

**THEORIES OF DETERMINISM IN  
THE FICTION OF  
MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON AND  
WILKIE COLLINS, 1852-74**

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## Abstract

This thesis concerns Mary Elizabeth Braddon's and Wilkie Collins's fictional representation and employment of theories of biological and environmental determinism. It demonstrates that both authors saw determinism as a theme for literary exploration, and also used it as a means of addressing associated issues debated throughout the Victorian period such as class, gender roles and moral responsibility.

The introductory first chapter provides an overview of sensation fiction and concurrent theories of determinism. Part 1 begins with a consideration of Wilkie Collins's use of early- to mid-Victorian psycho-physiological theories, in particular his depiction of monomania. Chapter 2 argues that Collins uses monomania to simultaneously explain and enhance the melodramatic atmosphere of *Basil*. Chapter 3 shows how his portrayal of monomania in *No Name* facilitates an engagement with Victorian debates about willpower and personal responsibility. Chapter 4 reveals how in 'Mad Monkton' and *Armadale*, Collins's speculations about heredity anticipate, without endorsing, theories of degeneration. The final chapter on Collins discusses how in *Man and Wife* his artistic change in direction towards "novels with a purpose" is accompanied by a greater emphasis on environmental determinism.

Part 2 begins with an analysis of Braddon's under-studied *The Lady Lisle* which uses ideas of nature and nurture to explore and manipulate class boundaries. Chapter 7 examines *John Marchmont's Legacy's* interrogation of notions of the "ideal woman", and its assertion that some women are constitutionally incapable of fulfilling such a role. The final chapter concerns Braddon's continued exploration of the connections between determinism and womanliness in the little-known *Lost for Love*, in which she depicts women as capable of great intellectual achievement if given the correct education. However, this depiction is filtered through a conservative ideology of gender which asserted that women should be primarily trained as companions to men.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction: Sensation Fiction and Victorian Deterministic Thinking

What is SELF? [...] the representation of an integral individual human being—the organisation of a certain fabric of flesh and blood, biassed [sic], perhaps, originally by the attributes and peculiarities of the fabric itself—by hereditary predispositions, by nervous idiosyncrasies, by cerebral developments, by slow or quick action of the pulse, by all in which mind takes a shape from the mould of the body;—but still a Self which, in every sane constitution, can be changed or modified from the original bias, by circumstance, by culture, by reflection, by will, by conscience, through means of the unseen inhabitant of the fabric.<sup>1</sup>

(Edward Bulwer Lytton, 'On Self-Control', 1863)

The popular and prolific novelist Edward Bulwer Lytton's *Caxtoniana: A Series of Essays on Life, Literature, and Manners* was serialised in twenty monthly parts in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* between February 1862 and October 1863.<sup>2</sup> In it, Bulwer Lytton offers reflection, advice and opinions on (as the accommodating subtitle suggests) a wide and sometimes disparate number of topics, from the everyday to the philosophical, often both within the same piece. 'On Self-Control' is one such essay which uses examples of historical figures to illustrate what Bulwer Lytton considered the true nature of self-discipline. Bulwer Lytton acknowledges, however, that before he can discuss the control of the self, he must first ask what 'Self' is.

This question - 'what is Self?' - interested, preoccupied and troubled many Victorian thinkers: both the contemplation of the question and its numerous possible answers had an impact on social developments and changes which took place throughout the Victorian period. As in Bulwer Lytton's essay, the question could arise from the most practical and everyday issues - here the matter of personal conduct. The relevance and context of the question itself

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Bulwer Lytton, 'On Self-Control' (1863), in *Caxtoniana* (London: Routledge and Sons, 1875), pp.206-14 (pp.207-08).

<sup>2</sup> The subtitle appeared in the initial serialization. 'On Self-Control' first appeared in *Blackwood's*, 93 (April, 1863), 471-76.

changed as social, scientific and religious transformations meant that conceptions and theories of self were contested, altered and created throughout the century. How the self was perceived could radically influence how it was seen to be integrated within its immediate social environment, within society, within the human race, and within vaster schemes, both spiritual and secular. By asking 'what is Self?', the Victorians were not simply asking about individual ontology, but about the social and environmental networks in which they were enmeshed. This is partly because the questions which arose from and led to a querying of 'Self' often concerned the extent to which humans were able to control their actions and desires, to exert free will and thereby be responsible for their own behaviour: were people at the mercy of their biological composition, their inherited characteristics, their upbringing, their inherent intellect (or lack thereof)?; or were they free, and therefore accountable beings who could make choices and act upon them without constraint?

Of equal importance was the question of the degree to which individuals could be improved or spoiled by their own actions, by those of the people around them, and by their environment: what individuals *necessarily* were, and what they *could* be, was vital not only to each person, but to the family unit, wider communities, and the nation. Thus, the issue of determinism – the extent to which the self was either fixed or malleable, and the forces to which it might be subject – was inextricable from ontological questions of selfhood.<sup>3</sup> Bulwer Lytton's own response to 'what is Self?' exemplifies how interrogating the nature of the self inevitably entails some consideration of its creation and development. Whilst not suggesting that the self is a purely physical entity, Bulwer Lytton defines it in 'flesh and blood' terms of hereditary transmission,

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis 'determinism' refers to the range of pre- and post-natal factors which influence (i.e. determine) personal development. This includes environmental factors such as education and upbringing which could be considered anti-deterministic because they in some senses belie the idea that human behaviour is biologically predetermined. Also, 'environmental determinism' refers to characters' social surroundings (such as those mentioned above). This is distinct from the geographical term 'environmental determinism' which refers to the 'doctrine that human growth, development and activities are controlled by the physical environment' and that 'factors of culture, race and intelligence are supposed to derive from the benign or malignant influences of climate, and other aspects of human habitat.' *Encyclopedia of Environmental Science*, ed. by David E. Alexander and Rhodes Whitmore Fairbridge (Dordrecht, Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999), p.196.

the cerebral and nervous systems, and the circulation of blood through the body, all of which may affect the developing 'mind'. He is therefore acknowledging that physiological constitution is a fundamental, formative part of each individual. At the same time this self is modifiable by the influence of external forces such as 'circumstance' and 'culture', and of internal, non-physical forces, such as 'reflection', 'will', 'conscience', and 'the unseen inhabitant of the fabric' which we may think of as soul or mind. Ultimately, according to Bulwer Lytton, that 'complex unity' which comprises 'Self' is alterable and manipulable by those around it and through *self*-modification. It is with such internal and external influences, how the mid-Victorians perceived them and, more specifically, how they were represented in popular fiction, that the following chapters are concerned.

Like Bulwer Lytton, many Victorians who wrote about the nature of selfhood (several of whom are included in this thesis) attached great importance to the individual's potential for free will. They held compatibilist views which acknowledged to a greater or lesser extent the many deterministic factors which played on the development of each individual, whilst maintaining a belief in the freedom of the willpower to dictate behaviour responsibly.<sup>4</sup> Yet the will itself was frequently seen as something to be developed and strengthened, meaning that it was open to manipulation: if properly understood, determinism could be harnessed and put to use. Heidi Rimke and Alan Hunt identify some of the aspects which were seen to contribute to the self as a whole, and observe that

despite their variant conceptualizations the will, the passions, the soul and the character share the crucial attribute of being suitable objects of governance; they can be worked upon, trained, developed and thus reformed. It is of particular significance to note that the governance of the will can be effected either by individuals themselves or by others; that is, their governance can be both internal and external.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Robert Kane gives concise explanations of terms such as 'compatibilism' used in current free will debates in *A Contemporary Introduction to Free Will* (New York: OUP, 2005), particularly chapters 1-4.

<sup>5</sup> Heidi Rimke and Alan Hunt, 'From Sinners to Degenerates: The Medicalization of Morality in the 19th Century', *History of the Human Sciences*, 15:1 (February, 2002), 59-88 (p.62).

Whilst these aspects were perceived to be modifiable, the possible extent of modification and 'governance' was by no means conclusive. The development of the will was perhaps the most important issue as the willpower was believed to control the passions and regulate the conscious behaviour of the individual.

The raising of people who were capable of self-control, of acting as responsible beings, was often a key concern to those Victorians engaged in the formation of social policy. It was hoped that by employing the correct external determining forces from an early enough age, internal governance could be developed to the point where it could reliably guarantee acceptable personal conduct. Pamela K. Gilbert, for example, has demonstrated how Victorian housing and sanitary reform was based on the belief 'that character is created in the home'.<sup>6</sup> It aimed to make the poorest classes suitable for citizenship by altering their domestic desires and behaviour so as to render them more congruent with those of the bourgeoisie. The internally and externally manipulable self was seen as a source of potential and of vulnerability. Left to themselves, the poor were not deemed capable of self-control or self-improvement - their self-determining actions were not to be relied upon, their wills would pursue the wrong desires - and so, as Gilbert shows, it was deemed necessary for the state to take a deterministic role in the management of their lives.

Determinism is also about what *cannot* be controlled. Although inherently desirable or detrimental traits may be respectively enhanced or counteracted by external influences, Victorian theorists were aware that there were factors at work which may contradict or overpower any efforts they made to determine the outcome of an individual's development. The inexorable forces of heredity, of (physical and mental) inherent constitution and of circumstance could assert themselves in unpredictable and unwelcome ways. Determinism was, therefore, both a potential threat and a potential opportunity.

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<sup>6</sup> Pamela K. Gilbert, *The Citizen's Body: Desire, Health, and the Social in Victorian England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2007), p.91.



Bulwer Lytton's 'On Self-Control' is just one example of a popular nineteenth-century author displaying interest in issues relating to determinism. The sensation fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins contains numerous examples of deterministic forces which are variously internal and external, naturally arising and socially engineered, complementary and conflicting. Sensation fiction was a genre which engaged with current, popular and controversial issues, including many of those which sparked discussions about determinism in Victorian society such as class and gender, insanity, heredity, mismanaged childhoods and the sanctity of the domestic sphere. Braddon and Collins were both popular and prolific; their widespread appeal meant that many readers were exposed to their portrayals of determinism.

Yet the very popularity of the sensation genre generated criticism from Victorian reviewers. Sensation fiction was contentious, censured as commercial, plot-driven and cheaply playing on the senses of the reader. Whereas "respectable" literature could be highly valued as 'at once the cause and the effect of social progress', sensation fiction was perceived as both an effect and cause of moral corruption.<sup>7</sup> As many critics, including Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore, have observed, sensation fiction was

seen to be symptomatic of the degeneration, not only of literature, but also of moral values, and there were very real concerns that readers—particularly female readers—would be adversely influenced by the amoral characters to be found in these works.<sup>8</sup>

Fears of degenerating 'moral values' were largely due to the genre's staple attributes of crime, murder, adultery, bigamy and insanity, all taking place in the supposed sanctity of the domestic sphere and often committed by middle-

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<sup>7</sup> G.H. Lewes, 'The Principles of Success in Literature', *Fortnightly Review*, 1 (May, 1865), 85-95 (p.85).

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore, 'Introduction', *Victorian Crime, Madness, and Sensation* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2004), pp.1-14 (p.5). See also: Sally Shuttleworth, "'Preaching to the Nerves": Psychological Disorder in Sensation Fiction' in *A Question of Identity: Women, Science, and Literature*, ed. by Marina Benjamin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), pp.192-222 (p.194); Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel: From 'The Woman in White' to 'The Moonstone'* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishing, 1994), p.5. Further references to are given after quotations.

and upper-class women of good repute.<sup>9</sup> Both Braddon and Collins received frequent criticism from reviewers. The *Athenaeum* described Collins's *Basil* (1852) as:

a piece of romantic sensibility,—challenging success by its constant appeal to emotion, and by the rapid vehemence of its highly wrought rhetoric. [...] The style of "Basil" is as eloquent and graceful as its subject is faulty and unwholesome. There is a gushing force in his words, a natural outpouring of his sensibility, a harmony, tone, and *verve* in his language.<sup>10</sup>

Similarly, John Dennis, reviewing Braddon's *Only a Clod* (1865) for *The Fortnightly Review* claimed that

Cleverness, indeed, is perhaps the most striking characteristic of her tales. They are defective as works of art, their moral tone is seldom healthy, they abound with errors of composition and improbabilities of plot; but they display so much ability that the reader willingly overlooks deficiencies, and is satisfied to be excited and amused.<sup>11</sup>

Both reviewers acknowledge the engaging, amusing nature of such sensational writing, but these very attributes make it a seductively dangerous form of moral corruption. Such reviews figure sensation fiction itself as a kind of negative determinant, corrupting the populace.

However, recent critics have argued that sensation fiction and the journals which carried it, particularly Braddon's fiction and her journal *Belgravia*, could aim to serve the positive end of educating readers, training them to be

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<sup>9</sup> Although sensation fiction could be transgressive and shocking in content, it was often ostensibly morally conservative in tone and plot outcome. Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) is an example of this, see Andrew Maunder, "'Stepchildren of Nature': *East Lynne* and the Spectre of Female Degeneracy, 1860-1861', in Maunder and Moore, *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, pp.59-71.

<sup>10</sup> Daniel Owen Maddyn, '*Basil: A Story of Modern Life*', *Athenaeum*, 1310 (4 December, 1852), 1322-23. Although sensation fiction is mainly an 1860s phenomenon, *Basil* (as discussed in chapter 2) contains sensational elements and the genre did not simply 'spring into being', as Gilbert notes: 'there have always been novels with aggressive heroines, novels with sex, novels with crimes, etc.' Pamela K. Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p.80. Maddyn's review anticipates 1860s criticisms of sensation fiction which (with other popular fiction) was described as unwholesome and diseased. See Gilbert, *Disease*, chapter 1, for examples.

<sup>11</sup> John Dennis, '*Only a Clod*', *Fortnightly Review*, 1 (July, 1865), 511-12 (p.511). Further references are given after quotations. Unless otherwise stated, original publication dates of novels are for the first book edition (rather than dates of serialization).

discerning and reflective thinkers who would interpret perceptively. Solveig C. Robinson, for example, notes that 'Braddon drove home the point that *popular* taste didn't necessarily have to mean *bad* taste', and presented popular literature as 'a legitimate literary field', whilst Jennifer Phegley argues that family literary magazines such as *Belgravia* 'empowered women to make their own decisions about what and how to read'.<sup>12</sup> In this sense, sensation fiction could be a positive influence. Such conflicting perceptions of the sensation genre show how terms such as positive and negative, healthy and diseased, cultivating and corrupting, normal and abnormal, are subjective and litigious. Who uses such terms and why is a key issue in this thesis.

As well as being morally dubious, sensation fiction was (and still is) seen to largely consist of "novels of circumstance", as opposed to Victorian realist fiction's "novels of character". Sue Lonoff, for example, notes 'the supremacy of the story' in Collins's fiction.<sup>13</sup> In literary criticism determinism has traditionally been closely related to realism, particularly with the works of George Eliot.<sup>14</sup> Realism is generally related to logical consequences and predictability (from the perspective of an omniscient narrator), whilst sensation fiction deals in chance, wild coincidences, the playing out of Providential design or the supernatural forces of Fate.<sup>15</sup> However, the question of circumstance - what a person would do in any given situation, and how that experience may affect their subsequent behaviour - is integral to thinking about determinism. Patrick Brantlinger has observed that 'the world of [...] the

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<sup>12</sup> Solveig C. Robinson, 'Editing *Belgravia*: M.E. Braddon's Defence of "Light Literature"', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 28:2 (Summer, 1995), 109-22 (p.111). Jennifer Phegley, *Educating the Proper Woman Reader: Victorian Family Literary Magazines and the Cultural Health of the Nation* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2004), p.2. See also Phegley, "'Henceforward I Refuse to Bow the Knee to Their Narrow Rule': Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Belgravia* Magazine, Women Readers, and Literary Valuation', *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 26:2 (June, 2004), 149-71.

<sup>13</sup> Sue Lonoff, *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship* (New York: AMC Press, 1982), p.18.

<sup>14</sup> See Gillian Beer, 'Beyond Determinism: George Eliot and Virginia Woolf', in *Women Writing and Writing about Women*, ed. by Mary Jacobus (Beckenham: Croom Helm, 1979), pp.80-99; Maurice Larkin, *Man and Society in Nineteenth-Century Realism: Determinism and Literature* (London: Macmillan, 1977).

<sup>15</sup> Braddon defended the use of 'accident in art' in a letter to Bulwer Lytton, asking 'why not admit accident in a story when almost all the great tragedies of real life hinge upon accident'. November or December, 1864, 'Devoted Disciple: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, 1862-1873', ed. by Robert Lee Wolff, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 12 (1974), 5-35, 129-161 (p.26). Further references are given after quotations.

sensation novel is very much one in which circumstances rule characters, propelling them through the intricate machinations of plots that act like fate', and I argue that this very fact reflects the social forces which may ensnare and control the individual.<sup>16</sup>

However, the apparent 'subordination of character to plot', which Brantlinger perceives to be the 'overriding feature' of sensation fiction, was derided by many Victorian reviewers, and characters of sensation fiction were often dismissed as sketchy, improbable, and unconvincing (Brantlinger, p.12). For example, one critic complained that Braddon's fiction contained 'no real thought, no analysis that is worth the name, no insight into human nature. Everything is shallow and thin. Her men and women are puppets; her plots and properties the most shadowy *Vorstellungen* [imaginings]'.<sup>17</sup> Dennis similarly declared that the action of characters in *Only a Clod* were 'marked by the wildest improbability, and it is essential to the plot that they should be', adding that 'in novels of the class represented by Miss Braddon, we look more for an exciting story than for a careful and consistent delineation of character' (Dennis, p.512). W.F. Rae, for the *North British Review*, dismissed Olivia in *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1863) as 'but a creature of Miss Braddon's imagination, [...] as unreal as a hobgoblin'.<sup>18</sup> Braddon herself was aware of this perception of her work: writing to Bulwer Lytton about *John Marchmont's Legacy*, she claimed that she had tried to write a novel in which 'the story arises naturally out of the characters of the actors in it, as contrasted with a novel in which the actors are only marionettes, the slaves of the story', but went on to admit regretfully that 'even my kindest reviewers tell me that it is not so and that the characters break down when the story begins' (17 January, 1864, 'Devoted Disciple', p.19).

H.F. Chorley, one of Collins's most caustic critics, regarded such subjecting of character to plot as a sign of moral and literary laxity:

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<sup>16</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, 'What is "Sensational" About the "Sensation Novel"?', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37:1 (June, 1982), 1-28 (p.13). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>17</sup> Williams, [?], 'The Lovels of Arden', *Athenaeum*, 2294 (14 October, 1871), 487- 488 (p.488).

<sup>18</sup> W. Fraser Rae, 'Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon', *North British Review*, 43 (September, 1865), 180-204 (p.195).

Those who make plot their first consideration and humanity the second,—those, again, who represent the decencies of life as too often so many hypocrisies,—have placed themselves in a groove which goes, and must go, in a downward direction, whether as regards fiction or morals.<sup>19</sup>

Chorley felt that Collins's apparent prioritisation of plot indicated a subordination of "humanity" as a theme. However, reading Collins's fiction in the light of contemporary theories of determinism offers an alternative interpretation of his emphasis on plot. Both Collins's and Braddon's stories can be read as an acknowledgement of the multiple factors (from environment and circumstance, to inherent traits and willpower) which lead individuals into certain situations (perhaps that of the jilted lover or the disinherited child), and dictate how they will act in those situations (with saint-like resignation, resolute defiance, or seditious plotting). Their novels attempt to portray and reflect the interplay of these determining factors. Like the works of many contemporary scientists and physicians, Braddon's and Collins's fiction reveals a conflict between a conception of the will as an independent decisive force and an awareness that a person's personality, abilities and actions were dictated by determining factors over which they had little or no control. Rather than failing to adequately "consider humanity", as Chorley claimed, sensation fiction's emphasis on plot can be interpreted as considering the human condition in a manner which reflects theories of determinism, acknowledging that a combination of internal and external pressures drive the individual, like the plot of a novel, through life, often precluding the possibility of truly independent action.

Supporters of sensation fiction often asserted their claims to some form of realism. G.A. Sala argued that Braddon's novels are 'like dwellers in the actual, breathing world in which we live', and refers the reader to the sensational events related in newspapers and police reports as proof.<sup>20</sup> Brantlinger notes

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<sup>19</sup> H.F. Chorley, 'Armada', *Athenaeum*, 2014 (2 June, 1866), 732-33 (p.732).

<sup>20</sup> George Augustus Sala, 'The Cant of Modern Criticism', *Belgravia*, 4 (November, 1867), 45-55 (pp.52-53). Frederick T. Monro's 'Truth is Stranger than Fiction' also argues that the 'incidents of everyday life' provide the 'fountain from which sensation-writers of the present day draw their inspiration', *Belgravia*, 9 (July, 1869), 103-08 (p.103). Sensation authors often drew on

that because they drew on the scandalous, sensationally reported crimes of the day sensation authors 'could even claim that to sensationalize was to be realistic'.<sup>21</sup> Sensation authors employ determinism in the same way that they draw on the news for inspiration; to satisfy their readers' craving for what Braddon described as 'strong meat' and to provide some form of realism (9 December, 1864, 'Devoted Disciple', p.28). Many of the non-fictional descriptions of insanity considered in the following chapters, for example, do not stint on intensity of description, whilst the distinctly unladylike, but very thrilling, behaviour of some of the fictional heroines - attempted bigamy and murder, imposturous acts - is often related to contemporary theories of female biology. Critics such as Sally Shuttleworth have acknowledged that although they wrote 'from a very different position within the cultural spectrum, and following very different generic rules [...] to very different effect', sensation authors often 'drew explicitly on the vocabulary and diagnoses of psychiatric discourse' (Shuttleworth, 'Preaching', p.193).

The 'effect' which Shuttleworth mentions is in part a depiction of the self which conflicted with the image of the stable, predictable self, steadily and soberly revealed in realist fiction. This is the dominant critical interpretation of sensation fiction. 'Sensation novels', as Shuttleworth observes, 'explicitly violated realism's formal rules of coherence and continuity and the psychological models of selfhood on which those works were founded. Disorder, discontinuity, and irresponsibility are the hallmarks of these feminine texts' (Shuttleworth, 'Preaching', p.195). Jenny Bourne Taylor writes that 'in sensation fiction masks are rarely stripped off to reveal an inner truth, for the mask is both the transformed expression of the "true" self and the means of

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famous cases such as the 1860 Road Murder. See June Sturrock 'Murder, Gender, and Popular Fiction by Women in the 1860s: Braddon, Oliphant, Yonge', in Maunder and Moore, *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, pp.73-88; Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.49-86; Kate Summerscale, *The Suspicions of Mr. Whicher: or, The Murder at Road Hill House* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), *passim*.

<sup>21</sup> Brantlinger, p.9. Dallas Liddle contrastingly argues for the conservativeness of newspaper reporting, 'Anatomy of a "Nine Days' Wonder": Sensational Journalism in the Decade of the Sensation Novel', in Maunder and Moore, *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, pp.89-104.

disclosing its incoherence'.<sup>22</sup> Pykett shows how Collins's fiction reveals gender to be 'not something natural and fixed, but produced and subject to change' (Pykett, *Sensation Novel*, p.21). More recently, Anne-Marie Beller has shown how the process of detecting the secrets at the heart of sensation plots consistently involves the 'revelation of self-division and incoherence'.<sup>23</sup>

This thesis agrees to an extent with such critical interpretations of sensation fiction as providing an unstable, fragmentary, alterable view of the self, but my focus is on how different forms of determinism are employed to create that view. As the following readings of Braddon and Collins show, they frequently provide clues to the reasons behind their characters' personalities, and lay the foundation for characters' actions by revealing details of family history, upbringing and inherent constitution. As well as drawing on recognised psychological states to explain characters' behaviour, these authors often show (implicitly or explicitly) how those states are brought into being. Maria K. Bachman observes that 'unlike Dickens, who uses caricatured figures for comic or bizarre effect, Collins explores the inner psyches of his mental deviants, examining what it means to be cast as "other" and relegated to the margins of society in Victorian England'.<sup>24</sup> It is important, moreover, that both Collins and Braddon portray respectable people who *become* deviants; they are not simply looking at 'what it means' to be other, but how one may become that way. Characters of sensation fiction are, therefore, portrayed as equally enmeshed in biological and social determinants as characters in "realist" novels.

This thesis also qualifies the idea that sensation fiction 'highlights the uncertain relation between the outer and inner forms of selfhood' but without the 'possibility, as in realist fiction, of pursuing a course of revelation until the "true" self is unveiled' (Shuttleworth, 'Preaching', p.196). Whilst in the course of a plot characters may undergo various transformations, there is often, in fact,

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<sup>22</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.8. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>23</sup> Anne-Marie Beller, 'Detecting the Self in the Sensation Fiction of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon', *Clues*, 26:1 (Fall, 2007), 49-61 (p.50).

<sup>24</sup> Maria K. Bachman, "'Furious Passions of the Celtic Race": Ireland, Madness and Wilkie Collins's *Blind Love*', in Maunder and Moore, *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, pp.179-94 (p.179).

an initial core of selfhood within each character (itself created by determinants such as hereditary transmission), with potential for development or ruin. Both Braddon and Collins tend to portray characters as beginning with a particular set of traits (an original constitution) which is then worked on – for better or worse – by circumstances throughout the novel.

Braddon and Collins display an alertness and receptivity to the major issues which raised awareness of, and led to engagement with, deterministic thinking in the mid-Victorian period. Many of these issues are staples of the sensation genre which have proved popular with modern scholars, such as criminality, insanity, and the role of women in society: critical discussions which touch on determinism tend to do so whilst focussing on these other issues (such as in the example of Gilbert above). John R. Reed has written an overview of the free will debate in fiction, and some critics have explored one particular form of determinism, such as Goldie Morgentaler's *Dickens and Heredity: When Like Begets Like*.<sup>25</sup> This thesis takes a different approach by foregrounding the multiple forms of determinism which are employed by Braddon and Collins and exploring the numerous functions they can serve as a means of addressing other social issues, or simply as a fascinating subject for literary representation. It also looks at how these sensational representations of determinism are rooted in, challenge and sometimes anticipate the theories of the scientists, physicians and physiologists who were at the forefront of mid-Victorian deterministic thinking.

Bulwer Lytton's decision to describe the self in terms of psychic and physical, internal and environmental deterministic forces, is typical of many Victorians who addressed this subject either directly or indirectly, but such an approach was not unproblematic for them. Traditional Christian beliefs placed man (possessing, as he did, a soul) as somehow separate from, and superior to, the rest of the material world. Yet it became increasingly evident, and accepted, that such segregations could not be clearly maintained. T.H. Huxley, for example, observed:

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<sup>25</sup> John R. Reed, *Victorian Will* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1989); Goldie Morgentaler, *Dickens and Heredity: When Like Begets Like* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000). Further references are given after quotations.



We have almost all been told, and most of us hold by the tradition, that man occupies an isolated and peculiar position in nature; that though he is in the world he is not of the world; that his relations to things about him are of a remote character; that his origin is recent, his duration likely to be short, and that he is the great central figure round which other things in this world revolve. But this is not what the biologist tells us.<sup>26</sup>

Huxley, rhetorically privileging the scientific knowledge of 'the biologist' (which is what, in fact, he was) over 'tradition', challenges the concept of man as a favoured being. In his depiction of the traditional view of humanity, Huxley is purposefully emphasising a dualist, Christian sense, in which 'man' refers to the spiritual aspect of each person which is 'in' but 'not of the world', and 'remote' from the physical environment. This physical environment includes the body in which a person's soul or mind was believed to temporarily reside, a discrete non-worldly entity, 'ontologically distinct', as Rick Rylance puts it, and 'remote from the determinations of the body'.<sup>27</sup> As Huxley's speech above suggests, however, new theories and discoveries in biology, as well as (to name but a few) medical, geological, and ethnological fields raised new and contentious questions about the position of man within the world, how he had come to be there, and how much he could really be perceived as 'not of the world'.

The revelations of the biologist (and others) provoked a variety of responses, particularly in the periodical press as contributors reassessed (or actively refused to reassess) their views of the world and of themselves in the face of scientific developments. The distinguished Quarterlies often both disseminated and contested new scientific theories. Responding to Charles Darwin's *The Descent of Man* (1871), the conservative *Quarterly Review* argued that 'man is the only rational [animal] known to us, and that his rationality constitutes a fundamental distinction - one of *kind* and not of *degree*', and went on to assert that man is

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<sup>26</sup> T.H. Huxley, 'On the Study of Biology' (1876) in *Collected Essays*, 9 vols (London: Macmillan, 1895), III, pp.262-93 (p.273). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>27</sup> Rylance notes a mid-century 'terminological shift from "soul" to "mind"', but both were usually seen as nonphysical. Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p.23, p.24. Further references are given after quotations.

also a free moral agent, and, as such—and with the infinite future such freedom opens out before him—differs from all the rest of the visible universe by a distinction so profound that none of those which separate other visible beings is comparable with it.<sup>28</sup>

Whilst man is referred to here as an ‘animal’ (and therefore bodily to some extent), the article reflects Huxley’s description of the traditional view of man, explicitly separating him from the rest of the ‘visible’ world and awarding him a privileged position, unattainable by other creatures.

Whilst such debate was often conducted in the *Quarterlies* and upmarket periodicals, other journals also engaged with these deliberations over the nature of humankind and its position in the world. One *Belgravia* article for example, addressing the ‘extreme’ views it felt were a part of modern culture, gave as an example the fact that we ‘are even told that Christianity must soon be abolished, and retreat before the superior sciences of sociology and biology’.<sup>29</sup> The article also points out that reformers ‘tell us that, having progressed from a brutish and barbarous state, we have our golden age to come’. This links the revelations of science to a revaluation of man’s level of development and position in the world.<sup>30</sup>

Whilst various works, such as Huxley’s lecture and the *Belgravia* article above, draw a distinction between the traditional Christian and scientific ways of viewing humanity, the divide was rarely so clear-cut, so ‘extreme’, even for ‘the biologist’. The eminent mid-nineteenth-century physiologist W.B. Carpenter is one significant example. Carpenter was well-respected, prolific, and kept abreast with the most recent physiological theories.<sup>31</sup> Reed identifies some of the problems people such as Carpenter faced: ‘at the same time that scientific studies were lending apparent proof to the theory that man was on an ascending plane of progress, they were presenting unwelcome evidences of

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<sup>28</sup> St George Mivart, ‘Darwin’s *Descent of Man*’, *Quarterly Review*, 131 (July, 1871), 47-90 (pp.88-89). For Mivart’s persistent conflicts with Darwin and Darwinism, see Gowan Dawson, *Darwin, Literature and Victorian Respectability* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), especially chapters 2, 4 and 5. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>29</sup> J.N. Willan, ‘Extremes’, *Belgravia*, 22 (January, 1874), 298-302 (p.299).

<sup>30</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> See L.S. Hearnshaw, *A Short History of British Psychology: 1840-1940* (London, Methuen, 1964), pp.19-24. Hearnshaw provides concise introductions to many of the key scientific figures in this thesis.

man's bondage to the earth.'<sup>32</sup> Whilst Carpenter did not allow new discoveries and ideas to shake his Unitarian faith, he acknowledged the need to accommodate his religious beliefs with new physiological evidence about human nature:

I cannot regard myself, either Intellectually or Morally, as a mere puppet, pulled by suggesting-strings; any more than I can *disregard* that vast body of Physiological evidence, which proves the direct and immediate relation between Mental and Corporeal agency.<sup>33</sup>

Carpenter reveals a concern with the possible consequences of new scientific knowledge, and a desire to affirm individual free will, to be more than 'a mere puppet'. Here, Carpenter is differentiating between his own beliefs about human nature and those of atheist materialists; like many scientific thinkers of the time, he is attempting to 'tread' what Lorraine J. Daston refers to as 'a tightrope between materialism and automatism on the one side and unscientific metaphysics on the other'.<sup>34</sup> Such delineation was perhaps necessary as Carpenter's own theories offered what Martin J. Wiener has described as a 'basically materialist model of brain process'.<sup>35</sup> Carpenter wrote extensively on the reflex action of the nervous system, developed the theory of unconscious cerebration and was influenced by Darwin's theories of evolution – his work was certainly grounded in an understanding of the physical aspects of the human body. Yet, as Lucy Hartley has observed, Carpenter attempted 'to hold a developmental conception of nervous function and action in balance with dualist assumptions about the existence of the soul and the agency of the will'.<sup>36</sup> Carpenter objected to 'materialist' depictions of man as 'but a *thinking machine*,

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<sup>32</sup> Reed, p.184. Reed asserts that Carpenter 'maintained a thoroughly materialist experimental position that he found compatible with his spiritual belief that a divine purpose supported all' (Reed, p.143).

<sup>33</sup> William Benjamin Carpenter, *Principals of Mental Physiology, With their Applications to the Training and Discipline of the Mind, and the Study of its Morbid Conditions* (London: King, 1874), p.x.

<sup>34</sup> Lorraine J. Daston, 'British Responses to Psycho-Physiology, 1860-1900', *Isis*, 69 (June, 1978), 192-208 (p.194).

<sup>35</sup> Martin J. Wiener, *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830-1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p.42. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>36</sup> Lucy Hartley, *Physiognomy and the Meaning of Expression in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p.165. Further references are given after quotations.

his conduct being entirely determined by his original constitution, modified by subsequent conditions over which he has no control, and his fancied power of self-direction being altogether a delusion'.<sup>37</sup> Carpenter expressed disapproval of literature such as Henry George Atkinson and Harriet Martineau's *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (1851) which, through contentious statements such as 'man has no more power to determine his own will than he has wings to fly', seemed to do away with the concept of free will.<sup>38</sup>

Materialism was often denounced in the periodical press. For example, the *British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review* spoke out against those (such as Atkinson and Martineau) who

declare that there is no personal Deity, (which is the same as saying that there is no God at all,) that man and external nature are everything, that this world is all, and that we are utterly destitute of all power to shape our own course, but are entirely what our organisation and circumstances make us.<sup>39</sup>

As a Christian scientist, Carpenter had to carefully negotiate a way between his own faith and the facts which science was revealing to him, and assured his readers that his theories were 'strictly conformable to the highest teachings of religion' (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.555). The aligning of Christianity with a belief in free will is apparent in the above quotation. A person had to be free to act in a morally independent and responsible manner if he or she was to win salvation. This free will, however, was reliant on some part of human nature being external from the constraints of the material world.<sup>40</sup> The increasing realization of 'man's bondage to the earth' during the nineteenth century contributed to the shift towards increasingly deterministic views of humanity

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<sup>37</sup> William B. Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology: With Their Chief Applications to Psychology, Pathology, Therapeutics, Hygiene, & Forensic Medicine* (1842), 5th edn (London: Churchill, 1855), p.548. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>38</sup> Henry George Atkinson and Harriet Martineau, *Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development* (London: Chapman, 1851), p.6.

<sup>39</sup> Anon., 'Miss Martineau and her Master', *British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review*, 8 (October, 1851), 538-40 (p.539). Carpenter was editing the *Medico-Chirurgical Review* at this time. The article derides Atkinson and Martineau as arrogant, illogical and credulous, but tellingly refrains from offering extracts, assuming that 'the less that is said about the book, the sooner will its unwholesome influence subside' (p.539).

<sup>40</sup> For the debates surrounding science, free will and Christianity see Reed (pp.38-59), and Rylance (pp.21-31).

(Reed, p.184). These views emphasised the organizational and circumstantial influences which dictated the development of an individual's personality. Such scientific advances also raised questions about how much humanity had been in control of its progress so far, and how much it could hope to be in charge of its further development.

The mid-Victorian period saw a number of important scientific events and the development of theories which precipitated or were a response to a move towards less dualistic, increasingly determinist thinking, as Wiener observes: 'the scientific world view shifted attention from acts to contexts, from the conscious human actor to the surrounding circumstances, whether in one's environment or one's constitution' (Wiener, p.162). The publication of *The Origin of Species* (1859) is undoubtedly a defining moment in the century, one which has generated a mass of critical and historical material, most famously Gillian Beer's pioneering work *Darwin's Plots*. Although the development of humankind was not explicitly referred to, the theory of evolution by natural selection caused many who read *Origin* (or read about it) to re-evaluate Victorian society's place in the universe and to find a new 'scale for the human' as Beer puts it.<sup>41</sup> Darwinian theories were swiftly applied to concepts of human social development. T.H. Huxley, for example, spoke of 'that struggle for existence, which goes on as fiercely beneath the smooth surface of modern society, as among the wild inhabitants of the woods'.<sup>42</sup> In this way the theory of natural selection and the struggle for survival (Herbert Spencer coined the term "survival of the fittest" in 1864) raised awareness of the influence of both hereditary and environmental factors on the human race.

The mid-Victorian period covered by this study is one of transition, in which old ideas were being lost or altered, and new ones were being developed. In his study of British psychology between 1850 and 1880, Rylance identifies a period of 'rapid growth in psychological ideas' (Rylance, p.4), and this is also true of other scientific disciplines (or areas developing into

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<sup>41</sup> Gillian Beer, *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Cambridge: CUP, 2000), p.220. Darwin speculates that in the future 'light will be thrown on the origin of man and his history', but he does not suggest his own work has done this. Charles Darwin, *The Origin of Species* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p.394.

<sup>42</sup> T.H. Huxley, 'Scientific Education' (1869), in *Collected Essays*, III, pp.111-33, (p.114).

disciplines) which are equally relevant to a study of determinism, particularly the areas of physiology and medicine.<sup>43</sup> Other critics have also identified significant changes to the scientific climate of the period. Rimke and Hunt, for example, note a shift in 'moral rule' through the mid-century from a focus on 'sin' to one on 'the distinction between the normal and the pathological' (Rimke and Hunt, p.60). Bourne Taylor describes the early 1860s as

a moment of extraordinary diversity within contrasting and overlapping discourses of inheritance, transmission, and genealogy. Notions of progress begin to transmute into degeneration; the concept of continuous transmission is transformed by adaptation; a unilinear narrative of change combines and clashes with plurality, diversity, and chance, even as organic metaphors and models are overwhelmingly deployed to fix social and sexual identity and to naturalize difference. (Bourne Taylor, p.135)

After the mid-century, as Bourne Taylor suggests, the seeds of later, more decidedly deterministic, theories begin to germinate, but earlier ideas continue to persist, sometimes modified in the light of new theories. Both non-fiction and fiction contain many ideas which had their routes in earlier theories of individual constitution and ability.

In the early-Victorian period emphasis was placed by scientists, physicians and social theorists on both the power of the passions, and on the individual's capacity to control them - to determine one's own behaviour. This meant that each person was viewed as ultimately responsible for his or her own actions or, at least, of having the capacity to be responsible. The caveat is necessary because external social influences - an abusive childhood, or defective education for example - were acknowledged to sway the development of the personality. Nevertheless, it was generally accepted that each individual possessed inherent willpower which should be cultivated from an early age and which would then allow them to control any wayward impulses and to best

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<sup>43</sup> In these years before increasingly discrete specialization and professionalization of scientific practices there was, as Rylance describes in relation to psychology, 'a more open discourse, more spaciouly framed in its address to common issues, and with an audience crossing wide disciplinary interests' (Rylance, p.7).

direct their behaviour. This belief in personal self-control informed a number of social and medical perspectives and influenced a number of legal policies.

Criminal policy, for example, was based on the assumption that people were rational and responsible, and should be able to perceive both the consequences of their actions and the deterrent of threatened punishment. As Wiener argues, criminals were seen to be suffering from a lack of self control, but ultimately capable of achieving it:

Images of the criminal reflected rising anxieties about impulses and will out of control; 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 behaviour and a broad ethos of respectability. (Wiener, p.11)

Crime was seen in terms of 'defective self-management', and the 'remedy' lay in 'reforming and developing the characters of offenders and potential offenders' (Wiener, p.49). Perceptions of criminality were, therefore, based on the pervading notion of the will as vulnerable to unruly influences, but also open to more positive influences which would encourage self-control and moral behaviour. This is reliant on the idea that the personality of the offender is capable of self-determination, and of being "trained" by the influence of the law. As Wiener's comments suggest, a socially recognised image of the criminal subsequently arose which depicted an individual whose behaviour was dictated by uncontrolled passions: morality, social order and self-restraint were aligned against immorality, criminality and unrestrained behaviour.

Closely linked to the management of criminals, was the management of the insane. In the same way that the early-Victorian criminal was viewed as an essentially responsible individual, capable of improvement through the development of self-control, those classified as insane were seen to be victims of their own overruling passions and weakened willpower. For example, John Barlow's *On Man's Power Over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity* (1843) insisted that 'he who has given a proper direction to the intellectual force, and thus obtained an early command over the bodily organ by habituating it to

processes of calm reasoning, remains sane amid all the vagaries of sense'.<sup>44</sup> The Victorian asylum practices of moral management and non-restraint relied on the idea that individuals could, when placed in conducive surroundings, learn to subdue their emotions through the exercise of willpower.<sup>45</sup>

Hysteria has been by far the most thoroughly discussed irregular mental condition in relation to Victorian fiction.<sup>46</sup> The form of insanity known as monomania has received far less critical notice, despite being a recurrent theme in sensation fiction. Its representation is also one of the ways in which Collins and Braddon engage with deterministic thinking. Marina Van Zuylen has published on the subject, but states that the 'historical concept of monomania is central to' her work 'only as a point of departure'.<sup>47</sup> Van Zuylen touches on some literary representations of monomania but does not discuss sensation fiction and is generally more interested in real life instances of men and women who adopt 'obsessive strategies' in order to 'keep the arbitrary out of their lives'.<sup>48</sup>

In this thesis, contrastingly, the historical and literary conceptions remain a focus throughout the discussions of monomania. Some critics mention monomania, but do not explore the significance of this particular form of madness in great detail (for example, Shuttleworth 'Preaching', pp.201-04). Like other forms of insanity, monomania generated much discussion in the Victorian period about self-management and self-control. As its name suggests, this particular form of insanity (popular in England from the 1830s) was commonly defined as a condition in which an individual suffered from *one* delusion. The presence of delusion was, for many doctors, a fundamental requirement in the diagnosis of monomania. However, by the mid-century, the term had come to be more closely connected to obsession (with one object, person, idea).

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<sup>44</sup> John Barlow, *On Man's Power over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity* (1843), 2nd edn (London: Pickering, 1849), p.28.

<sup>45</sup> For a brief description of the non-restraint system and moral management in Britain see *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts, 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: OUP, 1998; repr. 2003), p.227.

<sup>46</sup> For example Helen Small, *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp.199-200.

<sup>47</sup> Marina Van Zuylen, *Monomania: The Flight from Everyday Life in Literature and Art* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2005), p.3.

<sup>48</sup> *ibid.*, p.1.



Monomania could mean the overcoming of the will, the absorption of the consciousness, by one idea (not necessarily, or obviously, delusional). As Jenny Bourne Taylor has observed, 'by the mid-nineteenth century [monomania] had become a widely used term that could be stretched to mean almost any kind of irrational obsession' (Bourne Taylor, p.47). The term passed into public usage in such a way that the obsessive nature of the disease was stressed, rather than the delusional aspect: love, for example, was casually or humorously described as a form of monomania. How the monomaniacal state was supposedly produced – whether self-inflicted, inherited or caused by circumstance – was linked to determinism because it depended on whether the seeds of insanity were seen to originate inside or outside the individual, in the brain or the mind.

Monomania's primary association with obsession, a fixed idea, allowed writers to figure it as an inner conflict between different aspects of the self. The idea of monomania is complementary to the traditional elements of sensation fiction in a number of ways: its emphasis on overpowering emotions and obsessive desires, often described in medical writing as being cunningly concealed by the sufferer, harmonize with the dark secrets and hidden passions of sensation fiction. Monomania is recurrent in Braddon's fiction: Olivia Marchmont in *John Marchmont's Legacy* becomes obsessed with her cousin Edward; Robert Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) fears his compulsion to discover the truth about George Talboys' disappearance may be developing into a monomania, and he is later accused of being a monomaniac by Lady Audley.<sup>49</sup> However, monomania is most frequently to be found in Collins's work. In *The Woman in White* (1860) for example, Hartright fears that his incessant association of every strange occurrence with Anne Catherick is 'almost like a monomania'.<sup>50</sup> Chapters 2 and 3 on *Basil* (1852) and *No Name* (1862) concern Collins's portrayal of monomania in the characters of, respectively, Robert Mannion and Magdalen Vanstone.

The chapter on *Basil* shows how the novel draws on aspects of early-nineteenth-century melodrama, especially in its portrayal of Mannion as a

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<sup>49</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p.254, p.287.

<sup>50</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.80.

melodramatic villain who appears almost supernatural in his pursuit of the eponymous narrator. Collins shows Mannion to be subject to monomaniacal impulses, thus providing a recognised medical condition as an explanation for the outlandish behaviour of his villain. Monomania is a means of counteracting the fatalism of melodrama, which offers little if any reason for characters' behaviour or a play's happy ending beyond a Manichaeistic division into heroes and villains and a certainty that good will triumph over evil. The relation of monomania to the idea of determinism becomes apparent as Collins traces the origins of Mannion's condition: a series of social injustices and unfortunate occurrences have warped his personality. However, there is no real sense of Mannion's struggling against this state of affairs, and this is true of the majority of *Basil's* characters, who are swept along by their own uncontrolled passions and by the forces of circumstance; the result, as circumstance and passions converge, is obsession and monomania. Chapter 2 explores how Collins uses the dramatic and emotive feelings associated with the domination of unruly passions described in early-nineteenth century theories of insanity, in which the environment of a lunatic was paramount to his or her recovery. In *Basil* social conditions are contrived by Collins to increase the monomaniacal feelings of the characters, making the novel intense, oppressive, but also compelling reading.

Like *Basil*, *No Name* depicts a character whose emotions are out of control to the extent of developing monomaniacal tendencies. Unlike Mannion, however, Magdalen endures a series of internal conflicts between her 'better' nature and her monomaniacal urge. Collins's portrayal of monomania in *No Name* facilitates a contemplation of the different aspects which comprise the individual personality, and draws on Victorian theories of will and willpower. Magdalen is actually a very *wilful* character, but her willpower is channelled in the wrong direction as she has never been trained to manage it correctly. The nineteenth century saw a change in the extent to which the individual was viewed as possessing self-control, and Magdalen's struggle against her own unruly willpower reflects these developments. As the concept of the will began to change it came to be seen as increasingly fragile, manipulable and reliant on

physical influences. For example, Alexander Bain, a proponent of associationist psychology who believed that the personality was primarily composed through the reception of external stimuli argued, as Lucy Hartley explains, that the 'exercise of the will was dependent on the existence of physiological organisation and purely physical conditions'.<sup>51</sup> The psychiatrist Henry Maudsley also argued against 'the notion of an ideal or abstract will unaffected by physical conditions' and observed that each moment of consciousness was dependent upon a 'long series of causes', and that it was 'a deliberate fooling of one's self to say that actions depend upon the will, and then not to ask upon what the will depends!'<sup>52</sup> Collins's depiction of Magdalen's monomania shows a combination of internal and external determining factors: the influence of upbringing and social surroundings is particularly important as a determining factor in Magdalen's eventual monomania. However, that monomania is formidable because of the force of her own personality, and proves resistant to all outside influences. Circumstance brings out the worst in Magdalen, but she has intrinsic reserves of moral strength which are not attributed clearly to heredity or her life experiences, and it is these which save her in the end: it is eventually Magdalen's own better nature which overcomes the destructive aspects of her personality.

Like much Victorian physiological and medical writing which addressed the issues of mind/body relations, Collins explores the nature of insanity as a means of reflecting upon sanity: tracing what mental processes have gone awry suggests how they *should* function, and how they should be cultivated. This was largely reliant on social conceptions about what was 'normal' which often became conflated with what was 'good': moral, socially acceptable behaviour was seen to be normal, and deviancy was a sign of something having gone wrong. Gradations and definitions of normalcy and deviancy became increasingly significant as the century progressed, especially in relation to ideas of hereditary degeneration. Although theories of hereditary transmission were

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<sup>51</sup> Hartley, p.123. For an account of associationist psychology see Rylance pp.55-69. For Bain in particular see Rylance chapter 5, and Hearnshaw, pp.8-14.

<sup>52</sup> Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, rev. (1867; London: Macmillan, 1868), p.169, p.171.

influential throughout the century, it came to be seen in an ever more threatening light. Maudsley, for example, declared that 'there is a destiny made for a man by his ancestors, and no one can elude, were he able to attempt it, the tyranny of his organization'.<sup>53</sup> The emergence of eugenicist thinking, based on theories of heredity, was spearheaded by Francis Galton, whose 'Hereditary Talent and Character' was published in *Macmillan's Magazine* in 1865. It was in this article that Galton wondered 'what an extraordinary effect might be produced on our race, if its object was to unite in marriage those who possessed the finest and most suitable natures, mental, moral, and physical!'<sup>54</sup> Although eugenics is largely a late-nineteenth-, early-twentieth-century phenomenon, it was in the mid-Victorian period that such ideas began to take hold due to developing theories about what constituted each individual, and how desirable traits could be passed on and enhanced with each generation, as well as how objectionable individuals could be discouraged (or stopped) from procreating; questions of which traits were desirable, and should be protected or encouraged, became paramount.

Despite its later uses, eugenics could be perceived as an optimistic way of thinking as it aimed to identify, preserve and enhance strengths and desirable characteristics with each generation. Degeneration theories, contrastingly, offered a negative spin on both Darwinian theories of natural selection and Lamarckian theories of acquired characteristics. Whilst the specific theories themselves varied (and are considered in detail in later chapters), the general idea was that once a weakness (physical, mental or, increasingly, moral) entered a family line it would be passed on and enhanced through each generation. Often the only hope for stopping the development of the inherited flaw was the assumption that it, whatever *it* was, would lead to sterility and death – the self-destruction of the family. Daniel Pick identifies 'two different trajectories in the conception of degeneration': a drive to 'isolate a social threat – to reveal, transport, castrate and segregate "noxious elements"', and a concern that 'degeneration lay everywhere'; was it 'separable from the history of progress (to

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<sup>53</sup> Henry Maudsley, *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (London: King, 1874), p.22.

<sup>54</sup> Francis Galton, 'Hereditary Talent and Character', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 12 (June, August, 1865), 157-66, 318-27 (p165).

be coded as “regression”, “atavism” or “primitivism”), or did it reveal that the city, progress, civilisation and modernity were paradoxically, the very agents of decline?<sup>55</sup> These theories of degeneration were in many ways reliant on ideas about determinism – were people being warped by their environment, or was there an atavistic threat constantly hidden within the race, which circumstances merely brought out?

Such concepts of degeneration were ideal for exploitation in the sensation novel, a genre which deals in extremes, in modernity, and which takes events to apparently logical, but alarming and destructive conclusions. However, degeneration is predominantly a fin-de-siècle phenomenon, and the majority of works focus on later literary engagements with the subject.<sup>56</sup> Maunder discusses female degeneracy in *East Lynne*, but he treats it in terms of a general perceived moral deterioration of society and does not focus on the hereditary aspects of degeneration or specific theories. In chapter 4 the links between heredity and determinism in sensation fiction which are often overlooked, taken for granted, or touched upon only briefly are emphasised, especially in relation to degeneration. Chapter 4 begins with a reading of Collins’s 1855 short story about hereditary insanity, ‘Mad Monkton’, and goes on to discuss *Armadale* (1866), in which a murderous father fears that his sinfulness will be passed down to his son. Although many specific degeneration theories had not been published by the time *Armadale* was written, Collins’s imaginative speculations about heredity tended in the same direction as those of the degenerationists. In this sense the novel foreshadows developing degenerationist and eugenicist theories. By applying what would later be recognized as different “forms” of degeneration to different characters, and by offering different reasons for the development of that degeneration, Collins raises implicit questions about class and race.

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<sup>55</sup> Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p.106.

<sup>56</sup> See, for example, William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994); Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996); Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004). Further references are given after quotations.

George Levine has suggested that:

it is possible and fruitful to understand how literature and science are mutually shaped by their participation in the culture at large—in the intellectual, moral, aesthetic, social, economic, and political communities which both generate and take their shape from them.<sup>57</sup>

However, Gowan Dawson has recently argued that this “‘One Culture’” model of literature and science scholarship’ can be taken too far as it ‘implicitly celebrates discursive interchanges between scientific and literary modes of writing as invariably creative and mutually advantageous, [and] has been much too sanguine in its approach to the interrelations of science and literature in the Victorian period’ (Dawson, p.7). Dawson points out that in fact the interaction between science and literature was not always progressive and genial. These fissures are nowhere more evident than in sensation fiction.

Chapter 4’s examination of *Armadale* proposes that sensation authors and scientists were drawing on the same fund of social anxiety, and in this sense participating ‘in the culture at large’, as Levine puts it. Yet Collins certainly does not fully endorse degeneration theories as he uses them to create sympathy with, rather than to reject or isolate social outsiders. It is not always easy to distinguish between Collins’s portrayal of determinism as he perceived it to work, and his employment of determinism as a means of introducing (and later suppressing) controversial and subversive ideas in his fiction. Ultimately, however, Collins opposes the view that morality is irrevocably hereditary, at the same time as he highlights that there would be fearful consequences if it were. This goes against the prevailing drive of degenerationist thinking which, as William Greenslade observes, ‘was at the root of what was, in part, an enabling strategy by which the conventional and respectable classes could justify and articulate their hostility to the deviant, the diseased and the subversive’ (Greenslade, p.2.). Whilst Collins conforms in some ways to the

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<sup>57</sup> George Levine, ‘One Culture: Science and Literature’, in *One Culture: Essays in Science and Literature*, ed. by George Levine (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), pp.3-32 (pp.5-6).

cultural beliefs of his time, he also appropriates theories of determinism to challenge those beliefs.

As with theories of biological determinism, ideas about social and environmental influences could be both constructive and disheartening. Education and circumstance were considered significant determinants. An article in *Belgravia* emphasised the importance of earliest experiences: 'Associations, cradle-environing circumstances, are potent to produce an effect everywhere. The groove in which we are to run is ready hollowed for most of us before we cut our earliest teeth.'<sup>58</sup> The article provocatively argues that squires' sons will like guns and Jews' sons will be money-lenders: 'The employers of labour, and those who supply the want, are almost designated from the beginning'.<sup>59</sup> *Temple Bar's* 'The Management of Servants' argued that employers should be more lenient on servants who have not only had little or no training, but have been brought up in 'poverty, ignorance, selfishness, vulgarity, and prejudice', which are 'poor nurseries for the infancy and early childhood of servants'.<sup>60</sup> Such lines of thinking meant that the poor and destitute were feared to be criminals and deviants in the making due to their living circumstances and lack of moral role models. On the other hand, it was believed that if children could be given a correct upbringing, they could be trained from an early age to be upright, responsible citizens.

Although many such articles focussed on the management of the lower classes, education was also seen as essential for the middle and upper classes. Huxley was certain that individuals could be given a better chance in the world with a good education, and argued that each child was

a member of a social and political organisation of great complexity, and has, in future life, to fit himself into that organisation, or be crushed by it [...] their affections should be trained, so as to love with all their hearts that conduct which tends to the attainment of the highest good for themselves and their fellow men, and to hate

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<sup>58</sup> John Berwick Harwood, 'The Servant's Hall', *Belgravia*, 19 (January, 1873), 331-39 (p.332).

<sup>59</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>60</sup> Anon., 'The Management of Servants', *Temple Bar*, 1 (March, 1861), 545-57 (p.545).

with all their hearts that opposite course of action which is fraught with evil.<sup>61</sup>

People are part of a society which is bigger and more powerful than themselves: if they do not comply to its workings they will be the worse for it, but this is something they can be 'trained' to do. In the same way that hereditary degeneration was not simply a threat to a single family, but something which may spread to the nation as a whole, it was understood that if masses of individual children were receiving poor educations, the consequences for society did not seem promising. Collins explores these issues of education and environment in *Man and Wife* (1870), discussed in chapter 5. He emphasises the influence of society and upbringing in his characters. This is partly because at this point in his career, Collins began to turn towards the "novel with a purpose", and in this novel he aims to show the detrimental influence of poor education on a whole generation of young men, as well as the destructive nature of the marriage laws. *Man and Wife* depicts the force of circumstance: characters' behaviours are dictated by their previous experiences. The novel portrays entire generations and the nation as a whole as being in a state of decline, but that decline is due to poor education and environment, not bad heredity.

Education and environment remained important, therefore, as determining factors and also as a means of rectifying inherent flaws. The conflict between nature and nurture is explored in chapter 6 which examines Braddon's under-examined *The Lady Lisle*, published in 1862 just before the hugely successful *Lady Audley's Secret*. *The Lady Lisle* raises questions about the malleability or fixity of the personality: characters in the novel are often described and defined in terms of their physical constitutions and hereditary characteristics, and the possibility of altering the development of the individual through upbringing and education is explored and contested. *The Lady Lisle* features a near identical pair of young men from different ends of the social spectrum. Braddon employs ideas of heredity and environmental influence in

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<sup>61</sup> T.H. Huxley, 'The School Boards: What They Can Do, and What They May Do' (1870), *Collected Essays*, III, pp.374-403 (p.393).



describing the two boys. The impoverished murderer's son is raised in such a way as to bring out his supposedly inherent negative traits, whereas the heir to the Lisle fortune is given an upbringing which negates his detrimental qualities. Braddon combines concepts of education and hereditary degeneracy to segregate the lower classes, and to bring together the morally upright middle classes and the affluent upper classes.

Most of the social groups discussed in this thesis, such as the upper and lower classes, criminals, and lunatics, were generally seen to be in some sense manipulable – their wills could be cultivated, their defects bred or educated out, or they could be stopped from breeding altogether. When determinism was discussed in relation to gender, things were somewhat different. Men and women were seen to possess natural, distinctive traits and capacities, and to be determined by their own discrete biologies. Women especially were often hindered by a belief in the dominance of their reproductive systems. In 1851, for example, one contributor to *The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* attributed a vast range of medical afflictions in women (including, hysteria and moral insanity), to the 'influence of the reproductive organs'.<sup>62</sup> The increasing debates over the rights, education and employment of women often centred on their intrinsic nature and capabilities, and the extent to which they were physically, morally and intellectually different from men.

Chapter 7 on Braddon's *John Marchmont's Legacy* shows that there was often a blurring of the boundaries between what was seen to be ideal or desirable in women and what was understood to be natural and essentially feminine. This chapter features, like *No Name*, a monomaniacal character with a wilful personality but, unlike Magdalen, Olivia Marchmont is an example of deviant behaviour incited by the *suppression* of natural personality traits. Intellectually brilliant, Olivia is unable to find satisfaction from life as a dutiful rector's daughter and develops a disastrous obsession with her handsome young cousin. Olivia's malevolent and excessive actions are read in the light of Victorian medical texts about the nature of women which often depicted them

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<sup>62</sup> Anon., 'Woman in her Psychological Relations', *The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 4 (1851), 18-50 (p.23).

as volatile and potentially dangerous, and also in relation to Victorian ideas about the ideal woman. Braddon highlights the discrepancies between prevailing images of womanhood and suggests that expecting women to conform to an ideal for which they may not be suited can have destructive consequences. Whilst Olivia's extreme behaviour can be put down to the determinations of her female biology, it is also implied that if her environment had not been so restrictive, disaster could have been averted, and her potential released.

The final chapter considers Braddon's *Lost for Love* (1874), a novel which has received no critical attention until now. Like *Man and Wife*, this novel looks at the idea of education as a determining factor in individual development, and like *John Marchmont's Legacy* it explores themes of female potential and intellect, but *Lost for Love* is far more optimistic in its portrayal of these subjects. In this novel Braddon vouches for women's intellectual capacity and implies that defective education is to blame if they do not become useful members of society. At a time when women were campaigning for greater rights, including the right to pursue university education, Braddon shows that women are capable of intense intellectual study, and of becoming intelligent, interesting companions to men. However, the idea of woman as companion is paramount to this novel – both heroines are educated by, and for, the men who become their husbands. In this manner, Braddon maintains a relatively conservative angle, despite her endorsement of female intelligence.

In each novel, the forms of determinism brought into play are manifold; this thesis explores how and why Braddon and Collins portray biological, social and environmental influences as powerful determining factors. In his discussion of George Eliot and determinism, Levine warns readers that although determinism 'informed her artistic vision', they should not be tempted to 'treat George Eliot as a philosopher rather than an artist'.<sup>63</sup> Although readers of sensation fiction may not be so inclined to regard its authors as philosophers, it is still worth noting that Levine's point is applicable to the following readings

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<sup>63</sup> George Levine, 'Determinism and Responsibility in the Works of George Eliot', *PMLA*, 77:3 (June, 1962), 268-279 (p.268).

of Braddon and Collins: these authors are, first and foremost, crafters of entertaining fiction, not philosophers or theorists. The regularity with which they raise questions about nature and nurture suggests that this was a subject they felt would be relevant and interesting to their readers. Eliot takes pains to faithfully represent the determinism which she saw 'working even in the routine actions of ordinary life'.<sup>64</sup> Contrastingly, Braddon and Collins may make assumptions about how determinism works, but they are more willing to pick and choose concepts and theories which will serve their literary purpose at the time of writing. Sometimes the authors interact directly with ideas of determinism; sometimes their views on determinism can be inferred from their fiction; sometimes they may be questioning established views; sometimes they may be drawing on them to provide a 'realistic' character background or to promote their own ideas about issues such as class, gender and morality. Sometimes (often, in fact) all of these things happen in the same novel. For Braddon and Collins, deterministic thinking is both a literary device and a subject for literary portrayal.

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<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*, p.269.

## PART 1: WILKIE COLLINS

### Chapter 2

#### 'I cannot leave you if I would': *Basil*, Melodrama and Monomania

Believing that the Novel and the Play are twin-sisters in the family of Fiction; that the one is a drama narrated, as the other is a drama acted; and that all the strong and deep emotions which the Play-writer is privileged to excite, the Novel-writer is privileged to excite also, I have not thought it either politic or necessary, while adhering to realities, to adhere to every-day realities only.<sup>1</sup>

(Wilkie Collins, Dedicatory Letter, *Basil: A Story of Modern Life*, 1852)

A defensive tone is apparent in Collins's dedicatory letter to his second published novel, *Basil; A Story of Modern Life* (1852; revised 1862). In it Collins claims that in writing the novel, 'I have not stooped so low as to assure myself of the reader's belief in the probability of my story, by never once calling on him for the exercise of his faith', and goes on to assert that those 'extraordinary accidents and events which happen to few men' are 'as legitimate materials for fiction to work with [...] as the ordinary accidents and events which may, and do, happen to us all' (p.4). However, Collins's critics were not convinced by his claims to realism. In an encouraging letter Charles Dickens tactfully suggested that 'the probabilities here and there require a little more respect than you are disposed to shew [sic] them'.<sup>2</sup> Professional reviewers were more scathing, often provoked by what they perceived to be an immoral content in the novel: an anonymous critic for the *Westminster Review* argued that *Basil* was one of a 'class' of novels which offered 'scenes of fury and passion, such as, happily, real life seldom affords'.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Basil* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p.4. All further references, unless otherwise indicated, are to this edition which uses the revised 1862 text and are given after quotations.

<sup>2</sup> Letter from Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins, 20 December, 1852, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Graham Storey and others, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-1999), vi (1850-52), pp.823-824.

<sup>3</sup> Anon., 'The Progress of Fiction as an Art', *Westminster Review*, 60 (October, 1853), 342-74 (p.372). Further references are given after quotations.

It is certainly true that many of the characters in *Basil* display unusual, even bizarre behaviour which is rarely to be found in daily life. One of the most extreme characters is Robert Mannion. Mannion blames the eponymous narrator for marrying his employer's daughter, Margaret, who he had previously intended to be 'my wife, my mistress, my servant, which I choose' (p.189). Furthermore, Basil's father allows Mannion's father to be hanged for forgery, an event Mannion believes initiated his own exclusion from respectable society. In retaliation, Mannion first consummates his illicit relationship with Margaret (in Basil's hearing), and then vows to persecute Basil by following him to the ends of the earth, systematically destroying any social standing he may manage to achieve. In what reads as a near parody of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) Mannion, already psychologically a "monster", and now hideously disfigured from a confrontation with Basil, chases his prey as far as the 'southern shore of Cornwall' before shaking a threatening fist at Basil from the edge of a cliff, accidentally losing his balance, and plunging to his death.<sup>4</sup> From his thirst for revenge and impure intentions towards a young woman, to his final and fatal menacing gesture, Mannion seems a classic melodramatic villain.

Theatre in the Victorian period was, as George Rowell explains, 'dominated by melodrama'.<sup>5</sup> This theatrical form was distinguished both by its spectacular sets, and by numerous conventions, many of which are still recognizable today, as Peter Brooks observes:

The connotations of the word are probably similar for us all. They include: the indulgence of strong emotionalism; moral polarization and schematization; extreme states of being, situations, actions; overt villainy, persecution of the good, and final reward of virtue; inflated and extravagant expression; dark plottings, suspense, breathtaking peripety.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> p.254. The shift from a showdown between man and monster in the Arctic, to one between two men, one of which is mentally ill, in the wilds of Cornwall, is an example of sensation fiction's tendency to employ gothic elements in domestic and familiar settings. See Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.8.

<sup>5</sup> George Rowell, *Nineteenth-Century Plays* (London: OUP, 1953), p.v.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), pp.11-12. Further references are given after

Although, as with any genre, there are numerous exceptions and deviations, melodrama in its “purest” form is, as Brooks’s definition suggests, a genre of heroes, villains and happy endings.<sup>7</sup> The following chapter begins by showing how *Basil* is steeped in many of the conventions of Victorian stage melodrama. It often appears that the diegesis of *Basil* is one in which characters seemingly act, and events seemingly work themselves out, in keeping with the aesthetic and ethical codes of melodrama.<sup>8</sup>

However, to claim that *Basil* is in many ways a melodrama may seem to contradict Collins’s own claim that he has attempted to adhere ‘to realities’ (above). James L. Smith describes the ‘ideal world of melodrama’ as one in which ‘virtue after many thrilling and precipitous reversals is guaranteed to triumph over vice and end up with a choice assortment of material rewards’ (Smith, p.viii). This does not seem to be a world which is too concerned with the representation of reality. Moreover, as this thesis is ultimately concerned with Collins’s and Braddon’s interaction with Victorian concepts of determinism, it may seem incongruous to emphasise how the novel employs melodrama – a genre in which it is not necessary to explain the roots of good and evil, just to make sure that good and evil are clearly distinguishable.

Winifred Hughes’s work on 1860s sensation fiction and melodrama goes some way to reconciling these apparently disparate notions. Hughes demonstrates how sensation novelists ‘shamelessly exploited the familiar stereotypes of popular melodrama’ but replaced ‘the original moral certainty

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quotations. Brooks’s list is used because it is clear and succinct, not because it is exhaustive or prescriptive.

<sup>7</sup> John Walker’s ‘The Factory Lad’ (1832), for example, has a definite villain (the factory owner), but the downtrodden factory workers end the play facing execution for machine breaking. In *Victorian Melodramas: Seven English, French and American Melodramas*, ed. by James L. Smith (London: Dent, 1976), pp.39-63. Further references are given after quotations. Darryl Wadsworth, discusses how the plot of a melodrama may vary depending on the class of the intended audience and the location of the production in ‘“A low born labourer like you”: Audience and Victorian Working-Class Melodrama’, in *Varieties of Victorianism: The Uses of a Past*, ed. by Gary Day (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), pp.206-19.

<sup>8</sup> Collins was acting alongside Dickens in Bulwer Lytton’s *Not So Bad as We Seem* as he wrote *Basil*. See *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, ed. by William Baker and William M. Clarke, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1999), I, p.87, n.1. Further references are given after quotations. The influence of Collins’ interest in the theatre can be seen in many of his novels; *No Name* and *Man and Wife*, for example, are separated into scenes rather than volumes.

with moral ambiguity'.<sup>9</sup> In *Basil* 'moral certainty' is certainly lost because Basil, the "hero", is repeatedly deceitful and commits a brutal assault. Moreover, Hughes observes that some sensation fiction shows an emerging awareness of deterministic influences. This is because sensation novels often deal in the extremes of human nature and must 'provide some justification for the erratic behaviour of their murderers, bigamists, and adulteresses' in order to be seen to represent some form of reality. They are therefore

driven to exploit the irrational elements of the psyche, the obscure and unreasonable motivations that in the twentieth century are associated with the subconscious. Inner forces, as powerful and uncontrollable as fate, claim equal numbers of victims. Evil or antisocial action is no longer the direct result and expression of evil character, as in conventional melodrama, but derives from combinations of circumstance, weakness, insanity, impulse, "sensation" at its most basic. (Hughes, p.58)

This can be applied to *Basil*. *The Westminster Review* dismissed Robert Mannion as a villain 'gifted with a fiend-like perseverance, which, happily for mankind, does not exist' and went on to explain that 'man becomes weary, after a time, of one passion, or one pursuit, and the less principle he has to bind him to a straight course, the more does he diverge into fresh paths' ('Progress of Fiction', p.373). Mannion, however, is diagnosed by a doctor as a 'dangerous monomaniac' (p.223) and he is 'fiend-like' precisely because he is incapable of becoming 'weary' of the fixed idea which has taken over his consciousness - his desire for revenge against Basil. This use of a medically-recognised condition shows Collins's attempt to 'adhere' to 'realities'.<sup>10</sup> As well as identifying the condition which dictates Mannion's behaviour, *Basil* includes a letter by Mannion which explains the unfortunate combination of events that

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<sup>9</sup> Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.ix. Further references are given after quotations. Patrick Brantlinger also discusses the relationship between sensation fiction and melodrama in 'What is "Sensational" About the "Sensation Novel"?', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37:1 (June, 1982), 1-28 (pp.4-5).

<sup>10</sup> Collins often researched specific medical conditions for his fiction. For example, in *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), despite its farfetched coincidences, the anti-epilepsy treatment which turns Oscar Dubourg blue, the operation which temporarily restores Lucilla Finch's eyesight, her phobia of dark colours and her disillusionment with the visible world are all based on recorded cases. See Catherine Peters' introduction and notes, *Poor Miss Finch* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), pp. x-xiii, p.428.

causes it. Jenny Bourne Taylor makes a similar observation when discussing Mannion's monomania, arguing that he 'emerges as an unambiguous villain' who 'can be fitted into the perceptual framework of moral insanity, which enables his own self-possession and control of others to be encoded as a pathological sign'.<sup>11</sup>

This chapter and the following one on *No Name* (1862) differ from works by critics such as Hughes and Bourne Taylor by providing a sustained discussion of monomania in Collins's fiction and Victorian medical accounts of the condition. Beginning with an analysis of the melodramatic elements of *Basil*, followed by an examination of its depiction of monomania, this chapter proposes that many of the melodramatic aspects of the novel are not only explained but in fact enhanced by descriptions of monomania. For example, Mannion has the manipulative power of a melodramatic villain because he monomaniacally convinces himself that he is an instrument of cosmic vengeance. Other characters are also depicted in terms of early-nineteenth-century theories which emphasised the detrimental results of unrestrained passions. Indeed *Basil* as a whole displays a more symbiotic relationship between Victorian medical theories, sensation fiction and melodrama than Hughes allows for. Collins does not simply draw on melodrama; he presents, through his depiction of unusual psychological states, new ways of creating it. These psychological peculiarities are shown to be determined by social and biological influences, and generate a situation in which characters are at once more "real" and more melodramatic, participating in their own self-perpetuating melodrama. Whilst not entirely divesting the novel of the potential for a non-material explanation of events (something Collins is loath to do in any of his works), determinism works to generate melodrama and the result is a dynamic novel about human beings' ability to deceive themselves and others.

Although Collins's use of moral polarity is not as clear-cut as in conventional melodrama, he draws unrestrainedly on the spectacular and

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<sup>11</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.92. Further references are given after quotations. Monomania's relationship with moral insanity is discussed presently.



aesthetic aspects of the genre that Brooks identifies. The use of 'inflated and extravagant expression' is one of the most striking elements of melodrama. The following extract from H.M. Milner's stage play *Mazeppa* (1831) offers a point of comparison. Here the eponymous hero, strapped to an unbroken horse and sent into the wilderness, soliloquises after being savaged by wolves:

MAZEPPA Already have their gnashing teeth been buried in my flesh; and I could almost wish again to feel their horrid grip, if perchance it might free me from the cruel thongs that eat into my flesh and squeeze my swollen veins almost to bursting.<sup>12</sup>

The scene *Mazeppa* describes, unpleasant in itself, is made especially unsettling through the hyperbolic language. The density of adjectives ('gnashing', 'buried', 'horrid', 'cruel', 'swollen', 'bursting'), verbs ('eat', 'squeeze') and of nouns relating to the wolves and his mauled body ('teeth', 'flesh', 'veins') makes for a strikingly violent image.

Collins uses similar linguistic techniques in *Basil*. A comparative reading of the 1852 text and the heavily revised 1862 text reveals just how extreme the original story is as far as tone, dialogue and characterisation is concerned. The adulteress Margaret Sherwin, for example, suffers far more profoundly and vocally in her final deathbed scene. In a typhus-induced fever she envisions the mutilated face of her seducer, Robert Mannion, and cries out:

*It's the face of a devil; it's a face from hell: look! the scars of hell, the finger-nails of the devil, are on it! Take me away! drag me out! I can't move for that face: it's always before me: it gets larger and larger: it's walling me up among the beds: it's burning me all over.*<sup>13</sup>

Italicization indicates those parts which Collins removed in the 1862 edition.<sup>14</sup> In the original version the intensity of Margaret's suffering and sense of

<sup>12</sup> Henry M. Milner, *Mazeppa*, in Smith, *Victorian Melodramas*, pp.1-38 (p.19).

<sup>13</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Basil: A Story of Modern Life*, 3 vols (London: Richard Bentley: 1852), III, p.179. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>14</sup> The less histrionic tone of the 1862 version may be a response to the initial critical reception of *Basil's* subject matter as immoral. It may be simply be the revisions of a more experience author (*No Name* was also published in 1862 which, as chapter 3 shows, employs melodrama more subtly). Perhaps, after writing sympathetically about fallen and unconventional women such as *The Dead Secret's* Sarah Leeson (1857) and *No Name's* Magdalen Vanstone, Collins was no longer willing merely to create and condemn female monsters; whilst not fundamentally changing Margaret's character he spends less time emphasising and punishing her sinfulness.

entrapment is indicated more emphatically through her language. The repetition of 'face', 'hell' and 'larger', in addition to that of 'devil' conveys a greater sense of claustrophobia; Margaret describes the visions which are closing in upon her again and again because she cannot escape them. Her language boldly describes the spectacle of hellish imagery for the reader, and this is supported by Collins's peculiar use of punctuation: the initial excessive employment of exclamation marks indicates the strength of her response to the imagined devil's face; the subsequent repetition of colons in the final sentence gives a sense of one image arising from the next, reflecting Margaret's escalating, increasingly horrific hallucinations.

The emotional intensity and the straightforward imagery in Margaret's feverish speech relates to one of the main aims of melodrama as identified by Brooks: using dialogue, gesture and symbol it makes 'the world morally legible, spelling out its ethical forces and imperatives in large and bold characters' (Brooks, p.42). Douglas Jerrold's *Black-Ey'd Susan* (1829) provides a good example. The impoverished eponymous heroine's landlord (who is also her uncle) threatens to evict her and accuses her of infidelity whilst her husband is at sea. Susan retorts: 'Take, sir, all that is here; satisfy your avarice – but dare not indulge your malice at the cost of one, who has now nothing left her in her misery but the sweet consciousness of virtue'.<sup>15</sup> This speech (which would have been reinforced by the actors' onstage performances) leaves no doubt that Susan is right, her uncle wrong: her innocence, vulnerability and 'virtue' are clearly contrasted with his heartlessness, 'malice' and 'avarice'.

A similar effect is evident within *Basil*. It takes delirium for Margaret to find a voice within the text, but once she does the language and imagery are revealing and to the point. For example: 'Put roses into my coffin – scarlet roses, if you can find any, because that stands for Scarlet Woman – in the Bible, you know. Scarlet? What do I care! It's the boldest colour in the world' (Collins, *Basil*, p.234). Margaret's shamelessness, bravado, disregard for social convention and standard morality are clearly conveyed. A traditional symbol of

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willing merely to create and condemn female monsters; whilst not fundamentally changing Margaret's character he spends less time emphasising and punishing her sinfulness.

<sup>15</sup> Douglas Jerrold, *Black-Ey'd Susan*, in Rowell, *Nineteenth-Century Plays*, pp.1-43 (p.12).

romantic love, the rose, is perverted in no uncertain terms by being associated with death and lust.

Similarly, the language of Mannion, especially in 1852, is ferocious because of its clarity and the simplicity of its imagery, for example when he describes himself as 'an infection never to be hidden, never to be purified away' (*Basil*, 1852, III, p.69). Whilst the speeches of Mannion and Margaret may lack subtlety, and whilst their imagery may lack originality, there is power in the transparency of their language and its symbolism, and a purity in their conceptions of self when they unfalteringly state their own natures and clearly display the essence of their own personalities. Brooks perceives in melodrama an overcoming of repression, in which 'soliloquy has become pure self-expression, the venting of what one is and how it feels to be that way' (Brooks, p.38). For both Mannion and Margaret, the acknowledgement of their own natures, and the overcoming of repression means a disdain for convention and a dauntless pursuing of their own aims and desires. Mannion especially appears, by acting in a melodramatic, self-declarative fashion, to take his own destiny in hand. He holds true to his affirmed nature and intentions: after figuring himself as an 'infection', his subsequent actions fittingly infect Basil, making him appear horrific to the villagers with whom he hoped to make his home until 'they dreaded and loathed [Basil's] presence, as the presence of a living pestilence' (1852, III, p.251). Language conveys a self-determining power; the sense of Mannion's control over his own destiny is largely derived from the fact that he moulds the world, through speech, into a form which accords with his personal viewpoint. He perceives himself as an infection, declares himself to be so, and then acts as one. This clarity of vision, so plainly stated, is extremely persuasive.

Mannion conveys his personal interpretation of the world and of himself so effectively that Basil is overcome by the sheer power of his words. *Basil* is a repentant memoir supplemented with letters by other characters, an early example of Collins using multiple narrative forms and narrators. Mannion sends Basil a letter which reveals his true identity and purpose, and which has a

potent effect on Basil and his narrative. Shortly after reading Mannion's letter, Basil finds himself unable to think of anything else:

Already, the fatality denounced against me in Mannion's letter had begun to act: already, that terrible confession of past misery and crime, that monstrous declaration of enmity which was to last with the lasting of life, began to exercise its numbing influence on my faculties, to cast its blighting shadow over my heart. (p.210)

Basil never doubts Mannion's intentions: once his 'enmity' has been declared Basil is convinced that it will 'last with the lasting of life', just as Mannion has promised. Mannion's ability to cloud Basil's judgement is comparable with Margaret's use of her sexuality to persuade Basil that she is worthy of his love. Part of the villains' agency, therefore, comes from their ability to make themselves and the world appear as they want them to appear to others, to convince those around them of their powers of self-determinism.

Whilst Mannion and Margaret certainly provide 'overt villainy' in *Basil*, this is only one half of the 'moral polarization and schematization' which forms part of Brooks' definition of melodrama: villainy must be countered by goodness. The doubling motifs which are prominent throughout Collins's fiction are present in *Basil* in a particularly stark form, and rest largely on an apparent melodramatic dichotomy of 'good' and 'evil'.<sup>16</sup> Mannion and Margaret are opposed to the hero and heroine of the novel, Basil and his sister Clara. During his lengthy and admiring introduction of his sister, Basil declares that 'there is a goodness of heart, which carries the shield of its purity over the open hand of its kindness: and that goodness was hers' (p.23). Clara's role in the novel shows a divergence from classic stage melodrama as, although her goodness makes her the closest thing the novel has to a heroine, her role is secondary and she is never placed in any real peril.<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, her moral polarization to Margaret is repeatedly emphasised, and is symbolized by their physical and social opposition: the one is wealthy, fair and fragile, the other of

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<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of doubling in Collins's fiction see Nathalie Abi-Ezzi, *The Double in the Fiction of R.L. Stevenson, Wilkie Collins and Daphne du Maurier* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2003), pp.121-97.

<sup>17</sup> Margaret's honour is threatened by the villain, thus fulfilling one of the heroine's "duties", but she succumbs willingly. Clara is spared even having to prove (or risk) her purity in melodrama's customary "'Hands Off!" scene' (Smith, p.xi).

lower rank, well-developed and dark. The opposition of Margaret and Clara is belaboured by Basil's dream of two women. One is a sensual 'dark' woman, from the 'thick woods' who Basil describes in a kind of erotic blazon which recreates the movement of his eyes over her body:

her black hair flowed about her unconfined [...] Her eyes were lustrous and fascinating, as the eyes of a serpent—large, dark and soft, as the eyes of the wild doe. Her lips were parted with a languid smile; and she drew back the long hair, which lay over her cheeks, her neck, her bosom, while I was gazing on her. (p.41)

This dark woman physically embraces Basil, causing an implicit, but unmistakably sexual reaction:

she clasped her supple arms round my neck, and drew me a few paces away with her towards the wood [...] I was drawn along in the arms of the dark woman, with my blood burning and my breath failing me, until we entered the secret recesses that lay amid the unfathomable depths of trees. (p.42)

The symbolism is unambiguous and meaning is clearly communicated. Margaret's potent sexual allure is symbolized by the dark woman's loose hair, and her 'fascinating' eyes. The 'wild doe' reference could convey innocence, but instead works to soften any unpleasant aesthetic connotations that 'serpent' may carry.<sup>18</sup> Margaret's willingness to flaunt social conventions (and to cause Basil to do the same) is represented by the woman's drawing aside of her hair, immodestly inviting Basil's gaze, as well as by her enticing Basil into the 'secret recesses' of the woods.

The other woman is fair, coming from hills surrounded by 'bright, beautifully white clouds, gleaming in refulgent sunlight' (p.40); she leaves 'a long track of brightness' when she walks (p.41). Unlike the woman from the woods, she goes only so far as to where 'the hills and the plain were joined together', then she stops and watches 'from afar off', merely 'beckoning' to Basil and sending 'long thin rays of trembling light' (ibid.). Clara's purity is reliant on

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<sup>18</sup> Geraldine in S.T. Coleridge's 'Christabel' (1816) is literally serpent eyed, but this is something repellent she must hide from Sir Leoline, in *Poems* (London: J.M. Dent, 1993), pp.256-78 (ll.583-96). Basil, contrastingly, is attracted by the dangerous allure of the dark woman.

her passive modesty, symbolized by the fair woman's inability to step beyond the gleaming hills onto the mundane plane; her influence is therefore distanced and barely tangible, the light she sends is 'trembling'. On waking, therefore, Basil quickly forgets the moral alarm bells that are set off by his dream, but cannot 'dismiss from [his] heart the love-images which that dream had set up there for the worship of the senses' (p.43). The dream reveals the villainous Margaret as a woman who regardlessly pursues her goals, whilst the angelic Clara is incapable of action because of her deferment to convention.

Whilst the villainous Margaret and Mannion are defined by their apparently self-determined active, influential and acquisitive natures, Clara is defined by meekness, passivity and the restraints placed upon her desires and actions. Despite her offers of moral support, Clara's efforts to help Basil after he has been disowned by their father are futile. She fails to persuade their father to forgive Basil, instead fainting and thereby impeding any further interview between father and son (p.167). Later in the novel, she breaches her father's orders not to visit Basil, but she can offer nothing except largely ineffectual emotional support (pp.211-13). Feeling torn between 'notions of implicit obedience' to her father, and 'of her sisterly duties' to Basil, Clara is 'miserable from morning to night' (p.241). Whilst Margaret's disinclination to remain within idealized feminine spheres of purity (sexual, social and moral) is empowering, allowing her to win the gentleman husband she desires, Clara's confinement within those spheres is debilitating; she can do nothing but wait whilst circumstances move around her, until her passive virtue is rewarded by the return of Basil to her care. The passivity of the "good" characters in *Basil* is a trait of this novel: in melodrama the heroine would often be required to endure challenges which required her, as Michael R. Booth explains, 'to develop qualities of pluck and courage, especially in defying and resisting the villain'.<sup>19</sup> In *Black Ey'd Susan*, for example, Susan shows a degree of 'pluck' in defiance of her uncle which is unimaginable in Clara.

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<sup>19</sup> Michael R. Booth, *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert James, 1965), p.26. Further references are given after quotations.

It has already been observed that the dichotomy between hero and villain is not so absolute in the case of the male characters because Basil's own acts of duplicity and violence contribute to his downfall. In examining Basil's behaviour, however, a similar correspondence between villainy and action, goodness and passivity becomes apparent. Writing about *Basil's* parallels to *Frankenstein*, Tamar Heller observes that 'the intellectual, Basil, creates monsters he is not able to control'.<sup>20</sup> It is Basil's determination to pursue Margaret that leads to his moral corruption, and his rage at Margaret's unfaithfulness causes him to seek revenge by attacking Mannion - brutally mutilating his face on a freshly macadamised road (p.132). Although there are a few notable exceptions, such as when Basil compassionately chooses to go and visit the dying Margaret, in general, when Basil decides to act, it works out badly for him.

Often, when Basil *doesn't* take action it is because he is restricted, or persuaded, from doing so by other (generally morally dubious) people. Despite independently deciding to deceive his own father (i.e. to act immorally), he bows to the restrictions that Margaret's father imposes and agrees to see Margaret only in the presence of a chaperone. Whilst he loses control long enough to attack Mannion, he is 'struck [...] with a supernatural terror' in Margaret's presence and allows her to escape (p.133). Basil, unable to refrain from getting himself into trouble, without the resolve to get himself out of it, and open to manipulation by others, is often left with the worst of all worlds.

It is usually when he is actively (so to speak) pursuing a course of submission, passivity and patience that events turn in Basil's favour. Once he discovers the nature of Mannion's enmity towards him, his chosen course of defence is flight and seclusion. Like Shelley's monster, Mannion feels compelled to torment his "creator", but does so by pursuit rather than flight as Basil does not share the vehemence of Frankenstein whose 'rage is unspeakable' after the murder of his loved ones, and who devotes himself to the monster's 'destruction'.<sup>21</sup> Whilst Mannion has styled himself as Basil's hunter and persecutor, Basil accepts the role of prey that Mannion designates for him.

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<sup>20</sup> Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), p.62.

<sup>21</sup> Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.170.

Significantly, Mannion's downfall is the result of bad weather and unstable footing and occurs as Basil is, once again, fleeing his pursuer (p.258). Later, when Basil falls into helpless, and therefore inactive, delirium, he finds himself by chance in the care of the friendly Penhales who contact his family and thereby instigate a reconciliation. At the conclusion of the novel, Basil has experienced nine-years' 'repose in life' (p.269), living quietly with Clara 'in obscurity, in retirement, in peace' (p.271). The reward for a passive acceptance of events is apparently a passive existence.

Basil's passivity is further complicated when viewed in the light of mid-Victorian bourgeois ideals of gender. Whilst Clara's restraint and delicacy is a fitting aspect of her feminine domesticity, Basil's inaction results in emasculation. The clearest example of this is his agreement to leave his marriage to Margaret (after whom he obviously lusts) unconsummated for a year. This is made explicit by the feverish Margaret who mocks Basil's self-restraint: 'he calls himself a man, doesn't he? A husband who waits a year!' (p.233). In addition, although Basil is content at the end of the novel, he is living on his sister's estate, which has been passed down the maternal line. Basil expresses no desire to 'return to the busy world' because he has 'been wounded too sadly': 'The mountain-path of Action is no longer a path for *me*; my future hope pauses with my present happiness in the shadowed valley of Repose' (p.271). Basil assures his correspondent (the doctor who nursed him back to health) that this is 'not a repose that owns no duty', and that he serves 'the poor and the ignorant, in the little sphere which now surrounds' him (*ibid.*). It appears that Basil spends his time visiting the needy, a standard sign of female virtue (as discussed in chapter 7), and his 'little sphere' resembles that of the unmarried lady who could devote herself to her family and the disadvantaged people in her parish. Basil has received, in fact, a melodramatic heroine's ending, minus the happy marriage. It is Clara who seems to have marital prospects before her when Basil suggests that his correspondent would be particularly happy to visit for the sake of his sister, as much as for Basil himself (p.272). This ending can be seen as an adaptation of the moral absolutes of



melodrama: Basil's rewards are mitigated in keeping with the fact that he has not been a spotless hero.

In contrast to the relatively passive hero and the excessively passive heroine, the villains in *Basil* are ostensibly portrayed as active creators of their own destinies, moulding the world so that it falls in line with their desires. However, it is questionable exactly how independent or effective their activity is. Margaret is dictated to by Mannion, whilst he (as we will see) feels that he is driven to confront Basil by some external force. Booth explains that, although the hero was generally a 'handsome young man of action and courage', he

can spend most of the play entangled in the wiles of the villain, who commonly steals his money and property and outwits him with the greatest ease until the sensational and often accidental reversal of fortune. The basic hero is really rather stupid. (Booth, pp.16-17)

Apart from Basil's obvious lack of 'action and courage', this is reminiscent of the relationship between Basil and Mannion, as it is through two accidental reversals of fortune, rather than Basil's actions, that the villains' plans and the villains themselves are destroyed: Mannion falls into the sea and Margaret unwittingly breathes typhus-infected air. Although characters may pursue their own objectives, the final result appears to accord with melodrama's drive to render the world 'morally legible'. In this way, characters are depicted as victims of fate in a universe which will ultimately work itself out along moral lines.

Collins's exploitation of aesthetic and structural melodramatic staples such as (returning to Brooks) 'inflated and extravagant expression', and striking, unambiguous symbolism, creates convincingly threatening villains with great clarity of purpose and strength of desire. Collins then draws on another aspect of melodrama, 'breathhtaking peripety' (Mannion's plunge from the cliff), in order to effectively cancel out any attempts at self-determinism that characters make and ensure the 'final reward of virtue' (even Basil's slightly muddied virtue). This ending allows Collins to retain a sense of mystery about whether the outcome is finally decided by chance or Fate.

Whilst creating this melodramatic atmosphere, Collins grounds the outlandish behaviour of his characters in established medical conditions such as monomania. Monomania was commonly perceived as a type of partial insanity; the sufferer only appeared to be insane in relation to one delusion. The French physician J.E.D. Esquirol, whose theories were influential in England, designated this 'intellectual monomania' and argued that

the intellectual disorder is confined to a single object, or a limited number of objects. The patients seize upon a false principle, which they pursue without deviating from logical reasonings, and from which they deduce legitimate consequences, which modify their affections, and the acts of their will. Aside from this partial delirium, they think, reason and act, like other men. Illusions, hallucinations, vicious associations of ideas, false and strange convictions, are at the basis of this delirium.<sup>22</sup>

The importance of the 'false principle', a particular delusion which influences subsequent behaviour, is evident in this quotation, as is the fact that the sufferer will act "logically" apart from their belief in that delusion. The issue of delusion is important in Collins's portrayal of Mannion because, despite having carefully plotted Basil's downfall for some time, it is only after his encounter with Basil and the macadamised road that Mannion categorically manifests a palpable 'false principle'. Mannion's letter is composed during his recovery after being assaulted by Basil. During the course of the letter, Mannion states his interpretation of events so far, and his intentions for the future, thus revealing his belief that he is no longer entirely in control of his own behaviour:

Lying in this place at night, in those hours of darkness and stillness when the surrounding atmosphere of human misery presses heavy on me in my heavy sleep, prophecies of dread things to come between us, trouble my spirit in dreams. At those times, I know, and shudder in knowing, that there is something besides the motive of retaliation, something less earthly and apparent than that, which urges me horribly and supernaturally to link myself to you for life;

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<sup>22</sup> J.E.D. Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity* (1838), trans. by E.K. Hunt (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), p.320. Further references are given after quotations. For background to Esquirol and the rise of monomania in France see Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: CUP, 1987), chapter 5.

which makes me feel as the bearer of a curse that shall follow you; as the instrument of a fatality pronounced against you long ere we met—a fatality beginning before our fathers were parted by the hangman; perpetuating itself in you and me; ending who shall say how, or when? (pp.200-201)

Mannion's letter is imbued with a sense of horrifying and compelling fatality: his 'prophecies' trouble him, his urges are horrible, yet he feels forced to pursue Basil due to a supernatural 'something'; he perceives himself as a man who has gained special knowledge of his own role in a grand cosmic scheme. Collins appropriates monomania as a disease which is complementary to the heightened register and one-dimensional clarity of melodrama. The heroine and villain in stage melodrama may be given various motivations (money, love, honour), but they have assigned roles and assigned goals: the villain is evil, his job, ultimately, is to thwart the heroine; the heroine is good, her job is to represent virtue. Every action and every speech of melodramatic characters is expressive of their essential nature, and aimed towards achieving their designated goal. Mannion's monomania causes him to act in a similar fashion: unrestrained by guilt or fear of punishment, and utterly certain in his purpose.

Yet part of the force of Mannion's letter lies in the manifestation of a particular monomaniacal delusion: the belief that he is an 'instrument' of fate. Later, promising to follow Basil to the ends of the earth, Mannion declares:

Where you go, I have the limbs and the endurance to go too! I tell you again, we are linked together for life; I cannot leave you if I would. The horrible joy of hunting you through the world, leaps in my blood like fire! (p.257)

Once again Mannion's compulsion is described as 'horrible', he 'cannot' leave Basil even if he wanted to, but now he actually glories in his desires. The overcoming of repression and social restraints previously associated with Mannion (and Margaret) leads, in this case, to a different form of constraint: no longer concerned about society's rules or conventional morality, Mannion can indulge his most powerful desires; yet whereas previously he chose to act out his revenge, he is now compelled to do so. Monomania is, like his mutilated

face, a manifestation of Mannion's pre-existing immorality: melodramatic symbolism and medical discourse complement each other.

Although Mannion does not have a palpable delusion until later in the novel, his mental state is certainly deteriorating prior to Basil's attack. The physician James Cowles Prichard brought the term "moral insanity" into popular use in England in the 1830s.<sup>23</sup> 'Moral' had particular connotations within nineteenth-century medical discourse, as Janet Oppenheim summarises: by 'moral' Victorian alienists 'understood both the synonymous adjective *ethical*, but also the idea of emotional, mental, or nonphysical influences. Thus if they spoke of the moral causes of insanity, they referred to emotional trauma, such as overpowering grief, passion, disappointment, or fright'.<sup>24</sup> Moral insanity (which Esquirol termed 'affective monomania', p.320) emphasised the fact that not all insanity was characterised by the presence of delusion, hallucination or illusion. It consisted of a 'morbid perversion of the feelings, affections and active powers'.<sup>25</sup> Although he drew the distinction (the presence of delusion) between monomania and moral insanity, Prichard acknowledged that there was often a connection between the two. A patient could suffer from moral insanity only to have his or her imagination become fixated on one 'particular illusion'; at this point moral insanity became monomania (*Treatise*, p.28).

Whilst it is not conclusively stated that Mannion was insane, rather than just immoral, in the years prior to his disfigurement, in the light of Victorian medical discourse he is certainly a candidate for a diagnosis of moral insanity developing into monomania. In addition to the shock of his father's death, and his own subsequent social ostracism, Mannion's mother was so traumatised by her husband's execution that she 'died in a public mad-house' (p.183). Insanity was not always considered hereditary in the Victorian period, but it was frequently accepted that a 'constitutional predisposition' must exist, as not all

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<sup>23</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890* (Oxford: OUP, 1998; repr. 2003), p.406. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>24</sup> Janet Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves: Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England* (New York: OUP, 1991), p.41.

<sup>25</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1835), p.12. Further references are given after quotations.

people exposed to similar trying circumstances were in danger of losing their reason (Prichard, *Treatise* p.157). The insanity of Mannion's mother therefore adds a level of complexity to the question of exactly how and when Mannion lost control over his own behaviour. How much Mannion can be held responsible for his own deteriorating mental condition, and how much heredity and circumstance has determined his behaviour, is therefore open to speculation.<sup>26</sup> What Mannion's letter does reveal conclusively is the monomaniacal delusion which becomes the driving force of his revenge against Basil.

It was widely accepted that, because both moral insanity and monomania were forms of partial insanity, an individual could be afflicted without those around him or her being any the wiser. This could actually make for a dangerous and unpredictable individual as *The Lancet* observed in a series of articles on various forms of insanity: 'delusions in *monomania*, and in other states of insanity, may remain silent, till discovered by some accidental outbreak, when demonstrations of a painful character frequently and unexpectedly occur.'<sup>27</sup> One example of such an unexpected and 'painful' revelation of a delusion was reported in the same journal later in the year when 'a well-conducted servant girl, twenty-three years of age' who had 'never showed any signs of mental aberration' chopped off her left hand and thrust her arm into the fire.<sup>28</sup> *The Lancet* concludes that the 'patient seems to be strictly *mono-maniac*, as she gives very apposite and satisfactory answers respecting her age, state of health, family, and various other circumstances' but, when questioned about her self-mutilation, 'she invariably answers that God told her to do it'.<sup>29</sup> This report emphasises both the presence of a single delusion which characterises monomania, and also the fact that as far as those around her were concerned, the woman's 'well-conducted' behaviour was not of a sort to arouse concern that something may be wrong. Collins makes the most of the dramatic possibilities afforded by the concept of monomania; the monomaniac's ability to

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<sup>26</sup> Chapter 3 discusses the issue of personal responsibility in relation to theories of insanity.

<sup>27</sup> Joshua Burgess, 'The Policy and Pathology of Insanity', *Lancet*, 58:1463 (13 September, 1851), 246-47 (p.246).

<sup>28</sup> Anon., 'Religious Monomania; Self-mutilation', *Lancet*, 58:1472 (15 November, 1851), 456.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

maintain a façade of normality which hides his growing insanity makes Mannion a particularly insidious enemy.

Whilst Collins appropriates an unusual form of mental instability for his fiction, the emotions that motivate Mannion are entirely recognizable: anger, jealousy, bitterness, a sense of humiliation and exclusion. This may be something of a social critique; the prejudices of society have made Mannion what he is. T.C. Morgan, in an often sardonic article which protests against capital punishment for lunatics, declares:

We shall even find reason to believe, that it is the imputed sane who lead the acknowledged maniacs into their moonstruck mischiefs. The deluded wretch whose hallucination prompts him to strike at the life of a minister, does not invent the public distresses which give a specific direction to his insane impulse.<sup>30</sup>

Mannion's letter implies a similar sentiment in his account of the years after the death of his father, when 'the gallows still rose as the same immovable obstacle between me and fortune, between me and station, between me and my fellow-men' (p.184). Society's unwillingness to acknowledge Mannion as a blameless citizen (rather than the son of a felon) leaves him with no desire to respect conventional morality or laws.

However, Collins retains a sense of ambiguity in this letter; it is never entirely apparent to what extent the memory of the gallows is an obstacle perpetuated by Mannion, who admits that he is 'morbidly sensitive on this point' (ibid.) and distances himself from others because of it. Moreover, although Mannion's letter may raise some momentary sympathy, he is predominantly viewed through the fearful and disapproving eyes of Basil and is not, on the whole, a character the reader relates to easily.

Whilst, therefore, the commonness of Mannion's feelings may involve some implied authorial social criticism, they serve more to suggest the fine line that was perceived to lie between sanity and insanity, particularly in the first half of the Victorian period when an emphasis was placed on the unruly

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<sup>30</sup> T.C. Morgan, 'Monomaniacs and Monomania', *New Monthly Magazine and Humorist*, 68 (May, 1843), 43-51 (p.47). Morgan's plays with boundaries and perceptions here: it is of course the 'imputed' sane who attribute sanity to themselves and insanity to the supposed 'maniacs'.

passions as a cause of mental disorders. In *On Man's Power over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity* (1843) John Barlow argued that the key to preventing insanity was to maintain strict control over one's thoughts and emotions. Barlow suggested that anyone who doubted this should

note for a short time the thoughts that pass through his mind, and the feelings that agitate him: and he will find that, were they all expressed and indulged, they would be as wild, and perhaps as frightful in their consequences as those of any madman.<sup>31</sup>

For Barlow, all that stood between a person and insanity was the ability to control any 'wild' feelings which threatened self-control. Although most well-educated people were capable of making such an effort, anyone who did not was liable to succumb with potentially 'frightful' results.

Attempting to describe monomania in recognisable terms, Henry Holland also brought the possibility of insanity closer to home for his readers, suggesting:

Most persons have felt at one time or other [...] some dominant idea or feeling to possess the fancy; retaining its hold with a sort of malignant power, despite all efforts to shake it off; and by degrees distorting the subject, especially if it be a painful one, into a thousand false and alarming shapes.<sup>32</sup>

In accounts such as these, those emotions which prompted excessive behaviour could literally be considered maddening. Although monomania was originally based on the idea of one 'particular illusion' (Prichard, *Treatise*, p.28), the specific delusion was usually linked to an obsession with one idea, person, or object, and the term came to be associated (especially in popular thought) with obsession more generally. Holland's above reference to the condition, for example, concerns the 'dominant idea or feeling', which may then become delusive through its 'malignant power'. In both theories of insanity and in the

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<sup>31</sup> John Barlow, *On Man's Power over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity* (1843), 2nd edn (London: Pickering, 1849), p.71.

<sup>32</sup> Henry Holland, *Chapters on Mental Physiology* (London: Longman, Brown, Green and Longman, 1852), p.140.

terminology used to describe them, there was consequently an indistinct border between obsession and monomania.

*Basil* shows how indistinct this border is. Whilst Mannion is the only explicitly diagnosed monomaniac in the novel, the whole text has an obsessive intensity redolent of monomania; the *Athenaeum* described it as having a 'vicious atmosphere' which 'weighs on us like a nightmare'.<sup>33</sup> In *Basil*, characters frequently find themselves possessed by a single idea, urge or desire which has its basis in a recognisable but exaggerated emotion and which leads to clouded judgement and (at best) improper behaviour: Margaret is obsessed by Mannion, as is Basil, who has previously been obsessed by Margaret; Mannion is obsessed by his desire to torment Basil, which develops into his assertion that he is working for cosmic forces beyond his control.

As discussed above, monomaniacs could be seen to hide their obsessive compulsions, at least temporarily, and so avoid raising suspicion about their mental state. However, in many descriptions of the condition a breaching of the bounds of social acceptability was one of the key indications that obsession had crossed into insanity. For example Prichard saw little difference between madness and eccentricity; the important question for him was the point at which an individual became 'unfit to be at large', unable to function competently and safely in society.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, W.B. Carpenter explained to his readers that if a 'dominant idea' holds sway over an individual, and if 'the conduct which it dictates should pass the bounds of enthusiasm or eccentricity, we say that the individual is the subject of Monomania'.<sup>35</sup> Such descriptions can be applied to Mannion and Basil, and the intensity of their obsessions contributes to the overall melodramatic tone of the novel. Basil, for example, describes the effect that Margaret has on him when he first sees her:

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<sup>33</sup> Daniel Owen Maddyn, 'Basil: A Story of Modern Life', *Athenaeum*, 1310 (4 December, 1852), 1322-23 (p.1323).

<sup>34</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *On the Different Forms of Insanity in Relation to Jurisprudence* (London: Hippolyte Ballière, 1842), p.66. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>35</sup> William B. Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology: With Their Chief Applications to Psychology, Pathology, Therapeutics, Hygiene, & Forensic Medicine* (1842), 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Churchill, 1855), p.611.



My ideas were in utter confusion, all my thoughts ran astray. I walked on, dreaming in full day—I had no distinct impressions, except of the stranger beauty whom I had just seen. The more I tried to collect myself, to resume the easy, equable feelings with which I had set forth in the morning, the less self-possessed I became. (p.31)

In a blatant breach of propriety, Basil tracks Margaret to her home and arranges a meeting with her. The inability to maintain self-possession is integral to the concept of monomania, but also of falling in love; an individual is mentally overtaken by whatever (or whoever) has influenced them, and is ruled by his or her fascination for it. In Collins's short story, 'The Twin Sisters: a True Story' (1851), the protagonist, Mr. Streatfield, is 'seized with that amiable form of social monomania, called "love at first sight"'.<sup>36</sup> Mr. Streatfield loses all self-control at the sight of a pretty face in a manner anticipatory of Basil's reaction to Margaret: 'he flung himself back in the carriage, and tried to examine his own feelings, to reason himself into self-possession; but it was all in vain' ('The Twin Sisters', p.278). In these cautionary tales against apparent "love at first sight" the failure to retain self-possession in the face of an extreme, but common, emotion is apparent.

What power attractive women possess in both *Basil* and 'The Twin Sisters' is barely reliant on their own efforts; they simply come into view and men quite literally lose all self-possession beyond that which will help them achieve their desires.<sup>37</sup> This is a further important point – it is the idea, the dominant or fixed idea, that holds sway, not necessarily the object itself. In both 'The Twin Sisters' and *Basil* the impression left by the beautiful face is at odds with the actual outcome of the relationship. Love ceases to be an "amiable" form of monomania and becomes something which can ruin lives. In 'The Twin Sisters' Jane Langley is left a perpetual spinster after been rejected by Streatfield as the wrong twin, and Basil's obsession with Margaret blinds him to her real nature. Basil is fixated by Margaret's physical charms as his descriptions of her show, from his initial description of her 'too full' lips (p.30), to the dream vision of her

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<sup>36</sup> Wilkie Collins, 'The Twin Sisters: a True Story', *Bentley's Miscellany*, 29 (March, 1851), 278-91 (p.278).

<sup>37</sup> Of course, several of Collins's female characters know how to make the most of their attractions, Margaret, *No Name's* Magdalen Vanstone and *Armadale's* Miss Gwilt included.

loosened hair which falls to her bosom. He persists in believing that she must also be morally worthy, despite indications to the contrary, such as when she displays her vicious temper (pp.109-10). Whilst he declares throughout his narrative that his feelings towards her were faithful and enduring, they were also, as events finally reveal, somewhat superficial as he has loved only her external appearance all along. *The Woman in White* (1860) provides a contrast as Walter Hartright is certainly struck by the looks of Laura Fairlie, and freely admits that on the first day he saw her 'I let the charm of her presence lure me from the recollection of myself and my position'.<sup>38</sup> Yet Hartright overcomes these desires until he is in a situation to propose within the bounds of convention and acceptability.

It is barely excessive to describe Basil as suffering from monomania, and the neurotic tone of much of his narrative is largely responsible for the melodramatic feeling of the story. This is because from the moment that Basil sees Margaret, to the moment he suffers his final breakdown after witnessing Mannion's death, he is unable to see the world through clear eyes. After overhearing Margaret's infidelity, Basil is overcome by 'ONE THOUGHT', that of murdering Mannion. He describes how 'before the fell poison of that Thought, all other thoughts—good or evil—died' (p.130). This shares the fixative, overwhelming quality of monomania, and when he later sees Margaret, Basil's condition is intensified as his attention shifts from Mannion to her, and he is 'influenced' by the 'strange instinct of never losing hold of her' (p.133). This desire is manifest in Basil's delusion that, long after Margaret has run away, '*her* track and *my* track were one; that I had just lost my hold of her, and that she was just starting on her flight' (p.134). Passers-by perceive Basil to be mad, and although this scares him, he continues to pursue the image of Margaret. This is in keeping with Prichard's assertion that rather than being fixed the 'dominant illusion [...] is ever liable to change as to its subject'.<sup>39</sup> Basil's dominant thought

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<sup>38</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.53.

<sup>39</sup> *On the Different Forms of Insanity*, p.169. Prichard argued that there was no such thing as literal "partial insanity": a monomaniac may seem sane in all but one delusion, but 'on careful inquiry it will be found that his mind is in many respects in a different condition from that of perfect health' (Prichard, *Treatise*, p.28).

and subsequent delusion are expressive of a more general emotional disturbance.

As a genre of extreme emotional intensity, melodrama is a fitting complement to those early-nineteenth-century theories which proposed that "the passions" were at the basis of insanity. Like many others, the physician John Conolly emphasised the fact that the same passions which inspired 'poetry, eloquence, invention, persevering labour' were also those which 'when unrestrained, have ruined the mind', and observed:

It has been said that anger is a short madness; and it has been said, as truly, that no man can at once be in love and be wise: and, in like manner, we may observe each passion and emotion in excess disturbing the mind by a direct impairment of the comparing power, and, consequently, the judgement. Until the tyranny of the passion is past, the attention is forcibly withheld from all objects which would correct the false decision.<sup>40</sup>

*Basil* is a novel in which anything which would restore the influence of 'the comparing power' is given little or no attention in favour of anything which will intensify the wayward passions which have taken over the text; hence, Basil fails to be swayed by his sister Clara's calming influence and is instead enraptured by Margaret's intoxicating sensuality. Conolly was a leading advocate of the non-restraint system in lunatic asylums which worked on the assumption that restoring the patient's mental balance was a case of nurturing their own power of self-control. Conolly particularly advocated aiming for mental tranquillity: 'all excitement of mind, and all bodily irritation, all foolish indulgence, and all exciting topics of discussion' should be 'carefully avoided'.<sup>41</sup> Such a state is the antithesis of the atmosphere cultivated in *Basil*.

A lack of self-possession did not always result in insanity, but it was rarely described as a good thing. Edward Bulwer Lytton's 'On Self-Control', discussed in chapter 1, asserts:

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<sup>40</sup> John Conolly, *An Inquiry Concerning the Indications of Insanity, with Suggestions for the Better Protection and Care of the Insane* (London: John Taylor, 1830), in Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth, *Embodied Selves*, pp.240-43 (pp.240-41).

<sup>41</sup> John Conolly, *The Treatment of the Insane without Mechanical Restraints* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1856), in Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth, *Embodied Selves*, pp.235-36 (p.236).

Self, left to itself, only crystallises atoms homogeneous to its original monad. A nature constitutionally proud and pitiless, intuitively seeks, in all the culture it derives from intellectual labour, to find reasons to continue proud and pitiless – to extract from the lessons of knowledge arguments by which to justify its impulse, and rules by which the impulse can be drilled into method and refined into policy.<sup>42</sup>

Bulwer Lytton's assessment of the self is reminiscent of medical theories of sanity and self-cultivation already discussed in this chapter, and reflects the unconscious and detrimental influence of personality traits left unchecked. Neither Basil nor Mannion struggle particularly hard against their natural impulses, instead they find themselves in situations which intensify the obsessive elements of their personalities. As retrospective narrator, for example, Basil realises that when he went in search of Margaret after seeing her on the omnibus that he was 'hypocritically persuading myself, that I was only animated by a capricious curiosity to know the girl's name, which once satisfied, would leave me at rest on the matter, and free to laugh at my own idleness and folly' (p.32). Instead, this is the means of consolidating his new obsession.

Much of the melodrama of *Basil* is therefore a result of the characters' actions creating a self-perpetuating, emotionally intense atmosphere. Although the monomaniacal traits of the characters and the narrative tone complement the idea that the characters are incapable of acting with true intellectual independence, they do so by offering a mundane alternative to the cosmic Manichaeistic forces of melodrama: the characters are at the mercy of their unrestrained emotions and desires. Both Basil and Mannion profess to feeling like the victim of some fatal influence, although unlike Mannion who feels driven to achieve his goal of tormenting Basil, Basil's fatalistic feelings often result in passivity or capitulation to the dictates of others. After he has the dream about the two women Basil wonders whether it was 'a warning of coming events, foreshadowed in the wild visions of sleep?' He then asks

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<sup>42</sup> Edward Bulwer Lytton, 'On Self-Control' (1863), in *Caxtoniana* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1875), pp.206-14 (p.208).

himself, 'why had it remained incomplete, failing to show me the visionary consequences of my visionary actions? What superstition to ask!' (p.42). Jenny Bourne Taylor suggests that the dream is 'simultaneously an expression of suppressed desire and an allegorical warning' (Bourne Taylor, p.85) and that, therefore, 'the expression of desire becomes framed as a "prophetic" text' which Basil fails to interpret because it does not 'take the form of a moral tract' (Bourne Taylor, p.86). However, while it is true that taking some time to truly think about the possible import of his dream would have saved Basil a lot of trouble, what is significant to the current discussion is Basil's initial inclination to interpret the dream as supernaturally meaningful.<sup>43</sup> This demonstrates both his fatalistic leanings, and his inability to be distracted (despite these leanings) from his burgeoning dominant desire (Margaret). Later, Basil's fatalism falls in line with his obsessions, and they become mutually perpetuating. When, for example, the truth about Margaret has been revealed, he becomes increasingly passive: 'a superstitious conviction that my actions were governed by a fatality which no human foresight could alter or avoid, began to strengthen within me. From this time forth, I awaited events with the uninquiring patience, the helpless resignation of despair' (p.220). 'Superstitious' suggests the irrationality of his thoughts and feelings, yet they hold enough power over him that he resigns himself to the 'conviction' that he is governed by fate.

As with so much in this novel, the influence of Mannion is at the heart of Basil's 'resignation'. Bourne Taylor observes that Basil 'is continually misled by his attempt to read his environment in psychological terms, as the world becomes a projection of his own anxiety' (Bourne Taylor p.80). However, this is not merely the case in relation to Basil, but to Mannion also. It is their combined ability to perceive themselves as central players in a melodramatic conflict that shapes their immediate reality and draws in those close to them (i.e. Clara and Margaret) who also end up contributing to the oppressive atmosphere. Tim Dolin and Lucy Dougan have astutely observed that Basil's older brother, Ralph, is an antidote to this influence:

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<sup>43</sup> Collins frequently employs potentially prophetic dreams and visions, most prominently Allan Armadale's Dream which (unlike Basil's dream) indirectly drives much of the action of *Armadale*, discussed in chapter 4.

With his buffoonish ways and superficial ideas, Ralph ought to be a rather silly character, but, surprisingly, his appearance breaks a spell in which both Basil and the reader have for pages been held, claustrophobic and paranoid. Suddenly the air is cleared, the diabolical Mannion seems more like a schoolyard bully, and we feel that we, too, have let things get somewhat out of proportion.<sup>44</sup>

As Basil explains at the beginning of the novel, Ralph is sent to live abroad by his father after an 'awkward love adventure' with a tenant's daughter (p.16). His first visit home to England conveys something of his infectiously revitalizing manner: 'It was as if the fiery, effervescent atmosphere of the Boulevards of Paris had insolently penetrated into the old English mansion, and ruffled and infected its quiet native air' (p.17). Stimulating as Ralph's presence is, it is entirely out of place in the 'old English mansion'. French culture carried morally dubious connotations in the eyes of Victorian England, and Basil's descriptions of Ralph's encounters with women of 'mysteriously doubtful' and 'notoriously bad' reputation suggest that he is certainly embracing the stereotype.<sup>45</sup>

When Ralph later tries to assist Basil it is increasingly apparent that he is out of place in the world of Basil's narrative. Whilst the moral absolutes of melodrama cannot truly be said to exist in the novel, we have already seen that *Basil* (and Basil) tends to present characters in terms which paint them as either angelic or devilish. Physical attributes are one means of achieving this. The physical contrast between Clara and Margaret has already been observed: one is pale and pure, the other dark and voluptuous. Whilst Margaret exerts her influence over Basil, she remains an insurmountable (if somewhat too sensual) beauty. Once her secret is revealed her illness renders her correspondingly unattractive, symbolising her moral depravity. Basil, going to visit her

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<sup>44</sup> Tim Dolin and Lucy Dougan, 'Fatal Newness: *Basil*, Art, and the Origins of Sensation Fiction', in *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp.1-33 (p.19).

<sup>45</sup> p.18. French literature was often deemed amoral, if not immoral, and in fact the *Athenaeum* took *Basil's* focus on the unpleasant details of its subject matter as a sign that Collins had 'enrolled' in 'the unwholesome [French] literary school', (Maddyn, p.1323). Collins's fondness for Parisian living is apparent in his letters. In the years preceding the writing of *Basil* he frequently visited France as an escape from his working responsibilities and later with Dickens. See Baker and Clarke, *Letters of Wilkie Collins*, I, p.xxiii, p.xxvii.

sickroom, is shocked as she tears the hair from her face, exposing 'the smouldering fever in her cheeks; the glare of the bloodshot eyes; the distortion of the parched lips' (p.231). The most blatant symbol of Margaret's sexual power is rent aside to reveal the truth, instead of alluringly parted as it was in the dream. Like Margaret, Mannion maintains an effective disguise for much of the novel, hiding his sadistic intentions behind an 'extraordinary regularity of feature' (p.90). However, a flash of lightning shows a fleeting glimpse of a 'spectral look of ghastliness and distortion' in his features, and he seems to be 'glaring and grinning on [Basil] like a fiend' (p.106); later the monstrousness of his nature is (like Margaret's) fully externalised as Basil's attack results in a 'hideous deformity of feature' (p.239). Contrastingly, when Ralph returns to England his features have 'become coarser', marked by 'dissipation', he is slightly overweight and 'dressed rather carelessly'; he has merely become 'prematurely middle-aged' (p.205). Whilst this description is in keeping with Ralph's lifestyle, there is no drastic alteration and it is certainly not in keeping with this novel of angels, monsters, and monsters disguised as angels.

Ralph, in contrast to the four main characters, will 'submit to no restraints' and is 'determined to be his own master' (p.15). This offers a solution to the paradox in *Basil*: as this analysis of the novel has shown, masculinity, activity, and Evil seem aligned in the text, whereas Goodness is associated with feminine passivity; to remain on the side of Good, Basil is therefore effectively emasculated throughout much of the novel due to his inaction. This in part complements the Christian resignation that Basil promotes at the end of the novel, but as previously observed there is something unsatisfactory in his retreat from the world; his existence is stultified and his future seemingly empty. Ralph's disregard of conventional boundaries and his willingness to take action in order to assist Basil in a practical manner disrupt the careful alignment of positive and negative qualities which tends to occur in the novel. Ralph promotes an ability to act with common sense and good timing in order to produce practical results.

The way in which the two sons manage their relationships with their father is an example of this. Basil, attempting to confess his relationship with

Margaret to his father, fails to communicate the information resolutely. He feels a growing 'sense of bewilderment and oppression' and speaks 'more and more rapidly, confusedly, unconsciously' (p.161); needless to say, he is unsuccessful in enlisting his father's sympathy. Ralph, on the other hand, impresses his father by telling him of Basil's 'noble behaviour' by going to visit the dying Margaret (p.242). Ralph then advises Basil to leave London in order to allow 'that impression to strengthen' rather than remaining where his presence can cause offence or trouble (ibid.). Admittedly Ralph's news (that his shameful daughter-in-law is dead) is perhaps more palatable to their father than Basil's original news of his marriage, but it is the differing manner in which the brothers handle their situations that is telling. Basil swings ineffectually between reckless, impulsive activity (such as attacking Mannion) and resigned passivity; Ralph chooses decisively when and when not to act. In this manner, Ralph appears to be competently in charge of his own decisions, his own behaviour and his own life. Hence, when Ralph finally returns to England, having formed 'what would be termed in the continental code of morals, a reformatory attachment to a woman older than himself' with whom he ends up 'living quietly in the suburbs of London', he seems both content and carefree.<sup>46</sup> Whilst Ralph is therefore thoroughly out of place in Basil's narrative, he functions precisely as a contrast to the highly-strung, socially constrained and/or emotionally unrestrained central characters.<sup>47</sup>

In some ways Ralph can be seen as corresponding to the 'funny man' of melodrama who speaks in 'a racy lingo' which, as Smith explains, 'cuts the hero down to size, puncturing his high-flown lyricism with unsentimental common sense' (Smith, p.xiii). Despite this, Ralph's resistant and subversive presence is short-lived within the framework of the novel; in such a humourless work as

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<sup>46</sup> *Basil*, p.19. Collins's later unconventional lifestyle, supporting two mistresses, suggests that he, like Ralph, was somewhat influenced by the 'continental code of morals'. A further connection between Collins and Ralph is apparent as Ralph's mistress is referred to as the 'morganatic Mrs Ralph' (p.205), and Collins, in later years, would refer to his mistress and children as his 'morganatic family'. See *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, I, p.xxxi.

<sup>47</sup> In later years, Collins's antagonism towards the institutions and conventions of his society would be revealed in more explicit, but actually less controversial terms; in *Man and Wife* (1870), for example, his attack on marriage laws calls for a re-evaluation of the status-quo, but Collins does not tacitly promote living in sin as an appealing alternative as he does in *Basil*.



*Basil*, the funny man does not hold sway for long. When Ralph arrives soon after Basil has received the letter from Mannion, the influence of that communication is too compelling to be dismissed by Ralph's optimism: Ralph laughs at the news that Basil has placed Mannion in hospital, but Basil 'remembered Mannion's letter, and shuddered' (p.207). Readers may, for a moment, realise that things have got 'somewhat out of proportion', as Dolin and Dougan suggest, but they are swiftly plunged back into Basil's neurotically intense narrative. Bourne Taylor refers to the 'hero's wise voice of the present' which makes 'retrospective interjections' (p.80), but when Basil narrates the majority of his story, he is actually in hiding in Cornwall, still very much under the influence of Mannion. It is only in the final few pages that he is free from fear and obsession.

So, in the way they are presented to the reader through Basil's voice, the characters of *Basil* can be seen as consigned to play out the stereotypes of melodramatic heroes and villains. However, when read in the light of theories of monomania and the passions, this is seen to be due to the characters' tendencies to succumb to the dictates of their personal desires and dispositions; these determine their responses to the situations they find themselves in. The cultivation and assertion of willpower was, as the next chapter shows, thought essential to the control of the emotions and the behaviour, but it is something the characters of *Basil* do not exercise.

In anticipation of chapter 4 it is worth observing that Collins also makes some use of the concept of heredity in order to explain the weak and susceptible personalities of some of his characters. Basil, Clara and Ralph have inherited various emotional traits from their father. Their father's eyes have a 'commanding' look which gives 'a certain unchanging firmness and dignity to his expression' (p.14). However, it requires 'all the masculine energy of look about the upper part of his face, to redeem the lower part from an appearance of effeminacy, [...] his lips often trembled as women's do', he also has a 'tendency to flush all over in an instant' in moments of agitation (ibid.). Clara (who shares her father's features) exhibits a similar, although increased, tendency to 'flush' (p.20); she also appears to have inherited the emotional

nervousness indicated in the 'lower part' of her father's face by his trembling lips: 'the sensitiveness of her nervous organization is too constantly visible in her actions and her looks' (pp.20-21). Basil perceives Clara's gentle but nervous temperament (an effeminate streak in his father) to be the epitome of womanliness, but his own highly-strung narrative suggests that he, too, has inherited the 'lower half' of his father's face. As with monomania, the workings of heredity provide some explanation for Basil's and Clara's nervous natures and behaviour. Contrastingly Ralph asserts that he has not inherited his father's 'nervous delicacies' (p.215), and the description of him as a 'gay, hearty, handsome young Englishman', who is 'reckless' and 'boisterous' sets him apart, once again, from the rest of his family.<sup>48</sup>

Whereas Collins's depictions of mental and emotional instability are drawn from earlier Victorian theories of insanity and the passions, the explanation given for Margaret's behaviour looks forward to the increasing emphasis that would be placed on biological determinism. Mannion claims that as Margaret grew older 'neither her mind nor her disposition kept pace with her beauty' and he 'found her worthy of nothing, not even of the slave-destiny' he had planned for her (p.190). Mannion's damning account of Margaret continues:

She had neither heart nor mind, in the higher sense of those words. She had simply instincts—most of the bad instincts of an animal; none of the good. The great motive power which really directed her, was Deceit [...] The best training could never have wholly overcome this vice in her: the education she actually got [...] encouraged it.

(p.191)

This looks towards later Victorian degenerationist theories of inherent biological faults which placed less faith in the power of education and social influence (also discussed in chapter 4). Although this assessment of Margaret's true character comes from the not entirely reliable source of Robert Mannion, important for this discussion is the fact that Mannion roots Margaret's flawed

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<sup>48</sup> p.15. Basil's mother is barely described, particularly in the 1862 version.

disposition in ideas of constitutional 'instinct' and education, that Collins takes a moment to explain *why* his villainess is so villainous.

Whilst, therefore, Collins has undoubtedly written a melodramatic novel in terms of plot and atmosphere, it is a melodrama informed by medical and psychological theories of the period, and created by a combination of inherent and social factors shown to influence character behaviour. Characters (most importantly Basil himself) are often too willing to bow to the dictates of a fatality of their own imagining and to succumb to situations which are the creation of their own uncontrolled emotions and urges. Having abandoned the moral absolutes of melodrama, it is in this manner that the novel retains a moral element: the desire to indulge in passions and pursue desires without restraint or rational thought unerringly leads to ruin.

### Chapter 3

#### 'Like a possession of the devil': *No Name*, Willpower, and Monomania

In one completed Man there are the forces of many men. Self-control is self-completion.<sup>1</sup>

(Edward Bulwer Lytton, 'On Self-Control', 1863)

Whereas *Basil* is a novel of delusion and impeded perception, in which characters act imprudently under the dictates of their own unreliable emotions, in Wilkie Collins's *No Name* (1862), a number of sharp-eyed, clear-headed characters plot and counterplot in pursuit of the Vanstone fortune. Magdalen Vanstone is one of these competitors - clever, resourceful and perceptive. Yet like *Basil*'s Robert Mannion, Magdalen's character is invested with many of the attributes of a monomaniac, and we once again find Collins adhering to realities which are not of the 'every-day' variety in his portrayal of monomaniacal drives.<sup>2</sup> As with Mannion, Magdalen's monomania is the result of recognizable emotions: grief at the death of her parents; shock at the discovery that she and her sister are illegitimate; anger at the fact that their fortune is passed onto the next legal relative. In his preface Collins claims that he intended to depict 'the struggle of a human creature, under those opposing influences of Good and Evil, which we have all felt, which we have all known'.<sup>3</sup> Yet in sensational form the circumstances Magdalen finds herself in, and her responses to them, take her beyond the likely experience of *No Name*'s general readership.

Whereas Mannion remains generally unsympathetic, in *No Name* Collins attempts to maintain reader understanding and indulgence, by using an omniscient narrator who often describes Magdalen's thoughts and feelings with compassion. Moreover, although Magdalen's fixed idea gives her unwavering drive and focus, she experiences inner conflict over her actions. Mannion's

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Bulwer Lytton, 'On Self-Control' (1863), *Caxtoniana* (London: Routledge and Sons, 1875), pp.206-14 (p.214).

<sup>2</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Basil* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p.4. All further references, unless otherwise indicated, are to this edition which uses the revised 1862 text and are given after quotations.

<sup>3</sup> Wilkie Collins, *No Name* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.xxvii. *No Name* was serialized in *All the Year Round* (15 March 1862-17 January 1863); the first edition was published 31 December, 1862 (p.xxiv). Further references are given after quotations.

desires, dominant idea and morality coincide: he hates Basil; desires revenge upon him; and cares nothing about the moral consequences. Contrastingly, Magdalen wants the fortune and is monomaniacally determined to win it, but despises the dishonest lengths she must go to in order to be victorious. Winifred Hughes accurately observes that Magdalen's moral struggle 'never seriously affects the realm of action', but her further assertion that the 'real challenge is not to the heroine's virtue, but to her intelligence and daring' does not sufficiently allow for the pages that Collins devotes to the inner conflict between different facets of Magdalen's personality.<sup>4</sup> In fact, as H.F. Chorley claimed in his (largely unfavourable) review of the novel, Magdalen is 'virtually, the book'.<sup>5</sup>

*No Name* follows Magdalen's transformation from a charismatic, charming young woman, into a brooding, scheming villainess, and finally into a redeemed and rewarded heroine. Critical accounts of *No Name* often focus on Magdalen's vacillating social status and adoption of disguises from different social groups, and they rightly conclude that gender and class identity are revealed to be social constructs. Graham Law and Andrew Maunder, for example, write about *No Name's* 'engagement with the "Woman Question"' and argue that Magdalen 'negotiates and reacts against a set of ideologies that are simultaneously constructs and very real for her'.<sup>6</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor similarly observes that 'what *No Name* reveals above all is the impossibility of representing a coherent female subjectivity, a "true nature"'.<sup>7</sup> For this discussion, however, it is important to differentiate between Collins's portrayal of gender as a role, socially created for people and performed by them, and the implication in his work that there are 'forces of inborn and inbred disposition' within people (regardless of gender) which influence their behaviour (p.116). These inherent personality traits may be enhanced or suppressed, but they

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<sup>4</sup> Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.145. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>5</sup> H.F. Chorley, 'No Name', *Athenaeum*, 1836 (3 January, 1863), 10-11 (p.10). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>6</sup> Graham Law and Andrew Maunder, *Wilkie Collins: A Literary Life* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.87-88. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>7</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.134.

cannot be fundamentally modified.

This chapter concerns Collins's portrayal of such traits in Magdalen. The previous chapter explored *Basil's* employment of deterministic theories to justify and enhance the melodramatic atmosphere of the novel. *No Name*, contrastingly, selectively appropriates aspects of melodrama in order to illuminate Magdalen's psychological conflict. Through this revelation of what Law and Maunder call 'Magdalen's embattled psychology' Collins introduces two issues for speculation which receive more direct and exploratory attention in *No Name* than in *Basil*: the extent to which nurture and circumstance may influence the basic nature of an individual, and the difficulty of achieving self-control (Law and Maunder, p.87).

Collins's depiction of the composition of the human mind is comparable to mid-Victorian psycho-physiological theories of the relationship between the will and the emotions. Such theories asserted that the cultivation of the willpower was the most important means of achieving self-determination, but they were also increasingly wary of the fact that achieving the necessary level of cultivation was dependent on a number of external factors which the individual may be unable to control in the first place. At the same time, medical and popular articles about insanity, criminality and deviant behaviour expressed ongoing concern about the difficulties of assigning responsibility and blame if the vulnerable and precarious nature of self-control was acknowledged. *No Name* raises similar questions by making Magdalen clearly aware of the impropriety and immorality of what she is doing, but by making it unclear to what extent she is unable, or unwilling, to stop herself. Collins implies that individuals have inbuilt capacities for good and evil which cannot be intrinsically altered, but he also shows the ease with which potentially "good" people can fall victim, unawares, to both circumstance and their own lesser natures.

Before turning to the issue of psychical and physical determinants in *No Name*, it is important to acknowledge that the world in which Magdalen moves occasionally seems underpinned by some ordering force, an underlying *something* which drives the plot to its conclusion. For example, Magdalen's

saviour, Captain Kirke, who finds her by chance as she is about to be taken to the workhouse (p.576), happens to be the son of the man who saved Magdalen's own father from killing himself (p.99, p.588). Here, Patrick Brantlinger's description of characters being propelled through the 'intricate machinations of plots that act like fate' needs further qualification.<sup>8</sup> As the previous chapter argued, in *Basil* the sense of fatality is primarily generated by Basil and Mannion's belief in Fate. Mannion and Margaret's downfalls *could* be seen as some sort of Fate-driven peripety which brings back moral order, but they could also just as easily be entirely mundane accidents which (on an authorial level) allow for a conclusion to the events of the story. In *No Name*, contrastingly, Collins does not simply mould the plot in order to assure the ending he desires, he deliberately infuses the world he has created with a sense of teleology to which he draws his reader's attention. Kirke is fascinated by Magdalen before he is aware of who she is and declares, 'if it's ordered that I am to see that girl again, I *shall* see her' (p.286); Magdalen, similarly, cannot get the image of Kirke out of her mind (p.290). In the scene after Kirke has discovered Magdalen about to be removed from her lodgings, Collins employs free indirect speech to ask 'what mysterious destiny had guided him to the last refuge of her poverty and despair, in the hour of her sorest need?' (p.579).

However, when Kirke arrives at the conclusion which affirms his decision to stand by Magdalen, he speaks on his own: "'What has brought me here?" he said to himself in a whisper. "The mercy of chance? No! The mercy of God"' (ibid.). Whilst the more ambiguous form of free indirect style is used to ask the initial question, when it comes to giving an answer, or even giving some options to choose from, Collins and his narrator remain silent. Instead Kirke is responsible for selecting the providential designs of God over the randomness of chance. Another example occurs earlier in the novel when Magdalen contemplates suicide and decides to watch the ships passing on the horizon: if the number is even she will live; if odd, she will die. With seconds to spare an eighth ship passes by and Magdalen resolves to live: "'Providence?" she whispered faintly to herself. "Or chance?"' (p.409). Although Magdalen gives

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<sup>8</sup> Patrick Brantlinger, 'What is "Sensational" About the "Sensation Novel"?', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37:1 (June 1982), 1-28 (p.13).

no definite answer in this case, the options remain the same.

Whilst both Magdalen and Kirke voice the possibility of a beneficent providential force at work, the narrator tends to rely on terms with less religious connotations such as 'destiny' in opposition to the capriciousness of chance, as in the example of free indirect speech above.<sup>9</sup> In instances such as these the possibility of Providence, Destiny or Fate having a guiding hand is incorporated within the plot. Most often, however, the narrator uses 'fatal', which carries intimations of Fate, but also of a moment of possibly unconscious yet decisive action which seals, for a time at least, the course of events, obscuring the distinction between what is meant to be, and what *must* be due to the chain of circumstance. For example, early on in her quest Magdalen aims to gain knowledge of her enemy, Noel Vanstone, by visiting him in disguise. The building in which this encounter takes place is described as 'the fatal house' (p.222); in it, amongst other things, Mrs Lecount acquires the piece of 'brown alpaca dress' (p.237) with which she plans to prove Magdalen's identity.

It is essential to the overall discussion of determinism that Collins employs the possibility of providential or fatalistic intervention almost exclusively to preserve Magdalen from harm and bring about her happy ending. Although this provides a greater intimation of teleology than in *Basil*, the closest we get to feeling that Magdalen's personal development may have been influenced by some otherworldly force is the (somewhat indirect) fact that in the final internal struggle between 'Good and Evil', it is the growing 'gratitude' to Kirke (who fate or providence may have brought to her) which gives 'Good' the extra push it needs to be victorious (p.598). On the whole, the forces that drive Magdalen and determine her behaviour- monomania, the memory of her parents, her love for Kirke and her sister Norah - are depicted as products of her own inbred psychological disposition, influenced by what Collins significantly refers to as 'earthly Circumstance' (p.116, my emphasis). Without discounting the

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<sup>9</sup> "Chance" is used to describe unpredicted or unpredictable events which are, however, the result of earthly cause and effect generated by previous events. The question is whether "Circumstance" is generated by such mundane means, or engineered by some higher power. For Collins's attitude towards religion see Keith Lawrence, 'The Religion of Wilkie Collins: Three Unpublished Documents', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 52:3 (Summer, 1989), 389-402, and Kirk H. Beetz, 'Wilkie Collins and the *Leader*', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 1:15 (Spring, 1982), 20-29 (pp.23-25).



possibility of otherworldly influences, therefore, *No Name* focuses distinctly on the multitude of *worldly* factors which can determine a person's behaviour.<sup>10</sup>

Like Mannion, Magdalen's fixation originates in a desire to retaliate against a perceived wrong: the death of her parents leaves herself and her sister without the fortune which they believe to be rightly theirs. Collins draws on the medical discourse of monomania to describe Magdalen's behaviour once she has begun the attempt to win back her inheritance: she becomes 'haunted day and night by the one *dominant idea* that now possessed her' (p.544, my emphasis). When Magdalen goes to visit Noel Vanstone she presents herself to him as her ex-governess Miss Garth, concerned about what her former pupil may do; this allows Magdalen to express her feelings and her intentions in the third person. Magdalen's tone is both melodramatic and monomaniacal, revealing the extent to which her dominant idea (that of restoring her fortune to herself and her sister) has taken over her every action. She begins by admitting that 'she clings to the hope of hastening her marriage, and to the hope of rescuing her sister from a life of dependence', but goes on to assert that 'if both those objects were accomplished by other means, nothing would induce her to leave you in possession of the inheritance which her father meant his children to have' (p.236). All other considerations, as she here admits, have become secondary to the achieving of her goal.

Magdalen speaks with self-awareness of the power her desire has over her

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<sup>10</sup> The Victorian public was fascinated by the unexplained, including mesmerism from the 1840s and spiritualism from the 1850s. The 1852 edition of *Basil* contains a speculative passage about 'invisible, inexplicable influences' which may be the result of communication between 'the spirits that are departed and the spirits that are here' (Richard Bentley: London, 1852), I, pp.111-12. Also in 1852, Collins wrote a series of "letters" on mesmeric experiments, 'Magnetic Evenings at Home' in *The Leader*, 3 (Jan-March, 1852). By 1862, when Collins revised *Basil* and published *No Name*, spiritualism retained its mass appeal but the initial excitement had ended. Dickens was open minded and aware of the entertainment value of such subjects, but also wary of condoning credulity. *All the Year Round* published both articles with titles such as 'Spirits on their Last Legs' (14 (5 August, 1865), 45-48) and strange tales such as 'A Little Magic', in which some young women attempt to conjure up visions of their future husbands, with unfortunate results (6 (18 January, 1862), 400-403). Readers would therefore have probably been comfortable with the uncanny elements of Collins's fiction. See Louise Henson, "'In the Natural Course of Physical Things": Ghosts and Science in Charles Dickens's *All the Year Round*' in *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Media*, ed. by Louise Henson and others (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.113-123; for overviews of Victorian mesmerism and spiritualism see Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of the Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) and Janet Oppenheim, *The Other World: Spiritualism and Psychical Research in England, 1850-1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 1985), *passim*.

as she denounces the law that has rendered her illegitimate:

It is your law – not hers. She only knows it as the instrument of a vile oppression, an insufferable wrong. The sense of that wrong haunts her, like a possession of the devil. The resolution to right that wrong burns in her like fire. (p.236)

In these few sentences the nature of monomania is clearly conveyed. Whilst Magdalen asserts in these lines that her goal is a positive one of achieving justice for a moral injury, the urge which prompts her to act is as inescapable as a spectre, as controlling as a possessive 'devil', and threatens to consume and destroy her like 'fire'. At one point Magdalen stumbles on her dress as she goes up the stairs 'from sheer inattention to the common precaution of holding it up'; this is a sign that the 'trivial daily interests of life had lost their hold on her already' (p.402). Her obsession is so all-consuming that she has trouble conducting herself properly in the everyday acts of living.

Shortly before her marriage to Noel Vanstone, Magdalen, disturbed by a dream, steps outside in order to contemplate her situation:

By slow degrees, her mind recovered its balance, and she looked her position unflinchingly in the face. The vain hope that accident might defeat the very end for which, of her own free will, she had ceaselessly plotted and toiled, vanished and left her; self-dissipated in its own weakness. She knew the true alternative, and faced it. On one side, was the revolting ordeal of the marriage – on the other, the abandonment of her purpose. Was it too late to choose between the sacrifice of the purpose, and the sacrifice of herself? Yes! too late. The backward path had closed behind her. Time that no wish could change, Time that no prayers could recall, had made her purpose a part of herself: once she had governed it; now it governed her. The more she shrank, the harder she struggled, the more mercilessly it drove her on. No other feeling in her was strong enough to master it – not even the horror that was maddening her; the horror of her marriage. (p.396)

This is a particularly revealing passage: Magdalen is fighting to resist her own 'purpose', which has come to "govern" her. The sense of this inner turmoil is heightened by the use of free indirect discourse. Neither the positive feeling of 'hope' nor the negative feeling of 'horror' is strong enough to overcome her

dominant idea. It is after this scene that Magdalen considers suicide; she is living in a world of exaggeration in which only that most drastic of measures is a possible alternative to the achieving of her goal. Her desire to regain her inheritance is not only stronger than any other emotion, it also overwhelms her intellect. Magdalen is reasoning clearly and correctly, her mind seems balanced and she sees her own position 'unflinchingly', yet nothing is strong enough to dislodge her dominant idea: it is this which governs her actions, regardless of how she feels or what she thinks about what she is doing; she cannot see beyond the achievement of her goal.

The two things suggested as possible combatants of this idea are both emotions: horror and hope. Magdalen's intellectual and reasoning faculties allow her to view her situation clearly, but they are not otherwise brought into the struggle. The relation between the passions and the intellect was an important area of Victorian debate. As the previous chapter discussed, the sway of the emotions was seen as the dominant cause of insanity in many early- and mid-Victorian theories; identifying whether the emotions or the intellect (or both) were at fault was of great importance. For example, the psychiatrist John Charles Bucknill (writing primarily about moral insanity) emphasised emotion over intellect as a cause of insanity and suggested that those who felt otherwise (particularly in the legal world) were adversely influenced by a utilitarian philosophy which 'developes [sic] all the natural and healthy emotions of the human mind from the operation of the reasoning faculties'.<sup>11</sup> Such a philosophy necessarily disallowed 'the possibility of the secondary and dependent faculties [i.e. the emotions] becoming perverted and diseased, while their origin and cause remained healthy', and therefore seemed 'imperatively to forbid the supposition that moral insanity can exist without previous intellectual disease' (ibid., p.80.). Bucknill dismissed such theories, claiming that it was emotion, not intellect, that prompts an individual to action and concluding that '*insanity is always in the first instance emotional*' (ibid., p.85) because 'in the varied play of the emotive faculties, is to be found the true key of human action' (ibid., p. 86).

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<sup>11</sup> John Charles Bucknill, 'The Law and the Theory of Insanity', *British and Foreign Medico-Chirurgical Review*, 13 (January, 1854) 76-93 (p.79). Further references are given after quotations.

Collins's description of Magdalen's inner state accords with such theories of insanity by finding its source in a disrupted emotional state.

It was observed by psychiatrists that the change in the emotional state eventually led to alterations in the insane individual's relationship with those around them, as J.E.D. Esquirol explained in his description of a lunatic asylum: 'social bonds are broken; habits are changed; friendships cease; confidence is destroyed [...] With no community of thoughts, each lives alone and for himself. Egotism isolates all'.<sup>12</sup> Esquirol emphasises the emotional isolation of the lunatic in relation to family and friends: 'the insane often entertain an aversion towards persons who were previously dear to them. They insult, misuse, and fly from them. It is a result, however, of their distrust, jealousy and fear. Opposed to all, they fear all' (pp.26-27). Esquirol adds that feelings of affection for friends and relations may remain, but that 'this tenderness, which is sometimes excessive, exists without confidence, and without intimacy' (ibid). Read in the light of such accounts of insanity the 'unscrupulous selfishness' that provoked Chorley's disdain of Magdalen may be viewed as a symptom of her unstable mental state (Chorley, p.10). Magdalen's altered relationships with Miss Garth and Norah are also in keeping with Esquirol's description and are particularly apparent in the letters that she writes when separated from them. At the news of her father's death, Magdalen is curiously unresponsive, telling others: 'Don't speak to me; don't touch me. Let me bear it by myself' (p.83). Once her fiancé Frank Clare has abandoned her after the loss of her fortune, Magdalen refuses to see any of her old acquaintances. She tells Norah, in a letter, that she will see her eventually, and assures her 'My heart is true to you, Norah—but I dare not see you yet' (p.259). Her letter to Miss Garth shows a further withdrawal from them as she concludes that the 'best thing you can do for both of us, is to forget me' (p.260). This condition of emotional withdrawal was known as 'moral alienation', a doubly pertinent phrase here as Magdalen is both emotionally and ethically isolated from her previous life (Esquirol, p.27).

For many medical theorists, the key to controlling wayward emotions (and therefore to fending off potential insanity) was the assertion of willpower.

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<sup>12</sup> J.E.D. Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity* (1838), trans. by E.K. Hunt (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), p.20. Further references are given after quotations.

This was because, as Janet Oppenheim observes, 'virtually all Victorian and Edwardian attitudes toward adult mental health and illness were constructed' on the 'concept of the will', and the 'ability to reason, to exercise judgement, to fulfil one's role in life were all contingent on the operations of the will, for if that became inadequate to its directing task, the personality disintegrated'.<sup>13</sup> The will was a guiding force which directed, suppressed or enhanced the multitude of thoughts and emotions which arose either from within the mind through mental association or as a response to external stimulus; it chose which impulses to respond to, and what form those responses should take.

Perhaps the most frequent exponent and explicator of willpower in the mid-Victorian period was William Benjamin Carpenter. Individual conceptions of exactly what the will was and how it worked differed, but Carpenter's theories were highly influential.<sup>14</sup> Carpenter described the will as carrying 'into action the determination of the intellect'.<sup>15</sup> It is in the cerebrum, 'the instrument of all psychical activity', that psychical desires and impulses are conveyed to the physical body, prompting the actions which result in their achievement.<sup>16</sup> Carpenter's theory of will was directly linked to his conception of determinism:

Our characters are in the first instance formed *for* us by our original constitution and the conditions of its early development. But in proportion as the Will acquires domination over the Automatic tendencies, our characters are shaped *by* ourselves; the succession of our ideas and the play of our emotions are brought under its

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<sup>13</sup> Janet Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves: Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England* (New York: OUP, 1991), p.43.

<sup>14</sup> I draw heavily on Carpenter's theories because they were well known and relatively mainstream: Carpenter was read by medical students and practitioners, and admirably referred to in medical articles, for example, Bucknill, (p.93). He was also recommended to laypersons, for example, G.W. Child, 'Physiological Psychology', *Westminster Review*, 89 (January, 1868), 37-65 (p.56).

<sup>15</sup> W.B. Carpenter 'The Physiology of the Will', *Contemporary Review*, 17 (April, 1871), 192-217 (p.198). Further references are given after quotations. Although this article was published almost a decade after *No Name*, many theories in it were expressed in Carpenter's *Principles of Human Physiology* (1855). He probably chose to print this article at this time because he was preparing *Principles of Mental Physiology* (see n.17).

<sup>16</sup> Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology: With Their Chief Applications to Psychology, Pathology, Therapeutics, Hygiene, & Forensic Medicine* (1842), 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Churchill, 1855), p.653. Further references are given after quotations. *Human Physiology* was first published in 1842 (the 1<sup>st</sup> edition's subtitle adds that it is 'especially designed for the use of students'); 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (1844); 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (1846); 4<sup>th</sup> edn (1853); 5<sup>th</sup> edn (1855). The 6<sup>th</sup> edn (1864) was significantly edited as Carpenter removed the sections on mental physiology, intending to create a separate book on the subject; this did not happen until 1874 when he published *Principles of Mental Physiology*.

regulation; and our conduct in life comes to be the expression of our best energies, directed by the motives which we elect as our guiding principles of action. (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.199)

Carpenter believed in the possibility of self-cultivation through the exertion of the will, and therefore of personal responsibility, but only to a certain extent. 'Automatic tendencies' in the mind were the non-physical equivalent of automatic bodily actions such as the heartbeat or breathing, over which the individual had little or no control: thoughts and emotions were prompted by a mental association with a previous thought or external stimuli. A key element of Carpenter's theory of will is that it does not create thoughts or emotions, its power is purely directional: a person cannot help the thoughts that come into his or her head, but these mental processes are subject to volitional control, and a 'duly cultivated' will 'can regulate the course of Thought and the degree of Emotional excitement; intensifying some of these actions, and repressing others, by determinant efforts directed with that special purpose' (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.652).

Yet the will was not all-powerful in its ability to subjugate the automatic aspects of man's mind. When the will failed to control the thoughts and emotions, the 'reflex power' of the cerebrum was allowed 'too great a predominance, so that trains of ideas and states of feeling succeed each other automatically, and all the actions of the individual are simply the expressions of these' (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.653). Whilst the will was 'guided by the Intelligence' it was also 'acted-on by the desires and emotions' (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.12). The strength of a person's willpower was measured by the extent to which the will could perform its controlling function, only allowing action as a response to constructive and desirable emotions. The degree of self-determinism a person possessed was therefore reliant on the strength and cultivation of the willpower: 'in proportion as [a human being] acquires the power of *self-control*, does he become capable of emancipating himself from the domination of his automatic tendencies, and of turning his faculties to the most advantageous use' (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', pp.207-08).

Whilst the key to personal development was self-control, Carpenter saw insanity as characterised by 'a partial or complete deficiency in the Volitional control over the current of thought, and consequently over the actions which are the expressions of it' (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.656). In the case of monomania:

some one particular tendency acquires a dominance over the rest; and this may happen, it would seem, either from an extraordinary exaggeration of the tendency, whereby it comes to overmaster even a strongly-exercised Volitional control; or, on the other hand, from a primary weakening of the Volitional control, which leaves the predominant bias of the individual free to exercise itself. (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.659)

Carpenter gives an impression of internal conflict; the volition is in combat with a persistent 'tendency' which singles itself out from the other automatic thoughts and emotions that the will directs. Collins is similarly building up a multi-layered image of the human psyche in which the will and the emotions fight for control. Magdalen's dominant idea is an automatic response to the loss of her parents, her lover and her fortune, which has taken control of her cerebral functions, overwhelming all other emotional impulses and subjugating her will.

At the root of this depiction of the shifting, mutable mind, however, is the conviction that each person has what Carpenter calls an 'original constitution', that which we have within us at birth and which will be improved or marred by the external influences to which we are exposed (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.199). An early passage in *No Name* shows that Collins also conceived people as having original constitutions. After Mr and Mrs Vanstone are killed, Miss Garth is shocked when Magdalen eavesdrops outside a window to learn the truth about her and her sister's illegitimate status and disinheritance. Musing on the responses of the sisters to their parents' deaths, Miss Garth wonders if she has misunderstood the apparently open and exuberant Magdalen, and her reserved, sombre sister Norah. Miss Garth begins to have thoughts which, the narrator is certain, 'have startled and saddened us all' (p.115). This passage is worth quoting at length because, although written as

speculation, it is revealing of basic beliefs and uncertainties upon which Collins draws, and which he depicts throughout his fiction:

Does there exist in every human being, beneath that outward and visible character which is shaped into form by the social influences surrounding us, an inward, invisible disposition, which is part of ourselves; which education may indirectly modify, but can never hope to change? Is the philosophy which denies this, and asserts that we are born with dispositions like blank sheets of paper, a philosophy which has failed to remark that we are not born with blank faces - a philosophy which has never compared together two infants of a few days old, and has never observed that those infants are not born with blank tempers for mothers and nurses to fill up at will? Are there, infinitely varying with each individual, inbred forces of Good and Evil in all of us, deep down below the reach of mortal encouragement and mortal repression - hidden Good and hidden Evil, both alike at the mercy of the liberating opportunity and the sufficient temptation? Within these earthly limits, is earthly Circumstance ever the key; and can no human vigilance warn us beforehand of the forces imprisoned in ourselves which that key *may* unlock? (p.116)

Here Collins reacts to a Lockean *tabula rasa* philosophy which developed, as Rick Rylance explains, into nineteenth-century associationism and which theorized that 'the mind was primarily created in experience and the role of innate ideas was negligible'.<sup>17</sup> Associationism 'assumes that mental life is derived from sensory and perceptual stimulation. In childhood, these stimuli establish the fundamental structures of mind, which is empty without them'.<sup>18</sup> It assumed, in other words, that babies are 'born with blank tempers'. Collins did not deny the association of ideas, but he objects, in the above passage, to such theories about the origin of those ideas.<sup>19</sup> The alternative that Collins offers is delivered in sensational terms: not only may there be 'inbred forces of Good and Evil in all of us', but those forces may be 'deep down below the reach of mortal encouragement and mortal repression'. The melodramatic references to

<sup>17</sup> Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p.40.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p.57.

<sup>19</sup> Collins often employed unconscious cerebration (established by Carpenter), which relied on the idea of the reflex association of thoughts proceeding 'without our knowledge' (*Human Physiology*, p.609). Most famously in *The Moonstone* (1868) a discussion about the jewel leads to fears about its theft and the unconscious carrying out of that theft (Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone* (London: Pan, 1868), pp.477-78). In *No Name*, Mrs Lecount realises who Magdalen is through an unconscious train of thought (p.308).



'Good and Evil' and the indelible nature of each individual's basic personality gives a startling and saddening slant to ideas of inherent disposition because in such a train of thought human beings are powerless to react against the 'forces' within themselves. Collins's repeated reference to 'ourselves' implicates the reader in this powerlessness and negates the possibility of self-improvement at the most fundamental level.

However, it is significant that Collins refers to Good *and* Evil. Magdalen is not (unlike *Basil's* Margaret) an evil woman who has been educated for a time into acting in an acceptable manner, until she is exposed to 'the liberating opportunity and the sufficient temptation' (ibid.), she contains potential for both elements. Collins aimed to make Magdalen's 'a pathetic character even in its perversity and its error' (p.xxvii); one means of achieving this is by regularly reminding the reader that there are inherently admirable qualities in Magdalen. For example, when she visits Noel Vanstone, Magdalen may be disguised as Miss Garth but her words are honest in their intent, and in their intensity:

If that miserable girl was married and rich with millions to-morrow, do you think she would move an inch from her purpose? I tell you she would resist, to the last breath in her body, the vile injustice which has struck at the helpless children, through the calamity of their father's death! (p.236)

Importantly, Magdalen emphasises the fact that she is acting out of a sense of 'injustice', not for mercenary purposes. Furthermore, by the end of this speech Magdalen inadvertently speaks in her own undisguised voice, a mistake which Collins attributes to her internal moral struggle: 'once more, her own indomitable earnestness had betrayed her. Once more, the inborn nobility of that perverted nature had risen superior to the deception which it had stooped to practise' (p.236). The implication is that there is something intrinsically honourable within Magdalen which sabotages her own dishonesty. In fact, here Collins emphasises the inherence of her admirable features ('nobility' is 'inborn' within her), and suggests that her 'nature' has been 'perverted' on another, more immediate, level. By championing Magdalen's inherent goodness in this way, Collins implies that Magdalen's original constitution is basically virtuous,

but capable of immoral and improper behaviour.

Despite claims of Magdalen's 'inborn nobility' and although, as Law and Maunder argue, Collins 'positions her so that we feel sympathy for her' (Law and Maunder, p.87), some Victorian reviewers refused to be won over. Chorley was insensitive to Magdalen's conviction that she is following a 'strong desire to right a cruel injustice' (Chorley, p.10). Whereas Collins suggests there must be 'nobility' within Magdalen because she is able to do the right thing in the end, Chorley reverses this and asserts that there must be

coarseness, as well as meanness, in one capable of such actions and expedients as these [...] her persistence in her evil purpose can only be explained by admitting that there existed in the heroine's character hard and (we repeat) coarse elements, which deprive her of our sympathy. (Chorley, p.11)

Chorley's assessment of Magdalen is almost uniformly damning, twice insisting that there must be something fundamentally disagreeable and defective in her 'character' which allows her to act as she does; this is enough to render her unsympathetic.

In contemporary debates relating to insanity, criminality, and personal responsibility, it was widely acknowledged that the situation was not so simple: psychiatrists and physicians spent much time and effort attempting to pinpoint the root and causes of an individual's moral perversion; only after considering these options could one decide how much 'sympathy' an individual deserved. Personal responsibility was not only dictated by whether or not a person could control his or her own behaviour, but which aspects of his or her physical and mental constitution were dictating that behaviour. It was also important to consider why such people had begun to suffer from whatever condition was afflicting them, and what role their wills had played in the course of events. For example John Barlow (favourably quoting an anonymous physician) claimed of monomania that it 'is more often owing to a want of moral control over the mind than to any unsoundness of the intellectual faculties'.<sup>20</sup> Carpenter's theories of insanity show a similar endorsement of moral management and the

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<sup>20</sup> John Barlow, *On Man's Power over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity* (1843), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Pickering, 1849), p.73. Further references are given after quotations.

assertion of self-discipline. In the case of moral insanity, for example, he argued that 'nothing else is requisite, than that [the patient] should exercise an adequate amount of self-control' (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.659).

Carpenter separated actions into three 'modes': the previously discussed automatic, which the will did not control; voluntary, which were guided and permitted by the will; and volitional, in which an assertion of willpower was required to perform acts (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.195). So while the will could not prevent the occurrence of inappropriate or undesirable thoughts and feelings, Carpenter insisted that

it is the *acceptance* of them by the *permission* of the will, that makes them Voluntary, and brings them within the sphere of moral action; whilst it is the *intentional direction* of the attention to them, which gives them their Volitional character, and makes the *ego* fully responsible for them. (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.214)

If people did not exercise their wills to the best of their ability then they became proportionally responsible for their behaviour. Although Magdalen eventually fights her fixed idea, she is described as having initially pursued her goal 'of her own free will', her purpose had initially been 'governed' by her, rather than vice versa (p.396). Magdalen has, it would appear, brought this situation upon herself, abandoning herself to the emotions that subsequently overtake her. Collins therefore intimates that her behaviour would, at least for a moment, have fallen into what Carpenter would deem the category of voluntary (if not volitional) actions, allowing the desire to regain her fortune to take control and thus making her at least partially morally responsible.

Collins's portrayal of Magdalen shares some of the ambiguities and difficulties of mid-Victorian psycho-physiological theories such as Carpenter's. As we have seen, both Collins and Carpenter subscribe to the idea that people possess inherent personality traits or tendencies which may be altered by later life experiences. It therefore follows that some individuals will naturally possess more or less willpower and/or powerful emotions which require guidance than others; some will have more chance of successful self-cultivation than others. There is much in the descriptions of Magdalen to suggest that her

emotions are inherently intense and not easily restrained. She is good-natured but wild and excitable: she has 'large, electric, light-grey eyes' that 'were hardly ever in repose; all varieties of expression followed each other over the plastic, ever-changing face, with a giddy rapidity which left sober analysis far behind in the race' (p.8). The narrator maintains that this is a sign of 'overflowing physical health' (p.9), but the 'giddy rapidity' of incessant movement also suggests emotional or mental instability.

Magdalen hungers after any event that will thrill her nerves:

I want to go to another concert—or a play, if you like—or a ball, if you prefer it—or, anything else in the way of amusement that puts me into a new dress, and plunges me into a crowd of people, and illuminates me with plenty of light, and sets me in a tingle of excitement all over, from head to foot. (p.10)

Merely expressing her craving for physical and emotional stimuli generates great excitement. Andrew Mangham observes that the vitality of Magdalen conveys 'over-abundant sexual energies', and that this 'is accompanied by more menacing ideas of excess'.<sup>21</sup> Similar signs of 'excess' are apparent when the narrator describes how Magdalen has a 'curious fancy for having her hair combed at all times and seasons' (p.39):

The girl's fervid temperament intensified the essentially feminine pleasure that most women feel in the passage of the comb through their hair, to a luxury of sensation which absorbed her in enjoyment, so serenely self-demonstrative, so drowsily deep, that it did irresistibly suggest a pet cat's enjoyment under a caressing hand.

(p.40)

Magdalen's 'fervid temperament' suggests an ardent nature that feels emotional and sensual pleasures intently (more than 'most women feel') and is inclined to indulge them.

Such an excitable, powerful capacity for emotion would require the restraining influence of a strong and disciplined will. Carpenter believed that the willpower should be trained from infancy because 'those early habits of

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<sup>21</sup> Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.184.

thought and feeling, which exert an enormous influence over our whole subsequent mental life, are formed *for us* rather than *by us*' (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.205). For this reason, Carpenter was a great advocate of education which helped 'the development of the self-directing power' (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.551). Barlow similarly stated that to 'educate a man, in the full and proper sense of the word, is to supply him with the power of controlling his feelings, and his thoughts, and his actions' (Barlow, p.59). Barlow drew a distinction between different forms of deficient willpower, arguing that the 'poor' and 'uneducated' tended to suffer from an '*inefficiency of intellectual force*', whilst within the 'higher ranks' the intellectual force was misdirected (Barlow, pp.53-54).

Carpenter took such earlier conceptions of willpower further and identified three major ways in which the directing power of the will could become a negative force. A person may be of a '*brutal*' character, developed 'under the influence of circumstances which have tended to develop the lower propensities into passions, without calling forth any power of Volitional control', such people were not to be considered 'as responsible beings' (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.216). People of this type were uneducated and underprivileged: Although Magdalen's passions may be unruly, she is raised in a loving, respectable and affluent home and cannot realistically be classed as of a '*brutal*' character.

At the other end of the spectrum there was the out-and-out villain (Carpenter uses the example of Iago) who turned his volitional power to self-seeking ends: 'such men show us to what evil account the highest Intellect and the most powerful Will may be turned, when directed by the baser class of motives'; these people are morally lower than 'those who have never been taught the meaning of love and truth, kindness and honesty' (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.217). Collins has created such characters in diverse shapes like the villainous mastermind Count Fosco and the opportunist Captain Wragge, but Magdalen does not fall into this category as her volition is explicitly depicted as struggling against her drive to regain her fortune using any means necessary.

Alternatively, Carpenter speculated, a person may be capable of exercising volition under normal circumstances, but may not have made a habit of doing so. Carpenter argued that if a girl drowned herself after a lovers' quarrel, or a maid killed a child in a temper, she may be temporarily insane, but would be 'morally responsible for that crime, in so far as she has habitually neglected to control the wayward feelings whose strong excitement has compelled her to its commission' (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.216). This seems closer to an accurate description of Magdalen, as there is much in Collins's depiction of her to suggest that she is not an individual who is used to exerting (and so developing) the controlling power of her will, leaving it defenceless when she is influenced by her own wayward emotions. Pykett argues that Collins shows how 'the disaster which befalls the Vanstone sisters is the result of an unjust law' but that 'the novel's focusing on Magdalen's excessive emotions and her scheming also has the effect of transferring the reader's attention and perhaps also the blame [...] onto her perverse femininity and her obsessive desire for revenge and restitution'.<sup>22</sup> Certainly the blame of critics such as Chorley fell heavily on Magdalen, and Carpenter's theories above also suggest that Magdalen is to an extent 'morally responsible'. However, it may also be asked why Magdalen's willpower is so uncultivated.

Prichard placed great emphasis on a lack of early discipline in pinpointing reasons for insanity:

By too great indulgence and a want of moral discipline, the passions acquire greater power, and a character is formed subject to caprice and to violent emotions: a predisposition to insanity is thus laid in the temper and moral affections of the individual.<sup>23</sup>

This is particularly relevant to Magdalen's situation. Collins takes care in describing Magdalen's home life and behaviour before the death of her parents, revealing a loving but overly indulgent environment with little discipline. For example, at one point Magdalen wants to perform in a play and finds it easy to

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<sup>22</sup> Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel: From 'The Woman in White' to 'The Moonstone'* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishing, 1994), pp.23-24.

<sup>23</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (London: Marchant, 1835), p.172.

convince her father:

“Say yes,” she pleaded, nestling softly up to her father, and pressing her lips with a fond gentleness to his ear, as she whispered the next words. “Say Yes—and I’ll be a good girl for the rest of my life.”

“A good girl?” repeated Mr Vanstone—“A mad girl, I think you must mean.” (p.33)

Mr Vanstone’s constant lenience allows Magdalen to follow her every whim without forethought or deliberation and fails to prepare her mentally or morally for the disaster to come, making his words both prophetic and causal. Despite the remonstrations of Miss Garth and Mrs Vanstone, Magdalen’s father is unconcerned about his daughter’s high spirits: ‘she’s an unbroken filly. Let her caper and kick in the paddock to her heart’s content. Time enough to break her to harness, when she gets a little older’ (p.11). Obviously these words are ill-fated as the death of her parents means that Magdalen has no opportunity to be “broken to harness”.

Later in the novel, Magdalen’s erratic energies become focussed on the achievement of her dominant idea, resulting in a distinct physical change:

There was a settled composure on her face which, except when she spoke, made it look as still and cold as marble. Her voice was softer and more equable, her eyes were steadier, her step was slower than of old. When she smiled, the smile came and went suddenly, and showed a little nervous contraction on one side of her mouth, never visible there before. (p.267)

This is reminiscent of Mannion’s remarkably inexpressive countenance, yet Magdalen never quite achieves the same level of physical restraint: the ‘nervous contraction’ is a telling sign of inner strife which is later manifest in her inability to maintain complete composure around Noel Vanstone. Yet Magdalen is driven to continue her purpose as forcefully as Mannion; whilst her frequent outbreaks are representative of her disgust with her own actions, her composure and ability to fake a flirtation with Vanstone are dictated by her dominant idea. For example, as the wedding approaches, Magdalen demands that she be allowed two days away from Vanstone as she has been ‘tortured

enough' (p.358). She has a passionate outbreak and then asks Captain Wragge for forgiveness on the grounds that she is 'only a girl' (ibid). The torture she has endured, however, has been brought about by her own actions and, even as she voices her disgust of Vanstone, she declares 'I'll go through with it to the end' (ibid). Once again, no emotional or ethical aspect within her character is enough to challenge the ultimate force of her dominant idea. Whilst Magdalen apologises for being 'only a girl' because it stops her from being able to endure Vanstone's company any longer, it is a reminder of her youth and inexperience, and the fact that she is psychologically unprepared to resist her monomaniacal imperative. Carpenter asserted that 'a great deal of what is commonly termed *wilfulness* is in reality just the contrary of will-fullness; being the direct result of the *want* of volitional control over the automatic operation of the brain' (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.206); this seems particularly pertinent here.

Collins hoped to fulfil his desire of making Magdalen 'a pathetic character [...] by a resolute adherence, throughout, to the truth as it is in Nature' (p.xxvii). Whilst there is, as usual in Collins's prefaces, a defensiveness against those who may take offence against either his choice of subject matter, or who may dismiss his work as unrealistic due to its status as sensation fiction, it can be seen from this reading of the character of Magdalen that he has taken pains to portray the psychological and environmental determining factors which influence her behaviour during the course of the novel.

Magdalen's recovery and redemption is equally enmeshed with deterministic thinking. Sally Shuttleworth observes a tendency in Victorian sensation fiction for women to suffer from hereditary insanity which cannot be overcome, a situation which reflects their 'negative economic placement' in society.<sup>24</sup> Conversely, men tend to be 'placed in positions of economic possibility', and in a corresponding manner 'the threat of insanity that hangs over them is rarely an inescapable physiological destiny, but rather a partial, temporary form, which can be shaken off through self-discipline and a

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<sup>24</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, "'Preaching to the Nerves": Psychological Disorder in Sensation Fiction', in *A Question of Identity: Women, Science, and Literature*, ed. by Marina Benjamin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), pp.192-222 (p.205).



transformation of lifestyle'.<sup>25</sup> In *No Name*, however, Magdalen appears to suffer from a "masculine" form of mental instability - by an effort of willpower she finally overcomes her revengeful desires and seems ready to regain the ranks of respectability. Thus, when Magdalen discovers that Norah, through marriage, has come into possession of the fortune that she has been pursuing throughout the novel:

Good and Evil struggled once more which should win her [...] All the higher impulses of her nature, which had never, from first to last, let her err with impunity - which had tortured her, before her marriage and after it, with the remorse that no woman inherently heartless and inherently wicked can feel - all the nobler elements in her character gathered their forces for the crowning struggle, and strengthened her to meet, with no unworthy shrinking, the revelation that had opened on her view [...] she had victoriously trampled down all little jealousies and all mean regrets; she could say in her heart of hearts, "Norah has deserved it!" (p.598)

Collins's language is suggestive here of a number of different, and potentially conflicting, forms of determinism. The initial sentence depicts Good and Evil as external, abstract forces competing on the battleground of the mortal world. Yet as the paragraph progresses, these forces are internalized and become facets of Magdalen's 'nature': 'Good' is composed of 'all the nobler elements in her character'; 'Evil' is comprised of 'little jealousies' and 'mean regrets'. Thus, at once the internal ethical struggle is given a sense of grandeur, and a great Manichaeistic conflict is shown in the light of 'influences' we have all 'felt' and 'known'. The world of human emotions is both mundane and representative of vast, intangible moral forces which, conversely, only take on importance as they are channelled through, and translated into, understandable human feelings and actions. Magdalen's volition has ostensibly finally found the strength it needs to overcome her monomaniacal drive.

As we have seen, Collins was not entirely successful in making Magdalen a 'pathetic' character as far as some critics were concerned. In her critical review of *No Name*, Margaret Oliphant was unconvinced that Magdalen deserves a happy ending, complaining that she was allowed to emerge, 'at the cheap cost

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<sup>25</sup> *ibid*, p.206.

of a fever, as pure, as high-minded, and as spotless as the most dazzling white of heroines'.<sup>26</sup> Deborah Wynne has noted that 'although sensation novelists usually provided conservative solutions at the ends of their novels, their complex depictions of subversive possibilities are prominently placed for most of the narrative, suggesting alternatives without necessarily endorsing them'.<sup>27</sup> In *No Name*, however, the 'conservative solution' is not clear-cut: the worthy (such as Norah and Kirke) receive material benefits by the end of the novel, but so do those who are less morally upright. Captain Wragge uses the profits from his dealings with Magdalen to set himself up in the business of quackery and becomes 'solvent, flourishing, popular' (p.585); Mrs Lecount ends up living in 'honourable and prosperous retirement' (p.523). What particularly offended Oliphant, however, was that Magdalen "gets away with it" in a whole other sense: it is precisely because she suffers from a fever and recovers that she gains an aura of redemption and favourable moral judgement. Hughes argues that in *No Name* 'the primitive moral scheme of stage melodrama, generally under assault in the sensation novel, has broken down altogether, leaving behind only pallid abstractions of the vital principles that were once personified in hero and villain' (Hughes, p.145). Viewing things slightly differently, I argue that whereas *Basil* maintains in modified form such staples of the genre as the dichotomy of hero and villain, and the victory of Good over Evil, in *No Name* these Manichaeistic forces are internalized within Magdalen's own psyche; she is both hero and villain. As a heroine she quests to restore what she perceives to be moral justice to her world through the restoration of the inheritance which represents her parents' devotion to herself and her sister, her old worldview which has been shattered by their deaths, and her social identity. As a villain she adopts some distinctly improper means of achieving this outcome.

The novel accords with melodramatic tenets in that Magdalen's dishonest plans are thwarted, whilst the unerringly virtuous Norah (who displays patience equal to *Basil's* Clara) is rewarded with the restoration of her fortune. The morally restored Magdalen is also rewarded, however, as she is to share in

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<sup>26</sup> Margaret Oliphant, 'Novels', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 94 (August, 1863), 168-83 (p.170).

<sup>27</sup> Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), p.149.

that fortune. Like Basil, Magdalen sins, suffers and is redeemed, but despite the driving out of the perverted part of her nature, *No Name* lacks the purgative quality of *Basil*: there is no literal villain's death, no physical removal of the immoral threat; all changes are internal. The diminishment of the symbolic, morally polarizing drive of melodrama means that the transgressive possibilities suggested by Magdalen's immoral behaviour are not clearly expelled. Moreover, as Hughes rightly observes, 'Magdalen gets exactly what she wants' (Hughes, p.152): the fortune has been returned to the family. Magdalen, furthermore, is temporarily the recipient of the fortune bestowed by the secret trust. Whilst her destroying the trust is described as the 'last sacrifice of the old perversity and the old pride' (p.607), it is also something of an empty gesture as her aim was to have the fortune restored regardless of how it was done. In terms of monomania, Magdalen's dominant idea has been satisfied.

The critical dislike of Magdalen, and the unwillingness to allow her moral leeway, reflects the fears articulated by those concerned with the legal profession and its relationship to insanity. Whilst there was a general acceptance in medical circles of partial insanity, including a growing acknowledgement of moral insanity as a valid form of madness, this, as Henry Maudsley observed, led to the fear of people 'making out all sorts of vice and crime to be insanity'.<sup>28</sup> In the popular press, the public was made increasingly aware of the subject. In 1864, for example, *The Cornhill Magazine* described two different forms of insanity to its readers. In the "classic" form a man's 'hostile demeanour and murderous designs would be natural and legitimate, if his impression as to the facts were correct'.<sup>29</sup> The other type was closer in essence to instinctive monomania, in which 'a man may feel that he is on the verge of committing murder or suicide' and feels compelled to act because 'he is the

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<sup>28</sup> Henry Maudsley, 'Practical Observations on Insanity of Feeling and of Action', *Lancet*, 87:2234 (23 June, 1866), 679-80 (p.679).

<sup>29</sup> Coke Richardson, 'Extenuating Circumstances', *Cornhill Magazine*, 9 (February, 1864), 210-18 (p.211). Other popular periodical accounts concerning the difficulty of defining and treating lunacy in relation to criminal cases include 'Criminal Lunatics', by Charles Thomas Browne, *Temple Bar*, 1 (December, 1860), 135-43, which suggests that ordinary juries should not be used in criminal cases involving claims of lunacy. An example of instinctive monomania is discussed in chapter 5.

sport of an irresistible impulse'.<sup>30</sup> Such differentiations inevitably led to a consideration of the debates relating to personal responsibility in relation to criminality and insanity in the Victorian period. Whilst many felt that if an individual was truly incapable of controlling his or her own behaviour due to insanity they were entitled to sympathy and help, rather than punishment, it was also widely recognised that there was a danger of criminals being either unfairly incarcerated, or being given the means to evade execution by being declared insane.

In 1850 the *New Monthly Magazine* ran an article which began by citing the case of Robert Pate who was partially insane, suffered from 'imaginary persecutions', made 'an assault upon the person of her Majesty' and was subsequently transported for seven years.<sup>31</sup> The article asserted that insane criminals should not go unpunished, but suggested that conventional punishment was inappropriate. It adopts a viewpoint which was espoused by several "mad-doctors" (such as Conolly, quoted in the previous chapter), that not only is insanity difficult to measure, but that to speak of sanity itself as a normal mental state was rarely appropriate. The article advises its readers that the question for consideration 'in estimating the qualities of our fellow-creatures, is not whether anyone exists whose mind and body are thus perfectly sane, but what is the relative degree of his or her divergence from the perfect type' (ibid., p.405). It goes on to assert that 'few crimes are committed in a state of sanity': theft is therefore a 'mere manifestation of uncontrolled or diseased acquisitiveness'; violent and murderous acts are often 'the result of passions aroused to a maddened and uncontrollable degree' (ibid., p.406). In this manner, the article separates a diagnosis of insanity from a right to leniency, observing that 'if insanity was to be a shield to either punishment or prevention, the plea might be advanced in almost every instance of evil done' (ibid., p.407). The article solves the dilemma of how to treat a criminal who was not in their right senses at the time of committing the crime by classing 'confinement in an asylum and medical treatment' as a form of punishment

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<sup>30</sup> ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Anon., 'Responsibility of Monomaniacs', *New Monthly Magazine and Humorist*, 89 (August, 1850), 404-08 (p.404). Further references are given after quotations.

(ibid., p.404). A consideration of the extent to which a criminal has departed from a sane state at the point of committing the crime, as well as his or her current mental state, should dictate whether a “medical” or “criminal” punishment is more appropriate.

In 1862, only three weeks before *No Name* was serialized, *All the Year Round* ran an article entitled ‘M.D. and M.A.D.’ which would not have favourably predisposed readers towards Magdalen and her behaviour. It argued that mad-doctors were far too quick to condemn people as lunatics who exhibited antisocial or otherwise inappropriate behaviour. As in the *New Monthly Magazine*, this article suggests that perfect sanity is a rare condition. It draws a comparison between mental and physical health in order to suggest that unsoundness of mind, unless very severe, should not be considered unnatural:

There is no clear dividing line between sickness and health of mind; unsoundness of mind is, no doubt, as various and common as unsoundness of body [...] But we do not condemn our bodies as unfit for use when there are corns on our toes [...we] do our duty in the world as far as our infirmity permits. So it is with the mind. Every man has his weak place; his twist, his hobby.<sup>32</sup>

By essentially asserting that no one is entirely mentally stable, this article gives the impression that everyone is in the same boat, and must therefore do the best they can. The writer goes on to argue that ‘in honest truth, every criminal is a lunatic; but he is a lunatic who would admit, except under the most obviously exceptional conditions, any such plea as a bar to responsibility’ (ibid). Whilst the opinion that crime is a sign of lunacy is in keeping with the *New Monthly’s* claim that to break the law is not to be ‘in a state of sanity’, the tones of the articles are very different. Rather than advocating medical treatment for lunatic criminals, this article explicitly prioritizes social order over any concept of absolute justice.

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<sup>32</sup> Anon., ‘M.D. and M.A.D.’, *All the Year Round*, 6 (22 February, 1862), 510-13 (p.511). Further references are given after quotations. For another example of opposition to supposedly weak and indulgent attitudes towards crime and insanity see: Anon., ‘Insanity and Its Treatment’, *Belgravia*, 10 (February, 1870), 467-78, which protested against ‘mischievous and indiscriminate kindness’ being shown to the insane (p.467).

The influence of heredity is also referred to as a further reason why individuals might not be capable of controlling their own behaviour: an individual may inherit 'characters or forms of mind as well as forms of body, and a neglected untaught man may be no more able to control this or that evil turn of character, than he may be able to control the shape of his nose' (ibid). Yet, this greater emphasis on hereditary determinism does not prompt a sympathetic response when considered in the light of criminality as judges 'must give up society to anarchy, or shut their eyes to such metaphysical distinctions' (ibid). Emphasis is moved from the diagnosing of lunacy to the crime itself. The opinions expressed in 'M.D. and M.A.D.' resemble those adopted by critics such as Chorley in relation to Magdalen. Whilst they generally observe that she has a valid grievance, it is the means she adopts to overcome that grievance which are reprehensible; any mental peculiarities she may possess which could render her irresponsible for her actions are not sufficient to excuse her.

Collins tried to make Magdalen both sensational and sympathetic, but by drawing on the discourse and theories of insanity, he raised the same ethical and social dilemmas concerning personal responsibility and the assignment of blame within *No Name* as those debated in medical and popular works on the subject. The difficulty of "judging" Magdalen conclusively, either in terms of her mental health or her responsibility (and blameworthiness) for her behaviour, is complicated because Collins draws on conceptions of insanity which emphasised the need for willpower and self-control. Such theories placed their faith in the power of the will, at the same time as they emphasised its vulnerability to fierce passions, poor cultivation and abuse; to draw lines where control or responsibility began or ended was impossible. Nevertheless, proponents of these theories (such as Carpenter) retained a belief in the potential for self-determinism. This is something which, as we shall see in the next chapter, was increasingly threatened as the century progressed.

## Chapter 4

### 'Mad Monkton' and *Armadale*: Generating Degeneration?

Talk as we will and think as we will of the freedom of the will, of moral sense and of moral responsibility, we cannot deny the obvious influence of purely physical agents (to use the current phraseology) upon purely mental phenomena; we cannot pretend that we have any experience of mind or mental action independently of matter; we cannot ignore the modifying effects of different courses of life upon the elements which go to make up character, we cannot draw a line between what we may please to call merely nervous phenomena and mental action; above all, we cannot escape from the great overhanging cloud of hereditary influences, the fact that moral and intellectual traits follow down a race from father to son, or reappear in more remote descendants, exactly as do peculiarities of feature or diseased states of bodily constitution, such as scrofula and gout.<sup>1</sup>

(G.W. Child, 'Physiological Psychology', 1868)

There is absolutely no limit to this law of material and immaterial heredity. The physical defects, the physical beauty; the meanness of spirit, the nobility of soul; all things that make us petty and despicable, all that make us wise and excellent—are alike to be derived through this channel.<sup>2</sup>

(Nathan Sheppard, 'Genesis', 1874)

So far this thesis has considered early- and mid-Victorian medical and psycho-physiological theories about what aspects of a person determine his or her behaviour, and how Wilkie Collins represents them in his fiction. Most prominently, the passions and the will were seen as two powerful dictating forces which could battle for supremacy within a human psyche. Some of the causal factors that Collins indicates may be at the root of his characters' extreme behaviour have also been traced, such as overly-indulgent upbringings, disadvantageous social factors, and innate or hereditary weaknesses. In the cases of Mannion, Basil and Magdalen, Collins suggests what may go wrong

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<sup>1</sup> G.W. Child, 'Physiological Psychology', *Westminster Review*, 89 (January, 1868), 37-65 (p.63).

<sup>2</sup> Nathan Sheppard, 'Genesis', *Temple Bar*, 41 (May, 1874), 175-93 (p.179). Further references are given after quotations.

with determinism, and the results of this. However, the previous discussions of *Basil* and *No Name* were contextualized within theories and attitudes which emphasised the possibility of raising a well-balanced, level-headed individual by inculcating a sense of self-discipline from an early age. Men such as Prichard, Conolly and Carpenter theorized that the will could be strengthened, and the passions sublimated into useful, rather than self-destructive ends; they placed implicit faith in the power of the individual to initiate self-improvement, as long as circumstances allowed.

Such faith was challenged as the century progressed by the dissemination of theories of degeneration and eugenics which were increasingly entertained, although not always endorsed, by many theorists. B.A. Morel's *Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l'espèce humaine* (1857) influenced British psychiatrists such as Henry Maudsley, whilst Francis Galton publically speculated about selective human breeding from the 1860s.<sup>3</sup> These theories did not necessarily discount the possibility of influencing personal behaviour through upbringing or education, but the extent of that influence was distinctly limited; instead, the force of hereditary factors was emphasised in deciding the development of an individual's physical and mental constitution. Although there was not one cohesive theory of degeneration, they all shared a bleak outlook for the possibility of improving the degenerate individual. Degenerationists asserted that offspring would inherit parental flaws in a more virulent or transmuted form, and that the effects of upbringing and education would be, at best, a means of postponing an inevitable decline and probable demise. Eugenicists also perceived around them an increasing number of weak, sickly, mentally limited, and therefore hereditarily undesirable offspring. It was therefore theorised that either good characteristics had to be bred into the race (positive eugenics), or bad characteristics bred out (negative eugenics).<sup>4</sup> The degenerative power of heredity and the possibility of

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<sup>3</sup> Galton coined the term 'eugenic' in *Inquiries into Human Faculty and its Development* (1883). For a concise account of Galton's career, including his relationship with Charles Darwin, see Raymond E. Fancher, 'Scientific Cousins: The Relationship Between Charles Darwin and Francis Galton', *American Psychologist*, 64:2 (February-March, 2009), 84-92. For responses to Galton's theories see Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present* (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), pp.31-39.

<sup>4</sup> As in the epigraphic examples, Victorian writing on heredity contain strains of both eugenics



controlling the downward spiral attracted increasing attention from the mid-century.

The following chapter situates Wilkie Collins's 'Mad Monkton' (serialized 1855) and *Armadale* (1866) within ongoing Victorian debates about heredity.<sup>5</sup> Although beginning with a discussion of 'Mad Monkton' (first published seven years before *No Name*) temporarily disrupts the chronological treatment of Collins's fiction, it provides a thematic transition between the novels discussed in the previous two chapters and *Armadale*. 'Mad Monkton' combines themes of monomania, fate and heredity, and portrays the consequences of hereditary insanity as devastating and inescapable. Contrastingly, *Armadale* engages with a broader range of hereditary threats, but does not depict them as insurmountable. In both cases, Collins speculates about the consequences of hereditary transmission in its most negative sense. This chapter draws comparisons between Collins's fiction and a number of works on heredity which were unpublished at the time it was written. This shows that sensation fiction and medical writing about heredity respond to the same concerns about society, family and the nation. Unlike late nineteenth-century writers, Collins was not submerged in the cultural discourse of degeneration, but as a sensation author he had an eye for the more alarming implications of hereditary transmission.

Theories of heredity and its dangers had been prominent in medical discourse throughout the nineteenth century, and early-Victorian medical writers warned against the transmission of hereditary defects.<sup>6</sup> In 1814 Joseph

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and degeneration. However, for some they were separate and even antagonistic ways of thinking. Richard Barnett, for example, charts the degenerationist Edwin Ray Lankester and H.G. Wells's advocacy of improved education as opposed to eugenics as a plan for improving society in 'Education or Degeneration: E. Ray Lankester, H.G. Wells and *The Outline of History*', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 37:2 (June, 2006), 203-29 (see especially pp.216-19). This chapter is not intended to show *Armadale* (written before most of these theories were crystallised) as clearly distinguishing between degeneration and eugenics, it rather emphasises Collins's awareness of the dangerous potential for hereditary decline.

<sup>5</sup> *Armadale* was serialized in *The Cornhill Magazine* November 1864-June 1866. 'Mad Monkton' was first published with the title 'The Monktons of Wincott Abbey' in *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, November and December, 1855.

<sup>6</sup> John C. Waller discusses why the Victorian medical profession gave such credence to heredity, and offers examples of early- and mid-nineteenth writings on heredity in "'The Illusion of an Explanation": The Concept of Hereditary Disease, 1770-1870', *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 57:4 (October, 2002), 410-448.

Adams was so concerned about what he perceived to be excessive public fears about 'the apprehension of hereditary diseases' that he published *A Treatise on the Supposed Hereditary Properties of Diseases*.<sup>7</sup> As the 'Supposed' in the title suggests, Adams argued that hereditary disease was less prevalent than was generally believed, and he called for a level-headed approach to the choosing of one's (or one's child's) partner in marriage. Adams took a generally sanguine attitude towards human progress. Anticipating Darwinian natural selection, he assumed that in the same way that the strongest male animal would be 'father of the most offspring', 'health and intellect' would play a similar role in human society (Adams, p.32). This differs from eugenicist thinking which encouraged an interventionist approach to human breeding on the basis that society had reached a stage when it could avoid the evolutionary favouring of the fit and the clever. Nevertheless, although Adams argued that, in general, there was no need to interfere 'with the dictates of Nature' (Adams, p.41), he also suggested that, in order to 'lessen anxiety' about hereditary diseases, 'family peculiarities, instead of being carefully concealed, should be accurately traced and faithfully recorded' so that imprudent marriages could be avoided and vulnerable offspring be identified (ibid.).

The difference between Adams and later eugenicist or degenerationist texts is one of attitude and atmosphere. Adams argued that if correct precautions were taken against a hereditary taint such as gout, generations could pass 'without any appearance of the disease' as long as the individual did not 'yield to habits of indulgence' (Adams, p.25). Contrastingly, 'The Degeneration of Race' in *The Lancet* (1860) warns readers to 'remember that the seeds of disease are slow to germinate, and may possibly be restrained from development by skilful management, fortunate circumstances, and care [...] the laws of Nature work secretly and silently, but not capriciously'.<sup>8</sup> Whilst Adams views the non-appearance of a hereditary flaw in a generation as a result of good management, *The Lancet* gives a sinister slant to the same occurrence – the

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<sup>7</sup> Joseph Adams, *A Treatise on the Supposed Hereditary Properties of Diseases: Containing Remarks on the Unfounded Terrors and Ill-Judged Cautions Consequent on Such Erroneous Opinions* (London: Callow, 1814), p.v. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>8</sup> Anon., 'The Degeneration of Race', *Lancet*, 76:1947 (22 December, 1860), 619-20 (p.620). Further references are given after quotations.

flaw is lying in wait to wreak atavistic havoc further down the family line. Rather than emphasising the possibility of controlling defects, the later article focuses on their ineradicable nature.

The need to consider the possible influences of heredity on a future family prior to marriage was an ongoing subject of debate which G.H. Lewes addressed in 1856 whilst discussing hereditary insanity:

insanity is not only transmissible, but may suddenly manifest itself in persons who have hitherto shown no predisposition to it. The fact forces upon every mind an awful sense of responsibility, when a parent or guardian has to decide on permitting a marriage where the "hereditary taint" exists.<sup>9</sup>

Like Adams, Lewes attempted to deal with the subject in a non-alarmist manner, but here the threat of atavistic insanity suddenly rearing its head, and the 'awful sense of responsibility', gives a greater impression of potential danger than Adams. The bases for nascent eugenicist and degenerationist thinking were therefore laid by the time Collins came to write *Armadale*, but the pervasiveness and clarity of developed and widely asserted theories was not yet present.

Escalating fears of negative heredity were accompanied by an increasing tendency to perceive morality as hereditary. Once again, this was not a sudden occurrence. John C. Waller discusses 'the prevalent discourses on hereditary transmission and "prudent" reproduction that predated Galton's eugenical ideas' and demonstrates that:

by the mid-Victorian period notions of the inheritance of insanity and moral debasement were well established [...] Consequently, when late Victorian eugenicists articulated their belief in the heritability of moral derangement they were able to rely on a *corpus* of medical hereditarian theory and deterministic explications of mental traits that could (in a changed context) be frame-shifted to the level of national fitness.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> G.H. Lewes, 'Hereditary Influence, Animal and Human', *Westminster Review*, 66 (July, 1856), 135-62 (p.158). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>10</sup> John C. Waller, 'Ideas of Heredity, Reproduction and Eugenics in Britain, 1800-1875', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Biological and Biomedical Sciences*, 32:3 (September, 2001), 457-489 (p.458, p.463). Further references are given after quotations.

This moral element becomes increasingly apparent from the mid-Victorian period. In an article for the *Cornhill Magazine*, H.W. Holland implicitly acknowledges the difficulty of ascribing degenerate behaviour to nature or nurture. He claims that child criminals are influenced by their parents and environment, but also asserts that 'there is in some a *natural tendency* and *strong bias* towards dishonesty', and that 'thieving, and some other crimes seem to be hereditary, running in the same families for generations'.<sup>11</sup> Holland, a clergyman, seems to perceive humanity as innately sinful but asserts that

very few [criminals] adopt a life of crime from the sheer love of wrong-doing, and though they have, and must have, evil tendencies, the initiation of a criminal career is often wrought by the force of circumstances, or by the inveiglements of those who are already committed to a dishonest course. (ibid., p.328)

Significant here is the description of criminals with some evil within them, which is brought out by circumstance. This gives the impression of something irremovable, and Holland tellingly speaks of the 'suppressing' of crime, rather than its eradication (ibid., p.326). In 1865 Francis Galton, made it clear to his readers that hereditary defects covered a wide spectrum. Beginning with a range of physical diseases such as tuberculosis, Galton moves towards non-physical traits which carry ethical connotations:

A morbid susceptibility to contagious disease, or to the poisonous effects of opium, or of calomel, and an aversion to the taste of meat, are all found to be inherited. So is a craving for drink, for gambling, strong sexual passion, a proclivity to pauperism, to crimes of violence, and to crimes of fraud.<sup>12</sup>

There is a specificity to these examples - not an inclination towards deceit, but 'crimes of fraud' - which helped to create the sense of inexorableness which characterised degenerationist thinking. Such thinking led Galton to exclaim later in the paper: 'how differently are the principles of virtue measured out to different natures!' (ibid., p.324). He consequently speculated that selecting

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<sup>11</sup>H.W. Holland, 'Thieves and Thieving', *Cornhill Magazine*, 2 (September, 1860), 326-44 (p.329, p.330). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>12</sup> Francis Galton, 'Hereditary Talent and Character', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 12 (June, August, 1865), 157-66, 318-27 (p.320). Further references are given after quotations.

partners for breeding with a 'regard to their moral nature', would lead to a 'marked improvement' of people's 'natural disposition' (ibid., p.325).

In 1870, prison surgeon J.B. Thomson asserted that a distinct '*criminal class*', comprising of physically and mentally degenerate individuals, had been produced through years of criminals breeding amongst themselves.<sup>13</sup> Thomson asserted that, because of its hereditary nature, crime was 'intractable in the highest degree', and that prison reform would never work whilst criminals were still inter-breeding (Thomson, p.496). Thomson asserts that because criminals interact only 'with those of their own nature and habits, they must beget a depraved and criminal class hereditarily disposed to crime'. The habits children acquire from their lives amongst criminals are 'superinduced upon their original moral depravity' (Thomson, p.489). Thomson assures his readers that even when 'brought under very early training' to get them in good habits, the children of criminals are 'apt to lapse into their hereditary tendency' (Thomson, p.498). Thomson sees heredity as the predominant determinant for human action, and so moves towards ideas of eugenics as the only possibility for improvement.

J.B. Lamarck's early-nineteenth-century theories of acquired characteristics were widely accepted in the mid-Victorian period. For example Lewes asserted that there was 'abundant evidence' of 'acquired habits' (Lewes, 'Hereditary Influence', p.143). Lamarckism, which theorised that organisms acquired traits or skills useful for survival and then passed them on to offspring, played an important role in theories of degeneration. Degenerationists gave it a negative spin: as well as transmitting pre-existing flaws an individual could add to the hereditary hardships of future generations. Janet Oppenheim observes that 'Lamarckism' was 'essential' to the concept of degeneration and that 'conscious indulgence in vice or excess' was

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<sup>13</sup> J.B. Thomson, 'The Hereditary Nature of Crime', *Journal of Mental Science*, 15 (January, 1870), 487-98 (p.488). Henry Maudsley uses this article to support his own degenerationist arguments in *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (London: King, 1874), p.30. Further references for both texts are given after quotations. This is perhaps unsurprising as Maudsley was an editor for the *Journal of Mental Science* between 1863 and 1878. See Trevor Turner, 'Henry Maudsley—Psychiatrist, Philosopher and Entrepreneur', *Psychological Medicine*, 18:3 (August, 1988), 551-74 (p.555).

seen as an initiator of degeneration.<sup>14</sup> Henry Maudsley speculated that 'certain unfavourable conditions of life tend unquestionably to produce degeneracy of the individual; the morbid predisposition so generated is then transmitted to the next generation'.<sup>15</sup> Maudsley gives the example of intemperance developing into dipsomania, which could lead to 'idiocy, suicide or insanity' in later generations (Maudsley, *Responsibility*, p.43). Similarly, Sheppard asserted that a husband may contribute 'to his offspring many and unmistakable impresses', which 'may be evolved from traits and characteristics which are enduring, or from temporary conditions, the result of imprudence and excess' (Sheppard, p.185).

Deviant or immoral behaviour was therefore often perceived as a sign as well as an instigator of degeneration (much as sensation fiction was seen as a cause and effect of social decline). As Kelly Hurley observes, 'symptoms became increasingly confused with causes as degeneration theory became a tool for measuring the moral health of society as well as the health of the individual'.<sup>16</sup> In 'Mad Monkton' the hereditary insanity which afflicts each generation of the Monkton family is triggered by incest, a physical act with moral implications. The possibility of moral degeneration is at the centre of *Armada* as Midwinter's father (a profligate and a murderer) fears that his sins may be passed on to his son. Yet it is not only heredity that Ozias Midwinter has to fear: this mixed-race, potentially criminal, nervous, sometimes hysterical social outsider is a prospective degenerate in numerous ways. Through him especially, *Armada* engages with a whole conflation of issues concerning moral and social undesirability which distinguished emerging theories of degeneration. Midwinter, and also the villainous Miss Gwilt, view and describe themselves in degenerate terms because they perceive themselves, and their unconventional behaviour, as deviant or immoral (which in Miss Gwilt's

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<sup>14</sup> Janet Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves: Doctors, Patients and Depression in Victorian England* (Oxford: OUP, 1991), p.269, p.276. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>15</sup> Henry Maudsley, *Body and Mind: An Inquiry into their Connection and Mutual Influence, Specially in Reference to Mental Disorders* (London: Macmillan, 1870), in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: OUP, 1998; repr. 2003), pp.326-29 (p.327). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>16</sup> Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Cambridge: CUP, 1996), p.71. Further references are given after quotations.

case, to be fair, it often is). This immorality is expressed in terms of contagion and disease, and as something which, once acquired, cannot be removed.

Theories of degeneration and eugenics often considered heredity on a national scale. Waller sees a change in focus from the notion of individual or family health to one of 'national fitness' as a defining aspect of eugenics (Waller, 'Ideas of Heredity', p.463). Daniel Pick similarly notes a

general shift from notions of the individual degenerate [...] towards a bio-medical conception of crowd and mass civilisation as regression; the "individual" was reconceived in relation to the mesh of evolutionary, racial and environmental forces which, it was now insisted, constituted and constrained his or her condition.<sup>17</sup>

This change was partially because hopes of hereditary improvement related to children, society, the race - the individual's hereditary lot was already, irrevocably, cast. It was therefore essential to raise each generation with an awareness of any 'disastrous proclivities' and 'hereditary virtues' that may have been 'derived from the parental stock' (Sheppard, p.180). Equally importantly, new generations must be made aware of the 'laws of health' when choosing a partner (ibid., p. 81), because the 'evil results' of a bad marriage 'may be inexhaustible, and run on through the coming ages with augmented force and in multiplying channels' (ibid., p.182). Midwinter and his father fear that the son's inheritance of 'disastrous proclivities' may be impossible to mitigate and will lead to literally 'evil results'.

However, whereas degeneration and eugenics allowed little space for the development, and therefore, arguably, the importance, of the individual post-conception, Collins significantly focuses upon both Midwinter and Miss Gwilt as individuals. Collins spends considerable time describing the nervous vacillations of Midwinter's psyche, and like Marion Halcombe in *The Woman in White* (1860), the reader is allowed to read extracts of Miss Gwilt's diary. In fact, Miss Gwilt has a more direct connection to the reader as her diary is not 'appropriated and annotated' and edited by Count Fosco and Walter Hartright,

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<sup>17</sup> Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993), p.222.

as Lyn Pykett observes that Marion's is.<sup>18</sup> Miss Gwilt receives no such regulation. Hurley observes that 'by dehumanizing [...] the degenerate, the normative subject humanized itself' (Hurley, p.79). However, Collins prioritises the experience of the supposed degenerate, and by focussing on and focalizing through such characters, depicts in very personal terms the struggle to overcome whatever it is in him or her that threatens an impending decline. This leads the reader to view the degenerate with pity, sympathy and sometimes even empathy.

Ultimately in *Armadale*, Collins eventually affirms the possibility of overcoming a bad hereditary lot. This may have something to do with the changing climate surrounding theories of heredity, and also with Collins's growing sense of moral responsibility as an author (which led towards his later "novels with a purpose", discussed in the next chapter). I agree with Jenny Bourne Taylor's argument that in the 1860s Collins 'could draw on a range of psychological and experimental scientific methods, speculatively and hypothetically', but as degeneration came in later decades to be 'a dominant discursive model' Collins chose to 'overturn [its] assumptions'.<sup>19</sup> This is most evident in his 1888 novel, *The Legacy of Cain*, in which a murderer's daughter, Eunice, is at a time of extreme stress tempted to do 'dreadful things!', but overcomes these urges by drawing on the beneficial effects of her loving upbringing and 'the counterbalancing influences for good which had been part of [her] birthright'.<sup>20</sup> However, I also suggest that in *Armadale* Collins was already showing a greater awareness of the potential consequences of unequivocally accepting theories of degeneration, and that although he was

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<sup>18</sup> Lyn Pykett, 'Collins and the Sensation Novel', in *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor, (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp.50-64 (p.57).

<sup>19</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.211. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>20</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Legacy of Cain* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1993), p.199, p.201. *The Legacy of Cain's* villainess is Eunice's sister (by adoption), the attempted poisoner Helena. Helena functions mainly as a contrast to Eunice, as proof that the murderer's daughter can be better than a child of "respectable" parents. The reason for Helena's behaviour is not entirely explained. Her mother is petty-minded and 'wicked' (p.35), but Helena acts far worse than she ever does. This makes Helena the moral degenerate which Collins takes pains to prove that Eunice is not. The sisters serve as a warning that a person's true nature cannot be assumed based on their parentage or nurture, but in delivering this message Collins complicates his assertion that negative hereditary traits can be overcome.



willing to push notions of negative heredity to their destructive limits in a short story such as 'Mad Monkton', he was not willing to do so in *Armadale*. Nevertheless, in much the same way that *Basil's* plot and narrative tone renders it a distinctly "monomaniacal" text, *Armadale* is suffused with hereditary discourse and anxiety. This creates a distinctively degenerationist atmosphere. In fact, because Collins's sensational and largely pessimistic treatment of heredity anticipates the bleak outlook of late-Victorian degenerationists, it may actually have brought such thinking to public attention, helping to pave way for acceptance of their theories.

Alfred Monkton is the last in the line of a family plagued by hereditary insanity, who believes that he must prevent the fulfilment of an ancient prophecy about his family's extinction by finding and burying the lost body of his uncle. Monkton's plans are thwarted when the recovered body is lost with a sinking ship; he fails to recover from the shock of his adventure and dies before marrying his childhood sweetheart. The first-person narrator, despite his scepticism, cannot entirely explain the strange course of events which lead to the destruction of the Monkton line. This is anticipatory of *Armadale*, in which Midwinter's belief in the prophetic nature of Allan Armadale's Dream is opposed to medical explanations based on up-to-date Victorian dream theory.<sup>21</sup> In 'Mad Monkton', the reader is consistently faced with alternative means of interpretation: is the destruction of the Monkton line supernaturally fulfilled, is it the natural result of hereditary insanity, and do these two options necessarily cancel each other out? As Norman Page observes, the reader cannot unquestioningly accept the "sane" narrator's interpretation of events as resting on coincidence:

Collins's art in this story lies in creating an area of uncertainty in which, without necessarily giving full credence to the kind of experience enacted, we may find it difficult to dismiss it with the comforting label of "coincidence" or the more desperate one of "madness".<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For *Armadale's* engagement with Victorian dream theories see Taylor, pp.156-161.

<sup>22</sup> Introduction to Wilkie Collins, *Mad Monkton and Other Stories* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), pp.vii-xxx (p.xv).

However, whilst Collins goes to undeniable lengths in order to offer the reader the possibility of a supernatural explanation, he makes an equally determined effort, in both 'Mad Monkton' and *Armadale*, to offer non-supernatural explanations for events by drawing on Victorian discourses of heredity which are just as disconcerting. In fact, the idea of supernatural forces dictating the behaviour of a victim whose fate is already decided, becomes a metaphor for degeneration in which the future conduct of the individual is already partially determined by his or her ancestry: act how they may, the final outcome is inevitable.

As with *Basil* and *No Name*, monomania is the particular form of insanity which manifests itself in Alfred Monkton. However, in 'Mad Monkton', the insanity is unquestionably hereditary. The narrator's reference to a 'frightful story of a crime committed in past times by two of the Monktons, near relatives, from which the first appearance of insanity was always supposed to date' implies that the family's affliction is triggered by incest.<sup>23</sup> Victorian medical texts frequently warned against incestuous and consanguineous unions. In *The Lancet*, for example, it was asserted 'that marriages of consanguinity lead to the intellectual degradation and physical degeneration of the offspring of such unions' (*Degeneration of Race*', pp.619-20). In 'Mad Monkton' the supernatural alternative could actually be seen as the less disturbing explanation, as Dickens's unwillingness to print the story in *Household Words* out of 'consideration for those numerous families in which there is such a taint [of hereditary insanity]' suggests.<sup>24</sup>

As with *No Name* and *Basil*, Collins's description of Monkton's behaviour shows striking similarities to contemporary medical accounts of monomania. One of the most distinguishing features of Monkton's apparent insanity is that he suffers from delusions only in relation to the family curse as one of his acquaintances informs the narrator: 'When you can get him to say anything, which is not often, he talks like a sensible, well-educated man [...] But touch the

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<sup>23</sup> 'Mad Monkton', in *Mad Monkton and Other Stories* (Oxford: OUP, 1994), pp.39-104 (p.39). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>24</sup> Letter from Charles Dickens to W.H. Wills (subeditor of *Household Words*) 8 February, 1853, in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Graham Storey and others, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-1999), VII (1853-55), p.23.

subject of his vagabond of an uncle, and the Monkton madness comes out directly' ('Mad Monkton', p.47). Here again is a character with a monomaniacal fixation who appears sane under normal circumstances, but who becomes mad in relation to his personal obsession. The narrator soon has the opportunity of corroborating this account and observes that at the mention of his uncle Monkton's 'eyes wandered away, and fixed themselves intensely, almost fiercely, either on the perfectly empty wall at our side, or on the vacant space between the wall and ourselves' (p.48). It is subsequently revealed that Monkton believes he is looking at his dead uncle's spectre; this is his monomaniacal delusion. As previously mentioned, whilst monomania was often treated as synonymous with morbid obsession, many physicians noted the presence of an actual delusion or hallucination. For example John Abercrombie defined it as when the 'hallucination is confined to a single point, while, on every other subject, the patient speaks and acts like a rational man'.<sup>25</sup> Similarly to Mannion, Monkton's delusion is the ultimate expression of a growing obsession with his family and his family's past.

Monkton is hereditarily and constitutionally vulnerable. The need to control the passions, extolled by early-Victorian physicians, was seen as doubly important when hereditary insanity was involved. Families predisposed to insanity were advised that the education of children should aim for 'a character remarkable for sedateness, for the strict discipline of the feelings, and, as far as this is attainable, for the abolition of strong passions and emotions'.<sup>26</sup> Such a course of action could allow some control over the development of the personality, which would in turn inculcate the child with the ability to control his or her own behaviour. Monkton's description of his own childhood and young adulthood reveals that, like Magdalen, he was not raised in a situation conducive to counteracting any dangerous tendencies.

Monkton's sensitive and excitable nature is shown by his childhood fear of his uncle Stephen whose visits instigate a strange fascination in the boy, who 'used to dream of him long after he had gone away' (p.63). Furthermore, as a

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<sup>25</sup> John Abercrombie, *Inquiries Concerning the Intellectual Powers and the Investigation of Truth* (1830), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Edinburgh: Waugh and Innes, 1831), p.330.

<sup>26</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert, and Piper, 1835), p.172.

child Monkton hears something of the prophecy which tells of his family's decline and extinction, and when he discovers some of it in an 'antiquarian book' he is shocked to see a wood carving of a man 'strangely like' his uncle (p.64). Collins therefore gives the reader a means of tracing the basis and development of Monkton's monomaniacal attachment to his uncle. Monkton tells the narrator that he was warned 'that I must not waste time in thinking of such trifles, that I had more imagination than was good for me, and must suppress instead of exciting it', but this only irritates his 'curiosity' (ibid.). Monkton embarks on a search through the family records which takes him into the long-deserted depths of his ancestral home: 'such tempting suspense, such strange discoveries, such wild fancies, such enthralling terrors, all belonged to that life!' (ibid.) In this account of his experience (which, incidentally, sounds somewhat like a Victorian critic's description of reading sensation fiction) we can see that Monkton's nerves are thrilled, his imagination is fired, and he is entranced by the whole experience. He is, in short, living in a 'fascination of suspense and terror' (p.65). This is reminiscent of the 'horrible joy' Mannion experiences when he is driven to pursue Basil.<sup>27</sup> Monkton's description of his own life repels the narrator who can see the 'results' of such an existence, the crazed Monkton, before him (ibid.). For Monkton, however, the search for the prophecy is entirely addictive:

I always found something to lure me on. Terrible confessions of past crimes, shocking proofs of secret wickedness that had been hidden securely from all eyes but mine, came to light [...] There were periods when the results of this search of mine so horrified me, that I determined to give it up entirely; but I never could persevere in my resolution, the temptation to go on seemed at certain intervals to get too strong for me, and then I yielded to it again and again. (ibid.)

Monkton cannot turn away from the promise of further revelations about his home and family. By indulging and exciting his morbid inquisitiveness he is actively seeking out the dark centre of his family shame. By moving deeper into the rooms of his family home he is increasingly entrapped, and enraptured, by the threat of the hereditary taint. Although he attempts self-restraint, Monkton

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<sup>27</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Basil* (Oxford: OUP, 2005), p.257.

fails 'again and again'. This obsessive delving into his family's past uncovers a full written version of the prophecy. The fatal pull of hereditary insanity, and the way in which an individual can become complicit in their own downfall is made apparent: Monkton cultivates his own morbid excitement which then focuses on the family prophecy and later conjures up the spectre of his uncle. Monkton is caught in a vicious circle: constitutionally predisposed towards morbid fascinations, he is constitutionally incapable of avoiding temptation and therefore seeks it out, bringing himself closer and closer to insanity.

Monkton does indeed suffer for the sins of his fathers, but although his behaviour is dictated by the insanity he has inherited, 'Mad Monkton' does not carry the anxiety about moral heredity which is explored in *Armada*. It is true that the family madness is initiated by a socially unacceptable act, that members of his ancestry were morally dubious, and also that Monkton's fascination with his family's dark past could be read as a sign of his own inherent depravity. However, Monkton is a perfectly upright young man whose quest to retrieve his uncle's body is undertaken so that he can return home and faithfully marry his true love with an easy mind. 'Mad Monkton' also deviates (and this is true of *Armada*, too) from degenerationist theories in the sense that whilst insanity is certainly hereditary in the Monkton family, it does not appear to be intensifying with each generation. Janet Oppenheim points out that in 'older hereditarian theories of nervous temperament' the hereditary flaw was generally replicated in each generation and 'did not automatically assume a graver pathological form in offspring' whereas later 'nervous degeneration was something altogether more frightening and more disgraceful. Once set in motion, virtually everyone assumed that it was an irreversible process, dragging entire families into an inexorable downward spiral of declining physical and mental powers' (Oppenheim, p.272).

Nor, however, does Collins's text reflect the relatively optimistic view forwarded by those physicians who approved of moral management. G.H. Lewes used 'Mad Monkton' as one example of stories which 'assume that the transmission of the malady [insanity] is inevitable, and hence they insist on the duty of renunciation' (Lewes, 'Hereditary Influence', p.158). Lewes warned his

readers that 'artists are not bound to be physiologists, and are assuredly bad law-givers in such cases' (ibid.). Arguing (like Adams earlier in the century), for a level-headed attitude towards marriage and reproduction, Lewes asserted that the hereditary transmission of insanity was by no means assured. 'Mad Monkton', therefore, both reflects contemporary concerns about heredity, and anticipates later, more severe anxieties. It also looks forward to *Armada*, in which the potential for clash or collusion between the forces of destiny and the influence of biological determinism is realised to its fullest, yet most ambiguous, extent in Collins's fiction. However, 'Mad Monkton' is above all a gothic story possessing many of the hallmarks of such fiction: the Monkton family home is an ancient abbey full of long-abandoned rooms and shameful secrets, and the majority of the action takes place in Italy.<sup>28</sup> This gives a certain objectivity and distance to the story, it lacks the domestic focus of much sensation fiction. With *Armada*, everything is brought closer to home. With his shorter story (written, also, when he had less influence as a writer) Collins does not hold back in depicting the fears engendered by incest and hereditary insanity. He does not appear willing to do so in *Armada*.

Whereas Alfred Monkton is the last in a long line of hereditarily afflicted individuals, and 'Mad Monkton' depicts the final destruction of the family, Collins's *Armada* begins with the potential initiation of a hereditary affliction. The novel commences with the death of Midwinter's father from an illness which is implicitly syphilitic. Collins draws on the reader's recognition of the physical signs of syphilis, and its connection to a dissolute lifestyle; Midwinter's father has led a 'wild' and 'vicious' life, and is suffering from a 'paralytic affection'.<sup>29</sup> There was both a physical and a moral threat within the concept of syphilis: Andrew Smith describes it as 'both a medical problem and a trope for social and cultural degeneration. In other words, there was the reality of the

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<sup>28</sup> With a perplexed first person narrator observing a mentally unstable friend who is the end of his family line, this story has clear similarities to Edgar Allan Poe's 'The Fall of the House of Usher' (1839). For Collins's adaptation of some of Poe's work, see John Bowen, 'Collins's Shorter Fiction', in Bourne Taylor, *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge: CUP, 2006), pp.37-49.

<sup>29</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Armada* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.15. Further references are given after quotations.

disease and a cultural fear of it'.<sup>30</sup> Collins employs the trope of syphilis to create an atmosphere of moral infection. Armadale Senior fears that reprisal for his sins will be meted out to his son:

I see the vices which have contaminated the father, descending, and contaminating the child; I see the shame which has disgraced the father's name, descending, and disgracing the child's. I look in on myself – and I see My Crime, ripening again for the future in the self-same circumstance which first sowed the seeds of it in the past; and descending in inherited contamination of Evil, from me to my son.  
(p.55)

The language that Collins uses here taps directly into the discourses of heredity, disease and degeneration, most prominently with the appropriation of the biblical sins of the father, a favourite phrase of the degenerationists. Maudsley, for example, reminded his reader that 'it has been declared that the sins of the father shall be visited upon the children unto the third and fourth generations', and that the 'failing of the father [...] will run on in the stream of family descent' (Maudsley, *Responsibility*, p.22). Midwinter's father's words share the dramatic tones of degenerationist texts which seemed designed to shock and dismay the reader. T.A. Ribot, for example, attributed the 'decline of nations' to heredity, and declared that in looking back to the ancient Greeks

we discern the slow, blind, unconscious working of nature in the millions of human beings who were decayed, though they knew it not, and who transmitted to their descendants a germ of death, each generation adding to it somewhat of its own.<sup>31</sup>

The scale of Ribot's description ('millions' and 'nations'), the failure of people to understand what was happening, and the sense of accumulation as each person who lives adds a little bit of 'death' to his or her offspring, makes for a terrifying account of hereditary decay.<sup>32</sup> Despite the difference in scope, there is

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<sup>30</sup> Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), p.95.

<sup>31</sup> Théodule A. Ribot, *Heredity: A Psychological Study of its Phenomena, Laws, Causes and Consequences* (1873), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: King, 1875), in Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth, *Embodied Selves*, pp.306-08 (p.308).

<sup>32</sup> The morbidity of tone is apparent when compared with an article such as G.H. Lewes's 'The Two Aspects of History'. Lewes also saw the destruction of ancient civilizations as likely to be

an atmospheric similarity between these two passages as 'Evil' and 'death' respectively are transmitted from one generation to the next like 'seeds' or 'germs' which bring disaster, not life. In both passages, also, there is the sense of a privileged perspective: Ribot is looking back into the ancient past and discerning what those living at the time could not see; he uses this knowledge to awaken his reader's awareness of the fact that they may suffer a similar fate.

Midwinter's father sees his former life with a new awareness, not available to him when he was a young man. 'Descending' suggests evolutionary "descent", but it is moral, not physical, characteristics that he envisions being passed on. 'Vices' become contaminants, 'ripening again for the future in the self-same circumstance' suggests a belief that Midwinter will literally follow in his father's murderous footsteps. According to the father, both his generally debauched lifestyle and his particular 'Crime' are set to be recreated in the child (p.55). This conception of degeneration relies on the notion of acquired characteristics: Midwinter's father believes that his 'wild' lifestyle and murderous act have initiated Midwinter's own moral degeneration. Midwinter's father's behaviour as a young man was, according to him, largely socially determined as his 'boyhood and youth were passed in idleness and self-indulgence' (p.31). The supposed biologically transmitted moral decline of the family begins with him.<sup>33</sup>

Midwinter's father's fear of a specifically moral decline is one of the ways in which Collins employs the concept of negative heredity: it seems Midwinter will become a profligate and a murderer because his father was. The fear of degeneration is compounded with a supernatural fear of divine retribution: the murder has remained 'unpunished and unatoned', and for this reason 'Evil' is to be Midwinter's legacy (p.54). All this expectancy, however, proves to be deceptive, as neither Midwinter nor Allan Armadale follow in their fathers' footsteps. The sons do bear a physical resemblance to their fathers: Allan and

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repeated in the future, but optimistically declared to his readers that 'nations perish, individuals vanish, but the Race survives, and, surviving, advances towards completer life.' *Cornhill Magazine*, 9 (March, 1864), 292-96 (p.292).

<sup>33</sup> The emphasis on acquired characteristics was one of the differences between a degenerationist such as Maudsley, and a eugenicist such as Galton who felt that 'there are but few instances in which habit even seems to be inherited' (Galton, p.322).



his father are both bigger and stronger than Midwinter and his father (p.40, p.150). Furthermore, Midwinter's unprepossessing social conduct presents an unattractive impression which is ostensibly suggestive of his father's immorality: 'A stranger who had heard his story, and who saw him now, would have said, "His look is lurking, his manner is bad; he is, every inch of him, his father's son"' (p.120). This only serves to emphasise, however, the fact that appearances are deceptive. Allan (whose father 'left his home an outlaw' (p.31) and used deception to win his rival's intended wife) may be 'heedless to the last degree', but has a 'disposition' as 'open as the day' (p.62); Midwinter is unwaveringly loyal to those he cares for. The physical and moral degeneration that Armadale Senior warns of is not realised; Evil is not hereditary.

Furthermore, although the events of the past certainly affect the present, there is no literal mirroring of events such as Midwinter's father fears: his 'vices' are not Midwinter's vices; the shame which has 'disgraced the father's name' does not disgrace the child's; his 'Crime' does not ripen 'again for the future in the self-same circumstance which first sowed the seeds of it in the past' (p.55). Whilst the bizarre chain of events which bring Midwinter, Allan and Miss Gwilt together may seem to require some explanation beyond mere accident and coincidence, the circumstances of the past have not been recreated in the present, the sons could not lead their lives any more differently from their profligate fathers; everything that happens to them is a result of the events in the past, not a recreation of them.

However, Midwinter is described (by both himself and the narrator) as having "inherited" his father's superstitious nature; he suggests that 'the inheritance of my father's heathen belief in Fate is one of the inheritances he has left to me' (p.120). Midwinter attempts to combat this 'heathen belief' by drawing on the more admirable side of his nature; he declares that his 'love for Allan Armadale' has helped him to lift himself 'at last above the influence of [his father's] horrible letter', and to convince himself that it is unreasonable to believe that 'a friendship which has grown out of nothing but kindness on one side, and nothing but gratitude on the other, is destined to lead to an evil end' (pp.121-22). However this faith in his own good nature occurs early on in

*Armadale*, and Midwinter vacillates between many levels of belief in his father's prophecy during the rest of the novel, especially after Allan's Dream which may or may not prophesy evil events to come (pp.170-72). Only moments after declaring his faith in his love for Allan, Midwinter's suspicions are reawakened by the news that Miss Gwilt, who played a role in the events of the past, has been to visit Allan's mother. At this point, the narrator implicitly supports an interpretation of Midwinter's fatalistic tendencies as inherent by asking whether he felt 'the horror of his hereditary superstition creeping over him again?' (p.124).

Andrew Mangham observes that when Midwinter intends to atone for his father's sin, rather than avoiding Allan, he combines 'the father's fatalism with a more level-headed interpretation' of events.<sup>34</sup> Ultimately, Midwinter is unable to entirely dispose of his 'hereditary superstition', instead he manages to subsume it into the Christian faith advocated by Mr Brock. He claims that he cannot accept coincidences as explaining the fulfilment of the Visions, but that he has 'learnt to view the purpose of the Dream with a new mind':

I once believed that it was sent to rouse your distrust of the friendless man whom you had taken as a brother to your heart. I now *know* that it came to you as a timely warning to take him closer still. (p.815)

The possibility of a hereditary belief in Fate is not discounted, nor is the possibility that Fate may indeed play a role in the workings of the world, but the negative, degenerationist tone which characterised Midwinter's previous belief in the Dream, and in his father's prophecy, is gone. This change in tone is due to the fact that Midwinter, recollecting Mr Brock's words to him that 'God is all-merciful, God is all-wise' (p.816), has modified his beliefs and begun to think in terms of Providence rather than Fate. As Bourne Taylor observes, it is Mr Brock's 'belief in rational religion' which 'finally cancels out the opening of the scriptural [sic] denunciation of the absent father in the Prologue' (Bourne Taylor, p.162). Mr Brock suggests to Midwinter that he 'may be the man whom

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<sup>34</sup> Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.199.

the providence of God has appointed to save' Allan (p.624). Whilst a belief in Fate is a sign of superstition, faith in Providence is desirable and brings a sense of peace. Midwinter's natural tendencies are modified into healthier ends.

Nevertheless, Midwinter is the character in *Armadale* most readily connected with theories of bad heredity, both as a victim and a potential propagator of degeneration (indeed, with degeneration the individual often plays both roles). Most evidently, the very fact that he is his father's son goes against his favour, but his physically undersized appearance, his 'sensitive self-tormenting nature' (p.233) and his part-African racial background all serve to make him hereditarily "undesirable". In asserting that homosexuality is a central theme of *Armadale*, Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox argue that although Midwinter's 'darker skin could be an issue or a cause for alarm, this radical distinction is never mentioned by any of the characters, and it apparently goes unnoticed by all the novel's narrators'.<sup>35</sup> Awareness of racial differences, however, are important to this novel and to this discussion, as Midwinter's racial heritage is, of course, hereditary. Although Mr Brock eventually comes to trust Midwinter, he initially experiences feelings of apparent revulsion: 'the rector's healthy Anglo-Saxon flesh crept responsively at every casual movement of the usher's supple brown fingers' (p.73). Collins has loaded this sentence with racial awareness: Mr Brock's responsive flesh seems to be acutely aware of the difference in colour, instinctively creeping of its own accord.

Contrastingly, the initial description of Midwinter's mother is reasonably flattering: 'a woman of the mixed blood of the European and the African race, with the northern delicacy in the shape of her face, and the southern richness in its colour [...] who moved with an inbred grace'.<sup>36</sup> Her behaviour occasionally suggests a struggle with self-control, but, considering her distressing situation,

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<sup>35</sup> Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox, 'Wilkie Collins's Villainous Miss Gwilt, Criminality, and the Unspeakable Truth', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 32 (2002), 319-37 (p.327).

<sup>36</sup> *Armadale*, p.23. African blood, especially in women, seems to be something Collins employs for aesthetic purposes. Natalie Graybrooke in *Miss or Mrs?* (1873) has a 'mixture of Negro blood and French blood' from her mother's side, and therefore has 'her mother's superb black hair, and her mother's melting lazy lovely brown eyes'. Nathalie is certainly no "savage", having 'the gentle, innocent manner of a young girl.' *Miss or Mrs?* in *Miss or Mrs? The Haunted Hotel, The Guilty River* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), pp.1-83 (pp.9-10).

neither her 'hungering suspense' (p.46) to hear the truth about her dying husband's past nor her hysterical tears, appear particularly excessive (p.13). What wilfulness she shows, however, is explicitly related to her race: when she asks if her husband's first love was fair, the 'hot African blood' is visible in her cheeks (p.35). Innate "hot" blood is something that Midwinter strives against: when Miss Gwilt denies her relationship to him 'the savage blood that he had inherited from his mother rose dark and slow in his ashy cheeks' (p.757); when he resists striking her the 'black flush died out of his face' (p.758). The supposed savagery of African races is portrayed as hereditary and dangerous.

Collins's portrayal of racial difference is made more ambiguous as the reader is often invited to sympathise with Midwinter, and his actions are explained by the mediating voice of the narrator. His decision to accompany Miss Gwilt into her home is defended by an appeal to manhood: 'At his age, and in his position, who could have left her? The man (with a man's temperament) doesn't live who could have left her. Midwinter went in' (p.461). Audrey Fisch argues that *Armadale* directly takes up the 'issue of white male degeneration', but is not entirely 'sanguine about the possibility for peaceful assimilation of mixed-race people into English society' because Midwinter must commit an act of sacrifice in order to 'restore a degraded white society to its rightful position'.<sup>37</sup> Fisch goes on to point out that

while both [Midwinter and Allan] share a criminal inheritance born of the corruption of West Indian slavery on their white fathers, *Armadale* lives in complete ignorance. The mixed-race Midwinter is aware of and needs to do psychological battle with his inheritances: black blood on one side and white criminality on the other. (Fisch, p.324)

Allan's ignorance is maintained through Midwinter's effort, and, as Fisch observes, 'literally, the mixed-race character takes the poison for the white one here and, in so doing, enables the white man's continued success' (ibid.).

However, Fisch also argues that Midwinter 'remains alive only as a marginal character' at the end of *Armadale* (ibid.). Certainly, it is notable that

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<sup>37</sup> Audrey Fisch, 'Collins, Race, and Slavery', in *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins* ed. by Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox, (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 2003), pp.313-28 (p.319). Further references are given after quotations.

Midwinter's marriage to Miss Gwilt remains childless, and he therefore fails to fulfil any biological threat he poses to 'healthy Anglo-Saxon' blood.<sup>38</sup> In a form of literary eugenics, Midwinter may play the role of the hero, but successful marriage is reserved for the 'thoroughly English' Allan (p.62). Critics such as Greenslade have explored the normative drive of degeneration theories, which 'facilitated discourses of sometimes crude differentiation: between the normal and the abnormal, the healthy and morbid, the "fit" and "unfit", the civilised and the primitive'.<sup>39</sup> Degeneration theories worked towards the fixation of such bipolar categories, and the policing of the border between them. Midwinter's role in English society is (or more accurately, continues to be) marginalized at the end of the novel and he can continue to be viewed as Other. However, he is not marginal as far as the focal points of the novel are concerned - it is Midwinter's battle that has been fought and won (at a cost), the final chapter is entitled 'Midwinter', and the description of his words and emotions closes the narrative. Here, although Collins polices the borders to some extent, he is bringing the outsider to the foreground.

Pal-Lapinski perceives Midwinter as finding himself, through 'his relationship with Allan', engaged in a 'process of domestication, which seeks to homogenize and manage the plurality of his nomadic identity, distancing him from his mixed heritage and his mother's "negro blood"'.<sup>40</sup> Midwinter, by attempting to make himself worthy of Allan's friendship, undertakes a normative process, appearing to become less degenerate as he conforms to social expectations. This reflects discourses of heredity which throughout the century increasingly 'drew upon and themselves reinforced normative ideas of

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<sup>38</sup> For a discussion of Victorian theories of racial hybridity see Nancy Stepan 'Biological Degeneration: Races and Proper Places', in *Degeneration: The Dark Side of Progress*, ed. by J. Edward Chamberlin and Sander L. Gilman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.97-120 (especially pp.104-112). Midwinter is the child of a mixed-race woman, suggesting Collins accepted (unlike some Victorians) that different racial types could breed successfully. Although 'mulattoes' could be seen as infirm and 'in the long run unproductive', Midwinter's various weaknesses more clearly fit (as discussed presently) the degeneration associated with white, civilized societies (Stepan, p.108). See *Embodied Selves*, pp.352-372 for examples of Victorian writing on race.

<sup>39</sup> William Greenslade, *Degeneration, Culture and the Novel 1880-1940* (Cambridge: CUP, 1994), p.2.

<sup>40</sup> Piya Pal-Lapinski, 'Chemical Seductions: Exoticism, Toxicology, and the Female Poisoner in *Armada* and *The Legacy of Cain*', in Bachman and Cox, *Reality's Dark Light*, pp.94-130 (p.107). Further references are given after quotations.

desirable human qualities' (Waller, 'Ideas of Heredity', p.464). This is not simply about race, it is about nationality and, specifically, Englishness. Writing about *Armadale* and other *Cornhill* serializations, Deborah Wynne points out that well-behaved heroines are generally 'firmly rooted in provincial towns and villages, protected by their families, and never travelling further than the next town, or a journey to the seaside', but, she goes on to observe that "'flawed" heroines' tend to be 'English, yet have unorthodox family lives and dangerous associations with foreign countries'.<sup>41</sup> Lydia Gwilt, for example, 'attends a French boarding school, and later lives a wandering life in Europe', and even 'Allan's mother's otherwise blameless life is tainted by her deceit when she lives in the Canary Islands, although her return to rural Devon is marked by a selfless devotion to her son' (ibid.).

So Midwinter sublimates the hereditary threats of his father's superstitious nature, and his mother's possible 'savagery', and emerges as *Armadale's* hero. There are a number of other ways, however, in which the threat of degeneration makes itself felt in the novel. Midwinter often refers to himself as a 'dog', and he is described as following Allan 'like a dog' (p.166). This partly functions in a similar way to Midwinter's failure to become a father; he assumes a non-threatening reassuring attitude of submission towards Allan. Moreover, such language makes the "doglike" Midwinter potentially atavistic as animalistic qualities in humans suggested a resurfacing of earlier evolutionary traits. Maudsley, for instance, believed that it was possible for a person to possess an 'animal type of brain', due to hereditary defects and noted examples of 'idiots' who have lived in the wild and 'exhibited a somewhat striking aptitude and capacity for a wild animal life' (Maudsley, *Body and Mind*, p.328). Although certainly not an 'idiot', Midwinter's description of his own childhood shows that he was capable of living a 'wild animal life':

From the time when I was a child, I have been used to hardship and exposure. Night and day, sometimes for months together, I never had my head under a roof. For years and years, the life of a wild animal – perhaps I ought to say, the life of a savage – was the life I led. (p.367)

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<sup>41</sup> Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p.151.

The ability to live like a 'savage' also implies atavism: Charles Kingsley argued that our 'forefathers [...] were hardy, just as the savage is usually hardy, because none but the hardy lived'.<sup>42</sup> While "savagery" is depicted as inherent in *Armada*, upbringing is also important. Midwinter (who was literally raised with dogs for part of his childhood, coming to see them as his 'poor little four-footed brothers' (p.107)) is not claiming that he is *innately* animalistic, but the sense of his own animalism has a perceptible impact on his own self-conception, and helps to keep him subordinated to Allan. The loyalty to Allan which wins the favour of Mr Brock can also be read as a tame "doglike" acceptance of his place.

While Midwinter sees himself as hardened by his difficult upbringing, he is initially introduced to the reader when suffering from a 'brain fever', and is nursed back to health. Midwinter's nervousness is noted by the doctor, Mr Hawbury, who sees 'his varying colour, and the incessant restlessness of his hands', and concludes 'I wouldn't change nervous systems with that man, for the largest fortune that could be offered me' (p.166). Kingsley observed that modern social developments had resulted in the ability to 'save alive those who—looking at them from a merely physical point of view—are most fit to die'.<sup>43</sup> Although such constitutional features are not necessarily hereditary, they are certainly not hereditarily desirable; Midwinter's weak constitution is preserved to be passed, should he ever breed, down the family line. In these numerous ways Midwinter is depicted as either degenerate, or potentially degenerate.

Contrastingly Allan is, physically, an ideal candidate to procreate, his constitution receiving a favourable assessment from Mr Hawbury (p.169). Allan also lives away from an unhealthy city atmosphere. City living, with its frantic pace, polluted atmosphere and opportunities for unhealthy indulgences was often seen as an initiator of degeneration. Kingsley, for example, observed the healthiest men were 'country-bred' (Kingsley, 'The Science of Health', p.25).

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<sup>42</sup> Charles Kingsley, 'The Science of Health' (1872), in *Sanitary and Social Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1880), pp.21-45 (p.21). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>43</sup> Kingsley, 'Science of Health', p.27. Kingsley asserted that society should take responsibility for the existence of its weak members and should preserve and improve them as much as possible, but also try to improve the race at the same time (*ibid.*, p.28).

Benjamin Brodie speculated that it was 'not to be expected that the artisans in crowded cities, living in close habitations, and to a great extent indulging in intemperate and thriftless habits, can enjoy the robust health and physical powers of a rural population', and expressed concern that, due to increased relocation to cities, 'after a few more generations have passed away, the race will degenerate'.<sup>44</sup> His mother's disgraced position within her family, and her desire to keep him 'from all contact with the temptations and the dangers of the world' (p.61) mean that, although Allan is a gentleman by birth, he lacks the token signs of his class: he does not have a traditional upper-class education and dislikes visiting and hunting. Ill-qualified for the role of a landed gentleman, he readily acknowledges he is 'the wrong man in the wrong place' (p.242).

While the inhabitants of Thorpe-Ambrose may disapprove of their new lord of the manor, Allan's lack of upper-class characteristics is advantageous viewed in the light of certain degeneration theories. As chapter 6 discusses, the upper classes were increasingly linked to physical and moral deterioration throughout the century. The Armadale name at the beginning of the novel is in moral and economic decline: the original Armadale disinherits his son (Allan's father) who has 'disgraced himself beyond all redemption' (p.31); the value of the Caribbean land of both the Armadales and the Wrentmores is threatened by the coming slave emancipation (p.53). Allan brings the aristocratic Blanchard fortune to the Armadale name, but also 'the manly vigour' which Kingsley desired to see in society (Kingsley, 'The Science of Health', p.25). The advantages of Allan's upbringing and physical health are coupled with an honest and amiable nature.

Allan's fitness for procreation becomes questionable, however, in relation to Edwin Ray Lankester's definition of degeneration as an organism becoming 'adapted to *less* varied and *less* complex conditions of life'.<sup>45</sup> In comparison to the highly-strung but assiduous Midwinter, he is somewhat lacking in

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<sup>44</sup> Benjamin Collins Brodie, *Psychological Inquiries, Part II* (1862), in *The Works of Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie: With an Autobiography*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), I, pp.259-385 (p.313). See Greenslade, pp.41-46.

<sup>45</sup> Edwin Ray Lankester, *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (London: Macmillan, 1880). Further references are given after quotations.



intelligence and diligence, being 'slow over his books—but more from a constitutional inability to fix his attention to his tasks than from want of capacity to understand them' (pp.61-62). There are examples throughout the novel that, although honourable, Allan is morally simplistic, such as his choosing the Milroys as his tenants at the spin of a coin (p.135). Lankester's example of 'an active healthy man' who 'degenerates when he becomes suddenly possessed of a fortune' is particularly pertinent (Lankester, p.33). Allan's upbringing away from society, his possession of the Blanchard fortune, and the number of people who assist him in difficult situations (notably Mr Brock, Pedgift Junior and Midwinter) ensure he encounters few challenges requiring him to struggle or adapt in his life. Kingsley similarly spoke of men living a 'lap-dog' existence which he saw as 'unfavourable to the growth of the higher virtues', because for many 'safety and comfort may, and actually do, merely make their lives mean and petty, effeminate and dull.'<sup>46</sup>

Gabrielle Ceraldi's discussion of *The Woman in White* (1860) is pertinent here as she explores the novel in the light of the theory of natural selection and social Darwinism. She argues that Collins portrays England as culturally and evolutionarily superior to the rest of the world, but 'undermined from within by its growing ability to shelter itself from the rigors of evolutionary struggle'.<sup>47</sup> Collins suggests that because of this, 'biological stagnation is inevitable' (Ceraldi, p.186). This is also apparent in the character of Allan, who cannot compete against, or even perceive the real danger of his enemies. As Caroline Reitz pithily puts it, Allan is 'long on pluck and short on almost everything else, including a sense of the complexities of the modern world'.<sup>48</sup> Reitz's choice of 'complexity' is particularly applicable to this discussion as Midwinter not only represents a triumph of the individual over a particularly hard hereditary lot but because he is able to endure, and is hardened by, difficult experiences he is therefore the more complex organism.

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<sup>46</sup> Charles Kingsley, 'Heroism' (1873), in *Sanitary and Social Lectures* (London: Macmillan, 1880), pp.225-254 (p.226).

<sup>47</sup> Gabrielle Ceraldi, 'The Crystal Palace, Imperialism, and the "Struggle for Existence": Victorian Evolutionary Discourse in Collins's *The Woman in White*', in Bachman and Cox, *Reality's Dark Light* (pp.173-94) p.176. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>48</sup> Caroline Reitz, 'Colonial "Gwilt": In and Around Wilkie Collins's *Armada*', in *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 33:1 (Spring, 2000), 92-103 (p.98).

However, complexity itself could be seen as a cause of degeneration. Members of societies which were supposedly more evolved were believed to have more complex, but therefore more delicate, brains. Maudsley (writing about insanity) claimed that 'as is the height so is the depth, as is the development so is the degeneration'.<sup>49</sup> Certainly Collins's depiction of Midwinter's behaviour and physiology - his mental anxieties and highly-strung nervous system, his brain fever and hysteria, his obsessive overanalysing and moral vacillations - gives the impression that he is teetering, much of the time, on the brink of another breakdown. This is exactly the type of "modern", "civilized" degeneration which, according to Maudsley, savages (with their less developed brains) were not capable of experiencing.<sup>50</sup> In Midwinter, Collins has created a character who carries the potential for numerous types of degeneracy: on the one hand his "savage" blood could enter, and therefore degenerate, the white race (the very fact of his existence shows this has already happened to an extent); on the other hand he represents the fear of degeneration as something generated within civilized society itself.<sup>51</sup> Allan, contrastingly, is an admirable physical specimen, bringing middle-class vitality to the failing upper classes. Yet this educated, affluent, white English male, threatens a different type of degeneration again (although also a threat from within society), and can be seen as a confirmation of Lankester's warning that 'we are all drifting, tending to the condition of intellectual Barnacles or Ascidians' (Lankester, p.60).

Collins depiction of Lydia Gwilt also engages with ideas of degeneracy. Miss Gwilt's family background is a mystery even to herself, but she is initially described by Midwinter's father as '*innately* deceitful' and '*innately* pitiless', 'a marvel of precocious ability', with 'wicked dexterity', suggesting she has inborn

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<sup>49</sup> Henry Maudsley, 'On Some of the Causes of Insanity', *Journal of Mental Science*, 12 (January, 1867), 488-502 (p.490).

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.* Heidi Rimke and Alan Hunt, touch on this issue in relation to the evolution of the moral faculties and moral insanity in 'From Sinners to Degenerates: The Medicalization of Morality in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century', *History of the Human Sciences*, 15:1 (February, 2002), 59-88 (pp.75-76).

<sup>51</sup> The "savage" and "modern" combine as Midwinter's moral and intellectual anxieties (which make him 'complex') are based in part on his superstitious beliefs, a state of mind connected to less evolved races. The nineteenth-century craze for spiritualism was often seen as a sign that modern society had not reached the height of civilization and as late as 1900 periodicals were asking why 'in almost every respect the civilised human being is unlike the savage' and yet still displays the superstitious feelings of 'the men of the primeval world', D.F. Hannigan, 'The Tenacity of Superstition', *Westminster Review*, 154 (July, 1900), 69-72 (p.69).

immoral tendencies and natural criminal ability.<sup>52</sup> However, the ultimate discrediting of Midwinter's father's belief in his own moral contagion casts doubt upon his assessment of Miss Gwilt. She has, furthermore, been exposed to many morally detrimental social forces. She is abandoned by her parents, the Oldershaws, and Miss Blanchard (after being encouraged to commit forgery). Her subsequent exposure to increasingly dissolute influences (as Bashwood Junior's tale reveals, pp.632-44) gives validity to her final supposition that she might have been a 'better woman [...] if I had not lived a miserable life' (p.806).

Miss Gwilt's criminality may well be a result of nurture rather than nature, but she describes herself in terms which draw on the discourse of degeneration and bring to mind the notion of acquired characteristics. In a diary entry she tries to understand how her marriage to Midwinter has failed to fulfil its early promise:

I have thought and thought about it, till a horrible fancy has taken possession of me. He has been noble and good in his past life, and I have been wicked and disgraced. Who can tell what a gap that dreadful distance may make between us, unknown to him and unknown to me [...] Is there an unutterable Something left by the horror of my past life, which clings invisibly to me still? And is *he* feeling the influence of it, sensibly, and yet incomprehensibly to himself? Oh me! Is there no purifying power in such love as mine? Are there plague-spots of past wickedness on my heart which no after-repentance can wash out? (pp.660-61)

Miss Gwilt fears that her actions have set her irredeemably apart from Midwinter. As the narrator remains silent about the reasons for Midwinter's sudden change in attitude towards his new wife, we have only the suspicions of Miss Gwilt to extrapolate from and, like Midwinter's father, the fear of her own immorality renders her narrative voice extreme, unreliable, but compelling. Criminal tendencies were exactly the kind of characteristics which could supposedly initiate degeneration, and it is the fear that her previous immoral ways may have changed her in a fundamental, irreversible manner that is particularly important here. Miss Gwilt's description of the sinister 'unutterable

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<sup>52</sup> p.39, my emphasis. Descriptions of Lydia as 'tigerish' (p.438, p.668), render her (like Midwinter) potentially atavistic. In *Criminal Man* (1876), the Italian criminologist Cesare Lombroso theorized that the born criminal was atavistic. See Pick, chapter 5.

Something', the irremovable 'plague-spots' of wickedness she may have acquired, is expressive of the same fearful, anxiety-ridden atmosphere which was often generated by descriptions of degeneration. Théodule A. Ribot's portrayal of hereditary decline at work in entire societies (p.110 above), for example, also depicts degeneration as ominously invisible and formidable.

The sheer number of degeneration theories which can be linked to this novel results in a complex net of possibilities in which any form of weakness is a potential future threat and no character is free from the possible taint of degeneration in one of its many forms. This gives an impression of how oppressive and all encompassing the concept of degeneration could become, but also of how comfortably sensation fiction can accommodate theories of negative heredity. Sensation fiction is in fact the ideal genre for addressing, and exploiting, concerns about degeneration. In his review of *No Name*, Alexander Smith commented upon the ultra-tight plotting of sensation novels: 'every trifling incident is charged with an oppressive importance: if a tea-cup is broken, it has a meaning, it is a link in a chain; you are certain to hear of it afterwards'.<sup>53</sup> This is equally true for degeneration in its most extreme form – every deed, every mistake or weakness will effect an individual's future progeny. Degeneration theorists saw potential danger everywhere. Henry Maudsley, for example, (just over six months after *Armadale* finished its run in the *Cornhill*) warned readers of the *Journal of Mental Science* that:

all evil habits of life—habits of luxurious effeminacy, of indolence, and of excess in the indulgence of any appetite—as well as all unfavourable external conditions of life which deteriorate the mental and bodily health of individuals, are so far predisposing causes of the degeneracy of the race which individuals constitute. (Maudsley, 'Causes of Insanity', p.495)

The repetition of 'all' makes degeneracy seem almost unavoidable. The atmosphere of destructive fatality which appears to be at work in *Armadale* complements that of destructive heredity. Even the marriage of Allan Armadale to the robust young Neelie is problematic, not only because Allan himself can

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<sup>53</sup> Alexander Smith, 'Novels and Novelists of the Day', *North British Review*, 38 (February, 1863), 168-190 (p.184).

be seen as degenerate, but because Mrs Milroy suffers from a mysterious illness. Although Neelie seems particularly healthy, her mother's condition did not manifest itself until later in life, and there is no indication in the text as to how hereditary it may be (p.375).

*Armadale* is, therefore, a novel full of instances of potential mental, physical and moral decline. Indeed degeneration is, in many ways, seemingly only restrained through the 'renunciation' of the supposed degenerates (Lewes, 'Hereditary Influence', p.158). Midwinter ends the novel single and childless, devoted to his soon-to-be-married friend; Miss Gwilt, moreover, commits suicide, reclaiming her moral worth by purging the degenerate threat she poses. However, by showing admirable qualities in Midwinter, and even in Miss Gwilt, and by revealing Allan Armadale to be in some senses morally and intellectually inferior, Collins has blurred the boundaries between fit and unfit, desirable and undesirable. Ultimately, it is shown that a hereditarily suspect and vulnerable individual such as Midwinter may be able to overcome and improve on the imperfections of his parents. In fact, *Armadale* is in some ways, much more than the other novels discussed in this thesis, about the factors which *do not* determine an individual's behaviour. Rather than heredity or fatality proving the true danger, the accidents and coincidences with which characters are faced during their lives, and the choices they make in response to them are what really matter. This looks forward to Collins's later novel, *Man and Wife* (1870), in which there is no longer such a subtle blending of deterministic factors, and the rule of "Circumstance" is increasingly enforced.

## Chapter 5

### 'But the creatures of circumstances': Environmental Determinism in *Man and Wife*

It seems to me that, wherever we begin, we are always brought back to the same point, and compelled to acknowledge that we are but the creatures of circumstances, these circumstances being, up to a certain point, at least, independent of anything that we ourselves can do.<sup>1</sup>

(Benjamin Brodie, *Psychological Inquiries*, 1862)

So do we shape our own destinies, blindfold. So do we hold our poor little tenure of happiness at the capricious mercy of Chance.<sup>2</sup>

(Wilkie Collins, *Man and Wife*, 1870)

Wilkie Collins, as the previous chapters have demonstrated, engaged with a variety of Victorian deterministic theories for a number of reasons. The influences of innate and hereditary conditions, of upbringing and education, or of traumatic experiences are used to explain characters' behaviour, to consider social issues connected with these deterministic ideas, and to explore the ideas themselves. In *Basil and No Name*, Collins's portrayal of the relations between the passions, intellect and the will draws on nineteenth-century psychological theories which advocated the cultivation and application of the will, and perceived the exertion of willpower as a form of self-control and ethical progress. In 'Mad Monkton' and *Armadale*, Collins shows an awareness of the growing belief in the dominant influence of heredity, but in the latter text asserts that individuals may act in ways which contradict supposedly degenerate trends in their natures. The following chapter looks at how Collins continues to engage with theories of determinism in his 1870 novel, *Man and Wife*, often through a reworking of the themes, theories and devices used in the novels previously discussed in this study, especially monomania and heredity.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Collins Brodie, *Psychological Inquiries, Part II* (1862), in *The Works of Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie: With an Autobiography*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), I, pp.259-385 (p.302).

<sup>2</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Man and Wife* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.253. Further references are given after quotations. *Man and Wife* was serialized in *Cassell's Magazine*, January-June, 1870.

However, in this novel Collins places greater emphasis on the influence of environmental, non-congenital determining factors. This is linked to the fact that *Man and Wife* is Collins's 'novel with a purpose'.<sup>3</sup>

The *Westminster Review* described 'novels with a purpose' as ones in which the author wrote

not because he or she felt inspired to tell a story, but because certain meditations, or convictions, or doubts, on some subject connected with human society, seemed to find convenient and emphatic expression through the medium of a work of fiction'.<sup>4</sup>

Collins's preface declares that he intended the novel to explicitly address social grievances and 'afford what help it may towards hastening the reform of certain abuses which have been too long suffered to exist among us unchecked' (*Man and Wife*, p.5). *Man and Wife*'s main purpose is to censure the 'scandalous condition of the Marriage Laws of the United Kingdom' (ibid.). Collins uses his plot and characterization to show the harmful impact of these legal and social conditions. The parents of the heroine, Anne Silvester, discover that by Irish law their marriage is illegitimate because the husband failed to convert to Catholicism at the correct time. Anne herself twice falls foul of the Scottish marriage laws: first when she inadvertently marries her friend's fiancé, Arnold, by (innocently) spending the night with him in a hotel room and allowing the staff to believe them to be married for propriety's sake; second when it turns out that she is previously married to the villain Geoffrey Delamayn because they have exchanged a written 'promise of marriage' (p.523). The injustice of the English marriage laws which denied a wife control over her own earnings is also revealed through the story of Hester Dethridge whose abusive, hereditarily alcoholic husband legally claims and spends all of her wages until she is driven to murder and insanity.

The novel's other purpose is the disparagement of what Collins perceived as a harmful national 'mania for muscular cultivation' (p.5) at the expense of intellectual and moral development. The villain, Geoffrey Delamayn, represents

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<sup>3</sup> The social purpose novel was obviously not a new creation; famous examples include Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), and Charles Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854).

<sup>4</sup> Justin McCarthy, 'Novels with a Purpose', *Westminster Review*, 82 (July, 1864), 24-49 (p.29).

what Collins calls the 'washed Rough in broadcloth' (p.6). Although from an affluent and privileged family, Geoffrey has been raised to prize his physical prowess over his intellectual or moral development, and as a result he is little more than a thug.

Collins claimed that he intended the story to be more than just the means of conveying his message. He hoped that his reader would 'find that the purpose of the story is always an integral part of the story itself', and explained that he had tried to write a work in which 'the fact and the fiction' were 'never separable one from the other' (p.7). The plot is reliant on the state of the marriage laws as they stood at the time, and in this sense 'fact' and 'fiction' are intertwined; in achieving this, Collins's fiction itself has undergone a marked change from previous works.<sup>5</sup> One of the major alterations, and the one which is discussed in this chapter, is a shift in Collins's employment of concepts of determinism towards a depiction of character as predominantly affected by external factors rather than by inborn constitutions. In order to convey his message about the deleterious influence of certain legal and social practices, Collins highlights socially constructed determinants and their damaging consequences on individuals. Although some characters are described in terms of their inherent psychological makeup it is on the whole the long-term environmental factors such as upbringing, education and social rank, and the moment-by-moment circumstances in which they find themselves, that dictate the choices they make and the outcome of events.

Despite this increased emphasis on social and circumstantial determinism in *Man and Wife*, Collins includes some references to negative heredity which are reminiscent of *Armadale*. As in the earlier novel, the growing Victorian tendency to associate heredity with morality (as discussed in chapter 4) is taken

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<sup>5</sup> The 1870s are often seen as the beginning of a downturn in the quality, complexity and readability of Collins's fiction. See Sue Lonoff, *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship* (New York: AMS Press, 1982), p.52-53. Although often quoted, it is worth including Algernon Charles Swinburne's assessment of Collins's later work as it accords with that of many subsequent critics: 'What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?/ Some demon whispered—"Wilkie! have a mission"', *Wilkie Collins*, *Fortnightly Review*, 52 (November, 1889), 589-99 (p.598). Nevertheless, *Man and Wife* received reasonable reviews: the *Contemporary Review* found it 'weirdly fascinating' and 'forcibly written' (A.H. Japp, [signed H.A.P.] '*Man and Wife*', *Contemporary Review*, 15 (August, 1870), pp.317-19 (p.319)); the *Saturday Review* admitted to taking it 'at one draught' because it was 'too amusing to be laid down unfinished' Anon, '*Man and Wife*', *Saturday Review*, 30 (July, 1870), 52-53 (p.52).



to extremes by evoking intimations of the workings of Fate. It is not merely that children will inherit their parents' personalities and morality, it is insinuated that the events of the past will somehow mysteriously recreate themselves in the next generation. As with Midwinter's father in *Armadale*, *Man and Wife* begins with a dying parent's fear that her child is fated to repeat her mistakes (a career on the stage and unhappy marriage). Anne Silvester Senior sees her daughter as her 'second self' and anxiously speculates, 'She is Anne Silvester – as I was. *Will she end like Me?*' (pp.42-43). The fear is that children don't merely resemble their parents, they become them. Unlike Midwinter's father, however, Anne Senior hopes that some of the past will be recreated in the shape of her enduring friendship with her school friend Blanche:

We two mothers [...] seem literally to live again in our children. I have an only child. My friend has an only child. My daughter is little Anne – as I was. My friend's daughter is little Blanche – as *she* was. And, to crown it all, those two girls have taken the same fancy to each other, which *we* took to each other, in the bygone days at school. One has often heard of hereditary hatred. Is there such a thing as hereditary love as well? (p.18)

The possibility of 'hereditary love' and 'hatred' reflects the increasing emphasis on morality which was applied to theories of heredity, but without the unremittingly negative tone that accompanied theories of degeneration. Anne's hopes seem to be fulfilled as the younger Anne and Blanche become the best of friends.

Whilst the love between the older Anne and Blanche is replicated in their daughters, Anne Senior's fears do not (like those of Midwinter's father) prove entirely warranted. Anne never pursues a career on the stage and the exact circumstances of her mother's life are never repeated: whereas it is the dissolution of Anne Senior's marriage which initiates her misery, the commencement of Anne's marriages (first supposedly to Arnold, then to Geoffrey) bring about her suffering. However, as the narrative often makes clear, there are some strange similarities between Anne's situation and her mother's. For example, when Geoffrey tells Anne she is married to Arnold: 'she dropped senseless at his feet: as her mother had dropped at his father's feet, in

the bygone time' (p.252). Anne begins to share her mother's fears for her future when she realises that Geoffrey's father was the man who discovered the 'flaw' in her mother's marriage which led to her father's choosing another wife:

She felt the shock of the revelation with a shill of superstitious dread. Was the chain of a fatality wound invisibly round her? Turn which way she might, was she still going darkly on, in the track of her dead mother, to an appointed and *hereditary* doom? (p.424, my emphasis)

Once again there are similarities with *Armadales* Midwinter as the supposedly ill-fated character appears to have inherited, if nothing else, the 'superstitious' nature of the parent. The narrative continues to reveal the supposed resemblances between the lives of mother and daughter:

The parallel between her mother's position and her own position, was now complete. Both married to husbands who hated them; to husbands whose interests pointed to mercenary alliances with other women; to husbands whose one want and one purpose was to be free from their wives. Strange, what different ways had led mother and daughter both to the same fate! Would the parallel hold to the end? "Shall I die," she wondered, thinking of her mother's last moments, "in Blanche's arms?" (p.551)

As in *No Name*, the use of free indirect discourse in this passage both conveys Anne's anxiety about the future, and allows the narrator to suggest that fatality is stalking her without confirming it (see p.70 of this thesis). Despite some similarities between the positions of mother and daughter, it seems an exaggeration to suggest that the 'parallel' between them is 'complete', and it certainly does not 'hold' to the end. As with *Armadales*, members of the current generation eventually overcome the threat of the past (brought about by the actions of their parents) and forge their own futures. Whilst Collins does not go so far as to renounce his earlier claim in *No Name* that 'infants are not born with blank tempers', and although neither heredity nor Fate are actually discredited in *Man and Wife*, they take a back seat to the influence of socially constructed determinants and the determining power of circumstance.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Wilkie Collins, *No Name* (London: Penguin, 2004), p.116.

As with most sensation novels, there are many coincidental happenings that occur to drive the plot to its conclusion. Much of the action in *Man and Wife* is driven by chance, a term Collins uses not to suggest entirely random happenings, but rather the arising of unforeseen or misunderstood circumstances. There is always a chain of cause and effect, but characters are unable to perceive it in its entirety and therefore repeatedly miss each other, misconstrue each other or the situation, or make bad decisions based on poor information. Arnold Brinkworth, for example, unwittingly marries himself to Anne because he is unaware of the irregularities of the Scottish marriage laws. Blanche, on several occasions, acts in what she believes to be a helpful manner, but actually serves to make things worse. Her decision to take Sir Patrick into her confidence about Anne's situation is 'a resolution, destined to lead to far more serious results, in the future, than any previsions of hers could anticipate' (p.165). Similarly, when Geoffrey approaches Sir Patrick for information about Scottish law their discussion is 'so trifling in appearance, so terrible in its destined influence' (p.225). By using terms relating to destiny and psychic powers (a regular feature of this novel), Collins emphasises the fact that human beings do not have the ability to see into their own futures and cannot therefore accurately predict the consequences of their actions. Acts of will are described using the discourse of Fate (as with heredity discussed above), but they actually arise naturally out of human motives such as Blanche's affection for, and Geoffrey's dislike of, Anne, and their ignorance of the law. Rather than being preordained by some supernatural force, their actions *become* fatal, they create their destiny minute by minute through the choices they make.

On other occasions the fact that events rely on chance are more blatantly declared. Blanche fails to see Geoffrey leaving the library after he has told Anne that she is married to Arnold, because she chooses to stay by Anne rather than looking out of the window. The narrator tells us that:

making that one discovery, might have altered the whole course of events, not in her coming life only, but in the coming lives of others. So do we shape our own destinies, blindfold. So do we hold our poor little tenure of happiness at the capricious mercy of Chance. (p.253)

Blanche's choice helps to shape her "destiny", but destiny here is just the outcome of events and decisions made as a result of earthly influences. Although the characters are free to make their own choices, free will can only ever be exercised on incomplete information and using inadequate powers of perception, in response to events which the individual may never see coming, or may inadvertently create. John R. Reed sums this up nicely, when speaking of Collins's fiction generally, by asserting that Collins's outlook is

that life has no inherent design to be fathomed by the interpretation of this or that set of signs but is a complex union of human motive and external circumstance guiding a very limited yet free will to make choices in the face of mystery.<sup>7</sup>

Collins depicts 'the face of mystery' extensively in *Man and Wife*. For example, when Blanche and Sir Patrick wonder who the man in Anne's hotel room could have been and Arnold walks through the door, the narrator exclaims:

there stood the Discovery, presenting itself unconsciously to eyes incapable of seeing it [...] The terrible caprice of Chance, the merciless irony of Circumstance, could go no further than this. The three had their feet on the brink of the precipice at that moment. And two of them were smiling at an odd coincidence; and one of them was shuffling a pack of cards! (p.285)

Here, Collins reveals the emphasis that he is placing on men and women's inability to fully understand their own place in the world. 'Discovery', 'Chance' and 'Circumstance' hover around the unwitting human players, unknowable to them, and unalterable *because* they are unknowable. The characters in *Man and Wife* have, as Reed says, some free will, but they do not have the knowledge to put it to effective use. Although this may be true of events in many of Collins's novels (in sensation fiction, and in life generally), here Collins places increased weight upon human beings' helplessness in the face of circumstance.

It may not seem incongruous, after claiming that *Man and Wife* is a novel about chance and circumstance, to claim that it is also a melodramatic novel; after all, the peripety employed to bring about melodrama's happy endings

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<sup>7</sup> John Reed, *Victorian Will* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989), p.294.

often takes the form of chance happenings. However, melodrama is a genre which (in its own deterministic way) demands that innately good or bad characters act in a particular fashion according to their correspondence to the archetype of hero, heroine or villain. As Collins uses both melodrama and environmental determinism to convey his "purpose", his negotiation between the two requires some attention.

Chapter 2 explored how Collins drew on and subverted melodramatic archetypes, and the moral polarities which they represent. In the intervening novels between *Basil* and *Man and Wife* Collins continues to draw on the formal and stylistic traits of melodrama. Several of his characters appear to fall neatly into the categories of "goodies" and "baddies" (such as Walter Hartright and Laura Fairlie, Count Fosco and Sir Percival in *The Woman in White*). At other times Collins complicates the moral polarity of melodrama by creating ambiguous characters; heroines such as *No Name's* Magdalen who breach social codes, and villains such as *Armada's* Miss Gwilt, who may engender the reader's sympathy. With Collins's move towards novels with a purpose comes a return to a "purer" melodramatic tone; most prominently, protagonists come to be presented in starker terms of black and white.

Part of *Man and Wife's* melodramatic atmosphere is attributable to the fact that it was originally intended as a play.<sup>8</sup> It was written in a period of Collins's career when he was frequently engaged with writing adaptations of his novels for the stage. Comparing some of these with *Man and Wife* gives an impression of just how melodramatic the latter is, and also shows that at this time Collins often had to reconcile melodramatic moral absolutes with heroines who (like Anne Silvester) commit morally dubious acts. Moreover, he often employed notions of environmental determinism to do so. Collins's adaptations necessarily condense the plots of the novels in order to place them on the stage; family relationships are simplified and the action takes place in fewer locations. The alterations that Collins makes, however, also emphasise the melodramatic elements of the stories. Although, as I have observed previously (see p.37 of this thesis), there were variations on, and deviations from, the melodramatic

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<sup>8</sup> Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1991), p.314. Further quotations are given after references.

archetypes, Victorian melodramas still generally adhered to, and conveyed unambiguously, the genre's reliance on moral polarity. Although there are a number of plot alterations, *The Woman in White* (1871) did not actually require a radical adaptation of the main characters to achieve this polarity because, as mentioned above, they already fall rather neatly into the categories of hero, heroine and villain.<sup>9</sup>

Contrastingly, *No Name*, with its morally questionable heroine/villain, received a more substantial alteration of tone and characterization. Some of the controversial aspects of the novel are maintained as Magdalen continues to pursue the trust as single-mindedly as in the novel.<sup>10</sup> Also, several of Magdalen's speeches in the novel already contain a melodramatic intensity, and much of the dialogue is preserved either in whole or part. For example at one point Magdalen, alone, exclaims: 'Oh, my father! my father! the wrong your brother has done us haunts me like a possession of the devil. The resolution to right it burns in me like fire'.<sup>11</sup> This is taken almost directly from the novel, which reads: 'The sense of that wrong haunts her, like a possession of the devil. The resolution to right that wrong burns in her like fire' (*No Name*, p.236). However, in the play, Magdalen is addressing the spirit of her father (rather than threatening Noel Vanstone whilst in disguise). This impresses on the audience the fact that she is righting a wrong done to the dead.

Indeed throughout the play, Magdalen is given clearer reasons (which could be seen as justifications) for her behaviour. For instance, Norah has become 'a bedridden invalid, suffering from a spinal complaint' (*No Name*, 1870, p.10), who may be cured if the money can be found for her treatment. Moreover, Magdalen's remorse is emphasised; although she still goes through

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<sup>9</sup> Alterations include the early revelation of information (such as Pesca's membership of the brotherhood and Sir Percival's illegitimacy) and the means of Sir Percival's and Count Fosco's deaths (respectively, drowning and assassination in England rather than France). See Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White: A Drama in a Prologue and Four Acts* (London: published by the author, 1871).

<sup>10</sup> In addition to this, Magdalen's final change of heart is not proven by her destruction of the Secret Trust because Bertram actually burns it before she can get close to it. W.B. Bernard's earlier stage adaptation of the novel more closely retains the original ending as Magdalen tears up the Trust declaring that she has 'parted' with her 'past life.' *No Name: A Drama in Five Acts*, (London: Holsworth, 1863), p.57; compare with Wilkie Collins, *No Name*, 1862, p.607. Peters notes that neither Bernard's nor Collins's adaptations were very successful (Peters, p.239).

<sup>11</sup> Wilkie Collins, *No Name: A Drama in Four Acts* (London: published by the author, 1870), p.16. Further references are given after quotations.

with the marriage to Noel Vanstone, she not only buys the laudanum, she actually takes it and declares, 'placed between death and degradation, I have chosen death'.<sup>12</sup> Luckily, the concerned chemist has given her a harmless liquid, and Noel Vanstone's death removes the need for her to degrade herself further in that sense. Additionally, George Bertram (who essentially steps in as saviour at the end of the novel version) is the constant hero and lover of Magdalen, who refuses to lose faith in her:

BERTRAM [Magdalen's] noble nature [...] may fall, on the hard journey of life, but it has in it the capacity to rise again [...] I can see that her own keen sense of the wrong that she has suffered is her own worst enemy. I can make allowance for generous impulses led astray by temptation and bad advice. In one word, I can sympathise with her. (*No Name*, 1870, p.52)

Here, the inner struggles that Magdalen endures in the novel are clearly explained and to an extent excused by the reliable and morally infallible hero. Bertram exemplifies and dictates how the audience should react to Magdalen, and her increased guilt and good motives smooth the way towards feeling 'sympathy' with her. Magdalen is a 'noble' heroine, who has been led into bad behaviour by circumstance.

In Collins's dramatic adaptation of *Armadale*, *Miss Gwilt* (1875), the change between novel and play, and specifically the leading females, is even more striking. Advising Collins on his initial attempt at dramatizing *Armadale*, Dickens warned that Miss Gwilt would not do for the stage, as drama required 'interest in some innocent person', preferably 'a young woman [...] in peril'.<sup>13</sup> The subsequent change in the play's title suggests that Miss Gwilt is to be the 'innocent person' in whom the audience can feel an 'interest'. Although 'innocent' would be an exaggeration, Miss Gwilt's sinful past is lessened to her being the former mistress of Manuel. Moreover, Miss Gwilt is now a toy of the

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<sup>12</sup> *No Name*, 1870, p.56. Although suicide was a sin, Martin J. Wiener explains that as the nineteenth century progressed it was seen as less of a crime and more as a an unfortunate sign of an unsound mind. It was no longer 'classed as homicide' from 1879. *Reconstructing the Criminal: Culture, Law, and Policy in England, 1830-1914* (Cambridge: CUP, 1990), p.267.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins, 10 July, 1866 in *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Graham Storey and others, 11 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965-1999), XI (1865-67), pp.220-222 (p.221).

evil Doctor Downward who, unlike in the novel, is responsible for planning her marriage to Allan.<sup>14</sup> She does decide to poison Allan, but only once she has been utterly trodden underfoot by Doctor Downward and deserted, as she believes, by Midwinter. Miss Gwilt often makes declarative insights into her own nature:

MISS GWILT 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. (*Miss Gwilt*, p.68)

Like Magdalen, Miss Gwilt is a heroine who becomes a villain under the influence of circumstance and male oppression: something must be 'done to touch [her] heart', it is not something she can achieve on her own. Later, as Miss Gwilt struggles with her conscience, Doctor Downward confirms her belief that she is not a bad woman by exclaiming in an aside to the audience (that moment when a villain can safely be trusted to tell the truth): 'Curious! There is an undergrowth of goodness in that woman's nature which is too firmly rooted to be easily pulled up' (*Miss Gwilt*, p.73). The 'undergrowth of goodness' however, has been *overgrown* by a life of hardship and despair: 'I have suffered as few women suffer. My life has been wasted already!' (*Miss Gwilt*, p.27). In these plays, whilst the heroines may not be morally untouchable, they are morally simplified in order that the audience may perceive them as ultimately good.

*Man and Wife* shares a lot stylistically with these dramatic adaptations, particularly in its portrayal of the heroine Anne Silvester. Anne is certainly not an obvious candidate for the role of virtuous heroine as she has, before the novel begins, been the mistress of Geoffrey Delamayn. However, Anne is a less controversial figure than characters such as Magdalen or Miss Gwilt (from the novels, not the stage versions) as she desires to rectify her mistakes by marrying

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<sup>14</sup> Miss Gwilt is even reduced to pleading with Doctor Downward about her infatuation with Midwinter: 'Can you wonder that I love him? Oh, Doctor, Doctor, don't expect too much of me! I'm only a woman after all!'; and then she bursts into tears. This is not the Lydia Gwilt that *Armadales*' readers have come to know. *Miss Gwilt: A Drama in Five Acts* (printed for performance in the theatre only, not published, 1875), p.30. Further references are given after quotations.



Geoffrey, or to end her life if this does not happen. Furthermore, in a manner comparable with Bertram's defence of Magdalen, the narrator lets his readers know early on exactly how they should react to Anne through an "aside":

Is there no atoning suffering to be seen here? Do your sympathies shrink from such a character as this? Follow her, good friends of virtue, on the pilgrimage that leads, by steep and thorny ways, to the purer atmosphere and the nobler life. Your fellow creature, who has sinned and has repented—you have the authority of the Divine Teacher for it—is your fellow-creature, purified and ennobled. A joy among the angels of Heaven—oh, my brothers and sisters of the earth, have I not laid my hand on a fit companion for You?<sup>15</sup>

The narrator preaches a doctrine of Christian toleration: there is no doubt in this passage that the reader is intended to accept Anne as the heroine of the novel; it is through her experiences that, in the way of melodrama, good is seen to be persecuted and finally saved. Although a flawed heroine, due to her breaching of accepted social and moral codes, she is nevertheless undoubtedly a heroine. Contrastingly, Geoffrey Delamayn (who is discussed in detail presently) is one of the most utterly unsympathetic villains in Collins's oeuvre. Appearing irredeemable, Geoffrey is uncouth, stupid and treacherous, lacking the intellectual charisma of a Fosco or the glamour of a Miss Gwilt.

*Man and Wife's* appropriation of melodrama differs from a work like *Basil* in which the melodramatic atmosphere is created by the neurotic first person narrative and the behaviour of the characters. Whereas Basil's account and perspective of events is somewhat distorted and unreliable, in *Man and Wife* it is, as in the previous quotation, the omniscient third person narrator who dictates to the reader how Anne and Geoffrey should be regarded (i.e. as moral polar opposites). In a sense, melodrama in *Basil* is generated from within its diegesis, whereas in *Man and Wife* it is applied from without. As such, there is

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<sup>15</sup> *Man and Wife*, pp.77-78. This is reminiscent of an additional postscript in revised versions of Matthew Lewis's *The Monk* (originally 1796) which warns the reader against passing judgement and reminds us that 'to look with mercy on the conduct of others, is a virtue no less than to look with severity on your own', M. G. Lewis, *Ambrosio, or the Monk: A Romance*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn, 3 vols (London: J. Bell, 1800), III, p.311. Collins was familiar with *The Monk* as a young man, William Baker and William M. Clarke, eds, *The Letters of Wilkie Collins*, 2 vols (London: Macmillan, 1999), I, p.14. Collins also evokes New Testament morality as a defence of his subject matter in his preface to *Armadale* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.4. Also like *Armadale*, however, Collins's appeal to the religious sentiments of his readers is not accompanied by overt religiosity in the story itself.

less psychological complexity and ambiguity in Collins's portrayal of his characters in *Man and Wife*.

One of the reasons that Collins creates this morally polarized atmosphere is, as Jenny Bourne Taylor argues, because Collins's later works such as *Man and Wife* have controversial heroines whose cases he is trying to defend in order to make a social point. Collins finds the 'need to strip away much of [the novels'] psychological and cognitive equivocation in order to elicit their reader's sympathy'.<sup>16</sup> So Anne must appear to be very *very* good during the course of the novel if we are to forgive her for her previous transgressions: like Magdalen, Anne is said to have an 'inbred nobility' (p.168), but despite her fallen status (which has happened before the opening of the narrative) this nobility never significantly fails her, she never struggles against her own nature in the way Magdalen does. Other characters in the novel also have a fundamentally good personality on which environment and experience work their influence. Blanche has 'a substance of sincerity and truth and feeling' (p.57), and Arnold has an 'affectionate nature—simple, loyal, clinging where it once fastened' (p.274). Whether due to fortunate hereditary or a loving upbringing (it is not always clear), there is a sense that the goodness of these characters is somehow immutable, giving the melodramatic impression that ultimately these characters are good just because they are. Whilst the characters in *Man and Wife* may appear psychologically simplified due to their definite statuses as heroes and villains, Collins's use of melodramatic moral polarization is intended to bolster his social messages by giving the whole novel a sense of moral clarity. Collins does not engage, therefore, with Victorian theories of psycho-physiological determinism to the extent that he has in previous novels.

Instead, Collins's concern with depicting the disastrous outcomes of social wrongs leads to an exploration of social determinism, as in his depiction of Geoffrey Delamayn, a villain created by a deficient education. The quality of education became an increasing matter of concern throughout the 1860s as a number of nationwide Schools' Inquiries Commissions were set up to

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<sup>16</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p.221.

investigate teaching and learning at all social levels. As Norman McCord explains:

The Newcastle commission of 1858, the Clarendon commission of 1861, and the Taunton commission of 1864 investigated respectively ordinary elementary schools, the great public schools, and the varied schools for "those large classes of English society which are comprised between the humblest and the very highest".<sup>17</sup>

The results of these inquiries led to a general questioning of the quality of national education and concluded that the standard of learning that children received was lacking on a number of levels. One aspect of education which received particular attention was the balance of mental and physical development practiced in schools. At the end of the 1850s, Herbert Spencer advocated less emphasis on intellectual labour and more attention to health and fitness. Spencer argued that men of past generations were stronger than those of the present generation, and that the next generation looked as though it would be even weaker.<sup>18</sup> Spencer attributed much of this degeneration to an 'excess of mental application' at the expense of physical development (p.174). Spencer observed that the importance of physical development was beginning to be recognised and cites Kingsley's writings, as well as letters in newspapers about 'Muscular Christianity', as evidence of this (Spencer, p.147). Spencer acknowledged the need for balance, however, and thought perhaps Kingsley went a bit 'too far' (ibid.). Two years later, *Temple Bar* published an article on various forms of quackery and attacked 'the quack on the muscular Christianity basis' who

makes the playground of more importance than the class-room or the study; whose end and aim of masculine education is a manly bearing at football, and who ranks a good batter or a swift stroke before a Smith's prizeman or a double first; who places animal forces higher than brain power, and makes muscle of more account than mind.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Norman McCord, *British History: 1815-16* (Oxford: OUP, 1991) p.287.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861; repr. London: Routledge, 1993), p.173.

<sup>19</sup> Anon. [signed E.L.], 'On Quacks', *Temple Bar*, 2 (May, 1861), 268-75 (p.272).

As the 1860s progressed there was an increasing worry that the emphasis on physical fitness had indeed gone too far, particularly in upper-class boys' schools. An 1864 *Cornhill* article about the standard of education at Eton, for example, observed that 'influence and distinction in the school are only to be acquired by intense devotion to the oar or the bat'.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, T.H. Huxley, in an 1868 address to a Working Men's College, suggested that some may well ask whether 'the richest of our public schools might not well be made to supply knowledge, as well as gentlemanly habits, a strong class feeling, and eminent proficiency in cricket.'<sup>21</sup>

Collins makes Geoffrey an extreme example of the kind of education that promoted physical fitness and manliness over intellect. Collins emphasises the importance of intellectual development by coupling it with moral development: Geoffrey is not merely ignorant, he is entirely unscrupulous. The possibility of moulding the developing moral personality through education was frequently discussed in Victorian scientific and medical circles. William Benjamin Carpenter, for example, felt that education was key to developing an individual's 'self-directing power', which, as the previous discussion of *No Name* has shown, was integral to his theories about human agency and self-determination.<sup>22</sup> With his stunted moral and intellectual development Geoffrey lacks any 'self-directing' power beyond that which will achieve his basic desires (for fame, money and a suitable wife). Whereas Spencer in 1859 argued that 'we see infinite pains taken to produce a racer that shall win the Derby: none to produce a modern athlete' (Spencer, p.146), Collins in 1870 attacks the cult of athleticism by showing what happens when men are raised and trained like animals, describing Geoffrey as at best 'a magnificent human animal' (p.61), and at worst a 'wild beast' (p.495).

These animalistic descriptive terms are coupled with atavistic ones, for example when Geoffrey's anger is roused as he speaks to Anne:

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<sup>20</sup> M.J. Higgins [signed Paterfamilias], 'On Some Points of the Eton Report', *Cornhill Magazine*, 10 (July, 1864) 113-28 (pp.113-14).

<sup>21</sup> T.H. Huxley, 'A Liberal Education; and Where to Find It' (1868), *Collected Essays*, 9 vols (London: Macmillan, 1895), III, pp.76-110 (p.79).

<sup>22</sup> William Benjamin Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology: With Their Chief Applications to Psychology, Pathology, Therapeutics, Hygiene, & Forensic Medicine* (1842), 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Churchill, 1855), pp.550-51.

The savage element in humanity—let the modern optimists who doubt its existence, look at any uncultivated man (no matter how muscular), woman (no matter how beautiful), or child (no matter how young)—began to show itself furtively in his eyes; to utter itself furtively in his voice. (pp.79-80)

Implicitly accepting a progressive evolutionary perception of human development, Collins argues that the 'savage element in humanity' must be counteracted by cultivation, achieved through the kind of education that Geoffrey conspicuously lacks, as the narrator goes on to make clear:

Was he to blame for the manner in which he looked at her, and spoke to her? Not he! What had there been in the training of *his* life (at school or at college) to soften and subdue the savage element in him? About as much as there had been in the training of his ancestors (without the school or the college) five hundred years since. (p.80)

Here human society is responsible for failing to take control of the development of its members; Geoffrey is not 'to blame' because his personality has been moulded by his early and youthful experiences. Reed explains that many Victorian thinkers 'believed that humanity, not the individual human, could improve itself through education' (Reed, p.116). The individual may be largely incapable of self-determinism, but human societies could somehow take control of their collective development. Collins here seems to be advocating such a viewpoint: Geoffrey is a villain because of his defective upbringing; he cannot alter his own behaviour.

This is quite different to depictions of characters such as Magdalen or Midwinter who, although they are affected by their upbringings, and often in negative ways, have a core of goodness with the ability to at least struggle against those parts of themselves which are considered immoral or undesirable. It is also unlike Collins's portrayal of Anne (and the other "good" characters in the novel) with her 'innate nobility' which is intended to retain the sympathy of the reader. Geoffrey does not have even a hint of innate nobility, he is shown to be utterly the victim of environmental determinism. Similarly, when showing the physical deterioration that is the eventual result of Geoffrey's excessive

training, it is explicitly denied by a medical expert that he loses his race due to any hereditary infirmity: 'His rowing and his running, for the last four years, are alone answerable for what has happened today' (p.500). Environmental, rather than any other form of determinism is therefore employed to support Collins's social purpose.

Collins reasserts his viewpoint through both the narrator and Sir Patrick Lundie (a mouthpiece for the older generation) who offer a critical assessment of the circumstances which have resulted in Geoffrey's dishonourable character. In a lengthy lecture to several young men of the "present" generation, Sir Patrick warns of the dangers of praising physical training over mental, because an individual who has not been suitably educated is found 'defenceless, when temptation passes his way [...] he is to all moral intents and purposes, an Animal, and nothing more' (p.214). So on the one hand, an individual such as Geoffrey Delamayn has no choice in his conduct as he has not been properly prepared for the moral challenges that life throws at him. However, whereas Geoffrey has been previously absolved of blame, here Sir Patrick goes on to state that such an 'animal' will kill not 'in the character of a victim to irresistible fatality, or to blind chance; but in the character of a man who has sown the seed, and reaps the harvest' (ibid). Later, when Geoffrey feels no qualms about committing a murder the narrator again reminds us to 'look back at him in the past' (p.577) and realise that he is a product of his experiences and, when faced with an uncommon 'temptation', is no more than 'what his training has left him, in the presence of any temptation small or great—a defenceless man' (p.578). Despite the ways in which Geoffrey has arrived at his current state, he has been faced with 'temptation' and must make a moral choice - from the moment he abandons Anne to the moment he attempts to murder her he is entirely aware that what he is doing is wrong. This is reminiscent of the controversies over lunatic responsibility which were discussed in chapter 3: Geoffrey is 'defenceless', and cannot help his actions, but he has made his choices and must still be held responsible for them on some level. This paradox is at the heart of many discussions of free will, and the only solution Collins can offer is that it is of paramount importance that society (whose 'material tone'

has 'tacitly encouraged' the creation of such men as Geoffrey (p.578)) rethink its attitude towards education and morality.

Social determinism is also used to illustrate Collins's point about the unfairness of the marriage laws through the story of Hester Dethridge. Driven to despair over the years, Hester premeditates the murder of her alcoholic husband, but after successfully completing the act, rapidly loses control of her sanity in a particularly dramatic manner. Apparently dumb during the course of the novel due to a blow from her husband, it is not until her written confession is discovered by Geoffrey that it is revealed that, at the prompting of a vision, she ceased speaking as an act of penance for her husband's murder (p.603). Shortly after her vow of silence Hester begins to see an 'Appearance', which she describes as 'the vision of MY OWN SELF – repeated as if I was standing before a glass' (p.605), and which instructs her to kill innocent people.

Once again, Collins is drawing for dramatic effect on a recognized medical condition observed by many Victorian psychiatrists in which the patient was driven to act in a violent, often murderous manner, entirely against his or her will, and despite any attempt the patient might make to restrain his or her behaviour. Although (as was the case with many mental conditions) the terminology differed, this was often described under the category of monomania because it was a *partial* insanity with one distinct urge. Like those monomaniacs previously discussed – Robert Mannion, Alfred Monkton and Magdalen Vanstone – Hester is able to act like a sane person for the majority of the time, and when she makes her appearance in the novel she is working as a cook for the Lundies and appears to be a 'steady, trustworthy woman' (p.113). In the English translation of Esquirol's work, the term 'instinctive monomania' was chosen. Esquirol describes how the patient

is drawn way from his accustomed course, to the commission of acts, to [sic] which neither reason nor sentiment determine, which conscience rebukes, and which the will no longer has the power to restrain. The acts are involuntary, instinctive, irresistible.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> J.E.D. Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity* (1838), trans. by E.K. Hunt (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), p.320.

If the subject was particularly driven to kill, he or she could be referred to as suffering from 'homicidal madness', as Prichard termed it: 'the murderer is driven, as it were, by an irresistible power; he is under an influence which he cannot overcome, a blind impulse without reason'.<sup>24</sup> Such terms continued to be used throughout the period. Henry Maudsley used the phrases 'impulsive' and 'homicidal insanity', describing it as 'a certain state of mental disease' in which 'a morbid impulse may take such despotic possession of the patient as to drive him, in spite of reason and against his will, to a desperate act of suicide or homicide'.<sup>25</sup> Maudsley gives an example of an elderly woman who, like Hester, displays great strength when undergoing a sudden compulsion towards strangulation, although in this case the target is her own daughter.<sup>26</sup>

All three of the above medical writers note the lack, or failure, of reason as the murderous urge takes hold. The person may be aware that what they are doing is wrong, and they may strive to resist, but 'the will cannot always restrain, however much it may strive to do so, a morbid idea which has reached a convulsive activity, although there may be all the while a clear consciousness of its morbid nature' (Maudsley, *Responsibility*, p.138). Hester describes similar overwhelming sensations as those given above: 'I can only describe the overpowering strength of the temptation that tried me in one way. It was like tearing the life out of me, to tear myself from killing the boy'.<sup>27</sup> Physicians often drew on the same striking examples of this condition; a particular favourite was the account of a young maid who pleaded with her mistress to be removed from the house as she felt an overwhelming compulsion to tear to pieces the white flesh of her mistress's baby (Maudsley, *Responsibility*, p.145-46; Prichard, *Treatise*, p.385-86). John Barlow used this case as an example of how one can suffer from 'mental derangement' but still be considered sane: for Barlow it was only if the girl had succumbed to her impulse that she would have been truly

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<sup>24</sup> James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (London: Marchant, 1835), p.388. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>25</sup> Henry Maudsley, *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (London: King, 1874), pp. 133, 140. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>26</sup> Henry Maudsley, 'Practical Observations on Insanity of Feeling and of Action', *Lancet*, 87:2234 (23 June, 1866), 679-80 (p.679). See also Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, pp.659-60 n.

<sup>27</sup> *Man and Wife*, p.606. Collins adds delusion to Hester's impulsive insanity - the sinister apparition of herself which indicates her victims to her. This harks back to the vision of Alfred Monkton's uncle.



insane.<sup>28</sup> Like the maid, Hester initially manages to resist her urge, until she begins to see her apparition repeatedly when in proximity to Geoffrey Delamayn. In Barlow's thinking, therefore, Hester can only truly be classified as insane when she finally succumbs to her impulse and in a 'homicidal frenzy [sic]' strangles Geoffrey (p.636). By insanely despatching Geoffrey, Hester enacts the violent revenge which Anne Silvester, as the noble-hearted heroine, cannot. Collins's choice of mental illness combines with his employment of environmental determinism to support his social point about the injustice of the marriage laws.

Although Hester's murder of Geoffrey is an act she cannot control, despite her knowledge that it is wrong, her murder of her husband is premeditated. Hester describes how she attempts to leave the scene of her intended crime, but her wanderings through the city merely bring her back to her own house: 'The house held me chained to it, like a dog to his kennel. I couldn't keep away from it' (p.601). Whether or not this is read as the onset of her insanity, as a coincidence, as an unconscious homing in on the place she is trying to avoid, or as the work of Fate, Hester commits a premeditated murder and suffers a villain's outcome: monomania deteriorates into mania and she spends the remainder of her days in an asylum.<sup>29</sup> Like Geoffrey, Hester's life experiences have left her a hopeless victim to her own darker nature. Her visions of the Apparition are persistent, frightening, and ultimately overwhelming, the result of a moral corruption engendered through her husband's victimization of her. There is no gleam of goodness in Collins's portrayal of Geoffrey, and there is, correspondingly, no gleam of hope in his

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<sup>28</sup> John Barlow, *Man's Power over Himself to Prevent or Control Insanity* (1843), 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (London: Pickering, 1849), pp.42-43.

<sup>29</sup> p.639. As we have seen in chapter 3, the treatment and punishment of criminal lunatics was much debated in the Victorian period. The question of whether or not the maniac was aware that his or her actions were wrong, and if that did or did not change the extent of their responsibility, was particularly discussed in cases of impulsive insanity when the sufferer might know right from wrong, but be unable to resist committing a murderous act. For example, in *The Lancet* Harrington Tuke (like Maudsley, John Conolly's son-in-law) expressed shock that a man who had 'cut the throat of the woman with whom he had lived for thirteen years, and had intended to kill his three children by her, and afterwards himself' was sentenced to be hanged with no consideration of his mental state beyond whether he knew right from wrong when he committed the act. Tuke asserted that the man's 'disease of brain' was 'shown by insane letters, by insane words, by insane intentions, and an insane act'. 'Monomania and Homicide', *Lancet*, 90:2302 (12 October, 1867), 472-73 (p.472).

portrayal of Hester: the cook only resists her urges for long enough that her actions ultimately serve the plot by saving Anne. In this way Collins shows the devastating effects of marital abuse.

The growth in eugenics theories discussed in chapter 4 was marked by an increasing emphasis on the health of the nation, rather than individuals or individual families. Although Collins still does not adhere to ideas of unassailable negative heredity, *Man and Wife* is full of references to 'the nation' and the 'present generation'. Hester, Anne, and Anne's mother are all victims of current national marriage laws (of England, Scotland and Ireland, respectively), and Geoffrey is the product of the prevailing system of boys' education. These characters may be extreme examples but they are still representative of entire sections of society. Collins is tapping into this increasing awareness of mental, moral and physical national health, and in fact asserting that the structure and methods of society, particularly its educational practices, need to change: degenerate types are produced by society not breeding, and must be managed by social policies, not eugenics.

Collins's employment of environmental determinism as a means of criticizing society is part of a general sense that the current generation is not up to the same standard as the older one, with which Collins implicitly aligns himself. This alignment is mainly achieved by the fact that although the ageing Sir Patrick Lundie is considerably older than Collins (in his forties at the time of writing *Man and Wife*), Collins uses this character as his mouthpiece for denouncing modern institutions, as we have seen above. Often this generational difference is employed for humorous ends. Sir Patrick is 'a gentleman of the bygone [sic] time' who is

distinguished by a pliant grace and courtesy, unknown to the present generation [...] The talk of this gentleman ran in an easy flow – revealing an independent habit of mind, and exhibiting a carefully-polished capacity for satirical retort – dreaded and disliked by the present generation. (pp.57-58)

This is in contrast to the caricatured description of Blanche, a young lady who dresses in 'the height of the fashion' including a hat 'like a cheese-plate', 'fully inflated' hair, excessive jewellery, and 'striped stockings' (p.56):

Position, excellent. Money, certain. Temper, quick. Disposition, variable. In a word, a child of the modern time – with the merits of the age we live in, and the failings of the age we live in. (p.57)

Collins pokes fun at the latest fashion fads and the supposed quick tempers of modern young ladies. The humour is reliant on an acceptance of environmental determinism, the idea that people will act the way they do largely because of the world in which they have been raised, and that people of a certain rank, gender and generation will share certain attributes. When Sir Patrick addresses Anne at a delicate moment, for example, his behaviour is reliant on his status as one of the older generation: whereas a modern man would 'strike an attitude' and affect excessive sympathy, he is 'courteous as usual' (p.143). The narrator goes on to inform us that in Sir Patrick's time, it was usual to practise the 'habitual concealment of our better selves', but that this was 'upon the whole, a far less dangerous national error than the habitual advertisement of our better selves, which has become the practice, publicly and privately, of society in this age' (ibid.). Here again are references to the 'nation': certain personality traits are widespread, for better or for worse.<sup>30</sup>

Even characters who do not fall neatly into social categories are still described in terms of social influences. Arnold Brinkworth's father gambled his social position away, and as a result 'ruined his children's prospects' (p.66); Arnold has since earned his living 'in a roughish way' at sea (ibid.). Sir Patrick admires his ability to support himself and declares 'you're not like the other young fellows of the present time' (ibid.). The distinction between Arnold and a typical fellow 'of the present time' is exemplified when he asks to be allowed to spend the night in the hotel with Anne rather than brave the storm: Arnold wants 'tact, poor fellow – but who could expect him to have learnt that always superficial (and sometimes dangerous) accomplishment, in the life he had led at sea?' (p.151). Arnold is direct and honest because he has not lived in upper-class modern British society (although, like Allan Armadale, this also makes

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<sup>30</sup> It should be noted that Collins's narrator does not, when making such sweeping statements, tend to acknowledge the fact that a) he is generally talking about the upper-middle and upper classes, or that b) Sir Patrick's generation would have been largely responsible for the creation of the 'present generation'.

him vulnerable to manipulation by less scrupulous people such as Geoffrey). Environmental factors such as social status and surroundings, education and experience are by far the most deterministic forces in this novel.

Contrastingly, Collins's novels of the 1860s evoke multiple forms of determinism as converging forces which create an atmosphere in which the reader is never entirely certain of the extent to which characters are either responsible for, or capable of, making their own decisions. In *No Name*, for example, Magdalen is monomaniacal, but she makes a final moral choice which may be due to the satisfying of her "dominant idea", the influence of the fatality that has led Captain Kirke to her, or the fact that she is an inherently noble person who will necessarily make the right choice in the end, or to all of the above. These novels reflect the quandaries that many nineteenth-century thinkers found themselves facing as they reflected on humanity's position in the universe.

*Man and Wife* abandons such explorations of multiple determinants in order to focus on a portrayal of determinism which supports the novel's social critique. Collins combines a melodramatically simplified dichotomy between good and evil (intended to ensure his reader's sympathy with the correct characters), with a portrayal of individuals at the mercy of their social environment in both a long-term and a more immediate sense. Whilst characters can make choices and act on their own volition, it is often down to chance to damn or save them and their best hope lies with the improvement of society and the social institutions which provide many of life's chances. Whilst, therefore, this novel gives an indication of how Collins's fiction begins to change direction from the 1870s, it is apparent that he still employs deterministic thinking as an intrinsic and functional part of his fiction. Readings of these novels have shown that Collins was both sensitive to, and willing to exploit, theories of determinism. At times (as with *Armadale*) determinism is a subject to be explored through fiction; at other times (as with *Man and Wife*) it is employed in order to convey a message about another issue. The second part of this thesis reveals that a variety of deterministic theories are equally important,

and employed in an equally diverse number of ways, in the fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon.

PART 2: MARY ELIZABETH BRADDON

Chapter 6

'If fine clothes and a great fortune could make a gentleman, he'd be one':  
Nature and Nurture in *The Lady Lisle*

The daily life into which people are born, and into which they are absorbed before they are well aware, forms chains which only one in a hundred has moral strength enough to despise.<sup>1</sup>

(Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth*, 1853)

'You terrified me so much. You should have written to tell me that you were coming. I am not very strong.'

'No,' he said, with a curious, half-scornful laugh, 'not strong, never strong. Neither strong to oppose, to resist, or to endure. Forgive me, Lady Lisle, Heaven knows whether the defect is in your soul or your constitution. I sometimes wonder whether you have a soul.'<sup>2</sup>

(Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Lady Lisle*, 1862)

As chapter 4 on *Armadale* has shown, although the awareness of, and anxiety about, hereditary influence expressed by physiologists and physicians increased towards the end of the nineteenth century, the issue was already one of interest, and a cause for concern by the 1860s. The inheritance of non-physical traits such as intellectual, emotional and moral attributes generated at least as much attention as physical ones. William Benjamin Carpenter asserted that 'psychical character' was transmitted in the same way as physical features, because the 'development of the Brain' and its 'mode of activity' were as reliant on the 'formative capacity of the germ' when it was 'impregnated' as the development of other parts of the body. Thus, Carpenter reasoned, 'the "original constitution" of each individual is in great part (if not entirely)

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<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *Ruth* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.2.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Lady Lisle* (London: Ward and Lock, 1862), p.4. All further references, unless otherwise stated, are to this edition and are given after quotations.

determined by the conditions [...] of the parent-organisms'.<sup>3</sup> This emphasis on the hereditary nature of psychical features formed part of physiological inquiries into the interaction between the mind and body. Increasingly, physiologists realised, and insisted, that the mind could not be perceived as a discrete psychical entity, dictating behaviour through its "organ of influence", the brain; instead physiological inquiries revealed the immense influence of biological factors over both actions and thoughts. Previous chapters have also shown how environmental determinism was believed to play an important role in the development of the personality, leading many thinkers to lay emphasis on the role of education as a means of controlling, to some extent, development and behaviour. The relationships and influences between mind, body and environment were, therefore, all-important, but they were often also near-impossible to disentangle or even distinguish.

As the following chapters show, Mary Elizabeth Braddon's fiction relates to these deterministic debates by raising questions about the malleability or fixity of the personality. Braddon's characters are often described and defined in terms of their physical constitutions and hereditary characteristics, and the texts speculate about the possibility of altering the development of the individual through upbringing and education. Braddon's single-volume novel *The Lady Lisle*, published in the same year as she made her name with the best-selling *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), has received little critical attention. However, like Collins's *Basil*, it contains many themes, character types and plot features present in Braddon's later, more developed fiction, often in embryonic form, including the exploration and portrayal of deterministic factors.<sup>4</sup> An example of *The Lady Lisle's* engagement with theories of determinism is shown in the second epigraph, above. The second speaker, Captain Walsingham, distinguishes between the physical and spiritual nature of his interlocutor, and

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<sup>3</sup> William Benjamin Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology: With Their Chief Applications to Psychology, Pathology, Therapeutics, Hygiene, & Forensic Medicine* (1842), 5th edn (London: Churchill, 1855), p.592. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>4</sup> *The Lady Lisle* was serialized in *The Welcome Guest*, 4 (May-September, 1861). The only other critic who has written (briefly) on *The Lady Lisle* is Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.108-113. Further references are given after quotations. Of Braddon's biographers, Jennifer Carnell mentions it in passing and Robert Lee Wolff gives a brief plot description and some publication background.

eventual wife, Claribel, as though there are two separate aspects, the physical and the non-physical, which contribute towards the personality that is presented to those around her. As my reading of the novel will show, the answer to Walsingham's frustrated exclamation, 'Heaven knows whether the defect is in your soul or your constitution', seems to be that body and soul are inextricable; a person's "defects" cannot be neatly classified as belonging to the one or the other. Moreover, environmental and biological influences cannot be easily differentiated.

Like *Armada*, *The Lady Lisle* couples theories of determinism with an exploration of conventional class boundaries. This is achieved primarily through Braddon's portrayal of the affluent, upper-class Sir Rupert Lisle and the poor lower-class James Arnold: both begin as unappealing children with several disagreeable, and apparently hereditary, personality traits. However, whilst Rupert is raised in a manner which overcomes these flaws, James's upbringing enhances them and he is unable to successfully ascend the social scale. The result is a class-inflected engagement with several deterministic issues including the perceived degeneration of the upper and lower classes, the hereditary nature of morality and criminality, and the possibility of counteracting inherent flaws through education.

In *The Lady Lisle* the aristocracy is characterized by a 'lack of productivity' that Aeron Haynie also identifies in *Lady Audley's Secret*.<sup>5</sup> Yet whilst *Lady Audley's Secret* 'illustrates mid-Victorian concerns over the sanctity of the aristocratic country estate, the fear that it could be metaphorically invaded and contaminated by the middle class', in *The Lady Lisle* the middle classes are in fact presented as the means of rescue to an increasingly idle and dissolute upper class.<sup>6</sup> Determinism is employed in this novel to put errant working-class members firmly back in their place and to show how middle-class morals and assiduity can revitalize and improve the waning upper classes.

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<sup>5</sup> Aeron Haynie, "'An idle handle that was never turned, and a lazy rope so rotten': The Decay of the Country Estate in *Lady Audley's Secret*", in *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, ed. by Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert and Aeron Haynie (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp.63-76 (p.66).

<sup>6</sup> *ibid.*, p.64.



*The Lady Lisle* immediately establishes links between physical appearance, constitution and temperament. This is apparent from the first character description in the novel, that of Lady Claribel Lisle, Rupert's mother:

She was tall and slender. Altogether very delicate in appearance. She was dazzlingly fair; she had large, light blue eyes, lovely in colour, but perhaps rather wanting in expression; a small, straight nose; a mouth, which did not promise much decision of character; and long, loose floating curls, of the palest flaxen hair. She would have been a beautiful doll, but she was not a beautiful woman.<sup>7</sup>

Claribel physically resembles Lady Audley, whose 'large and liquid blue eyes', 'rosy lips', 'delicate nose' and 'profusion of fair ringlets', play on stereotypes of ideal beauty and the "typical" Victorian heroine.<sup>8</sup> However, whereas Lady Audley's loveliness masks villainy, Claribel's appearance hides no such surprises. In this way she bears more resemblance to heroines such as Laura Fairlie in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860). Laura's hair is of 'so faint and pale a brown—not flaxen, and yet almost as light; not golden, and yet almost as glossy—that it nearly melts, here and there, into the shadow of [her] hat', and her eyes are 'of that soft, limpid, turquoise blue, so often sung by the poets, so seldom seen in real life', altogether a 'fair, delicate girl'.<sup>9</sup> As with Claribel, external appearance reflects internal characteristics.

However, Laura is given slight, humanising flaws, such as her 'sensitive lips [which] are subject to a slight nervous contraction, when she smiles' (*Woman in White*, p.49). Although this reveals a certain mental fragility which develops to the point of breakdown later in the novel, these flaws only serve to

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<sup>7</sup> *The Lady Lisle*, p.2. In the 1890s Braddon's publishers produced a "Stereotyped Edition" of her works so far. *Lady Lisle* ['*The*' was abandoned] includes some revisions to the novel, here the addition of 'a rosy little mouth', reinforcing Claribel's doll-like beauty. *Lady Lisle* (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent, [189(?)]), p.6. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>8</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lady Audley's Secret* (Oxford: OUP, 1987), p.52. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>9</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), pp.49-50. Braddon may have been attempting to capitalise on Collins's success. Both novels share a preoccupation with doubling and substitutions which breach established class boundaries; both have a larger than life, charismatically appealing villain with a seemingly near-preternatural understanding of human nature; both have two heroines, one feisty and strong-minded, one lovely, fair, and a little bit bland. Braddon certainly read Collins as competition to keep an eye upon, as she mentioned in a letter to Bulwer Lytton. [November or December, 1864], 'Devoted Disciple: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton 1862-1873', ed. by Robert Lee Wolff, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 12 (1974), 5-35, 129-161 (p.26).

endear her further to the sympathetic narrator (who loves her). Laura's beauty is indicative of an attractive personality: her eyes are

large and tender and quietly thoughtful—but beautiful above all things in the clear truthfulness of look that dwells in their inmost depths, and shines through all their changes of expression with the light of a purer and a better world. (*Woman in White*, p.49)

Although not the most captivating of heroines, this description shows some of the aspects which make Laura interesting to Walter Hartright: she has 'inmost depths', changing expressions and a gaze which reveals her purity of spirit. Claribel's eyes, contrastingly, are 'rather wanting in expression', and she is dehumanised by the impersonal third-person narrator who likens her to a doll; flawlessness becomes insipidness which reflects her colourless personality. Whereas Laura's physical appearance concords harmoniously with her appealing personality, Claribel's beauty is in accordance with a *lack* of personality, belying the stereotypical ideal Victorian heroine almost as much as Lady Audley.<sup>10</sup> These descriptions of Claribel suggest links between physical and mental character, establishing a sense that in *The Lady Lisle* outward signs will accurately represent non-physical characteristics.

Claribel's personality is described as fundamentally inalterable, for example when her second husband Walsingham declares: 'My poor, beautiful, fragile, soulless Claribel, one might as well look for strength in those trembling harebells, as hope for faith and constancy from you' (p.5). Walsingham's pitying (although slightly bitter) words suggest that Claribel has no control over, and so cannot be held responsible for, her behaviour. His condescension towards Claribel and her behaviour is shared by the (less pitying) narrator, such as when she 'passively' consents to marry Reginald Lisle, because her family desire her to:

Whatever other people bade her do, she did. She would have married the Captain [Walsingham] at his command, being utterly incapable to resist the influence of a stronger mind than her own, had she not been restrained by the counter influence of her aunt,

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<sup>10</sup> The superficially attractive Lady Audley is also described as 'wax-dollish' (*Lady Audley's Secret*, p.33).

which, from the force of long habit, was more powerful still. She was entirely at the mercy of those who controlled, or counselled her. She saw with their eyes, thought with their thoughts, and spoke with their words [...] Rudderless, anchorless, driven about by every wind.<sup>11</sup>

Claribel's 'mind' is weak, capable of being dominated by another's, and this is reinforced by 'habit' (submission to her aunt's will). Moreover, Claribel 'had thought for herself so seldom, and had been so used all her life to act upon the opinions of other people, that the most obvious ideas never appeared to occur to her spontaneously' (p.4); her inability to think independently is enhanced by her lifestyle; the less she has to think for herself, the less capable she is of doing so.

Claribel's passivity actually makes her, in some senses, a good wife to her first husband Reginald as she is 'gentle and tractable, if not affectionate'. This is through no decisive attempt on Claribel's part:

If he had asked her to ascend Mont Blanc, she would have toiled bravely to the summit, though she had died there. It was scarcely a virtue, this tacit obedience, this smiling assent; it was rather the constitutional indolence of a lymphatic temperament. Anything was less troublesome to her than resistance. (p.17)

Here, Claribel's actions are not convincingly virtuous because she is not choosing them; they are the natural outcome of having a 'lymphatic temperament'.<sup>12</sup> Although it is asserted that Claribel acts the way she does because she is constitutionally predisposed to, there is contempt in the narrator's hyperbolic image of her death on Mont Blanc through a failure to cause a fuss, and in the assertion that her 'smiling assent' should not be mistaken for 'a virtue': if Claribel is not responsible for her behaviour, she is not

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<sup>11</sup> pp.15-16. *The Lady Lisle* characters are often prototypes for later ones. Georgy Sheldon in *Birds of Prey* (1867) also accepts 'all things as they were presented to her by a stronger mind than her own', and has 'no exalted capacity for happiness or misery'. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Birds of Prey* ([Whitefish, MT]: Kessinger Publishing, [2004]), p.95.

<sup>12</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "lymphatic" in relation to 'persons and their temperaments' as 'having the characteristics (flabby muscles, pale skin, sluggishness of vital and mental action) formerly supposed to result from an excess of lymph in the system'.

to be praised when it happens to take the form of acceptable conduct.<sup>13</sup> These depictions of Claribel as the product of a mixture of nature and nurture leave little room for self-determinism; this sets the tone for much of what follows in *The Lady Lisle*.

Although Claribel's personality is partially the result of inborn characteristics, there is little emphasis on her heredity or ancestry. Claribel's aunt, who pressures her into marrying Reginald, must be a woman capable of expressing her own opinions and is therefore quite unlike her niece. We know that Claribel is the 'orphan heiress of a rich East India merchant' (p.12), and therefore of an affluent (presumably self-made) upper-middle-class background; no information is given about her mother. Whilst the middle-class side of Rupert Lisle's parentage is not given in any detail, his father's family is given a sizeable introduction, including prolonged descriptions of the former glory of the Lisles and the current vastness of the Lisle estates. This emphasis on the family history is partly because it is this ancient name, with its associated estates and wealth, which is at stake in the novel. It is also part of Braddon's differentiation between middle- and upper-class values and attributes: the latter are associated with ancestry and accumulation over the generations.

The reader is taken on a tour of the 'noble and wide domain' of Lislewood: we are told of 'many a snug homestead and substantial farmhouse' which delivers its half-yearly rent to Sir Rupert, of the woods, fields, villages and farmlands which are the Baronet's property and of the village inns called 'the Lisle Arms, or the Baronet's Head, or the Sir Rupert Lisle' (p.19). Not only is the extensiveness and affluence of the Lisle family revealed, but its age and prestige:

The name of Lisle was as old in the county as the Battle of Hastings itself [...] The pedigree and grants of the seven years' old baronet would have stretched the length of the longest avenue in Lislewood Park, had the great rolls of mouldering parchment been unfolded to their fullest extent. (pp.19-20)

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<sup>13</sup> Pliable women recur throughout Braddon's fiction. Millicent Markham in *The Captain of the Vulture* (1863) would learn Homer if asked, although she is driven by affection, Claribel by lethargy (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., [189(?)]), p.53. Further references are given after quotations. See the final chapter on *Lost for Love* for a later, more positive treatment of willing women.

The 'mouldering parchment' may hold the record of Rupert's impressive ancestry, but it is also old and decaying, never 'unfolded' or put to any use. This reflects the state of the Lisle family which, despite its wealth and power is mouldering in its own way, as the narrator makes clear at the end of our tour:

It was strange, after this constant recurrence of the ancient name, this wide extension of the grandeur and wealth of the house of Lisle, to come back to Lislewood Park and find the sole owner of so much importance playing drearily in the stiff flower garden, with a pale, sickly face, and languid, girlish manners. Had the captain of the Norman cross bows, the haughty oppressor of the Saxon, the victors of Cressy and Flodden, the noble royalists [...];—had all these strong and valiant men left only this feeble, little, fair-haired child to inherit their wealth and honours? It seemed almost as if the weight of this vast inheritance, falling solely upon this, a helpless orphan, must surely crush and destroy him. There was something sinister and unnatural in his lonely splendour. No younger brother to claim a portion of his lands; no designing relations to eat into his fortune; his mother's wealth to be one day added to all that which he had succeeded at his father's death; shut in from the outer world of his poorer struggling fellow-creatures, the boy-baronet seemed to languish under a load of grandeur, and to sicken of a surfeit of prosperity. (pp.20-21)

Braddon draws a genetic line through ruling English social groups to the Victorian upper classes, stressing a biological and social distinction from those of Saxon lineage. Contrasted with his 'gallant' ancestors, who have won 'wealth and honours' through bravery in battle, the feminized and sickly Rupert symbolizes aristocratic decline. Rupert's health is inversely proportionate to his prestige, which seems to bear down on him as a crushing weight.

The Lisle family has in fact been deteriorating for some time and the last three generations of Lisles have 'died of a lingering decline, which had been fatally prevalent in the house of Lisle; for three generations, the heads of the family had died before they had attained their thirtieth year, leaving only sons to inherit the title and property' (p.16). The Lisles have reached the point where they can only physically have one child, and that a sickly one marked out for premature death; Rupert's delicate health seems to foreshadow a similar fate. Primogeniture has become a sort of perverse necessity as the heir of Lislewood takes up his lonely position at the head of a family consisting (as far as the male

bloodline is concerned) solely of himself until he can marry and produce the single son who will replace him.

Depictions of an unhealthy aristocracy were a popular source of mid-Victorian satirical humour. In Charles Dickens' *Bleak House* (1853), the Dedlock gout has 'come down, through the illustrious line, like the plate, or the pictures, or the place in Lincolnshire' and (being both hereditary and associated with rich living) is nursed by Sir Leicester Dedlock with perverse pride as 'a demon of the patrician order'.<sup>14</sup> In Braddon's *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1863) Edward Arundel flippantly speculates that members of the upper-class Marchmont family are unlikely to live long, healthy lives:

The present possessor himself is a middle-aged man; so I shouldn't think *he* can be likely to last long. I dare say he drinks too much port, or hunts, or something of that sort; goes to sleep after dinner, and does all manner of apoplectic things, I'll be bound. Then there's the son, only fifteen, and not yet marriageable; consumptive, I dare say.<sup>15</sup>

Aristocratic lifestyles and pursuits are depicted as habitually injurious, and indeed not so long after this scene one of the Marchmont heirs *does* die of apoplexy.

Hereditary diseases were also used for more serious and dramatic effect as, for example, with the recurring insanity in Wilkie Collins's 'Mad Monkton'. In Ellen Wood's *St Martin's Eve* (1866) the St. Johns of Alnwick suffer from a mysterious hereditary affliction (with symptoms reminiscent of those in *The Lady Lisle*) in which family members have 'wasted away without apparent cause; wasted to death' to the extent that they 'never live to see their thirty-third birthday'.<sup>16</sup> Lyn Pykett assumes that the hereditary affliction is consumption, but Wood (like Braddon) leaves it unnamed.<sup>17</sup> This at once adds to the mystery of the wasting disease, makes it appear unique to the families it attacks, and

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<sup>14</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.234.

<sup>15</sup> *John Marchmont's Legacy* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), pp.25-26.

<sup>16</sup> Ellen Wood, *St Martin's Eve* (London: Macmillan, 1907), p.51, p.53. Braddon's later revisions add that the 'lingering decline' is 'a slow wasting away; a kind of disease', making the Lisle's condition closer to that described by Wood ([189(?)], p.22).

<sup>17</sup> Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel: From 'The Woman in White' to 'The Moonstone'* (Plymouth: Northcote House Publishing, 1994), p.66.

adds to a sense of ubiquitous enervation rather than a particular condition that can be diagnosed and combated.

Depictions of a deteriorating aristocracy were also recurrent in Victorian medical literature which often blamed the over-indulgence and ennui to which the upper class's wealth exposed them. One contributor to *The Lancet* classed the aristocracy as a group in which 'gloomy affections, disease, and excess' resulted in 'unhealthy semen', leading to the degeneration and eventual extinction of the family line.<sup>18</sup> Braddon depicts the Lisle family as idle and decadent through descriptions of Reginald Lisle's self-indulgent daily activities: he is 'fond of field sports, horses and dogs, gunnery, the turf, all those amusements so dear to gentlemen who have plenty of money and very little to do' (p.17). Reginald attempts farming experiments which 'never came to any good, but they amused him', and his race horses quickly lose their novelty (ibid.). Idleness is cited as an actual health threat in Benjamin Brodie's *Psychological Inquiries* (1854):

The *ennui* which is the necessary result of an over-abundance of leisure is not only painful and a mighty evil in itself, but it leads to still greater evils; the victims of it, in not a few instances, being driven to seek relief by resorting to low and degrading pleasures, while in others the circumstance of the mind preying on itself produces a permanent derangement of the general health, and even to such an extent as to shorten the duration of life.<sup>19</sup>

Braddon's description of Reginald combines the two dangers mentioned in Brodie; he moves from one useless (if not degrading) activity to another before apparently dying of boredom:

Everything wearied him in time; every amusement failed to occupy him; and it almost seemed as if he fell into a decline at last, because he could think of nothing else to do. (p.17)

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<sup>18</sup> K. Corbet, 'The Degeneration of Race', *Lancet*, 78:1981 (17 August, 1861), 170.

<sup>19</sup> Benjamin Collins Brodie, *Psychological Inquiries, Part II* (1862), in *The Works of Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie: With an Autobiography*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), I, pp.259-385 (p.302).

Reginald's mental weariness translates into physical weariness, and his indolent lifestyle parallels the Lises' generative unproductivity; the hereditary wasting disease becomes a symbol of the nobility's insularity, idleness and uselessness.<sup>20</sup>

Inheritor of the Lisle name and fortune, Rupert has also inherited many of his parents' unenviable mental and physical traits. Rupert is:

weak and ailing, small for his age, and very backward with his studies; difficult to amuse, with a dislike to active exercise, and very little love for even childish books and pictures. He would mope about his nursery all day, and only go out on his pony when compelled to do so. (p.30)

In a manner comparable to theories of degeneration, Rupert possesses his father's short attention span, but with an increasingly morbid streak: Rupert does not even *try* to amuse himself. Rupert also has other attributes of the Lisle temper:

There was a stubborn obstinacy in the Lisle blood, which had often led the sons of that house to do more desperate things than the most courageous men had ever attempted [...] Sir Rupert had the true Lisle nature – dull and unimpulsive; but intensely obstinate. (p.63)

This family trait leads to Rupert's downfall when the villain, Major Varney, incites the boy's 'stubborn obstinacy' by daring him to ride his pony down a sheer drop; Rupert nearly dies in the attempt, allowing Varney to abduct him. Rupert's behaviour is, it seems, hereditarily determined; Varney's understanding of his nature grants him power.

Rupert also takes after Claribel, being 'a pale-faced, delicate boy of six years of age, resembling his mother both in person and disposition; like her, quiet and unimpulsive; like her, unblest with brilliant talents, or energy of character' (p.17). Claribel's hereditary influence adds another level of languor to the Lisle temper (which is also described as 'unimpulsive', above). Furthermore, Rupert has inherited his parents' limited emotional aptitude. Reginald only experiences short-lived interest in any activity, and only feels desire inspired by

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<sup>20</sup> Affluent, idle and unhealthy men are also a feature of Collins's fiction: *The Woman in White's* Mr Fairlie has a 'frail, languidly-fretful, over-refined' look (p.39); *No Name's* Noel Vanstone suffers from 'a wearing and obstinate malady' (London: Penguin, 2004), p.118.



covetousness (p.15); Claribel is rarely troubled by strong emotion, exemplified when she marries Reginald 'without loving him, as passively as she had taken her music lessons without having an ear for melody' (p.15). Similarly, Rupert 'showed no great capacity for affection, and his love for his mother, who idolized him, was of a feeble and negative order'.<sup>21</sup>

Despite its declining condition, the Lisle family, like the Monktons and the St Johns, continues generation after generation. Diane B. Paul explains that one problem perceived by Victorian eugenicists was that 'aristocrats were notoriously inbred and often mentally weak but, being rich, could breed as much as they pleased'.<sup>22</sup> This was a concern expressed in Francis Galton's writings on eugenics:

One of the effects of civilization is to diminish the rigour of the application of the law of natural selection. It preserves weakly lives, that would have perished in barbarous lands. The sickly children of a wealthy family have a better chance of living and rearing offspring than the stalwart children of a poor one. As with the body, so with the mind. Poverty is more adverse to early marriages than is natural bad temper, or inferiority of intellect. In civilized society, money interposes her aegis between the law of natural selection and very many of its rightful victims. Scrofula and madness are naturalised among us by wealth; short-sightedness is becoming so. There seems no limit to the morbid tendencies of body and mind that might accumulate in a land where the law of primogeniture was general, and where riches were more esteemed than personal qualities.<sup>23</sup>

Galton is cynically asserting that the poor are left to survive as they will, whilst the rich can buy their way out of the natural selection process. *The Lady Lisle* seems to corroborate Galton's ideas. Although Rupert is 'very backward with his studies' (p.30), this need not concern his family, as Walsingham points out:

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<sup>21</sup> p.30. Claribel's being 'passionately fond of her son' (p.18) may have seemed a redeeming feature to some Victorian readers, but maternal instincts could be too intense and Claribel's idolization of Rupert may be a contributing factor to his languidness. Theorists warned that 'emotional immoderation in the mother' could lead to effeminate offspring, Sally Shuttleworth, 'Demonic Mothers: Ideologies of Bourgeois Motherhood in the Mid-Victorian Era', in *Rewriting the Victorians: Theory, History, and the Politics of Gender*, ed. by Linda M. Shires, (London: Routledge, 1992), pp.31-51 (p.43). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>22</sup> Diane B. Paul, *Controlling Human Heredity: 1865 to the Present* (New York: Humanity Books, 1998), p.29.

<sup>23</sup> Francis Galton, 'Hereditary Talent and Character', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 12 (June, August, 1865), 157-66, 318-27 (p.326).

'he will be a rich man, and he has no need to be clever. It is we poor fellows, who have the battle of life to fight, who want all the brains' (p.8). Although not advocating a Social-Darwinist philosophy, Walsingham speaks of men inevitably engaged in the struggle for survival, but like Galton, he suggests that the affluent are exempt from the competition; riches alone are enough to make them "fit".<sup>24</sup> Although Rupert is of delicate health, he is protected by the 'aegis of wealth', having 'escaped many of the scourges common to childhood, through the watchful care of his nurses and his doctors' (p.30). This is a luxury that others may not be able to afford. In this manner, the Lises have managed to fend off what was seen by some as the likely, even preferable, outcome of degeneration: the 'ban of sterility' which 'prevents the permanent degradation of the race'.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, despite ill health and unappealing personalities, the Lisle men have little trouble finding wives. Reginald is a particularly unlikeable person who, we are told, 'had never desired to have anything, except for the pleasure of taking it away from somebody else'.<sup>26</sup> Yet at the behest of her aunt, Claribel marries Reginald rather than the healthy, devoted, but penniless Captain Walsingham. The even more boorish James Arnold wins the hand of the attractive Olivia who, under the impression that he is Rupert Lisle, openly declares: 'I marry you for your title, and I marry you for your estate, and if you hadn't that, I wouldn't marry you' (p.153).

Borne up by medical care and mercantile marriages, the Lisle line carries on, but the family is undoubtedly declining. When the narrator claims that it is 'almost as if the weight of [Rupert's] vast inheritance [...] must surely crush and destroy' him (p.20), the reader may well perceive that it is not merely Rupert's material wealth and ancient name which is bearing down upon him. Andrew

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<sup>24</sup> For a history of social Darwinism see Greta Jones, *Social Darwinism and English Thought: The Interaction Between Biological and Social Theory* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980).

<sup>25</sup> Henry Maudsley, *Body and Mind: An Inquiry into their Connection and Mutual Influence, Specially in Reference to Mental Disorders* (London: Macmillan, 1870), in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: OUP, 1998; repr. 2003), pp.326-29 (p.327). Maudsley argued that eventual sterility was nature's way of weeding out the unfit.

<sup>26</sup> p.15. The Stereotyped Edition is even more scathing, reading: 'rarely in the whole course of his brief and useless existence had [Reginald] desired to possess himself of anything, except...' (*Lady Lisle*, [189(?)], p.20, my emphasis).

Mangham has also noted the 'compound of debilitating causes' which mean that Rupert is 'clearly ill-equipped to carry the burden of his aristocratic lineage' (Mangham, p.108). Mangham's focus, however, is on Claribel and the novel's exploration of negative maternal influences, rather than exploring the wider range of determining factors which come into play around the child baronet. As well as contending with being the product of a bad confluence of parental attributes, Rupert's first six years are spent 'shut in from the outer world' (p.20) under the influence of an over-indulgent mother and a petty-minded father, not a lifestyle conducive to the counteraction of his inherited defects. Neither Rupert nor Reginald are responsible for creating this situation (although Reginald has perpetuated it), but they seem unworthy of the lands and riches which they possess. The unflattering descriptions of the listless Rupert are not so much a critique of *him*, rather a portrayal of familial and class decline; nor is this an anti-class portrayal, as such, but a criticism of the vices associated with the modern nobility. The Lises are in a vicious downward spiral, and in these early stages of the novel, it seems unclear how each new generation can hope to improve on the past, or even recognise the need for improvement.

However, the Lisle deterioration is arrested when Rupert is abducted by Varney so he can be replaced, when he comes of age, with the lower-class James Arnold. Rupert is enrolled under a false name in a respectable middle-class school.<sup>27</sup> Varney's servant Salamons pays occasional visits as his supposed uncle, and convinces Rupert that his memories of being a child baronet are yellow fever-induced delusions, and that, if he does not want to become mad, he must 'effect [his] own cure' by repressing them.<sup>28</sup> Threatened with madness as an alternative, Rupert learns (unlike any of the characters described so far) to discipline his own thoughts and behaviour.<sup>29</sup> When we meet him again, at the

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<sup>27</sup> Rupert Lisle and James Arnold are referred to by their real names except in quotations when the original text is maintained.

<sup>28</sup> pp.194-95. The novel has a continuity flaw - Salamons begins as Uncle Alfred and Rupert begins as George (p.130), but Salamons becomes Uncle George (p.194), whilst Rupert becomes Richard (p.191).

<sup>29</sup> pp.194-5. Threatened madness recurs throughout Braddon's work. For example, Lady Audley threatens Robert Audley (*Lady Audley's Secret*, p.273), and later in *The Lady Lisle* Varney

age of twenty-one, there are still physical reminders of the child he once was. He is 'singularly delicate in appearance' (p.129), his 'temperament is peculiarly nervous, and his health delicate' (p.190); in these respects, Rupert does not particularly appear to have changed. However, whilst he remains 'nervous' and 'delicate', other personality traits, or flaws, that distinguished him previously (moroseness, languidness, spitefulness, inability to amuse himself, intellectual backwardness) have vanished. When we first encounter him again, it is during a visit from Salamons to the school in which he has been housed, Rupert is first observed 'reading' and is so 'absorbed in his book' that he does not notice his visitor's arrival (p.129). The principal of the academy assures Salamons that Rupert is perfectly content with his 'his books, his botanical studies, his herbal, and his dog [...] He is a most amiable youth, and very generally beloved' (ibid.). Rupert is now capable of entertaining himself and of sustained study.

Rupert's studies earn him a reputation as being 'very clever' (p.190), and he eventually becomes a respected teacher. When the curate Walter Remorden interviews Rupert for the role of schoolmaster, he is initially unimpressed. Remorden observes Rupert's hands, 'white and slender as the hands of a woman', and finds him nervous and monosyllabic, to the extent that he feels bound to view him as being 'as delicate as a girl' and 'sadly deficient in intellect' (pp.191-92). Once again we are reminded of the Rupert of 14 years ago. Once Rupert's shyness is overcome, however, his conversation 'grew fluent, nay, almost eloquent. He talked of a great many things; never very brilliantly, but always sensibly' (ibid.). There is consistency here - Rupert is not 'brilliant', but maturity achieved through years of study and discipline has improved his mind. Indeed, his pupils love and respect him, viewing him as 'a great scholar', and he is a devoted reader of the highbrow *Quarterlies* (pp.215-16). Here, middle-class education comes to the rescue of the aristocracy, suggesting that environmental influences can counteract what appeared to be inbred flaws. Neither class distinctions nor the influence of heredity are discredited. Rupert is 'not a handsome young man,' but he retains 'a delicacy and refinement in his appearance that made him peculiarly attractive [...] wear what he would, he

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threatens Olivia, after she discovers James is an impostor (p.214). Here, Rupert actually believes he was on the brink of madness.

must always have looked a gentleman' (p.216). Rupert's noble blood (manifest in the 'delicacy and refinement' he exudes) shows through, regardless of his surroundings, but it has taken the middle-class environment in which he has been raised to neutralise the negative attributes of the modern aristocracy and display his nobility to its best advantage.

Writing about Victorian advice books, Shuttleworth observes that the middle classes were often warned that 'idle, artificial habits, copied from a degenerate aristocracy, endangered the health and wealth of the nation' (Shuttleworth, 'Demonic Mothers', p.34). In *The Lady Lisle*, middle-class characters such as Claribel's avaricious aunt are enticed by the thought of forging links with the aristocracy, and Claribel enters into her husband's idle lifestyle, resulting in a listless and sickly child. In the next generation, however, things happen differently: Rupert falls in love with the rector's daughter, Blanche Hayward. Although her mother is a 'ladylike nonentity' (p.185), Blanche is 'no ordinary girl', having been 'educated by her father' (p.186), she teaches at the 'National School' (p.187) and possesses a 'powerful intellect' (p.188). Although her intellectual capacity may be an inborn asset, Blanche's active, dutiful and compassionate personality is due to the influence of her father. Blanche does not attempt to conform to aristocratic 'habits', instead Rupert comes to embrace middle-class attitudes, and she listens to his declaration of love because she believes that they are 'equals by education and feeling, as [they] are most likely equals by birth' (p.217); she later learns to love him in return.<sup>30</sup> Characters such as Blanche embody a specific set of middle-class values (including assiduousness, dutifulness and philanthropy) which neither the Lisles, nor the Mertons who desire to marry into the nobility, possess.

Despite offering a bleak picture of class and ancestral degeneration, therefore, Braddon implies that this downward spiral can be halted through a careful education and choice of partner. This was something that even the often negative Henry Maudsley admitted may be possible: 'an opposite course of regeneration of the family by happy marriages, wise education, and a prudent

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<sup>30</sup> In the Stereotyped Edition Braddon adds the reassurance that Blanche fell for Rupert 'before the discovery of the young man's real position' (*Lady Lisle*, [189(?)], p.304).

conduct of life is possible; the downward tendency may be thus checked, and even perhaps effaced in time'.<sup>31</sup> More enthusiastically, Galton speculated:

Neither is there any known limit to the intellectual and moral grandeur of nature that might be introduced into aristocratical families, if their representatives, who have such rare privilege in winning wives that please them best, should invariably, generation after generation, marry with a view of transmitting those noble qualities to their descendents. Inferior blood in the representative of a family might be eliminated from it in a few generations.' (Galton, p.326)

*The Lady Lisle* makes similarly hopeful suppositions, concluding with the sound of 'childish voices' echoing 'under the long beech avenues in which Sir Rupert Lisle had played seventeen years before', suggesting that Rupert and Blanche have had more than one child (p.267). The Stereotyped Edition expands upon this, assuring us that Claribel lives 'to see a band of bright children playing merrily in the gardens where Sir Rupert Lisle had wandered listlessly to and fro in his companionless childhood' (*Lady Lisle*, [189(?)], pp.304-05). So at least part of the family curse is broken, but neither version mentions whether Rupert conquers the threat of the hereditary wasting disease and lives beyond his thirtieth year. Major Varney plans to make Rupert believe that he is a different person, but he does not foresee that by removing the boy from his unhealthy environment he gives him the opportunity to become not only a different person, but also a better one.

Rupert's personality is salvaged through the acquisition of middle-class values, but for the lower-class James Arnold, who is substituted for Rupert, the forces of environment, heredity, and class boundaries, prove insurmountable. Like Rupert, James's personality is reflective of his father, the ex-poacher and murderer, Gilbert Arnold. Gilbert is 'a sneak and an idler', (p.26), 'a sulky, dissatisfied man' (p.27), with a 'capacity for hatred, envy, and malice' which is 'considerably in advance of the generality of his species' (p.29). It is unclear to what extent James has inherited or acquired Gilbert's personality traits. There are early intimations that Gilbert is a bad example for his son. When James's

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<sup>31</sup> Henry Maudsley, *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (London: King, 1874), p.279. Further references are given after quotations.

mother Rachel urges him not to 'tease the pigs or the fowls', Gilbert retorts: 'I don't want him to be a fiddle-faddling girl. Let him tease the pigs and the fowls, if he likes; I did it when I was a boy' (p.29). The narrator subsequently observes that:

Mr. Gilbert Arnold, loitering about the lodge all day, with his pipe in his mouth, and his hands in the pockets of his velveteen jacket, did not quite recommend himself as a person whose example it would be well for youth to follow. Perhaps his wife thought this as she sighed and went on with her work.<sup>32</sup>

Like Claribel, and like Blanche's mother, weak-willed Rachel has little influence on her son's development, keeping her opinion to herself as in the above example. Contrastingly, Gilbert sets an example to his son through words and actions. On other occasions Braddon gives the impression that Gilbert is training his son to follow in his footsteps, such as when he asks: 'we won't lie down, and be walked over by rich people's shiny leather boots, eh, Jim?' James quickly replies 'not if we know it, father', with a 'glance of precocious cunning' (p.52), as if this is a practised response.<sup>33</sup> Like the young Rupert, James is not growing up in the most promising of circumstances.<sup>34</sup> At other times the narrator suggests hereditary influence at work in the development of James's personality, for example when we are told that 'James Arnold inherited his father's envious temper, without his father's bulldog courage' (p.54). In either case, paternal influence is paramount.

However, it is James's *lack* of inherited 'bulldog courage' which serves Varney best. As Braddon does not make it explicit, it would be mere speculation to suggest whether James's timidity is inherited or learned (or both) from his timorous mother, nonetheless it is a core part of his personality, which

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<sup>32</sup> *ibid.* Bad father figures are common in Braddon's early novels: in *The Captain of the Vulture* Henry Masterson's lower-class father teaches him 'his own bad ways' and he eventually becomes a highway man (p.89).

<sup>33</sup> The possibility of individuals consciously acting as determining forces on others is discussed in chapter 8.

<sup>34</sup> The Stereotyped Edition further emphasises Gilbert's influence of on James when the boy looks at Rupert with an 'envious glance' because 'Master Arnold had acquired some of his father's propensities, and thought it a very hard thing that this other boy should wear a velvet tunic and a plume of feathers' (*Lady Lisle*, [189(?)], p.47).

Varney exploits in the same way that he exploits Rupert's constitutional traits. After James cries in fear at being placed on a pony, Varney declares that

This boy can't help being frightened [...] He has a nervous temperament, and a man with a strong will could do whatever he liked with him. I'd make that child follow me like a dog, and look in my face for his words, before he had the pluck to speak them. (p.55)

Varney is proved correct when, fourteen years after having abducted Rupert, he passes James off as the real heir of Lislewood and exerts his influence over him in order to live off the Lisle fortune.

Braddon's description of James's mental abilities also hints at hereditary influences. As the discussion of *Armadale* has shown, hereditary criminality and immorality was increasingly discussed in Victorian medical and popular literature. G.H. Lewes, for example, asserted that a range of vices (including alcoholism, gambling and the 'thieving propensity') were inheritable.<sup>35</sup> James's 'precocious cunning' resembles the 'leer of low cunning' in his father's 'eyes' (p.58). This was seen as a particular attribute of hereditary criminals, who Maudsley described as: 'of mean and defective intellect, though excessively cunning' (Maudsley, *Responsibility*, p.30). Braddon makes a similar distinction between intellect and cunning. When the adult James is first described the narrator claims that he has 'rather a delicate, regular face, but it gave no promise of a powerful intellect' (p.112). Initially this helps to make James look more like the child Rupert who was, it will be remembered, 'backward with his studies' (p.30). However, the lack of 'powerful intellect' in the countenance of the once precocious James is not a sign that he has lost any mental ability, but that his precocity took the form of cunning, rather than intellect. So, when the hereditary criminal, James, outwits the criminal mastermind, Varney, later in the novel, we are told that 'in the struggle between intellect and cunning, the lower faculty had conquered'.<sup>36</sup> Like Rupert, therefore, James has several undesirable traits, which are either hereditary or early-established.

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<sup>35</sup> G.H. Lewes, 'Hereditary Influence, Animal and Human', *Westminster Review*, 66 (July, 1856), 135-62 (p.143).

<sup>36</sup> p.152. Varney falls into the category of villain mentioned in chapter 3 (p.84) who employs his strong will to 'evil account', W.B. Carpenter 'The Physiology of the Will', *Contemporary Review*,



It is not primarily James's personality that Varney takes advantage of, however, but his physical resemblance to Rupert. Both boys look like their blonde-haired and blue-eyed mothers, who happen to bear a likeness to each other, as Rachel tells Gilbert: 'When I was quite a girl [...] I was counted rather like Miss Merton, by some of our folks [...] Hard work has taken the beauty out of me'.<sup>37</sup> This is another type of environmental determinism on which the novel touches. Between marrying her first and second husbands 'Claribel has scarcely changed [...] Her delicate beauty has lost none of the purity of its transparent hues. The clear blue eyes are as bright as they were eight years ago' (p.24). Whilst the women began life resembling each other, Claribel has not been emotionally or physically taxed over the years, whereas Rachel's life of drudgery (and, we may surmise, emotional abuse from her husband) has taken its toll. The similarity between Claribel and Rachel means that at this point in the novel the middle classes appear more akin to the lower classes than the upper classes which, as we have seen in the descriptions of the Lises, are depicted as a race apart. As I have observed, Claribel allows herself to be subsumed into an upper-class lifestyle, and those aspects of her personality which she does transmit to her son appear to merge effortlessly into the Lisle character. However, by transmitting her physical features, Claribel unwittingly opens the way for Varney's schemes.

James is 'a sickly, precocious boy, six years old, with light flaxen hair, and a pale, sharp face, resembling his mother, and entirely unlike his stalwart, dark-complexioned father' (p.27). His external resemblance to Rupert is apparent:

the long curls of the Baronet, and James Arnold's closely-cropped hair, were of the same flaxen shade. Both the boys had light blue eyes, pale faces, and sharp but delicate features; but so great was the distinction made by the rich dress and flowing locks of one, and the ungainly garments of the other, that the careless observer lost sight of the striking resemblance between the children. (p.54)

This passage conveys the same message as the environmentally determined differences between Claribel and Rachel: that clothes (or lifestyle) make the

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17 (April, 1871), 192-217 (p.217). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>37</sup> p.71. Whereas in *The Woman in White* Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick's resemblance is explained by their being half-sisters, no reason is given in *The Lady Lisle*.

man. As far as personality is concerned, there is little to choose between the disadvantaged, cowardly, James, and the spoiled, intellectually weak heir, Rupert. Neither one seems to be made of particularly gentlemanly material, and the reader may feel compelled to agree with Gilbert Arnold when he exclaims to his wife:

Look at the little Baronet in his velvet frock, riding his dapple pony [...] And then look at my son, in his hob-nailed boots and huckaback pinafore; and yet I know which is the sharpest lad, any day in the week. (pp.28-29)

In the same way that Rachel's lost looks throw into relief Claribel's complacent lifestyle, moments like this in the early chapters of the novel, highlight the superficiality of differences between rich and poor, often to the former's disadvantage.

Class prejudices are further challenged when Claribel is fooled into believing that James is really her son. Mangham argues that Claribel's 'longing for her son clouds her ability to notice the impostor' (Mangham, p.111). Certainly Varney's plan works because of Claribel's influence. The sceptical authorities are swayed by 'the testimony of the young man's mother, whose instinct could scarcely be supposed to deceive her, and whose motives were above suspicion' (p.117). However, whilst Claribel is undoubtedly delighted to be reunited with her son, there are indications in the text that, in at least equal measure to her affections, Claribel's class pride is used against her. When convincing her to declare her belief that the young man he introduces her to is Rupert, Varney asks her to be certain that she is not accidentally mixing him up with James, prompting Claribel to emphatically declare that she 'never believed in the existence of any likeness between the boys' (p.113). However James's upbringing has maintained those qualities which made him most similar to Rupert; he looks in delicate health, when he speaks he flushes 'a faint, unhealthy crimson' and 'his thin, bloodless lips [quiver] nervously' (p.95). Varney has also ensured that James is groomed to have a look of neglected gentility:

His flaxen hair, which grew rather long, had fallen away from his low, narrow forehead. His clothes, though rather shabby, were of the last fashion, and such as only a gentleman's son would wear. His hands were white and delicate.<sup>38</sup>

We are reminded of Rupert's longer curls and his delicate appearance. In fact, James's hair has retained its light colour, whereas Rupert's darkens to 'a pale shade of brown' as he grows up (p.129). The reviewer W. Fraser Rae mocked (and not entirely without cause) the ever-changing hair colour of Braddon's characters, but as children's hair often darkens as they grow up, the change in Rupert's hair from 'fair', to light brown seems deliberate, representing his gradual change and maturation, in contrast to James whose development has been stalled.<sup>39</sup> Like Miss Gwilt's imposture as a respectable governess in *Armada*, this suggests the superficiality of class stereotypes.<sup>40</sup> This is supported by later passages such as when Olivia, James's future wife, declares scornfully 'who would ever think that flaxen-haired stripling came of such a noble house? I fancy a Lisle, of Lislewood, ought to be tall and stalwart, dark and stern'.<sup>41</sup> Although the reader, unlike Olivia, knows that James is not a real Lisle, it is also true that Rupert looks equally unlike her ideal image of a baronet (there is no physical description of Reginald to draw comparison with). Moreover, both the criminal Gilbert Arnold, and Claribel's second, illegitimate, son fit Olivia's description of tall, dark and stalwart.<sup>42</sup> It seems on such occasions that *The Lady Lisle* may be preparing to dispel class prejudices and challenge a system which favours the dissolute rich over the suffering working classes, regardless of personal merit.

However, unlike with Rupert, it is never shown what effect a more

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<sup>38</sup> p.111. The *Welcome Guest* enhances the superficiality of James's appearance, describing his hands as 'white and delicate, and evidently unused to work of any kind', *The Lady Lisle, The Welcome Guest*, 4 (July, 1861) 239-243 (p.241).

<sup>39</sup> W. Fraser Rae, 'Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon', *North British Review*, 43 (September, 1865), 180-204 (p.188, p.194).

<sup>40</sup> Miss Gwilt infiltrates Thorpe-Ambrose society by fulfilling the external requirements of a reputable, and therefore supposedly morally respectable, lady. Both *Armada* and *The Lady Lisle* discredit such conventional measures of virtue and propriety.

<sup>41</sup> p.138. The Stereotyped Edition further emphasises the theme of class as Olivia adds 'That sickly effeminate face and low forehead of his have such a plebeian look' (*The Lady Lisle*, [189(?)], p.160).

<sup>42</sup> p.27, p.121. In true sensational style, it turns out that Claribel's second husband, Walsingham, actually legally married Mrs Varney before Claribel.

favourable upbringing may have had on James; after being removed from his home at Lislewood (in preparation for his future imposture) he is raised in near-isolation with only his parents and Varney for company. Victorian physiologists debated at length the extent to which an individual could be held responsible for his or her actions in the face of undesirable constitutional traits un-counteracted by education. Previous chapters have explored the ambiguous presentation of characters such as *No Name's* Magdalen Vanstone and *Man and Wife's* Geoffrey Delamayn who are deemed at least partially unable to modify their own behaviour, but who must still be held in some way accountable for that behaviour, and for bringing their troubles upon themselves. Chapter 3 explored some of the ways in which the directing force of the willpower could either fail or be abused, and suggested that Magdalen could not be classified as a 'brutal' character who had never learned to exert her volition (Carpenter, 'Physiology of the Will', p.216). The same cannot be said of James, however – his personality has been degraded by his circumstances in life and Braddon's portrayal of him can be read in the light of Carpenter's reasoning that

a being entirely governed by the lower passions and instincts, whose higher moral sense has been repressed from its earliest dawn by the degrading influence of the condition in which he is placed, who has never learned to exercise any kind of self-restraint (or, if he has learned it, has only been trained to use it for the lowest purposes) [...] such a being [...] can surely be no more morally responsible for his actions, than the lunatic who has lost whatever self-control he once possessed. (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.551)

It seems reasonable that James's situation should induce pity, if not sympathy. After all, as the beneficial force of a good upbringing has been made apparent in relation to Rupert, it seems necessary to take James's neglected childhood into account.

When James enters Lislewood as the restored baronet, the narrator comments that

It was only natural that, after fourteen years spent in the society of Gilbert Arnold, Sir Rupert Lisle should be a little awkward at the dinner-table; that he should use a knife for his fish; that he should be not a little confused by the man who brought him melted butter, and

the other man who brought him fish-sauce; that he should wonder at the flat champagne glasses; that he should want to drink more sparkling Moselle than was good for him; and that he should wind up by quenching his thirst from his finger-glass. This, though very painful to his mother, was only natural. (p.120)

This seems reasonable, regardless of whether it is the "real" baronet we are talking about or not - a person unused to an affluent lifestyle would be uncomfortable in such surroundings. But 'natural' is an ambiguous word, especially as the reader is in on the secret of the substitution; the 'naturalness' of James's ineptness may suggest that the son of a lower-class criminal could not, *by nature*, fill the shoes of a true noble.

Varney's defence of James's inappropriate behaviour is ostensibly designed to excuse him:

Poor dear child! it is so like the pupil of that horrible poacher man to prefer port. I daresay he would like it thick and sweet. Injured child! it will take us some time to form him, my dear madam. (p.121)

Varney is blaming James's behaviour on his upbringing: he is Gilbert's 'pupil', and to counteract the influence Varney and Claribel must now try to 'form' him in another mould. But the reader knows that Varney has already had a hand in "forming" James, that there is a further link between James and Gilbert than mere association, and that Varney is aware of this fact. Varney is not to be trusted, particularly when he appears to be stating simple facts, and his words become double-sided, offering justifications for James's behaviour, but also hinting that there may be a deeper (hereditary) truth at work.

James also defends himself on grounds of upbringing:

Because my education hasn't been as good as it ought to be for a man of my station and my position in life, I suppose I'm to be bullied and ordered about, and tyrannized over, and stared at by any beggarly officer [Varney] who chooses to take up his quarters in my house. Once for all, I won't stand it. (p.144)

Yet it is through petty outbursts such as these that Braddon begins to turn the reader against James; after this argument with Varney, James meets Claribel's 'little Blenheim spaniel' in the hall and kicks 'the animal savagely away' (p.145).

This prefigures a similar scene in Collins's *Man and Wife* when Geoffrey Delamayn kicks a dog, breaking its ribs: hurting an innocent animal is a sure sign of villainy.<sup>43</sup> Claribel also blames James's upbringing as the reason for her disappointment in the man her son has become:

For some time there had been a coolness between herself and her elder son, which had every day increased. Deeply as she had mourned for his loss, his restoration had been, perhaps, a still deeper grief to her, for she had felt the bitter anguish of the discovery that her child was no longer worthy of her love. Years of association with a cunning villain had so changed the innocent mind that the mother shuddered, as she became every day more familiar with her new-found son. (p.145)

There is no quavering over the baseness of James's personality, but it is attributed here to 'association' rather than innateness. Claribel is discovering that, as Maudsley put it, 'whosoever would transform a character must undo a life history' (Maudsley, *Responsibility*, p.272).

In the popular press the necessity of good environmental influences was advocated. For example a writer for *Temple Bar* described a night refuge for the homeless and asked readers to reflect on the living conditions of the unfortunate people:

As much, God knows, and more than they can bear is theirs of sin and folly and ingratitude; but when one minute's reflection shows us the mere accident of birth, and how that ours might have been the rags, the squalor, the hunger, and the ignorance, and theirs the warmth, the broadcloth, the cheerful home, and the well-stored mind, we should be more readily inclined, not merely to pardon their short-comings, but to think more gratefully of those blessings vouchsafed to us.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *Man and Wife* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.171. Comparatively, the upbringing of Collins's Ozias Midwinter is almost as awful as James's, but he comes to feel compassion for his 'brother' dogs, and this core of seemingly inherent "goodness" is never lost. Wilkie Collins, *Armada* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.107.

<sup>44</sup> Anon., 'The Houseless Poor', *Temple Bar*, 1 (March, 1861), 225-29 (p.227).

By invoking a "there but for the grace of God" sentiment, this passage intimates that were 'we' born into a less privileged environment, 'we' too may have become victims of 'sin and folly and ingratitude'.

Despite the apparent comprehension that James has suffered and deserves pity, he increasingly loses the sympathy of the other characters, the narrator, and also the reader. As this change happens throughout the second half of the novel there is an adjustment in how James's personality is described. Although he has always been depicted as a product of nature *and* nurture, the emphasis begins to shift towards nature. For example, James woos the scornful Olivia Marmaduke and we are told that: 'there seemed to be something craven in his nature, which made him most love and admire this girl when she most openly despised him. He followed her about like a dog' (p.152). "Cravenness" in his 'nature' suggests something that may pre-exist in him, rather than be due to his upbringing, or that has become so normal to him that it has become a part of his nature (an acquired characteristic).

James and Olivia honeymoon in Europe, but on their return little has changed:

Continental travelling had done very little for Sir Rupert Lisle. If there is any particular polish to be attained by contact with the more refined inhabitants of foreign cities, Sir Rupert had failed to attain it. Perhaps this foreign polish, whatever its nature may be, requires a certain smoothness in the surface upon which it is to be spread, and may refuse to adhere to the coarser texture of certain cross-grained woods. If there is any refining influence in the contemplation of beautiful and sublime scenery, in the sight of perfect and unapproachable works of art, [...] if, I say, there is in all these a refining influence which rarely fails to improve the most ordinary mind, that influence had produced no effect upon the sullen nature of Sir Rupert Lisle. He returned to England, if possible, a greater boor than he had been when he left his native shores. (pp.170-71)

This is a passage full of suggestive phrases - is there any particular polish to be had from continental travel? Claribel and Reginald certainly don't profit from their European tours earlier in the novel, being unable 'to distinguish a Titian from a Terniers' (p.17). However, by this point the focus of the novel has changed and is beginning to fall on James's 'cross-grained' nature, which is

apparently incapable of receiving elevating influences. James's mind is below even the 'most ordinary', his 'nature' is 'sullen' – his new life is not counteracting the influence of his old one, it is at best throwing his flaws into relief, at worst intensifying them.

References to coarse nature occur again when the narrator describes how James lives in fear of his headstrong wife, but this does not matter to him: 'She was his! To his coarse and low nature all was said in this. However she might rule him, she was, after all, but a part of his wealth' (pp.174-75). James's *worst* action occurs towards the end of the story when he murders a gipsy girl, but this is told in retrospect by another gipsy. The most *shocking* display of his increasingly bad behaviour is the moment when he strikes Rachel, who has come to beg of him, in front of his guests, an action described in painful detail:

The poor creature, still kneeling on the ground and clinging to his hand, lifted up her face in supplication as she spoke. In a mad fury the Baronet, with his disengaged fist, struck the wretched woman full in the face; so violently, that the blood gushed in a torrent from a cut across her upper lip. Rachel Arnold fell to the ground with a stifled shriek. (pp.179-180)

This is the truly damning moment of the novel when the reader, and the characters around him, realise the extent of James's viciousness. The young man's striking of his own mother whilst she kneels before him, so hard that he draws blood, is as memorable and unsettling as Aurora Floyd's famous whipping of the Softy.<sup>45</sup> However, the reaction of the characters is significantly different to their worried but sympathetic reactions to his earlier, harmless blunders. Varney declares James to be a 'contemptible villain! without one redeeming touch of common humanity': 'if I had known what you really are, you might have rotted piece-meal in the garret where I found you before I would have soiled my hands by lifting a finger of them to help you' (p.180). Although Varney is not to be taken at face value, his words – 'what you really are' – are significant. No longer is James an 'injured child', there is implicitly

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<sup>45</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Aurora Floyd* (1863; Oxford: OUP, 1996), pp.138-39. Like James and Geoffrey, the Softy reveals his villainous potential by striking a dog (p.138).



something essentially wrong with his personality. A guest who witness James's assault on Rachel declares that his behaviour is

a sign of the deterioration in the blood of our great county families. The Lises, sir, have been accounted the noblest gentlemen in Sussex for upwards of six hundred years, and I can assure you the conduct of that young man to-day was a severe blow to my feelings. (p.182)

On the one hand, the hypocrisy of the guest may come to mind: Sir Reginald was hardly a fine example of a noble gentleman. On the other hand, James's behaviour has gone far beyond Reginald's worst moments, and once again the reader is aware that it is not a true Lisle behaving in such a way. James does not have "noble" blood, and it seems more and more that he may be incapable of acting nobly.

Maudsley argued that, although 'the training which a person undergoes must have a great influence on the growth of his intellect and the formation of his character' the influence of education was 'limited by the capacity of the individual nature, and can only work within this larger or smaller circle of necessity' (Maudsley, *Responsibility*, p.20). This assessment of the limited pliability of the inherent personality seems relevant to James who, as the narrative progresses, is presented as constitutionally incapable of change. His upbringing ceases to be used as an excuse for him, his flaws are increasingly referred to as inherent, rather than acquired, he is portrayed as a scoundrel by nature, rather than by nurture.

Increasingly as *The Lady Lisle* progresses, James does not inspire sympathy or understanding, but contempt, especially from those characters who know, or discover, his true identity, and from the narrator. When Olivia discovers that James is an impostor, she declares:

look at him, drunken and stupid,—more brutal than the oxen that sleep in his fields,—lower than the lowest brute in his stables. Good heavens! what a pitiful dupe I must have been to have been deceived by such a thing as that! (p.209)

Olivia's language places James below cattle, and the narrator, also drawing on animalistic imagery, likens to him a 'tiresome dog' (p.172), an 'ill-conditioned

cur' (p.246), and a 'guilty hound' (p.197). Remorden (unaware of James's true identity) describes him to Blanche as a 'low-minded vulgarian' (p.221), explaining that although he was high-born 'there were peculiar circumstances attending his childhood and youth, which, as some said, accounted for his loutish manners and paltry mind' (p.222), but by this point in the novel the reference to James's upbringing seems like a poor excuse, and once again, Walter's affirmation that James is high-born, reminds the reader that he is *not*. The gipsies are also scornful: 'If fine clothes and a great fortune could make a gentleman, he'd be one; and if a bitter, black, treacherous, and cowardly heart can make a scoundrel, he *is* one' (p.232). The gipsy's words ring true, in James's case clothes have not made the gentleman in anything but a superficial sense, and he is without doubt a scoundrel.

Whether his adult personality is the result of nature or nurture, the outcome is that James becomes a dissolute wretch, and eventually a murderer. In him we see the image of his father (who has also committed murder in the past), but with wealth and power to corrupt him further. Ultimately James dies an ignoble death, being thrown from his dog-cart whilst in a drunken stupor. Rupert eventually returns to his rightful place at Lislewood. Once again motherly instinct is relied upon to judge the validity of the apparent heir's claim, but this time we are assured that Claribel welcomes Rupert 'with a wild cry of delight and a thrill of affection such as she had never felt for the impostor, James Arnold' (p.265).

Constitution and heredity hold a lot of potential power in this novel. The treatment of James seems compatible with Maudsley's physiological interpretation of human nature, that men differ, 'and this is not a difference which is due to education or circumstances, but a fundamental difference of nature which neither education nor circumstances can eradicate' (Maudsley, *Responsibility*, p.21). This 'fundamental difference' is, in *The Lady Lisle*, given an explicitly class-based bias which is, in turn, validated by reference to theories of heredity. However the 'fundamental difference' which separates the middle from the upper classes appears to be somewhat more eradicable than that between the lower classes and those above them. Braddon does not portray

hereditary decline as entirely intractable, or as an irrefutable means of categorising society and measuring individual worth – Rupert, after all, is capable of personal improvement. But Braddon employs heredity selectively, calling it into play differently depending on whether it is related to James or Rupert. Heredity protects the middle and upper classes from the possibility of incursion by the lower classes, as James is portrayed as increasingly incapable, by nature, of being a gentleman. But, whilst hereditary degeneracy results in the segregation of the lower classes, the hereditary degeneracy of the upper classes is curable with a good dose of ideal middle-class moral and social principles. When Rupert brings his acquired middle-class practices and his middle-class bride home to Lislewood with him, *The Lady Lisle* offers its middle-class readership the aspiration of upward class mobility, and suggests the desirability of merging the values of the one class with the affluence and antiquity of the other. *The Lady Lisle* is, in this sense, more conservative than *Lady Audley's Secret*. Winifred Hughes observes that Lucy Audley is a 'social climber' who 'embodies an internal threat to the respectable classes because she identifies with them; she wants what they value and brilliantly parodies their ideal. It is the validity of this ideal that Braddon repeatedly calls into question'.<sup>46</sup> In *The Lady Lisle*, the 'ideal' of the 'respectable classes' does not rest in the dissolute upper classes, but in the middle classes, and it is an ideal which is firmly endorsed.

*The Welcome Guest*, in which *The Lady Lisle* originally appeared, attracted a partially lower-class readership. The title was in fact eventually sold on to become a working-class magazine, offering the 'stronger class of fiction' which such readers desired; the editorial staff moved on to work on *Robin Goodfellow* in which *Lady Audley's Secret* appeared.<sup>47</sup> *The Lady Lisle* is therefore that bit closer to the anonymous working-class fiction that Braddon wrote in periodicals such as *The Halfpenny Journal*. These journals adopted a rather didactic tone towards the working and lower-middle classes, praising them for industry and service which could earn them respectability and social promotion

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<sup>46</sup> Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.127.

<sup>47</sup> Anon., 'Preface', *Welcome Guest*, 4 (May, 1861), iii.

firmly within class boundaries.<sup>48</sup> Hence Rachel, who is misled by her scoundrel husband but knows (and does not seek to exceed) her place as a servant, is also rewarded at the end of the novel by returning to the 'pretty Gothic lodge at the gates of Lislewood' where she started (p.267).

Some ambiguity remains at the end of the novel. As with *Armada*, theories of hereditary and environmental determinism, once released into the text, are not easily controlled and may initiate trains of thought which contradict the overall current of the novel. Whereas Collins's novel does not entirely eradicate the threat of hereditary degeneration, in *The Lady Lisle* James's hopelessly awful upbringing remains difficult to forget, even when he is at his most despicable. Nevertheless, whereas a novel such as *Armada* often invites the reader to sympathise with morally and socially dubious characters (such as Miss Gwilt and Midwinter), *The Lady Lisle* is not a work which generally offers sympathetic readings of its characters, and Braddon's portrayal of James seems designed to inspire increasing contempt.

As we have seen, the emergence of the sensation genre was contemporaneous with the emergence and dissemination of nascent eugenics and degeneration theories in England. Braddon's and Collins's imaginative depictions of negative hereditary, or at least innate, influences are anticipatory of the disconcerting writings of people such as Maudsley who spoke of the overwhelming 'tyranny' of man's 'organization' (Maudsley, *Responsibility*, p.22). Novelists, then, as well as physicians and scientists, perceived the alarming possibilities implied in the thought that one's hereditary or constitutional lot may be inescapable: for Rupert (like Midwinter), this fear proves false; for James it appears increasingly true. Through this appropriation of notions of determinism, Braddon and Collins are acknowledging, like Carpenter, the 'direct and immediate relation between Mental and Corporeal agency', the fact that non-corporeal aspects which had been traditionally seen as separate from

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<sup>48</sup> The title, *The Halfpenny Journal: A Magazine For All Who Can Read; Containing Novels, Romances, Tales and Sketches, Poetry, Miscellaneous Articles, Essays, Interesting Items, Family Helps, Golden Gleanings, Merry Moments, &c., &c.*, gives a sense of the journal's paternalistic tone. It included snippets with titles such as 'Be Punctual', and pages 'To Correspondents' which answered readers' queries, and ran Braddon's anonymous *The Black Band* (1861-62) and its sequel *Oscar Bertrand* (1863-64).

and superior to the body - the mind and morality - are influenced by the *physical* transmission of constitutional traits.<sup>49</sup> Yet, whilst Braddon and Collins both evoke the dramatic fear that 'the tyranny of organization' may be absolute, they also give countenance to the possibility that it may be defeated by careful management of external forces. In this manner they engineer the "happy" endings to their stories.

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<sup>49</sup> William Benjamin Carpenter, *Principals of Mental Physiology, With their Applications to the Training and Discipline of the Mind, and the Study of its Morbid Conditions* (London: King, 1874), p.x.

Chapter 7

'Nature makes these mistakes now and then':  
Ideal Womanliness in *John Marchmont's Legacy*

But who shall parcel out  
His intellect by geometric rules,  
Split like a province into round and square?  
Who knows the individual hour in which  
His habits were first sown, even as a seed?<sup>1</sup>

(William Wordsworth, *The Two-Part Prelude*, 1799)

The tenderness which is the common attribute of a woman's nature had not been given to her. She ought to have been a great man. Nature makes these mistakes now and then, and the victim expiates the error.<sup>2</sup>

Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1863)

*The Lady Lisle*, discussed in the previous chapter, uses notions of biological and environmental determinism to reinforce a largely conservative portrayal of class boundaries. In its depiction of women, however, the novel is less conventional. The submissive Claribel Lisle is treated somewhat scornfully by the narrator, but Blanche Haywood, the final and most admired Lady Lisle, is 'a good classical scholar, [who] spoke half a dozen modern languages, was well read in history, and could write a good lecture or an excellent sermon'.<sup>3</sup> The previous Lady Lisle, Olivia Marmaduke, is headstrong, fiery and naturally dominating.<sup>4</sup> Although Olivia learns a harsh lesson about avarice (discovering the man she married for rank and money is an impostor), both of these active and imposing women are favourably portrayed. *John Marchmont's Legacy* (1863) addresses more directly, but also more ambivalently, the question of what qualities are desirable in women. This chapter investigates how the novel's

<sup>1</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Two-Part Prelude* l.243-47, in *Romanticism: An Anthology*, ed. by Duncan Wu, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), pp.448-73 (p.466).

<sup>2</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *John Marchmont's Legacy* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.356. Further references are given after quotations. *John Marchmont's Legacy* was serialized in *Temple Bar* (December, 1862- January, 1864).

<sup>3</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Lady Lisle* (London: Ward and Lock, 1862), p.186.

<sup>4</sup> Olivia Marmaduke (dark-haired, flashing-eyed and horsey) is a prototype *Aurora Floyd*.

exploration of conceptions of womanliness both engages with and employs concepts of determinism. As the above epigraph suggests, the narrative questions whether women naturally possess defining qualities such as tenderness without which they become unwomanly 'mistakes' of 'Nature', victims in a social environment which is unable to sustain them.

The focus of this chapter is the poor rector's daughter Olivia Marchmont, who lives her life according to rigorous, self-imposed ethical standards based on Victorian ideals of religion, class and gender. Olivia Marchmont shares several traits with Blanche and Olivia Marmaduke, including intelligence, assertiveness, keen religious principles, a rigid sense of duty, and altruistic devotion to the most needy of her father's parishioners. In fact, Olivia has 'all the elements of greatness [...] genius, resolution, an indomitable courage, an iron will, perseverance, self-denial, temperance, chastity' (p.117). But unfortunately for Olivia, we are also told that it is 'not natural to her to be gentle and tender, to be beneficent, compassionate, and kind' (p.69). Olivia's personality is at odds with her pious lifestyle, making her unpopular, unfulfilled and unhappy; this proves unsustainable, and during the course of the story Olivia succumbs to jealousy and hatred, is exploited by the novel's villain, and eventually loses her grip on sanity.

Like *The Lady Lisle's* James Arnold, Olivia is presented as the result of an unlucky combination of nature and nurture, but with greater detail and deliberation: Braddon clearly wants to explain why Olivia acts as she does. Braddon told Edward Bulwer Lytton that she wanted to write a character (who it may be surmised is Olivia) 'more original' than previous ones.<sup>5</sup> These efforts, however, resulted in some scathing critical responses. W. Fraser Rae, for example, pronounced Olivia to be 'as unreal as a hobgoblin' and cited a particularly sensational scene in which she is so enraged by jealousy that 'two streams of lurid light seemed to emanate from [her] dilated grey eyes'.<sup>6</sup> On such occasions Olivia's behaviour may well appear excessive, but her actions become

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<sup>5</sup> Letter from Braddon to Bulwer Lytton, [May, 1863], in 'Devoted Disciple: The Letters of Mary Elizabeth Braddon to Sir Edward Bulwer Lytton, 1862-1873', ed. by Robert Lee Wolff, *Harvard Library Bulletin*, 12 (1974), 5-35, 129-161 (p.14). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>6</sup> W. Fraser Rae, 'Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon', *North British Review*, 43 (September, 1865), 180-204 (p.195).

more explicable when read in the light of Victorian texts about female physiology. Prevailing medical perceptions attributed much female behaviour to the influence of women's reproductive systems, which supposedly made them physically, mentally and emotionally volatile. *The Journal of Psychological Medicine*, for example, asserted that changes in the ovaries could lead to changes of personality including 'morbid appetites', 'hysterical cunning' and 'monomaniacal cunning', 'numerous instances of strange and motiveless deceptions, thefts, and crimes', and 'moral insanity'.<sup>7</sup> Henry Maudsley similarly claimed that some women were driven to commit violent acts 'under the influence of their special bodily functions'.<sup>8</sup> Olivia's malicious actions, inspired by passionate but unrequited love for her cousin Edward Arundel, seem to reveal a connection between female sexuality and pathological behaviour. In biological terms Olivia could be described as *too* womanly, too much at the mercy of her female physiology.

Braddon's medicalized depiction of Olivia is, as most critical readings of *John Marchmont's Legacy* acknowledge, coupled with a critique of the limitations Victorian society placed on women's lives. Andrew Mangham, for example, argues that '*John Marchmont's Legacy* makes a direct connection between the narrow existences of nineteenth-century women and the incubation of insane violence'.<sup>9</sup> By arguing that Braddon demonstrates how female biology and a restrictive lifestyle influence women's behaviour, such readings implicitly acknowledge a deterministic aspect to the novel, but they do not explicitly trace how Braddon uses determinism, or draw attention to the contradictions and uncertainties which play a central role in the depiction of Olivia.

The close readings in this chapter reveal an increasing confusion of cause and effect: the order of events shown to instigate Olivia's mental deterioration, and the process of deterioration itself, are inconsistently described. This may be a symptom of the high-pressured environment in which Braddon was working.

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<sup>7</sup> Anon., 'Woman in her Psychological Relations', *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 4 (1851), 18-50 (pp.30-34). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Maudsley, *Responsibility in Mental Disease* (London: King, 1874), p163.

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine and Victorian Popular Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p.102. Further references are given after quotations.



In the month *John Marchmont's Legacy* commenced in *Temple Bar*, she complained to Bulwer Lytton that 'the curse of serial writing & hand to mouth composition has set its seal upon me, & I have had to write a lot of things together'.<sup>10</sup> However, these inconsistencies allow for increased speculation by the reader about what it means to be womanly, and what comprises such a state.

Despite being portrayed very much in terms of female biology, Olivia's inability to sustain her dutiful lifestyle is recurrently connected to claims that she is *unwomanly*, overly intellectual and lacking in feminine characteristics. Women's social and domestic roles were increasingly called into question during the nineteenth century and this generated much literature about the "nature" of women. Notions of womanliness often blurred the boundaries between what was considered ideal and what was understood to be essentially feminine. The image of the ideal woman recurred in various forms throughout Victorian literature: she was the moral heart of the domestic sphere, good-natured and giving; her character, occupations and mission were frequently held up as points of reference in works which addressed the nature and function of women. For example, *The Welcome Guest* asserted that women inherently possess a 'softer character', 'easier faith', 'graceful flexibility' and a 'readier acknowledgement of authority'.<sup>11</sup> John Ruskin offered a particularly demanding image of the ideal woman as 'incapable of error [...] enduringly, incorruptibly good; instinctively, infallibly wise'.<sup>12</sup> The ideal woman was a paragon of morality, whose goodness was inextricable from her femininity, and was demonstrated in her behaviour.

This is not to say that notions of ideal and real women were always unthinkingly conflated. Although claiming that 'a perfect woman is indeed the most exalted of terrestrial creatures – physically, mentally, morally', *The Journal*

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<sup>10</sup> Letter from Braddon to Bulwer Lytton, [December 1862], 'Devoted Disciple', p.10.

<sup>11</sup> T.P. Healey, 'Shall We Marry Her?', *The Welcome Guest*, 1 (January, 1860), 228-29 (229).

<sup>12</sup> John Ruskin, 'Sesame and Lilies' (1864), in *Sesame and Lilies, The Two Paths and the King of the Golden River* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1907), pp.1-79 (p.60). 'Of Queen's Gardens' (the second lecture in 'Sesame and Lilies') does not necessarily encapsulate Ruskin's gender belief system, but its importance here is its contribution to the Victorian image of the ideal woman. For revisionist views of Ruskin's ideas of gender see *Ruskin and Gender*, ed. by Dinah Birch and Francis O'Gorman (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).

of *Psychological Medicine* also asserted that 'ideal perfection' is 'rarely, if ever' achieved ('Woman in her Psychological Relations', p.18, p.21). Anthony Trollope commented that Ruskin's 'Of Queens' Gardens' (quoted from above) was written with 'such a charm of exquisite verbal music that the reader [...] is often tempted to forget that they have no definite tendency, and that nothing is to be learned from them by any woman living or about to live'.<sup>13</sup> June Sturrock points out that newspaper narratives and fiction show 'the unease arising from a clash between the ideal and the reality of the domestic woman', and that conduct literature was didactic, not descriptive.<sup>14</sup> In 1874, Herbert Cowell called for some level-headedness regarding the role of women in society:

It is only when the imagination breaks loose, and people begin to discuss ideal woman as she ought to be, and actual woman as she is fancied to be, that the rein is given to considerable bitterness of feeling, and a good deal of sentimental foolishness on both sides.<sup>15</sup>

This chapter argues that although Braddon's imagination certainly 'breaks loose' around the topic of the ideal woman, she allows it to do so in order to speculate about the possibility of women ever approaching that ideal.

Jeni Curtis observes that

the ideas of what constitutes a "natural" woman, the middle-class ideal of true womanhood, embodied in the literatures of surveillance, from conduct books to novels, are based on a fundamental paradox. If the books were written on the assumption that woman's nature is fixed and given, what then could be the need for books that also assume that women (and men) can be produced, shaped, and trained?<sup>16</sup>

Curtis therefore suggests that there is a 'repressed counter-assumption' in such literature that 'the nature of woman is suspect' (ibid.). *John Marchmont's Legacy*

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<sup>13</sup> Anthony Trollope, 'Sesame and Lilies', *Fortnightly Review*, 1 (July 15, 1865), 633-35 (p.635).

<sup>14</sup> June Sturrock, 'Murder, Gender, and Popular Fiction by Women in the 1860s: Braddon, Oliphant, Yonge', in *Victorian Crime, Madness and Sensation*, ed. by Andrew Maunder and Grace Moore (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004), pp.73-88 (pp.73-74).

<sup>15</sup> Herbert Cowell, 'Sex in Mind and Education: A Commentary', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 115 (June, 1874), 736-49 (p. 747).

<sup>16</sup> Jeni Curtis, 'The "Espaliered" Girl: Pruning the Docile Body in *Aurora Floyd*', in *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, ed. by Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert and Aeron Haynie (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp.77-92 (p.79). Further references are given after quotations.

concerns such ideas of the ideal, natural, and manipulable woman. Braddon's novel asserts that Olivia's nature is almost entirely 'fixed and given', but this nature is the antithesis of 'the middle-class ideal of true womanhood' (ibid.). Despite her best efforts, Olivia's inherent personality renders her incapable of fulfilling the role of ideal woman, suggesting that people cannot always be 'produced, shaped, and trained' (ibid.). Moreover, Olivia's supposed unwomanliness is directly connected to her inability to sustain an ethical lifestyle. In order to perform her philanthropic duties, she must suppress her natural inclinations and perform a function she is intrinsically unsuited for. Unable to fulfil her designated social role, her fall into sin comes to seem inevitable.

However, in *John Marchmont's Legacy* Braddon implies not that 'the nature of woman is suspect' (Curtis, p.79), but that the natures of *some women* do not naturally conform to the Victorian ideal of womanhood. Winifred Hughes has argued that Braddon portrays the 'feminine ideal' as 'potentially treacherous, for both the women who conform and the men who worship them; the standard feminine qualities—childishness, self-suppression, the talent for pleasing—inherently contain the seeds of their own destruction'.<sup>17</sup> However, it is important to note that Braddon is often commendatory of the feminine ideal, and speculates about what conditions may bring it about or prevent it. This is shown by Braddon's employment of two other female characters, Mary Marchmont and Belinda Lawford. Critics are often dismissive of Belinda and (to a lesser extent) Mary; Toru Sasaki and Norman Page call them 'no more than conventional heroines, well qualified to become, successively, the wives of the upright, manly, and fairly conventional hero' ('Introduction', *John Marchmont's Legacy*, p.xv). Yet by assessing what makes them so 'well qualified', we can discover what it is that makes Olivia so *unqualified* for Edward, and for her lifestyle. Moreover, we can ascertain what combination of deterministic factors will result in the prized ideal woman.

The narrator repeatedly speaks in conservative terms about 'womanhood' and what attributes make 'womanhood beautiful' (p.69). The thing itself

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<sup>17</sup> Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p.124. Further references are given after quotations.

becomes conflated with the things which make it beautiful, and both are praised as desirable, but they are precisely what are lacking in Olivia's nature. Pamela K. Gilbert distinguishes between the 'body as it has been represented', which is 'generalized' and 'almost never individual', and 'the lived body'.<sup>18</sup> Lived bodies are subjective, belonging to 'real people who differ dramatically from "the" body which represents them'.<sup>19</sup> Braddon's novel makes a similar differentiation between concepts of 'womanhood' (including womanliness, and that which makes 'womanhood beautiful') which are posited as ideal, and individual women who may or may not correspond to these notions. Braddon's distinction rests on the assumption that each individual is born with an inherent character which may be influenced by environment, but never fundamentally altered. Mary Poovey demonstrates that the Victorian 'notion' that "'instincts" and a "natural" difference between the sexes delineate social roles' is an historically specific 'concept of nature' which had 'material effects' on the everyday lives of Victorians.<sup>20</sup> By presenting a female character who naturally lacks many feminine qualities, Braddon implicitly acknowledges the 'historical specificity' of the concept of womanhood extolled in Victorian society and literature, and through the story of Olivia she shows the detrimental 'material effects' of trying to live up to such concepts.<sup>21</sup> It is therefore implied that not every woman can fit the mould of the ideal woman and that to attach notions of goodness and morality to it so inextricably is both limiting and dangerous.

Although Olivia's exceptional personality is a main focus of this novel, Braddon does not explain how she has come by it. Olivia shares her father's pride and energy, but the description of his 'wild' days at 'college' suggests a sociable and unrestrained personality unlike his daughter's (pp.6-7). In a bitter moment, Olivia comments that the

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<sup>18</sup> Pamela K. Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (Cambridge: CUP, 1997), p.15.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.* p.16.

<sup>20</sup> Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (London: Virago, 1989), p.1.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.*

blood of the Dangerfield Arundels must have had some drop of poison intermingled with it, I should think, before it could produce so vile a creature as myself; and yet I have heard people say that my mother was a good woman. (p.244)

There is a readiness here to attribute moral flaws to hereditary transmission, a readiness which, as demonstrated in chapter 4, was increasingly embraced by many Victorians. Tellingly, the mother is indicated as a possible source of corruption: the woman marries into a family, importing outside influences. Also, as Mangham explains, 'it was widely understood that mothers were more likely to bequeath insanity' (Mangham, p.35). Heredity, however, does not appear to account for Olivia's character, nor are we given any useful information about her childhood. Olivia therefore enters the novel as a grown woman with a developed, but unaccounted for, personality; she is fittingly likened to Pallas Athenë, who sprung fully-formed from the forehead of Zeus (p.78). Nevertheless, her inherent qualities are paramount to the depiction of her character, and she is immediately described as the possessor of 'dangerous gifts', a 'fatal dowry of beauty and intellect and pride' (p.8). 'Dangerous gifts' refers to Olivia's inborn assets which may (and do) become drawbacks in the wrong situation, making them 'fatal'. Whether 'fatal' is interpreted as likely to cause ruin, or as the indication of Fate at work, Olivia's personal qualities are hazardous.

The defence against Olivia's 'dangerous gifts' lies, as her concerned father tells himself, in her 'religious principles' which

are strong enough to keep her right under any circumstances, in spite of any temptation. Her sense of duty is more powerful than any other sentiment. She would never be false to that. (p.8)

Religious belief and Olivia's 'sense of duty' are therefore aligned against her 'beauty and intellect and pride'. It remains unclear what type of temptation Olivia is likely to fall into, but the image of a young, beautiful woman left parentless and near penniless (as her father imagines she might be), implies that Olivia may be left vulnerable to immoral propositions or inappropriate suitors.

It soon becomes apparent that this is far from the case. In fact, it is Olivia's 'sense of duty' which leads to her undoing.

Olivia's life, the narrator informs us, may be 'told in these few words: she did her duty [...] uncomplainingly, unswervingly' (p.66). As a rector's daughter Olivia would be 'expected to discharge many of the same duties' and charitable works as the ladies of landed gentry did on their estates, and she fulfils these duties diligently.<sup>22</sup> Olivia earns the commendation of the local 'dowagers' and of the 'bishop of the diocese' for her displays of 'active devotion' (p.66). She is as a 'young saint' in 'shabby gowns' (p.66) who visits the homes of the sick whilst remaining 'sublimely indifferent to the foul weather without, to the stifling atmosphere within, to dirt, discomfort, poverty, inconvenience' (p.67). Olivia's behaviour is in keeping with *Temple Bar's* claim, printed in the year before it serialized *John Marchmont's Legacy*, that women should be taught to be 'generally active and helpful, and charitable in thought and word and deed'.<sup>23</sup>

However, despite the approbation she earns, there is something disconcerting about Olivia which causes Mary (who becomes Olivia's stepdaughter), to recoil involuntarily from her when they meet. Mary's reaction prompts the narrator to ask: 'what was it in Olivia Arundel's handsome face from which those who looked at her so often shrank, repelled and disappointed?' (p.63). The response takes the form of a lengthy physiognomic description of Olivia:

Every line in those perfectly-modelled features was beautiful to look at; but, as a whole, the face was not beautiful. [...] The handsome mouth was rigid; the dark grey eyes had a cold light in them. The thick bands of raven-black hair were drawn tightly off a square forehead, which was the brow of an intellectual and determined man rather than of a woman. Yes; womanhood was the something wanted in Olivia Arundel's face. Intellect, resolution, courage, are rare gifts; but they are not the gifts whose tokens we look for most anxiously in a woman's face. If Miss Arundel had been a queen, her

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<sup>22</sup> Jessica Gerard, 'Lady Bountiful: Women of the Landed Classes and Rural Philanthropy', *Victorian Studies*, 30:2 (winter, 1987), 183-210 (p.190).

<sup>23</sup> Anon. 'A Word to Women', *Temple Bar*, 2 (April, 1861), 54-61 (p.58). Mangham surmises that Braddon wrote this article because *Temple Bar* had two female correspondents in 1861 and the other, Eliza Lynn Linton, did hold the opinions expressed in the article (Mangham, p.119). The article is reprinted in the *Sixpenny Magazine* (2 (March, 1868), 423-32) which serialized *Lady Audley's Secret*, which may add some support to Mangham's supposition.

diadem would have become her nobly; and she might have been a very great queen: but Heaven help the wretched creature who had appealed from minor tribunals to *her* mercy! Heaven help delinquents of every kind whose last lingering hope had been in her compassion! (p.63)

Certain aspects of Olivia's personality are as yet unrevealed, but as with Claribel Lisle's doll-perfect visage, physical appearance is accurately representative here. After initial hesitancy, the narrator quickly becomes certain of the off-putting 'something' in Olivia's appearance by a detailed observation of her features. Whereas earlier Olivia was described as *receiving* the wrong 'gifts' from Nature, here the 'gifts' she *lacks* also cause problems. Features such as the broad forehead and firm mouth denote supposedly manly qualities ('intellect, resolution, courage'); contrastingly, signs of 'womanhood' ('mercy' and 'compassion') are lacking. The guileless Mary is unaware of the reasons for her response (p.64), but the narrator's use of the inclusive 'we' suggests that whether they know it or not, everyone looks for certain traits in women.

Physiognomy therefore reveals an incongruity between Olivia's personality and attributes seen to befit her gender.<sup>24</sup> The rest of the novel predominantly supports such an assessment. The idea that 'we', would share Mary's aversion to Olivia is supported by the fact that despite her untiring dedication to the poor, Olivia does not enjoy 'the love and gratitude, the tenderness and blessings, which usually wait upon the footsteps of those who do good deeds', for though the parishioners are 'grateful' to her they do 'not love her' (p.67). The narrator speculates that this failure to win affection is due to 'a lack of personal tenderness in her kindness, which separated her from the people she benefited' (p.67). Olivia's automaton-like performance of duty makes her less appealing: 'she was always the same,—Church-of-England charity personified [...] rigidly just, terribly perfect' (p.68). Olivia is more a personification than a person. Here again are similarities with Claribel Lisle:

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<sup>24</sup> Braddon was not necessarily convinced of the efficacy of physiognomy, but it is useful shorthand for novelists wanting to convey character. In *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) Mr Raymond's phrenological assessments of character are generally correct, but phrenology is also a source of humour as the narrator wonders whether 'pudding-making and stocking-darning' are represented by a particular organ. Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.82.

both Claribel and Olivia seem too perfect, and therefore dehumanised, Claribel in her physical appearance, Olivia in her adherence to duty.

Braddon is engaging here with mid-Victorian concerns about the nature and purpose of charitable and philanthropic works, as Dickens does with Mrs Pardiggle and Mrs Jellyby in *Bleak House* (1853).<sup>25</sup> This is in fact a recurring theme in Braddon's works: women's charitable acts and the spirit in which they perform them are an indication of moral worth and a means of winning (or losing) reader sympathy.<sup>26</sup> One of the admirable features of *The Lady Lisle's* Olivia Marmaduke is that she is good to her pensioners during her time as Lady Lisle.<sup>27</sup> In *The Lovels of Arden* (1871) Miss Granger has inherited 'all the commercial faculties of her father' but has 'no other outlet for this mercantile genius' than 'to expend her gifts upon the petty details of a woman's life', which means dictating and enforcing good domestic habits in "her poor".<sup>28</sup> To her schoolchildren she seems 'a kind of prophetess, sent upon earth for their correction and abasement'.<sup>29</sup> Thus Miss Granger has the rigidity and severity of Olivia Marchmont, but the enthusiasm of Dorothea Brooke (*Middlemarch* began publication in the same year). As in *John Marchmont's Legacy*, negative depictions of excessive philanthropy are used to comment on the restrictive nature of women's lives. Yet whilst Miss Granger draws little reader sympathy, Braddon's frequent focalization through Olivia, and emphasis on the determining factors which mean she cannot feel satisfied with her life, makes for a more complicated response to the character.

The narrator emphasises the difficulties of interpretation posed by the dichotomy between Olivia's innate personality and the woman she is trying to be:

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<sup>25</sup> Charles Dickens, *Bleak House* (Oxford: OUP, 1996). Mrs Jellyby neglects her family and the London poor in favour of overseas charities; Mrs Pardiggle's preaching and dispensing of tracts and criticism makes no practical difference to the lives of those she visits.

<sup>26</sup> For an account of Victorian women's pursuit of good works and the growth of the philanthropic movement see Patricia Thomson, *The Victorian Heroine: A Changing Ideal, 1837-1873* (London: OUP, 1956; repr. Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1978), pp.13-36.

<sup>27</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Lady Lisle* (London: Ward and Lock, 1862) pp.175-76.

<sup>28</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Lovels of Arden* (Teddington: Echo Library, 2006), p.139.

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*



How shall I anatomise this woman, who, gifted with no womanly tenderness of nature, unendowed with that pitiful and unreasoning affection which makes womanhood beautiful, yet tried, and tried unceasingly, to do her duty, and to be good; clinging, in the very blindness of her soul, to the rigid formulas of her faith, but unable to seize upon its spirit? Some latent comprehension of the want in her nature made her only the more scrupulous in the performance of those duties which she had meted out for herself. [...] She could be good to her father's parishioners, and she could make sacrifices for them; but she could not love them, any more than they could love her.

That divine and universal pity, that spontaneous and boundless affection, which is the chief loveliness of womanhood and Christianity, had no part in her nature [...]

No; Olivia Arundel was not a good woman, in the commoner sense we attach to the phrase. It was not natural to her to be gentle and tender, to be beneficent, compassionate, and kind [...] She was a woman who was for ever fighting against her nature; who was for ever striving to do right; for ever walking painfully upon the difficult road mapped out for her (p.69).

This quotation works similarly to the previous physiognomic description of Olivia: what is lacking in her nature—tenderness, pity, beneficence, compassion, and so on—is revealed concurrently with assertions that these attributes are distinctively womanly. Two conflicting conceptions of 'nature' emerge - that which is inbuilt in Olivia's mental constitution, and that which is generally considered to be natural to womanhood: Olivia is continually fighting against the former, trying to achieve some semblance of the latter. Here 'right', a woman's moral worth, becomes aligned with acting in a manner befitting her gender: to 'do right', Olivia must act in a way that does not come naturally to her. The religious tone of the passage supports this; attributes such as 'pity' and 'affection' are a sign of both 'womanhood' and Christian feeling. One of the main ways in which notions of real and ideal women became confused concerned women's supposedly intuitively spiritual nature. For example *The Quarterly Review* argued that women need not study theology because 'there is no need to teach them wider charities, or more trustful and unaffected piety. Those, in the true woman, are innate'.<sup>30</sup> Olivia's inability to embrace the spirit of Christianity is a further denial of her womanliness.

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<sup>30</sup> James Davies, 'Female Education', *Quarterly Review*, 119 (April, 1866), 499-515 (p.508).

Womanliness, dutifulness, and goodness are, therefore, closely bound; it is intimated that if Olivia lacks the first of these qualities, she will be unable to maintain the second of them, and that the last is therefore in peril. Olivia essentially chooses to do the right thing: caring for her father's parishioners; nursing the sick; offering religious education; *acting* as a 'good woman', even if she is not one. Whereas James Arnold is unable to act as a gentleman because he attempts to inhabit a lifestyle he was not born for, Olivia is unsuited for the role that she is supposed to play in life, but feels compelled to do her best. This denial of her own nature in preference of conformity is presented as unfortunate but ultimately admirable, as the narrator asks, 'and who shall say that such a woman as this, if she persevere unto the end, shall not wear a brighter crown than her more gentle sisters,—the starry circlet of a martyr?' (p.69). However, the 'if' is crucial here, and it is soon confirmed that persevering 'unto the end' is not something Olivia is capable of: before long, we are assured, she will 'fling' down 'her burden' and 'abandon herself to the eager devils who had been watching for her so untiringly' (p.70). Even before Olivia has committed any questionable act, we are asked to 'imagine a woman with a wicked heart steadfastly trying to do good, and to be good', and are assured that this 'dark and horrible picture' is 'the only true picture' of Olivia (p.83). Such moments contribute to an atmosphere of impending doom; it is clear that Olivia's breaking point is approaching. What goodness she initially seemed to possess is stripped from her or distorted as the narrator focuses on her more and more closely. Olivia's lack of womanliness, her inability to find satisfaction in good works, is now indicative of wickedness. Such melodramatic language correctly forewarns that when Olivia does abandon her course of right living, the consequences will be dire: she eventually allows Mary to be kidnapped and cheated out of her fortune. Unable to live in a way befitting her gender and social position, Olivia falls into moral ruin, and no middle ground seems available.

Yet Olivia undoubtedly struggles against her own nature for as long as she can: 'the deepening circles about her eyes, the hollowing cheeks, and the feverish restlessness of manner which she could not always control, told how

terrible the long struggle had become to her' (p.69). Olivia *cannot* control herself to the necessary extent. When Olivia eventually flings 'aside the cross she had borne in dull, mechanical obedience, rather than in Christian love and truth' it is difficult to see how one with her temperament could have carried the 'cross' in anything other than a 'mechanical' fashion (p.149). In this sense *John Marchmont's Legacy* reacts against a English Christian ideology which, as John R. Reed explains, posited 'self-suppression as a means to self-fulfilment'.<sup>31</sup> It also contradicts claims such as William Benjamin Carpenter's that hysteria and other mental derangements (especially women's) were the result of a 'habitual want of self-control'.<sup>32</sup> Olivia has an 'iron will' and is very much in the habit of controlling herself, but this does not help in the long run (p.117). Braddon questions mid-Victorian faith in willpower and its cultivation, instead looking forward to later ideas which diminished notions of self-modification through self-control and self-suppression. Although Braddon does not explain the pre-congenital determining factors which lead to Olivia's mental constitution, her early depiction of Olivia firmly asserts the notion of an original constitution which can only be modified to an extent, either by the individual herself, or by the environmental influences to which she is exposed.

Nevertheless, environmental determinism plays an important role in Olivia's breakdown precisely because her fundamental nature cannot be trained to find satisfaction with her lifestyle and surroundings: Braddon shows how the Swampington, 'one of the dullest and dampest towns in fenny Lincolnshire' (p.6), has a definite detrimental impact on Olivia's mental health. Descriptions of Olivia's mental constitution are interspersed with frequent reminders that Olivia leads 'a fearfully monotonous, narrow, and uneventful life [...] at Swampington Rectory' (p.68). 'Narrow' is used three times on page 68 alone, indicating the mental and physical restrictions to which Olivia feels subject. Her lifestyle clearly contributes to her downfall:

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<sup>31</sup> John R. Reed, *Victorian Will* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 1989), p.83.

<sup>32</sup> William B. Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology: With Their Chief Applications to Psychology, Pathology, Therapeutics, Hygiene, & Forensic Medicine* (1842), 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Churchill, 1855), p.662. Further references are given after quotations.

She was weary of her life. She sickened under the dull burden which she had borne so long, and carried so patiently. The slow round of duty was loathsome to her. The horrible, narrow, unchanging existence, shut in by cruel walls, which bounded her on every side and kept her prisoner to herself, was odious to her. The powerful intellect revolted against the fetters that bound and galled it. The proud heart beat with murderous violence against the bonds that kept it captive. (ibid.)

The narrator, here, appears sympathetic towards Olivia, admitting that her existence is 'horrible'. In addition to 'narrow' we have 'dull', 'slow', 'unchanging', and images of captivity to illustrate the mind-numbingly claustrophobic state of her existence. There is a hint that Olivia's suffering is partially self-inflicted: she is 'prisoner to herself'; the 'cruel walls' and 'bonds' to which she chooses to submit are figurative. Nevertheless, the monotony of her daily existence is undeniable; environment is therefore a determining influence in that it clashes with her inherent 'powerful intellect', leading to disaster.

As Olivia's dissatisfaction with her life is made known, another aspect of her personality emerges – her 'passionate nature':

"Is my life always to be this—always, always, always?" The passionate nature burst forth sometimes, and the voice that had so long been stifled cried aloud in the black stillness of the night, "Is it to go on for ever and for ever [...] is the lot of other women never to be mine? Am I never to be loved and admired; never to be sought and chosen? Is my life to be all of one dull, grey, colourless monotony [...] without one burst of rainbow-light?" (pp.68-69)

Olivia's repetition of 'always' and 'for ever' reflects the 'colourless monotony' of her life, and indicates the extent of her emotional reaction to it. Moreover, it is revealed that Olivia does possess a desire shared by other women – to be 'loved and admired', 'sought and chosen'. Olivia has never received a suitor because her 'inherent want of tenderness [...] chilled and dispirited the timid young Lincolnshire squires'; 'inherent' is key here, Olivia quite simply does not possess the attributes which would make her appealing to those around her (p.70).

Whilst Olivia may want what other women have (a lover), she cannot achieve this because her temperament is fundamentally lacking in what other women have (feminine tenderness). This qualifies claims that Olivia is lacking in 'womanhood' (p.63); more accurately she lacks the qualities which make 'womanhood beautiful' (p.69). Occasionally there are hints that, in different circumstances, other womanly features could have developed in Olivia. For example, we are told that 'there was no natural womanly vanity, no simple girlish fancy, which this woman had not trodden under foot, and trampled out in the hard pathway she had chosen for herself' (p.67). Moreover, although Olivia is 'unblest with many of the charms of womanhood' she is 'not entirely without its weaknesses' (p.85); these weaknesses induce her to accept John Marchmont's hand in marriage as revenge against Edward. In these extracts it is implied that vanity, fancifulness, and vengefulness are as natural to women as the tenderness and other attributes that characterize the ideal woman. Although Olivia is frequently referred to as "unwomanly", it is more precisely that she is the wrong *type* of woman, she is not the Victorian ideal of womanhood.

Olivia develops an unreciprocated infatuation with Edward, and this is a key event in her downfall. However, the narrator's description of the reasons for, and development of, Olivia's feelings are somewhat confused. As well as possessing suppressed and undesirable feminine qualities, it also appears that she has the potential for more positive feminine emotions:

She would have loved her stepdaughter in those early days, if she could have done so; but *she could not*—she could not. All that was tender or womanly in her nature had been wasted upon her hopeless love for Edward Arundel. The utter wreck of that small freight of affection had left her nature warped and stunted, soured, disappointed, unwomanly. (p.101)

Whereas at previously mentioned places in the novel, womanly tenderness is entirely lacking in her nature, here her love for Edward is the reason that she has no womanly feelings. Only a few pages later, however, we are told that:

it was not in her nature to love. Her passionate idolatry of her boyish cousin had been the one solitary affection that had ever held a place in her cold heart. All the fire of her nature had been concentrated in this one folly, this one passion. (p.114)

The phrase 'not in her nature', is a telling one: used casually it means that a tendency is unusual (it was not in his nature to be up before 9am), but the constant emphasis in this novel on what does and does not constitute Olivia's nature gives it an added, more literal, weight. Yet we are also told that Edward is 'the only creature who had ever had the power to awake the instinct of womanhood in her soul' (p.160). Passion, tenderness and womanliness are confusingly entangled, sometimes conflated, in these extracts. The narrative seems to struggle to sufficiently explain how a woman who has no tenderness in her nature can be a woman in love. It may well be that Braddon made concessions as the serialization went along, allowing Olivia a 'small freight of affection', just enough to forward the plot. These confusions suggest the numerous deterministic paths which could have led to Olivia's current state, but also weaken the earlier certainty about her original constitution. Aborted lines of potential development become apparent; for example she cannot love Mary because of her love for Edward. Unfulfilled potential is, as we shall see, a major part of Olivia's characterization.

Despite the inconsistencies, there is no doubt that Olivia's feelings for Edward are detrimental, driving her to contravene every personal standard. Olivia's excessive passion seems to show that, although she is unwomanly by Victorian social standards, her biology is a determining factor and, moreover, conforms to many Victorian medical notions of female biology. As Sally Shuttleworth and Jenny Bourne Taylor observe, religion was often seen as 'a form of displacement for sexual energy'.<sup>33</sup> For example the physician J.G. Millingen claimed that women are both highly spiritual, and 'more forcibly under the control of matter' than men, meaning that they are 'subject to all the aberrations of love and religion' and that 'the latter becomes a resource when

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<sup>33</sup> Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890* (Oxford: OUP, 1998; repr. 2003), p.167. Further references are given after quotations.

the excitement of the former is exhausted by disappointment, infidelity and age'.<sup>34</sup> Although, as we have seen, Olivia is not excessively spiritual, she rigidly adheres to her performance of good works and also pours her feelings into sermons which are 'fierce denunciatory protests against the inherent wickedness of the human heart' (p.83). This religious devotion, as Hughes notes, is both 'an instrument of self-suppression and self-torture', and 'an indirect outlet for her passion' (Hughes, p.132), but it is not enough to turn her thoughts from Edward.

The fact that Olivia cannot express her desires reflects Carpenter's claim that woman is constitutionally more emotional and

in all that relates to sexual love, she is frequently restrained by a sense of decorum from giving outward expression to feelings which she is secretly brooding-over, and whose injurious influence she is exaggerating by the attention she gives to them. (Carpenter, *Human Physiology*, p.663)

Olivia's passion for Edward is the 'blight of her life', and the narrator speculates that if she had not loved him she 'might have grown out of her natural self by force of her conscientious desire to do right; and might have become, indeed, a good and perfect woman' (p.86), she might, in other words, have submitted to the constraints of her 'narrow life'. We are now offered the possibility that without Edward, the dutiful, persevering side of her nature might have overcome the frustrated, demoralized part of her that wants something more out of life; instead Olivia broods over Edward as Carpenter describes, exaggerating the 'injurious influence' of her thoughts.

Contrastingly, much later on the narrator also hypothesizes that if Olivia

could have been Edward Arundel's wife, she would have been the noblest and truest wife that ever merged her identity into that of another, and lived upon the refracted glory of her husband's triumphs [...] She would have been great by reason of her power of self-abnegation; and there would have been a strange charm in the aspect of this fierce nature attuned to harmonise with its master's soul, all the barbaric discords melting into melody. (pp.356-57)

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<sup>34</sup> John Gideon Millingen, *The Passions; or Mind and Matter* (London: J. and D. Darling, 1848), in Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth, *Embodied Selves*, pp.169-70 (p.169).

In both cases (if she had never met Edward, or if she had married him) there is the possibility that Olivia could somehow repress or subdue the fierceness of her nature; in the first case her passion would never have been aroused to a dangerous extent; in the second she would have found a means to sublimate it into a socially acceptable and personally bearable form. As it is, neither of these things happens. In terms of certain Victorian theories relating to reproductive physiology, this is the worst-case scenario. Henry Maudsley claimed, like the other physicians quoted above, that unmarried women who had 'no aim in life to work for, no outlet for their energies in outward activity, are sometimes driven to a morbid self-brooding, or to an excessive religious devotion', and connected this specifically to the inability to satisfy sexual desire: 'their whole system feels severely the effects of an unsatisfied sexual passion, and exhibits these in irregular bodily functions, in restlessness, irritability, and moodiness of mind, and in a morbid self-feeling, taking a variety of forms.'<sup>35</sup> Another physician, T.J. Graham, also asserted that it could be dangerous to excessively 'suppress [...] the propensity of nature to physical love.' Graham believed that if (in both sexes) the 'appetite of love' is 'excited [but] not indulged' it will 'become greater and greater, until it induces derangement of various functions, and hence hypochondriasis, convulsions, hysteria, and even insanity may be the result.'<sup>36</sup> Read in light of this, Olivia's mental deterioration may be attributable to an excited, but unreleased, 'appetite for love'.<sup>37</sup> Braddon seems to endorse this view to an extent as she argues that in Olivia 'all the volcanic

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<sup>35</sup> Henry Maudsley, 'On Some of the Causes of Insanity', *Journal of Mental Science*, 12 (January, 1867), 488-502 (p.492).

<sup>36</sup> Thomas John Graham, *On the Management and Disorders of Infancy and Childhood* (London: Simpkin, Marshall and Co., 1853), in Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth, *Embodied Selves*, pp.187-88 (p.188).

<sup>37</sup> These examples contradict another Victorian image of women (promoted by physicians such as William Acton) as lacking in sexual feeling. However, M. Jeanne Peterson warns that Acton 'ought not to be accepted as typical' as physicians held varied opinions, 'Dr Acton's Enemy: Medicine, Sex, and Society in Victorian England', in *Energy and Entropy: Science and Culture in Victorian Britain*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), pp.248-69 (p.250). In a non-medical example, *The Westminster Review* warned its readers (in relation to the stereotypical literary heroine) that 'no good end is attained by trying to persuade ourselves that women are all incorporeal, angelic, colourless, passionless, helpless creatures [...] who regard the whole end and passion of human life as ethereal, Platonic love, and orderly, parent-sanctioned wedlock'. Justin McCarthy, 'Novels with a Purpose', *Westminster Review*, 82 (July, 1864), 24-49 (p.48).



forces of an impetuous nature, concentrated into one narrow focus, wasted themselves upon this one feeling [for Edward], until that which should have been a sentiment became a madness' (p.86).

The particular form this madness takes is one already familiar to the reader of this thesis - monomania. Like Magdalen in *No Name*, Olivia is not directly identified as a monomaniac by the narrator, but she comes very close to being so:

It was a madness, an isolated madness, which stood alone in [Olivia's] soul, and fought for mastery over her better aspirations, her wiser thoughts. We are all familiar with strange stories of wise and great minds which have been ridden by some hobgoblin fancy, some one horrible monomania; a bleeding head upon a dish, a grinning skeleton playing hide-and-seek [...] some devilry or other before which the master-spirit shrank and dwindled until the body withered and the victim died. (*John Marchmont's Legacy*, p.116)

Although Olivia (unlike Alfred Monkton) does not actually hallucinate, Braddon conjures up images of monomaniacs who do, thereby giving her love for Edward a destructive and unnatural appearance. Olivia's 'master-spirit' does indeed begin to waste away before the image of Edward Arundel:

Yes; she thought of him for ever and ever. The narrow life to which she doomed herself, the self-immolation which she called duty, left her a prey to this one thought. Her work was not enough for her. Her powerful mind wasted and shrivelled for want of worthy employment. It was like one vast roll of parchment whereon half the wisdom of the world might have been inscribed, but on which was only written over and over again, in maddening repetition, the name of Edward Arundel. (pp.135-36)

Olivia's mind returns again and again to Edward, but is this a sign of insanity, or the thing that drives her insane? In the above passage it seems that the obsession with Edward is a result of Olivia's 'narrow life': Olivia is a woman with great reserves of energy and passion; this becomes misdirected towards Edward because she has nowhere else to expend it.

It is evident that the powerful resources which develop into feelings for Edward could have been more profitably employed elsewhere. It is frequently

indicated that Olivia's love for Edward is a by-product of unfulfilled potential and wasted energies, that she is wasting 'a world of intellect and passion upon this bright-haired boy' (p.86). In those passages which most clearly describe the monomaniacal aspects of Olivia's affections, the sense of misspent intellectual potential is far more evident than her repressed sexual desires. The narrator's conjecture that if 'her life had been a wider one, this wasted love would, perhaps, have shrunk into its proper insignificance', undermines a reading of Olivia as merely a slave to her female biology (p.86). As Shuttleworth observes:

Braddon draws on the contemporary discourse of psychiatry to depict the destructive impact of sexuality on Olivia. This is not some unexplained monomania, however, but the explicit product of the limited conditions of her life and her willed adherence to ideologies of female self-negation. Female violence and evil, the text asserts, are not the result of physiological aberrations but are directly produced by the social conventions governing Victorian femininity.<sup>38</sup>

It is important, however, that it is Olivia's individual temperament which clashes with 'social conventions'; as the comparison with Mary and Belinda will presently show, not all women in this novel respond so violently to a narrow lifestyle.

Despite any inconsistencies in characterization, Olivia is first and foremost an example of vast but squandered potential, and not merely because she cannot win the ideal woman's role of wife. Olivia is often likened to women with powerful, potentially admirable qualities, but dangerous and morally questionable reputations: she has 'the ambition of a Semiramis, the courage of a Boadicea, the resolution of a Lady Macbeth' (p.130), 'ambition which might have made her an empress' (p.85), and is 'by nature dauntless and resolute as the hero of some classic story' (p.244). Such examples emphasise the image of abilities wasted, distorted, eventually becoming ruinous, the historical and/or legendary nature of many of them suggest the impossibility of Olivia fulfilling her potential in the world as it is. Whilst in an alternative reality

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<sup>38</sup> Sally Shuttleworth, "'Preaching to the Nerves": Psychological Disorder in Sensation Fiction' in *A Question of Identity: Women, Science, and Literature*, ed. by Marina Benjamin (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1993), pp.192-222 (p.217). Further references are given after quotations.

Olivia could have been a great (if not a good) woman, her actual situation leaves her 'chained down, bound, trammelled by her love for' Edward (p.117).

In fact, throughout the novel there seems to be no limit to what Olivia might have been (even a tender woman, had Edward reciprocated her feelings). Braddon gives an array of possible alternatives for Olivia which would fill the same hole in her life as her affection for Edward. Romantic or domestic fulfilment is not the only, or even necessarily the preferable, means of occupation for Olivia:

If Olivia Marchmont could have gone to America, and entered herself amongst the feminine professors of law or medicine, —if she could have turned field-preacher, like simple Dinah Morris, or set up a printing-press in Bloomsbury, or even written a novel, —I think she might have been saved. The superabundant energy of her mind would have found a new object. As it was, she did none of these things. She had only dreamt one dream, and by force of perpetual repetition the dream had become a madness. (p.136)

This passage would have been particularly significant to readers in the early 1860s when questions of female education and occupation were prominent in the press and when, as Mangham observes, the 'image of the first female physician, Elizabeth Garrett', was 'looming over mid-Victorian society'.<sup>39</sup> Yet even here, alternative lifestyles are placed out of Olivia's reach. In some senses Olivia's personality remains a drawback – her unspiritual nature would make her an unlikely 'field-preacher', and her aversion to frivolous activity suggests she is not the type to write a novel. In terms of a medical career, whereas this would not be an entirely impossible dream for some female readers of the novel, *John Marchmont's Legacy* is set from the late 1830s to the mid-1850s, so for Olivia it would have been unattainable.

Not only is Olivia's intellect wasted, she comes to view it as a reason for Edward's disinterest in her, asking 'what have I made of myself in my pride of intellect?' (p.76). The year before *John Marchmont's Legacy* came out, Herbert Spencer argued that 'men care little for erudition in women; but very much for

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<sup>39</sup> Mangham, p.102. Barbara Onslow's *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 2000) explores the new opportunities, and the obstacles, for women embarking on journalistic careers, including Braddon.

physical beauty, good nature, and sound sense'.<sup>40</sup> Asserting that over-learning would damage female health, thus making women less attractive, Spencer asked 'how many conquests does the blue-stocking make through her extensive knowledge of history?'.<sup>41</sup> *John Marchmont's Legacy* seems to reflect (to an extent) this commendation of a certain, attractive, type of femininity. Significantly, Edward dismisses Olivia's beauty as having a 'little too much of the Pallas Athenë about it' (p.78). Laura Morgan Green identifies a growing concern with 'women's intellectual ambitions' in mid-Victorian fiction, but observes that 'novelists continued to thread these ambitions through the needle's eye of a plot of courtship and marriage'.<sup>42</sup> *John Marchmont's Legacy* differs from such novels in that the more conventional marriage plot is left for Mary and Belinda, neither of whom have any notable intellectual ambition. Intelligence in this novel has little to do with the ideal woman.

Towards the end of the novel, however, the characterization of Olivia is further confused by a change in the narrator's assessment of her mental faculties. At first the bad combination of narrow lifestyle and large intellect results in Olivia's dissatisfaction with life. Later, conversely, Olivia's mind is described in terms which reflect aspects of her lifestyle. For example, she is described as one of 'these strong-minded women, whose minds are strong because of their narrowness, and who are the bonden slaves of one idea', in whose 'violent and concentrative natures the line that separates reason from madness is so feeble a demarcation, that very few can perceive the hour in which it is passed' (p.356). Olivia's mind no longer has room for 'half the wisdom of the world' (p.135), it is as narrow as her lifestyle, and she is now described as succumbing to monomania because her mind is of a certain constitution. Braddon is definitely concerned with explaining Olivia's extreme behaviour, but these inconsistencies show that she is not writing with a clear set of deterministic rules in mind. In fact, as with James Arnold, the more Olivia becomes an obviously hopeless case, the more the narrator begins to suggest

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<sup>40</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861; London: Routledge, 1993), p.187.

<sup>41</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> Laura Morgan Green, *Educating Women: Cultural Conflict and Victorian Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), xi.

that she was constitutionally predisposed to such an outcome all along. As a result, some of Olivia's formidableness, and also the sense of potential tragically wasted, is lost by the end of the novel.

Ultimately Olivia's dreams remain unfulfilled and she is doomed to repeat the monotonous rounds of visiting which were so damaging to her in the first place: 'day by day she went the same round from cottage to cottage, [...] exhibiting an unwearying patience that was akin to sublimity' (p.484). However, there is now an important difference in Olivia. The narrator states that 'passion had burnt itself out in this woman's breast, and there was nothing in her mind now but remorse' and that the people of Swampington believe that she is 'not quite right in her mind' (ibid.). Olivia is forced into submission. Not constitutionally inclined towards any of the female attributes which would make her fit in, she can only fulfil the role of good woman through the complete effacement of her personality.

So, Olivia Marchmont has the potential to become a good woman, but this can never be realised in her current surroundings. Moreover, the kind of woman she could become if her potential was developed would still not suit life in Swampington. This is further emphasised by comparison with the two heroines of the novel, Mary Marchmont (Olivia's stepdaughter and Edward's first wife) and Belinda Lawford (Edward's second wife). Influenced by both inherent and environmental determining factors, these women fulfil, to varying extents and in different ways, the role of ideal woman in a manner impossible for Olivia.

Like Olivia, when we first meet Mary there is something about her which strikes the observer, and which is revealed through further scrutiny:

She was very pretty, very lady-like, very interesting; but it was impossible to look at her without a vague feeling of pain, that was difficult to understand. You knew, by-and-by, why you were sorry for this little girl. She had never been a child [...] The ruthless hand of poverty had snatched away from her the gift which God had given her in her cradle; and at eight years old she was a woman,—a woman invested with all that is most beautiful amongst womanly attributes—love, tenderness, compassion, carefulness for others, unselfish devotion, uncomplaining patience, heroic endurance. She was a woman by reason of all these virtues; but she was no longer a

child. (p.18)

Many of Mary's 'attributes' ('carefulness for others, unselfish devotion, uncomplaining patience, heroic endurance') are also displayed by Olivia before her downfall, yet Mary also possesses 'tenderness' and 'compassion', which do not inhabit Olivia's nature. Ideal womanliness is a state which Mary achieves prematurely, one which Olivia is unable to achieve. Although environmental determinism in the form of the 'ruthless hand of poverty' has undoubtedly affected Mary, there are a number of indications that she is constitutionally predisposed towards those 'womanly attributes' which *John Marchmont's Legacy* extols. Mary has a 'capacity' for learning 'far beyond her years' (p.35), but whereas Olivia's manly intellect is off-putting, Mary's is explicitly portrayed as contributing to her womanliness: 'Intellect here reigned supreme. Instead of the animal spirits of a thoughtless child, there was a woman's loving carefulness for others, a woman's unselfishness and devotion' (p.59); although labelled 'intellect', this describes more of an emotional capacity.

Furthermore, Mary and her father share 'an affection that was almost morbid in its intensity', suggesting a hereditary trait.<sup>43</sup> Indeed, Mary's 'morbidly sensitive rather than strong' mind is one of her distinguishing features, and one which is partly responsible for her womanly demeanour (p.22). When her father inherits the affluent estates of Marchmont Towers, Mary does 'not forget to be good to the poor', paying visits, reading New Testament stories and distributing 'brandy, and wine, and milk, and woollen stuffs, and grocery' (p.48). Whereas Olivia diligently but empty-heartedly ministers to her father's parishioners in Swampington, Mary's 'morbidly sensitive nature adapted her to all charitable offices [...] She had a subtle and intuitive comprehension of other people's feelings, derived from the extreme susceptibility of her own' (p.49). Mary's 'morbidly sensitive nature' makes her an instinctively "good" woman in a way that Olivia is not. Moreover, despite years of poverty, Mary has never been 'vulgarised' by its 'associations' because of 'her self-contained nature' which 'took no colour from the things that

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<sup>43</sup> p.19. Mary is also described as being 'delicate like her mother' (p.26).

surrounded her'; there is, it seems, an underlying purity which means hardship improves rather than tarnishes Mary's personality (ibid.).

A further example of Mary's constitutional predisposition towards being a good woman is apparent when the narrator tells us that 'the organ of veneration must have been abnormally developed in Mary Marchmont's head' because she possesses the 'guilelessness which thinketh no evil, which cannot be induced to see the evil under its very nose' (p.104). Although potentially 'dangerous', the narrator assures us that 'such blind confidence' is nonetheless one of the most 'beautiful and pure things upon this earth' (ibid.). Mary's morbid sensitivity proves a threat to her goodness on one occasion when 'a sudden agony, that was near akin to madness, seized upon this girl, in whose sensitive nature affection had always had a morbid intensity' (p.110). Mary is inclined towards suicide but her constitutional weakness actually saves her when she faints away before she can perform the act.

As she grows older Mary retains her womanly traits, but also remains 'infantine in her innocence and inexperience of the world outside' (p.133). This combination of innocent childishness and tender womanliness proves a winning one. When he is reunited with Mary after some years abroad, Edward can 'remember no one as fascinating as this girl, who seemed as childlike now, in her early womanhood, as she had been womanly while she was a child' (pp.142-43) and he favours Mary over the 'artificial belles of a Calcutta ballroom' (p.144).

Whereas a combination of environment and inherent constitution protects Mary, Olivia is tried to the point where she sins. Olivia is aware of the difference between herself and Mary, which only helps to further drive her towards ruin as she wonders

What had she done, this girl, who had never known what it was to fight a battle with her own rebellious heart? what had she done, that all this wealth of love and happiness should drop into her lap unsought, — comparatively unvalued, perhaps? (p.150)

This is reminiscent of the narrator's scornful assessment of Claribel in *The Lady Lisle*, whose constitutional passivity makes her a good, because untroublesome,

wife. In *John Marchmont's Legacy* the narrator is generally admiring of Mary, but here the use of free indirect discourse allows the narrative voice to convey empathetically some of Olivia's bitterness. Whilst not condoning Olivia's behaviour or devaluing womanly virtues the reader may feel that the temperamentally gentle Mary certainly finds life easier than the naturally dynamic Olivia.

However, Mary's special brand of womanliness comes at a price, and the 'wealth of love and happiness' that Olivia envies does not last for long. Whereas Olivia is an empress, a manly woman, a natural ruler, Mary is described as 'the poor pale neglected flower, the fragile lily, the frail exotic blossom, that was so cruelly out of place upon the bleak pathways of life!' (p.14). Olivia and Mary share the quality of being 'cruelly out of place' in their present surroundings, but whereas the former would be perfect in another time, another place, another gender, Mary is unsuited for the 'bleak pathways of life' altogether. This early description of Mary hints at her eventual fate; always frail, the traumatic events she endures ensure that she does not survive for long after peace is restored to her. Indeed, Mary never gets to experience being a woman in the right time and place. When Mary is about to return to Marchmont Towers as a married woman Edward praises her 'pretty, infantine, unworldly spirit', and wishes they could be 'two grown-up babes in the wood, and could wander about gathering wild flowers' (pp.204-05). The fairytale imagery reasserts the sense that Mary is not at home in the world as it is. In sensational fashion, Mary is prevented from returning to fulfil her role as mistress of Marchmont and a grown 'woman of business' when disaster strikes in the form of the railway accident which prevents her marriage from being made public (ibid.).

Mary is too gentle, too tender, and too fragile. Although she is womanly and endearing, she never really gets to experience the material rewards of being a good woman, the 'happiness of a home; the sweet sense of ownership; the delight of dispensing pleasure to others; all the simple domestic joys which make life beautiful' (p.376). Rather she is conditioned for enduring suffering, and is a 'poor broken-hearted girl, whose many sorrows had brought her to



look upon life as a thing which was never meant to be joyful, and which was only to be endured patiently' (p.455). This gives Mary a martyrish quality. From early on in the novel the narrator, after describing the child's pensive face, asks why Mary is 'so utterly different from all other children?' and wonders whether she is 'already marked out for some womanly martyrdom – already set apart for more than common suffering?' (p.55). Later, Mary herself resolves to be a martyr, convinced that she is willing to suffer and die for her father (p.97). Finally, after her ordeal at the hands of Olivia and Paul Marchmont, Mary's face appears 'deathly pale' so that it seems to Edward that

there was something almost supernal [celestial] in the brightness of that white, wasted face; something that reminded him of the countenance of a martyr who has ceased to suffer the anguish of death in a foretaste of the joys of Heaven. (p.434)

Mary is increasingly resembling a celestial rather than human being; mundane causes such as chronic stress and grief have made her face appear 'supernal', an indication of her ultimate fate. Although Mary does not get more than a taste of acting as a wife and mother, we are assured that 'she was very happy; and her nature, always gentle, seemed sublimated by the sufferings she had endured, and already akin to that of the angels' (p.480). The overtly religious ending of the novel describes Mary taking her place in Heaven, and smiling upon Edward 'from amidst the vast throng of angel faces' (p.487). The prematurely womanly Mary receives her reward in the end, becoming something she never was on Earth: 'a child for ever and ever before the throne of God!' (ibid). Whilst Olivia can only struggle in vain to win the 'starry circlet of a martyr', Mary is predisposed, through constitution and upbringing, towards martyrdom (p.69).

In contrast to Olivia and Mary is the 'blooming English maiden' Belinda (p.315). Belinda is a generally overlooked character. Shuttleworth for example, argues that in the novel 'the female role is divided into two [...] split between the childlike heiress, Mary, and the fiercely intelligent but penniless Olivia' (Shuttleworth, 'Preaching', p.215). Shuttleworth also cites Mary as the 'archetype of womanliness' (ibid., p.216), and sees Belinda as simply being a 'less fragile and childlike bride' for Edward (ibid., p.219). Certainly, Belinda is

only introduced over halfway through the novel, and she does not have much to actually “do”, other than fall in love with and (eventually) marry Edward. Nevertheless, it is telling that Braddon felt the need to provide a more robust substitute for Mary. Belinda is crucial in this novel because she is, in fact, the epitome of ideal womanliness, and the characterization of Olivia and Mary cannot be fully appreciated without comparison to her. When Edward first sees her he knows that she is ‘a good and beautiful creature’ (p.311), he feels ‘instinctively that she was as good as she was beautiful, and that her pity must be a most genuine and tender emotion, not to be despised by the proudest man upon earth’ (p.312). Belinda wins love from Edward, and indeed everyone around her:

She had the beauty of goodness, and to admire her was to do homage to the purest and brightest attributes of womanhood [...] the beauties of tenderness, truth, faith, earnestness, hope and charity, were enthroned upon her broad white brow, and crowned her queen by right of divine womanly perfection. A loving and devoted daughter, an affectionate sister, a true and faithful friend, an untiring benefactress to the poor, a gentle mistress, a well-bred Christian lady; in every duty and in every position she bore out and sustained the impression which her beauty made on the minds of those who looked upon her. She was only nineteen years of age, and no sorrow had ever altered the brightness of her nature. She lived a happy life with a father who was proud of her, and with a mother who resembled her in almost every attribute. She led a happy but a busy life, and did her duty to the poor about her as scrupulously as even Olivia had done in the old days at Swampington Rectory; but in such a genial and cheerful spirit as to win, not cold thankfulness, but heartfelt love and devotion from all who partook of her benefits.

(p.316)

This passage is worth quoting at length because it is here that we are given a description of the earthly, womanly ideal that neither Mary nor Olivia can fulfil, and of the environment required for creating such an individual. As with Mary, the qualities which Olivia is said to lack, ‘tenderness’, ‘affection’, ‘gentleness’, are all part of what makes Belinda endearing. The good works which are soul-destroying to Olivia are pleasurable and fulfilling for Belinda. Like Mary, Belinda has done little, it seems, other than be born with a personality type which happens to render her appealing, but also with good

health, wealth, and a loving, protective family. Much like Mary, Belinda is 'a natural, artless, spontaneous creature [...] utterly powerless to conceal her emotions, or to pretend a sentiment she did not feel', but she is no fading flower (p.319). Her father assures her that she is 'as good as a son' (p.365). The narrator supports, with qualifications, this declaration: 'she was as good as a son; that is to say she was braver and more outspoken than most women; although she was feminine and gentle withal, and by no means strong-minded' (ibid.). Furthermore, she is 'clever; but only just clever enough to be charming' (p.378). The ideal woman who is emerging here is useful and opinionated, but only insofar as it will help her to support and bring happiness to those (especially men) around her.

The main difference between Belinda and Olivia is that the former is content with her quiet life. As her wedding approaches, Belinda reminisces fondly:

How often mamma and I have sat under the dear old cedar, making our poor children's frocks! People say monotonous lives are not happy; mine has been the same thing over and over again; and yet how happy, how happy! (p.419)

The charitable aspects of Belinda's life are connected, in this passage, to its lack of excitement and sedate pace. This refers back to Olivia's hatred of her own 'monotonous' life: her vigorous intellect and fiery personality cannot find happiness in the blandness of the good works she performs; yet goodness and femininity remain inextricable from the fact that Olivia's duties are dictated by life in Swampington, and this 'narrow life', in antagonism with her 'powerful mind', primes her for self-destruction.

Olivia's love is also unfavourably compared to Belinda's. Love for Olivia is 'a dark and terrible passion, a thing to be concealed, as monomaniacs have sometimes contrived to keep the secret of their mania, until it burst forth at last, fatal and irrepressible, in some direful work of wreck and ruin' (pp.144-45). Belinda's love is a different 'sentiment to that which had raged in Olivia's stormy breast', coming

like the gradual dawning of a summer's day,—first a little patch of light far away in the east, very faint and feeble; then a slow widening of the rosy brightness; and at last a great blaze of splendour over all the width of the vast heavens. (p. 319)

How these women experience love reflects their intrinsic personalities: Olivia's feelings are violent, akin to destructive madness; Belinda's feelings are ennobling, figuratively described as natural, beautiful and illuminating. Shuttleworth has argued that Braddon exposes 'as a sham the whole ideology of duty and self-effacement that governed Victorian female lives', but Belinda makes for a complication of this argument (Shuttleworth, 'Preaching', p.217). On the one hand it could be argued that Belinda's perfectly complementary temperament, upbringing and environment are too idealised to be taken seriously. If Belinda's character fulfils an impossible paradigm, this reinforces Shuttleworth's argument. There are hints that this may be the case, as in the following extract:

A woman had need to be country-bred, and to have been reared in the narrow circle of a happy home, to feel as Belinda Lawford felt. Such love as hers is only given to bright and innocent spirits, untarnished even by the knowledge of sin. (p.420)

Belinda is both born and raised to be a 'good woman', and does not even have 'knowledge of sin' - this is certainly quite a claim. On the other hand, Belinda seems no more unrealistic than the born-for-martyrdom Mary or the monomaniacal frustrated genius, Olivia. *John Marchmont's Legacy* therefore suggests that some women are naturally more suited to lives of 'duty and self-effacement' than others, and exposes 'as a sham' the idea that all females are born with shared womanly attributes. Joan Burstyn argues that the Victorian ideal of womanhood offered a means of social control which 'cast woman as an entity and left little room for variations among individuals'.<sup>44</sup> Although Braddon depicts a number of variations between her female characters, the message is clear that the closer to the ideal of womanhood a woman is in heart and mind, as well as in deed, the better it will be for her.

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<sup>44</sup> Joan N. Burstyn, *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p.11.

Whilst *John Marchmont's Legacy* seems to appeal for understanding of Olivia, she can only 'hope to be a good woman' through struggle, and it is 'only by the rigid performance of hard duties, the patient practice of tedious rites, that she could hope to attain that eternal crown which simpler Christians [i.e. Belinda and Mary] seem to win so easily' (p.129). The fates of the three main female characters correspond can be read in the light of Charles Darwin's insights upon natural selection. Olivia survives the novel, but remains unmarried and childless - her undesirable traits end with her. The sickly Mary's ethereality makes her physically and mentally unsuited to sustain the Victorian female role of wife and mother; she has only one child (who takes after his healthy father) before dying of 'a lingering pulmonary complaint' (p.484). Belinda is physically healthy and most suited to her lifestyle and to Victorian ideals of femininity: she marries Edward and provides him with numerous children (p.487).

This is not to say that Braddon is portraying things as they *should* be. Writing about George Eliot, Moira Gatens responds to arguments that she failed 'to provide her female characters with meaningful or non-traditional life options but rather allowed them to be defeated by circumstance' by pointing out that Eliot felt a 'commitment to portray her characters truthfully and realistically *in situ*'.<sup>45</sup> The same can be said of Olivia, who sees no escape from her miserable life other than the usual route of marriage. Detailed descriptions of Olivia's mental constitution in this novel, along with the many possibilities of what she *could* have been, and *ought* to have been, create ambivalence towards notions of womanliness. Braddon is both portraying the Victorian ideal of womanhood, and suggesting how difficult it is to meet that ideal. Success is arbitrarily reliant on the physiology and environmental influence experienced by each individual. Only a woman such as Belinda has just the correct temperament and upbringing to ensure perfection. On the one hand Braddon offers the possibility that 'nature makes these mistakes now and then, and the victim expiates the error' (p.356). Olivia is deprived of the feminine attributes which would supposedly make her both attractive and content; her own nature

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<sup>45</sup> Moira Gatens, 'Freedom and Determinism in *Middlemarch*, or Dorothea, the Lunatic', *Sidney Studies in English*, 29 (2003), 31-38 (p.35).

is at the heart of her breakdown. On the other hand, there is an implicit sense that Victorian society also 'makes mistakes' in limiting women's lives and options. Whilst the Victorian notion of womanhood is shown to be socially constructed, individual character is revealed to be largely determined before birth. The final chapter explores how in *Lost for Love* (1874) Braddon continues to negotiate between the real and the ideal, offering a more positive, if somewhat idealistic model for cultivating the virtues of women.

## Chapter 8

### 'What do we want in the Woman When We Have Educated Her?': Education as a Determining Tool in *Lost for Love*

The whole theory and practice of Education, indeed, involves the distinct recognition of external influences, as having a most important share in the formation of the character; whilst it is the object of every enlightened Educator to foster the development, and to promote the right exercise, of that power by which each individual becomes the director of his own conduct.<sup>1</sup>

(William B. Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology*, 1855)

There must be a soul lurking in this neglected form – a soul of wider capabilities than common souls – a mind that lacked only the light of education [...] What a glorious thing it would be to illumine the outer darkness in which this poor child lived – to redeem this imprisoned soul from its bondage – or, in plain words, to educate Jarred Gurner's daughter!<sup>2</sup>

(Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lost for Love*, 1874)

It has become evident throughout this thesis that questions of the extent to which individual development could be controlled and modified formed an important part of Victorian debates about determinism. Education was seen as a tool which, if skilfully wielded, could go some way (how far exactly was arguable) to preventing the manifestation of negative characteristics and also to developing natural potential which may otherwise remain dormant. In this sense education could be a counteraction or an aid to biological determinism and a means of manipulating environmental determinism for socially desirable ends. For example, as the epigraph above and the previous discussion of *No*

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<sup>1</sup> William Benjamin Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology: With Their Chief Applications to Psychology, Pathology, Therapeutics, Hygiene, & Forensic Medicine* (1842), 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London: Churchill, 1855), p.550.

<sup>2</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Lost for Love*, 2 vols (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1874; repr. [n.p.] Elibron Classics, 2005), I, p.122. Further references are given after quotations. *Lost for Love* was serialized in *Belgravia* from November 1873 to November 1874, and was published in 3 volumes in 1874.

*Name* (chapter 3) show, education was integral to W.B. Carpenter's theories about human agency, cultivation and self-determination.

Victorian fiction frequently explored the dangers of mismanaged education, perhaps most didactically and famously in Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) which depicts the harmful consequences of a utilitarian education.<sup>3</sup> Braddon touches upon educational themes in many of her novels. Chapter 6 showed how *The Lady Lisle* depicts education as an improving force on Rupert Lisle. Some of Braddon's most famous heroines are poorly or irregularly educated and subsequently jeopardize their domestic environments. For example, Aurora Floyd's undisciplined childhood culminates in her abandoning a finishing school in France in order to elope with her father's groom. Isabel Gilbert in *The Doctor's Wife* (1864) has 'no friendly finger to point a pathway in the intellectual forest' and so she 'rambled as her inclination led her'.<sup>4</sup> Inclination leads Isabel from romantic fiction, to impossible fantasies, to a dangerous attraction to the dashing Roland Lansdell.

This chapter considers Braddon's more extensive depiction of education as a means of cultivating character in her largely overlooked novel *Lost for Love* (1874).<sup>5</sup> Like *John Marchmont's Legacy*, *Lost for Love* engages with mid-Victorian debates over the role of women in society and female intellectual capabilities, but this novel speculates more optimistically about the potential for intelligent and talented women to find personal fulfilment. Whereas Olivia Marchmont's fearsome intellect prevents her from finding contentment in life, *Lost for Love's* two heroines, Flora Chamney and Louisa Gurner, find happiness in part *because* of their intellectual abilities. Braddon engages with the debates over female higher education that arose in the last half of the nineteenth century. In doing

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<sup>3</sup> Interest about good education in the second half of the nineteenth century, contributed to the history of debate about how to manage the nurture of individuals and social groups, apparent in the publication of such works as Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile; or On Education* (1762).

<sup>4</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.29.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Lee Wolff briefly discusses this novel in relation to Braddon's satirizing of cant (*Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (New York: Garland, 1979), pp.244-47), whilst Jennifer Carnell merely includes it in her list of Braddon's works. Emma Liggins discusses Braddon's engagement with the Woman Question in some of her 1870s fiction but explores 'women's leisure and female attitudes to money', rather than education. 'Her Mercenary Spirit: Women, Money and Marriage in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's 1870s Fiction', *Women's Writing*, 11:1 (2004), 73-87 (p.74).



so she makes inferences regarding both biological and environmental determinism in relation to women, presenting them as having vast inherent intellectual potential which requires education to fulfil its promise.

Mid-Victorian writing generally admits, as discussed presently, that women's education required review and improvement, but there was less consensus about exactly what a woman should know, what the depth of her learning should be, and what ends she should be able (and expected) to put her learning to. For some writers the main question was ostensibly about what women were physiologically capable of when it came to learning. Henry Maudsley's controversial 'Sex in Mind and in Education' (1874) argued that women's delicate reproductive systems rendered them physically incapable of enduring periods of intensive study without endangering both their personal health and their prospects of reproduction.<sup>6</sup> Women's educational opportunities were therefore limited not primarily by their mental capacity, but by their 'foreordained work as mothers and nurses of children'.<sup>7</sup> According to Maudsley, the dictates of women's constitutions determined what they could and could not do mentally.

Others arguments centred less on what women were capable of and more on the social roles they were expected to fulfil. Many writers asserted, as John Ruskin did in his 1864 lecture 'Of Queen's Gardens', that woman was 'made to be the helpmate of man'.<sup>8</sup> Whilst his assertion that woman is *made* a helpmate may suggest a divinely ordained, innate role for women, Ruskin insisted that good education was necessary to help women achieve this goal. He claimed that a woman 'ought to know whatever her husband is likely to know', but

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<sup>6</sup> Maudsley controversially made explicit references to the female reproductive system, menstruation and puberty, treating readers 'to a discussion which, however appropriate to the pages of a medical publication, is a novelty in English current literature' (Herbert Cowell, 'Sex in Mind and Education: A Commentary', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 115 (June, 1874), 736-49 (p.737)).

<sup>7</sup> Henry Maudsley, 'Sex in Mind and in Education', *Fortnightly Review*, 21 (April, 1874), 466-83 (p.471). Further references are given after quotations. Joan N. Burstyn observes that Herbert Spencer similarly argued that educated women were more often sterile, prematurely menopausal and had trouble breastfeeding. *Victorian Education and the Ideal of Womanhood* (London: Croom Helm, 1980), p.94. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>8</sup> John Ruskin, 'Sesame and Lilies', in *Sesame and Lilies, The Two Paths and the King of the Golden River* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1907), pp.1-79 (p.50). Further references are given after quotations.

added that such knowledge need only stretch 'so far as may enable her to sympathise in her husband's pleasures, and in those of his best friends' (Ruskin, pp.64-65). Braddon depicts the benefits of such a woman (and of being such a woman) in *John Marchmont's Legacy's* universally admired Belinda, who is 'only just clever enough to be charming'.<sup>9</sup> This idea is taken further in *Lost for Love*.

William Fulford had expressed similar sentiments about women as companions in 1856 for the *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, asserting that women they under a necessity 'of understanding, appreciating and assisting their male friends (especially wives their husbands) in their intellectual pursuits'.<sup>10</sup> Such opinions are articulated throughout the 1860s: James Davies, writing for the *Quarterly Review*, insisted that

the primary and divine idea of woman is "a help meet for man". And if so, in educating her for her vocation, respect must be had, not less to such provisions as may fit her to exercise her proper influence as a wife over her husband, or as an unmarried woman over society, than to such as may make her a model mother to her boys and girls. In each sphere, if she realises her mission, she has it in her power to be "vainqueur des vainqueurs de la terre;" the more cultivated her mind and heart, the more complete her spell in whatsoever state of life she finds herself occupying under the allotments of Providence.<sup>11</sup>

There are several parallels between this passage and Ruskin's 'Of Queen's Gardens' (from which Davies quotes favourably). Like Ruskin, who maintained that 'wherever a true wife comes [...] home is always round her' (Ruskin, p.60), Davies emphasises the 'influence' of women over those in their vicinity. Whilst men are the 'vainqueurs de la terre', the conquerors of the earth, female power is such that women can come to bear influence over them. Also like Ruskin, Davies's conception of separate spheres does not involve a strict demarcation between the public (male) and private (female) domains, as women's influence may be exerted 'over society' as well as within the family circle. This influence

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<sup>9</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *John Marchmont's Legacy* (Oxford: OUP, 1999), p.378.

<sup>10</sup> William Fulford, 'Woman, her Duties, Education, and Position', *Oxford and Cambridge Magazine*, 1 (August, 1856), 462-477 (p.464). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>11</sup> James Davies, 'Female Education', *Quarterly Review*, 119 (April, 1866), 499-515 (p.500). Further references are given after quotations.

needs cultivation, and for Davies education is the key to developing each woman's potential to be the ideal wife, mother or spinster.

Montagu Burrows, also writing for the *Quarterly Review*, echoed many of these opinions when he asked 'What do we aim at? What do we want in the woman when we have educated her?' and concluded that 'such a cultivation as will make a really good wife, sister, or daughter, to educated men, is the thing to be aimed at'.<sup>12</sup> Here again is the assumption that women should be educated in keeping with an ideal defined by the needs of those around them. With this in mind, Burrows advised that 'woman' ought not to be 'brought up to the same point as man by education, and taught to be his rival; but rather as the complement of man, perfect in herself, and intended to hold an entirely different place in the world' (Burrows, p.465-66). These definitions of the female vocation as companion concur in their belief that women needed to be educated in order to be capable of supporting, entertaining, sympathising with, and advising (although not actively directing, in the case of husbands), those who fell under their influence.

It was not only advocates of separate spheres and conservative conceptions of women's role who employed the image of companion. In the 1860s women's rights campaigners were fighting, with increasing success, for opportunities for women to enter higher educational courses and to achieve professional qualifications.<sup>13</sup> These campaigners appropriated the concept of woman as companion, as Ellen Jordan observes, 'as a means of legitimating' their movement for changes which 'seemed to contradict conventional definitions of femininity'.<sup>14</sup> For example, Millicent Garrett Fawcett who came to lead the women's suffrage movement, argued that:

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<sup>12</sup> Montagu Burrows, 'Female Education', *Quarterly Review*, 126 (April, 1869), 448-79 (p.452, p.465). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>13</sup> For example Girton College, Cambridge was established (as Hitchin College) in 1869. For women's higher education debates see Burstyn, *passim*, and Laura Morgan Green, *Educating Women: Cultural Conflict and Victorian Literature* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2001), *passim*. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>14</sup> Ellen Jordan, "'Making Good Wives and Mothers"? The Transformation of Middle-Class Girls' Education in Nineteenth-Century Britain', *History of Education Quarterly*, 31:4 (winter, 1991), 439-62 (p.443). Further references are given after quotations.

constant companionship with a person of inferior and ill-developed capacities must deteriorate the most powerful mind. A woman is seldom or never so weak as to possess no influence over her husband; in some degree, either for better or for worse, she is sure to exercise some control over the tenor of his life and thoughts. A woman whose whole life is bounded by her own domestic circle, and who has no thought or care for anything outside it, is certain to infect her husband with this sort of selfishness, to damp, and perhaps destroy his public spirit and sense of public duty.<sup>15</sup>

Fawcett's argument for equal educational opportunities for both sexes (which Ruskin, Davies and Burrows opposed) also draws on the ideal of woman as companion to support her point. Like Ruskin and Davies, Fawcett refers to female influence, but here it is not only something that can be elicited and enhanced through education in order to benefit the family and society, it is something which *must* be cultivated to useful ends for fear that it may otherwise have a detrimental effect. Fawcett asserts that it is in men's best interests to have intelligent, educated women in their homes, as a poorly-educated wife not only threatens to bore her husband, but to 'infect' him with her own triviality.<sup>16</sup> Fawcett observes (like Davies and Burrows) that women cannot necessarily assume that they are to become wives and mothers; she insists that a 'woman who commences life with a soundly-trained mind and well-developed capacities, will be fitted to perform, with far greater efficiency than had she been badly trained, whatever duties, public or private, may devolve upon her' (Fawcett, p.569). Education for Fawcett is to be put to practical ends, helping women not only to support themselves should they be unable to marry, but to contribute to society.<sup>17</sup> The idea of duty is important

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<sup>15</sup> Millicent Garrett Fawcett, 'The Medical and General Education of Women', *Fortnightly Review*, 10 (November, 1868), 554-71 (p.569). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>16</sup> Green notes that J.S. Mill's *On the Subjection of Women* (1869) also warns against the 'contaminating force' of 'women's degraded intelligence' in order to argue for improved female education (Green, pp.84-85).

<sup>17</sup> Concern that girls were raised on the assumption that they would marry and have a husband to provide for them, rather than being given skills necessary to support themselves, was caused by the fact that an 'increasing number of women in mid-Victorian Britain had to remain unmarried' as there was a 'surplus of women over men' which increased by 42% between 1851 and 1871. There was greater infant mortality in boys, more men emigrated; also, men tended to wait until they were older to marry so that they could keep their wives in the manner to which they had been accustomed in their parents' homes (Burstyn, pp.34-35). Jennifer Phegley shows how anxiety about "surplus" women partially inspired the *Cornhill Magazine's* 'agenda of

here, as is the insistence that this may take a 'public or private' form; Fawcett presents women as socially responsible beings, and therefore requiring more than training as a domestic companion to men.

Other critics, falling somewhere between the extremes of advocating separate spheres and calling for sexual equality, draw on similar arguments to campaign for improved female education. T.H. Huxley, for example, assumed that 'the female type of character is neither better nor worse than the male, but only weaker' and added that women are 'meant neither to be men's guides nor their playthings, but their comrades, their fellows, and their equals, so far as Nature puts no bar to that equality'.<sup>18</sup> He therefore argued that women should be given the same educational opportunities, partly because with their natural disadvantages they need all the help they can get, and partly because they are meant to be men's companions. Huxley reassured his (male) readers, however, that even with these opportunities the 'big chests, the massive brains, the vigorous muscles and stout frames of the best men will carry the day' when they 'contest the prizes of life with the best women' (ibid., pp.73-74). Huxley also points out that because at least some women are required to bear children, they will always 'be found to be fearfully weighted in the race of life' (ibid., p.75).

*Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country* avoided advocating higher education for women on the basis that even if they did end up working towards careers, it would not be until some point in the 'millennium', or, as expressed in another article, a woman's college could not 'generally be made to fit into the present arrangements of society' beyond providing training for teachers and governesses.<sup>19</sup> Yet the magazine also presented women as being in desperate need of better educations for the good of individual families and the nation. Once again the concept of female influence was key: one critic argued that if

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promoting women's education and entry into the professions', 'Clearing Away "The Briars and Brambles": The Education and Professionalization of the *Cornhill Magazine's* Women Readers, 1860-65', *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 33:1 (Spring, 2000), 22-43 (p.36).

<sup>18</sup> Thomas Henry Huxley, 'Emancipation—Black and White' (1865), *Collected Essays*, 9 vols (London: Macmillan, 1895), III, pp.66-75 (p.72). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>19</sup> Anon, 'Women's Education', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 79 (May, 1869), 537-52 (p.548); F.P. Varney, 'Female Education in France', *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*, 80 (September, 1869), 366-79 (p.379). Further references for both texts are given after quotations.

readers really thought about how much influence women already had over those around them they would no 'longer consent to leave the preparation for such a sphere of action in the hands of the worst educated of human beings [...] the governesses and schoolmistresses of England' (Varney, pp.377-78). From these examples it is apparent that whilst there was undoubtedly disagreement as to what constituted a good education, it was generally conceded that a good education was precisely what was needed if women were to fulfil effectively their roles as wives, mothers, companions, and members of society.

*Lost for Love* responds to the decade and a half of debate over gender and educational reform which had preceded it in the popular press. Its publication in the same year as 'Sex in Mind and in Education' suggests how much *Lost for Love* engages with a topic which was still very much in public awareness: there is no demonstrable influence between the two (*Lost for Love* was already well underway in *Belgravia* before Maudsley's article was printed) but they are grown out of the same cultural climate. The novel explores issues of female ability, learning, and development, of innate potential and social limitation, and of the value and purpose of female education. The novel's heroines, Louisa Gurner and Flora Chamney, have both received inadequate, although very different, educational experiences, but rather than portraying the disastrous consequences of a poor education, *Lost for Love* depicts the heroines' experiences of informal "higher" educations under the instruction of the men who eventually become their husbands. For both heroines, the continuation of education is undeniably beneficial: they become intellectually and socially accomplished; it offers consolation and distraction in times of grief; it also helps to forge the bonds between themselves and their future husbands. *Lost for Love* shows women can excel mentally, and that the standard of current middle-class female schooling is superficial and debilitating.

Braddon also draws on the notions of companionship which were so central to debates about female education. Louisa and Flora are moulded, intellectually and emotionally, in accordance with the desires of their husbands, who consciously contribute to the formation of their wives' adult personalities. Education lifts Louisa and Flora out of their former narrow worlds at the will of

the men who fall in love with them; they are inescapably defined by their roles as companions. Rather than merely using the conventional courtship plot as a means of presenting women's intellectual capabilities, Braddon places value on their ability to be accomplished companions (as both wives and mothers). Braddon also emphasises how education and the acquiring of knowledge can be personally fulfilling, interrogating notions of utility regarding both the form education takes and the ends to which it is put. Whereas women's rights campaigners such as Fawcett wanted improved female education for practical, financial ends, Braddon emphasises the personal and domestic benefits that may be generated by learning. Louisa and Flora, as the novel closes, are not making the best of a bad job, using their intellectual skills in the domestic environment because that is the only option open to them; they are portrayed as genuinely content women. Moreover, as Flora and Louisa reap the benefits of education, female influence is shown to be a potent and restorative force upon their husbands. *Lost for Love* therefore asserts that both men and women (and relations between them) will be better off if women are raised to be intelligent, interesting and competent individuals.

Before the two heroines are introduced to the reader, Braddon presents us with Mrs Ollivant, Flora's eventual mother-in-law, and in many ways the epitome of middle-class Victorian womanhood. Mrs Ollivant is notable almost entirely on account of the outstanding practical and moral support that she provides to her husband and son (Dr Cuthbert Ollivant). On his deathbed, Mrs Ollivant's husband declares that his son's 'comfortable' inheritance is due to her, because 'there never was such a woman to save money' (I, p.9). After her husband's death, Mrs Ollivant moves into her son's new London residence, and becomes

the careful mistress of his house, the intelligent companion of his brief intervals of leisure. Her character presented a curious mixture of the ultra-prosaic with the intellectual and imaginative. She would lay down her volume of Wordsworth or Shelley to order the dinner or give out a week's supply of grocery. [...] She would not suffer a stale crust of bread or a basin of dripping to be wasted between January and December; yet she contrived to retain the respect of her servants, and was accounted a liberal mistress. Her son's simple

dinners [...] could hardly have been exceeded at a West-end Club.  
(I, pp.11-12)

Although Braddon describes this as a 'curious mixture' of attributes, the description of Mrs Ollivant resembles the ideal woman as described in a variety of Victorian literature. Whilst less prosaic qualities such as moral purity were certainly associated with the ideal, being the centre of the domestic sphere meant that women also needed practical skills to ensure the household ran smoothly, making the home a pleasant place for men to return to. Isabella Beeton opened her successful *Book of Household Management* (1861) by assuring her readers that those feminine 'acquirements' which 'enter into a knowledge of household duties' are especially important because 'on these are perpetually dependent the happiness, comfort, and well-being of a family.'<sup>20</sup> In the above passage from *Lost for Love*, Mrs Ollivant's thriftiness is admirable as she provides her son with every comfort he requires. Her ability to 'retain the respect of her servants' whilst being both an exacting and 'liberal' mistress is also a sign of domestic capability; Mrs Beeton notes that if a mistress can inspire respect and affection in her servants 'they will be still more solicitous to continue to deserve her favour'.<sup>21</sup>

Most important in relation to this discussion of *Lost for Love*, Mrs Ollivant is an 'intelligent companion', who makes 'it her business to be interested and well informed in everything that interested her son' (*Lost for Love*, I, p.12), thus fulfilling Ruskin's requirement that a woman should know 'whatever her husband is likely to know' (or in this case her son), so that she may 'sympathise' in his 'pleasures'. She even adapts her own tastes to Cuthbert's: 'his opinions were her opinion. For him to dislike or disapprove was enough for her' (I, p.62). Mrs Ollivant is, therefore, an estimable housewife and companion, wife and mother, who has willingly spent her life caring for the men in it. The narrator claims that it 'would have been hard to imagine a face which indicated a more tranquil existence, a serener soul' (I, p.55). Coexisting with this ostensible serenity, however, is 'an indefinable melancholy in the countenance, as of a

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<sup>20</sup> Isabella Beeton, *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management* (Oxford: OUP, 2000), p.7.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid.* p.15.



woman who had only half lived, whose life had been rather like the winter sleep of hibernating animals than the ardent changeable existence of warm-blooded mankind' (I, p.55). Mrs Ollivant's years of devotion to her husband and child, with little attention paid to her own personal interests (it is not even made clear if her volumes of Wordsworth and Shelley are studied to suit her own tastes, or her son's) have imbued her with a sense of incompleteness. Moreover, her quality of life is reliant on her son's, who has himself lived only a half-existence, having devoted himself to his profession: 'he had lived his own life, which was a solitary and sequestered life, and she had lived only for him' (I, p.63). A woman, therefore, may be a good companion whilst still being half a person. However, Mrs Ollivant belongs to 'an age gone by' (I, p.55) and she provides a valuable contrast to Louisa and Flora when considering the value and function of female education and knowledge.<sup>22</sup>

Of the two heroines in *Lost for Love*, Flora's education is the more conventional, being described as of the 'common boarding-school type' (I, p.115). As Joan Burstyn explains, standard female education, tended to focus on the obtaining of 'social rather than intellectual skills [...] girls were taught how to behave as contenders in the marriage market, and as social hostesses; most were given neither systematic intellectual training, nor instruction in the skills of housekeeping and childcare' (Burstyn, p.22). This sort of education drew frequent criticism. In 1862, for example, Benjamin Brodie argued that because of women's influence over their children 'it is to the well-being of society that the education of the female sex should include studies of graver interest, and not be exclusively devoted, as it too often is, to the acquirement of those accomplishments which are merely graceful and ornamental'.<sup>23</sup> Herbert Spencer similarly complained about the 'immense preponderance of "accomplishments"

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<sup>22</sup> Emily Davies points out that the old 'field of action for feminine energy' (household chores) had been 'invaded and taken possession of by machinery', and therefore 'married ladies of former days [...] got through a vast amount of household business, which their successors cannot possibly do, simply because it is not there to be done', *The Higher Education of Women* (London: Strahan, 1866), p.109. Mrs Ollivant is a member of an older generation, but she is living in an age when she (especially with her consummate domestic skills) does not need to channel her entire energy or concentration into housework.

<sup>23</sup> Benjamin Collins Brodie, *Psychological Inquiries, Part II* (1862), in *The Works of Sir Benjamin Collins Brodie: With an Autobiography*, 3 vols (London: Longman, Green, Longman, Roberts, and Green, 1865), I, pp.259-385 (p.342).

which proved that 'use' in girls' education was 'subordinated to display. Dancing, deportment, the piano, singing, drawing – what a large space do these occupy!'<sup>24</sup>

There was already an established literary history critiquing the superficial nature of female education. Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) famously rebukes society's contentment with women displaying merely 'superficial accomplishments'.<sup>25</sup> On a less serious note, the Miss Musgroves in Jane Austen's *Persuasion* (1817) leave school with 'all the usual stock of accomplishments, and were now, like thousands of other young ladies, living to be fashionable, happy, and merry'.<sup>26</sup> Although content and affable young women they are not trained for any practical ends beyond giving pleasure to themselves and others. *Jane Eyre* (1847) famously insists that women should not be confined to 'making puddings and knitting socks, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags'.<sup>27</sup>

The results of the Schools' Inquiries Commissions of the 1860s (see p.138 of this thesis) sparked new debate about the validity and purpose of both male and female education. The results of the Taunton Inquiry in 1868 (after four years of visits to middle-class schools around the country) brought renewed attention to female education, and were seen by many as proof that educational reform was urgently required. Fawcett, for example, quoted the commissioners' accounts of a 'want of thoroughness and foundation, want of system, slovenliness and showy superficiality, inattention to rudiments, undue time given to accomplishments, and those not taught intelligently or in a scientific manner' (Fawcett, p.559). Burrows also cited the commissioner's reports, and their claim that there was a 'sacrifice of everything else to "accomplishments," and the pitiful character of those "accomplishments" when acquired – the poverty of the French, the worthlessness of the music, the absence of any training and strengthening of the mind' (Burrows, p.450).

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<sup>24</sup> Herbert Spencer, *Education: Intellectual, Moral and Physical* (London: Williams and Norgate, 1861; repr. London: Routledge, 1993) p.3. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>25</sup> Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman: With Strictures on Political and Moral Subjects*, (London: [n. pub.] 1792), p.67. Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>26</sup> Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (London: Headline, 2006), p.41.

<sup>27</sup> Charlotte Brontë, *Jane Eyre* (Oxford: OUP, 1998), p.115.

Such superficial training did not, commentators argued, develop any critical or reasoning faculties, and 'even where female education goes beyond mere accomplishments, it is of its very essence that it should be superficial' ('Women's Education', p.545). Despite his opinions on women's abilities, Maudsley also wrote against 'the trivial and defective character of female education' which fit 'them only for the frivolous purposes of the present fashion in female life'.<sup>28</sup> Braddon's descriptions of Flora and her educational background are reminiscent of these disparaging accounts. As Flora's first fiancé, the artist Walter Leyburne, puts it, she 'doesn't know a great deal of anything, but she knows a little of everything'; he pronounces her to be 'a dear little thing, and clever too in her feminine way; she's essentially feminine' (I, p.175). Leyburne's words assume women possess broad but superficial knowledge, but read in the context of these descriptions of female education, it seems that this aspect of Flora's femininity is not "essential" or natural to her, but mass-produced; Braddon's engagement with educational themes in the rest of *Lost for Love* seems to confirm such an assessment.

When the novel commences, Flora has little grasp of intellectual subjects, but a basic grounding in the accomplishments expected of a young lady such as painting, playing the piano, and singing. Despite the objections made to a preponderance of accomplishments, such skills were not entirely disparaged in Victorian society: whilst lamenting the 'pitiful character' of female accomplishments, Burrows maintained that 'society requires some power in the sex of pleasing others, yes, and of being useful to others in social life, over and above what it requires of men, who are necessarily trained to earn their bread or to govern'.<sup>29</sup> This qualifies Spencer's distinction between 'use' and 'display' in relation to education: in the context of both the marriage market and social engagements, female accomplishments were useful. Different notions of utility were therefore under examination in these debates. Flora's vocal skills are certainly put to use in social situations, as she uses them to entertain her father

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<sup>28</sup> Henry Maudsley, 'On Some of the Causes of Insanity', *Journal of Mental Science*, 12 (January, 1867), 488-502 (p.492).

<sup>29</sup> Burrows, p.469. The intimation that women are never required to 'earn their bread' was being generally refuted in this period. See n.17.

and his guests (I, p.35). In fact, Leyburne is enchanted by Flora's singing: when he first hears her, he fancies 'that his hour was come' and that Flora is to prove 'the perfection and completion of his lot' (I, p.47). Flora and her accomplishments are useful here *because* they are ornamental and provide pleasure to the men who observe them. Leyburne and Flora soon end up singing duets together, and when his affections for her are wavering, Flora's singing remains 'the one fascination which Walter could not resist' (I, p.213).

Whilst Flora's natural vocal talent has been successfully cultivated, it is evident that she is typical of the young ladies described in the commissioner's reports, full of superficial, half-developed abilities. For example, Flora admits that, whilst she likes to paint, she rarely finishes her pictures as they 'look beautiful at first', but 'then somehow they go wrong' (I, p.34). Her artistic attempts create an opportunity to develop her relationship with Walter Leyburne; he is 'enraptured' when he discovers that she paints, and immediately offers to help her with her studies (I, p.48). Yet when his feelings for Flora are waning he becomes disenchanted; her artistic aspirations, unlike her singing, inspire only pity as he imagines 'little Flora, who was struggling up the steep mountain of art, with a box of crayons, chalking Gulnares and ancient beggarmen *ad nauseam*' (I, p.172). Flora's painting does not give the same personal satisfaction or provide the same social leverage as the singing she excels in.

Indiscriminate teaching of accomplishments, regardless of talent or efficacy, such as Flora has received, was a common area for complaint in the press throughout the 1860s. In 1861, a *Temple Bar* contributor claiming to be a woman, and possibly Braddon herself (see Chapter 7, n.23 of this thesis) complained that women are

wofully [sic] brought up from the beginning. Few, very few of us are ever properly and steadily and judiciously educated, with a view to our capacities, our individualities, and the talents or qualities it is probable we shall be afforded opportunity to turn to the best account

in our maturity. We rarely learn anything thoroughly; we are made smatterers; our faculties are half cultivated, our minds, not at all.<sup>30</sup>

Not only, this passage argues, was the education girls received meagre and irregular, it was impersonal, making no attempt to cultivate individual proclivities or abilities. The article proceeds to give a depiction of poorly educated women who cannot act as successful companions to their husbands, being intellectually incapable of conversing with them. Davies similarly asks if it would 'not be well to take a little more trouble in ascertaining the various bents of girlish capacity' because 'the struggle to master too many accomplishments is apt to end in a superficiality, spreading over the more solid studies, and acting prejudicially on the whole mind' (Davies, p.503). Both of these quotations express concern that by showing no discrimination in choosing what subjects are to be taught, educators not only fail to encourage inherent abilities, but have a negative impact upon the character of women: they grow up mentally "uncultivated", trained to think only in a superficial manner.

Moreover, the prevalence of superficial accomplishments in girls' curricula attracted criticism from objectors who felt that girls were being deliberately groomed in order that they may 'be at leisure to contemplate an eligible investment in the matrimonial market', whilst the 'resources' they would need in 'future life' were disregarded (Davies, p.501). In a short poem, *Punch* satirised the accomplishments accrued by young ladies, and the supposed aim of them (marriage):

Daughters to sell! Daughters to sell!  
 They cost more money than I can tell;  
 Their education has been first-rate;  
 What wealthy young nobleman wants a mate?  
 They sing like nightingales, play as well:  
 Daughters to sell! Daughters to sell!<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Anon., 'A Word to Women', *Temple Bar*, 2 (April, 1861), 54-61 (p.55). Further references are given after quotations.

<sup>31</sup> Anon., 'Daughters to Sell', 1-6, *Punch*, 41 (13 July, 1861), 4 (ll.1-6).

The mercenary tone (daughters are on sale to men of wealth and rank), and the dehumanisation of the daughters (they sing like pet birds and are to be 'mates' rather than wives) shows the avariciousness and shallowness of such an approach to marriage. Moreover the refrain 'Daughters to sell!' suggests that the 'Lady of Fashion' narrator is having trouble getting rid of her girls.

Flora (whose pet name is Baby) is no femme fatale; she has 'a sweetness, a freshness, a youthful innocence about her that are more winning than beauty' (I, p.25), and 'the ways and works of coquetry were unknown to her simple soul' (I, p.150), yet her vocal talents prove an enticement to Leyburne. Despite this, when he considers her as a potential life companion Leyburne worries that she 'might be but a childish helpmate for one who hoped to be distinguished by-and-by' (I, p.221); the utility of accomplishments only goes so far and an ability to enchant and entertain is only moderately desirable. Flora is, ultimately, an example of those young women who were brought up, as Ruskin puts it, 'as if they were meant for sideboard ornaments' (Ruskin, p.67), and Braddon implies that however dazzled men may be by an array of accomplishments, this may not suffice in the long run.

Dr Ollivant also falls in love with (and eventually marries) Flora. Initially it seems that her superficial accomplishments will be enough for him. In their first conversation Flora, with a 'wry face', comments that science 'means steam-engines and cotton-looms and things, doesn't it?' in a 'winning childish way, which made even her foolish speeches pleasant to hear' (I, p.31). Ollivant is unsurprised by Flora's lack of knowledge, assuming that 'one can hardly expect a young lady to be interested in [science], any more than one can expect the flowers to know their own Latin names, or be learned in botany' (I, p.31). Flora connects Ollivant with grave and dull matters above her comprehension; Ollivant does not expect her to know any better, nor does he desire her to, being perfectly content with her childish talk and seemingly unaware (despite the example of his mother's intellectual ability) that women are capable of anything more.

Ollivant's initial interest in Flora's superficial merits, rather than her mental aptitude, appears to support the views of those writers who argued that

women pursuing higher education would 'not be popular with men'.<sup>32</sup> Braddon shows the troubles faced by overly-intellectual women in *John Marchmont's Legacy*, but as *Lost for Love* progresses it both discredits the superficial, indiscriminate teaching of accomplishments and suggests that women have a huge intellectual potential which will ultimately prove desirable to potential partners. Despite his complacency about her ignorance, Ollivant fantasises about educating Flora soon after meeting her:

He thought how he might improve her education, which was of the common boarding-school type, and enlarge her mind. How his own old love of poetry, put aside on the very threshold of his scientific education—the younger and more romantic tastes and fancies of his boyhood—might revive in this Indian summer of his life. (I, p.115)

Importantly, Ollivant does not intend to teach Flora about science, but to use her as a connection to his earlier life and interests. This is not because she shares those interests, but because he believes that she may be made to do so.

Ollivant is given the opportunity to make his fantasy a reality after he accidentally pushes Leyburne from a cliff, leaving him for dead.<sup>33</sup> Distraught at his disappearance, Flora will have nothing to do with art and music (which remind her of Leyburne), and so falls into 'habits of indolence' (II, p.28). Ollivant consequently dedicates himself to interesting Flora's 'dormant mind' and teaching 'the head to cure the wounds of the heart' (ibid.). He decides that 'she must have some kind of employment, some occupation which would beguile her from this brooding sorrow', and so determines to 'develop this poor child's intellect, to teach her something' (II, p.29). Significantly, the narrator comments that had Ollivant been more religious he would have suggested Flora find comfort through church attendance and good works, instead he turns to 'that literature which he knew best', the classics (II, p.29). This new educational phase in Flora's life is to be shaped regardless of her own tastes and talents; instead, her educational experience is moulded according to the tastes and understanding of the man who intends to be her future husband.

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<sup>32</sup> Burrows, p.465. See also p.203 for Spencer's comments on the subject.

<sup>33</sup> Ollivant's act is the result of a scuffle after he discovers that Leyburne has been making love to Louisa Gurner when he is engaged to Flora.

Flora is taught Latin so that she can read the Roman poets, which is ‘a dull, dry business enough perhaps at first, but something for her to achieve, difficulties for her to grapple with, work to do’ (II, p.29). Ollivant tries to win her interest by first describing the Horatian period: ‘those wondrous cities, villas, gardens, fountains, chariot races, gladiatorial combats [...] all the glory of old Rome’; following this he reads her ‘the purest and best of the Odes’ in translation (II, p.29). Rather than being immediately charmed by her subject, Flora works to please her father and Ollivant – her tastes are shaped for her. The learning initially serves little purpose other than to distract her from her own grief, but later, once she has married Ollivant, they honeymoon in Rome and ‘talk about Virgil and Horace, and the Rome they knew, before the old gods were dead’ (II, p.202). Ollivant becomes the ‘the master and guide who had *formed* her mind, and filled her dreams with fairest fancies’ (II, p.203, my emphasis); rather than finding a wife who is already a suitable match for him, he has the opportunity of tailoring one to his own tastes.

The merits of studying the classics (for boys, let alone girls) were debated by many interested in education. Spencer felt that the Greek and Latin learnt by schoolboys did not prepare them for their practical working lives, and was merely a ‘badge marking a certain social position’.<sup>34</sup> The classics, in this sense, were as much for show as women’s accomplishments. Contrastingly, Davies (a classical scholar) urged that girls should learn Latin, because it was ‘a discipline so promotive of accuracy, so improving to English style, so helpful to familiarity with the grammar and syntax of most European tongues’ (Davies, p.504). Flora, as an heiress, does not need to be concerned about preparing herself to earn a living, but Latin does help to prepare her for “woman’s work” – for being a good companion for Ollivant. Flora has not been trained for the marriage market, but for marriage, and marriage which is satisfying for both her husband and herself.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Spencer, p.2. Burstyn notes that whereas many advocates of women’s higher education (such as Emily Davis) wanted equality between the sexes, others were opposed to women receiving a classical education the same as men because it was seen as outdated and narrow (Burstyn, p.152).

<sup>35</sup> Defending the teaching of classics to girls Davies in fact quoted Ruskin’s comments that women should know whatever their husbands are likely to know (Davies, p.505).



Huxley likened learning the classics to 'toiling up a steep hill, along a bad road', so that only a 'strong man [...] can appreciate the charms of [the] landscape'.<sup>36</sup> Braddon (also using a road metaphor) shows that Flora's progress is partially due to the fact that Ollivant is a good teacher:

The doctor did his utmost to make the road easy – did not bind her down to the dry details of grammar [...] He gave her a Horatian ode almost at the beginning, and by that one lyric showed her the genius of the language, and awakened her interest in the study. (II, p.31)

Here, Ollivant acknowledges Flora's ability to tackle more advanced aspects of the language and to appreciate the quality of the poetry. Ollivant is careful not to 'fatigue her or exhaust her interest' (ibid.), and awakens her 'organ of wonder' by teaching her astronomy and botany (II, pp.31-32). Flora proves both capable and, as her interest is stimulated, eager to learn; this gradually beguiles 'her into temporary forgetfulness of that one absorbing sorrow' (II, p.31). Braddon shows, through Flora, that education is not merely about setting oneself up for the public, professional world, but about personal fulfilment and personal relations. If education is seen, as this chapter argues it should be, as a determining tool which can help to form the developing personality, then *Lost for Love* presents it as a tool which can influence the entire character, not just prepare a person for work or the achievement of social standing.

Braddon's portrayal of female education as a personally fulfilling experience for use in the domestic sphere engages with mid-Victorian arguments over the function of female higher education. Laura Morgan Green observes that in the mid-1860s 'the reformist view of women's educational needs encompassed two somewhat different emphases – on "cultivation" and on "action"' (Green, p.15). Some (such as Emily Sherriff) saw education as a means of developing "self culture", and others (represented in the *English Woman's Journal*, which aimed to increase opportunities for female employment) saw it as having more practical ends. Green argues that George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871-72) shows a distrust of 'institutionalized knowledge

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<sup>36</sup> T.H. Huxley, 'A Liberal Education; and Where to Find it' (1868), in *Collected Essays*, 9 vols (London: Macmillan, 1895), III, pp.76-110 (p.97).

systems', and 'takes moral development to be at the heart of the educational project' (Green, p.72). Whereas Dorothea Brooke at least wants to improve the lot of those around her, *Lost for Love* exhibits even less desire for women to partake of learning for practical ends. Intellectual development is a means of finding fulfilment and of helping to establishing a happy marital union; learning is not required to lead to professional or constructive occupation.

Although *Lost for Love* shares some of the thematic elements of *Middlemarch*, Dorothea's relationship with Mr Casaubon is strikingly different to the relationships in *Lost for Love*. Dorothea is thirsty for knowledge and imagines that the 'really delightful marriage must be where your husband was a sort of father, and could teach you even Hebrew, if you wished it'; she believes that 'those provinces of masculine knowledge', Latin and Greek, must be 'a standing-ground from which all truth could be seen more truly', and she wishes not only for 'a wise husband', but 'to be wise herself'.<sup>37</sup> Unfortunately, Casaubon is neither as learned as Dorothea believes (due to his mental rigidity and closed-mindedness towards foreign scholarship), nor as willing to share his knowledge; the result is a marriage of emotional boundaries and disappointments. Contrastingly, Flora does not initially wish to be 'wise', and does not choose her husband based on this criteria, and Ollivant *does* desire to share his learning with her; this is key to the success of their developing relationship.

When teaching Flora, Ollivant is 'careful not to overtax the young student's brain, yet stretched the cord to its fullest tension' (II, p.32). The dangers of overwork for both adults and children received much attention. Spencer, for example, wrote against the dangers of 'excess of mental application', which could lead to mental and physical illnesses, and was increasingly prevalent in society as the young were rigorously trained to 'hold their places under [the] intenser competition' of the modern world (Spencer, p.174). Such concerns were vocalised throughout the rest of the century: the frantic pace of modern society was seen as a cause of 'premature mental decay'

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<sup>37</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (Oxford: OUP, 1997) p.10, p.59. Further references are given after quotations.

in people who failed to regulate mental exertion properly.<sup>38</sup> Maudsley argued that women attempting to compete intellectually with men would be especially vulnerable to overexertion because of the physiological domination of their reproductive organs. Maudsley insisted that proper consideration must therefore be given to 'the nature of [a woman's] organization, and to the demands which its special functions make upon its strength' (Maudsley, 'Sex in Mind', p.466). In the following number of the *Fortnightly Review*, Dr Elizabeth Garrett Anderson published a rebuttal of Maudsley's article, which accused him of exaggerating the enervating effects of both puberty and menstruation in women, and insisted that so 'far as education is concerned it is conceivable, and indeed probable that, were they ten times as unlike as they are, many things would be equally good for both [boys and girls]'.<sup>39</sup>

In *Lost for Love* Flora is not portrayed as vulnerable to the dangers of overwork because of her sex. In the above quotations, Ollivant's care not to 'exhaust *her interest*' (II, p.31, my emphasis), results in varying mental activity (rather than reducing it); the concern is about maintaining intellectual engagement, not about its being detrimental. The second time overwork is explicitly mentioned, references to gender are removed from the sentence, and Ollivant is 'careful not to overtax the young *student's* brain' (II, p.32, my emphasis) - overwork threatens students generally, not young women specifically. The concept of overwork draws on mid-Victorian theories of mental and physical interaction - the health of the body was affected by the state of the mind, and vice versa. In *Lost for Love*, rigorous intellectual exertion is a cure (or at least a palliative) for emotional trauma, which leads to physical regeneration. Flora undertakes a demanding (and traditionally male) learning process which benefits her mental and physical well-being. Flora's initial intellectual shortcomings are shown to be a result of her previous inadequate

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<sup>38</sup> Charles Henry Felix Routh, *On Overwork and Premature Mental Decay: Its Treatment* (1873), 3<sup>rd</sup> edn (London: Ballière, Tindall and Cox, 1878), in *Embodied Selves: An Anthology of Psychological Texts 1830-1890*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth (Oxford: OUP, 1998; repr. 2003), pp.300-02 (p.300).

<sup>39</sup> Elizabeth Garrett Anderson, 'Sex in Mind and Education: A Reply', *Fortnightly Review*, 21 (May, 1874), 582-94 (p.584). Further references are given after quotations.

education, rather than of natural mental limitations.<sup>40</sup> Fawcett commented that although the Taunton School's Inquiry commissioners complained about the 'deplorably bad' state of girls' education, it was 'cheering to see that all the causes which produce the inferiority are removable either by social or legislative reform', rather than girls being 'naturally unfitted to receive and benefit by the highest mental culture' (Fawcett, p.565). In fact, she adds, 'in classics and mathematics, girls, when properly taught, were found quite as proficient as boys' (ibid.). Braddon tacitly supports this description of female ability.

Danger of mental overexertion becomes apparent when Flora discovers that Leyburne had been pursuing a relationship with Louisa as well as herself. In her new grief, Flora becomes too eager to study and Ollivant must 'recommend less devotion to Horace and Linnæus, the flowers and the stars' (II, p.66). With Ollivant's careful monitoring of her progress, however, Flora's mental advancement continues to be both rapid and emotionally beneficial, and her 'mind ripened rapidly in this intellectual forcing-house' (II, p.66). Botanical metaphors were a well-established means of discussing the cultivation of young women. For example Wollstonecraft complains that, due to defective educations, women are 'like the flowers which are planted in too rich a soil, strength and usefulness are sacrificed to beauty' (Wollstonecraft, p.2). Wollstonecraft's concerns about 'usefulness' and superficiality continued to be discussed, as we have seen, in the Victorian period. She also asserts that women are forced (through being planted in 'too rich a soil') into roles as beautiful flowers too soon, with the result that 'the flaunting leaves, after having pleased a fastidious eye, fade, disregarded on the stalk, long before the season when they ought to have arrived at maturity' (ibid.). The metaphor of forcing flowers, particularly within a hot-house or forcing-house was (like Wollstonecraft's rich soil) generally used negatively to refer to the premature development (mental and social) imposed upon girls. Davies, for example, complained that a boy of seventeen would be 'entering the most telling years of his mental culture. At the

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<sup>40</sup> Isobel Hurst's *Victorian Women Writers and the Classics: The Feminine of Homer* (Oxford: OUP, 2006) discusses how and why Victorian women learnt the classics, as well as how female authors used them in their work.

very same age the hot-house plant, his sister, is transferred from the school-room, where every appliance has been used to facilitate precocious ripeness of mind and manners', into society where she will begin her hunt for a husband (Davies, p.501). Davies felt 'that this kind of forcing is physically as well as morally hurtful' (ibid.). Fulford similarly asked 'how much *can* a girl learn at school worthy of the name of sound knowledge, when she is taken from it at the age of sixteen or eighteen, at the very age when her brother, destined for Oxford or Cambridge, first really begins to "read?"' (Fulford, p.469).

In the case of *Lost for Love*, the image of the forcing-house used in connection to Flora seems a positive one as Ollivant proves to be a competent gardener who does not allow her to develop too quickly. Nor does Ollivant cultivate her for immediate gratification over long-term benefits: although he is making her into a beautiful flower in line with his own tastes, she is not to be left, as Wollstonecraft put it, 'disregarded on the stalk'. Instead, Flora's education under Ollivant helps her to acquire 'stronger command over herself' (II, p.68). The metaphor of women as flowers (Flora's name takes on an added significance in this light) to be cultivated, brought to bloom and tended into pleasing forms, complements the general inclination in this novel to emphasise education as a tool which may be used to affect the development of an individual's personality.

However, although the intellectual forcing-house Flora finds herself in is fruitful, there are indications in the text that her development is being forced in other, less beneficial ways. On his deathbed, Mark Chamney tells his daughter to 'live and try to be a bright happy woman—useful to others, as a woman should be' (II, p.74), and thereby fulfil 'a woman's fairest destiny—loving and beloved—happy wife, happy mother' (II, pp.74-75). Female happiness in Chamney's eyes is inextricable from female duty; but the context of this speech within the storyline of the novel means that it must be read ambivalently. Chamney goes on to voice his desire that Flora marry Ollivant. Whilst the doctor undoubtedly loves her, and will protect her, she does not love him, and the reader is aware that Ollivant is responsible (albeit accidentally) for the violent removal of his rival, Leyburne. Second, despite her recent steps towards

maturity, Flora is not prepared for the death of her father (telling him, 'if I lose you, I lose all' (II, p.77)), nor is she prepared practically, emotionally or morally for marriage and motherhood. Flora has been forced into womanhood too soon, and Chamney's death symbolically prompts an attack of brain fever which returns Flora's mind to 'her girlish, nay even childish, days at the Notting-hill academy [...] That year of womanhood, which held all the events of her life, seemed to have slipped from her memory altogether' (II, p.80).

Once again with Ollivant's help, Flora regains her memory and health, instigating yet another educational phase in her life. As she is too weak to immediately resume the classics, Ollivant begins to raise her interest in the outside world by teaching her politics: 'he was continually educating her [...] and she grew more womanly in his society, without altogether losing the old childish grace' (II, p.88). Ollivant begins to hold social gatherings for Flora's 'well-being' (II, p.99). She thereby learns the pleasures of society, and conducts herself admirably:

The light-hearted schoolgirl had developed into a thoughtful woman, self-contained, self-possessed, accomplished, well-informed. Flora's education had made rapid progress during that year of tranquil seclusion. There were few subjects of which she could not talk, and talk well, yet without a shade of pedantry. Enough of the old girlishness, the old spontaneity remained to make her charming even to the frivolous. (II, p.101)

Education here is explicitly linked to the ability to conduct oneself competently in society; intellectual attainments are more valuable, more useful, than accomplishments. Flora does retain some 'girlishness' in her demeanour, but this proves advantageous: as well as being the aspect of her personality which first caught Ollivant's attention, it makes her popular with a broader part of the society to which she is exposed. Ollivant's careful tuition creates a suitable companion, but also an admirable and intelligent member of society in her own right, which is exactly what many campaigners for improved female education (conservative and radical) wanted to see in educated women.

Despite Flora's social achievements, the intimations continue that she is being "forced" into a role which she is entering into too soon. After Chamney's

death Flora, rather than living 'only to please and pet her father' (II, p.68), has no one but Ollivant to consider, who is her guardian and, due to her father's deathbed wish, is now considered to be her betrothed husband. She eventually consents to marry Ollivant, unromantically promising him 'I will give you all I can—fidelity and obedience'.<sup>41</sup> Although Flora is not in love, she appreciates Ollivant's feelings for her, and realises that there is 'some happiness, after all, in being so entirely beloved' (II, p.108). Respect and mutual support partially compensate for the lack of love on Flora's part, and on returning from the honeymoon, she is 'to all appearances as bright and happy a bride as a man could desire to give gladness to his days' (II, p.114). Flora has come a long way from Miss Mayduke's boarding school, and her intellectual development undoubtedly has a lot to do with her ability to live amicably with a husband she does not yet love. Nevertheless, 'to all appearances' serves as a warning to the reader that things are not perfect; Flora's development is far from complete.

With the Ollivants, Flora's girlishness remains her dominant quality. On returning from the honeymoon and seeing her newly-decorated bedroom, she kisses Cuthbert and Mrs Ollivant 'in her simple innocent manner, like a child who bestows grateful kisses on the giver of her last new toy' (II, p.116), and despite claiming that she does not want to be 'treated quite as a child', she concedes to Ollivant that 'it is very nice to be so petted by you and mamma' (II, p.119). Flora is still not quite grown up, and little is done by the Ollivants to correct this. The description of their household arrangements is particularly revealing:

Never was wife more indulged than Flora. Her existence was one bright holiday, spent among books and flowers and music, fenced in and surrounded by love. Of the actual burden of life she knew nothing. Mrs. Ollivant kept the house, and took the weight of all sordid cares upon her own patient shoulders [...] If [Flora] had lived in a fairy palace, where all the household work was performed by enchantment, she could not have been more free from household

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<sup>41</sup> II, p.107. In the same issue of *Belgravia* in which Flora accepts Ollivant's, a light-hearted article asserted that in courtship 'the girl' in particular (as she has less to occupy her elsewhere) should 'surrender her whole soul'. This suggests by contrast how far from the romantic ideal Flora and Ollivant's relationship is. Sidney H. Blanchard, 'Courtship', *Belgravia*, 23 (June, 1874), 511-15 (p.513).

cares. [...] Nor did the servants even complain that they had two mistresses, for all were agreed upon regarding Flora as a kind of ornamental addition to the household, its glory and its pride. [...] Arranging the flowers and seeing to the birds [...] made up the sum of young Mrs. Ollivant's household work. (II, p.120)

The fairytale imagery indicates Flora's girlishness and innocence, and that (as is often the case with fairytales) there may be a loss of innocence yet to encounter. The reference to Flora's purely decorative status brings to mind those previously quoted criticisms of accomplished, yet useless, young ladies raised to be ornaments. This actually shows a regression in Flora's development into a mature wife. Chamney's ill-health had meant that Flora started to learn the 'mysteries' of housekeeping (II, p.70), and after his death (but before her marriage) Flora experiences a gradual awakening to her own naivety; she remembers her 'bright holiday life' when she was simply 'playing at housekeeping' (II, p.92). As Ollivant's wife she is relieved of any immediate need to continue with this practical education or growing self-awareness, and no longer even needs to 'play' housekeeper.

This novel reflects the concern that girls who were run through a forcing-house of education, so that they may take their place in the marriage market as soon as possible, would become immature brides. Higher education was seen by some as beneficial precisely because it kept girls from marrying prematurely. Anderson argued women who experienced higher education would enter 'society at a somewhat less immature age', and would therefore be better prepared to take 'an intelligent part in it' and to 'get more real pleasure from the companionship it affords' (Anderson, p.591). Moreover, such a woman would be 'less apt to make a hasty and foolish marriage' (ibid.). Although Braddon's portrayal of Flora confirms that women do have the mental capacity for higher education, Flora's "higher education" does not help her to make a more mature marital choice. This makes for an implicit critique of conventional Victorian marriage practices: although Flora marries and learns to love Ollivant, and eventually discovers, and forgives, his part in Leyburne's disappearance, these events happen in the wrong order; the protection Mark Chamney sought for his daughter is jeopardised by her early marriage to a man with a secret. The



cossetting that Flora has received from the men who take responsibility for her has actually left her vulnerable.

Nevertheless, this novel promotes a generally orthodox acceptance of gender roles. Most significantly Flora's higher education is informal, for personal and domestic ends, and tailored by her husband. Moreover, Braddon's novels involving heroines who marry prematurely or foolishly often place intrinsic value upon domestic skills, making them a measure of maturity. Isabel Gilbert, for example, is described as being without any 'of the common distractions of a young matron', having relinquished all household tasks to the housekeeper, Mrs Jeffson (*The Doctor's Wife*, p.116). Similarly Aurora Floyd frankly tells her husband 'Heaven help your friends if they ever had to eat a dinner of my ordering', and hands all responsibility over to her ex-governess, Mrs Powell, who plots Aurora's downfall.<sup>42</sup> In Braddon, the shirking of domestic responsibility symbolises at best immaturity, at worst moral laxity. Contrastingly, women's movement campaigners such as Fawcett tended to be rather dismissive of practical housekeeping skills, arguing that 'women cannot really be good wives and mothers if charming accomplishments *and domestic tastes* are to be considered their highest virtues' (Fawcett, p.567, my emphasis). *Lost for Love* falls in here, with conservative texts supportive of improved female education, such as the anti-higher-education 'A Word to Women', which asserted that 'the real, practical details' of housekeeping should be studied before marriage ('A Word to Women', p.59). *Lost for Love* does not question the essentially domestic role of women, it instead suggests ways in which society might train them to better fulfil that role through education.<sup>43</sup>

Flora's immaturity is reemphasised when Ollivant buys a country house at Teddington as 'a toy for his wife' (II, p.121). It is here, in the place where she can once again "play" at being in charge, that Flora suffers her greatest loss of

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<sup>42</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *Aurora Floyd* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p.132.

<sup>43</sup> Despite her unconventional relationship with Maxwell (he already had a wife living in a lunatic asylum), Braddon adopted the role of wife and mother within their family. In his autobiography, Braddon's son admiringly referred to Braddon's ability to 'actively [conduct] the domestic affairs of two households' with 'scarcely any help from a housekeeper' as a sign of her merits, and also describes her as an attentive mother and 'companion' to his father. W.B. Maxwell, *Time Gathered* (London: Hutchinson, 1937), pp.281-82.

innocence when she discovers the truth about Ollivant's involvement in Leyburne's disappearance. When Ollivant admits that he struck Leyburne a shocking experience once again forces her towards a realisation of her own naivety, and we are told that 'the anguish of these moments had transformed her. She was no longer the gentle girlish wife he had known an hour ago' (II, p.166). Flora subsequently loses the baby she has been carrying, which she had previously thought of 'as a child thinks of its first doll' (II, p.212). The symbolism of this is made explicit when the doctor attending her miscarriage explains to Ollivant that: 'all had happened prematurely, and in the dead of night' (II, p.175). The practical and physical aspects of marriage (from housework to reproduction) cannot be achieved, in this novel, without the analogous mental and emotional maturity.

Although Flora and Ollivant are finally described as 'utterly happy' (II, p.302), Braddon implies that women like her, with 'common boarding-school educations', are liable to marry when still immature, undereducated, and with no real sense of self, rather than waiting and taking a husband for whom they will naturally be a fitting companion. Such girls only begin their personal development after they have chosen their future husbands (to the extent that it *is* their choice), a decision which they are ill-equipped to make. Braddon's portrayal of Flora shows women to be intellectually capable, but also malleable. The novel implies the need for reform in educational practices, and an awareness that whilst companionship and domestic skills are admirable things to aim for, how these are perceived and defined needs to be reformed in order to produce happy and well-balanced women and men.

In contrast to Flora, Louisa Gurner is the barely-educated child of Jarred Gurner, a poor picture and violin restorer, who lives in shabby lower-middle-class Voysey-street and who 'by reason of her early-acquired knowledge of life's darker side, seemed to be ten years older than Mark Chamney's daughter' (I, p.131). This knowledge of the 'darker side' of life affects Louisa's behaviour. For example, when Leyburne declares his feelings for her, she assures him that she would not allow him to desert Flora: 'I know too much of the world for that, though I have been brought up in Voysey-street' (I, p.185); it is actually life in

Voysey-street which has given her this knowledge. She consequently refuses to listen to Leyburne's protestations of love, and shows 'more firmness and wisdom than her lover' (I, p.186). When shut out of doors by her father after returning late from a daytrip with Leyburne (Gurner hopes to prompt a proposal of marriage), Louisa refuses to be given lodgings by Leyburne, prompting the narrator to declare that Louisa is 'not a wild-wood blossom by any means, this young woman; not a snowdrop, whose petals no poisonous breath had ever polluted; but stanch and pure after her own fashion' (I, p.191). Despite the adoption once again of botanical imagery, Louisa is explicitly not (unlike Flora) likened to a flower; she is not morally 'pure' in the sense of the innocent Flora, but nor is she so easily dismissed as decorative.

Louisa's considerations are both moral and practical; even when she has nursed Leyburne back to health after his fall, and his affections are no longer divided, she makes him wait three months before consenting to marry him.<sup>44</sup> Whereas Flora enters into a union she is unready for, Louisa's increased independence of mind and maturity stops her from rushing into (or being rushed into) marriage until she is certain of her own and her lover's readiness. Louisa is a rarity amongst Braddon's heroines in that she gains and keeps her first love untarnished: perhaps this is because she has suffered somewhat before she meets him; perhaps because, unlike other heroines (including Flora), she is already womanly in a number of ways. Her experiences and heartaches do not mark a passage to maturity, but to refinement. Louisa's more successful negotiation of life and marriage is symbolised by the fact that she ends the novel not only as a happy wife but, unlike Flora, a happy mother.

Louisa has received some sporadic education in the 'small academies' which are occasionally run in the 'front parlours' of her neighbours' houses, set up for 'the instruction of youth, miscellaneous as to sex and age' (I, p.78). She has also 'managed to pick up some shreds and patches of education from her father' which make her 'not quite as ignorant as the majority of young women in Voysey-street' (I, p.87). Louisa is painfully aware that her education is

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<sup>44</sup> Readers of sensation fiction will be unsurprised to discover that Leyburne is in fact not dead, but fails to convey this fact to Flora.

incomplete and unrefined. When Gurner reproaches her for remaining silent during a conversation, Louisa reacts indignantly:

"I suppose it's nature's fault if I'm stupid," she said; "so you needn't throw that in my teeth, father; and I don't see that it's my fault if I'm ignorant. I'd have been glad enough to learn if any one would have taken the trouble to teach me."

This was true enough. She had besought her father, even with tears, to help her a little out of his vast storehouse of knowledge; but Jarred was too lazy even to impart the little he knew. (I, p.97)

Louisa's bitterly witty retort (showing a quickness of mind which is anything but stupid) acknowledges the distinction between natural intelligence and knowledge acquired through nurture. No one has taken the 'trouble to teach' Louisa, and she therefore has no inkling of her intrinsic talents beyond a vague awareness that she is 'handsomer than her neighbours, and sharper of intellect' (I, p.85). As the novel progresses, Louisa is shown to have innate intelligence which is drawn out through her relationship with Leyburne.

Intellectual potential is neither gendered nor class-based in this novel (all four main characters are naturally intelligent), but the same cannot be said of the extent to which a person's personality can be moulded through external influence. The opening pages introduce Ollivant as a small child, the son of a moderately successful medical practitioner. Ollivant's father perceives his son as something which can be moulded into his own image and 'at the earliest stage in which the infant brain is open to receive impressions, had striven to imbue his son's mind with a correct idea of life, contemplated always from his own particular point of view' which extols 'hard work' and 'worldly success' (I, pp.7-8). The Lockean language emphasises the influence of external factors on the formation of the consciousness. This extract also reflects notions of self-improvement through personal exertion, which were popularised by Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help* (1859). Both Locke's theory of the mind as a *tabula rasa* and Smiles's ideology of self-help place emphasis on external influences and environmental determinism, rather than on biological and innate influences. Smiles, for example, told his readers that 'the characters of parents are [...]

constantly repeated in their children', but this was because of the 'acts of affection, discipline, industry, and self-control, which they daily exemplify', rather than because of hereditary traits.<sup>45</sup> Ollivant's father seeks to employ education as a means of forming his son's character from scratch, as it were, conveying certain 'impressions' in order to have a particular result. However, the narrator informs us that 'Cuthbert Ollivant learnt the lesson [of hard work and worldly success], but applied it after his own fashion' (I, p.8), as he has been 'endowed with a larger mind than had illumined the Ollivant family within the present century; and for him success meant originality – the fruition of new ideas, a step forward in the march of science' (I, p.8). The father can only influence the development of his son to a certain extent as the inborn intellectual power of Ollivant asserts itself. This novel endorses the possibility of individuals being able (in the right circumstances) to improve their own lifestyles, improve on previous generations, and to rise in the social scale. However, whilst this is a novel about the cultivating power of education, Braddon's stance is essentially anti-Lockean as she assumes (like Collins) that each person possesses certain basic traits which can then be developed or suppressed through external influences.

Jarred Gurner is more successful than Ollivant's father when it comes to producing a desired result in his daughter, having 'contrived to instil into her youthful mind the profoundest belief in his genius' (I, p.84). Louisa

believed implicitly in her father, and lived in a chronic state of anger against society at large for its neglect and ill-usage of him [...] This feeling, fostered by the father's wild talk, had grown with Louisa's growth, and now found expression in a lurking discontent which pervaded the girl's nature, and was even visible in her handsome young face. (ibid.)

Here is a less sanguine description of what daily parental influence can achieve: Louisa's faith in Gurner is achieved at the expense of her personal contentment;

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<sup>45</sup> Samuel Smiles, *Self-Help* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p.298. A review of *Self-Help* gives further evidence of the ubiquitousness of concern about women's roles, pointing out that 'many a self-helper' would have been 'helpless' without his wife to act as supportive companion and foresee her husband's potential. Richard Chermiside, 'Self-Help', *Macmillan's Magazine*, 1 (March, 1860), 402-406 (p.405).

her whole 'nature' is altered. Whereas Ollivant's inherent intellectual capacity sublimates his father's influence, resulting in ambition, Gurner's influence on Louisa is increasingly dominant. As well as being under the social authority of men (as parents or husbands), the personalities of the women in this novel are malleable under the influence of the male characters.

Other aspects have affected the formation of Louisa's character, and whilst she may be discontented, her immediate environment has also taught her resignation:

Neither selfishness nor vanity found a congenial soil in the flower-gardens of Voysey-street. Other vices might spring up there and thrive apace; but for these delicate flowers of evil there was but scanty nutriment. Louisa, having never known what it was to find her inclinations studied or her desires ministered to, had resigned herself, even before she turned up her back hair and lengthened the skirts of her shabby gowns, with advancing womanhood, to take life as she found it. (I, p.85)

Here again is botanical imagery, and once again Louisa is not directly figured as a flower; instead she is a sum of individual characteristics that may be nourished by a particular environment, or 'soil'. This metaphor merges Louisa with her environment – Voysey-street is a soil in which vices may (or may not) grow, but Louisa, as the possessor (or otherwise) of these vices, may also be seen as the soil or garden in which they grow. Louisa cannot disassociate her sense of self from her Voysey-street environment; she is resigned to spending the rest of her life there and feels that she and her family are irrevocably degraded because of the time they have already lived there. For example, when Leyburne argues that education could 'raise' Louisa to Flora's 'level', as the latter's ladylike 'sweetness is the sweetness of a refined nature which has never been degraded by vulgar associations', Louisa replies that her 'nature has been so degraded' by life in Voysey-street that 'you couldn't wash the vulgarity out' (I, p.160). Education goes a long way in this novel to contradicting Louisa's assumptions about her irremovable vulgarity. In this sense *Lost for Love* gives the less privileged heroine a chance for improvement which was not afforded to James Gilbert in *The Lady Lisle*.

Initially, however, Louisa's meagre education is only

enough, at least, to teach her the sordid misery of her existence, and the bare fact that there is a higher kind of life somewhere beyond the regions of Voysey-street. She has learned to be angry with destiny for casting her lot in this back slum, and is in this respect unlike the aborigines, who talk as if Voysey-street were the world [...] education had removed Louisa from this Arcadian simplicity, and to her vitiated mind Voysey-street was hateful. (I, pp.87-88)

The wrong type of knowledge in the wrong situation brings discontent rather than elevation. Louisa is 'taught' that her life is unenviable, and that there are ways of living different to those she sees in her immediate environment; she has 'learned' to be discontent, her mind is 'vitiating' because she has lost the ignorance of the standard Voysey-street aborigine. As a young woman with no financial prospects, no useful education, and nobody (until Leyburne's arrival) who is willing to help her improve her lot in life, there seems little hope that she will be able to move beyond Voysey-street.

Louisa's resignation to her lot is echoed by her father, who fleetingly wonders whether Louisa could ensnare Leyburne, but then dismisses this thought, believing that 'the girl's surroundings were too much against her':

No, it was scarcely within the range of possibility, thought Jarred, looking at his daughter's untidy hair, worn gown, and listless attitude. He was almost sorry he had not taken a little more pains with her [...] why should not a girl like that have some capability in her that might be worth cultivation? But it was too late now; the chance was gone. There the girl was, unkempt, untaught, uncared for – a weed instead of a flower. (I, p.98)

Gurner's musings entertain the possibility of cultivating people through education and upbringing, but he assumes an individual must be raised in a certain way from the start; weeds cannot be transformed into more desirable plants. The aspects of Louisa which are mentioned, however, are all external and alterable, and indeed are entirely altered by the end of the novel when Louisa, married to Leyburne, possesses all the appearances of a lady to the extent that when Flora sees her, she not only perceives her as a social equal, but

envies her appearance (II, p.213). This transformation is the result of an educational process initiated by Leyburne which, although different in detail, is similar to Ollivant's education of Flora as it results in Louisa being Leyburne's ideal wife.

Leyburne initially wants Louisa to be able to support herself financially, optimistically assuming that a 'woman with a good education may do so many things. She may turn governess or companion [...] or she may go in for book-keeping, and earn a handsome living in some commercial establishment' (I, p.123), he later adds that 'there are telegraph-offices and houses of business, and goodness knows what, open to the weaker sex nowadays' (I, p.159). In light of this, Leyburne intends to send Louisa to a boarding school where she will learn the skills necessary for self-sufficiency. However, Louisa never gains any of those modes of employment suggested by Leyburne; she is saved from her unsatisfactory existence by the more standard option open to Victorian women - marriage. It is this, not education, which makes Louisa into a lady. Education is used, as with Flora, to make Louisa a suitable wife for Leyburne.

Leyburne intends to send Louisa to boarding school as a gift of thanks for acting as his artist's model. During the sittings, however, he takes it upon himself to begin Louisa's education by reading her poetry, including Shakespeare and the Romantics. Already bitter at the world, Louisa experiences a new level of dissatisfaction with her life: 'now I feel restless, and there's a fever in my mind sometimes, and I have such wishes and longings for a brighter life' (I, p.170). Yet she remains resolute that nothing can extricate her from the 'degradation' in which her family is mired (I, p.171). Even Leyburne begins to feel 'that he had done her disservice by raising her ideas above the dull level of her most prosaic surroundings' (ibid.). Whereas Flora's initial learning of the classics at least helped her to overcome her grief, Louisa finds it more difficult to integrate her newfound love of poetry into her daily life. Whilst she gains some imaginative and intellectual relief from poetry, it is also emotionally disruptive and serves no social or financial purpose. Once again Braddon introduces questions about the utility and function of education,



about whether knowledge which cannot be put to “practical” ends can still be perceived as beneficial or worth learning.

Popular periodicals drew attention to issues concerning “appropriate” and “useful” education. In 1861, for example, two *Temple Bar* articles included discussions about educational opportunities for the working classes. ‘The Management of Servants’ lamented the fact that employers often expected ‘industrial and social perfection’ from servants who came from disadvantaged homes and had little or no training, but also advised that any training servants did receive should be useful to their future situations: ‘reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, and history’ are ‘all very good, nay indispensable, but very incompetent and insufficient if used as substitutes for industrial training’; after all, the article asks, ‘what connection is there between the multiplication-table and boiling potatoes?’<sup>46</sup> Later in the year, ‘Our Pet Social Doctor’ advocated better education for the poorer classes as a way to a better lifestyle: ‘education opens new ways of life to the poor. The man in rags, who has culture, even of the simplest description, sees chances, and can invent remunerative employment’.<sup>47</sup> Although Louisa is from a lower-middle-class family, the sentiment of the article is applicable. Braddon is not devaluing a knowledge of poetry as Louisa enjoys reading it for its own sake, but if she had not married Leyburne she would have found Keats and Shakespeare of little practical or economic use in terms of either her current lifestyle or her likely future occupations.<sup>48</sup> A career on the stage may spring to the reader’s mind but, perhaps strangely considering Braddon’s theatrical background, no one suggests this.<sup>49</sup>

Despite her objections, Louisa does go to boarding-school under Leyburne’s patronage after Gurner shuts her out of doors. After declaring that ‘I couldn’t sit quiet to teach children grammar and geography if it was my only chance of escaping starvation’ (I, p.159), she now finds herself destined to be

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<sup>46</sup> Anon., ‘The Management of Servants’, *Temple Bar*, 1 (March, 1861), 545-57 (pp.545-6).

<sup>47</sup> Jerrold Blanchard, ‘Our Pet Social Doctor’, *Temple Bar*, 3 (October, 1861), 329-39 (p.333).

<sup>48</sup> This is not to say that Flora’s education is any more practical, but she is an heiress who need not work for her living.

<sup>49</sup> For Braddon’s theatrical career see Jennifer Carnell, *The Literary Lives of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (Hastings: Sensation Press, 2000), pp.11-86.

'thoroughly grounded in all the branches of a useful modern education' so that she may be 'able to impart instruction in music to girls of twelve after three years' painstaking study on her own part' (I, pp.218-19). Braddon's portrayal of 'Miss Tompions [sic] of Thurlow House, Kensington' (I, p.218) offers a satirically comic depiction of 'common boarding-school' educations. Not only is the ultimate aim of her education detestable to Louisa, but Miss Tompion's opinions about what constitutes an appropriate syllabus for a young lady differ fundamentally from Leyburne's. Miss Tompion does not approve of a 'taste for poetry' unless 'acquired under the guidance of a cultivated understanding, after education has formed the mind' and declares that she would consider 'an ignorant undisciplined love of poetry in an ill-regulated mind [...] a fatal tendency' (ibid.); she finds Shakespeare particularly objectionable from a moral perspective (I, p.302). Louisa's introduction to poetry has certainly not been a good grounding for the type of education Leyburne now expects her to undergo.

At Miss Tompion's Louisa is placed in the lowest class with the youngest children, despite being a year older than the oldest pupil in the school: 'the spoon-meat suitable to babes of eight and nine years was deemed suitable to her because she too was a beginner'; yet this is inappropriate to her intelligent, developed adult brain, and 'in all the educational process there was nothing she could grasp at' (I, p.300). Miss Tompion believes that she is giving Louisa a thorough education by starting her at the beginning, rather than offering her 'a mere surface varnish of education, which would wear off as quickly as it was attained' (I, p.301); in reality she is providing no appropriate stimulus for Louisa's mind, her teaching methods, which she calls 'laying a foundation' cannot 'employ an intellect keen enough to have grappled with the difficulties of serious study' (II, p.5). The narrator reiterates this fact through the example of language learning:

If Miss Storke had given her Schiller and a German dictionary, the eager desire to know a new poet might have overcome all difficulties; nay, difficulties would have inspired this vigorous nature. But the easy twaddle of the lower fourth disgusted her with

the whole business of education. Her ardent longing for enlightenment would have given zest to toil [...] but instead of studies that would call upon her industry and develop the latent power of her mind, Miss Storke gave her infantine lessons, which she repeated parrotwise, in common with girls in pinafores and plaited hair. (I, p.303)

This contrasts with Flora's classical education under Ollivant, where he interests her in the poetry in order to spur on her language study. It also brings to mind the previously discussed criticisms of indiscriminate learning of accomplishments, regardless of talent or inclination: Louisa's love of poetry could have been used to interest her in German.

Comparisons may also be drawn with Herbert Spencer's theories of education, which insisted that teachers must always tailor their courses to the level of mental development they were working with, and must try to make learning exciting and compelling. Spencer argued that the intellect will naturally crave the material it is ready for, and that children who enjoy learning will be inclined to keep improving, whilst those who are chastised and forced will simply cultivate a dislike of all learning, teachers, and become generally sullen and unenthusiastic (Spencer, p.68, pp.102-03). Louisa's mind craves knowledge appropriate to its level of maturity and personal inclination (poetry), the lack of it dissuades her from education generally, as Spencer predicts will be the case. Furthermore, Spencer was very much against rote learning (repeating facts 'parrotwise') as this process sacrificed 'the spirit to the letter' (Spencer, p.29). Louisa is accustomed to reacting to the 'spirit' of the poetry she reads; rote learning is particularly offensive to her. Spencer also believed that children should be 'led to make their own investigations, and to draw their own inferences. They should be *told* as little as possible, and induced to *discover* as much as possible' (Spencer, p.77). Louisa, with her intelligent and mature mind would respond much more efficiently if she were able to approach the challenges of a new poet.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Spencer prioritised forms of knowledge useful to duty and livelihood over accomplishments and classics (including poetry), so Louisa's education certainly does not proceed along his ideal route. However, he also believed that humanity has 'a more worthy aim' than 'to be drudges', and knowledge of poetry was, for him, one of the things that made life worthwhile (p.87).

As well as receiving a negative educational experience, Louisa is appalled by the manners and ignorance displayed by the pupils at Miss Tompion's. The girls share (unsympathetically) Louisa's conviction that one cannot escape one's family and antecedents, claiming that Louisa has visibly 'low instincts' and that she is 'out of place' at the school (I, p.306). However, the girls do not live up to Louisa's expectations of the products of good breeding; they are 'boastful and arrogant, loud-voiced and shrill of laughter' and their 'various claims to distinction were alike based upon the material advantages of their "people."' (II, p.6). Critics of middle-class education often deplored the "'school-girl" type' as not being 'a favourite one in good English society. The mischief learnt so often at school is only too well known' (Burrows, p.460). Education within the home could be preferable, as there are 'greater facilities in girls' schools for pettiness, deceit, and frivolity' (Davies, p.510). The girls at Miss Tompion's are based on quite another stereotype of the boarding-school student to Flora, but they share her inadequate education. Miss Portslade, the head girl, is supposedly finishing off her education in 'Latin, chemistry, and Italian singing', but Louisa, having talked to her about 'poets and painters' is

surprised by the narrow views of the damsel, whose acquaintance with the world of imagination had never gone beyond the choice morsels in a gift-book or selection for recitation, and who knew about as much of art as the great gray cockatoo on the brazen stand in the ballroom. (I, p.304)

Miss Portslade is the outcome of the rote learning begun in the lowest class, capable only of 'recitation', literally compared to a parrot. Impractical and brief as Louisa's education under Leyburne may have been, it has been far more enriching than the years girls like Miss Portslade have spent at Miss Tompion's.

Louisa responds so well to Leyburne's teaching in part because of her brilliant natural grasp of poetry; his choice of subject matter is in tune with her personal tastes and talents. However, the lack of a conventional education also contributes to the fresh and original manner in which she reacts to literature: on hearing Shakespeare she responds to the texts as 'no young woman who had been spoon fed with "Gems of Shakespeare" at school could have' (I, p.132).

The combination of her keen mind and special circumstances - coming to poetry as an adult from an imaginatively barren life - results in a startling intellectual development:

An education such as this—the world of poetry suddenly unveiled to an intelligence sharpened by privation and the bitter experiences of Voysey-street—effected a strangely rapid transformation in this ardent undisciplined nature. This girl's mind was empty of all those objects which distract the attention, or even absorb the mind, of the happier portion of womanhood. Dress, pleasure, society, had for her no existence. Half the dreariness of her past life had arisen from the fact that, except cares and troubles, she had nothing to think of. Her mind was a virgin soil, ripe to receive the new seed that fell upon it—the seed of grand thoughts and of melodious verses full of deep meaning. (I, p.134)

Once again Braddon employs botanical imagery, and again Louisa is not a flower but the soil in which flowers may grow, making her appear a site of more organic potential than 'forcing-house' Flora. Although Gurner thinks of Louisa as a 'weed' rather than a 'flower' (above), he is mistaken in his metaphor, and meanwhile the narrator presents Louisa as intellectually fertile. It is partly because of her lack of education that Louisa becomes so interesting to Leyburne, who early on discovers that hers is 'a mind hid in darkness, but with infinite capacity' (I, p.132). As Leyburne tells her: 'when I think how little you know and how much you understand, I'm absolutely thunderstruck' (I, p.177). Like Ollivant with Flora, Leyburne consciously decides to become Louisa's teacher, and (taking advantage of the fact that her mind is 'a virgin soil') chooses poetry based on his own tastes. Yet unlike Flora, Louisa's interest is spontaneous and unforced.

Moreover, Louisa offers a very different type of companionship to Flora:

He talked to her now as if she were on an intellectual level with himself [...] He would talk to her as he had never ventured to talk to Flora—with a certain Bohemian recklessness, but no shadow of evil thought. (I, pp.130-31)

Leyburne's ease is partly due to Louisa's social status and bohemian environment, he does not feel constrained to act within the conventions of polite society and is not 'particularly anxious to retain her good opinion' (I, p.131). Louisa does not hold the 'sacred character in his mind' that Flora (at this point his fiancée) does (ibid.). Importantly, however, this lack of restraint does not lead Leyburne to act disrespectfully or condescendingly towards Louisa. Instead it allows him to address her as an intellectual equal, something he finds particularly attractive, as he tells Louisa:

[Flora] hasn't so bold a mind as yours, Loo: she's not such a companion to a man as you are. One must sing duets, or talk about the last book she has read, to get on with her; but you seem to understand and sympathize with me about everything; you follow my thoughts everywhere, even when you have to grope through the dark. When I talked to you about Æschylus just now, I could see that you went with me into the dark hall where Agamemnon lay groaning in his bath. Flora would only have shuddered, and said 'How dreadful'. (I, pp.174-75)

Flora's accomplishments and decorous upbringing restrict, as far as Leyburne is concerned, her thoughts and imagination. This speech of Leyburne's advocates something approaching intellectual equality between spouses, but it also reveals another issue at the heart of this novel: it is not merely that Louisa can match Leyburne imaginatively and intellectually, it is that she can do so on his terms: *he* talks about Aeschylus, *she* follows him.

Leyburne favours a challenging and inspiring companion, but one who is moulded to his own needs and interests. Unlike Flora, who labours to appreciate the classics to please Ollivant, Louisa immediately astounds Leyburne with her ability to both understand and sympathise with him. It is reiterated many times in the novel that Leyburne feels an intellectual and emotional release when he is with Louisa:

How he talked! pouring out every thought and fancy as freely as if Loo were his second self, his twin-born spirit, with a mind that nature had attuned to his—she seemed to understand him so thoroughly, and all she said chimed in so well with his own thoughts. (I, pp.173-74)

Louisa is the perfect complement to Leyburne, and this is reminiscent of Burrow's definition of the ideal woman quoted at the start of this chapter, with the vital difference that Louisa is capable of matching Leyburne intellectually - she is implicitly his equal. Her ability to learn what he knows so quickly and effortlessly suggests she may even be his superior, but this is never openly acknowledged. Braddon draws a picture of extreme female capability which is still compatible with male authority as it is Leyburne who dictates the direction of Louisa's learning. Finally, Louisa and Leyburne end up as the happiest of couples because she adores him and he loves her in return, but even more, he loves to be adored: he is 'perfectly happy in the companionship of a wife who worshipped him' (II, p.236). Indeed, after their marriage his "creation" of Louisa is an endless source of pride to Leyburne, who feels 'as Pygmalion the sculptor might have felt if his animated statue had been a clever woman instead of a nonentity' (II, p.291). Education is the tool that has sculpted Louisa, Leyburne is the sculptor, and the result is a blissfully happy partnership. Flora, piqued by the revelation that Leyburne loved another, believes that he cared for Louisa 'with a low common love for her handsome face' (II, p.44), but the reader has been shown differently. Leyburne's love for Louisa is not 'common' but bespoke.

Louisa certainly benefits from her experiences with Leyburne, and in such a way as to make her an even more suitable companion for him:

The wandering life she had led with her artist husband, the communion with all that is loveliest and grandest in nature, the study of all that is purest and noblest in art, had been a higher educational process than any formal scholastic routine ever devised by mortal teacher, and Loo had profited by her opportunities of culture. (II, p.263)

Louisa's response to 'culture' is strikingly different to James Gilbert's in *The Lady Lisle*. James's inability to respond sensitively, or to be improved by his European tour is, it will be remembered, one of the signs that he is perhaps inherently incapable of acting like a gentleman (see pp.174-75 of this thesis). For

Louisa, travel is an educational experience, but it is also a sign that she is inherently *capable* of learning and benefitting from exposure to art and nature. Her innate intelligence and sensitivity allow her to respond to her experience and are in turn heightened by it.

Burrows, writing against higher education for women, argues that 'sensible men will always like sensible and cultivated women; but they will always prefer that their good sense and cultivation should have come through channels which they recognise as suitable for the womanly character' (Burrows, p.465). Louisa's 'cultivation' has 'come through' a 'suitable' channel in that it has been the result of masculine interest and effort. She has been a muse to, and is a creation of, Leyburne—he is the artist responsible for her development. Louisa may have inherently predetermined abilities, but the channel they shall take is ultimately determined by her husband. With her depictions of Louisa and Flora, Braddon advocates a form of female higher education and shows female intellect to be capable of great achievements, but she has done so in such a way as to remain largely within the bounds of Victorian gender conventions.

Significantly, Flora, pursuing the accomplishments she learned at school, dabbles weakly in watercolours, whereas Louisa is a muse who inspires "powerful" art: 'Loo reading a letter in a sunlit garden; Loo playing with her baby in the firelight; Loo looking dreamily across the moonlit waves; always Loo; that most patient and devoted of models was never weary' (II, p.291). Whilst in a coupling of Flora and Leyburne one would be the poor shadow of the other, who tried to create her own art rather than inspiring his, Leyburne and Louisa more fully realize the Victorian ideal of woman as support and companion to man, complementary, not the same. Both Leyburne and Ollivant profit from the efforts they put into educating their wives: Ollivant finds himself finally enjoying life, redecorating his old-fashioned town house, and imbibing some of Flora's youthfulness; Leyburne finds in Louisa the grounding and inspiration he needs to begin building a serious career as a painter. The "influence" of these females (Flora's girlishness, Louisa's common sense) is not a direct outcome of their learning, but their learning allows them to build



relationships with their husbands in such a way as to allow them to exert that influence. Comparison with *Middlemarch* is again fruitful here: Dorothea is unable to cater to Casaubon's needs, or alleviate his anxieties, and in contrast he cannot give her the intellectual stimulation she requires. Braddon offers a more optimistic portrayal of married life than Eliot's depiction of Dorothea and Casaubon (or indeed Rosamond and Lydgate, whose temperaments are equally unsuited), but this is because she lowers the expectations of her heroines, and aligns those expectations to fit in with their husbands' desires. Part of the "problem" for *Middlemarch's* Dorothea and Rosamond is that they have a preconceived idea of what a husband should be like, and what he should be able to offer his wife (education and material comforts respectively). Both Louisa and Flora are, by comparison, blank canvases on which their husbands may paint at will.

The personalized developments of Louisa and Flora, in line with the tastes and needs of their husbands, are made apparent towards the end of the novel when Flora sees Louisa (whom she has never met) arranging Leyburne's artist's paraphernalia. For Flora this reminds her of what she now feels to be a foolish affection for Leyburne, whilst for Louisa it is the fulfilment of her wifely duty and a source of pleasure (II, 213-15). When Flora finally sees Leyburne alive and well she sees him with new eyes: his 'old lightness' which had 'been a charm in the past, an attribute of that careless sunny nature which had seemed so bright and fair to the girl's fancy [...] jarred upon the woman now' (II, p.222). Each woman has matured in accordance with her husband's tastes and mode of life.

This novel celebrates female intellectual potential, but it also portrays men as responsible for dictating the lines along which intellectual development will progress. Braddon's advocacy of female ability is embedded almost unresistingly within the tenets of domestic ideology. Her claims for female intellectual potential, and the satisfaction that can be gained from learning, are enmeshed with her implication that women may find happiness and intellectual stimulation through devotion to their roles as wives. *Lost for Love* acknowledges Victorian women's reliance on the men who governed their lives irrespective of whether those men were dependable and responsible guardians.

In an 1869 article for *Belgravia* entitled 'Whose Fault is it?', Braddon castigated men for not realising the power they hold over women. She argued that young men had made a bad example by ridiculing 'everything virtuous as "spoony," and everything domestic as "slow,"' and had consequently encouraged young ladies to mimic the loose women who the men they hoped to marry seemed to find so exciting.<sup>51</sup> Braddon insisted that the 'cure must begin where the disease began - amongst the stronger, not amongst the weaker sex'.<sup>52</sup> Such sentiments are reflected in *Lost for Love* in which, despite being intellectually capable and improving influences, women are pliable and the role of creation lies with the men who influence them. Moreover, whilst there may be plenty of predetermined potential in young women, *Lost for Love* shows that conducive circumstances are vital to bringing it out, and that a good education is one of the best means of ensuring this happens.

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<sup>51</sup> M.E. Braddon, 'Whose Fault is It?', *Belgravia*, 9 (August, 1869), 214-16 (p.214).

<sup>52</sup> *ibid.*, p.215.

### Conclusion

The whole character of the man then as we find him may be said to have been built up by the following processes. He comes into the world as an infant, with a nervous system in a comparatively undeveloped state. This nervous system as it exists in infancy is the result of the combination of the two original constitutions of its parents, plus the effects of their life-experience upon them; life-experience meaning the modifications effected in the original constitution by the whole circumstances of the whole existence of the individual. And having come into the world thus constituted, the man's character is modified again by circumstances as he also grows from infancy to manhood, and the final result is *the sum of the effects which these modifications are capable of producing on his original constitution*. That a conclusion such as this is that to which the present state of physiology seems not indistinctly to point, we think can hardly be denied.<sup>1</sup>

(G.W. Child, 'Physiological Psychology', 1868)

In 1868, G.W. Child reviewed Henry Maudsley's *Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (1867) for *The Westminster Review*. Child took the opportunity to bring readers up to date with 'the present position of our knowledge of mental physiology', and the above passage formed part of his conclusion (Child, p.38). Child's summary of 'the whole character of man' is in fact a summary of what determines the development of an individual, leading to a 'final result'. This, it may be surmised, must be constantly changing as each new experience brings its own 'modifications', adding to what has gone before.

Child's account of each individual as the result of a multitude of pre- and post-congenital factors includes many of the determinants which, as we have seen throughout this thesis, were debated, contested and theorized in a variety of Victorian literature such as heredity, acquired characteristics and circumstance. It has been shown that Braddon and Collins were not only aware of theories about these determining factors, but knowingly drew on them for their fiction. Their work contains numerous instances of the biological transmission of physical, mental and moral characteristics, and of

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<sup>1</sup> G.W. Child, 'Physiological Psychology', *Westminster Review*, 89 (1868), 37-65 (p.63).

environmental determinants such as education, social surroundings and upbringing.

Reading a range of Braddon's and Collins's texts reveals that neither author had a consistently "favoured" form of determinism; different novels employ theories of determinism in different ways and for different ends. Sometimes, deterministic ideas are used to provide an explanation for the actions of a character. Theories of insanity, as chapters 2 and 3 especially have shown, were often necessarily deterministic: psychiatrists identified different forms of mental disease based on how it affected the behaviour of the sufferer. Both Robert Mannion and Magdalen Vanstone develop a mental condition (monomania) which makes them into single-minded, formidable villains (temporarily in Magdalen's case). These conditions are brought about in turn by social factors, in these cases the loss of social status. Similarly, the exceptional but ill-fated Olivia Marchmont is depicted as the disastrous result of a convergence of female biological drives, social environment, and inherent intellect.

Determinism is also used to engineer particular plot developments, either as a means of driving the story along, or making a point about a particular issue. Hester Dethridge's murder of Geoffrey Delamayn (again a case of monomania determining character behaviour) is both a means of doing away with the novel's villain, and of showing the awful consequences of domestic abuse and unjust marriage laws. The spoiled and effeminate Rupert Lisle is educated into an admirable young man with middle-class principles who can then revitalize his flagging family line; meanwhile a combination of heredity and upbringing ensures that the lower-class James Gilbert will not succeed in his attempts to fraudulently usurp the Lisle name and fortune. Both Flora Chamney and Louisa Gurner are educated into ideal wives, but at the same time Braddon implies the great and often neglected potential of female intellect.

Both authors tend to accept that each person has, to use Child's words again, an 'original constitution'. The issue is then how much later '*modifications are capable*' of altering that constitution. Neither author has a single definite answer to this, but reading the novels covered in this thesis as a whole, there is

a sort of self-regulation occurring. Both Collins and Braddon write stories about the power of heredity (*The Lady Lisle*, 'Mad Monkton' and *Armadale*) in the 1860s, and novels advocating the power of education to form and improve or ruin the individual in the 1870s (*Man and Wife* and *Lost for Love*). Although the latter may be in part a response to popular concern about the state of education, it is significant that they are writing these novels at a time when (as we have seen) scientific determinist theories were tending towards less optimistic conceptions of heredity, and citing eugenics as the means of halting social degeneration. In this way both authors are asserting the ability, and responsibility, of society to raise good citizens. Overall both authors strike, perhaps not a balance, but something approaching it, between the extremes of the individual as at the mercy of either his or her inherent constitution, or uncontrollable environmental influences, both of which would effectively exclude the possibility of self-improvement and personal responsibility.

It will have become apparent that it is difficult to talk about deterministic thinking on its own - it is usually connected to some other theme, issue or idea (insanity, gender, class etc). Many of these themes are already key areas for critical studies of sensation fiction. What this thesis has done is place determinism at the centre of the discussion, bringing to the forefront elements which may otherwise remain unmentioned or be referred to only in passing. This oversight is perhaps because the determinants which contribute to human development are everywhere, all the time, and often taken for granted. Child's claim, above, that a range of biological and environmental factors influence development may seem vague, even obvious. In looking at Braddon's and Collins's novels, and the non-fiction texts which have been compared with them, however, it can be seen that beliefs about determinism were crucial to how people were perceived by themselves, by those around them, by society and its institutions of science, medicine and law. How people were perceived affected how they were treated, and how they were treated was a further modification of the 'original constitution', generating a new 'final result'. Braddon's and Collins's novels show an awareness of this, and depict the (possibly dangerous) power of *ideals* of determinism as well as the process itself.

The idea of hereditary morality is certainly full of dramatic potential which Collins puts to use in *Armadale*, but the novel rejects heredity as an unconquerable force, condemning individuals to lives of misery and criminality. In *John Marchmont's Legacy* and *Lost for Love*, Braddon is unwilling to perceive female biology or psychology as restrictions to female achievement; it is society which holds women back, potentially with tragic results.

Braddon and Collins are certainly willing to employ one form of determinism over others if it serves their literary purpose. Yet these authors featured determinism (either prominently or implicitly) in their novels because they believed in it. For Braddon and Collins, biological and environmental factors are part of the mass of circumstances that build the chain of cause and effect which drives their plots. Braddon and Collins's fiction shows a tacit acceptance of the new ways of thinking about mind/body interaction which Child outlines above, and of the fact that the mind was undeniably affected by its physical environment (which included the body and brain). Their response to such ideas is both imaginative and speculative, they experiment with different theories, and their plots enact the outcome of events influenced by various determining factors. Throughout their fiction runs the implication that determinism is *important*. Time and again characters are lost or saved by the combinations of internal and external factors which determine their development and subsequent behaviour. By providing a new angle from which to approach sensation fiction this thesis has sought to show one way (albeit touching on other wide-ranging issues) in which sensation authors were enmeshed within, responded to, and challenged the social and scientific ideologies of their day.

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For unsigned articles I have used the attributions from the electronic edition of the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals: 1824-1900*, excepting Athenaeum articles for which I have drawn on *The Athenaeum Index of Reviews and Reviewers: 1830-1870*. All volume numbers for Victorian periodicals refer to old series numbering.

### Abbreviations

CUP            Cambridge University Press  
 OUP            Oxford University Press

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*The Athenaeum Index of Reviews and Reviewers: 1830-1870*  
<<http://athenaeum.soi.city.ac.uk/reviews/home.html>>

*Eighteenth Century Collections Online* <<http://galenet.galegroup.com>>

JSTOR <<http://uk.jstor.org/>>

*OvidSP* <<http://ovidsp.tx.ovid.com>>

*The Oxford English Dictionary Online* <<http://dictionary.oed.com>>

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*Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals: 1824-1900*  
<<http://wellesley.chadwyck.com>>