a novel has ceased to seem so when I try to adapt it for the stage, and that I must get courage and strength for a bolder spring before I can free myself from paralyzing conventionalism.'[65]

The other dominant concern in the responses to the *Pall Mall Gazette* is commercial, and in particular these replies are characterised by a strong defense of writers' pecuniary interests. The responses that fall under this category address Archer's claim in the *Fortnightly Review* that 'what would tend more than anything else to promote the development of serious dramatic art in England would be a theatre, a single theatre, which should be exempt from the necessity of paying interest on capital invested.'[66] One correspondent, who opted to remain anonymous and identified themselves only as 'A Novelist,' couched their response in financial terms: 'A novelist writes to earn daily bread. He deals in an article for which he can get a fairly regular price. On that he can often manage to live in a tolerable condition of lower-middle-class comfort. Why, then, should he waste his time in writing plays as a speculation?'[67] Considering the profession of writing in terms of both the language and dynamics of a market economy was not uncommon: Lord Lytton had argued ten years earlier that 'Eminent actors and successful managers cannot be expected to waste time and trouble, for the pure love of literature, *in unprofitable speculations*, nor can eminent and successful authors be expected

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[64] Ibid.
[65] *The Pall Mall Gazette* (8 September 1892), 3.
[66] William Archer, 'The Drama in the Doldrums', *Fortnightly Review*, 52 (August 1892), 167.
[67] *Pall Mall Gazette* (5 September 1892), 3.

to write for the stage if the result is not conducive to their literary reputation and pecuniary advantage.'[68]

What emerges from this conversation in literary periodicals and newspapers is a schematised understanding of the English literary landscape of the late nineteenth century as divided between a refined readership who contented themselves with novels, an unrefined readership whose literature of choice came from inexpensive periodicals, and an unsophisticated theatre audience ('that triple-headed monster of the stalls, pit, and gallery,' in Braddon's words) satiated on unintellectual and unchallenging dramatic fare.[69] The refined readership, for whom novelists from George Eliot to Henry James wrote, had no significant analog in the theatre.

The issue for these critics was not simply that England did not have any native playwriting talent; even if Archer's 'Messiah' were to appear, so they claimed, the theatregoing public would be unable to appreciate their work. The combination of a perceived lack of native English playwriting talent along with an undiscerning audience was thrown into sharp relief for dramatic critics with the advent of Ibsen's Scandinavian influence: even Moore could not help but observe that 'the great Ibsen plays to empty benches after three or perhaps six performances.'[70] Yet Henry Irving would become the first actor to receive a knighthood in 1895, a testament to the widely recognised importance of his career as actor and manager. Collins's career echoes the anxiety produced at the end of the nineteenth century by the tension between the astounding popularity of the theatre and its distinct un-literariness. By considering his dramatic works in light of the adaptive practices that proliferated onstage, this study sheds light on and redresses the narrative surrounding our inherited assumptions about late-Victorian popular culture.

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[68] Lord Lytton, 'The Stage in Relation to Literature', *Fortnightly Review*, 34 (August 1883), 225; emphasis mine.
[69] *Pall Mall Gazette* (5 September 1892), 3.
[70] *Pall Mall Gazette* (7 September 1892), 3.

Source Material and Limitations

This thesis draws on the unpublished manuscripts of Collins's dramatic works, with a particular emphasis on those sent for licensing in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection of the British Library. In addition to the Lord Chamberlain's copies, I also consider annotated performance copies, prompt-books, and manuscript copies of Collins's plays which are held at the Huntington Library, the Harry Ransom Center, the Berg Collection, the M. L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists at Princeton University, and the Harvard Theatre Collection.

I also draw on the substantial digital collections of newspapers and periodicals, including *British Library Newspapers Parts I–IV*, *Nineteenth Century Collections Online* (*NCCO*), *19th Century UK Periodicals*, *19th Century U.S. Newspapers*, *JSTOR 19th Century British Pamphlets*, and *The Times Digital Archive (1785–2006)*. The access to a wide-ranging variety of reviews of Collins's plays has been instrumental in recovering not only their performance history, but also the politics of their reception.

One of the primary limitations of this thesis is geographical. While some of Collins's plays engaged in provincial and transatlantic tours with varying degrees of success, I have deliberately placed a significant emphasis on their performance histories in London theatres. While recent scholarship into the histories of provincial theatre and performance have rightly altered what was typically a London-centric narrative of theatrical production, Collins understood, wrote for, and was himself a member of the distinct audience that frequented the major and minor theatres of the West End. Locating these works within the specific context of the London stage thus reveals the cultural, social, and political dynamics that animate his writing.

Chapter 1
Staging the Sensation Novel

> The growth of civilisation has brought even into the homes of the poor comforts unknown to the rich in the days of Elizabeth. The million, who then could only satisfy their mental appetite by taking good thought through their ears from stage or pulpit, may now sit at ease by their own fireside and read what they will. In perfect rest of body they may feast their fancies upon tales rich in dramatic incident and speech of men – dramas, in fact, wherein well-written description takes the place of scenery, and the author's own way of analysis supplants the actor's power of interpreting the humours and the passions of the scene. The best of these novels are more original in their construction, paint character with more skill, and have a better dialogue than may be found in any of the new plays acted on the stage. The play, if, after its kind, as good as the novel and well acted, gives a greater pleasure. But is it a pleasure so much greater as to tempt people away from their home comforts after the labours of the day, induce them to submit to the trouble of a journey to and from the theatre, and sit there during four, or sometimes five hours, bound to one allotted seat?
>
> Henry Morley, Prologue to *The Journal of a London Playgoer*, 1866

As a contributor to *Household Words* and its successor *All the Year Round*, Morley was not just an observer of but a participant in the production of the 'tales rich in dramatic incident' which kept an increasingly literate mid-Victorian public at the side of the hearth instead of in the theatre. Nevertheless, as drama critic for *The Examiner*, Morley's 'unshakeable faith in the essential worth and stature of the stage as a national institution of the highest standing' is evident in his collected reviews.[1] 'If the stage were what it ought to be', he writes, 'and what good actors heartily desire to

[1] Michael R. Booth, Introduction to *The Journal of a London Playgoer* by Henry Morley (Leicester University Press: Leicester, 1974), 22.

make it, it would teach the public to appreciate what is most worthy also in the sister arts, while its own influence would be very strong for good'.[2] In other words, the drama and the novel are not isolated forms, but can be mutually informative. An appreciation of drama, he implies, leads to a greater appreciation of art in all other spheres. Morley's tenure as drama critic for *The Examiner* witnessed the rise of the sensation drama, of which he was both deeply critical and dismissive, and its counterpart in the periodical press, the sensation novel. Attributed at first to the degeneration of public morality and an intense desire for shocking stories that mimicked contemporary accounts of violent crimes which abounded in the mid-Victorian press, it has now been nearly half a century since the sensation novel was reclaimed as a legitimate site of academic inquiry by literary critics and cultural historians.

Adaptations of sensation novels thrived onstage alongside original sensation dramas. Enterprising playwrights and theatre managers sought to capitalise on the widespread success of the sensation novel by drawing audiences to dramatised versions of popular novels such as Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (Victoria, 1863) and *Aurora Floyd* (Britannia, 1863), Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (Surrey, 1866), and even Collins's *The Woman in White* (Surrey, 1860). Despite having long been considered one of the architects of the sensation genre, the dramatic adaptations Collins wrote of his own canonical novels receive drastically less critical attention than their novelistic counterparts. The dramatic versions of *The Woman in White* (Olympic, 1871) and *No Name* (published in 1870), written when the condemnation of the sensation novel was reaching a fever pitch, simultaneously embrace and eschew the sensational mode. Critics, however, have tended to read the financial motives of the sensation drama and an investment in social and cultural politics as mutually exclusive. Michael Diamond, for example, has claimed that 'stage adaptations of sensation novels were […] intended to

[2] Morley, *The Journal of a London Playgoer*, 5.

satisfy the public's delight in seeing the characters of a popular novel on stage', and that 'the motive force of sensation drama was not art but profit'.[3] Reading Collins's dramatic adaptations alongside his novels reveals how the process of adaptation complicates such claims and demonstrates the tightly woven relationship between the Victorian theatre and the novel for readers, writers, audiences, and critics alike. This chapter moves beyond the well-rehearsed critical paradigm that characterises sensation dramas as bottom-line enterprises which existed solely to line the pockets of canny business owners. Though the sensation novel has long since been reclaimed as a legitimate site of academic inquiry, in particular for its criticisms of the mid-Victorian society out of which it arose, the sensation drama has yet to be afforded the same critical consideration.

Almost as soon as the term sensation began to be applied to novels and plays did it face an intense critical backlash. Henry Longueville Mansel and Margaret Oliphant, contemporary reviewers of the sensation novel, presented what are now the most lasting and well-known denunciations of the genre. Mansel, writing for the *Quarterly Review*, offered the following condemnation:

> Regarding these works merely as an efflorescence, as an eruption indicative of the state of health of the body in which they appear, the existence of an impure or a silly crop of novels, and the fact that they are eagerly read, are by no means favourable symptoms of the conditions of the body of society.[4]

Mansel's critique is characteristic of the reactions which the sensation novel prompted, particularly in its reading of the genre as symptomatic of a broader social illness. Oliphant's intervention, while less scathing than Mansel's, singles Collins out as an example of the literary sophistication of which the sensation novel was capable, but nevertheless anticipated that the recent success of *The Woman in White* would inspire inferior and decidedly less moral imitators: 'Mr. Wilkie Collins, in his remarkable

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[3] Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation: Or the Spectacular, the Shocking, and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Anthem Press: London, 2004), 223; 228-29.
[4] Henry Longueville Mansel, 'Sensation Novels', *The Quarterly Review*, 113 (1863), 512.

novel, has given a new impulse to a kind of literature which must, more or less, find its inspiration in crime, and, more or less, make the criminal its hero'.[5] The strained syntax of Oliphant's critique – the insistence on couching her criticism in terms 'more or less' accurate – echoes the emphasis placed in Collins's work on interrogating the ability to identify 'good' and 'bad' people. The characters of his novels and plays regularly push against the boundaries of respectability, interrogating the division between the stringent orthodoxies of the law and an abstract understanding of justice.

The term 'sensation', moreover, was not only applied derogatorily to works published in the periodical press; it also had a robust presence in the dramatic criticism of the 1860s and 70s. Onstage, the sensation drama attracted the same reactionary criticism which abounded in literary periodicals condemning sensation novels. A letter to the editor published in *The Daily Telegraph* offered the following criticism:

> There is no chance for original dramatic writing at the present time […] The English Stage no longer exists, but in its place we have a faint luminous something with a borrowed voice – a *Scin Læca*, or shining corpse. We have no original drama, but a *mélange* of foreign scraps collected here and there […] The mere fact of 'sensation' authors making large sums of money is no sign of their possessing either a literary or dramatic ability. They have commenced by thoroughly corrupting the public taste, and now live upon the rottenness they have engendered.[6]

Echoing this, *The Caledonian Mercury* noted that the sensation drama 'seems to be completely usurping the stage, and no amount of good acting, apparently, can restore the ancient glories of the legitimate drama', while *Fun* claimed that 'good acting is daily becoming less necessary in this age of sensation dramas'.[7] *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* drew an explicit link between the sensation drama and a perceived increase in violent crime: 'We live in 'sensation' times. […] It is this state of things which

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[5] Margaret Oliphant, 'Sensation Novels', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 91 (1862), 568.
[6] *The Daily Telegraph* (7 March 1862), 5.
[7] *The Caledonian Mercury* (1 April 1862), para. 1; *Fun* (19 April 1862), 42.

is one of the causes, perhaps, of the increase, now notorious, not of crime generally, but of crime of a violent and extraordinary character. […] the 'sensation' mania may be said to assist in giving force'.[8] The concerns expressed by commentators such as these echo a larger anxiety present in some degree throughout the nineteenth century about the dominance of French plays on London stages and a perceived lack of native English playwrighting talent. Criticism of the sensation drama is one iteration of the larger narrative of decline within which Collins's writing for the stage appears.

A review published in *The Times* of Edmund Falconer's 1862 sensation drama *Peep O' Day* at the Lyceum attributed 'the introduction of a new word [sensation drama] into the theatrical vocabulary' to Dion Boucicault's *Colleen Bawn*, the 1860 play first performed at Laura Keene's Theatre in New York.[9] The review prompted a response from Boucicault, which *The Times* published: 'Will you allow me to repudiate the cant word "sensation" attributed to me in *The Times* of this day, and which, in truth, I was the means of bringing into use? It is a bad word, and I beg pardon for it'.[10] Boucicault objected to the value of works deemed 'sensation dramas' being distilled into a single 'sensation scene' which refers to 'any lavishly mounted sequence in a melodrama which took the audience's breath away, or any scene of intense emotional upheaval'.[11] 'If a drama having sustaining power in its plot and in its development of character is to be called "sensation"', Boucicault argued, 'then I claim that Mr. Charles Kean made *Macbeth* a "sensation drama"'.[12] Throughout the decade, sensation drama had become a common flashpoint for dramatic criticism and parody, as, for example, in a poem published in *Punch* titled 'Shakspeare Superseded':

> Up to Nature while buffoons,
> On the stage, the mirror hold,
> *Colleen Bawns* and *Octoroons*,

[8] *Aris's Birmingham Gazette* (2 August 1862), 6.
[9] *The Times* (12 March 1862), 12.
[10] *The Times* (14 March 1862), 5.
[11] Diamond, *Victorian Sensation*, 218-19.
[12] *The Times* (14 March 1862), 5.

> In succession we behold.
> Drawing, since a by-gone day,
> More than *Hamlet* ever drew.
> Those sensation dramas pay –
> 'Whar's your Wullie Shakspur noo?'[13]

The popularity of the sensational mode had not abated by the 1870s, prompting *The Standard* to offer the following snobbish prologue to a review of F. C. Burnand's sensation drama *Dead Man's Point* (Adelphi, 1871): 'That sensation drama of the highly-coloured class had ceased to be numbered among our dramatic entertainments, and had given place to a purer and more refined form of theatrical exposition, has long been a consummation devoutly anticipated, not only by critical observers, but by all real admirers of true art'.[14] The review ends sarcastically: 'It is almost superfluous to add that the house was filled nearly to overflowing'.[15] The response to Burnand's play captures one of the anxieties at the heart of the response to both the sensation novel and drama: their detrimental moral principles became even more alarming as a result of their immense and enduring popularity.

This conversation in the press demonstrates a dynamic which is emblematic of the reception and criticism of both the sensation novel and drama: balancing the moral concerns characteristic of mid-Victorian propriety with a rapidly expanding readership and audience. The abolition of the theatrical monopoly in 1843, the development of urban commuter trains in London and its suburbs, the development of lending libraries, and swiftly increasing literacy provided popular novels with larger readerships and sensation dramas with larger audiences than earlier in the century. Supercilious critics condemned sensation wholesale, and even writers such as Collins and Boucicault, typically considered stalwarts of the genre, were themselves hesitant to associate too readily with it.

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[13] *Punch, or the London Charivari* (4 September 1869), 91.
[14] *The Standard* (6 February 1871), 6.
[15] Ibid.

Though even as critics railed against the genre and lamented the decline of British art and morality, profit-driven theatre managers, publishers, and owners of lending libraries disregarded such criticism in favour of catering to a profitable demographic, a demographic that cut across class lines. The anxiety latent in reviews such as those quoted above is in part a class anxiety: the sensation novel was read widely across the class spectrum, and the varied audiences of London's theatres brought success and money to a number of theatre managers and playwrights. 'Shakespeare', lamented Oliphant, 'even in the excitement of a new interpretation, has not crowded the waning playhouse, as has the sensation drama'.[16] Even as readers clamoured for weekly instalments of sensation novels in the periodical press and audiences filled theatres which produced lavishly mounted sensation dramas, Gilbert and Sullivan parodied the genre at the respectable, family-friendly Royal Gallery of Illustration with their 1871 production *A Sensation Novel*, in which an author's stock characters come to life and comment on the absurdity of the plot they are forced to endure. Mid-Victorian sensation as a genre was thus characterised by the tenuous coexistence of critical antipathy towards it and its enduring popularity.

The genesis of the Victorian sensation novel of the 1860s and 70s has proven fertile ground for several critical and theoretical approaches over the course of the last half-century. For Marxist literary historians, an expanding book market coupled with the rising class tensions produced by the industrial revolution resulted in a genre which incorporated that revolutionary fervour into both its form and its content. Jonathan Loesberg, following Fredric Jameson, has located a political dimension in the narrative structures of sensation fiction: they are 'manifestations of the same ideological responses that formed the structure of Victorian discussions of parliamentary reform in the late 1850s and 1860s'. The sensation novel, he argues, 'could both use the *frisson* of class fear for

[16] Oliphant, 'Sensation Novels', 565.

its literary ends and yet draw back from making any thematic claims in its use of that *frisson*'.[17] William R. McKelvy has noted, of *The Woman in White*, that 'the market for printed images inspired the innovative portrayal of a familiar tale, one focused on an inter-class marriage authorized by individual romantic agency. For by telling this story with a collection of narrators coming from diverse social and professional standings, Collins mimicked the elaborate creative networks responsible for giving contemporary readers what they wanted'.[18] McKelvy locates the class tension of Collins's most famous sensation novel in the way it authorises cross-class modes of artistic reproduction, in contrast to Ruskin's condemnation of mass production.

The sensation novel's formal flexibility, its frequent denial of high-Victorian realism in favour of polyvocal first-person narration and its disregard for the increasing predominance of character over plot have prompted interventions by post-structuralist literary critics and legal historians alike. In particular, they have drawn links between the sensation novel's narrative innovations and its tenuous relationship with realism. The context of the Victorian theatre complicates Susan Bernstein's claim that 'sensation fiction undercuts realism's correspondence between text and world, character and self' by virtue of the stage's relationship with mimesis, one which does not necessarily map onto the realist novel.[19] Patrick Brantlinger's early work on the sensation novel noted that it 'marks a crisis in the history of literary realism' by 'breaking down the conventions of realistic fiction' and 'the undermining of the narrator's credibility'.[20] Walter Kendrick has also asserted that *The Woman in White*, emblematic of the sensation novel, 'violates the realist's faith at every turn' by simultaneously acknowledging the presence of faithful narration in other

[17] Jonathan Loesberg, 'The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction', *Representations*, 13:1 (1986), 116, 135; see also Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Methuen: London, 1981).
[18] William R. McKelvy, 'The Woman in White and Graphic Sex', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 35:1 (2007), 297.
[19] Susan David Bernstein, 'Dirty Reading: Sensation Fiction, Women, and Primitivism', *Criticism*, 36:2 (1994), 229.
[20] Patrick Brantlinger, 'What is "Sensational" about the "Sensation Novel"?', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37:1 (1982), 15, 27.

realist novels, while undermining that narration internally.[21] While Michael Wheeler has acknowledged that 'character and plot in the sensation novels of the 1860s are often highly ambivalent, and the morality of the novels is relativist rather than absolutist', he nevertheless locates that ambivalence in a distinctly readerly project: 'The reader is presented with problems of reading or interpretation in which appearance and reality are blurred or contradictory'.[22] Susan Griffin has also read Victorian anti-Catholic discourse in the form of the sensation novel itself, asserting that its 'narrative structures, forming and formed by the learned associations of its audience, are borrowed in part from anti-Catholicism'.[23] What these critical evaluations and revaluations continually return to is the sensation novel's fraught relationship with realism, its deployment and rejection of the narrative mode which was so staunchly represented in other contemporary non-sensational writers such as George Eliot and Anthony Trollope. Though critics have often located the sensational novel's radical interrogation of mid-Victorian moral orthodoxies in the formal innovations associated with the novel itself, the sensation drama's lasting popularity suggests that the social and cultural politics of sensation as a genre are rooted less in the form of the sensation novel than its content. The process of adaptation – specifically Collins's – reveals the ideological commitments of the sensation novel to inhere within its domestication and localisation of familiar melodramatic and Gothic plots rather than solely in its deployment of complex narrative structures.

Perhaps most fruitful of all, and certainly most instrumental in demonstrating the sociological implications of the sensation novel, has been its ability to explore themes concomitant with the interests of second- and third-wave feminism. Feminist critics have seen the sensation novel's persistent concern with sex, gender, and nascent proto-feminist movements as emblematic

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[21] Walter M. Kendrick, 'The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 32:1 (1977), 37.
[22] Michael Wheeler, *English Fiction of the Victorian Period 1830-1890* (Longman: London, 1985), 93.
[23] Susan M. Griffin, 'The Yellow Mask, the Black Robe, and *The Woman in White*: Wilkie Collins, Anti-Catholic Discourse, and the Sensation Novel', *Narrative*, 12:1 (2004), 57.

of the genre's ability to interrogate the sexual assumptions which underpinned Victorian morality. Kate Flint has seen the sensation novel's 'most disruptive potential … in the degree to which it made its women readers consider their positions within their own homes and within society'.[24] Tamar Heller asserts that the rise of the male detective figure, as exemplified in Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859) and *The Moonstone* (1868), represents 'an attempt to reassert male authority by emphasizing men's analytical power and their ability not only to be differentiated from, but also to read and control the feminine'.[25] Other critical interventions have found the sensation novel to engage in nuanced critiques of Victorian culture, in particular its concern with gender and the institution of marriage.[26] The sensation novel's participation in the rapidly evolving and ongoing conversation surrounding the participation of women in economic, social, and cultural life, existed alongside – not separate from – the sensation drama's use of the stage as an ideological locus to engage in the same conversations.

More recent approaches in the medical humanities have made productive use of the sensation novel's ability to explore the literary mode's intersection with physiological readerly responses, a dynamic implied by the nomenclature of the genre. One of the earliest sustained critiques of the sensation novel provided the model for reading its somatic relevance: Jenny Bourne Taylor claims that the sensation novel 'worked directly on the body of the reader and as an infection from outside'.[27] Pamela K. Gilbert has noted that the sensation novel's 'understanding by the critics and readers of its day was grounded in popular understandings of medicine and physiological

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[24] Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader: 1837-1914* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1993), 276.
[25] Heller, *Dead Secrets*, 107.
[26] See, for example, Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1977), 153-181; Lyn Pykett, *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Women's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (Routledge: London, 1992).
[27] Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (Routledge: London, 1988), 12.

psychology'.[28] 'The desired effect of the sensation novel', writes Jesse Rosenthal in a revaluation of the Victorian novel's form, 'is to produce the same sensation in its readers that it describes in its character. It may have taken place in the past, but it is playing out in the reader's body – the novel's 'theater' – *right now*'.[29] The physiological implications of the sensation novel take on an additional valence in the context of theatrical performance that allowed Victorian audiences to witness the physiological and affective responses they themselves might have felt upon reading a novel – the heart palpitations, increased blood pressure, and perspiring palms for which the sensation novel was so often criticised – embodied onstage and among their fellow audience members.

Jessica Cox's recent guide to criticism on the sensation novel usefully summarises the extant terrain of criticism which concerns it, but nevertheless collapses the distinction between sensation drama and melodrama: 'the 'sensation mania' of the 1860s encompassed not only fiction, but melodrama as well – sometimes referred to as "sensation drama"'. [30] While it is certainly true that aspects of the sensation drama as exemplified by writers such as Collins, Boucicault, and Reade echo elements of the stage melodrama that had been popular in London since the turn of the nineteenth century, one of the primary appeals of sensation drama was its domestication and localisation of melodramatic plots. Both *The Woman in White* and *No Name* were published and, in the case of the former, staged, within the context of the sensation novel, sensation drama, and the theatrical landscape of the 1860s and 70s. Sensation drama certainly rehearsed some of melodrama's most potent tropes – complex plots, heightened emotionality, an intensely visual vernacular – but it

[28] Pamela K. Gilbert, 'Sensation fiction and the medical context' in Andrew Maunder (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2013), 182-95; see also Pamela K. Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1997).
[29] Jesse Rosenthal, *Good Form: The Ethical Experience of the Victorian Novel* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 2017), 179; emphasis in original.
[30] Jessica Cox, *Victorian Sensation Fiction* (Red Globe Press: London, 2019), 146.

crucially updated those tropes to carve out a cultural niche that was adjacent to, but separate from, the long history of melodrama on the English stage.

A comparative study between Collins's novels and their dramatic versions expands these critical perspectives by demonstrating the ways in which those adaptations illuminate the interrelation between the development of the Victorian sensation novel and the theatre. The reception of the sensation drama highlights the myriad political dynamics of sensation as a genre and suggests that those politics exist beyond the exigencies of literary form. This thesis tracks the introduction of new primary texts into the critical conversation surrounding Collins's corpus of work and pays particular attention to the literary, cultural, and economic dynamics which the process of adaptation reveals.

The Woman in White

'This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve', goes the opening line of *The Woman in White* (1859).[31] For critics over the course of the last century, however, Collins's novel has also been a story emblematic of several critical and theoretical paradigms. In addition to providing a nexus through which many critics have commented on Victorian literature and culture, the novel was a phenomenal success with its own contemporary readers as well. It raised the circulation numbers of Dickens's serial *All the Year Round* to triple that of its predecessor, *Household Words*; it provided successful leverage against the monopoly of Mudie's

[31] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 49.

lending library; it inspired the 'Woman in White Waltz and a Fosco Galop'.[32] 'Author of *The Woman in White*' is engraved on Collins's tombstone in Kensal Green Cemetery, a testament to the success of the work and an echo of the pivotal scene in the novel where Walter sees Laura standing above the tombstone which proclaims her death. *The Woman in White* has historically been considered as a foundational text in the emergent sensation genre which was to dominate the serial press in the 1860s and 70s. In this chapter, I expand on the extensive critical conversation concerning this novel by considering the dramatic adaptations of *The Woman in White* and Collins's subsequent work, *No Name* (1862) alongside the original novels, and against the larger backdrop of sensation drama. Locating Collins's dramatic writing within the arc of his career as a whole – not just the adaptations of his sensation novels, but his later works as well – confirms Janice Norwood's claim that Collins's dramatisation of *The Woman in White* 'pointed the way forward to the more psychological dramas of the final quarter of the nineteenth century'.[33] A sustained comparison of the novel and its dramatic version expands upon Karen E. Laird's assertion that the adaptation 'prioritized realism over sensation', as well as Richard Pearson's claim that in 'staging, characterization and theme, Collins's plays of the 1870s were novel and new in themselves'.[34]

The Woman in White, Collins's fifth novel, was serialised from November 1859 to August 1860 in Dickens's *All the Year Round* in England, and *Harper's Weekly* in North America. It is the story of the artist Walter Hartright, a member of Victorian England's burgeoning professional middle class, employed by an aristocratic family in Cumberland to educate the wealthy heiress, Laura Fairlie. Orphaned by her parents and all but abandoned by her histrionic uncle Frederick Fairlie,

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[32] Peters, *The King of Inventors*, 227-45; especially 227, 232; see also Guinevere L. Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Indiana University Press: Bloomington, 1970), ch. 5.
[33] Janice Norwood, 'Sensation Drama? Collins's Stage Adaptation of *The Woman in White*', in Mangham, *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays*, 229.
[34] Karen E. Laird, *The Art of Adapting Victorian Literature, 1848-1920: Dramatizing Jane Eyre, David Copperfield, and The Woman in White* (Ashgate: Farnham, 2015), 177; Pearson, *Victorian Writers and the Stage*, 154.

Laura relies on the support of her androgynous half-sister Marian Halcombe in all aspects of her life. After Walter falls in love with Laura and learns that she is already engaged to be married to the aristocratic Sir Percival Glyde, he leaves his position in the Fairlie family home and embarks on a dangerous tour of Central America. Upon his return to England, he discovers first that Laura has died, and subsequently that her death was falsified by her husband, who buried Anne Catherick – the eponymous 'woman in white' – in her place. Meanwhile, Laura has been falsely identified as Anne Catherick and wrongfully incarcerated in an asylum in her place. Walter and Marian, in a brilliant display of extralegal investigation, secure evidence that Laura Fairlie is, in fact, alive, and she closes the novel restored to her rightful place as heir of the Fairlie family fortune. This convoluted plot, which is indicative of the general literary mode of the sensation novel, enthralled readers who clamoured first for the next serial instalments, and then for dramatic adaptations of Collins's novel.

The overarching concern of the novel, present both in its structure and its content, is the 'machinery of the Law': its inadequacy to protect vulnerable citizens, its susceptibility to corruption and fraud, and the origins and failures of the modern surveillance state.[35] D. A. Miller's influential reading of Foucauldian disciplinary ideology in the fabric of *The Woman in White* noted that it is 'built into the structure of the Novel that every reader must realize the definitive fantasy of the liberal subject, who imagines himself free from the surveillance that he nonetheless sees operating everywhere around him'.[36] The context of the theatre expands on Miller's formative reading of *The Woman in White* by placing the liberal subject 'free from surveillance' in the position of audience member, a position as much surveyor as it is surveyed. But Miller's argument relies on the importance of reading disciplinary ideology in the form of the sensation *novel*, in its narrative

[35] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 49.
[36] D. A. Miller, 'Cage aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*', *Representations*, 14:1 (1986), 116; see also Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (Allen Lane: London, 1977).

structures that lay bare the characteristic policing which was to reach ever newer heights in the nineteenth century. Despite claiming to restore 'sensation to its textual and cultural mediations', Miller's argument is absent of any discussion of the theatre.[37]

Miller's reading of the novel equally stresses its implications for the present: he claims that *The Woman in White* 'offers a pertinent, if not exhaustive, demonstration of the value, meaning, and use that modern culture – which in this respect has by no means broken radically with Victorian culture – finds in the nervous state'.[38] Rosenthal has similarly defended detaching the Victorian novel from the Victorian era by arguing that its formal qualities 'are not tied completely to either England or the nineteenth century; rather they are, in many ways, features of realism more generally'.[39] Dramatic realism developed onstage in tandem with realism in fiction and visual art; if criticism of the novel can illuminate aspects of form and genre that transcend historical specificity, then the process of dramatic adaptation stands to be equally informative.[40] While Peter Thoms has argued that 'there is no disjunction between the work's intricate construction and more serious concerns', he nonetheless privileges the brand of psychological interiority characteristic of mainstream realist writers: 'as we follow the protagonists on their quest for the literal solutions to mysteries, we follow them on their psychological journey, as they emerge from the designs of others to possess their true narrative'.[41] This psychological journey is not uniquely encoded within the form of the novel's narrative structure, but is registered by the qualities which inhered in both the

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[37] Miller 'Cage aux Folles', 108.
[38] Ibid., 108-9.
[39] Rosenthal, *Good Form*, 193.
[40] The intersection of Collins's dramatic adaptations with the development of dramatic realism is a topic which I treat more fully in Chapter 2: Approaching Realism Onstage.
[41] Peter Thoms, *The Windings of the Labyrinth: Quest and Structure in the Major Novels of Wilkie Collins* (Ohio University Press: Athens, 1992), 83.

sensation novel and drama: the characteristic combination of romance and realism, updated to grapple with mid-Victorian anxieties.

The legal mechanism on which the plot of *The Woman in White* is based is the law of coverture, which transferred a wife's earned wages and inheritance into the possession of her husband upon marriage. In the case of Laura Fairlie, however, as tended to be the case with upper-class marriages, her inheritance would have been protected by a marriage settlement drawn up by the family solicitor, precisely to prevent the kind of financial control a husband could otherwise exert over his wife. What *The Woman in White* articulates is not only the unjust nature of the laws of coverture – indeed, it also demonstrates how able families could and did circumvent them – but how the legal subjugation of women upon marriage allowed the flow of capital to be manipulated around, and thereby exclude, female inheritors. The terms of Laura's marriage settlement, despite the protestations of the family's solicitor, allowed the fortune to be placed into her husband's hands, rather than any other children or relatives, upon her death; Sir Percival was thus given a vested interest in her untimely demise.

Though marriage settlements existed to protect Laura's inheritance from precisely this kind of mercenary marriage, those settlements are contingent on the participation of a male guardian. The narrative of Vincent Gilmore, the Fairlie family's solicitor, describes at length his attempts to persuade Frederick Fairlie, Laura's uncle and legal guardian, to draw up a settlement which prevents Sir Percival from having a vested interest in Laura's death. He frames his own desire to protect Laura from such a mercenary marriage in the language of fatherhood:

> I had an honest feeling of affection and admiration for her; I remembered gratefully that her father had been the kindest patron and friend to me that ever man had; I had felt towards her, while I was drawing the settlement, as I might have felt, if I had not been an old bachelor, towards a daughter of my own; and I was determined to spare

no personal sacrifice in her service and where her interests were concerned.[42]

Even the family solicitor, who in this case acts as Laura's own father might have done to protect her financial interests, is unable to effect any change in the marriage settlement as a result of Frederick's obstinacy. When Laura's uncle, her de facto legal guardian, refuses to accept the version of the marriage settlement that would protect Laura's financial interest, Gilmore articulates Frederick's failure in his duty as Laura's protector, stating: 'You shall take the whole responsibility of this discreditable settlement on your own shoulders'.[43] Walter's later statement that Laura is his 'to love and honour as father and brother both' echoes the earlier failure of Laura's legal guardians – first her father, then her uncle – to offer her adequate protection from a mercenary marriage.[44] When Fosco recounts his abduction of Anne Catherick and his placation of her in the cab on the road to London, he states: 'I can be paternal – no man more so – when I please; and I was intensely paternal on this occasion'.[45] Fosco's appropriation of paternal modes of comfort and protection here perverts the fatherly protection that the law required in order to protect women like Laura. The novel demonstrates the potential pitfalls of male guardianship: women's interests in this novel, limited not just to Laura but also to Marian and Madame Fosco, are not safe in the hands of the men meant to protect them.

Leila Silvana May has noted that not only the novel's form, 'but also its content, places it in a self-consciously ambivalent relation to the law. In fact, we can say that Collins uses a technique that transgresses the laws of narrative in order to tell a story about the transgression of the law'.[46] May's claim echoes other critical assertions that the sensation novel disrupts the reader's expectation of

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[42] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 184.
[43] Ibid., 189.
[44] Ibid., 423.
[45] Ibid., 600.
[46] Leila Silvana May, 'Sensational Sisters: Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*', *Pacific Coast Philology*, 30:1 (1995), 98.

mainstream literary realism. The novel's multiple witness accounts 'told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in Court' unsettles narrative expectations by replacing the authority of an omniscient narrator with the fallible, competing chronicles of multiple characters.[47] For critics this has tended to sublimate the sensation novel's disruptive energy into a formal argument: its innovative narrative structure becomes proof that the sensation novel's investment in social, political, and cultural discussions are contingent on its formal structures. Collins's own stage adaptation of *The Woman in White*, however, eliminates the formal element to which critics have most often referred when exploring the novel's political valences: its multiple narrators. Brantlinger's claim that 'the sensation novel was felt to be dangerous by many of its first critics, while stage melodrama seemed less threatening' produces a false dichotomy between the two genres rather than interrogate their mutually constitutive relationship.[48] In much the same way that critics once reclaimed the sensation novel from the annals of history, recent critical revaluations of stage melodrama have uncovered its narrative complexity and underlying social, political, and economic dimensions.[49] Merging these two critical reclamations via the process of adaptation suggests that Collins's omissions and revisions in the stage version of *The Woman in White* reveal the political interventions of sensation as a mode of cultural production to be steeped in the work's ideological commitment to exploring the inequities of marriage as an institution, not its form or narrative structure.

That intervention most clearly takes shape in the way the novel explores moments of criminality that operate under the aegis of domestic respectability. Historian Martin J. Wiener has

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[47] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 50.
[48] Brantlinger, 'What is Sensational about the Sensation Novel?', 5.
[49] See Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill (eds), *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* (British Film Institute: London, 1994); Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace 1800-1885* (Stanford University Press: Stanford, 1995); Michael Hays and Anastasia Nikolopoulou (eds), *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a Genre* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1996); Christine Gledhill and Linda Williams (eds), *Melodrama Unbound: Across History, Media, and National Cultures* (Columbia University Press: New York, 2018).

noted that in Victorian England 'crime was a central metaphor of disorder and loss of control in all spheres of life. Criminal and penal policy articulated the effort to counter this perception by fostering disciplined behavior and a broad ethos of respectability'.[50] This metaphor certainly extended into the cultural realm of the novel, and Wiener's historical account of state-sponsored discipline echoes Miller's Foucauldian reading of Collins's novel. Even Frederick Fairlie's statement, 'we don't want genius in this country, unless it is accompanied by respectability', subtly ironises the 'ethos of respectability' which was so determinedly cultivated in other aspects of English life.[51] The sensation novel's persistent recourse to the legal aspects of Victorian society operates alongside its concern with the inner workings of the home. It is not just the polyvocal narrative structure of *The Woman in White* that constitutes its criticism of Victorian England, but equally the sensation novel's pairing of the newly professionalised criminal justice system with the place of English citizens within that system. The London Metropolitan Police was founded after the 1829 Metropolitan Police Act; the sensation novel and drama's focus on crime differs from earlier melodramatic and Gothic plots because it exists within the context of England's first professional and organised police force.[52]

The thematic focus on crime in the sensation mode is often contrasted with the more abstract concept of justice, a concept which is the predominant concern of *The Woman in White*. When Walter tells the Fairlie family solicitor that he will restore Laura's rightful identity not just in the eyes of her family but in the eyes of the law as well, he claims that 'those two men shall answer for their crime to ME, though the justice that sits in tribunals is powerless to pursue them'.[53] By including the narrative of the Fairlie family solicitor alongside the narratives of the novel's central characters, Collins confronts the ethics of the current state of marriage laws even as the settlement

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[50] Martin J. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England 1830-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1990) 11.
[51] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 57.
[52] See Clive Emsley, *The English Police: A Political and Social History* (Harvester Wheatsheaf: Hemel Hempstead, 1991).
[53] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 545.

drawn up which gives Percival a vested interest in Laura's death is perfectly legal. Indeed, throughout the novel ethics and legality are often diametrically opposed, an opposition which is rendered even clearer by Percival's abuse of Laura later in the novel. As Gilmore writes, 'If you were to apply, at the nearest town here, to the first respectable practitioner you could find, he would tell you … that it is against all rule to abandon the lady's money entirely to the man she marries'.[54] Ironically, while Gilmore asserts that abandoning Laura's money entirely to Sir Percival is both unjust and dangerous, it is not entirely 'against all rule', as the settlement is technically legal. Neither in the hands of her male guardians, nor in the hands of the law, then, is Laura Fairlie safe. The novel also demonstrates the other version of this scenario, one in which the family's male guardian has provided for and looked after the interests of his wife and daughter. Walter Hartright, the novel's male protagonist and love-interest, recounts how his father was anxious to provide for his wife and daughter, the very opposite of the insensible and irritable Frederick Fairlie:

> his affectionate anxiety to provide for the future of those who were dependent on his labours, had impelled him, from the time of his marriage, to devote to the insuring of his life a much larger portion of his income than most men consider it necessary to set aside for that purpose. Thanks to his admirable prudence and self-denial, my mother and sister were left, after his death, as independent of the world as they had been during his lifetime.[55]

The novel sets up this ideal version of the protective father and husband only to further contrast it later with the uncaring Frederick and the abusive Percival. In the form of Walter's father, Collins acknowledges that the current legal system could work to protect the interests of some women, while also demonstrating that it was far from universally effective.

The driving force of the novel's argument is not only that women should own the right to their own property, or that they should be granted the right to divorce abusive husbands, but that

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[54] Ibid., 189.
[55] Ibid., 51.

these legal issues are symptomatic of a wider misogynist culture struggling to reconcile a burgeoning campaign for greater legal rights for women with the more abstract project of imagining what such a world would look like. *The Woman in White* is invested not solely in reforming laws regarding marriage and property, it is also an examination of the institution of marriage, and its central aesthetic aim is to visualise both the consequences of those laws and the possibility of a world without them. What separates the political ethos of the sensation novel from its aesthetic counterpart, the social-problem novel, is precisely the literary topos which critics have surveyed thus far: its relationship with literary realism. The narrative experimentation that made the sensation novel the topic of derision for its critics – convoluted plots, sublimation of character to incident, sheer improbability – stands in stark contrast to the mainstream realism of Collins's contemporaries. The sensation novel's rupture with the realist tradition licenses a narrative tone which is both startlingly optimistic and at odds with the increasingly rationalised ethos of Victorian England.

Like the working-class cities of Benjamin Disraeli's *Sybil* (1845) and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), the sensation mode shuttles its characters between middle- and upper-class homes, or institutions that aped the home, such as asylums and hotels. The difference is that while the social-problem novel engendered class tension by depicting the plight of the working classes, sensation novels and dramas dealt with inheritance, violent crime, and mistaken identities. Both were invested in exploring the inequities of Victorian England, but the sensation novel avoided the gritty realism of the social-problem novel and instead merged the heightened emotionality and complex plots of the melodramatic tradition with the aesthetic sensibilities of a middle- and upper-class readership. Murders, abductions, and falsified identities in the sensation novel occur in the drawing rooms of English country homes; its plots operate under the aegis of domestic respectability while questioning it at every turn. Registering the novel's interrogation of mid-Victorian society in its domestication of familiar melodramatic and Gothic plots rather than its deployment of multiple narrators – a formal

innovation not necessarily unique to Collins, as, for example, Emily Brontë had used it over a decade prior in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) – demonstrates that sensation as a mode of cultural production deployed the self-reflexive and reformist impulse of mainstream realism alongside its unique ability to produce and maintain narrative and dramatic interest. Reading Collins's adaptation of *The Woman in White* alongside the novelistic original reveals the novel's socio-political commitments to exist beyond the remit of narrative structure and within the innovative mixture of a melodramatic tradition and contemporary mid-Victorian anxieties.

Collins's dramatic version of *The Woman in White*, which ran at The Olympic from 9 October 1871 to 24 February 1872, was met with general approval from theatrical critics in the press. Many were keen to view the dramatic adaptation of *The Woman in White* as a work in its own right, and not solely as the heir to a literary original, as the reviewer in the *Pall Mall Gazette* notes: 'the drama of "The Woman in White" has claims to be regarded rather as an independent production than as an adaptation of an ordinary kind'.[56] Even the reviewer for the *Morning Post*, who elsewhere laments the play's final scene, notes that the play 'does not smack too strongly of the book – a rare quality in a drama taken *from* a book'.[57] While literary criticism of the sensation novel has typically understated or overlooked the importance of the sensation drama, recent attempts to reclaim the latter as a site of academic inquiry have equally looked beyond adaptation.[58]

The argument I have been suggesting so far is developed in a speech given by Dickens at the General Theatrical Fund in 1863. Though the relationship between Dickens and Collins has at times threatened to overshadow the merits of the latter – Jerome Meckier, for example, has suggested that

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[56] *Pall Mall Gazette* (11 October 1871), 12.
[57] *The Morning Post* (11 October 1871), 5.
[58] See Joanna Hofer-Robinson and Beth Palmer (eds), *Sensation Drama, 1860-1880: An Anthology* (Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh, 2019), xviii: 'this anthology seeks to offer something of a corrective to prior critical reviews of sensation drama, which often privilege the novel by focusing on adaptations of well-known sensation fiction'.

surpassing Dickens was 'always one of Collins's main objectives'[59] – here the words of the Inimitable illuminate the theatrical spirit and its ability to act as a positive influence on society:

> I am very fond of the play, and herein lies one of the charms of the play to me; for example, when I am in front – and when I discharge for the moment all my personal likings and friendships for those behind – when I am in front any night, and when I see, say, my friend Mr Buckstone's eye roll into the middle of the pit with that fine expression in it of a comically suspended opinion which I like so much, how do I know on whom it alights, or what good it does that man? Here is some surly, morose creature come into the theatre bent upon the morrow on executing some uncharitable intention, and the eye of Mr Buckstone dives into his right-hand trousers pocket where his angry hand is clenched, and opens his hand and mellows it, and shakes it in quite a philanthropic manner. […] Over and over again it is my delight to take my place in the theatre next to some grim person who comes in a mere figure of snow but who gradually softens and mellows […] It is a joke in my home that generosity on the stage always unmans me, and that I invariably begin to cry whenever anybody on the stage forgives an enemy or gives away a pocket book. This is only another and droller way of experiencing and saying that it is good to be generous, and good to be open-handed, and that it is a right good thing for society, when they come together with but one great, beating, responsive heart among them, to learn such a truth together.[60]

Dickens hyperbolically overstates the palliative effect of the theatre on its audience members for the benefit of his listeners, but the sentiment embodied in this excerpt nonetheless registers the theatre as a public institution for good, precisely at a time when British drama was said to be in decline, and when successful dramas of crime and murder were said to have a deleterious effect on public morals. Though Wiener has also noted that, for writers such as Dickens, 'tolerance was an unaffordable luxury and empathy an inadequate, even counterproductive, social stance', here Dickens's own admiration for the theatre would contradict such a claim.[61]

Situated chronologically between the Arnoldian argument for art as a moralising instrument and the disinterested decadence of the late-nineteenth century, the adaptation of Collins's novel at

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[59] Jerome Meckier, *Hidden Rivalries in Victorian Fiction: Dickens, Realism, and Revaluation* (Kentucky University Press: Lexington, 1987), 94.
[60] Charles Dickens, 'Speeches for the General Theatrical Fund, 4 April 1863', in *Charles Dickens on Theatre*, edited by Pete Orford (Hesperus: London, 2011), 85-6.
[61] Wiener, *Reconstructing*, 33.

once breaks with the tenets of realism to which the social problem novel assiduously clung while also experimenting with the theatre's ability to visualise the rupture of England's oppressive marriage laws.[62] That project is enabled by the sensation drama's rejection of mainstream realism; in order to imagine a world where the wives of England need not sublimate their identity into those of their husbands, Collins's novel and play move beyond the proscriptive narrative structures of literary realism. This is precisely why critics have located the novel's revolutionary fervor in its formal deployment of multiple narrators, but the novel's multiple narration is only a symptom of the larger imaginative project of *The Woman in White* as a whole. It is for this reason that, despite the absence of its polyvocal narration, Collins's dramatic adaptation nevertheless echoes the ongoing debate surrounding the cruelty of oppressive marriage laws.

The sensation novel and the sensation drama had the ability to demand that their respective audiences perform a mental calculus which moved beyond the Manichaean moral aesthetic of earlier melodrama. This was certainly not the case for *all* sensation novels and plays, but rather that their intricate plots and larger-than-life characters allowed readers and audiences alike to inhabit a world that did not precisely mirror their own. That was the realm of realist writers who chronicled the condition of England, represented by the industrial towns of Gaskell and Disraeli or the London slums of Dickens. Juliet John has argued that 'critical theory, whilst largely rejecting the subject-centred, mimetic perspective on literary texts which it associates with liberal humanism, is frequently guilty of intellectual elitism in its dealings with popular culture'.[63] The same is true of critical reclamations of Collins's novel and the sensation genre more broadly. If snobbish Victorian critics swept Collins under the rug because his subordination of character to incident placed him within the

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[62] See Matthew Arnold, 'The Function of Criticism at the Present Time' and 'Culture and Anarchy', in Vincent B. Leitch (ed), *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*, 2nd ed. (W. W. Norton & Company: New York, 2010), 695-720; see also Daniel S. Malachuk, *Perfection, the State, and Victorian Liberalism* (Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke, 2005), 120-50.
[63] Juliet John, *Dickens's Villains: Melodrama, Character, Popular Culture* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2001) 8.

cultural realm of East End melodrama, then modern critics, in attempting to correct those readings, have located the significance of novels such as *The Woman in White* in their ability to deploy an innovative narrative structure in service of an ultimately sophisticated work of art. My point is not to argue that Collins's writing does *not* produce sophisticated representations of interiority – indeed I argue just that in Chapter 3 – but rather that the sensation novel's character studies are not unique to the novel form. Peter Brooks has claimed that Collins 'uses multiple narrators to maintain interest and to create a nearly epistemological form of suspense, a deep uncertainty of perspective'.[64] This epistemological suspense and perspectival uncertainty, however, exists equally in the play despite the absence of multiple narrators. Philip H. Bolton's claim that Collins 'believed in a unitary dramatic art that existed in two phases: the stage and the narrative' levels a critical field that has tended to position his dramatic writing as an avaricious project without the artistic or ideological merits of his novels.[65]

Count Fosco is the site of Collins's sophisticated reworking of melodrama, the character who pushes Collins's writing beyond the conventional realism of his earlier work – in the biography of his father, or in his historical novel *Antonina: Or, the Fall of Rome* (1850), for instance. John has claimed that Dickens's villains 'are the products of the dialectical emotional economy governing melodrama, which revolves around the principles of excess and restraint', and this reading of Dickens's antagonists applies to Fosco as well.[66] It is no coincidence, then, that when Collins was looking to produce *The Woman in White* onstage, he stated that 'the play is *all Fosco*. If he does not take the audience by storm, failure is certain'.[67] Karen E. Laird, one of the few critics to comment at length on Collins's adaptation, notes that his 'obsession with the character of Fosco and which actor

[64] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1992), 169.
[65] Bolton, *Dickens Dramatized*, 35.
[66] John, *Dickens's Villains*, 11.
[67] Wilkie Collins, 'To Unknown Recipient, 7 August 1871', quoted in Laird, *The Art of Adapting Victorian Literature*, 176.

would play him reveals how important it was that his villain be depicted with measured restraint, unlike the gloomily evil or shiftily comic stock villain of melodrama'.[68] It is evident that Fosco is central both to the play's aesthetic and political aims; aesthetic in its departure from the dominant melodramatic mode and political in the way it harnesses and redirects that rupture into its cultural politics. If the project of *The Woman in White* was to self-reflexively consider the institution of marriage, then the villain whom the relatively bland, easily identifiable middle-class Walter Hartright must overcome needed to be more imaginative than the greedy landlords and wicked factory-owners of earlier melodrama. This is precisely the point of disjuncture between Dickens's melodramatic villains, for example, and Collins's interiorising character study of Fosco. While the aim of a novel such as *Oliver Twist* (1837), for instance, was to address the barbarism of the 1834 Poor Law Amendment Act, the cultural politics of *The Woman in White* are not equally straightforward. In order to urge readers to self-reflexively consider their embrace of marriage as a civil institution, the villain of Collins's novel moves beyond the recognisable tropes of melodrama and produces a readerly experience which elicited, explored, and questioned those abstract anxieties.

This is precisely why, despite Collins's many omissions in the stage adaptation of his novel, Fosco nevertheless occupies a commanding role. The other characters – Sir Percival included – orbit around him, a dynamic also at work in the novel but brought to the forefront in the play. The most significant alteration Collins makes when adapting *The Woman in White* for the stage is to reveal to audiences in the prologue what the novel withholds until its conclusion. Anne Catherick's incarceration, Percival's illegitimacy, his mercenary motive for marrying Laura, and the half-sibling relationship between Anne and Laura Fairlie are all disclosed at the outset of the play, rendering the narrative tension produced in the novel – the potential discovery of these secrets – obsolete. Instead,

[68] Laird, *The Art of Adapting Victorian Literature*, 115.

I argue that the drama returns to the 'human interest' which Collins sought to highlight in the novel and does so by bringing Laura Fairlie's married life to the stage. In other words, the play takes the novel's opening claim that it is 'the story of what a Woman's patience can endure', and forces audiences to watch as Laura Fairlie endures a mercenary, abusive marriage to Percival.[69] Thus the appeal of the drama is not what drives the novel forward, as audiences familiar with the novel would have anticipated Laura's safe return, and the demise of Sir Percival and Count Fosco. Instead, the dramatic tension derives from the staging and acting of Laura's marriage, and Fosco's almost superhuman ability to manipulate those around him.

Count Fosco offers the most concrete link between the novel and Collins's dramatic adaptation. Marian's first impression of the Count in the novel emphasises the mesmeric quality of his gaze: 'The marked peculiarity which singles him out from the rank and file of humanity, lies entirely, so far as I can tell at present, in the extraordinary expression and extraordinary power of his eyes'.[70] Elsewhere in the novel, Fosco is aligned consistently with the theatre. When Marian witnesses the Count outside the window of their humble London lodgings, she notes that he 'turned at the corner of the street, and waved his hand, and then struck it theatrically on his breast'.[71] As Maria K. Bachman has noted, the Count's 'expressive gestures and exaggerated movements' echo the physicality and movement typical of nineteenth-century melodrama.[72] Moreover, the Count's mesmeric influence over other characters in the novel – including, perhaps, his wife – recalls the eighteenth-century actor David Garrick, whose 'penetrating eyes' were 'an instantaneous identifier of the actor' both within and outside of the theatre.[73] Fosco's visit to the opera, when he sees Walter's Italian comrade Professor Pesca and anticipates the danger he is in, portrays him as entirely in his

[69] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 49.
[70] Ibid., 242.
[71] Ibid., 544.
[72] Ibid., 544n1.
[73] Leslie Ritchie, *David Garrick and the Mediation of Celebrity* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2019), 94.

element in the theatre of fashionable London. He remains silent when the English audience surrounding him applauds at incorrect moments, he cheers when the audience remains silent, and is perfectly satisfied when the English audience begins to follow his example. When Walter coerces Fosco into offering an account of the conspiracy to falsify Laura's death in his own words, midway through the narrative the Count offers the following aside: 'What a situation! I suggest it to the rising romance writers of England. I offer it, as totally new, to the worn-out dramatists of France'.[74] Fosco refers to his narrative as a 'programme' and reads the manuscript aloud 'with loud theatrical emphasis and profuse theatrical gesticulation'.[75] The novel thematically prepares Fosco for his dramatisation, rendering him an inherently theatrical character.

From his first lines in the drama, it is evident that the play works to establish Fosco as a character with a level of depth that is absent from the standard villains of stock melodrama. When he and Walter first meet in the garden outside Blackwater Park, for instance, Fosco pontificates about the beauties of the English countryside:

> *Fosco (in a tone of good-humoured sarcasm)*. Strange, such enthusiasm at my age, is it not? Bah! Old as I am, and fat as I am, there is poetry in my soul. Nature has imperishable charms, inextinguishable tendernesses, for me. I wander in this noble park – I bathe myself in the glorious light – the sublime lines of Dante, on the evening (you know them, of course?), burst in fervent declamation from my lips. Little by little, your modest English twilight steals over the scene. I start; I look round; I find myself lost like a Babe in the Wood. Pity a poor foreign baby, sir![76]

Fosco's exaggerated vernacular stands in stark contrast to Sir Percival's brutish violence. Including both characters, however, allows Collins's dramatisation of *The Woman in White* to simultaneously deploy the melodramatic villain familiar to the English stage in tandem with a gesture towards the nascent psychologising of the late-nineteenth century. After Fosco and Sir Percival resolve to

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[74] Collins, *The Woman in White*, 602.
[75] Ibid., 587.
[76] Collins, *The Woman in White: A Drama*, 25.

murder Anne Catherick and incarcerate Laura in an asylum in her place, the former's steady demeanour stands in stark contrast to the latter's irritation at finding Fosco in the picture gallery of Blackwater Park:

> *Sir P.* I have been looking for you everywhere. What are you doing here?
> *Fosco.* I am admiring the superb family portraits which adorn your gallery at Blackwater Park.
> *Sir P. (astonished).* At such a time as this? With all you and I have got on our minds?
> *Fosco.* That is exactly why I am here. I won't have this risk that we are going to run perpetually haunting my thoughts. Music, poetry, pictures, to these innocent sources I apply for relief. Invariably the relief comes.[77]

Fosco's lower-key, psychological villainy manifests itself in the dramatic adaptation of *The Woman in White* as a contrast to Sir Percival's inept violence. The way that the play embraces both the melodramatic legacies of the English stage and its embryonic psychologising gestures towards the double bind that would come to characterise Collins's dramatic writing for the rest of his career.

The final scene of the play drastically revises Collins's approach to the ending of the novel. While the novel ends with Walter and Laura's child, heir to the Limmeridge estate, held aloft in Marian's arms, the play breaks away from melodrama's familial tableau of reunion by orienting its focus on Fosco's marriage. The play's final scene takes place in the drawing room of Fosco's villa, with Walter threatening to blackmail Fosco to obtain proof that would secure the return of Laura's true identity in the eyes of the law. Importantly, Collins once again gives over the final scene in the dramatic version to an interrogation of the rights of married women. After securing proof of Laura's identity from Fosco, Walter considers offering Fosco forgiveness:

> *Wal.* (*joyously*). This completes it! Oh, Laura! (FOSCO, *after looking at* WALTER *with contemptuous surprise, turns away, and lights a cigarette.* WALTER *continues to himself.*) I have forced the evidence out of him which makes me happy for life. Villain as he is, can I leave him recklessly to his fate? Is it possible to warn him without betraying Pesca? (*He addresses* FOSCO.) Count Fosco, I have a last word to say before I go. I express no

[77] Ibid., 54.

> opinion of Madame Fosco's conduct to her niece. But I ask *you*, in the name of your innocent victim, have you no word of repentance to say at parting?
>
> *Fosco* (*loftily*). Stop, Mr. Hartright! You have mentioned Madame Fosco in a tone that there is no mistaking. I assert my wife's sublime devotion of herself to my interests, as one of my wife's virtues. What duty does the marriage obligation impose on a woman in this respectable country of yours? It charges her, unreservedly, to love, honour, and obey her husband. That is exactly what Madame Fosco has done. Silence, Calumny! Your sympathy, wives of England, for Madame Fosco![78]

Here, as Valerie Pedlar has noted, Fosco's words echo Sarah Stickney Ellis's 1843 conduct manual *The Wives of England: Their Relative Duties, Domestic Influence, and Social Obligations*, the strictures of which Countess Fosco adopts as a model for her own behaviour.[79] Collins borrows from popular discourse surrounding marriage, married women, and their rights, in adapting his novel for the stage. After refusing Walter's mercy, Fosco is murdered by two unnamed and silent men. The play closes with a final tableau that sees Fosco's lifeless body 'in the moonlight', and the cries of Madame Fosco from offstage, asking 'Count! may I come in?'[80] This final scene was also noted by the reviewer in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, who states: 'The curtain descends upon a picture of the devoted Countess Fosco fainting as she contemplates the slain body of her husband'.[81] In contrast with the melodramatic convention of ending the drama with a happy reunion between family, husband, and wife, which Collins adopts in the novel, the stage version ends with audiences not revelling in the joyous reunion of Walter and Laura, but rather being forced to consider what Countess Fosco's loyalty has earned her, and how she is to live without the husband to whom she has devoted her life. The same reviewer also claims that '[t]his sombre catastrophe excited some disapprobation', which suggests that audiences experienced discomfort when met with a final scene that disrupts

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[78] Ibid., 87.
[79] Valerie Pedlar, 'Drawing a Blank: The Construction of Identity in *The Woman in White*', in Dennis Walder (ed), *The Nineteenth Century Novel: Identities* (Routledge: London, 2001), 85-6.
[80] Collins, *The Woman in White. A Drama in a prologue and four acts*, 88.
[81] *Pall Mall Gazette* (11 October 1871), 12.

melodramatic expectation.[82] This discomfort was also noted by the dissatisfied reviewer of *The Morning Post*, who laments that

> a play without a *dénouement* is not likely to please any one. It is little better than a contradiction in terms. Here we have no *dénouement* worthy of the name. The plot simply *falls in*, collapsing like a house of cards, and the spectators go on their way dumbfounded. […] the culmination of an elaborately-constructed play in a shriek does not satisfy the mental requirements of a lettered audience in an age of high intellectual culture.[83]

Again, the reviewer praises the play as a whole, but laments that the final act leaves so much to be desired, despite the fact that the central conflicts of the play, the restoration of Laura's identity and her pursuit by Sir Percival, have been entirely resolved. This reviewer is unable to reconcile the resolution of plot with the contradiction of melodramatic stage convention in its substitution of the familial reunion typical of stage melodrama for an open-ended conclusion.

It is precisely this open-endedness which characterises the play's most obvious shift away from the easily legible moral strictures of melodrama, a paradigm which Collins also adopted in his adaptation of *Armadale* for the stage. The most tantalising reading of this scene, and certainly the most confusing for Victorian audiences, is that it invites sympathy for Madame Fosco. The Count's death neatly provides retribution for his crime, and yet the play's final line – the offstage echo of Madame Fosco's voice – immediately complicates any narrative satisfaction by forcing audiences to consider the practicalities of melodrama's retributive justice. In other words, what happens to Madame Fosco? The almost unanimous disdain in the critical press for the final scene, despite the play's relative success, registers an anxiety which reveals the uncomfortable confrontation between Collins's play and the dominant moral ethos of the stage. In contrast to these reviews which appear

[82] Ibid.
[83] *The Morning Post* (11 October 1871), 5.

confounded by the play's final scene, the reviewer for *The Daily News* seemed to be pleased by the unconventional ending:

> It will no doubt be a relief to thoughtful playgoers to be spared the conventional termination in which young couples are paired off in rotation, and the wicked having been handcuffed and handed over to the police, happiness is served out to the residue of the *dramatis personae*.[84]

As opposed to the 'audience in an age of high intellectual culture' identified by the reviewer in *The Morning Post* who is reluctant to accept the play's final scene, this review associates the conventional melodramatic ending which Collins avoids with an audience of less discerning taste. Indeed, the reviewer for *The Daily News* goes on to claim that 'to the majority of the audience the fall of the curtain probably appeared rather abrupt'.[85] Here, the distinction between popular and highbrow taste is made clear: the majority of audiences, unable to grapple with the nuance of the ending that does not see couples 'paired off in rotation', can only be left disappointed and confused. Alternatively, the audience of 'thoughtful playgoers', spurning melodramatic convention, would appreciate the nuance of Collins's ending. The reviewer for *Reynold's Newspaper*, who otherwise praises the play, complains that '[t]he chief defect is the feeble, tame, and unsatisfactory conclusion of the final act', and *The Examiner* bluntly states that '[t]he play ends badly'.[86] The significant insight, here, is not whether we can attribute to Collins's drama an appeal to high or low culture, but rather that the play's final scene was a central point of contention among reviewers. By refusing to allow the play to end conventionally, and instead offering the closing tragedy of Madame Fosco's life, Collins co-opts the stage as a site of cultural and political reform. The nebulous context of marriage's inherent power imbalance is writ large in the play's abrupt ending. By contrast, the play does not depict Walter and Laura's marriage whatsoever, prompting the reviewer for *The Standard* to complain that 'no

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[84] *The Daily News* (11 October 1871), 3.
[85] Ibid.
[86] *Reynold's Newspaper* (15 October 1871), 5; *The Examiner* (14 October 1871), 1018.

explanations of the ultimate fate of Lady Glyde and Hartwright [sic.] are given', despite having been shown the resolution in the form of Sir Percival's death, and Walter's securing of the essential proof of Laura's identity.[87] The 'ultimate fate' to which this reviewer refers is the marriage otherwise absent from the stage. The comfortable resolution in marriage which reviewers so clearly desired had the potential to undermine the argumentative thrust of Collins's drama by granting playgoers the ability to revel in the joy of Walter and Laura's domestic union, something fundamentally opposed to the drama's larger reformist project of radically reimagining marriage. Instead, Madame Fosco occupies the final portion of the play, reminding audience members that a marriage functioning the way the law prescribed was not functioning at all, relying, as Madame Fosco's did, on abuse, intimidation, and suppression.[88]

The most critically-recognised change Collins makes when adapting his novel for the stage is in the removal of its sensational elements, prompting some critics to consider whether his dramatisation is a sensation drama at all.[89] Importantly, the play lacks a sensation scene; the vestry fire that results in Sir Percival's death is relegated to an offstage drowning, Marian's rain-soaked, windowsill eavesdropping occurs behind a door, and her visit to the lunatic asylum to rescue Laura does not go beyond the lobby. While the loss of these sensational elements points to a larger cultural shift shared between authors, readers, and theatregoers away from cheap thrills and towards the eventual advent of realism on the British stage, Richard Pearson has noted that connecting 'Collins to a new theatrical movement is problematic, not to mention whether such a conscious movement ever really existed in retrospect'.[90] It is certainly true that Collins himself does not explicitly anticipate the transformation of British theatre at the end of the nineteenth century, but his dramatic

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[87] *The Standard* (11 October 1871), 6.
[88] For a full discussion of domestic abuse in the nineteenth century, see Marlene Tromp, *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain* (University of Virginia Press: Charlottesville, 2000).
[89] Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, edited by Matthew Sweet (Penguin: London, 1999), 634.
[90] Pearson, *Victorian Writers and the Stage*, 153.

writing nevertheless demonstrates a nascent recognition and use of the stage as a site of social and political reform. If earlier melodrama registered political anxieties about the advent of class upheaval, its adjacent dramatic modes – the sensation drama among them – developed a way to register political anxieties relevant not only to the working-class audiences of the East End, but to the cross-class audiences of the West End. The sensation mode appealed to readers and audiences across the class spectrum, and Collins's adaptation of *The Woman in White* is part of this project: its determined shift away from the sensational thrills not just of the novel but of other pirated adaptations is a symptom of its cultural politics, of its position in the increasingly abstract triangulation of marriage, criminal justice, and art.

While Fosco, Madame Fosco, and their fraught marriage exist at the centre of this triangulation, the other character who embodies the aesthetic and political range of Collins's work is Marian Halcombe. While critics have tended to focus on the dramatisation's elision of Marian's androgyny – indeed no reference is made either in the play-text or in contemporary reviews to Marian's incongruous masculine features – in the play, even more so than in the novel, Marian moves the narrative forward. She protects Laura from Sir Percival and Count Fosco in the first and second acts and seeks revenge much more explicitly than in the novel when she says to Walter: 'There are two men who are guilty of Laura's death. There are two men whom I have vowed to bring to a day of reckoning'.[91] The play, free of the polyvocal narrative structure of the novel, is no longer Walter's accumulation of evidentiary accounts from various minor characters and is instead driven along by Marian's desire to protect, avenge, and save Laura. The play brings to the forefront what May has termed the 'Victorians' obsession with … the mad intensity and eventual domestication of sisterly love'.[92] In the lunatic asylum where Laura is being held, Marian announces:

[91] Collins, *The Woman in White: A Drama*, 67.
[92] May, 'Sensational Sisters', 82-84.

'Walter! If we move heaven and earth to do it, let us lay our hands on the count!', and later intervenes in a confrontation between Walter and Fosco, opting instead to meet with the Count alone.[93] In the form of Marian Halcombe, the play picks up the novel's attempt to reform the literary image of the spinster and brings to the stage an unmarried woman who operates as the play's central protagonist – a place nominally held by Walter Hartright but which is, in practice, Marian's domain. Marian, in remaining unmarried and nevertheless enjoying an equally privileged position onstage as she does in the novel, offers an alternative version of the theatrically-represented spinster, a figure Leslie Hill notes as fulfilling only 'an atmospheric function, serving as symbols of waste, futility and sacrifice' on the Victorian stage before the suffrage drama of the early twentieth century.[94] While a dramatic character like Marian was certainly not the norm on the nineteenth-century stage, it is precisely her status as both protagonist and spinster that places her firmly within the drama's use of the stage in its political discourse. By portraying an unmarried woman not only in a positive light, but in a privileged position of action within the drama, Collins's dramatisation anticipates what Hill identifies as the spinster's participation in late-Victorian feminism and suffrage drama.

The adaptation makes no reference to Marian's physical appearance, and in no stage direction or paratextual accompaniment is she referred to as visibly masculine. Instead, in Collins's 1871 adaptation, she is explicitly referred to as a 'woman' by both Laura and Count Fosco, the latter of which refers to Marian benefiting from 'the privilege of [her] enchanting sex to rush to conclusions'.[95] While it is possible to assume that, given the novel's monumental success, the explicit inclusion of Marian's masculine appearance would have been redundant to actors, theatre companies, and a theatregoing public, contemporary reviews of Collins's dramatisation tell a far

[93] Ibid., 66, 68; 'count' is lowercase in the original script.
[94] Leslie Hill, *Sex, Suffrage and the Stage: First-Wave Feminism in British Theatre* (Palgrave Macmillan: London, 2018), 75.
[95] Collins, *The Woman in White: A Drama*, 34, 49, 56.

different story. Of the comparatively few times Marian is discussed at all in reviews of Collins's 1871 adaptation, she is treated entirely as a secondary character, in spite of her large presence in the novel. *The Morning Post* noted that 'Mrs. Charles Viner (late Miss Cleveland) deserves high praise for her lady-like and impressive impersonation of Marian Halcombe', while *The Daily News* stated simply that 'Mrs. Charles Viner sustains the character of Marian Halcomb [*sic*] with taste and feeling'.[96] *The Era* claimed that the 'Marian Halcombe of Mrs. Charles Viner (late Miss Cleveland) rose at times to the grandeur and intensity of high tragedy, while in the lighter moods she acted with much tenderness and grace'.[97] These reviews, in the few times Marian is even mentioned, gloss over her part in favour of other characters such as Fosco and Laura. It can be assumed, then, that the Marian of the novel (possessor of the 'masculine mouth' and 'dark down on her upper lip') has transformed onstage into a more outwardly feminine character. Along with the novel's sensational elements, the play has also excised Marian's androgynous appearance.

The elimination of the novel's sensational elements, both in the simplification of various plot points as discussed above, or in the elimination of Marian's alarming appearance, has engendered a critical conversation which sees Collins's adaptation as devoid of the merit which prompted the novel's success. To avoid repeating the teleology which I have elsewhere argued against – that while Collins's novels may suggest a sense of psychological interiority, the simplification of his dramatic adaptations demonstrates the formal shortcomings of pre-Ibsen British theatre as a site of complex character study – I argue that it is precisely this simplicity that registers the depth of Collins's adaptation. That the process of adaptation necessitated streamlining, specifically in the form of Collins's notoriously complex plots, does not necessarily preclude their psychological depth; in fact, it is precisely the opposite. By shifting the focus away from Sir Percival's sensational death, for

[96] *The Morning Post* (11 October 1871), 5; *The Daily News* (11 October 1871), 3.
[97] *The Era* (15 October 1871), 11.

instance, and by moving away from a narrative economy that withholds information from the audience, Collins's adaptation focuses both narrative and affective interest on the journey of his heroine, Laura Fairlie, and her exploration of the options available to her via marriage.

One of the starkest contrasts between the novel and its dramatisation is that where the novel lingers on Walter and Marian's attempts to rescue Laura and reassert her legal identity, the play focuses instead on the events leading up to her imprisonment. What results is a more thorough explication of Laura's married life, and this is achieved primarily through lengthy portions of dialogue that were well-suited to the exigencies of theatrical performance. This dynamic – sublimating the sensational aspects of Collins's writing into a dramatic work that gravitates around a domestic setting – would come to characterise his later writing for the stage. The dramatisation of *The Woman in White* did not significantly alter any of the novel's plot elements, but rather repurposed scenes from the novel and broached them from the play's updated perspective focused more squarely on Laura's married life. When she and Sir Percival return from their wedding tour, for instance, Laura confesses to Marian that their life together did not begin happily:

> *Mar.* Why don't you answer my question? Why are you silent about your married life?
> *Laura.* The subject is so uninteresting, Marian. Will it do if I say I am resigned to my married life? There is no confidence between my husband and me. He is devoured by anxieties – money anxieties, I suspect – of which I know nothing. Have I answered your question? Need I say anything more?[98]

The ensuing scenes generate narrative interest by juxtaposing Laura's dissatisfaction with her married life with Fosco and Sir Percival's plot to falsely imprison her. When Laura, having been deceived by Fosco, leaves Blackwater Park thinking she is going to meet Marian in Cumberland, she tells Sir Percival: 'We have not lived together happily, Percival. Let us part on friendly terms, and let us meet again with more forbearance on both sides. Will you say that *you* forgive *me* as heartily as *I*

[98] Collins, *The Woman in White: A Drama*, 34.

forgive *you*?'[99] Laura's gentle patience and earnest desire to find fulfilment in her marriage to Sir Percival is sharply weighed against the plot to falsely imprison her, but the play does not wholly embrace the novel's sensational tone. Instead, its more explicitly domestic focus licenses a tone that more closely resembles the brand of quieter, subdued drama being staged at theatres such as the Prince of Wales's, one that Collins would later embrace in his 1873 productions of *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen*. Placing Laura's married life centre stage, at the expense of a more decidedly sensational play, gestures towards the kind of increasingly psychologised and subdued dramatic works that would come to populate the stage towards the end of the nineteenth century.

Locating Collins's adaptation of *The Woman in White* within the critical and historical contexts of both the sensation novel and the sensation drama demonstrates how Collins's adaptation expands upon the ongoing critical conversation concerning the sensation novel's cultural politics. The adaptation's selective embrace of the defining qualities of the sensation mode alongside its studied shift away from the sensation drama highlight Collins's management of the novel's cultural politics when adapted for the stage. *No Name* (1862), the novel published immediately following *The Woman in White*, expands on several of the themes that would come to characterise Collins's career.

No Name

No Name was published serially in *All the Year Round* between March 1862 and January 1863, and overseas in *Harper's Weekly*. The novel was commissioned by Sampson Low for £3,000 in the wake of *The Woman in White*'s tremendous success and combines themes that would become typical of Collins's writing: the injustice of the laws of primogeniture, a desire to widen the availability and

[99] Ibid., 60.

the social acceptance of divorce, and the arbitrary nature and attendant consequences of bastardy laws. In order to protect the copyright to represent *No Name* dramatically, Collins enlisted the help of William Bayle Bernard, an American-born dramatist living and working in London, to produce the initial playscript. In a letter to journalist W. H. Wills, Collins exclaims: 'Mr Bernard is certainly giving me plenty for my money! I wish I could write chapters as fast as he writes acts. […] All I want, as you know, is my legal protection from the British Manager and Dramatists'.[100] Collins failed to secure copyright protection for dramatic representation of *The Woman in White*, something that repeatedly drew his ire, and was a mistake he clearly sought not to repeat with *No Name*. In 1870, Collins explained to dramatist George F. Rowe that, having suffered from a 'severe attack of illness' upon completing the final serial instalment of *No Name*, he 'engaged Mr Bayle Bernard to make, very hastily, a dramatic version of the story – purely with a view to protect my own interest in it, so far as the stage was concerned'.[101] The version written by W. B. Bernard, published in 1863 as *No Name: A Drama in Five Acts*, was never staged. Collins went on to write and publish his own dramatisation, *No Name: A Drama in Four Acts*, in 1870, which was never staged as a play in England during Collins's lifetime. An attempt was made at a staging in Croydon in 1870, though Collins doubted the ability of the local theatre company to do justice to his play:

> 'No Name', after only four rehearsals, would I am afraid present my own words to me in a state of undesirable transformation – and, excepting the case of the two principal characters, I doubt whether the resources of the local company would suffice to present the play to me in its true light.[102]

After the failed staging in Croydon, Collins conceded the right of performance to Wybert Reeve, who had successfully produced the play at Augustin Daly's Fifth Avenue Theatre in New York in

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[100] Wilkie Collins, 'To W. H. Wills, 21 November 1862', in William Baker, Andrew Gasson, Graham Law, and Paul Lewis (eds), *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins: The Collected Letters*, 4 vols. (Pickering & Chatto: London, 2005), 282.
[101] Wilkie Collins, 'To George F. Rowe, 22 August 1870', *Public Face II*, 207.
[102] Wilkie Collins, 'To George F. Rowe, 21 November 1870', *Public Face II*, 222.

1871 and went on to take the part of Captain Wragge successfully to Australia, in a version of the play by then called *Great Temptation*.[103] The New York run of *No Name* appears to have lasted no longer than eleven nights: its first review in the *New York Times* appears on the 8th of June, and an advertisement on the 12th announces its last night as the following Saturday, or the 17th.[104] Though the reviewer for the *New York Times* praises 'Mr. Collins' invariable *cheval de bataille* – his plot', they nevertheless identify 'the usual drawback of dramas founded on novels', which is 'the patchy effect' brought on by a series of 'abrupt transitions that seem needless, and are occasionally ludicrous, and an intermittent dropping and snapping up again of the thread of the fable, which are the reverse of pleasing'.[105] The confusion engendered by *No Name*'s complex plot is indicative of a wider dynamic evident in the arc of Collins's dramatic projects. His earlier novels shuttle relatively large casts of characters between a wide variety of locations; his later novels, as his dramatic ventures were met with increasing success, are increasingly streamlined and adapt more readily to the exigencies of theatrical production.

No Name participates in the ongoing Victorian debate between nature and nurture, embodied in the divergent lives of two sisters, Norah and Magdalen Vanstone. Despite being sisters and having been raised in the same idyllic Somerset home, Norah's piety and calm demeanour stand in contrast to Magdalen's lively spiritedness and theatrical aptitude. When the sisters' father dies in a train accident, and their mother dies shortly after apparently of a broken heart, they discover first that they are illegitimate children, and subsequently that they are to be disinherited of the Vanstone family fortune. Their contrasting reactions to this situation exemplify the differences between them: Norah meekly accepts their fate, while Magdalen, incensed at having lost what she sees as her

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[103] Wilkie Collins, 'To George F. Rowe, 10 June 1878', *Public Face III*, 196-7.
[104] *The New York Times* (8 June 1871), 4; *The New York Times* (12 June 1871), 7.
[105] *The New York Times* (8 June 1871), 4.

birthright, seeks to regain their inheritance. It is Magdalen's quest to restore the Vanstone fortune to herself and Norah that produces the majority of the action in the novel.

When Michael Vanstone, an elderly cousin, inherits the Vanstone fortune, the sisters are forced out of Combe-Raven, their family home, without provisions having been made for them. While Norah seeks employment as a governess, Magdalen, with the help of a distant relative, Captain Wragge, pursues a career as an actress. Magdalen then learns of Michael Vanstone's death, and subsequently plots to marry under an assumed identity his sickly son Noel, who is now in possession of the inheritance. While Magdalen is aided in her quest by Wragge, Noel is managed by his Swiss housekeeper, Mrs. Lecount, who has a shrewd eye and a vested interest in Noel's fortune.

Magdalen eventually succeeds in deceiving Noel and marrying him, but Mrs. Lecount informs Noel of the true identity of his wife, and succeeds in convincing him to rewrite his will, effectively disinheriting Magdalen again, keeping a sizeable portion of his fortune for herself, and leaving the rest to Admiral Bartram, his cousin. Mrs. Lecount also urges Noel to include in his will a secret trust, to be given to Admiral Bartram, which leaves the fortune to the Admiral's son, George Bartram, on the condition that he marry a woman within six months who is not a widow – in other words, preventing Magdalen from repeating the same plot on the new possessor of the inheritance. Noel, already ill, dies from the stress of producing the new will.

Magdalen travels to London, where she learns that the fortune has passed into the hands of Admiral Bartram. Still persistent in her quest to regain her birthright, she enters the Bartram home, St. Crux-in-the-Marsh, under the pretence of being a maid in order to steal the secret trust. Magdalen successfully enters St. Crux but is ultimately caught in her attempt to steal the secret trust and returns to London to enter lodgings. While in London, Magdalen falls ill and, just as she is about to enter a workhouse, she is fortuitously rescued by Robert Kirke, a captain in the merchant

service who first met Magdalen in Suffolk, where she married Noel Vanstone. Meanwhile, Norah has married George Bartram, and, by the provision of the secret trust, ultimately regains the Vanstone fortune, though Norah is unaware of this. When Captain Kirke proposes marriage to Magdalen, she first reveals the crimes of her past, before finally agreeing to marry him.

The most significant changes Collins makes in adapting *No Name* for the stage are in line with the techniques he had developed when adapting *The Woman in White*: streamlining its complex plot, reducing the number of characters, and freeing up narrative space to explore the moral struggles of Magdalen's journey. Norah Vanstone is relegated to a disabled character offstage – the need for whose care and support adds an urgent valence to Magdalen's quest to restore their inheritance. George Bartram, a relatively minor character in the novel, is presented as Magdalen's, not Norah's, mutual love interest from the beginning of the play, and much of the tension is derived from Magdalen being torn between her desire to marry George and her need to protect Norah while regaining their inheritance. In *No Name*, Collins explores the 'opposing influences of Good and Evil' by contrasting Magdalen's temper with Norah's forbearance, and concentrates on the tension between conscience and ambition in Magdalen, employing lengthy narratorial asides commenting on her competing impulses. In the play, which lacks the narrative framework of the novel, the tension between good and evil is focalised within Magdalen alone, a technique Collins would later deploy in *Miss Gwilt*, his adaptation of *Armadale*.[106]

As a review for the first serial instalment of the novel states, *No Name* 'is evidently to be a story of every-day life'.[107] Or, overseas, as the *Chattanooga Daily Rebel* put it: *No Name* 'is a story of English domestic life, as are all the stories which wish to succeed in the world, since "Jane Eyre"'.[108]

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[106] Collins, *No Name*, 5.
[107] *Berkshire Chronicle* (15 March 1862), 7.
[108] *Chattanooga Daily Rebel* (4 August 1863), 6.

As the sensation novelists of the mid-nineteenth century continued to localise and domesticate the plots of earlier Gothic writers, few, if any, were more prolific in exposing the seedy underbelly of Victorian society, even as it operated under the aegis of domestic respectability, than Collins. Mid-century sensation novelists synthesised continental European Gothic romance with the increasingly interiorised and psychologising British novel, and presented plots similarly concerned with, for example, wrongful incarceration, but localised within the Victorian home which was ostensibly safe from the immorality of the outside world. The moral strictures of the domestic world, for Collins, provided fertile ground for a host of novels that at once accommodated a nascent taste for stories of 'English domestic life', while also displaying the hypocrisies with which that life was laden. The sensational plot of *No Name* shuttles its heroine, Magdalen Vanstone, from location to location, emphasising at each turn her inability to access the domestic spaces that had formed the happiness of her childhood. The novel's insistence on domestic settings, as noted by reviewers like those above, is of even greater importance in the stage version of *No Name*, where those backdrops physically figure Magdalen in the very spaces in which she and Norah are no longer welcome.

Critical attention paid to *No Name*, like scholarship concerning the sensation novel more broadly, has tended to relate its interrogation of marriage and the home to the features of literary form. Anna Jones, for instance, has argued, of *No Name*, that addressing the 'disconcerting question [of redundant women] gives Victorian fiction its distinct form'.[109] In reading the sensation novel alongside the nascent genre of the journalistic exposé, Christine Bolus-Reichert has claimed that 'narratives of social reform and sensation novels converge and become mutually intelligible around the middle of the nineteenth century'.[110] That the novel's form addresses the question of redundant

[109] Anna Jones, 'A Victim in Search of a Torturer: Reading Masochism in Wilkie Collins's *No Name*', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 33:2 (2000), 503.
[110] Christine Bolus-Reichert, 'The Foreshadowed Life in Wilkie Collins's *No Name*', *Studies in the Novel*, 41:1 (2009), 39.

women and oppressive marriage laws is symptomatic of a wider project in which Collins interrogates the potentially antithetical relationship between legality and justice. Locating *No Name* within the broader cultural landscape of sensation to include both novels and dramas reveals how Magdalen Vanstone's grappling with ethical dilemmas echoes a wider reckoning with the intersection between art and politics that characterises Collins's career. Understanding the dramatic adaptation of *No Name* to be part of this project demonstrates that Collins's theatrical works, even absent the sensation novel's formal elements, nevertheless evoke the ideological underpinnings of his fiction.

In reading Collins as a 'Victorian theatre novelist' (a novelist who writes about the theatre), Lauren Chattman argues that 'with his generically unstable realism, Collins exposes the artful constructedness of what is usually taken for granted as essential: the family and the proper lady'.[111] Similarly, Lauren Eriks Cline has read *No Name* alongside the theatrical memoir, noting that 'Collins uses *No Name*'s epistolary interludes to stage "live" events, narrated by characters who do not share the more omniscient narrator's foreknowledge of things to come, and that are thus oriented toward future precarity'.[112] Julie Hankey has also positioned *No Name* within its social and political context, reading Magdalen's dramatic proclivities within the familiar critical paradigm linking Victorian actresses with prostitution.[113] This chapter builds upon these perceptive insights structured by the novel's recurrent concern with theatricality and performance by considering the novel alongside its own dramatic adaptation, thus coalescing its thematic concerns with questions of genre and form. The play dramatises the epistemological uncertainty engendered by the novel's rupture with the

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[111] Lauren Chattman, 'Actresses at Home and on Stage: Spectacular Domesticity and the Victorian Theatrical Novel', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 28:1 (1994), 84.
[112] Lauren Eriks Cline, 'Epistolary Liveness: Narrative Presence and the Victorian Actress in Letters', *Theatre Survey*, 60:2 (2019), 246.
[113] Julie Hankey, 'Body Language, the Idea of the Actress, and some Nineteenth-Century Actress Heroines', *New Theatre Quarterly*, 8:31 (1992), 226-240; see also Tracy C. Davis, 'Actresses and Prostitutes in Victorian London', *Theatre Research International*, 13:3 (1988), 221-234; Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2006).

stable narration associated with mainstream realism by centring the play around Magdalen's self-recriminations. Instead of positioning Magdalen between the narrator's moral judgment and Wragge's sly criminality, the play evinces her ethical dilemma by leveraging her role and centring the drama around her desperate attempts to justify her actions.

The novel opens with a lengthy exposition of domestic life which begins with the aural cue of a clock: 'Seven o'clock struck; and the signs of domestic life began to show themselves in more rapid succession'.[114] As Jeanne F. Bedell has noted, the 'placid opening scenes of the novel disarm readers and lull them into a false sense of security, one they share with its characters'.[115] The demands of staging, however, necessarily preclude such a prolonged investigation into the domestic details of the Vanstone home, and the play instead distils the opening scene to the epitome of the Victorian household; Collins's 1870 dramatisation opens in '*the drawing-room of the late Mr. Vanstone's house at Combe Raven, in Somersetshire*', the stage directions specifying that Miss Garth, the Vanstone sisters' governess, is '*dressed in deep mourning*'.[116]

The play cannot afford the novel's opening interlude, and instead relies on visual and aural cues to convey the same domestic environment that the novel was able to do over the course of several serial instalments. Because the play launches immediately into discussion of the inheritable fortune, the deaths of Andrew Vanstone and his wife are initially communicated to the audience by nothing more than Miss Garth's mourning attire, relying on legible, visual signs to indicate a significant aspect of the plot. Magdalen later appears, also '*clothed in deep mourning*', echoing Miss Garth's attire. She delivers her first line not in grief over the loss of her parents, but in stoic

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[114] Collins, *No Name*, 8.
[115] Jeanne F. Bedell, 'Wilkie Collins' in Earl F. Bargainnier (ed), *Twelve Englishmen of Mystery* (Bowling Green University Popular Press: Bowling Green, 1984), 21.
[116] Wilkie Collins, *No Name: a Drama, in Four Acts. (Altered from the Novel for Performance on the Stage.)* (Published by the Author: London, 1870), 5.

acknowledgment that she has overheard the true nature of her legal identity. The use of such detail to transmit essential information at the beginning of the play updates melodrama's reliance on dumbshow and a visual vernacular with the understated staging of T. W. Robertson's plays at the Olympic under the Bancrofts.[117] The social formality of dressing in deep mourning – by this point Queen Victoria had been dressed in mourning over the death of Prince Albert for nine years and would continue to do so for the rest of her life – here leverages its position as public ritual in order to undermine the emotional legibility of the Vanstone household's domestic lexicon. Magdalen's stoic resolve in the face of being disinherited is a point of friction for the other characters; both the novel and play interrogate how the surface legibility of Magdalen's mourning is at odds with her psychological interiority. The former is evident in her mourning attire, while the latter will be teased out over the course of several acts or serial instalments. In drawing attention to the distinction between public ritual and private grief, this first act frontloads the play with the thematic concerns of the work as a whole. The divisions between public and private, domestic and worldly, legitimate and illegitimate, are enmeshed throughout; Collins's use of mourning attire in this initial scene signals the play's larger concern with exploring those divisions.

An early line in the play spoken by Miss Garth, the Vanstone sisters' childhood governess, suggests how the work will consider the presumed security and transparency of domestic spaces:

> *Geo.* (*to* Miss Garth). Is it possible that Michael Vanstone knew nothing of his brother's true position?
> *Miss G.* It is certain that he knew nothing. I, who lived in the same house with them, knew nothing.[118]

[117] The relationship between Collins's dramatic writing and the plays of T. W. Robertson is explored fully in Chapter 2, which addresses his adaptations of *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen* against the backdrop of the Bancrofts' management of the Olympic.
[118] Ibid, 9.

Even an idyllic household like Combe-Raven, this exchange implies, has the ability to maintain and withhold secrets. The epistemological uncertainty generated by multiple narrators in the novel – the sensation novel's dizzying ability to upset readerly expectations at every turn – is here distilled into Miss Garth's revelation at the domestic household's capacity for stemming the flow of information.

Magdalen's infiltration of domestic spaces, first the home of Noel Vanstone, then the home of her employer, Admiral Bartram, and finally the more abstract space of marriage itself, under the guise of assumed identities, reveals Collins's subtle yet persistent criticism of the Victorian cult of domesticity. As Sundeep Bisla has recently argued: 'far from attempting to accommodate a newly emergent popular Victorian domestic taste', through Magdalen's constant denial of domestic spaces, physical or conceptual, Collins 'is actually covertly attacking that taste and its very foundations'.[119] By emphasising the injustice of the Vanstone sisters' disenfranchisement, *No Name* sets up domestic spaces only to reveal their essential hypocrisy. While Magdalen and Norah are shunned from Combe-Raven and the homes of their relatives, Noel Vanstone's cruelty and greed are sanctioned by laws that allow him to operate under the protection of the domesticity. Both the novel and play interrogate the tenuous link between the household and a broader sense of justice, ethics, and virtue. In placing laws regarding divorce and illegitimacy at the centre of *No Name*, Collins uses domestic space as a vehicle for demonstrating legislative injustice. Especially in the dramatic adaptation, which embodies Magdalen physically in the very spaces that legally reject her, marriage and its attendant domestic virtues are inseparable from the legal context that informs both the novel and its stage adaptation.

The play leverages the formal features of theatrical performance to explore and probe its domestic ethos. Shortly after discovering that she and her sister will be disinherited, for example,

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[119] Sundeep Bisla, 'Over-Doing Things with Words in 1862: Pretense and Plain Truth in Wilkie Collin's *No Name*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38:1 (2010), 1-19.

Magdalen overhears the sound of Norah's harp '*playing the air of* "Home, Sweet Home" *from offstage*'.[120] The song had originally appeared in Henry Bishop's 1823 opera *Clari, or the Maid of Milan* with lyrics by John Howard Payne and received its first performance by Ellen Tree at Covent Garden in the same year.[121] The song, then published and sold separately, went on to make over £2,000 for its publishers, but Payne never saw a cent beyond the £30 for which he sold the original, a copyright misfortune similar to those which Collins would then spend most of his career fighting against. By 1852, Henry Bishop relaunched the song as a parlour-ballad, and it again enjoyed popularity through the American Civil War. The song went on to enjoy such popularity in the United States, and its association with the joy of domesticity was so resilient, that certain American military camps were forbidden from playing it, due to fears that its plaintive tone would 'serve to depress and unnerve the suffering men'.[122] When Collins wrote the dramatic version of *No Name* in 1870, it is not a coincidence, then, that the song is deployed at precisely the moment when Magdalen and Norah are forced to leave the happiness of their childhood home. When Magdalen then resolves to end her relationship with her childhood love Francis Clare so as not to burden him without a wedding portion, the sound of Norah's harp once again is heard in the background:

> *Mag.* (*bursting out*). Oh, that wrong! that wrong! that insufferable wrong! I won't submit! If I die under it, I won't submit! (*Her attention is attracted by the notes of the harp, which have been heard faintly thus far all through.*) The music! the music maddens me, it's so tame, so quiet, so subdued.[123]

Unlike Magdalen's fiery temper, which has oscillated from stoic to impassioned throughout this scene, the 'tame' music of Norah's harp serves as a reminder of what are now, for the Vanstone sisters, bygone days. The drama's ability to make use of its formal elements, in this case musical

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[120] Ibid., 14.
[121] Charles Herbert Sylvester, *Journeys Through Bookland VI,* 10 vols. (Bellows-Reeve Company: Chicago, 1922), 221.
[122] Francis A. Lord, *They Fought for the Union* (Bonanza Books: New York, 1960), 224.
[123] Collins, *No Name: A Drama in Five Acts*, 15.

accompaniment, updates the thematic concerns of the novel to be legible in a dramatic context. Collins's deployment of a uniquely theatrical lexicon registers how his dramatic writing moves beyond a limited understanding of its narrow, commercial interests and reveals how it addresses the same social, political, and ideological commitments of his fiction.

After Magdalen and Norah are forced to leave the happy home of their childhood, the play only returns to a domestic setting once Magdalen has successfully married Noel Vanstone under the assumed identity of Miss Bygrave, Captain Wragge's niece. The scenes before then, of which there are three, either take place outside (Act 2, in York, or Act 3 Scene 1, on the beach at Suffolk) or in an otherwise non-domestic space (Act 3 scene 2, in Mr. Pendril's legal chambers). Only by Act 3 scene 3, when Magdalen is now married to Noel Vanstone, does the play return to a drawing-room, indicating Magdalen's return to the world of domesticity. Stage fittings for this scene include '*a sofa in a prominent position, so that it can be seen by the whole audience, a writing-table in one part of the room, a side-table in another, with a bottle of wine on it and some glasses*'.[124] By Act 4, the play's final act, Magdalen's ruse has been discovered, and she is once again removed from the domestic setting of Noel Vanstone's villa; the act begins in '*a sitting-room in a lodging-house in London, poorly furnished*', a sharp contrast to the grandiose Vanstone villa.[125] The next scene occurs in the transient space of the inn at St. Crux, the village in which Magdalen assumes the identity of a parlour-maid in order to retrieve the secret trust from Admiral Bartram which she believes will restore the Vanstone fortune to Norah and herself. Again, despite the '*respectable servant*' and '*large bow-window*', Collins indicates that the domestic space in which Magdalen finds herself in this scene – Wragge's room at the inn – is only pseudo-domestic, an imitation of the life to which she wants to return, highlighting this with Magdalen's line, delivered

[124] Ibid., 53.
[125] Ibid., 62.

while in the parlour-maid's uniform: 'To-morrow shall find me freed from this vile disguise!'[126] When prompted by a servant to provide her name while on a visit to Captain Wragge, Magdalen responds by echoing Mr. Pendril's earlier assertion and indicates that she has 'No name'.[127] The play's final scene locates Magdalen in the banqueting hall of her employer Admiral Bartram's country home. Onstage, Magdalen's final return to the domestic world is, by Victorian standards, inherently perverted: she is neither married nor the legitimate heiress to a fortune, nor does she possess a legitimate legal identity, and her position as parlour-maid was obtained by adopting yet another false identity.

In the final moments of the play, during which Magdalen attempts to steal the secret trust, Collins makes use of a higher ratio of stage directions to dialogue than throughout the rest of the play, emphasising the scene's physical excitement. When George Bartram, having returned to his father's home, discovers what he assumes is a maidservant rifling through her employer's belongings, he apprehends her. When he discovers that it is, in fact, Magdalen, the two embrace, having finally been reunited. The play closes with the assumption that the two will get married, restoring the Vanstone fortune to Magdalen and Norah. Wragge speaks the play's final words to the couple: 'Accept my best congratulations. Good evening!'[128]

The formal elements of *No Name*'s dramatic adaptation reveal it to be equally invested in the novel's socio-political commitments. The visual, domestic cues of locating Magdalen either in or outdoors reflect her marital status; it is only when she is briefly married to Noel Vanstone that she returns to the drawing-room of her childhood. But this return is fundamentally distorted: she returns

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[126] Ibid., 70.
[127] Ibid., 70.
[128] Ibid., 82. In the novel, George Bartram marries Norah, not Magdalen. In the stage version, Collins excises Captain Kirke, along with Magdalen's disgraced return to London and near-fatal illness, and instead pairs her up with George, who is introduced from the beginning of the play as a close family friend, present in the drawing room at Combe-Raven when the sisters learn news of the Vanstones dying intestate.

not as Magdalen Vanstone, but as Miss Bygrave, an assumed identity. She later assumes another identity as a parlour-maid in the home of Admiral Bartram in a desperate attempt to retrieve the secret trust. By representing Magdalen in a host of domestic settings, each of which requires Magdalen to assume a false identity, Collins highlights the essentially arbitrary nature of legal identity. The Magdalen Vanstone entering each of these spaces remains the same character: her essential nature has not changed, but what grants her access to each space are the falsified legal identities which she adopts. In doing so, however, Collins's concern is to expose the hypocrisy of these domestic spaces by demonstrating that the criteria by which Magdalen and Norah are denied entry – fortune, social class, employment – are never, throughout *No Name*, indicators of either morality or ethics.

No Name updates the narrative structure of *The Woman in White*, turning its eyewitness testimony into the personal accounts of Captain Wragge alongside an omniscient third-person narrator, which positions the reader between two poles of moral judgment. The overt moral message of the novel – that Magdalen's temptation into deceit is a moral error – is undermined by the tug between Wragge's own judgments and the narrative space given over to Magdalen's oscillating justifications and self-recriminations. The reader is put, then, in the position of siding with the notorious criminal Wragge (who condemns Magdalen, but nevertheless helps her), or with Magdalen (who defends her quest, but nevertheless condemns herself). When Wragge takes Magdalen on as an actress-pupil, he is intimidated by her ability to so readily and efficiently assume a different identity: 'She has shown the cloven foot already. I begin to be a little afraid of her'.[129] 'She has', he tells the reader,

> a natural gift for assuming characters, which I have never seen equalled by a woman […] A girl who takes the sharpest people unawares by using such a capacity as this to

[129] Collins, *No Name*, 243.

> help her own objects in private life; and who sharpens that capacity by a determination to fight her way to her own purpose which has beaten down everything before it, up to this time – is a girl who tries an experiment in deception, new enough and dangerous enough to lead, one way or the other, to very serious results.[130]

The crux, however, is precisely what 'her own objects in private life' are. 'Thousands of women marry for money', Magdalen asks herself, 'Why shouldn't I?'[131] This rhetorical question articulates many of the recurrent themes which make Magdalen's quest so morally challenging: she is not a profiteering fortune-hunter, but rather a woman embracing her latent dramatic abilities to right what she perceives as an injustice.

In figuring Magdalen's deceptions as a departure from morality, the novel's condemnatory narrative voice stands in stark contrast to the events it narrates, events in which Magdalen and Wragge understand themselves to be morally justified. The dramatic version of *No Name* focalises this complex debate in Magdalen's character. When she decides to marry Noel Vanstone under an assumed identity, for instance, the stage directions indicate her severe discomfort: she speaks '*faintly*', without looking at Captain Wragge, and ends the scene '*still petrified in her chair*'.[132] What the novel achieves in the clash between its narrative voice and Magdalen's own self-recriminations, the play achieves by centring the work's moral torpor in Magdalen herself. Focusing a work's complex understanding of justice within the journey of a female character is a strategy that Collins's writing would increasingly deploy in the latter half of his career. Importantly, this provided opportunities in his dramatic works that created roles for lead actresses which were morally complex and emotionally charged. Magdalen Vanstone, like the later characters Lydia Gwilt, Anne Silvester, and Mercy Merrick, for example, is a dramatic role that would have relied on the ability of an actress to portray

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[130] Ibid., 256-57.
[131] Ibid., 489.
[132] Collins, *No Name: A Drama in Five Acts*, 50.

the same kind of moral struggles the novel explores in its deployment of an interrogatory narrative voice.

In giving over so much narrative space to Magdalen's repentant exhortations, the novel constantly precludes the possibility of an absolute moral condemnation. 'What do good women like you', Magdalen asks her childhood governess, Miss Garth, 'know of miserable sinners like me?'[133] The moral ambiguity of Magdalen's life did not, however, prevent high-minded Victorian critics from condemning the novel outright, but the sheer amount of rhetorical energy pious reviewers expended condemning Magdalen's actions suggests that she was not simply the inexorable villain those reviewers believed her to be. This is what makes *No Name* and several of Collins's other works so morally challenging. There is no doubt that Magdalen, like the later characters Lydia Gwilt and Mercy Merrick, has committed crimes. The politics of Collins's sensational writing are embedded in the way it blurs the distinction between heroes and villains; it updates the legible moral binary of earlier stage melodrama and interrogates how – in the case of Magdalen Vanstone – domestic virtue has internalised the uncritical categories of crime and virtue. Reading Collins's theatrical adaptations reveals how his dramatic writing queries the identificatory categories his novels have consistently been understood to upset or reject wholesale.

No Name does not, however, indiscriminately refuse the value of the home, but rather questions the ethics of the legal context underpinning it. The idyllic childhood of the Vanstone sisters, though not legally authorised by marriage and therefore not falling within the sanction of Victorian respectability, stands in contrast to, for example, Laura Fairlie's horrific episode at Blackwater Park, which, though legally sanctioned by her marriage to Sir Percival, is nevertheless cruel and abusive. While Collins's writing consistently questions the value his mid-Victorian

[133] Ibid., 586-87.

contemporaries placed in the domestic world, his novels and plays do not characterise that world as essentially problematic. It is, instead, the legal context underwriting the domestic world that Collins treats with intense scrutiny. It is the inability to access divorce which leads to Magdalen and Norah's dispossession; it is bastardy laws that deprive them of their birthright; it is inheritance legislation that enables Noel Vanstone's greed. *No Name* does not just recount the theft of a fortune, it also explores the lengths to which judicial inequality can push those who have been unjustly wronged and endorses actions that are ethically dubious. Noel Vanstone disinheriting the sisters is unjust, but it is not illegal. Both the novel and its adaptation thus rupture the easily legible moral binary of earlier melodrama invested in the epistemological certainty engendered by clearly distinct heroes and villains.

The attention paid to domestic detail throughout the theatrical adaptation of *No Name* – its stage directions, scene-settings, and musical accompaniment – reveals Collins's dramatic writing to be steeped in the same political ethos for which his novels have received sustained critical attention. It is an attention to Magdalen's dress that announces her filial grief to the audience; it is her exclusion from the domestic settings of her childhood that demonstrates her desire to be once again accepted within them; it is the sound of Norah's harp, the unwelcoming atmosphere of Noel's villa, the stark landscape of Admiral Bartram's banqueting hall that aurally and visually communicate to the audience the loss of Magdalen's childhood idyll.

Reviewers of the novel balked at Magdalen's turbulent interiority, unable to locate her character within an emergent psychological realism that was finding its literary footing in contemporary English writers. Critics reviewing the novel struggled to reconcile the deftness of Collins's plotting with what appeared to them to be his inferior characterisation. The *Chattanooga Daily Rebel*, for instance, offered the following indictment:

> Its characterization is quite as inferior. Altogether constructive. Made to order. Unnatural men and women to suit unnatural events. Imitations, self plagiarisms, dilutions. Puppets that work on wires, not flesh and blood, beings of feeling, thoughts, action and utterance. Instead of holding the mirror up to nature, he has contrived to reverse the glass. We are thus given faint and distorted shadows of humanity from the rough mercury, not clear outlines and the very age and body of the time, from a burnished surface.[134]

Dissatisfied with what they identified as an implausible set of characters, this reviewer draws a distinction between the novel's 'unnatural events' and its 'unnatural men and women'. They see the characters' motives as unconvincing, as nothing but devices contrived in the service of a complex and morally damaging plot. This was a common condemnation of Collins's writing throughout his career: that his emphasis on plot was necessarily at the expense of any psychological depth.

Reviewers on both sides of the Atlantic argued for and against the believability of Collins's characters. *The Daily Telegraph*, amid other criticisms of the novel in a generally negative review, claimed that 'Mr. Collins is unrivalled as a story-teller, but he has never yet succeeded in establishing his claim to be a creator of character'. They saw evidence of this in Michael Vanstone, employing dramatic language in their criticism of his character, describing him as 'a miser and a villain, somewhat of the Victoria Theatre type'.[135] *The Daily Telegraph* located Collins's novel within a theatrical context in order to rehearse the familiar criticism that Collins's notoriously convoluted plots were at the expense of a nuanced character study. As Collins himself suggests, however, the plot of *No Name* is essential to its moral purpose. Collins's characters live through situations that eschew the ability to tidily mete out justice in order to reveal the hypocrisies of domestic propriety. In exploring the latent capacity for good and evil within its characters, *No Name* relies on intricate plotting to question the assumed moral superiority of those operating within the domestic

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[134] *Chattanooga Daily Rebel* (4 August 1863), 6.
[135] *The Daily Telegraph* (2 January 1863), 2.

household. Magdalen is a spirited character, but certainly not a criminal, until she and her sister are robbed of their childhood happiness.

The notion that Magdalen's character was fundamentally unbelievable, that she wasn't 'real' enough, was taken up in *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*: 'He [Collins] has taken great pains with Magdalen, but she is, after all, scarcely real'.[136] This claim is offered almost as an aside: it is to be taken for granted that Collins's characters 'are real, after the manner of reality which is accepted in in farces, short dramas, and short stories, where full development is not looked for'.[137] *The Times* was more descriptive in its denunciation of Magdalen's character: 'We are not at all sure that the Magdalen of the earlier scenes can be morally identified with the Magdalen of the later ones … [her] conduct is so unaccountable, so inconsistent with her character, so indefensible, so false and foolish, that Mr. Collins might have been content to amuse us, and might have kept his hands off the mighty issues of good and evil'.[138] That the Magdalen of the earlier scenes of domestic idyll cannot possibly be the Magdalen of the later scenes is precisely the kind of hypocrisy against which Collins is writing: it is not that Magdalen has been transformed into a 'reckless adventuress' throughout the course of the novel, it is that the capacity for good and evil had always been latent qualities within her. As *The Daily Telegraph* put it, in Magdalen 'we have a woman, well educated, carefully and gently nurtured, who enters wilfully and deliberately on a long career of low and dark intrigues'.[139] That a middle-class education combined with a loving family would offer inoculation against the kinds of criminal behaviour to which Magdalen turns throughout the novel is precisely the assumption that *No Name* seeks to undermine.

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[136] *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (10 February 1863), 187.
[137] Ibid., 188.
[138] *The Times* (22 January 1863), 7.
[139] *The Daily Telegraph*, (2 January 1863), 2.

Collins's preface to the novel describes *No Name* as a book that 'depicts the struggle of a human creature, under those opposing influences of Good and Evil, which we have all felt, which we have all known'.[140] The kinds of crimes Magdalen commits throughout the novel explore the possibility that the latent capacity for crime existed even within the drawing rooms of ostensibly innocuous English country homes, an exploration that continues in *The Moonstone*, a text narrowly focalised within a single home. Marian Halcombe's quest to rescue Laura Fairlie from the villainous Sir Percival had, in *No Name*, evolved into Magdalen's morally suspect journey to retrieve her own and her sister's birthright. 'The picture is good', wrote *The Times*, 'but we think that the less said about its moral purport the better'.[141]

These reviewers' desire to read *No Name*'s characters as fundamentally 'unreal' is only one half of a critical conversation circulating around the novel. Other reviewers were unequivocal in their praise of the novel, and what some reviewers saw as unbelievable shells, they saw as literary masterpieces. *The Daily News*, for instance, acknowledges this debate in its review:

> This most rare and wonderful power of sheer storytelling – a power certainly unequalled in the English language – has been perverted by adverse critics into evidence that the novelist is deficient in those other and higher requisites of his art which are conceded to less ingenious constructors … On the character of Magdalen the author has concentrated all his powers, and it stands out from the canvas with the force of life.[142]

This review acknowledged other critics' struggle to reconcile the strength of Collins's plotting with his characterisation, and instead offered a reading that presents Magdalen as a fundamentally believable character. *The Morning Post* was equally positive in its reading of Magdalen's character: 'It is difficult to contemplate as a whole a narrative which has progressed from week to week, watched

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[140] Collins, *No Name*, 5.
[141] *The Times* (22 January 1863), 7.
[142] *The Daily News* (29 January 1863), 2.

with unvarying interest and curiosity, until the people and the places have become *so thoroughly real* that one feels parting with them sad'.[143] That there existed such a disparity in the critical conversation surrounding the novel and its characterisation suggests the depth of its moral and psychological complexity. *No Name* employs elements popularised by a nascent desire for sensation – rousing stories about crime, violence, and justice – and reorients them within middle-class sensibilities. Reading the novel alongside its dramatic adaptation reveals the extent to which *No Name* as a novel relies on plumbing the depths of Magdalen's character. The sensation novel's formal features are symptomatic but not constitutive of its political investment: onstage, *No Name* embraces a theatrical language but nevertheless explores the complex duality of Magdalen's character.

Overall, reviews of the novel were generally positive, perhaps influenced by the meteoric success of his previous work, *The Woman in White*.[144] On one topic, however, reviewers of the novel – both positive and negative – agree: the moral topos of *No Name* was invariably to its detriment. Reviewers from across the spectrum, whether they elsewhere praised Collins's literary merit or denounced deficiencies in his writing ability, regarded the moral universe of *No Name* as a flawed enterprise, and the depiction of Magdalen's false marriage and assumed identities was always one step too far. Some reviewers saw *No Name* as a novel that breeched propriety by blurring the boundary between public and private. *The Illustrated Times*, for instance, offered the following criticism:

> We shall not allow him [Collins] to degrade our daily lives for us by fingering the folds of the bed-curtains, and looking under the table, snipping at the flounces of our sisters' dresses, and peering into the rims of our daughters' eyes … We appeal to women of sense *and* sensibility if, after reading 'No Name' with the interest which it undoubtedly created, they have not felt a little ashamed of themselves? As if the intimacies of life

[143] *The Morning Post* (3 January 1863), 2.
[144] *Bangor Daily Whig & Courier* (29 January 1863), 180; *The Derby Mercury* (19 November 1862), 6; *The Daily Palladium* (27 January 1863), 22.

> had been fingered and pottered over in an ignominious manner with their consent and in their presence?[145]

This review collapses the act of reading a novel into the intrusion of its author into a reader's private life. Importantly, the language they employ, invoking domestic details ('the table', 'the flounces of our sisters' dresses', 'the intimacies of life') demonstrates that Collins may have indeed been successful in his project to uncover the pretences of Victorian society. *The Daily Telegraph* claimed that 'the whole story is so unlifelike that it can hardly produce much influence, for good or bad, on its readers', opting instead to condemn its immorality as a result of its implausibility. *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine*, elsewhere positive in its review of the novel, argues that 'We feel interested in the reading of this tale, and yet, when we lay it down, we feel insulted. The novelist has been too familiar'. It is precisely this breech of propriety that *No Name*, through Magdalen's nomadic quest to return to domestic happiness, employs in order to demonstrate that the moral strictures under which Victorian society operated were essentially hypocritical. 'He has handled, and scrutinised, and fumbled about a good deal too much. He seems to have been rummaging your bedroom to find something which was of no consequence', continues this reviewer, once again locating the morality of Collins's novel within a domestic landscape. The evident discomfort of these reviewers suggests that *No Name* too effectively exposed the hypocrisies that undergirded the faith Victorian society held in the relationship between domesticity and moral goodness.

Reviews of the novel positioned *No Name* as a fierce participant in the conversation surrounding Victorian morality and respectability, and it is clear that reviewers were keen to project their own moral anxieties onto the novel. A comparative study of the novel and its stage adaptation, moreover, reveals concerns larger than Magdalen herself; *No Name* struggles against ideas of natural

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[145] *The Illustrated Times* (17 January 1863), 46.

justice, of legal identity, and precisely what it means to be a 'good' person. By the time Collins wrote the stage adaptation of the novel, his career had reached its zenith: fresh off the success of *The Moonstone*, he embarked on two simultaneous writing projects: first, *Man and Wife*, largely considered to be his first didactic novel, and second, the dramatisation of *No Name*. The question of natural justice, of legal identity, what 'rightfully' belongs to Magdalen and who precisely Magdalen is, are questions that reviewers struggled with in readings of the novel. In the play, these questions take on new facets, as Magdalen's identity is no longer a literary construction but one to be dramatised in front of an audience.

Collins's characterisation of Magdalen was already a contentious topic for reviewers, as evidenced by the reviews quoted above. The periodical press allowed Collins to introduce readers to Magdalen over the course of several serial instalments. Indeed, it is over a hundred pages before we learn of Andrew Vanstone's death, and in that period the novel introduces readers to Magdalen through a series of amateur theatrical episodes, passages which themselves blur the boundary between public and private. As the often-intrusive narrator states, no 'well-regulated mind ever draws its inferences in a hurry', and Collins allows the well-regulated minds of his readers to familiarise themselves with Magdalen over the course of several chapters.[146] In the stage version, Collins excised the novel's exploration of amateur theatricals, where Magdalen first discovers her dramatic proclivities. Still, the language Collins employs throughout this scene in the novel underscores how the novel explores the boundaries between public and private life: Mrs. Marrable, the Vanstones' affable neighbour persuaded into hosting the amateur theatricals in her home, 'gave up the drawing-room to be laid waste for a stage and a theatre … and to accept all the other responsibilities, incident to creating a dramatic world out of domestic chaos'.[147] The amateur

[146] Collins, *No Name*, 58.
[147] Ibid., 47.

theatricals at the beginning of *No Name* serve precisely this purpose: to create 'a dramatic world out of domestic chaos'. Magdalen's nomadic journey is set against the backdrop of a domestic life which rejects both Norah and herself on the basis of a legal technicality: they are exiled from Combe-Raven and financially disenfranchised not because of their own wrongdoing, but as a result of an illegitimate marriage. Collins's interrogation of precisely what it means to be respectable, that core Victorian value, is centred on Magdalen's exploration of justice, on the morally challenging situation in which she and Norah are thrust.

In the play, Collins employs a narrative economy that locates Magdalen in similar settings but relies equally on distinctly theatrical cues to emphasize the importance of domestic spaces throughout the play. Where, in the novel, the Marrables' drawing-room is 'laid waste' for a theatrical performance, in the play the opening scene in the drawing-room at Combe Raven is itself the site of domestic chaos, laid waste by the news of the Vanstone sisters' disinheritance. Magdalen's amateur theatricals introduce themes which Collins takes up throughout the remainder of the novel: the distinction between true and affected character, between authenticity and performance. Her theatrical prowess is not merely proclaimed to his readership, but is instead demonstrated to them as Magdalen outshines all other members of the cast: 'There, forcing its way steadily through all the faults of inexperience—there, plainly visible to the dullest of the spectators, was the rare faculty of dramatic impersonation, expressing itself in every look and action of this girl of eighteen, who now stood on a stage for the first time in her life'.[148] The inclusion of this amateur theatrical episode introduces the reader to Magdalen's dramatic proclivities which will later serve her in the assumption of a number of false identities. It also, however, allows the reader to identify aspects of Magdalen's character in events that exist outside the plot of the novel. In other words, these episodes of

[148] Ibid., 63.

exposition allow Collins to shape Magdalen's character – what one might call her 'essential' identity – before her legal identity is stripped away from her. By the time Magdalen and Norah Vanstone become 'Nobody's Children', they are, especially Magdalen, fully realised characters in the minds of his readership.

The point at which Magdalen's legal identity has been entirely erased, however, is where Collins opts to begin the dramatic version of *No Name*. The Vanstone family solicitor Mr. Pendril's often-quoted line is spoken before Magdalen even makes her first appearance onstage: 'Mr. Vanstone's daughters are Nobody's Children, and the law leaves them penniless at their uncle's mercy'.[149] When we meet Magdalen Vanstone onstage we are not privy to any aspects of her character, and it is the project of the play to delineate her character alongside the events of the plot. Where the novel took pains to introduce readers to the flighty, independent, self-aware woman well before either of her parents died, the play, perhaps responding to accusations which saw Magdalen's later actions as irreconcilable with her initial characterisation, introduces audiences to Magdalen only once she embarks on the quest to retrieve her fortune. Audiences thus learn about Magdalen not in the context of her idyllic, domestic upbringing, but rather as she rails against a legal system that has unjustly deprived her and Norah of their birthright. This is one of the major departures that Collins makes from the novel in adapting *No Name* for the stage. Where the novel delays the death of Magdalen's parents by eleven chapters, depicting Magdalen in the happy life of her childhood home, Collins instead opens the play with her legal banishment from the otherwise familiar space. Doing so not only accelerates the action of the play, it also forces audience members to form opinions about Magdalen as they watch her struggle against being disinherited. This is one potential solution to the criticism that the novel faced: introduced, at first, to an ostensibly morally-upright character,

[149] Collins, *No Name: a Drama*, 10.

reviewers were then unable to reconcile this well-bred young lady with her later crimes. Beginning the play without the expository domestic idyll allows Collins to develop Magdalen's character without opening the work up to accusations of inconsistent characterisation. The first act ends, echoing Magdalen's initial appearance onstage, with yet another domestic intrusion. When the rakish Francis Clare deserts Magdalen without even so much as meeting with her face to face, Magdalen falls insensible onto a sofa, immune to Miss Garth's attempts to rouse her. It is at this moment that Captain Wragge, who had earlier sent a servant inside with a visiting-card, bursts onto the stage. The stage direction labels Wragge's trespass:

> (Magdalen, *roused by* Miss Garth's *exclamation, starts, and looks up at the intruder. The captain takes off his hat with a flourish, and addresses the ladies with vagabond self-possession.*)
> *Wragge*. Can I be of any use?
> (*The curtain falls.*)[150]

Wragge's entrance echoes Magdalen's earlier appearance onstage, both essentially intruding into the drawing-room of the Vanstone house, and anticipates their later partnership in retrieving the Vanstone fortune. As the curtain falls, the audience is left to wonder how Wragge fits into Magdalen's disenfranchisement.

Much of Collins's fiction questions the relationship between legality and ethics, and his training as a lawyer positioned him well to comment on at best the law's inefficacies, and at worst, as in *No Name*, its sheer injustices. Even *The Illustrated Times*, who otherwise condemned the novel, nevertheless offer a reading of Magdalen which sees her as operating against the injustices of the law: 'it must be borne in mind that Magdalen is all along pursuing what is *her right* – fighting against an injustice done to her. Her position, as she sees it, is that of an entrapped and defrauded person, who merely opposes stratagem to unjust force'.[151] It is striking that a review so otherwise concerned

[150] Ibid., 19.
[151] *The Illustrated Times* (17 January 1863), 46.

with denouncing the morality of the novel nonetheless justifies Magdalen's actions. Such a stance necessarily assumes that the law is either not operating as it should, or, more insidiously, is operating to protect the interests of a limited few. Far from ascribing any anarchic quality to *The Illustrated Times* or *No Name* itself, the salient point here is that this reviewer sees Magdalen's 'right' as a form of natural justice, something which, for these reviewers, the law has judged incorrectly. The novel consistently explores this question, and the morally complex fabric of the novel militates against readings that see it as simply another sensation novel written to satiate the public hunger for scandalous crime fiction. Invoking Magdalen's 'right' to her fortune raises a host of attendant questions: if the law does not govern what rightfully belongs to her, what does? If Magdalen's 'true' identity does not have its basis in legality, who is she? Magdalen herself offers a potential answer to these questions, when she states: 'Neither lawyer, nor governess, shall dispute my right to my own will, and my own way'.[152] Magdalen asserts that neither the legal context of her life (having been stripped of her legal identity and thus disinherited) nor the conventions of social propriety (the domestic settings which reject her) will prevent her from retrieving what she sees as rightfully hers. Magdalen's own murky legal identity is itself reflected in her outward appearance: in the novel, Wragge notes that she 'has the flexible face, the manageable voice, and the dramatic knack which fit a woman for character-parts and disguises on the stage'.[153] In the novel, her 'extraordinary talent as a mimic' foreshadows her later assumption of false identities, but it also echoes her lack of legal identity now that she no longer lives under the aegis of legitimate parentage.[154]

One potential solution to the complex issue of Magdalen's self-identificatory process and her own definition of what is rightfully hers lies in her motivation. Importantly, what remains true

[152] Collins, *No Name*, 413.
[153] Ibid., 236.
[154] Ibid.

throughout both versions of *No Name* Collins wrote is what motivates Magdalen to pursue such a reckless course of action. It is not greed that prompts her to impersonate first a lady to entrap Noel Vanstone into a false marriage, then a parlour-maid in order to obtain the legal document which would place the fortune back into her own hands, but instead a sense of duty towards the mild Norah, who has meekly accepted their fate. Indeed, in contrast to Mrs. Wragge whose obsession with material goods verges on the neurotic, Magdalen never regrets having been forced to give up the comforts of her upbringing in order to regain her fortune. While 'sensation fiction often probed the issue of woman's financial insecurity through female greed for money and luxuries', *No Name* probes the very same problem in precisely the opposite way: through the distinctly male greed of Michael and Noel Vanstone.[155] The context of Magdalen's circumstances, paired with the novel's exploration of a morally complex landscape, complicate readings of her character which describe her as a ruthless fortune-hunter. She seeks to restore what she sees as rightfully belonging to her, and the novel explores both the options available to her and her struggle to balance her sense of justice with propriety.

The play further complicates this dynamic by positioning Norah's disability and potential recovery as yet another motivation for Magdalen's quest. Early in the second act, while hiding from George Bartram, Magdalen explicates this: 'Parted from my sister! hidden from my best friend! Nothing to justify me, nothing to sustain me, but my resolution to recover the birthright of which we have been robbed'.[156] Interestingly, in December of 1870 Collins asked French actor and playwright François Régnier whether he would be available to read over the manuscript of *No Name*'s dramatisation and offer any suggestions for its improvement.[157] By the following January,

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[155] Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, 'Victorian Sensation Shoppers: Representing Transgressive Femininity in Wilkie Collins's *No Name*', *Victorian Review*, 31:2 (2005), 56-78.
[156] Collins, *No Name: a Drama*, 21.
[157] 'To François Régnier, 22 December 1870', *Public Face II*, 225.

Collins had received Régnier's feedback, and used it to edit the final scene of the play. The original, published version of the play ends with Magdalen stealing the keys to a bureau which contains the secret trust from her sleepwalking employer, Admiral Bartram, whose house she has entered under the assumed identity of a parlour-maid. It appears that the play's performance in New York incorporates Régnier's alterations and stops Magdalen from stealing the key and opening the bureau. Collins sent those edits to his dramatic agent in New York the day after writing the following to Régnier:

> The sleep-walker leaves the key in the lock – Magdalen is alone – the bureau is at her mercy – she has only to open it and (though it is for her sister's sake) she sickens at the idea, and cannot prevail on herself to ~~open~~ turn the key. […] This is infinitely better – and for this, I am indebted to you. […] The value of your critical insight is inestimable to a student like me. I know not where else to look for it, if I look away from you.[158]

It is clear, then, that Régnier saw the importance of portraying Magdalen in as little incriminating a light as possible, and the speed with which Collins accepted and incorporated his feedback is equally striking.

Moreover, relegating Norah to a disabled character offstage adds an additional layer of moral complexity to Magdalen's quest to regain their inheritance. This is made even more explicit onstage as a result of Norah's malady, rendering her literally incapable of supporting herself. In the play, Collins goes so far as to put a price tag on Norah's recovery:

> *Miss G.* […] The disorder from which your sister has so long suffered has reached a crisis. For the first time there is a chance of her being restored to health, provided we can meet the expenses of the treatment.
>
> *Mag.* Are the expenses serious?
>
> *Miss G.* To us, most serious. Many – I dare not say how many – hundred pounds.

[158] 'To François Régnier, 20 January 1871', *Public Face II*, 232.

> *Mag.* (*warmly*). The hundredth part, perhaps, of the inheritance which my father meant to leave to Norah and to me![159]

Where, in the novel, Norah seeks respectable employment as a governess, she is physically incapable of doing so in the play. Onstage, Magdalen strays even further from 'the average adventuress of the newspapers', something her sly accomplice Captain Wragge notes, and instead assumes the role of heroic sister.[160] To the very end of the play, the tangible goal of Norah's well-being operates in tandem with Magdalen's desire to achieve a more abstract sense of justice. About to steal keys from her employer in order to gain access to the secret trust which stands between her and her rightful fortune, Magdalen asks herself: 'Can I do it?' and immediately responds: 'For Norah's sake I must – I will!'[161]

No Name is the story of a process by which Magdalen discovers that what makes her Magdalen Vanstone is not legal status but rather something more intangible, something the law does not recognise. It explores the abstract concepts of performance and authenticity, of identity and persona. In the same way that *The Woman in White* uses its sensational plot structure to interrogate complex truths, *No Name* witnesses its protagonist commit a series of crimes in a quest to restore her birthright but also to discover what constitutes identity. In an era of increasing rationalisation, of Darwinian evolutionary biology, of a rapidly secularising public sphere, the novel distils some of the very questions asked by other, less sensational writers, into its plot: in becoming Miss Bygrave, in becoming a parlour-maid, Magdalen's character probes just what it meant to *be* someone. Importantly, the process of adaptation plays a significant role in this probing: because the metaphorical crux of *No Name* is the relation between interior reflection and external demonstration – a relation which was being explored simultaneously in the nascent tastes for psychological realism,

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159 Collins, *No Name: a Drama*, 62.
160 Collins, *No Name*, 256.
161 Collins, *No Name: a Drama*, 79.

both onstage and in the novel – the ways in which Collins dramatises his work registers the complex narrative developments occurring in the novel as having their parallel on the stage.

Finally, *No Name* sees the beginnings of Collins's increasingly regular concern with the theme of repentance or atonement. In both the novel and the play, just before Magdalen succeeds in marrying Noel Vanstone, she becomes overcome with guilt and attempts suicide. Interestingly, the reviewer for *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* labels this scene in the novel its 'sensation scene', echoing the language of the sensation drama.[162] During this same moment in the play, she utters the following to George Bartram:

> *Mag.* One word before we part for ever. Don't think me worse than I am. It is true that I have married Noel Vanstone this morning. You can guess what the object was. It ends here. He will never take me home with him as his wife. Placed between death and degradation, I have chosen death. Blame nobody. And remember this: If I have done wrong, I have atoned for it with my life.[163]

Atonement by confession and suicide are, again, two options not available to the Magdalen Vanstone of the novel. Indeed, in the novel the narrator only offers the following: 'The remorse which had embittered her married life was deadened now to a dull despair. It was too late to make the atonement of confession'.[164] In the drama, Magdalen is given the opportunity that was previously unavailable to the version of her character in the novel. Evidently, the stage is not the place for 'dull despair', and Magdalen is instead given over to bombastic displays of repentance which, as the reviewer for the *New York Times* notes, border on the ludicrous. Still, Magdalen's moral and emotional vicissitudes are essential to Collins's politics, which are grounded in characterising Magdalen as a fallible, though ultimately human, figure. Indeed, given the moral condemnation the novel faced in the critical press, the following claim in *The Daily Telegraph* is almost unsurprising: 'For

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[162] *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* (10 February 1863), 187.
[163] Collins, *No Name: A Drama*, 57.
[164] Collins, *No Name*, 600.

the widow of Noel Vanstone there were but two courses open. An early death or a long life of solitary repentance could alone have wrought out her redemption. We can honour and pardon the Magdalene weeping in the wilderness, but not married, wealthy, and respectable'.[165] Indeed, even as the novel version of *No Name* ends conventionally by ultimately not rewarding Magdalen's crimes but restoring the Vanstone fortune via Norah's marriage, this reviewer cannot comfortably accept a version of events where Magdalen redeems herself and continues to live happily. Instead of responding to pressure like this by rendering the play even more morally conventional, perhaps by having Magdalen enter a convent after marrying Noel Vanstone, Collins opts to reward Magdalen's actions with the restoration of the Vanstone fortune and a happy marriage to George Bartram. In this respect, as with the others discussed above, the play is both essential in re-emphasising the political tenor of *No Name* and is also slightly more radical in its belief in Victorian society's ability to reintegrate a redeemed criminal. The moral uncertainty of *No Name*, alongside this redemptive optimism, would get taken up again in Collins's later novel and play *The New Magdalen*, in which a reformed prostitute, much like Magdalen, assumes another's identity. Indeed, it appears that, after *The Woman in White*, Collins never again adhered as closely to the model of literary or dramatic villains: whether in his subsequent popular novels – *Armadale* (1866) and *The Moonstone* (1868) – or his later, didactic ones, such as *Man and Wife* (1870) and *The Evil Genius* (1885), Collins slowly realises the moral ethos he set out for himself and his works in the 1862 preface of *No Name*.

This chapter began by locating two of Collins's most popular novels within the expansive critical legacy of the sensation novel, as well as the cultural context of their production and publication. It has also insisted on the importance of studying those novels' dramatic adaptations and considered the interrelation between two distinct forms of Victorian media: the periodical press

[165] *The Daily Telegraph* (2 January 1863), 2.

and the theatre. *The Woman in White* and *No Name* share a broad overlap in content which, by now, is clear: the figure of the unmarried spinster, the hypocrisy of the importance ascribed to domesticity, and, most importantly, a drive to reconsider the institution of marriage. Their overlap, however, is more than solely thematic. These novels do not converge simply on matters of plot or content, but on a much larger scale as well. It has been the contention of various critics for decades that the sensation novel developed newer, more sophisticated narrative strategies in service of a variety of purposes: to entertain an expanding reading market, to sell periodicals and line the pockets of writers and publishers, and to criticise Victorian society. An in-depth consideration of these novels alongside their respective dramatic adaptations reveals that such strategies are not unique to the novel form. Artistic production in the sensation mode, which moved fluidly between the novel and the stage, demonstrates that the 'Sensation mania' of the 1860s operated not just across lines of class, but across lines of form as well.

In many ways the term 'sensation' is, as such labels often are, bound to a specific historical period. As critics have demonstrated, both the sensation novel and drama grew out of earlier Gothic romances and stage melodrama, evolved concomitantly alongside mystery and detective novels, and experimented with innovations in both narrative and dramatic technique. The sensation mode repurposed extant literary and dramatic practices in a specific cultural moment. The enterprising foreigners (Fosco, Mrs. Lecount), the imposing mansions (Blackwater Park, St. Crux-in-the Marsh), and the spectacular theatricals of the sensation drama are devices that echo novels and plays from earlier in the nineteenth century, but their moral and aesthetic sensibilities are deeply rooted in the political ethos of England in the 1860s and 70s. That is what differentiates the sensation novels of writers such as Braddon and Collins or the sensation dramas of Boucicault and Reade from, for example, J. B. Buckstone, Douglas Jerrold, or Edward Fitzball's melodramas. Attempts to remove the sensation novel from its specific context by emphasising the importance of its ostensibly

universal narrative innovations have overlooked the parallel importance of similar innovations in the theatre.[166]

The sensation mode allowed Collins to rupture the easily legible moral binary of earlier melodrama, to merge the fantastic plots of Gothic romance with the biting political criticism of other realist writers, and to articulate anxieties about concepts as abstract as morality, justice, and identity. It is not just that he wrote *about* them, it is the *way* he wrote about them. To the extent that sensation is a useful label in capturing Collins's method – keeping in mind that 'sensation' is a term Collins himself was eager to move beyond and reluctant to apply to his own work – the mode provides a useful case study in considering how Collins's adaptive process interacted with the dynamics of genre and form.

The emergence of sensation as a mode of cultural production that existed both in print and onstage is itself one of the various ways Victorian readers, writers, and audiences came to terms with a rapidly evolving and continually expanding world. The implausible plots of Laura Fairlie and Magdalen Vanstone are another version of the self-reflexive impulse that produced Dorothea Brooke's pious marriage plot(s) or Thackeray's barbed satire. This impulse is present in both the sensation novel and drama: the ability for a community to accurately know and represent itself is constantly under investigation by characters who lie, are lied to, and lie to readers and audiences.[167] Collins's adaptations provide a useful case study for understanding how sensation's political investments move beyond the remit of literary form. Reading the dramatisations of *The Woman in White* and *No Name* alongside their novelistic counterparts, and within the contexts of Collins's

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[166] See, for example, Rosenthal, *Good Form*, 193.
[167] On lying in the Victorian novel, see John Kucich, *The Power of Lies: Transgression in Victorian Fiction* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1994).

career and the Victorian theatre, reveals that the sensation novel's ability to articulate distinctly mid-Victorian anxieties about the perceived safety of the household was equally present in the drama.

Chapter 2
Fashionable and Fastidious Audiences

The painter's and the poet's fame
Shed their twinned lustre round his name,
To gild our story-teller's art,
Where each in turn must play his part.

What scenes from Wilkie's pencil sprung,
The minstrel saw but left unsung!
What shapes the pen of Collins drew,
No painter clad in living hue!

But on our artist's shadowy screen
A stranger miracle is seen
Than priest unveils or pilgrim seeks,
The poem breathes, the picture speaks!

And so his double name comes true,
They christened better than they knew,
And Art proclaims him twice her son,
Painter and poet, both in one!

Oliver Wendell Holmes, 'A Toast to Wilkie Collins', 22 October 1873

Recited by the poet and Dean of Harvard Medical School Oliver Wendell Holmes at a party given in Collins's honour during his 1873-4 reading tour of America, this poem plays on a series of references embedded in Collins's name. First, to William Wilkie, the Scottish poet and author of *The Epigoniad*, an epic poem in nine books based on the *Iliad* written in the style of Alexander Pope's *Homer*. Second, to David Wilkie, the English landscape painter and close friend of the third referent, William Collins, Collins's Royal Academician father. This triad of literary and artistic references

appears ostensibly at odds with the writer being memorialised: William Wilkie's best-known work, written in heroic couplets, and the sentimental landscape and genre painting of both David Wilkie and the elder Collins bear little resemblance to the radical and sensational writing for which Collins is now remembered.

The year 1873 marked a watershed moment in Collins's theatrical career: by halfway through the year, two of his plays were running concurrently at the Prince of Wales's and The Olympic. This chapter, not unlike Holmes's poem, will locate Collins's most successful attempts at writing for the stage within a greater artistic canon that encompasses what may be broadly termed 'realism'. In making connections between nascent realisms across the artistic spectrum in visual, literary, and dramatic arts, this chapter argues that the dramatic versions of *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen* emblematise a generic shift in Collins's writing away from the capacious, sensational plots of the 1860s, to a style which absorbed and merged both the high-Victorian realism of writers such as George Eliot as well as the subdued, domestic realism of dramatists such as T. W. Robertson.

Both *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen* focalise their narratives on the 'fallen woman', the character who would proliferate on the stage especially during the final decades of the nineteenth century, though the addition of the Edenic 'fallen woman' to fiction and drama was not a strictly Victorian invention. Samuel Richardson's wealthy libertine Robert Lovelace pronounces, in *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady* (1751), that a 'fallen woman is a worse devil than even a profligate man'.[1] The eponymous character of Lord Byron's blank verse tragedy *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice* (1821) states, equally frankly: 'The once fall'n woman must for ever fall'.[2] While she had predecessors both on the stage and in the emergent form of the novel, however, the 'fallen woman'

[1] Samuel Richardson, *Clarissa, or, the History of a Young Lady*, vol III (Printed for S. Richardson: London, 1751), 173.
[2] Lord Byron, *Marino Faliero, Doge of Venice* (John Murray: London, 1821), II, i, 53.

would only become a lightning rod for moral debates after the mid-Victorian period as female sexuality was increasingly managed in public forums.

The term was stretched, throughout the nineteenth century, to refer to a variety of situations and character types in fiction and drama. It referred, for example, to the seduced maidens who populated melodramas such as W. T. Moncrieff's *The Lear of Private Life* (1820), J. B. Buckstone's *Henriette the Forsaken* (1831), and J. T. Haines's *The Life of a Woman* (1840), or could equally refer to women who worked as prostitutes and courtesans, as in William Travers's *A Poor Girl's Temptations* (1858), Dion Boucicault's *Formosa; or, the Railroad to Ruin* (1868), and Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848).[3] The sexual and moral politics of the 'fallen woman' could also include the depiction of a woman who has left either a seducer or a previous relationship struggling to find a place within society, as in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Oscar Wilde's *A Woman of No Importance* (1893), or, indeed, Collins's *Man and Wife* (1870).[4] The 'fallen woman' was not limited, moreover, to representations in novels and theatre; she also proliferated in the visual art of the period, and was an especially fruitful source of inspiration for Pre-Raphaelite art, as in, for example, Sir John Everett Millais's *Virtue and Vice* (1853) and William Holman Hunt's *The Awakening Conscience* (1853). The referential flexibility of the term 'fallen woman' allowed Victorian critics to mobilize their critiques of female sexuality under the umbrella of a term that included a staggeringly wide array of tropes, stereotypes, and situations in which female sexuality figured at the centre.[5] One important element which unified these disparate representations of the fallen woman as seduced maiden or avaricious

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[3] For a full discussion of the fallen woman on the nineteenth-century stage, see Sos Eltis, *Acts of Desire: Woman and Sex on Stage 1800-1930* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2013).

[4] See, for example, Elisabeth Rose Gruner, 'Plotting the Mother: Caroline Norton, Helen Huntingdon, and Isabel Vane', *Tulsa Studies in Women's Literature*, 16:2 (1996), 303-325; Monika Hope Lee, 'A Mother Outlaw Vindicated: Social Critique in Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*', *Nineteenth-Century Gender Studies*, 4:3 (Winter 2008).

[5] See, for example, Nina Auerbach, 'The Rise of the Fallen Woman', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 35:1 (1980), 29-52; Elin Diamond, *Unmaking Mimesis: Essays on Feminism and Theater* (Routledge: London, 1997), ch. 1; Gretchen Braun, '"Untarnished Purity": Ethics, Agency, and the Victorian Fallen Woman', *Women's Studies*, 44:3 (2015), 342-367; Hill, *Sex, Suffrage, and the Stage*, ch. 1; Linda Nochlin, 'Lost and Found: Once More the Fallen Woman', *The Art Bulletin*, 60:1 (1978), 139-153.

courtesan is either a tragic end, or a repentant expulsion from society (and, often, both feature in the same work). As the sexual politics of the nineteenth century became increasingly complex, so did the representational methods used to dissect and analyse those politics. Thus, the uniformly repentant women of the early Victorian stage evolve into the relatively more complex fallen women of the latter half of the century. Accordingly, Linda Nochlin has argued that realist writers and artists paid 'overwhelming attention […] to a social category previously neglected or treated with less than seriousness or objectivity, but raised by the Realists to the status of a major issue: that of the prostitute or demi-mondaine'.[6] Moreover, as Lynn Nead has noted, 'During periods of social crisis, anxieties were deflected or displaced on to questions of morality. Prostitution frequently became the focus during these moments of moral panic'.[7]

Realism in novels, drama, and visual art throughout the nineteenth century developed along separate, but often tightly intertwined, paths. The focus of this chapter is to synthesize Collins's works with developments in realism across the artistic spectrum which share as their gravitational centres the figure of the fallen woman or discussions of illicit female sexuality. As Peter Brooks has argued, 'realism is almost by definition highly visual, concerned with registering what the world looks like'.[8] It is against precisely this taxonomic impulse in much Victorian literary realism which Virginia Woolf would rail at the beginning of the twentieth century in 'Modern Fiction', in her criticism of the novelist Arnold Bennett:

> The writer seems constrained, not by his own free will but by some powerful and unscrupulous tyrant who has him in thrall, to provide a plot, to provide comedy, tragedy, love interest, and an air of probability embalming the whole so impeccable that if all his figures were to come to life they would find themselves dressed down to

[6] Linda Nochlin, *Realism* (Penguin: London, 1971), 199.
[7] Lynn Nead, 'The Magdalen in Modern Times: The Mythology of the Fallen Woman in Pre-Raphaelite Painting', *Oxford Art Journal*, 7:1 (1984), 30.
[8] Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 2005), 16.

> the last button of their coats in the fashion of the hour.[9]

As Sos Eltis and Kirsten Shepherd-Barr remind us, however, we have 'forgotten how radical realism in the theatre was when it first emerged', and, in turn, we have rehearsed the common assumption that realism is somehow 'antithetical to meta-theatricality and a self-conscious awareness of the medium itself, which are fundamental to modernism'.[10] The definition of realism to which this chapter adheres aligns most closely with the way in which Simon Dentith has phrased it:

> I am using realism to mean here the capacity to provide a vivid impression of the presence and interaction of people in all their intensity and complexity, and thus the pressure of a personality across its whole range. This is much more a matter of the texture of the writing than to do with questions of the plotting and narrative arrangements, the areas of novel-writing where 'plausibility' is most usually discussed.[11]

Indeed, *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen* demonstrate a significant shift away from questions of 'plotting' and 'narrative arrangements' which were the focus of Collins's earlier novels, and towards 'the presence and interaction of people in all their intensity and complexity'. These two works establish a determined departure from the itinerant, sensational narratives of novels such as *The Woman in White* and *No Name*, and echo the subdued, domestic realism of dramatists such as T. W. Robertson. Though 'Robertson is the first major playwright associated with the so-called problem play, whose verisimilitude was understood as contrasting with the more mannered theatricality of the melodrama', as Michael Meeuwis has noted, those plays 'contained melodramatic elements, however, so it is perhaps more productive to understand his drama defined by an internal *claim* to realism'.[12] The same is true of Collins's works; while *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen* shed the sensational

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[9] See Virginia Woolf, 'Modern Fiction' in Andrew McNeille and Stuart N. Clarke (eds), *The Essays of Virginia Woolf VI*, (Hogarth: London, 1986), 160.
[10] Sos Eltis and Kirsten Shepherd-Barr, 'What *Was* the New Drama?' in Laura Marcus, Michèle Mendelssohn and Kirsten Shepherd-Barr (eds), *Late Victorian Into Modern* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2016), 136.
[11] Simon Dentith, 'Realist Synthesis in the Nineteenth-Century Novel: "That unity which lies in the selection of our keenest consciousness"' in Matthew Beaumont (ed), *A Concise Companion to Realism* (Wiley-Blackwell: Oxford, 2010), 36.
[12] Michael Meeuwis, 'Representative Government: The "Problem Play," Quotidian Culture, and the Making of Social Liberalism', *ELH*, 80:4 (2013), 1108; emphasis in original.

apparatus of the previous decade, they nevertheless indulge in the emotional excesses of melodrama – the heroines of both plays often fall insensible at other characters' feet, for instance. It is the relative realism of these works, however, which locates them within the development of a distinctly realist tradition: Collins had begun shedding the conflagrations, shipwrecks, and asylum visits as early as 1871 in his adaptation of *The Woman in White*, but it would not be until 1873, in *The New Magdalen*, that one of his works would take place strictly within the respectable confines of a society drawing room.

Man and Wife

Serialised in *Cassell's Magazine* and overseas in *Harper's Weekly* between 1869 and 1870, *Man and Wife* tells the parallel stories of Anne Silvester and Blanche Lundie. The former is the daughter of an opera singer, while the latter is the only daughter of an aristocratic family. The novel opens in the past, in a villa in a London suburb rented by Anne's parents, when her father expresses a desire to leave his marriage with Anne's opera-singer mother and pursue a relationship with Lady Jane Parnell, a woman whom he sees as a path to his entry into high society. His lawyer, Mr. Delamayn, reveals to him that because he and Anne's mother were married in Scotland by a Catholic priest, technically they were never legally married. Anne's father delivers this news to her mother, who shrinks from it in a paroxysm of grief that leads eventually to her death. At that moment, Blanche's mother, the childhood friend of Anne's mother, arrives, and promises to look after Anne as if she were her own.

The narrative skips forward to the adulthood of Anne Silvester and Blanche Lundie, where Anne is employed as Blanche's governess under the watchful eye of Lady Lundie, Blanche's stepmother, her mother having died years earlier in India. In the midst of a garden party at

Windygates, the country seat of the Lundie family, Anne seeks a meeting with Geoffrey Delamayn, the dissolute young Oxonian and son of the lawyer Mr. Delamayn, with whom, it is revealed, she had engaged in a sexual relationship. When he finally agrees to a meeting, Anne threatens him with exposure and her subsequent suicide, thus blackmailing him into a private marriage with her at a nearby Scottish inn. When Geoffrey is told of his father's imminent death, he sends the naive Arnold Brinkworth, Blanche's suitor, to the inn in his place, to notify Anne of the delay. Because Anne had presented herself to the innkeeper as a married woman in order to ensure that she would be able to take a room, the staff at the inn assume that Arnold, when he arrives, is Anne's husband.

When Arnold arrives at the inn in Geoffrey's place, Anne is visibly distressed, acutely aware that Geoffrey is likely to have deserted her, as well as reluctant to jeopardize Blanche's happy relationship. They pass a stormy and chaste night together at the inn, and part ways shortly afterwards. In the ensuing action, it is revealed by Blanche's garrulous uncle and patriarch of the Lundie family, Sir Patrick, that Arnold and Anne, by virtue of an arcane Scotch marriage law, have inadvertently been married to each other, simply by presenting themselves as married in the presence of strangers at the inn. Geoffrey, seeing the possibility of deserting Anne once and for all, pounces on the opportunity, and courts Mrs. Glenarm, a wealthy, young widow chosen for him by his mother.

Blanche is kept conveniently in the dark from all this knowledge by Sir Patrick and Arnold as they attempt to right the wrong, and, in order to distract her from Anne's disappearance, Sir Patrick recommends hastening her marriage to Arnold. Meanwhile, it is revealed that Anne gave birth to Geoffrey's stillborn child and passes an indeterminate period of time unconscious in a Scottish hotel. When she returns to consciousness, she retrieves a letter sent to her by Geoffrey which he signed as her husband, notifying her that Arnold would appear at the inn in his stead. Armed with

this letter, which proves that Geoffrey had promised himself to her, she confronts the young, caustic Mrs. Glenarm in the house of Julius Delamayn, Geoffrey's brother. Mrs. Glenarm refuses to believe Anne, thinking her an adventuress seeking only to annoy the couple.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Glenarm writes to Lady Lundie, informing her of these circumstances. Lady Lundie confronts Arnold Brinkworth at Sir Patrick's home in London, where he reveals to her that he and Anne are, for the time being, legally married, until the letter can be produced which proves her marriage to Geoffrey. Lady Lundie, having positioned Blanche within earshot of this confession, secrets her away to her own London home. Later, Anne attends a footrace in Fulham in which Geoffrey is competing, where he collapses as a result of overtraining.

The narrative comes to a head in a mock-trial scene in Lady Lundie's London home, in which Anne produces the letter which is concrete proof that Geoffrey married her before Arnold appeared at the Scottish inn. Geoffrey abandons himself to his fate and resolves to take Anne home with him in a blaze of murderous intent. Despite the protestations of Blanche, Arnold, and Sir Patrick, who are worried for Anne's safety, they are powerless to stop him from taking his wife home.

Geoffrey and Anne return to a run-down cottage owned and let by the ex-cook at Windygates, the mute Hester Dethridge. While there, Geoffrey's mother and brother dissuade him from continuing a relationship with Anne, and subsequently offer the two an annuity to separate. Geoffrey inexplicably declines their generous offer, and it is later revealed that he intends to murder Anne. When he discovers Hester's secret diary in which she confesses to the murder of her own abusive husband without having been discovered, Geoffrey blackmails her into showing him how she achieved it. Later that night, he attempts to murder Anne in the same way, but is stopped at the last moment by Hester, who strangles him nearly to death. In the ensuing action, Geoffrey dies of

the same muscular overexertion to which he had succumbed during the footrace. The novel ends in the Scottish countryside, at Windygates, where Lady Lundie's place as matriarch of the Lundie family has been replaced by Sir Patrick's bride, 'the new Lady Lundie', who turns out to be none other than Anne Silvester.[13]

Reviews of the novel demonstrate the critical paradigm which characterised the whole of Collins's career. After surveying the capacious plot of the novel, the critic writing in the *Saturday Review*, for instance, laments: 'Ingenuity of construction is sufficiently rare in English writers to make us regard these peculiarities as at least a pleasant variation upon the ordinary run of novelists. But we have a suspicion that it is gained at a rather heavy price, and that in particular the reality of the characters is often sacrificed to the exigencies of the situation'.[14] The reviewer for *Putnam's Magazine* equally complained: 'How clever he [Collins] can be he has shown us over and over again; let him now show that he can be natural'.[15] The characteristically conservative Margaret Oliphant, reviewing the novel for *Blackwood's Magazine*, criticised the novel's mock-trial, where Anne sacrifices herself to her position as Geoffrey's wife in order to save Blanche's marriage to Arnold. 'But no one says, Don't go', Oliphant complains, 'which in real life every one would have said'.[16] Considering Anne's character, the *Saturday Review* similarly stated that 'our imaginations entirely refuse to accept her as a living woman at all; she is simply an actor playing two entirely different parts'.[17] The tension between Collins's improbable plots and the perceived realism of his characters was a common battleground on which critics debated the literary merits of his fiction, both in reviews of *Man and Wife* and throughout his career. Critics bemoaned the ways in which they perceived Collins's novels to be

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[13] Wilkie Collins, *Man and Wife* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008), 642.
[14] *Saturday Review* (9 July 1870), 52-3, quoted in Norman Page (ed), *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* (Routledge: London, 1974), 183.
[15] *Putnam's Magazine* (September 1870), 339-40, quoted in ibid., 187.
[16] *Blackwood's Magazine* (November 1870), 628-31, quoted in ibid., 190.
[17] *Saturday Review* (9 July 1870), 52-3, quoted in ibid., 183.

sacrificing character to incident, a common criticism of the sensation novel, a genre from which, by *Man and Wife*'s publication in 1870, Collins had decidedly stepped away.

The well-rehearsed criticism of Collins's novels, that their poorly rendered characters are second in importance to their elaborately constructed plots, echoes criticisms of the well-made play popularised by Eugène Scribe in the 1850s.[18] That *Man and Wife* shares many of the well-made play's stylistic elements is not a coincidence. Collins's library, catalogued and auctioned off by his estate after his death, demonstrates his interest in both the well-made play and French drama more generally, including collections of writings by Dumas *père*, Dumas *fils*, Victor Hugo, Scribe, Octave Feuillet, Eugène Labiche and René-Charles Guilbert de Pixérécourt, along with several anthologies of French drama.[19] In 1855, before Collins had achieved the critical and popular success of *The Woman in White*, Scribe had read a French translation of his stories, and in turn had 'charmed [Collins] by his kind encouragement'.[20] Collins also regularly attended the theatre, both in London and on the Continent, having seen, for example, Delphine de Girardin's *La Joie Fait Peur* (1854, St. James's Theatre) and Victorien Sardou's *A Scrap of Paper* (1860).[21] The epistolary focus of *Man and Wife*, that Blanche's marriage to Arnold relies on proving Anne's previous marriage to Geoffrey by producing a letter he signed as her husband, echoes the tightly constructed well-made play with its common reliance on crucial documents. The importance of dates, receipts, and tickets is a plot element to which Collins's writing consistently returns.

Reviews of *Man and Wife* also register reviewers' concerns with what they rightly perceived as the increasingly overt moral purpose of Collins's writing. 'Moral aims generally spoil any novel in

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[18] Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 86; see also John Russell Taylor, *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play* (Routledge: London, 1967); Stephen Stanton, 'Shaw's Debt to Scribe', *PMLA*, 76:5 (1961) 575-585.
[19] William Baker, *Wilkie Collins's Library: A Reconstruction* (Greenwood: London, 2002), 102, 105, 121, 124, 139, 148.
[20] Wilkie Collins, 'To Robert du Pontavice de Heussey, 15 March 1886' in *Letters II*, 520.
[21] Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 206; Baker, *A Wilkie Collins Chronology*, 69.

which they are prominent', wrote the *Saturday Review*, 'and we think that they have led in this case to some serious artistic faults'.[22] 'What we want is not reformers, but novelists', baldly wrote the reviewer for *Putnam's Magazine*.[23] Oliphant argued that Collins's 'strength, which lies in plot and complication of incident, does not lend itself successfully to polemics'.[24] The central focus of these reviews is the novel's indictment of Scotch marriage laws, which, as Anne and Arnold discover, allowed couples to become legally married simply by presenting themselves in the character of husband and wife. As Collins writes in the preface to the novel, 'the purpose of the story is always an integral part of the story itself. The foremost condition of success, in a work of this sort, is that the fact and the fiction shall never be separable one from the other'.[25] The preface sets out Collins's dual concerns in *Man and Wife*: 'the present scandalous condition of the Marriage Laws of the United Kingdom', as well as 'the question of the influence of the present rage for muscular exercises on the health and morals of the rising generation of Englishmen'.[26]

Collins wrote the dramatic version of *Man and Wife* alongside the novel, and had it privately printed in 1870, the year in which it completed its serialised run. This was, along with the requisite copyright performance, by that point in his career, Collins's usual method of preserving dramatic copyright for his novels, even though he had no immediate intentions of staging its dramatic version.[27] It would not be until 1873 that *Man and Wife: A Dramatic Story in Four Acts* was presented on the stage at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, then leased and operated by the Bancrofts, who

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[22] Ibid., 186.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid., 188.
[25] Collins, *Man and Wife*, 7.
[26] Ibid., 5.
[27] The copyright performance of the dramatic version took place on 16 August 1870. See 'To William F. Tindell, 15 August 1870', *Public Face II*, 205.

confirm that its dramatic version preceded, at least in part, its novelistic counterpart: 'the first act of the play was written, and the entire drama planned, before the novel was commenced'.[28]

The copy of *Man and Wife: A Dramatic Story in Four Acts* held in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection represents the script as performed at the Prince of Wales's in 1873.[29] The licensing copy contains extensive manuscript revisions to the printed original, and the play's original ending has been replaced by several handwritten pages. A copy sent by Collins to the American theatre manager Augustin Daly, which survives in Harvard University's Houghton Library, preserves the original ending, discussed below, in which Geoffrey dies, leaving Anne a free woman.[30] It is unclear whether the handwritten revisions are by Collins's pen or the work of someone employed by the Prince of Wales's, though the handwriting does not appear to match Collins's hand.[31] Collins was present at the rehearsals for the London production of *Man and Wife* and was involved throughout the theatrical process, which renders the issue of handwriting less crucial: we can assume that these revisions were sanctioned by Collins himself given his presence both at rehearsals and subsequent performances. In their memoir, the Bancrofts confirm Collins's presence at their rehearsals: 'We bestowed great pains upon the rehearsals, often having the benefit of the author's presence and assistance, which, when the play was well advanced, proved of real service'.[32] In a letter addressed to Hunter Rose & Co., Collins's Canadian publishers in Toronto, he notes that he has 'been seriously hindered by the rehearsals of [his] dramatic version of 'Man and Wife' at the Prince of Wales's Theatre'.[33] Collins's presence at the Prince of Wales's, moreover, dates from 1871, when he wrote

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[28] Squire Bancroft, *Mr. & Mrs. Bancroft: On and Off the Stage* (Richard Bentley and Son: London, 1888), 368.
[29] Wilkie Collins, *Man and Wife: A Dramatic Story in Four Acts* (Published by the author: London, 1870), British Library Lord Chamberlain's Collection, Add MS 53118 F.
[30] Wilkie Collins, *Man and Wife: A Dramatic Story in Four Acts* (Published by the author: London, 1870), Harvard Theatre Collection, EC85 C6977 870m.
[31] Examples of Collins's hand consulted include his manuscript copy of *The Evil Genius: A Drama in Four Acts*, British Library MS 53345 E; 'Handwriting of Eminent Persons' *Cassell's Saturday Journal* (11 June 1887); Andrea Lyttleton, 'Notes on Handwriting Samples of Wilkie Collins Between 1864 and 1889', *The Wilkie Collins Society*, June 1997.
[32] Bancrofts, *On and Off*, 368-9.
[33] Wilkie Collins, 'To Hunter Rose & Co., 20 February 1873', *Public Face II*, 386.

enthusiastically to Squire Bancroft about the prospect of working together on the production of *Man and Wife*.[34] His enthusiasm about the success of the play,[35] and his express desire to continue working with and writing for the Bancrofts, all leave little room to imagine the revisions done without his knowledge.[36] In contrast to relations with his literary publishers, which were often strained both in terms of copyright and with his remuneration and negotiation of terms, Collins had the following effusive praise to offer in a letter to Squire Bancroft:

> I should be the most ungrateful man living if the result of *Man and Wife* did not far more than merely 'satisfy' me. My play has been magnificently acted, everybody concerned with it has treated me with the greatest kindness, and you and Mrs. Bancroft have laid me under obligations to your sympathy and friendship for which I cannot sufficiently thank you.[37]

The theatrical process for Collins, always an ambition throughout his career and now realised for the second time since his success with *The Woman in White*, was by this point threatening to overtake his novel-writing career. His later novels contain a higher proportion of dialogue than his earlier ones, a vestige of the process by which Collins would simultaneously write for the serial press and for the stage. Despite being remembered primarily as a novelist, it is clear that by the middle of his career in the 1870s, Collins was devoting equal amounts of energy to writing novels as well as their dramatic counterparts. This is especially evident in the process of adapting *Man and Wife* for the stage: portions of its dialogue are lifted verbatim from the novel, as if in writing for *Cassell's Magazine* Collins was also already envisioning those lines being performed onstage, a practice Collins would repeat in his later production of *The New Magdalen* (1873). The example of *Man and Wife* is doubly instructive in considering Collins's writing process because of the play's revision history. Not only did Collins by this point in his career write his novels with an eye towards stage effect – indeed, *Man*

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[34] 'To Squire Bancroft, 19 March 1871', Ibid., 264.
[35] 'To W. P. Frith, 10 February 1873', Ibid., 380.
[36] 'To Squire Bancroft, 15 August 1873', Ibid., 410-11.
[37] Ibid.

and Wife existed in his mind first as a play, not a novel – he allowed the texts themselves to be altered in the interest of theatrical success, and with good reason: of the thirty-five productions which ran for over a hundred nights under the direction of the Bancrofts (including their lesseeship of The Haymarket in 1880), *Man and Wife* ranks twentieth, outrunning numerous revivals of Robertson's comedies.[38]

Collins's adaptation of *Man and Wife* for the stage pares down the novel's substantial cast of characters, removing Geoffrey's family, various Scottish lawyers, and Hester Dethridge. As with Collins's previous adaptations for the stage, the play simplifies the plot and focuses on its romantic entanglements, contrasting the relationship between Blanche and Arnold with that of Anne and Geoffrey. Significantly, the play eliminates the episode at 'Salt Patch', the cottage in which Geoffrey attempts to murder Anne before being thwarted by Hester Dethridge. The 'Salt Patch' episode is the novel's only generically sensational incident, and Collins's decision to remove it from the dramatic adaptation of his text clearly signals a decided shift away from the sensationalism of the 1860s. While the play certainly embraces the emotional excess of melodrama – Anne often falls to the floor in a fainting fit, for instance – the play is less about punishing Anne or Geoffrey than it is a biting criticism of Collins's contemporary society. The play borrows the conventions of the British and French stages with which Collins was familiar – seduced maidens, poetic justice, emotional display – and gives them a contemporary voice and setting. In this way, then, as much as *Man and Wife* echoes the British stage of the previous half-century, it equally anticipates, for example, Wilde's society plays. Victor Emeljanow has identified Robertson's Lady Ptarmigant as 'the predecessor of Wilde's Lady Bracknell', and the acerbically witty matriarch Lady Lundie can certainly be placed along this timeline as well.[39] The treatment of Anne Silvester's sexual history does not rehearse the punishment

[38] W. Craven Mackie, 'The Bancrofts' Repertory, 1865 to 1885', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 27:1 (1975), 100-101.
[39] Victor Emeljanow, *Victorian Popular Dramatists* (Twayne Publishers: Boston, 1987), 100.

of female sexuality familiar on the nineteenth-century stage, but rather grapples with the sexual double standard in a way that anticipates Mrs. Erlynne's struggle to re-enter society, or Mrs. Arbuthnot's studious avoidance of it.[40]

The play opened on 22 February 1873 at the Prince of Wales's Theatre, then leased and managed by Marie and Squire Bancroft. The theatre's recent move towards an increasingly middle-class audience as well as a subtler, more realistic brand of theatre dovetailed nicely with Collins's desire to write for an audience which he perceived as being more educated and critical than his understanding of mid-Victorian theatrical audiences, a concern which was apparent even as *Man and Wife* was being serialised. Collins's 'frustrations with the book business made him more eager than ever to succeed on the stage, which he though was much more professionally run than publishing', writes Collins's most recent biographer.[41] 'No one epitomised this commercial approach more than the actor-manager Squire Bancroft who, with his actress wife Marie Wilton, had transformed the Prince of Wales [sic] Theatre, off down-at-heel Tottenham Court Road, into a fashionable venue'.[42]

Both Marie and Squire Bancroft acted in the dramatisation, respectively taking the parts of Blanche Lundie, 'a bright, pretty part, but quite of a secondary order', and of Dr. Speedwell, 'an important minor *rôle* confined to a dozen sentences', the Bancrofts write in one of their theatrical memoirs.[43] The lead role of Anne Silvester was taken by Lydia Foote, who had previously acted the lead role of Clara Vernon in Collins's *The Frozen Deep* (Olympic, 1866) as well as the role of Esther Eccles in the original run of T. W. Robertson's *Caste* (1867). The role of Anne Silvester offers a

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[40] *Lady Windermere's Fan* (St James's Theatre, 1892); *A Woman of No Importance* (Haymarket, 1893); see also Sos Eltis, *Revising Wilde: Society and Subversion in the Plays of Oscar Wilde* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1996), ch. 3-4.
[41] Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 328.
[42] Ibid.; it is worth noting that Marie Wilton's lesseeship of The Prince of Wales's preceded both her relationship with Squire Bancroft and their subsequent marriage, and Lycett's phrasing of Wilton as 'actress wife' somewhat diminishes the executive role she played in the Prince of Wales's refurbishment; see William Kleb, 'Marie Wilton (Lady Bancroft) as an Actress', *Theatre Survey*, 20:1 (1979) 43-74; Shannon Epplett, 'The Waterloo Summer of the Prince of Wales's Theatre: New Writing, Old Friends, and Early Realism in the Victorian Theatre', *Theatre History Studies*, 36 (2017) 149-78.
[43] Bancrofts, *On and Off*, 368.

useful foil to the role of Esther Eccles, an alternative version of an equally spirited character subject to very different circumstances. Where Esther proclaims to her abusive, alcoholic father, 'I am a woman – I am a wife – a widow – a *mother!*', Anne is allowed no such remit for self-definition, and must instead pursue a private marriage of convenience, one of the few options available to Victorian women in search of social and financial stability.[44] 'Miss Lydia Foote's talent in portraying female sorrow has rarely produced less effect than in her representation of Anne Sylvester [*sic*]', writes the reviewer for *The Times*, 'another person whose idiosyncrasy is made known to us by a thousand minute details', gesturing towards the Robertsonian style of creating character by relying less on declamatory speeches and acting 'points,' and instead on realistic stage business made up of micro-movements and habitual gestures, a style Foote had evidently practiced in her portrayal of Esther.[45] Of Foote's portrayal of Anne Silvester, *The Daily Telegraph* claimed 'in every situation created by the dramatist the actress thoroughly commanded the sympathies of the audience'.[46]

The Bancrofts had recently achieved tremendous success with Robertson's cup-and-saucer dramas, plays which blended verisimilitude in staging practice with understated satire, as in *Caste*, when the working-class couple Sam and Polly only have two cups and saucers with which to serve Hawtree, their aristocratic guest. The Bancrofts' decision to stage Collins's play signals a shift away from those lighter, social comedies to something slightly more melodramatic than *Society* (1865), *Ours* (1866), *Caste* (1867), *Play* (1868), *School* (1869), or *M.P.* (1870). *Man and Wife* plays on the sexual suspense familiar in stage melodramas, a dynamic which was either absent or toned down in Robertson's most successful works. Collins makes Anne's 'deviant' sexuality the central focus of *Man and Wife* instead of decorously skirting around the topic, and while the politics of *Man and Wife*

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[44] T. W. Robertson, *Caste* in *T. W. Robertson: Six Plays* (Amber Lane Press: Charlbury, 1981), 154-55.
[45] *The Times* (24 February 1873), 12.
[46] *Daily Telegraph* (24 February 1873), 2.

have more in common with the sexual problem play of the end of the century, its proscriptive stage directions and declamatory speeches recall generic melodrama.

Indeed, by the time the Bancrofts staged Collins's adaptation of *Man and Wife*, they had already revived five of Robertson's plays.[47] Their production of *Man and Wife*, moreover, was the first generic drama staged at the Prince of Wales's since Marie Wilton began her management in 1865, the other productions consisting mainly of farces, burlesques, and the light comedies for which the theatre earned its reputation.[48] This shift was noticed by the critical press reviewing *Man and Wife*, and almost every reviewer offered an opinion on the Bancrofts' move away from Robertsonian comedy. While 'the piece is very prettily mounted, and has been extremely well received', *Reynold's Newspaper* wondered 'whether the *habitues* of the [Prince of Wales's] theatre will, however, relish this violent change from high-class comedy to melodrama is a problem to be solved'.[49] *The Daily Telegraph* also noted

> That the drama is of a much more sombre cast than those pieces which have hitherto been among the notable successes of the theatre is not to be disputed, and doubts may have arisen as to the advisability of the present experiment, but there can be no hesitation in declaring that in 'Man and Wife' will be found a play of such remarkable completeness, both in story and in the acting, that on this ground alone a lengthy career may be confidently predicted.[50]

As these reviews illustrate, even as the critical press was ready to pronounce the play a resounding success, they remained hesitant as to the decision made to present such a departure from the previous theatrical offerings at the Prince of Wales's. *The Era* baldly stated that 'With the new drama the Management makes a marked diversion from the line in which most of its previous successes

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[47] Mackie, 'The Bancrofts' Repertory', 105-8.
[48] Ibid., 105; I am using Mackie's definition of 'drama' as distinct from 'comedy,' 'burlesque', and 'farce,' in his calendar of the Bancrofts' repertory.
[49] *Reynold's Newspaper* (2 March 1873), 8.
[50] *Daily Telegraph* (24 February 1873), 2.

have been achieved'.[51] *The Examiner* continued with the positive praise, writing that 'Mr. Wilkie Collins's new play, "Man and Wife," produced on Saturday last at the Prince of Wales's, gives conclusive proof that, whatever may be the value of its author's talents, they find their best expression in a dramatic form'.[52]

The Morning Post similarly claimed that 'So radical a change in the order of entertainment provided at the Prince of Wales [*sic*] Theatre as was involved in the production of a dramatic version of the "Man and Wife" of Mr. Wilkie Collins stimulated greatly the curiosity of those who had been accustomed to regard this theatre as contesting with the Haymarket for the distinction of being the home of Comedy'.[53] The reviewer then identifies what would become a recurrent concern in the Prince of Wales's adaptation of *Man and Wife*, namely the decision to stage a play that embraced distinctly melodramatic overtones in a theatre that had otherwise achieved success with Robertson's understated comedies. 'When on Saturday, accordingly, the final plunge was made, and the domain of comedy was quitted for that of melodrama, the keenest interest was developed', the review continues, navigating a balanced line between reporting on the genuine success of the piece while also gently chastising the audience for their enjoyment of Collins's melodramatic work. Like the other reviews, they admit that a 'complete success has accordingly to be declared', though naturally with the added caveat that they 'can only hope that melodrama will not now monopolise this most charming of theatres, but that some new dramatist will arise to lead back some day the company into the old and pleasant paths of comedy it has temporarily quitted'.[54] The reviewer also reveals an intimate knowledge of the play's novelistic original: 'Great wisdom has been shown in the rejection of the ultra melodramatic scene connected with the attempted murder of Anne, and the omission of

[51] *The Era* (2 March 1873), 12.
[52] *The Examiner* (1 March 1873), 233.
[53] *The Morning Post* (24 February 1873), 3.
[54] Ibid.

the dumb Hester is a mercy for which we are thoroughly thankful'.[55] While the revisions made to Collins's original playscript, as discussed below, trim excessive dialogue so that the play more closely resembles the fast-paced dialogue of Robertson's comedies rather than the lengthy, declamatory speeches of the earlier English stage, Anne's self-flagellation occasionally slips into the melodramatic. The mock-trial at the end of *Man and Wife* that invalidates Anne's 'marriage' to Arnold Brinkworth, however, indulges in the emotional excess of melodrama to no greater an extent than any of Robertson's comedies. Still, the critical press appeared committed to tacking the label onto the dramatic adaptation of *Man and Wife*, almost always pejoratively, and generally in contrast to the lighter comedy previously offered by the Bancrofts at the Prince of Wales's. 'In a melodramatic theatre', wrote the reviewer for *The Times*, 'Mr. Collins might, perhaps, have wrought his subject into a play as effective as his *Woman in White*, but it seems to us that there is a gulf between *Man and Wife* and the Robertsonian drama, which he has vainly essayed to pass'.[56] The drama critic Dutton Cook similarly stated that '*Man and Wife* is not to be classed among the pleasant plays which have hitherto been the staple entertainments of the Prince of Wales's Theatre'.[57]

Like most of Robertson's comedies, *Man and Wife* uses marriage as its essential focal point. In contrast with the relationships of Maud Hetherington and Sidney Daryl in *Society*, Blanche Haye and Angus MacAlister in *Ours*, or George D'Alroy and Esther Eccles in *Caste*, however, the tension in *Man and Wife* is derived from the exploration of the sexual double standard, not from the tension produced by the obstacles impinging on the marital union of the play's main characters. In addition to this crucial difference in subject matter, what separates Robertson's comedies from *Man and Wife*, is their variation in tone. Both indulge in the improbabilities of melodrama, as in George D'Alroy's

[55] Ibid.
[56] *The Times* (24 February 1873), 12.
[57] Bancrofts, *On and Off*, 371.

miraculous return from the Crimean War, or in Arnold Brinkworth's accidental marriage to Anne. Both, moreover, make use of the realistic stage business which became one of the crucial elements of stagecraft at the Prince of Wales's. Whether in the form of Mary Netley and Hugh Chalcot making a pudding onstage in *Ours*, Polly Eccles preparing tea in *Caste*, or the Lundie family's game of croquet in *Man and Wife*, both Robertson's and Collins's plays use realistic stage business as a framing device through which their characters navigate interpersonal relationships. In this sense, then, Collins's drama has much in common with the Robertsonian comedies: the backdrop of otherwise banal activities onstage, as in the serving of dinner at the Scottish inn which sets the scene for Anne's confession to Arnold that she expects Geoffrey to marry her, foreground the contemporary social issues which these plays addressed. Where Collins departs from Robertson, then, is not explicitly in matters of stagecraft, but rather the overall mood of the play itself, in shifting the tone away from delayed gratification through marriage toward a drama that synthesises Robertson's approach to writing and staging with Collins's own melodramatic and often overtly political tendencies. Dutton Cook gestured toward this shift in tone when he wrote that 'Mr. Collins's play is a production of a more forcible if more gloomy character,' when compared with the works of Robertson, 'with a tendency towards melodrama and a severely tragical catastrophe'.[58]

The extent to which *Man and Wife* represents a departure from Robertson's earlier comedies illustrates the double-bind of Collins's career that would become increasingly apparent as he continued to wrote more prolifically for the stage. While the play gestures towards the gradual psychologising of English drama that would not reach maturity until the performance of Ibsen's works at the end of the century, its frequent recurrence to melodramatic elements undermines its ability to do anything larger than provide an embryonic indication of the kind of theatre that would

[58] Ibid.

be produced at the turn of the twentieth century. Even despite Collins's determined shift away from the sensational apparatus of the 1860s – gone are the shipwrecks, attempted murders, and hidden identities of his most famous novels – the play nevertheless relies on melodrama's gestural language in its portrayal of Anne Silvester. Especially given the revised ending ultimately performed at the Prince of Wales's, which combines Anne's repentance with her forgiveness of Geoffrey's abuse, the play eschews the sensationalism of Collins's earlier works only to placate middle-class aesthetic and moral sensibilities.

Dramatic critics also had much to say about the didacticism of Collins's play, either alerted to it by the explication of his social purpose in the preface to the novel, or otherwise by the moral arguments underwriting the action of the play. *The Era* claimed that the stage had always been 'regarded as the most potent weapon with which to attack social abuses, and it should never be forgotten that before the age of newspapers it was the only channel through which the voice of the people could find utterance'.[59] This review also notes that 'the audience last evening were invited not merely to take an interest in a simple dramatic representation, but to take an active part afterwards in helping to get altered one of the laws of the realm'.[60] This appears to be precisely the outcome which Collins had hoped for in the original preface to the novel, that the story would be both entertaining and instructive. While reviewers of the novel, as those quoted above, tended to find its moral purpose incompatible with its literary merit, theatrical critics tended to see its didacticism as separate from its merit as a play, and therefore did not find that Collins's reformist energy detracted from the play's dramatic merit. Where the theatrical press did take issue with the dramatic adaptation of *Man and Wife* was when it tended towards the melodramatic, not the political. In fact, as this review illustrates, its political message was, for some reviewers, a welcome addition. 'In dramatising his own

[59] *The Era* (2 March 1873), 12.
[60] Ibid.

story', *The Daily Telegraph* writes, 'Mr. Wilkie Collins has made some judicious modifications, which, without in any degree lessening the force of the double moral his novel was written to convey, have the advantage of discreetly removing out of sight those portions of the narrative that deal with events too terrible for stage illustration'.[61] Here, this reviewer echoes the earlier sentiment put forth by *The Morning Post* about the excision of both Geoffrey's attempted murder of Anne and Hester's character altogether. In spite of this omission, however, 'the earnest purpose of the novel is as strongly maintained and as vividly exemplified in the play'.[62]

'As most persons know', wrote the reviewer for *The Graphic*, 'Mr. Wilkie Collins has in the novel followed Mr. Dickens's custom of having a purpose – over and above that of pleasing and interesting the reader by an ingenious story – in exposing social and legal abuses'.[63] Elsewhere, this same reviewer offers a generally negative review of the play, noting that its 'subject is somewhat repulsive'.[64] *The Standard* echoes this negative sentiment in its own review: 'He [Collins] has undertaken to sustain a thesis, to maintain a paradox, and to write an entertaining drama at one and the same stroke', an endeavour which might have succeeded in the hands of a more skilful dramatist but, in the case of *Man and Wife*, is a failure.[65] 'The same analysing and dissecting tendency which makes Mr. Collins's novels charming to some and tedious to others', the review continues, 'stands in his way when he attempts the stage'.[66] *The Times*, for its part, saw something wholly undramatic in the story of *Man and Wife*, noting that it 'is of a remarkably didactic character, evidently written with two distinct purposes'.[67] 'His stories generally have about them an unpleasant aroma of the police-court, the surgery, or the madhouse', wrote *The Examiner*, 'and it is this quality which gives them

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[61] *Daily Telegraph* (24 February 1873), 2.
[62] Ibid.
[63] *The Graphic* (1 March 1873), 202-203.
[64] Ibid.
[65] *The Standard* (24 February 1873), 3.
[66] Ibid.
[67] *The Times* (24 February 1873), 12.

much of their popularity'.[68] The tension between *Man and Wife*'s popular success and the criticism it faced in the press encapsulates a dynamic that would come to characterise Collins's decades-long career. Critics, especially adamant in condemning the play's apparent embrace of melodramatic conventions, were reluctant to see the improbabilities of Collins's plot blended with play's emotional excess on the same stage which had recently popularised Robertson's subtle comedies.

Collins's decision to stage *Man and Wife* at the Prince of Wales's, in the context of this contemporary critical conversation, demonstrates a determined shift away from both the melodrama and sensationalism that remained popular even later in the century when he would begin to regularly stage his works, as in The Adelphi's 1873 revivals of both Edmund Falconer's *Peep o' Day* and J.B. Buckstone's *The Green Bushes*. Instead, against the backdrop of the Prince of Wales's light comedies, Collins presented his adaptation in the same venue that critics have located as the precursor to the psychological, realist theatre of the late-nineteenth century.[69] Doing so speaks to Collins's awareness of the theatrical environment, and equally suggests a determined shift away from the sensational reputation he had endured for the previous decade.

Despite the divergence of value judgments present in the reviews of *Man and Wife*, the realism of the play's stage design seemed to offer critics a piece of common ground on which they could meet and discuss the play. *The Morning Post*, which was elsewhere apprehensive of the Prince of Wales's perceived move towards the melodramatic in its staging of *Man and Wife*, praised the 'scene in which everything was realistic at once and attractive: a summer-house with real seats and tables, with real croquet balls and mallets'.[70] The fourth act, which takes place in the picture-gallery of Sir

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[68] *The Examiner* (1 March 1873), 233.
[69] Marvin Carlson, 'Montigny, Laube, Robertson: The Early Realists', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 24:3 (1972) 227-236; Patricia Denison, 'Victorian and Modern Drama: Social Convention and Theatrical Invention in T. W. Robertson's Plays', *Modern Drama*, 37:3 (1994) 401-20; Shannon Eplett, 'The Waterloo Summer of the Prince of Wales's Theatre: New Writing, Old Friends, and Early Realism in the Victorian Theatre', *Theatre History Studies*, 36 (2017) 149-78.
[70] *The Morning Post* (24 February 1873), 3.

Patrick's Edinburgh country house, was praised both by critics who appreciated the play as well as by critics who elsewhere questioned its dramatic merit. *The Daily Telegraph* noted that the scene was 'another most skilfully contrived example of stage illusion, with apparently solid walls adorned with real portraits, and an admirably-arranged perspective'.[71] *The Era* also noted that this final scene, 'a remarkably well-arranged "set", with real pictures on the walls of the apartments, which appear to be solidly build out', offered a sense of realism to the scene which only benefited the overall performance.[72]

The play opens in a summer-house overlooking the lawn and garden of Blanche Lundie's country home. Blanche, the play's *ingénue*, is 'dressed in the extreme of the present fashion'.[73] As with the opening scenes of *No Name*'s dramatisation, here the play relies on sartorial choices to do some of the characterising work narration might otherwise accomplish in a novel. As *The Examiner* wrote regarding this opening sequence, 'a really surprising amount of information is communicated in a very short space of time'.[74] The staging here echoes the novel's partitioning into sections, which are themselves a gesture to Collins's theatrical ambitions: each section of the novel is split into 'scenes', and each 'scene' represents a separate, domestic interior: for instance, 'The Summer-House', 'The Inn', and 'Swanhaven Lodge'. The staging of each act brings these locations to life. The closing line of the first act, Lady Lundie's dramatic pronouncement to Blanche that 'Miss Silvester has left the house!' is only rendered more meaningful by the play's setting: we never actually see Anne represented in the house itself.[75] The action instead takes place in the pseudo-domestic space of the summer-house, suggesting the thoroughly *un*-domestic nature of the relationship between Anne and Geoffrey. The stagecraft here again recalls Robertsonian comedy: particularly the third act of *Ours*,

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[71] *Daily Telegraph* (24 February 1873), 2.
[72] *The Era*, (2 March 1873), 12.
[73] Collins, *Man and Wife: A Drama*, 4.
[74] *The Examiner* (1 March 1873), 233.
[75] Collins, *Man and Wife: A Drama*, 21.

set in the interior of a hut made of mud and stones in the middle of the Crimean war. Where the makeshift domesticity of Robertson's comedy throws into sharp relief the love between Blanche and Angus, the domestic-adjacent interior of the summer-house frames the corrupt relationship between Anne and Geoffrey. Again, the difference in tone between Robertson's comedies and Collins's drama is brought to the fore: similar elements of stagecraft here are used in diametrically opposed ways to highlight the ways their characters navigate the exigencies of the Victorian marriage economy.

That this opening act should use a game of croquet as its framing device is not a coincidence. Introduced into England as early as the 1850s, by the time Collins writes *Man and Wife*, the game had already 'lost much of its aristocratic exclusiveness', wrote one contemporary commentator on the sport, but nevertheless 'retains its prestige as an attractive pastime; and its play is constantly on the increase among the middle classes'.[76] Given Collins's career-long concern with writing for and about the English middle class, the choice to set the expository scenes of both the novel and the play against the backdrop of a croquet-match becomes doubly important. The same commentator illustrates the game's ability to move between and be enjoyed by all strata of English society:

> When we reflect on its influence socially – its adaptation to all classes of society – to both sexes, and all ages, from the child just entering upon the walk of life, through the varied stages of manhood or womanhood to the grandfather tottering in his steps – when we reflect on this universal fitness, we cannot fail to attach great value to the game.[77]

Indeed, this scene features croquet being played by both men and women, as well as characters both old and young. As the scene progresses, the various characters decide on partners for their matches,

[76] Mayne Reid, *Croquet: A Treatise, With Notes and Commentaries* (Charles James Skeet: London, 1863), 14.
[77] Ibid., 6.

move mallets about the stage, and discuss strategy, all while navigating the socially precarious position in which Anne and Geoffrey, as well as Blanche and Arnold, find themselves. Thus, croquet throughout this first act is not simply a realistic illustration of the English garden party, but also offers a tactile realization of the social games these characters are forced into playing. When the matriarchal Lady Lundie invites Anne to play, the ensuing exchange illustrates both the balance and tone of their relationship:

> *Anne.* Thank you, Lady Lundie, I would rather not play.
>
> *Lady L.* (*with an assumption of extreme surprise*). Oh, indeed! Considering that we are all here for the purpose of playing, that seems rather remarkable. Is anything the matter, Miss Silvester?
>
> *Anne.* Nothing is the matter, Lady Lundie. I will play if you wish it. (*She takes a mallet and ball from the table.*)[78]

Anne's quiet acquiescence to Lady Lundie at the outset of the play immediately illustrates their relationship to the audience. Blanche's pronouncement that 'Sir Patrick won't play. Croquet wasn't discovered in his time,' and Sir Patrick's vivacious response ('I'll play! I'll play!) in taking up a mallet further sets up his spirited and modern attitude.[79] When Lady Lundie later re-enters the summer-house under the pretext of searching out Anne for the croquet match, she narrowly misses Geoffrey whom Anne has pushed offstage. Arnold's pronouncement, at this point, that 'the game is at a standstill' could equally be applied to the impasse at which Anne and Geoffrey have arrived, the latter refusing a marriage that would write him out of his ailing father's will. The quintessentially domestic game of croquet throws the fundamentally wretched nature of the relationship between Anne and Geoffrey into sharp relief from the onstage vantage point of the pseudo-domestic summer-house. It is also doubly important for Collins's political project, as croquet was a game

[78] Collins, *Man and Wife: A Dramatic Story*, 4-5.
[79] Ibid.

which not only allowed but invited female participation: the croquet match allowed characters to meet each other, and, importantly, allowed audiences to meet the characters in a setting which did not presume an inherent power imbalance. Despite recent improvements in the legal and financial lives of women in the nineteenth century such as the 1870 Married Women's Property Act, Collins continued to write, until the end of his career, against the ill-treatment of women in the legal, economic, and social spheres of Victorian England; at any rate, the aforementioned Act applied only to married women, and would have therefore offered no independence to either Anne or Blanche. While the novel introduces these characters during a croquet match, the play emphasises the sport's relevance by bringing it to the forefront onstage, as audiences were faced with what appeared to be real croquet implements. This realistic approach to staging merged the Victorian fascination with theatrical verisimilitude and the quieter, domestic dramas of the small Prince of Wales's theatre.

The revisions made to the original dramatic adaptation recorded in the Prince of Wales's licensing copy move Collins's drama further in the direction of the Robertsonian style: the portions of dialogue removed throughout the play, particularly in Act 2 during the lengthy conversation between Anne and Arnold, position the dialogue more in line with the realistic, staccato conversations employed by Robertson, for instance between Maud Hetherington's and Sidney Daryl's first onstage meeting in a residential, West End square.[80] The extensive portions of dialogue removed from Collins's original version of *Man and Wife* are those which ring particularly melodramatic, evoking pathos for Anne's situation. Some of her excised lines include: 'Is it my fault? I am a stranger in Scotland. What else could I do but meet him here?', 'Perhaps you will grant me your pity? I can ask for nothing more', and 'Leave me to the solitude that is best for me, and to the sorrow that I have deserved'.[81] Apart from the handwritten revisions applied to the published

[80] T. W. Robertson, *Society* in *Six Plays*, 11-14.
[81] Collins, *Man and Wife: a Dramatic Story*, 23, 25, 26.

version of the dramatic adaptation and the omission of Geoffrey's attempted murder and the character of Hester Dethridge, the play makes few other alterations to the overall structure of the novel. Despite the claim in *Reynold's Newspaper* that the drama is 'but a phantom of the novel', most critics were in support of Collins's decision to trim the more sensational elements from the novel.[82] 'The dialogue is throughout the piece nearly identical with that in the novel', wrote *The Examiner*, again demonstrating intimate knowledge of the play's literary original.[83] Indeed, entire portions of dialogue in the play are lifted directly from the novel. This is in contrast to Collins's earlier adaptations of *The Woman in White* and *No Name*, in both of which he altered significant aspects of the plot.

The realism of detail in the minute interactions of characters onstage, as in Geoffrey's prolonged concern with the status of his pipe while talking to Anne, might initially appear to be at odds with the emotional vicissitudes of the play's premise. Indeed, in a work overwhelmingly concerned with preventing the destruction of Anne's life, reconciling the minutiae of stage business with its overarching thematic concerns might at first appear impossible. In playing with the balance of emotional overload and subtle stage business (indeed it does not take the two as mutually exclusive), *Man and Wife* fundamentally does not replicate traditional melodrama, a mode from which, as Matthew Buckley has recently described, 'consumers expected the economical and reliable production and reproduction of a specific state of feelings'.[84] Instead, the play borrows occasionally from melodramatic convention, while also occasionally gesturing towards a new direction in English theatre represented by Robertson's comedies. Thus the realism of set (the rolls of thunder, the authentic picture-gallery and the croquet implements, for instance) and the realism of dramatic

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[82] *Reynold's Newspaper* (2 March 1873), 8.
[83] *The Examiner* (1 March 1873), 233.
[84] Matthew Buckley, 'The Formation of Melodrama', in Julia Swindells and David Francis Taylor (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Georgian Theatre, 1737-1832* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2014), 469.

technique (particularly evident in the play's extended dialogues which loosely resemble Robertson's writing, as well as its realistic stage business) mesh with the parts of the play which tend toward the melodramatic to present audiences with a work that was at once old and new.

The second act of the play opens at the Scottish inn where Geoffrey has agreed to meet Anne. Interestingly, the staging of the second act had originally been imagined by Collins as split in half, with one portion of the stage representing a sitting room, the other a waiter's pantry. This was a stage effect with which he had experimented in his earlier adaptation of *Armadale* for the stage, *Miss Gwilt*, published in 1866. The scene in *Miss Gwilt* which divided the stage into two was derided by critics when the play was finally staged in 1875, and it is perhaps a stroke of foresight or their theatrical experience which prompted the management at the Prince of Wales's to eliminate the waiter's pantry from the stage. The Bancrofts confirm Collins's willingness to adapt his play-text to their suggestions: 'he also, in the kindest way, fell in with our views and altered the second act of his play […] in accordance with our suggestions, and greatly, as he generously admitted, to the advantage of its representation'.[85] The act ends when Blanche, having followed Anne to the inn, arrives at the front door, on the brink of finding her love interest, Arnold, staying with Anne in her apartments. Anne quickly shrouds the scene in darkness by blowing out her candles, and a momentary roll of thunder sounds around the stage as the curtain falls, obscuring Blanche's vision and again offering audiences a realistic approach to scene-setting: the Bancrofts note that 'in this scene we went to unusual pains to realize a storm, and I think electric lightning was then first used, as was also an effect we introduced of moving clouds'.[86]

[85] Bancrofts, *On and Off*, 369.
[86] Ibid.

The final two acts both invoke the Prince of Wales's strength in domestic backdrops. The penultimate act takes place in the library of Lady Lundie's home and is also the site of Blanche and Arnold's happy marriage before they learn of Arnold's potential bigamy. As noted above, the fourth and final act of the play takes place in the picture-gallery of Sir Patrick's country-house, the realism of which impressed critics. While reading Milton with Arnold, Blanche earnestly asks, 'What's the use of Adam without Eve? There can't be any love till Eve comes in'.[87] Throughout the rest of this scene, Geoffrey Delamayn seeks the advice of Sir Patrick regarding Arnold's potential marriage to Anne and sees himself freed from the responsibility of marrying her if Scottish law already recognises her as bonded to Arnold. 'After thirty years' practice as a lawyer', Sir Patrick says, 'I don't know what is *not* a marriage in Scotland'.[88] When the scene closes with Geoffrey proclaiming to Anne, 'You are married already to Arnold Brinkworth', she '*drops insensible*' at his feet as the curtain falls.[89] The phrasing of Collins's stage direction, here, echoes the prologue of the novel, where Anne's mother falls 'senseless' at the feet of Mr. Delamayn, Geoffrey's father, the lawyer who proclaims her marriage to have been invalid under Scotch marriage law.[90]

The most significant revision Collins made to the version of *Man and Wife* acted at the Prince of Wales's is in its very last moment. The final act of the play undergoes a revision like the second, one in which Collins's split-stage effect becomes condensed into a single scene. The marriage between Anne and Arnold is brought to a trial, like in the novel, and all characters despair at their inability to stop Geoffrey from exerting his control over Anne, the woman who is now legally his wife. 'The law! the law!', Sir Patrick complains, '*lifting his hands in despair*'.[91] As in the novel, if Geoffrey is to be written out of his father's will and barred from marrying the young widow Mrs.

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[87] Collins, *Man and Wife: A Drama*, 45.
[88] Ibid., 52.
[89] Ibid., 57.
[90] Collins, *Man and Wife*, 21.
[91] Collins, *Man and Wife: A Drama*, 73.

Glenarm, he appears intent on at least exerting his legally-sanctioned control over Anne. Blanche, watching this happen, cries: 'Remember what he said to her! Remember how he looked at her! Sir Patrick, Arnold, will you let him take her away?'[92] At this point, in the Prince of Wales's copy, the published version of the playscript ends, and the final pages have been removed, and replaced by manuscript notes which are written in the hand which has elsewhere been revising and editing the text. The Harvard copy preserves the original ending, in which Geoffrey dies as soon as the trial determines he and Anne to be legally married, effectively rendering Anne a free woman. The manuscript ending, however, in the Prince of Wales's copy, drastically reverses Collins's original ending. Instead of dying, Geoffrey suffers a vague nervous fit and loses the ability to move his arm. Anne, seeing this, ends the play with the following line: 'I forgive him as I hope to be forgiven. Geoffrey, come home'.[93] It is unclear what prompted or who suggested the alterations to the final scene, but what is certain is that the revised ending undermines the play's ability to interrogate the sexual double standard that punished women but not men for extra-marital sex.

The focal point of the 'tendency towards melodrama' and 'several tragical catastrophe' identified by Dutton Cook in *Man and Wife* is the fallen woman. While women with a compromised sexual past had been a familiar theme in plays, novels, and visual art throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, *Man and Wife* was published two decades before the 'woman with a past' would reach her apotheosis on the nineteenth-century stage in such plays as Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1893) and Henry Arthur Jones's *Mrs. Dane's Defence* (1900). While melodrama had policed and punished errant female sexuality since its inception on the British stage at the beginning of the nineteenth century, *Man and Wife* embraces many of melodrama's formal conventions while eschewing some of its sexual conservatism. The 'woman with a past', Anne

[92] Ibid.
[93] Ibid., 74.

Silvester, is punished not because of her pre-marital sex, but because she chose the wrong partner in the lascivious Geoffrey Delamayn. Collins's 'fallen women' have less in common with the repentant or suicidal characters of Jones and Pinero than they do with critical women of Ibsen's works or the satirical parodies of virtue in Wilde's dramas. The revised ending of the play, however, directly undermines the embryonic suggestion in both the novel and the play's original ending of a nascent movement toward a sexual landscape that did not punish female sexual desire. Instead of condemning wholesale the concept of female sexual desire, for instance, the narrator of the novel carves out a space for Anne's sexuality:

> Was she without excuse? No: not utterly without excuse. She had seen him under other aspects than the aspect which he presented now. She had seen him, the hero of the river-race, the first and foremost man in a trial of strength and skill which had roused the enthusiasm of all England. She had seen him, the central object of the interest of a nation; the idol of the popular worship and the popular applause. *His* were the arms whose muscle was celebrated in the newspapers. *He* was first among the heroes hailed by ten thousand roaring throats as the pride and flower of England. A woman, in an atmosphere of red-hot enthusiasm, witnesses the apotheosis of Physical Strength. Is it reasonable – is it just – to expect her to ask herself, in cold blood, What (morally and intellectually) is all this worth? – and that, when the man who is the object of the apotheosis, notices her, is presented to her, finds her to his taste, and singles her out from the rest? No. While humanity is humanity, the woman is not utterly without excuse.[94]

In this passage, offered to the reader even before Geoffrey deserts Anne, the novel works to understand the attraction Anne feels towards him. Instead of offering up their sexual past as a symbol of Anne's fall, the novel suggests a more complex reading that registers both social pressure and physical attraction. The diction Collins employs throughout this passage – 'red-hot enthusiasm,' 'arms whose muscle was celebrated', 'thousand roaring throats', 'the apotheosis of Physical Strength' – offers an especially visceral defence of Anne's sexual attraction to Geoffrey. Swept up in the language of sexually-charged athletic fervour, the novel encourages readers to empathize with Anne,

[94] *Man and Wife*, 77.

couching her actions in an embodied, physical vocabulary. The framing of Anne's sexual attraction to Geoffrey in terms of his sporting achievements echoes the novel's larger dismissal of the assumed relationship between athletic ability and a sense of masculine nobility or goodness.

Indeed, Anne Silvester is explicitly *not* repentant. She regrets her sexual fall, not because of the act itself, but because it was with Geoffrey Delamayn. The novel is at pains to tease out the distinction, however subtle, between regret and repentance. The novel does not condemn Anne because she had premarital sex; rather, it interrogates the dynamic of embracing sexual desire and the attendant hypocrisies of condemning a woman to a life of misery afterwards. The novel explores the dichotomy between human nature, here figured as sexuality, and Victorian adherence to social mores. The original ending of the play, which foregrounded Geoffrey's death and Anne's freedom, comes closer to the novel's interrogation of sexual mores than the revised and, ultimately, performed ending, which restores both Geoffrey's health and his marriage to Anne. The altered ending is in direct contrast to both the ending of the novel and the original ending of Collins's dramatic version, which both punish Geoffrey with death. The divergence between *Man and Wife* as a novel and the version performed at the Prince of Wales's further illustrates the conditions in which Collins was writing for the stage. Torn between his novels which pressed against the boundaries of respectable fiction and the moral exigencies of nineteenth-century drama, *Man and Wife* as a play attempts to cater to both Collins's legacy as a writer of sensational novels and an increasingly genteel theatrical audience.

In *Man and Wife*, Collins merges a lucid exploration of the theme of sexual fall with an incisive critique of arcane Scotch marriage law. These thematic elements, however, exist under the larger thematic umbrella of the novel and, indeed, the majority of Collins's career: interrogating the union of marriage. In contrast to the overdetermining influences of class and wealth, marriage

offered women of the nineteenth century one of the primary avenues in which they could exercise any form of agency, however attenuated, in moulding the shape of their lives. The Victorian concern with nominal determinants of identity – class, family, birth, wealth – is visible cross the artistic spectrum of the nineteenth century: in visual art, novels, plays, and poetry, artists interrogated the broad spectrum of human relationships, the institution of marriage, and human sexuality and desire. *Man and Wife* reflects Collins's enduring interest in exploring the possibilities available to Victorian women to form intimate relationships, and the way those relationships are sanctioned or hindered by a variety of external factors that have little to do with the woman – or the female character – as an individual in possession of both agency and desire. It is not a coincidence that the two works which garnered him the largest theatrical successes of his career – *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen* – offered audiences a blend of the domestic realism newly popularised by the Bancrofts' productions of T. W. Robertson's comedies at the Prince of Wales's with subject matter that appealed to the middle- and upper-middle class audiences which increasingly frequented the West End as the century progressed.

The New Magdalen

Man and Wife is the final work included in Robert Ashley's early, seminal study of Collins's career under the label 'Master Craftsman', followed by the final phase which he labelled 'Novelist Emeritus'.[95] Though scholarship has since called into question such arbitrary divisions between Collins's works of the 1860s and his later, more explicitly didactic, fiction, criticism of Collins's writing nevertheless tends to focus on the early portion of his career. If *Man and Wife* evoked the

[95] Robert Ashley, *Wilkie Collins* (Arthur Barker: London, 1951), 13.

development of Collins's career from one that was strictly literary to one that demonstrated his theatrical aspirations, however, *The New Magdalen* takes that development one step further.

Published in *Temple Bar*, John Maxwell's response to the *Cornhill* then edited by Thackeray, *The New Magdalen* was serialised between October 1872 and June 1873.[96] It is the first of Collins's works to be staged within weeks of the completion of its serial run. As its publication in *Temple Bar* was coming to a close in June, *The New Magdalen* opened at The Olympic on 19 May 1873. This was new for Collins; the tight timeline demanded that the playscript be ready for performance with minimal or no revisions, and could not be a placeholder to protect his dramatic copyright until such a time as he felt ready to stage the work, as he had done with his early adaptation of *Armadale* in 1866, for example, later to be revised into the final stage version, *Miss Gwilt*. The dramatic adaptation of *The New Magdalen* thus resembles the novel to a degree which far outweighs his previous works.

The New Magdalen opens in France, at a cottage on the border of France and Germany, in the midst of the Franco-Prussian War. Mercy Merrick, a stoic nurse bearing the cross of the Geneva Convention, tends to wounded soldiers when Grace Roseberry, an Englishwoman travelling to London from Italy, takes shelter in the same cottage. When torrential rainfall forces the two women to spend the night together, Mercy reveals to Grace – and to the reader – that she used to work as a prostitute, and her occupation as nurse in the war was the only avenue available to her. Grace, so scandalised that she will not even touch Mercy's hand, explains that she was recently orphaned in Italy, with nothing to her name but a letter of introduction to a distant relative by marriage, Lady Janet Roy in London, who has agreed to take her on as companion. As the Germans advance on the

[96] Sarah Kemp, Charlotte Mitchell, and David Trotter (eds), *The Oxford Companion to Edwardian Fiction* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2005); see also Peter Blake, 'The Paradox of a Periodical: *Temple Bar* Magazine under the Editorship of George Augustus Sala (1860-1863)', *The London Journal*, 35:2 (2010), 185-209.

cottage, Grace is struck by a bullet. When Mercy assumes her to be dead, she resolves to impersonate her and take her place in the home of Lady Janet. As the cottage is abandoned, Mercy is sped through the border back to England with the help of Horace Holmcroft, an English journalist, who is clearly impressed by Mercy's beauty.

The narrative then advances four months to the time when Mercy is comfortably settled in Mablethorpe House, Lady Janet's London home. We learn that she is engaged to be married to Horace Holmcroft, who, along with Lady Janet, assumes her to be Grace Roseberry. Mercy's refusal to set a date for the wedding, and thus marry Horace under an assumed identity, confuses both her fiancé and Lady Janet, who try and fail to persuade her to set the date. Just as Lady Janet is on the brink of succeeding, her nephew Julian Gray, an English clergyman, appears at her home bearing important news. Julian recoils in surprise when he is introduced to Mercy as Grace Roseberry and reveals to Lady Janet that he himself has committed to helping a woman he met in Europe who herself claims to be Grace Roseberry.

When Julian brings the real Grace to Mablethorpe House, Mercy faints upon seeing her, and her reaction is readily explained away by her shock at seeing the woman she had taken for dead to be alive once again. Julian nevertheless insists on helping the real Grace, whom both Lady Janet and Horace brand an adventuress, and he ultimately discovers the story of Mercy's impersonation. Not satisfied with leaving Julian to manage her affairs, the resolute Grace sneaks into Mablethorpe House to confront Mercy herself. Just as Mercy had resolved to confess all and return to the Refuge in which she had once lived, Grace's arrogance and insults get the better of Mercy's docile, forbearing nature and Mercy doubles down on her claim to Lady Janet's love and affection.

Only when Mercy understands that the true Grace is to be sent to a madhouse does she decide to confess and prevent Grace being taken away. First, she reveals the truth to Horace, who

breaks off their engagement and refuses even to extend a hand to her, echoing Grace and Mercy's initial meeting in the French cottage. Then, Mercy's numerous attempts to confess the truth to Lady Janet are rebuffed, and it becomes clear that Lady Janet has already worked out the truth on her own, and because she has grown so attached to her, refuses to allow Mercy to leave. Even when faced with the prospect of remaining in Mablethorpe House with Lady Janet's express sanction, Mercy opts to return with the matron of the refuge in which she once lived, rather than continue living with her guilt.

Julian, having fallen in love with her immediately, has by now proposed several times to Mercy, and leaves his career as a clergyman to take up manual labour, not unlike Walter Hartright's journey to Central America when he learns he cannot marry Laura Fairlie. When Julian becomes ill and mumbles only Mercy's name, it is the doctor's opinion that only the presence of Mercy at his sickbed will induce his recovery. Lady Janet, risking a scandal in London society, visits the refuge first to apologise to Mercy and finally to convince her to come to Julian's rescue. When Julian recovers, Mercy finally assents to marry him, and Lady Janet throws a ball in their honour. When it becomes clear that the members of London society whom Lady Janet has invited to their ball have all conveniently left their unmarried (and therefore susceptible to corruption) daughters at home, Julian and Mercy suffer one final insult and emigrate the following day to America.

Unlike his previous dramatic adaptations, the stage version of *The New Magdalen* makes no significant alterations to the novel's plot, and reviewers of the novel commented on the similarities between the two works. The reviewer of the novel for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, for instance, offered the following decidedly unflattering analogy for Collins's simultaneous writing practice:

> We should be inclined to suspect that the drama was written first, and that the novel is merely an expansion of it; but it may be the case that both were written at the same time, in much the same way as boys in writing their impositions, by an ingenious mode

> of holding two pens, manage to write two lines at the same time.[97]

It was not only reviewers of the novel who picked up on the evident similarity between the stage production and its novelistic original. In reviewing the opening of *The New Magdalen* at The Olympic, the reviewer for the *Times* offered the following claim which echoes that of the *Pall Mall Gazette*:

> When a play is founded on a novel, its plot is seldom quite intelligible to those who have not previously become acquainted with it in a narrative form. No drama, however, could be more complete in itself than the *New Magdalen*. It is said, indeed, of Mr. Collins that he does not turn his novels into plays, but writes two works independent of each other on one common subject. Whether this is the case we know not, but the new piece certainly favours the belief that rumour has spoken the truth.[98]

The reviewer for the *Times* picked up on a thread which ran its way consistently through Collins's literary and dramatic careers, namely that his capacious and complex plots were both challenging to the modern reader and difficult to adapt into a dramatic format. Indeed, Collins's early works – *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armadale*, and *The Moonstone*, for instance – all required extensive simplifying when shifting from a lengthy three-volume novel to a three-hour performance. The same is true of *Man and Wife*; Collins regularly omits several characters and key incidents in his dramatic adaptations of these works, which has led to the well-rehearsed criticism that his plays pale in comparison to their novelistic originals. Indeed, in a review of the novel's published format after its serialised run, the reviewer for *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* claimed that 'The story of *The New Magdalen* is short, the characters are few, the plot is simple; but the whole story is wrought with that consummate skill and that perfection of detail which render its author without a peer in his peculiar province'.[99] This review of the novel echoes reviews of *The New Magdalen*'s stage version in focusing on the way it shares the novel's relative simplicity, and its focus on motivation and judgment rather

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[97] *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 June 1873), 12.
[98] *The Times* (21 May 1873), 14.
[99] *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1 July 1873), 301.

than complex plot development, which was in itself a radical shift in Collins's career. The misplaced letters, secret rooms, and murderous villains of his previous novels are all absent in *The New Magdalen* and have been replaced by lengthy meditations on morality, hypocrisy, and redemption.

This is not to say that reviewers were unanimously in favour of the purported morals of Collins's novel. The reviewer for the *Graphic* baldly stated that 'We cannot congratulate Mr. Wilkie Collins either upon his choice of a subject in [*sic*] his manner of treating it'.[100] Despite calling the novel "eminently readable", this same reviewer went on to argue that 'Magdalens, beautiful or otherwise, have doubtless a right to compassion and charity, but they are not nice subjects for heroines, even when they supplement unchastity by systematic imposture'.[101] The *Pall Mall Gazette* found issue not simply with the portrayal of a repentant prostitute, but also in the way Collins's novel essentially lays the blame at society's feet: 'Mr. Wilkie Collins, having done his little to render an unhealthy literature still more unhealthy, falls of course to abuse the age in which he lives, and to call its civilization "rotten to its core"'.[102] This reviewer quotes a scene from the novel directly, in which the Matron of the Refuge who has come to take Mercy with her has brought a child from the streets, also intended for the refuge, to Mablethorpe House. The narrator heavy-handedly describes this girl as 'the savage and terrible product of a worn-out system of government and of a civilization rotten to its core!'[103] Some reviewers were, however, more judicious in their condemnation of Mercy's actions. *The Woman's Journal*, for example, carefully navigated the line between the moral of the novel and Mercy's criminal conduct:

> We do not approve the imposture of which Mercy Merrick was guilty, although it was partially justifiable from her standpoint […] The agony, remorse, heart-sickenings and disappointments, which are shown to attend the struggles of the fallen Woman to regain a respectable place in society, are painted in colors sufficiently strong, by Mr.

[100] *Graphic* (28 June 1873), 602.
[101] Ibid.
[102] *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 June 1873), 12.
[103] Wilkie Collins, *The New Magdalen* (Alan Sutton: Stroud, 1993), 198.

> Collins, to counterbalance her eventual triumph in marrying a good man, who after all, is socially tabooed in consequence. […] There are some moral flaws in the story certainly. But its chief aim, to which every detail points indisputably, is the elevation of the fallen.[104]

As reviewers grappled with the moral implications of Collins's novel, they provided a generally unified front in praising its technical merit. The *Bradford Observer* noted that while 'Mr. Wilkie Collins has now taken his New Magdalen beyond the point at which the reader wonders as to what her fate will be, but, for all that, the story is still the leading feature of the magazine [*Temple Bar*]'.[105] *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* was effusive in its praise, claiming that *The New Magdalen* 'ranks among the best of Wilkie Collins's romances – that is, among the best productions of the best of modern romance-writers'.[106] The dichotomy between the perceived lapse in moral judgment of *The New Magdalen* and the evident enjoyment it produced in readers and audiences alike would become a consistently thorny point in both Collins's career and for the sexual problem play of the latter portion of the nineteenth century more generally. More conservative critics balked at the audacity of making a prostitute, however repentant, the heroine of his work. The fallen woman was not, however, a new invention in either the novel or the drama, and while more liberal critics could stomach a novel or a play *about* a prostitute, Collins not only lets Mercy close the work alive, she is rewarded with a marriage to a respected English clergyman.

Mercy's ending, of course, is loaded with caveats. She is spurned first by Horace Holmcroft, for having lied about her identity, and then by Lady Janet, for insisting on confessing the truth. She resigns herself to life in the Refuge, and repeatedly ignores Julian's numerous proposals of marriage, until he finds himself on his death bed and the only cure is Mercy's presence at his sickbed. In this way, she resumes the position in which we first meet her at the beginning of the novel: that of stoic

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[104] *The Woman's Journal* (28 June 1873), 208.
[105] *The Bradford Observer* (7 June 1873), 6.
[106] *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* (1 July 1873), 301.

nurse caring for wounded soldiers at their bedside, a martyr who would rather succumb to the horrors of war than abandon her charges. Once she and Julian are at last married, she suffers one final insult at the hands of London society, and she and Julian emigrate immediately to America in order to forge a new life for themselves.

The extent to which the ending of *The New Magdalen* undermines its radical potential, or vice versa, is best understood in the context of the fallen woman on the nineteenth-century stage and in the nineteenth-century novel. That Mercy simply ends the novel alive (caveats notwithstanding) is in itself radical when compared with the typically proscribed ending for such characters either succumbing to disease or other conveniently wrought deaths, most famously exemplified by Marguerite Gautier in Dumas, *fils*'s *La Dame aux Camélias* (1848), which had a long afterlife on the English stage. By making Grace Roseberry haughty and arrogant in comparison to Mercy's acquiescent docility, however, *The New Magdalen* undermines part of its own radical potential by rewarding Mercy's submissive demeanour. Though making the sexually experienced Mercy more mild and forbearing than the virginal Grace was itself radical, *The New Magdalen* ultimately finds value in Mercy's passive femininity. Even the reviewer for *The Woman's Journal*, who is elsewhere sympathetic with the moral of Collins's novel, decorously sidesteps condoning Mercy's sexual history: 'Would it be just or generous to sincere efforts toward reformation, constantly to probe the wound that must inevitably rankle in a remorseful heart, by making the shame of the past, a prominent reflection forever?'[107] As the characters grapple with the revelation that the woman they assume to be Grace Roseberry is actually Mercy Merrick, both the novel and play sidestep any explicit discussion of prostitution. Because Mercy confesses having worked as a prostitute to Grace in the prologue, the 'social evil' lingers in the minds of both audiences and readers, but is never

[107] *The Woman's Journal* (28 June 1873), 208.

named outright by the entourage at Mablethorpe House.[108] *The New Magdalen* struggles to reconcile Collins's commitment to integrating women who have worked as prostitutes into society with the risk of alienating the middle-class audiences to which both he and theatre as an institution were becoming increasingly attuned as the century progressed. *The New Magdalen*'s inability to face head on 'the shame of the past' is what undermines its ability to convey a lucid, political statement; though it embraces a sensational subject matter, its treatment of that theme works to partially undercut its radical potential. This dynamic, torn between his commitment to a number of political causes and the moral sensibilities of an increasingly gentrified cultural landscape, would come to characterise Collins's career as he continued to write both novels and plays.

The language of *The New Magdalen* builds on Collins's previous female characters and their explorations of both sexuality and desire. This is especially evident in Mercy's beauty and the effect it has on the people, particularly the men, around her – a trait she shares, for example, with both Anne Silvester and Lydia Gwilt. As she explains to Grace, 'I have the misfortune (in my situation) to be what is called a handsome woman; I rouse the curiosity of strangers'.[109] When Mercy first presents herself at Mablethorpe House, Lady Janet does not even bother to read Grace's letter of introduction, claiming that 'Your face is your introduction, my dear; your father can say nothing for you which you have not already said for yourself'.[110] When Julian first meets Mercy, he apparently sees in her face the history of her past: 'She was beginning to perplex as well as to interest him. "No common sorrow", he thought, "has set its mark on that woman's face; no common heart beats in that woman's breast. Who can she be?"'[111] Later, when Julian rouses Horace's jealousy by taking an interest in Mercy, Julian questions his own honour: "After only once seeing her,' he thought, 'has

[108] See Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 9.
[109] Collins, *The New Magdalen*, 10.
[110] Ibid., 32.
[111] Ibid., 47.

she produced such an impression on me that Horace can discover it, before I have even suspected it myself? Can the time have come already when I owe it to my friend to see her no more?"[112] Julian also explicitly links his attraction to Mercy to his conviction that she will act honourably and confess the truth to Horace and Lady Janet:

> The only remedy now left to try was the desperate remedy of letting things take their course, and trusting implicitly to Mercy's better nature for the result. […] If Julian's confidence in her was a confidence soundly placed, she would nobly pardon the outrages that had been heaped upon her, and she would do justice to the woman whom she had wronged. If, on the other hand, his belief in her was nothing better than the blind belief of an infatuated man—if she faced the alternative and persisted in asserting her assumed identity—what then?
>
> Julian's faith in Mercy refused to let that darker side of the question find a place in his thoughts.[113]

By this point in the novel, Julian has no reason to believe that Mercy's 'better nature' even exists, let alone that she will act upon it. He nevertheless trusts that she will restore her place to the real Grace Roseberry, and the only solid foundation of their relationship is his attraction to her. As the police officer who has been hired to take Grace to the madhouse wryly observes, 'The nice-looking woman is always at the bottom of it; and, sooner or later, the nice-looking woman has her way'.[114]

The depictions of Magdalen's radiant beauty echo a larger nineteenth-century discussion that read latent capacities for good and evil within the pseudo-scientific framework of physiognomy, reading her face as an indicator of her character. Such discussions were especially evident in visual art, particularly among the Pre-Raphaelite painters who, not coincidentally, returned consistently to the theme of feminine virtue and sexuality in their paintings.[115] The reviewer of the novel for the *Pall*

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[112] Ibid., 71.
[113] Ibid., 124.
[114] Ibid., 129.
[115] See Julie F. Codell, 'Expression over Beauty: Facial Expression, Body Language, and Circumstantiality in the Paintings of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood', *Victorian Studies*, 29:2 (1986), 255-290; Jeanne Fahnestock, 'The Heroine of Irregular Features: Physiognomy and Conventions of Heroine Description', *Victorian Studies*, 24:3 (1981), 325-350; Lucy Hartley, 'Putting the Drama into Everyday Life: The Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and a Very Ordinary Aesthetic',

Mall Gazette equally judges the morality of the novel in the language of visual art: 'Like as those who spend a summer's afternoon in a gallery of modern pictures get their eyes so spoilt by the glare of the colours that they can no longer come to any correct judgment, so the critics who have to read the modern novels get their sense of propriety so blunted that they can no longer tell what is proper and what is improper'.[116] Such logic in *The New Magdalen*, moreover, does not apply solely to its female characters; the narrator provides the reader with the following description of Horace Holmcroft:

> Men—especially men skilled in observing physiognomy—might have noticed in the shape of his forehead and in the line of his upper lip the signs indicative of a moral nature deficient in largeness and breadth—of a mind easily accessible to strong prejudices, and obstinate in maintaining those prejudices in the face of conviction itself.
>
> To the observation of women these remote defects were too far below the surface to be visible. He charmed the sex in general by his rare personal advantages, and by the graceful deference of his manner.[117]

The observation of Horace's deficient moral nature here sets up his later refusal to forgive Mercy, and his immediate abandonment of their engagement without so much as a backwards glance at his fiancée. When Horace later oversteps and offends Lady Janet, she instantly compares him with her nephew, Julian:

> For the first time in her life she found herself comparing Horace with Julian—to Horace's disadvantage. He was rich; he was a gentleman of ancient lineage; he bore an unblemished character. But who had the strong brain? who had the great heart? Which was the Man of the two?[118]

The juxtaposition of Horace's wealth, ancient lineage, and unblemished character – all important markers of value in the marriage market of Victorian society – with Julian's more abstract virtues

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Journal of Victorian Culture, 7:2 (2002), 173-195; J. B. Bullen, *The Pre-Raphaelite Body: Fear and Desire in Painting, Poetry, and Criticism* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1998).

[116] *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 June 1873), 12.

[117] Collins, *The New Magdalen*, 35.

[118] Ibid., 87.

echoes Collins's consistent suspicion of the institution of marriage, a suspicion which shaped the majority of his writing career. As Mercy navigates a relationship between these two partners, the pseudo-scientific framework of physiognomy exposes the contrast between Horace's 'graceful deference of manner' and his moral failure. The hypocrisy legible in Horace's face stands in contrast to the virtue legible in both Julian and Mercy's.

That Mercy's actions are steeped in the biblical language of temptation is not a coincidence. When Mercy is presented with the opportunity of impersonating Grace and passing through the German lines under the auspices of Horace's influence as a journalist, the narrator intervenes and offers the following: 'If she could only have been absorbed again, mind and body, in her good work as a nurse, the temptation might even yet have found her strong enough to resist it'.[119] The stark title of this chapter is, simply, 'Temptation'.[120] Later, when Lady Janet continuously rebuffs Mercy's attempts to confess to her the truth, Julian warns her against the 'renewed temptation' of remaining at Mablethorpe House.[121] The framework of 'temptation' serves a dual purpose: it simultaneously reinforces the image of Mercy as the Edenic fallen woman yearning for a prelapsarian past, while also muddying Mercy's guilt in assuming Grace's identity. The language of 'temptation' employed throughout the novel locates Mercy's crime in the wider, religious context of sin, confession, and forgiveness. This is not to say that she is innocent – neither the novel, its readers, nor its reviewers claims this – but rather that *The New Magdalen* portrays its characters struggling with morality, conflicting motivations, and their own underlying capacities for good and evil, a theme which Collins first explored at length in *No Name*.

[119] Ibid., 25.
[120] Ibid., 18.
[121] Ibid., 146.

In a sense, however, *The New Magdalen* is the mirror image of *No Name*. Though Grace Roseberry, like Magdalen Vanstone, has lost her identity, the novel's protagonist is clearly Mercy Merrick. The reader's sympathies, however, are naturally torn between the virtuous Mercy and the unsympathetic Grace who, after all, has been robbed of the legal right to her name. In this sense, then, *The New Magdalen* builds on themes which were already familiar in Collins's writing, namely anxieties surrounding the fragility of legal identity. But *The New Magdalen* pushes readers further, in attempting to elicit sympathy not simply for a woman who was once a prostitute, but one who also assumes the identity of another. Whatever readers and reviewers thought of it, the novel does not assign moral judgment to any of its characters, shedding a moral binary in favour of lengthy explorations of motivation. After Grace's first appearance at Mablethorpe House, the narrator is unable to describe what any of the central characters feel:

> Not by so much as a hair-breadth was the position of the false Grace Roseberry shaken by the first appearance of the true Grace Roseberry within the doors of Mablethorpe House. Lady Janet felt suddenly repelled, without knowing why. Julian and Horace felt suddenly repelled, without knowing why. Asked to describe their own sensations at the moment, they would have shaken their heads in despair, and would have answered in those words. The vague presentiment of some misfortune to come had entered the room with the entrance of the woman in black. But it moved invisibly; and it spoke as all presentiments speak, in the Unknown Tongue.[122]

This passage echoes Dorothea Brooke's wedding journey in *Middlemarch* (1871), when, gazing out over Rome in the character of a married woman, Eliot's narrator struggles to explain why Dorothea is crying.[123] The link between Eliot's eminently realist novel and *The New Magdalen* is not arbitrary; in writing more extensively for the stage, Collins repeatedly engaged with and often frustrated the moral binary more familiar to stage melodrama than to the realist novel. In the dramatic adaptations written prior to 1873, Collins explored themes in a manner more consistent with the equivocal

[122] Ibid., 64.
[123] George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2019), ch. XX.

morality of the novel than with the relative binaries of stage melodrama's hero-and-villain dynamic, and he did so again in *The New Magdalen*, which thoughtfully elicits sympathy for its various characters. Just as the novel trades in the nebulous feeling of sympathy, Collins's narrator opts to describe only a 'vague presentiment' felt by those living at Mablethorpe House. Collins's previous works marked limits to narratorial knowledge by imposing elaborate narrative structures in the form of diary entries, witness testimony, and written correspondence. *The New Magdalen* marks that limit much less explicitly, and in doing so gestures towards an increasingly psychologised cultural landscape. George Taylor has argued that

> Victorian actors employed a basically emotional analysis of character. Of course there were reasons why characters felt different emotions at different times, and expression varied with personality and social background, as well as with the style of the play, but they seldom seemed to be driven by unconscious motives. Guilt was not suppressed, but was indulged as an agony assuaged only by further crimes. Although some characters were presented as 'naturally' good or 'naturally' evil, the reasons for these propensities were unambiguous. The same quality can be found in the early Victorian novels of Ainsworth, Dickens, Wilkie Collins and Thackeray, but later, in the works of Meredith, George Eliot, Henry James and Thomas Hardy, the psychological complexity increased; characters behave according to 'instincts' or 'conditioning', of which they are hardly aware.[124]

The New Magdalen, however, offers a midway point between the 'unambiguous' propensities of early Victorian drama and novels, and the increasing psychological complexity of writers towards the end of the century. The same shift occurs within Collins's own body of work. Marian Halcombe, for instance, is narrowly focused on rescuing her sister Laura Fairlie; Mercy Merrick, however, struggles between the instinct of self-preservation and the more abstract concept of justice.

This is not simply an issue of perspective in that the reader does not have access to the inner workings of these characters' minds because the reader inhabits only Mercy's perspective. The novel features several instances of rhetorical asides which arise seemingly out of nowhere and are not

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[124] George Taylor, *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theatre* (Manchester University Press: Manchester, 1989), 152.

attributed to a character.[125] In shifting the focal point away from a single character's perspective, and in eschewing the practice of explicating what a character is thinking, *The New Magdalen* demonstrates the effect that writing simultaneously for the stage had on Collins's novel-writing. In other words, it shifted the psychologising work typically done by an intrusive narrator to occur in moments of dialogue which were readily translated wholesale into the stage adaptation. This also necessitates a shift in narrative focus, and the simplified plot of *The New Magdalen* relative to Collins's other works allows the space necessary for the focal point to shift from complex plots to complex characters and conflicting motivations. Collins externalises his characters' inner psychologies not in the asides or soliloquies familiar to the stage, but in lengthy conversations, thus allowing his characters to do the work typically reserved for the privileged narrator of the realist novel. It is not a coincidence, then, that Collins makes few noticeable changes to the stage version of *The New Magdalen*. The plot points remain identical, no characters are added or omitted, and entire portions of dialogue are simply repeated onstage.

Collins's dramatic version, *The New Magdalen: A Dramatic Story, in a Prologue and Three Acts* opened at The Olympic on 19 May 1873, with Ada Cavendish, then manager of the theatre, in the title role, opposite Frank Archer as Julian Gray. The play was revived numerous times throughout the nineteenth century and proved to be the most frequently revived of Collins's dramatic adaptations.[126] The production of *The New Magdalen*, more so than *Man and Wife*, marked a watershed moment in Collins's career: gone were the itinerant, capacious plots of his earlier novels, replaced by conversations in sumptuous drawing rooms and around society dinner tables.

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[125] Collins, *The New Magdalen*, 95, 112, 118.
[126] Charing Cross (1875); Novelty (1884); The Margate Theatre Royal (1885); The Oldham Colosseum (1887); and Marlborough (1906).

While the play ran for four months prior to its provincial tour, critics in the press constantly returned to its 'dangerous' morality, and predictably centred their discussions on the propriety of both making a fallen woman the heroine of his play, while also allowing that heroine a happy resolution in marriage. The reviewer for the *Times*, for instance, noted that 'The piece is evidently written in that didactic spirit which distinguishes the works of Mr. Wilkie Collins, who in this case would extol to the highest possible degree the virtue of contrition. Most writers whose ethics take the same direction end their story with the death of the penitent'.[127] The *Times* reviewer goes on to compare Collins with the German dramatist August von Kotzebue, whose popular works came under fire over half a century earlier for their perceived immorality: 'Mr. Collins has shown himself a bolder man than Kotzebue, teaching, as he does, that penitence sufficiently overbalances any amount of guilt, and merits a reward in this world as well as in the next'.[128] Echoing the *Times*, the reviewer for the *Graphic* noted that 'Had it been a tragic story, pure and simple, and had Mercy Merrick, refusing all help, and turning aside from man's love, gone sadly and resolutely back to the Refuge, a powerful denouement would have been obtained, and possibly a better moral held forth'.[129] The *Pall Mall Gazette* echoed the comparison with Kotzebue: 'The force and ingenuity with which this story is set forth upon the stage are insufficient to mask its essential unwholesomeness and its tone of morbid sentimentalism, which entitle it to be fairly classed with dramatic writings of the school of Kotzebue'.[130]

One reviewer condemned Collins's 'rather extraordinary views of morality', stating that 'The story told by Mr. Wilkie Collins is altogether favourable to Magdalens, new or old', while another claimed that 'a good many will certainly, while admiring the boldness and freedom of the author,

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[127] *The Times* (21 May 1873), 14.
[128] Ibid.
[129] *The Graphic* (24 May 1873), 487.
[130] *The Pall Mall Gazette* (21 May 1873), 10.

cavil at the propriety of introducing such a character as the heroine on the stage'.[131] The reviewer for *Reynolds's Newspaper* ironically stated that 'The moral of the piece is that repentance covers a multitude of sins. The courage he has displayed in making a fallen woman the heroine of his piece at a theatre frequented by fashionable and fastidious audiences has met with its due reward – unequivocal success'.[132] As with the sexual problem play of the fin de siècle, as well as the sensation novel of the 1860s, the critical press struggled to reconcile the perceived immorality of these works with their abundant audience success. Having evaded censorship from the Examiner of Plays, once produced onstage, for better or worse, if they continued to sell tickets they would continue to be performed.

The reviewer for the *Graphic* also offered the following condemnation: 'Mr. Wilkie Collins's drama of The New Magdalen was produced at the Olympic Theatre on Monday evening last with complete success, despite the dangerous nature of the plot, and the peculiar theory which the play appears to suggest', going on to claim that 'No bolder experiment has been attempted on the stage by a modern dramatist than this effort, and successful effort, to enlist the sympathies of an audience in the nefarious conduct of a characterless woman, who at the eleventh hour repents of the evil that she has created'.[133] Nevertheless, while critics almost universally condemned the play's perceived immorality, they consistently echoed each other in their praise of the piece: *The Sporting Times*, for instance, accurately predicted the play's future success: 'Bad dramas are now-a-days so constantly recurring and ubiquitous a malady, and the production of a good play is so rare an exception to a deplorable general rule that notwithstanding the questionable doctrine it inculcates, "The New

[131] *Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* (24 May 1873), 2; *The Liverpool Mercury* (3 December 1873), 3.
[132] *Reynolds's Newspaper* (25 May 1873), 4.
[133] *The Graphic* (24 May 1873), 487.

Magdalen" will probably for some months to come usurp the place of the more virtuous drama at the little theatre in Wych-street'.[134]

The critical conversation surrounding *The New Magdalen* exposes the constant struggle in Collins's career between satisfying the morality of reviewers while also responding to the evident demand of audiences and readers for works which stretched the boundaries of Victorian propriety to their limit. Too narrowly focusing this discussion on the play's moral precepts, however, threatens to overshadow its technical innovations and the ways it engages with the emergent form of domestic realism which would come to dominate the stage towards the end of the century. In both *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen*, the fallen woman operates as the work's gravitational centre, and certainly for dramatic critics Anne Silvester and Mercy Merrick tended to distract from discussions of style and form. The purpose of this chapter, therefore, is to once again place these works in the context of the stage in the 1870s, a period which developed the fusion of psychological complexity and domestic realism that would come to characterise many of the most popular plays of the end of the century.

One scene in particular illustrates Collins's early suggestion of the interplay between subdued, domestic realism and psychologically complex drama. After Mercy faints upon seeing the true Grace alive for the first time, she and Julian find themselves alone together in the dining room of Mablethorpe House. In an effort to stem her anxiety, Mercy busies herself with a basket of wool brought to her by a servant. The novel narrates the events which take place identically onstage: 'Mercy's work-basket was near her. She took it, and gained time for composing herself by pretending to arrange the coloured wools'.[135] She discovers that her skeins are tangled, and Julian steps in to

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[134] *The Sporting Times* (24 May 1873), 165.
[135] Collins, *The New Magdalen*, 253; see also Wilkie Collins, *The New Magdalen: A Dramatic Story in a Prologue and Three Acts* (London: Published by the Author, 1873), 54-56.

help her unravel them. While their hands are busy with the decidedly domestic activity of detangling wool skeins, they discuss the appearance of the woman claiming to be Grace Roseberry in the house and Mercy's fitful reaction. In the novel, the narrator is free to describe the action:

> He took a stool at her feet, and set himself to unravel one of the tangled skeins. In a minute the wool was stretched on his hands, and the loose end was ready for Mercy to wind. There was something in the trivial action, and in the homely attention that it implied, which in some degree quieted her fear of him. She began to roll the wool off his hands into a ball. Thus occupied, she said the daring words which were to lead him little by little into betraying his suspicions, if he did indeed suspect the truth.[136]

In the play, this work is done by stage direction, but the tenor of the scene remains the same: Julian and Mercy discuss the appearance of the true Grace Roseberry, and its attendant implications, against the backdrop of an activity not unlike Polly Eccles preparing tea in *Caste*. This is a radical departure from Collins's earlier works, as well as the sensation dramas of the 1860s, which relied on theatres' emerging technical ingenuity to produce ever larger and more spectacular scenes of visual interest.[137] Instead, it is altogether likely that Collins had in mind the Prince of Wales's brand of domestic realism as he wrote the scene both in the novel and in the play. While Errol Durbach has argued that such domestic objects in the works of Robertson 'serve both to inhibit the demonstration of passion and to deflate its expression', it is precisely the contrast between the subdued action and intense emotion which the domestic gesture underscores.[138] 'One of the novelties of French acting', writes Alan S. Downer, 'was its quietness. […] The second novelty was in the manner of stage business'.[139] In *The New Magdalen*, Collins blends his exploration of England's sexual double standard with the stylistic influence of French drama and acting.

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136 Ibid., 99.
137 See Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre* 1850-1910 (Routledge & Kegan Paul: London, 1981).
138 Errol Durbach, 'Remembering Tom Robertson (1829-1871)', *Educational Theatre Journal*, 24:3 (1972), 285.
139 Alan S. Downer, 'Players and the Painted Stage: Nineteenth-Century Acting', *PMLA*, 61:2 (1946), 551.

Gone are the wandering narrative and sensational episodes of *The Woman in White* and *No Name*; *The New Magdalen* takes places almost entirely within the confines of the respectable walls of Mablethorpe House. The brief prologue, which occurs within a small cottage in the middle of a war, is quickly left behind as the narrative speeds along to London society. As the reviewer for *The Sporting Times* noted, 'The piece calls for no great display of scenery, but where opportunities arise the work of the scenic artist is, as usual, remarkable for judgment and taste'.[140] In his earlier works, Collins tested the limits of dramatic and novelistic propriety by having his characters impersonate each other, plot murder, and appear and disappear from view. *The New Magdalen* emblematises a distinct shift away from the commodious plots of these earlier novels to a narrative framework which both lent itself to dramatic versions and incorporated the psychologising techniques of the stage. That is to say, the higher proportions of dialogue in his later novels indicate both his interest in staging them as well as focalising the interest of those works on the interiority of their characters, as opposed to their actions. *The New Magdalen* is not about whether Mercy will get caught, but rather whether or not she will confess. The distinction is subtle but important: the former drums up suspense in a manner consistent with earlier sensation drama, the latter explores Mercy's psychology and her conflicting desires.[141]

The play's reviewers, while reluctant to approve of the work's dubious morality, nevertheless acknowledged the quality of *The New Magdalen*. As reviewers of the novel did, dramatic critics had to reckon with a work which took familiar themes (fallen women, repentance, falsified identity) and presented them in a manner which perversely enlisted audience sympathy for a social outcast. As the reviewer for the *Sporting Times* noted, the play 'has the radical defect of inviting

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[140] *The Sporting Times* (24 May 1873), 165.

[141] This is not to say that the sensation drama lacked psychological interiority (indeed I argue the opposite in Chapter 1), but rather that the psychologising work of *The New Magdalen* is more in line with the domestic realism of Robertson and later writers than with Boucicault's and Collins's own earlier sensation dramas.

sympathy on behalf of a person whose actions prove her to be almost utterly worthless'.[142] Still, in a review of the play's provincial tour, the *Liverpool Mercury* noted their approval of the work, despite its perceived baseness: 'In this instance the author has shown a keen appreciation of true stage effect, and has, with a firm and skilful hand, woven a plot which for dramatic impressiveness and admirably arranged ingredients has scarcely been equalled in modern times'.[143] Likewise, the ironic reviewer for *Reynolds's Newspaper* was, despite their recalcitrance, forced to admit that the play 'is full of dramatic incidents; and this is developed to the very utmost by the masterly manner in which Mr. Collins has adapted his novel to the stage'.[144] For the first time in Collins's dramatic career, the usual lengthy discussion of his adaptive process – what he chose to omit, revise, and edit in his dramatisation – is entirely absent from the play's reviews. Unlike reviews for his earlier plays (*The Woman in White* in particular), where reviewers blended their thoughts on the piece with prolonged meditations on the possibility or impossibility of adapting Collins's infamously intricate novels for the stage, reviews of *The New Magdalen* demonstrate a relatively narrow focus on the work's morals and dramatic quality.

Collins's dramatic writing would never again reach the success it enjoyed in 1873. Though *The New Magdalen* would go on to be revived until the end of the century, Oscar Wilde would later advise a young Elizabeth Robins not to appear in a proposed revival of *Man and Wife*, telling her 'the English public finds it tedious'.[145] While his dramatic success was short-lived, however, the influence of writing for the stage left its mark indelibly on Collins's fiction, a gradual process which reached its peak with *The New Magdalen*. Even later novels which Collins never intended to portray on the stage, such as *The Law and the Lady* (1875) and *Heart and Science* (1883), are indebted to the influence of his writing for the theatre. They bear a higher proportion of dialogue than his earlier novels, the scenes

[142] *The Sporting Times* (24 May 1873), 165.
[143] *The Liverpool Mercury* (3 December 1873), 3.
[144] *Reynolds's Newspaper* (25 May 1873), 4.
[145] Lycett, *Wilkie Collins*, 399.

are constructed against backdrops which increasingly appear like sets, and his once omniscient and intrusive narrative voice fades into the background, deferring to the authority of his characters. While depicting sexuality and interrogating hypocrisy and double standards would remain a concern for the rest of his career, the failure of his novel *The Fallen Leaves* in 1879, a heavy-handedly titled novel which deals with no fewer than four separate fallen women, stands in stark contrast to the success of *The New Magdalen*. By the end of the century, as the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood disbanded, the French drama loosened its vice-grip on the English stage, and the realist novel sought new subject matter and style, the taste for Collins's commodious and moralising plots had begun to wane. As English drama would continue to seek increasingly creative ways to explore both the sexual double standard and female sexuality, the popularity of these later works would come to eclipse, both in the critical and popular imaginations, the memory of Collins's earlier works centred around the same subjects. Given the praise heaped on *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, as the critic reviewing Pinero's play for *The Era* put it in 1895, 'one would imagine that such plays as *Camille*, *The New Magdalen*, *Man and Wife*, and *Charity* had never been written'.[146]

[146] *The Era* (22 June 1895), 19, quoted in Eltis, *Acts of Desire*, 157.

Chapter 3
Repulsive Motives, Crime, and Detection

Armadale/Miss Gwilt

By 1875, Collins had solidified his reputation as a writer of both excellent novels and dramas: four of his plays had enjoyed runs of over one hundred nights and were being performed both in the provinces and in America. If the 1860s saw his development and growth as a novelist, not just of lowbrow sensationalism but of complex, thoughtful works, it is also the period when his career as a playwright began to crystallise. This is evident in the production of *Armadale*, Collins's longest novel, and the first of his works to be published simultaneously as both a novel and a play. Collins had not done this with his previous works, including *The Woman in White* and *No Name*, and had therefore surrendered his exclusive right to produce those works dramatically. *Armadale: A Drama in Three Acts* was published in 1866, and, though no record of its copyright performance exists, it is likely to have occurred given that the 1863 case *Tinsley v. Lacy* had established the precedent of the requisite performance in order to establish dramatic copyright. Though *Armadale: A Drama in Three Acts* was published in 1866, the play itself would not be performed until 1875, with a radically altered script and an entirely new title: *Miss Gwilt: A Drama in Five Acts*. Copies of the 1866 dramatisation are held in the Harvard Theatre Collection and the Huntington Library, while the 1875 text sent to the Examiner of Plays for licensing is held in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection of the British Library.

The play opened at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool, in December 1875, and later transferred to London's Globe Theatre in April 1876. *Miss Gwilt* ran for twelve weeks in London, before Ada Cavendish revived the role in 1879 at Wallack's Theatre in New York.[1] Later in his career, Collins referred to the 1866 dramatisation of *Armadale* as 'little better than the record of a failure…it has never been, and never can be, performed on the stage'.[2] In *Miss Gwilt*, Collins fundamentally changed the premise of the original dramatic work and the novel, resulting in what are essentially two theatrical works of diametrically opposed natures. Comparison of the two adaptations – written nearly a decade apart – illustrates Collins's growth as a playwright during this period and the influence of his theatrical experience on his dramatic writing. The 1866 play *Armadale* is a work steeped in the sensational nature of Collins's earlier writing: the plot is complex and reliant on dates, the characters spend more time plotting murder than interacting with each other, and the stage direction is often clunky and overdetermined. *Miss Gwilt*, on the other hand, is a play that bears the distinct influence of the theatrical productions that occurred between 1866 and 1875: a stripping down of sensational plot devices and a dramatic focus shifted onto questions of marriage and romantic tension. 'This time, the novel is not like the 'Magdalen' a novel ready made to the dramatist's hands', Collins wrote in a letter to Carlotta Leclercq, who had previously acted in two of his plays.[3] 'My *Armadale* play is <u>all but</u> a new work – with scenes upon scenes which are not in the book'.[4]

The critical assessments and re-assessments of the detective novel, which date as far back as G. K. Chesterton's 1901 essay 'A Defence of Detective Stories', have sought to shed light on the various ways in which detective fiction (alternatively called crime fiction, the mystery novel, the

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[1] Baker, *A Wilkie Collins*, 173.
[2] 'To Frederick Enoch, 24 February 1880', *Public Face III*, 269.
[3] 'To Carlotta Leclercq, 27 December 1875', Ibid., 109-110.
[4] Ibid.

novel of suspense) emblematises the overarching relationship between narrative and, for instance, psychoanalysis, feminism, Marxism, imperialism, and the division between 'high' and 'low' culture. A distinction is often made in the critical conversation surrounding detective fiction between the aggressively historicised beginning of the genre and its zenith, which is variously located in the modernist rejection of Victorian realism, in the postmodern rejection of the modernist detective novel, or in the avant-garde expressionism which characterises many detective novels since their inception. 'Nineteenth century novels', writes Michael Holquist, 'had unfolded in an extreme specificity of time and place – there is a sense in which they are all historical novels'.[5] Teleological accounts of the detective novel's genesis often cite the genre's nineteenth-century originators – Poe, Dickens, Collins, Conan Doyle – as the necessary, albeit humble, foundations of a genre which stagnated until the influence of avant-garde modernists and postmodernists imbued the detective novel with psychological depth, complexity, and nuance.

Attention paid to the detective novel's history on the Victorian stage complicates teleological accounts of the novel's progressive rise to ever-more artistically accomplished forms. I choose *Armadale* and *The Moonstone* as my texts in this chapter because, unlike the amateur sleuths of *The Woman in White* and *No Name*, they feature the character of the professional detective, newly introduced to Victorian England and thus also newly fictionalised. What seemed difficult, experimental, and 'sensational' in Collins's fiction was exploited in the stage adaptations of those controversial novels. A parallel might be drawn between the mass industrialisation to which Holquist attributes the crisis that the postmodern detective novel attempted to resolve, and the expansion of a London-centric model of theatrical production which followed the Theatres Act of 1843 as well as the proliferation of railway technology. Nineteenth-century industrialisation facilitated both the

[5] Michael Holquist, 'Whodunit and Other Questions: Metaphysical Detective Stories in Post-War Fiction', *New Literary History*, 3:1 (1971), 145.

touring of London companies, gradually doing away with the provincial stock company, as well as the construction of newly legitimised theatres. What ignited literary critics in Collins's novels became fodder for dramatic critics in his plays, theatrical fare which had become accessible to an audience larger than ever before. In the same way that Holquist sees the postmodern detective novel oscillating between popular culture and a sophisticated literary mode, Collins's stage adaptations register an awareness of literary and dramatic innovation on the one hand, and commercialisation on the other.

Though literary critics have deployed the detective novel in arguments that span a wide breadth of critical and theoretical concerns, those arguments share a tacit agreement in the essential quality of literary narrative. George Grella's assertion that the detective novel 'prevents the characteristically emotional engagement of tragedy' by presenting the materials of human disaster in strictly unemotional terms thus relies on the novel form's anodynic effect.[6] Albert Hutter's reading of *The Moonstone*, which rejects 'reductionistic models of psychoanalytic literary criticism', relies on Collins's innovative polyvocal narrative structure.[7] Peter Brooks has seen Collins's use of 'the periodization of serial publication to delay, divert, and spin out the narrative' as an essential factor in the production of his novels' suspense.[8] Geoffrey Hartman's claim that the detective novel involves the reader 'in the interpretation of a mystery' presupposes a participatory form of reading which is inherent to the novel and not necessarily applicable to a theatrical audience.[9] Peter Hühn has argued that detective fiction 'seems to be unique among narrative genres in that it thematizes narrativity itself as a problem, a procedure, and an achievement'.[10] Tzvetan Todorov's analysis of the detective

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[6] George Grella, 'Murder and Manners: The Formal Detective Novel', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, 4:1 (1970), 33.
[7] Albert D. Hutter, 'Dreams, Transformations, and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction', *Victorian Studies*, 19:2 (1975), 187.
[8] Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 1992), 169.
[9] Geoffrey H. Hartman, *The Fate of Reading and Other Essays* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 1975), 207, 212.
[10] Peter Hühn, 'The Detective as Reader: Narrativity and Reading Concepts in Detective Fiction', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 33:3 (1987), 451.

novel which separates crime fiction into the story of the crime, and the second related but separated story of the inquest, has endured: 'the narrator cannot transmit directly the conversations of the characters who are implicated', he writes, 'to do so, he must necessarily employ the intermediary of another'.[11] Collins's stage adaptations of *Armadale* and *The Moonstone* complicate these enduring critical legacies by shifting the critical framework away from a reliance on novelistic form. If conflict in crime fiction is 'consolingly resolved by the plotting and the structure of the novel', as Stephen Knight has claimed, is the same true of what might be called crime drama?[12] Acknowledging the proliferation of detective stories on the nineteenth-century stage requires moving beyond the strictly formal considerations of the novel or serial press.

While literary critics have tended to focus on the work of twentieth-century writers in theorising the detective novel, historians of the nineteenth century have nevertheless adopted many of those frameworks. Britta Martens, echoing Todorov, claims that the 'classic detective formula consists of two contiguous stories: that of the crime and that of the investigation'.[13] The genealogy of the detective novel is often traced back to the Newgate novels of the 1830s and 40s, and the adjacent sensation novels of the 1860s and 70s. Lyn Pykett's claim that the opponents of the sensation novel rejected 'the ways in which the plots and narrative methods of sensation novels repeatedly put their readers in the position of having to suspend or revise moral judgments' takes on an added valence in the context of the heavily moralised – if not moralising – nineteenth-century stage.[14] While Pykett argues that the cultural pervasiveness of the Newgate novels, which eventually led into the production of detective fiction, was encouraged 'through the numerous stage

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[11] Tzvetan Todorov, *The Poetics of Prose* (Cornell University Press: Ithaca, 1977), 46.
[12] Stephen Knight, *Form and Ideology in Crime Fiction* (Macmillan Press: London, 1980), 5.
[13] Britta Martens, 'Dramatic Monologue, Detective Fiction, and the Search for Meaning', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 66:2 (2011), 202.
[14] Lyn Pykett, 'The Newgate novel and sensation fiction, 1830-1868' in Martin Priestman (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2003), 35.

adaptations of the novels', I argue that the stage adaptations of Collins's novels did not simply fan the flames of an already successful literary genre, but are themselves constitutive of the innovations which have been retroactively ascribed uniquely to the detective novel form. Indeed, they challenge Hartman's claim that 'in most detective stories, clearly, there is both a reversal and a recognition, but they are not linked as powerfully as in tragedy. The reversal in detective stories is more like an unmasking; and the recognition that takes place when the mask falls is not prepared for by dramatic irony'.[15] Unlike his novels, which participate in the narrative economy of withholding information from and providing information to readers, Collins's stage adaptations are concerned less with the revelation of facts than they are with the exploration of crime's psychological depth, its effects on discrete individuals – concerns typically afforded to twentieth-century crime writers such as Hammett, Chandler, or Borges.

In locating detective fiction within the broader context of the Victorian stage, this chapter builds upon the privileged critical space afforded to the novel form. Putting the detective novel in conversation with the formal conventions of melodrama demonstrates the stage versions of those novels to be participating in the same cultural ruptures typically reserved for Collins's fiction. Martha Stoddard Holmes links the detective novel with melodrama while discussing Victorian representations of disability, but nevertheless continues to privilege the novel's form: 'a model for melodrama needs to include failure, those moments when emotional closure is incomplete, as often happens when this feeling genre enters *the more complex narrative space of the novel*'.[16] It is precisely because Collins's plays exist in a similarly complex narrative space that they shared a fraught relationship with the critical press. I am not making an argument for melodrama's narrative

[15] Hartman, *The Fate of Reading*, 203; emphasis mine.
[16] Martha Stoddard Holmes, *Fictions of Affliction: Physical Disability in Victorian Culture* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2004), 18; emphasis mine.

complexity as a whole, but rather exploring how Collins's stage adaptations exhibit the same complexity critics such as Holmes reserve strictly for the form of the novel. Winifred Hughes's assertion that 'the final consolation of *The Moonstone*, for the reader as well as the self-conscious narrators, most of all for Collins himself, is the triumph of form' implies that the novel's innovations are primarily literary.[17] 'Unlike the melodramatists of the popular stage', she writes, 'Collins no longer equates plot with moral content or with the ultimate meaning of human destiny'.[18] The purpose of this chapter is to place Collins's dramatic writing in the context of 'the melodramatists of the popular stage', registering Collins's writing, in both its dramatic and literary forms, within the landscape of the Victorian stage.

The pairing of 'classical' detective fiction and melodrama offers a tantalising set of critical assumptions and similarities. 'The detective paradigm', writes Laura Marcus, 'it has been said, shaped nineteenth-century fiction, with writers such as Charlotte Brontë, Dickens and Balzac structuring their narratives around secrets and their disclosure'.[19] Collins, among a host of other nineteenth-century writers, dramatists included, may very well be added to this list. Both *Armadale* and *The Moonstone*, despite the presence of professional detectives, hidden identities, and as-yet-unsolved crimes, register a concern with questions more profound than the simple solving of those crimes. In considering Sherlock Holmes within the context of the detective story and Gothic tales, Nils Clausson has noted that 'the deeper questions raised by the Gothic plot […] are rather more difficult to answer, if indeed they can finally be answered at all'.[20] Indeed Collins's novels and plays ask much the same questions: why are crimes committed? How does a family, a society, or a country react to

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[17] Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1980), 165.
[18] Ibid., 161.
[19] Laura Marcus, 'Detection and literary fiction' in *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*, 246.
[20] Nils Clausson, 'Degeneration, Fin-de-Siècle Gothic, and the Science of Detection: Arthur Conan Doyle's The Hound of the Baskervilles and the Emergence of the Modern Detective Story', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, 35:1 (2005), 79.

and recover from the effects of crime? Linda Maier has claimed that the crime novels of Collins and Borges 'portray the limitations of human intelligence and prompt us to question the existence of an explicable universe'.[21] This epistemological crisis – exemplified in Collins's immoral (*Armadale*) or ultimately incompetent (*The Moonstone*) detectives – is dramatised by the rupture of melodrama's easily legible moral absolutism in the staging of those novels. My reading of Collins's plays thus necessarily engages with the critical context of detective fiction as well as the history of stage melodrama. The at times tenuous link between discussions of Collins's novels and the deployment of melodrama's critical paradigm becomes firmer by acknowledging those novels' presence on the stage. The plays' deployment of melodramatic technique – capitulation to its emotional excesses, stylised language and gesture – or their studied embrace of a nascent move towards restrained dramatic realism offers an additional dimension to the work of those critics cited above.

The characters in *Armadale* who most clearly illustrate Collins's experiments with the form of detective fiction are Allan Armadale's house-steward, Mr. Bashwood, and his son, James 'Jemmy' Bashwood, employed in a London private inquiry office. The elder Bashwood, characterised by his 'constitutional timidity' in the novel, is also hopelessly infatuated with Lydia Gwilt, a situation that she naturally uses to her advantage.[22] The diffident, elder Bashwood, previously in the employment as steward to one Sir John, was forced out of his situation as a result of his son having 'behaved dishonestly', forcing the elder Bashwood to bankrupt himself in acting as his son's security.[23] It is the elder Bashwood's infatuation with Lydia Gwilt that prompts him to hire his son, 'employed', as he says, 'in no creditable way, at the Private Inquiry Office', in an attempt to gather information about her past.[24] Even the return address on James's letter – 'Shadyside Place' – evokes the deceitful nature

[21] Linda S. Maier, 'Critique of Pure Reason: Confluences between the Works of Jorge Luis Borges and Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868)', *Clues*, 29:1 (2011), 33.
[22] Wilkie Collins, *Armadale* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2008), 277.
[23] Ibid., 283.
[24] Ibid., 582.

of his employment.[25] In contrast to the venerable Sergeant Cuff who would represent the newly institutionalised detective police in *The Moonstone*, or the later scientific rationale of Sherlock Holmes, James Bashwood instead represents an avaricious branch of the profession. As opposed to the amateur sleuthing of Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White*, or Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name*, characters motivated by the search for familial stability, James Bashwood's detection is motivated simply, and brutally honestly, by financial gain: 'though I own you were out of pocket by me once', he tells his father, 'I can't afford to be out of pocket by you. It must be understood that you are answerable for all the expenses of the inquiry'.[26] In response to his father's desperate plea, 'will you tell me how you found her out. Do, Jemmy, – do!', James says only: 'The reckoning up of Miss Gwilt has cost more money and taken more time than I expected; and the sooner we come to a settlement about it, the sooner we shall get to what you want to know'.[27] James then recounts the elaborate process that led to the discovery of Lydia Gwilt, which involved the impersonation of a clerk in a milliner's shop and an accomplice at Scotland Yard. 'If we had had a less notorious woman to deal with', he says, 'she might have cost us weeks of inquiry, and you might have had to pay hundreds of pounds. A day did it in Miss Gwilt's case; and another day put the whole story of her life, in black and white, into my hand'.[28] It is thus that the process of detection features in the novel *Armadale*: it does not anticipate the suave calculations of Sherlock Holmes, nor does it evoke the sense of professional status that it does in *The Moonstone*.

This nexus of characters – Lydia Gwilt, the elder Bashwood, and his son James – emblematise *Armadale*'s concern with and depiction of female sexuality. The elder Bashwood's infatuation with Lydia Gwilt highlights her 'dangerous' attraction: in a letter to Mrs. Oldershaw,

[25] Ibid., 586.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 628.
[28] Ibid., 630.

describing her first meeting with the elder Bashwood, Miss Gwilt writes: 'of all the ways in which men have looked at me, no man ever looked at me in that way before. Did you ever see the boa constrictor fed at the Zoological Gardens? They put a live rabbit into his cage, and there is a moment when the two creatures look at each other. I declare Mr. Bashwood reminded me of the rabbit'.[29] She is elsewhere described as the 'woman who had tyrannized over Mr. Bashwood'.[30] Despite being thirty-five years old, Miss Gwilt is an adept user of cosmetics and thus appears younger than her actual age: 'more sinister than any poison', writes Lisa Niles, 'cosmetics becomes the locus in the novel for unveiling a terror that exists beyond the world of the novel'.[31] It is this interplay between threatening sexuality and deception that makes Miss Gwilt such a threatening character. When asked why the elder Bashwood is so readily available to aid Miss Gwilt, she responds by simply stating: 'Mr. Bashwood is in love with me'.[32] Lydia Gwilt's character moves beyond the proscriptive narrative structure of the Victorian marriage plot in her mercenary embrace of feminine sexuality. Not only in her manipulation of the elder Bashwood but equally in her ultimate rejection of Midwinter, Lydia Gwilt's inability to adhere and appeal to a sense of domestic womanhood becomes part of what Dickens would later see as unsuitable in the novel's original stage adaptation.

One of the fundamental changes Collins made in revising the original dramatisation of *Armadale* into *Miss Gwilt* is in the eponymous character. While both plays treat Miss Gwilt as the central character, in the former she is a woman intent on marrying and murdering Allan Armadale, exacting revenge on Armadale's mother, avoiding debtor's prison, and who consistently refuses to acknowledge or give in to her moral and ethical impulses. In the latter, however – and here the

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[29] Ibid., 349.
[30] Ibid., 460.
[31] Lisa Niles, 'Owning 'the dreadful truth'; Or, Is Thirty-Five Too Old?: Age and the Marriageable Body in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*', *Nineteenth-Century Literature*, 65:1 (2010), 68.
[32] Collins, *Armadale*, 739.

similarities between the new work and Collins's successful plays are thrown into sharp relief – she plots to murder Allan Armadale to preserve her reputation and with it her marriage. Like Anne Silvester in *Man and Wife*, or Mercy Merrick in *The New Magdalen*, the motivating factor behind Lydia Gwilt's actions is primarily the protection of her social standing. Unlike in the original version of the play, where Lydia Gwilt seeks revenge and the income of Armadale's widow, in *Miss Gwilt* she believes Allan Armadale to be in possession of her secret – that she had previously been romantically involved with the navy captain, Manuel – and fears that he will reveal this secret to her husband, Ozias Midwinter. What emerges is a character whose complexities motivate her actions, not a linear mind bent on revenge. Upon reading the initial playscript of the 1866 version, Dickens wrote to Collins, cautioning him against the character of Lydia Gwilt:

> Almost every situation in it is dangerous. I do not think any English audience would accept the scene in which Miss Gwilt in that widow's dress, renounces Midwinter. And if you got so far, you would never get through the last act in the Sanatorium. You could only carry those situations, on a real hard wooden stage and wrought out (very indifferently) by real live people face to face with other real live people judging them, - you could only carry those situations *by the help of interest in some innocent person whom they placed in peril, and that person a young woman*.[33]

It is impossible to determine whether Collins's revisions to Lydia's character in the 1875 production were the result of Dickens's influence or Collins's own canny knowledge of what would be successful onstage. In either case, Miss Gwilt in the ultimately staged dramatisation of the novel is a

[33] Charles Dickens, 'To Wilkie Collins, 10 July 1866', in Madeline House and Graham Storey (eds), *The Letters of Charles Dickens* vol. 11 (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1965), 220-21; emphasis in original.

fully-matured version of the character from the 1866 play *Armadale*, an earlier iteration which only hints at the moral complexity of the character in the novel.

Collins's adaptations of *Armadale* for the stage fundamentally alter the relationship of the novel with the process of detection. The rapacious James Bashwood is written out of both the original version (1866) and its updated revision (1875). It is not until 1877, then, that Collins finally stages a professional detective in the form of Sergeant Cuff in *The Moonstone*. The 1866 play nevertheless emphasises Miss Gwilt's 'dangerous' sexuality and uses her relationship with the elder Bashwood to do so. The first introduction to Mr. Bashwood in the 1866 play substitutes the narrator's description of his diffidence with the stuttered delivery of his lines:

> (*Enter Mr. Bashwood, left. He is poorly dressed in black – stammers over certain words – and addresses Miss G. humbly, with his hat in his hand.*)
> *Mr. B.* I b-b-beg your pardon, Miss Gwilt. They're all w-w-wondering at the flower-show where you are. I thought – I ventured – to – to – to look for you. Nobody can spare – if you'll excuse my saying so – nobody can spare the brightest or-or-ornament of the Fancy Fair![34]

When Miss Gwilt, after having married Midwinter and claiming the estate of Allan Armadale's widow, declares to Midwinter 'I am *not* your wife', Mr. Bashwood, having been present for the declaration, falls into paroxysms of shock and continued devotion to Miss Gwilt:

> *Mr. B.* (*aside*). *He* is the man! When she m-m-married, she married *him*! Not Mr. Ar-Armadale – no! no! no! She's false – she's wicked – she's d-d-deceived me for some purpose of her own! And yet I love her! Oh, me! – false and wicked – and I love her![35]

More than simply offering a convenient plot mechanism, in the 1866 play Mr. Bashwood serves to throw into sharp relief Miss Gwilt's power of infatuation. Indeed, his character is part of what serves to underline her devious sexuality, and, in writing him out of the 1875 version, Collins in effect

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[34] Wilkie Collins, *Armadale: A Drama, in Three Acts*. (Smith, Elder and Co.: London, 1866), 15.
[35] Ibid., 44-45.

addresses Dickens's concern that the play version offered little – if any – redeeming morality. Neither the elder Bashwood nor his son appears in the 1875 version, which Collins names *Miss Gwilt* instead of *Armadale*. Eliding the process of detection thus, in essence leaving no secrets hidden from the audience, *Miss Gwilt* renders its eponymous character significantly more sympathetic than either her novelistic counterpart or her earlier dramatic rendition.

Early in the first act of the 1866 play *Armadale*, Collins introduces the audience to what motivates Miss Gwilt, in an exchange with the dubious Doctor Downward:

> *Miss G.* (*thoughtfully*.) I should like to be Mr. Armadale's widow.
> *The Dr.* Oh, fie! fie! Think of his eight thousand a year while he's alive – and say his wife.
> *Miss G.* No. I say, his widow.
> *The Dr.* My dear lady! You talk as if you had some old grudge against this unlucky young man. You look as if you actually hated him!
> *Miss G.* My looks tell the truth then. I do hate him.[36]

The following six pages of the script are concerned with Miss Gwilt recounting to Doctor Downward her past, and how Armadale's father had bribed her to forge a letter from his mother which consented to his marriage to the woman who would become the young Armadale's mother. After Armadale's father drowned in a shipwreck, the only people in possession of the secret were Armadale's mother and Miss Gwilt herself. She was sent to a French boarding school at her mistress's expense, until she turned eighteen and was abandoned by Armadale's mother. 'I was left at eighteen, in a foreign country, to my own resources', she tells the doctor. 'You know the horrors I have gone through, the miseries I have suffered, the wickedness (if you like) that I have committed since. It all sprang from that time – it all lies at Mr. Armadale's door'.[37] She is speaking, of course, of Armadale senior. After finally tracking down Armadale's mother, Miss Gwilt learns that she arrived

[36] Ibid., 7.
[37] Ibid., 11-12.

moments too late, and finds herself instead at the woman's funeral. 'Death had come between us, and had snatched her out of my reach!' She continues. 'Now do you understand why I hate the son, for the mother's sake? Now do you know why I should like to be Armadale's widow instead of Armadale's wife?'[38]

This scene sets up the character Miss Gwilt becomes over the next three acts. She is calculating, passionate, and determined. Her relationship with and marriage to Ozias Midwinter occurs in spite of her feelings towards the Armadale family, and despite being offered a comfortable life married to a man whom she genuinely loves, she takes the first opportunity presented to her to leave him, falsify her identity as Armadale's widow, and claim her widow's income. When it is revealed that he survived the shipwreck which she believed claimed his life, she attempts to murder him, only backing out at the last minute when she learns she was about to murder Midwinter, her real husband, with whom she was still in love. She ends the play by taking her own life instead in an act of remorse which the critical press found insufficient to counteract the rest of her immorality when it was finally staged in 1875.

The original Miss Gwilt in *Armadale* certainly errs on the side of the murderess that reviewers of the novelistic original thought her to be. Historian and theologian Connop Thirlwall referred to her as 'a tragic Becky Sharp, but immensely below her prototype', while H. F. Chorley, reviewing the novel for *The Athenaeum*, claimed she is 'one of the most hardened female villains whose devices and desires have ever blackened fiction'.[39] More inflammatory still, the *Spectator* claimed the novel 'gives us for its heroine a woman fouler than the refuse of the streets'.[40] This perception of her character is echoed by the declamatory, melodramatic phrases Miss Gwilt speaks in the original dramatisation: 'If

[38] Ibid.
[39] *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, 145, 147.
[40] Ibid., 150.

I could kill Armadale at this moment by holding up my finger–I'd do it! No, I wouldn't! I'd wait to marry him, and have the widow's income!'[41] Faced with the prospect of Armadale's future in her hands, she baldly states to the doctor: 'I should kill him!'[42] When she finally decides to leave Midwinter and claim the income of Armadale's widow, she is alone onstage:

> *Miss G.* […] there is no necessity that wants twice considering but the one terrible necessity of Armadale's death! (*A pause. A ray of moonlight penetrates through the trees, and falls on her, as she stands thinking.*) Armadale's death! The death of a man whom I hate doubly, for his mother's sake, and for his own! (*Another pause. She lifts her hands with a sudden gesture of supplication.*) Oh you Devil tempting me, is there no Angel near, to raise some timely obstacle which might help me to give it up?[43]

Soliloquising alone onstage, Miss Gwilt does not so much struggle against her evil impulses as she looks for ways to justify them. At this moment, instead of being joined onstage by an 'Angel' who might appeal to her better nature, the morally ambiguous Doctor Downward enters, who ends up assisting her in the plot to murder Armadale all while plausibly exculpating himself. Even Miss Gwilt herself doubts that there exists in her any of the good to which a different character might have appealed. When the doctor mentions the quarrel that prompted Miss Gwilt to leave her husband in Naples and return to England, she responds with a barrage of rhetorical questions: 'Who could help quarrelling with such a woman as I am? How was our marriage to end, with a great nature like his, and a vile nature like mine? What do *you* know of the heartache that man suffered when he found he had built his hopes on me, and built them in vain? What do *you* know of the despair that drove me away from him, and the madness of wickedness that has ended in *this*?'[44]

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[41] Collins, *Armadale: A Drama in Three Acts*, 21.
[42] Ibid., 39.
[43] Ibid., 28.
[44] Ibid., 37.

Even when faced with the reality of lying to her husband's face about being Armadale's widow, the original Miss Gwilt chooses the path of revenge rather than abandoning her murderous plans:

> *Miss G.* 'My wife is the vilest of living women'. Those were his words. I *have* been the vilest of women to him; but, oh! the bitterness of hearing it from his lips! (*Flings her arms on the table, and drops her head on them. A pause. She suddenly raises her head, and looks up.*) What! Sensitive to his opinion of me, after denying him to his face? Am I here – with the resolution in me at last to brush Armadale's life out of my way, as I might brush a stain off my dress; and I can't hear my husband say I'm the vilest of living women, and laugh at it? (*Starts to her feet, and bursts out laughing hysterically.*) Ha! ha! ha! ha![45]

Whatever ostensible interior struggle Collins may have been suggesting here is immediately negated by her outburst which verges on the absurd. Miss Gwilt in *Armadale* prioritises revenge over all else, even the man for whom she experiences genuine feeling. It is only at the end of the play, when she nearly murders Midwinter instead of Armadale, that she abandons the murder and attempts to atone for her actions in her last lines: 'All that woman can risk, I have risked. All that woman can lose, I have lost. The end has come – not for Armadale but for *me*. The one atonement I can make to my husband is the atonement of my death'.[46] By this point, however, this speech is not the tragic, interior struggle of a more complex character, but is instead the retributive justice that arises out of melodrama's organising worldview. In other words, the original stage version of Miss Gwilt falls prey to the logic of melodrama, unable to navigate a line between good and evil, and instead oscillating between the two.

This constant back and forth within Miss Gwilt characterises the original dramatisation of *Armadale*: it is not that she sees her own nature torn in half, and is only in need of a push in the right direction. She does not struggle against moral and immoral impulses, but rather is resigned to the

[45] Ibid., 65.
[46] Ibid., 73.

total absence of moral impulses within herself. She accepts her inherent immorality while trying to live a life in spite of it: she marries Midwinter not in search of a moral way of living but in spite of her own wickedness. It would not be until the more compassionate 1875 version that Collins was to depict a sense of Miss Gwilt's divided self. The original dramatic version of Miss Gwilt more straightforwardly slots into the easily legible moral binary of melodrama, something that Collins avoids in the version finally staged at the Globe Theatre in 1875. This stable understanding of Miss Gwilt's inherent wickedness is exactly what Collins changes in the 1875 rewriting of the play: she is no longer a criminal attempting in vain to live a life of normalcy, but a character trying desperately to manage the competing impulses of vice and virtue. These two versions of Miss Gwilt illustrate the two poles of tragedy and melodrama identified by Robert B. Heilman: the former is characterised by a 'completeness of understanding, insight into human division, a full sense of flaw and excellence', while the latter 'includes the whole realm of conflicts undergone by characters who are presented as undivided or at least without divisions of such magnitude that they must be at the dramatic center'.[47] The original Miss Gwilt is melodramatic insofar as she emblematises a character whose 'dramatic center' is not her own division but rather her singular focus on revenge. The updated Miss Gwilt, following in the footsteps of her dramatic predecessors Anne Silvester and Mercy Merrick, embraces more of the tragic complexity typically considered absent from melodrama: she, like Magdalen Vanstone before her, navigates the line between what is legal and what is right. Unlike the original dramatic Miss Gwilt, her standing in the world is at risk not because she insists on exacting revenge on Armadale, but because the mores of Victorian England render her romantic past incompatible with her present life.

[47] Robert B. Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama: Versions of Experience* (University of Washington Press: Seattle, 1968), 26, 86.

The Miss Gwilt of the 1875 version, moreover, is altogether more sympathetic than the original. Collins achieves this by fleshing out the relationship between Miss Gwilt and those around her, at the expense of the various villains she consorts with in the 1866 version. Rather than an expository conversation between Miss Gwilt, Doctor Downward, and Mrs. Oldershaw, which introduces Miss Gwilt's desire for revenge – as we get in the original adaptation – in *Miss Gwilt* Collins introduces audiences to Miss Gwilt in her capacity as a talented and sympathetic governess. Major Milroy's assessment of Miss Gwilt illustrates the difference between the two versions of her character: 'Miss Gwilt, you are the most universally-gifted person I have ever met with. If my reckoning is right, you have been a resident in our family for something like three weeks. I declare hardly a day has passed without our finding some fresh accomplishment of yours to admire!'[48] In *Armadale* no mention is made of Miss Gwilt's accomplishments, nor do we see her interacting sympathetically with her employer. In *Miss Gwilt*, one of her early lines clearly demonstrates that by 1875 she had evolved into an almost entirely different character. Prompted by her employer, Major Milroy, to talk about her past, she offers the following summary:

> I have had the training of a lady – for the life of a servant! My mind has been cultivated, my tastes have been refined – and all for what? To see people without mind and without taste prosperous and happy – to find my poverty degrading all that is highest and best in me to the level of something to sell, something which the insolence of wealth can purchase on its own terms. Don't think me ungrateful! I am speaking of the time before you knew me. Will the day ever come when I shall deserve your kindness? Shall I stay with you long enough to win a sister's place in my pupil's heart?[49]

In addition to deepening the relationship between Miss Gwilt and her employer's family, in the 1875 version Collins also revised her relationship with Midwinter. One of the 'scenes upon scenes' which he added to the 1875 play adds an additional layer to the history of Miss Gwilt and Midwinter: the

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[48] Wilkie Collins, *Miss Gwilt: A Drama in Five Acts*. (London: Ranken & Co., 1875), 23. British Library Lord Chamberlain's Collection Add MS 53155 G.
[49] Ibid., 24.

two had previously met when Midwinter saw Miss Gwilt at the police-station having been charged with an attempt on her own life. When they meet at Thorpe-Ambrose, the Armadale family home, he pretends not to have seen her, and thus their romantic entanglement begins: 'Have I a heart still left? and has that man touched it?' Miss Gwilt asks herself. 'What is it that speaks to me in his voice? – what is it that looks at me in his eyes?'[50]

Shifting the drama's early narrative focus away from Miss Gwilt's crimes, as in the novel, and onto her interactions with her employer's family enables the play to begin developing her character in a realm that exists outside of the considerations of criminal behaviour. Miss Gwilt's relationship with her student, Miss Milroy, for instance, draws attention to the former's stoic demeanour in the face of the latter's haughty arrogance. When prompted by her father to admire one of Miss Gwilt's drawings, Miss Milroy responds:

> *Miss M.* I am looking at the works of Raphael, papa. Perhaps I may be excused if I have no admiration to spare, even for Miss Gwilt.
> *Miss G.* I am charmed to find, my dear, that you are making some progress in your knowledge of art. It is something to have discovered that Raphael was a better painter than I am![51]

This kind of interaction elicits sympathy for Miss Gwilt, not unlike the distinction made in *The New Magdalen* between Grace Roseberry's grating demeanour and Mercy Merrick's quiet disposition. The depictions of Mercy Merrick and Miss Gwilt onstage challenged both Victorian audiences and critics alike in the way they juxtaposed criminality with a more abstract interrogation of justice, ethics, and morality. In trying to elicit sympathy for Miss Gwilt in a way that neither the novel nor the 1866 adaptation did, however, *Miss Gwilt* sometimes overcompensates by emphasising her character's

[50] Ibid., 26.
[51] Ibid., 21.

pathos, as in the frantic monologue she delivers alone onstage in a fit of anxiety at having deceived Midwinter:

> *Miss G.* (*alone*). What has Armadale been saying about me behind my back? Nothing, or I should have seen it in my husband's face. And yet! and yet! (*She seats herself, and pauses, thinking.*) Oh, me! is the blessed peace of mind that some women know, never to be mine again? I have tried so hard to be worthy of my husband! I have loved, honoured, and obeyed him! I have done all but confess to him the miserable story of the past! (*She rises, and paces backwards and forwards impatiently.*) Why does the kiss he has left on my lips burn me with the guilty sense of my own deceit?[52]

In moments like these, where she is less a calculating criminal than she is a desperate woman looking for forgiveness, Miss Gwilt's character echoes the profoundly repentant fallen women that proliferated on the nineteenth-century stage. For all of the play's potentially radical moments, particularly in its exploration of a person's latent capacity for crime, moments like these eschew a sense of progressive politics and underscore Collins's lasting sexual conservatism.

The role of Miss Gwilt was originally played by Ada Cavendish, both in Liverpool and then in London. Cavendish had also premiered the role of Mercy Merrick in Collins's *The New Magdalen* at the Olympic in 1873, a role similar to Miss Gwilt in both characters' desperate determination to preserve their reputation. Of Cavendish, Collins writes: 'She has, I think, more of the sacred fire in her than any other living English actress of "Drama" – and she has the two excellent qualities of being always eager to improve and always ready to take advice in her Art. I am really interested in her well-doing …'[53] Other lead roles included Arthur Cecil as Doctor Downward, Leonard Boyne as Midwinter, and Robert Charles Lyons as Armadale. Arthur Wing Pinero played the small role of the lawyer, Mr. Darch. One reviewer called the production 'the chief event of the autumnal dramatic season'.[54] Critics were often emphatic in praising Cavendish's portrayal of Miss Gwilt, even as they

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[52] Ibid., 51.
[53] Wilkie Collins, 'To William Winter, 5 August 1878', *Public Face III*, 487.
[54] *The Era* (12 December 1875), 4.

struggled to wrap their heads around her dubious morality. One reviewer noted that her performance was 'the gem of the whole, the apex of the pyramid, the sun of the firmament […] unswervingly and triumphantly successful in her realisation of the author's unfortunate though not blameless woman'.[55]

In making Miss Gwilt a more sympathetic character – one who is motivated by the protection of her reputation, and the love she feels for Midwinter, instead of exacting revenge on Armadale – Collins sacrificed the essential plot mechanism of the original version. Without Miss Gwilt's murderous intent, there would be no logical reason for her to entrap Armadale in the doctor's sanatorium. In *Miss Gwilt*, therefore, Collins raises Doctor Downward from the status of dubious accomplice to villainous mastermind. The *Liverpool Mercury* refers to him as 'the most vigorous and successful conception of character' in the play.[56] The character who, in *Armadale*, had previously only stood back in shock and awe as Miss Gwilt committed crime after crime – all while absolving himself – was to become the puppet-master behind her actions in *Miss Gwilt*. 'I am a ruined man if I haven't got the handling of Armadale's money' he declares to the audience.[57] The plan to marry Miss Gwilt off to Armadale is, in the 1875 adaptation, entirely the doctor's idea. 'I thank you for offering me the chance of becoming Mrs. Armadale', she tells the doctor when it becomes clear that Armadale and her pupil, Miss Milroy, have been secretly engaged. 'It is a chance that I have lost. We must give it up'.[58] Only when she is blackmailed by the doctor, only when she believes that Armadale will reveal the secret of her romantic past to Midwinter, does she reluctantly attempt to take his life. 'I look back at my own past life – the guilty, miserable past. Midwinter knows nothing of it; Midwinter loves me. I am vilely deceiving him!'[59] The remorse Miss Gwilt feels

[55] *The Era* (19 December 1875), 7.
[56] *The Liverpool Mercury* (11 December 1875), 3.
[57] Collins, *Miss Gwilt: A Drama in Five Acts*, 30.
[58] Ibid., 29.
[59] Ibid., 39.

in the 1875 adaptation reads as much more sincere than the tormented ravings of the 1866 version. 'Are you tempting me to a crime?' she asks, later in the play, further distancing her character from the crime of attempting to murder Armadale.[60] The reviewer for *The Era* picked up on this crucial moment, noting this as 'one of the most effective scenes of the play. In a state of stony insensibility she is led off the stage by her evil counsellor, the doctor, who, as a last stroke, has sent off the returned Armadale to his sanatorium at Hendon, in order to find means of killing him'.[61]

The structuring logic of Miss Gwilt's romantic past allows her character to demonstrate a vulnerability otherwise unavailable to the murderous original. Because the object at stake is her social standing, and thus the dramatic tension is derived not from Allan Armadale's survival (as in the original) but from the survival of her marriage to Midwinter, Collins is able, in the 1875 adaptation, to append this passage to her earlier monologue:

> *Miss G.* (*alone*). […] One fault – committed when I was so innocent and so young; repented so bitterly and so truly – and it pursues me like the vengeance of heaven! *Any* words may tell my husband how he has been deceived. *No* words can tell him how he is loved![62]

The 'miserable story' of Miss Gwilt's past is her previous romantic relationship with the navy captain, Manuel. In the 1875 dramatisation, Collins offered audiences a toned-down version of the female protagonists of his previous dramatic successes. Where Mercy Merrick in *The New Magdalen* was explicitly a prostitute in her past life, and where Anne Silvester's relationship with the rakish Geoffrey Delamayn in *Man and Wife* was explicitly sexual, nowhere in *Miss Gwilt* does Collins explicate a sexual relationship between its eponymous character and Manuel – it is implied, but nowhere near as aggressively as in his previous plays.

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[60] Ibid., 56.
[61] *The Era* (12 December 1875), 4.
[62] Collins, *Miss Gwilt: A Drama in Five Acts*, 51.

When Miss Gwilt finally believes her husband to be dead, and that he died knowing the secret of her romantic past, she feels herself giving in to the evil side of her nature. Unlike her character in the 1866 adaptation, who is sure of her own inherent evil, in *Miss Gwilt* she struggles to stave off the worst impulses which lie dormant inside her:

> *Miss G.* […] I am hardened with a dreadful hardness. I am frozen up in a changeless despair. I feel the good that there is in me going day by day. I feel the evil gaining on me, little by little, with slow and stealthy steps. I dread myself! […] Doctor, I am not a bad woman. No bad woman could have loved Midwinter as I loved him. But there are seeds of evil in all mortal creatures. I am left alone with a great despair. A bad end will come of it if something is not done to touch my heart. Help me to make the best, and not the worst, of my lonely and friendless lot. Tell me if a quiet life, among old happy associations, may not help my mind back to health.[63]

The doctor, however, has a vested interest in Armadale's death and the income of his widow, and therefore appeals to the wicked side of Miss Gwilt's nature. The duality of human nature is a theme Collins first experimented with at length in *No Name* (1862), a novel in which Magdalen Vanstone seeks to reclaim her family's stolen birthright at all costs. By the time he dramatised *Armadale* in 1866, that duality is only hinted at in Miss Gwilt's character – Collins suggests some of the internal struggles that characterize her later dramatic iteration, but the psychological complexity of her character had not yet matured into its later representation. In *Miss Gwilt*, however, her character embodies Heilman's definition of tragedy, and the dramatic tension of the piece is derived from the way she is constantly on the precipice of giving in to her evil impulses, of navigating what is legal and what is right. 'There is an undergrowth of goodness in that woman's nature,' Doctor Downward states, 'which is too firmly rooted to be easily pulled up'.[64]

Characters like Mercy, Anne, and Miss Gwilt illustrate Collins's process in adapting his works for the stage, a process captured by *Miss Gwilt*'s reviewer for the *Sporting Gazette*: they claimed

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[63] Ibid., 68.
[64] Ibid., 73.

that if Collins chose to write only for the stage, without adapting his novels into plays, 'he would find it unnecessary to choose such particularly close and complicated plots; he would have fewer events to cram into a small compass; fewer events would enable his characters to dispense with some of their redundant action; less redundant action would demand from them a smaller number of motives, and a smaller number of motives would allow them to develop their characteristics in a less abrupt and more natural manner than they do at present'.[65] Comparing *Armadale* the novel, the 1866 attempt at dramatising *Armadale*, and its final 1875 version, *Miss Gwilt*, demonstrates that Collins had certainly recognised the necessity of simplifying his characters' motivations in writing for the stage. Miss Gwilt onstage in 1875 is not a murderer spurred on by a family legacy, a convoluted plot for revenge, and a quasi-prophetical dream, as she is both in the novel and in the original dramatisation; she is, like Mercy Merrick and Anne Silvester, a character driven by the competing priorities of living a fulfilling life within the constrained position of Victorian women, and deceiving others to expedite that process. Nevertheless, the reviewer for *The Sporting Gazette* was not satisfied with Collins's simplifications, and found that the play failed 'to make [the characters'] conduct appear rational, even from the point of view of crime'.[66] 'Probability, and sometimes possibility, are completely outraged', wrote the reviewer for *Fun*.[67]

Miss Gwilt illustrates how Collins's approach to writing for the stage evolved over the length of Collins's career. By the time Collins was ready to stage his dramatic adaptation of *Armadale*, the three major theatrical successes he had experienced gradually distanced the tone and form of his dramatic writing from his literary production. His dramatic productions of *Man and Wife*, *The New Magdalen*, and, to a lesser extent, *The Woman in White*, all progressively shift away from sensational

[65] *The Sporting Gazette* (29 April 1876), 425.
[66] Ibid.
[67] F*un* (26 April 1876), 186.

plot devices and mechanisms and embrace simplified plots which allow room for more natural dialogue and character development. The same is true of *Miss Gwilt*, and placing Collins's final 1875 dramatisation against the original version produced in 1866 – before he had found his theatrical footing – illustrates his development as a playwright in the direction of the emergent realism and psychological complexity of late-Victorian theatre.

If the character of Miss Gwilt exists within the paradigm Collins was creating for himself with roles like Mercy Merrick and Anne Silvester, it is also experimental in the way it anticipates his subversion of the detective novel, a genre he was partially responsible for popularising. The detective novel – most obviously emblematised in *The Moonstone* (1868) – is predicated upon a structuring logic that withholds necessary information from readers. Tension builds as characters follow false leads, investigate clues, and interrogate each other, all with the aim of arriving at some verifiable truth which was previously unavailable to characters and readers alike. The transposition of the detective novel onto the stage was not without its obvious challenges: as critics like those for *Fun* and *The Sporting Gazette* implied in their reviews of *Miss Gwilt*, theatrical audiences had less patience than novel readers for a steady inundation of dates, facts, and minute details. The trouble, then, was to adapt a genre whose primary tension was derived from withholding information, into a form that operated within a different system of artistic values. The questions which formed the basis of Collins's most successful novels – who is the 'woman in white', who stole the Moonstone, who is Miss Gwilt – are replaced, onstage, with questions that Collins's dramatic experience had taught him were more amenable to the stage: will Laura Fairlie and Walter Hartright get married, will Franklin Blake and Rachel Verinder get married, will Mercy Merrick and Julian Gray get married?

This is not to suggest that Collins's novels were reduced to saccharine love stories when adapted for the stage, but it is clear that in reorienting dramatic focus onto their marriage plots,

Collins produced vehicles for captivating theatrical audiences. Thus, when adapted for the stage in 1866, Miss Gwilt was primarily concerned with how a marriage to Midwinter might facilitate her exacting revenge upon Armadale: by the updated version in 1875, her primary focus is to prevent the revelation of her romantic history. Caroline Radcliffe has noted that when adapting his novels for the stage, Collins 'does not simply reiterate the techniques used in his writing but has a clear sense of what will produce the greater effect dramatically – a theatrical "re-telling"'.[68] Radcliffe discusses the use of onstage and offstage imaginary space in Collins's dramatisations as a way of concealing or revealing 'the uncanny through the handing over of the panoptical role of the author to the audience'.[69] Collins's sometimes elaborate scenographic design – the sanatorium scene in which Miss Gwilt attempts to murder Armadale and ends up taking her own life, for instance, is divided in half, allowing audience members to see both parties onstage – should also be understood in the context of Collins's adaptive process. Radcliffe identifies the uncanny audience response produced throughout *Miss Gwilt* as both a causal factor in the stage design of Collins's play but also a consequence of his understanding and deployment of a theatrical system of storytelling values: the panoptical split-stage design allowed audience members to view two rooms at once, but, importantly, those two rooms are occupied by the play's central romantic relationship.

This reading of the final play's staging – that its panoptical design intentionally redirects dramatic interest onto the play's marriage plot – is once again supported by the context of Collins's adaptive process. In the novel, as in the 1866 dramatisation, the reader and/or audience member is only able to view Miss Gwilt poisoning Midwinter, and then herself, from the vantage point of the drawing room outside the bedroom in which the poisoning actually occurs. In the novel, after she

[68] Caroline Radcliffe, 'Behind Closed Doors: The Theatrical Uncanny and the Panoptical Viewer in the Dramas of Wilkie Collins', *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 42:1 (2015), 82.
[69] Ibid., 95.

rescues Midwinter from the poisoned air, the reader watches her leave the imaginary narrative space: 'The door of the room opened – and closed on her. There was an interval of silence. Then, a sound came dull and sudden, like the sound of a fall. Then, there was silence again'.[70] In the 1866 dramatisation, Miss Gwilt's final moments look almost identical: '*Rises and puts her hand on the lock of the door of Number Four. Waits and looks again at Midwinter, touches her lips with her hand, waves it to him as a last farewell, and enters the room, closing the door behind her. A pause of a moment, then the sound of a fall is heard faintly in the dark room*'.[71] In *Miss Gwilt*, however, Collins no longer relegates her death to an offstage imaginary space, and instead she dies in full view of the audience, separated by a wall from the barely-conscious Midwinter who says her name one final time before she is overpowered by the poisoned air. Though the critic for the *Pall Mall Gazette* found this stage illusion unconvincing and ludicrous, calling it 'a device utterly fatal to all scenic illusion', it nevertheless indicates Collins's concern in directing the audience's interest onto the play's romantic plot via its stage design.[72]

The final scene of *Miss Gwilt* demonstrates that Collins's attention to theatrical success – his deployment of what worked in the theatre, and what did not – was not limited to questions of plot. When the critical press writes of his sometimes-futile attempts to 'compress' lengthy and complex novels into a single play, they are often caught up in questions of plot, as the reviewers for *Miss Gwilt* tend to be. Closer inspection of these dramatic adaptations, especially against the backdrop of their original versions, reveals Collins's adaptive process to be gradually more concerned and familiar with the tastes of Victorian audiences, tastes which sometimes overlapped with those of novel-readers, but which also had a tendency to subvert literary taste entirely. The very things that made Collins's novels successful in the first place, the very things that made *Armadale* a success in both periodical

[70] Collins, *Armadale*, 807.
[71] Collins, *Armadale: A Drama in Three Acts*, 74.
[72] *Pall Mall Gazette* (10 May 1876), 11.

and novel-form, were the things Collins had to change when transferring it to the stage. That he had to eliminate or alter those aspects of what made *Armadale* a successful novel was a lesson he learned through his time working in the theatre; his original 1866 adaptation of the novel, a version he himself later deemed a failure utterly unsuitable for stage performance, illustrates this.

The generic inconsistency of a novel like *Armadale* when adapted for the stage inevitably confused audiences and reviewers alike. Where *The Standard* referred to the play as 'a morbid melodrama', others used generic phrasing such as 'powerful' and 'unhealthy drama', and Collins's own printed plays never refer to themselves as melodramas.[73] Nevertheless, one need not look far to understand why some reviewers observed *Miss Gwilt* through the lens of melodrama: its entire plot, reliant as it is on doubled identities and foul play, is not immediately evident as the realm of thoughtful, cerebral drama. Even the theatre in which it was staged, The Globe, was a far cry from the intimate space of The Prince of Wales's. The theatre had a capacity of 1,800, nearly twice that of the Bancrofts' venue, and was known, by the time *Miss Gwilt* was staged there in 1876, primarily for the production of operettas adapted from the French such as Henry S. Leigh's *Fal-sac-ap-pa* (1871), a version of Offenbach's *Les Brigands*.[74] The process of detection itself – subdued in *Miss Gwilt* but brought to a fever pitch in Collins's later adaptation of *The Moonstone* – itself had a precursor in Victorian melodrama, particularly in Tom Taylor's *The Ticket-of-Leave-Man* (Olympic 1863). Hawkshaw, the detective in Taylor's play, anticipates themes upon which Collins would elaborate both in *Armadale* and *The Moonstone*: the excitement of suspicion and the subsequent involvement of an outside actant in investigation and discovery. Dickens's Inspector Bucket, the detective in *Bleak House* (1852-3), had already been present for over a decade in England, while in America Edgar Allan Poe's *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* had been published over twenty years prior. 'When a whole

[73] *The Standard* (17 April 1876), 3.
[74] Richard Traubner, *Operetta: A Theatrical History* (Routledge: London, 2003), 60.

civilization is engaged in using its imagination melodramatically', writes Maurice Wilson Disher, 'novelists and playwrights, alike, and in bulk, inevitably use identical means to achieve some thrilling effect'.[75]

The generic indeterminacy of *Miss Gwilt* militates against readings of the play from a single perspective: it can be a tragedy, a melodrama, a sensation drama, or a detective drama, shifting amorphously between these genres depending on one's vantage point. A useful point can be made, however, in considering specific aspects of the play rather than the work as a whole. To return to Heilman's distinction between tragedy and melodrama, the character of Miss Gwilt, between the 1866 and 1875 adaptations, undergoes a determined shift from the melodramatic to the tragic, as part of Collins's larger project in reorienting the play's focus onto the drama's capacity for psychological complexity. Melodrama's moral binarism finds a place in *Miss Gwilt*, though it finds itself in one and the same character: Miss Gwilt herself suffers from the dual impulses inside her, and she is at once the play's heroine and villain. Though one reviewer praised Cavendish's acting while complaining that her 'undoubted ability should be bestowed on so morally unworthy an object', others were more equivocal in their condemnation of the eponymous character, perhaps sensing the similarities between herself and characters like Anne Silvester or Mercy Merrick.[76]

The evolution of Miss Gwilt's character, from her initial novelistic depiction – the character who speaks 'with a merciless tyranny of eye and voice–with a merciless use of her power over the feeble creature who she addressed'[77] – into her 1866 dramatic version, who escapes detection but nevertheless profits from her sexual attraction, and finally into her 1875 dramatic version, who sheds much of what made her original iterations evil in the eyes of reviewers and writers like Dickens, is

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[75] Maurice Wilson Disher, *Blood and Thunder: Mid-Victorian Melodrama and its Origins* (Frederick Muller: London, 1949), 245.
[76] *Fun* (26 April 1876), 186.
[77] Collins, *Armadale*, 455-56.

indicative of Collins's investment in using his stage adaptations to probe the same kinds of ethical dilemmas as his novels. Michael Diamond has noted that 'over the course of [*Armadale*'s] serialization, the *Cornhill* lost about three thousand readers, unable to stomach the evil Miss Gwilt'.[78] Evil characters, however, had abounded in nineteenth-century novels and plays for decades before Miss Gwilt. What made *Armadale* – and, indeed, Collins's wider *oeuvre* – so objectionable is that it ruptures melodrama's easily legible moral binary. Readers were unable to stomach Miss Gwilt not simply because they saw her as evil, but because the novel did not unilaterally condemn her. In its review of the novel, the *Saturday Review* stated that 'the real objection to *Armadale* is not that Miss Gwilt is too sinful to be drawn. The question is whether it is worth while drawing her, and what the picture comes to when it is painted. The chief flaw in it is not that it is pernicious, but that it is ugly'.[79] Miss Gwilt as a character is indicative of Collins's career-long concern with interrogating ethics and justice, and the evolution of *Armadale*'s dramatic adaptations demonstrate his attempts to reconcile his dramatic writing with the psychological and moral complexity of his novels.

The detective drama, however, did not offer the same avenues for narrative complexity that the novel did. This is not to suggest that the Victorian theatre did not demonstrate narrative complexity, as is often either claimed or implied, but that the nineteenth-century stage demonstrated that complexity in a different form, in a language of its own. While Miss Gwilt's devious sexuality in the novel can exist in tandem with 'the inner agony that tortured her' in having to deny her marriage to Midwinter, in order to demonstrate the psychological complexity of a character both driven to and capable of crime onstage, Collins must simplify the convoluted plot of his mammoth novel.[80] The simplification of plot, however, does not necessarily entail the simplification of *Armadale*'s

[78] Diamond, *Victorian Sensation*, 207.
[79] *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, 155.
[80] Collins, *Armadale*, 756.

complex characters motivated in a wide variety of ways. Victoria Stewart has recently shown that interwar debates about the prominence of detective fiction were, in fact, continuous with debates about literary modernism; Collins's earlier, prototypical detective fiction – onstage or in a novel – demonstrates a similar psychological complexity which is usually found to have its genesis in literary modernism.[81] If recent critical re-readings of Collins's novels, *Armadale* among them, make a case for their subtlety and nuance as precursors to literary modernism, it is necessary to also include their dramatic versions in those arguments.

Another aspect of *Armadale* that gets lost in what Henry James called 'the mysterious process of "adaptation"' is its colonial presence.[82] Anticipating later readings of *The Moonstone* that bring its relationship with imperialism to the fore, Caroline Reitz has recently noted that '*Armadale* demonstrates an Englishness that is strengthened by recognizing colonial mistakes, by articulating a discourse of colonial gwilt'.[83] Suchitra Choudhury has also recently read Miss Gwilt's red Paisley shawl as 'a powerful metaphor to symbolize mid-century anxieties about class and empire'.[84] While the novel is set between the years 1832 and 1837, immediately following the abolition of slavery in the British empire, both the 1866 and 1875 versions of the dramatic adaptation are set in the present, in various English locations, with a brief excursion into Italy. Neither play makes any significant reference to the novel's colonial context, despite that context structuring so much of the novel's modern critical reception. That Collins whitewashed the story of *Armadale* for the stage in order to render it more palatable for often-fickle Victorian audiences is unlikely: his earlier collaboration with Charles Fechter, *Black and White* (Adelphi 1869), set in Trinidad in 1830 handles

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[81] Victoria Stewart, 'Defining Detective Fiction in Interwar Britain', *The Space Between*, 9:1 (2013), 103-118, especially 102.
[82] Henry James, *The Scenic Art: Notes on Acting and the Drama, 1872-1901*, edited by Allan Wade (R. Hart-Davis: London, 1949), 93.
[83] Caroline Reitz, 'Colonial 'Gwilt': In and Around Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 33:1 (2000), 101.
[84] Suchitra Choudhury, 'Fashion and the "Indian Mutiny": The 'Red Paisley Shawl' in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 44:4 (2016), 817.

the theme of slavery, while Boucicault's *The Octoroon* and adaptations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* proliferated in English theatres.[85] Collins himself, moreover, rarely shied away from conflict or controversy in his writing, evidenced by both the subject matter of his literary and dramatic writing as well as their prefaces, which often directly confront the inflammatory critical conversation surrounding his work. The nineteenth-century stage had also demonstrated that it could successfully entertain the notion of staging England's relationship with India: Boucicault's *Jessie Brown or the Relief of Lucknow* had premiered in 1858 to great success.

Armadale's colonial plot was one of the many aspects of the novel Collins removed when dramatising it in order to ensure the integrity of his characters' psychological complexity. While the novel form allowed Collins to integrate a variety of aspects into his fiction, the exigencies of stage production necessitated a distillation of his artistic project. While the novel form – its sheer size, its polyvocal narrative structure, its persistence in the periodical press – allowed Collins to weave a variety of contemporary social, political, and economic commentary into the fabric of his novels, that commentary gets more narrowly focused in their stage adaptations. This is not to suggest that his plays are de-politicised; rather, they participate aggressively in discourses more familiar to the stage, such as the rehabilitation of 'fallen' women. Instead, dramatising the narrative complexity of crime, the delicate balance between eliciting sympathy for a character while also depicting that character's criminal actions required the entirety of the play's rhetorical strength, in the 1866 but especially in the 1875 stage adaptation of *Armadale*. That such a project was not always successful does not necessarily neutralize the otherwise nuanced portrayal of *Miss Gwilt*'s eponymous character. In experimenting with the possibilities of detective fiction at a time when detective fiction was itself in its infancy, especially in England, Collins's writing anticipates the psychologically complex crime

[85] See Hazel Waters, *Racism on the Victorian Stage: Representation of Slavery and the Black Character* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2007).

fiction of later modernists. His dramatic adaptations, those of *Armadale* in particular, figure at the centre of this claim: they demonstrate his attention to the possibility of dramatising an ethically complex character, and his gradual process of reconciling what was palatable and successful on the Victorian stage with his own artistic interests and moral compass. In reorienting much of the drama's focus onto its romantic plot – the triangulated relationship between Miss Gwilt, Midwinter, and Armadale – Collins blends the familiar dramatic language of the Victorian stage with his characteristic attendance to psychological complexity, a concern evident in his detective fiction and its dramatic counterpart.

The Moonstone

The rich critical heritage of *The Moonstone*, 'the sole mid-Victorian novel of the first rank that makes England's relation with India the center of its business', according to Ian Duncan, has largely focused on either its relationship to detection or imperialism and how those relationships are then mediated by the novel form.[86] A number of scholars have interpreted the novel's concern with its imperial context, embodied in the form of the diamond's initial theft from India, and subsequently in the Brahmin priests whose presence lurks in the background of the novel as an exoticised reminder of the diamond's origin, as central to its discursive strategy in either opposing or promoting colonial ideology. Certain scholars have read empire as one aspect of Victorian England treated by Collins in the novel, and others have viewed the imperial project as a foundational force which underpins all of Collins's other social, economic, and political criticism in the novel. Patricia Miller Frick has noted that the presence of the Indian diamond reveals 'the disorder and disharmony

[86] Ian Duncan, '*The Moonstone*, the Victorian Novel, and Imperialist Panic', *Modern Language Quarterly*, 55:3 (1994), 297.

underlying the English characters' relationships with one another', and in a similar vein Ashish Roy has argued that the novel's 'chief concern is not the diamond's actual recovery but the violation of an English home', producing 'a *mythos* entirely consonant with arguments for empire'.[87] The entire absence of the Brahmin priests in the dramatic version of *The Moonstone* complicates Niketa G. Narayan's claim that they are 'central to the narrative and are far more active (and effective) policing agents than the English characters'.[88]

Further still, D. A. Miller's influential reading of *The Moonstone* which blends Foucauldian disciplinary ideology with the form of the detective novel has endured in informing its critical reception: '*The Moonstone* tells a story of modern power analogous to Foucault's […] If Foucault is right, the text would do more than dramatize a certain ideology of power. It would produce this ideology as an effect – and in the mode – of its being a novel'.[89] Collins's dramatisation of *The Moonstone* pushes these readings of the novel which centralize either its imperial or detective context (or both) beyond the boundary of formal consideration. That the stage version excises almost entirely the novel's imperial context certainly complicates Duncan's claim, and if the detection 'inscribed in the ordinary practices and institutions of the world' identified by Miller persists in the play, then it is not a result of the formal elements particular to the novel.[90] Mark Hennelly's formal assessment that 'the Moonstone with its attendant mineralogical and mythological pedigree specifically informs the novel's narrative and plot structures, its presentation of character, and its thematic concerns' does not necessarily transpose onto its dramatic version. Katie Lanning has also

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[87] Patricia Miller Frick, 'Wilkie Collins's 'Little Jewel': The Meaning of *The Moonstone*', *Philological Quarterly* 63:3 (1984), 318; Ashish Roy, 'The Fabulous Imperialist Semiotics of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*', *New Literary History*, 24:3 (1993), 657-681.
[88] Niketa G. Narayan, 'The Persistence of the Brahmin Priests in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 45:4 (2017), 783.
[89] D. A. Miller, 'From 'Roman Policier' to 'Roman-Police': Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*', *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 12:3 (1980), 167.
[90] Ibid., 160.

argued that a closer examination of the novel's serial publication 'recovers Betteredge's *Crusoe* from narrative trope or pure fiction and restores its dual nature and layered meanings, all of which combine to produce a complex understanding of the text that is reflective of the media, attitudes, and anxieties of its time and period'.[91] The existence of *The Moonstone*'s dramatic version does not negate such arguments, but it does support readings that go beyond the usual triangulation of the novel between print publication and wider political contexts. An awareness of dramatic form encourages readings that go beyond the narrow limitation of the novel form.

When Collins approached Marie and Squire Bancroft, then managers of the Prince of Wales's Theatre, about a potential dramatisation of *The Moonstone*, both the couple and Collins himself agreed that the production would be 'too melodramatic in its treatment' for the small, intimate theatre.[92] His dramatic version, they thought, would be more at home on the stage of the Olympic: a larger venue where Collins had previously enjoyed great success with his adaptations of *The Woman in White* (1871) and *The New Magdalen* (1873). Despite having assigned roles to the Prince of Wales's company – Marie Bancroft would have resumed character-acting in the form of Miss Clack, a passion which she had resignedly left behind for quieter, domestic dramas – the managerial couple opted instead to leave themselves 'stranded for an autumn production suitable to the theatre and the newcomers'.[93] The play was eventually staged at The Olympic in 1877 to moderately positive reviews, though it was ultimately pulled from the stage after only a two-month run due to faltering receipts.

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[91] Katie Lanning, 'Tessellating Texts: Reading The Moonstone in All the Year Round', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 45:1 (2012), 18.
[92] Bancrofts, *On And Off the Stage*, 62-3.
[93] Ibid.

As early as December 1867, almost a decade before it would finally be staged at The Olympic, Collins was already imagining *The Moonstone* as a drama.[94] When approached by an author who intended to produce his own dramatisation of the novel, Collins responded: 'I am myself about to dramatise "The Moonstone." My first rough draft of the contemplated play is already drawn out. Under these circumstances it is not possible for me to comply with your request'.[95] By 1870, Collins wrote to John Palgrave Simpson, then secretary of the Dramatic Authors' Society, to let him know he had 'a complete Scenario of "The Moonstone" […] waiting in my "archives" until I can find time to write the piece, and actors to play it'.[96] Collins finally had the play, *The Moonstone: A Dramatic Story in Three Acts* privately printed in 1877. The licensing copy is held in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection, while Henry Neville's prompt copy, which survives in Harvard's Houghton Library, is instructive in illustrating Collins's amenability to change even in the middle of a run.

The Moonstone's dramatic adaptation was to be Collins's next theatrical venture after the moderate success of *Miss Gwilt*.[97] Like his dramatisation of *Armadale*, Collins's adaptation of *The Moonstone* bears the distinct mark of the decade of experience producing works for theatrical audiences. Though *The Moonstone* is canonically received as one of the progenitors of the modern detective novel – T. S. Eliot famously called it 'the first, the longest, and the best of the modern English detective novels in a genre invented by Collins' – its dramatic version strays from its literary identity in Collins's attempt to appeal to a distinctly theatrical audience.[98] As Collins's most recent biographer points out, 'the love interest between Franklin Blake and Rachel Verinder became the

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[94] Wilkie Collins, 'To Harriet Collins, 28 January 1868', *Public Face II*, 94-5.
[95] Wilkie Collins, 'To Harry Leman, 12 September 1868', *Public Face II*, 122.
[96] Wilkie Collins, 'To John Palgrave Simpson, 2 June 1870', *Public Face II*, 240.
[97] An adaptation of Collins's novel *The Dead Secret* was staged at The Lyceum in August 1877, though beyond allowing the writer E. J. Bramwell to adapt the work, Collins played no further part in its production.
[98] Ronald R. Thomas, 'Detection in the Victorian Novel', in Deirdre David (ed), *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001), 179.

main focus' of the play, a dynamic with which Collins had already experimented and found success in *The Woman in White*, and, to a lesser extent, *Miss Gwilt*.[99]

The novel, serialised in Dickens's *All The Year Round* between January and August 1868, blends many themes for which Collins had become known: a complex plot, intricate details, and memorable characters with questionable morals. *The Moonstone* is the story of Rachel Verinder, a young Englishwoman, who inherits the novel's eponymous diamond on her eighteenth birthday. It is a jewel left to her by her uncle, an officer of the British army who served in India, and was an estranged member of her mother's family. When the diamond disappears on the night of Rachel's eighteenth birthday, the otherwise quiet Verinder family home is thrown into disarray as various parties interrogate servants, members of the family, and investigate every inch of the house in search of the missing jewel. The Moonstone is ultimately discovered as having been stolen by Franklin Blake, Rachel's cousin and potential suitor, in an opium-induced trance recreated by the liminal character Ezra Jennings.

When adapting the novel for the stage, Collins reversed the fundamental premise of *The Moonstone* – the disappearance of the diamond, and the subsequent suspicion aroused in readers about which of the characters had stolen it. As in his adaptation of *The Woman in White*, also staged at The Olympic, Collins eliminated the suspense generated in the novel by withholding information from the audience, and instead the play derives dramatic tension from its romantic plot, a move which his previous adaptations demonstrated to him suited theatrical audiences. Audiences witnessed Franklin removing the Moonstone – all while being observed by Rachel – from its cabinet at the end of the play's first act, something readers of the novel only learn during its final scenes. 'He [Collins] knows that an audience will not stand being puzzled as he delights to puzzle his readers',

[99] Lycett, *Wilkie Collin*s, 363.

wrote the reviewer of the drama for the *Pall Mall Gazette*, 'and therefore he takes them into his confidence from the first'.[100] The play, then, is not about discovering who stole the diamond, but how the romantic relationship between Rachel and Franklin will survive the theft. Collins's dramatisation introduces the romantic intrigue between the two characters before anything is even mentioned about the diamond: upon his return to the Verinders' country-house from an education on the continent, one of Franklin's first lines is to ask Gabriel Betteredge, the house's irascible butler, whether Rachel is yet married.[101] By the middle of the play's first act, Rachel and Franklin have already confessed their love to each other, only to be interrupted on the verge of embrace by the moralising hypocrite Miss Clack.[102] The reviewer for *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper*, for example, referred to the love interest being only 'supplemented by the romantic history of the famous diamond'.[103]

Despite having eliminated the central object of suspense in the novel when adapting it for the stage, Collins nevertheless stages a version of Sergeant Cuff, as opposed to the total elimination of the detective James Bashwood in *Miss Gwilt*. Isabel Stowell-Kaplan has recently assessed Cuff's dramatisation, finding that his character 'allows for the clear resolution expected on the melodramatic stage, proving himself an agent of and for melodramatic style and substance'.[104] While Cuff in the drama serves a function that his novelistic counterpart does not – in the novel Cuff fails to find the diamond, and in the drama he triumphantly hands it back to Rachel himself – the play nevertheless resists being identified as a melodrama. Indeed, as the reviewer of the play for *The*

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[100] *Pall Mall Gazette* (19 September 1877), 10.
[101] Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone: A Dramatic Story, in Three Acts. Altered form the novel for performance on the stage*. (Charles Dickens & Evans, Crystal Palace Press: London, 1877), 4.
[102] Ibid., 14.
[103] *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (23 September 1877), 12.
[104] Isabel Stowell-Kaplan, 'Mediating Melodrama, Staging Sergeant Cuff', *Nineteenth-Century Theatre and Film*, 46:1 (2019), 3.

Graphic noted, 'To figure in this instance as a melodramatist is however not Mr. Collins's desire'.[105] If the role of the detective in the drama, as Stowell-Kaplan claims, is to participate in melodrama's 'epistemological and moral investments', its adherence to ultimately knowable good and evil, then it is Mr. Candy, not Sergeant Cuff, who fulfils this role most prominently. While Cuff's intervention does indeed return the diamond to Rachel's possession, it does not solve the question of how the diamond went from Franklin's theft to a second, unidentified party. It is only through Mr. Candy's recreation of the night of the theft itself – taking over from the novel's Ezra Jennings, who, along with Rosanna Spearman, does not get a dramatic version – that we learn the diamond was handed over to the hypocritical Godfrey Ablewhite for safekeeping.

Cuff's characterisation in the drama is notably less venerating than his literary version. In the novel, the detective is referred to as 'the great Cuff' no less than fourteen times, and 'the celebrated Cuff' five, though no such reference is made in the drama.[106] Franklin's assertion that 'there isn't the equal in England of Sergeant Cuff' sets up the notoriously competent 'all-accomplished' detective with 'immovable eyes'.[107] A review in *The Theatre* of *The Moonstone*'s dramatisation suggests Collins's canny knowledge of the theatrical marketplace: 'Detectives on the stage are risky people just now. […] Somnambulism is perhaps a good thing – upon the stage; so too is a detective. But they are good things of which it is easy to have too much'.[108] Indeed, the presence of Sergeant Cuff in the drama is accordingly minimal; even the moralising Miss Clack occupies a more significant presence in the play.

In shifting much of the dramatic tension away from the question of who stole the diamond, Collins reorients the play, as he did in *Miss Gwilt*, to deal more uniformly with its romantic plot.

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[105] *The Graphic* (22 September 1877), 271.
[106] Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (Broadview Press: Peterborough, 1999).
[107] Ibid., 155.
[108] *The Theatre* (18 September 1877), 114.

Even when Rachel has seen Franklin steal the diamond out of her own cabinet, she refuses to accuse him of the theft, and appears less concerned with the loss of the diamond than with the loss of her romantic suitor: 'He can calculate on my poor servants being suspected of the theft; he can sell the jewel abroad, and cheat me as he has cheated his creditors! And this is the man I love? This is the hero of my secret thoughts, for years past?'[109] Indeed, one of the most notable revisions Collins makes in adapting *The Moonstone* for the stage is in rendering Rachel's motives significantly less opaque. In the novel she refuses to co-operate with the investigations led by Sergeant Cuff, she does not respond to questions posed by either her mother or the family's lifelong butler, and does not admit, until the end of the novel, that she has witnessed Franklin steal the diamond from her cabinet. In the play, Rachel's behaviour does not change; she remains equally reluctant in acquiescing to any of the demands placed on her. Significantly, however, Collins allows audiences a glimpse into her motive. In other words, though Rachel continues to avoid any involvement whatsoever in the investigation for the diamond, audiences understand why: she is desperately preserving the reputation of the man whom she loves, and therefore also her own reputation: 'I degrade myself, if I degrade *him*'.[110] When Sergeant Cuff is on the verge of discovering Franklin's theft of the diamond by way of his paint-stained dressing-gown, Rachel's is tellingly concerned with nothing but Franklin's reputation:

> *Rachel* (*springing to her feet*). He wore his dressing-gown last night! His room will be searched – the stain will be discovered – he will be exposed as a thief before every creature in the house! (*She walks distractedly to and fro.*) After all I have suffered, to see him publicly disgraced – ruined, ruined for life! It's maddening to think of it![111]

Rachel then resolves to destroy Franklin's dressing-gown in a desperate attempt to shield him from the obvious accusation of theft, prompting the following exclamation: 'The stain *is* on his dressing-

[109] Collins, *The Moonstone: A Drama*, 34.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Ibid., 44.

gown! I have saved from exposure a degraded wretch who is unworthy of my interest – unworthy of my pity. Oh, how ashamed of myself I feel! I never knew how meanly I could behave until now'.[112]

In an 1867 letter to Jane Bigelow, the American writer and politician John Bigelow's wife, Collins sums up the character of Rachel Verinder:

> I hope my new story will, in some degree justify your good opinion of my stories that have gone before it. This time, I am going to try to interest you in a nice girl who submits to a very awkward sacrifice and <u>does</u> something very generous – all for love. She is, I think, to be a dark – as a set-off against poor "Miss Gwilt," whom I persist in thinking a hardly-used woman. Black hair (I hear) is to be brought into fashion – against red – in Paris, next season – so my dark young lady has a chance of appealing to the newest and freshest sympathies of the sex – which is a great point.[113]

Though Collins is referring to the Rachel Verinder of the novel, here, this very paradigm – a character who submits to an awkward sacrifice all for love – is also true of the Rachel of the play. Indeed, it is doubly evocative of Rachel's dramatic version; without the innumerable plot elements that form the rich fabric of the novel – the Brahmin priests, the suspicion of crime, the eccentric Ezra Jennings and Rosanna Spearman, for example – Rachel's 'awkward sacrifice' becomes the focal point of the drama. Collins's comparison between Rachel and Miss Gwilt is equally telling; in 1867, before he had written *Miss Gwilt* and had only published *Armadale: A Drama in Three Acts*, the version of *Armadale* that offered a less sympathetic portrayal of the governess, Collins nevertheless saw his character in a sympathetic light. That Collins should, in the wake of the furore raised by her character in the critical press, continue to consider Miss Gwilt 'a hardly-used woman' further elucidates my earlier claim that it is his ultimately sensitive, compassionate, and nuanced depiction of her character that incited the ire of moralising reviewers. The very idea that crime could lurk among

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[112] Ibid., 46.
[113] Wilkie Collins, 'To Jane Bigelow, 18 June 1867', *Public Face II*, 75.

the well-mannered class of English society – its even-tempered governesses, its gentle heiresses – is precisely what concerned the opponents of Collins's novels.

An undercurrent of sexual tension also importantly highlights Franklin's theft of the diamond, both in the novel and in the play. Though readers do not find out until the end of the novel that Franklin entered Rachel's rooms in the middle of the night in order to steal the diamond, in the play this sequence closes the first act. Nevertheless, the immediate response is clear in both cases: why did Rachel not immediately alert the house to Franklin's misconduct in entering her rooms at night, and why did she not then inform the police after the diamond had disappeared? As Collins's letter to Jane Bigelow explicates, Rachel opts not to inform the police of Franklin's actions out of love, though the preservation of her own reputation is inevitably wrapped up in the mere fact of Franklin's presence in her rooms at night. Thus, Franklin's theft of the diamond is itself imbued with a sexual undercurrent which ineffably colours the way in which Rachel navigates the investigation of the diamond's disappearance: she must balance her own sexual reputation, her love for Franklin, and the theft of her diamond. In the novel this is something readers experience in retrospect; onstage, audiences experience this very dynamic with Rachel in real-time.

Adherence to Heilman's terminology becomes complicated when considering Collins's dramatic adaptation of *The Moonstone*. Rachel Verinder is essentially an undivided character; her motive remains, throughout the play, the preservation of Franklin Blake's reputation, a sacrifice she makes purely out of love for him. In doing so, however, she grapples with the duty she owes to her loving mother, to her loyal and faithful servants, and to a more abstract sense of justice. The novel's Rachel does not grapple with such problems – or, perhaps more accurately, if she does, the reader is not privy to those struggles. In the drama, however, those struggles make up the entirety of the dramatic interest: *The Moonstone*'s dramatic version is not about discovering the location of a missing

diamond, but how the impact of such a diamond's theft affects the ostensibly happy dynamic of an English country-home.

Reviewers of the play were divided in their reception of Collins's dramatic emendations, particularly with the transferral of dramatic interest onto the romantic plot. 'The motive of the play', wrote the reviewer for *The Standard*, 'the suspicion on the part of a young heiress that her impecunious cousin, whom she loves and who loves her, has stolen her diamond, is somewhat repulsive'.[114] While *The Examiner* otherwise praised Collins's experimentation – particularly his reduction of the play to a twenty-four hour period – they nevertheless claim that 'Mr. Collins's ingenuity in replacing the interest of the novel by a play-interest which ought to have been equally powerful is more or less thrown away'.[115] 'The plot thus modified necessarily awakens no expectation', wrote *The Graphic*, and 'causes no suspense'.[116] 'To speak in the language of architectural metaphor', wrote *The Morning Post*, 'he has discarded the ground plan of his novel altogether, and, knocking down the story, has built out of its bricks a play'.[117]

Generic indeterminacy characterised *The Moonstone*, both in the play's production and critical reception. *The Moonstone*'s legacy as a detective novel requires further interrogation when considering its dramatic adaptation. Though the Bancrofts agreed that the play would be too melodramatic for the Prince of Wales's, melodrama was itself a term Collins was reluctant to apply to his own work, and his excision of those plot elements which would lend themselves well to a traditional melodrama indicate his reluctance to embrace the enduringly popular form, even as he continued to search for theatrical success. Even the play's central focus – the romantic relationship between Rachel and Franklin – appears better suited to the romantic mishaps of the Robertsonian drama than an

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[114] *The Standard* (19 September 1877), 3.
[115] *The Examiner* (22 September 1877), 1209.
[116] *The Graphic* (22 September 1877), 271.
[117] *The Morning Post* (18 September 1877), 5.

Olympic melodrama. Unlike Taylor's *The Ticket-of-Leave Man* (1863), which was also staged at The Olympic and in which Henry Neville also starred as Robert Brierly, the eponymous character, Franklin is only ever suspected by Rachel herself, not an official branch of the judiciary. Where the intervention of a detective facilitates Robert Brierly's eventual marriage to May, in *The Moonstone* Sergeant Cuff's intervention has the potential to place Franklin Blake in prison, a fate that Rachel desperately attempts to avoid.

Like the adaptation of *Miss Gwilt*, Collins noted that 'many of the chief scenes and situations [in *The Moonstone*] are not in the novel at all, and are now first invented by me'.[118] He later told American manager Augustin Daly, who was to stage *The Moonstone* across the Atlantic, that 'the best scenes and situations are not in the novel at all'.[119] Collins's adaptation of *The Moonstone* demonstrates the competing priorities of Collins's dramatic writing. As Stowell-Kaplan suggests, Cuff's character embraces the melodramatic legacy of The Olympic theatre, while Collins's choices in plot and staging themselves reject that very same melodramatic tradition. The dramatic adaptations Collins produced throughout his career illustrate the tensions that the nineteenth-century stage would come to face as it struggled to cater to both a well-established audience that had a history of enjoying melodramatic productions and an increasingly gentrified audience that balked at what they perceived as melodrama's lowbrow entertainment. As the cross-class appeal of Collins's writing suggests, however, these two audiences are not as disparate as might be imagined, and, when Collins was adapting his novels into plays throughout the 1870s and 80s, the nineteenth-century theatre was working to simultaneously respect its traditions and bring new audiences into the fold. Henry Irving's management of the Lyceum, the Bancrofts's management of the Prince of Wales's, and the management of St. James's by John Hare and the Kendals, for instance, all gesture towards the

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[118] Wilkie Collins, 'To Fanny Davenport, 8 September 1877', *Public Face III*, 168.
[119] Wilkie Collins, 'To Augustin Daly, 25 September 1877', Ibid., 172.

attempt made by nineteenth-century theatre practitioners to reconcile the drama's storied past with its upwardly mobile future.

As his career progressed, and especially as he gained theatrical experience, Collins's female heroines became increasingly complex and sympathetic. The plays he created out of his novels in the 1870s illustrate this point: Laura Fairlie, Magdalen Vanstone, Mercy Merrick, Anne Silvester, Miss Gwilt, and Rachel Verinder, are all equally or more sympathetic than their novelistic counterparts. The female heroine, then, is a nexus for the many interconnected facets of Collins's career. They often emblematize the political fervor in which his writing was increasingly steeped as his career progressed, especially where his writing rails against unjust marriage laws and echoes contemporary proto-feminist movements. They also demonstrate his shrewd, businesslike approach to writing, an approach that became increasingly evident as he learned what sold tickets and what did not. Conversely, they are also indicative of his passion for storytelling, one which found expression in several forms and prompted him to write, in the preface to the revised 1871 edition of the novel: 'I doubt if I should have lived to write another book, if the responsibility of the weekly publication of this story had not forced me to rally my sinking energies of body and mind – to dry my useless tears, and to conquer my merciless pains'.[120] He thanks his readers and his characters, refers to them as having made 'friends' across the world, and imbues them with a humanity that militates against readings of Collins's career that see it as profiteering opportunism.[121]

Collins relied not only on his female heroines to produce much of the interest of his novels and plays, but also on the actresses who brought them to life onstage. Lydia Foote, Ada Cavendish, Ada Dyas, Fanny Davenport, and Isabella Pateman all became central figures in Collins's theatrical career for the roles they played in embodying his complex characters. Isabella Pateman played

[120] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 49.
[121] Ibid.

Rachel in Collins's adaptation of *The Moonstone* at The Olympic in 1877, opposite Henry Neville as Franklin Blake. Pateman had previously played Ophelia to one of Edwin Booth's Hamlets and was, in 1877, engaged in the Olympic's company alongside her husband Robert, who played the minor role of Candy in *The Moonstone*.

Isabella Pateman's career on the Victorian stage illustrates the larger web of interconnected actors, writers, and theatres which characterised it: before taking on the role of Rachel in *The Moonstone*, she had previously acted the part of the heroine in a revival of Tom Taylor's historical drama *Lady Clancarty* in 1876, a role originated by Ada Cavendish two years earlier in 1874.[122] Her relationship with the critical press – who knew her as 'Bella Pateman' – was a slightly mixed one: the reviewer for *The Academy* stated: 'Her performance in *Clancarty* gives one no reason to think that her name must some day be added to those of the few actresses who have any serious claim to be considered artists'.[123] The reviewer for *The Examiner*, praising her later performance opposite Henry Neville in *The Wife's Secret* (1876), laments the unsuitability of the part but nevertheless praises her acting: 'Such slight defects are all the more to be regretted, as they inevitably detract from the praise that must be awarded to Miss Pateman's acting, and their avoidance would heighten, by leaving more evident, her power'.[124] *The Theatre*, of her performance in *The Wife's Secret*, also positively noted that 'We have comparatively few actresses who are, or promise to be, strong in emotional display'.[125]

It is in this context that the press viewed her performance of Rachel Verinder in *The Moonstone*, which was generally much better received than her role as Lady Clancarty. *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* praised her 'easy grace' and 'intensity and depth of feeling which commanded the

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[122] Leigh Hunt, 'The Drama', *The Athenaeum* (14 March 1874), 268-9.
[123] *The Academy* (4 November 1876), 462.
[124] *The Examiner* (24 March 1877), 375.
[125] *The Theatre* (27 Mach 1877), 97.

sympathy and applause of the house', though *The Graphic* criticised her 'exaggerated vehemence'.[126] *The Era* claimed that her 'acting throughout was admirable […] and thanks to her efforts and those of Mr Neville, the pulse of the audience was made to beat faster', though the *Pall Mall Gazette* notes 'her acting in the lighter parts leaves much to be desired'.[127] Reviewers were generally less critical of her male counterpart, Henry Neville, in the other lead role of Franklin Blake, as well as the Olympic's company more generally. *The Examiner* noted that the 'acting of the play leaves little to be desired', while *The London Reader* praised 'the attraction of a good play, written by a popular author, and supported by an excellent acting company'.[128] 'A respectable interpretation was afforded', writes the reviewer for *The Athenaeum*, 'Mr. Neville marked with distinctness the different phases of shame and indignation through which the hero passed'.[129] *The Morning Post* had praise for both lead actors, writing 'Miss Pateman's part is one of more than ordinary difficulty, and as much may be said of Mr. Neville, but both acquitted themselves of their arduous tasks with signal ability'.[130]

In addition to the plot elements Collins altered in dramatising his novel, he also experimented with other theatrical aspects in producing *The Moonstone* for the stage, and his experimentations with plot also extended into experimentations with form. The reduction of the action of the drama to a twenty-four-hour period is mirrored in one of Collins's staging choices for the play: the entirety of the drama occurs in the main hall of the Verinder country home, and the changes between acts represent only the passage of time within that twenty-four-hour period. In other words, for the entirety of the play, the audience sees just one very specific view into the Verinder home. At the end of the first act, for example, the act ends 'without the fall of the curtain. During the whole interval between the First and Second acts, the stage is left empty in the view of

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[126] *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (23 September 1877), 12; *The Graphic* (22 September 1877), 271.
[127] *The Era* (23 September 1877), 12; *Pall Mall Gazette* (19 September 1877), 10.
[128] *The Examiner* (24 March 1877), 375; *The London Reader* (13 October 1877), 556.
[129] *The Athenaeum* (22 September 1877), 380.
[130] *The Morning Post* (18 September 1877), 5.

the audience'.[131] The reviewer for *The Standard* found the simplicity in scenographic design satisfying, noting that 'the shortness of the intervals between the acts is a most welcome improvement'.[132] The transition between the second and third acts was represented by merely the 'falling of velvet drapery', which, according to the reviewer for *The Morning Post*, sufficed to 'mark a momentary interval between the acts'.[133]

Collins's choice in staging here is significant in its departure from his previous theatrical writing. In contrast to *Miss Gwilt*, which oscillates between London, the English countryside, and Italy, *The Moonstone* occupies only a narrow view of a single, quintessentially English country-home. The scene onstage of the Olympic echoes the butler Gabriel Betteredge's line from the novel: 'here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian Diamond'.[134] Audiences of *The Moonstone* did not witness the sensational plot elements of foul play and crime as they unfolded in equally sensational locations, either abroad or lost in the anonymous swell of London's urbanity: the staging of the play deliberately emphasised the juxtaposition of crime – the theft of the diamond – with the otherwise tranquil idyll of the English country-home. Unlike *The Woman in White* and *The New Magdalen* – both of which Collins had previously produced at the Olympic – *The Moonstone*'s scenes do not alternate between the English countryside and distinctly more sensational venues such as an asylum, anonymous London lodgings, or a sanatorium: the play decidedly demonstrates dramatic intrigue in its insistence on representing events occurring not only in a single countryside home, but one specific angle of that home. When questioned about the safety of the Verinder estate, Rachel's response emphasises the perceived safety of the domestic sphere: 'I hate the worry of keeping keys! What use are they here? Is my house an hotel? Are my faithful old servants thieves?'[135]

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[131] Collins, *The Moonstone: A drama*, 28.
[132] *The Standard* (19 September 1877), 3.
[133] *The Morning Post* (18 September 1877), 5.
[134] Collins, *The Moonstone*, 88.
[135] Ibid., 22.

The staging of the play, moreover, highlights Anthea Trodd's claim that 'what the intrusion of the police might expose was that the home was not so much a sanctuary from public life as a continuation of it, operating with the same methods of manipulation and subterfuge'.[136] Indeed, *The Moonstone*'s dramatic version makes such a claim even more forcefully than the novel: while the latter is spread out over a number of locations, not all of them domestic, the play homes in on the Verinder estate, and it alone.

Collins had originally imagined the play as a three-act piece, but when it was finally staged in 1877 the drama had expanded to four acts to allow for more dramatic tension. Henry Neville's prompt copy details the changes made to the piece during production, changes that Collins considered 'essential to the dramatic interests of the piece'.[137] The most significant of these changes is in shortening the second act of the play, when it is revealed that the incriminating piece of evidence – the paint-stained dressing gown – belongs to Franklin Blake. He holds up the article of clothing and shouts 'Mine!!!'[138] In Collins's original dramatisation, this is followed by a lengthy back-and-forth in which Franklin asserts his innocence, and Rachel remains obstinately silent. In the final staging, however, audiences only see Franklin come to the realisation that somehow, he had stolen the diamond. Other revisions to Neville's copy shorten some of Collins's tendency towards lengthy dialogue, and the often-declamatory additions are certainly indicative of Neville and the Olympic's tendencies towards the melodramatic. Though again, it is difficult to categorise Collins's adaptation as a melodrama, given the many changes Collins makes himself in dramatising his work: the novel

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[136] Anthea Trodd, 'The Policeman and the Lady: Significant Encounters in Mid-Victorian Fiction', *Victorian Studies*, 27:4 (1984), 460.
[137] Wilkie Collins, 'To Augustin Daly, 22 September 1877', *Public Face III*, 171; Henry Neville's prompt copy of *The Moonstone: A Drama in Three Acts* is available in Harvard University's Theatre Collection: GEN TS 2436 588, Barcode 4125596.
[138] Collins, *The Moonstone: A Drama*, 51.

ends, for example, in murder for the obsequious hypocrite Godfrey Ablewhite who had attempted to sell the diamond to pay off his debts; in the play he is simply arrested.

After *Miss Gwilt* and *The Moonstone*, Collins would no longer experience any of the theatrical success for which he had been searching throughout the entirety of his career. Even as he continued to write novels more explicitly suited for stage performance, they failed to captivate audiences as they had at the beginning of the decade, and in spite of Collins's best efforts, they nevertheless maintained an air of old-fashioned, high-Victorian realism which alienated audiences. Still, Collins's adaptation of *The Moonstone* forces us to interrogate the standard critical reception of his work and encourages new readings that go beyond the canonical critical work on his novels. The process of detection, which Miller famously brought to the fore, is all but sublimated into the play's romantic plot, and the orientalising influence of the Brahmin priests is excised from the play entirely, complicating readings which see Collins as either a pro- or an anti-colonialist writer. His attention to staging, moreover, illustrates the complex fabric of his career, one that was not exclusively sensational or literary. He embraced experimentation and responded flexibly to the demands placed on his writing by fickle theatrical audiences: the compression of chronologies, of scene-setting, of staging and character design, of dialogue and of plot, all contribute to the legacy of his dramatic career and are wholly emblematised in *The Moonstone*.

This chapter began by locating Collins's novels within both the literary and critical histories of the detective novel. Attention paid to these novels' stage versions expands upon the recent critical re-assessments of both Collins's career and the detective novel more broadly. In restoring the dramatic adaptations of *Armadale* and *The Moonstone* to critical attention, it becomes clear that the processes of detection embedded in these novels, as suggested by the criticism of D. A. Miller, are not unique to the novel form, and are instead located in those works' epistemological and

psychological interrogations. The novel's formal elements which have typically been considered constitutive of an emergent surveillance process in the nineteenth century are actually symptomatic of a wider reckoning occurring across forms that struggled to understand the underlying causes and repercussions of crime and punishment. It is an attempt to understand, for example, Miss Gwilt's 'repulsive' motives that produced a near-hysterical reaction in the critical press.

Tracing the figure of the detective from its first sustained appearance in Collins's fiction, in the shady private inquiring of James Bashwood, through to the venerable and famously competent Sergeant Cuff, and finally to their respective dramatic versions (or lack thereof) reveals the same epistemological concerns present in the novels, only represented by the dramatic medium. The ability of a community to know itself – the Armadale lineage, the Verinder household – is thrown into question both in the novel and onstage. I am not suggesting that the form of the nineteenth-century novel is not itself invested in the epistemological probing of Victorian England, but rather that it is not *unique* to the novel form. As demonstrated by the dramatic adaptations of the very novels that critics have touted as representative of the novel form's exceptional ability to theorise, reimagine, and critique the communities it represented, the theatre offered a similar ethos of narrative complexity in a language unique to its own medium.

In particular, it is the adaptations' relationship to melodrama, the theatrical landmark against which Collins's plays were often measured, that most effectively demonstrates their ability to ask the very same questions literary critics have found their novel versions to be asking. Melodrama's adherence to a moral binary, the ultimate knowability of good and evil, is most evidently ruptured by the staging of Miss Gwilt. By the time she is finally embodied onstage in 1875, by an actress who had succeeded in garnering praise and approval from much of London's dramatic press, the sheer force with which her character elicited both sympathy and terror is itself representative of the moral

nuance evident in his novels. In flipping melodrama's easily legible moral binary on its head, the play foregrounds the juxtaposition of her criminal behaviour with her sympathetic qualities.

In 1877, a review of *The Moonstone*'s dramatisation published in *The London Reader* concisely illustrates the experience of Collins's previous theatrical endeavours on his dramatic writing: 'The novel on which Mr. Wilkie Collins has built his play is widely known, and the judgment, almost extending to severity, with which the author has "cut out" numerous characters from his published story, has made "The Moonstone" what it could not otherwise have been, an "acting" play'.[139]

[139] *The London Reader* (13 October 1877), 556.

Chapter 4
The Index of Public Opinion

In 1877, the year following *Miss Gwilt*'s London premiere, Henry Irving's Lyceum opened its fall season with an adaptation of Collins's 1857 novel *The Dead Secret*. The play was not adapted by Collins, but by E. J. Bramwell, with 'the Author's express permission'.[1] In many ways the reception of the Lyceum's adaptation of *The Dead Secret* encapsulates the intersection that Collins's career had reached by the final quarter of the nineteenth century. Despite having been adapted by a third party, when *The Examiner* reviewed the play after its opening night performance, the reviewer located the play within the landscape of Collins's career:

> The 'Dead Secret' holds a very distinguished place among the novels of this century. It was written at the only time in the history of our literature when we can be said to have had a school of English novelists, grouped round a recognised master, and working more or less under his guidance. The younger men who wrote stories for *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, under the editorship of Dickens, formed something much nearer a school than had ever appeared before in England. Of all the productions of the pupils of this school there was none which attracted more attention than the 'Dead Secret.'[2]

It was during Collins's tenure writing for Dickens's periodicals that he wrote the novels that have most readily endured in both scholarship and popular culture: *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armadale*, and *The Moonstone*.[3] The works Collins produced after his departure from the demanding

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[1] Gasson, *Wilkie Collins: An Illustrated Guide*, 47.
[2] *The Examiner* (1 September 1877), 1113.
[3] For more on the collaborative work between Collins and Dickens, see Nayder, *Unequal Partners.*

nature of writing for periodicals, and after Dickens's death in 1870, however, demonstrate a determined shift away from the 'school of English novelists' identified by *The Examiner*. As I have discussed in previous chapters, the adaptations of these novels written after 1870 eschew the sensational school of writing fostered by the wide circulation of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, and gesture towards a subtler psychological realism influenced in part by concomitant developments on the stage.

Other reviews of the production were equally willing to wax nostalgic about *The Dead Secret* – which was by then already two decades old – but were nevertheless critical of the Lyceum's adaptation. *The Graphic*, for instance, claimed that though the novel was 'the earliest, and in some respects the best, of the author's long series of fictions', the Lyceum's adaptation 'becomes almost a pure melodrama'.[4] *The Era* claimed that 'the best proof of the inadequacy of the novel for stage purposes is to be found in the fact that it has not been so applied by Mr. Wilkie Collins himself'.[5] Another reviewer expounded on the novel's 'un-dramatic character, seemingly so unfitted for the purposes of the stage'.[6] The reviewer for *The Pall Mall Gazette* wrote that 'the powerful novel makes by no means a powerful play; and its representation at the Lyceum Theatre last Wednesday night failed to arouse anything like the interest which attends the perusal of the book.'[7] They went on to claim that 'no amount of skill in the work of dramatising would have transferred the peculiar attractions of the novel to the acted play.'[8]

Differentiating an 'acted play' from a novel unfit for stage purposes was a recurrent issue throughout Collins's career. Frustrated with lax copyright laws that did not protect his financial

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[4] *The Graphic* (1 September 1877), 199.
[5] *The Era* (2 September 1877), 12.
[6] *Lloyd's Weekly London Newspaper* (2 September 1877), 12.
[7] *The Pall Mall Gazette* (1 September 1877), 11.
[8] Ibid.

interest in unlicensed adaptations of his novels, Collins was equally aggravated by laws that sanctioned pirated adaptations of his work which threatened not only his wallet but also his reputation as a writer and that of his works. When a pirated adaptation of his 1871 novel *Poor Miss Finch* appeared, Collins was characteristically vocal in a letter to John Hollingshead:

> My 'Poor Miss Finch' has been dramatised (without asking my permission) by some obscure idiot in the country. I have been asked to dramatise it, and I have refused, because my experience in the matter tells me that the book is eminently unfit for stage performances. What I dare not do with my own work, another man (unknown in Literature) is perfectly free to do, against my will, and (if he can get his rubbish played) to the prejudice of my novel and my reputation.[9]

Though by 1871 Collins was preparing dramatic versions and copyright performances of the novels he intended to eventually dramatise and printing them privately in order to protect his right to represent them onstage, he did not do this with novels like *Poor Miss Finch* in which he saw nothing to be dramatised. This allowed theatrical pirates to prepare their own dramatic versions and bypass Collins's pecuniary and artistic interests. Other novels more readily intended for performance onstage, such as *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen*, were published alongside Collins's dramatic texts.

After the tepid reception of *The Moonstone* in 1877, though none of Collins's dramatic endeavours would enjoy the critical and popular success of his earlier works, he nevertheless continued to write simultaneously for the periodical press and the stage. When the *Spectator* reviewed Collins's 1880 novel *Jezebel's Daughter*, which was based on his 1858 play *The Red Vial*, it tellingly used the past tense to characterise his career:

> It has been popularly supposed that Mr. Collins was a mighty weaver of plots, and that the dissemination of his works was in direct proportion to the intricacy of his webs. When the ordinary reader thinks of Wilkie Collins, he connects him in his mind with memories of *The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone*, and *After Dark*; whereas Mr. Collins

[9] Wilkie Collins, 'To John Hollingshead, 25 February 1873', *Letters II*, 362-63; emphasis in original.

> himself has all the time been pluming himself on *The New Magdalen*, *The Law and the Lady*, and *Fallen Leaves*.[10]

Even during his lifetime, then, Collins's early writing produced under the auspices of Dickens's widely circulated periodicals cast a looming shadow over all of his subsequent work. The sensational school which he helped to popularise, and from which he earned fame and fortune as a novelist, ultimately overshadowed his ensuing writing. The last works Collins would write for the stage before his death in 1889 were *Rank and Riches*, an original play, and *The Evil Genius*, adapted from the novel of the same name.

Rank and Riches

When *Rank and Riches* opened at the Adelphi on 9 June 1883, Arthur Wing Pinero, whose wife Myra was playing the role of a servant gone mad with jealousy, met Collins backstage. As the two writers exchanged greetings, Pinero observed that in Collins's button-hole was a large camellia, both a nod to the play's lead actress Alice Lingard, who had recently starred in The Imperial's *Camille*, and an acknowledgment that he expected to be called to the stage after the final curtain, just as he had been for several of his successful dramas throughout the 1870s.[11]

Collins began working on *Rank and Riches* as early as March 1880, after the serialisation of his novels *The Fallen Leaves* (1879) and *Jezebel's Daughter* (1879). Various manuscript copies of early drafts of the play remain, which went through the experimental titles *The Bird-Doctor* and *Lady Calista*, before settling on the final version, *Rank and Riches*, that was sent to the Lord Chamberlain for

[10] *The Spectator* (15 May 1880), 627-8, quoted in *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, 207.
[11] John Dawick, *Pinero: A Theatrical Life* (University of Colorado Press: Boulder, 1993), 113-14.

licensing in 1883.[12] Unlike Collins's adaptations, which served the additional function of protecting his dramatic copyright, *Rank and Riches* was a standalone dramatic work, and therefore was not privately printed. The copies that survive, including the one sent to the Lord Chamberlain's Office for licensing and eventually performed at The Adelphi, are manuscript copies.

The intricate plot of *Rank and Riches* revolves around Lady Calista's upcoming marriage to the Duke of Heathcote, in which her father, Lord Laverock, has a vested interest. Having been widowed while Calista was young, Lord Laverock left her upbringing in the hands of her aunt, the affable Lady Sherlock. During this time, Calista's only companion was her maid and foster sister, Joyce Woodburn, who has fallen ill just before the action of the play begins and been replaced by the capricious Alice Rycroft.

The play opens in the waiting room of Lord Laverock's London home, where two people, hired by the family for various purposes, are shown in. The first is Cecil Cassilis, a clerk in the office of Lord Laverock's lawyers, and the second is referred to simply as 'Dominic', an elderly Italian refugee and bird-doctor, who has been engaged to look after Calista's ailing pet bird. While they wait for their respective appointments, it becomes clear that Dominic recognises the young clerk, and he begins to recount the sad tale of Cecil's life back to him. Cecil, having been unjustly accused of theft by his previous employers and removed from their employment, now works as a clerk in a lawyer's office. As Dominic repeats the tale of this unjust accusation, he also reveals that his information comes from the true perpetrator of the theft, who has been waiting for years to confess and bring the truth to light. Optimistic at the prospect of justice on the horizon, Dominic enters the house, as Lady Calista's new maid, Alice Rycroft, joins Cecil in the waiting room.

[12] These versions include *The Bird-Doctor,* held at the Harry Ransom Research Center; *Lady Calista*, held at the Huntington Library, and an earlier draft of *Rank and Riches*, held at the Phillips Exeter Academy.

When Alice notices that the buttons on Cecil's waistcoat are torn off, he explains that his dishevelled appearance is the result of an earlier incident in St. James's Park where he confronted a 'ruffian' that had been assaulting a young woman who will turn out to be Calista herself. Alice becomes instantly infatuated with the handsome young clerk, and the two gossip about Calista's notoriously fiery temper. Overhearing this, Calista enters the room, and, having met neither Cecil nor Alice before, introduces herself in the character of Joyce Woodburn, her previous maid. When Calista recognises Cecil as the man who rescued her in St. James's Park, her subdued attraction to him is starkly contrasted with Alice's sudden infatuation.

As Cecil enters the house, the bell is rung and Calista's fiancé, the Duke of Heathcote, is shown into the waiting room. Shaken by her interaction with Cecil, Calista behaves ambivalently towards the man to whom she will soon be married, while her mind lingers on the young clerk. When Cecil and Dominic both return to the front of the house, the former is suddenly struck ill while the latter tends to him. During this episode, a letter arrives informing Cecil that the true perpetrator of the crime of which Cecil was accused will provide a confession, in writing, at a nearby public house. When it becomes clear that Cecil cannot go in his present state of infirmity, Calista elects to go in his place.

Calista enters the public house and finds herself at the meeting of a Republican Brotherhood. Accused of being a spy, she presents herself once again in the character of Joyce Woodburn and is requested by the brotherhood to drink their toast to the downfall of the English peerage. She retrieves the written confession from the true criminal, who is in service of the Brotherhood as their secretary, and who promptly dies as the curtain closes on the first act.

The ensuing action takes place at Lightcliffe, the Laverock family's seaside home. When Alice and Cecil meet on the pier, she once again expresses her infatuation with the young clerk and

intimates that any relationship between him and Calista will be impossible because of her upcoming marriage. When Calista appears, she and Cecil engage in a fiery conversation that culminates in a clandestine kiss which, unbeknownst to them, is witnessed by the Duke. As Calista leaves the pier, rather than confronting Cecil in a jealous rage, the Duke resolves to leave Calista's marriage entirely up to her choice. He allows for one full month, at the end of which Calista will decide whether she wishes to marry Cecil or the Duke, who magnanimously agrees to accept whichever outcome.

The third act returns to Lord Laverock's London home, which is busy in preparation for Calista's upcoming marriage, when a man enters and reveals the presence of Joyce Woodburn at the meeting of the Republican Brotherhood in a public house. When Lady Sherlock promptly dismisses Joyce Woodburn from her service, Calista intervenes and attempts to explain that it was she who was present at the public house, having assumed Joyce's identity. When her father assumes she is lying to protect Joyce, Calista brings in the landlord and landlady of the public house as witnesses, who confirm that it was she who was present at the meeting. Undeterred, Lord Laverock insists on Calista's marriage to the Duke. At the end of the third act, Alice Rycroft, who had obstinately refused to corroborate Calista's story, picks up a knife from a nearby breakfast table and attempts to murder Calista in a fit of jealous rage.

The fourth act reconciles the various plot elements which have been hitherto introduced throughout the play. The Duke, understanding that Calista is in love with Cecil, withdraws his offer of marriage and encourages the two of them to marry. Cecil, apprehensive of bringing Calista down in rank and being labelled a social climber, postpones their union until he can work his way up in the world. Dominic reveals that he had previously been married to Lord Laverock's mother, an Italian actress, who then married Lord Laverock's father while her first husband, unbeknownst to her, was still alive. It is revealed that Lord Laverock's birth was therefore illegitimate, since his mother's

second marriage was accidentally bigamous, and thus neither he nor Calista has a claim to the hereditary title. Because Calista has been stripped of her rank and title, Cecil now agrees to marry her, and, as the truth is revealed, the Duke resolves to aid Cecil's upward social mobility. The curtain drops as the two men triumphantly clasp hands.

In the context of Collins's career, *Rank and Riches* epitomises the crossroads at which he found himself towards the end of the nineteenth century. Tightly focused around lengthy portions of dialogue, the play eschews the sensational scenes of his novels. In the adaptations he wrote throughout the 1870s, Collins gradually shifted the focus of his plays away from the corporeal thrills for which the sensation genre had earned its name and towards an emergent psychological realism that was grounded in subdued, domestic scenes. *Rank and Riches* represents an attempt to do justice to both the literary legacy for which he was well-known as well as to the tendencies of the late-Victorian stage. In the eyes of both audiences and critics, the play failed spectacularly at both. If Calista's frustration with the constraints and limitations of her life suggested an indication of early feminist impulses, those are undermined by the play's deployment of melodramatic formal elements: her objections to the restrictions of her life are never given the solid grounding necessary to establish a meaningful presence in the play because they are constantly interrupted by coincidence and revelation.

Despite Collins's determined shift away from the sensational writing of the 1860s in his later dramatic works, *Rank and Riches* draws on many of the elements that abounded on the melodramatic and sensational stage. The play's elaborate plot depicts Calista's life against the backdrop of an accidentally bigamous marriage, an attempted murder, and no fewer than three mistaken identities. The play's simultaneous embrace of sensational elements and an emergent domestic realism

characterised by Collins's time working closely with Robertson and the Bancrofts echoes a larger shift in the class context of 'sensation' in the 1880s, as one critic for *The Era* wrote:

> It is the custom with a certain superfine order of dramatic critics to sneer at the sensational drama. They declare there ought to be nothing horrible upon the stage. Nothing to hold the spectator breathless, to harrow up his soul, to excite him, and, as the Fat Boy in "Pickwick" says, to make the flesh creep. […] Now, this superfine view of the Drama is all very well for those who are surrounded by Chippendale furniture, and who take their delights in rooms that reflect a deliciously faded hue of green upon the quaintest of old china cups and expensive bric-à-brac. But even these sedate lovers of dramatic art do not object to be horrified sometimes upon the stage, provided the thing is done in a very genteel sort of way. [13]

The reference to Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* (1836) aptly stands in to represent the divide between the kind of lowbrow sensationalism cultivated at theatres like, for example, The Surrey, where *The Woman in White* was first pirated onstage in 1861, and the highbrow thrill that *Rank and Riches* sought to achieve. The play's class politics, its insistence on Cecil's upward mobility exclusively at the expense of Calista's rank and wealth, is inextricably linked to the class context of its reception. 'It is all very well to talk of culture, or "culcha," as the aesthetic choose to call it', the critic in *The Era* continued, 'but the most cultured man or woman of the day will become as keenly interested over the details of a deed of crime, horror, and bloodshed as the most ignorant occupant of the fourpenny gallery in a suburban Theatre'.[14] Collins's play strains to combine sensational incidents with an aura of prestige, resulting unsuccessfully in a play that audiences and critics alike ultimately jeered off the stage.

In 1883, when Collins was first considering staging *Rank and Riches*, he saw a production of *Camille*, an adaptation of *Dumas, fils*'s *La Dame aux Camélias*, at the Imperial. He found it 'the very worst adaptation of Young Dumas' Dame aux Camélias that could possibly be produced,' but was

[13] *The Era* (22 January 1881), 5.
[14] Ibid.

nevertheless taken with Camille, played by the Australian actress Alice Lingard.[15] 'I have seen nothing since [Aimee] Desclée in "Frou-frou," he wrote, 'so true, so passionate, so various, and so finely disciplined in the matter of Art. I am resolved to keep my piece waiting till I can give her a thoroughly good "cast"'.[16] The production of the play gravitated around the casting of the heroine's role, as had many of Collins's previous plays: Ada Cavendish in *Miss Gwilt* and *The New Magdalen*, as well as with Lydia Foote in *Man and Wife* and Isabella Pateman in *The Moonstone*. Collins's distinct attention paid to the lead actresses of his plays gestures towards the increasingly important role of the international celebrity actress that would come to embody an emergent feminist movement during the *fin-de-siècle*.[17] *Rank and Riches* began its short run at the Adelphi on 9 June 1883, only to close after six performances due to harsh reviews from audiences and critics alike. The management of the Adelphi replaced the show with the production of *Camille* that Collins had originally seen at the Imperial. Despite the distinguished cast assembled around Lingard, which included Myra Holme (Mrs. Pinero) as Alice Rycroft, G. W. Anson as Dominic, and George Alexander (who had recently played Armand to Lingard's Camille) as Cecil, the play was taken off the stage after only six nights.

Rank and Riches builds on themes well-worn throughout Collins's career: marriage, repentance, and domesticity. In Lady Calista's pronounced inability to articulate her emotions and desires, however, Collins's heroine simultaneously looks back towards Mercy Merrick and Magdalen Vanstone, and forwards to the dissatisfied Ibsenite woman who rails against the constrictions of patriarchy. While the play comfortably deploys tropes familiar to both Collins and the melodramatic stage – mistaken identity, crime, guilt, accidental bigamy, the triumph of justice – it is not only the

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[15] Wilkie Collins, 'To William Winter, 27 April 1883', *Letters II*, 458.
[16] Ibid.
[17] See Rhonda K. Garelick, *Rising Star: Dandyism, Gender and Performance in the Fin de Siècle* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1998); Susan A. Glen, *Female Spectacle: The Theatrical Roots of Modern Feminism* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge, 2000); Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin-de-siècle France* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago, 2002).

story of two young lovers who, having been separated by impinging circumstance, defy the odds in order to be together. Indeed, despite the 'rank and riches' of the title, rather than being a lavish display of aristocratic life the play is, characteristically for a work by Collins, a meditation on the nature of marriage and companionship.

One of the themes running through the work, suggested by its previous working title *The Bird-Doctor*, is the mirroring of Calista's own life in the life of Dicky, her sickly pet canary. As Calista deals with the breakdown of her engagement to the Duke of Heathcote, Dominic is often backstage tending to her caged bird. The aviary of the Laverock home is in view throughout the third act, and the stage directions explicitly call for a caged canary onstage.[18] Dominic, speaking to the birds in the aviary, declares to them: 'prisoners as you are, you are often happier than the free human creatures who put you in the cage.'[19] When, on the day set for her marriage to the Duke, Calista can think only of her pet bird, her aunt, Lady Sherlock, admonishes: 'Calista! Are you really interested in nothing but your bird, on the day before your marriage? Are you deliberately trifling with your life to come?'[20] The insistence on keeping pets is a habit to which many of Collins's characters adhere: Fosco and his mice in *The Woman in White*, for example, or Madame Lecount and her exotic reptiles in *No Name*. His novel *Heart and Science*, which ended its serial run in *Belgravia* at the same time *Rank and Riches* opened at The Adelphi, makes an explicit argument against vivisection. In mirroring Calista's metaphorical caging with the literal caging of her pet bird, the play merges Collins's longstanding interest in a nascent movement for women's rights with the recurrent motif of animals in his writing.

[18] Wilkie Collins, *Rank and Riches: A Play in Four Acts and Five Tableaux*. Add MS 53295 F, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Collection, 21.
[19] Ibid., 97.
[20] Ibid., 91.

One of the play's central tensions – that Calista's maid, then, it is revealed, Calista herself, was seen in a public house – echoes *Man and Wife*, in which Anne Silvester's presence as an unmarried woman at an inn had the ability to irreparably tarnish her reputation. Collins's later works return frequently to the ways in which Victorian society placed strict regulations – social, if not legal – on which spaces women were permitted to inhabit without compromising their respectability. This dynamic between the public and private, the commercial and the domestic, had productive implications when it intersected with the staging practices of Victorian theatre. As early as his adaptation of *No Name* in 1870, Collins was exploring the possibilities of the stage to visualise his female characters in the very spaces that they were discouraged or outright forbidden from inhabiting. By rendering this dynamic one of the central plot mechanisms of *Rank and Riches* and, moreover, one of its most stimulating scenes, Collins effectively replaced the sensation scene of the 1860s with scenes of social transgression. The audience, the other characters, even Calista herself are aware of the risks inherent in presenting herself at a public house. That the public house in question also happens to be the meeting place of a Republican Brotherhood whose sole intention is to do away with the aristocracy appears, remarkably, to be an afterthought. When Joyce is accused of having been to The Polestar and Lady Sherlock ultimately learns it was her niece who was present, her worry is not the political agenda of the Brotherhood's members, but rather the attendant scandal of Calista's presence at a public house.

The play is also unique among Collins's corpus of work in the way it focuses more closely – and in some ways sympathetically – on the aristocratic household. Collins frequently depicted the aristocracy in his other works, but primarily as comic, villainous, or minor characters. The main characters of his novels – Walter Hartright, Ozias Midwinter, Franklin Blake, Anne Silvester, and Mercy Merrick, for instance – belong in the portion of broadly middle-class citizens that were sometimes wealthy but not aristocratic. The characters of *Rank and Riches*, as the title suggests,

however, are both wealthy and aristocratic. The distinction is subtle but important. Caught between the upwardly mobile theatre of the late nineteenth century and a legacy of sensational writing that appealed to readers across the class spectrum, *Rank and Riches* gravitates around Calista's aristocratic trials rather than Cecil's working life. Collins's 'social problem' novels and 'problem plays' achieve their most rigorous and coherent social commentary when they are primarily concerned with the class of English citizens who had to work in order to live. The success of *The New Magdalen* and *Man and Wife* – two such works – thus stands in stark contrast to the abject failure of *Rank and Riches*.

Indeed, besides the conversation between Calista and Cecil on the pier which culminates in a brief kiss – a spontaneous moment ludicrous enough to be laughed at by the Adelphi audience – Calista is altogether more concerned with finding meaning beyond her decadent, aristocratic life than she is with marrying Cecil. *Rank and Riches* oscillates between telling the story of a declining aristocracy – one towards which Collins was ambivalent at best – and the story of a young woman struggling to find a place in a new world order. Lady Calista rails against the high society into which she was born but cannot articulate what it is that she wants in its place. When, for example, the Duke presents himself at her home in London immediately following her first conversation with Cecil, Calista cannot make sense of her emotions: 'The Duke of Heathcote! (*aside*) what is the matter with me? I never felt so little inclined to see him as I do at this moment.'[21] When she is short with the Duke, Calista fails to make sense of her irritation: 'Don't be angry with me,' she says to him, 'I am not well. I am irritable without knowing why.'[22] The stage directions register Calista's emotional torpor by instructing her to behave '*absently*' and '*mechanically*,' and when the Duke confronts her, communication breaks down even further: 'You are so dreadfully kind and considerate, I can't

[21] Ibid., 21.
[22] Ibid., 24.

express it. I can only clench my fist.'[23] Even by the end of the play, Calista cannot provide a straightforward answer when the Duke asks her if she loves him: 'I would answer you if I knew my own nature. I don't know it! I can't answer.'[24] That Calista does not respond with a plea on behalf of her relationship with Cecil, and instead registers only an acute failure to identify the workings of her heart and mind, is emblematic of the play's central thesis. Calista is not the flighty, temperamental woman that she is assumed to be by the other characters at the beginning of the play; rather, she is representative of a large swathe of Victorian women who yearned for a fulfilling life configured outside of marriage.[25]

At first glance, Calista's inability to explicate her emotional vicissitudes runs the risk of lapsing into hysterics, for which no further explanation would be necessary. As the play progresses, however, it is clear that Calista's abortive declarations are not the ravings of a madwoman – those lines, still present in the play, belong later to Alice Rycroft – but rather register a larger frustration with the unsatisfying horizon of the life laid before her. In contrast to Catherine Peters's claim that one 'has to dig hard to disinter any coherent intention at all' in the play, Calista's lengthy digressions from the perspective of stifled womanhood often verge on the didactic.[26] Collins allows no room for vagueness, for example, when Calista affirms:

> Oh, how weary I am of the monotone of my life. I should like to do something that would scandalize the whole fashionable world. Do the lower classes live in such narrow limits as <u>we</u> do? The same visits […] all through the season, and the same country house when the season is over with the same jaded London faces and the hateful London gossip once more. How contemptible, how degrading.[27]

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[23] Ibid., 24, 26.
[24] Ibid., 110.
[25] On the Victorian spinster, see Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (Pandora Press: London, 1985); Rita S. Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration: Contested Subjects* (Macmillan: Basingstoke, 1999), chapter 5; Hill, *Sex, Suffrage, and the Stage*, chapter 3.
[26] Peters, *The King of Inventors*, 403.
[27] Collins, *Rank and Riches*, 27.

Calista expands on this point later in the play, when she declares to Cecil: 'I am very lonely in spite of my position in the world. My odd ways of thinking don't attract much sympathy. My heart is hungry for a friend.'[28] Notably, this is the first moment in which Calista affirms a positive desire, not for the conventional comfort of a romantic partner, but for the ambiguous position of 'friend,' a role more readily filled by her previous maid and 'foster sister' Joyce Woodburn.[29] Collins further solicits sympathy for Calista's aristocratic stasis when she states to Cecil:

> Have some pity on me! It is my hard lot to hold a place in the world for which I am by nature unfit. Over and over again I try to submit myself to the conventional splendours and business of my life, and the untameable spirit in me revolts, control it as I may. My engagement to the Duke was one of those vain efforts at me resigning myself to my circumstances. (her head sinks on her bosom) And I suffer the penalty of it now.[30]

Without ever addressing or resolving them, the play squeezes in these lengthy declarations of Calista's dissatisfaction between otherwise conventionally melodramatic moments. What results is a play that critics found needlessly complex, and audiences found preposterous.

During the second act, after the unlikely death of the Brotherhood's secretary, the audience erupted into a frenzy of jeers and laughter, on the one hand, and cheers and shouts of encouragement from hardline supporters of Collins on the other. When the Adelphi's manager, G. W. Anson, who was also playing the role of Dominic, took to the stage to admonish the audience's behaviour, he was received with even less goodwill than the play was. The review of the play in *The Standard* the following morning voiced its dissatisfaction with the encroachment of polite society onto the usually raucous theatrical audience:

> Audiences certainly will not conform to the new theatrical law which seemed to be propounded by Mr. Anson – that when they see a new play they may show approval of what they like, but must not show disapproval of what they do not like. Actors desire

[28] Ibid., 69.
[29] Ibid., 29.
[30] Ibid., 70.

> applause, and if they receive this they must receive the opposite. They have to take their chances. *Applause is the index of public opinion*, and it is most desirable that the index should be true.[31]

Anson's management of the Adelphi never recovered after this event, and theatregoing audiences never forgot his severe admonition, and he eventually emigrated to Australia.[32] The reception of the play reduced Alice Lingard to tears, and effectively ruined Myra Pinero's acting career.[33] Collins considered both the play and its cast 'brutally treated […] by a pit and Gallery – as incapable of understanding the piece as if it had been written in Hebrew. I was fool enough to trust an "Adelphi audience"– and I have paid the penalty.'[34]

Collins's characterization of an 'Adelphi audience' is notably at odds with the spirit of *Rank and Riches*. By 1883, the phrase was being used to describe an audience accustomed to intricate scenic effects made possible by advancements in theatrical technology at the expense of a refined aesthetic sensibility or thoughtful engagement.[35] In 1877, for example, a writer in *The Standard* baldly claimed:

> A high standard of art is not frequently applied to the productions at the Adelphi Theatre […] The fact that the Adelphi has an audience of its own has often been stated, and although it is next door to one of the modern homes of comedy, it still maintains its old allegiance to melodrama in its strongest form.[36]

One reviewer of *Rank and Riches* noted that Anson's replacement of the play with *Camille* was received positively, 'but the story [of *Camille*] is, altogether, too morbid and slow for an Adelphi audience'.[37] Even the consumptive Camille, in an adaptation of Dumas *fils*'s novel, did not satisfy the Adelphi audience's desire for fast-paced storytelling, visual effects, and happy endings. Reviewing

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[31] *The Standard* (11 June 1883), 3.
[32] Peters, *The King of Inventors*, 403.
[33] Charles Hawtrey, *The Truth at Last* (Little, Brown: Massachusetts, 1924), 97; Dawick, *Pinero*, 114.
[34] Collins, 'To William Winter, 3 July 1883', *Letters II*, 459.
[35] See Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, especially chapters 1 and 3.
[36] *The Standard* (14 August 1877), 3.
[37] *Supplement to the Nottinghamshire Guardian* (22 June 1883), 3.

Love and Money (Adelphi 1882) by Charles Reade and Henry Pettitt, one critic noted that the climactic final scene wrought in viewers an 'enthusiasm such as is rarely witnessed even where an Adelphi audience is in the question'.[38] Robert Buchanan's 1883 play *Storm-Beaten*, which he adapted from his novel *God and the Man* (1881), included a collision between a ship and an iceberg, and the scene featured a 'grind and crash with a sound that thrill[ed] the nerves of even an Adelphi audience'.[39] *The Times*, in its review of Buchanan's play, claimed that a 'play so freely charged with sensation is pretty sure of success at the Adelphi'.[40] It is important, however, to note that despite Collins's evident value judgment, not all commentators saw the tastes of an 'Adelphi audience' as inherently negative. For all the anxiety in the periodical press about the state of English drama at the end of the nineteenth century, one writer in *The Islington Gazette* argued that:

> Nothing is more conducive to the ruin of a theatre than stepping out of its *specialité*. An Adelphi audience was once a proverb, but frequent changes of direction in the management has dispersed one class of audience without making another. If Mr. Webster would but stick to good melodramas and broad farces, which his company can illustrate better than any in London – would pay some attention to his scenery, and act a little oftener himself, with occasional importations of actors and actresses who have made a hit, in the special business adapted to the Adelphi stage – he would recover its *prestige*. If he persists in going at all in the ring, a valuable property will be seriously injured. In a population of three millions, a classification of theatrical performances is necessary and politic.[41]

The atomization of London's rapidly increasing number of theatres, for this commentator, was not only prudent, but essential to their success. *Rank and Riches*, with its convoluted plot, bigamous marriage, and moral orthodoxy (Calista's mere presence at a public house acts as a catalyst for the rest of the play's action) – in other words, its deployment of melodramatic tropes – places it firmly within the canon of plays familiar to and welcomed by an 'Adelphi audience'. The implication of

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[38] *The Glasgow Herald* (20 November 1882), 3.
[39] *The Exeter and Plymouth Gazette* (16 March 1883), 8.
[40] *The Times* (17 March 1883), 5.
[41] *The Islington Gazette* (16 June 1865), 3.

Collins's criticism, that the Adelphi audience lacked the intellectual capacity to apprehend the subtleties of his play, is undermined by its leveraging of the thematic and formal elements that audience was infamous for enjoying.

In spite of the play's vague gesturing towards an undefined potential future in which the dynamics of class status and wealth are no longer inseparable from marriage, its ability to explicate a coherent political viewpoint is almost completely undercut by its adherence to a melodramatic tradition that was, by 1883, beginning to appear outdated. This is not to say that melodrama was no longer popular – the enduring presence of the 'Adelphi audience' well into the late nineteenth century suggests otherwise – but rather that *Rank and Riches* was unable to fully commit to being either a 'pure melodrama' in the way that Bramwell had adapted *The Dead Secret* or to an emergent psychological drama that found its first fully-fledged iteration on the English stage in Ibsen's work. Prior to the production of Ibsen's dramas in the 1890s, however, the English stage had been tentatively moving towards the style and subject matter his works embraced. William Archer's 'somewhat gloomy view of the present state of the drama', which he proclaimed at the beginning of *English Dramatists of To-Day* (1882), reflected 'the new living interest which had been awakened among thinking people in the fortunes of the English drama'.[42] The aspirations of the English stage were embodied in the 1881 opening of Richard D'Oyly Carte's Savoy, the first theatre to be completely lit by electricity, for the production of Gilbert and Sullivan's operas.[43] Conspicuously absent were cherubs, deities, or any other brash décor that ran the risk of upsetting the delicate tastes of his intended middle-class audience.[44] *Rank and Riches* was poised squarely between the theatre's imminent upward mobility and its lengthy history of melodramatic appeal.

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[42] William Archer, *English Dramatists of To-Day* (Sampson Low: London, 1882), 1; Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900, Volume 5* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1959), 157.
[43] Michael Ainger, *Gilbert and Sullivan: A Dual Biography* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2002), 193.
[44] Regina Oost, *Gilbert and Sullivan: Class and the Savoy Tradition 1876-1896* (Routledge: London, 2009), 59.

This dynamic is embodied most obviously in the trajectory of Cecil's life: his intense desire to succeed in the world and move beyond the recriminations of his past stands in stark contrast to Calista's desperate inertia. It is this gulf between the play's central characters that forms its failure to present a lucid interrogation of Collins's late-Victorian England. When Alice mockingly suggests that Cecil may 'marry a rich lady' in order to rise in the world, he firmly responds:

> No. That is not my way of rising in the world. When I dream of a happy future I dream of some sweet woman who is no richer than I am, and who will love me for myself alone. Let the thought of my wife be the spur that urges me on the hard road forward. Let me use the position I am in to raise her to rank among the ladies of the land.[45]

Though the depiction of Calista's constrained life highlights the lack of fulfilling options available to women even at the end of the nineteenth century, the only reprieve that the play grants her from aristocratic restriction is in the form of Cecil's upwardly mobile career. In this respect, despite appearing nearly a quarter of a century later, Calista's life bears a strong resemblance to *The Woman in White*'s Laura Fairlie, who similarly required the intervention of her love interest, Walter Hartright, in order to break free from the confines of her highborn life.

Reviews of the play that appeared in the week following its premiere were unanimously scathing. Despite Collins's claim that 'strangers to me, who were present on the first night, expressed their sympathy and indignation,' the critical press struggled to find anything good to say about *Rank and Riches*.[46] Most found it expedient to put the play in the context of Collins's distinguished career, as Anson had when he reprimanded the audience. 'That a very good novelist may write a very bad play there is proof positive in Mr. Wilkie Collins's new drama,' wrote *The Morning Post*.[47] 'Beyond its name the piece has no attraction. Indeed, a more trashy production has

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[45] Collins, *Rank and Riches*, 17-18.
[46] Wilkie Collins, 'To William Winter, 3 July 1883', *Letters II*, 459.
[47] *The Morning Post* (11 June 1883), 1.

seldom been seen upon any stage. It serves to demonstrate that genius has its aberration as well as its inspirations – a fact of which genius is often unaware.'[48] This review is characteristic of the play's reception in the way it blends an acknowledgment of Collins's 'genius' with a caustic critique of his latest work. 'There is no need of further description,' it continues. 'Enough has been told to show the general character of 'Rank and Riches' – as bad a play as has ever been written by any dramatist, eminent or obscure.'[49]

The reviewer for *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* was marginally more generous to Collins's career, if not to the play:

> Mr. Collins having of late years given us adaptations of his own novels, feels it necessary to state that his latest effort is an original play, the story never having seen the light in any other than dramatic form. From our most dramatic novelist a better play might have been expected than the crude, improbable work which was presented, and which before it had proceeded one act provoked unfavourable comment from the house. […] Incidents wild and incongruous, motive false when it is not confused, and throughout a melodramatic posing of the characters with nothing to support it – these are the characteristics of a weak, very weak play.[50]

In referring to Collins as 'our most dramatic novelist,' this reviewer acknowledges both the dramatic quality of his novels as well as the success of their dramatisations. Like *The Morning Post*, this reviewer sees *Rank and Riches* as an outlier in Collins's otherwise successful track record of writing for the stage. While *The Standard* also attempted to do justice to Collins's career by referring to him as 'a favourite novelist who has given so many pleasant days to readers,' it nevertheless admitted that the play 'is singularly bad. […] The audience was confused by a vague story, the incidents were wildly improbable, there was nothing to awaken sympathy or hold attention. […] That a writer of such undoubted power should have turned out so very poor a play is extraordinary.'[51]

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.
[50] *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (10 June 1883), 1.
[51] *The Standard* (11 June 1883), 3.

While reviewers were unable to praise a single aspect of the play, they generally came to the defence of the audience against Anson's remonstrance, in some cases hyperbolically asserting the audience's virtues. *The Morning Post*, for instance, declared:

> Nothing could be more unseemly or more presumptuous than this [Anson's] attack. The piece was witnessed with edifying forbearance by one of the best-natured audiences ever assembled within the walls of a theatre. They were exceptionally patient and long-suffering, and it was only when the situation became too preposterous for human gravity that they indulged in a laugh.[52]

'A play that only runs a week requires no record,' succinctly wrote *The Theatre*, 'and space in these pages is too valuable to spare any of it for comments on so wild and incoherent a dramatic effort as this.'[53] The play 'was deservedly and properly laughed at,' the review continued, 'and had the pit possessed a spark of their old fire, or the gallery a particle of their old ire, they would have hissed Mr. Anson off the stage, then and there, for daring to dictate to the audience what judgment they shall pass on a work deliberately submitted for their verdict.'[54]

When not concerned with assailing the quality of the play or defending the virtues of the Adelphi's audience, reviewers of *Rank and Riches* were quick to defend the eminent cast, laying the blame squarely on Collins's text. 'The failure was due to the author alone,' wrote *The Standard*, 'and it was made in the presence of an audience which would most cordially have welcomed success in a new field on the part of a representative and long-popular writer who has done so much admirable service.'[55] *The Daily News* more baldly claimed that 'no art in the performers could possibly endow these personages with genuine vitality – a fact which may, we hope, absolve us of the duty of saying anything about the acting of the play.'[56] 'It is needless to speak of the performance,' wrote *The*

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[52] *The Morning Post* (11 June 1883), 1.
[53] *The Theatre* (2 July 1883), 47.
[54] Ibid.
[55] *The Standard* (11 June 1883), 3.
[56] *The Daily News* (11 June 1883), 3.

Edinburgh Evening News. 'All the artistes did their best, but Mr. Wilkie Collins' most solemn speeches were received with shrieks of laughter.'[57] Most condemning, perhaps, was the reviewer for *Lloyd's Weekly Newspape*r, who stated that the actors 'all did their best; but what could they do when laughter greeted some of their most solemn utterances, and the author had given them nothing but words?'[58]

These reviews echo the backdrop against which *Rank and Riches* appeared. As the middle class gradually came to view the theatre as a respectable venue for entertainment after mid-century, English theatres – especially strongholds for melodrama like the Adelphi, which had a long record of affinity with the working class – were caught between a history of cross-class appeal and an increasingly upward social mobility. Though the English theatre would have to wait until the following decade to shed the steady narrative of decline that attended it at least in some measure throughout the nineteenth century, critics writing in newspapers and periodicals around the time *Rank and Riches* premiered registered what they saw as the potential renewal of English drama. *Punch*, for instance, published a list of twenty-one 'Signs of the Revival of the Drama', which included the Bancrofts' renovation of the Haymarket, Henry Morley's lecture on the future of the English stage, and Ruskin's appearance at Irving's Lyceum.[59] Henry Morley gave his lecture, 'The Future of the English Stage', on the very first day of 1880, and claimed that 'the present condition of the theatres was a more hopeful one than that of two years ago'.[60] H. J. Byron, whose *Our Boys* (Vaudeville 1875) held the record for longest running play for over a decade, warmly welcomed Morley's assessment of and suggestions for the drama's future: 'to make any scheme for the advancement of the theatrical calling as an art a success it is necessary that members of that calling should be the prime

[57] *The Edinburgh Evening News* (11 June 1883), 4.
[58] *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (10 June 1883), 1.
[59] *Punch, or the London Charivari* (24 January 1880), 35.
[60] *The Morning Post* (2 January 1880), 3.

movers in the matter'.[61] If English drama had not yet achieved the acclaim that Byron and Morley hoped it could, a sense of looming change characterises much of the writing about theatre at the beginning of the 1880s. 'Not very long ago', wrote a critic in *The Times*, 'the decay of the drama was an accepted axiom'.[62] This tentative optimism signalled, if not the outright revival of English drama, then the potential for one on the horizon.

A series of rhetorical questions that prefaced an article entitled 'The Revival of the Drama' in *The New Quarterly* highlights the critical anxiety concerning a possibly revitalised and distinctly English stage: 'Can our drama be regenerated by means of a national theatre? Does our drama need regenerating – is it in a declining and moribund condition? If it is weak, ailing, and half-alive, and new vigour cannot be breathed into it by mechanical means, where are we to look for a remedy?'[63] While J. T. Grein's Independent Theatre Society would not be formed until 1891, the potential for a national theatre solved two problems which dramatic critics persisted in discussing especially in the 1880s: the governing economic concerns of theatrical performance and the perceived lack of English playwriting talent. Surgeon-turned-writer Richard Davis Perry, writing in *The Era*, claimed that 'there is a rock ahead upon which the good ship dramatic literature has perpetually been wrecked – I mean dramatic interest'.[64] For Perry, the English stage, in its subordination of the 'delineation of manners to the enunciation of a mere stage story', in other words, its capitulation to market forces that demanded a high volume of ticket sales to ensure financial viability, failed to foster quality English plays.[65] *St. James's Magazine* drew a link between what it perceived as the venal status quo of English politics and the lack of a national drama:

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[61] *The Daily Telegraph* (5 January 1880), 2; see also Jim Davis (ed), *Plays by H. J. Byron* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1984).
[62] *The Times* (17 June 1881), 9.
[63] *The New Quarterly*, 3 (January 1880), 55.
[64] *The Era* (7 April 1883), 9.
[65] Ibid.

> Have we Englishmen of to-day any true national feeling, any true political hope and ardour, any true interest in the welfare of the State as a whole? Or do we rather stake the hazard of the die on the success of a party, the triumph of an hour? This is a question which every one must answer for himself; but certainly the result of the last two years has been hardly calculated to evoke much patriotic ecstasy. But even supposing the stimulus of triumphant superiority animated the cold spirit of our age, it would scarcely evoke a national drama. And why? Because the nineteenth century, with its progress, its scientific thought, and its education, has by the revelation of countless facts, the development of so many 'ologies, almost eliminated, or, at any rate, contracted into the narrowest limits the realm of the imaginative. Even our poetry is tinctured with German philosophy, our novelists are eminently realistic.[66]

The writer leverages this jingoistic assessment of an abstract English national character in a broader discussion concerning England's inability to engender a successful theatrical environment that did not rely so heavily on French influence. 'Should the day ever come back when the flower of the national genius, in the fullness of its powers', wrote *The Times*, 'is enlisted into the service of the drama, there need be no fear that it will manifest itself in *Dame aux Camélias*'.[67] Walter Baynham, whose book on Scottish theatre *The Glasgow Stage* (1892) was dedicated to Irving, in a lecture given at the Athenaeum entitled 'The Drama, Past, Present, and Future', attributed the decline of English theatre to the abstract 'weakness of character in the present age'.[68] In a retrospective consideration of the previous year's dramatic offerings, one critic in *The Times* noted in 1881 that 'we are forced to the melancholy, yet inevitable conclusion that the most striking products of the year, if not virtually the best, have been those of a foreign growth'.[69] For these critics, the narrative of a deteriorating stage was bound up with a perceived erosion of the English state and its culture.

If Collins meant *Rank and Riches* to address the myriad concerns raised regarding the drama in newspapers and periodicals, its harsh reception fundamentally prevented it from doing so. *The Times* claimed that it and Henry Pettitt's *The Spider's Web* (Olympic 1883), an equally disastrous play,

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[66] *St. James's Magazine*, 4:37 (April 1880), 320.
[67] *The Times* (17 June 1881), 9.
[68] *The Era* (10 October 1880), 6.
[69] *The Times* (17 January 1881), 6.

'disputed with each other the distinction of being the greatest fiasco of the year'.[70] Shortly after *Rank and Riches* premiered in 1883, on the eve of his first tour of the United States, Henry Irving hosted a lavish celebrity dinner. When *The World* declared that 'the Irving dinner of 1883 is really an historical event, and may mark a new point in the national position of English letters as well as of the English stage', it epitomised the landscape in which Collins's ill-fated play appeared.[71] Having failed to appeal to both the adherents of an earlier melodramatic tradition as well as an increasingly gentrified late-Victorian audience, *Rank and Riches* is remembered today as little more than an unfortunate mishap in the waning career of a bygone novelist. Within the context of Collins's career, however, the play encapsulates many of the social, cultural, and economic dynamics that characterised the anxious atmosphere of the 1880s as theatre critics impatiently awaited the renewal of an English stage that did not rely so heavily on financial profit, lowbrow thrills, and French influence.

The Evil Genius

After the abysmal reception of *Rank and Riches*, Collins would go on to write only one more work for the stage. The dramatic version of *The Evil Genius* was written, as with *Man and Wife* and *The New Magdalen*, at the same time as the novel. In fact, its copyright performance (little more than actors reading the play aloud onstage) at the Vaudeville Theatre on 30 October 1885 preceded the novel's initial serial publication in the *Leigh Journal and Times*, which began that same year on 11 December. Though the sale of the novel's newspaper-syndication rights earned Collins £1,000, netting him more than any of his previous works, the dramatic adaptation was never performed.[72] Despite the embarrassment of his most recent theatrical failure, however, Collins had hoped the play

[70] *The Times* (4 January 1884), 4.
[71] Quoted in Jeffrey Richards, *Sir Henry Irving: A Victorian Actor and His World* (Hambledon and London: London, 2005), 280.
[72] Peters, *The King of Inventors*, 416.

would eventually be produced. Managers were evidently apprehensive: three American managements rejected the play before it was finally turned down in England by the Carl Rosa Opera Company.[73]

No privately printed copy of the dramatic version exists. A Sotheby's sale from April 1895 lists a manuscript copy of the dramatisation, with a note in Collins's hand: 'Version performed on one afternoon at the Vaudeville Theatre to secure my copyright in 1885. Since corrected and revised in 1886 on this copy; to be destroyed when the piece is again performed in its corrected form.'[74] The copy used to license the 1885 Vaudeville Theatre performance remains in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection, while additional manuscript copies are held in the Harvard Theatre Collection and the Harry Ransom Centre.[75] The licensing copy only contains the first three acts of the play – which was nevertheless enough to secure dramatic copyright – and two versions of the play's fourth and final act are held in the Harvard Theatre Collection.

The Evil Genius is the story of Sydney Westerfield, a young woman employed as governess in the household of the happily married Catherine and Herbert Linley. She develops a strong bond with her pupil Kitty, the Linleys' daughter, and even manages to win over the affection of the suspicious Mrs. Presty, Catherine Linley's mother and the 'Evil Genius' of the title.

The novel opens with the history of Sydney's family. Her mother, having been widowed by her husband's death at sea, ventures to America to start a new life with her firstborn son, Sydney's brother, and leaves Sydney behind in England. It is revealed that Sydney's father was accused of stealing diamonds held in the cargo of a ship which sank while he was captain. Sydney is left to fend

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[73] Ibid., 418.
[74] 'Sale Jottings.' *The Publisher's Circular and Booksellers' Record of British and Foreign Literature Volume 62* (Sampson and Low, Marston & Company: London, 1895), 445.
[75] British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Collection Add MS 53345; Harvard University Theatre Collection MS ENG 968.1 and 968.3; The University of Texas at Austin, Harry Ransom Center Wilkie Collins Collection MS-0881; the licensing copy in the LC collection contains only the first three acts, while one of the entries in the Harvard Theatre Collection (MS 968.1) contains only the fourth act.

for herself in her aunt's boarding school, a place where she is ill-treated and destitute. When she places a notice advertising her services as governess in a local newspaper, her last-ditch attempt to forge a life for herself, she is hired by Herbert Linley, who was immediately taken with the self-effacing tone of her advertisement.

With Sydney employed as governess, life at Mount Morven, the Linley family household, is idyllic. As she manages Kitty's education, Sydney is held in high esteem by both Herbert and Catherine, who are pleased not only by her ability to instruct their daughter but also her amiability as a member of the household. Even Catherine's wily mother, Mrs. Presty, who had initially distrusted Sydney's youthful naiveté, grows to trust her. The domestic bliss does not last long, however, when it is revealed that Herbert and Sydney harbour a mutual, clandestine affection for each other. After a dinner party given at Mount Morven, the two confess to each other in the garden, and are overheard by Mrs. Presty.

Sydney resolves to leave the home at once, and Herbert, afraid of his sexual frailty, determines to confess the whole affair to his wife. Catherine, innocently suspecting none of this, receives the news at first in shock, and forgives both Sydney and her husband. She recommends Sydney be employed by a nearby neighbour who had been impressed by Kitty's progress as a student and urges her to start her life afresh without any ill-feeling. When Kitty suddenly falls ill, however, the doctor's only prescription for her wellbeing is the return of her governess, whose name she routinely mumbles throughout her feverish delirium. Catherine, swallowing her pride, sends for Sydney immediately.

Once she returns to Mount Morven, Herbert is no longer in control of his sexual ardour, and the two share a fiery kiss. Catherine witnesses their embrace and resolves immediately to leave the house and claim sole custody of their daughter. When she and her mother flee the house with

Kitty, their lawyer clarifies that the only way for Catherine to keep custody of her daughter is to file for a divorce. Though a judge ultimately grants the divorce, his ruling in the paper disparages Catherine's behaviour, particularly her decision to initially forgive both Sydney and her husband. The public ruling ensures that Catherine Linley, who now goes by the vague name of 'Mrs. Norman,' will be a subject of scandal for the rest of her life.

When Catherine seeks solace in the quiet seaside resort of Sandyseal, she encounters Captain Bennydeck, a devoutly religious man who falls immediately in love with her. Catherine, unable to tell him the truth, says only that she is a widow. When Captain Bennydeck proposes to her, however, she cannot live with the guilt of having lied to him and confesses that she is not a widow but a divorced woman. Though Catherine only rises in his estimation after this confession, he withdraws his offer of marriage because of his devout adherence to religious tenets.

Meanwhile, Herbert and Sydney attempt to begin a life together, but their new beginning is rife with unhappiness and distrust. Sydney suspects that Herbert will leave her at the first possible opportunity, as he did with Catherine, and Herbert himself begins to regret ruining his once happy marriage and desperately wishes to see his daughter. When Sydney leaves Herbert to seek a new life in a nearby convent, she meets Captain Bennydeck, who offers her a secretarial position in his newly founded home for rehabilitating fallen women. Herbert, having followed her, runs into Catherine, and the two decide to remarry.

When juxtaposed with the complex plot of *Rank and Riches*, *The Evil Genius* is strikingly uneventful. Even in the context of Collins's increasingly uncomplicated later works, *The Evil Genius* is exceptionally calm. There are no murders or alarming disappearances, no mysteries to be solved or perilous journeys on which characters set out. Aside from the overarching theme of divorce – which was itself tendentious – the characters do little else aside from talk to each other. Herbert and

Catherine discuss their failed marriage, Sydney and Herbert discuss the pitfalls of their illicit affair and the potential of a new life together, Mrs. Presty and Catherine discuss the pros and cons of divorce, and even Kitty repeatedly discusses her devotion to both her governess and her parents. The additional dialogue, at the expense of the lengthy scenes of action and intrigue which characterised Collins's earlier novels, did not go unnoticed by reviewers.

The critical anxiety regarding the state of English drama in which *Rank and Riches* appeared – an anxiety, critics were quick to point out, that had persisted for decades – was equally present when *The Evil Genius* was published two years after the former play's disastrous opening. The tentative optimism exhibited by earlier critics carried over into the middle of the decade: if critics in newspapers and periodicals were not yet ready to claim the renaissance of a native English drama, the very suggestion of one loomed promisingly on the horizon. 'The outlook for the coming dramatist is probably more favourable than any of his predecessors ever knew', *The Era* announced in 1884, arguing that 'the drama will be a much more important commodity than it is even now'.[76]

The continued dearth of native English playwriting drove dramatic critics to search for signs of a theatrical resurgence in other aspects of the drama. *The Times*, for instance, found those signs in the theatre's expanding interest in visual art:

> It can scarcely be doubted that the close connexion now established between art and the stage, the growth of an educated taste, and the diffusion among all classes of a keen interest in the drama and its professors are more significant of a dramatic renaissance than the quantity or quality of the theatrical output at a given period.[77]

While the stage had shared an intimate relationship with the visual arts throughout the nineteenth century, by the end of that century that connection had come to signify for dramatic critics the

[76] *The Era* (12 July 1884), 10.
[77] *The Times* (4 January 1884), 4.

ushering in of a new era of English theatre.[78] One critic argued that 'Mr. Robertson did for the modern stage what Mr. Ruskin did for pictorial art'.[79] Architect Ingress Bell saw in the rising prominence of the theatre an opportunity for edification and entertainment:

> Our ideal theatre should be the home of *all* the arts. Its structure and decoration should be in conformity with the best architectural knowledge, and should no longer be the only remaining stronghold of the rococo frivolities of a now discredited epoch. Our ears should be charmed and our imaginations quickened by the noblest verse our language affords, and our eyes should be regaled with dispositions of form and colour by the greatest painters of the age. No more rational recreation for overworked humanity could be conceived than such a theatre would furnish, and the national drama would take a foremost place amongst the humanising influences of the time.[80]

That the discussion of English theatre had crept outside the columns of *The Era* and *The Theatre* signalled the potential revival of a public institution central to the lives of many Victorian readers, writers, and critics, not just those intimately connected with dramatic pursuits. The intersection of visual art and the theatre allowed critics to speculate about the possible directions the future of English drama might take.

It was not only visual art and its attendant criticism that bore witness to the widening critical discussion surrounding the potential future of a native English stage. Madge Kendal, five years into her management of St. James's Theatre, gave an address at the 1884 Social Sciences Congress in Birmingham. 'The English people are, indeed, rapidly becoming alive to the fact that the progress and culture of a nation depends upon its diversion as well as upon its occupations', she reported, 'and, as a matter of consequence, the dramatic art is receiving an unprecedented meed of

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[78] On the relationship between nineteenth-century theatre and visual art, see e.g., Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1983); Patricia Smyth, 'Theatre, Art, and Visual Culture in the Nineteenth Century', special issue of *Nineteenth Century Theatre and Film*, 39.1 (2012); Amy Holzapfel, *Art, Vision, and Nineteenth-Century Realist Drama: Acts of Seeing* (Routledge: London, 2013).
[79] Lewis Wingfield, 'Realism Behind the Footlights', *The Fortnightly Review* (1 April 1884), 475.
[80] E. Ingress Bell, 'The Stage Considered as a School of Art', *The Art Journal* (May 1884), 143.

recognition'.[81] 'Social Science or not', one reporter in *The Times* commented, 'the drama is an interesting theme in the hands of one who speaks of it from experience'.[82]

The journey to a revitalised English drama, however, was not straightforward. While lectures by Henry Morley and Madge Kendal expressed a cautious confidence in the possibility of a native English drama, old prejudices and disputes persisted. One reader of *The Times*, for example, wrote in to express concern over the morally deleterious effect of the stage:

> Again, there are thousands who, desirous of introducing their families to the wholesome plays put before us now in our best theatres, are kept from doing so by the natural dread of the suggestive phrases and insinuations absolutely unnecessary for the development of the play, but yet constantly recurring and marring the effect of that which without them would be nothing but healthful.[83]

While the stage had the potential to be a publicly edifying institution in the eyes of some commentators, for others the old prejudices that linked the stage with immorality persisted. This was especially difficult to navigate for writers like Collins who had staked their careers on discussions – if not full-scale endorsements – of social outcasts. The kinds of criticism that attended characters such as Lydia Gwilt and Mercy Merrick echo the concern expressed by this reader in *The Times*. In the eyes of Henry Arthur Jones, however, capitulation to the moral orthodoxies of a fastidious public was itself a barrier to a renewed English drama: 'the matter of a free atmosphere for dramatists to work in, the matter of some sort of an appeal or tribunal beyond the heated, changeful prejudices and caprices of the populace, is of the greatest importance to the future of the drama'.[84]

Against the backdrop of these tensions expressed in newspapers and periodicals, Collins wrote *The Evil Genius* and secured his right to produce it dramatically with a single copyright

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[81] *The Daily Telegraph* (24 September 1884), 3.
[82] *The Times* (24 September 1884), 9.
[83] *The Times* (30 September 1884), 12.
[84] Henry Arthur Jones, 'Religion and the Stage', *The Nineteenth Century* (January 1885), 169.

performance. When *The Evil Genius* had completed its serial run in 1886, the reviewer for the *Spectator* praised the work by first repudiating Collins's earlier style of writing:

> Mr. Collins, in the early days of his novel-writing, was in the habit of inventing a secret or puzzle which taxed the reader's curiosity to unravel. This rather childish exercise of ingenuity was dearer to him, or easier, than the delineation of character; neither did he give much heed to verisimilitude, and perhaps regarded improbability as an aid to the faith demanded of the novel-reader. In his latest work, there is no skein to be disentangled, and no accidents or coincidences more remarkable than we are accustomed to in fiction. The novel before us commands the reader's attention throughout. He is never tempted to lay it down, neither does he come to passages he can afford to skip. It is full of dramatic scenes, and might, we think, be readily transformed into a sensational drama.[85]

It is unclear whether this reviewer uses the term 'sensational' to refer to the sensation dramas of the 1860s, or simply to imply that a good play might be adapted out of this novel. In any case, the dramatic version of *The Evil Genius* is, like many of Collins's later works, far-removed from the earlier sensation genre characterised by moody atmospheres of intrigue and deception. Both the novel and its adaptation are narrowly focused on how an ostensibly happy nuclear family – the Linleys – react to events that threaten their domestic idyll. Despite interrogating the institution of marriage and the veneer of Victorian domesticity, themes to which Collins returned consistently throughout his decades-long career, the formal elements Collins deploys in *The Evil Genius* differ starkly from his earlier sensation novels. In the early portions of his career – the works best remembered and most often studied by literary critics and cultural historians – Collins deftly joins the emergent trend toward sensational narrative fiction with his characteristic suspicion of domesticity. As his career progressed, however (and it is not a coincidence that during these years his writing for the stage became more prolific), his works gradually turn away from abductions and

[85] *The Spectator* (4 December 1886), 1628, quoted in *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, 220.

stolen identities so that, by the time *The Evil Genius* is published, a work that abounds in nothing but conversation is more typical of Collins's writing than one that features murder and mystery.

In his introduction to Broadview's critical edition of the novel, Graham Law discusses the transition from complex narrative frameworks to the exigencies of stage production: 'multiple plotting and multiple narrators are largely replaced by the narrative economies of the stage play; psychological depth is introduced not through symbolism but through dialogue. While it would be naïve to argue that no loss of complexity was involved in this transformation, it seems equally unwise to dismiss the narrative and social interest of the later novel entirely on this count'.[86] This chapter offers a slight corrective to Law's argument, one which is typical of criticism concerning Collins's later works. The 'loss of complexity' invoked in comparing the novel with its dramatic version echoes literary criticism's larger insistence on the superiority of the novel's formal elements in producing thoughtful works, as I discussed in the previous chapter on the mystery novel. Indeed, in the context of Collins's career, especially in the wake of the needlessly elaborate plot of *Rank and Riches* and its attendant failure, 'complexity' operates more accurately to the detriment of his writing which is at its most engaging when it merges the elegant simplicity of realistic dialogue with an earnest desire for social justice. The implication of Law's claim – that the 'narrative economies of the stage play' and 'complexity' are somehow mutually exclusive – has been addressed in recent work on nineteenth-century theatre that has sought to re-establish its importance as both a popular and a sophisticated form. Comparing the novel and dramatic version of *The Evil Genius* reveals the latter to be an equally refined interrogation of marriage, companionship, and social mores.

Because Collins's usual plot devices – mistaken or stolen identities, theft, murder, bigamy – are entirely absent from the novel, it explores instead the multifaceted and at times contradictory

[86] Wilkie Collins, *The Evil Genius*, edited by Graham Law (Broadview Press: 1994), 9.

responses that Catherine and Herbert share towards the breakdown of their marriage. As with so much of Collins's career, the novel sets up a dichotomy between the practicability of the law and the ways in which the law diverges from human experience. It interrogates many of the same overarching themes as *Man and Wife* did in 1870, but with a much lighter hand. Unlike that earlier novel, there is no inherited fortune at stake, no hidden pregnancy, no perilous journeys undertaken in the dead of night. While both novels interrogate the sexual double standard that forgave adultery in husbands but not wives, *The Evil Genius* strips that interrogation down to its bare essentials. As Tamara S. Wagner has shown, '*The Evil Genius* deliberately, and self-reflexively, takes one of the most sensational plot-devices [mysteriously concealed and disappearing children] and filters it through a growing interest in psychological realism.'[87] The 'growing interest in psychological realism' evident in the novel is concomitant with similar emergent tendencies in Collins's dramatic writing, particularly in its stage directions, as I discuss below. The development of Collins's career can be usefully represented by *Man and Wife* on one end, in 1870, when Collins began writing seriously for the stage, and by *The Evil Genius*, in 1885, as his writing increasingly eschewed the dictates of novelistic form that shaped his earlier novels. In other words, though he continued to publish his novels serially, they progressively turn away from the formal elements characteristic of his earlier writing – complex plots, expansive casts of characters, epistolary sequences – and embrace less elaborate structures that were more readily adapted to the stage.

The Evil Genius is, at times, a frustrating novel in its relentless commitment to equivocation. When Mrs. Presty blames the content of a book she is reading for sending her to sleep, she explains to her daughter that the contemporary school of novel-writers is to blame. 'The new school provides the public with soothing fiction. […] No story to excite our poor nerves; no improper characters to

[87] Tamara S. Wagner, 'Collins and the Custody Novel: Parental Abduction and Family Business.' *Wilkie Collins Society Journal* 8 (2005), 46.

cheat us out of our sympathies; no dramatic situations to frighten us; exquisite management of details (as the reviews say), and a masterly anatomy of human motives.'[88] This passage is dense with references to various moments in Collins's career, and it is unclear whether Mrs. Presty is a mouthpiece for Collins's own opinions, or offers an ironic counterpoint to his own career. For instance, 'no improper characters' may apply to Collins's later fiction, which has shed the villainous aristocrats of earlier novels, and the 'exquisite management of details' certainly echoes the many reviews which praise his ability to construct plots at the expense of delineating character. Thus 'a masterly anatomy of human motives' stands in contrast to Collins's reputation as a weaver of intricate plots but little else. What this passage does achieve, though, is to locate *The Evil Genius* within a wider literary sphere than the narrow limitations of the sensational 1860s, a brand from which Collins was eager to distance himself almost as soon as he had originated it. The novel itself can be read as one of Collins's final attempts to demonstrate to critics that he was, in fact, capable of producing an interesting work that relied on little more than a 'masterly anatomy of human motives.'

This is most evident in the character of Catherine Linley, who oscillates between righteous indignation at her husband's adultery and a gracious acceptance of her fate as a divorced wife. Early in the novel, the narrative is invested in demonstrating the happiness of the Linleys' marriage. 'If a married stranger had seen them, at that moment,' Collins's narrator states, 'he would have been reminded of forgotten days – the days of his honeymoon.'[89] Catherine's early description by the narrator as the 'most unsuspicious woman living' does not immediately inspire confidence that she will be any different from the hapless Laura Fairlie who, over twenty years prior in *The Woman in White*, required the intervention of others to resist marital subjection.[90] When Herbert later confesses

[88] Collins, *The Evil Genius*, 89.
[89] Ibid., 93.
[90] Ibid., 127.

the mutual attraction he and Sydney share, however, Catherine receives the news with grace: "'My governess," she said, "might have deceived me – she has not deceived me. I owe it to her to remember that. She shall go, but not helpless and not friendless.'"[91] After Herbert has confessed, 'treasured remembrances of her married life filled her heart with tenderness and dimmed with tears the angry light that had risen in her eyes. There was no pride, no anger, in his wife when she spoke to him now.'[92] Yet despite both Catherine and Herbert's determination to continue their married life as normal after Sydney's departure, 'there was something wanting in the reconciliation. Mrs. Linley left her husband, shaken by a conflict of feelings. At one moment she felt angry with him; at another she felt angry with herself.'[93] Catherine's emotional vacillation here echoes Lady Calista's inability to articulate her fears and desires in *Rank and Riches*, a narrative strategy Collins had employed as early as 1868 in *The Moonstone* when Rachel Verinder opts not to disclose having witnessed the theft of her diamond for fear of also communicating her romantic and potentially sexual desire for Franklin Blake.

The cadence of *The Evil Genius* pairs moments of abrupt decision-making with lengthy passages agonising over the results of those decisions. When Catherine discovers Herbert and Sydney kissing in their home, the chapter ends shortly after she declares to her husband that 'the woman who was once your wife despises you.'[94] Though she phrases their initial separation in terms that anticipate the divorce to come, Catherine's lawyer, the garrulous Mr. Sarrazin, relates that facing the legal reality of divorce was 'so repugnant to all her most cherished convictions; so sinful and so shameful in its doing of evil' that she retracts the application.[95] It is only when Catherine is convinced that divorce is the only method by which she can keep legal custody of their daughter,

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[91] Ibid., 146.
[92] Ibid., 147.
[93] Ibid., 153.
[94] Ibid., 174,
[95] Ibid., 209-10.

Kitty, that she ultimately applies for the divorce. Catherine's fears, however, are not entirely unjustified. Though a judge does grant her the legal separation from her husband, and thereby the custody of their child, he also prints a scathing dissent in a widely circulated newspaper:

> Grievously as Mrs. Linley has been injured, the evidence shows that she was herself by no means free from blame. She has been guilty, to say the least of it, of acts of indiscretion. When the criminal attachment which had grown up between Mr. Herbert Linley and Miss Westerfield had been confessed to her, she appears to have most unreasonably overrated whatever merit there might have been in their resistance to the final temptation. She was indeed so impulsively ready to forgive (without waiting to see if the event justified the exercise of mercy) that she owns to having given her hand to Miss Westerfield, at parting, not half an hour after that young person's shameless forgetfulness of the claims of modesty, duty and gratitude had been first communicated to her. To say that this was the act of an inconsiderate woman, culpably indiscreet and, I had almost added, culpably indelicate, is only to say what she has deserved.[96]

The assigning of blame for Herbert's infidelity is a source of tension with which the characters grapple throughout the novel. It is inevitable that some of Collins's readers would have agreed wholeheartedly with the judge's condemnation of Catherine's behaviour, while others, particularly those sympathetic to an emergent feminist movement, would share Catherine's outrage over the judge's harsh words. When Catherine seeks solace at the seaside resort of Sandyseal, her identity is revealed to the hotel's haughty guests and they refuse to allow their children around Kitty for fear of scandal. 'She had encouraged the abominable governess,' Lady Myrie, one of the hotel's guests, says, 'and if her husband had yielded to temptation, it was her fault.'[97]

While the hotel's aristocratic entourage is ready to pronounce judgment on Catherine, the novel encourages readers to resist a moral binary. Like so much of Collins's other writing, *The Evil Genius* does not feature a central protagonist and instead explores moments of social transgression – in this case, a divorce – with nuance. After the dissolution of the Linleys' marriage, the novel shifts

[96] Ibid., 214.
[97] Ibid., 234.

between Catherine's reclusion and Herbert's new life, allowing readers to inhabit both the perspective of the wronged wife and the adulterous husband. After Herbert reads the judge's comments on the trial, the narrator does not hold back: 'When he looked back, he saw nothing but the life that he had wasted. When his thoughts turned to the future, they confronted a prospect empty of all promise to a man still in the prime of life. Wife and child were as completely lost to him as if they had been dead – and it was the wife's doing. Had he any right to complain? Not the shadow of a right.'[98] The narrator of *The Evil Genius* – unlike the narrator of Collins's earlier novels – refrains from commenting explicitly on the developments of the plot. This was a technique Collins frequently employed in *No Name*, in which the narrator would step outside of the novel to address readers directly and encourage sympathy for Magdalen Vanstone's actions. In *The Evil Genius*, however, the narrator is significantly less heavy-handed, and it is not immediately clear whether the passage quoted above is in Herbert's voice or the voice of an omniscient narrator. In this way, *The Evil Genius* deploys the free indirect discourse more familiar in Jane Austen's novels than in Collins's earlier works; by 1885, the elaborate narrative apparatus of novels such as *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* or *No Name*'s judgmental narrator, for instance, have been eclipsed by the characters themselves. The elaborate apparatus of a novel like *The Woman in White* with its mock-trial and legal setting has all but disappeared in Collins's later novels which required a simpler narrative structure in order to be readily adapted for the stage. Indeed, as the plots of Collins's novels became gradually less intricate, so too did the narrator fade increasingly into the background. The novel even inhabits Sydney's perspective, who reads the judge's comments in the newspaper shortly after Herbert: 'A cruel reproof, and worse than cruel, a public reproof, administered to the generous friend – and for what? For having been too ready to forgive the wretch who had taken her husband from her, and

[98] Ibid., 221.

had repaid a hundred acts of kindness by unpardonable ingratitude.'[99] The rhetorical question here could be the narrator's, or it could be Sydney's. The lack of speech markers encourages a blurring of the narrator's voice with Sydney's train of thought. In this way, the novel encourages sympathy for its entire cast of characters without relying on the explicit intrusion of an omniscient narrator making direct addresses to readers.

By shifting the moral weight of his novel away from relying on the participation of an omniscient narrator, Collins rendered his later works more readily adaptable for the stage. As critics of his adaptations throughout the 1870s noted, it was fundamentally impossible to transpose one of the strengths of Collins's novels – their elaborate narrative frameworks – onto the stage. The structure of *The Evil Genius* solves this problem by shifting the focus of the novel away from narration and onto dialogue.

The dramatic version of *The Evil Genius* resembles its novelistic original to a much greater extent than any of his previous adaptations. Like *The New Magdalen*, it lifts portions of dialogue wholesale from the novel and makes no major alterations to the plot. Moments that stand out in the novel – when Catherine refers to herself as 'the woman who was once your wife,' for instance – are notably present in the dramatic version as well.[100] Though the afternoon performance at the Vaudeville did not include a cast list, *The Evil Genius* is characteristic of Collins's plays in that it provides several interesting roles for its female characters and significantly less interesting roles for its male ones. The role of Catherine Linley in particular would have offered an actress the opportunity to demonstrate her ability to represent a wide spectrum of human emotions, from outrage to remorse.

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[99] Ibid., 225.
[100] Wilkie Collins, *The Evil Genius: A Drama in Four Acts and Two Tableaux*. Add MS 53345 E, British Library, Lord Chamberlain's Collection, 52.

Mrs. Presty, as the enterprising dowager mother-in-law, exhibits as much life in the dramatic version as she does in the novel, and echoes Collins's earlier vivacious matriarch, Lady Lundie. When Catherine is reduced to tears after her daughter's illness and her husband's subsequent betrayal, Mrs. Presty responds fiercely: 'Don't cry! Be in a passion – scream – stomp on the floor. In one word, do justice to yourself and your child.'[101] When Catherine resolves to go abroad, Mrs. Presty responds: 'Go where you may, you will attract attention. Strain at a gnat, my dear, and swallow a camel!'[102] Collins offers a note at the beginning of the script that advises the actress playing Mrs. Presty: 'It is of importance that the character of "Mrs Presty" should be acted so as to produce a favourable impression on the audience. She is naturally a good-natured woman, with a love for satirical humour. But she is too readily influenced by her strong prejudices, and by her love of domineering. She speaks sharply from want of tact; and is not herself aware of it when she hurts the feelings of persons about her.'[103] One of her opening lines, a demand made to Catherine for 'a glass of Port Wine and the liver wing of a chicken', demonstrates her peculiar brand of tactless gentility.[104]

In its staging, the dramatisation of *The Evil Genius* is consistent with the rest of Collins's plays. The play moves from one domestic environment to another – first Mount Morven, the Linley family home, then to the seaside resort Sandyseal, and finally to a hotel in London – all while the characters work through their own domestic troubles. Much in the same way that Collins's narrators fade into the background of his later novels, the set design of *The Evil Genius* has significantly less bearing on the development of the plot than, for example, the intimidating country homes that make

[101] Ibid., 63.
[102] Ibid., 64.
[103] Ibid., 2.
[104] Ibid., 4.

up the backdrop of both *The Woman in White* and *No Name*, or the entryway into the Verinder household that makes up the only backdrop in *The Moonstone*.

While the significant emphasis placed on dialogue throughout *The Evil Genius* occurs at the expense of the melodramatic coincidence Collins employed in *Rank and Riches*, its stage directions nevertheless display a reluctance to fully adhere to an entirely subdued mode. Indeed, the stage directions throughout *The Evil Genius* bear out the double bind of the final years of Collins's career: some call for an explicitly psychological approach to certain deliveries, while others replicate the melodramatic gestures of his earlier plays. When Catherine first hears of Sydney and Herbert alone together in the garden, the stage direction informs the actress how to deliver this discovery: '*She stops. A first vague doubt begins to enter her mind, in spite of herself*'.[105] No further indication is given as to how a 'vague doubt' is meant to be acted. When Herbert and Sydney attempt to begin their life together, the stage directions are similarly abstract: '*Sydney's appearance is changed. Her manner is sad and subdued. She looks like a person who is suffering from ill-health. On speaking to each other, she and Herbert are especially careful to show no ill temper. They control themselves with the same dread of hurting each other's feelings. No harsh tones, no angry looks escape them*'.[106] The focus on what motivates Catherine, Herbert, and Sydney to behave in these ways is a shift from Collins's earlier stage directions that focus on reaction rather than motivation. The act of interpretation rests on how the scene is produced and gestures towards both an increasingly psychologised stage and a shared understanding that actors would be able to convey this.

The play does not, however, do more than gesture towards the Ibsenite drama: when Catherine indicates her forgiveness of Sydney by way of an outstretched hand, the governess '*drops*

[105] Ibid., 24.
[106] Ibid., 70-71.

on her knees, and lifts the forgiving hand to her lips'.[107] The dichotomy between the portions of the play that are subdued and these moments of intensely emotional gesture echo the larger positioning of Collins's career by the time *The Evil Genius* was published. *Rank and Riches* failed because, in the eyes of a commentator in *The Times*, it was 'marked by the fatal blemish of insincerity, or of what, at least, on the stage, appeared to be such'.[108] While *The Evil Genius* makes a significant departure from the outlandish plot of *Rank and Riches*, it nevertheless pairs a subdued portrayal of a marriage's breakdown with moments that acknowledge melodrama's insistent popularity at the end of the nineteenth century. After Sydney is brought to Mount Morven to cure Kitty's illness, she unexpectedly meets Herbert and the shock nearly kills her:

> Sydney (*with an outburst of despair*): […] I am a wretch unworthy of all the kindness that has been shown to me. I don't deserve your interest – I don't even deserve your pity. Send me away! Be hard on me – be brutal to me. Have some mercy on a miserable creature whose life is one long hopeless effort to forget you! […] remember how young I am, how weak I am. Oh, Herbert, I'm dying – dying – dying![109]

Despite the increasingly important shift to a subtler delivery and mood, these intensely fraught moments nevertheless prevent the play from achieving the kind of psychological drama critics would praise at the end of the century.

The Evil Genius is characterised by this duality between the kind of precise, understated delivery popularised by Robertson at the Olympic and more firmly melodramatic emotional surges. When Catherine finally uncovers the truth about the affection between Herbert and Sydney, for example, there is no vindication on Mrs. Presty's part:

> Catherine (*alone*): My mother has spoken rashly and cruelly; but there was truth in what she said – and if she feels strongly it is for my sake. (*Mrs. Presty enters by the door on the left. Catherine takes her hand*). I wish to beg your pardon, Mama. I was hasty; I was wrong.

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[107] Ibid., 29.
[108] *The Times* (4 January 1884), 4.
[109] Collins, *The Evil Genius: A Drama*, 51.

Mrs. P (*kissing her*): No, my dear. I was hasty – and I was wrong.[110]

Scenes like this one indicate the general shift in tone from *Rank and Riches* to *The Evil Genius*. The latter play is not about the scandalous revelation of a marriage destroyed by adultery, but rather the quiet repairing of trust between the characters affected by this domestic breakdown. Mrs. Presty's comic relief, Kitty's childishly innocuous lines, and Catherine's dignified reluctance to accept the truth, for example, are markers, throughout the play, that serve as reminders of these characters' interiorities. They work within the confines of a stringent set of social customs that limit the kinds of fiery reactions available to them, reactions Collins had liberally employed in *Rank and Riches* to unanimous critical condemnation. The play's fluctuation between subdued conversation and outburst allows it to achieve a depth absent in *Rank and Riches*: when Catherine, speaking to Herbert, ends the second act by referring to herself as the 'woman who was once your wife', the contrast between that line and her earlier, quiet dignity produces the kind of genuine emotion Collins strove for in his earlier play.[111]

The Evil Genius, however, is not fully purged of the melodramatic mode in which Collins's writing is steeped. For all the lofty aspirations dramatic critics held for the potential of a revitalised English drama, Collins's writing never abandoned its roots in the sensational or the melodramatic. To be certain, their influence is less heavily felt in *The Evil Genius* than in *Rank and Riches*, but it has not entirely disappeared. The convenience of Captain Bennydeck's appearance, for instance, giving Sydney an expedient opportunity outside of a failed elopement with Herbert, is less absurd than the rapid succession of improbable events in *Rank and Riches*, but nevertheless comfortably ties up the play's loose ends. Moreover, the continued use of the aside as a functional method of delivering expository information, though less frequent in *The Evil Genius*, still positions Collins within an

[110] Ibid., 28-29.
[111] Ibid., 52.

earlier dramatic tradition rather than at the forefront of those works steadily moving towards the renewal of the English stage. When Captain Bennydeck reveals the entirety of his personal history to Herbert's brother Randal, however, he offers the following disclaimer: 'I hope you won't think me a vain man. I am ashamed to have said so much about myself'.[112] The copy of the script held in the Harvard Theatre Collection, likely written after the original licensing copy, amends Bennydeck's line: 'I hope you won't think me a vain man? I seldom say so much about myself as I have said just now. You seem to have drawn it out of me'.[113] These lines may be attributed to Bennydeck's religious humility, but they may equally point to an awareness on Collins's part that the expository monologue and the informative aside belonged to an earlier dramatic tradition rather than to the nascent drama of the *fin de siècle*.

What *Rank and Riches* and *The Evil Genius* share in common are thoroughly unsatisfying endings. Characteristically of Collins's work, *Rank and Riches* stops short of espousing a radical politics in its inability to grant options to Calista that exist outside of romantic relationships. Despite Calista's railing against the shackles of her aristocratic life, by the end of the play marriage continues to be the structuring principle by which her world is ordered. Though Catherine spends much of *The Evil Genius* regretting having ever married Herbert Linley, at the end of the novel and play she is once again by his side as his wife. Even the politics of these works demonstrate the double bind of Collins's lengthy career. His writing never fully embraced the gritty naturalism of the French writers he so admired, nor did it commit to embracing a radical politics that risked offending middle- and upper-class sensibilities. While the sensation novels of his early career may have indeed traded in taboo topics and illicit affairs, by the end of his career Collins was caught between writing for an audience attuned to melodramatic overtones in both novels and plays and a separate audience that

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[112] Ibid., 45.
[113] Wilkie Collins, *The Evil Genius: A Drama in Four Acts*. Harvard Theatre Collection MS968.1, 58.

represented an increasing demand for bourgeois dramas that eschewed what they perceived as melodrama's facile simplicity.

In 1886, *The Times*'s annual review of the previous year's dramatic offerings – the year in which *The Evil Genius* may have premiered if it had gone beyond a single copyright performance – echoes the persistent concern in dramatic criticism regarding a perceived scarcity of sophisticated, English playwriting talent: 'Among the native growth, farce and melodrama have all but monopolized attention, and have apparently secured such a degree of popularity as will give them a preponderating influence on the stage for some time to come'.[114] That even after the failure of *Rank and Riches* Collins did not fully sever the ties between his dramatic writing and the melodramatic tradition speaks to its enduring popularity. As the wider discussion in newspapers and periodicals concerning the lasting presence of melodrama on the English stage suggests, by the penultimate decade of the nineteenth century Collins was adapting his novels for two audiences: one that had a track record of attending melodramas for decades, and one that was only abstractly gestured at by dramatic critics who claimed it wanted English plays that broke the melodramatic mould. *The Evil Genius*, in the way it comfortably deploys an emergent psychologising alongside firmly melodramatic moments, represents an attempt to bridge the apparent divide between those two modes.

That same year, Herman Merivale's lecture on 'The Drama of The Day', echoing the title of Archer's important work of 1882, was 'hopeful in tone and lofty in its aspirations'.[115] A commentator for *The Morning Post* summarised Merivale's optimism:

> In the course of his address the lecturer said that it was often asserted that the English drama was now dead. This was not so, for Englishmen could write, and write well, could gain sympathetic audiences whose opinion was worth more than that of dramatic critics who prated about situation, motive, or construction, as though these were the only things necessary to dramatic art. The office of the drama was not simply to hold

[114] *The Times* (14 January 1886), 13.
[115] *The Daily News* (22 March 1886), 6.

> the mirror up to nature, but to be the mirror.[116]

Merivale sets up a distinction between the outsized voice of the dramatic critic bemoaning the death of English drama and what he describes as a distinctly English playwrighting talent that already existed. When *The Era* took issue with Merivale's lecture after it was published in *Temple Bar*, it was not with its optimism or perception of an already extant dramatic talent, but with its homogenising of theatrical audiences:

> The habitués of Sadler's Wells, who were used to the broad acting of Mr. Phelps's Shakespearian school, would not have cared for the minute and finished style of the Robertson drama at the Prince of Wales's Theatre. When Mr. Merivale says the English public wants the English dramatist, he speaks as if there were one playgoing public, and all dramatic authors of ability were wanted indiscriminately, no matter what their style should be.[117]

This critic echoes the article from *The Islington Gazette* of two decades earlier that extolled the virtues of theatrical atomization. As the dramatic market expanded, so did the need for theatres to cater to increasingly specific portions of the 'English audience' broadly understood. That Merivale's lecture attracted criticism not because of its assertion that native English playwrighting talent did, in fact, exist, but because of its failure to identify for whom those playwrights were writing, suggests that the death of English drama was beginning to recede into the memory of dramatic criticism.

That same issue of *The Era* reported on the Vice-Chancellor of Oxford University's invitation extended to Henry Irving to address its members. This event, the commentator claimed, 'is a sign of the times which it is impossible to overlook, and difficult to over-estimate as a

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[116] *The Morning Post* (19 March 1886), 3.
[117] *The Era* (3 July 1886), 17.

compliment to the dramatic profession'.[118] The reporter's breathless optimism in describing the event encapsulates the hopeful promise of a revived English drama:

> The invitation of the Vice-Chancellor was a distinct ratification of the feeling of our largest minds that the English drama has now to be reckoned with as one of the leading intellectual forces, for good or evil, of the present time. […] The general interest felt in the drama, no less than the sense of dissatisfaction with things theatrical as they at present exist which is noticeable in certain quarters, is a sign of good augury for the future. […] Such vehemence is far better than the placidity of stagnation or the calmness of indifference; and is but a sign of the seriousness with which many writers for the stage now regard their vocation.[119]

If English drama had not yet quite worked out how to pivot from its melodramatic history to bring an increasingly gentrified and sophisticated audience into the fold – as Collins's divided writing suggests – it was, at the very least, acknowledged as a possibility.

As the excerpt from *The Examiner* with which this chapter began implies, Collins was never able to shed his identity as a writer of the Dickensian school. Whether Collins was ever self-consciously part of this 'school of English writers' is unclear. What is evident, however, is that Collins's many contributions to the nineteenth-century stage shed light on a capacious career that extends well beyond the narrow limitations of the works for which he is most readily remembered today.

[118] Ibid., 13.
[119] Ibid.

Conclusion
A Name of the Victorian Age

> Wilkie Collins published his first novel, 'Antonina,' in 1850, in the midst of the palmiest days of the Victorian era of fiction. And what an era that was! What writers! What books! It was the period when literary giants abounded, and each year witnessed the production of literary masterpieces.
>
> Lewis Melville, *Temple Bar*, 1903

Two days after Collins's death in 1889, the *Pall Mall Gazette* ran two parallel obituaries. The first, by art critic and fellow writer Harry Quilter, extolled the virtues of his gregarious friend and argued that Collins's many important contributions to the national heritage of English literature warranted a monument in his honour in Westminster Abbey. The second obituary, located in the column immediately to the right of Quilter's deeply personal essay, comprised a single paragraph narrowly focused on Collins's playwriting:

> Mr. Wilkie Collins, like his friend and admirer, Charles Reade, was what may be called a half-baked dramatist. He had strong leanings towards the stage and many dramatic qualities, but was fatally deficient in that indefinable scenic instinct or tact which is so common among French-men, so rare on this side of the Channel. Had he been 'caught young,' he might have acquired this tact, and become a prolific and successful playwright. Unfortunately, or fortunately, he was a hardened novelist before he seriously attempted the stage.[1]

[1] *Pall Mall Gazette* (25 September 1889), 2.

Writers in newspapers and periodicals took the opportunity of Collins's death to memorialise a career that was universally understood to have waned after the publication of his most popular novels of the 1860s. Passing references made to his dramatic works overwhelmingly serve to draw a contrast between them and his more widely successful novels. 'Melodrama was Wilkie Collins's forte', wrote *The Athenaeum*, 'but he worked better as a novelist than as a dramatist'.[2] Swinburne's famous obituary, which elsewhere criticised the overtly moral tendencies of Collins's later fiction, also confirmed that the novel as a form had superseded drama:

> And, far as the modern novel at its best is beneath the higher-level of the stage in the time of Shakespeare, it must be admitted that the appeal to general imagination or to general sympathy, which then was made only by the dramatist, is now made only by the novelist.[3]

The conversation in periodicals and newspapers surrounding Collins's death and the legacies of his career serve to illustrate the wider anxiety that moral, psychological, and artistic complexity were to be increasingly found in novels as opposed to the widely popular but nevertheless inferior drama. This anxiety characterised the latter half of Collins's career which was dedicated to writing across both form and genre. 'Whether we like it or not', wrote *The Daily Telegraph* in its obituary, 'the fact remains that the novel is nowadays the popular vehicle for illustrating theology, science, spiritualism, theosophy, history, politics, biology, and fashion'.[4]

However cannily Collins tried to navigate the exigencies of an aggressively expanding literary and dramatic market, the reputation of his works would struggle to move beyond the narrowly constrained limits of the sensational writing of the 1860s. 'His is a name of the Victorian age', wrote *The Daily Telegraph*, 'which posterity will not readily let die'.[5] As one obituary put it, 'The death of Mr

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[2] *The Athenaeum* (28 September 1889), 418.
[3] Algernon Charles Swinburne, 'Wilkie Collins', *The Fortnightly Review* (1 November 1889), 589.
[4] *The Daily Telegraph* (24 September 1889), 3.
[5] *The Daily Telegraph* (24 September 1889), 3.

Wilkie Collins removes, with the single exception of Miss Braddon, the very last survivor of the famous band of novelists of whom Charles Dickens was the head'.[6] The following year, Scottish writer and critic Andrew Lang summarised the reputation that would characterise Collins's writing for the majority of the following century:

> In all but his very best novels his combinations were apt to be too intricate, too like a very difficult game at chess, and in passing from one coincidence to another, we gradually lose our power of belief, and with it, of course, our interest. […] He may have been saved from the dangers of success by his conscientious endeavour, in each new tale, to do his very best. As to that best, one cannot equal it with the excellence of Dickens, of Thackeray, of George Eliot, of Charles Reade, or even of Anthony Trollope. The *genre* of novel to which Mr. Collins devoted himself was lower than theirs.[7]

The Academy, which framed its obituary in terms of Collins's working relationship with Dickens, also took the opportunity to criticise the theatrical side of his works:

> If Dickens learnt from Wilkie Collins the importance of at least attempting to construct a plot, it is no less certain that Dickens taught his friend and disciple how to combine realism with romance and to tinge his fiction with a moral lesson. The tendency to melodrama, as shown by their theatrical tastes, was probably native to both.[8]

Here, despite its enduring popularity on the nineteenth-century stage, the 'tendency to melodrama' figures as a critique of both Collins's and Dickens's writing. 'Every decade has its host of sensational writers', wrote *The Speaker* nearly a decade later. 'Wilkie Collins was only a sensational writer; he has had his vogue, and is known no more'.[9]

Though both Collins's novels and plays heartily embrace the melodramatic tradition that both came before and outlived him, there are indications throughout his corpus of work that gesture

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[6] *The Aberdeen Journal* (24 September 1889), 5.
[7] Andrew Lang, 'Mr. Wilkie Collins's Novels', *The Contemporary Review* (January 1890), 22, 28; emphasis in original.
[8] *The Academy* (28 September 1889), 203.
[9] *The Speaker* (29 September 1902), 227.

towards the kind of psychological, emotional, and social complexity that would come to characterise the *fin de siècle*. Despite writing prolifically for the nineteenth-century stage, Collins himself remained deeply critical of what he saw, at times, as an essentially flawed enterprise. In a letter to the actor Charles Kent, for instance, Collins despaired at the state of English theatre:

> Lord Lytton kindly brought the "Brutus" play to me while I was in town. And, in spite of my weak eyes, I read with delight and admiration that masterly work. As dramatic poetry it is, to my mind, far in advance of "The Lady of Lyons" and "Richelieu" – and as an acting play there is such true power in the characters and the "situations" that I could see the scenes on the stage while I was reading them. And this masterpiece remains unacted! If you want to know why, look at the theatrical advertisements in the newspaper – and don't forget that the theatres are in a state of unexampled prosperity.[10]

Collins's relationship with the theatre as an institution was coloured by the competing disdain and admiration he felt for it. Two years after writing this letter, however, Collins would go on to produce the spectacular failure *Rank and Riches* at the Adelphi, which shared more in common with the plays publicised in those 'theatrical advertisements' than with Lytton's poetic drama. This double-bind encapsulates Collins's wider career: constantly torn between writing for cross-sections of the population that cut across class lines and overlapped with each other, his works have been understood as being simultaneously too radical to belong to a high-Victorian sensibility and too conservative to be located alongside the kinds of formal, political, or aesthetic innovations of the late-nineteenth century.

In 1889, *The Saturday Review* claimed that 'the future admirer of *The Woman in White* or *The Moonstone* will find very scanty materials out of which to form an image of his idol'.[11] To an extent, this has remained true: despite increasing scholarly interest in Collins's prolific career, only those two

[10] Wilkie Collins, 'To Charles Kent, 21 September 1881', in *Letters II*, 438. Edward Bulwer-Lytton's unpublished play *Brutus* (1847) would be produced by Wilson Barrett at the Princess's Theatre in 1885 as *The Household Gods*.
[11] *The Saturday Review* (28 September 1889), 343.

novels have received consistent attention in popular culture, stretching from the era of silent films up to contemporary, lavishly produced BBC period pieces. Foregrounding Collins's dramatic writing enables us to look beyond our inherited assumptions about a career that lasted nearly four decades and to question the ways in which both critical and cultural legacies are continuously being reformed. That Collins's dramatic works remain, for the most part, unacknowledged by scholars of the Victorian period is symptomatic of a wider dynamic in both literary and cultural criticism that has tended to leave the intellectual hierarchies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries unchallenged.

In 1917, the Thanhouser Company, one of the first major American motion picture companies, produced a silent film adaptation of *The Woman in White*. The film opens with Anne's frantic escape from the asylum in which she is being held captive. Later, the film lingers on its portrayal of Marian's rain-soaked eavesdropping, alternating between shots of her struggling through a frigid downpour and Sir Percival's wicked grin. The film, later rebranded as *The Unfortunate Marriage*, specifically adapts scenes from the novel which Collins's own dramatic adaptation of 1871 excised. In doing so, the film restored *The Woman in White* to its sensational roots, paving the way for a host of subsequent adaptations that equally rely on suspenseful moments to generate narrative interest. Later iterations such as *Tangled Lives* (1917), *The Twin Pawns* (1919, later rebranded as *The Curse of Greed*), and *Crimes at the Dark House* (1940) concretised a popular understanding of Collins's works as intricately plotted and suspenseful.

The process of theatrical adaptation, of which Collins was an early pioneer, has never truly left us. Both Broadway and the West End are replete with sumptuous dramatisations of novels and films, from Disney's family-friendly musicals to plays like Baz Luhrmann's extravagantly sensual *Moulin Rouge* (2019). The West End's longest-running plays, moreover, share a distinct lineage with

Collins's dramatic works: the suspense of both Agatha Christie's *The Mousetrap* (1952) and Stephen Mallatratt's dramatisation of Susan Hill's novel *The Woman in Black* (1989) echoes the critical legacies of Collins's writing. In demonstrating the centrality of the stage to a writer who has so often been remembered as one of the novel's most important architects, this thesis has suggested that what is at stake in redressing the amorphous formal boundaries of the nineteenth century is not simply the recuperation of a set of historical events, but also our impression of how cultural production has been shaped by, responded to, and reckoned with an aggressively expanding market economy. A better understanding of adaptation as it was practiced throughout the nineteenth century can clarify part of the relationship between culture and industry. Typically understood – as it continues to be understood – as a profiteering enterprise, a sustained analysis of adaptation that locates those works within (but not behind or subservient to) the forces of a market economy reveals adapted works to be capable of demonstrating the same political, social, and psychological sophistication that has typically been reserved for an abstract 'original'.

Foregrounding Collin's dramatic adaptations also encourages us to reconsider the process of canon formation, and to question the ways in which our own assumptions about both the Victorian period and its cultural production can equally and inadvertently reproduce the kinds of biases against which literary criticism has been arguing for decades. Collins's dramatic writing did not exist in a vacuum, and if a sustained engagement with his plays reveals how the institution of theatre shaped the trajectory of his wider career, then the field of nineteenth-century theatre studies equally has the potential to leverage its position as central to the broader field of Victorian studies. In doing so, however, it is important to avoid replicating the teleology that has tended to characterise nineteenth-century drama as a steppingstone for the novel's more important and more rigorous sophistication. Collins wrote for the stage because it was profitable, because it allowed him to explore a variety of cultural forms and genres, and because it introduced him to a vibrant world that moved beyond the

narrow intellectualising he both distrusted and loathed. The Victorian stage was a multi-faceted, complex, and intricate enterprise that created problems for itself and its admirers in its double embrace of lowbrow thrills and a nascent gentrification. Locating Collins's works within this context reveals them to be responding to and struggling to understand modes of spectatorship that were in constant flux and development. In much the same way that Collins's writing once collapsed distinctions between 'high' and 'low' culture and between the strictures of form, its afterlife in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries equally has the capacity to blur the line between scholarly interest and popular culture.

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