



PROJECT MUSE®

---

"The Wholesome Application" of Novels: Gender and  
Rehabilitative Reading in *The Moonstone*

Hosanna Krienke

Victorian Review, Volume 46, Number 1, Spring 2020, pp. 83-99 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/vcr.2020.0016>



➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/771446>

---

[ Access provided at 23 Nov 2020 14:17 GMT with no institutional affiliation ]



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License.

# “The Wholesome Application” of Novels: Gender and Rehabilitative Reading in *The Moonstone*

HOSANNA KRIENKE



IN WILKIE Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868), Gabriel Betteredge recovers from the stress of the plot by, ironically, reading another kind of novel. Betteredge, of course, exists in a sensation novel, a genre that supposedly produced physical symptoms of agitation and restlessness in its readers. His chosen novel, by contrast, is *Robinson Crusoe*, a text whose “wholesome application” apparently produces entirely different physiological effects (*The Moonstone* 180). In the evenings, when the suspense of his own sensationalist plot threatens to agitate physical symptoms (a malady he names “detective-fever”), he turns to this book to recuperate (131). He reports: “In this anxious frame of mind, other men might have ended by working themselves up into a fever; I ended in a different way. I lit my pipe, and took a turn at *Robinson Crusoe*” (86). Scholars have thoroughly discussed the ways in which literary reviewers of the 1860s and 1870s fretted about the pathologized pangs and excitations of female (or at least feminized) readers of sensation fiction.<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I show how reviewers of this era also theorized an alternative practice of healthful novel reading appropriate for men. While Betteredge's claims of the rejuvenating benefits of *Robinson Crusoe* are humorous, they are not far afield from the claims some contemporary reviewers made about the necessity of men's leisurely novel reading. As one 1865 reviewer declared in *Fraser's Magazine*, a novel's “first function is to entertain us, to amuse us, to give us agreeable relaxation. Nor let such entertainment be counted a trivial gain. Our health and sanity depend on it” (“Fiction and Its Uses” 747). Unlike overwrought feminine reading, masculine reading was envisioned as a much-needed respite from the stress of modern life.

In describing men's rehabilitative reading, literary reviewers often anchored their arguments in another apparently critical leisure practice: convalescence, or the extended period of rest following serious illness. Across the second half of the nineteenth century, campaigners increasingly argued that several weeks of convalescent care were necessary to shore up medical patients' long-term health. Indeed, thanks to the spread of philanthropic and friendly society convalescent homes, post-acute convalescent care became increasingly accessible across the social classes of Britain.<sup>2</sup> Literary reviewers drew on this context to describe men's novel reading as

a similarly imperative period of rest. As the reviewer cited above continued, novels could serve as a “partial substitute” for the physical benefits of convalescence. He wrote, “Though we seek them not, great gains are ours; they come to us of themselves, like that physical balm and those quiet thoughts that come to us, while we lie cool and languid, satisfied for hours to watch half unconsciously the changes of the light, after a long illness, in the first days of returning health” (“Fiction and Its Uses” 748). Through such analogies, literary reviewers drew upon a popular discourse in which aimless leisure was a necessary medical practice and even a larger social good.

But while literary reviewers used convalescence to legitimize men’s leisure reading, an emergent genre of men’s convalescent autobiography drew different lessons from the lived experience of physical recuperation. Also published in the major magazines of the day, men’s convalescent writings emphasized how the experience was both enjoyable and destabilizing, as it removed them from their conventional social roles as labouring middle-class men. Writers such as W.E. Henley, George Whyte-Melville, and Wilkie Collins himself published essays about the profound disruption of convalescent leisure. Collins actually published two essays on the topic, “Laid Up in Two Lodgings” (1856) and “Journey in Search of Nothing” (1857) in Charles Dickens’s *Household Words*.<sup>3</sup> As a genre, these convalescent essays described the writer’s liberation from his normal routines of overwork, a liberation that prompted new worries about his own and others’ place within an exploitative labour system. In many essays, such reflections ultimately led the writers to commiserate with other overburdened workers, including their own female caregivers and fellow sufferers in the lower classes. Ironically, then, when literary reviewers drew on convalescence to sanction men’s leisure reading, they compared reading with an experience that many writers described as an illuminating interruption of the conventional purview of middle-class masculinity.

Crucially, in their divergent visions of the stakes of men’s rehabilitative practices, both literary reviewers and the convalescent essayists focus on the time scale of convalescence as the key factor of their analyses. Convalescence was a temporary phase of recuperation, lasting many weeks or months, between the cessation of serious symptoms and the point at which a patient resumed his or her normal habits.<sup>4</sup> While Maria Frawley has thoroughly described the “stasis” of nineteenth-century invalidism (12), convalescence was by definition transient: the lingering aftermath of an acute health crisis.<sup>5</sup> Thus, on the one hand, the literary reviews invoked convalescence to envision novel reading as a beneficial—but circumscribed—respite from men’s pathological overwork. Convalescent essayists, on the other hand, portrayed physical recuperation as a disorienting hiatus from their routine lives. In either case, these thinkers contextualize their understanding of the male, labouring body in terms of temporality, a dimension that has been underemphasized in both studies of Victorian masculinity and discussions

of nineteenth-century physical impairments.<sup>6</sup> For example, Martin Danahay argues that the Victorian ideal of masculine labour required unrelenting exertion: “To not work is to leave the category of ‘man.’ In other words if you are not working you are not masculine” (27). Alternatively, Karen Bourrier examines “an alternative and complementary Victorian mode of masculinity” envisioned by mid-century novels that depict emotive men with orthopaedic impairments (3). Complicating the duelling tropes of the perpetually labouring man and the permanently disabled one, nineteenth-century convalescence was framed as a fundamentally *temporary* experience, both of leisure and of physical infirmity. Both the literary reviewers and the convalescent essayists aimed to investigate how such a respite interacted with more habituated senses of the self.

The temporality of convalescence—and its potential links with men’s reading practices—offer a new context through which to evaluate *The Moonstone*’s accumulation of several aging, impaired, and recuperating men. Many literary critics have observed that *The Moonstone* is, as Lara Karpenko puts it, a “novel about men” (139). The plot follows the search for a cursed Indian diamond that has been stolen from an aristocratic house. To recover the gem, the family enlists the help of multiple male detective figures, all of whom are characterized by compromised relationships to masculine health and productivity: the insomniac Franklin Blake, the aging Gabriel Betteredge, the almost-retired Sergeant Cuff, the recuperating Dr. Candy, and the chronically ill Ezra Jennings. Some scholars have argued that this roster of men and their detective efforts constitute a generic shift in which this novel “attempts to relabel itself as masculine-dominated detective fiction” rather than feminine-coded sensation (Zieger 212). Others have claimed that Collins’s male protagonists across his novels, much like Bourrier’s case studies, offer an “alternative masculinity” characterized by languor, irresolution, and nervous symptoms (Tondre 588).<sup>7</sup> My work offers a different dimension through which to evaluate Collins’s novel. The men of *The Moonstone* are constantly engaging in rehabilitative routines—novel reading, gardening, even smoking—to recover from the stress of their mystery. Yet as the plot unfolds, such masculine leisure activities are revealed to be central components of the feminine sensationalist mystery. Most significantly, Blake’s leisurely habit of smoking—which appears to ameliorate his insomnia—is not merely a restful activity but also a significant clue to the plot. In seeking out masculine repose that (as it turns out) can comfortably coexist with feminine sensational suspense, the men of *The Moonstone* experience a disruption of their routine social roles in ways that parallel that of the convalescent essayists. Yet more than this, the synching of men’s rhythms of leisure to a sensationalist mystery ultimately exposes the reader’s contradictory investments in engaging with the plot.

Like Betteredge himself, the reader of *The Moonstone* is simultaneously obsessed with an effeminate sensational mystery and engaging in an

enjoyable, masculine pastime. This depiction, I argue, accomplishes more than simply mocking reviewers' assumptions about the identity and morals of sensation readers. By scrambling supposedly masculine and feminine reading practices, *The Moonstone* offers individual readers the opportunity to occupy unfamiliar social roles. The direct appeals to the reader make this agenda explicit. Like many Victorian novels, *The Moonstone* often appeals to the reader as a singular "you."<sup>8</sup> However, unlike other novels, *The Moonstone* implies that the reader occupies a range of incongruous subject positions. At various points, the many narrators of this novel address "you" as male or female, young or old, as well as upper- or lower-class. In constructions, *The Moonstone* co-opts the disruption experienced by convalescent middle-class men and extends it to a mass audience of novel readers. The reader of *The Moonstone* necessarily experiences a disturbance of his or her habitual, gendered routines in reading a novel that addresses itself to incompatible subject positions. As this novel imagines it, the experience of reading a novel is a beneficial, even ethical interruption of any reader's habitual routines.

#### I. MEN'S HEALTH AND LEISURE IN THE VICTORIAN PERIODICAL PRESS

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the British periodical press routinely published both personal accounts of men's convalescence and literary reviews that analogized men's reading practices with convalescent care. Both of these genres capitalized on the anxieties that magazines such as the *Saturday Review*, *Chambers's Journal*, and *Fraser's Magazine* already voiced about the plight of middle-class men of letters who seemed doomed to chronic overwork.<sup>9</sup> However, these two genres of writing offered competing assessments of how convalescence interacted with discourses of male intellectualism. On the one hand, reviewers were attracted to convalescence as an analogy because it modelled a kind of advantageous but aimless repose, thus illustrating how fiction could "amply fulfil an excellent purpose if it only amuses" ("The Uses of Fiction" 180). On the other hand, convalescent essayists viewed the experience of expansive leisure during recuperation as fundamentally unsettling. As Collins exclaims in one essay, "Oh, blessed Idleness, after the years of merciless industry that have separated us, are you and I to be brought together again at last?" ("A Journey" 217). As a medically necessary experience of leisure, convalescence was for middle-class Victorian men simultaneously an act of masculine duty and, ironically, a respite from it.

In theorizing a masculine mode of rehabilitative novel reading, nineteenth-century reviewers envisioned a readerly method that was distinct from not only the pathological consumption of sensation novels but also the moral didacticism of mid-century realism. These critics stridently resisted the need for didacticism: "We are indignant with the man who would entice us into listening to his homily under pretense of amusing us" ("Fiction and Its Uses" 759). Dickens, in particular, was "perhaps too deliberately moral" ("Art and

Morality" 95). The mid-century insistence on instruction, they argued, drove readers to sensationalism. As one writer reasoned,

When even many of our novelists indulge us with reflections, theories, schemes for universal improvement, and a good deal more which might generally be left out with advantage, is it to be wondered at that we are in our moments of leisure compelled to seek refuge from thought in sensation, and so pass from one extreme to another? ("The Sensation Novel" 142)

For these reviewers, then, novels needed to be neither too instructive nor too addictive. As a temporary respite from the hectic pace of modern life, the best novels allowed tired workers to "linger restfully when we return home wearied and faint with the pursuing of the day" ("Fiction and Its Uses" 748).

In constructing a method of novel reading that was both anti-didactic and anti-sensational, reviewers articulated an ideal for novel reading that falls outside of much current scholarly discussion of nineteenth-century reading practices. On the one hand, some current critics argue that novel reading in the nineteenth century was imagined as a kind of "temporal training" to habituate readers to the hectic rhythms of modernity (Daly 37).<sup>10</sup> On the other hand, various scholars have focused on the pathology ascribed to novel reading, particularly in the case of female readers. Laurie Garrison argues that sensation readers, in particular, were thought to inhabit "unnatural states": "They were too effectively stimulated, too seduced by the suggestive pleasure of 'unwholesome' excitement" (3). The Victorian defences of masculine reading, however, fit neither of these paradigms. One reviewer commented that, far from being a training regimen, fiction was "a most wholesome mental refreshment" when it served as "a relief from facts" ("Sin of Light Reading" 292). And, rather than a dangerous stimulant, novels could be a "mental anodyne" or "a great relief" ("Fiction in Two Aspects" 514).

To model the kind of reading appropriate for middle-class men, nineteenth-century writers appealed to the "light reading" that was already a common recommendation for convalescent care. Among its distinctive features, Victorian convalescence was consistently figured as an ideal opportunity to read contemporary novels. As one health manual advised, "Pleasant conversation, or light reading, will be found assisting the cure; but anything like intellectual toil is decidedly injurious, the brain being less able to bear such efforts than at other times" (*Handbook for the Sea-side* 25). Florence Nightingale recorded that her patients especially enjoyed novels during convalescence: "[T]hey often state that never in their lives did they know what the pleasures of fancy were before" (209). One journalist even noted that "the great problem of convalescence,—[is] how to hold a book, and turn the pages, without letting your nursetender suspect there is danger of catching cold" ("Fiction and Its Uses" 749).

Literary reviewers directly invoked such depictions of therapeutic convalescent reading in order to justify leisure reading at other times in life: "In convalescence after illness, the reading or listening to a story is far less fatiguing than receiving visitors, while the monotony of the sick-room has to be relieved; and even in times of trouble and anxiety, a book that will take us 'out of ourselves' is something to win our gratitude" ("Uses and Abuses of Fiction" 776). Another critic challenged the dubious reader: "Supposing a story is avowedly written only to amuse, is it therefore a thing of no value? Ask the over-wearied, the sick, the lonely. Ask those who feel not only the delight, but the necessity of sometimes forgetting themselves, their cares and vexations" ("The Use of Fiction" 388). Convalescent reading practices offered an incontrovertible case study for critics to argue that literature read purely for amusement could be considered socially beneficial.

In addition to direct analogies between convalescence and leisure reading, the critics of the periodical press drew on the physiological language of convalescent care to describe the mental and physical benefits of reading. When a reader finishes a novel, "[t]he tension of the mind is relieved, new thoughts are suggested, fresh interests awakened, and the book is laid down in a very different frame of mind from that in which it was taken up" ("Fiction in Two Aspects" 514). Such refreshment could even produce physiological improvements: "[T]he movements and colour of a broader and more vivid life cause the pulses to quicken, and the blood to course through the veins with a fuller throb" ("The Use of Fiction" 388). This quickened pulse was not feverish but strengthened. The writer continued, asserting that, on finishing a novel, a reader is rehabilitated: "The spirit returns from its brief sojourn in dreamland, restored and recreated, better prepared for its duties of doing, or bearing, more ready to resume the 'heat and burden of the day'" (388). Such temporary respites from work, in this model, could thus produce better workers.

Perhaps the most striking convalescent analogy was one writer's recommendation to read a novel at the end of each workday. The writer of "Fiction and Its Uses" scolded his reader for refusing to value leisure: "You are most blameworthy for the first and causal offence—refusal to amuse yourself at the right time." After just one half-hour of overwork, he insisted, one would be left "fretful and impatient, morbidly sensitive, cross." This irritable mental state was hardly conducive to one's familial and social commitments in the evening. Fortunately, these morbid symptoms could be alleviated by novel reading. If one read a novel at the end of each workday, "your forehead would have cooled, and your eyes cleared, and your brain grown tranquil" (747). Novel reading was thus placed as a buffer—a pause—between a period of pathological overwork and a period of healthful sociability. Novel reading, in this portrayal, took on the structural form of convalescence. More than a harmless use of one's free time, novel reading was a necessary rehabilitative practice.

But while literary reviewers had much to say about the analogy between novel reading and other rehabilitative practices, an emergent genre of men's convalescent essays offered different assessments of how periods of needful repose interacted with the norms of masculinity. More than any other demographic, middle-class men published autobiographical accounts of their convalescence, generally in the form of essays in the periodical press.<sup>11</sup> These convalescent essayists celebrated the mandatory leisure of their conditions, a respite from their habits of relentless work. In her foundational study of invalidism, Frawley profiles an entire genre of invalid travel literature, mostly written by men, who chronicled their "search for health" (121). The convalescent essayists, however, did not attempt to perform such masculinist striving but rather revelled in the medical prescription (as they put it) "to do nothing" (Collins, "Journey" 217; Henley 417). Collins even humorously titled one convalescent essay "A Journey in Search of Nothing." The writers voice delight in the utter repose of convalescence. One essayist declared, "There is a highly satisfactory feeling, under such circumstances, that to do nothing is, so to speak, to do one's highest duty" ("Luxuries of Illness" 639). Another noted that convalescents know "hours of delight and days of relief of which the invariably vigorous have no sort of conception" (Shand 547). A priest suffering from overwork wrote that his holiday was delightfully unproductive: "An indolence took possession: it was pleasant to sit and do nothing and think of nothing . . . It was a season of enjoyable passiveness: not of active production at all" ("Between" 314–15). The requisite rest of convalescence thus sanctioned unusual experiences of total relaxation for middle-class men. Yet this expansive leisure, far from preparing them for a return to their routine lives, instead prompted these writers to reflect on their own and others' precarious status within structures of gender, able-bodiedness, and class.

The essayists described how the expansive relaxation of convalescence made them recognize that their habits of overwork were unsustainable in the long term. For many, the weakness of convalescence foreshadowed the decline of old age. The "middle-aged, hard-working" priest narrating "Between June and May" addressed his reader as a fellow sufferer: "When you have been lowered through overwork and worry . . . You read biographies sadly: thinking mainly how the early flow of spirits fails men as years go forward, and the capacities of enjoyment are dulled" (304). Another writer weighed the benefits and drawbacks surrounding his position as a recent retiree recovering from a serious illness. He surmised, "Retired from the active business of life, I cannot help experiencing some of the feeling of melancholy as well as of satisfaction." He continued, "If no longer exposed to the hardships of my earlier days, nor harassed with the trials of my past years of labour and vexation, I yet must needs perceive that I am no longer . . . nerved with the vigorous resolution of meridian manhood" (Gorle 595). By viewing the vigour of manhood as a transient state—a



“meridian” to be crossed—this essayist offered a striking time-based critique of conventional masculinity. During the temporary period of recuperation, convalescent essayists realized that their privileged positions as middle-class, able-bodied intellectuals were also fundamentally temporary.<sup>12</sup>

During such a disruptive experience of enjoyable passivity and disconcerting impairment, many convalescent essayists described a kind of ethical awakening to the plights of other marginalized groups. The poet W.E. Henley, writing in the *Saturday Review* in 1877, admitted that his protracted convalescence made him irritable and selfish. Yet he also lamented the burden his care placed on his female caregivers, bemoaning that “unfortunately, the convalescent himself is not the only sufferer” (417). Other writers drew direct parallels between their breakdowns in health and the strain of the working class, who also suffered from unsustainable productivity. Many bitterly noted that they felt intense economic pressure to recuperate quickly; they were “always worried about making up for lost time” (“Disadvantages” 441). In this fear, they sympathized with the convalescent poor. One writer asserted that “not too rich bread-winners” were recommended a “complete change of air and scene,” a suggestion which “seems not much less beyond their reach than is the nourishing diet recommended to some half-starved recipient of parish relief” (Holt 126, 128). Another added that the prescription for leisure for middle-class men was a “mockery” of their economic status (Shand 549). He lamented, “Might as well prescribe a generous diet—turtle-soup and old brown sherry—to a bedridden labourer” (550). Both middle- and lower-class medical patients were trapped in a cycle of poorly paid, relentless labour that, paradoxically, made convalescent rest both medically necessary and economically out of reach.

Such moments of commiseration led some writers to voice insights they themselves found subversive or unsettling. George Whyte-Melville, in “A Week in Bed” for *Fraser’s Magazine* in 1864, noted that the experience of a leg injury made him newly sympathize with an amputee crossing sweeper he previously passed on his commute to work. Writing in the second person, he mused, “from your heart you pity the poor fellow . . . and you wonder how you could yourself bear to be crippled for the rest of your days. Would your eye be as bright as his, your voice as cheery, your thanks for small mercies as sincere?” (332). Whyte-Melville related that, in health, his own fundamental belief was that “[c]ompensation . . . is the fundamental principle that keeps humanity in equipoise” (332). However, he confessed that he could not locate any appropriate compensation for the crossing sweep that would be “on this side of helpless old age” (332). While Whyte-Melville moved quickly on from this disturbing breakdown in his own ideology, other writers chose to denounce the status quo firmly. The writer of “The Disadvantages of Convalescence” fumed at the disparity between utterly worn-down medical patients of the middle or lower classes and the pampered elite, whose wealth allowed them to indulge in all kinds of imaginary

ailments. As he observed, for the majority of the population, convalescence was “a trying time” because they were unable to earn money as they recuperated (438). By contrast, the “English upper ten thousand” could extend their ill health indefinitely (437). To solve the endemic ill health of the upper classes, this writer bitinglly suggested that the aristocratic invalid (like the wageless labourer) should receive no interest on his land when he succumbed to an attack of gout. Such a deprivation “would be one step towards equality, or rather towards a principle of equality” (438). Somewhat facetiously, this writer imagined that the economic shock of losing rent would accelerate the recovery of many aristocratic invalids. Yet, curiously, he did not affirm the necessity of such economic duress for the lower classes. Rather, he endorsed the work of philanthropic convalescent homes, which treated discharged hospital patients of the working classes to several weeks of rest, hearty meals, and healthful leisure.

Perhaps more than any other essay, Collins’s “Laid Up in Two Lodgings” explores how the leisure of convalescence could initiate new empathy toward others’ material and economic circumstances. At the opening of the two-part essay, he insisted that, as a barely recuperated convalescent, he would deal only with topics related to his illness. Occupying a conventional stance of the self-absorbed invalid, he claimed he is utterly unable to offer “a flight of thought beyond myself and the weary present time” (481). But as the essay unfolds, this pathological self-interest instead fosters a radically new perspective on the marginalization of other people. Staring out of the window of his rented room, the speaker takes newfound interest in abject figures: an omnibus full of sufferers from a sanitarium, the harassed nursemaid of a spoiled child, and a policeman who appears “all but worked to death” (486). “I should have missed altogether, or looked at [them] with indifference,” he admits, “if I had occupied my bachelor apartment in the enviable character of a healthy man” (485). What begins ostensibly as an essay on “the involuntary egotism of a sick man” thus becomes a meditation on the shared burdens of overwork and ill health (482). Particularly, Collins emphasized the miserable working conditions of female servants who provide his care. Having nothing to do but to make conversation with a maid-of-all-work, he reported, “Life means dirty work, small wages, hard words, no holidays, no social station, no future, according to her experience of it” (521). This conversation led him to decry *her* plight instead of his own: “No human being ever was created for this. No state of society which composedly accepts this, in the cases of thousands, as one of the necessary conditions of its selfish comforts, can pass itself off as civilized, except under the most audacious of all false pretences” (521). At the end of the second instalment, he declared that the experiences surrounding his rehabilitation “have taught me to feel for my poor and forlorn fellow-creatures as I do not think I ever felt for them before” (522). Such expansive sympathy across boundaries of class and gender, as Collins portrayed it, was

directly prompted by his disassociation from his own social role during convalescence.

While many scholars have studied the norms of masculine health and labour in the Victorian period, the genre of convalescent autobiography reveals a counter-narrative in which men who typically occupied a position of hegemonic power and normativity underwent a transformative, if temporary, experience. These writers experienced not only the rejuvenation of convalescence but also an awakening to the material conditions surrounding their own and others' physical experience. Some learned to doubt the gospel of work, to foresee their own future disability in aging, and even to recognize the tremendous physical strain endured by the lower classes. Thus convalescence, in requiring the middle-class man "to do nothing," could accomplish a significant amount of work. While contemporary literary reviewers may have resisted activating many of these connotations in their essays linking convalescence and novel reading, I posit that Collins himself draws on the radical potential of men's convalescent leisure in *The Moonstone* in order to reimagine the opportunities involved in the act of reading a novel.

## 2. GENDER AND REHABILITATIVE PRACTICES IN *The Moonstone*

Given that men's health was such a recurring concern of literary reviewers, it is with great irony that *The Moonstone* places men's rhythms of health and rehabilitation at the centre of a seemingly pathological, sensationalist plot. The centrality of these themes is revealed with the identity of the true thief of the stolen diamond. While several potential thieves are suspected, the culprit turns out to be one of the male detectives. Franklin Blake, suffering from insomnia brought on by quitting smoking, is unknowingly drugged by Dr. Candy to settle a debate on the merits of medical intervention for his sleeplessness. While Blake reports sleeping particularly well on the night of the theft, he, in fact, stole the diamond himself in an opium-laced stupor. However, these events remain secret because Dr. Candy also falls ill on this night and experiences prolonged cognitive impairments throughout his convalescence. In positioning men's compromised health and rehabilitation as the ultimate secret of a sensationalist plot, this novel perversely activates two contradictory discourses surrounding the act of reading, both the pathological stimulation of the female reader and the healthful repose of the male reader. In this depiction, the novel consistently obfuscates which reading posture its own audience is supposed to occupy.

In the midst of the mystery, the men of *The Moonstone* continually engage in therapeutic regimens to alleviate symptoms of illness, anxiety, overwork, aging, and suspense. Betteredge and the lawyer, Mr. Bruff, both turn to novels, while Sergeant Cuff takes refuge in rose gardening. Yet as the novel unfolds, such restorative habits are revealed to be integral to the sensationalist plot in various ways. Long before we learn that Blake's leisurely habit of

smoking is the most important clue, we have already seen multiple cases in which men's rehabilitative leisure and a morbid obsession actually coincide. Gabriel Betteredge is an avid novel reader whose interactions with the novel's mystery mirror many of the concerns reviewers voiced about the readers of sensation novels, yet his habit of using *Robinson Crusoe* to recuperate actually functions as a suspenseful delay for readers of *The Moonstone*. Betteredge's attempts to modulate sensationalist suspense with healthful novel reading are just one example among many of the way this novel deliberately entangles men's leisure practices into its sensationalist mystery. Sergeant Cuff also claims to balance his professional identity as a detective with the hobby of gardening. He declares, "The nature of a man's tastes is, most times, as opposite as possible to the nature of a man's business" (108). Echoing contemporary treatments for overwork, Cuff states that his interest in roses is a deliberate attempt to enjoy an activity diametrically opposed to work. He asserts, "Show me any two things more opposite one from the other than a rose and a thief; and I'll correct my tastes accordingly—if it isn't too late at my time of life" (108). While Cuff claims to divide his time between labour and leisure, these two positions become noticeably synchronous as the plot progresses. In fact, Cuff's appreciation for the garden of the Verinder estate turns out to be twofold. Not only does he admire the roses, but he also interrogates several characters in this space to avoid being overheard. As he explains, "in my line of life, we cultivate a healthy taste for the open air" (122). The healthiness of the outdoors is thus figured both as the antithesis of detective work and (ironically) as a necessary component of it.

Even the lawyer, Mr. Bruff, experiences a remarkable coincidence in which his leisure becomes an integral part of the central mystery. Baffled in his professional attempts to unravel the mystery of the missing diamond, Bruff gives up his efforts for the day: "I had a dinner engagement that evening; and I went upstairs, in no very genial frame of mind" (286). In this moment, Bruff is placed in precisely the position of a man who, according to the periodical press, should take time to read a novel. Exhausted from the day's work, he is too irritable to perform his evening social duties. Notably, readers have already been informed that Mr. Bruff, like Betteredge, is generally a novel reader "in his hours of leisure" (224). Yet, fortuitously in this case, Bruff's suspense and his leisure are satisfied simultaneously. As he reports retrospectively, he could not have predicted that "the way to my dressing-room and the way to discovery, meant, on this particular occasion, one and the same thing" (286). As this foreshadowing indicates, Bruff goes to the dinner party where he meets the adventurer Mr. Murthwaite, and their discussion illuminates several crucial aspects of the mystery. In highlighting a felicitous moment in which the retirement of the "dressing-room" and the excitement of "discovery" happen to coincide, the novel positions itself as achieving both a sensationalist enjoyment of suspense and a healthful distraction from readers' daily routines.

Such orchestrations of suspense and leisure occur even at climactic moments. Just before he dregs up the all-important box buried in the quicksand near the estate, Franklin Blake must wait an hour for the tide to shift. This blatant plot device opens up the opportunity for both heightened suspense and healthful recreation. Blake lights a cigar, an action that readers already know to be fundamental to his health and (perhaps) even a clue to the mystery, since he stopped smoking just before the diamond went missing. Blake reports on his unexpected enjoyment of this delay, "The sunlight poured its unclouded beauty on every object that I could see. The exquisite freshness of the air made the mere act of living and breathing a luxury." He declares, "It was the finest day I had seen since my return to England" (312). By itself this scene may be read as a paradigmatic instance of narrative desire. Blake is able both to relish delay and to anticipate closure in the same way that all readers simultaneously seek to extend the experience of reading and to accelerate to the end. However, *The Moonstone's* use of such dual impulses is distinctive in that it conflates two reading practices that, historically, were divided by conceptions of health and illness as well as by masculinity and femininity.

The men of *The Moonstone* are not the only ones for whom incompatible leisure and obsessional postures happen to coincide. The novel constructs its own form as an opportunity for its readers to experience different readerly postures and social roles as well. Karpenko argues that the implied reader of this novel is identified as male; however, I find that the novel highlights its own inconsistent conception of the reader (138). The reader of *The Moonstone* is repeatedly addressed in the second-person singular "you." However, over the course of the novel, "you" are described variously as bored or enthralled, young or old, upper class or lower class, and, perhaps most significantly, male or female. *The Moonstone* constructs an unusually prominent role for its audience, whose supposed critiques and affective responses are directly addressed by the many narrators of the novel. Whatever actual readers' feelings about the plot may be, the narrators variously insinuate that readers experience "disappointment" that a particular episode concludes in "rather a flat ending" (59), find their curiosity "irritate[d]" by characters withholding information (157), or even allow their attention to wander, since "it's a book that asks for [attention], instead of a person" (43). At one point Betteredge asserts, "If you are as tired of reading this narrative as I am of writing it—Lord, how we shall enjoy ourselves on both sides a few pages further on!" (187). In directly begging readers to pay attention and referring to the book's material "pages," the narrators of *The Moonstone* consistently interrupt readers' immersion in the story to foreground various possible postures of reading.

The reader's implied responses to the narrative do not just alternate; different affects can exist simultaneously. After successfully narrating a sequence of events without digressing, Betteredge congratulates himself, "Thanks be to Heaven, we have arrived at the eve of the birthday at last! You will own, I

think, that I have got you over the ground this time without much loitering by the way." Implying that his reader is perhaps exhausted by such rapid plot developments, Betteredge exhorts: "Cheer up! I'll ease you with another new chapter here—and, what is more, that chapter shall take you straight into the thick of the story" (70). Paradoxically, Betteredge here attends to his reader's leisure—"eas[ing]" the stress of narrative progress—and entices the reader to forge ahead to arrive at "the thick of the story." Thus, in a single sentence, the reader—like Cuff whistling about roses, Mr. Bruff retiring to his dressing-room, and Blake watching the tide—experiences both leisure and suspense at once in the form of a chapter break.

The reader of *The Moonstone* is imagined to inhabit not only a range of affective responses but also several incongruous social roles. In one passage, Betteredge insists that the reader pay particular attention and then proceeds to shift his figuration of the reader's class status. He reports on Blake and Rachel's project of painting a door and declares, "There are reasons for taking particular notice here of the occupation that amused them. You will find it has a bearing on something that is still to come" (62). This call for the reader to focus is then followed by a sharp critique of the extravagant leisure of the upper class. However, in this passage, the reader's supposed class status is in noticeable flux. First, the reader is positioned alongside Betteredge as a lower-class observer of the elite: "[Y]ou see them occupied for hours together in spoiling a pretty flower with pointed instruments, out of a stupid curiosity to know what the flower is made of" (62). Yet the reader's vantage point seamlessly shifts to one whose affluence results in messy hobbies. Comparing the diversions of the elite with the play of children, Betteredge notes, "You dabbled in nasty mud, and made pies, when you were a child; and you dabble in nasty science, and dissect spiders, and spoil flowers when you grow up" (62–63). In the first case, mud pies may be the hobby of children of any class, while the hobbies in the second instance are the luxuries of the bored elite. After this, "you" are clearly among the upper class: "And so it ends in your spoiling canvas with paints, and making a smell in the house" (63). However, by the end of the paragraph, the reader is suddenly returned to being Betteredge's peer: "But compare the hardest day's work you ever did with the idleness that splits flowers . . . and thank your stars that your head has got something it must think of, and your hands something that they must do" (63). In such shifts, the novel inescapably offers an alternative perspective for the reader to inhabit, regardless of the reader's actual class. While Collins's own experience of convalescence in "Laid Up in Two Lodgings" allowed him to imaginatively commiserate with the working class, the form of *The Moonstone* takes such identification a step further. In this paragraph, the novel showcases its own capacity to shift the implied class status of the reader at will.

The novel also varies the reader's implied age. Miss Clack, the religious spinster narrator, intermittently slips into what she calls her "Sunday-school

style" (205) to sermonize young readers. Betteredge also addresses the youthful reader, cautioning, "When you come to my age, you will find sitting down on the slope of a beach a much longer job than you think it now" (37). Yet Betteredge sometimes imagines a middle-aged reader who is married with children (57). At still other times, he addresses disparate groups together. Complaining about his daughter's rough combing of his hair, Betteredge appeals to the reader, "If you are bald, you will understand how she scarified me. If you are not, skip this bit, and thank God you have got something in the way of a defence between your hair-brush and your head" (75). At many moments in reading *The Moonstone*, the audience is confronted with not only a direct address but also a strangely precise subject position implied in the use of "you." These moments serve both to acknowledge the diverse audience who enjoyed sensation fiction and to draw attention to the collective act of reading.

The reader's implied viewpoint shifts most obviously when the narrators alternate between addressing male and female readers. Miss Clack references an audience of "dear girls" (250), for example, while Bruff speaks to his reader as "my dear sir," a colleague who may perhaps disagree with his professional practices (276). Betteredge often abruptly shifts in his implication of a male or female reader, yet he consistently addresses the reader as a singular persona. At one point, he defends Rachel Verinder's character by declaring, "She had just as many faults as you have, ma'am—neither more nor less" (65). However, just a few paragraphs later, Betteredge asks, "Perhaps you think you see a certain contradiction here? In that case a word in your ear" (66). The proffered confidential advice is suddenly gendered anew. He counsels, "Study your wife closely, for the next four-and-twenty hours. If your good lady doesn't exhibit something in the shape of a contradiction in that time, Heaven help you! you have married a monster" (66). In both instances, the "you" addressed is noticeably singular rather than plural. A reader may be disoriented by such disruptive appeals, yet these direct addresses also mirror the incongruous reading practices elicited by the text.

In speaking to "you," the novel can slip between incongruous subject positions in ways that are both seamless and jarring. In yet another instance in which Betteredge demands the reader's particular attention, the novel again takes the opportunity to highlight the heterogeneity of its readership. Betteredge implores the reader, "Pay attention to it, or you will be all abroad, when we get deeper into the story." He continues, "Clear your mind of the children, or the dinner, or the new bonnet, or what not. Try if you can't forget politics, horses, prices in the City, and grievances at the club" (42). The first sentence here clearly refers to a female reader's stereotypical distractions from reading; the second describes a male reader's conventional interruptions. Yet both sets of concerns are invoked in his appeal to a singular "you." He goes on to apologize, "I hope you won't take this freedom on my part amiss; it's only a way I have of appealing to the gentle reader"

(42–43). By conjoining bonnets and gentlemen's clubs among the interests of "the gentle reader," *The Moonstone* draws attention to its varied audience and simultaneously consolidates its readership into a single figure. In reading a novel, one must "clear [one's] mind" of one's actual social role and, for a time, take up the alternative, ever-morphing role of a reader.

In its characterization of a simultaneously diverse and singular reader, *The Moonstone* emphasizes its eclectic mass audience and unifies this readership into a singular persona. Patrick Brantlinger argues that the motif of appealing to a singular reader often registers anxieties about an unruly mass audience: "The reduction of mass to individual, readers plural to reader singular, itself manifests anxiety about controlling reader response" (15). Yet in *The Moonstone's* play upon such fears, the broad and unknowable audience of novels can be unified in calls to turn the page, to enjoy the narrative, and—above all—to pay attention to a story that takes them out of their routines and roles. By emphasizing its function as a temporary suspension of a reader's life, the novel positions itself as a convalescent experience, a respite that can be healthful and illuminating while also providing surprise and suspense. Ultimately, *The Moonstone* makes a case for its beneficial role in readers' lives by emphasizing a collective disruption of social roles made possible through the act of reading for leisure.<sup>13</sup>

#### Notes

- 1 For discussions of the feminine or feminized sensation reader, see Garrison, Debra Gettelman.
- 2 As the Charity Organization Society reported, more than two hundred and fifty institutions for convalescence were founded between 1840 and 1889 (*Charities Register*).
- 3 These essays first appeared anonymously before being reprinted with Collins's byline in his 1863 *My Miscellanies*.
- 4 Convalescence did not necessarily end in full recovery; this period of recuperation could also take place within more long-term health problems. Thus on one hand, Whyte-Melville hinted that he was recuperating from either a sprained or broken leg; on the other hand, Collins and Henley convalesced from serious attacks stemming from chronic conditions (gout and tuberculosis of the bone, respectively).
- 5 While Frawley's study sometimes subsumes convalescence within the paradigm of invalidism, she observes that convalescent essayists represent a counter-narrative to her central argument, both in the transience of their conditions and in their continued interest in identity categories outside of invalidism (234–35).
- 6 Filling this scholarly gap, Jewusiak's recent investigation of aging in the Victorian novel foregrounds the temporality of growing older, linking this process to changing conceptions of both gender and able-bodiedness (10–12).
- 7 While Tondre focuses on Collins's *Armada*, Karpenko makes similar claims for *The Moonstone* (134).
- 8 See Brantlinger, Garrett Stewart for sustained assessments of direct addresses to readers in Victorian novels.
- 9 For a wider account of the anxieties surrounding the labour of Victorian men of letters, see Danahay 3–8.



- 10 Similarly, Nicholas Dames argues that the discourse of physiological novel theory viewed the novel as “a training ground for industrialized consciousness” (7).
- 11 Women, of course, also convalesced and also wrote about convalescence. However, women’s published writing on the topic tends toward the practical: devotional guides, caregiving manuals, and even cookbooks.
- 12 In these revelations, Victorian convalescent essayists offered their own version of what has become a common observation within modern disability scholarship: able-bodiedness cannot function as a permanent identity category, because “in reality most people who live long enough will experience some form of disablement in their lives” (Bourrier 140n13).
- 13 The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Research Council under the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme (FP/2007–2013) under Grant Agreement Number 340121.

### Works Cited

- “Art and Morality.” *The Cornhill Magazine*, vol. 32, no. 187, July 1875, pp. 91–101.
- “Between June and May.” *Fraser’s Magazine*, vol. 10, no. 57, Sept. 1874, pp. 304–15.
- Bourrier, Karen. *The Measure of Manliness: Disability and Masculinity in the Mid-Victorian Novel*. U of Michigan P, 2015.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Indiana UP, 1998.
- Charity Organization Society. *Charities Register and Digest: Convalescent Section*. 3rd revised ed., Longman, 1890.
- Collins, Wilkie. “A Journey in Search of Nothing.” *Household Words*, vol. 16, no. 389, 5 Sept. 1857, pp. 217–23.
- . “Laid Up in Two Lodgings.” *Household Words*, vol. 13, no. 324–25, 7 and 14 June 1856, pp. 481–68; 517–23.
- . *The Moonstone*. Edited by Sandra Kemp, Penguin, 1998.
- Daly, Nicholas. *Literature, Technology and Modernity, 1860–2000*. Cambridge UP, 2004.
- Dames, Nicholas. *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction*. Oxford UP, 2007.
- Danahay, Martin A. *Gender at Work in Victorian Culture: Literature, Art and Masculinity*. Ashgate, 2005.
- “The Disadvantages of Convalescence.” *Tinsleys’ Magazine*, vol. 1, Nov. 1867, pp. 436–41.
- “Fiction and Its Uses.” *Fraser’s Magazine*, vol. 72, no. 432, Dec. 1865, pp. 746–60.
- “Fiction in Two Aspects.” *Chambers’s Journal*, vol. 4, no. 816, 16 Aug. 1879, pp. 513–15.
- Frawley, Maria. *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. U of Chicago P, 2004.
- Garrison, Laurie. *Science, Sexuality, and Sensation Novels: Pleasures of the Senses*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Gettelman, Debra. “‘Those Who Idle over Novels’: Victorian Critics and Post-Romantic Readers.” *A Return to the Common Reader: Print Culture and the Novel, 1850–1900*, edited by Beth Palmer and Adelene Buckland, Ashgate, 2011.
- Gorle, J. “My Own Room: A Reverie in Two Parts.” *The Gentleman’s Magazine*, vol. 10, May 1873, pp. 593–607.
- The Hand-Book for the Sea-side, for the Invalid and Convalescent*. Hamilton, 1857.
- Henley, W.E. “Convalescence.” *Saturday Review*, vol. 44, no. 1145, 6 Oct. 1877, pp. 417–18.
- Holt, Eliot. “A Winter Cruise in Search of Health.” *London Society*, vol. 47, no. 278, Feb. 1885, pp. 126–36.
- Jewusiak, Jacob. *Aging, Duration, and the English Novel: Growing Old from Dickens to Woolf*. Cambridge UP, 2019.

- Karpenko, Lara. "A Nasty Thumping at the Top of Your Head': Muscularity, Masculinity, and Physical Reading in *The Moonstone*." *Victorian Review*, vol. 38, no. 1, Spring 2012, pp. 132–54.
- "The Luxuries of Illness." *Saturday Review*, vol. 50, no. 1308, 1880, pp. 639–40.
- Nightingale, Florence. *Notes on Nursing: What it Is and What it Is Not*. Revised ed., Harrison, 1860. "The Sensation Novel." *The Argosy*, vol. 18, 1874, pp. 137–43.
- "The Sensation Novel." *The Argosy*, vol. 18, 1874, pp. 137–43.
- Shand, Alexander I. "The Pleasures of Sickness." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, vol. 145, no. 882, Apr. 1889, pp. 546–56.
- Stewart, Garrett. *Dear Reader: The Conscripted Audience in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Johns Hopkins UP, 1996.
- Tondre, Michael. "'The Interval of Expectation': Delay, Delusion, and the Psychology of Suspense in *Armada*." *ELH*, vol. 78, no. 3, 2011, pp. 585–608.
- "The Sin of Light Reading." *Saturday Review*, vol. 20, no. 514, 2 Sept. 1865, pp. 291–92.
- "Uses and Abuses of Fiction." *Chambers's Journal*, vol. 11, no. 571, 8 Dec. 1894, pp. 775–77.
- "The Uses of Fiction." *Tinsleys' Magazine*, vol. 6, 1870, pp. 180–85.
- "The Use of Fiction." *The Argosy*, vol. 28, 1879, pp. 386–88.
- Whyte-Melville, George. "A Week in Bed." *Fraser's Magazine*, vol. 69, no. 411, Mar. 1864, pp. 327–35.
- Zieger, Susan. "Opium, Alcohol, and Tobacco: The Substances of Memory in *The Moonstone*." *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, edited by Pamela Gilbert, Wiley-Blackwell, 2011, pp. 208–19.