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**Sensation Novels and Domestic Minds:
Mental Health and the Home in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's and Wilkie Collins's
Novels of the 1860s**

By

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Abstract

Drawing on the recent academic interest in approaching health and wellbeing from a humanities perspective, *Sensation Novels and Domestic Minds* investigates how the Victorians dealt with questions of mental health by examining literary works in the genre of sensation fiction. The novels of Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins, two prominent writers of the genre, often portray characters suffering from mental illnesses commonly diagnosed at the time, among which are monomania, moral insanity, melancholia and hypochondria. By studying the fictional works of Braddon and Collins alongside medical texts from the nineteenth century, it sets out to investigate how these novels fictionally represented real mental sufferings. This thesis considers the different mental illnesses the characters of sensation novels develop inside and outside the home as they struggle to define their own identity against Victorian social expectations. It demonstrates how these novels fictionalised the crisis of the leisured upper classes, who spent most of their time at home, and found themselves at odds with a society that increasingly separated the domestic and working environments, while also considering the impact that a lack of a sense of domestic belonging had on their mental health. This thesis further analyses the extent to which domesticity—in its excess or lack—could afflict the mental health of Victorian men and women through the fictional representation of suicidal thoughts and acts in the novels of Braddon and Collins.

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Introduction

Sensation, Home, and Health

In 1895, prominent Scottish psychiatrist Sir James Crichton-Browne was invited to deliver a lecture before the West London Medico-Chirurgical Society about his work. Crichton-Browne apologetically opened his lecture by noting that, due to his position as Lord Chancellor's Medical Visitor in Lunacy, his work had of late been mostly confined 'to the narrow precincts of officialism' and involved no 'command of clinical material,' and he feared his contribution on that day would not be as serviceable to the community as he wished.¹ However, Crichton-Browne managed to capture his audience's attention by suggesting a new way of approaching medicine and, in particular, questions of mental health. Declaring that 'medicine is many-sided, and touches or is touched by almost all human affairs,' he explained that:

it occurred to me that I might not unprofitably conduct you this evening into a by-path of pathology, and ask you to leave the bedside for a little and consider with me certain mental conditions that are encountered in daily life, that have a literary and philosophical interest, and that are not, I believe, without great medical significance.²

The mental condition Crichton-Browne wished to discuss on that occasion was what he called 'dreamy mental states,' akin to the familiar sensation of 'déjà-vu.' To introduce this condition, the psychiatrist used literary quotations from novels by Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy, Sir Walter Scott, Coventry Patmore, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Alfred Tennyson, William Wordsworth, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, all of whom had fictionally described these 'dreamy mental states' within their work. Crichton-Browne's choice to depart from the traditional case-studies approach of medicine and rather engage with literary or philosophical depictions of mental health conditions testifies to the interconnection that already existed in the nineteenth century between medicine and the

¹ James Crichton-Browne, *On Dreamy Mental States: Delivered Before the West London Medico-Chirurgical Society, on Thursday, June 20, 1895* (London: Baillière, 1895), p. 3 This source was first discovered in Athena Vrettos' essay on Victorian Psychology, p.69.

² Crichton-Browne, *On Dreamy Mental States*, p. 3.

humanities. As Athena Vrettos notes in her brief review of Victorian psychology, ‘by drawing upon fictional and poetic examples, nineteenth-century psychologists paid tribute to the contributions of literature in the study of human psychology.’³ Vrettos furthermore identifies a blurring of disciplinary boundaries as nineteenth-century physicians and psychiatrists borrowed ‘from a variety of sources to chart out their intellectual and methodological terrain.’⁴ Such interdisciplinarity is central to the fields of Medical Humanities and Health Humanities, both of which see ‘human affairs’ as an essential component of our understanding, exploration and practice of medicine and health care. Such an approach will be taken in the present thesis.

Health Humanities: Literature’s Influence on Understandings of Health and Well-Being.

In this thesis, I propose to follow Sir James Crichton-Browne’s initiative and ask readers to approach different mental health conditions through the medium of literature. As Crichton-Browne explained to his audience, the mental states he set out to examine were ‘to be found described vaguely, but recognisably, in the writings of many of our most gifted authors.’⁵ Physicians themselves then used such writings for their own medical inquiries, as Crichton-Browne attempted in his 1895 lecture. A ‘two-way’ traffic therefore exists between science and literature, as Gillian Beer explains in her exploration of evolutionary narratives, which sees both scientists drawing ‘openly upon literary, historical and philosophical material as part of their arguments’ and writers including scientific inquiries for dramatic purposes.⁶ This two-way traffic is visible in the work and legacy of Sigmund Freud for example, whose literary knowledge greatly influenced his scientific publications, including the use of Shakespearean myths, and whose work in turn influenced a number of writers.⁷ Similarly, many nineteenth-century novelists described the mental health

³Athena Vrettos, ‘Victorian Psychology’, in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 67–83 (p. 69).

⁴ Vrettos, ‘Victorian Psychology’, p. 69.

⁵ Crichton-Browne, *On Dreamy Mental States*, p. 4.

⁶ Gillian Beer, *Darwin’s Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 3rd ed (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 5.

⁷ Graham Frankland, *Freud’s Literary Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

conditions known as *melancholia*, *hypochondria*, *hysteria*, *monomania* and *moral insanity* in their writings, all of which were classified as mental disorders at that time. While a historical approach to these disorders, based on medical records, treatises and journals, is necessary to understand how the medical community then devised, understood, and treated them, it is also important to explore how individuals endure them, through either personal narratives based on lived experiences, or fictional narratives.

The literary interest these disorders have generated and still generate not only allows us to consider them from a non-medical point of view, but also provides a broader understanding of how the general population then perceived these disorders. As many scholars of both the medical humanities and health humanities acknowledge, literature has the potential to greatly inform our understanding of somatic and mental illnesses, as it relays human experiences in ways medical reports cannot.⁸ In fact, nineteenth-century physicians drew upon canonical literary texts to make sense of obscure mental states, as did renowned British psychiatrist L. Forbes Winslow in 1856 when using Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to illustrate cases of 'positive insanity.'⁹ This sort of mutual discourse allowed 'not only ideas but metaphors, myths, and narrative patterns [to] move rapidly and freely to and fro between scientists and non-scientists,' as Beer notes.¹⁰ If we consider 'art as expertise,' as David Sklar suggests, this interdisciplinary approach 'may be able to help sharpen the abilities of health providers to elicit and to better understand the stories of their patients.'¹¹ The medical humanities and health humanities thus invite us to follow in the footsteps of physicians such as Sir James Crichton-Browne who encouraged healthcare practitioners to view pathologies through a different lens other than medical examination. Because 'human

⁸ David P. Sklar, 'Health Humanities and Medical Education: Joined by a Common Purpose', *Academic Medicine*, 92.12 (2017), 1647–49; Therese Jones and others, 'The Almost Right Word: The Move From Medical to Health Humanities', *Academic Medicine*, 92.7 (2017), 932–35; Charley Baker and others, *Madness in Post-1945 British and American Fiction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010); *The Routledge Companion to Health Humanities*, ed. by Paul Crawford, Brian Brown, and Andrea Charise (Milton: Taylor & Francis Group, 2020) Introduction.

⁹ Forbes Winslow, 'On Some Unrecognised Forms of Mental Disorder', *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 9.1 (1856), 82–90 (p. 89).

¹⁰ Beer, *Darwin's Plots*, p. 5.

¹¹ Sklar, 'Health Humanities and Medical Education', p. 1648.

experience is a vastly heterogeneous field of inquiry,¹² and health and illness are human experiences, the treatment of our body and mind needs to be conceived as a holistic endeavour that considers individual circumstances. Such a realisation led scholars to distinguish between two different fields of inquiry in this interdisciplinary approach: the medical humanities and the health humanities.

While the medical humanities has been recognised as a scholarly field of its own for over fifty years,¹³ the health humanities arose in the 2010s, quickly gathering momentum among both healthcare professionals and arts and humanities scholars. Leading figure of the health humanities, Paul Crawford has argued for ‘a more inclusive and applied approach to humanities in healthcare’¹⁴ than the one provided by the medical humanities thus far.¹⁵ As Jones et al. argue, the terminological move from medical humanities to health humanities was essential to fully integrate every aspect of human health, because ‘medicine is only a minor determinant of health in human populations alongside other social factors such as class, education, occupation, environment, race, and stigma.’¹⁶ An arts and humanities approach allows for these factors to be more effectively considered, therefore procuring more individual responses to experiences of illness. This can be achieved through ‘stories, creative works, and the performing arts,’¹⁷ as well as, I argue, the exploration of fictional narratives of illness. Literature is a particularly potent mode of exploration for mental illness, as it allows individuals to share their own experiences, and for different voices to be heard. Even fictional accounts of these mental states can be powerful, as they unquestionably reflect elements of lived experiences. The dramatization of such experiences can subject both writers and readers to a more universal exploration of their own mental states and lead them to reflect on the nature and influence of social factors

¹² Andrea Charise, ‘Site, Sector, Scope: Mapping the Epistemological Landscape of Health Humanities’, *Journal of Medical Humanities*, 38.4 (2017), 431–44 (p. 434).

¹³ Jones and others, ‘The Almost Right Word’, p. 932.

¹⁴ Paul Crawford and others, ‘Health Humanities: The Future of Medical Humanities?’, *Mental Health Review Journal*, 15.3 (2010), 4–10 (p. 8).

¹⁵ Today, the health humanities is an internationally accredited field of interdisciplinary research with courses taught at leading higher education institutions, as Andrea Charise notes. A number of papers and monograph have recently been published in the field, including the ones cited above.

¹⁶ Jones and others, ‘The Almost Right Word’, p. 933.

¹⁷ Charise, ‘Site, Sector, Scope’, p. 434.

on psychology in general. Crawford et al. identified the specific need for an exploration of mental health issues from a health humanities perspective, arguing that ‘reading and interpretation foster skills that enable us to listen carefully in the clinical setting, to think and reflect, as well as to consider and engage empathically.’¹⁸ The empathy authors may wish to elicit in their readers involves a better understanding of and discussion around the characters’ social circumstances, including their occupation, gender, environment, class, and the stigmas they may be facing. The present thesis looks to address this need through a close textual analysis of nineteenth-century fictional and non-fictional texts.

Here, I seek to uncover how the popular nineteenth-century genre of sensation novels might help us better understand the mental sufferings of many Victorian men and women. Sensation authors, such as Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, included in their writings recognisable representations of mental disorders that were amply discussed, researched, and interrogated by contemporary medical practitioners. Although their fictional representations are sometimes equivocal and lack legitimate medical grounding, they carry enough details on known symptoms of these conditions to be recognised by readers, both contemporary and future. An exploration of how Braddon and Collins grasped the sufferings of individuals subjected to nervous and obsessional disorders, as well as forms of depression, therefore offer us great insight into the way these disorders were perceived at the time. The timeframe of the nineteenth century particularly accommodates such an inquiry, as the period witnessed an increasing interest in the study of the mind and psychology, and physicians started to disregard the overused label of ‘madness.’¹⁹ Sensation literature, popular in the United Kingdom between 1855 and 1870, is especially representative of the era’s preoccupation with a more rigorous treatment of mental health. Although references to ‘madness’ are omnipresent for the sensational component they add, the genre also depicts an important number of characters suffering from depression, obsessive disorders or nervousness because of their socio-economic circumstances. As stated above, a variety of social factors need to be taken into

¹⁸ Crawford and others, ‘Health Humanities’, p. 6.

¹⁹ This has been demonstrated in: Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 2007); Roy Porter, *Madness: A Brief History* (Oxford: University Press, 2010); Andrew Scull, *Madness in Civilization: A Cultural History of Insanity, from the Bible to Freud, from the Madhouse to Modern Medicine* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2015).

consideration when examining mental states in order to fully understand an individual's experience of mental illness. Here, I am particularly interested in the demographic of middle-to-upper class men and women in the Victorian period, who are the most represented in sensation novels. These characters' statuses and domestic situations are important factors to consider as they are intimately connected to the development of their mental disorders. The wealthy members of the upper class, often described in the novels as leading lives of constant leisure and indulging in idleness or indolence, show signs of mental distress because of their confinement at home.²⁰ Similarly, many middle-class characters develop mental disorders after their exclusion from the domestic environment and subsequent confrontation with the public sphere. Because the ideology of home was so central to the lives of Victorian women, men and children, it played an essential role in their mental and emotional health and wellbeing. This is particularly visible in sensation novels which mostly engage readers with the domestic lives of the characters. This thesis therefore aims to fully investigate the connection between domestic circumstances and the development of mental illness in characters of sensation novels.

Even though nineteenth-century literature and mental health have been jointly studied in the past,²¹ many areas of concern are still left unanswered and thus benefit from the attention given here. Most scholarly research on the literary representation of mental health has tended to focus on the notion of 'madness' to avoid narrowing the scope of

²⁰ In this thesis, the words *idleness* and *indolence* are used intermittently to evoke a persistent lack of physical and mental exertion and a fondness for quietness and inactivity. This terminology is consistent with that used in nineteenth-century scholarly publications, in which the terms are similarly interchangeable.

²¹ Among others, one may cite Lillian Feder, *Madness in Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983); Chris Wienthal, *Figuring Madness in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997); Judy Cornes, *Madness and the Loss of Identity in Nineteenth Century Fiction* (London: McFarland, 2007); Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination*, 2nd ed (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); Cristina Hanganu-Bresch and Carol Berkenkotter, *Diagnosing Madness: The Discursive Construction of the Psychiatric Patient, 1850-1920* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2019); Peter Melville Logan, *Nerves and Narratives: A Cultural History of Hysteria in Nineteenth-Century British Prose* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1987); Sally Shuttleworth, *Charlotte Brontë and Victorian Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

inquiry to one specific disorder, as well as to encompass the ‘social, personal, and cultural context of the term.’²² However, in this doctoral thesis, specific mental disorders will be examined, namely depression, obsessive disorders and nervousness. All of these are here understood to refer to their nineteenth-century acceptance. I analyse ‘depression’ as the emergent diagnosis it was in the 1860s and alongside the affiliated concept of ‘melancholia.’²³ Obsessive disorders mainly comprise of the diagnoses of ‘monomania’ and ‘moral insanity’ as defined by psychiatrists Jean-Dominique Esquirol and James Cowles Prichard respectively, while I apprehend ‘nervousness’ as the nineteenth-century ‘British malady’ of the upper classes and their recurrent complaints towards their delicate and sensitive ‘nerves.’²⁴ I purposefully focus on these disorders because of their recurrent appearance in sensation novels, and because their fictional representations can greatly inform our own understanding of how the general public perceived them. This thesis will not investigate the presence of ‘madness’ in sensational novels, neither as a literary trope nor as a medical condition in its own right, because it aims to demonstrate that a number of sensation characters suffer from specific mental disorders without portraying classical signs of ‘madness,’ as it is culturally understood. This approach to the study of sensation novels therefore inscribes itself in the ideology of the health humanities, as it seeks to understand individual experiences of mental illness through a comprehensive exploration of the social, economic, and political environments of these individuals. Furthermore, like many other health-humanities projects, this research uses a creative medium, in the fictional productions of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, to underpin our understanding of nineteenth-century psychology. The following study will demonstrate that an exploration of fictional narratives of mental illness from a different era and social context than ours can still inform our own perception of mental health and the way health practitioners address these issues today. Accordingly, this thesis values ‘aesthetics, social experiences, and interpretive methods over quantitative and/or biomedical modes of investigation,’²⁵ and is grounded in a truly interdisciplinary perspective.

²² Baker and others, *Madness*, p. 3.

²³ G. E. Berrios, ‘Melancholia and Depression during the 19th Century: A Conceptual History’, *The British Journal of Psychiatry: The Journal of Mental Science*, 153.3 (1988), 298–304.

²⁴ Scull, *Madness in Civilization*.

²⁵ Charise, ‘Site, Sector, Scope’, p. 433.

The work undertaken here involves the close textual analysis of key literary texts, including *The Woman in White* (1859) and *No Name* (1862) by Wilkie Collins, and *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862) and *The Doctor's Wife* (1864), by Mary Elizabeth Braddon, alongside a review of medical texts from the same period in order to gain insight into the Victorians' views on and knowledge of mental health issues. These non-literary texts will inform the political, social and medical contexts of the production of sensation novels. They allow for a clear recognition of how nineteenth-century novelists used existing medical diagnosis in their writings, and the degree to which these are dramatised for literary purposes. I analyse these non-literary sources alongside Collins's and Braddon's novels in order to understand the semantic construction of mental illness in the nineteenth century and see how literary texts can be construed as representations of real pathological inquiries. I have purposefully avoided drawing on these authors' more personal pieces of writing such as letters or pamphlets because I wish to emphasise the dialogue between reality and fiction by comparing actual medical publications to fictional representations of mental health conditions. An in-depth study of sensation writers' knowledge and consideration of these mental states would be of great interest, yet it does not fall under the scope of this thesis, for which specific choices had to be made. Similarly, my interest in domesticity mainly lies in the way Braddon and Collins interwove conceptions of the home with mental health states, and not in the authors' own personal experiences of domesticity. The latter subject has recently been approached by Beth Palmer who analyses Braddon's last novel *Mary* (1916) alongside the writer's personal life and approach to domestic spaces.²⁶ Palmer's use of Braddon's life writings and letters is an example of the enduring and varied interest in sensation authors that the present thesis aligns with.

Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context

Sensation novels offer an insight into Victorian psychology because of the very nature of the genre. Proposing a brief definition of sensation fiction, Patrick Brantlinger writes that

²⁶ Beth Palmer, "'Domestic Interests'" in the Late Fiction and Life Writing of Mary Elizabeth Braddon', *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, 140.1 (2021), 178–89.

‘it deals with crime, often murder as an outcome of adultery and sometimes of bigamy, in apparently proper, bourgeois, domestic settings.’²⁷ The intrusion of mystery and crime into the Victorian home is one of the main components of the genre, which opens the field for psychological inquiry. The mental or psychosomatic reactions male and female characters have to these events is often described in great detail in sensation novels, allowing the reader to perceive the emotional state of these characters. Emotions are a key element of the genre, as sensations and emotions are constantly brought to the surface through intense plot developments. While Henry Mansel, an ardent opponent of sensation novels, famously wrote that the genre only aimed at ‘electrifying the nerves of the reader,’²⁸ it needs to be noted that this was done through the stimulation of the characters’ nerves themselves. Their relentless confrontation with crime, deceit, shock and danger produces both physical and mental sensations which trouble their emotional states. Writing a few years before the advent of sensation novels, physician Robert Brudenell Carter explored the role of the emotions in some mental disorders and located their origins in ‘vivid’ sensations, aroused by ‘objects, either perceived, or remembered, or imagined, or by (the remembrance of) other prior emotions.’²⁹ Sensations and emotions have therefore a long history of shared semantic connotations, with the assumption that emotions derive from sensory experiences.³⁰

With its emphasis on sensations and emotions, the genre explores individual psychological responses to strong stimuli, which often take the form of specific mental disorders with which the characters must contend. This aspect of the genre has previously been analysed by scholars of Victorian literature and others interested in the intersection between health and literature, including seminal works such as Winifred Hughes’s *The Maniac in the Cellar* (1980), Jenny Bourne Taylor’s *In the Secret Theatre of Home* (1988), and Lyn Pykett’s *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel* (1994). All of these were

²⁷ Patrick Brantlinger, ‘What Is “Sensational” about the “Sensation Novel”?’, *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37.1 (1982), 1–28 (p. 1).

²⁸ H. L. Mansel, ‘Sensation Novels’, *Quarterly Review*, 113 (1863), 481–514 (p. 488).

²⁹ Robert Brudenell Carter, *On the Pathology and Treatment of Hysteria* (London: J. Churchill, 1853), p. 4.

³⁰ The Oxford English Dictionary refers to ‘strong emotions’ in five of its entries for definitions of ‘sensation.’

written and published in the last two decades of the twentieth century, prompting a new and enduring interest in the genre, and allowing it to no longer be seen as ‘irremediably irrelevant or marginal in Victorian fiction but as representing a “new” side to the mid-Victorian imaginary,’ as Andrew Maunder writes.³¹ In her invaluable work on Wilkie Collins, psychology, and sensation fiction, Jenny Bourne Taylor gives a thorough analysis of psychology, which, she acknowledges, ‘was not a unified discipline in the mid-nineteenth century’ but rather ‘a point of intersection of various fields of knowledge—philosophy, physiology, aesthetic and social theory.’³² Taylor initiated an interdisciplinary approach to the genre of sensation novels and its interest in medicine, which later inspired scholars to continue such work, including Pamela K. Gilbert, Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, Helena Ifill, Heidi Logan, Andrew Mangham and Athena Vrettos among others.³³ These publications, focusing on health and medicine, are only one strand of the general enthusiasm for sensation fiction witnessed in the past twenty years, with the appearance of several companions and anthologies on the genre, as well as a wide array of journal publications.³⁴ Andrew Maunder identifies ‘the resurgence of Marxist criticism as a mode of intellectual inquiry; psychoanalysis; postcolonialism; Foucauldian readings of crime and

³¹ Andrew Maunder, ‘Mapping the Victorian Sensation Novel: Some Recent and Future Trends’, *Literature Compass*, 2.6 (2005), 1–33 (p. 3).

³² Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), p. 19.

³³ Helena Ifill, *Creating Character: Theories of Nature and Nurture in Victorian Sensation Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018); Heidi Logan, *Sensational Deviance: Disability in Nineteenth-Century Sensation Fiction* (New York: Routledge, 2018); Pamela K. Gilbert, ‘Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 182–95; Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins, Medicine and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009); Andrew Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction: Crime, Medicine, and Victorian Popular Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Andrew Mangham, ‘Hysterical Fictions: Mid-Nineteenth-Century Medical Constructions of Hysteria and the Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon’, *The Wilkie Collins Journal*, 6 (2003) <<https://wilkiecollinssociety.org/hysterical-fictions-mid-nineteenth-century-medical-constructions-of-hysteria-and-the-fiction-of-mary-elizabeth-braddon/>> [accessed 7 April 2020]; Vrettos, ‘Victorian Psychology’.

³⁴ Companions on the genre include *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, ed. by Jenny Bourne Taylor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011); *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

punishment, [and] gender studies’ as some of the main analytical tools used in the study of sensation novels in recent years, as well as an interest in ‘their historical importance and the contemporary ideas and anxieties they can be seen to contain.’³⁵ I wish to employ a similar approach in the present thesis, as it inscribes itself in the methodological tradition of New Historicism and its interest in both literary and non-literary texts as means of exploring historical periods.³⁶ As Catherine Gallagher explains, practitioners of New Historicism ‘generally posit no fixed hierarchy of cause and effects as they trace the connections among texts, discourses, power, and the constitution of subjectivity.’³⁷ I employ a similar critical approach in my analysis of different discourses on mental illness in the mid-nineteenth century and the subjective position taken by sensation novelists on this subject.

This approach allows me to explore the relationship between sensation novels and psychology in a more focused way than previously done, by calling attention to specific forms of mental illness, building on Gilbert’s identification of the genre’s interest in ‘extreme medical and mental states,’ which often govern the character’s actions and thoughts.³⁸ These extreme mental states are described in much detail in the novels of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, and resonate with nineteenth-century medical writings on the mind. Through an engagement with a variety of medical publications from this period, we can identify how literature and medicine influenced one another and ultimately offer a broader vision of the history of health in Victorian times. In her analysis of the ‘two cultures’ relationship at play in literature and science studies, Alice Jenkins notes that scholars in this field have identified the nineteenth century as a time when ‘writers and readers of literary and scientific work were familiar with and interested in one

³⁵ Maunder, ‘Mapping the Victorian Sensation Novel’, p. 4.

³⁶ Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt, *Practicing New Historicism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); Catherine Gallagher, ‘Marxism and The New Historicism’, in *The New Historicism*, ed. by H. Aram Veeser (New York: Routledge, 1989), pp. 37–49.

³⁷ Gallagher, ‘Marxism and The New Historicism’, p. 37.

³⁸ Gilbert, ‘Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context’, p. 185.

another's work,' and highlights a 'shared culture' between the two.³⁹ Jenkins discusses the shared language used in nineteenth-century scientific and literary texts, with 'different disciplinary groups [using] similar words, phrases, and metaphors for different purposes,' which implied 'a degree of shared or overlapping knowledge and beliefs.'⁴⁰ While she insists this did not mean an easy access to either culture, it suggests that we can find in literary productions a similar language on mental disorders as the one used in contemporary scientific publications.

Helen Small cautions us, however, on the use of, and reference to, canonical medical texts from nineteenth-century physicians such as John Conolly, Henry Maudsley and Alexander Morison, because such a selection 'cannot do justice to the more complex picture presented by domains of medical practice which have traditionally remained tangential to the history of psychiatry.'⁴¹ Conolly's, Maudsley's and Morison's works, which Small cites in *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865*, are all concerned with 'insanity' or forms of madness. In this thesis, I explore distinctive forms of mental illness, which at times fall under the larger compass of 'insanity,' precisely to exhume areas of mental health that have remained in the background of the history of psychiatry. For example, while interdisciplinary inquiries have previously analysed the nervous conditions of eighteenth and nineteenth-century populations, including Janet Oppenheim's enduring work *'Shattered nerves': Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (1991), few Victorian scholars have explored nervousness outside the typical strand of female hysteria. Nicolas Day, who sees 'the hyperstimulation of the nerves [as] a component of historical modernization,' analyses the narrative agency of the nerves in sensation novels through a focus on the railway age.⁴² Other scholars have identified nervousness as an intrinsic component of the sensational

³⁹ Alice Jenkins, 'Beyond Two Cultures. Science, Literature, and Disciplinary Boundaries', in *The Oxford Handbook of Victorian Literary Culture*, ed. by Juliet John (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 401–15 (p. 405).

⁴⁰ Jenkins, 'Beyond Two Cultures' p. 409.

⁴¹ Helen Small, *Love's Madness: Medicine, the Novel, and Female Insanity, 1800-1865* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), p. 39.

⁴² Nicholas Daly, 'Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses', *ELH*, 66.2 (1999), 461–87 (pp. 464–65).

genre, invading all aspects of the narrative contract between reader and writer. Not only are characters of sensation novels subjected to nervous shocks, but so are the readers themselves, whose nerves are strained from one instalment to the other, until their ‘reading bodies, neither fighting nor fleeing,’ become ‘theaters of neurasthenia,’ as D. A. Miller writes in his critical work on sensation novels.⁴³ Nervousness also impacted sensation writers themselves as the process of novel writing for serial production induced notable nervous breakdowns, as Lyn Pykett notes.⁴⁴ Therefore, for contemporary readers—and detractors—of sensation novels, the genre produced ‘a shared mania, a collective nervous disorder, or a “morbid addiction” to which the middle classes had succumbed.’⁴⁵ The aim of this thesis is to analyse how this ‘shared mania’ applies to the characters of the novels as well.

While nervousness has often been identified as central to the sensation genre, most scholarly publications on this subject have focused on a hermeneutic approach to these novels and have failed to identify the potential for a valuable exploration of individual experiences of nervous disorders through literary production. Following David Lodge’s claim that we can learn more about human experiences from literature than scientific psychology because ‘science tries to formulate general explanatory laws which apply universally, [while] works of literature describe in the guise of fiction the dense specificity of personal experience, which is always unique,’⁴⁶ I argue that sensation novels can at times tell us more about individual experiences of nervous disorders than contemporary scientific publications. By focusing on hypochondria, identified as a nervous disorder in the nineteenth century, and its fictional representation in Collins’s and Braddon’s novels, I investigate how we can make sense of specific demonstrations of nervousness in Victorian individuals. My focus mostly lies in the gendered approach to nervous disorders in the Victorian period, as a clear distinction existed between the diseases of hypochondria,

⁴³ D. A. Miller, ‘Cage Aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*’, *Representations*, 14, (1986), 107–36 (p. 107). ‘Neurasthenia’ was a nervous disease thought to incapacitate patients. It was a particularly popular concept in America in the nineteenth century.

⁴⁴ Lyn Pykett, *Wilkie Collins* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 22.

⁴⁵ Pykett, *Wilkie Collins*, p. 181.

⁴⁶ David Lodge, *Consciousness and the Novel: Connected Essays* (Vintage Digital, 2012), p. 17.

mostly diagnosed in male patients, and that of hysteria, ‘the classic female malady.’⁴⁷ As Rachel Ablow notes in her work on Victorian pain, hypochondria had ‘no single, simple definition’ in the nineteenth century, and medical writings referring to the disease can be extremely contradictory.⁴⁸ Identified as both a somatic and mental disease, with a wide array of symptoms and causes, and referred to as both ‘hypochondria’ and ‘hypochondriasis’ in contemporary publications, the disease was—and still is—hard to delineate. However, there existed a clear common association between hypochondria and nervousness, as well as a general understanding that it implied a ‘fear of illness,’ even though some physicians ‘saw such an anxiety as incidental to, rather than constitutive of, the disease.’⁴⁹ Likewise, many identified a strong propensity to detail one’s suffering and a desire for constant attention in hypochondriac patients. This aspect of the disease, still widely accepted today in our own understanding of hypochondria, warrants its position as a valuable subject for literary explorations of individual experiences of mental health. The highly subjective nature of hypochondria, and the power patients retain to ‘define their illness,’⁵⁰ offer great narrative opportunities which sensation novelists made use of, as I demonstrate in this thesis. Ablow’s analysis of hypochondria in Charlotte Brontë’s novel *Villette* (1853) remains one of the few literary explorations of the disease, which sharply contrasts with the voluminous body of work done on its parent disease, hysteria, and its place in Victorian literature. This is why the present thesis is interested in filling the existing gap in the portrayal of hypochondriac male characters in academic research on sensation novels and mental conditions, while also providing a contrasting view of nervous disorders through an analysis of female hysteria in Braddon’s and Collins’s novels.

The archival work I conducted on a number of nineteenth-century medical publications allowed me to gather a wide array of sources on the diseases of hypochondria and hysteria outside the medical canon identified by Helen Small. These include *The Edinburgh Medical Journal*, *The Journal of Mental Science*, *The Asylum Journal of Mental Science*, *The Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology (JPMMP)*, *The*

⁴⁷ Showalter, *The Female Malady*, p. 18.

⁴⁸ Rachel Ablow, *Victorian Pain* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), p. 17.

⁴⁹ Ablow, *Victorian Pain*, p. 17.

⁵⁰ Ablow, *Victorian Pain*, p. 17.

British Medical Journal, *The London and Edinburgh Monthly Journal of Medical Science*, *The Medical Quarterly Review*, and *The British and Foreign Medical Review*.⁵¹ A close textual analysis of both these publications and Braddon's and Collins's novels revealed significant overlap between the medical descriptions of patients suffering from hypochondria and hysteria, and the fictional nervous experiences of some characters of the novels. I therefore identify Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone, two secondary male characters appearing in Collins's novels *The Woman in White* and *No Name* respectively, as hypochondriac sufferers, based on the depiction of their mental states in the narration. Both characters have received little critical attention in the past, despite the extensive number of scholarly publications on Collins's novels, which warrants a new approach to these texts. Signs of hypochondria can also be detected in the characters of Robert Audley and Roland Lansdell, the main characters in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Doctor's Wife* respectively. An analysis of their nervous symptoms also offers a fresh view on these major works of fiction, as well as a different perspective on the disease of hypochondria than the one offered in the portrayal of Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone, therefore granting us a wider overview of how literature can relate different experiences of mental disorders. Each character exhibits or details singular symptoms and sensations related to their nervousness, which corroborates Lodge's assertion about the 'uniqueness' of human experiences which 'the creation of literary texts recapitulates.'⁵² The analysis of their symptoms, informed by the medical descriptions of hypochondria found in the Victorian journals cited above, is here contrasted with the narration of hysteria in the characters of Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White*, and Isabel Gilbert in *The Doctor's Wife*.

While I rely on previous research on hysteria in the sensation genre for this analysis, my interest mostly lies in the singularities of both diseases and what made them so distinct and gendered in the eyes of Victorian physicians. While hysteria was generally believed to originate in women's reproductive organs, the nineteenth century saw more and more

⁵¹ These have been accessed through databases such as the online American National Library of Medicine, the HathiTrust Digital Library, the Cambridge University Press, and ProQuest, to which I am greatly indebted.

⁵² Lodge, *Consciousness & the Novel*, p. 17.

medical publications claiming that the disease rather found its seat in the brain and could therefore be diagnosed in men as well as women. Sensation novels partly reveal such an epistemological shift by portraying male characters whose nervousness borders on the hysterical rather than hypochondriacal. Nineteenth-century writers would have been acquainted with medical discussions on nervousness through the close proximity of medical and literary texts in the periodicals in which they published their novels. Jenkins notes that ‘periodical readers were able to move freely between literature and science, creating connections for themselves, and becoming accustomed to carrying those connections over into their other reading.’⁵³ Not only writers but readers of sensation novels could then learn about medical discoveries and investigations, and see them dramatically represented in the stories they read. I will therefore examine in this thesis the thin line physicians drew between male hypochondria and female hysteria, and how sensation fiction responded to the medical discourse on nervousness.

When Lyn Pykett writes about the ‘shared mania, [...] collective nervous disorder, or [...] “morbid addiction”’ that sensation novels were thought to produce in readers, she also points to the obsessional nature of serial publications.⁵⁴ Because serial novels such as *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Lady Audley’s Secret* and *The Doctor’s Wife* were published in instalments and each publication usually ended with a suspenseful plot twist, readers would impatiently—if not obsessively—await for the next instalment. As Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund observe, such an extensive reading involvement ‘was different from what modern readers experience completing entire works in a few days or weeks.’⁵⁵ This specific reading venture also concerned the writing process of sensation novels, as authors often discussed the pressing demands of their publishing houses to submit their next instalments, which itself produced an obsessional writing practice.⁵⁶ Braddon herself acknowledged that she was often writing ‘against time’ as her publishers waited for the

⁵³ Jenkins, ‘Beyond Two Cultures’, p. 406.

⁵⁴ Pykett, *Wilkie Collins*, p. 181.

⁵⁵ Linda K. Hughes and Michael Lund, *The Victorian Serial* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1991), p. 8.

⁵⁶ Lennard J. Davis studies such compulsive writing or ‘graphomania’ in *Obsession: A History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

next stage of the story.⁵⁷ Since both readers and writers experienced an obsessive relationship to sensation novels, it is not surprising to note that the topic of obsessive forms of mental illness has been addressed in many literary analyses of the genre. In particular, scholars have shown interest in the disease of monomania, a form of obsessive disorder first identified and named by French alienist Jean Dominique Esquirol in the 1810s, which ‘denoted an *idée fixe*, a single pathological preoccupation in an otherwise sane mind.’⁵⁸ Although the term did not endure in the medical community for very long, as many physicians contested its legitimacy in the nomenclature of mental diseases, it quickly caught the attention of writers in Europe and America who adopted the diagnosis to define some of their most iconic characters.⁵⁹ Sensation novelists found the diagnosis of monomania particularly appealing to account for the erratic and unnatural behaviours of their most transgressive characters. Laurence Talairach-Vielmas dedicates an entire chapter of her study on Wilkie Collins published in 2009 to the exploration of the use of monomania in *Basil* (1852), ‘Mad Monkton’ (1855) and *The Woman in White* (1859), all three of which associate the disease with different sources and manifestations.⁶⁰ More than twenty years before her, Jenny Bourne Taylor had also identified the disease of monomania as central to the stories of Wilkie Collins, pointing to the usefulness of the term as a literary device, as it allowed ‘madness’ to permeate the daily lives of upper-class families undetected.⁶¹ Braddon also makes use of monomania in novels such as *Lady Audley’s Secret*, *John Marchmont’s Legacy* (1861) and *Eleanor’s Victory* (1863), which shows how ubiquitous the disease had become by the mid-nineteenth century.

While an analysis of monomania in Braddon’s and Collins’s novels is therefore crucial to any inquiry into the representation of mental illness in their works, what mostly interests me here is the partial nature of the disease. According to Esquirol, monomania

⁵⁷ Lyn Pykett, ‘Mary Elizabeth Braddon’, in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 123–33 (p. 129).

⁵⁸ Jan Goldstein, *Console and Classify: The French Psychiatric Profession in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 154.

⁵⁹ Simon During, ‘The Strange Case of Monomania: Patriarchy in Literature, Murder in Middlemarch, Drowning in Daniel Deronda’, *Representations*, 23, (1988), 86–104.

⁶⁰ Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins*, p. 22.

⁶¹ Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*.

was ‘characterized by a partial lesion of the intelligence, affections or will. At one time, the intellectual disorder is confined to a single object, or a limited number of objects.’⁶² Monomania did not manifest itself in every aspect of the sufferer’s psychological state, which implied a potential latency of the disease, and, most importantly, a great difficulty in diagnosing it. This led to the introduction of a similar form of partial disorder, named ‘moral insanity’ by British psychiatrist James Cowles Prichard in his 1835 *Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind*. This form of mental disease, Prichard wrote, ‘consists of a morbid perversion of the feelings, affections [or] habits,’ and ‘sometimes coexists with an apparently unimpaired state of the intellectual faculties.’⁶³ The distinction between complete and partial delusions was extremely important at the time, as criminal courts increasingly asked psychiatrists and alienists to weigh into judicial cases in order to determine whether the accused could and should be held accountable for their crimes.⁶⁴ Questions of criminal responsibility appeared in most articles and treatises on monomania and moral insanity, both considered as forms of partial insanity at the time. Sensation writers made use of this popular debate in their novels, often leading readers to reflect on the emotional and psychological state of the characters.⁶⁵ When reading *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley’s Secret*, we may question whether Walter Hartright and Robert Audley are indeed suffering from monomania, as the narrators suggest, or if the symptoms they display may rather point to a diagnosis of moral insanity. Through a close textual analysis of medical records on both diseases, I wish to determine how much sensation writers borrowed from medical texts in order to portray their obsessive characters, and how their fictional appropriations of medical knowledge informed larger understandings of the diseases. Similarly, I examine the characters of Magdalen Vanstone

⁶² Jean Étienne Dominique Esquirol, *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity*, trans. by Ebenezer K. Hunt (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), p. 320.

⁶³ James Cowles Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (London: Sherwood, Gilbert and Piper, 1835), p. 6.

⁶⁴ Raymond de Saussure, ‘The Influence of the Concept of Monomania on French Medico-Legal Psychiatry (from 1825 to 1840)’, *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences*, 1.3 (1946), 365–97; Cristina Hanganu-Bresch, ‘Public Perceptions of Moral Insanity in the 19th Century’, *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, 207.9 (2019), 805–14.

⁶⁵ Famous cases such as that of French maid Henriette Cordier’s homicidal monomania were widely discussed in international popular journals. See During, ‘The Strange Case of Monomania’.

in *No Name* and Lucy Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret* to determine if the description of their mental states may relate to either monomania or moral insanity.

It is important to note at this point that the term 'moral insanity' is used here as a legitimate nineteenth-century medical diagnosis referring to a particular mental disorder, not as a synonym for 'madness.' As stated before, the aim of the present thesis is not to investigate the literary representation of madness as 'the everyday term employed to come to terms with Unreason,'⁶⁶ but rather to explore specific mental disorders commonly referred to in the nineteenth century and appropriated by novelists. Moral insanity first and foremost implied an unbalanced emotional state, from which sensation characters often suffer. In order to better understand how Braddon and Collins devised the psychological condition of their characters, we need to look more closely at the emotions these characters feel and the events that cause such emotions. Helen Small has deplored the fact that previous interdisciplinary studies on medicine and literature have failed to question the 'easy cross reference between literature and medicine,' assuming that 'the evidence of nineteenth-century medical and fictional texts is bound to be complementary.'⁶⁷ This is why I wish to go beyond the general assumption that sensation novels merely reflected the popular interest in diseases such as hypochondria, hysteria, monomania, moral insanity, or melancholia and ask how they contributed to a more in-depth exploration of human mental suffering. Sensation writers not only exploited the public's vicarious interest in these disorders to appeal to readers, but they also proposed a more sympathetic depiction of mental health suffering than the one found in medical or legal texts published in journals alongside serial novels. They achieved this, I argue, by grounding their plots in a decisively domestic setting, which is at times both confining and dismissive. Sensation novels portray individuals suffering from their confinement at home, as much as individuals feeling alienated from the domestic sphere. Both circumstances are presented as having significant impacts on the mental health of characters and lead to the development of some of the diseases mentioned above.

⁶⁶ Scull, *Madness in Civilization*, p. 14.

⁶⁷ Small, *Love's Madness*, p. 36.

Mental Health and Home in Sensation Novels.

Alongside the notion of ‘madness,’ scholars interested in mental health in the nineteenth century have tended to identify the asylum as the prevailing space for the manifestation, observation, and treatment of mental illnesses.⁶⁸ In this thesis, I introduce the home as another central space in which these conditions found their origin and expression, especially as represented in sensation novels, which take the home as the main setting for their plots. As Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling have reported, the past two decades have witnessed an increasing interest in the notion of home and how individuals relate to it, and this thesis contributes to the now large body of works exploring the social value of home.⁶⁹ For Victorian middle-to-upper-class families, the home was often a space of solitary confinement and imposed passivity. Many women belonging to these classes were expected to sit at home and oversee domestic duties performed by servants while landed aristocratic men often found themselves idling away time at home in the absence of any practical incentive to work. Home confinement and its impact on individuals’ mental health is therefore central to this thesis, which highlights how sensation novels challenged the Victorian ideal of the home as a place of safety and family bliss. The genre provides fertile literary ground to investigate challenges to individuals’ mental health and wellbeing, as it relies on the depiction of crime and mystery invading the sacred space of home and domesticity. What I argue, however, is that it is not necessarily the murders, acts of bigamy or enigmatic disappearances that challenge the protagonists’ psychological states, but rather their relationship to home. The thesis sets out to demonstrate that characters found invariably inactive at home are prone to develop nervous disorders, while active characters who labour outside the home frequently suffer from monomania and moral insanity. Overall, I contend that the characters of sensation novels predominantly have a problematic relationship with the domestic environment, which translates itself into a deep mental distress visible in the characters’ chronic unhappiness and, ultimately, suicidal tendencies.

⁶⁸ Scull, *Madness in Civilization*; Porter, *Madness*; J. Moran, Leslie Topp, and Jonathan Andrews, *Madness, Architecture and the Built Environment: Psychiatric Spaces in Historical Context* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2007); Goldstein, *Console and Classify*.

⁶⁹ Alison Blunt and Robyn Dowling, *Home* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 2.

The notion of ‘home’ is famously difficult to define and delineate because of the subjective meanings and associations it conveys. Home is not necessarily a house or any particular place and can be experienced both alone and as a community. How individuals perceive their home depends on social and cultural environments as well as historical periods. In our contemporary western society, some view the home as a place of refuge where the family gathers, while others feel more at home in the vastness of the outdoors and public space.⁷⁰ The notion of home therefore becomes a useful vantage point from which to examine life experiences and, as Crawford et al. assert in their study of British nurse Florence Nightingale’s relationship to home, ‘thinking about the home as variously a material reality, a concept, a geographical region, and a psychological impulse [...] provides a sophisticated framework for thinking about aspects of the past.’⁷¹ Studies on the home often conceive individuals’ emotional responses to their domestic environment as indicators of an era’s social, cultural and political realities. As the phrase ‘feeling at home’ and other similar expressions convey, home and domesticity are related to emotions and sensations which are unique to everyone. Blunt and Dowling view the home as a ‘spatial imaginary’ made up of social constructs, ideas and feelings, which ‘may be feelings of belonging, desire and intimacy [...] but can also be feelings of fear, violence and alienation.’⁷² This spatial imaginary, and the set of feelings attached to it, is precisely what the present thesis looks to investigate in the context of the nineteenth century and sensation novels.

Scholars and commentators have noted a shift in the concept of domesticity in the early nineteenth century, as the notion then held a particularly wholesome nature. While domesticity and the home were by no means brand new concepts in the Victorian period, ‘it was only in the 1830s and 1840s that the ideal of home was raised to the level of a

⁷⁰ The highly acclaimed book *Nomadland: Surviving America in the Twenty-First Century* (2017), by Jessica Bruder, and subsequent film adaptation, as well as the rising number of people adopting the ‘van life’ experience, testify to this new quest for mobility in our living conditions.

⁷¹ Paul Crawford and others, *Florence Nightingale at Home*, (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 8–9.

⁷² Blunt and Dowling, *Home*, p. 2.

cultural norm,' as John Tosh argues.⁷³ For middle-to-upper-class families in particular, the home—and its demarcation from work and physical labour—came to define many aspects of Victorian social, emotional and political standards. Family was central to this domestic ideal and the onus was placed on finding the right matrimonial match and raising children in harmony with one's values and expectations. Writing about the Victorians' 'domestic vision,' Tosh regards 'comfort, privacy and time spent in the home' as the primary focus of the era.⁷⁴ Victorian comfort was expressed through a variety of elements, including material comfort in the form of furniture, food, heating, and various goods, which required a stable financial income. While the Victorian social elite identified these aspects in a positive light, we can also fathom a more unfavourable side to them if we consider the hidden labour necessary to this domestic bliss. The 'smooth running' of the household indeed 'depended on a great deal of back-breaking and monotonous labour performed by domestic servants,' as Tosh reminds us.⁷⁵ Therefore, while comfort was indeed prized in the family home, it was by no means a comfort all its inhabitants enjoyed. Besides its unequal gratification, comfort was furthermore a source of anxiety for many Victorians, especially women, upon whom its charge lay. This was no small burden since, as Judith Flanders notes, 'the house, and its decoration, was an expression of the morality that resided within.'⁷⁶ The home was not only a place where the family could gather and retreat from the busy public life, but it was also a place to entertain, especially for middle-to-upper-class families who placed great importance on their socialising duties. Much scrutiny and judgement were therefore laid on people's interiors and the level of comfort in them, thus adding even more obligations which befell women. Working specifically on middle-class homes, Andrea Kaston Tange notes that 'a house defined one's class position by revealing both the ideals to which one aspired and the degree to which [...] one was able to achieve the dream of the ideologically perfect home.'⁷⁷ Through an insistence on dreams

⁷³ John Tosh, *A Man's Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 30.

⁷⁴ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 27.

⁷⁵ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, p. 13.

⁷⁶ Judith Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home: A Portrait of Domestic Life in Victorian England* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), p. 18.

⁷⁷ Andrea Kaston Tange, *Architectural Identities: Domesticity, Literature and the Victorian Middle Class* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010), p. 9.

and ideologies, Tange highlights here the dimension of artificiality attached to domesticity in the Victorian period. This artificiality, I argue, is what sensation writers sought to reveal in their novels.

The ‘proper, bourgeois, [and] domestic’ setting Patrick Brantlinger has identified in sensation novels is no more than a mere front covering the essentially ‘undomestic’ nature of these places which typically contravene the Victorian ideology of domesticity introduced above. Characters of sensation novels invariably transgress or distort the Victorian domestic vision of ‘comfort, privacy and time spent in the home’ that Tosh identifies. While Victorians viewed time spent at home as a luxury and a pleasure, these novels show how the excess of domestic dwelling time could impact people’s happiness and wellbeing. From Frederick Fairlie in Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, who sinks deeper and deeper into inanition in his highly pampered habitat, to Isabel Gilbert in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *The Doctor’s Wife*, who loses any semblance of activity as she settles into the domestic reality of her married life, sensation characters served as a warning to a Victorian audience against the glorification of idleness and the avoidance of labour as a mark of affluence. The trope of home confinement makes this caution even more poignant, as many sensation novels deal with either forced or endured confinement. Not only are cases of wrongful confinement in lunatic asylums common in sensation fiction, but so too are stories of home confinement in which protagonists are secluded at home due to physical or mental coercion.⁷⁸ This topic is not limited to sensation novels or mid-nineteenth-century fiction in any way, as American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s 1892 short story ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ exemplifies, in which a young woman suffering from nervous depression after the birth of her first child is confined at home by her physician husband and slowly loses her grasp on reality as she cannot bear to stay inactive inside the home. However, this trope is particularly powerful in sensation novels as the genre relies so heavily on the depiction of home life and its subversion.

⁷⁸ Christina Hanganu-Bresch and Carol Berkenkotter explore sensation fiction’s representations of real wrongful confinement cases in Chapter 2 of *Diagnosing Madness*, pp. 35–55. The prevalence of the wrongful confinement trope in sensation novels has also been noted by, among others, Logan, *Sensational Deviance*; Gilbert, ‘Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context’; Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins*; Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*.

Privacy is a similarly problematic notion in sensation novels, especially considering the hermeneutic logic of the novel form itself, which lays bare the life and privacy of the characters it depicts. Beyond this consideration, sensation novels offer another level of privacy infringement as they rely on the disclosure of concealed secrets, including domestic ones. This thesis therefore analyses how sensation novels upset the ideal of the private domestic sphere by depicting situations in which family or personal secrets are revealed both inside and outside the home. In her analysis of domestic crimes in the Victorian novel, Anthea Trodd noted that ‘the sensation novel promoted a belief that there was something inherently suspect about the privacy of the middle-class home, and formulated those suspicions by displaying the home as a place where secret crimes flourished.’⁷⁹ Trodd’s claim can even be extended beyond the middle-class home as privacy is equally suspect in upper-class homes, which Sir Percival’s case demonstrates in *The Woman in White*. Both Braddon and Collins further exploit this convention in the novels examined here to account for the characters’ declining mental health. In *No Name*, the revelation of the Vanstones’ unmarried life at home is what triggers the series of events leading to Magdalen’s mental breakdown, while *Lady Audley’s Secret* relies on the unstable balance between both revealing and concealing Lady Audley’s secret, as Robert Audley restricts his desire to see her secret exposed to the family circle. In both cases, as well as in most sensation novels, these secrets are either contained or revealed inside the home through the agency of characters who physically invade the home’s privacy. Eva Badowska correlates sensation novels and Sigmund Freud’s treatment of the term *Unheimliche* to discuss the unhomely nature of homes in the genre. Badowska contends that ‘Freud could have been describing the structure of the sensation novel when he said about the movement of the uncanny that it “start[s] from the homely and the domestic” and “develop[s] towards the notion of something removed from the eyes of strangers, hidden, secret.”’⁸⁰ Badowska’s Freudian approach to sensation novels is compelling, yet the present thesis does not explore possible psychoanalytic readings of these texts, and is rather interested in how sensation novels rely on the domestic while at the same time transgressing every aspect of its ideology. While

⁷⁹ Anthea Trodd, *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1989), p. 5.

⁸⁰ Eva Badowska, ‘On the Track of Things: Sensation and Modernity in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret*’, *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 37.1 (2009), 157–75 (p. 166).

scholars have already noted the significance of domesticity to the sensation genre, not least Jenny Bourne Taylor in *The Secret Theatre of Home*, as well as the role homes play in the very structure of the novels, including Stephen Bernstein's gothic exploration of Blackwater Park in *The Woman in White*, the correlation between the home and the characters' mental health has been somewhat ignored.⁸¹ Mark Jackson, who has explored the implication of the modern home 'in the distribution and manifestations of diseases,' both mental and physical, has similarly deplored the paucity of research on this topic, noting that despite the existence of 'historical and sociological studies of the cultural meanings of the home [...], the changing nature of the home and its relation to health have rarely been explored in any depth.'⁸² My hope is that this thesis will contribute to filling this gap, as it seeks to explore the nature of the Victorian home, in all its social, economic, cultural and ideological aspects, in relation to the mental health state of the Victorian population through an analysis of one of the era's most culturally relevant productions that were sensation novels.

Thesis Outline

The cultural relevance of sensation novels explains the choice of primary sources for this thesis, which centres around the close textual analysis of Wilkie Collins's and Mary

⁸¹ Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*; Stephen Bernstein, 'Reading Blackwater Park: Gothicism, Narrative, and Ideology in *The Woman In White*', *Studies in the Novel*, 25.3 (1993), 291–305. Other publications focusing on home and sensation novels include: Ilona Dobosiewicz, 'Domestic Spaces as the Scene of Crime in the Sensation Novel: *Lady Audley's Secret* and the Subversion of the Conception of the Home.', in *Exploring Space: Spatial Notions in Cultural, Literary and Language Studies; Volume 1*, ed. by Andrzej Ciuk and Katarzyna Molek-Kozakowska (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2010), pp. 95–103; Christina Flotmann, "'Monstrous Homes': How Private Spaces Shape Characters' Identities in 19th-Century Sensation Fiction', in *Monstrous Geographies: Places and Spaces of the Monstrous*, ed. by Sarah Montin and Evelyn Tsitas (Freeland: Inter-Disciplinary Press, 2013), pp. 75–95; 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; Tange, *Architectural Identities*; Grace Wetzel, 'Homeless in the Home: Invention, Instability, and Insanity in the Domestic Spaces of M.E. Braddon and L.M. Alcott', in *New Perspectives on Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, ed. by Jessica Cox (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), pp. 75–94.

⁸² Mark Jackson, *Health and the Modern Home* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2007), pp. 6–7.

Elizabeth Braddon's novels, two of the most prolific and acclaimed sensation writers. Canonical works such as *The Woman in White* (1859) and *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), as well as the less-studied *No Name* (1862) and *The Doctor's Wife* (1864), form part of this study. Collins's and Braddon's popularity in the mid-nineteenth-century literary market ensures that contemporary readers would have been familiar with their work and would have engaged with their representations of mental health. I wish to highlight here that, while studying less established sensation writers would also be of interest, I have chosen to focus on Braddon and Collins because their popularity amongst their contemporaries bestows their fictional representations of mental health with more poignancy and legitimacy, especially for twenty-first-century scholars interested in the discourse on mental health of that era. Similarly, while both *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley's Secret* have already interested a wide range of scholars in the past, unlike some of the authors' more unexplored novels, I argue here that some aspects of the novels have been overlooked by previous scholarship, such as the interesting characters of Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone, who deserve a lengthier analysis than has previously been provided. The position of home and domesticity in relation to the development of mental disorders is also of key importance in a genre that so heavily relied on lives spent at home, and has been unfortunately neglected in past scholarship, thus justifying a new approach to these canonical authors and novels. Collins's and Braddon's notorious novels are representative of how heavily sensation novels rely on this intricate relationship between home and mental health and make fitting texts to instigate such analysis which, I hope, will later be extended to less covered texts.

It is important here, I believe, to provide a brief summary of the novels, in order to help any reader unfamiliar with them to navigate this thesis and fully grasp the main arguments it advances. *The Woman in White* is made up of a collection of accounts narrated by different characters and put together to tell the story of Laura Fairlie, a young woman who has been defrauded of both her identity and fortune. The story begins with Walter Hartright, a young painter, who has been hired to teach painting to Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe, half-sisters, and to restore a collection of art belonging to Frederick Fairlie, Laura's uncle. The night before Walter goes to Limmeridge House to take his new position, he encounters a strange woman dressed in white on the outskirts of London and helps her

find her way, before learning that she has recently escaped from a lunatic asylum. The reader then follows Walter's work at Limmeridge house, as he slowly falls in love with Laura and discovers Frederick Fairlie's insufferable personality. Walter soon learns that Laura is to be married to Sir Percival Glyde, a baronet and friend of her late father, even though Laura has herself fallen in love with Walter. The story is further complicated by the presence of Anne Catherick, the woman dressed in white that Walter had met on his journey to Limmeridge house, and who seems to know and distrust Sir Percival, and to bear a striking resemblance with Laura Fairlie. In spite of all this, the marriage goes ahead, and Walter leaves for America to try and forget Laura. Laura and Marian soon realise that Sir Percival's only interest in the marriage was financial, as he has no money himself and prays on his wife's inheritance. With the help of his Italian friend—and Laura's uncle—Count Fosco, Sir Percival devises a plan to confine his wife to a lunatic asylum in place of Anne Catherick, who is conveniently dying, and to declare Anne's death as Laura Fairlie's.

Walter eventually comes back from America to discover this entire scheme. As the only one, along with Marian Halcombe, to believe Laura's claim of her real identity, he endeavours to make her story known and legally recognised. Walter discovers the long-hidden secret of Sir Percival, who had forged a church registry to include an entry of his parents' wedding which, in reality, had never taken place, therefore making him an illegitimate child with no claim to his inheritance or his title of Baronet. Anne knew his secret, hence her incarceration in the lunatic asylum by Sir Percival. Walter uses this to blackmail him, and Sir Percival dies attempting to hide the church registry. It is eventually Count Fosco who testifies in writing to the whole scheme, as Walter threatens him to reveal his former life as an Italian spy. Laura and Walter eventually marry and manage to restore Laura's identity before they inherit Limmeridge house upon Frederick Fairlie's death.

In *No Name*, Collins takes a different approach to the sensation genre, as the novel's central mystery is revealed at the very beginning. After discovering the Vanstone family, with its two grown-up daughters Magdalen and Norah, and their loving parents, readers learn, upon the tragic death of both parents, that they were never married, thus making their daughters illegitimate children, with no claim to the family name or fortune. While Norah resigns to her fate and becomes a governess, the vindictive Magdalen decides to track her

inheritance, bequeathed to her miserly and sickly cousin Noel Vanstone. Under disguise and with the help of Captain Wragge, an estranged family friend, Magdalen manages to seduce her cousin and marry him. Alerted of the true identity of his wife by his cunning housekeeper Mrs Lecount, Noel changes his will to dispossess Magdalen, hours before he dies. As a skilful actress, Magdalen then passes for a housemaid in the house of the man who now possesses her inheritance in order to discover a way to retrieve her claim to the money. She is however found out and turned out of the house, finding herself entirely destitute and both physically and mentally ailing. Magdalen is eventually found, by chance, on the brink of death in a squalid lodging house by Captain Kirke, an older man who had fallen in love with her earlier in the novel. Kirke nurses her back to life and, once restored, Magdalen learns that her sister has inherited the family money through a love union with a distant cousin.

In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon follows the typical sensation plot with a series of mysterious disappearances, attempted murders and acts of bigamy. The novel focuses on the duo created by Lucy Audley and Robert Audley. Lucy is a remarkably beautiful young woman who, after working as a governess in a small town, marries the town's wealthiest man, Sir Michael Audley, by far her elder. Not long after their union, Sir Michael's nephew visits them with his friend George Talboys who has recently returned from America to learn that his wife, whom he had deserted to make his fortune abroad, has died. Robert and George intend to spend the summer idly in Audley court, yet their plans are thwarted when George disappears. Upon investigating his friend's disappearance, Robert discovers that Lucy Audley is George's former wife, who has faked her death and remarried under an assumed name. When Robert confronts Lucy, she reveals everything she did or conspired to do to maintain the lie, including throwing her former husband down a well when he had discovered her, and setting fire to the inn where Robert Audley was staying. Lucy proclaims that she has inherited her mother's madness, telling Robert that George's desertion made her lose her mind. Desirous to shield the family from any public scandal, Robert sends Lucy to a lunatic asylum abroad where she eventually dies. The novel ends on the discovery that George had not died from his fall and had gone to America before returning to England, where he finds Robert engaged to his sister Clara.

The Doctor's Wife is essentially a rewriting of French novelist Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), in which Braddon replaces the French heroine with Isabel Gilbert, a young and naïve girl who is excessively fond of reading novels. After the desertion of her father, Isabel's family find themselves in a desperate situation and she is forced to secure a position as governess, despite her inclination for doing nothing. Soon after taking her new position, Isabel is courted by George Gilbert, a young and pragmatic country surgeon. Flattered by George's love for her, Isabel almost inadvertently accepts his marriage proposal and becomes the doctor's wife before her twentieth birthday. The young woman very soon realises that her new life will not fulfil her desire for tragic romances and adventures born of her novel reading, and slowly falls into a deep depressive state, worsened by her utter lack of activity both inside and outside the house. The couple soon meets the wealthy Lansdell family living in their neighbourhood and Isabel falls in love with the young squire Roland Lansdell who represents the Byronic hero Isabel has been longing for. As Roland does not know what to do with either his money or his time, he often meets Isabel to discuss literature and quickly falls in love with her too. However, Roland's suggestion that Isabel should leave her husband to become his mistress outrages her, leading her to repent the time she spent with him and away from her home and husband, thus bringing her unconsummated affair with Roland to an end. The novel's sensational element reveals itself when Isabel's father reappears in her life as an escaped convict seeking money from his daughter. Following a secondary plot disclosure, Roland and Isabel's father quarrel, leaving Roland almost beaten to death. As Roland lies on his deathbed, George is also taken ill after visiting a sick patient and both of them die within a few days. Now widowed, Isabel discovers she is the sole heir to Roland's fortune and decides to use it to provide for the poor.

Outside their main plot lines, all four novels share other similarities, not least in terms of their portrayal of mentally distraught characters whose misfortunes or perils are connected to their domestic situation. Chapter One of this thesis therefore first addresses the question of the significance of home in the Victorian period. Using John Ruskin's notorious description of the ideal home in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) as a marker of the Victorian ideology of domesticity, I argue that sensation homes, typically described as dangerous and treacherous places for their inhabitants, far from epitomise such ideology.

Ruskin, like many of his contemporaries, professed that home should be a place of rest, separate from the activity of public life. This is taken to excess in sensation novels, in which many characters, both female and male, find themselves isolated at home with no duties to attend to, and expose themselves to boredom. This chapter examines mid-nineteenth century gendered perceptions of idleness amongst the characters of sensation novels, illuminating men's and women's contrasting experiences of home confinement. It demonstrates that a shift had occurred at the turn of the eighteenth century in terms of social attitudes toward the leisured classes. The industrial revolution brought about a new approach to work, which was now seen as defining one's identity, or at least men's identities. This chapter considers the changes to the notions of work, masculinity and idleness in the mid-nineteenth century and contends that Braddon's and Collins's novels convincingly demonstrate that while upper-class men had the choice of either taking on a professional path or indulging in their wealth at home, women's lack of activity was, on the other hand, imposed.

Chapter Two focuses on the previously-considered characters' mental health and the popular nineteenth-century disorders they approximate. A range of male characters present clear symptoms of hypochondria, a nervous disease often associated with a lack of both physical and mental activity in the nineteenth century, while many female protagonists are described as suffering from nervousness or hysteria. In this chapter I argue that it is because of their passivity and their troubled relationship with home—established in Chapter One—that these characters develop the mental disorders mentioned above. The analysis of these characters' mental health is strengthened by non-fictional material from medical journals such as the *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, set up in 1848 or *The Asylum Journal*, as well as medical treatise by leading nineteenth-century physicians such as Edwin Lee's *A Treatise on Some Nervous Disorders* (1833) or Forbes Winslow's *On Obscure Diseases of The Brain, and Disorders of the Mind* (1860). This new historicist methodological approach offers great insight into the knowledge Victorians had on nervous disorders and provides an interesting context to Braddon's and Collins's own representations of these conditions. The chapter concludes with a discussion on how Braddon and Collins differ in their treatment of their nervous and inactive characters by examining whether or not they allow them to overcome the mental ailments

that oppress them. While Collins's characters Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone fail to conquer their idle predispositions and eventually perish at home, in the same prostrated and isolated position they were initially found in, Braddon's nervous characters Robert Audley and Roland Lansdell manage to rouse themselves and let go of their idleness. The case of Robert Audley is particularly interesting, as the young man evolves from the position of idle dilettante to that of an overly focused and determined detective. Concentrating on this character allows for a transition to Chapter Three, in which more industrious men and women are examined.

Chapter Three marks a break with the previous sections and introduces characters adapting to the new modern world, actively taking their lives into their own hands. It examines two typical sensation characters: the persevering amateur male detective and the transgressive—often criminal—active woman. This chapter reveals how differently men's and women's actions were perceived at the time; while male characters are invariably praised for their industriousness, female characters appear as foolish, dangerous, or simply 'mad.' This analysis nevertheless goes beyond the notion of the active women as 'mad' and instead explores the connection between their industriousness and their lack of any sense of real homeliness. I examine here the complex relationship these male and female characters have with the domestic realm and suggest that the socio-economic marker of property ownership had a significant impact on the characters' readiness to act. I argue that while the characters examined in chapters One and Two were all landowners who could afford idleness because of their housing security, the characters examined in this chapter are actively trying to gain such security. These characters rarely fully occupy the domestic space and I argue that the lack of any place to call home forces them to be continuously on the move, working obsessively towards their ultimate goal.

In Chapter Four, I connect the nineteenth-century national drive for industriousness and action to the Victorian popular diseases of monomania and moral insanity. The chapter introduces these obsessive disorders, explaining how monomania first appeared on the French medical scene in the early nineteenth century, quickly entered popular discourse in the Western world and took a central place in the medico-legal arena, to finally lose credibility by the end of the 1860s. A close analysis of French alienist Jean-Étienne

Dominique Esquirol's *Mental Maladies: A Treatise on Insanity* (1845) provides the necessary background to understand the development of this diagnosis, as Esquirol first coined the name *monomania* around 1810. I also introduce James Cowles Prichard's own appropriation of the disorder with his diagnosis of moral insanity and show how both terms overlapped and diverged. The notoriety of monomania and moral insanity, and the ease with which it was diagnosed in mid-nineteenth-century patients, coincided with the rising popularity of sensation novels, which appeared as the perfect vehicle to address this health concern. Monomania was in itself a sensational disease because of its possible ubiquity: anyone who expressed some form of obsession for a particular object, person, or desire, could be diagnosed as a monomaniac. This chapter examines how Braddon and Collins approached both diseases in their novels and their conception of obsessive male and female characters. While monomania and moral insanity were undoubtedly highly useful tools for sensation writers, since the notion of 'partial insanity,' common to both diseases, opened a range of narrative opportunities, I argue that Braddon and Collins did not merely discuss these ideas to suggest madness in their characters, but also to demonstrate how the characters' dire social and domestic situations induced obsessive disorders and real mental anguish.

The final chapter of this thesis, Chapter Five, examines cases of comorbidity in the characters mentioned above, especially focusing on the development of melancholia—an antiquated form of modern depression—in men and women suffering from nervous or obsessive disorders. This chapter assesses the close connection between nervous disorders, partial insanity and melancholia in nineteenth-century medical discourses and the extent to which it complicated diagnoses. It ultimately argues that both passivity and activity, driven to excess in sensation novels, are bound to lead to the development of melancholia in male and female characters. Here I suggest that rather than discussing whether or not Collins and Braddon portray their characters as mad, we should wonder whether they are not simply representing states of sadness. In this chapter, I explore the condition of melancholia and the deep unhappiness of many sensation characters, with a particular focus on suicidal ideation and its implications, both historical and social. Sensation characters confined at home, as well as those deprived of a home, recurrently express suicidal fancies, which conveys the extent of their mental anguish. Finally, I argue that, through the depiction of

characters whose mental health is so fragile, Braddon and Collins exposed the dangers of any excess of idleness or industriousness and advocated for a balanced life of rest and activity, at home and outside of it.

Chapter One

‘And we will pass hours and hours every day with these four friendly walls round us’:

Domesticated Idleness in Sensation Novels

In his lecture delivered in December 1864 in Manchester, which he later published in the manuscript *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), John Ruskin gave an impassioned description of the ideal Victorian home. This description was not concerned with the ideal shape of a house, the bricks and mortar that keep the edifice together and protect its inhabitants against the natural forces of the outside. Rather, Ruskin discussed the different elements that constituted the highly evasive notion of ‘home.’ Like many of his contemporaries, Ruskin idealised the home and saw it as the one place where Victorian standards of excellence could and should be expressed. His vision of the perfect home ran thus:

This is the true nature of home—it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home [...]. But so far as it is a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth watched over by Household Gods [...] so far it vindicates the name, and fulfils the praise, of Home.¹

Such an ode to the ideal home points to the pressure Victorians faced to build and maintain domestic perfection, and therefore homely bliss.² For middle-to-upper class families in

Collins, *The Woman in White*, p. 212.

¹John Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), ed. by Deborah Epstein Nord (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), p. 77.

² Critics of Victorian novels and domesticity have also noticed the pertinency of Ruskin's remarks on this subject, although they focus on different implications for sensation novels than my own

particular, the home was a sacred place where the family gathered, and the hardships of the outside world vanished.³ Ruskin's description of the 'true nature of home' is emblematic of the Victorian 'domestic ideology,' as Monica Cohen suggests.⁴ This, however, was only an ideology, not a reality, and few Victorians effectively managed to successfully erect such a barrier against the public world, as Andrea Kaston Tange argues.⁵ Wilkie Collins, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and most sensation writers of the 1860s pointed to the inconsistencies that existed between social expectations and reality in their novels, and Ruskin's description of the perfect home appears to contrast sharply with those represented in sensation novels. Cohen summarises the 'set of dichotomies' found in Ruskin's picture of the ideal home as 'a place of peace and not strife, rest and not labor, confidence and not anxiety, unity and not division,'⁶ all of which are at odds with the typical home found in sensation novels. In this genre, if home is a place of peace, it is only in appearances, as violence—both physical and psychological—is secretly endured in it; if it is a place of rest, it is an excessive and often imposed one, bordering on idleness; and anxiety and divisions are far more likely to be found in them than confidence and unity. It is therefore not surprising to learn that Ruskin was highly critical of the sensation genre and other popular literatures, a criticism he most poignantly voiced in his 1880 essay 'Fiction, Fair and Foul.'⁷ In sensation novels, the 'hostile society of the outer world' constantly penetrates the boundaries of the home and thus, according to Ruskin, it 'ceases to be home.' As Cohen notes, the ideal Ruskinian home 'is only "true" if it can be correlated to psychological comfort,'⁸ a comfort that is far from accessible in sensation novels. This chapter sets out to define the typical sensational home and to investigate how sensation novels subverted the Victorian ideology of home that Ruskin's treatise summarised. I am particularly interested

readings. These include Monica F. Cohen, *Professional Domesticity in the Victorian Novel: Women, Work, and Home* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Dobosiewicz, 'Domestic Spaces as the Scene of Crime'; Flotmann, "'Monstrous Homes'".

³ Tange, *Architectural Identities*, p. 12.

⁴ Cohen, *Professional Domesticity*, p. 1.

⁵ Tange, *Architectural Identities*, p. 12.

⁶ Cohen, *Professional Domesticity*, p. 1.

⁷ Jonathan Smith discusses Ruskin's critic of sensation novels in 'Domestic Hybrids: Ruskin, Victorian Fiction, and Darwin's Botany', *SEL Studies in English Literature 1500-1900*, 48.4 (2008), 861–70.

⁸ Cohen, *Professional Domesticity*, p. 1.

here in how sensation characters cope with their domestic environment and the psychological discomfort rather than comfort they experience in it.

The notion of home as a place of rest is a fundamental element in the perception of the Victorian domestic environment. The separation of the private and public spheres strengthened in the nineteenth century and meant that the home could not properly be seen as a place of business among upper-class Victorians.⁹ Because home was constantly depicted as a peaceful and quiet space, tucked away from the urgencies of social life, it was expected to be a place of rest and leisure. For many upper-class women and men, who had no domestic duties to attend to, this also meant inactivity, idleness, and stasis.¹⁰ Women were expected to sit at home and supervise the work of their servants, receive visitors, and improve skills deemed fit for their sex, such as embroidery, singing, drawing or painting.¹¹ Conduct books from the eighteenth and early nineteenth century urged women to find and demonstrate happiness in the little activities they performed at home, as did English priest Thomas Gisborne's *Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (1797).¹² While guarding against idleness of any kind, these books explicitly told women to stay at home and avoid fantasising about other forms of entertainment found outside, which were sure to corrupt them and spoil their womanly virtues.¹³ Drawing on conduct books and other treatises published in the nineteenth century about the domestic roles of men and women, this chapter explores the Victorian cultural representation of domestic idleness through the

⁹ Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*; Sarah Jordan, *The Anxieties of Idleness: Idleness in Eighteenth-Century British Literature and Culture* (Lewisburg [Pa.]: Bucknell University Press, 2003); Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850* (London: Routledge, 2003).

¹⁰ David Cannadine, *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), p. 386.

¹¹ Even middle-class women who sometimes had to work were encouraged to do so within the seclusion of their home. Sarah Ellis, who wrote influential conduct books in the mid-nineteenth century, mentions the 'art of drawing patterns for the muslin and calico printers, an occupation which appears peculiarly adapted to the female taste, and which might be carried on without the least encroachment upon the seclusion of domestic life, and the delicacy of the female character' (*The Women of England: Their Social Duties, and Domestic Habits* (London: Fisher Son & Co, 1845), p. 464.)

¹² Thomas Gisborne, *An Enquiry into the Duties of the Female Sex* (London: T. Cadell, 1801), p. 368.

¹³ James Fordyce, in his *Sermons to Young Women* (New York: I. Riley, 1809), urged parents to convince their daughters that 'the calm and rational pleasures of that home are preferable to the noise and giddy diversions usually found abroad,' p. 45.

close reading of a body of sensation novels. A range of characters from Braddon's and Collins's novels find themselves secluded at home—by choice or through somebody else's constraint—and their inactivity in the home never benefits their mental health, as Chapter Two demonstrates. These novels therefore demystify the ideal of absolute rest at home as a sustainable domestic lifestyle, and this chapter sets out to examine and contrast male and female characters' experiences of home confinement and idleness in order to bring this to light. While female characters Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White* and Isabel Gilbert in *The Doctor's Wife* are forced to stay inactive at home because of the absence of any other alternative for them, Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone, both male characters in *The Woman in White* and *No Name* respectively, deliberately choose to isolate themselves at home and shun all physical or mental activity.

Contemporary critics of sensation novels have reproached the genre's focus on the 'action, action, action' of plot over the development of characters.¹⁴ Sensation novels depend on densely packed and captivating plots in which secrets are revealed, crimes occur and characters act recklessly. Yet, despite such fiction clearly seeking to intrigue readers, the characters in these novels typically endure confinement, idleness and boredom. How, then, can we make sense of boredom in the context of sensation literature? What does Laura and Frederick Fairlie's utter lack of action bring to the narration of *The Woman in White*? Why did Mary Elizabeth Braddon decide to rewrite Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* about a bored French middle-class housewife, as a sensation novel, and most importantly, does this kind of translation into another genre work? Even then, boredom and idleness are not limited to the home sphere as the non-domesticated characters Roland Lansdell in *The Doctor's Wife* and Robert Audley in *Lady Audley's Secret* reveal. In order to efficiently explore the origins and consequences of home confinement and idleness on sensation characters, the sensational home will here be defined to explore how it stood against the normative concept of the home in the Victorian period.

Home, a Shelter against all Injury, Terror, and Doubt?

¹⁴ Mansel, 'Sensation Novels', p. 486.

In Mary Elizabeth Braddon's and Wilkie Collins's novels, every character has a different conception of and relationship to home. For some, like Roland Lansdell, it is an ideal to aspire to, a wholesome entity in which individuals eventually find happiness. For others, like Laura Fairlie, home is only one specific house which can never be replaced. For others still, home is only a piece of property, a 'bargain' as Noel Vanstone proudly says in *No Name*. It is therefore difficult to define the typical home in sensation novels. What transpires, however, is that sensation characters never attain the Ruskinian ideology of home, regardless of their efforts to do so. It is not a 'shelter, [...] from all injury, [...] all terror, doubt, and division'¹⁵ since these elements constantly penetrate the domestic realm to harm its inhabitants. Collins's *The Woman in White* is a particularly striking example of this. The first home the reader is introduced to, Limmeridge House, has all the appearances of the perfect aristocratic family home in which two sisters live in perfect harmony, watched over by the family patriarch, Frederick Fairlie. In reality, it is a secluded dwelling place in which outsiders are seldom welcome and inhabitants rarely interact with each other. Marian Halcombe, Laura Fairlie's half-sister, does not draw a particularly appealing picture of Limmeridge House herself when she first welcomes Walter Hartright, the drawing master, into it, explaining to him:

My uncle, Mr. Fairlie, never joins us at any of our meals: he is an invalid, and keeps bachelor state in his own apartments. There is nobody else in the house but me. Two young ladies have been staying here, but they went away yesterday, in despair; and no wonder. (TWW: 35)

Yet, Limmeridge House does appear to her half-sister Laura as the 'vestal temple' described by Ruskin. It is the one place where Laura feels safe, happy, and taken care of by her sister. The seclusion and tranquillity of the house suit her temper and she feels soothed by the childhood memories she has of it. This is particularly evident when she leaves Limmeridge House and moves into her husband's property, Blackwater Park. In this new house, Laura is distressed by the loss of her sense of homeliness. She communicates to her sister, who comes to live with her, her wish to find in this new property the little things that made Limmeridge House a real home. After ensuring that Marian's possessions

¹⁵ Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 77.

are settled in her room, including her 'dear-little-shabby-old-satin-wood book-case' (*TWW*: 212), Laura revels in the idea of making her sister's bedroom her own little island of peace and safety, a place which, as she says, 'is so like home again' (*TWW*: 212). More work is needed, however, to secure her sense of homeliness, and Laura asks her sister 'how can we make it more like home still? I will put my father's portrait in your room instead of in mine—and I will keep all my little treasures from Limmeridge here' (*TWW*: 212). For Laura to be happy, Blackwater Park needs to be more than a house; it needs to be home.

The first description we receive of Blackwater Park informs us that it will hardly be easy for the two sisters to ever feel at home there. As Marian says when she arrives, the house 'is the exact opposite of Limmeridge' (*TWW*: 197). Her first description of it discloses the claustrophobic impression she experiences, as she explains that 'the house is situated on a dead flat, and seems to be shut in—almost suffocated, to my north-country notions, by trees' (*TWW*: 197). Marian later adds that 'daylight confirmed the impression which I had felt the night before, of there being too many trees at Blackwater. The house is stifled by them' (*TWW*: 204). This feeling of suffocation is worsened by their seclusion within the home, as the sisters are eventually restricted to one specific room, which Laura tries to turn into a refuge, the only place in which she is allowed to reminisce on the happy times of her childhood and forget about her dreadful marriage to Sir Percival. Her sister's room becomes the shelter imagined by Ruskin, in which she is united with her sister and cannot be hurt. Laura confidently tells her sister 'we will pass hours and hours every day with these four friendly walls round us' (*TWW*: 212), as if she were hoping to recreate her Limmeridge home within the microcosm of her sister's bedroom. The feeling of oppressive entrapment communicated by the image of the four walls surrounding the two sisters is counterbalanced by the word 'friendly,' supposed to suggest domestic happiness. It is nevertheless quickly apparent that these walls are far from 'friendly' and are rather part of the larger entity that is Blackwater Park, a house described early on as daunting, unhomely and secluded. Instead of communicating a desired sense of security, these 'four friendly walls,' as Laura calls them, rather 'attest to the generally claustral quality of life in the mansion.'¹⁶ Not only are Laura's apartments no refuge against her abusive husband, they

¹⁶ Bernstein, 'Reading Blackwater Park', p. 293.

actually become a prison in which he entraps her. During one of Sir Percival's worst fits of anger, Laura is held captive in her own bedroom. In this scene, Marian tries to defend her sister and asks Sir Percival:

‘Am I to understand, Sir Percival, that your wife's room is a prison, and that your housemaid is the gaoler who keeps it?’

‘Yes, that is what you are to understand,’ he answered. ‘Take care my gaoler hasn't got double duty to do—take care your room is not a prison too.’ (TWW: 293)

Even though Laura is quickly released from captivity, this traumatic experience has a long-lasting impact on her mental state. As I will discuss in Chapter Two, this episode resonates with the hardships she meets later in the novel when, mistaken as her lookalike Anne Catherick, she is placed in a mental asylum. As a result of her internment, Laura's mental health deteriorates and this event interrogates ‘any stable division between the resonances of “home” and “asylum” as places of safety and danger,’ as Jenny Bourne Taylor argues.¹⁷

The psychological violence that Laura meets in her domestic life at Blackwater Park coalesces with the one she experiences in the asylum, which reveals the nature of the sensational home as a place where danger and deceit can and will occur. As nineteenth-century writers and critics such as Henry James identified, what characterised sensation novels was their determination to take the sensational and thrilling elements of other genres, especially the Gothic, out of the haunted castles and ruins and directly into the home, which was ‘infinitely the more terrible.’¹⁸ Although Collins appears to have intentionally attributed elements of the Gothic to his descriptions of Blackwater Park,¹⁹ it remains in appearance a proper bourgeois home in which such terrors are not supposed to take place. The scene described above would not have been as sensational if Laura Fairlie had been imprisoned in an abandoned ruined castle's gaol, as it would have pertained to the remote, unfamiliar setting of such places. ‘Instead of removing its readers from their daily lives to distant or exotic locales,’ Winifred Hughes notes, ‘the sensation novel

¹⁷ Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, p. 99.

¹⁸ Henry James, ‘Miss Braddon’, *Nation*, 1.19 (1865), 593–94 (p. 593).

¹⁹ Bernstein, ‘Reading Blackwater Park’.

brought them closer to grim reality by bringing them closer to home and to themselves.’²⁰ The reality of Laura’s predicament resonated with many Victorians’ fantasies about what took place behind their neighbours’ closed doors. Such scenes can be found in most sensation novels, including the ones studied in this thesis. In *No Name*, Noel Vanstone finds poison in his wife’s cupboards after discovering that she misled him about her identity. While his wife did not intend on using the laudanum on her husband, the doubt is instilled in him and forces him to flee his home immediately. In *Lady Audley’s Secret*, the very presence of Lucy Audley in her new husband’s house introduces danger and violence into the domestic environment. It appears evident that even a paragon of Victorian respectability and manhood as Sir Michael Audley is incapable of securing ‘the sanctity of his home against the intrusion of crime and madness.’²¹ Hughes further develops this issue by noting that ‘the implications of this are devastating: the outward semblance of the domestic ideal may prove worse than empty.’²² Isabel Gilbert in *The Doctor’s Wife* feels the emptiness of the domestic ideal as soon as she enters her husband’s house. Although the heroine does not meet any physical violence there, it is still a dangerous and upsetting space in which she must combat the influence of loneliness and isolation on her mental state.

Braddon’s *The Doctor’s Wife* exemplifies how distant the kinds of homes found in sensation novels are from the Ruskinian ideal of them, albeit in a different way than *The Woman in White* does, where it is synonymous with physical violence, deceit and mystery. In Braddon’s novel, home is a place of despair and solitude. Isabel’s husband’s views on matrimony and domestic bliss perfectly correspond to the Victorian ideals of it, in which everything revolved around the presence of women in the house.²³ Braddon writes that:

He loved this young woman, and believed in her, and was ready to bring her to his simple home whenever she pleased to come thither; and had already pictured her sitting

²⁰ Winifred Hughes, ‘The Sensation Novel’, in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 260–79 (p. 261).

²¹ Winifred Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 45.

²² Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, p. 45.

²³ Gisborne writes in *An Enquiry*, that ‘home is the center round which the influence of every married woman is principally accumulated. It is there that she will naturally be known and respected the most’ p. 305.

opposite to him in the little parlour, making weak tea for him in a Britannia-metal teapot, sewing commonplace buttons upon his commonplace shirts, [...] Yes; George pictured Miss Sleaford the heroine of such a domestic story as this, and had no power to divine that there was any incongruity in the fancy; no fineness of ear to discover the dissonant interval between the heroine and the story. (TDW: 78)

George is unable to see any issue in the picture he has drawn for himself because this was precisely the image put forth by Victorian society of the ideal domestic situation. Although Isabel often voices her unhappiness at home, George never seems to hear the disharmony in their marriage. The musical analogy present in the passage quoted above is recurrent in the novel, as the narrator uses it again when comparing George's disinterest in poetry to another domestic argument:

I have heard of a lady who was an exquisite musician, and who, in the dusky twilight of a honeymoon evening, played to her husband,—played as some women play, pouring out all her soul upon the keys of the piano, breathing her finest and purest thoughts in one of Beethoven's sublime sonatas.

“That's a very pretty tune,” said the husband, complacently.

She was a proud reserved woman, and she closed the piano without a word of complaint or disdain; but she lived to be old, and she never touched the keys again. (TDW: 122)

This loss of music making inside the home, something commonly performed by women, damages the chances for domestic harmony. Victorian morality and propriety conceived women as embodying the heart of the domestic environment, conferring warmth and stability to the home.²⁴ George readily subscribes to the Victorian practice that ‘placed the onus on women to carry out the emotional and moral labour necessary to create and maintain the ideal home.’²⁵ As Mike Hepworth argues, women's ultimate role was ‘to

²⁴ Caroline Austin-Bolt, ‘Sarah Ellis's *The Women of England*: Domestic Happiness and Gender Performance’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 37.3 (2015), 183–95 (p. 183).

²⁵ Mike Hepworth, ‘Privacy, Security and Respectability: The Ideal Victorian Home’, in *Ideal Homes? : Social Change and the Experience of the Home*, ed. by Tony Chapman and Jennifer Lorna Hockey (London: Routledge, 2002), pp. 17–29 (p. 23).

transform the image into reality.’²⁶ The domestic story George envisions is so deeply rooted in his mind that it seems impossible to him that anyone else should expect or hope for a different one. After a few months of marriage, George’s domestic arrangement in which his pretty wife smiles at him and waits patiently for him to come back home, is so satisfying to him that ‘if any one had ever said that such a marriage as this in any way fell short of perfect and entire union, Mr. Gilbert would have smiled upon that person as on a harmless madman’ (*TDW*: 186).

Unfortunately, Isabel does not live up to the domestic story imagined by her husband. As a highly romantic and impressionable young woman, Isabel has a very different picture of domestic life than that of her husband, and reality soon disappoints. When she first enters her husband’s house, Isabel’s dismay is clear: “‘It is so miserable!’” she sobbed; “‘it all seems so miserable!’” (*TDW*: 112). Isabel’s complete inability to transform the image of her own ideal home into a reality makes it impossible for her to feel any sense of homeliness in her new house.

Home! she shuddered at the simple monosyllable which it is the special glory of our language to possess. The word is very beautiful, no doubt; especially so to a wealthy country magnate,—happy owner of a grand old English mansion. [...]

But for Mrs. Gilbert “home” meant a square-built house in a dusty lane, and was never likely to mean anything better or brighter. (*TDW*: 237)

The Victorian dream of building the perfect domestic environment and finding in one’s home the promise of happiness and security is countered by the reality of an ill-advised marriage. George’s inflexible resolution to keep his ancestral home unaltered and to oppose any new purchase for it prevents Isabel from turning this house into her home. Ruskin’s warning that home ‘ceases to be home’ whenever husband or wife allows ‘the anxieties of the outer life [to] penetrate into it, the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world [...] to cross [its] threshold’²⁷ is here verified. As the narrator writes, George ‘had married this girl because she was unlike other women; and now that

²⁶ Hepworth, ‘Privacy, Security and Respectability’ p. 23.

²⁷ Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 77.

she was his own property, he set himself conscientiously to work to smooth her into the most ordinary semblance of every-day womanhood' (TDW: 116). Such inconsistency, along with his avarice, creates a set of anxieties that Isabel cannot overcome. Jennifer Conary shows that George's 'failure to understand Isabel's need to beautify her new home causes her to give up on improving her married life.'²⁸ Her sense of hopelessness is worsened by the weight of the Victorian ideology of domesticity and her own awareness of what is expected of her:

This unhappy girl felt a blank despair as she thought of her commonplace home,—her home for ever and ever,—unbrightened by a hope, unsanctified by a memory; her home, in which she had a comfortable shelter, and enough to eat and to drink, and decent garments with which to cover herself; and where, had she been a good or a sensible young woman, she ought of course to have been happy. (TDW: 135)

Not only is the sensational home a place of insecurity, as Collins shows in *The Woman in White*, but it is also a place filled with anxiety and doubt, as its inhabitants struggle to find happiness in it, while everything else reminds them that they ought, indeed, to be happy.

Home, a Shelter against Divisions?

The isolation felt by Isabel in her own house is another feature common to all domestic environments in sensation novels. Ruskin urged people to cast away any form of division within the home, but more often than not, the inhabitants of sensational homes are deeply disunited. Frederick Fairlie, Laura's uncle in *The Woman in White*, is a prime example of domestic isolation as the old bachelor never leaves his house or chambers. Unlike Laura and Marian who are trapped and secluded at Blackwater Park because, as women, they have no recourse to leave it,²⁹ Frederick's home confinement is entirely voluntary. As

²⁸ Jennifer Conary, 'Never Great, Only Popular: Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* and the Literary Marketplace', *Studies in the Novel*, 46.4 (2014), 423–43 (p. 17).

²⁹ As Marian explains, 'We two women had neither father nor brother to come to the house and take our parts. There was no choice but to write those two doubtful letters, or to put Laura in the wrong and myself in the wrong, and to make all peaceable negotiation in the future impossible by secretly escaping from Blackwater Park. Nothing but the most imminent personal peril could justify our taking that second course.' (TWW: 306)

Marian explains to Walter, ‘Mr. Fairlie, never joins us at any of our meals: he is an invalid, and keeps bachelor state in his own apartments’ (TWW: 35). We are told that ‘the state of his health still obliged him to remain a solitary prisoner in his own room’ (TWW: 110), a common situation in the nineteenth century for people deemed ‘invalids,’³⁰ yet Frederick Fairlie’s illness is often exaggerated, and his domestic seclusion seems to perfectly satisfy him, as I discuss later in this chapter. Frederick Fairlie, the ‘helpless sufferer, confined to his room’ (TWW: 129) who ‘considerately [remained] single’ (TWW: 345), laments that ‘it is the grand misfortune of [his] life that nobody will let [him] alone’ (TWW: 338). His unwillingness to create a sense of unison within his home or to interact with his nieces makes it impossible for them to fulfil the model of ideal domesticity set by Victorian society. As the patriarch in this household, Frederick Fairlie is supposed to ensure the safety of his family and assume the responsibilities of his role, but as Marian tells Walter, he cannot be depended on. Marian is fully aware of the old man’s hatred of duty and asks Walter for his assistance because ‘Mr. Fairlie, in his state of health and with his horror of difficulties and mysteries of all kinds, is not to be thought of’ (TWW: 78). Frederick therefore appears unsuccessful both as the patriarch of the house and the character of a sensation novel because of his failure to take responsibility for the care of the women under his tutelage and his inability to withstand the mysteries typically found in sensation novels. Frederick always looks for ways to be discharged of all domestic or social responsibilities and proudly recognises: ‘I invariably let things stop as they are’ (TWW: 344. Emphasis in original text). As a result, Marian and Laura are often unprotected and exposed to the hardships of the outer world, something that was incompatible with the ideal domestic environment. Both Limmeridge House, ‘this great lonely house’ (TWW: 187), and Blackwater Park therefore cannot conform to the image of the ideal Victorian home. When discussing the question of settings in *The Woman in White*, ‘what is most important,’ Stephen Bernstein notes, ‘is the oppressive claustral interdependence of the novel’s

³⁰ For a more comprehensive account of the sickroom scene and its centrality in the discourse on Victorian domesticity, see Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); and Miriam Bailin, *The Sickroom in Victorian Fiction: The Art of Being Ill* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

numerous locations.’³¹ This oppression is both physical and psychological in nature and severely impacts the characters’ mental health, as I discuss in Chapter Two.

If the sensational home fails to be a shelter against injury and terror, as *The Woman in White* exemplifies, or division and anxiety, as *The Doctor’s Wife* suggests, it also fails to offer its inhabitants shelter against doubt and secrecy. While Ruskin declared that home ‘ceased to be home’ if doubt and secrecy entered through its doors, these elements are often found to be the foundation of any domestic environment in Braddon’s novels. While Henry James notoriously wrote that ‘to Mr. Collins belongs the credit of having introduced into fiction those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries which are at our own doors,’ he also credited Braddon with ‘a skilful combination of bigamy, arson, murder, and insanity,’ all of which are found in the domestic spaces of *Lady Audley’s Secret*.³² The novel starts with a lengthy description of its main setting, Audley Court, and within the first two pages, the word ‘secret’ appears three times, as though Braddon was already giving us the keys to the plot. Although the house is said to be a ‘glorious old place [in which people yearned] to have done with life, and to stay there forever’ (*LAS*: 8), it is also described as inhospitable because of the secrets it holds. Braddon writes that ‘the principal door was squeezed into a corner of a turret at one angle of the building, as if it were in hiding from dangerous visitors, and wished to keep itself a secret’ (*LAS*: 8). We also learn about rooms concealed in the house and the ‘lime-tree walk; an avenue so shaded from the sun and sky [...] that it seemed a chosen place for secret meetings or for stolen interviews; a place in which a conspiracy might have been planned’ (*LAS*: 9). These places seem to prefigure some of the most riveting scenes in the novel and warn the reader that Audley Court is not the ideal home it appears to be, but rather typically sensational. The door ‘hiding from dangerous visitors’ later stands in the way of Robert Audley and his friend George Talboys from entering the house and meeting Lady Audley, as the young woman wishes to stay hidden from their sight. The secret rooms also become central to the revelation of the mystery of Lady Audley’s identity, as it is through a secret passage that Robert and George manage to access Lady Audley’s locked bedroom and see her portrait. Finally, the lime-tree walk becomes

³¹ Bernstein, ‘Reading Blackwater Park’, p. 301.

³² James, ‘Miss Braddon’, p. 593.

the place where she secretly meets her former husband, and the scene of her most shocking crime: the attempted murder of George Talboys. By hinting at the centrality of dissimulations so early on in the novel, Braddon confirms that ‘many [sensation novels] imply by their very structures that domestic tranquillity conceals heinous desires and deeds.’³³ Just as the picturesque and noble outward aspect of Audley Court acts as a veil, hiding its potential for danger and coyness, Lady Audley’s extreme beauty allows her to hide the secrecy of her past behind the mystery of her perfect features. As Braddon writes, ‘no one knew anything of her’ (LAS: 10) when she arrived in the neighbourhood of Audley Court as a governess, but because she was ‘blessed with that magic power of fascination, by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile’ (LAS: 11), no one doubted the few references she brought with her and ‘everyone loved, admired, and praised her’ (LAS: 11). It is therefore not only the characters’ makeup but also the ‘renderings of space’ which ‘constitute a great part of the novel’s subversiveness.’³⁴

Lady Audley’s menacing intrusion into her new husband’s house seems to spoil its domestic essence. Before marrying her, Sir Michael lived in simple domestic happiness with his daughter Alicia and Lady Audley’s presence in their home starts to upset this homely balance even before any of her secrets are revealed. Alicia ‘reigned supreme’ in her father’s house before the arrival of her stepmother and loses her supremacy in the house thereafter, ‘so the baronet’s daughter [...] spent most of her time out of doors’ (LAS: 10). Chased out of her own home, Alicia becomes resentful and upsets the tranquillity that used to reign at Audley Court. Robert Audley, the main investigator in his friend George’s disappearance, is also affected by the presence of his uncle’s new wife in the house. The vacillating young man, living at the barristers’ quarters in Fig Tree Court, lacks a sense of domestic belonging, which he can only occasionally find at Audley Court. When visiting his uncle, he expresses his wish to stay there as long as possible and Sir Michael tells him ‘stay, my dear Bob, as long as ever you like. I have no son, and you stand to me in the place of one. Make [...] the Court your home as long as you live’ (LAS: 108). However, Robert

³³ Patrick Brantlinger, ‘What Is “Sensational” About the “Sensation Novel”?’ *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 37.1 (1982), 1–28 (p. 3).

³⁴ Flotmann, ‘Monstrous Homes,’ p. 81 Flotmann’s interpretation of monstrous spaces in sensation novel, though short, offers excellent insights into these novels, arguing that Audley Court’s ‘failure of domestic ideology reigns paramount in the novel.’ (p.83).

is soon deprived of this unique domestic pleasure because of Lady Audley's actions and the shame and sorrowfulness she has brought onto the house. After she has been secretly sent to the asylum, Robert reflects on the future of Audley Court:

He [...] wondered at the change in that old house which, until the day of his friend's disappearance, had been so pleasant a home for all who sheltered beneath its hospitable roof. He sat brooding over the desolate hearth, and trying to decide upon what must be done in this sudden crisis. (LAS: 312)

Robert's insistence on the fading and desolate hearth reminds us that 'because of its traditional sacred associations, the fireplace played a special role in the symbolic representation of the ideal home'³⁵ and beyond that, of the ideal wife. Grace Russo Bullaro also identifies the hearth as an 'iconically Victorian image that had a tremendous impact both as mirror and reflection of its society,' and was central in the doctrine of the separation of spheres.³⁶ The 'Angel of the Hearth', as Russo Bullaro writes, was a 'Madonna-like wife and mother from whom all morality sprang; who was to be a spiritual guide, light of the home and self-sacrificing martyr.'³⁷ Having lost all of these virtues, Lady Audley tarnishes the ideology of the hearth as a source of warmth and comfort and the home itself becomes an inhospitable empty vessel. Visibly abandoned by the 'Household Gods,' Audley Court is no longer 'a sacred place, a vestal temple, a temple of the hearth' as Ruskin claimed it should be.³⁸ As Winifred Hughes notes, 'the one island of security and certitude remaining in a tumultuous age has been invaded and despoiled' because 'social and moral chaos has spread even to the inner sanctum, infecting the emblem of domesticity.'³⁹ Hughes's image of a disease spreading and infecting the home as body echoes nineteenth-century treatises on mental illnesses, such as psychiatrist Forbes Winslow's 1856 article, in which he writes:

³⁵ Hepworth, 'Privacy, Security and Respectability', p. 25.

³⁶ Grace Russo Bullaro, 'Salvatore Morelli, John Stuart Mill and the Victorian "Angel of the Hearth" Feminine Role Paradigm', *Forum Italicum*, 39.1 (2005), 157–66 (p. 157).

³⁷ Bullaro, 'Salvatore Morelli, John Stuart Mill and the Victorian "Angel of the Hearth" Feminine Role Paradigm', p. 157.

³⁸ Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 77.

³⁹ Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, p. 45.

How much of the bitterness, misery, and wretchedness so often witnessed in the bosom of families arises from concealed and undetected mental alienation! How often do we witness ruin, beggary, disgrace, and death result from such unrecognised morbid mental conditions! It is the canker worm gnawing at the vitals, and undermining the happiness of many a domestic hearth.⁴⁰

Lady Audley's self-diagnosed insanity might be at the root of her inability to maintain a stable home environment, something I will investigate in the second part of this thesis.

Ultimately, that which best defines the true nature of home in sensation novels, one could argue, is its deceptiveness. If home is 'only "true" if it can be correlated to psychological comfort'⁴¹ as mentioned before, the sensational home can never be so because its inhabitants are constantly challenged psychologically and find no comfort in their domestic environments. Not only is home a place of physical and psychological danger, in which secrets are kept and families torn apart, but it also invariably relies on deception. As previously mentioned, Sir Michael's domestic happiness at Audley Court is quickly revealed to have been based on lies and concealments, as Lady Audley was still married to George Talboys and had committed bigamy in marrying Sir Michael. The myth of domestic perfection feigned at Audley Court is therefore debunked and, because it is the only domestic space described in the novel, it suggests that no such thing as a candid home exists. In *The Doctor's Wife*, George Gilbert is entirely oblivious to Isabel's misery at home and her potentially adulterous flirtation with the country-squire Roland Lansdell. On his deathbed, George repeatedly affirms that Isabel has been a 'good wife,' as the young surgeon never manages to dissociate his fantasy of the ideal wife from the reality of Isabel's own personality. The narrator writes that 'he died supremely peaceful in the consciousness of having done his duty [...] and never, throughout his simple life, had one pang of doubt or jealousy tortured his breast' (*TDW*: 368). The domestic bliss in which George thought he and his wife were living was a delusion, common to many sensational plots. Home is also rooted in lies in *The Woman in White*. Not only did Sir Percival disguise his true

⁴⁰ Forbes Winslow, 'On Some Unrecognised Forms of Mental Disorder', *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 9.1 (1856), 82–90 (p. 84).

⁴¹ Cohen, *Professional Domesticity*, p. 1.

personality before marrying Laura, portraying himself as a caring and considerate suitor, but he also concealed the reality of his lineage. Walter Hartright's investigation into Sir Percival's past eventually reveals that his parents were never married, making him unfit to receive his parents' inheritance or social status. Sir Percival's falsification of the marriage register renders his home, Blackwater Park, a complete forgery and a lie. Out of all the novels studied here, however, Collins's *No Name* remains the most compelling demonstration of the deceitful nature of sensational homes.

The main theme in *No Name* is that of the injustice of the British laws on inheritance. The title of the novel hints at the extent of the damages caused by these laws on illegitimate children, who stand to lose everything, including their very names and identities. Collins started this discussion in *The Woman in White* with Sir Percival's criminal attempts to hide his illegitimacy, but it is in *No Name* that he fully engages with this issue. Collins does not directly discuss the injustice of British laws—not even in his preface—, yet the words of the family solicitor Mr Pendrill, who declares: 'I am far from defending the law of England as it affects illegitimate offspring [...] It visits the sins of the parents on the children' (NN: 110), may echo Collins's own thoughts on the matter.⁴² As children's illegitimacy was customarily kept secret from society, its presence in sensation novels consequently renders the home a place of concealment. According to Vicky Simpson, *No Name* 'carefully juxtaposes both "real" and "fictional" families'⁴³ but I would argue that there are no such things as 'real' families in the novel, nor any real homes. The novel rather stands as a falsification of the Victorian myth of the ideal homestead. *No Name* opens with a description of the Vanstone family as living in a harmonious domestic situation in Combe-Raven, with loving parents at the head of the household, free-spirited daughters and a beloved governess.⁴⁴ The frivolous blissfulness in which the whole family lives is the perfect embodiment of the ideal home described by Ruskin, and it is all the

⁴² Dougal B. Maceachen, 'Wilkie Collins and British Law', *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, 5.2 (1950), 121–39 (p. 123).

⁴³ Vicky Simpson, 'Selective Affinities: Non-Normative Families in Wilkie Collins's *No Name*', *Victorian Review*, 39.2 (2013), 115–28 (p. 115).

⁴⁴ Sundeep Bisla writes that '*No Name* begins with an illegitimate "happy home"' in 'Over-Doing Things with Words in 1862: Pretense and Plain Truth in Wilkie Collins's *No Name*', *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 38.1 (2010), 1–19 (p. 2).

more disheartening to witness the downfall of the Vanstone family. When the secret of the parents' unwedded relationship is revealed, Mr Pendrill implores the governess Miss Garth to 'remember so tenderly [...] that happy home existence' (NN: 102) in which the couple lived despite their lifelong lie to the family. Victorian readers could only be critical of the Vanstone's reckless decision to build a household without being married, regardless of Mr Pendrill's lengthy explanation as to Mr Vanstone's motives.⁴⁵ The utter destruction of the Vanstone homestead, which follows a series of events—Mr Vanstone's death in a train accident, his wife's illness caused by the shock of this news and her ultimate death, and the revelation that his will left his daughters unprovided for—originated in their sin of illegitimacy. As Mr Pendrill explains, 'the accident of their father having been married, when he first met with their mother, has made them the outcasts of the whole social community' and has meant that 'Mr. Vanstone's daughters are Nobody's Children' (NN: 109). Now belonging to their ungrateful uncle Michael Vanstone, Combe-Raven has lost its status as a home, and is now a mere house, a clear distinction made by Miss Garth, declaring 'when they leave this house, they leave it with me. My home is their home, and my bread is their bread' (NN: 129). This new figurative home—since Miss Garth does not really have a residence of her own—might reveal itself to be the only real home in the novel, as all others fail to uphold the values of home. When Magdalen leaves her sister and Miss Garth to retrieve her inheritance, she meets Captain Wragge, the 'moral agriculturist [...] who cultivates the field of human sympathy' (NN: 169) and together they create the illusion of a happy family, using Captain Wragge's list of '*Skins To Jump Into*' (NN: 263. Emphasis in original text). Wragge explains to Magdalen that 'the Skin which will exactly fit us originally clothed the bodies of a family named Bygrave' (NN: 263), giving her details on their lives, and 'specimens of my intimate knowledge of our new family Skin' (NN: 263) to guard against inquiries made about their household at North Shingles Villa in Aldborough. This disguise makes a mockery of the notion of Victorian family life as

⁴⁵ Henry Mansel was very critical of Collins's stance in the matter and talked of the Vanstones as an 'erring couple,' and of Andrew Vanstone, who was already married when he met Magdalen's and Norah's mother, as a 'felon' (Mansel, 'Sensation Novels', p. 496.). As Maceachen writes in 'Wilkie Collins and British Law', Collins's hostility towards the laws of his country are quite clear in the novel. His own personal life and refusal to marry either of his lovers Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd also testifies to his distrust of the marriage institution and his sympathy towards individuals such as Andrew Vanstone.

Captain Wragge literally unearths and steals the identity of a respectable family to act as his own. Rather than being a home, North Shingles Villa remains a stage on which, each morning, its three occupants dress up in their 'new family skin' and act the role of a respectable household.

The Bygraves are not the only ones to feign respectability and unity, as Noel Vanstone and his housekeeper Mrs Lecount also emerge as skilful players in this game. As a multiple property owner, all inherited from his late father, Noel Vanstone envisions a home in terms of its monetary value and sturdiness. Noel Vanstone and Lecount appear to be living in an affectionate domestic relationship, yet it is undoubtedly money that 'maintains the relationship between the miserly Noel Vanstone and his maternal but avaricious housekeeper,' as Vicky Simpson argues, since 'each believes the other is a financial investment of sorts.'⁴⁶ Noel Vanstone views his housekeeper as a 'bargain' (NN: 230) because of her unequalled efficiency and cheap maintenance, while Mrs Lecount patiently waits for the provision Noel is bound to award her when she retires from his services. Effectively, both of them are 'willing to live their lives as a charade of a family in a continuous power struggle resulting from fear of financial repercussions.'⁴⁷ Their affection for each other is constantly feigned and the web of lies and deceptions that Captain Wragge cleverly—and easily—weaves between them renders it impossible for Noel and Mrs Lecount to have a genuine home. It is only to the outsider gaze that their household and homely life may appear real. At the most crucial moment in Noel's life, after discovering the treachery of his wife, Lecount assiduously cares for him—to ensure her provision is stated in his will—and in his helpless state Noel forgets himself in this domestic performance:

He took her hand with a confidential tenderness, and held it in his while the talk went on. A stranger, looking in through the window, would have taken them for mother and son, and would have thought to himself: 'What a happy home!' (NN: 475)

The 'happy home' can never be more than an illusion in *No Name* as the novel functions as a stage on which home is performed but never truly lived. This fallacy is powerfully

⁴⁶ Simpson, 'Selective Affinities', p. 122.

⁴⁷ Simpson, 'Selective Affinities', p. 123.

promoted throughout the novel, especially in Magdalen's staged performances of 'a Young Lady at Home' (NN: 191) which can never be more than an act, as Magdalen fails to feel 'at home' anywhere.

Jenny Bourne Taylor encapsulates the main components of the sensational home in the title of her monumental work on sensation novels *In the Secret Theatre of Home* (1988). This is the true nature of home in sensation novels: it is a place of secrecy and concealment, in which characters are beset by physical and psychological danger and doubt, while having to perform the role of happy families, wives and husbands. Sundeep Bisla argues that 'far from attempting to accommodate a newly emergent popular Victorian domestic taste [Collins] is actually covertly attacking that taste at its very foundations'⁴⁸ and the very foundations of Victorian domesticity lay in its ideology of the perfect home. While Bisla is here only addressing the case of Collins's *No Name*, her assertion can be extended to all the novels studied in this thesis, and most other sensation novels beyond them. Surprisingly, both Braddon and Collins leave some space for optimism at the end of their novels, suggesting that genuine domestic happiness might be found at home. *The Woman in White* ends on the joyous family picture of Walter, Laura, and their son inheriting Limmeridge House, in which they have the potential to fulfil the typical Victorian ideal of domesticity. *No Name* sees its heroine redeemed and married to a loving and strong man, while her sister extraordinarily inherits their parents' wealth through marrying the man she loves, and *Lady Audley's Secret* concludes on the promise of Robert Audley's success as a reformed barrister, husband and father. Braddon asks us not to 'take objection to [her] story because the end of it leaves the good people all happy and at peace' (LAS: 380) but it remains to be proven that they will indeed be happy and at peace in those sensational homes. Only *The Doctor's Wife* ends with no promise of a happy home life. Both George and Roland die while Isabel retires with her newly-found fortune and starts philanthropical work. This can be explained, I argue, by Isabel's inability to overcome her domestic idleness, unlike the other characters mentioned above. Her passivity ultimately makes it impossible for her to escape the sensational home and its dangers.

⁴⁸ Bisla, 'Over-Doing Things with Words in 1862', p. 1.

Sensational Idleness

The Ruskinian ideology of home envisioned it as a place of rest, clearly cut off from the busy world of the public sphere. Inside the house, men and women were supposed to enjoy a time of relaxation and leisure whilst always safeguarding the homestead against the evils of idleness. While sensational novels may seem to uphold such conventional value of the Victorian domestic ideal, readers quickly discover that it is yet another opportunity for transgression. In Braddon's and Collins's novels, rest at home is often excessive and a source of anxiety and psychological violence for both male and female characters. As mentioned above, Laura Fairlie's enthusiastic declaration to her sister that they 'will pass hours and hours every day with these four friendly walls round [them]' (TWW: 212) at Blackwater Park is misguided, as these four walls will prove to be anything but friendly. Regardless of what Laura's bedroom is though—refuge or prison—she will indeed 'pass hours and hours every day' in it because such is the lot of her sex. The implications of passivity and even idleness present in this sentence are telling: Laura has accepted the inactive lifestyle that is going to be hers, and seems content with it. Such is also the case of her uncle Frederick Fairlie, whose seclusion within the 'four friendly walls' of his bedroom is even more pronounced. What mainly distinguishes these two characters is their gender and the implications this passivity has on their social lives. As Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall explain, the contrast between the private and public sectors was widening in the Victorian period and was progressively embodied at home in 'carefully regulated social interaction and rules of etiquette.'⁴⁹ While women 'were increasingly engulfed by the private realm, bounded by physical, social and psychic partitions,' men were expected to evolve within both realms.⁵⁰ Women's stasis at home was seen as a manifestation of their feminine values and attested to their social status,⁵¹ while men were,

⁴⁹ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 319.

⁵⁰ Davidoff and Hall, *Family Fortunes*, p. 319.

⁵¹ Austin-Bolt, 'Sarah Ellis's *The Women of England*', p. 186.

on the contrary, defined by their action, and urged to work in order to contribute to society. This divide meant that, while passivity at home was accepted for women in the nineteenth century, it was far from being so for men. Sensation novels address this social inequality by depicting excessive domestic passivity in the form of sinful idleness that plagues both female and male characters.

Under the influence of evangelicalism in particular, indolence, idleness, and similar expressions of a love of ease and dislike for work, was decried as a behaviour contradicting the will of God, who, in the scriptures, encouraged men to be active and to contribute to society.⁵² The image of the landed aristocrat, indulging in his leisurely activities all year long was no longer fashionable. With rapid industrialisation and the rise of the bourgeoisie, work and ambition were promoted as a way of climbing the social ladder. ‘As manliness became associated with work and with monetary success,’ Herbert Sussman explains, ‘the hereditary aristocrats were now seen as idle dilettantes.’⁵³ Paradoxically, the more industrious middle-class was actively working its way up to this very same dilettante class and ‘idleness, therefore, was somehow the desired reward for hard work, the ultimate attainment in social status, while it was also viewed as deeply threatening, to the self and to the nation,’ as Sarah Jordan writes.⁵⁴ This instability within social class identifications was often attributed to the ills of modernity in the nineteenth century and many scholars have reflected on the impact of industrialisation on men’s mental states and their relationship to work and ambition. Sussman argues that the development of machines altered the notion of manliness, as mechanical power came to replace and devalue men’s physical force.⁵⁵ The whole question of what it meant to be a man in the nineteenth century was redefined, and this was reflected in the cultural production of the time, and especially in sensation novels. As Mariaconcetta Costantini explains, the Reform Acts of 1832 and 1867, which extended the right to vote to more men, led to fears of a ‘loss of identity resulting from the collapse of class barriers,’ fears that were encoded in sensation novels’

⁵² Herbert L. Sussman, *Masculine Identities: The History and Meanings of Manliness* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012).

⁵³ Sussman, *Masculine Identities*, p. 87.

⁵⁴ Jordan, *The Anxieties of Idleness*, p. 18.

⁵⁵ Sussman, *Masculine Identities*, p. 83.

obsession with ‘plots of lost identity.’⁵⁶ While discussing more recent pieces of literature, Judy Cornes shows an interest in the definition of the self within the broader nineteenth century, and finds in Henry James’s late work ‘The Jolly Corner’ (1908) an illuminating description of the modern man as ‘mindful of his past, fearful of his future, and paralyzed by a self-loathing born of his inability to identify himself through action.’⁵⁷ This definition incidentally fits the sensational male character perfectly and reflects what the following chapters set out to demonstrate. Because of their domestic idleness, male characters in sensation novels struggle to make sense of their own existence, which has an undeniable impact on their mental health. While Chapter Two thoroughly investigates this question and focuses more specifically on nervous disorders, the following pages first demonstrate that sensation novels relied on inaction and idleness as much as they did on ‘action, action, action,’⁵⁸ and show how the characters’ stasis in lieu of motion worked within the whole dynamic of the genre.

Critics have often dwelled on middle-to-upper-class women’s home confinement and lack of meaningful domestic activities and its impact on their mental health, yet less interest has been shown for similar circumstances among the male Victorian population. Men’s sometimes problematic situation at home can be considered through the lens of sensation novels, which often portray male domestic idleness and reveal particular nineteenth-century social views on aristocratic or bourgeois masculinity.⁵⁹ Four characters

⁵⁶ Mariaconcetta Costantini, ‘Sensation, Class and the Rising Professionals’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 99–112 (p. 100).

⁵⁷ Cornes, *Madness and the Loss of Identity*, p. 8.

⁵⁸ Mansel, *Quarterly review* (1863), p. 486.

⁵⁹ For more information on the evolution of the notion of masculinity and where it stood in the nineteenth century, see John Tosh, ‘What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain’, *History Workshop*, 38, 1994, 179–202; John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family and Empire* (London: Routledge, 2005); Michael Roper and John Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991); Sussman, *Masculine Identities*; Herbert L. Sussman, *Victorian Masculinities: Manhood and Masculine Poetics in Early Victorian Literature and Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995); *The Victorian Novel and Masculinity*, ed. by Phillip Mallett (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015); Michèle Cohen, “‘Manners’ Make the Man: Politeness, Chivalry, and the Construction of Masculinity, 1750–1830”, *Journal of British Studies*, 44.2 (2005), 312–29; Philip Carter, ‘An “Effeminate” or “Efficient” Nation? Masculinity and Eighteenth-

in Braddon's and Collins's novels are of particular interest here, as they all come from wealthy backgrounds and share a common lifestyle of self-indulgence and idleness, eventually leading them to develop signs of nervousness. Robert Audley, a non-practicing barrister and central character in *Lady Audley's Secret*, is first described as 'a handsome, lazy, care-for-nothing fellow, of about seven-and-twenty' (LAS: 32), who spends his time smoking cigars and reading French novels—a highly reprehensible act according to Victorian propriety. As Sir Michael Audley's nephew, Robert finds himself between the ranks of aristocracy and the rising bourgeoisie, while his settlement of '£400 a year' (LAS: 32) gives him the privilege of being disinterested in any form of employment. Robert's 'lymphatic nature' (LAS: 34)⁶⁰ is often mentioned in the novel and, along with other descriptions of the gentleman as, for example, 'the most vacillating and unenergetic of men' (LAS: 39), sets the portrait of a highly inactive and self-indulgent young man. The narrator ironically describes one of Robert's typical days in the following manner:

Sometimes, when the weather was very hot, and he had exhausted himself with the exertion of smoking his German pipe, and reading French novels, he would stroll into the Temple Gardens, and lying in some shady spot, pale and cool, with his shirt collar turned down and a blue silk handkerchief tied loosely about his neck, would tell grave benchers that he had knocked himself up with over work. (LAS: 33)

The idea that such an unproductive day could be regarded as 'over work' is particularly absurd in the context of the nineteenth century, as a large number of men were actually starting to feel the effect of excessive work due to the acceleration of the means of production.⁶¹ In *The Doctor's Wife*, Braddon draws the portrait of a similar character, the

century Social Documentary', *Textual Practice*, 11.3 (1997), 429–43; Philip Carter, *Men and the Emergence of Polite Society, Britain 1660-1800* (London: Routledge, 2000); Catherine Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class: Explorations in Feminism and History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992); Tara MacDonald, *The New Man, Masculinity and Marriage in the Victorian Novel* (London: Routledge, 2015).

⁶⁰ Jenny Bourne Taylor, in her edition of *Lady Audley's Secret*, notes that physician Robert Hooper described men with 'lymphatic temperaments' in his *Medical Dictionary* (1839) as having 'in general an insurmountable inclination to sloth, averse alike to labours of the mind and body' and being 'little fitted for business' (original quote in Hooper, p.1401).

⁶¹ Amelia Bonea and others explore Victorian excessive working habits throughout their book *Anxious Times: Medicine and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019).

dashing and tormented Roland Lansdell, ‘a young English gentleman, idle, rich, accomplished, and with no better light to guide his erratic wanderings than an uncertain glimmer which he called honour’ (TDW: 139). Unlike his counterpart Robert Audley, Roland Lansdell is a member of the aristocracy, a fact often called to the attention of the reader, as the narrator recurrently reminds us that ‘he had so much money and so much leisure, and so little knew what to do with himself’ (TDW: 141), a very dangerous combination in the eyes of the author. Braddon purposefully insists on the inaction that characterises Roland’s life, writing that ‘at thirty Roland was nothing. He had dropped out of public life altogether, and was only a drawing-room favourite; a loungeur in gay Continental cities; a drowsy idler in fair Grecian islands’ (TDW: 140). The narrator’s criticism of the young aristocrat grows increasingly harsh, and leaves little doubt as to Braddon’s desire to portray Roland Lansdell as the worst kind of idlers, or, as the narrator puts it, ‘a beautiful useless, purposeless creature [...] altogether a mockery, a delusion, and a snare’ (TDW: 141). Both men are regularly said to ‘dawdle’ away time,⁶² in their significant nonchalant and idle manner, for lack of a better occupation. What mainly characterises these two men, however, is their own self-awareness of their indolence, and the dispirited vision they have of their ‘useless’ lives, as Roland Lansdell repeatedly laments. Braddon’s writing style, at times purposefully moralising, is often based on repetitions, which helps the reader understand her stance on some capital issues. The narrator repeats twice in the same paragraph that Roland ‘was not a good man,—he had not led a good life’ (TDW: 201) which, along with the six repetitions throughout the novel that Roland was ‘useless,’ sustains the negative image the reader has of this character. Braddon’s condemnation of idleness is therefore flagrant, but so is her absolution of idle men, who emerge as victims of a decaying class system rather than purposefully sinful.

Wilkie Collins’s version of the idle aristocrat is quite different in this respect. While readers can develop sympathy for both Robert Audley and Roland Lansdell, such feelings are not likely to arise when reading about Frederick Fairlie or Noel Vanstone, both secondary characters in *The Woman in White* and *No Name* respectively. The two men

⁶² Robert Audley has a ‘constitutional dawdle’ (73) and Braddon uses the verb and its derivatives a significant number of times in both her novels (TDW: 133; 148; 186; 296; LAS: 33; 60; 73; 90; 101).

share many character traits: both are landed aristocrats, living on inherited incomes and properties; both live secluded in their houses, without much social contact or activity; both are ‘invalids’, although no actual illness can be discovered; and both are extremely proud of their social status. The first time Walter Hartright—and along with him, the reader—is acquainted with Frederick Fairlie is through the words of Marian Halcombe who explains that ‘Mr. Fairlie never joins us at any of our meals: he is an invalid, and keeps bachelor state in his own apartments’ (TWW: 35). Fairlie’s isolation in his room is furthermore emphasised by the description of both his chambers, in which there is said to be an ‘air of profound seclusion,’ and the ‘solitary figure of the master of the house’ himself, ‘leaning back, listlessly composed, in a large easy-chair, with a reading-easel fastened on one of its arms, and a little table on the other’ (TWW: 42). Fairlie himself informs us that ‘in the wretched state of [his] nerves, movement of any kind is exquisitely painful to [him]’ and ‘exertion of any kind is unspeakably disagreeable to [him]’ (TWW: 43-4). Such indications of his state of health and the impact of action—either on his part or from others—on his well-being are constantly brought up in the novel and give the reader an image of Frederick Fairlie as the most inactive of men. His interview with the family solicitor Mr Gilmore strengthens this image, as the adverbs ‘lazily’ and ‘indolently’ (TWW: 157-8) are used to describe the few actions taken by Fairlie, thus highlighting his constant listlessness. Gilmore also emphasises the extent of Frederick’s home confinement by mentioning that he found him ‘in his usual room, his usual chair, and his usual aggravating state of mind and body’ (TWW: 157). The repetition of the adjective ‘usual’ denotes the staid nature of Frederick’s life and helps the reader conceive a visual representation of the lifeless attitude in which he can invariably be found.

In *No Name*, Collins offers a similar description of the lifestyle of Noel Vanstone, who is, at the beginning of the novel, confined to his bed after traveling from Zurich to England (NN: 118). The young man’s powerlessness is made explicit early on as we learn that he is incapable of the simplest exertion, such as writing letters, as his ‘delicate health and recent bereavement prevent him from writing himself’ (NN: 204). His habitual inactivity is also emphasised when his governess Mrs Lecount, concerned by the weak state of his health, explains that ‘his heart will go on well enough if you don’t give his heart too much to do’ (NN: 227). We can furthermore draw a parallel between Collins’s two

characters through the description of the men's physical positions when they are first introduced to the reader. Like Frederick Fairlie, who was 'leaning back, [...] in a large easy-chair' (TWW: 42), Noel Vanstone is also seated, and neither of them rises to welcome their visitors. Similarly, the white colour of their garments—a 'waistcoat and trousers of spotless white' (TWW: 42) for Mr Fairlie and 'a fair white dressing-gown' (NN: 228) for Mr Vanstone—testifies to the extreme passivity of their lives, which allows them to preserve the spotlessness of the colour white. However, unlike Robert and Roland, Frederick and Noel never question their passivity. Both of them constantly complain about the poor state of their health, but they do not express a wish to be more useful for and involved in society. In this respect, Braddon's and Collins's treatments of idleness diverge and foretell widely different outcomes to their characters' lives.

In *The Woman in White*, Marian informs us that 'Mr. Fairlie is too great an invalid to be a companion for anybody' (37). The notion of companionship is important here, as his seclusion from the exterior world accentuates his portrayal as an idler, a man unfit to partake in the patriarchal society of the nineteenth century, be that public or private. Noel Vanstone is also incapable of entertaining any social relationship, which Collins makes clear by postponing his first introduction with the reader. The Vanstone's family solicitor Mr. Pendril, along with the reader, is indeed disappointed in his hope of meeting Noel because he 'was not then in a condition to receive visitors' (NN: 118). All four characters discussed here furthermore exclude themselves from the public sphere by not working alongside their fellow men. While Frederick's and Noel's exclusions are more conspicuous because of their home confinement, Robert's and Roland's refusal to work also sets them apart from the rest of society. Robert Audley, who was 'supposed to be a barrister' (LAS: 33), is being 'laughed at' by 'solemn benchers' while 'rising barristers shrugged their shoulders under rustling silk gowns, when people spoke of Robert Audley' (LAS: 81) because of his customary idleness and his refusal to work on a legal case. Similarly, Roland Lansdell, after being disappointed in his short-lived political career, is said to have 'dropped out of public life altogether' (TDW: 140). Both men purposefully relinquish work because of their dislike of effort and duty, which Braddon oftentimes criticises in her writing. The nineteenth-century redefinition of masculinity and its relationship to work is noticeable in these novels and helps us understand how the Victorian population may have

experienced such changes. The Victorians were voicing their concern for and their disapproval of idleness in a society that constantly looked for innovation. In an article entitled 'Useless people' and published in *The Sixpenny Magazine* in 1861, the author remarks that there are two types of 'useless' individuals: those who deviated from the righteous path of life because of ill-advised choices, and those who purposefully chose a life of indolence. These two types of people—usually men, from what the author implies—are exemplified by Roland Lansdell and Robert Audley on the one hand, and Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone on the other. The treatment of these characters and the moral discussion the authors attach to them perhaps typifies the Victorian mind-set at the time, as the author of the above article writes that:

we can find in our hearts to pity those who, with the best intentions in the world, have wandered from the beaten track; but the truly useless people, those who are such through egotism, laziness, or sheer obtuseness of intellect, fly them as you would a plague, and at their approach let every door be hermetically sealed.⁶³

In *The Woman in White* and *No Name*, people do not need to keep their doors 'hermetically sealed' from Frederick and Noel, since the two bachelors are doing so already, keeping everyone at bay in order to enjoy the quietness of their listless lives at home. Roland and Robert, on the other hand, are open to new encounters and relationships, but their laziness prevents them from keeping pace with a modern society in which 'a man is esteemed and loved but by reason of the share of usefulness which he brings to the common stock.'⁶⁴

A Gendered perception of idleness

For eighteenth- and nineteenth-century thinkers such as Thomas Carlyle or Reverend Isaac Taylor, who believed that 'men, to be men, must act,'⁶⁵ the concept of a masculine form of domestic idleness seemed inconceivable. As many Victorians struggled

⁶³ 'Useless People', *The Sixpenny Magazine*, 1.5 (1861), 607–8 (p. 608).

⁶⁴ Anon, 'Useless People', p. 607.

⁶⁵ Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, p. 266.

with their contemporary redefinition of masculinity, work, Sarah Jordan explains, ‘began to shift from that which a gentleman did not do, indeed could not do if he were to retain his gentle status, to an activity defining responsible masculinity.’⁶⁶ Here, none of the above-described characters upholds a form of ‘responsible masculinity’ as idealised by the Victorians. Reverend J. Hiles Hitchens, a prolific writer for the religious weekly magazine *The Quiver*, specifically emphasised the importance of work for the general society and published an essay in 1867 about the ‘Butterflies; or, the Pleasure-Seekers of Society,’ thus identifying people who spent their time in leisurely activities and were of no use to society.⁶⁷ Hitchens denounced people who:

look out on a busy world, where good and bad men are untiringly at work; they know their lot is cast in an age eminently characterized by progress; they see that their season of life on earth, at the best, is brief, and yet, with lamentable indifference, oblivious to their own present improvement and future well-being, as well as to the advantage of others, they spend life in indolence and diversion.⁶⁸

People who were slowing down national innovations and the general drive for progress were deemed irresponsible. Hitchens mostly identified these ‘butterflies’ to be women, yet he also recognised that some men conformed to this definition and that ‘manliness blushes to record that there are vain, conceited simpletons called *men*, whose lives correspond with the picture above drawn.’⁶⁹ The italics used by the author on the word *men* highlights the criticism they faced and the depreciation of their value. Their whole identity as human beings is questioned, especially when Hitchens writes in the premises of his article that ‘there is a race of persons living, who humanly speaking are of no service to their generation,’⁷⁰ thus setting them apart as another race entirely. Collins accentuates this in his writings when Frederick Fairlie expresses that he is ‘nothing but a bundle of nerves dressed up to look like a man’ (TWW: 348) hence suggesting a form of masquerade of his

⁶⁶ Jordan, *The Anxieties of Idleness*, p. 20.

⁶⁷ Hitchens’s other publications in *The Quiver* include ‘Manliness’ (1896), ‘The Young Men Of Society’ (1884), ‘Our Domestic Queens; Or, Woman’s Sphere’ (1867).

⁶⁸ J. Hiles Hitchens, ‘Our Butterflies; or, the Pleasure-Seekers of Society.’, *Quiver; London*, 3.118 (1867), 212–14 (p. 212).

⁶⁹ Hitchens, ‘Our Butterflies’, p. 213 Emphasis in original text.

⁷⁰ Hitchens, ‘Our Butterflies’, p. 212.

own masculinity. Noel Vanstone is likewise repeatedly emasculated, either by describing his body as particularly frail or by comparing him to a child (*NN*: 440) or a ‘creature’ on several occasions. Whenever Noel is actually called a ‘man’, the noun is followed or preceded by deprecatory terms, such as ‘the poor weak creature! the abject, miserable little man!’ (*NN*: 475). Braddon uses similar techniques to belittle her two characters’ manly values, calling Roland Lansdell a ‘purposeless creature,’ who was ‘nothing’ in this world (*TDW*: 140). Roland seems to view himself in the same light as Frederick Fairlie, explaining that he owes his position in society to his tailor’s ability to dress him fashionably, and that he is, in the end, ‘only so much old clothes’ (*TDW*: 295). He is, like Frederick Fairlie, only ‘dressed up to look like a man.’ Braddon also questions Robert Audley’s masculinity on several occasions in the novel and refers to both Roland and Robert as ‘wretches’ who do not consider themselves as men.⁷¹

The four men’s idle states generate a variety of social and individual problems. Their indolence sets them apart from their male peers whose more industrious lifestyles elevate in a society defined by progress. Robert, Roland, Noel and Frederick feel the whole weight of the Victorian era’s change in its perception of aristocracy, previously evocative of masculinity, strength and power. Catherine Hall summarises this by writing that the Victorians’ ‘critique of the degeneracy and effeminacy of the aristocracy focused on its softness, sensuousness, indolence, luxuriousness, foppishness, and lack of a proper sense of purpose and direction.’⁷² The effeminacy of the aristocracy is not only suggested in these novels through the male characters’ inability to act, but also through their gender fluidity. The hypothesis put forth in all four novels is that these men’s inability to act and their domestic confinement stems from their lack of masculine attributes, as expected by society. Collins give us countless examples of his characters’ effeminacy, from Frederick’s ‘effeminately small’ feet that were ‘clad in buff-coloured silk stockings, and little

⁷¹ The *OED* defines the word ‘wretch’ as both ‘one who is sunk in deep distress, sorrow, misfortune, or poverty; a miserable, unhappy, or unfortunate person; a poor or hapless being’ and ‘a vile, sorry, or despicable person; one of opprobrious or reprehensible character; a mean or contemptible creature.’ These definitions respectively correspond to Roland and Robert’s emotional situation and the way they view themselves.

⁷² Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, p. 257.

womanish bronze-leather slippers' (TWW: 42) to Noel's complexion, which 'was as delicate as a young girl's' (NN: 228). Braddon chooses to challenge her characters' masculinity by portraying them as unfit for Victorian patriarchal society. Robert Audley's suggested repressed homosexuality, which a wide range of scholars has identified and commented on,⁷³ lays doubts about his adequacy as a potential husband and father, while Roland's refusal to take a legitimate wife defines him as a scoundrel. Their inability to support the 'traditional roles of adult men as husbands, fathers, and upholders of the social order'⁷⁴ shows their incompatibility with the ideal Christian notion of manliness. As Mark Micale explains, the Victorian ideal of manliness 'frowned upon what it regarded as idleness, playfulness, and sensual pleasures, and it became ever more intolerant of masculine emotional self-expression,'⁷⁵ all of which were more readily pardoned in the female sex. The four men lack a sense of purpose in their lives, something that would give meaning to their existence, and would keep their minds and bodies busy. In the absence of such exertion, they develop somatic and mental ailments, which stem from their indolent lifestyles at home as much as from their struggle to define their own identities. In the nineteenth century, 'a man's individuality, his male identity, was closely tied to independence,' Hall explains, but that independence 'was no longer predicated on having the wherewithal not to have to work but rather on the dignity of work itself.'⁷⁶ The four characters examined here have all lost their male identity and are both physically and emotionally dependent despite their financial independence. Both Frederick and Noel are invalids, who constantly rely on their domestics' help, while Robert and Roland seem constantly ruled by some sort of 'fatality' which renders them passive agents of their own lives.⁷⁷

⁷³ Recent scholarship has been interested in the repressed homoerotic sensations of Robert and other Eton pupils in Victorian England, not least of whom Jennifer S. Kushnier in 'Educating Boys to be Queer' and Richard Nemesvari in 'Robert Audley's Secret.'

⁷⁴ Mark S. Micale, *Hysterical Men: The Hidden History of Male Nervous Illness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), p. 54.

⁷⁵ Micale, *Hysterical Men*, p. 54.

⁷⁶ Hall, *White, Male and Middle Class*, p. 257.

⁷⁷ In both *The Doctor's Wife* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, the notion of fatality recurrently appears, and is invoked as the agent bringing down on Robert and Roland the afflictions from which they suffer. This topic will be discussed in the second part of this thesis.

Independence was by no means what typified female identity in the nineteenth century, especially their domestic identity. As the discussion of the characters of Laura Fairlie and Isabel Gilbert has shown, women's domestic comfort was conditioned by the home their male relatives could offer them, as either husbands or fathers. For upper-class women in particular, work could not be the means through which they secured domestic independence, and it was rather their ability to content themselves with passivity at home that secured it. As previously noted, Braddon remarks that according to Victorian standards, Isabel Gilbert 'ought' to have been happy in her new home because she had 'a comfortable shelter, and enough to eat and to drink, and decent garments with which to cover herself' (TDW: 135), but most importantly, because she was free from any constraint to perform work. The secret to a happy homelife existence for women was to find the elusive balance between too much and too little activity at home. Many commentators on Victorian domestic life insisted that women had to relinquish hard work at home and menial tasks that servants could perform in their stead, while also urging them to stay busy at home to avoid the moral failings of idleness.⁷⁸ As Lee Anna Maynard explains 'women [needed] occupations (in the domestic sense) and should cultivate at least the appearance of usefulness, even if there is no product to show for their labors.'⁷⁹ James Fordyce, one of the most recognised authors of conduct books in the nineteenth century, exhorted women not to 'eat the bread of idleness'⁸⁰ and insisted that their situation in life and physical condition perfectly suited them 'for a thousand little soothing offices, as well as domestic services' which should help in the way of keeping both their minds and hands busy.⁸¹ Sarah Ellis similarly urged women to develop an interest in needlework to occupy their time at home as otherwise 'their days are indeed heavy, and their evenings worse than dull.'⁸² Needlework is precisely what is identified in *The Doctor's Wife* as a woman's chief saviour from domestic boredom. Always critical of Isabel's idleness, the housekeeper Mrs Jeffson,

⁷⁸ Austin-Bolt, 'Sarah Ellis's *The Women of England*', p. 183.

⁷⁹ Lee Anna Maynard, *Beautiful Boredom: Idleness and Feminine Self-Realization in the Victorian Novel* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009), p. 24.

⁸⁰ Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, p. 111.

⁸¹ Fordyce, *Sermons to Young Women*, p. 83.

⁸² Ellis, *The Women of England*, p. 152.

reminisces on the days when George's mother was mistress of the house and embodied the ideology of female domesticity:

my dear young mistress used to sit in yon chair, stitch, stitch, stitch at the Doctor's cambric shirt-fronts, and the fire was always burning bright and pleasant when he came home. She was a regular stay-at-home, [...] she was as happy as the day was long, sitting at home, working for her husband, and always ready to jump up and run to the door when she heard his step outside—God bless her innocent heart! (TDW: page)

Unfortunately, Isabel is not fit for this sort of existence. Her idleness and absent-mindedness are noted early on in the novel. Before meeting George, Isabel is presented to the reader in her parents' garden, sitting on a bench and reading novels, and we learn that 'it was in this neglected garden that Isabel Sleaford spent the best part of her idle, useless life' (TDW: 23). Isabel tries to mould herself into the 'ideal of a wife' (TDW: 104) George wants her to be when they are first married. She had quickly 'given up novel-reading, and employed her leisure in the interesting pursuit of plain needlework' (TDW: 106), but this attempt to transform herself is short lived. Isabel rapidly reverts to her former idle self and is eventually found at home sitting 'for hours together reading in the little parlour at Graybridge; and George, whose life was a very busy one, grew to consider her only in her normal state with a book in her hand' (TDW: 186). In *The Doctor's Wife*, Braddon does not condemn novel-reading as an activity in itself, but rather the excess of it. Much like her critique of sensation writers through the character of Sigismund Smith is a critique of 'highly-spiced fictions' (TDW: 11) written without much literary consideration, her recurrent comments on Isabel's love of novels serves to warn against the dangers of a life spent exclusively between the pages of fiction. Needlework therefore never becomes Isabel's relief from a boring life at home, and neither do domestic duties. Braddon repeatedly writes that Mrs Jeffson would have 'resented any interference' (TDW: 116; 155) from Isabel in her daily duties and so the young woman 'had none of the common distractions of a young matron. She had no servants to scold, no china to dust, no puddings or pies or soups or hashes to compound for her husband's dinner' (TDW: 116). Isabel's boredom at home becomes increasingly flagrant as Braddon writes that she 'went into the kitchen sometimes, when she was very much at a loss as to what she should do with herself,

and sat in an old rocking-chair swinging languidly backwards and forwards, and watching kind-hearted Tilly making a pie' (TDW: 155). Braddon furthermore writes that 'there are some young women who take kindly to a simple domestic life, and have a natural genius for pies and puddings [...] and when a gentleman wishes to marry on three hundred a year, he should look out for one of those bright household fairies' (TDW: 155). While making it clear that Isabel is not one of those household fairies and condemning her inbred idleness, Braddon also conveys in her writing a form of absolution for Isabel's sins and entreats the reader to recognise that not all women could be fashioned into the ideal housewife, content to be at home.

From the start of the novel, Isabel is framed as a household ornament. Her beauty and romantic dispositions make her the perfect candidate to become the iconic 'angel in the house' but Isabel's idle predispositions upset this prospect. She is passively moved from one house to the other, until she enters that of her husband's. The infatuated surgeon is delighted with the idea of bringing this beautiful picture of a wife back to his home, and revels in the 'image of this pale-faced girl, sitting in the little parlour at Graybridge, waiting to receive him when he came home from his patients' (TDW: 93), just as his mother did for his father. Isabel is expected to be 'sitting' and 'waiting' at home, positions which complied with what the 'beautiful' ought to be. As Elaine Scarry has shown, eighteenth-century writers Edmund Burke's and Immanuel Kant's subdivision of the 'aesthetic realm' into the sublime and the beautiful paved the way for a new and long-lasting understanding of beauty.⁸³ According to their writings, the dichotomy between the two attributives could be expressed in terms of gender, and from an aesthetic standpoint, the sublime was masculine and beauty feminine.⁸⁴ In his *Philosophical Inquiry into the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke describes the beautiful as that which is 'small,' 'smooth and polished,' 'light and delicate' and a source of pleasure,⁸⁵ all of which, Maynard argues, 'are translated by the domestic ideologues into a circumscribed, indoor, inactive, selfless

⁸³ Elaine Scarry, *On Beauty and Being Just* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 83.

⁸⁴ Jacqueline M. Labbe, *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender, and Romanticism* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), p. 37.

⁸⁵ Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (London: Thomas M'lean, Haymarket, 1823), p. 182.

manner of existence for women.’⁸⁶ As these doctrines were popularised in the Victorian period, upper-class women came to view stasis and domestic inactivity as a marker of aesthetic perfection and boredom was eventually seen as beautiful. Because Isabel is described as exceptionally beautiful, she ought to be content with boredom. Similarly, Walter Hartright talks about ‘the delicate beauty of Miss Fairlie’s complexion’ and ‘the smooth purity of her skin’ (97) in *The Woman in White*, while considering her as ‘the woman who first gives life, light, and form to our shadowy conceptions of beauty’ (TWW: 52). Laura’s beauty therefore predisposes her to a life of stasis to maintain her purity, and because of her delicate and nervous dispositions, she is most often found in bed or sitting at home and indulging in little activities such as drawing or playing the piano. Her sister Marian on the other hand, whose physical description by Hartright at the beginning of the novel—divulging in turn her perfect body and ugly face—is one of the most comical passages of the novel, is considered as a ‘sublime creature’ (TWW: 336) by the aesthete Count Fosco. This attribution of the sublime fits Marian just as much as the beautiful fits her sister, as Marian is always active, and movement was believed to characterise the sublime.⁸⁷ This conception of the sublime and the beautiful instructed women that to achieve beauty, they had to embrace stasis and passivity.⁸⁸

Like Isabel, Laura has her domestic independence secured through her male relatives—first at Limmeridge House with her uncle, then at Blackwater Park with her husband—and like Isabel still, because of her social position, she has no domestic duties to attend to keep herself busy. Laura is thus able to spend ‘hours and hours every day’ in her room because she has no incentive to act. Marian on the other hand needs to be active because her independence is not secured. What mostly characterises Laura is her passivity

⁸⁶ Maynard, *Beautiful Boredom*, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Maynard, *Beautiful Boredom*, p. 7.

⁸⁸ In ‘Schiller’s “Maria Stuart”: The Historical Sublime and the Aesthetics of Gender’, *Monatshefte*, 82.2 (1990), 123–41, Kari Lokke argues that eighteenth-century authors such as Edmund Burke or Immanuel Kant employed ‘the distinction between the sublime and the beautiful to establish a cultural opposition between male courage and sublimity and feminine grace and beauty’ and considered a sublime woman as ‘a contradiction in terms’ (p. 124). Lokke furthermore notes that in ‘Maria Stuart,’ Schiller attributed ‘to a woman the radical strength of will and moral courage of the sublime,’ which closely relates to Collins’s own depiction of Marian Halcombe.

at home. Even though Collins does not insist on her idleness as he does on Frederick Fairlie's, Laura is consistently portrayed as a passive agent in her own life and despite her being at the centre of the conspiracy at play in the novel, she never acts herself and constantly relies on other, more industrious characters to solve the situation. Laura's passivity, both at home and in the story overall, is furthermore evidenced by her conspicuous absence in the long list of narrators involved in the novel. As Collins writes in the preface, 'the story of the book is told throughout by the characters of the book [...] and they all take the chain up in turn, and carry it on to the end' (TWW: 3). Yet, despite being one of the most crucial characters of the book, Laura's narrative voice is never heard, and her story is continuously told by others. As I remark later in this thesis, it is only when Laura has lost all claims to her identity and therefore property that she becomes averse to idleness and stasis and expresses her wish to be more active in order to overcome her depression.

In many respects, then, homes in sensation novels fail to epitomise the Victorian ideal of a peaceful and quiet place separate from the unstable and frightening outside world. While Ruskin urged people to make home a 'shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division,'⁸⁹ sensation writers such as Braddon and Collins made it an essential element of their plots to have injury, terror, doubt and division invade and pervert the home. Such elements have substantial impacts on the health of characters populating sensation novels, not least in terms of their mental states. The excess of idleness, which I have explored in this chapter, is not only portrayed as an evil plaguing the wealthy members of Victorian society, but also as an agent contributing the development of mental illnesses associated with the dangers of domesticity. This is a recurrent pattern in the genre, one that sensation writer Mrs Henry Wood chose to bring to an even greater level in *East Lynne* (1861), a novel in which murder and deceit are committed at home. The importance of home in this novel is rendered through its very title, as Lord Mount Severn's house East Lynne becomes an eponymous character. Homes are often personified in these novels since most residences have names: Limmeridge House and Blackwater Park, Audley Court, Vauxhall Walk, Combe-Raven, and Mordred Priory, and through the very act of naming

⁸⁹ Ruskin, *Sesame and Lilies*, p. 77.

them, houses become characters in their own rights and play an important part in the unfolding of the plots. Foes rather than friends, they prevent the main characters—who are often trapped indoors—from developing into fully-grown individuals. In *East Lynne*, when returning to her childhood home as a married woman, Isabel Vane is taken aback by the changes that happened to it, and despite her husband's confidence that it will be a 'happy home' for her (*EL*: 142), it will eventually prove to be the same isolating and restrictive space as Isabel Gilbert's and Laura Fairlie's homes are. East Lynne becomes an opponent in Isabel Vane's self-fulfilment, a place in which she spends her days 'looking at [her] watch, wishing the time would go quicker' (*EL*: 150). Like most homes in sensation novels, East Lynne becomes a place of excessive rest for its female occupants, in which, despite their daunting lack of meaningful activities, they still ought to be happy. Isabel Vane's boredom at home is similar to Isabel Gilbert's and in both situations, boredom creates the basis for some of the sensational elements of the plot. It is because of their boredom at home that both women become attracted to the outside world and what it has to offer. Their fascination with that which lies beyond the boundaries of their domestic confinement brings about murder and deceits and makes their lives sensational. E. S. Dallas fervently criticised the literature of the mid-nineteenth century because of its emphasis on active female characters, which, he argued, went against the very nature of the female sex. According to Dallas, 'when women are thus put forward to lead the action of a plot, they must be urged into a false position,' a position which forces the novelists to intensify the contrast and to describe them as 'rushing into crime, and doing masculine deeds.'⁹⁰ Dallas's conviction on the subject was based on his assumption that 'the life of women cannot well be described as a life of action,'⁹¹ therefore making it inconceivable for them to be the subjects of such active plots. However, if the lives of women cannot be described as active, neither should they be described as boring. Sensation novels therefore worked to show that neither action nor boredom could exclusively describe the life of women, and that they still had to find their place both in the private and public spheres, or else they would succumb to different forms of mental grievances, as Chapter Two demonstrates.

⁹⁰ Eneas Sweetland Dallas, *The Gay Science* (London, Chapman and Hall, 1866), p. 297.

⁹¹ Dallas, p. 297.

Where many believed, like Dallas, that women's lives could not be described as active, they trusted that men's should. If action appeared as unnatural for women, it was stasis that contradicted the very nature of masculinity and here again, sensation novels explored this issue at length, subverting the expected domestic roles by devising female characters who relinquished passivity at home, and male characters who embraced it. Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone, as domestic dilettantes, adopt the position women were supposed to welcome and thus offer another uncomfortable image for the Victorian reader to contemplate.⁹² Their feminine attributes and reluctance to partake in the outside world equips them with the necessary temperament to be contented with a life of home confinement and passivity. Their idleness and utter lack of activity is also a trigger for the sensational elements of the plots, as their inability to identify and face the menaces threatening their domestic havens makes them easy targets for criminals and swindlers. Incidentally, idleness and boredom also work well within the context of the sensation genre because they exhort some of the male characters to let go of their idle existence and become more active, in order to conform with the expectations of Victorian society. Roland Lansdell and Robert Audley, like many of the female characters cited above, cannot withstand boredom—both inside and outside the home—and it is because of their need to overcome their passivity that the novels develop into the riveting stories they are known to be. Sensation novels therefore turn the domestic space into a stage on which the characters evolve and find their own identities. Passivity is assumed as a prerequisite of domesticity and the individual characters are left to decide how to manipulate it. Whether they gladly indulge in it, like Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone, submissively bear it, like Isabel Gilbert and Laura Fairlie, or try to overcome it, like Roland Lansdell, Robert Audley, Magdalen Vanstone and Lucy Audley, they are all left with the marks of their internal struggles, in the form of a diverse range of mental illnesses that cripple them. The next chapter consequently examines the nervous disorders these characters develop as a result of their domestic idleness.

⁹² Janet Oppenheim hints at the awkwardness of these characters for Victorian readers, explaining that Frederick Fairlie is 'frightening specifically because he is so epicene, like a mythical monster belonging to neither gender, and manipulating his sexlessness to further his selfishness.' Janet Oppenheim, *'Shattered Nerves': Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 149.

Chapter Two

‘I am nothing but a bundle of nerves dressed up to look like a man’:

Nervous Disorders and Domestic Life

Late in his career, Scottish physician Thomas Trotter became interested in diseases of the mind and wrote essays and pamphlets on a variety of ailments, including the highly fashionable nervous diseases of the early nineteenth century. Following in the footsteps of George Cheney’s *The English Malady* (1733), Trotter drew attention to the remarkable increase of nervous diseases in the previous century, and the prevalence of nervousness amongst his contemporaries. In *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (1808), Trotter addressed the difficulty of defining nervous diseases due to ‘their protean shape and multiform appearance’¹ but still ventured to offer a description of the ‘leading characteristics [sic] of *nervous disorders*,’ which included:

An inaptitude to muscular action, or some pain in exerting it; an irksomeness, or dislike to attend to business and the common affairs of life; a selfish desire of engrossing the sympathy and attention of others to the narration of their own sufferings; with fickleness and unsteadiness of temper, even to irascibility [sic]; and accompanied more or less with dyspeptick symptoms [...] to be referred in general, to debility, increased sensibility, or torpor of the alimentary canal.²

Trotter furthermore declared that bilious and nervous complaints were ‘the progeny of wealth, luxury, indolence, and intemperance,’³ a view that most physicians working on nervous diseases shared. Trotter’s description of the nervous sufferer remained a reference throughout the nineteenth century and several editions of *A View of the Nervous Temperament* were printed, while practitioners invited their nervous patients to purchase

¹ Thomas Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament* (Troy (N.Y): Wright, Goodenow, & Stockwell, 1808), p. xi.

² Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, p. xii Emphasis in original text.

³ Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, p. 19.

copies of it.⁴ Most elements defining the nervous sufferer above can be found in sensation literature and this chapter investigates how Braddon and Collins engaged with nervous diseases in their novels. Even though Trotter did not provide any substantially new vision of nervous diseases and mostly continued the works of eighteenth-century physicians such as Cheney, his work ‘gives a comprehensive description of late Georgian thinking on the consequences of luxury and idleness on the nation’s health.’⁵ What I argue here is that Braddon’s and Collins’s novels work in a similar fashion, fictionally describing mid-century Victorians’ views on the excesses of domestic idleness and its impact on people’s mental health. Following the in-depth textual analysis of home representation and domestic idleness in Braddon’s and Collins’s novels of the previous chapter, I now propose to examine how these elements contribute to the authors’ explorations of forms of mental illness.

This chapter focuses on the different symptoms of nervous disorders proposed by Trotter and other nineteenth-century physicians working on nervous disorders, and investigates how mental health is represented in sensation fiction, especially in its connection with home confinement. My interest mostly lies in the diseases of hypochondria and hysteria, two of the most common nervous disorders affecting the mind, as identified by nineteenth-century doctors. Here I demonstrate that many sensation novelists described characters confined to their homes as suffering from these conditions. While hypochondria and hysteria differ in various ways, not least in terms of somatic symptoms, sensation fiction typically combines these conditions to evoke nervousness. Janet Oppenheim describes them as ‘twin disorders’ with hypochondria generally believed to concern male patients, while hysteria was considered a female malady.⁶ However, this chapter also

⁴ In his preface to the 1812 edition, Thomas Trotter writes about the letters he received from patients thanking him for his accurate description of their ailments; in *The Anatomy of Madness*, William F. Bynum writes about the persistence of Trotter’s view on nervousness throughout the century. (William F. Bynum, ‘The Nervous Patient in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Psychiatric Origins of British Neurology’, in *The Anatomy of Madness: Essays in the History of Psychiatry. 1: People and Ideas*, ed. by William F. Bynum (London: Tavistock Publications, 1985), pp. 89–102.)

⁵ Brian Vale and Griffith Edwards, *Physician to the Fleet: The Life and Times of Thomas Trotter, 1760-1832* (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011), p. 188.

⁶ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 142.

investigates how the division between hypochondria and hysteria along gender lines is not so straightforward or universal. For, while it is often the case that male characters show symptoms of hypochondria and female characters exhibit signs of hysteria, Braddon and Collins sometimes reverse this pattern. This broader conception was apparent in medical writings of the time, with Surgeon Edwin Lee's *A Treatise on Some Nervous Disorders* (1833) recognising that, while men were 'more liable to hypochondriasis than women' because they were 'more exposed to the predisposing causes' of the disease, women could also experience hypochondriac symptoms.⁷ For centuries, it was believed that hysteria found its origin in the uterine system and was therefore only diagnosed in female patients, a belief that was still widely adopted in the middle of the nineteenth century.⁸ Lee refuted this idea in his treatise, pointing to the increasing number of cases of men suffering from symptoms of a hysteric nature, and promoting evidence showing that hysteria was 'essentially a disorder of the brain' and not of the reproductive system.⁹ This chapter therefore analyses how the representation of the diseases of hysteria and hypochondria in sensation novels reflect divergent contemporary medical and cultural beliefs attached to nervous conditions.

While many scholars writing about hysteria and its literary representations have tended to focus on the descent into madness of hysteric patients,¹⁰ the following pages will mainly consider it as a nervous disorder affecting the happiness and self-fulfilment of sensation characters confined inside their homes. Hysteria featured in popular and medical discourses of madness in the nineteenth century, and a number of female protagonists displaying signs of it are labelled as 'mad' in sensation novels. However, the present chapter examines how the symptoms of nervousness experienced by characters in sensation novels relate to their lifestyle rather than simply to the motif of madness. This is very clear in how Braddon and Collins present hypochondria and hysteria as the result of a life of

⁷ Edwin Lee, *A Treatise on Some Nervous Disorders* (London: Burgess and Hill, 1833), p. 144.

⁸ Anne Digby, 'Women's Biological Straitjacket', in *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. by Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1989), pp. 192–220.

⁹ Lee, *A Treatise on Some Nervous Disorders*, p. 56.

¹⁰ Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830-1980* (London: Virago, 1987); Gilbert and Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic*.

indolence and excessive wealth, showing how the domestic idleness of the wealthiest characters induces their nervousness. Here I survey the profound languor characterising typified hypochondriac and hysteric sufferers and their ‘inaptitude to muscular action, [...] or dislike to attend to business and the common affairs of life,’ as Trotter wrote.¹¹ I furthermore examine the representation of said sufferers in sensation novels and their depiction as vacillating and irresolute characters, thus showing the convergence of medical beliefs on nervousness and its literary representations. I argue that Braddon and Collins deploy the trope of domestic isolation and lack of occupation, of characters without faith in themselves and questioning their own identities and place in society, as the cause of their increased nervousness. Idleness was a familiar subject for Collins, who wrote ‘The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices’ with his friend and mentor Charles Dickens in 1857, in which they discuss the different forms idleness can take, its merits and drawbacks, for the self and for society.¹² Collins also addressed the issue directly in ‘A Journey in Search of Nothing,’ a story he published in *Household Words* in 1857 about a man’s struggle to sustain enforced idleness at home after his doctor prescribed it to combat the symptoms of an ‘over-taxed’ brain.¹³ However, it is in *No Name* and *The Woman in White* that Collins most fully engages in the social and medical implications of enforced idleness.

In his treatise, Trotter suggested that nervous diseases imputed patients with ‘uncommon sensibility to all impressions’ and ‘false perceptions,’¹⁴ symptoms which were found in all medical writings on nervous disorders. While hysteric patients were believed to have a heightened sensibility and to be liable to strong emotions, hypochondriacs tended to suffer from a compromised cognition, or ‘lesions of the imagination,’¹⁵ as another physician described it, which led them to believe their health to be worse than it was. Their

¹¹ Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, p. xii.

¹² Lillian Nayder, *Unequal Partners: Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, and Victorian Authorship* (Cornell University Press, 2002), chap. 4.

¹³ Wilkie Collins, ‘A Journey in Search of Nothing’, *Household Words*, 16.389 (1857), 217–23 (p. 217).

¹⁴ Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, p. 199.

¹⁵ ‘A Complete Treatise on Hypochondria’, *The British and Foreign Medical Review*, 20.40 (1845), 364–76 (p. 366) Trotter also refers to the ‘imagination’ of the nervous patient on several occasions in his treatise.

customary lack of confrontation with the outside world prevented them from forging a sturdier constitution and protection against nervousness. In this chapter, I seek to demonstrate that sensation novels correlate sheltered and secluded lives at home with a particular sensitivity in their characters and a tendency to let themselves be ruled by their imagination. This chapter ends on a close analysis of how these novels relate to the notion that nervous sufferers had the ‘selfish desire of engrossing the sympathy and attention of others to the narration of their own sufferings.’¹⁶ The narration of nervous illness is central here, both in terms of the characters’ accounts of their painful sensations and the narrative styles of Braddon and Collins. Throughout this chapter, references to specific nineteenth-century writings on nervous diseases in general, and hypochondria and hysteria in particular, will help to negotiate the division of these overlapping conditions. As Janet Oppenheim writes, scholars should beware attempting to investigate nervous conditions, including hypochondria and hysteria, in the context of the Victorian period, due to ‘the inexactitude of diagnostic labels, the laxity with which the terminology of nervousness was applied to widely disparate physical and mental states, [and] the imposition of social concerns on medical decisions.’¹⁷ It is important to stress that the aim of this chapter is not to offer a historical account of the discussion on nervous conditions in that period, nor to offer a medical appraisal of these but rather to examine their literary representation. This chapter critically explores correlations between mid-nineteenth century medical writings on nervous disorders and the fictional and discursive strategies in works by Collins and Braddon.

Purchasing the ‘Luxury of Illness’

Previous studies on work and nervousness in the context of the nineteenth century have often shown that overwork, rather than inaction and idleness, was believed to cause nervous disorders. An article published in the *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* (JPMMP) in 1852 entitled ‘The Overworked Mind’ warned against the different

¹⁶ Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, p. xii.

¹⁷ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 9.

mental sufferings that loomed over men who worked too much, especially the ‘literary, political, and professional men [who have] robbed the brain of the repose necessary to its vigorous action.’¹⁸ Commentators at the time perceived that the new drive for professional appreciation and overall ambition had an impact upon people’s health and wellbeing. Another anonymous author, reviewing suicide rates in the nineteenth century, blamed modern society and overwork for the increase in depressive thoughts and a rise in the number of suicides. According to the author, the correlation between an intense work life—both physically and mentally—and poor mental health was unequivocal, and the issue of overwork was something that ‘the physician specially engaged in the treatment of this class of maladies cannot ignore.’¹⁹ The class of maladies referred to here were those affecting the brain and nervous system, thought to suffer the most from overwork. In our contemporary context, such notions continue in a focus on ‘burnouts’ and other occupational phenomena. In *Anxious Times: Medicine and Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, Sally Shuttleworth and others suggest that nervous illness was—and still is—the ‘disease of modern life.’²⁰ *Anxious Times* partly focuses on the work of Doctor James Crichton-Browne, a pioneer in the study of mental health and a promoter of public health policies. At an address delivered for the Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association in 1880, Crichton-Browne expressed that the whole spectrum of social classes was concerned with this increase in nervous disorders, deemed a corollary of the modern world. He nevertheless excluded one group of people from this general calamity, the most well-off members of society, who had a better life expectancy because they had ‘to take no thought for the morrow,’ and did not have to ‘contend for daily bread’, unlike the working classes.²¹ This was not a universally accepted statement however, and many recognised a rising anxiety among the ‘do-nothing’ classes,²² whose nervous system was often strung.

¹⁸ Anon, ‘The Overworked Mind’, *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 5.19 (1852), 257–76 (p. 270).

¹⁹ Anon, ‘Neglected Brain Disease—Suicide’, *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 10.7 (1857), 413–53 (p. 413).

²⁰ Bonea and others, *Anxious Times*, p. 15.

²¹ James Crichton-Browne, ‘Circles of Mental Disorder-Modern Nervous Diseases’, *British Medical Journal*, 2.1024 (1880), 262–67 (p. 265).

²² Costantini, ‘Sensation, Class and the Rising Professionals’, p. 112.

Writers of sensation novels addressed this social concern by portraying middle-to-upper class men and women who worried about the future and suffered from shattered nerves.

Two contrasting perspectives thus coexisted on the relation between work and mental health in the nineteenth century and while Crichton-Browne and other medical professionals assessed the impact of physical and mental overwork, others reviewed how inaction and a lack of occupation affected the mental state of the population. Across the Atlantic, authors promoted the importance of work and employment to protect individuals against the diseases of their time, such as melancholia, hysteria or hypochondria. Benjamin Rush, writing in America at the end of the eighteenth century, repeatedly suggested ‘constant employment’ as a remedy for different kinds of bodily and mental ailments.²³ It was believed that indolence within the confines of one’s home increased the chances for mental or somatic diseases, especially those of a nervous nature.²⁴ A contributor to the *JPMMP* wrote of hypochondriasis that it was ‘the poor man’s scourge and the rich man’s plague,’²⁵ thus suggesting a potential infectious nature of hypochondriasis among the wealthy, propagated by their indolent lifestyle. Surgeon Frederic Skey, who studied the nervous system at St. Bartholomew’s Hospital in London, attributed ‘hysterical diseases’ to ‘people without compulsory occupation, who lead a life of both bodily and mental inactivity—people whose means are sufficiently ample to indulge in, and who can purchase the luxury of illness.’²⁶ These people were not only indulging in idleness, they were indulging in illness itself. The description given by Skey fits a number of sensation characters who enjoy large amounts of wealth without having to work, are both mentally and physically inactive, and see their nervous debility as a mark of their social superiority.

As I demonstrated in the previous chapter, many sensation fiction characters belonging to the middle and upper classes are inactive at home and lack occupation. In *The*

²³ Benjamin Rush, *Medical Inquiries and Observations, Upon the Diseases of the Mind* (Philadelphia: Kimber and Richardson, 1812).

²⁴ See Anon, ‘On Hypochondriasis’, *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 3.9 (1850), 1–14; Anon, ‘On Suicide’, *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 11.11 (1858), 396–424.

²⁵ Anon, ‘On Hypochondriasis’, p. 1.

²⁶ Frederic C. Skey, *Hysteria; Six Lectures Delivered to the Students of St. Bartholomew’s Hospital* (London: Longmans, Green, Reader, & Dyer, 1867), p. 56.

Woman in White, Frederick Fairlie, who remains isolated in his own chambers, has the financial means necessary to accommodate his nervousness. Suffering from an undiagnosed disease, he is described as an ‘invalid,’ whose condition is a source of speculation within the house, as Marian Halcombe explains:

‘I don't know what is the matter with him, and the doctors don't know what is the matter with him, and he doesn't know himself what is the matter with him. We all say it's on the nerves, and we none of us know what we mean when we say it.’ (TWW: 37)

Frederick Fairlie's wealth and free time allow him to surround himself with doctors and servants who cater to his every need. Like him, his niece Laura Fairlie, who also suffers from nervousness, is in a position to ‘purchase the luxury of illness.’ Both of them appear as the ideal fictional representatives of the stereotypical hypochondriac and hysteric sufferers. Frederick is constantly complaining about the ‘wretched state of [his] nerves’ (TWW: 43-4; three repetitions) and seems to suffer from an unknown disease that renders him incapable of the slightest exertion, both of which fit the diagnosis of hypochondria. Laura is similarly passive and always protected by her sister from any unwelcome or distressful news that could ‘alarm [her] to no purpose’ (TWW: 39). As Marian tells Walter Hartright, Laura and Frederick are both, ‘in widely different ways, rather nervous and sensitive’ (TWW: 39) and contemporary medical practitioners then suggested that women with a ‘high degree of sensibility’ were often subjected to hysterical fits when confronted with ‘strong emotions.’²⁷ Physician Julius Althaus, who published various essays on nervous disorders, furthermore explained that hysteria was most frequent in ‘the higher classes of society, in ladies who lead an artificial life, [and] who do nothing.’²⁸ Laura's highly pampered and inert lifestyle at Limmeridge House breeds her nervousness and thus increases her inactivity. When Walter Hartright first arrives at Limmeridge, Marian tells him that Laura is ‘in her own room, nursing that essentially feminine malady, a slight headache’ (TWW: 36), which was a ‘pretty consistent symptom’ of hysteria according to physician Edwin Lee.²⁹ Throughout the novel, Laura recurrently suffers from headaches

²⁷ Julius Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy: Three Lectures* (London: John Churchill & Sons, 1866), p. 39.

²⁸ Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy*, p. 39.

²⁹ Lee, *A Treatise on Some Nervous Disorders*, p. 44.

and requires bedrest. Spending her days in the seclusion of Limmeridge House, doing watercolour paintings and playing the piano, her lifestyle—as that of many women of her class—could indeed be qualified as ‘artificial.’ Every household duty is undertaken either by the house servants or by her sister Marian who takes care of all managerial aspects of the household. Marian declares that they ‘are in every respect as unlike each other as possible. [...] I have got nothing, and she has a fortune. I am dark and ugly, and she is fair and pretty’ (TWW: 37), but the contrast also lies in Marian’s energy and her sister’s passivity. This important distinction explains why, despite living in the same domestic seclusion at Limmeridge House, Laura is highly nervous, while Marian is rather sanguine.³⁰ Beyond any question of character traits, this distinction suggests that Laura, as heir to Limmeridge House and a large fortune, is in a socio-economic situation that enables her to lead an idle life at home and to rest for hours together when her nervous state obliges it. Marian, on the other hand, who has no property to her name and therefore no security, is in no position to ‘purchase the luxury of illness’³¹ and needs to stay active and healthy—both mentally and physically—in order to secure her domestic situation. Considering that Collins received multiple applications from single gentlemen wanting to discover who he had based his highly original Marian character on, we may suppose that Laura was a characteristic example of the upper-class-indulgent-type of young woman while Marian distinguished herself through her industriousness.³²

Isabel Gilbert’s description as a ‘lazy, selfish thing’ (TDW: 116) in *The Doctor’s Wife*, fits the profile of nervous women devised by Althaus to an even greater degree than Laura Fairlie. Despite her working-class origins, Isabel has been used to indolence in her childhood, and her marriage to the country doctor George Gilbert, offering her domestic stability and security, emphasises this disposition as she finds herself devoid of occupation in her new home. Isabel, more than any of the other female characters examined here, does nothing. As noted in the previous chapter, her sole occupation at home is to read novels, an activity that she already enjoyed at her parents’ home, regardless of other

³⁰ The difference between the two dispositions is examined later on in the chapter, with a discussion on the theory of the four temperaments.

³¹ Skey, *Hysteria*, p. 56.

³² Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White*, ed. by Matthew Sweet (London: Penguin, 2003), p. xv.

responsibilities. Her stepmother proclaims that she ‘would have sat on the grass and read novels if the house had been blazing, and all her family perishing in the flames’ (TDW: 116). The narrator explains that her family was too busy working to ensure Isabel would be brought up to understand her duties in life and take to domestic responsibilities. This conditioned her for a spoilt life, in which she is able to read novels undisturbed as much as she wishes. When Isabel discovers that her married life is not to be as luxurious and fashionable as she expected, she ‘burst into a passion of hysterical sobbing’ (TDW: 112), which echoes Althaus’s description of women who were ‘very apt to go into hysterics at the slightest provocation or contrariety.’³³ To soothe her, Isabel’s husband brings her ‘some sal-volatile, in a wineglass of water’ (TDW: 112) a common remedy for hysterical fits.³⁴ In the figure of the housekeeper Mrs Jeffson, who ‘did not entertain a very high opinion of a young lady who went into hysterics because there was no fire in her sitting-room’ (TDW: 112), but who also resented any interference in the domestic duties of the house, Braddon brings together the two most prevalent Victorian attitudes towards female idleness. While overly sensitive and refined women were often criticised, they were also absolved of their shortcomings, believed to be caused by their lack of occupation. Crichton-Browne, an advocate of female education, wrote that ‘occupation of some kind is needful to save them from the dreary, aimless vacuity of mind that is hysteria's favourite soil.’³⁵ Many physicians, including Crichton-Browne, believed that affluent women were more prone to hysteria during the early years of womanhood, when they were left unoccupied at home and did not have the care of children to keep their minds and bodies busy.³⁶ Because she is quickly forced to ‘give up novel-reading’ (TDW: 106), Isabel’s lack of mental and physical occupation is soon supplemented by a perilous mental inanity.

Men of the upper class who were ‘without occupation, or rather without the necessary “bore” of earning [their] daily bread,’³⁷ also suffered from nervousness because

³³ Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy*, p. 39.

³⁴ ‘Hysteria’, *The Penny Cyclopaedia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (London: Charles Knight, 1833), p. 421.

³⁵ James Crichton-Browne, ‘Education and the Nervous System’, in *The Book of Health*, ed. by Malcolm Alexander Morris (London: Cassell & Company, Limited, 1884), pp. 269–381 (p. 312).

³⁶ Lee, *A Treatise on Some Nervous Disorders*, p. 51; Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy*, p. 36.

³⁷ Anon, ‘On Hypochondriasis’, p. 5.

of their idleness, as two of Braddon's male characters exemplify. Both Roland Lansdell and Robert Audley have more money than they know how to spend and are said to 'dawdle' away time for lack of any better occupation. Both men suffer from a crippling languor preventing them from leading a more active life. Braddon writes that Robert, who was 'indolent, handsome, and indifferent, [...] took life as altogether too absurd a mistake for any one event in its foolish course to be for a moment considered seriously by a sensible man' (LAS: 57). Calling Robert a 'sensible man,' meaning here a person of 'sound judgement,'³⁸ is an example of Braddon's clever use of sarcasm and highlights the melodramatic nature of the young man's discourse on the vacuity of life. Any 'sensible man' in the nineteenth century would take the responsibilities of his title and social status more seriously than Robert is shown to do. The narrator uses the word 'hypochondriac' to describe Robert on three occasions in the novel (LAS: 217; 229; 344) and this diagnosis furthermore discredits the sensible nature of the young man. Sensitivity, rather than sense, characterised the hypochondriac sufferer, and it is therefore rather difficult to take Robert's despondency seriously throughout the novel. Robert only seems to grow hypochondriacal because of his unwillingness to be more active. Writer and diarist James Boswell, himself a self-proclaimed hypochondriac, wrote in the eighteenth century that 'hypochondria sometimes brings on such an extreme degree of languor, that the patient has a reluctance to every species of exertion'³⁹ but in the case of Robert Audley, it appears that it is languor itself that brings about hypochondria in the first place. The young man is trapped in a vicious circle in which idleness leads to hypochondria and hypochondria leads to a receding desire to be active.

In *The Doctor's Wife*, Roland Lansdell finds himself in a similar position. Roland establishes himself as the victim of his class affiliation and the lack of incentive and encouragements he received to continue his political career. Here again, Braddon sarcastically entreats the reader to sympathise with Roland's hardships, thus emphasising the young man's dramatic complaints. 'Alas for poor humanity,' the narrator writes,

³⁸ 'Sensible, Adj., n., and Adv.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)
 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/175971>> [accessed 1 June 2021] entry V. 15.a.

³⁹ James Boswell, *Boswell's Column: Being His Seventy Contributions to the London Magazine under the Pseudonym the Hypochondriack from 1777 to 1783 Here First Printed in Book Form in England*, ed. by Margery Bailey (London: W. Kimber, 1951), p. 49.

Roland found Parliamentary work ‘more wearisome than the labour of Sisyphus, or the toil of the daughters of Danäus’ (*TDW*: 143). Braddon’s reference to mythical stories of hard work sets a sharp contrast between Roland’s disengagement with work and other men’s exertions. The author’s reference is all the more powerful when read alongside her previous novel, *John Marchmont’s Legacy* (1863) in which the main character, Edward Arundel, laments the loss of his position as soldier in his Majesty’s service after a personal tragedy. Edward, who had always been an active and ambitious man, struggles with the emptiness of his new life, in which he had ‘no duty to perform, no task to achieve.’ Braddon’s tone is then highly moralising, noting that a man’s nature:

must be utterly selfish, entirely given over to sybarite rest and self-indulgence, which does not feel a lack of something wanting these,—a duty or a purpose. Better to be Sisyphus toiling up the mountain-side, than Sisyphus with the stone taken away from him, and no hope of ever reaching the top. (*JML*: 30)

The difference between the two men is emphasised by Braddon’s double use of the image of Sisyphus. While Roland cannot withstand the difficulties of political work and compares it to the toils of mythical heroes, Edward Arundel wishes he had a stone to push. Roland Lansdell has neither duty nor purpose, and a crippling languor has taken possession of him. While his past exertions in the political arena are described as ludicrously short and lacking commitment, Roland believes that he ‘had done his best, and had failed ignominiously, and had won the right to be idle ever after that failure’ (*TDW*: 152). Just like James Boswell, who believed that any hypochondriac, like himself, ‘regrets his having ever attempted distinction and excellence in any way, because the effect of his former exertions now serves only to make his insignificance more vexing to him,’⁴⁰ Roland looks back on his past efforts with bitterness because they remind him of his failures. Feeling despondent because of a lack of faith in what they could achieve was a recurrent symptom in nervous patients which often led them to act inconsistently and see their moods change rapidly, as the next pages show.

⁴⁰ Boswell, *Boswell’s Column*, p. 208.

One Who Has no Faith in Himself

A nervous sufferer, who anonymously published his *Confessions* in the mid-nineteenth century, rhetorically asked ‘what is a hypochondriac if not one who has no faith in himself, nor, indeed, in any one else, for two hours together?’⁴¹ This statement resonates with Trotter’s discussion on the ‘fickleness and unsteadiness’ of hypochondriacs’ tempers and suggests a lack of both self-confidence and consistency in hypochondriac patients, who could see their attitude shift in an instant. Any reader of *The Doctor’s Wife* would recognise such symptoms in Roland Lansdell, a man who ‘did not believe in himself; and lacking that grand faculty of self-confidence, [...] had grown to doubt and question all other things, as he doubted and questioned himself’ (TDW: 142). Because of his incapacity—or unwillingness—to adopt a more active lifestyle, Roland develops a constant apathy towards the world, and a ‘sceptical manner of looking at everything’ (TDW: 289). This attitude is common in Braddon’s sensation heroes, who all seem to have been ‘infected with the noxious disease of our time, the fatal cynicism that transforms youth into a malady for which age is the only cure’ (TDW: 85). The vocabulary of illness running through this passage shows how dangerous cynicism could be for one’s mental health and how easily one could develop hypochondriacal symptoms. Robert Audley, described as a ‘young philosopher of the modern school’ in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, is said to ponder over ‘the favourite modern question of the nothingness of everything, and the folly of taking too much trouble to walk upon a road that went nowhere, or to compass a work that meant nothing’ (LAS: 176). The ‘modern school’ of philosophy to which Braddon alludes may refer to the growing scepticism felt by the Victorian population, which reflected profound epistemological doubt. Braddon’s repetition of the negative prefix ‘no’ and the image of emptiness conveyed by the words ‘nothingness,’ ‘nowhere,’ and ‘nothing’ emulates some of the writings of eighteenth-century philosophers and their disbelief concerning our ability to know anything. Yet Robert, who is described by his cousin as ‘a lazy, selfish Sybarite, who cares for nothing in the world except his own ease and comfort’ (LAS: 237) does not so much ponder on the universal possibility of knowing than on his own (in)significance

⁴¹ M. R. C. S., *Confessions of a Hypochondriac; or, The Adventures of a Hyp. in Search of Health* (London: Saunders and Otley, 1849), p. 109.

in the world. After failing to trace back the steps of his friend George before he disappeared, Robert expresses doubts about his capacity to achieve anything:

‘If a resolute, sanguine, active and energetic creature, such as the baker, fail to achieve this business, how can a lymphatic wretch like me hope to accomplish it? Where the baker has been defeated, what preposterous folly it would be for me to try to succeed.’
(LAS: 195)

The distinction between their ‘sanguine’ and ‘lymphatic’ natures recalls the Greek theory of the four temperaments, which still held firm in the nineteenth century and was seen by some to ‘distinguish one man or family from another; or [...] one race or variety of a race from another.’⁴² Robert seems to subscribe to the belief that his temperament dictates the course of his life and eventually doubts both his physical and mental faculties. When his search for his missing friend starts to obsess him, Robert wonders if the evidence he collected is not ‘woven out of [his] own folly,’ and vehemently asks: ‘what if this edifice of horror and suspicion is a mere collection of crotchets—the nervous fancies of a hypochondriacal bachelor?’ (LAS: 217). Robert’s self-diagnosis of hypochondria shows that he is aware of the symptoms attached to this disease. The author of the *Confessions* mentioned above noted that hypochondria was ‘a state of being without a sense of security; a perpetual suspense, an expectation, a dread of an inevitable evil,’⁴³ which is exactly the state in which Robert finds himself. This description establishes the hypochondriac as the quintessential protagonist for sensation fiction. Since the genre relies heavily on the depiction of crimes, mysteries, and deceit, sensation characters are always in ‘a perpetual suspense’ for something distressing to happen, a situation that begets (self-)doubt.

Roland Lansdell also experiences this early on in his life. After his cousin and betrothed Gwendoline breaks his heart along with her promise to marry him, Roland sustains a ‘disappointment that had struck home to his heart, and had given him an excuse for the cynical indifference, the hypochondriacal infidelity, which grew upon him from this

⁴² John C. Murray, ‘On the Nervous, Bilious, Lymphatic, and Sanguine Temperaments: Their Connection with Races in England, and Their Relative Longevity’, *The Anthropological Review*, 8.28 (1870), 14–28 (p. 14).

⁴³ M. R. C. S., *Confessions*, p. 109.

time' (TDW: 144). Braddon's unusual turn of phrase almost stands as a pleonasm. If hypochondria is understood to involve an 'irresolution of conduct'⁴⁴ on the part of the sufferer, it also suggests a tendency to unfaithfulness, to which Braddon alludes in this sentence. Because of his nervous nature and his past experiences, Roland is perpetually expecting deception from others and has no faith in himself nor in anyone else. His 'hypochondriacal infidelity' endures throughout the novel and is blatant in his infatuation with the doctor's wife. The narrator writes that:

Mr. Lansdell beguiled his homeward way with many bitter reflections of this kind. But, inconsistent and vacillating in his thoughts, as he had been ever inconsistent and vacillating in his actions, he thought of himself at one time as being deeply and devotedly in love with Isabel Gilbert, and at another time as being only the victim of a foolish romantic fancy, which would perish by a death as speedy as its birth. (TDW: 213)

Roland's irresolution, which had hitherto been confined to his actions, is now affecting his thought process as well. James Boswell wrote that 'nothing characterises a Hypochondriack more peculiarly than irresolution, or the want of power over his own mind,'⁴⁵ which is elicited here, and shows how much the condition of hypochondria affects Roland Lansdell's mental health. The mention of Roland's homeward journey is also important here, as it suggests that it is in the solitude and isolation of his home that he will dwell on these erratic thoughts and aggravate his sense of insecurity in the face of a threatening romantic fancy. Before the start of the novel, Roland was squandering his wealth all over Europe and had short romantic encounters, and it is only after coming home to settle in Mordred Priory that his hypochondria reveals itself and his inconsistent feelings for a woman become problematic. Roland's unfamiliar domestic confinement thus intensifies his lack of volition and nervousness. The causality between Roland's passive state and his mental suffering is explicitly stated by the narrator who preaches that 'the soul of man cannot be satisfied in a state of sin: and a purposeless idle existence is a state of sin' (TDW: 152. Emphasis in the original text). Towards the end of the novel, after Isabel

⁴⁴ Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, p. 199.

⁴⁵ Boswell, *Boswell's Column*, p. 47.

has rejected him, Roland shuts himself at home and refuses to see anyone, prompting his nervousness to increase. At the climax of his despair, the narrator writes that ‘the habit of vacillation, which had grown out of the idleness of his life, was stronger in him to-night than usual’ (TDW: 349), thus marking the culmination of his hypochondria, through this demonstration of irresolution and idleness, which, according to Boswell, best characterised the hypochondriac.

Roland’s hypochondria is also featured through a profound lack of confidence in his abilities as a man. Like Robert Audley, who compared himself to the ‘sanguine’ baker, Roland measures his own insignificance against working-class men:

‘Only thirty years of age [...]—thirty profitless, tiresome years; and there is not a reaper in the fields, or a shock-headed country lad that earns sixpence a day by whooping to the birds amongst the corn, that is not of more use to his fellow-creatures than I am.’ (TDW: 166)

Roland’s feeling of uselessness, which renders him increasingly nervous, is here linked to his social class and lack of work, a common correlation at the time. The contributors to the *Penny Cyclopaedia*, a popular multi-volume encyclopaedia published by the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge between 1833 and 1843 and involved scholars from a variety of social backgrounds, viewed luxury as a ‘fertile source of hypochondriasis’ and believed that a lack of occupation induced nervousness. The writer of the entry on hypochondriasis wrote: ‘happy are those whom the possession of a competence, earned by the labour of each day, preserves from such malady.’⁴⁶ Roland believes he has no competence, and blames it on his social class and the lack of incentive he received to work when he was younger. This aspect of hypochondria is however not found in either Frederick Fairlie or Noel Vanstone, two other male characters suffering from the disease. While Roland and Robert express, through their confessed sense of uselessness, a form of repentance toward their idleness and their lack of contribution to society, Frederick and Noel revel in their indolence and see it as a mark of their social superiority. As William

⁴⁶ ‘Hypochondriasis’, *The Penny Cyclopaedia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (London: Charles Knight, 1833), p. 412.

Bynum points out, physicians like George Cheyne or Thomas Trotter flattered their patients by writing that only those of ‘good breeding suffered from the nerves’ since nervousness was the disease of the elite.⁴⁷ James Boswell communicated similar notions, writing that ‘we Hypochondriacks may be glad to [...] console ourselves in the hour of gloomy distress, by thinking that our sufferings mark our superiority.’⁴⁸ William Baker has shown that Collins possessed many of Boswell’s works in his library, and we may assume that Collins was greatly inspired by Boswell’s own account of the disease to describe the sufferings of his two hypochondriac characters.⁴⁹ Both Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone seem to share Boswell’s sentiment, as they incessantly remind people around them of their eminence and regard their nervous condition as a component of their aristocratic inheritance. Frederick often notes the difference in social class between him and others and is remorselessly patronising. He states, for example, that ‘people in the lower class of life never know when or how to go out of a room. They invariably require to be helped out by their betters’ (TWW: 344). According to him, none of the people belonging to the lower classes can understand his nervous sufferings because they are ‘persons born without nerves’ (TWW: 46).

Noel Vanstone displays a similar complacency in his superior position. Unlike Robert and Roland who frequently wonder if members of the lower classes are not more admirable than they are, Noel constantly reminds others of his ascendancy over them. Despite his utter dependence on his housekeeper, he never misses an opportunity to assert his position as master of the house. We therefore find many instances of Noel making declarations such as: ‘I allow nothing unpleasant in my establishment, [...] I’m master—you must have noticed that already, Mr. Bygrave—I’m master’ (NN: 328). Noel’s pride in his position as head of the household is connected to his high regard for lineage and the respectability he believes to have inherited from his father, asserting that ‘my father was master before me. And I am my father’s son’ (NN: 241). Like Frederick who ‘invariably let things stop as they are’ (TWW: 344), Noel relinquishes any unpleasant task and spends

⁴⁷ Bynum, ‘The Nervous Patient in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Britain’, p. 91.

⁴⁸ Boswell, *Boswell’s Column*, p. 42.

⁴⁹ William Baker, *Wilkie Collins’s Library: A Reconstruction* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 49.

his days sitting at home. Thus, rather than suffering from a lack of self-confidence, the two men suffer from an excess of it. This was another symptom of hypochondria, addressed by surgeon F. P. Atkinson, who suggested that a lack of occupation led the mind to ‘take up with Self,’ that ‘all engrossing thought.’⁵⁰ Both men are extremely selfish and use their nervousness as excuses to avoid efforts of any kind. As Walter Hartright notes, ‘Mr. Fairlie’s selfish affectation and Mr. Fairlie’s wretched nerves meant one and the same thing’ (TWW: 43). Exploring the issue of narcissism in *The Woman in White*, Carolyn Laubender suggests that Frederick’s hypochondria ‘develops when the self becomes so obsessed with itself that it essentially begins to see the entire external world as a threat to either health or sanity,’⁵¹ thus detailing a similar state of ‘perpetual suspense’ described by the writer of the *Confessions*. Rather than lacking confidence in themselves, Frederick and Noel lack confidence in others, and see any intrusion of their domestic confinement as a threat to their physical safety. Unlike Robert and Roland, who are inconsistent in their opinions of others, Frederick and Noel never deviate from their distrust in their fellow men, something I will develop later in this chapter.

A lack of confidence and vacillating mind were recognised symptoms of hypochondria rather than hysteria, and it is rare to find in medical records any mention of female sufferers experiencing these issues. Althaus wrote about hysteric women’s characters as ‘versatile and capricious,’⁵² and subject to frequent mood shifts, but we do not find many instances of patients experiencing doubts about their own capacities. This is also reflected in the sensation novels examined here, as the female characters suffering from hysteria do not share the irresolution of male characters like Roland Lansdell or Robert Audley. This, I argue, owes to their respective domestic situations. Because Victorian women were expected to sit patiently at home, they did not experience the same self-doubt men did in terms of their usefulness—or at least, they were not supposed to. Robert and Roland both question their idleness because they know that, as men, society expects them to contribute to public life and the advent of the nation. For women,

⁵⁰ F. P. Atkinson, ‘Hypochondriasis: Its Nature and Treatment’, *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, 18.5 (1872), 437–39 (p. 438).

⁵¹ Carolyn Laubender, ‘Loving Self-Reflection: Paradigms of Narcissism in *The Woman in White*’, *Lehigh Review*, 18 (2010), 14–21 (p. 15).

⁵² Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy*, p. 47.

nervousness mostly manifested itself in the form of hysterical fits, believed at the time to be connected to an unbalanced reproductive system, but which actually articulated their profound unhappiness with their domestic situation. Upper and middle-class women were considered vulnerable to experiencing either too little or too much mental and physical exertion and medical practitioners emphasised the need for striking the right balance to safeguard them from nervous breakdowns.⁵³ Isabel Gilbert and Laura Fairlie, who fail to find such balance, become victims of their nervous conditions, and stay in a prostrated state at home, never wondering if they could work to be more useful to society. While Isabel often fancies that she should run off to London to become a famous actress, it is only to satisfy her romantic ideals born out of her excessive novel-reading. When she is engaged to George and prepares herself to leave her position as governess to become his wife, she realises that ‘her life was all settled. She was not to be a great poetess or an actress. [...] She was not to be anything great. She was only to be a country surgeon's wife’ (*TDW*: 98). If marriage signified property security for women, it also marked their settlement in domestic confinement.

The Lesions of the Imagination

Domestic confinement, for both women and men of the upper classes, also meant a lack of confrontation with the outside world, which exacerbated their fears and fantasies about what lay outside the domestic realm. A large number of nineteenth-century physicians were starting to question the notion that hysteria originated in the uterus, some of them arguing that it found its seat in the individual's emotions. Nineteenth-century physician Julius Althaus proclaimed that the medical community did not ‘lay sufficient stress on the emotional character of the disease,’ which, according to him, explained the protean nature of hysteria, its ‘infinite variety of symptoms, but also [its] causation and progress.’⁵⁴ Strong emotions, such as fear, romantic disappointments, grief or pain could trigger hysterical fits, which were more frequent in women of a particular nervous constitution. Physician Robert Brudenell Carter, whose treatise *On the Pathology and Treatment of Hysteria* (1853)

⁵³ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 200.

⁵⁴ Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy*, p. 35.

opened with a chapter on ‘The Effects of Emotion,’ defined these emotions as ‘vivid feelings’ or ‘sensations’ aroused ‘by objects, either perceived, or remembered, or imagined, or by (the remembrance of) other prior emotions.’⁵⁵ These affects could therefore emanate from any aspect of daily life and could take the form of repressed memories or fantasies. This was particularly harmful to women, who often had to hide their emotions and subdue their imagination. Janet Oppenheim writes that it was particularly difficult to distinguish instances of nervous breakdowns in affluent women who were ‘plagued with nervous illness’ because, unlike men, their ‘lives were not defined by their occupation’ and moments of incapacitation were therefore less conspicuous.⁵⁶ For this reason, some women ‘may have dragged themselves around for years, just managing to function as wife, mother, sister, or daughter, but always shrouded in hopelessness and emotional pain.’⁵⁷ Such is the situation often described in sensation novels. Female characters such as Laura Fairlie and Isabel Gilbert are portrayed as functional wives and daughters on the surface, but the text often reveals underlying emotional struggles. Isabel who, as we remember, ‘went into hysterics because there was no fire in her sitting room’ (*TDW*: 112), is really just a deeply unhappy young woman. Her already nervous condition is aggravated by the repressed emotions she feels after marrying George. The narrator writes that Isabel’s marriage was a ‘mistake’ on several occasions and expresses the young woman’s submissive acceptance of it. Following her honeymoon, Isabel realises that her new life is never going to be what she had imagined for herself, and while ‘the slow tears gathered in her eyes, and rolled down her pale cheeks,’ she thought that her marriage ‘was a mistake,—a horrible and irreparable mistake,—whose dismal consequences she must bear for ever and ever’ (*TDW*: 110). The narrator leads us to believe that Isabel outgrows her former fantasies, as she thought of Napoleon the First and imagined a life by his side, only to feel the disparity with her new life:

Ah, to have lived in his time, and followed him, and slaved for him, and died for him in that lonely island far out in the waste of waters! The tears fell faster as all her childish

⁵⁵ Carter, *On the Pathology and Treatment of Hysteria*, p. 4.

⁵⁶ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 181.

⁵⁷ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 181.

dreams came back upon her, and arrayed themselves in cruel contrast with her new life.
(*TDW*: 110)

The ‘cruel contrast’ so fiercely felt by Isabel suggests that she has grown out of her childish fancies and has accepted her mistakes, but we later learn that she quickly ‘fell back upon the useless dreamy life she had led so long in her father’s house’ because she is so often ‘left to herself’ (*TDW*: 116). Isabel’s position as a doctor’s wife furthermore drives Oppenheim’s claim that women would appear to happily function as mothers or wives without their husbands ever noticing their mental struggles. As the contrast between her life and that of the aristocratic Lansdell family becomes more difficult to bear, Isabel increasingly suffers from headaches, which, as I have discussed, were recognised symptoms of hysteria, and George is ‘quite puzzled by his wife’s headache’ (*TDW*: 227). Braddon writes that ‘her pulse was rapid, her tongue was white, and [George] pronounced her to be bilious. He had not the faintest suspicion of any mental ailment lurking at the root of these physical derangements’ (*TDW*: 227). This suggests that even medical practitioners’ wives could be subjected to a lifetime of mental sufferings without their relatives understanding it, an idea which, once again, was already present in Braddon’s previous novel, *John Marchmont’s Legacy*. In it, Mrs Weston declares that ‘a doctor’s wife may often be useful when a doctor is himself out of place,’ furthermore stating that ‘these medical men watch us in the agonies of hysteria; they hear our sighs, they see our tears, and in their awkwardness and ignorance they prescribe commonplace remedies out of the pharmacopoeia’ (*JML*: 60). The repetition of this observation in two different novels shows Braddon’s awareness of women’s struggles with mental health and their inability to find support from their relatives and healthcare providers.⁵⁸

In *The Doctor’s Wife*, Braddon suggests that Isabel’s sheltered life at home and innocent views on the realities of the outside world foster her nervous disposition and tendency to hysterical fits. The narrator writes that:

⁵⁸ The leitmotif of the doctor’s wife whose husband fails to recognise her mental suffering is fairly common in nineteenth-century literature and can also be found, for example, in American writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s short story ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’ (1892).

Isabel was a very capricious, ill-tempered young woman [who] flew into a passion of rage and grief because her husband counted his fingers while she was reading to him. But then such little things as these make the troubles of people who are spared from the storm and tempest of life. (*TDW*: 121)

Isabel's ill-temper grows as she is confronted with the reality of married life and realises how different it is from the overly romanticised ideals she had developed from the novels she read. Yet, Isabel is still in no position to be acquainted with the hardships of others, and because of her confinement at home and lack of social interactions, she fails to recognise the real 'storm and tempest of life.' Althaus explained that hysteria was less noticeable in older women, not because their reproductive systems were less disturbed, as many physicians has previously suggested, but rather because as age advances, 'the mind has become settled and critical, and less accessible to sudden impressions and emotions.'⁵⁹ Althaus furthermore contended that 'as imagination gives way to a more matter-of-fact view of life and the world, illusions vanish, and impressions and sensations are kept more under control than previously.'⁶⁰ Braddon's fictional representation of hysteria through the character of Isabel corroborates Althaus's statement, as it is only after undergoing the worst trial of her young life—the premature death of both her husband and her platonic lover—that Isabel's mind settles and becomes more critical, leading her to devote her life to philanthropic missions. However, it was hardly easy for women like Isabel Gilbert to let go of their imagination and come to terms with 'a more matter-of-fact view of life.' As I demonstrated in Chapter One, women were expected to turn the fantasy of the ideal household into a reality and make the hearth a moral and spiritual heaven, set apart from the harshness of public life. As Mike Hepworth explains, 'the central contrast between the home and the outside world placed the onus on women to carry out the emotional and moral labour necessary to create and maintain the ideal home.'⁶¹ How, then, could women be expected to let go of their fanciful imagination and intense emotions, if they were simultaneously asked to maintain the fantasy of an ideal domestic life?

⁵⁹ Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy*, p. 46.

⁶⁰ Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy*, p. 46.

⁶¹ Hepworth, 'Privacy, Security and Respectability', p. 23.

Much like middle-and-upper-class housewives who stayed mostly at home, affluent men who were not confronted with public life and the pressure of work found themselves at odds with the realities of the outside world. Some, like Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone, never left their houses and did not entertain any social relations, while others, like Roland Lansdell and Robert Audley, went out into the world oblivious to the hardships of others because of their own privileged situations. This disengagement from the rest of society places them in a similar situation to the one described above, in which Isabel Gilbert, and along with her, many non-fictional Victorian women, suffer from their heightened emotions and imagination. One of the features of hypochondria that still endures today is the understanding that patients imagine themselves ill, and despite their experience of real mental sufferings, no recognised somatic disease can be diagnosed. The definition of hypochondria proposed in the *Penny Cyclopaedia* (1833) suggested that patients ‘believe themselves worse than they really are, [and] detail their sufferings with exaggeration’ while also considering every painful sensation in their bodies as the sign of ‘as many different diseases.’⁶² A contributor to *The British and Foreign Medical Review*, who underlined the complex nature of the disease, wrote that hypochondria involved ‘lesions of the intelligence or the imagination, namely the greatly exaggerated, or [...] the fanciful feelings and sensations of which the patient supposes himself to be the subject.’⁶³ The dismissive vocabulary used in this definition is suggestive of the author’s disdain for hypochondriac sufferers. This vocabulary reappears not only in many treatises on hypochondria, but also in the novels examined here. The nervous sufferer’s ‘fanciful’ sensations, here referring to their imagination, seem to be a key element of the disease. When Braddon first introduces the possibility that Robert Audley may be suffering from hypochondria for example, she assigns such realisation to Robert himself, as he wonders if he might not be imagining the chain of evidence he sees against Lady Audley, comparing his own deductions to ‘the nervous *fancies* of a hypochondriacal bachelor’ (*LAS*: 217, my emphasis). Furthermore, the word ‘lesion,’ often used to discuss physical injuries or trauma,⁶⁴ suggests an actual mental impairment in the sufferer. The author of the article

⁶² ‘The Penny Cyclopaedia’, p. 412.

⁶³ Anon, ‘A Complete Treatise on Hypochondria’, p. 366.

⁶⁴ ‘Lesion, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)
 <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/107461>> [accessed 27 November 2020] Entry 1.a & b.

mentioned above reveals a negative judgment toward hypochondriacs, suggesting that even the uneasiness they feel about their own health is not real, as they ‘suppose’ themselves to be subjected to these emotions.

Among the four male characters portrayed as hypochondriacs in my body of texts, Frederick Fairlie displays the most features deemed typical of the hypochondriac in the Victorian period. As cited earlier, nobody knows ‘what is the matter with him’ but they all ‘say it’s on the nerves’ (TWW: 37), which associates his suffering with the diagnosis of hypochondria. As Matthew Sweet notes in his edition of *The Woman in White*, “‘nervousness’ had become a catch-all diagnosis for mid-Victorian doctors, and for some patients, a badge of sophistication and delicacy’ (TWW: 657). Blaming one’s nerves for unidentified—and often imagined—ailments was therefore easy and often favoured by hypochondriac patients. Professor of English Maria Frawley explains that ‘the hypochondriac posed unique diagnostic challenges because of the role accorded in medical understanding to that inevitably amorphous entity, the imagination,’⁶⁵ a challenge that we encounter in *The Woman in White* and which explains, I argue, why Frederick Fairlie is never explicitly identified as a hypochondriac in the novel. Through Frederick’s constant complaint about his nerves and general physical and mental fragility, Collins hints at a possible hypochondria diagnosis, but never specifies it, thus letting the reader decide whether or not Fairlie’s illness originates from his imagination. Many characters in the novel share the belief that Fairlie is imagining his illness. The family solicitor Mr. Gilmore explains that he ‘had been, or had fancied himself to be, an invalid for years past’ (TWW: 127), which refers us back to the ‘fanciful feelings and sensations’ of hypochondriacs discussed above. Frederick always refers to his supposedly imagined illness in extremely vague terms. Often mentioning the ‘wretched state of [his] nerves’ (TWW: 43-4; three repetitions), the ‘arch-complainer’⁶⁶ also talks about ‘the lamentable state of [his] health’ (TWW: 44), ‘the tortures [he] should suffer [...] if Louis dropped that portfolio’ (TWW:

⁶⁵ Maria H. Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), p. 70.

⁶⁶ Michael Taylor refers to Frederick Fairlie as the ‘arch-complainer’ in “‘In the Name of Her Sacred Weakness’: Romance, Destiny, and Woman’s Revenge in Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*”, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 64.2 (1995), 289–304 (p. 298).

45), his ‘state of nervous wretchedness’ (TWW: 338), his ‘miserable health’ (TWW: 338), and his ‘prostrated’ state (TWW: 346). The diversity of evasive symptoms Frederick describes reflects James Boswell’s observation that ‘a disordered imagination teems with a boundless multiplicity of evils, [making it] scarcely possible to specify all the sufferings of a Hypochondriack.’⁶⁷ Boswell’s unusual turn of phrase classifies the imagination as an organ of the human body, which can be disordered and requires curing. In this sense, Frederick aligns with the view of hypochondria as a ‘disordered imagination’ coupled with a constant sense of insecurity. Such a state of mind exacerbates Frederick’s belief that any contact with the outside world is a threat to his health. When Count Fosco visits him to share the news of Marian’s illness, Frederick instantly fears the illness to be infectious, and refuses to accept Fosco’s ‘personal assurances of the uninfected nature of the fever’ (TWW: 351). Frederick believes himself to be in imminent danger of being infected as Fosco seems to him ‘big enough to carry typhus by the ton, and to dye the very carpet he walked on with scarlet fever’ (TWW: 351). Frederick becomes excessively anxious for the Count to leave and laments that he is lingering in the room, allowing ‘more time for the development of infectious influences—in *my* room, too—remember that, in *my* room!’ (TWW: 353. Emphasis in original text). Frederick’s insistence to mark his property shows how much the intrusion of the outside world into his own confined space unnerves him. His dread of what lays beyond the boundaries of his own house—or even his own room—is increased by his boundless imagination and every picture of peril he can conjure up. His ignorance of the outside world makes him prone to see danger in anything he is not familiar with, a feature he shared with the typical hypochondriac who had a ‘morbid aptitude to fancy himself the victim of every new disease or symptom which he either reads of, or from which he hears that others are suffering.’⁶⁸ This account stresses the importance of the imagination and the extent to which the hypochondriac’s mind will go in order to contrive unknown diseases. The Count finally leaves, and Fairlie immediately requires action to be taken against the imaginary infection:

⁶⁷ Boswell, *Boswell’s Column*, p. 44.

⁶⁸ Anon, ‘A Complete Treatise on Hypochondria’, p. 366.

I rang for Louis, and retired to my bathroom. Tepid water, strengthened with aromatic vinegar, for myself, and copious fumigation for my study, were the obvious precautions to take, and of course I adopted them. I rejoice to say they proved successful. (TWW: 356)

These measures would obviously prove successful as they acted against an imaginary threat. This entire passage correlates with what Boswell described of his own struggles with hypochondria, explaining that the sufferer ‘is either so weakly timid as to be afraid of everything in which there is a possibility of danger, or he starts into the extremes of rashness and desperation.’⁶⁹ The later state is reminiscent of the passionate fits into which hysterical women were said to fall, an element characteristic of both nervous diseases.

Like Frederick Fairlie, Noel Vanstone displays an exuberant imagination in terms of his health, and his reactions to external threats to his wellbeing often resemble hysterical fits. Noel’s hypochondria is less conspicuous than Frederick’s, as the young aristocrat is not so often complaining about the state of his health, but his prostrated condition, as well as his distrust of everything and everyone, along with the ‘chronic feebleness—[...] fatty degeneration—[and] want of vital power in the [heart] itself’ (NN: 227) make Noel the archetype of nervous sufferers. The physical fragility of the young man is constantly mentioned and undermined, thus suggesting that his suffering is, more often than not, affected. He is indeed referred to as, throughout the novel, ‘an invalid’ (225), a ‘frail, flaxen-haired, self-satisfied little man’ (228), a ‘little man’ (228; 350; 369; 475), a ‘coward’ (231), a man with ‘half-closed eyes, weak and watery’ (332), a ‘miserable little creature’ (341; 452), a ‘frail little figure’ (440), a man who ‘looked singularly small, and frail, and miserable’ (441), and a ‘poor weak creature’ (475). Furthermore, his feminine attributes are regularly stressed in the novel, which brings the character closer to the hysterical condition so willingly attributed to women at the time. In order to get what he wants, Noel often resorts to tricks and tantrums which he blames on his nervous condition. When he realised he was the victim of an elaborate scheme, Noel ‘dropped to his knees and caught at [Lecount’s] dress with the grasp of a drowning man,’ yelling ‘Save me!’, and almost fainted out of fear (NN: 449). Later in the novel he furthermore reacts to upsetting news

⁶⁹ Boswell, *Boswell’s Column*, p. 209.

‘with an angry stamp of his foot’ before ‘he sank into a chair and burst out crying’ (NN: 473). These descriptions and episodes blur the lines between hypochondria and hysteria, thus suggesting that Collins did not consider either of these disorders as gender-bound.

Andrew Scull notes that in the nineteenth century, nervous sufferers were commonly believed to feign their illness to manipulate people.⁷⁰ The insistence on the importance of the imagination in both hypochondriacal and hysterical disorders did not help to discredit this assumption, nor did the fictionalisation of these illnesses. In Collins’s novel, Noel Vanstone always uses his nervous state for personal gain, and the narrator leaves little doubt as to the deceitful nature of his nervous fits. When Noel receives an anonymous letter informing him of the conspiracy at play against him, his anxiety prostrates him and he finds himself unable to take any action against it, leaving everything to his housekeeper. While the narrator concedes that ‘no practiced eye observing the peculiar bluish pallor of his complexion [...] could have failed to perceive that the great organ of life was in this man [...] too weak for the function which it was called on to perform’ (NN: 241), the reader is still led to question the somatic nature of his prostration. Seconds after Mrs Lecount has reassured Noel that he will not be losing any money, Noel is ‘recovering his self-importance, and raising himself gradually in his chair’ (NN: 242). Similarly, when Mrs Lecount and Noel move to North Shingles Villa and they walk along the beach together, Noel portrays himself as an invalid in too much pain to entertain the company of his neighbour, Mr. Bygrave. Mrs Lecount notes that he ‘complained of fatigue [...] a few minutes since’ and entreats him to ‘go indoors and rest’ (NN: 296), but as soon as Noel lays eyes on the beautiful Magdalen, he declares: ‘not yet, Lecount. [...] I fancy I feel stronger; I fancy I can go on a little’ (NN: 296). His choice of words is important here, as it reminds us of the ‘fanciful feelings and sensations’ of the hypochondriac bachelor mentioned earlier and suggests that Noel can conjure up a picture of his wellbeing on demand.

Like Frederick Fairlie who becomes paranoiac about the idea of catching a disease brought by Count Fosco, Noel becomes fearful of everything surrounding him after

⁷⁰ Andrew Scull, *Hysteria: The Disturbing History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 93.

learning about Magdalen's treachery.⁷¹ He asks his housekeeper 'can an egg be poisoned?' after having some for breakfast (NN: 453). Noel refuses to be left alone and helpless in his house after this incident and cannot think about anything besides the peril in which he believes himself to be. His fear is once again connected to his excessive sedentary state and his inexperience of the outside world. Noel's inactivity and nervous imagination render him the ideal victim of conspiracies. As Benjamin Rush, one of the pioneers of psychiatry, noted in 1812, 'constant employment is an antidote to the fear of death; for fear, like vice, is the offspring of idleness.'⁷² An American hypochondriac patient, whose ordeal he reported to Rush in a letter in 1808, explained:

My mind is liable to be excited by trifling and unsubstantial causes; disposed to cleave to unpleasant usages, to dwell on dreadful consequences from really trifling circumstances, to be appalled with vain apprehensions, and to cherish disgusts and disagreeable associations; indeed, to labour under a *fixidity* of ideas which causes my misery.⁷³

This narrative resonates with Noel's situation and accounts for nervous sufferers' struggles to let go of their anxiety, which many believed was fancied, unsubstantial and vain, and resulted from their inability to exert themselves to a more dynamic lifestyle. The fictional subjects examined here experience the same 'fixidity of ideas' Rush's patient described, as all of them obsessively dwell on their pains and narrate their suffering to the people around them. The next section examines the literary use of nervousness as a narrative catalyst.

The Narration of Their Own Sufferings

⁷¹ For a more detailed examination of the connection between hypochondria and paranoia, see George Rousseau, 'Modernism and the Two Paranoias: The Neurology of Persecution', in *Neurology and Modernity: A Cultural History of Nervous Systems, 1800-1950*, ed. by Laura Salisbury and Andrew Shail (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 130-47.

⁷² Rush, *Medical Inquiries*, p. 328.

⁷³ Rush, *Medical Inquiries*, p. 87 Emphasis in original text.

According to the author of the article ‘A Complete Treatise on Hypochondria,’ the lesions of the imagination of hypochondriacs manifested themselves through:

the disproportion of the patient's anxiety about himself, [...] the tenacity with which his attention is fixed on his own case; [...] his propensity to dwell on his complaints; to speak of them to everyone; and, in describing them, to employ the most vivid and strong language.⁷⁴

This need to narrate one's suffering aligns with the vision of hypochondria we have today, which suggests that ‘this narrative act has had a lengthy and an intimate connection with nervous conditions,’ as Peter Logan points out.⁷⁵ The above pages have served to show how much the hypochondriac characters in Braddon's and Collins's novels are ‘fixed on their own cases’ and dramatize their sufferings, while the final pages of this chapter address how the excessive narration of their ailments works within the whole dynamic of sensation novels. Here I also examine the space taken by these narratives compared with those of female characters and demonstrate that a genuine imbalance existed between hypochondria and hysteria on this issue, as female nervous sufferers tend to censor their torments while their male counterparts are often more effusive. Thomas Trotter claimed that patients suffering from nervous disorders of any kind had ‘a selfish desire of engrossing the sympathy and attention of others to the narration of their own sufferings,’⁷⁶ yet it is mostly hypochondria that has historically been associated with this tendency. Julius Althaus who, in his lectures, exposed all the external signs of hysteria, noted that, despite a wide array of issues connected to the disease, hysteric patients were ‘singularly free from hypochondriasis. It is true that they complain much of symptoms, but they do not trouble themselves and others with speculations about the nature or probable termination of their case.’⁷⁷ By contrast, troubling themselves and others about their condition is precisely what hypochondriac men do in the novels examined here.

⁷⁴ Anon, ‘A Complete Treatise on Hypochondria’, p. 366.

⁷⁵ Peter Melville Logan, ‘Narrating Hysteria: “Caleb Williams” and the Cultural History of Nerves’, *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 29.2 (1996), 206–22 (p. 208).

⁷⁶ Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, p. xii.

⁷⁷ Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy*, p. 47.

In her chapter “‘Beyond Hope, Help, or Remedy’: Confession, Cure, and the Hypochondriac’s Narrative,” scholar of nineteenth-century literature Maria Frawley considers the confessional narrative form as the perfect outlet for hypochondriacs, as it offers them the possibility to tell their readers about those sensations which they were told were only imagined.⁷⁸ Sensation novels, which rely on the presence of mystery and deceptions, contain many confessions within their pages, all proposed under different forms. As the writer of a collection of poems entitled ‘An Alien’s Dreams,’ comprising of ‘half-heartbroken, half-cynical verses, those deliciously scornful elegies upon the hollowness of lovely woman and things in general’ (TDW: 120), Roland Lansdell has an outlet for his despondency and painful sensations, but it is mostly through the omniscient narrative voice that the reader becomes aware of Roland’s pains. Owing to the narrator’s overarching perspective, we learn that ‘Mr. Lansdell often thought about his life. It is not natural that a man, originally well disposed, should lead a bad and useless life without thinking of it’ (TDW: 153). Braddon’s moral judgement is yet another reminder that ‘the soul of man cannot be satisfied in a state of sin: and a purposeless idle existence is a state of sin’ (TDW: 152. Emphasis in the original text), and suggests that it was the idle man’s plague to continually think about his sins and dwell on them. This idea was shared by the author of the *Confessions of a Hypochondriac*, who eventually realised that ‘hypochondriacism is the affliction of idleness,’ further declaring that ‘man was not made to do nothing, and he who spends and wastes his hours as if they were his own, not as if they were lent to him, probationally, has to pay for it with a proportionate misery.’⁷⁹ Roland’s misery, as we come to realise it, is boredom, a proportionate and fitting punishment for leading a useless and unprofitable life. Roland confesses to his cousin Gwendoline that ‘it’s myself that bores me; the only bore a man can’t cut’ (TDW: 127). Roland suffers from ‘a state in which the patient examines himself, and experiences a continual desire to speak about all his moral sufferings,’⁸⁰ as a contributor for the *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology* wrote about hypochondria. After carefully examining himself, Roland realises

⁷⁸ Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity*, chap. 2.

⁷⁹ M. R. C. S., *Confessions*, p. 306.

⁸⁰ Anon, ‘An Analysis of Guislain’s Work on Insanity’, *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 6.23 (1853), 418–36 (p. 432).

that the root of his nervous suffering lies in his moral failings. The writer of the *Confessions* presents idleness as ‘the crime of the rich, as poverty is the crime of the poor,’ and compares their situations by declaring that ‘the one is starved by want, the other bored by inanity. Ennui is as killing to endure as hard work.’⁸¹ Roland is constantly and unfruitfully looking for ways to occupy his time and invariably concludes that there is nothing for him to do. He often wonders:

What should he do with himself? That was the grand question which this young man found himself very often called upon to decide. [...] Ten years is a very long time when you have fifteen thousand a year and nothing particular to do with yourself or your money. (TDW: 165)

Once again, the narration of his troubles resembles that of non-fictional hypochondriacs, who complained about the vacuity of their lives. The author of the *Confessions* writes:

What was I to do with my time? with myself?—Nothing to do! Melancholy condition! What a pity I was not born a stupid idiot, insensible to care and caution; a reckless rake or inaccurate spindrift. [...] Something—anything—than this unbroken nothingness. Inaction pillages the soul of its joy.⁸²

Their respectively indirect and direct speeches aptly express the state of their mental disarray. The rhetorical questions, dashes, and disjointed sentences show the turmoil of their psyche and give the reader access to the root of their suffering. Both of these men’s narrations are not likely, however, to promote sympathy from their readers. Roland asks to be pitied for having too much money, while the author of the *Confessions* wishes he was not so clever, and it is easy to understand why the public opinion about nervous sufferers was negative at the time. Frawley notes that the author of the *Confessions* was ‘nothing if not dramatic,’⁸³ which we can witness in the above passage. Even though the public and medical opinion towards hypochondria had shifted in the early nineteenth century from scepticism to sympathy towards patients—mainly because of ‘a growing body of literature

⁸¹ M. R. C. S., *Confessions*, p. 116.

⁸² M. R. C. S., *Confessions*, p. 155.

⁸³ Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity*, p. 65.

in medical psychology' which discussed this condition—,⁸⁴ such dramatic accounts told by sufferers hardly helped the community to take their pains seriously. A year after the publication of the anonymous *Confessions*, a writer for the *JPMMP* expressed what many of his contemporaries seemed to think of hypochondriacs, whom he dubbed an 'unhappy and ignoble class of personages,' writing about the *Confessions* that 'the buffoonery is indispensable to its success, since it would be impossible to treat the subject in any other way than that of the burlesque—aiming a random shot at folly as it flies.'⁸⁵ Braddon's writing does not pertain to the burlesque, yet the reader can hardly take Roland's complaints seriously nor can he really sympathise with him. When Roland rambles on about the boredom that afflicts his life and asks, 'what is the use of me, Gwendoline? what am I good for?' (*TDW*: 295), we are tempted to answer: not a great deal.

While Roland Lansdell's complaints are mostly reported by the narrator, the reader witnesses Frederick Fairlie's excessive narration of his ailments first-hand. Due to the nature of the narrative form of *The Woman in White*, Frederick enjoys the position of first-person narrator at one point in the story. Collins explains in his 1860 preface that the novel is 'an experiment' where 'the story of the book is told throughout by the characters of the book. They are all placed in different positions along the chain of events; and they all take the chain up in turn, and carry it on to the end' (*TWW*: 3). In his approximately twenty-page-long narrative, Frederick writes about the events that have occurred in his presence and have had some importance in the story of his niece Laura Fairlie. The invalid emphasises that he had no wish to write this narrative but was threatened and forced to do so, and asks: 'is a man in my state of nervous wretchedness capable of writing narratives?' (*TWW*: 338). What Maria Frawley's work on confessions uncovers however, is that nervous sufferers were indeed capable of such a task and evidently found a form of catharsis in it. The length of Frederick's narrative and the amount of detail he gives on the state of his health persuades us that, in spite of his complaints, he enjoys the opportunity of self-disclosure. With this narrative, Frederick Fairlie's obsession with his state of health powerfully epitomises the condition of hypochondriasis. Among innumerable instances of

⁸⁴ Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity*, p. 71.

⁸⁵ Anon, 'On Hypochondriasis', p. 5.

Frederick's grievances within that passage, we note such expressions as: 'shattered by my miserable health and my family troubles, I am incapable of resistance' (TWW: 338) and 'when I am totally prostrated (did I mention that I was totally prostrated by Marian's letter?) it always takes me three days to get up again' (TWW: 346). These vague descriptions of the state of his health correspond to the typical writings by nervous victims who discussed their 'shattered nerves or broken health'⁸⁶ and show how much Fairlie—and by extension Collins—made use of previous nerve narratives. As Peter Logan explains, the discourse on nervousness was so omnipresent in the Victorian society that it permeated most aspects of social life and most literate men and women would have been familiar with nerve narratives. Logan indeed writes that in the nineteenth century, 'nervous disorders could not be thought without an implicit, privileged association with narrative.'⁸⁷

Frederick also repeatedly complains that he is not left alone, and reiterates a desire for the 'preservation of his own tranquillity' (TWW: 111; 192). The old bachelor begins his narrative by declaring, 'it is the grand misfortune of my life that nobody will let me alone' (TWW: 348). Outside of this narrative, which stands as his own 'Confessions of a Hypochondriac,' the old man constantly talks about his sufferings, something the family solicitor Mr. Gilmore remarks when he visits him, noting that 'his talk was to the same purpose as usual—all about himself and his ailments' (TWW: 129). Out of Frederick's thirty-four utterances in the novel—excluding the entire section narrated by him—fifteen of them mention the state of his health,⁸⁸ which attests to his obsessive need to remind people that he is a sufferer. While Fairlie portrays himself as an aesthete because of his supposedly superior taste in the arts, he can more convincingly be addressed as a 'virtuoso on the sensitive nerves,'⁸⁹ whose narrative resembles a litany of complaints. Because an excessive narration of one's suffering has featured as an enduring and primary characteristic of hypochondria, it is understandable why many scholars have attributed the

⁸⁶ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 5.

⁸⁷ Logan, "Narrating Hysteria", p. 207.

⁸⁸ These numbers only include Fairlie's direct speeches, not his reported speeches, which appear in letters or through other characters' speeches.

⁸⁹ Anon, 'Hypochondriasis', *Medical Critic and Psychological Journal*, 3.10 (1863), 300–305 (p. 300).

disorder to Frederick Fairlie in their readings of *The Woman in White*. While some have talked about ‘Frederick Fairlie’s extreme hypochondria,’⁹⁰ or his ‘comical hypochondria,’⁹¹ others have merely casually, and often dismissively, diagnosed Fairlie as a hypochondriac.⁹² Nevertheless, none of these scholars has justified such an interpretation, and I argue that it is essential to go back to nineteenth-century medical views on the disease to have an accurate reading of the character, especially considering Collins’s choice not to explicitly diagnose Fairlie as a hypochondriac.

Frederick’s obsessive need to discuss his nervous state and make others aware of his suffering relates to the allegations of a contributor for the *JPMMP*, who wrote that ‘nothing is so painful to this [hypochondriac] patient as the perception that no attention is paid to his complaints.’⁹³ Such is also the case of Collins’s other hypochondriac, Noel Vanstone. When Mrs. Lecount suggests going away to take care of business for her helpless master, Noel reacts ‘with an angry stamp of his foot’ and expresses his discontent through both words and gesture:

‘And leave me here? Leave me alone in this house after what has happened? [...] Have you no feeling, Lecount? Can you leave me in my miserable situation—?’ He sank into a chair and burst out crying over his own idea, before he had completed the expression of it in words. ‘Too bad!’ he said, with his handkerchief over his face—‘too bad!’ (NN: 473)

The disjointed discourse and rhetorical questions remind us of Roland Lansdell’s melodramatic speech, which is amplified here by the theatricality of the handkerchief brought to the eyes and the hysterical cries. Unlike Frederick Fairlie who is given full possession of the narration in *The Woman in White*, Noel’s narrative voice is never heard, but Collins manages to communicate his complaints to the reader through another narrative

⁹⁰ Eileen Cleere, *Avuncularism: Capitalism, Patriarchy, and Nineteenth-Century English Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 12.

⁹¹ Laubender, ‘Loving Self-Reflection’, p. 15; Taylor, “‘In the Name of Her Sacred Weakness’”, p. 304.

⁹² Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins*, p. 43; Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, p. 112; Pykett, *Wilkie Collins*, p. 182; Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors: A Life of Wilkie Collins* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 218.

⁹³ Anon, ‘An Analysis of Guislain’s Work on Insanity’, p. 432.

device. On several occasions, Collins uses free indirect discourse to convey Noel's long jeremiads, which reveal the young man's vital need to ensure that people around him pay attention to his 'miserable situation,' as the following passage shows:

The gossip, led by Noel Vanstone, consisted as usual of an endless string of questions, and was devoted entirely to the subject of himself and his future prospects. Where would Lecount take him to when they went away the next morning? Why to London? Why should he be left in London, while Lecount went on to St. Crux to give the admiral the Letter and the Will? Because his wife might follow him, if he went to the admiral's? Well, there was something in that. And because he ought to be safely concealed from her, in some comfortable lodging, near Mr. Loscombe? [...] Would the law set him free from the Wretch who had deceived him? How tiresome of Lecount not to know! [...] So he ran on—the poor weak creature! the abject, miserable little man! (NN: 475)

Noel's anxiety to ensure that he will be taken care of is expressed through his incessant egomaniacal line of questioning. One can easily imagine how this scene would be acted on stage, Noel hurriedly asking his questions without waiting for an answer and condescendingly dismissing Mrs. Lecount's replies. Collins's use of free-indirect speech here is a fitting tool used to carry forward the 'pervasive theatrical metaphors'⁹⁴ Mark Ford identifies in *No Name* and to give more substance to an otherwise insipid character. As Peter Logan notes, while most symptoms of hypochondria entailed 'constrained or inhibited actions,' the act of narration 'is not only uninhibited but actually in need of constraint.'⁹⁵ Incapable of performing any sort of physical action, Noel is bound to assert his presence and superiority through spoken performances, which also explains his constant need to remind people that he is 'master.'⁹⁶

Logan's conjecture that 'while nervous condition impedes most actions, it enables the act of narration'⁹⁷ is certainly true for male nervous sufferers, but lacks foundation when it comes to female sufferers. Not only are women confined to the domestic environment in

⁹⁴ Wilkie Collins, *No Name*, ed. by Mark Ford (London: Penguin, 1994) Introduction pxii.

⁹⁵ Logan, 'Narrating Hysteria', p. 208.

⁹⁶ Noel Vanstone repeats 'I am master' on four occasions in the novel.

⁹⁷ Logan, 'Narrating Hysteria', p. 208.

sensation novels, their stories are also set within the boundaries of male narratives. This is particularly true of *The Woman in White* in which, as Ann Gaylin notes, ‘women have very different narrative opportunities than men do.’⁹⁸ Marian Halcombe shares a significant amount of the narrative space with Walter Hartright, yet it is he who ‘ultimately controls what is told to whom.’⁹⁹ While, as I mentioned above, Frederick Fairlie enjoys some narrative agency within the novel, Laura Fairlie, whose story and misfortunes form the basis of the plot, is never given such power. Although Collins declared in his preface that his epistolary experiment had ‘afforded [his] characters a new opportunity of expressing themselves, through the medium of the written contributions which they are supposed to make to the progress of the narrative’ (TWW: 3), his exclusion of Laura Fairlie as a reliable narrator shows his partiality for assertive male characters over pivotal female ones. In addition to Laura’s actions being dictated and controlled by her male relatives, her ‘female narrative activity and mobility [...] is contained and enclosed in reassuring, conventional, patriarchal structures.’¹⁰⁰ Laura does not have narrative agency in the novel because of her nervous condition and the unreliability of her emotions. As I discussed above, Victorians viewed nervous and hysteric women as ruled by their emotions and their discourses suffered from it. After meeting Marian and Laura upon his return from America, Walter needs to acquaint himself with past events and the hardships Laura had to overcome in the asylum to which she was confined. Rather than including in his collection of narratives the account of Laura’s journey from Blackwater Park to her lodgings in London, Walter decides to submit to the reader his own rewriting of the event. Dismissing Laura’s ‘often interrupted, often inevitably confused’ narrative of her own life (TWW: 414), Walter offers a ‘brief, plain, studiously simple abstract which I committed to writing for my own guidance’ so that ‘the tangled web will be most speedily and most intelligibly unrolled’ (TWW: 414). As Gaylin remarks, ‘Walter boldly claims for himself the right and the power to tell other people’s stories better than they can,’¹⁰¹ when in fact Laura’s interrupted, confused and unintelligible account would have told her story much better. In collaging

⁹⁸ Ann Elizabeth Gaylin, ‘The Madwoman Outside the Attic: Eavesdropping and Narrative Agency in *The Woman in White*’, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 43.3 (2001), 303–33 (p. 305).

⁹⁹ Gaylin, ‘The Madwoman Outside the Attic’, p. 305.

¹⁰⁰ Gaylin, ‘The Madwoman Outside the Attic’, p. 305.

¹⁰¹ Gaylin, ‘The Madwoman Outside the Attic’, p. 321.

every character's narratives, Walter seeks to prove to the reader—and a possible jury—that foul play was conducted against Laura Fairlie, and a genuine narrative of her kidnapping and forced institutionalisation, told in her own traumatised and nerve-wracked narrative voice, would have offered a much stronger advantage to their claim. We are told at the beginning of the novel that both Laura and Frederick are 'in widely different ways, rather nervous and sensitive' (TWW: 39) yet Laura is the only one who is stripped of her narrative prospect because of said nervousness, despite her central position in the story.

Furthermore, Laura's dismissal as a reliable narrator is not restricted to the aftermath of her imprisonment in the asylum and the impact it had on her psyche. At no point in the novel is Laura given narrative agency, and thus a chance to discuss and share her nervous suffering. Much like Laura, nervous patients were rarely given the opportunity to directly share their experiences with the public. Leading nineteenth-century alienists and mental health practitioners, such as Jean Dominique Esquirol or James Cowles Prichard, discussed patients' cases under headings such as 'Mad'e C, twenty-nine years of age' or 'Mad'lle E., thirty years of age, of a nervous temperament and delicate constitution'¹⁰² and described their symptoms and sufferings by paraphrasing their own accounts of it, but rarely included direct quotations. This explains why, as Frawley writes, so many books, pamphlets and essays were written and published by sufferers directly.¹⁰³ Like medical practitioners then, Walter describes Laura's symptoms from his own observations of them but never lets her speak—or rather write—for herself. When Walter is away and incapable of accounting for the events taking place at Blackwater Park himself, he entrusts the housekeeper Eliza Michelson with the progression of the story rather than Laura, who was herself present at the time. While it is never explicitly indicated, her nervous state is the reason why she is deemed unsuitable as a strong and apposite narrator. Eliza Michelson recounts that:

[Laura] was much too nervous and too delicate in health to bear the anxiety of Miss Halcombe's illness calmly. She only did herself harm, without being of the least real assistance. A more gentle and affectionate lady never lived—but she cried, and she was

¹⁰² Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, p. 185.

¹⁰³ Frawley, *Invalidism and Identity*, p. 11.

frightened, two weaknesses which made her entirely unfit to be present in a sick-room.
(*TWW*: 358)

This account of Laura's unfitness as a sick-room nurse could be used to describe her unfitness as a narrator too. Her nervous and delicate health supposedly make her liable to fantasies that would discredit her report of events and be of no 'real assistance' in the matter. Furthermore, her cries and fits of fright—both expressions of her hysteria—temporarily distract her from the series of events happening at Blackwater Park and prevent her from providing an accurate statement of them. These limitations are however never imputed to Frederick Fairlie, a nervous sufferer as well, whose account of events is taken as a reliable piece of evidence, even though his histrionic descriptions of his encounters with Count Fosco and Laura's maid are full of ellipses used to account for the mental and physical toll this narrative act had on him. One may wonder why Collins chose not to consider Laura as a trustworthy—or even powerful—narrator for his story, since the reader experiences such an intense reaction to Fairlie's narrative. The old man's condescending tone, self-pitying, and overall insufferable manners are nothing if not captivating and, as D. A. Miller notes, 'no reader can identify with unruffled characters' because nervousness has become a 'necessary "condition" in the novel for perceiving its real plot and for participating in it as more than a pawn.'¹⁰⁴ The absence of Laura's narrative voice therefore becomes another mystery the reader needs to unveil.

Like Laura Fairlie, Isabel Gilbert lacks the power to express her nervous suffering and is therefore misunderstood by everyone around her. While her hysteric fits are observed by both the narrator and the characters, who record her 'hysterical' weeping on several occasions (*TDW*: 112; 375; 377), Isabel is never given the opportunity to talk about her mental health and share with others the hardships she faces. As I have mentioned earlier, Isabel's husband is incapable of understanding his wife's mental afflictions, and Isabel's incipient attempts to communicate with her husband in the early days of their marriage are checked by George's pragmatic views on how his wife ought to behave. When George fails to share his wife's interest in the poetry of 'An Alien's Dream,' Isabel has one of her nervous fits and bursts out crying, telling him 'you don't understand me,' to which he

¹⁰⁴ Miller, 'Cage Aux Folles', p. 109.

answers, ‘No, my dear Isabel, [...] I certainly do not understand you when you give way to such temper as this without any visible cause’ (*TDW*: 121). Rather than discussing this issue with his wife, George leaves the room and refuses to indulge in his wife’s attempt to communicate with him. The narrator informs us that George ‘did not relish these flights of fancy on the part of the young lady he was training with a view to his own ideal of a wife’ (*TDW*: 104) and such an ideal wife could not very well be subject to mental derangements. George, who is said to ‘crush his wife’s enthusiasm’ (*TDW*: 116) also crushes her very nature as an emotional and sensitive woman and along with it the voice that expresses such characteristics. As the narrator often remarks, George is delighted by his domestic situation and only sees the empty signs of his wife’s happiness at home, for, when he comes back from work, ‘he found a beautiful creature waiting to receive him—a lovely and lovable creature, who put her arms around his neck and kissed him, and smiled at him’ (*TDW*: 118). Such a perfect image of the fulfilled housewife does not prompt any suspicion concerning her mental health, yet the narrator points to the extent of George’s denial, writing that ‘it was not in his nature to see that the graceful little embrace, and the welcoming kiss, and the smile, were rather mechanical matters that came of themselves’ (*TDW*: 118). George seems to need a strong visual illustration of his wife’s unhappiness in order to notice it, as the verb ‘to see’ used above, and his request for a ‘visible cause’ in the previous passage suggest. Without these visual cues, the pragmatic doctor cannot fathom his wife’s internal—and undisclosed—pains.

George’s dismissal of his wife’s physical manifestations of mental breakdowns—in the form of hysterical fits and passionate outbursts—along with his unwavering and blind confidence in their domestic bliss, leaves little space for Isabel to express her sufferings. Unlike Collins, who evidently suggests that Noel Vanstone’s outbreaks are melodramatic and feigned, Braddon never leads us to believe that Isabel’s hysterical fits are anything but real, although she often condemns them as childish. Isabel thus reverts to communicating her sorrow through the act of reading, and finds in the novels she obsessively pores over the emancipation she seeks. Julius Althaus, who wrote that ‘the mental condition of [hysterical patients] becomes, after a time, considerably perverted,’ noted that they tended to be ‘immoderately fond of sensational novels, of concerts, balls

and theatres, and neglect the graver duties of life.’¹⁰⁵ These are all forms of human expression in which both the performer and viewer can voice their emotions. Isabel, like many other women who had to ‘conceal their passions’ at home,¹⁰⁶ finds in literature a form of narration that perfectly expresses her own feelings, in the absence of any other platform for her to disclose them openly. From the Romantic poetry of Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord Byron to Charles Dickens’s novels, Isabel always finds a way to extract from literature little morsels of the life she aspires to, lamenting that her ‘life was altogether vulgar and commonplace, and she could not extract one ray of romance out of it, twist it as she would. Her father was not a Dombey, or an Augustine Caxton, or even a Rawdon Crawley’ (*TDW*: 29). Owing to the narrator’s omniscient position, the reader is fully acquainted with Isabel’s mental afflictions but, unlike Roland Lansdell who communicates his troubles through both the internal narration and his external complaints to others, Isabel never voices her distress out loud. Every expression of Isabel’s emotional state seems to be related to fiction, and Braddon’s innumerable references to literature always dovetail with Isabel’s mental state. When still a governess, Isabel thinks, ‘with a thrill of horror’ that she has not yet lived, at the old age of eighteen, any of the major life-events her favourite characters have experienced at a similar age, as the narrative voices notes that ‘Juliet was buried in the tomb of the Capulets before this age, and haughty Beatrix had lived her life, and Florence Dombey was married and settled, and the story all over’ (*TDW*: 73). Her relationship to fiction invades every aspect of her mental process as even her thoughts resemble the pages of a book. The narrator twice refers to Roland as ‘*him*’ because Isabel ‘always thought of him in italics’ (*TDW*: 196. Emphasis in the original text), and she often ‘floated away upon the wings of sentiment and fancy, into that unreal region where the young squire of Mordred reigned supreme, beautiful as a prince in a fairy tale, grand as a demigod in some classic legend’ (*TDW*: 237). The unreal regions to which Isabel’s mind escapes seem to dangerously overshadow her real life, as the young lady only finds space to narrate her distress in the fictional realm. Isabel’s tendency to fanaticise about any resemblance between her life and that of her favourite fictional characters is all the more problematic because of her own mistaken reading of literature. As Catherine J. Golden

¹⁰⁵ Althaus, *On Epilepsy, Hysteria and Ataxy*, p. 47.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Hysteria’, ‘The Penny Cyclopaedia’, p. 420.

notes, 'those familiar with Isabel's favorite authors and characters likely have grave misgivings about her ability to analyze fiction,' especially when Isabel idealises cruel and rough male characters such as Dickens's Bill Sykes and envies mistreated female characters like Florence Dombey.¹⁰⁷ The impact of her misguided literary fabrications is however examined at more length in the final chapter of this thesis.

Historians and literary scholars have argued that the discourse on hysteria has commonly 'restricted women to rigid domestic roles, with nearly all behaviors that deviate from a so-called "angel in the house" domesticity being labeled as potential evidence of a hysterical nature.'¹⁰⁸ Both Collins and Braddon subscribe to this assumption as their nervous female characters Laura Fairlie and Isabel Gilbert are branded hysterical by other characters whenever their behaviour deviates from social expectations. Yet, their overall nervous disposition is never fully explored in the novels and its impact on their mental health and happiness is not accounted for. Unlike male characters like Frederick Fairlie, Noel Vanstone, Roland Lansdell or Robert Audley, whose whims and nervous sufferings are recorded throughout the pages of the novels, female characters find little space dedicated to their anguish. Not only do female characters lack narrative agency to discuss their malady, they also lack an overall recognition of it and therefore remain unnoticed as grieving characters. While the effects of Laura's traumatic imprisonment on her psyche are alluded to in *The Woman in White*, they are never fully recorded or examined, nor is the root of her original nervousness. Because Laura is never given the opportunity to account for her nervous disposition there can be no alleviation of her suffering, and it only remains an accepted truth that Laura is 'rather nervous.' One may then wonder if she will not fall into the same apathy and headache-ridden daily-life after her wedding to Walter Hartright. By contrast, because male sufferers enjoy so much space to narrate their sufferings and express how their lack of occupation affects their mental health, there is a hope for recovery. Both Roland and Robert, who are given the opportunity to articulate their moral

¹⁰⁷ Catherine J. Golden, 'Censoring Her Sensationalism : Mary Elizabeth Braddon and *The Doctor's Wife*', in *Victorian Sensations: Essays on a Scandalous Genre*, ed. by Kimberly Harrison and Richard Fantina (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2006), pp. 29–40 (p. 34).

¹⁰⁸ Erin Wilson, 'The End of Sensibility: The Nervous Body in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Literature and Medicine*, 30.2 (2012), 276–91 (p. 287).

anguish and to make amends for their lack of industriousness, eventually manage to let go of their idleness and irresolution. Robert, in particular, embarks on an active quest to reveal Lady Audley's secret, as I show in the following chapters. However, Noel and Frederick both die in the same nervous prostration in which they have spent their lives, because they use their narrative agency to 'engross the sympathy and attention of others'¹⁰⁹ rather than using it for self-awareness. In Braddon's and Collins's novels, the characters' narrative agencies mirror their domestic influence. Laura and Isabel have as little power over the narration of their story and mental struggles as they have over their homes. In both spaces, they are constrained as passive figures who lack the power of action—either physical or verbal—to improve their condition. Similarly, Noel and Frederick confine themselves in self-indulgence both in their home and their narrative, without ever reflecting on the necessity to step out of these familiar and reassuring spaces. In the case of Roland and Robert, their domestic space and narrative agency possess the same emancipating and auspicious potential, which they use to discover their own individualities. Overall, not only does domestic confinement induce the nervousness of sensation characters, it also shapes it according to these individuals' experience of home.

Thomas Trotter contended that nervous disorders were a disposition of mind that exhibited 'in the whole, signs of deranged sensations,'¹¹⁰ which suggests that such a disorder is the ideal element for a successful sensation novel. Because most of their plots rely on submitting both their characters and their readers to the most nerve-wracking sensations, these novels become an ideal ground for the literary exploration of nervous diseases. As D. A. Miller conjectures, nervousness becomes the 'hermeneutic project'¹¹¹ of sensation novels and the characters' hypochondria and hysteria are the tools to understanding the mysteries that lie at the bottom of their pages. Yet both Braddon and Collins fail to fully exploit this tool by refusing to let their most nervous women share their sensations with the readers, and their malady remains the 'mysteria' that it was for medical practitioners at the time.¹¹² However, Braddon and Collins manage to more fully explore

¹⁰⁹ Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, p. xii.

¹¹⁰ Trotter, *A View of the Nervous Temperament*, p. 199.

¹¹¹ Miller, 'Cage Aux Folles', p. 110.

¹¹² American physician Silas Weir Mitchell often referred to the disorder as 'mysteria' as Andrew Scull reveals in *Hysteria*, p. 7.

the obsessional disorders many of their characters develop, another form of mental illness that pervaded sensation fiction. As the previous two chapters have investigated how the domestic confinement of sensation characters induced and fostered their nervous disorders, the next chapters will examine how a lack of domestic belonging promoted the advent of monomania and moral insanity.

Chapter Three

‘Our quiet life here maddens me; I can bear it no longer; I must go’:

Public Industriousness and Obsession.

In his 1871 book entitled *Character*, Scottish writer Samuel Smiles declared that ‘home is the first and most important school of character.’¹ Smiles strongly believed in the popular saying that ‘home makes the man,’ considering it to be the prime location for the establishment of an individual’s—and more specifically of a man’s—identity and story. Primarily thinking of the family home, in which young men were brought up following rigid Victorian precepts, Smiles argued that it was in the home that:

every human being receives his best moral training, or his worst; for it is there that he imbibes those principles of conduct which endure through manhood, and cease only with life. It is a common saying that “Manners make the man;” and there is a second, that “Mind makes the man;” but truer than either is a third, that “Home makes the man.” For the home-training includes not only manners and mind, but character. It is mainly in the home that the heart is opened, the habits are formed, the intellect is awakened, and character moulded for good or for evil.²

Smiles’s insistence on the emotional impression of home on the individual correlates with the nineteenth-century domestic ideology explored above, yet the writer’s reminder that home moulded the character ‘for good or for evil’ raises the issue of its potential to damage the individual’s mental health. Writing predominantly in the mid-nineteenth century—he had published *Self-Help*, his most acclaimed book, in 1859—Smiles was a contemporary of sensation writers and it can therefore be illuminating to consider his approach to thrift, work, self-improvement and domesticity alongside the novels of Collins and Braddon. After focusing on how the act of narrating helps the characters of sensation novels express and sometimes cope with their mental distress, I wish here to focus on a moral material

¹ Samuel Smiles, *Character* (New York: Harper & brothers, 1872), p. 42.

² Smiles, *Character*, p. 42.

aspect relating to the subject of the characters' mental health. The importance Smiles and others laid on the possession of a home for the appropriate fulfilment of one's character meant that Victorian men and women undeniably felt the pressure of securing such property, something sensation novels often reflected. Beyond their individual endeavours, most sensation characters seem to strive for property ownership. While some are already landowners, like most of the characters examined in the previous chapters, others obstinately aspire to this possession. This is exemplified in the endings of the novels, where, as the following pages demonstrate, most of these formerly property-less characters eventually secure some form of property security through intense personal investment. In sensation novels, characters who lack the safety that property offers invest both time and energy in their pursuit of such possession. Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name* and Walter Hartright in *The Woman in White* are highly active individuals who go to great length to secure a home, and both achieve their goals at the end of Collins's novels. In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Lucy Audley and Robert Audley play a long-winded game of secrecy and discovery which concludes in both of their settlement in secure domestic situations—albeit perhaps too secure for Lucy. All four characters become obsessed with this pursuit which, I argue, is due to the lack of domestic belonging they experience at the beginning of the novels and to their yearning for more stability.

Industry—in the sense of hard work—was part of an individual's character and sense of duty and, outside the ranks of nobility, the means to access property. As noted in Chapter One, a good work ethic had become a pillar of the newly-industrialised country, something Jacqueline Botterill notes in her work on consumer culture through the ages.³ Braddon and Collins seem to have shared such a vision, as their propertyless characters manage to secure domestic property through their industriousness. Robert, Walter, Lucy and Magdalen are energetic and resourceful individuals who use the public space to navigate their ways through complex Victorian social standards and expectations. It is precisely when they are outside the domestic environment that they show themselves to be most active. As this chapter demonstrates, there is a sharp contrast in these characters' demeanours and personalities depending on whether they are inside or outside the domestic

³ Jacqueline Botterill, *Consumer Culture and Personal Finance: Money Goes to Market* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2010), p. 26.

space, which sets the public and private scenes further apart in sensation novels. Chapter Three thus goes beyond the premise of Chapter One, which focused on the inaction of sedentary characters inside the home. Frederick Fairlie, Noel Vanstone, Isabel Gilbert and Laura Fairlie are rarely seen outside the domestic realm, which intensifies their close connection to home in the eyes of the reader. By contrast, Robert Audley, Walter Hartright, Lucy Audley and Magdalen Vanstone, characters I examine in this chapter, are regularly found outside the home environment, where they are notably more active than inside of it. I argue here that the lack of a proper grounding in any stable domestic environment causes these middle-class male and female characters to be constantly active and pushes their drive for property ownership ever further.

Due to their very reliance on domesticity, sensation novels forcefully epitomise Smile's declaration that 'home is the first and most important school of character.' These novels show throughout their pages how much one's relationship to home shapes one's character. Helena Ifill, working on the creation of character in sensation novels, argues that Braddon and Collins built their characters' personalities partly by 'revealing details of family history, upbringing and inherent constitution.'⁴ I suggest here that their connection to home is yet another determining component of their personalities. As Chapters One and Two demonstrate, the characters of sensation novels are built around the notion of home and can see their personalities altered by the amount of time they spend confined in it. However, so too can their nature be altered by their lack of domestic belonging. All four characters examined in this chapter are searching for their own identities and evolve throughout the pages of the novels, much more so than any of the characters studied in Chapters One and Two. While Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone remain idle dilettantes confined at home, and eventually die in this state, Walter Hartright and Robert Audley change dramatically from a nonchalant nature to one of determination and vindication. While Laura Fairlie and Isabel Gilbert mainly endure their passive lives at home and are only slightly more acquainted with the outside world by the end of the novels, Lucy Audley and Magdalen Vanstone devise ever more elaborate plans to acquire what they believe to be rightly theirs. Furthermore, the identity crises they experience seem to find their

⁴ Ifill, *Creating Character*, p. 9.

resolution with the acquisition of domestic security at the end of the novels, thus legitimising the idea that property ownership was paramount in the search of the self. After struggling to find his place and use in society, Robert sees the edification of his character through the successful elucidation of his friend's disappearance and the purchase of a house. Similarly, Walter's ambiguous relationship with Laura Fairlie and his doubts about his own abilities as a man are settled once he has managed to secure his wife's return to her property and name. Magdalen's multiple identities, which manifest themselves through her disguises as much as through the evolution of her personality, disappear once she has found her place as a legitimate wife and mistress of her own house. Finally, it is only once she is established in her *maison de santé* that Lucy's act drops and her real character, along with the confession of her inherited madness, is revealed for what it truly is.

There is, however, a noticeable divide in sensation novels between the industrious male and female characters. While Walter and Robert are both materially and morally rewarded and praised for their industriousness after successfully taking on the role of amateur detectives and reliable manly figures, Magdalen and Lucy are portrayed as transgressive and unbalanced women whose perseverance is condemned. This can be explained by the role attributed to men and women in Victorian society and their uneven legitimacy in both public and private spaces. Therefore, while vindication is at the heart of all their endeavours, it is by no means presented in the same light. Both Robert and Walter labour to right the wrongs done to others and elevate their manly characters through their actions, while Lucy and Magdalen act in order to right the wrongs done to themselves. In this respect, both their motives and actions are significantly set apart and produce different appraisals from the reader, as much of the contemporary reaction to these novels shows.⁵ Yet, all characters share the common feature of a growing obsession for the object of their labour. As Chapter Four examines the obsessiveness of these characters, their growing monomania and moral insanity, the following pages detail how they arrive at these extremes by identifying where their industriousness originates from, why it mostly manifests itself in the public space, and how Victorian society perceived it. This chapter

⁵ Margaret Oliphant, 'Novels', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 102.623 (1867), 257–80; Mansel, 'Sensation Novels'; Fraser Rae, 'Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon', *North British Review*, 43 (1865), 180–206.

therefore first establishes the situation in which Walter Hartright, Robert Audley, Lucy Audley and Magdalen Vanstone are found at the beginning of the novels and the events that lead to building their industrious characters. Although Robert Audley has already been presented in previous chapters, the extreme change he goes through, and the development of his character are significant enough to warrant a new introduction here. I then move on to discuss how the issue of home ownership relates to these characters. This allows me to consider how the Victorian emphasis on property is represented as impacting them by fostering their active impulses. Following on this analysis, I focus on the examination of these characters' actions, schemes, movements, and enterprises at large to reveal how the motion versus stasis and outside versus inside dichotomies articulate themselves in the novels. Finally, the chapter ends on a commentary on the gender divide existing in terms of industriousness. I suggest here that the Victorian gender normative values not only prescribed the characters' chances of seeing their endeavours succeed but also incipiently stigmatised them as either moral or immoral beings. The social pressures they experience in this regard, be it the strong incentive men received to be laborious, or the prejudice women faced if they were, is represented as that which contributes to the development and settlement of their character, as well as the progressive establishment of their obsessive disorders.

The Experience of Modernity

When Lucy Audley realises the dire situation in which she stands, after Robert Audley's discoveries threaten to reveal her secret, she engages in a desperate move to discredit his claims against her and asks her daughter-in-law 'have you ever studied your cousin's character, Alicia?' (*LAS*: 237). Lucy's defamation attempts against Robert point to the unknowable nature of one's character and the ease with which particular traits—such as taints of madness, as Lucy suggests in this passage—can be attributed to individuals. This is incidentally the ground on which sensation novels are based, as they often play on the malleable nature of identity and individuals' struggles to define theirs. Studying Robert's character—and that of several other sensation characters—is precisely what the present chapter sets out to do. The polysemy of the word *character*, which the previous sentence

illustrates, requires some clarification. Both Lady Audley here and Samuel Smiles in the publication cited above refer to the nature of individuals, either their ‘reputation [and] general estimation of qualities,’ or ‘the sum of the moral and mental qualities which distinguish an individual or a people, viewed as a homogeneous whole.’⁶ These understandings of the word character, essentially synonymous with one’s personality, are different from the one referring to ‘a person portrayed in a work of fiction, a drama, a film, a comic strip, [or] a part played by an actor on the stage.’⁷ Both of these meanings are useful in the present analysis as, while I endeavour to study the character—or personality—of Robert and others, I will have to navigate the different characters—or roles—they play in the novels. Indeed, while the *Oxford English Dictionary* views *character* as a ‘homogeneous whole’ I contend that what these individuals experience is far from uniform, as they struggle, throughout the novels, to find their own identity and individuality.

Scholars such as Tara MacDonald, Jonathan Loesberg, Lyn Pykett and Dallas Liddle have recognised the centrality of identity loss in sensation plots while attributing it to different sources.⁸ Loesberg particularly links this issue to social and legal circumstances, identifying the changes in class boundaries which resulted from Parliamentary reforms as the main element disrupting people’s senses of individuality, something sensation writers often recorded in their novels.⁹ While Loesberg’s dismissal of the importance of the psychological factor in identity crisis is somewhat problematic, his focus on the social tumult of the nineteenth century as the location of these anxieties, which relates to the issue of modernity, is conclusive. The definition of *character* mentioned above furthermore specifies that it relates to ‘a person’s [...] individuality deriving from

⁶ ‘Character, n.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/30639>> [accessed 7 April 2021] Senses 13. and 9.a.

⁷ ‘Character, n.’ Sense 14.

⁸ Jonathan Loesberg, ‘The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction’, *Representations*, 13, (1986), 115–38; Tara MacDonald, ‘Sensation Fiction, Gender and Identity’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 127–40; Lyn Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel* (Tavistock: Northcote House Publishers, 2011); Dallas Liddle, ‘Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1859–60)’, *Victorian Review*, 35.1 (2009), 37–41.

⁹ Loesberg, ‘The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction’, p. 117.

environment, culture, experience, etc.,¹⁰ all of which are heavily determined by the state and shape of society. The social and cultural environments in which the characters of sensation novels evolve is defined by modernity and the industrial changes that took place in the course of the nineteenth century.¹¹ Thus, the experience of these characters, which shapes their personalities, is the experience of modernity. Marshall Berman, a prolific author on the question of modernity, describes the ‘atmosphere in which modern sensibility is born’ as an atmosphere ‘of agitation and turbulence, psychic dizziness and drunkenness, expansion of experiential possibilities and destruction of moral boundaries and personal bonds, self-enlargement and self-derangement, phantoms in the street and in the soul.’¹² This overwhelming list encapsulates the emotions of sensation characters and the different stages through which their psyches progress in the novels. The agitation and dizziness Berman reported is at the heart of sensation plots, and most characters undergo moments of either self-enlargement or self-derangement somewhere in the narration. Furthermore, the destruction of moral boundaries is usually what sensation novels are most concerned with.

Both Pykett and Laurence Talairach-Vielmas have identified modernity as one of the ‘main preoccupations’ of sensation novels, showing how they transposed the elements of the Gothic and domestic novels to a more modern and familiar setting, thus modernising the anxieties of the past and grounding them in the age of industrialisation.¹³ As French philosopher Jean Baudrillard explains, modernity can be grasped as a psychological concept, wherein the individual subject, confronted with their ‘status of autonomous consciousness,’ attempts to find their place within the larger civilisation.¹⁴ According to Baudrillard, this position induces a form of alienation and abstraction of the individual in the material world of mass production and consumption, visible in sensation novels through

¹⁰ ‘Character, n.’ Sense 9a.

¹¹ Nicholas Daly, *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

¹² Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (Baskerville, USA: Penguin Books, 1988), p. 18.

¹³ Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*, p. 8; Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins*.

¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, ‘Modernity’, *Encyclopaedia Universalis*, 12 (1985), 424–26 (p. 67).

the characters' search for material property.¹⁵ Characters such as Robert Audley, Walter Hartright, Lucy Audley or Magdalen Vanstone, in their search for their own individuality and the delineation of their character, see property as a means of escaping their disorientation in the modern world. Home ownership becomes the promise of stability in a tumultuous age, which sees one's 'experience of time and space as transitory, fleeting, fortuitous or arbitrary,' as sociologist Alan Swingewood writes.¹⁶ Swingewood's description of the experience of time and space is useful to understand the foundation of sensation characters' need for action. As previously noted, Robert Audley, the non-practicing barrister who spends his time reading French novels and smoking cigars, 'took life as altogether too absurd a mistake' (*LAS*: 57) and has an overall vision of time and space as too arbitrary. Robert's belief that happiness is 'essentially accidental [and] utterly irregular' (*LAS*: 174) is mirrored by the narrator, who frequently dwells on the circumstantial nature of life:

We are apt to be angry with this cruel hardness in our life—this unflinching regularity in the smaller wheels and meaner mechanism of the human machine, which knows no stoppage or cessation, though the mainspring be forever hollow, and the hands pointing to purposeless figures on a shattered dial. (*LAS*: 174)

This passage is highly evocative of modernity and the ills associated with it. The vocabulary of pain, assimilated with that of machineries and the ineluctability of the passing of time, encapsulate what many writers thought of the modern world, such as Charles Baudelaire who, in *The Painter of Modern Life* (1863), first described modernity as 'the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent.'¹⁷

This atmosphere of modernity, which Braddon records in the passage quoted above, is found in all sensation novels and contributes to the formation of character—in both senses of the word. As Nicholas Daly, who wrote extensively on the question of modernity

¹⁵ Baudrillard, 'Modernity', p. 67.

¹⁶ Alan Swingewood, *Cultural Theory and the Problem of Modernity* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press LTD, 1998), p. 144.

¹⁷ Charles Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life: And Other Essays* (London: Phaidon Press, 1964), p. 13.

and literature, has noted, the pace of the modern world is both the cause of the characters' predicaments and the reason why they must overcome them. Taking the material example of the railway as a metonym of modernity, Daly suggests that sensation novels can be seen as 'an attempt to register and accommodate the newly speeded-up world of the railway age.'¹⁸ Daly relates Walter Benjamin's identification of shock as 'the defining experience of modern life in the nineteenth century,' to the sensation genre's fixation on the nerves.¹⁹ According to Daly, the sensation characters' nervousness serves to protect them from the shock of modernity. If Daly's argument can indeed be applied to the nervous characters studied in the previous chapters, who shield themselves at home against the invasion of modernity, it can also be extended to those characters who decide to embrace modernity and use such shock as an incentive for action. Robert Audley is first confronted with modernity through the introduction of his new aunt, Lady Audley, whose apt use of modern technological tools plunges Robert in an unknown world. Lady Audley's manipulation of newspaper advertisements is one example of her modern expertise. At one point making use of them to find genuine employment, she also uses publications to track her husband's arrival from Australia and assess the time she has to disappear from society. Easy access to newspapers also helps Lucie fake her own death. Robert therefore must let go of his idleness and carelessness if he wishes to face Lady Audley who is, as Louise Lee suggests, 'distinguished by [her] technophilia.'²⁰ In her excellent article on 'Sensation Fiction's Technologically Minded Villainesses,' Lee notes the distinction between male and female characters in sensation novels and their ability to embrace modernity and the tools it offers. While Lucy Audley is presented as a master artist of the modern world, Robert is only catching up to his rival. As Lee suggests, the 'railways, telegraphs, and newspapers' constitute a 'bold new set of possibilities' that presents itself to Lucy and allows her to keep her secret for a long time, which would have been far more difficult 'in the age of the carrier pigeon, the village hall, and the horse and cart.'²¹ Robert, on the other hand, seems

¹⁸ Daly, 'Railway Novels', p. 464.

¹⁹ Daly, 'Railway Novels', p. 465.

²⁰ Louise Lee, 'Lady Audley's Secret: How Does She Do It? Sensation Fiction's Technologically Minded Villainesses', in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Pamela K. Gilbert (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2011), pp. 134–46 (p. 136).

²¹ Lee, 'Lady Audley's Secret', p. 139.

stuck in that very age. Lucy's advantage in this matter comes, I suggest, from her more juvenile clash with the modern era, when her mother was brought to a madhouse. While admitting to her crimes, Lucy tells the story of her life and the institutionalisation of her mother when she herself was only a child. Not much is revealed about the true nature of her mother's madness, except that it was 'an hereditary disease transmitted to her from her mother, who had died mad. She [...] had been, or had appeared sane up to the hour of [Lucy's] birth, but from that hour her intellect had decayed' (LAS: 298). Lucy, who talks about her mother's asylum as her 'prison-house' (LAS: 298) describes her surprise at not seeing there any 'raving, straight-waist-coated maniac, guarded by zealous jailers' (LAS: 298), as this was the typical image one had of modern-time asylums. While modernity meant the expansion of technological innovations and a reshaping of the social order, it also meant the expansion of asylums and institutions for the criminally insane.

As historian of medicine Roy Porter explains, the private madhouse was by then used as the training ground for aspiring psychiatrists and reflected the social changes around it. The general idea was, Porter writes, that 'the well-designed, well managed asylum was the machine to restore the insane to health. Experience and innovation became the watchwords.'²² Here again, the industrial vocabulary used by Porter suggests an important connection between the treatment of mental health and modernity, which Lucy experienced at a very young age. Lucy's early confrontation with the modern treatment of the insane is what encouraged her to be active, cunning and resourceful, in order to hide the secret of her mother's condition, 'for it was a secret that might affect me injuriously in after-life,' as Lucy admits (LAS: 298). As most historians of madness and insanity record, the nineteenth century saw the modernisation of medicine and the emergence of a new kind of practice, psychiatry.²³ Within the first half of the nineteenth century, the British and European approach to mental health and the care of mentally ill patients drastically changed.²⁴ In 1808, an act of Parliament authorised the building of lunatic asylums by

²² Porter, *Madness*, p. 100.

²³ Oppenheim, 'Shattered Nerves,' p. 21.

²⁴ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*; Jane Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution: Material Life in Asylums, Lodging Houses and Schools in Victorian and Edwardian England* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2014); Porter, *Madness*; Scull, *Madness in Civilization*.

county authorities and the two Lunacy Acts of 1845 created the national Lunacy Commission in charge of ensuring that every county and borough in Britain provided pauper lunatic asylums.²⁵ As Jane Hamlett writes, ‘in 1850 there were 24 county and city institutions for the insane; by 1910 there were 91.’²⁶ The extension of the care of mentally ill people outside the home was overwhelming, something Lucy Audley experienced first-hand. Lucy’s hatred of poverty finds its origin in the treatment of her mother who was institutionalised because her husband had to work to support the family and could not care for his wife. As Lucy bitterly explains, ‘my mother, who might have been tended by a devoted husband, was given over to the care of hired nurses’ (*LAS*: 297). Lucy’s experience of domesticity was thus ingrained in the modern world where the care of family members was done outside the home. Lucy is furthermore confronted with another shock associated with modernity, in her husband George’s departure for the ‘new world’ and the Australian gold rush. While George sees his emigration as a brave and selfless act to restore his wife to money and property, Lucy ‘looked upon this as a desertion, and [...] resented it bitterly’ (*LAS*: 300). Lucy’s confrontation with the modern world, and her understanding of how to navigate the ‘world’s great lottery’ (*LAS*: 298) that life is, shaped her character and fashioned her into a skilful and determined actor of her own life.

Unlike Robert and Lucy Audley, whose confrontation with modernity happens gradually, Magdalen Vanstone and Walter Hartright experience actual shocks that greatly affect their future. As many sensation scholars have noted, Walter’s encounter with the woman in white at the beginning of the novel produces a nervous shock in both Walter and the reader.²⁷ This experience is akin to Lucy Audley’s, as both of them involve the locus of the asylum and the threat of insanity. The presence of Anne Catherick, the woman in white, on that lonely road outside of London is another consequence of the modernisation of mental health care, which saw the rise of wrongful incarcerations. As medical rhetoric

²⁵ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 24.

²⁶ Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution*, p. 3.

²⁷ Daly, ‘Railway Novels’, p. 465; Kirby-Jane Hallum, ‘Collecting Men: Masculinity and Cultural Capital in *The Woman in White*’, *Victorian Network*, 4.1 (2012), 27–47 (p. 42); Miller also writes about Walter’s encounter with the Woman in White as a ‘primal trauma’ in ‘Cage Aux Folles’, p. 123.

scholars Cristina Hanganu-Bresch and Carol Berkenkotter explain, in the 1850s and 60s, ‘wrongful confinement was starting to become a well-known trope in literature as well as public discourse,’²⁸ and the case exposed in Collins’s novel is an example of the impact it could have on people’s lives. Walter’s fascination with Laura Fairlie, which later induces him to act against her enemies, originates in his encounter with the woman in white. Acting as narrator in the first part of the novel, Walter stresses the impact this event had on the rest of his life, noting: ‘I trace these lines, self-distrustfully, with the shadows of after-events darkening the very paper I write on’ (TWW: 26). While walking with Anne Catherick towards London, Walter silently wonders if he had ‘really left, little more than an hour since, the quiet, decent, conventionally domestic atmosphere of [his] mother’s cottage?’ (TWW: 27). This incident effectively marks Walter’s complete rupture with any ‘conventionally domestic atmosphere’ and the start of his progress toward the modern and public one instead. Walter’s determined and helpful nature, as we know it in the novel, along with his ability to navigate the modern and urban world of the mid-nineteenth century, seem to be circumscribed by his encounter with the woman in white.

Magdalen Vanstone also endures a life-changing shock at the beginning of *No Name*. After enjoying a carefree life as the member of a happy family and the heiress of her father’s fortune, Magdalen is brutally faced with the reality of the modern and public world when her father dies in a train accident. Not only was this accident a symbol of modernity in itself in the eyes of the readers, who were, at the time Collins wrote the novel, well acquainted with railway accidents and the dangers of the high-speed means of transportation, it is also the agent through which the quiet Vanstone family is confronted with modern society. Ralf Harrington notes in ‘The Neuroses of the Railway’ that not only did railway accidents subject victims to ‘unprecedented violence and shock,’ they ‘also produced previously unknown and puzzling psychological and nervous reactions in those who were otherwise unharmed.’²⁹ The mental shock experienced by the whole Vanstone family after this accident has tremendous consequences on all of their lives. As the lawyer Mr Pendril explains, when Mr and Mrs Vanstone moved into their house in West

²⁸ Hanganu-Bresch and Berkenkotter, *Diagnosing Madness*, p. 5.

²⁹ Ralph Harrington, ‘The Neuroses of the Railway’, *History Today*, 44.7 (1994), 15–21 (p. 17).

Somersetshire, sharing the secret of their unwedded relationship, they were living outside the busy public life and enjoying a very private domestic situation:

Neither courting nor avoiding notice; simply happy in themselves, in their children, and in their quiet rural life; unsuspected by the few neighbours who formed their modest circle of acquaintance to be other than what they seemed—the truth in their case, as in the cases of many others, remained undiscovered until accident forced it into the light of day. (NN: 104)

The accident Pendril refers to is that of the modern world catching up with them and causing the clueless Mr Vanstone to die in a tragic railway crash, leaving his daughters unprovided for, because of his ignorance of the British legal system. Like Walter, who had left the safe rural setting of his ‘mother’s cottage’ and was approaching the urban milieu of London when he encountered the woman in white, Andrew Vanstone experiences the violence of the modern world when he steps out of the ‘quiet rural life’ and travels to London. Incidentally, Mr Vanstone had been warned against the impending clash between his carefree old-fashion life in the countryside and the modern outside world when his friend and neighbour Mr Clare, the cynical father of Magdalen’s suitor, Frank, lectured Mr Vanstone about ‘the enormous prosperity of Fools’ (NN: 55) in modern society:

“One of these days [...] the whole rotten system of modern society will come down with a crash.”

“God forbid!” cried Mr. Vanstone, looking about him as if the crash was coming already.

“With a crash!” repeated Mr. Clare. (NN: 55-6)

The use of the word crash, repeated three times in this exchange, foretells Mr Vanstone’s fate and the brutality with which modern society catches up with him, in the form of a train crash.

Magdalen’s father’s accident is, however, not her first confrontation with the modern world. Her plans to marry Frank at the beginning of the novel are thwarted by Frank’s father who, believing that ‘the only excuse which a poor gentleman has for

presuming to exist in the nineteenth century, is the excuse of extraordinary ability' (NN: 27), decides to send his 'ever-reluctant, ever-helpless and ever-ungrateful' son to China to make his fortune (NN: 64). The expansion of international trade and the development of means of transportation made this pursuit a natural thing for a nineteenth-century young man but also meant the break-up of the two young lovers' idyll. The impression these two events had on Magdalen's character is recorded by her governess Miss Garth who soon reflects on the changes that have occurred in the lives of her pupils. Initially favouring Magdalen over her sister Norah, Miss Garth soon realises that Magdalen's reaction to the calamity that hit the family is ominous. Miss Garth believes the incident revealed Magdalen's true nature: her determination, disregard for rules of propriety, and artfulness. Unlike Norah, Magdalen indeed refuses to be left out of an important conversation with the family lawyer and hides under the window to eavesdrop what he reveals about her parents. This behaviour foretells the many manoeuvres and frauds she will later commit. As readers, we are asked to wonder:

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? (NN: 116)

Although such inward and invisible disposition exists, the narrator does point to the influence of social environments and circumstances on the character—or personality—of the individual. Miss Garth believes that she had, until now, only seen the surface of Magdalen's character, 'a surface which there had been nothing, hitherto, in the happy, prosperous, uneventful lives of the sisters to disturb' (NN: 116) and that the 'inborn and inbred disposition' of the young woman had now been thrown into view by 'the shock of the first serious calamity in their lives' (NN: 116). The shocks these characters experience, which is the result of the modernisation of society, throws them out of the familiar and reassuring domestic setting and thrusts them onto the restless and unfamiliar public stage. This drastic change in their lives, as I argue, is what sets the foundation for their active and resolute nature, which fully expresses itself in the public sphere.

The Promise of Property

Marshall Berman remarked that ‘in order for people, whatever their class, to survive in modern society, their personalities must take on the fluid and open form of this society.’³⁰ According to Berman, it was not enough for Victorian men and women to accept the changes of modern society; they also had to actively embrace them and learn to take advantage of these. To avoid becoming the victims of modernity, men and women have to forgo the ‘real or fantasized past’ and to ‘delight in mobility, to thrive on renewal, to look forward to future developments in their conditions of life and their relations with their fellow men.’³¹ While many sensation characters, such as Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone, fail to recognise the validity of this, others, such as Magdalen Vanstone, Lucy Audley, Robert Audley and Walter Hartright cleverly obey this precept. Not only do their mutable personalities reflect the society of the mid-nineteenth century, but they are also uncommonly mobile and often reflect on the development of their own personalities. As I argue here though, these characters fail effectively to let go of the past and often hang onto previous grievances. If we can indeed recognise Lucy Audley’s aptitude to adapt to the modern world, we also note her crippling inability to forget her origins and the threat of hereditary madness she believes to be looming over her. While Robert, Magdalen and Walter accept the need for mobility and adaptation, they are unable to let go of the traumatic experiences of the past, the memory of which eventually dominates their enterprises. These characters furthermore share a common attachment to a domestic ideal that they either lack or lost. All four of them appear determined to (re)acquire this connection to home by any means necessary.

This determination is particularly evident in the character of Magdalen, who, after losing her family home at Combe Raven, sees the restoration of her inheritance as her only means to regain her lost domestic sanctity. After meeting Noel Vanstone and Mrs Lecount for the first time under the disguise of her governess Miss Garth, Magdalen realises that Mrs Lecount was not deceived by her costume, and the two women exchange their first candid conversation. Mrs Lecount, knowing very well that she is addressing Magdalen,

³⁰ Berman, *All That is Solid Melts Into Air*, p. 95.

³¹ Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, p. 95.

asks ‘when your pupil was a little innocent child, did she ever amuse herself by building a house of cards?’ (NN: 239). After Magdalen answers in the affirmative, Mrs Lecount’s covert threat is made more evident:

“Give her, if you please, a friendly message from me. I venture to say she has built the house high enough already; and I recommend her to be careful before she puts on that other card.”

“She shall have your message,” said Magdalen, with Miss Garth’s bluntness, and Miss Garth’s emphatic nod of the head. “But I doubt her minding it. Her hand is rather steadier than you suppose, and I think she will put on the other card.”

“And bring the house down,” said Mrs. Lecount.

“And build it up again,” rejoined Magdalen. (NN: 239)

The metaphor of the house of cards representing Magdalen’s elaborate scheme is telling here, as it reminds the reader of Magdalen’s ultimate purpose, which is to build her household up again. As most historians of property in the nineteenth century agree, domesticity was at the centre of every middle-to-upper class families’ preoccupations, and the question of property ownership was equally important.³² Reviewing the historical significance of home ownership, geographer Richard Harris and historian Chris Hamnett have argued that its meaning ‘has usually been treated as self-evident: for most writers it is the unambiguous indicator of economic well-being, social mobility, and status.’³³ Sensation writers seem to have subscribed to such a notion, as property is often used to assess one’s status in their novels. In *No Name* as well as *The Woman in White*, Collins repeatedly refers to the landed property of its most well-off characters. While Michael Vanstone—Noel’s father—is lauded for having invested in house property once he came into his inheritance, Sir Percival is often referred to as ‘a Baronet, and the owner of property

³² Botterill, *Consumer Culture and Personal Finance*; Shani D’Cruze, ‘The Family’, in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, ed. by Chris Williams (Williston: John Wiley & Sons, 2006); Sara L. Maurer, *The Dispossessed State: Narratives of Ownership in Nineteenth-Century Britain and Ireland* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012); R. J. Morris, *Men, Women and Property in England, 1780–1870: A Social and Economic History of Family Strategies amongst the Leeds Middle Class* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

³³ Richard Harris and Chris Hamnett, ‘The Myth of the Promised Land: The Social Diffusion of Home Ownership in Britain and North America’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 77.2 (1987), 173–90 (p. 174).

in Hampshire' (TWW: 77). Property ownership is also critical for female characters, and Collins dedicates significant passages in his novels to detail the inheritance laws in force in the nineteenth century to explain how the women in his novels either lose or acquire property.

Property ownership was indeed a different matter for men and women in the Victorian period. Assessing the historical evolution of property, Jacqueline Botterill writes that in the early nineteenth century, 'the ability to work to support one's family, most powerfully articulated by way of homeownership, became identified deeply with the discourses on manliness.'³⁴ Acquiring the means to purchase land and property was considered as a man's duty towards his family and lineage, especially for the new 'industrial middle class.'³⁵ Historian R. J. Morris furthermore links the rise in property purchases to the increase in population that the 1820 census revealed, which 'produced a mixed reaction of heady enthusiasm and worrying threat.'³⁶ Along with the Parliamentary reforms of 1832 and 1867, this increase in population changed the social landscape and the relationship of individuals to property. Even though the reforms did not altogether change the electoral system and its reliance on land, since 'both reformers and their opponents agreed on the necessity of property ownership, just as both could not envisage a world without it,' it changed the status of property and its significance in the economic market.³⁷ The aristocracy and landed gentry were no longer the only classes to be able to access property ownership, and towards the end of the century, a large proportion of the eclectic middle class was defining itself through property ownership. As Morris states, 'property identified the middle classes just as a middle class identity affected the ambitions and strategies of property.'³⁸ These ambitions and strategies, however, mostly concerned men, whose access to property ownership could happen through both inheritance and hard work. Women, on the other hand, were often excluded from the property venture and when they

³⁴ Botterill, *Consumer Culture and Personal Finance*, p. 41.

³⁵ Martin Hewitt, 'Class and the Classes', in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. 310.

³⁶ Morris, *Men, Women and Property in England*, p. 34.

³⁷ Michael S. Smith, 'Parliamentary Reform and the Electorate', in *A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain*, p. 161.

³⁸ Morris, *Men, Women and Property in England*, p. 22.

inherited it, they usually held only a life interest in it.³⁹ Once married, women retained no rights to their property and could not make any purchase or financial acquisition that did not instantly transfer to their husband. As feminist legal scholar Mary Lyndon Shanley states, not only were the names of married women missing from the deeds to properties, they themselves became the property of their husbands under British law.⁴⁰ It was not before the late 1850s and the creation of the Married Women's Property Committee that discussions on the unfairness of the legal status of married women was properly discussed, as members of the committee argued that 'married women, like all other adults, had an inalienable right to their own property and the fruits of their own labor.'⁴¹ These women's efforts led to a series of reforms and acts that granted more freedom and rights to married women, such as the Marriage and Divorce Act of 1857 and the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882. However, none of the women appearing in Collins's and Braddon's novels enjoyed any of these social advances, as the plots of *No Name*, *The Woman in White*, *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Doctor's Wife* all take place between 1846 and 1859.⁴² Therefore, Helen Talboys's decision to fake her death in 1854 to become Lucy Audley appears as the only alternative left to a woman who could not divorce a husband who had deserted her, and Braddon's heroine emerges as 'a woman who was determined to survive on her own.'⁴³

If they decided never to marry, women could keep their property under their own names and, if they were lucky enough to have wealthy parents and no brother to inherit the family land and money, could hope to be economically independent. However, women's social position and prospects were such in the nineteenth century that very few middle-to-upper class women could afford not to marry. As historian Lee Holcombe rhetorically asks,

³⁹ D'Cruze, 'The Family', p. 262.

⁴⁰ Mary Lyndon Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), p. 22.

⁴¹ Shanley, *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England*, p. 33.

⁴² *Lady Audley's Secret* is the only novel in which the story goes beyond 1857, yet the main marriage plot which could have been averted with the introduction of the new Marriage and Divorce Act of 1857 is Lucy's and George Talboys's, which takes place in 1854.

⁴³ Renata Kobetts Miller, 'Imagined Audiences: The Novelist and the Stage', in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, ed. by Patrick Brantlinger and William B. Thesing (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), pp. 207–24 (p. 217).

‘why should women be educated and trained to work as men were, [or] be encouraged to take an interest in social problems and in public affairs’ since they would probably marry men who would take care of such matters?⁴⁴ Therefore, while women could decide to remain single, they were then faced with a paucity of opportunities to make a fortune for themselves, as many lines of work were neither accessible nor proper for their station. After losing everything and seeing her inheritance given to her male relative, Magdalen initially tries to provide for herself by exploiting her innate talent for acting and becoming a stage actress. This decision causes outrage among her relatives and her sister Norah is eventually forced to resign her position as governess in a respectable family after they discover her sinful sister’s profession. This event illustrates the obstacles facing women who considered fending for themselves and somehow answers the question ‘can a woman find her own way in patriarchal culture without inheritance, property, and the legal rights denied married women in particular’ that Hilary M. Schor asks in her essay on gender politics in the Victorian novel.⁴⁵ Even though it is Magdalen’s parents’ short-sightedness and ignorance of British inheritance laws, rather than her gender, that cause her to lose her inheritance, her subsequent fall from grace and illicit activities are the result of society’s unwillingness to let women decide what kind of work they could perform. It quickly becomes apparent to Magdalen that the only way for her to retrieve her property is through marriage, as most of her contemporaries had understood before her.

Women’s reliance on marriage and men’s ignorance of it is ironically noted by Braddon in *Lady Audley’s Secret* as the narrator shares Sir Michael’s dilemma before proposing to a woman half his age:

I do not think that, throughout his courtship, the baronet once calculated upon his wealth or his position as reasons for his success. [...] It pained him too much to believe for a moment that any one so lovely and innocent could value herself against a splendid house or a good old title. (LAS: 12)

⁴⁴ Lee Holcombe, *Wives and Property: Reform of the Married Women’s Property Law in Nineteenth-Century England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983), p. 4.

⁴⁵ Hilary M. Schor, ‘Gender Politics and Women’s Rights’, in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, p. 178.

Sir Michael appears oblivious to the dire situation of ‘lovely and innocent’ women who could hope to gain neither house nor status without marrying for money. While single or widowed women could legally purchase property on their own, the reality of their position meant that most women relied on their male relatives—fathers, husbands, brothers or uncles—to own the family home. Lucy Audley’s domestic establishments are all affiliated to men, as she moves from her father’s house to that of Mr Dawson, for whom she works as a governess, to her role as the mistress of Audley Court. Like Magdalen, Lucy tries to build her house up again every time it crumbles down. When her husband deserts her, she ‘had to work hard for [her] living, and in every hour of labour [...] recognised a separate wrong done [to her] by George Talboys’ (*LAS*: 300) The wrong done by George was not providing a safe home for his wife, which was believed to be the responsibility of any respectable man. Ultimately, this is what Robert Audley and Walter Hartright strive to do, as both of them progressively realise the importance of securing a safe family home. As demonstrated in Chapter One, homes in sensation novels are easily invaded, and the experience of vulnerability inside the home is all the more potent for characters who are not in possession of their domestic space. While Lucy Audley is, to all appearances, ‘mistress of Audley Court’ (*LAS*: 13) the lawlessness of her marriage to Sir Michael means that she is not legally entitled to the property. Her sense of security at Audley Court is therefore weakened, especially since her own personal space is often invaded, first when her maid Phoebe and her suitor Luke enter Lucy’s room to look at her jewels and find hidden secrets to then blackmail her, and later when Robert and George crawl through a secret passage in the house to see her portrait, locked in her chambers. Alicia Audley carelessly talks about the possibility for anyone to intrude upon her mother-in-law’s apartments without her knowledge:

if you don't mind crawling upon your hands and knees, you can see my lady's apartments, for that passage communicates with her dressing-room. She doesn't know of it herself, I believe. How astonished she'd be if some black-visored burglar, with a dark-lantern, were to rise through the floor some night as she sat before her looking-glass, having her hair dressed for a party!’ (*LAS*: 63)

Lucy's lack of knowledge about the house shows how little possession she has of it, and her discovery, later on, that the two men entered the room while she was absent reinforces her desire to more fully secure her private space and eliminate the threat to her domestic settlement.

Robert Audley, Magdalen Vanstone and Walter Hartright experience similar intrusions of their homes while they reside in rented apartments. Lucy retaliates against Robert's invasion of her space by entering his chambers in London to steal the letters that could incriminate her. Magdalen Vanstone's own rooms are invaded by her archenemy, Mrs Lecount, as she gains access to Magdalen's wardrobe to inspect her dresses and find proof that she was indeed the woman who visited Noel Vanstone under the guise of Miss Garth. Finally, the lodgings that Walter rents under 'an assumed name' (TWW: 412) in London are constantly surveyed by his enemies, which forces him to change the location in a hurry at one time and, at another, to circumvent the place to lose the spies, which prevents him from going 'straight home again under any circumstances whatever' (TWW: 439). These characters' statuses as tenants rather than owners of their places of residence deprives them of the freedom one should enjoy in one's home and pushes them to actively secure ownership of their homes. Scholars explain that homeownership was by no means the norm in the mid-nineteenth century, with the landed aristocracy still controlling most of the purchase and management of properties, and middle-class families privileging renting for geographical mobility.⁴⁶ However, the ideal of homeownership was present in most households, as English novelist Anthony Trollope showed in *The Last Chronicle of Barset*, first published in 1867. As one of the characters in the novel wonders why 'people are so fond of land,' his father, the Archdeacon Grantly, tells him: 'it is a comfortable feeling to know that you stand on your own ground. Land is about the only thing that can't fly away. [...] land gives so much more than the rent. It gives position and influence and political power' (LCB: 539).⁴⁷ The notion of the immutability of land and property is furthermore highlighted by another character explaining that land 'does make one feel so

⁴⁶ Botterill, *Consumer Culture and Personal Finance*, p. 42; Tange, *Architectural Identities*, p. 7; Flanders, *Inside the Victorian Home*, p. 23.

⁴⁷ David Cannadine also uses this reference to Trollope's novel in *The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy* to illustrate the status of property ownership in the nineteenth century.

secure! The land can't run away' (*LCB*: 224). Historian David Cannadine writes that 'land was wealth: the most secure, reliable, and permanent asset. Land was status: its ownership conferred unique and unrivalled celebrity. And land was power: over the locality, the county, and the nation.'⁴⁸ Braddon's tale of the young barrister Robert Audley, initially presented as 'a man who would never get on in the world; but who would not hurt a worm,' (*LAS*: 33), who gains wealth, status, and power by the end of the novel, perfectly represents this social condition. In the closing chapter of *Lady Audley's Secret*, the narrator informs us that 'Mr. Audley's dream of a fairy cottage has been realised' as the young man purchases a 'fantastical dwelling place of rustic woodwork' for him and his family (*LAS*: 378). After acquiring property, we learn that 'Mr. Audley is a rising man upon the home circuit by this time, and has distinguished himself in the great breach of promise case of *Hobbs v. Nobb*' (*LAS*: 378).⁴⁹ Robert has gained professional status and power, which few believed him capable of at the beginning of the novel. His character, both in terms of his personality and the estimation of his reputable qualities, has been shaped by his acquisition of property. Robert's journey towards property has been, however, a long and tedious one, mostly marked by his presence in the public space and his absence from the domestic one.

Domestic Apathy and Public Activity

Before any of the characters discussed above secure a safe home, they all experience rejections from the domestic environment. Robert, who talks about Audley Court as 'the house he loved' (*LAS*: 183, 209), is 'exiled' (*LAS*: 181) from it by his uncle when Lucy pretends to have received unwanted attention from him, even after his uncle told him to 'make [...] the Court your home as long as you live' (*LAS*: 108). Lucy's attempts to dismiss Robert from Audley Court are matched by Robert's own efforts to reveal her crimes and thus 'banish her forever from the house which her presence has polluted' (*LAS*: 216). The word 'polluted' encapsulates the idea of pervasiveness, as though Lucy's

⁴⁸ Cannadine, p. 16.

⁴⁹ The 'home circuit' here refers to the legal practice of circuit courts in England which required judges to travel to different locales in the country to establish a wide judicial representation. This remark would have brought home to readers the mobility of barristers, who travelled to different locales in the aim of standardising the law.

presence in the old house had infected the very essence of Audley Court, an infection Robert wants to eliminate. However, this exclusion goes both ways as Lucy manages to close Audley Court's door to him after suggesting Robert's preoccupation with her to her husband. Thus, 'Sir Michael Audley told his nephew that the Court was no home for him, and that my lady was too young and pretty to accept the attentions of a handsome nephew of eight-and-twenty' (*LAS*: 114). Magdalen is likewise excluded from most domestic environments. After being evicted from her family home, she sees most doors closed to her, as both Noel Vanstone and Admiral Bartram have been warned against her. Magdalen is fully aware of this and resents the exclusion, saying, before she visits Noel: 'there he lives on our money, in the house that his father's warning has closed against me!' (*NN*: 216). Magdalen's only chance to penetrate these habitations is in disguise, a solution she contemplates after wondering 'whether his father has warned him against Miss Garth?' (*NN*: 216), like he warned him against her. Similarly, when she learns that the Secret Trust, giving her access to her inheritance, is kept by the Admiral, Magdalen knows that he will have been cautioned against her, as she explains to her maid that 'if I went to his house, the door would be closed in my face. I must find my way into St. Crux as a stranger' (*NN*: 502). Like Magdalen and Robert, Walter Hartright is banned from places he cherishes, especially the only house where he ever felt at home. After realising that 'any room in the house was better than home to [him] when [Laura] entered it, and barren as a desert when she went out again' (*TWW*: 66), Walter is told he 'must leave Limmeridge House [...] before more harm is done' (*TWW*: 72) as Marian reveals to him that Laura is already engaged to be married. All four characters have therefore been excluded from homes they love and find themselves adrift in the public space.

Their domestic ostracism greatly contributes to the development of their resolute characters, as all of them understand the necessity to be active when confronted with the outside world. The changes occurring in Walter's physical and mental dispositions after leaving Limmeridge House are the most flagrant. When the Fairlie family solicitor Vincent Gilmore meets Walter in the streets of London sometime after his departure from the house, he observes that 'he was so changed that I hardly knew him again. His face looked pale and haggard—his manner was hurried and uncertain' (*TWW*: 155). Walter's 'hurried and uncertain' manner is the result of his confrontation with the modern urban world. After

leaving the quietness and seclusion of Limmeridge House, Walter is thrown back into the busy streets of London and finds himself in a state of constant agitation. Gilmore further notes that ‘he spoke so fast, and crowded his questions together so strangely and confusedly, that I could hardly follow him,’ while ‘a momentary nervous contraction quivered about his lips’ (TWW: 155). Walter’s confused speech, along with the signs of his growing nervousness, lead the solicitor to wonder about his mental state, especially considering the ‘strange, suspicious manner’ in which Walter looked at passers-by in the street, ‘as if he thought that some of them might be watching [them]’ (TWW: 156). At the end of their encounter, Walter shook Gilmore’s hands and ‘disappeared among the crowd without saying another word’ (TWW: 156), thus epitomising ‘the alienated experience of the “fragmented” nature of modern urban life’ which Charles Baudelaire identified as the essence of modernity.⁵⁰ As Winifred Hughes notes, sensation novels often confront the ‘overwhelming experience of urban, technological society [and] reflect the newly diminished stature of the individual amid the crowding and the complexities of modern existence.’⁵¹ This is precisely the position Walter finds himself in after being rejected as a suitable suitor for Laura. In a letter to Marian, Walter writes that ‘the effort to return to his old habits and pursuits grows harder instead of easier to him every day’ and asks Marian to help ‘get him employment that will necessitate his absence from England, and take him among new scenes and new people’ (TWW: 166).

After experiencing brief but intense domestic happiness at Limmeridge House, Walter struggles to find his place on the busy London stage and decides to distance himself from the modern world by joining ‘a private expedition to make excavations among the ruined cities of Central America’ (TWW: 178). With this, Walter not only experiences a disconnection from the domestic environment, but also from ‘his home, his country, and his friends’ (TWW: 178). As Marian asks, ‘in his unhappy position, how can I expect him or wish him to remain at home?’ (TWW: 178). Marian’s use of the word ‘home’ refers here to Britain but the phrase ‘remain at home’ is particularly potent in the case of Walter, as he neither has a home in which to remain, nor a desire to remain anywhere. Walter’s decision

⁵⁰ Swingewood, *Cultural Theory and the Problem of Modernity*, p. 141.

⁵¹ Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, p. 57.

to leave England for Central America gives him both the opportunity to escape the busy metropolis, and to be active. As Lyn Pykett writes, Walter's identity crisis 'is a matter of action, work and the discovery of a vocation,'⁵² all of which are contingent on his disengagement from his familiar surroundings and his profession as a passive drawing master. Walter's transition from domestic listlessness to foreign enterprise is therefore quite drastic, as he leaves behind Limmeridge House and its 'sense of peace and seclusion [which] soothed all thought and feeling into a rapt, unearthly repose' (TWW: 59) for 'a new world of adventure and peril' (TWW: 406). While every description of Walter's time at Limmeridge induces the reader to picture a life of gentle stasis and leisure, the accounts we receive of his time in America tell of constant watchfulness and action. Walter writes of the perils he faced during his voyage, and his escapes from death, 'death by disease, death by the Indians, death by drowning' (TWW: 406). Marian writes that since the last news she had of Walter's expedition, 'civilisation has lost all trace of them' (TWW: 198), and all traces of Walter Hartright, the drawing master, have indeed been lost. As Walter himself writes when taking possession of the narration once again, he came back from his 'self-imposed exile' as 'a changed man':

In the waters of a new life I had tempered my nature afresh. In the stern school of extremity and danger my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind to rely on itself. I had gone out to fly from my own future. I came back to face it, as a man should. (TWW: 406)

Action, industriousness, and a severance from all domestic attachment changed Walter's nature and made him better prepared to face the modern public space. When Walter is followed again in the streets of London, after settling there with Marian and a shattered Laura, he knows how to lose his tail, a stratagem he had used 'against suspected treachery in the wilds of Central America' and is now using again, 'with the same purpose and with even greater caution, in the heart of civilised London' (TWW: 454).

Robert Audley's move into action is not as clearly defined as Walter's, even though both characters share many common traits. Unlike Walter, who immediately goes back to

⁵² Lyn Pykett, *The Sensation Novel: From The Woman in White to The Moonstone* (Plymouth, U.K: Northcote House, 1994), p. 18.

London after his dismissal from Limmeridge House, Robert remains in the vicinity of Audley Court after being driven out of it. Robert rents an apartment in Lucy Audley's former maid's inn to gather more information on the disappearance of his friend. While staying there, Robert reflects on the sight of the lonely road stretching from the inn, which appears 'untrodden by a footstep' and lacks liveliness 'for a man used to the fascinations of Temple Bar,' (*LAS*: 121), his place of work in London. Even though the Castle Inn is described as a 'lonely' place of 'rickety construction' that drastically contrasted with the 'luxurious comforts of Audley Court' (*LAS*: 115), Robert resigns himself to settling there and finds a way to make himself at home in it and therefore reverts to his idle ways. On his first morning spent at the inn, Robert is found 'lounging over the well-ordered little breakfast-table, with [...] a county paper on his knees, and [making] a feeble effort now and then to read the first page' (*LAS*: 120). For Robert to be active, he needs to be thrown into the tumult of the times, which happens after Lucy Audley visits him at the inn. During their encounter, Robert tells her that he intends to look at his friend George's letters to understand what may have happened to him, including letters from his late wife, which he kept in a trunk. Lucy is immediately alarmed, as she knows the handwriting on these letters will be hers, and her secret will be revealed if Robert reads them and makes the connection. Lucy promptly determines to steal the letters before Robert has a chance to read them. While Lucy 'started for London by the 12.40 train' upon leaving the inn, Robert follows her there 'by the next train' (*LAS*: 125), thus making full use of the busy railway schedule. Robert 'packed his portmanteau, paid his bill, fastened his dogs together [...], stepped into the rumbling fly kept by the Castle Inn [and] caught an express that left Brentwood at three o'clock' (*LAS*: 125). The abundance of action verbs used in this passage, when compared to the description of his time spent 'lounging' at the inn, shows the sharp contrast taking place in Robert's behaviour once he is set to enter the public sphere.

This contrast remains throughout the novel as Robert, who grows increasingly more industrious and determined, invariably reverts to his idle self whenever settling into any domestic environment. Louise Lee suggests that Robert's 'refusal to step up to the racketing pace of Victorian life is depicted as a somnolence from which he must be

awoken.’⁵³ The way for Robert to awaken from this somnolence is to disengage himself from domestic spaces, which seem to have a deadening effect on him. After journeying from London to Southampton and Dorsetshire in a series of express trains, relentlessly following the traces of George’s life, Robert regains his chambers in Figtree Court where he spends ‘his lonely evenings in his quiet sitting-room [wandering] listlessly in the Temple Gardens on sunny mornings, absently listening to the children’s babble, idly watching their play’ (LAS: 180). Here, the adverbs ‘listlessly,’ ‘absently,’ and ‘idly’ work together to underline Robert’s passivity at home and create a sharp contrast with his active self in the outside world. Even his attempts to continue his investigation are weighed down by the taint of his domestic drowsiness, and when he receives new pieces of evidence from Clara, George’s sister, he contemplates ‘the envelope for some minutes before opening it—not in any wonder as to his correspondent, [...] but in that lazy dreaminess which was a part of his character’ (LAS: 179). Yet, this ‘lazy dreaminess’ does not entirely define Robert’s character, as he eventually adjusts to the more agitated environment that surrounds him.

As Lee notes, Robert’s investigation into the disappearance of his friend incidentally leads him to fully accept the reality of the modern urban space, which alters his very nature, full of ‘backward-looking, antiquated, and pastoral delusions.’⁵⁴ This confrontation with the Victorian modern age also changes his idle nature and ‘reinstates Robert into a new industrial notion of manhood’ as Daniel Martin suggests.⁵⁵ Martin sees the exhausting process of railway travel and its impact on the individual’s body and psyche as the real sign and consequence of Robert’s obsession with his investigation, as the railway becomes the main scene in which his battle with Lucy Audley takes place. Following on Martin’s discussion of ‘railway fatigue’ in the novel and its importance in the construction of Robert’s character, I consider the railway as a liminal space in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, as it neither belongs to the domestic nor the public spheres and involves both mobility and immobility. As Joseph De Sapio explains in his study of communities and the railway system, trains were presented in the nineteenth century as ‘home away from home,’ where

⁵³ Lee, ‘*Lady Audley’s Secret: How Does She Do It?*’ p. 137.

⁵⁴ Lee, ‘*Lady Audley’s Secret: How Does She Do It?*’, p. 137.

⁵⁵ Daniel Martin, ‘Railway Fatigue and the Coming-of-Age Narrative in “*Lady Audley’s Secret*”’, *Victorian Review*, 34.1 (2008), 131–53 (p. 137).

travellers were invited to ‘partake of one’s own elaborate rituals of domesticity— reading, quietly conversing, and occasionally eating, drinking or smoking.’⁵⁶ This is precisely how we find Robert in all of his train journeys, settling himself ‘comfortably in a corner of an empty first-class carriage, coiled up in a couple of railway rugs, and smoking a cigar in mild defiance of the authorities’ (*LAS*: 125). Robert’s ‘railway rug,’ which he carries everywhere, is the very image of the intersection between the domestic and the public, as the rug also invokes the picture of the domestic hearth. While Robert stays immobile in the carriage, the mobility of the train itself suggests a sense of purpose and direction. Robert uses trains not only to go from one place to another, but also to gather pieces of evidence in his investigation and this space therefore becomes the territory of sustained action achieved through inertia.

Lucy Audley is likewise skilled in the art of using the liminal space of railway stations and trains as she masterfully adapts her behaviour to different settings. After Robert has followed her to London, they inadvertently run into each other at the station while Lucy ‘hurried on to the platform at the very moment that Robert approached the train, and almost ran against that gentleman in her haste and excitement’ (*LAS*: 127). However, all signs of urgency and impetuosity are lost once Lucy has recognised Robert and has stepped into the contained space of the carriage, where she ‘[settled] herself in her seat, spreading her furs over her knees, and arranging the huge velvet mantle in which her slender little figure was almost hidden’ (*LAS*: 127). As Robert notes, ‘whatever object brought her to London has been successfully accomplished’ (*LAS*: 127) and after using the railway for geographical mobility, she can now occupy that space as an extension of her domestic environment, in which she is immobile, docile and fragile. Much like in the train, where she asks Robert to ‘open the carriage door for [her]’ and help her to her seat, (*LAS*: 127), Lucy’s passive presence at home is mostly shown by her propensity to surrender all actions to others. While Robert visited the family at Audley Court for dinner, Lucy ‘professed the most bewitching incapacity for carving the pheasant set before her, and called Robert to her assistance,’ even though she was able to ‘carve a leg of mutton at Mr Dawson’s’ when she was a governess there (*LAS*: 78). Because of her past situations, as

⁵⁶ Joseph De Sapio, ‘Transient Communities: Travel, Knowledge, and the Victorian Railway Carriage, 1840–90’, *Mobilities*, 8.2 (2013), 201–19 (p. 207).

mistress of a working-class household and later governess, Lucy has been used to staying active inside the house and to take charge of most matters, but she quickly adapts to her position as the wife of a wealthy landowner who enjoys the help of servants. Lucy lets her maid brush her hair for her and is waited on for most aspects of her domestic life, thus reducing the opportunities to occupy herself in the house, much like Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White* and Isabel Gilbert in *The Doctor's Wife*. Therefore, when Lucy finds herself in a state of deep mental agitation, especially after events occur that threaten to reveal her secret, she is at a loss to stay busy inside the house. After Robert and George have seen her portrait, Lucy is described as being 'restless from very joyousness of spirit, and unable to stay long in one place, or occupy herself with one thing' (LAS: 71), as she needs to assume the appearance of a happy, carefree hostess. Similarly, when it becomes clear, later in the novel, that Robert is about to reveal her secret to his uncle, Lucy goes outside 'because she was under the dominion of a horrible restlessness, which, would not suffer her to remain within the house waiting for certain tidings which she knew must too surely come' (LAS: 288). Lucy seems utterly at a loss for what to do when inside the house, as though the very essence of her domestic environment, and her position in it, precluded any sense of activity.

Victorian propriety dictated that Lucy remains passive at home and does not show any semblance of industriousness, but her active nature needs an outlet, which she finds in the outside world. Lee observes that Lucy 'can act the role of a conduct manual angel [...] and yet also be plotting and orchestrating her secret life of "adventures" in the city with Phoebe Marks, beyond the domestic hearth.'⁵⁷ The notion that Lucy is only acting the part of a leisured upper-class wife is exemplified in the following passage, when Lucy, deeply absorbed in thoughts and contemplating a way to stop Robert's investigation, hears a knock on the door of her chambers:

She rose, and threw herself into a low chair near the fire. She flung her beautiful head back upon the soft cushions, and took a book from the table near her. Insignificant as this action was, it spoke very plainly. It spoke very plainly of ever-recurring fears—of fatal necessities for concealment—of a mind that in its silent agonies was ever alive to

⁵⁷ Lee, *Lady Audley's Secret: How Does She Do It?*, p. 139.

the importance of outward effect. It told more plainly than anything else could have told how complete an actress my lady had been made by the awful necessity of her life. (*LAS*: 254)

In this instance, Lucy does not feel like she can afford to be seen so motionless and in deep reflection. To play her part, she needs to be engaged in some light form of entertainment, which will show her audience that she is composed and carelessly happy, rather than perpetually manipulating the situation. Lucy's mind is indeed ever active and prepared to operate any necessary scheme, while always concealing this capacity. However, once Lucy is outside the domestic realm, once she has 'safely [made her] escape from the house,' as she says (*LAS*: 267), she can let her real nature express itself, albeit often under some form of disguise. It is in that foreign space that, throughout the novel, she travels to and from Audley Court to stage her death, escape her encounter with George Talboys, steal the letters Robert intends to use as evidence, and set fire to the Castle Inn where Robert sleeps, proving every time that 'the outside world, the public sphere, is as manageable and controllable as her own home.'⁵⁸ It is only when Lucy Audley is free to enter the public sphere that she poses a threat to society, which is why the last home to which she is sent, the Belgian *maison de santé*—literally 'home of health'—is so fitting for her, as it impersonates the domestic space while making the public one unattainable. As physician Dr. Mosgrave tells Robert,

from the moment in which Lady Audley enters that house, [...] her life, so far as life is made up of action and variety, will be finished. [...] Whatever crimes she may have committed she will be able to commit no more. If you were to dig a grave for her in the nearest churchyard and bury her alive in it, you could not more safely shut her from the world and all worldly associations. (*LAS*: 324)

Dr. Mosgrave's correlation of action and public world is clear in this passage, and implies that, while Lucy may be comfortable in this *maison de santé*, she will never again be active.

⁵⁸ Lee, 'Lady Audley's Secret: How Does She Do It?', p. 139.

Working on the parallel between spiritualism and sensation fiction, Tatiana Kontou writes that ‘both sensation heroines and mediums assume a false passivity, a docile or domestic exterior, in order to create spectral doubles and mysterious afterlives—alternative selves through which socially unacceptable forms of behaviour can be enacted.’⁵⁹ According to Kontou, it allows these heroines to challenge the accepted notion that individuals are composed of a single nature, and instead to portray ‘a diverse range of vivid personae.’⁶⁰ The performance of the self has already been explored in the case of Lady Audley, who adopts an identity of docile and passive wife in order to conceal her other improper but fundamental self, which allows her to survive the oppressive Victorian society. This notion is all the more relevant for Magdalen Vanstone who literally acts—either professionally or for her own personal gain—a variety of selves. As Collins’s biographer Catherine Peter notes, heroines such as Magdalen Vanstone ‘adopt a false identity with increasing danger to their social standing and cost to their mental health,’⁶¹ because they have no other choice. As previously noted, Magdalen initially tries to be her genuine spirited self when she takes on the profession of actress, but society prevents her from pursuing this profession, forcing her to mould herself into the proper middle-class young lady she is supposed to be. Magdalen suffers psychologically from this social pressure, as she feels unable to reveal her true character to anyone, not even her sister Norah. In a letter she writes to Norah before running away, Magdalen tells her ‘I dare not show myself to you as I really am’ (NN: 144). However, ‘the key to Magdalen’s character is her “exuberant vitality,”’⁶² as Hughes notes, and she therefore struggles to remain passive whenever propriety forces her to be. As the narrator indicates when describing her ‘headlong course down the house stairs’ before the calamity hit the Vanstone family, every aspect of Magdalen’s vitality ‘sprang alike from the same source; from the overflowing physical health which strengthened every muscle, braced every nerve, and set the warm young blood tingling through her veins, like the blood of a growing child’ (NN: 9). The

⁵⁹ Tatiana Kontou, ‘Parallel Worlds: Collins’s Sensationalism and Spiritualist Practice’, in *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2007), pp. 37–54 (p. 41).

⁶⁰ Kontou, ‘Parallel Worlds’, p. 41.

⁶¹ Peters, *The King of Inventors*, p. 220.

⁶² Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, p. 151.

emphasis on Magdalen's strength and muscles is by no means usual in the description of an upper-class Victorian lady of eighteen, and this description prefigures the heroine's need for action.

In her family home, Magdalen feels able to give free rein to her restless personality, but the loss of this familiar setting precipitates a loss of emotional connection to any domestic environment and an incapacity to feel at home and unrestricted in any of them. Magdalen cannot withstand stasis in a house where she does not feel like she belongs. In her letter to Norah, Magdalen explains that:

Our quiet life here maddens me; I can bear it no longer; I must go. If you knew what my thoughts are; if you knew how hard I have fought against them, and how horribly they have gone on haunting me in the lonely quiet of this house, you would pity and forgive me. (NN: 144)

The emotional and mental toil that the loss of her home has on her is expressed through her incapacity to be passively content at home. As Norah appreciates, Magdalen's attempt to join the stage 'is nothing more than a means of freeing herself from all home dependence, and of enabling her to run what mad risks she pleases, in perfect security from all home control' (NN: 143). It is only outside the premises of the home that Magdalen can hope to be active, and this fracture between the two spheres has a detrimental impact on her emotional and mental state because of her inadequacy in the public sphere. Barely 'three months since the spoiled darling of her parents; the priceless treasure of the household' has left all domestic attachments, the reader finds Magdalen in the streets of York, described as 'a castaway in a strange city, wrecked on the world!' (NN: 155).

Uncomfortable in both the private and public spheres, Magdalen struggles to find her place in the crowded Victorian society. Andrea Kaston Tange locates Magdalen's lack of social status and position in the different domestic roles she occupies, which change according to the roles she plays, and overall demonstrate 'the potential liminality of all middle-class women's positions.'⁶³ In an article exploring 'Magdalen's Peril,' Lewis Horne

⁶³ Tange, *Architectural Identities*, p. 181.

observes that the novel is composed of eight ‘Scenes,’ ‘each set in a different place, each devoted to one chief activity [where] the reader finds Magdalen in a different role or disguise.’⁶⁴ One may add that it is specifically in different houses that these scenes are enacted, all of which entrust Magdalen with different opportunities and restrictions for action. As the daughter of a loving and lenient father, Magdalen can behave recklessly in the first scene, but as her status changes, she needs to adapt to the demands of other domestic spaces. The ‘story of the ghost,’ in which Magdalen, coming home in a hurry to her lodgings in London after her meeting with Noel Vanstone while dressed as Miss Garth, encounters Mrs Wragge in the stairs leading to her room, and frightens Mrs Wragge, who then believes she has seen a ghost, is a pivotal event which warns Magdalen that ‘more and more depends on her maintaining her tenuous command over the spaces she occupies.’⁶⁵ Magdalen’s careless actions in this instance threaten her whole enterprise and teaches her to preserve her mobility for the public sphere. Following this event, Magdalen appears much more docile, bordering on the comatose, whenever she is indoors. In the fourth scene, when Magdalen and Captain Wragge are acting as the Bygrave family to defraud Noel Vanstone, Magdalen appears to save all her energy for the outside space, going on long walks on the beach and elaborating schemes with Captain Wragge to lure Noel away from Mrs Lecount. Whenever she goes back to their house in the North Shingles Villa, however, Magdalen is remarkably passive. Before her first scheduled encounter with Noel Vanstone as the lovely Miss Bygrave, Magdalen spends a lot of time in the house, lying in bed or looking through the window of her bedroom. At home, her despair after her lover Frank rejected her, weighs down on her physical and mental strength, yet her vitality awakens when she contemplates activities to be performed outside the house. The narrator thus writes that:

After sitting by the window for nearly an hour, her eyes looking mechanically at the view, her mind empty of all impressions, and conscious of no thoughts, she shook off the strange waking stupor that possessed her, and rose to prepare herself for the serious business of the day. (NN: 290)

⁶⁴ Lewis Horne, ‘Madgalen’s Peril’, *Dickens Studies Annual*, 20 (1991), 281–94 (p. 284).

⁶⁵ Tange, *Architectural Identities*, p. 209.

The constant oscillating mental process between apathy and resolution greatly contributes to the development of her obsessive disorder, as Magdalen finds no restful refuge in the domestic environment, only a space for restless yet restrained mental agony. Just before the fateful day when she is supposed to marry Noel, Magdalen asks Captain Wragge to take her away from ‘this hateful place’ and to give her ‘two days out of prison in this horrible house’ (NN: 358). Yet, if Magdalen cannot feel at home in any house, she can find no refuge in the public sphere either, as propriety condemns her active self. As Hughes notes, it is only when her ‘energy was gone; her powers of resistance were crushed’ (NN: 552) that she ‘can be readmitted to the conventional world’ of Victorian decent femininity.⁶⁶ Magdalen’s character, or personality, needs to be subdued by the outside world in order for her to be allowed back into the happy and comfortable domestic setting. Like her, Lucy, Robert and Walter need to alter their own characters in order to attain what they yearn for: a stable home.

Acting in One’s Own Character

Propriety dictated that women should be discreet and compliant, not steadfast and audacious. Robert Audley, who forcefully declares ‘I hate women’ (LAS: 178), believes all women stray from this doctrine and remarks an innate difference between women’s and men’s characters, finding women to have an ‘impulsive heart and active mind’ while men ‘might lie in the sunshine, and eat lotuses, and fancy it “always afternoon”’ (LAS: 177). While Robert stubbornly wants to see life as ‘an unavoidable nuisance, only redeemable by its brevity,’ he contends that woman goes through it:

as if it were a pageant or a procession. [...] She pushes her neighbours, and struggles for a good place in the dismal march; she elbows, and writhes, and tramples, and prances to the one end of making the most of the misery. She gets up early and sits up late, and is loud, and restless, and noisy, and un pitying. (LAS: 177)

This description, which encapsulates Robert’s vision of all women, is replete with action verbs and invokes the mental image of a violent fight for one’s place in life. Although

⁶⁶ Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, p. 152.

Robert's diatribe is somehow exaggerated and rancorous, it does pertain to some reality of women's situation in the mid-nineteenth century and their need to 'struggle for a good place.' If women did not actively strive to obtain a good situation in life—most often signified by a satisfactory marriage—their character, even more so than their survival, was at risk of being imperilled. This was made particularly visible by the 1851 Census conducted in the United Kingdom, which revealed a large population of so-called 'surplus women.'⁶⁷ This category distinguished unmarried middle-and-upper-class women who were considered in distress because they could not be financially independent. The report of the 1851 census stressed the importance of marriage for a well-functioning society, claiming that 'on the conjugal state of the population its existence, increase and diffusion, as well as manners, character, happiness, and freedom, intimately depend.'⁶⁸ An individual's character was therefore believed to be closely connected to matrimony and domesticity, a notion shared by Samuel Smiles who wrote, twenty years after the census was circulated, that 'homes [...] are the nurseries of character.'⁶⁹ Publications such as the report of the 1851 census therefore questioned the dignity and morality of unmarried women.

The importance of matrimony placed the onus on middle-class women to find a suitable husband in order to build their character, secure financial and emotional protection, and escape the social stigmas of spinsterhood. A conservative writer for the *Saturday Review*, forcibly reacting to the wave of radical responses to the Census which called for reforms in favour of the education and emancipation of women, proclaimed that 'married life is woman's profession; and to this life her training—that of dependence—is modelled.'⁷⁰ The author pursues the analogy of marriage and work by explaining that, like any tradesman trained for a particular profession who failed to gain employment, or lost their employment for any given reason, women who could not find a husband, or lost their

⁶⁷ Judith Worsnop, 'A Reevaluation of "the Problem of Surplus Women" in 19th-Century England: The Case of the 1851 Census', *Women's Studies International Forum*, 13.1–2 (1990), 21–31.

⁶⁸ Thomas Milner and Augustus Heinrich Petermann, *The Census Of Great Britain In 1851* (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1854), p. 36.

⁶⁹ Smiles, *Character*, p. 52.

⁷⁰ Anon, 'Queen Bees or Working Bees?', *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 8.211 (1859), 575–76 (p. 576).

husbands, had merely ‘failed in business,’ and should not expect any assistance from society.⁷¹ It is therefore not surprising to hear that women ‘elbow, and writhe, and trample, and prance’ (LAS: 177) to make a place for themselves in society, which is precisely what Lucy and Magdalen do throughout the novels. Both of them initially follow the social convention of matrimony when they are at an age to marry, and both of them see their attempt fail through no fault of their own. While Lucy’s husband abandons her to go to Australia to make a fortune, Magdalen’s fiancé Frank sets sail for China to learn a trade before they can be married. These tales incidentally fit the pattern revealed by the 1851 census showing that the demographic disparity between men and women in England was mostly due to emigration, as a disproportionate number of men went abroad in search for work compared to women.⁷² However, as the writer for the *Saturday Review* revealed, without help from outside, these forsaken women had to help themselves. As Lucy explains when revealing her secret, ‘I determined to run away from this wretched home which my slavery supported. [...] I determined to go to London and lose myself in that great chaos of humanity’ (LAS: 301). This notion of the individual lost in the masses is precisely what Emily Steinlight studies in *Populating the Novel: Literary Form and the Politics of Surplus Life*, showing that literature played an important role in the formation of a national awareness of the problem of mass population.⁷³ Magdalen, who also finds herself lost in the crowds of York, writes to her sister:

we must get our living for ourselves; I have only gone to get mine in the manner which is fittest for me. Whether I succeed, or whether I fail, I can do myself no harm either way. I have no position to lose, and no name to degrade. (NN: 144)

However, Magdalen is mistaken here, as the very act of looking for paid labour was harshly condemned for a woman of her class.

⁷¹ Anon, ‘Queen Bees or Working Bees?’, p. 576.

⁷² Worsnop, ‘A Reevaluation of “the Problem of Surplus Women”’, p. 23; Emily Steinlight, *Populating the Novel: Literary Form and the Politics of Surplus Life* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2018), p. 138.

⁷³ Steinlight, *Populating the Novel*, p. 3.

Both Braddon and Collins hint at the possibility for these women to be independent through paid labour as governesses. Indeed, the figure of the governess is promoted in both novels: Lucy is hired as one before marrying Sir Michael, Magdalen's sister takes on this role when they lose their fortune, and the sisters' governess Miss Garth plays an important role in the novel.⁷⁴ However, even this profession was by no means regarded in a favourable light. As Mariaconcetta Costantini explains, these women 'had to fight against the prejudices of a society that considered middle-class women's paid labour as unfeminine and redolent of working-class vulgarity,'⁷⁵ an observation that also applied to upper-class women. Historian Mary Poovey also notes that the governess was often identified as a 'redundant woman' who was 'deviant simply because she was a middle-class woman who had to work and because she was always in danger of losing her middle-class status and her "natural" morality.'⁷⁶ The governess's liminal position, which Poovey distinguishes as 'the figure who epitomized the domestic ideal, and the figure who threatened to destroy it,'⁷⁷ puts her in a precarious position, both in terms of her economic situation and mental state. This is particularly visible in *Lady Audley's Secret* when Lucy tells of her mental agony when living in poverty and asks, 'what labour is more wearisome than the dull slavery of a governess?' (LAS: 300). Physician John Webster, who expressed sympathy for governesses in an article published in 1855 in the *JPMMP*, pointed to their 'anomalous social position' and 'the frequency with which Mental disease appears to supervene' in this class of women.⁷⁸ In *No Name*, Magdalen's sister particularly suffers from the lack of recognition she receives as a governess, both from her employers, and from society. When Magdalen follows Norah under disguise, she witnesses her sister being kicked by her pupils and laughed at by passers-by. This scene, which sees Norah 'made an object of public curiosity and amusement; Norah reprimanded in the open street; Norah, the hired victim of

⁷⁴ Mrs Lecount, Noel Vanstone's housekeeper, is another example of working middle-class women whose status and situation were extremely precarious, as her entire condition—present and future—depends on her male employer.

⁷⁵ Costantini, 'Sensation, Class and the Rising Professionals', p. 106.

⁷⁶ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 14.

⁷⁷ Poovey, *Uneven Developments*, p. 127.

⁷⁸ John Webster, 'Remarks on the Religious Persuasion, Degree of Education, and Employments of Persons Affected with Insanity', *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 8.32 (1855), 472–77 (p. 477).

an old woman's insolence and a child's ill-temper' (NN: 222), only drives further Magdalen's resolution to use unsanctified means to survive rather than suffer the same fate as her sister. As the narrator writes, 'the thought of her sister [...] was now the thought which sanctioned that means, or any means, to compass her end' (NN: 222). The governesses' mental distress, caused by their lack of specific social class affiliation, was also exacerbated by their lack of domestic belonging. As Grace Wetzel notes in her essay on 'Homeless in the Home,' Victorian fiction showed that governesses found only 'temporary housing' in their employment, as 'these spaces seem impermanent homeless shelters—domestic spaces in which the women do not actually belong.'⁷⁹ Because of their lack of connectedness, Wetzel observes, these women are 'prone to negative self-imaging and damaged mental health.'⁸⁰ If the alternative of paid labour was so bleak, and their initial attempt to subscribe to the social standard of matrimony failed so prematurely, it is not surprising to find Lucy and Magdalen look for other ways to survive.

Historian Judith Worsnop writes that a strong opponent to the emancipation of women, W. R. Greg, believed that around '6% of unmarried females are natural celibates,' a figure encompassing, among other distinctions, women 'who are devoid of the fibre-feminine, [or] are too passionately fond of a wild independence.'⁸¹ Considering the character of both Lucy and Magdalen, they may have been classed as 'natural celibates' by society. As Magdalen's governess Miss Garth notes, Magdalen 'is resolute and impetuous, clever and domineering; she is not one of those model women who want a man to look up to, and to protect them' (NN: 59). Using the distinction of 'model women,' Miss Garth clearly shows that dependent and submissive women formed the norm of womanhood. Similarly, Lucy reveals her lack of attachment to her first husband and their child, explaining that 'he fell in love with me, and married me three months after my seventeenth birthday. I think I loved him as much as it was in my power to love anybody' (LAS: 299). However, because of a lack of other resources, these two women are pressured to enter matrimony and resolved to have a fraudulent marriage. 'The irony,' Lyn Pykett notes, 'is

⁷⁹ Wetzel, 'Homeless in the Home', p. 80.

⁸⁰ Wetzel, 'Homeless in the Home', p. 81.

⁸¹ Worsnop, 'A Reevaluation of "the Problem of Surplus Women"', p. 27.

that all of Lucy's actions are directed towards those goals which were recommended to all middle-class girls: achieving and maintaining a socially acceptable and financially secure marriage, and keeping up appearances.'⁸² Yet Lucy, like Magdalen, is undeniably punished for actively pursuing these goals and for trying to right the wrongs done to her. This is by no means the reaction industrious male characters encounter in the novels. While Costantini sees a connection between the distrust society had for surplus women and the distrust it had for the rising figure of the detective, male amateur detectives like Robert Audley and Walter Hartright hardly experience the same repudiation female characters do.⁸³ Unlike Magdalen, who is pictured as transgressing social norms for recognising that 'we must get our living for ourselves' (*NN*: 144), Walter is praised for declaring that he must 'act for [him]self' (*TWW*: 449), and Robert for promising that he will 'do [his] best to act' (*LAS*: 123).

Unlike Magdalen and Lucy, who need to conceal their independence under disguise of matrimonial subordination, Walter and Robert make their actions very public and expose their agency in the unfolding of the plot. Rachel Heinrichs notes that, 'as Robert takes on the role of detective and protector of social standards, he apparently becomes a self-sufficient man who transcends his former pretensions,'⁸⁴ a change which Braddon plainly registers when recording Robert's thoughts on his investigative success:

Good heavens! [...] how can I believe that it was I who used to lounge all day in this easy chair reading Paul de Kock, and smoking mild Turkish? [...] Was it I to whom life was such an easy merry-go-round? Heaven knows I have learnt the business of life since then. (*LAS*: 341-2)

⁸² Pykett, *The Sensation Novel*, p. 80.

⁸³ Costantini dedicates an entire section of her essay to this question under the heading 'Outsiders looking in: surplus women and detectives', contending that 'two groups, in particular, embodied an idea of low-ranking occupation that was felt as threatening by their contemporaries: working middle-class women and detectives,' furthermore arguing that their situation 'attracted the attention of sensation novelists who represented the multiple tensions clustering around them.' p. 106.

⁸⁴ Rachel Heinrichs, 'Critical Masculinities in *Lady Audley's Secret*', *Victorian Review*, 33.1 (2007), 103–20 (p. 106).

Robert and Walter enjoy the luxury of publicly affirming their rise to action because society would see their endeavour in a favourable light. This discrepancy between female dissimulation and male assertiveness is particularly visible in the way characters consider disguises. As MacDonald writes, 'in sensation novels, the ability to "step out of one's character" is often figured as a particularly feminine act,' which attests to the fragmentation of women's identities.⁸⁵ A prime example of this ability is of course Magdalen, who, as Captain Wragge declares, 'has a natural gift for assuming characters which I have never seen equalled by a woman' (NN: 207). Wragge furthermore discloses the universality of this process and the population's awareness of it, by noting that:

it is something more than the mere fact of her choosing to disguise herself to forward her own private ends that causes my present perplexity. Hundreds of girls take fancies for disguising themselves; and hundreds of instances of it are related year after year in the public journals. But my ex-pupil is not to be confounded for one moment with the average adventuress of the newspapers. (NN: 207)

Such stories related in the press would probably have shown these 'adventuresses' in a less than favourable light, denouncing the travesty they made of proper femininity. Magdalen's first disguise in the novel is loudly applauded as she charmingly and triumphantly appears on stage for her friends and family 'with false hair and false eyebrows, with a bright-red complexion and patches on her cheeks, with the gayest colours flaunting in her dress, and the shrillest vivacity of voice and manner' (NN: 49). This performance pleasantly 'staggered the audience' because of its locale: a conventionally domestic little play acted for and by the members of an upper-class assembly. However, as the story progresses, Magdalen's disguises become more and more subversive and condemnable. Her candid talent for disguise and character impersonations is quickly perverted by Captain Wragge who wants to excessively profit from it by '[training] her in the art of dramatic disguise' (NN: 190-91). This talent soon attracts crowds as 'her knack of disguising her own identity in the impersonation of different characters so completely staggers her audiences that the same people come twice over to find out how she does it' (NN: 198). At such point in the novel, her talent is still presented in a favourable light, yet we are reminded that none of

⁸⁵ MacDonald, 'Sensation Fiction, Gender and Identity', p. 128.

the people applauding Magdalen's performances would want to publicly associate with her. Magdalen's skill truly takes on a devious form when she determines to use it to impersonate Miss Garth in order to deceive Noel Vanstone. Sensing her resolution, Wragge writes in his journal that:

a girl who takes the sharpest people unawares by using such a capacity as this to help her own objects in private life, and who sharpens that capacity by a determination to fight her way to her own purpose, which has beaten down everything before it, up to this time—is a girl who tries an experiment in deception, new enough and dangerous enough to lead, one way or the other, to very serious results. (NN: 207)

This ominous reflection comes forth in the rest of the novel as Magdalen's disguises become more and more illicit and progressively damage her sense of identity and self-esteem. Magdalen at one time experiences 'a horror of the vile disguise that concealed her' (NN: 221) and later goes to such extent as to truly surrender her own identity and status to her maid Louisa in order to become a maid herself and work under disguise for Sir Bartram.

Lucy Audley's ploy to fake her death by registering a deceased woman who looked like her under her own name is yet another example of artful female deception. By employing this stratagem, Lucy essentially eliminates her real identity—that of Helen Talboys, mother, wife and daughter—thus showing the extremes to which women had to go to in order to survive. For men, on the other hand, disguise is often seen as a form of abdication, which they are disinclined to perform. When confronted by the need to lose himself in the crowds, Walter writes that:

there was something so repellent to me in the idea—something so meanly like the common herd of spies and informers in the mere act of adopting a disguise—that I dismissed the question from consideration almost as soon as it had risen in my mind. [...] In my own character I had acted thus far—and in my own character I was resolved to continue to the end. (TWW: 482),

Unlike Walter Hartright and the rest of the Victorian male population, women generally could not afford to act in their own character, and the constant need to conceal this part of themselves had a perceptible effect on their mental health. While Walter can stay true to

his own identity and keep both his past and future selves unmasked, Lucy and Magdalen are prevented from acting in their own character and must use disguises to survive, even if they, too, find the idea ‘repellent.’

Samuel Smiles used the title ‘Home Power’ for the second chapter of *Character*, declaring that ‘it is mainly in the home that the heart is opened, the habits are formed, the intellect is awakened, and character moulded for good or for evil.’⁸⁶ Smiles believed that ‘domestic life should be preparatory to social,’⁸⁷ and that men and women arrived on the public stage with a defined character and a sense of their own place in society. Reading sensation novels reveals, however, that home was not invariably the best location for the formation of one’s identity. While we can indeed argue that some occupants of the domestic spaces ‘used cultural norms attached to those spaces as a means of creating an identity for themselves or locating themselves within a family, a social network, or domestic ideology more broadly,’⁸⁸ as I have also shown in the first part of this thesis, we need to account for the abundance of characters who evolve outside of the domestic ideology. For many sensation characters, it is the modern urban space rather than the traditional domestic rural one that forms their nature. As I demonstrated in this chapter, for Magdalen, Lucy, Walter and Robert, it is predominantly the experience of modernity and the confrontation with the urban sphere that build their industrious and resourceful characters. The various shocks they suffer sever them from domestic life and forces them to adopt a new identity, more suitable to sustain the hardships of public life. Yet, none of these characters manages or aspires to a complete disconnection from domesticity, and it is through their search for property security that they effectively build their character, define their own moral principles and discover their social standing.

After realising how little agency and control they have over their own domestic situations, Lucy and Magdalen discover the limitations to their endeavours in the public sphere as well. As Lee Anna Maynard notes, ‘it is for Victorian women that the physical, the active, and the public were off-limits,’⁸⁹ and what is left to them is artifice, passivity

⁸⁶ Smiles, *Character*, p. 42.

⁸⁷ Smiles, *Character*, p. 43.

⁸⁸ Tange, *Architectural Identities*, p. 177.

⁸⁹ Maynard, *Beautiful Boredom*, p. 14.

and covertness. As I have shown, the art of disguise is presented as predominantly feminine in sensation novels, suggesting a proclivity for concealment on the part of women. However, as Anne-Marie Beller has shown, it is not the sensational adventuress who conceals facts in the novels, but rather the male detective.⁹⁰ Working specifically on the art of detection, Beller argues that ‘there is a sense in which the male detective works to contain crime and preserve the status quo, whereas the female detective effectively disrupts convention.’⁹¹ While Beller is mostly concerned with novels in which female characters take it upon themselves to solve the central mystery of the plot, such as Collins’s *The Moonstone* (1868) and Braddon’s *Henry Dunbar* (1864), we notice how this argument can be generally extended to describe the gender discrepancies at play in the Victorian novel regarding the art of dissimulation. While conservative male characters, such as Walter and Robert, desperately try to conceal the truth about people’s identities, in order to safeguard a certain social order and protect the reputation of their loved ones, transgressive female characters strive to upset social norms and reveal the inadequacy of a society which left no space for women who could not or would not be passively dependent. Beller contends that in Collins’s and Braddon’s novels ‘crime and detection is often used as both a catalyst and metaphor for a crisis in psychological and social constructions of identity.’⁹² The crimes Lucy and Magdalen commit, and the discoveries Walter and Robert make, are at the heart of their individual making, as they simultaneously reveal their inner need for action and define them in the eyes of society. There is still, however, as Beller identifies, a psychological crisis at work in these novels, which the authors illustrate through the characters’ growing obsessions for their enterprise. Lucy’s and Magdalen’s relentless and compulsive descent into immorality is fuelled by the mental distress they feel for lack of belonging, and Walter’s and Robert’s obsessive quest for the truth is sustained by their growing sensation of self-discovery. The following chapter explores such compulsions and obsessions in line with the nineteenth-century understanding and framing of such mental states.

⁹⁰ Anne-Marie Beller, ‘Detecting the Self in the Sensation Fiction of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’, *Clues*, 26.1 (2007), 49–61.

⁹¹ Beller, ‘Detecting the Self’, p. 50.

⁹² Beller, ‘Detecting the Self’, p. 51.

Chapter Four

‘Mad to-day and sane to-morrow, mad yesterday and sane to-day’:

Partial Insanity or Deviant Behaviours

Dissatisfied with the nosology of mental diseases in the early nineteenth century, French alienist Jean Dominique Esquirol proposed a new classification of insanity, including the disease of monomania, which was ‘characterized by a partial lesion of the intelligence, affections or will.’¹ The term, which he coined as early as the 1810s, suggested a form of partial insanity in which the sufferer was obsessed with one single idea.² The notion that individuals could experience isolated moments of delusion, while possessing an otherwise sane mind, was also expressed later in the century by English physician James Cowles Prichard who coined the term ‘moral insanity’ in a *Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (1835). Both disorders were classed as forms of partial insanity, in which only some of the patients’ mental faculties were disturbed.³ Prichard distinguished the two diseases as follows:

1. Moral Insanity, or madness consisting in a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses, without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties, and particularly without any insane illusion or hallucination. [...]
2. Monomania [...], in which the understanding is partially disordered or under the influence of some particular illusion, referring to one subject, and involving one train of ideas, while the intellectual powers appear, when exercised on other subjects, to be in a great measure unimpaired.⁴

¹ Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, p. 320.

² Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, p. 153.

³ Although Prichard only explicitly classed Monomania as a form of partial insanity, his own denomination of moral insanity was later classed in the same category, as Carlson and Dain show in ‘The Meaning of Moral Insanity’ (p135).

⁴ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 6.

Prichard classed Esquirol's monomania as a form of 'intellectual insanity,' which contrasted with his own notion of moral insanity, in which there was no 'perceptible lesion of the intellectual faculties,'⁵ but rather of the emotional faculties. As historians of psychiatry Eric T. Carlson and Norman Dain explain, with both Prichard's and Esquirol's diagnoses, a new 'dichotomy of the intellect and the emotions' emerged in the nosology of insanity.⁶ This dichotomy is also present in sensation novels, in which both the intellectual and emotional states of the characters are at times afflicted. The aim of the present chapter is therefore to demonstrate that Collins and Braddon used the notion of partial insanity in their writings, describing symptoms of both monomania and moral insanity in a range of characters.

Although the concept of partial insanity was not new to the nineteenth century, the diseases of monomania and moral insanity quickly became popular in all spheres of Victorian society. As historian Jan Goldstein notes, monomania became 'significant not only in the usual medical context but also in a lay context, where, construed more figuratively than literally, it became contemporary shorthand for a particular state of mind.'⁷ Esquirol's notion of singled-out obsessions encapsulated the Victorian drive for individual demarcation and essentially pathologized the passions.⁸ Although the medical community widely discussed and employed monomania and moral insanity in their diagnoses, the disorders were 'at the centre of many arguments about whether such a restricted form of insanity could actually exist.'⁹ These disorders mostly fascinated the population in terms of the significance they took in medico-legal proceedings. As historian of medicine Raymond de Saussure writes, 'the concept of monomania is an interesting subject because, although clinically false, it had a great influence on medical

⁵ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 5.

⁶ Eric T. Carlson and Norman Dain, 'The Meaning of Moral Insanity', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 36.2 (1962), 130–40 (p. 139).

⁷ Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, p. 155.

⁸ The word 'passions' is here understood as 'an intense desire or enthusiasm for (also †of) something; the zealous pursuit of an aim. [...] An aim or object pursued with zeal; a thing arousing intense enthusiasm.' 'Passion, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/138504>> [accessed 6 February 2023] entries 9.a and 9.b.

⁹ Stanley W. Jackson, 'Melancholia and Partial Insanity', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 19.2 (1983), 173–84 (p. 179).

jurisprudence.’¹⁰ The same can be said of moral insanity and the weight Prichard’s diagnosis had in Victorian courts. The jurisprudence attached to partial insanity is central to understanding why writers widely employed it in the literature of the time, especially in sensation novels. As Carlson and Dain noted, moral insanity and monomania suggested a ‘status before the law of an individual at least partially rational and therefore presumably at least partly responsible for his actions.’¹¹ Sensation writers often used the concept of partial insanity to explain the immoral or criminal acts of many sensation characters, and the responsibility they bear in them is then questioned throughout the novels.

Most readers of sensation novels would have been familiar with the concept of partial insanity because of its ubiquity in popular newspapers.¹² Paige Matthey Bynum argues, for example, that readers of Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘The Tell-Tale Heart’ (1843) would have read the short-story with a ‘frame of reference that [...] would have included a knowledge of a controversial new disease called “moral insanity” and of the legal and philosophical dilemmas that surrounded its discovery.’¹³ Similarly, I suggest here that the readers of *The Woman in White*, *No Name* and *Lady Audley’s Secret* would likely have read the novels with at least a partial understanding of both concepts. In her exploration of sensation novel Victorian readership and magazine publications, Deborah Wynne mentions the intersection between fictional and non-fictional texts in periodicals, which newspaper editors often intentionally exploited ‘to draw out the themes and ideas of the serial novels in ways which would enhance reading pleasure and generate debate.’¹⁴ Wynne thus writes that ‘when an instalment of a novel depicts forgery, or insanity, and is immediately followed by an article on forgery or insanity, one can safely assume that editors were

¹⁰ de Saussure, ‘The Influence of the Concept of Monomania’, p. 365.

¹¹ Carlson and Dain, ‘The Meaning of Moral Insanity’, p. 135.

¹² For more on the prevalence of monomania and moral insanity in Victorian popular literature, see de Saussure, ‘The Influence of the Concept of Monomania’; Vrettos, ‘Victorian Psychology’; Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction*; Goldstein, *Console and Classify*; Carlson and Dain, ‘The Meaning of Moral Insanity’; Paige Matthey Bynum, “‘Observe How Healthily — How Calmly I Can Tell You the Whole Story’: Moral Insanity and Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Tell-Tale Heart””, in *Literature and Science as Modes of Expression*, ed. by Frederick Amrine (Dordrecht: Springer, 1989), pp. 141–52.

¹³ Bynum, “‘Observe How Healthily — How Calmly I Can Tell You the Whole Story’”, p. 141.

¹⁴ Deborah Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine* (Houndsmill: Palgrave, 2001), p. 3.

“interpellating” their readers.’¹⁵ Here, I follow such assumptions to establish a framework of literary analysis that relates the Victorians’ general knowledge on medical notions to their reading experience of sensation novels. While Braddon and Collins use the term monomania in some of these texts, they never explicitly mention ‘moral insanity,’ although the behaviours and mental states of their characters often feature recognised signs of the disease. Like Bynum’s reading of ‘The Tell-Tale Heart,’ the aim of this analysis is not to diagnose Collins’s and Braddon’s characters with a specific mental disease that is not named in the text, but rather to demonstrate, through a parallel exploration of contemporary medical texts and popular literature, that readers of these novels would likely have identified signs of monomania and moral insanity in the narration.

Partial insanity offered interesting narrative possibilities to nineteenth-century writers, as it allowed them to introduce the threat of insanity in any given setting while maintaining a façade of balanced mental state in the rest of the novel. For sensation writers in particular, partial insanity was the perfect tool to bring crime into the otherwise mundane domestic setting. This chapter therefore opens with an exploration of the concept of partial insanity, common to monomania and moral insanity, to see how the medical understanding of it featured in the novels of Collins and Braddon, with a special interest in its connection to domesticity. In this section, I demonstrate how the characters examined in the previous chapter, namely Walter Hartright in *The Woman in White*, Robert Audley and Lucy Audley in *Lady Audley’s Secret* and Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name*, appear and act sanely in the main body of the texts, and present signs of mental delusions at specific moments, not least in those moments reflecting their conflictual relationship to home, as examined in the previous chapter. In the first section, I explore in more detail the notion of the *idée fixe*, which was peculiar to monomania. All four characters present an obsessive state about one specific idea, connected, as I show, to their alienation from the domestic environment. I then examine the terminology used for both monomania and moral insanity to see how Prichard and Esquirol described the diseases, and how sensation writers in turn used the language attached to them in their novels. While monomania was understood as affecting

¹⁵ Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, p. 3.

the intellect and reason of the sufferer, moral insanity involved their passions¹⁶ or ‘moral dispositions.’¹⁷ It is interesting here to dwell on the meaning of ‘moral’ in Prichard’s term, as this has often been misunderstood to refer to the ethical character of the individual, rather than their emotions.¹⁸ This is apparent in Collins’s and Braddon’s novels, in which morality is very much connected to the censured actions of their characters.

This chapter then focuses on the loss of volition, common to both monomania and partial insanity. According to Prichard and Esquirol, these forms of partial insanity altered the will of the sufferer and their ability to act according to their own determination. Collins and Braddon both suggest this in their novels through their frequent use of fatality as an authority ruling over their characters. As I demonstrate there, the compulsive acts of Walter, Robert, Lucy and Magdalen reflect their separation from the domestic environment and their inability to fit within society. Finally, the chapter ends on the question of responsibility. Because the monomaniacs and morally insane were said to act against their own will, their accountability in the unlawful acts they performed under the influence of the disease was often questioned when cases were brought to court. Sensation novels also reflect this dimension through the redemption characters sometimes enjoy at the end of the novels. While their crimes are never judged by the law, readers are never led to condemn them too harshly either. I therefore explore Collins’s and Braddon’s motivations in using—or hinting at—diagnoses of partial insanity for their characters. Overall, this chapter explores the question of partial insanity and the scope it offered sensation writers in terms of narrative opportunities. I argue here that monomania and moral insanity perfectly represent the popular anxiety of the nineteenth century about the loss of power over one’s mind, something both Braddon and Collins encapsulate in their tales of crime, deceit and mental struggle. This chapter furthermore connects mental states associated with partial insanity to a lack of domestic grounding and an excess of industriousness outside the home

¹⁶ The word ‘passions’ is here understood as ‘a fit, outburst, or state marked by or of strong excitement, agitation, or other intense emotion. In early use also: a fit of madness or mental derangement’ ‘Passion, n.’ Entry 6.c.

¹⁷ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 6.

¹⁸ Jan Verplaetse, *Localising the Moral Sense: Neuroscience and the Search for the Cerebral Seat of Morality* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2009), p. 191.

environment, thus highlighting a contrast with the argument I put forth in Chapters One and Two that connected nervous disorders to domestic seclusion and idleness.

A Break in an Otherwise Sane Mind

Reflecting on the densely populated madhouses of the nineteenth century, the narrator in *Lady Audley's Secret* famously wonders 'how many minds must tremble upon the narrow boundary between reason and unreason, mad to-day and sane to-morrow, mad yesterday and sane to-day' (LAS: 176). This statement reflects the popular dread of madness that prevailed in Victorian times, mainly due to the expansion of asylums and the growing role of alienists and psychiatrists in society. The notion of partial insanity, alluded to by Lucy here, greatly accentuated this anxiety as the medical community suggested that the threat of insanity lay in every individual and in every household, and could reveal itself at any time. Madness was no longer an alien conception, but rather a possibility insinuating itself in the mundane lives of respectable society. As historian of medicine Stanley Jackson explains, the notion of partial insanity already existed as early as the sixteenth century, when it mainly described the disease of melancholia.¹⁹ Before Prichard and Esquirol introduced the terms of moral insanity and monomania, melancholia was the main form of recognised partial insanity, in which the subject was believed to be inappropriately despondent and sad about a specific subject.²⁰ Melancholia, a highly complex and elusive form of mental illness that historians of medicine have often struggled to identify and characterise, is the key to understanding the pertinence of partial insanity to sensation novels. The acknowledged link between melancholia and today's definition of clinical depression accounts for the feeling of sadness and dejection that melancholic individuals experienced, which suggests an element of deep mental anguish rather than absolute madness. This is precisely what the characters of sensation novels endure. As I suggest in this chapter, their episodes of partial insanity—as nineteenth-century readers would likely have identified them—are expressions of their mental disarray and existential distress.

¹⁹ Jackson, 'Melancholia and Partial Insanity', p. 174.

²⁰ Jennifer Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy: From Aristotle to Kristeva* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 12.

Magdalen's obsessive quest for her inheritance and her name finds its origin in the trauma she experienced after the death of her father. Yet, because it culminates in acts deemed irrational and immoral, her conduct is often recognised as that of a mad person by other characters. Miss Garth writes about Magdalen's 'mad resolution of recovering her father's fortune' (NN: 434), and the young woman herself wonders if her quest pertains to 'wickedness [or] madness' (NN: 406). However numerous the references to Magdalen's depressive state are, including her suicidal thoughts and unhappiness at her separation from her sister, the emphasis rests on her incipient monomania throughout the novel.

Esquirol's notion of monomania in part originated from his disagreement with the diagnosis of melancholia, which he believed referred too widely to different states of sadness, and because of its somatic association with black bile.²¹ Esquirol considered melancholia to be 'fundamentally acceptable in content but unacceptable in name' and therefore introduced a new terminology for it, replacing melancholia with *lypemia* and setting it apart from the disease of monomania.²² This latter term then became the most popularly recognised form of partial insanity, at least well into the late 1860s. However, despite Esquirol's desire to distinguish monomania from melancholia—and its association with depressive spirits—, monomania maintained an element of despondency of spirits in the popular imagination, which the literature of the time widely exploited. Whereas *lypemia* involved a 'predominance of a sorrowful and depressing passion,' monomaniac delusions presupposed 'excitement, and predominance of a gay, and expansive passion,'²³ yet none of the monomaniac characters found in sensation novels experience such an elated state of mind. Like Magdalen, Lucy Audley, Robert Audley and Walter Hartright are unhappy characters whose obsessions stem from their feelings of inadequacy and loss of identity. As I have shown in the previous chapter, their exclusion from the domestic environment exacerbates their depressive states and pushes them to act, sometimes compulsively, to change their situation. Furthermore, because Prichard's term of moral insanity was greatly influenced by Esquirol's work on monomania—Prichard dedicated his

²¹ Jackson, 'Melancholia and Partial Insanity', p. 179; de Saussure, 'The Influence of the Concept of Monomania', p. 365.

²² Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, p. 156.

²³ Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, p. 29.

Treatise on Insanity to Esquirol—and monomania itself found its roots in the concept of melancholia, all three diseases are intimately connected and share many common traits. As an anonymous writer for *The Medico-Chirurgical Review* noted in 1835 when reviewing the works of Prichard and Esquirol, ‘definitions of diseases have always proved great stumbling-blocks to nosologists. Insanity does not exhibit an exception. It has had various definitions, none of which will apply to all cases.’²⁴ What we find, then, in sensation novels, is a good representation of the complexity of diagnosis for these conditions, as characters experience symptoms that could be associated with either monomania, moral insanity or melancholia. These diseases however share a common trait in the partial nature of the delirium they cause, something sensation novelists used to great effect, in particular through the notion of a singled-out object of the sufferer’s obsession.

Scholars working on sensation novels have previously explored the connection between this genre and monomania, showing how the novels popularised the disease and contributed to its sensational appeal in Victorian times.²⁵ Yet few have delved into the origins of these characters’ developing monomanias and the correlation between their lack of domestic grounding and their growing obsessions. Associating the structure of obsessions to that of addictions, Pamela K. Gilbert contends that ‘the hermeneutic logic of the sensation form is obsessional,’ because the readers themselves obsessively await for the next mystery or crime to be revealed.²⁶ Deborah Wynne also discusses this phenomenon in her analysis of sensation novel readership, explaining that the weekly instalments which published chapters of these novels were ‘designed to keep readers at a fever-pitch of suspense, [which] set the agenda for many of the emerging family magazines of the

²⁴ Anon, ‘A Treatise on Insanity, and Other Disorders of the Mind’, *The Medico-Chirurgical Review*, 22.44 (1835), 442–48 (p. 442).

²⁵ Helena Ifill, ‘Wilkie Collins’s Monomaniacs in Basil, No Name and Man and Wife’, *Wilkie Collins Society*, 12 (2013) <<https://wilkiecollinssociety.org/wilkie-collinss-monomaniacs-in-basil-no-name-and-man-and-wife/>> [accessed 22 May 2020]; Ifill, *Creating Character*; Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*; Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins*; Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction*; Gilbert, ‘Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context’; Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*.

²⁶ Gilbert, ‘Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context’, p. 185. In *Obsession: A History*, Lennard J. Davis explores similar ideas while looking at readers’ obsessive attention to the novels they read, focusing particularly on William Godwin’s *Caleb Williams* (1794) which Davis considers to be ‘the first obsessive novel’ (p.54)..

period.’²⁷ Elizabeth Anderman similarly notes a spread of nervousness from the characters in the novels to the readers themselves in her analysis of *The Woman in White*. Anderman writes that ‘the reader has been set up’ just as Marian has been set up by the conspiracy, and her emotional reaction is mirrored in the reader who is ‘trapped between intellect and visceral response, not knowing whether to trust the body or the mind.’²⁸ Readers therefore both understood and empathised with sensation characters as they witnessed the character’s growing obsessions, along with their own. As Gilbert writes, both obsession and addiction ‘involve a craving that cannot be satisfied and indeed, that is only increased by being fed,’²⁹ and in the case of monomaniacal obsessions, that craving concerns one particular object. In the case of the Victorian reader, such craving took the form of the novel’s long-awaited following chapter. For the sensation characters themselves, however, this craving often emerges as a need for domestic belonging, which they have been lacking. Magdalen’s complete inability to feel at home anywhere feeds her determination to marry Noel Vanstone in order to retrieve her inheritance. Likewise, Robert Audley’s obsession with his friend’s disappearance is fuelled by his conviction that his aunt’s secret is threatening the only place in which he ever felt domestic bliss. His own obsessiveness in turn urges Lucy Audley to save the semblance of domestic security she acquired and leads to her own fixation on the destruction of her enemy. Finally, although it is Walter Hartright’s love for Laura Fairlie that bolsters his obsession for the woman in white and the mystery surrounding her, the promise of domestic security and social elevation associated with the success of his endeavour also plays an undeniable role in his obsessive state. While contemporary readers of sensation novels may very likely have associated these characters’ excessive and resolute behaviours with partial insanity, their motivations rather appear connected to social pressure and the Victorian *idée fixe* of the ideal home.³⁰

²⁷ Wynne, *The Sensation Novel and the Victorian Family Magazine*, p. 2.

²⁸ Elizabeth Anderman, ‘Hysterical Sensations: Bodies in Action in Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*’, in *From Wollstonecraft to Stoker: Essays on Gothic and Victorian Sensation Fiction*, ed. by Marilyn Brock (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2009), pp. 79–88 (p. 83).

²⁹ Gilbert, ‘Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context’, p. 185.

³⁰ This argument can be extended to other monomaniacs in sensation literature, such as Mannion in Collins’s *Basil*, whose obsession with injuring Basil stems from his conviction that Basil’s family is responsible for his loss of social standing and domestic happiness.

Broadly speaking, the Victorian period was a time of obsessional endeavours. As Lennard J. Davis notes, the first use of the adjective ‘single-minded,’ as referring to a specific mental focus, can be found in a quote from an 1860 issue of *All Year Round*, which stated: ‘he was a more single-minded and one-idea’d man than even his patron and master.’³¹ The use of the adjective ‘one-idea’d’ is a clear reference to Esquirol’s notion of *idée fixe*.³² Jan Goldstein also notes that monomania fitted well within the Victorian drive for self-help,³³ something that Esquirol clearly surveyed in his work, as he identified the sub-category of ‘ambitious monomania’ and wondered in his treatise ‘how many are the cases of monomania, caused by thwarted love, by fear, vanity, wounded self-love, or disappointed ambition.’³⁴ In the novels examined here, the characters’ monomanias are often connected to a sense of wrong-doing which they identify as theirs to vindicate, and ‘the monomaniacal urge becomes the part of the individual which refuses to accept his or her fate without a fight.’³⁵ We can identify, for example, an intensification of Magdalen’s obsessive quest after her fiancé Frank breaks off their engagement. The young woman is then left without any prospects of a real domestic bond, and her resolution to deceitfully marry her cousin becomes paramount. Her desire for vindication is visible when Magdalen tells Captain Wragge that she is resolute, ‘not for the sake of the fortune—mind that! For the sake of the right’ (NN: 274). Magdalen feels her determination growing ‘stronger, ten times stronger, than ever,’ explaining to Captain Wragge that it is ‘the natural result of having nothing else to think of’ (NN: 274). After her fiancé breaks off their engagement, Magdalen furthermore discloses, ‘I had something else to think of before [...]. I have nothing else to think of now. Remember that, if you find me for the future always harping on the same string’ (NN: 274). The vocabulary Magdalen uses at the end of this sentence clearly resonates with Esquirol’s own writings about his patients who continually referred

³¹ ‘Single-Minded, Adj.’, *OED Online* (Oxford University Press)

<<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/180145>> [accessed 12 August 2021] Entry 3. Cited in Davis, 2008, p. 72.

³² The ‘*idée fixe*,’ literally meaning ‘fixed idea,’ comes in different terminologies throughout Esquirol’s publication. We can note ‘leading idea,’ ‘the idea or controlling affection of his mind’ (p. 333), ‘the “one idea”’ (p. 334).

³³ Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, p. 161.

³⁴ Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, p. 200.

³⁵ Ifill, ‘Wilkie Collins’s Monomaniacs’, online resource.

to the same subject. As Helena Ifill notes, although Collins never uses the word monomania in *No Name* to discuss Magdalen's mental state, the terminology and phrases he uses invest her with 'many of the attributes of a monomaniac that are the result of recognisable emotions.'³⁶ Besides, because of Collins's previous engagement with monomania in *Basil* (1852), readers familiar with his work would have recognised the signs of Magdalen's monomania and seen her deviant actions as the results of her all-consuming obsession.³⁷

In *Lady Audley's Secret*, Braddon refers to Esquirol's disease more plainly, with the word monomania and its derivatives appearing seven times in the novel in the words of either Robert Audley or Lady Audley. Robert, with his desperate need to know what came of his friend George Talboys, feels his obsession growing in him, until it becomes a compulsion. Like Magdalen's, Robert's monomania originates in a sense of wrongdoing which he needs to vindicate. Feeling himself so changed by his new obsession 'as to transform him into another creature,' Robert views himself as 'a pitiless embodiment of justice, a cruel instrument of retribution' (*LAS*: 231) which will, despite himself, bring about the destruction of his uncle's domestic happiness. The narrator explains that:

The one idea of his life had become his master. He was the bonden slave of one gloomy thought—one horrible presentiment. A dark cloud was brooding above his uncle's house, and it was his hand which was to give the signal for the thunder-clap, and the tempest that was to ruin that noble life. (*LAS*: 180)

Here again, the emphasis on the singleness of his thoughts appears as a direct reference to Esquirol's definition of monomania as an 'intellectual disorder [...] confined to a single object.'³⁸ Thereafter, the disappearance of his friend, the unanswered questions surrounding Lucy Audley, and the threat to the sanctity of his family home coalesce to form the one object of Robert's focus. The reader frequently finds Robert questioning his state of mind and wondering, 'am I to be tormented all my life by vague doubts, and wretched suspicions, which may grow upon me till I become a monomaniac?' (*LAS*: 127). Even after collecting a large amount of evidence pointing to foul play against George and

³⁶ Ifill, *Creating Character*, p. 35.

³⁷ See Talairach-Vielmas for a compelling exploration of monomania in *Basil*.

³⁸ Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, p. 320.

the involvement of Lucy Audley, Robert doubts his own mental faculties: ‘What if this chain of evidence which I have constructed link by link, is woven out of my own folly? What if this edifice of horror and suspicion is a mere collection of crotchets?’ (LAS: 217). His self-distrust speaks of the impact the diagnosis of partial insanity had already had on the Victorian population at the time, and the common fear of an insidious form of madness existing in every individual. Esquirol’s definition of monomania highly contributed to this, as he noted a propensity in his patients to ‘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.’³⁹ The notion of ‘false principle’ was a subjective one however, especially for individuals remarkably invested in their endeavours and lacking the mental capacity necessary to evaluate the veracity of their principles. Such an ambiguous description of the symptoms of monomania could easily blur the distinction between rational and irrational thinking.

The threat of partial insanity is particularly addressed by Braddon in this novel, as Lucy Audley shamelessly insinuates that Robert is mad, discarding her husband’s and daughter-in-law’s doubts with the explanation that ‘people are insane for years and years before their insanity is found out’ (LAS: 244). Lucy furthermore lectures her husband on the instability of the human mind:

What is one of the strangest diagnostics of madness—what is the first appalling sign of mental aberration? The mind becomes stationary; the brain stagnates; the even current of reflection is interrupted; the thinking power of the brain resolves itself into a monotone. As the waters of a tideless pool putrefy by reason of their stagnation, the mind becomes turbid and corrupt through lack of action; and the perpetual reflection upon one subject resolves itself into monomania. Robert Audley is a monomaniac. [...] He dwelt upon this one idea until he lost the power of thinking of anything else. The one idea looked at perpetually became distorted to his mental vision. (LAS: 244-5).

Lucy’s analysis of Robert’s state of mind resembles most medical treatises on insanity of this period, including the popular publication of *The Penny Cyclopaedia* (1833-1843), in

³⁹ Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, p. 320.

which monomania—found under the entry for ‘insanity’—is defined as a delusion combined with ‘a morbid state of the moral feelings, and in many instances a great weakness of the reasoning faculty.’⁴⁰ It is therefore not surprising that Lucy’s husband, and along with him readers who had previously encountered similar writings in the periodicals they read, is convinced by her speech. In *No Name*, Captain Wragge attempts to cast similar doubts on the sanity of Mrs. Lecount, talking to Noel Vanstone about his housekeeper’s ‘wandering mind’ and seeing in her distrust of Magdalen ‘the cunning of insanity, the suspicion of insanity, the feline treachery of insanity’ (*NN*: 335). As usual in the novel, Noel answers in a way that seeks to ascertain his intellectual ascendancy over people and tells Captain Wragge ‘I don’t think Lecount’s mad [...] It couldn’t have escaped me, with my habits of observation; it couldn’t possibly have escaped me if Lecount had been mad’ (*NN*: 335). However, what Captain Wragge suggests here is that Lecount is suffering from a form of partial insanity, which revealed itself through her nascent obsession with Magdalen. Her supposed insanity would therefore not have been previously visible. This hint easily persuades Noel who later tells Captain Wragge ‘I’m half inclined to think my infernal housekeeper is mad’ (*NN*: 339).

The ‘epidemic of monomania,’ as English scholar Simon During refers to the rise in diagnoses of partial insanity, was due to its potential ubiquity and confounding delineation, since one could recognise a monomaniacal act ‘just by its “strangeness and inconsistency,” which means its resistance to understanding.’⁴¹ Moral insanity was similarly challenging to identify as ‘the borderline between the normal and the abnormal was extremely difficult to establish.’⁴² Monomania and moral insanity could therefore be everywhere and nowhere at the same time as they both ‘conceptualized the mind as potentially fragmented, with certain parts that were diseased or dysfunctional and other parts that functioned according to normal, or rational, standards of behavior,’ and implied that the individual could appear ‘normal’ in most situations.⁴³ Yet these diseases involved

⁴⁰ ‘Insanity’, *The Penny Cyclopaedia of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* (London: Charles Knight, 1833), 484–88 (p. 484).

⁴¹ During, ‘The Strange Case of Monomania’, pp. 92; 87.

⁴² Carlson and Dain, ‘The Meaning of Moral Insanity’, p. 136.

⁴³ Vrettos, ‘Victorian Psychology’, p. 76.

different areas of delusion. While monomania involved an ‘isolated fixation’ on one specific subject, moral insanity implied a “‘perversion” of the subject’s moral character or temperament,’ as Athena Vrettos writes.⁴⁴ This distinction is important when trying to identify the basis for the representation of the characters’ mental sufferings in sensation novels.

A Disease of the Reason or the Emotions

While the intellectual and reasoning faculties of the morally insane patient were not necessarily impaired, those of the monomaniac were so, but only concerning the object of their obsession. In this respect, it is difficult to identify which of these conditions the characters of sensation novels struggle with. As medical humanities scholar Cristina Hanganu-Bresch explains, ‘the morally insane were so in conduct—not ideas,’ conducts that were deemed improper and unnatural.⁴⁵ Yet because fiction often provides us with the characters’ internal thoughts, we are privy to what Magdalen Vanstone, Lucy Audley, Robert Audley and Walter Hartright think but never confess. Their partial insanity—in the sense that they can think and act unreasonably and deviously at times but appear mentally sound at others—is therefore expressed both externally and internally and blurs the lines between monomania and moral insanity. In order to examine more closely where Braddon and Collins would have drawn their inspiration from to describe the mental sufferings of these characters, we need to understand how monomania and moral insanity were perceived in the nineteenth century, and the meaning that became popularly attached to these two terms. One of the most important distinctions between moral insanity and monomania was that the former related to the affect and emotions of the sufferer, while the latter altered their reasoning faculties. It is therefore important to analyse both the emotional state of the characters, to which the omniscient narrative voices in the novels give us access, and their ability to reason—or reflect—on their thoughts and actions.

⁴⁴ Vrettos, ‘Victorian Psychology’, p. 76.

⁴⁵ Hanganu-Bresch, ‘Public Perceptions of Moral Insanity in the 19th Century’, p. 806.

In his book on human morality and the brain, Jan Verplaetse retraces the history of moral insanity and explains that much confusion surrounded its meaning and the terminology Prichard used to describe the condition.⁴⁶ Verplaetse points to the fact that Prichard did not refer to the word ‘moral’ as meaning ethical or virtuous, but rather as relating to the emotions of the individual.⁴⁷ The term should therefore not be construed as an antinomy of ‘immoral.’ Instead, moral insanity was a disease of the emotions, which the individual could not control, in turn leading them to act and think against moral or ethical propriety. Professor of theoretical philosophy Carla Bagnoli explains that emotions have historically been a source of concern as they can ‘interfere with the deliverances of reason, and often provide motives that are in competition with morality.’⁴⁸ If reason and emotions are what distinguish monomania from moral insanity, where, then, is the demarcation between the two? All four characters examined in this chapter are in deep emotional turmoil, a state that affects their reasoning faculties and endangers their ability to distinguish right from wrong. Morality, then plays an important role in the condemnation of their actions, and reveals that both Braddon and Collins, like many of their contemporaries, may have understood moral insanity as pertaining to ethical values. This is particularly evident in Collins’s *No Name*, as the writer constantly brings up moral values and emotions in the novel, often setting them against one another. Miss Garth’s and the lawyer Mr Pendril’s discussion of the ‘cruel’ laws of inheritance highlights this, as Mr Pendril exclaims:

I think it a disgrace to the nation. It visits the sins of the parents on the children; it encourages vice by depriving fathers and mothers of the strongest of all motives for making the atonement of marriage; and it claims to produce these two abominable results in the names of morality and religion. (NN: 110)

His emotional reaction towards the unjust English law is set against the normative standards for Victorian morality, thus showing that the law and morality do not always align together. While the very core of the novel rests on this unfair yet legal treatment of

⁴⁶ Verplaetse, *Localising the Moral Sense*, p. 191.

⁴⁷ Verplaetse, *Localising the Moral Sense*, p. 195.

⁴⁸ *Morality and the Emotions*, ed. by Carla Bagnoli and Patricia S. Greenspan (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 2.

the Vanstone sisters after the death of their parents, the reader's emotional sympathy is called upon to decide whether Magdalen's actions should be sanctioned. Therefore, Magdalen's own emotional turmoil and incapacity to choose right from wrong can be considered as a natural human response ensuing from the trauma of losing her home and family, and yet Collins plays with the potentiality of partial insanity by making her act in a way deemed deviant by Victorian society.

Prichard's definition of moral insanity suggested that it was 'madness consisting in a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses,' without any 'defect of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties.'⁴⁹ This list of nouns associated with moral insanity is highly evocative of the emotions,⁵⁰ and a 'morbid perversion' of them is precisely what Magdalen experiences. Because the narrator and other characters around her often criticise her exuberant and intense character, Magdalen quickly learns to conceal her emotions. The narrator discloses that, long after the death of her parents, Magdalen reveals the 'first outward betrayal of emotion which had escaped her yet' (NN: 122). Later in the novel, the same vocabulary is used to inform us that Magdalen enquires about the presence of Noel Vanstone with 'the only betrayal of emotion which had escaped her yet' (NN: 268). This repetition emphasises the repressed nature of Magdalen's emotional state and reveals why her moral disposition is then perverted. Every time the reader is acquainted with Magdalen's thoughts she is secluded in her own room, deliberating on the course of her actions and the transgressions she is about to commit. This emotional turmoil, and her fight against the 'forces of good and evil' (NN: 116; 188), are rendered through her restlessness and wavering between determination and despair. However, other characters rarely witness these fits of passion and Magdalen has to overcome them on her own. The position in which she stands recalls the 'unusual intensity of particular passions or emotions' which Prichard

⁴⁹ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 6.

⁵⁰ The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines 'emotion' as 'strong feelings, passion; (more generally) instinctive feeling as distinguished from reasoning or knowledge.' 'Emotion, n.', *OED Online* (Oxford University Press) <<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/61249>> [accessed 23 August 2021] Sense 3.b.

classed as an instance of moral insanity.⁵¹ According to the physician, ‘there is reason to believe that this species of insanity has been the real source of moral phenomena of an anomalous and unusual kind, and of certain perversions of natural inclination which excite the greatest disgust and abhorrence.’⁵² Mr Pendril, who believes Magdalen to be ‘one of the most reckless, desperate, and perverted women living’ (NN: 485), and Miss Garth, who sees Magdalen’s way of life as ‘suspicious [...] to all respectable people’ (NN: 245) both express disgust and abhorrence towards Magdalen’s choices, without ever knowing or understanding her emotional struggles. Therefore, while many literary analyses of *No Name* have identified Magdalen’s mental distress as pertaining to the monomaniacal, as I mention earlier in this chapter, we may consider Collins’s insistence on the emotions of the character as rather a reference to moral insanity. In her analysis of Magdalen’s monomania, Helena Ifill writes that ‘it is the conflict between Magdalen’s “better” self and her fixed idea which most clearly reflects non-fictional depictions of monomaniacs,’ a statement which also points to the complex distinction that exists between monomania and moral insanity.⁵³ While Magdalen’s emotional struggle between right and wrong suggests moral insanity, her obsession for this very struggle is what identifies her as a monomaniac. We may therefore find in this ambiguity the reason why Collins decided not to identify Magdalen as a monomaniac, thus letting the reader form their own opinion of the character’s mental struggles, particularly considering his use of the diagnosis of monomania in previous publications such as *The Woman in White* and *Basil*.

Many, like Prichard, believed that a conflicted emotional state could cause mental derangements. Renowned psychiatrist Sir John Charles Bucknill, wrote in 1857 that:

perhaps the only diagnostic symptom between mere vicious propensities, and moral insanity, is the mode of causation. Moral insanity is always preceded by an efficient cause of mental disease, and there has always been a notable change in the emotions and the propensities following, and apparently consequent upon the operation of this cause.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 24.

⁵² Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 24.

⁵³ Ifill, ‘Wilkie Collins’s Monomaniacs’, Online resource.

⁵⁴ John Charles Bucknill, ‘The Diagnosis of Insanity’, *The Asylum Journal of Mental Science*, 3.20 (1857), 141–85 (p. 165).

What causes Magdalen's emotional state to change is the trauma she experiences and the overpowering idea of reclaiming her lost inheritance that follows it. Similarly, it is Lucy Audley's experience of rejection from the standard Victorian domestic situation that saturates her emotions with hatred, fear and resentment, later leading her to act deviously. Lucy explains that her first husband's desertion of her and their child precipitated the external expression of the insanity she believes to have inherited from her mother:

the hereditary taint that was in my blood had never until this time showed itself by any one sign or token; but at this time I became subject to fits of violence and despair. At this time I think my mind first lost its balance, and for the first time I crossed that invisible line which separates reason from madness. (*LAS*: 301)⁵⁵

Lucy's use of the word 'reason' is interesting here, as it suggests a lesion of her own reasoning faculties, peculiar to cases of monomania. She then declares that 'these fits of desperation resolved themselves into a desperate purpose' (*LAS*: 301), that is, the one idea of committing bigamy and escaping her wretched situation. Once again, monomania, moral insanity, reason and emotions are mingled in the representation of Lucy's mental delusions, highlighting the complexity of these diagnoses. Prichard himself identified a close connection between the two diseases, discussing the possible 'transition from one into the other,' and identifying monomania as a more debilitating form of moral insanity.⁵⁶ Prichard wrote that 'the state of the feelings in these forms of insanity is the same, and monomania is only moral insanity with the addition of disorder affecting the understanding or the rational powers.'⁵⁷ Yet, Lucy Audley's rational powers are never affected and she appears, throughout the novel, in full possession of her intellectual faculties. Lucy is able to think, scheme, and act in order to achieve her goal and hide her secret. In her confessions, she explains, in a 'hard, dogged tone' (*LAS*: 334), how she faked her death using another girl's body, and threw her first husband down a well. As the alienist Dr. Mosgrave explains in the novel, 'she employed intelligent means, and she carried out a conspiracy which required

⁵⁵ Henry Maudsley also used the image of the 'invisible line' in an essay published in 1874 in which he analysed the concept of partial insanity and wrote that 'the invisible line which it was so difficult to define was not, let it be noted, between sanity and insanity, but between perfect and partial insanity' (Henry Maudsley, 'Law and Insanity', in *Popular Science Monthly*, 1874, v, p. 77.)

⁵⁶ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 56.

⁵⁷ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 288.

coolness and deliberation in its execution. There is no madness in that' (*LAS*: 321). Lucy's bitter outcry when she finds herself in the *maison de santé* in Belgium and asks: 'have I plotted and schemed to shield myself and laid awake in the long deadly nights, trembling to think of my dangers, for *this*?' (*LAS*: 333. Emphasis in the original text), reveals her own knowledge of the agency she held in the crimes she committed. Therefore, while Lucy insinuates that she has crossed the line between 'reason and madness,' we may be more inclined to believe that she has let her powerful emotions take control of her faculty to distinguish right from wrong and is suffering from so-called moral insanity.

Both Magdalen and Lucy realise the social judgement their actions would and do encounter, but neither of them condemns them because they believe themselves to have been wronged. As Bynum explains, 'the morally insane man might be rational, might realize that those around him would condemn his behavior, but he himself would not.'⁵⁸ Magdalen's and Lucy's desires for vindication are too strong to stand against moral etiquette. However, Magdalen does feel ashamed of the counterfeit marriage she is about to conclude and this emotion expresses itself at different times in the novels, thus demonstrating her awareness of the baseness of her actions. When considering which dress to wear to seduce Noel, she declares, 'with a reckless laugh,' 'what does it matter! [...] I am equally worthless in my own estimation, whichever I put on' (*NN*: 291). Yet her resolution never entirely falters, even in the face of such self-depreciation. Likewise, Lucy absolves her actions because of her belief that she could never have escaped her predisposition to criminal insanity, which her husband's ill-treatment of her brought to the surface. She tells Robert: 'when you say that I killed George Talboys, you say the truth. When you say that I murdered him treacherously and foully, you lie. I killed him because I AM MAD!' (*LAS*: 294. Emphasis in the original text). We never find, however such atonements in the cases of Robert Audley and Walter Hartright. Interestingly, when Braddon and Collins name the disease of monomania in their writings, they attribute it to characters whose partial insanity does not express itself through criminal deeds. Both Robert and Walter are diagnosed as monomaniacs at some point in the novels, and this diagnosis is mainly based on their loss of volition in the face of their obsessive quest, which

⁵⁸ Bynum, "Observe How Healthily — How Calmly I Can Tell You the Whole Story", p. 143.

I examine in the following pages. Yet, emotions and morality are equally important in the analysis of Robert's and Walter's partial insanities, as both of their obsessions with uncovering the truth find their origins in personal and emotional events.

The loss of his friend George forces Robert to reflect on his own emotional state on several occasions, often wondering at the unexpected pain he feels. Robert asks himself, 'who would have thought that I could have grown so fond of the fellow, [...] or feel so lonely without him?' (LAS: 138). The nervous shock he feels after George's disappearance engenders a profound change in his character and the workings of his mind. The narrator thus explains that:

the one purpose which had slowly grown up in his careless nature until it had become powerful enough to work a change in that very nature, made him what he had never been before—a Christian; conscious of his own weakness; anxious to keep to the strict line of duty; fearful to swerve from the conscientious discharge of the strange task that had been forced upon him. (LAS: 135)

The evocation of Christianity, duty and conscientiousness show that Braddon ascribed an element of morality to Robert's obsessive mental state. However, his moral struggles differ from the ones Lucy and Magdalen experience, since Robert does not contemplate criminality. Robert mostly conjectures whether his desire to uncover the truth is moral and reasonable, or if it falls under a form of mental delusion. As Rachel Heinrichs writes, 'Braddon often characterizes desire as madness,' and Robert's desire to know what happened to George borders on the unreasonable and the maniacal.⁵⁹ When he wonders 'why was it that I saw some strange mystery in my friend's disappearance? Was it a monition, or a monomania?' (LAS: 217), Robert reveals a complete loss of intellectual independence, as both alternatives suggest an external power exercised over his own reasoning faculties. Braddon's description of Robert's mental process between the disappearance of his friend and Lady Audley's internment in the *maison de santé* is

⁵⁹ Heinrichs, 'Critical Masculinities in *Lady Audley's Secret*', p. 109.

therefore a perfect representation of moral insanity ‘degenerating’ into monomania,⁶⁰ as Robert’s disordered feelings turn into a disordered intellect.

Walter Hartright finds himself in a similar position to Robert’s. His encounter with Anne Catherick on the lonely road to London and the eerie resemblance between Anne and Laura Fairlie produce strange and unaccountable sensations in the young drawing master. Walter observes ‘something wanting’ in Laura’s features when he meets her for the first time, and is unable to say ‘where it was, and what it was’ (TWW: 53). Likewise, he is unable to explain why his ‘adventure’ on the London road produced such ‘wonder and excitement’ that ‘will last me for the whole term of my stay in Cumberland, if not for a much longer period’ (TWW: 38). These emotions indeed endure for the whole duration of the novel and are the foundation of his obsessional need to understand the mystery that surrounds Laura. The ‘something wanting’ which he initially detects creates an unnatural desire to put the pieces together and go beyond rational endeavours to uncover the truth. When Walter starts doubting the character of Sir Percival, he readily admits that ‘judging by the ordinary rules of evidence, I had not the shadow of a reason, thus far, for connecting Sir Percival Glyde with the suspicious words of inquiry that had been spoken to me by the woman in white’ (TWW: 77). The absence of a reasonable explanation for Walter’s distrust first points to a possible disturbance of his intellectual faculties, which he associates with the emotions he feels for Laura. Walter furthermore speculates on his own mental faculties and asks, ‘had the events of the morning so unnerved me already that I was at the mercy of any delusion which common chances and common coincidences might suggest to my imagination?’ (TWW: 77). His self-questioning culminates when he ‘began to doubt whether [his] own faculties were not in danger of losing their balance. It seemed almost like a monomania to be tracing back everything strange that happened’ (TWW: 81). The evocation of the ‘balanced’ state of mind reminds us of Braddon’s notion of the ‘invisible balance upon which the mind is always trembling’ (LAS: 344) and once again highlights the influence of the concept of partial insanity, which inspired fear of mental breakdowns and complete loss of will in any individual.

⁶⁰ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 36.

The Hand that is Stronger than Them

According to Carlson and Dain, the main opposition moral insanity and monomania, as concepts, encountered in the nineteenth century, was based around the argument that men and women were born with an innate understanding of good and evil and any deviation from the right path was ‘simply a wilful transgression of this innate knowledge.’⁶¹ Yet, both Prichard and Esquirol insisted that an alteration of the will was one of the main features of moral insanity and monomania, thus suggesting that patients had no wilful control over their transgressive actions. Esquirol discussed monomania’s ability to ‘modify [the patient’s] affections, and the acts of their will,’ and explained that monomaniac patients acted deviously because of a temporary suspension ‘of all understanding; all moral sensibility and volition.’⁶² Similarly, Prichard recognised that ‘there are some patients who are well aware of the disorder of their thoughts or of their affections, and who are deeply afflicted at not having sufficient strength of will to repress it.’⁶³ This loss of volition, common to both diseases, is the most interesting feature of partial insanity we can study in relation to literature and sensation novels. Characters of these fictional texts often express their frustration with their inability to control their emotions and obsessions, which invariably turn into compulsions. Fictional accounts of monomania often focus on the individual’s loss of volition and inability to prevent themselves from either thinking or acting according to some external forces. While sensation novel scholars have explored the question of willpower in the genre before, including Helena Ifill’s recent work on theories of nature and nurture in Victorian literature,⁶⁴ what I bring to the discussion is an analysis of the way in which a loss of volition in these characters inscribes itself in the development of their obsession for domestic security.

In an article titled ‘The Monomaniac: A Tale,’ published by *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal* in 1843, the narrator Albert Folarte tells of his obsession with gambling and his

⁶¹ Carlson and Dain, *The Meaning of Moral Insanity*, p. 137.

⁶² Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, pp. 320; 365.

⁶³ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 122.

⁶⁴ Ifill, *Creating Character*.

desperation to overcome his dependence. Folarte describes how the ‘malady’ first became obvious to him and deprived him of his own agency, writing that ‘my own form continually appeared standing beside me. I was the slave of ITS actions. I had lost my will, my identity. I was nothing but an unembodied appendage of my own form.’⁶⁵ Throughout the article, Folarte refers to this external volitional power as ‘it,’ ‘my other self’ or ‘we,’ thus demonstrating his lack of possession over his own capacity to act or think when under the influence of the disease. Folarte further states that: ‘my heart and conscience were still left to gall and accuse me; but my will, with the power to answer its dictates, had passed to another.’⁶⁶ This reference to his heart and conscience, the seats of emotions and morality, reveals his own awareness of wrongdoing, and the consequences he suffered, with no power to prevent himself from sinking deeper into his habits. The vivid description Albert Folarte gives of his struggle with monomania—which he overcomes at the end of his tale—is very similar to the internal struggles Robert Audley and Walter Hartright experience in the novels. Robert’s awareness of the weakening of his volitional powers is progressive in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, as he gradually realises he can no longer resign from his role as detective on the case of his missing friend. This is noticeable in one of Robert’s frequent internal monologues:

Why do I go on with this, [...] when I know that it is leading me, step by step, day by day, hour by hour, nearer to that conclusion which, of all others, I should avoid? Am I tied to a wheel, and must I go with its every revolution, let it take me where it will? Or can I sit down here to-night and say I have done my duty to my missing friend, I have searched for him patiently, but I have searched in vain? [...] Am I bound to discover how and where he died? or being, as I think, on the road to that discovery, shall I do a wrong to the memory of George Talboys by turning back or stopping still? What am I to do?—what am I to do?” (LAS: 135)

The reference to the wheel, with the use of the third-person pronoun *it*, in the sentence ‘am I tied to a wheel, and must I go with its every revolution, let it take me where it will?’,

⁶⁵ Albert Folarte, ‘The Monomaniac: A Tale’, *Chambers’s Edinburgh Journal*, 2.3 (1843), 344 (p. 344).

⁶⁶ Folarte, ‘The Monomaniac: A Tale’, p. 348.

refers us back to Folarte's account of his own battle with the external force leading him where he does not want to go, much like the sonority between the homophones 'wheel' and 'will' emphasises the importance of the loss of volition. While Robert uses the word 'will' as a modal verb expressing future events, we may read this sentence as referring to the 'will'—or volitional power—of this unidentified third person. Furthermore, in Robert's account, duty is at the core of his internal struggle, as the young barrister feels a necessity to do right by his friend but feels reluctant to pursue a route that can only bring troubling news. When Robert interrogates Lucy Audley's father, he is upset to see the impact of his enquiries on the old man and regrets his involvement, telling Mr Maldon:

If I could let the matter rest; if—if I *could* leave England forever, and purposely fly from the possibility of ever coming across another clew to the secret, I would do it—I would gladly, thankfully do it—but I *cannot*! A hand which is stronger than my own beckons me on. I wish to take no base advantage of you, less than of all other people; but I must go on; I must go on. (LAS: 146. Emphasis in the original text)

Robert repeatedly refers to this 'hand' (LAS: 146; 170; 219) explaining that 'it is not myself; it is the hand which is beckoning me further and further upon the dark road, whose end I dare not dream of' (LAS: 146), which yet again recalls Folarte's tale and the disengagement he experienced from his own body and self.

The hand to which Robert continually refers also embodies the hand of destiny, forcing thoughts and actions upon the individual. As the narrator suggests in *Lady Audley's Secret*, it is through the workings of destiny that Robert faces Lucy once again. After he has been dismissed from Audley Court, Robert's cousin asks him to go back there because of her father's state of health. The letter he receives from her, as the narrator writes, 'hurried him one step further towards his destiny, by causing him to return to the house' (LAS: 181). Winifred Hughes remarks that characters of sensation novels are customarily 'ruled by circumstances,' which causes 'obvious problems of coherence' in the narration.⁶⁷ According to Hughes, sensation novelists often 'exploit the irrational elements of the psyche' to justify their immoral or irrational actions.⁶⁸ The trope of destiny's fatality is one

⁶⁷ Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, p. 58.

⁶⁸ Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, p. 58.

such irrational element. Collins and Braddon found this material in the diseases of monomania and moral insanity, which involved a ruling entity depriving the individuals of their own agency and will. Thus, the figure of ‘the hand’ reappears in Collins’s *No Name*, when the governess Miss Garth unknowingly assists Magdalen’s relentless purpose by providing yet another disguise under which to hide. ‘So,’ the narrator asserts, ‘the fatal force of circumstance turned the hand that would fain have held Magdalen back into the hand that drove her on’ (NN: 338). Similarly, upon returning to England and finding Laura alive, Walter Hartright declares that ‘the Hand that leads men on the dark road to the future had led me to meet that time’ (TWW: 414), referring here to the moment his obsessive quest to clear Laura’s name started. As Hughes notes, throughout the novel, Walter ‘is obsessed with the idea of design and fatality,’ and sees signs of ‘some irresistible cosmic force’ in many of his encounters.⁶⁹ Early on in the novel, Walter exclaims that ‘there was a fatality in it’ (TWW: 76. Emphasis in the original text), after discovering the connection between Anne Catherick and Limmeridge house, and often writes about ‘the fatal resemblance’ between Anne and Laura (TWW: 433; 434; 554). His strong conviction that the hand of destiny is involved in the mystery seems to act as a catalyst in the development of his monomania and his loss of volitional power.

Collins and Braddon invoked both partial insanity and fatality to explain the unusual determination of their characters, and their uncommon industriousness. The word ‘fatal,’ reappearing throughout the novels, is often uttered by the potentially morally insane or monomaniac characters themselves, as though they found in it an explanation for their loss of will and their need for vindication. Their exclusion from the domestic environment, which is itself brought about by fatalistic circumstances, pushes them ever more to rely on this external force to retrieve their place in it. When Magdalen is about to embark on her deceitful scheme, she appears hesitant to take the first step. The narrator discusses the ‘forces of Good triumphing in the strife for her over the forces of Evil’ (NN: 220) when she turns away from Noel Vanstone to follow her sister. However, after seeing her sister mistreated as a governess, Magdalen is reminded of everything they lost after their father’s untimely death, and she eventually feels compelled to go back to Noel’s house, that ‘fatal

⁶⁹ Hughes, *The Maniac in the Cellar*, p. 139.

house' (NN: 220, 222). Magdalen's loss of will and reliance on fatality are at their most extreme when she finds herself unable to put an end to her repulsive wedding and contemplates suicide as the only other option left to her. In this passage, Collins exploits both her monomania and resignation to fate to express her sorrow:

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. (NN: 396)

The reappearance of the pronoun 'it' once again conjures the image of an external element acting on behalf of the character, of a fixed idea possessing the individual. Magdalen then decides to let 'the hazard of a chance' (NN: 408) determine her outcome and watches boats sailing towards her, resolved to drink poison if an uneven number of boats passes before her window in the following half-hour. Magdalen wonders if it is 'providence [...] or chance' (NN: 408) that brings about the eighth boat and stops her from ending her life, thus entirely excluding the possibility of having willingly chosen to stay alive, and at the same time maintaining the reader's uncertainty as to her religious beliefs and motivations. In *No Name* as in the other sensation novels explored in this thesis, the recurrent fatality ruling over the characters' lives is neither entirely disengaged from Christianity, as we can find Magdalen praying to atone for her wish to die, nor an indication of the characters' religious beliefs since those are rarely discussed. In fact, every action Magdalen takes is ruled by circumstances and her inability to abandon her purpose. When the key to her inheritance lies with Colonel Bartram at the end of the novel, Magdalen's rational faculties seem to have entirely left her, as she no longer seems obsessed with her purpose but rather possessed by it. Reflecting on Lennard J. Davis's explanation that the etymological distinction between 'possession' and 'obsession' lies in the individual's awareness of being 'besieged,' we may suppose that Magdalen has sunken so deeply in her obsession that she

is no longer aware of it.⁷⁰ The narrator reports that she was ‘haunted day and night by the one dominant idea that now possessed her’ (*NN*: 544), using the adverb ‘now’ to suggest a progression in the domination she experiences. A similar image can be found in *Lady Audley’s Secret* when the narrator explains that ‘the one idea of [Robert’s] life had become his master. He was the bonden slave of one gloomy thought’ (*LAS*: 180). The notion of the possessed, enslaved self also reappears when the reader observes Lucy Audley’s state of mind before she resolves to set the inn on fire to rid herself of Robert. We learn that ‘she had altogether the appearance and manner of a person who has yielded to the dominant influence of some overpowering excitement’ (*LAS*: 266). Both instances show that Braddon also played with the notion of mental domination, which impresses the reader with compassion for these characters, as the reader is himself or herself under the domination of the obsessional nature of serial sensation novels.

The notions of mastery and power remind us that a distinguishing feature common to monomaniac and morally insane characters was their propensity for action. Unlike the characters studied in the first part of this thesis, who yield to idleness because of their nervous disorders and their confinement at home, Lucy, Robert, Magdalen and Walter are highly active characters, whose actions are motivated by their obsessive thoughts and their insecure situation outside the domestic space. In this regard, Robert Audley’s evolution from nervous disposition to compulsive activity is the most dramatic one, and may find its explanation in the association between nervous disorders and partial insanity. Esquirol and Prichard, along with other contemporary physicians, identified a close connection between hypochondria and partial insanity, viewing hypochondria as a first stage of both monomania and moral insanity.⁷¹ As hypochondria was characterised by a constant preoccupation with one’s state of health and a delusion regarding the illness under which the sufferer believed to be labouring, the disease was often described as obsessional. Robert

⁷⁰ Davis states that ‘the distinction was that in the case of possession the victim was unaware of the fact that she or he had been possessed by the devil because the devil had entered that person and had complete control over the soul. In the case of obsession that person was aware of being besieged by the devil since the demon did not have complete control, had not entered the city of the soul, and the victim could therefore attempt to resist.’ Davis, *Obsession*, p. 31.

⁷¹ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 31; Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, p. 53; Anon, ‘A Treatise on Insanity, and Other Disorders of the Mind’, p. 9; Anon, ‘A Complete Treatise on Hypochondria’, p. 366.

thus sees his nervous disease evolve into a form of monomania because of external circumstances and the strong emotions he feels. While his initial obsession with his sense of uselessness, which I analysed earlier in this thesis, intensified his idleness and resistance to all exertion, his new obsession with the disappearance of his friend compels him to act. The narrator first alludes to this evolution when explaining that:

With Mr. Audley's lymphatic nature, determination was so much the exception rather than the rule, that when he did for once in his life resolve upon any course of action, he had a certain dogged, iron-like obstinacy that pushed him on to the fulfilment of his purpose. (*LAS*: 81)

In this passage, apathy and determination are set apart and show the important evolution of the character's mental state. The loss of volition these characters experience is therefore not hindering their power to act, but rather strengthening and steering it in a specific direction.

As Goldstein notes, monomaniac sufferers experienced a form of 'manic "exaltation"' since 'the distinguishing feature of monomania was for Esquirol the propensity to garrulousness and energetic activity centered around the preoccupation.'⁷² It therefore contrasted with the sluggishness that lypemaniacs, melancholics, and hypochondriacs experienced. This preoccupation, in the case of Lucy, Robert, Magdalen and Walter, is the hope of securing a home. The 'manic exaltation' that the female characters of this quartet display is however not at all in keeping with the docile and passive attitude middle-to-upper class women were supposed to evince, which only intensifies their transgressions and marks their insanity in the eyes of Victorian society. Cristina Hanganu-Bresch writes that the new rules of civility used in the nineteenth-century to discipline society found their expression in moral insanity and monomania, as they 'aimed at preserving norms and othering people who did not conform to them.'⁷³ These forms of partial insanity were essentially used to stigmatise excessive behaviours that went against accepted Victorian notions of morality and decency, one of them being centred around the notion of domesticity. While Lucy and Magdalen are condemned for the way they seek to

⁷² Goldstein, *Console and Classify*, p. 157.

⁷³ Hanganu-Bresch, 'Moral Insanity,' p. 805.

access domestic security, they never receive praise for their obsessional dedication to acquire what society asks of them, that is, a husband and a home. Assessing the importance of home in *Lady Audley's Secret*, Tabitha Sparks suggests that we ‘treat Lucy’s alleged psychosis as a reaction to the cultural pressures of the day rather than accept the novel’s glib and unconvincing gesture towards inherited madness,’ showing how interconnected Lucy’s mental state and her domestic situation are.⁷⁴ Sparks furthermore states that ‘the home [...] is her objective; her marriages are only means to that end,’⁷⁵ a statement that could similarly fit Magdalen Vanstone. Both women develop an obsessive disorder because of the pressure they experience to fulfil Victorian norms of decency. Their loss of will can therefore rather be read as an excess of will and a dedication that goes against the accepted level of self-determination for women. These characters’ developing obsessions and loss of control over them therefore closely intersect with the notion of home and domesticity. All of them suffer from ‘moral alienation,’ as Esquirol termed it, because of their ‘emotional withdrawal’ from their homes and families.⁷⁶ Without the proper supervision that the domestic structure offers, they develop excessive behaviours that, incidentally, are driven by their desire to find such structure. It is therefore not surprising that these characters’ partial insanity—as the narration suggests—reaches its conclusion in the acquisition of a new home. Magdalen’s purpose stops prompting her as soon as her and her sister’s domestic situations are settled. Walter and Robert both manage to conclude their obsessive investigations at the same time as they enter matrimony and property ownership, and Lucy’s yearning for domestic security no longer dominates her once she has settled in the facsimile of a home that her *maison de santé* is.

Motives and Responsibility

The characters’ distinctive loss of volition, whether it originates from their supposed partial insanity or the rulings of fatality, raises questions as to the authors’ perspective on their

⁷⁴ Tabitha Sparks, ‘To the Mad-House Born: The Ethics of Exteriority in *Lady Audley’s Secret*’, in *New Perspectives on Mary Elizabeth Braddon*, ed. by Jessica Cox (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012), p. 20.

⁷⁵ Sparks, ‘To the Mad-House Born’, p. 24.

⁷⁶ Ifill, *Creating Character*, p. 51.

characters' actions. Because Collins and Braddon provide justifications for Magdalen's and Lucy's transgressions, it is difficult to establish where both writers stood on some of the moral issues raised in the novels. Similarly, because Walter's and Robert's actions seem to be driven by some external power only, it diminishes the appreciation of their industriousness and supposes that neither of them actually chooses to become the active and reliable men they are praised as being at the end of the novels. Through their actual use of—or hint at—partial insanity, Braddon and Collins act both as physician and moralist in their novels, a battle that was already engaged in British courts at the time. In 1857, Charles Bucknill explained that physicians had to 'point out to the magistrate that which is disease and that which is not' in the deliberation of criminal cases.⁷⁷ On the other hand, the moralist had the authority to judge whether it was because of 'emotions and propensities which have acquired strength by constant indulgence' that individuals' immoral actions became 'irresistible when the moment of temptation arrives.'⁷⁸ However, if these two roles were well delineated in Victorian society, that of the writer was not.

Simon During notes that monomania had been in part devised by psychiatrists to oppose jurists in the defence of criminals, and 'when literature gained experts in close reading, monomania became, implicitly, its opposite and its double.'⁷⁹ During furthermore writes that 'literature, which was thought to embody a sanity and value the condition lacks, also possesses its energy, its paradoxical freedom from law and restraint.'⁸⁰ This is particularly true of sensation novels, which needed to maintain a certain level of intensity, managed by the presence of crime and mystery, but which also aimed to convey strong moral values. During's analysis of monomania in literature could also be extended to moral insanity, which produced the same appeal for writers. Both diseases offered immense dramatic opportunities to novelists in terms of the moral and social debates they instigate and the lack of prosecution they can afford. Although bigamy was in the Victorian period

⁷⁷ Bucknill, 'The Diagnosis of Insanity', p. 166.

⁷⁸ Bucknill, 'The Diagnosis of Insanity', p. 166.

⁷⁹ During, 'The Strange Case of Monomania', p. 100.

⁸⁰ During, 'The Strange Case of Monomania', p. 100.

a criminal offense and bigamy cases were often taken to court,⁸¹ Lucy Audley is never prosecuted for it, nor is she for the attempted murder of her first husband. As historian Ginger Frost writes, ‘bigamy cases required a prosecutor; in other words, someone had to bring the matter to the attention of the authorities,’ and this is never done in the novel.⁸² Neither of Lucy’s husbands, nor their family members, decide to make the case public, which seems to lessen the gravity of it in the eyes of the reader. Similarly, Magdalen never faces the legal consequences of committing fraud after marrying Noel under a false name, even though her enemies have the necessary evidence to prove her crime. By suggesting, in their writings, that Lucy and Magdalen might be suffering from partial insanity, while also detailing the motivations behind their crimes, Collins and Braddon act as jurists, psychiatrists, and moralists all at once. The hardships we know these women to have faced, and the vivid emotions and reactions that result from them, are used to account for the development of their partial insanity and therefore the absolution they receive for it.

Magdalen’s and Lucy’s stories are in many ways very similar: both enter into disingenuous marriages after being abandoned by their first betrothed, both flee their homes and use a new identity to start afresh, and both are suspected of wanting to murder their husbands.⁸³ After confronting Lucy for the first time, Robert tells her, ‘I would have condoned your crimes out of pity to your wretchedness. You have refused to accept my mercy’ (*LAS*: 235). Similarly, the readers of *No Name* and *Lady Audley’s Secret* are tempted to condone Lucy’s and Magdalen’s crimes because of their past and the doubts concerning their partial insanity, but their perseverance in their criminal ways hinder such feelings. Braddon and Collins essentially involve the readers as jurors in these cases, and the verdict turns out to be different in each novel. While both women face some sanction for their actions, Magdalen is the only one to come out of it absolved. Interestingly, it is within the confines of a domestic environment that both women face the expiation of their sins. After failing to discover the Secret Trust, Magdalen finds herself destitute, ‘hidden in

⁸¹ David Cox, ‘Trying To Get A Good One’ Bigamy Offences in England and Wales, 1850-1950’, *The Plymouth Law & Criminal Justice Review*, 4 (2012), 1–32.

⁸² Ginger Frost, ‘Bigamy and Cohabitation in Victorian England’, *Journal of Family History*, 22.3 (1997), 286–306 (p. 287).

⁸³ While, as readers, we know that Magdalen did not intend to use the laudanum she bought to poison her husband, both Noel Vanstone and Mrs Lecount believe she did.

the squalid by-ways of London under a false name; cast, friendless and helpless, on the mercy of strangers, by illness which had struck her prostrate, mind and body alike' (NN: 578). Her powerlessness in the lodging-house becomes utter when she is overtaken by illness and has to stay bedridden for more than six weeks, with no hope of getting out of her room. This confinement nonetheless becomes her redemption, as she must be stripped of all mental and—more importantly—physical power before she can be restored to society. As the doctor says upon examining her, it would be 'a dangerous experiment to move her too soon—the least excitement or alarm would be fatal to her' (NN: 581). Magdalen must indeed go through complete immobility to expiate the excess of mobility for which society has condemned her.

Magdalen's confinement is also a pivotal moment in the narration, as her 'new life' (NN: 591; 594; 598) supposedly starts after she has gone through this harrowing illness and overcome it. It is not surprising then, that such an important moment takes place in the precinct of a domestic environment, in which she eventually rediscovers the emotion of feeling 'at home,' thus completing the cycle, from her eviction from home at the beginning of the novel, to her reinsertion in it at the end. Magdalen's saviour Captain Kirke offers the promise of domestic security and happiness, even before they are married and settled. It is in the house in which Kirke saved and nursed her that she finds the emotional connection necessary to identify this place of dwelling as a home. After her recovery, Magdalen comes back there to meet Kirke and tells him 'I suppose this street is very ugly, [...] and I am sure nobody can deny that the house is very small. And yet—and yet it feels like coming home again' (NN: 608). In order to feel 'at home' anywhere, Magdalen needs to let go of her past life and past excesses. The doctor, Mr. Merrick, explains to Kirke that his patient 'has suffered some long-continued mental trial, some wearing and terrible suspense—and she has broken down under it' (NN: 580). It is only after her mental faculties have been broken down that Magdalen can hope to free herself from her obsessiveness. Collins presents her life-threatening illness as the event that purges Magdalen of all the elements responsible for her transgressions. Her mind is now more balanced, and the threat of partial insanity has dissipated; she is no longer headstrong and impulsive but restrained and passive; and she is ready to enter into matrimony and be dependent on her husband's income. When Magdalen destroys the Secret Trust, and thereby renounces her claim to her parents'

inheritance, she enacts her liberation from her previous struggle between Good and Evil, but she also loses all chance of financial independence. The reader fully understands Collins's approbation of his character's new situation when the narrator writes that, by destroying the document, Magdalen 'made the last sacrifice of the old perversity and the old pride. So she entered on the new and nobler life' (NN: 607).

Through the character of the physician Mr. Merrick, the reader gets an even clearer understanding of Collins's opinion of Magdalen's evolution throughout the novel, as the doctor declares, after discovering his patient's past, that 'it is a very, very sad story; and I am bound to say that I, for one, make great allowances for the poor girl downstairs' (NN: 595). Like the doctor, the reader, who also knows Magdalen's 'very, very sad story,' is asked to make allowances for her and Collins very much insists on the importance of Magdalen's story in the judgement he asks the reader to render in her fictional trial. Not only does Mr. Merrick make allowances for her after hearing about her past, but so does Captain Kirke, the most righteous character in the novel. Through these two characters, Magdalen receives the absolution she needs from both the physician and the moralist, as most partially insane sufferers would have needed in such trials. The doctor initially refers to the necessity of knowing Magdalen's story in order to provide an adequate assessment of her state of health, both physical and mental. Mr. Merrick explains that 'it might have helped me if I could have known what the nature of the trial was, and how long or how short a time elapsed before she sank under it' (NN: 580). His use of the word 'trial' is important here, as it once again suggests that Magdalen is being examined and judged, and every aspect of her past is essential to determine whether she is merely morally perverted, suffering from partial insanity, or acting in a way justifiable by her past grievances. Magdalen's last words at the end of the novel summarise Collins's didactic undertaking in the novel as she asks Kirke 'do I deserve my happiness?', and tells him:

"Oh, I know how the poor narrow people who have never felt and never suffered would answer me if I asked them what I ask you. If they knew my story, they would forget all the provocation, and only remember the offense; they would fasten on my sin, and pass all my suffering by." (NN: 610)

Readers find themselves wondering if they will be among those ‘poor narrow people’ who will judge her for her crimes, or feel sorry for her suffering. Collins often makes his own position clear through the family lawyer who acknowledges the part played by the English law in the young woman’s misfortunes. Collins furthermore uses his authorial voice to assert his stance, not least in his 1862 preface, in which he qualifies his story as portraying ‘the struggle of a human creature,’ informing the reader that ‘it has been my aim to make the character of “Magdalen,” which personifies this struggle, a pathetic character even in its perversity and its error’ (NN: xxi). In his introduction to *No Name*, Mark Ford however notes the ambivalence of the novel over matters of ‘moral absolutes or notions of divine justice on which Establishment values were founded,’ an ambivalence Collins probably purposefully maintained.⁸⁴

Collins’s stance in this matter concurs with some of the discussions held amongst physicians on the question of responsibility in cases of partial insanity. At a lecture on partial responsibility held in 1863, French psychiatrist Dr. Legrand du Saulle argued that, in cases of partial insanity, ‘the time has arrived for us to abandon [...] the too absolute doctrines of irresponsibility *in toto*, and to give greater authority to the motives which might mitigate a sentence.’⁸⁵ The argument is less distinct in the case of *Lady Audley’s Secret*, as Braddon does not portray her transgressive heroine in the same light. Unlike Magdalen who uses her illness and confinement to reflect on her past actions and decides to continue on a new path, Lucy Audley never repents for the crimes she committed. She sees her internment in the *maison de santé* as the last injustice done to herself, even though she takes advantage of the leniency sometimes afforded to individuals in cases of partial insanity. Like many other sensationalists, Braddon uses the trope of wrongful confinement but approaches it from a different angle. In this case, the confinement is not wrongful because Lucy, as a sane person, should not have been confined at all, but rather because she should have been incarcerated in an actual prison, had she been found guilty. Lucy’s lack of a proper trial is what renders her confinement unlawful. Yet she appears perfectly content with this situation, and before Robert brings her to the *maison de santé*, she

⁸⁴ Collins, *No Name*, p. ix.

⁸⁵ Henry Legrand du Saulle, ‘On Partial Responsibility in Lunacy and Nervous Disorders’, *Medical Critic and Psychological Journal*, 3.12 (1863), 668–85 (p. 685).

supposes that ‘they’ll put me away somewhere, [...] that is the worst they can do for me’ (LAS: 317). The narrator furthermore notes that:

she looked upon herself as a species of state prisoner, who would have to be taken good care of. A second Iron Mask who must be provided for in some comfortable place of confinement. She abandoned herself to a dull indifference. (LAS: 317)

Her dull indifference is what establishes her guilt and prevents the reader from developing similar feelings of sympathy for her as they might do for Magdalen Vanstone. Moreover, unlike Mr. Merrick in *No Name* who offers absolution from the medical community, Dr. Mosgrave condemns Lucy for her actions by declaring that she is not mad but cunning: ‘she is sane but immoral, which is not, he implies, the same as morally insane,’ as Jill Matus writes in her analysis of Lady Audley’s case.⁸⁶ Lucy is indeed provided with a ‘comfortable place of confinement’ in which she could take the opportunity to reflect on her crimes and repent. However, her discovery and indignation at finding that such place is in fact a madhouse prevents her from finding the inner peace necessary for repentance. While Lucy believes that confinement is ‘the worst they can do’ for her, she does not immediately realise that it will effectively materialise her biggest fear: finding herself in the same situation her mother was in. The cruelty of Lucy’s sentence truly lies in the irony of her situation. While she directed all her efforts at securing a wealthy and opulent domestic situation, she is eventually incarcerated in a place that poses as such. Not only is she aware of her forced confinement in it, but she must also witness the mere show of luxury the *maison de santé* puts on every day for the rest of her life.⁸⁷

Through her exploitation of partial insanity and its complicated relationship with the law, Braddon shows that what Lucy really needs—and perhaps does not realise

⁸⁶ Jill Matus, ‘Disclosure as “Cover-up”: The Discourse of Madness in *Lady Audley’s Secret*’, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 62.3 (1993), 334–55 (p. 350).

⁸⁷ For an extensive analysis of the *maison de santé* acting as an upper-class home in *Lady Audley’s Secret*, see Elisabetta Marino, ‘Challenging the Commodification of Victorian Femininity: The Sensation Novel’, in *The Silent Life of Things: Reading and Representing Commodified Objecthood*, ed. by Daniela Rogobete, Jonathan P. Sell, and Alan Munton (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2015), pp. 165–82; For a more general exploration of asylums as homes, see Hamlett, *At Home in the Institution*.

herself—is a trial in which she would have the opportunity to be judged for her actions, and not for her potential hereditary madness. As Matus writes, ‘the ending exposes rather than resolves the confusion created by defining madness in terms of immoral behaviour, and punishing deviant behaviour by means of the institutions set up to deal with madness.’⁸⁸ While Braddon may not induce readers to feel sorry for Lucy, she brings to their attention the fact that Lucy’s behaviour—both immoral and deviant—should not merely and secretly be relegated to the realm of madness. As Emily E. Auger notes in her analysis of the novel, the fact that Lucy never faces charges for Luke’s murder—the owner of the inn that she sets on fire—shows that ‘the “crime” for which she is eventually punished is her ambitious upward social mobility rather than her breaking of actual laws.’⁸⁹ Thus, Braddon manages to instil feelings of compassion toward her devious character, not because we believe Lucy to be guilt-free, but rather because, knowing her story, like we know Magdalen’s, we understand the injustice and miscalculation of her punishment. The same confusion between excessive forms of behaviour and partial insanity surrounds the character of Robert Audley and the appreciation he receives from the reader. While there is no question of legal responsibility in his case, as Robert has committed no crime—except perhaps hiding a murderer in a luxurious madhouse for personal reasons—we are still led to offer a judgement on his character and his drastic change in personality. Because Robert’s supposed monomania disappears as fast as it had appeared, we are tempted to discard his own theory of partial insanity and see his relentless obsession with Lady Audley’s secret as a mere eccentricity. Lucy herself confounds eccentricity with madness in her discussion with her daughter-in-law, when she asks Alicia ‘have you never thought [Robert] eccentric?’ (LAS: 237). Alicia answers that she believes indeed that it ‘is the excuse generally made for such people. I suppose Bob *is* eccentric’ (LAS: 237. Emphasis in the original text). This gives Lucy an opportunity to insinuate a potential for madness, claiming that ‘Mr. Audley may be as you say, merely eccentric; but he has talked to me this evening in a manner that has filled me with absolute terror, and I believe that he is going mad’ (LAS: 238). As Pamela Gilbert writes, with the new categories of moral insanity and monomania,

⁸⁸ Matus, ‘Disclosure as “Cover-up”’, p. 351.

⁸⁹ Emily E. Auger, ‘Male Gothic Detection and the Pre-Raphaelite Woman in *Lady Audley’s Secret*’, *Clues*, 26.3 (2008), 3–14 (p. 6).

‘what had been considered mildly eccentric or even normal behaviours were increasingly identified as insane.’⁹⁰ These new ideas were so ingrained in people’s minds, that Robert himself sees his excessive desire to know what happened to his friend, and the behaviour that results from it, as a form of partial insanity. The issue remaining at the end of the novel, is that, while Sir Michael declares that he wants to ‘consult some London physician about Robert, and let him discover if there is really anything the matter with [him]’ (*LAS*: 247), no such medical consultation ever takes place. We therefore have no authoritative take on the state of Robert’s mental health.

The constant implication that Robert suffers from monomania, and is therefore not master of his own actions, questions the professional and personal development he is praised for at the end of the novel. While Rachel Heinrichs argues that Braddon challenges the ‘autonomy and authority of the middle-class gentleman by calling attention to its innate theatricality,’⁹¹ that is, the theatricality of masculinity, I argue that Braddon also brings about such a challenge through her use of partial insanity. Because Robert often says he acts according to ‘the hand that is stronger than [him]’ and experiences a compulsive need to discover the truth, we are inclined to read his social and professional ascension, as well as his evolution from effeminate idleness to masculine industriousness, as mere products of circumstances rather than real agency. Braddon uses Robert’s eccentric behaviour—read as monomania—as an excuse to explain his much-desired evolution to the status of gentleman, thus showing that such changes are only coincidental and due to the ‘fatality’ present everywhere in the novel, and that ‘identity formation is an unnatural social activity.’⁹² Wilkie Collins plays with the same confusion with the character of Walter Hartright who, like Robert, sees fate and destiny in all aspects of his interaction with Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick. However, Collins’s use of partial insanity is less stringent, as there are only few references to his loss of will and obsession with the investigation. While Walter appears to be ruled by circumstances, as Winifred Hughes states it, he is also portrayed as a righteous hero, using the prompting of fate to act of his own free will to save the woman he loves. The story of professional and personal development Collins offers is

⁹⁰ Gilbert, ‘Sensation Fiction and the Medical Context’, p. 189.

⁹¹ Heinrichs, ‘Critical Masculinities in *Lady Audley’s Secret*’, p. 104.

⁹² Heinrichs, ‘Critical Masculinities in *Lady Audley’s Secret*’, p. 117.

therefore more compelling as a story of masculine identity formation. The author's sporadic allusions to partial insanity in the novel seem to only serve as a reminder that such fears were predominant at the time, and that even strong-minded individuals such as Walter, who have a plethora of evidence pointing to the sanity of their judgement, might be led to question their mental state.

The diagnoses of monomania and moral insanity, which Esquirol and Prichard proposed to the medical community in the first half of the nineteenth century, had an unexpected impact on the literary production of the time. Because both diseases implied a form of partial insanity, in which the subject could appear sane most of the time, and irrational or insane on some specific occasions, Victorian writers found in monomania and moral insanity a narrative tool that allowed them to present complex and enigmatic characters. This literary device would be replaced later in the century by fictional scientific inventions such as the potion Dr Jekyll drinks in Robert Louis Stevenson's iconic novel before transforming himself into a mad criminal. Using medicine and science to explain deviant behaviours has therefore been a common literary trope, and the present chapter has sought to investigate how Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Wilkie Collins use this trope in their novels. While both writers exploit the popularity and intricacy of partial insanity in *No Name*, *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley's Secret*, they also include in their writings enough details on the story of their characters to bring confusion around their mental states. As Cristina Hanganu-Bresch notes, the concept of moral insanity 'essentially redefined immoral, amoral, and criminal behavior as a form of madness,'⁹³ which posed obvious problems of interpretation and coherence as to how people's actions were perceived by society. The same can be said of monomania, as the disease, closely related to moral insanity, suggested that passionate and excessive behaviours for a specific object were instances of insanity. Collins and Braddon successfully manage to render this perplexing situation in their novels, by asking readers to determine whether the characters' actions result from a latent form of madness, or simply from a perverted ethical judgement. Jill Matus writes that 'if insanity can be understood as the consequence of defective moral

⁹³ Hanganu-Bresch, 'Public Perceptions of Moral Insanity in the 19th Century', p. 805.

agency, behaviour judged deviant then becomes a symptom of moral insanity.’⁹⁴ What Braddon and Collins might be suggesting in their novels, then, is that Magdalen Vanstone, Lucy Audley, Robert Audley and Walter Hartright were sane individuals before the triggering events described in the novels took place, and their excessive reactions to these events perverted their moral agency, thus insinuating the threat of partial insanity in them.

The eccentric behaviours of characters often recorded in these novels all find their origins in the extreme emotions they feel as a result of the hardships they encounter. As I explored in this chapter, medical writings often closely related moral insanity and monomania to the emotions, and many physicians actually disputed the dichotomy established between the intellect and the emotions. Physician George Fielding Blandford refuted this division, asking in his 1869 essay on insanity if ‘the emotional part of the mind [could] be so divorced in operation from the intellectual, that the one can become insane, the other remaining perfectly sane?’⁹⁵ Others, however, found in the emotions the perfect explanation for instances of partial insanity, such as physician Henry Monroe who suggested in 1856 that the term ‘moral insanity,’ which had been in his opinion ‘more abused than the term monomania,’ should be instead ‘characterized by the phrase emotional insanity.’⁹⁶ Monroe believed that such a terminology would help avert ‘those difficulties which must arise from the use of a word which entails the attempt to distinguish between the sinful propensities of a sound mind and the diseased propensities of an unsound mind.’⁹⁷ This distinction was indeed at the heart of every medical, legal, and literary discussion on moral insanity and monomania, both of which possessed some ethical connotations. ‘Emotional insanity’ might indeed be the best phrasing we can use to describe the mental state of the characters in *No Name*, *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley’s Secret*, as well as Isabel Gilbert’s in *The Doctor’s Wife*.⁹⁸ Whether or not these characters would have been found

⁹⁴ Matus, ‘Disclosure as “Cover-up”’, p. 338.

⁹⁵ G. Fielding Blandford, ‘Insanity without Delusions’, *Journal of Mental Science*, 15.69 (1869), 23–48 (p. 32).

⁹⁶ Henry Monroe, ‘On the Nomenclature of the Various Forms of Insanity’, *The Asylum Journal of Mental Science*, 2.17 (1856), 286–305 (p. 296).

⁹⁷ Monroe, ‘On the Nomenclature of the Various Forms of Insanity’, p. 296.

⁹⁸ While Isabel Gilbert has not appeared in my analysis of partial insanity because the topic does not appear in *The Doctor’s Wife*, I wish to observe in the subsequent chapter that her deep mental

to be ‘insane,’ in the nineteenth-century understanding of the term, they are all suffering from intense emotions which undermine their mental state and prevent their happiness. Carlson and Dain have exposed the connection between moral insanity or monomania and today’s definitions of clinical depression, writing that in the cases described by Prichard, ‘we find examples of almost all the present-day diagnostic categories of clinical mental illness: persons suffering from manic-depressive reactions were the most common type.’⁹⁹ The characters’ ‘manic-depressive reactions’ is at the centre of Chapter Five, with an investigation of the profound sadness most characters examined in this thesis experience.

anguish and suicidal thoughts can be related to the phrase ‘emotional insanity’ because of its association with clinical depression.

⁹⁹ Carlson and Dain, ‘The Meaning of Moral Insanity’, p. 136.

Chapter Five

‘If this state of depression continues, very distressing mental consequences may follow’:

Melancholy Extremes in Sensation Novels

Early in his influential career as a psychiatrist, Henry Maudsley (1835-1918) showed an interest in a physiological rather than psychological approach to the mind, thus tending towards the popular degenerationist theory of the nineteenth century.¹ In his first major publication, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (1867), Maudsley pursued the ‘physiological method of interrogating self-consciousness,’ and included hereditary and social elements such as ‘the influence of civilization; over-population and the struggle for existence; over-crowding and insanitary conditions; [...] sex; education; religion; condition of life’ as potential causes for insanity.² This view of the human mind led Maudsley to consider mental disorders as circumstantial rather than psychological in some cases, thus arguing that ‘in cases of simple melancholia,’

there may be no delusion: the patient’s feeling of external objects and events may be perverted so that he is conscious of being strangely and unnaturally changed [...]. The delusion is not the cause of the feeling of misery, but is engendered of it,—is precipitated, as it were, in a mind saturated with the feeling of inexpressible woe; and it takes different forms according to the degree of the patient’s culture, and the social, political, and religious ideas prevailing at the particular epoch.³

This view of melancholia, articulated in an influential medical writing contemporary with the publication of sensation novels, may enlighten our reading of Wilkie Collins’s and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s stories of ‘inexpressible woe.’ In this chapter, I wish to demonstrate that delusions are indeed not the cause of sensation characters’ feelings of misery but rather their consequences. It is because of their emotional despair and deep

¹ Trevor Turner, ‘Henry Maudsley – Psychiatrist, Philosopher and Entrepreneur’, *Psychological Medicine*, 18.3 (1988), 551–74 (p. 558).

² Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind* (New York: Appleton, 1867), p. xii.

³ Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind*, p. 328.

unhappiness that Laura Fairlie, Walter Hartright, Lucy and Robert Audley, Magdalen Vanstone and Isabel Gilbert develop behaviours or beliefs often recognised as delusions. These delusions, I argue, are here again deeply rooted in the domestic, either as regards to the places in which these characters experience their most melancholic episodes, or to the subject of their melancholia itself. As all four novels demonstrate through their varied lexical use of the word *delusions*—at times referring to mere deceptions or false impressions, at others to actual mental derangements—the term needs to be thoroughly defined and examined in its literary use. This chapter therefore seeks to determine, through the diagnostic inconsistencies and uncertainties qualifying the nineteenth-century nosology on mental health, whether Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon indeed attributed psychological delusions to their characters.

The final chapter of this thesis initially offers an overview of the evolution of the notion of melancholia and its eventual closeness to our contemporary diagnosis of clinical depression. Such a historical account of the changes melancholia bore throughout the centuries has already been completed by several scholars of history, psychology and literary studies, in varying lengths and details, hence my own account primarily focuses on the character of melancholia in the nineteenth century and its relevance to the sensational genre.⁴ A common feature appearing in most accounts of the evolution of melancholia is the centrality of the nineteenth century, often identified as a turning point in the conceptualisation of the disorder. G. E. Berrios sees three determining changes in the early nineteenth century explaining the transformation of melancholia.⁵ According to Berrios, changes ‘in the concept of disease,’ with a move from ‘organ to tissue and finally to cell’ in the anatomical study of disease, allowed for neurosis lesions to be incorporated ‘into

⁴ Writers working exclusively on the question of melancholia include Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy*; Jackson, ‘Melancholia and Partial Insanity’; Berrios, ‘Melancholia and Depression during the 19th Century: A Conceptual History’; Wolf Lepenies, *Melancholy and Society* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992); Kenneth S. Kendler, ‘The Origin of Our Modern Concept of Depression—The History of Melancholia From 1780-1880: A Review’, *JAMA Psychiatry*, 77.8 (2020), 863–68; Erin Sullivan, ‘Melancholy, Medicine, and the Arts’, *The Lancet*, 372.9642 (2008), 884–85; Aubrey J. Lewis, ‘Melancholia: A Historical Review: Part I’, *Journal of Mental Science*, 80.328 (1934), 1–42; Clark Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac: A History of Depression* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

⁵ Berrios, ‘Melancholia and Depression during the 19th Century: A Conceptual History’, p. 298.

psychiatry,’ while the change from associationism to ‘faculty psychology,’ which conceptualised the mind into different faculties, such as intellectual or emotional, provided psychiatrists with a wider classificatory framework.⁶ Finally, a change in ‘taxonomic principles,’ led to a multiplication of views on insanity and a variety of denominations, already partially explored in Chapter Two here. All these changes explain why the nineteenth century is a pivotal moment in the study of melancholia and mental health in general. According to Kenneth Kendler, this is a transitional period which can be further broken down. Kendler divides his overview of the ‘History of Melancholia From 1780 to 1880’ into three distinct phases, with the second—and shortest—phase spanning from 1850 to 1860, which incidentally corresponds with the emergence of sensation novels.⁷ During this decade, Kendler explains, melancholia moved from an intellectual disorder to ‘a disorder of “moral sentiment,” that is, mood.’⁸ This distinction is important for us as it can enlighten our understanding of sensation characters’ experiences of melancholia in terms of emotional turmoil rather than an (in)ability to reason.

Melancholia has always been a valuable literary theme, much because of its elusive definition and categorisation. In the mid-nineteenth century in particular, writers used the new discourse of melancholia as a mood disorder to qualify their characters’ emotional struggles. According to Esquirol, who presented *monomania* as a new denomination for melancholia in his *Treatise on Insanity* (1845),

the word melancholy, employed in the language of common life to express that habitual state of sadness from which some people suffer, should be left exclusively to moralists and poets, who, in their expressions, are not obliged to employ so much precision as physicians.⁹

Precision was not exactly the physician’s forte either, since the nomenclature on mental disorders at the time of Esquirol’s publication was extremely complex and self-contradictory, as we have seen. Yet the French psychiatrist was right in considering

⁶ Berrios, ‘Melancholia and Depression during the 19th Century: A Conceptual History’, p. 299.

⁷ Kendler, ‘The Origin of Our Modern Concept of Depression’, p. 864.

⁸ Kendler, ‘The Origin of Our Modern Concept of Depression’, p. 865.

⁹ Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, p. 209. A consideration of the difference between *melancholy* and *melancholia* will be taken in the following pages.

melancholy as a fitting tool for poets and writers in general, especially when the word was used to qualify a generalised sadness. By exploring Collins's and Braddon's recurrent use of the word melancholy, especially in its adjectival form, I suggest here that the writers recognised the disease of melancholia in its mid-nineteenth-century acceptance, that is as a condition expressing angst and sorrow rather than substantial delusions. Melancholia therefore allowed writers to install a sorrowful tone in their novels, which often foretells and mirrors the characters' darkest thoughts, sometimes culminating in suicidal ones. This chapter therefore moves on to an analysis of the sensitive and controversial subject of suicide in sensation novels, particularly in the novels studied in this thesis. As many commentators of the genre have noted, suicide was a particularly fitting topic for sensation novels and their reliance on mysteries, murders and unlawful actions in general, yet the genre does not record a significantly high number of suicides. The sensational aspect of self-murder may have been trumped by its immorality and irreverence for Christianity, especially in the eyes of the Victorian audience, which remained a mainly religious, moralistic and impressionable one.

The untowardness of self-murder in Victorian British standards may explain the most significant difference between Braddon's *The Doctor's Wife* and French author Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857), of which the former is a rewriting. In Flaubert's novel, the main protagonist Emma Bovary dies by suicide after accruing considerable debts and being unfaithful to her husband. While Isabel Gilbert, in Braddon's version, expresses suicidal thoughts throughout the novel, she never actually commits to the act and the novel eventually sees her restored to reason and leading a life of devotion and reformation. Through an analysis of Braddon's hints to *felo-de-se* here, I argue that she uses suicide as a literary tool to maintain the much-needed suspense of sensation novels, much in the same way as Collins uses the topic in *No Name* when Magdalen's desperation reaches its highest point. Magdalen's very-near suicide attempt on the day before her wedding to her cousin is an extraordinary fictional exploration of the human psyche, especially because of the prevalence of fate over will in this scene. Here again, one may wonder why Collins chose not to have his female character lose her life to suicide—in this scene or later in the novel—especially considering that suicide does appear in some of his

subsequent novels.¹⁰ However, I argue in this chapter that building suspense should not be viewed as the sole reason for the presence of suicidal thoughts and attempts in sensational novels. These scenes also serve as an expression of the characters' deep unhappiness and inability to see a way out of their distressing situations. Suicide is therefore not portrayed as the mad act of mentally unstable individuals, an explanation people readily used in the nineteenth century, but rather as the rash act of desperately unhappy ones. As I argue here, the characters' sadness is often correlated with their inability to conform to social or domestic norms, thus prompting an exploration of the correlation between suicide and domesticity. The characters' excessive passivity at home or exertion outside of it foster these self-destructive thoughts and contribute to the suggestion that they might be suffering from mental delusions.

This chapter concludes on a discussion of excesses in the works of Collins and Braddon, arguing that in their sensational tales, both authors seek to warn readers against excessive idleness or industriousness and excessive seclusion at home or exclusion from it. These excesses nurture the characters' mental alienations, which may be read as symptomatic of real and recognised mental disorders. However, this final section seeks to discuss the view that such mental alienations may also rather be read as symptomatic of a profound sadness which both Braddon and Collins identified as chronic in Victorian society and heavily connected with the pressures of the domestic ideology.

Fits of Melancholia

Matthew Bell opens the first chapter of his historical review of melancholia with the question "what happened to melancholia in the twentieth century?", a fair question indeed, considering the important transition in the use of the nosological term between the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries.¹¹ Bell remarks that while we may simply answer that melancholia was replaced in psychiatry by the diagnosis of clinical depression, the

¹⁰ Several of Collins's novels include completed suicides, among which are *The Moonstone* (1868), *The Law and the Lady* (1875), *Heart and Science* (1883), *I say No* (1884).

¹¹ Matthew Bell, *Melancholia: The Western Malady* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), p. 33.

reality is more complex. Melancholia still exists today as a clinically recognised term, even appearing in the DSM-5 (2013)—albeit as a ‘features specifier’ rather than a diagnosis of its own—¹² and still appears as the subject of research within the psychiatric community, as Professors of Psychiatry Michael Alan Taylor’s and Max Fink’s relatively recent publication dedicated to the diagnosis proves.¹³ Yet melancholia undeniably encountered noticeable changes throughout the centuries, and particularly in the nineteenth century, as a result of the complexification of the nosology of mental health already mentioned in Chapter Four. Part of the complexity of melancholia also lies in its lexical ramifications, especially in the English language. While in French, for example, the word *mélancholie* can be both a noun and an adjective denoting either an emotional state or a medical condition—when it was recognised as such—, the words ‘melancholia’ and ‘melancholy’ have been used interchangeably throughout the ages. While the term ‘melancholy’ is usually employed in its adjectival form to qualify the emotional state of a person or the nature of a place, object, or notion, it has also been used to designate the mental condition first described in antiquity as ‘melancholia.’ Bell, who shows a personal preference for the term ‘melancholia’ throughout his book, explains that the use of ‘melancholy’ to refer to a mental health condition in British literature ‘often gives the impression that British ‘melancholy’ was somehow distinctive’ from melancholia.¹⁴ In his translation of Esquirol’s *Treatise on Insanity*, British physician E. K. Hunt chose the word ‘melancholy’ throughout to define a form of insanity, thus not making any distinction from the different uses of *mélancholie* in the original French text and forgoing the Greek origins of melancholia.¹⁵ In Prichard’s and Maudslsey’s publications, which have been of particular interest in this thesis, both terms are however present. Prichard aligns melancholia with other distinctive diagnoses such as monomania or moral insanity, and uses melancholy either in its nominal

¹² Bell, *Melancholia*, p. 33.

¹³ Michael Alan Taylor and Max Fink, *Melancholia: The Diagnosis, Pathophysiology, and Treatment of Depressive Illness* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Jane Darcy offers a thorough literature review of both recent and past works on Melancholia in the introduction of *Melancholy and Literary Biography, 1640-1816* (Basingstoke: Springer, 2013).

¹⁴ Bell, *Melancholia*, p. xiii.

¹⁵ E. K. Hunt’s translation of Esquirol’s work is the one I use throughout this thesis, which may account for some of the complexities encountered when discussing melancholia in Esquirol’s work.

form akin to sorrow, or in its adjectival form such as ‘melancholy dejection.’¹⁶ This inconsistency in the lexical treatment of melancholia and melancholy helped sustain a certain vagueness around the condition as well as the emotional affection. In this thesis, I align with Prichard’s writings and employ the word *melancholia* to discuss the specific mental health condition, and *melancholy* to qualify states of sorrow.

Some elements of melancholia have however endured from its inception to our present time. In his 1934 historical review of melancholia, Aubrey Lewis mentions ‘the states of fear and distress with which [the term] has from the beginning been associated,’ a statement still accurate today in our contemporary understanding of melancholia and the various terminologies associated with it.¹⁷ All historical reviews of melancholia demonstrate that, whether it be from antiquity to medieval times, when melancholia was primarily associated with black bile, or throughout the Enlightenment and nineteenth century, when melancholia was either perceived as an intellectual or mood disorder, fear and distress were present in medical writings on melancholia.¹⁸ Fear and distress—or despondency, sadness, sorrow, however it may be termed in different eras and publications—are therefore essential elements of melancholia, elements which have endured despite the many modifications to its definition and to both medical and popular understandings of it. As Åsa Jansson notes in her analysis of the history of melancholia, the demarcation between medical and non-medical views on melancholia has never been a clearly marked one, thus allowing even more complexity in the concept.¹⁹ Therefore, while Lewis and other commentators on the concept view fear and distress as inherent

¹⁶ Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 82.

¹⁷ Lewis, ‘Melancholia: A Historical Review: Part I’, p. 1. Jennifer Radden concurs with Lewis’s statement, noting that ‘from the earliest Hippocratic writing, melancholy is seen to involve states of fear and sadness, and this account of melancholic subjectivity varies little through the centuries.’ Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy*, p. 10.

¹⁸ While this extremely brief and simplistic overview of melancholia may feel unsatisfactory to some readers, a lack of space prevents me from dedicating more lines to the history of melancholia. Readers may find more information in such works as Lawlor, *From Melancholia to Prozac*; Bell, *Melancholia*.

¹⁹ Åsa Jansson, *From Melancholia to Depression: Disordered Mood in Nineteenth-Century Psychiatry* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), p. 65. Jansson refers to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) as an example of such assimilation of lay and medical explorations of the disease.

components of melancholia, it is difficult to assess whether it was indeed always part of the medical understanding of it, or only the popular one.

If we can accept literary productions as legitimate testimonies of an era's popular perception of a particular subject,²⁰ then we may gather that fear and distress have indeed always been present in popular representations of melancholia, thanks to both pictorial and literary productions.²¹ Lawrence Babb showed, in his analysis of melancholia in Elizabethan drama, that these two components were very much present in literary representations of the condition at the time, while Jane Darcy finds elements of fear—mostly the fear of death—and sorrow in most biographies of eighteenth-century literary men.²² The collection of essays featuring in the collective work *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660–1800* similarly abounds in examples of literary representations of melancholy in which fear and sorrow prevail, even though the team of writers endeavours to present all aspects of the experience of depression—under the veil of the eighteenth-century term 'melancholy.'²³ Situated closer to our own time, Sanja Bahun explores the literary power of melancholia after the rise of psychoanalysis, in the modernist literature of the first half of the twentieth century, with a specific interest in loss and mourning, in which fear and sorrow undeniably rest as well.²⁴

Notwithstanding such diverse literary criticism on melancholia throughout the ages, little research appears to have been done on the position of melancholia in nineteenth-century literature. The fact that the Victorians, according to David G. Riede, 'seem to have produced no literary monument to melancholia comparable to Burton's *Anatomy*,

²⁰ See Wolf Lepenies's assertion, quoting Swiss literary critic Alexandre Vinet, that 'literature is the expression of society.' *Melancholy and Society*, p. 29.

²¹ The illustrations Clark Lawlor includes in his monograph on Melancholia, for instance, all bear marks of fear or distress in their iconography.

²² Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady; a Study of Melancholia in English Literature from 1580 to 1642* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1951); Darcy, *Melancholy and Literary Biography*.

²³ Allan Ingram and others, *Melancholy Experience in Literature of the Long Eighteenth Century: Before Depression, 1660-1800* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

²⁴ Sanja Bahun, *Modernism and Melancholia: Writing as Countermourning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Milton's "Penseroso," or Keats's "Ode," may explain such a paucity of literary criticism dedicated to the subject.²⁵ Riede furthermore points out that for the Victorians, melancholia had strong religious connotations deriving from a Darwinian revolution of the human sense of self within the cosmos.²⁶ Still, this new kinship with melancholia also relates to a sense of fear and sorrow: the fear of the loss of God and the sorrow of a disoriented self. The nineteenth-century poems Riede analyses in his book therefore frequently mention fear and sorrow, incidentally highly elegiac subjects in themselves. Such fear and sorrow are also found in nineteenth-century novels, revealing the Victorians' struggles to conform to a changing society and their fear of inadequacy. In sensation novels in particular, fear and distress are central elements of the plots as the stories rely on distressing crimes and mysteries which maintain the characters in a constant dread of future predicaments. Such dread is often related to the characters' place in society and their ineptness to conform to the Victorian norms of domesticity and propriety.

In *The Doctor's Wife*, Roland Lansdell has 'an expression of profound melancholy' (TDW: 128), referred to several times throughout the novel. This feature in the young man's character is often correlated—either as cause or consequence—to his feeling of loss and ineptitude, already mentioned in Chapters One and Two. The narrator informs us that 'Mr. Lansdell was subject to gloomy fits of melancholy, in which the Present seemed a burden, and the Future a blank,—a great blank desert, or a long dreary bridge' (TDW: 128). Roland's lack of any proper domestic situation and his apparently inescapable idleness subject him to an existential dread, expressed here through a concerning future. In Braddon's novel, the characters' melancholy is very much connected to their affinity with domesticity. Whilst Roland's despondency always relates to his wish of being more industrious and securing a family life, Isabel Gilbert's melancholy always stems from her romantic views and her desire to escape the cloistering domestic realms—first parental, then matrimonial—for a life of adventure, freedom, and often martyrdom. Early in the novel, Sigismund Smith informs us that Isabel, then still living with her family, is 'waiting for a melancholy creature, with a murder on his mind' (TDW: 30), a longing the narrator

²⁵ David G. Riede, *Allegories of One's Own Mind: Melancholy in Victorian Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2005), p. 4.

²⁶ Riede, *Allegories of One's Own Mind*, p. 8.

reiterates after Isabel has married and is then again hoping that a ‘grand melancholy creature could have been conjured into life and planted by her side’ (*TDW*: 158). Isabel’s character and expectations meet in the concept of melancholia as she is both a melancholic creature and searching for one. The third chapter of the novel, entitled ‘Isabel,’ includes five of the twenty-three occurrences of the word ‘melancholy’ in the novel, all in the form of adjectives or adverbs qualifying her. Most of the remaining occurrences in the novel are either employed to describe Isabel or Roland. Yet, it is difficult to discern if Braddon used the word ‘melancholy’ only to ascribe a vague sorrowfulness in both these characters, or to allude to the diagnosis of melancholia.

As mentioned above, by the nineteenth century, both terms were employed interchangeably and some of the phrases Braddon used may have referred to the mental health diagnosis of melancholia. One of the few instances in the novel when ‘melancholy’ concerns neither Isabel nor Roland is when Mr. Raymond talks about the two orphans he has the charge of as ‘melancholy-looking objects,’ adding that he gives them ‘plenty of roast meat’ because ‘meat’s the best antidote for melancholy’ (*TDW*: 69). This image of melancholy as a curable illness edges closer to the diagnosis of melancholia than the emotion of melancholy, yet Mr. Raymond’s dismissal of its gravity with the supposed curing virtues of ‘roast meat’ shows a lack of real concern for the children. The previously cited allusion to Roland as being subject to ‘fits of melancholy’ is similarly ambiguous as we can also find references to ‘fits of melancholia’ in nineteenth-century medical writings. In 1882 for example, a *New-York Tribune* article mentioned a lady who ‘had been subject for some time to fits of melancholia,’ here evidently referring to the medical diagnosis.²⁷ This particular example is of substantial interest to us as it more broadly concerns Mrs Seguin, wife of American-raised neurologist E. C. Seguin who published a paper in 1876 on the ‘treatment of mild cases of melancholia at home,’ advocating for a democratisation of the treatment of depression within the household. Seguin suggested that patients experiencing melancholia could be successfully cared for at home if proper guidance was

²⁷ Cited in Christopher G. Goetz and Donald H. Harter, ‘Treating Melancholia at Home: Theoretical Wisdom and Grim Reality in the Career of E.C. Seguin’, *Neurology*, 80.18 (2013), 1710–14 (p. 1711).

also given by a physician, except if, even in cases of mild melancholia, ‘depression was tightly linked to the current home environment, [then] removal to an institution must be recommended.’²⁸ Seguin’s wife was herself suffering from melancholia and treated at home by her husband, which did not prevent her, however, from killing their three children before ending her own life in their home in 1882. This shocking story resonates with Isabel Gilbert’s, as both women suffered from depression at home while their physician husbands were oblivious of the extent of their depression. Not much is known on the circumstances of Mrs Seguin’s domestic life and her diagnosis of melancholia, or on the reasons for the murder-suicide she committed at home, yet we may picture similar conditions to the ones Braddon imagined for her character in *The Doctor’s Wife*. While the Seguin tragedy occurred in America some twenty years after the publication of Braddon’s novel in England, the prominence of E. C. Seguin in the psychiatric community and his close connection to Europe—Seguin was born in France and spent considerable time on the continent,—²⁹ allow us to see connections between this sensational affair and the stories that populate sensation novels, especially in regards to melancholia.

In *The Doctor’s Wife*, Braddon furthermore seems to suggest a hereditary nature in the melancholy affecting Isabel, as her ‘weird and melancholy beauty’ is associated a few lines down to her late mother’s ‘loving, melancholy face’ (*TDW*: 25; 26). Heredity was often mentioned in medical treatises on insanity in the nineteenth century, and was a common trope in sensation novels. In the fifty case reports Henry Maudsley includes in his *Physiology and Pathology of Mind* to illustrate his chapter on the causation of insanity, eleven mention ‘hereditary predispositions,’ among which are several cases of melancholia.³⁰ As seen previously in this thesis, heredity is likewise an important element of the insanity question in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. Lucy Audley uses this argument both to account for her own behaviour and to suggest insanity in Robert Audley’s lineage. Lucy’s insinuations were only plausible because of the medical and popular publications promoting such notions. Similarly, when the narrator reports Sir Michael’s train of thought

²⁸ Goetz and Harter, ‘Treating Melancholia at Home’, p. 1711.

²⁹ Seguin’s obituary was published in the *BMJ* at his death in 1898. ‘Edward Constant Seguin, M.D’, *British Medical Journal*, 1.1943 (1898), 829.

³⁰ Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of the Mind*, pp. 291–97.

on the subject of his nephew's insanity, his melancholy is invoked as proof: 'he had very much changed within the period that had succeeded the disappearance of George Talboys. He had grown moody and thoughtful, melancholy and absent-minded' (LAS: 281). Because physicians and psychiatrists saw melancholia as a definite form of insanity—or as a first step towards insanity at the very least—, popular imagination, like Sir Michael's, also equated such notions. Prichard, Esquirol and Maudsley all classed melancholia—or 'melancholy,' depending on the terminology they chose to use—as a form of insanity alongside hypochondria, mania, monomania or partial insanity.³¹ Robert's growing sorrowfulness in the novel is directly linked to the loss of his friend and may be seen as a natural expression of grief rather than insanity. However, Robert's melancholia seems to distinguish itself from his mourning of George Talboys as the novel progresses, and edges closer to an existential despair once again connected to domesticity. Robert's 'melancholy thoughts' while investigating the disappearance of his friend 'repeated themselves in never-varying succession in the chaos of his slumbering brain,' culminating in dreams about Audley Court, 'the house he loved' and in which he put all his expectations of domestic happiness, 'standing bare and unprotected upon that desolate northern shore, threatened by the rapid rising of a boisterous sea, whose waves seemed gathering upward to descend and crush the house' (LAS: 209). Similarly, after successfully admitting Lucy to the *maison de santé*, Robert questions his entire life and past idleness, fantasising about the domestic bliss a marriage to Clara Talboys would offer, all of which are qualified as 'melancholy lamentations' (LAS: 372). Robert's fears and distress, essential elements of melancholia as seen above, are domestic in nature and, much like Isabel's, reflect the Victorians' struggles to meet the era's expectations of property.

In Collins's novels, melancholy generally helps build an atmosphere of dejection around the domestic situation in which some characters seem entrapped. In *The Woman in White*, as Marian Halcombe reluctantly awaits her sister's settlement into married life, she notes the 'melancholy absence of any male relative of Laura's, at the most important moment of her life' (TWW: 187) thus foretelling the future dismal nature of Laura's life with Sir Percival. This sentiment is further confirmed when the sisters are reunited after

³¹ Henry Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind* (London, Macmillan, 1868), p. 247; Prichard, *A Treatise on Insanity*, p. 4; Esquirol, *Mental Maladies*, p. 30.

Laura's six-month-long honeymoon in Italy and Marian has the 'melancholy conviction of the dearth of all warmth of feeling, of all close sympathy, between her husband and herself' (TWW: 213). As Laura's situation and her husband's behaviour towards her worsen, she fantasises about the life she could have had with Walter Hartright 'if it had pleased God to bless [her] with poverty,' a life in which she would have been 'sitting at home and waiting for him while he was earning [their] bread—sitting at home and working for him and loving him all the better because [she] had to work for him' (TWW: 259). Marian—in charge of the narration at this point in the story—qualifies these reveries as 'melancholy words,' here again correlating domesticity with melancholia, or at least sorrowfulness. Laura's passivity at home which, as I exposed in Chapters One and Two, can be seen as the cause of her mental breakdown and nervousness, is here again considered as a source of sorrow and distress set against a fictitious parallel life in which Laura would be free of restrictions linked to her class and position in society. Work is portrayed in this passage as a relief against melancholia, a common notion in nineteenth-century medical publications on the subject, following on Robert Burton's notorious claim that 'there is no greater cause of melancholy than idleness, no greater cure than business' in his 1621 *Anatomy of Melancholy*.³²

Maudsley, who believed melancholia to be the most curable form of mental diseases, also credited work with relieving benefits. In his treatise on *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind*, Maudsley reported the case of 'a man of very active mind and energetic character' confined in an asylum, whose case was undoubtedly deteriorating because of, according to the physician, 'the restraint, monotony, and idleness of life in an asylum.'³³ On the other hand, this patient's melancholia was 'warded off by the freedom, variety, and bustle of an active life' outside the asylum. While this doctrine would have seldom been directed to the female Victorian population—whose freedom to lead an active life was disputable—occupation within the home was also regarded as a successful way to ward off melancholia. Physician William B. Neville thus promoted 'amusements within doors that

³² Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, ed. by Holbrook Jackson (London: Folio Society, 2005), p. 7.

³³ Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind*, p. 487.

combine some degree of bodily exercise with the occupation they afford the mind' without making any distinction between genders.³⁴ Since physicians and alienists now saw melancholia as mainly an affliction of the emotions without direct somatic symptoms, occupation offered the mind a distraction from the depressive thoughts it was subjected to.³⁵ By this time, melancholia was edging closer and closer to the modern term 'depression' as Maudsley's work shows, in which he writes about the states of 'profound depression which we describe as melancholia.'³⁶ This shift is also visible in Wilkie Collins's work, where the words 'depression' and 'depressed' appear several times in a sense akin to our contemporary understanding of them. Before Laura has married Sir Percival, both sisters try to hide her romantic attachment to Walter Hartright, which Marian describes as 'the real secret of [Laura's] depression and my anxiety' (*TWW*: 162). However, it is in *No Name* rather than *The Woman in White* that Collins most fully engages with depression, as the main character Magdalen Vanstone is repeatedly described as depressed. Whilst the narrator often alludes to Magdalen's 'depressed' spirits, we can also read about her 'hopeless depression' and 'intractable depression' (*NN*: 279; 306). *No Name* distinctly exemplifies the lexical shift that was taking place in the nomenclature of mental diseases during the Victorian era, moving away from melancholia as a recognised disorder and closer to clinical depression. In the novel, Collins uses the word 'melancholy' mostly in its adjectival form, synonymous of 'melancholic.' When writing about the 'long and melancholy howl' of the family dog or the 'melancholy lines which closed [late Mr Vanstone's] letter,' Collins adds a dimension of sorrow to these elements without evoking a sense of mental impairment (*NN*: 3;111).

Braddon does not use the diagnosis of depression in either of the novels examined here, yet she marks a distinction between mental states of despondency and actual disorders of insanity. Following Lucy's explicit insinuations of insanity on Robert's

³⁴ William B. Neville, *On Insanity: Its Nature, Causes, and Cure* (London: Longman, Rees, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longman, 1836), p. 183.

³⁵ Neville reminded his reader, for example, that melancholia was 'essentially a chronic affection, marked with little of excitement in any organ of the body; appearing among weakly, delicate, and what are called nervous individuals, and generally supervening under depressing or debilitating influences.' *On Insanity*, p. 143.

³⁶ Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind*, p. 268.

part, Sir Michael's daughter, Alicia, refutes the idea by declaring that, although Robert may suffer from what would amount to a depressed spirit, he could not descend into insanity:

my lady thinks that Bob is going mad, but I know better than that. He's not at all the sort of person to go mad. How should such a sluggish ditch-pond of an intellect as his ever work itself into a tempest? He may move about for the rest of his life, perhaps, in a tranquil state of semi-idiocy, imperfectly comprehending who he is, and where he's going, and what he's doing—but he'll never go mad. (*LAS*: 281)

The distinction Alicia makes here illustrates the fine line one usually finds in sensation novels between madness and depression. Characters of sensation novels are rarely mad or insane but their profound sadness and despair, combined with the nosological confusion of the time, render them subject to such insinuations as Lucy's. It is however important to note that, regardless of any specific diagnosis of melancholia—as a form of insanity—or depression, characters of sensation novels face dire consequences to their despair in the form of suicidal thoughts. In his article on 'Some Unrecognised Forms of Mental Disorder,' Forbes Winslow discussed the potentially destructive outcome of such feelings, writing that

these slight ruffles upon the surface, these attacks of mental despondency, these paroxysms of morbid ennui, accompanied as they generally are with intense weariness of life, a desire for seclusion, love of solitude, and a want of interest in the ordinary affairs of life, are fraught with fatal mischief.³⁷

Sensation characters' 'weariness of life' is precisely the subject of the following section, which investigates the extent of their despondency through, I would argue, the not-so-sensational topic of self-murder.

Near-Fatal Mischief

Most publications on the exploration of insanity in the nineteenth century included sections on suicide resulting from patients' disordered minds. Maudsley, Prichard, Esquirol and

³⁷ Winslow, 'On Some Unrecognised Forms of Mental Disorder', p. 89.

other prominent psychiatrists even used self-murder to sub-categorise the different forms of insanity, including diagnoses of ‘suicidal melancholia,’ ‘suicidal monomania,’ ‘suicidal lypemania’ or simply ‘suicidal insanity.’ Suicide, suicide attempts, and family histories of suicides were all recorded as elements explaining or illustrating an individual’s insanity. In Maudsley’s treaty for example, ‘suicide’ and ‘suicidal’ appear in seven of the fifty cases the physician presented to illustrate the causes of insanity.³⁸ Apart from these lengthy publications, articles dedicated to the question of suicide in the Victorian period also appeared in such magazines as the *JPMMP*, the *Journal of Mental Science* or the *Asylum Journal*. In the *JPMMP* itself, sixty-six articles had the word ‘suicide’ in their title in a period ranging from 1840 to 1880, which provides an insight into the interest suicide upheld in the medical community. The year 1840 also marked the publication of Forbes Winslow’s *The Anatomy of Suicide* which he claimed to be the first extensive work published on this particular inquiry. Until this point, suicide had been, according to Winslow, ‘the theme of the novel and the drama, and [had] never, with the exception of an incidental notice in works on medical jurisprudence, been considered in this country in reference to its pathological and physiological character.’³⁹ Winslow identified an intrinsic difference between literary and medical explorations of suicide which he attributed to the nineteenth-century medical status quo that considered suicide as ‘foreign to their pursuits, and belonging rather to the province of the moral philosopher,’⁴⁰ something fiction was better suited to address. While Winslow believed literature could convey the emotional affections of suicide, he identified a need to acknowledge its medical character too and its origin in a ‘derangement of the brain and abdominal viscera.’⁴¹ Winslow’s work, which conglomerated moralistic, religious, social, medical and psychopathological reflexions, also included in-depth analyses of literary works, particularly some of Shakespeare’s plays and their timeless stories of suicide. Winslow conceded that ‘nothing which the master spirit of Shakspeare [sic] ever penned can equal the exquisitely touching and melting

³⁸ Maudsley, *The Physiology and Pathology of Mind*, pp. 291–97.

³⁹ Forbes Winslow, *The Anatomy of Suicide* (London: H. Renshaw, 1840), p. vi.

⁴⁰ Winslow, *The Anatomy of Suicide*, p. vi.

⁴¹ Winslow, *The Anatomy of Suicide*, p. v.

pathos of the speech of the Moor [...].⁴² Thus, a conflation between literary and medical reports of suicide existed, which translated itself into the popular views on self-murder.

Barbara Gates shows in *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* that Winslow was not alone in bridging the gap between literature and medicine on this subject. Quoting both Henry Maudsley and John Charles Bucknill for example, Bates explains that in the 1850s, ‘physicians began commenting upon suicide and insanity in literary works, while literary figures increasingly based their viewpoints upon medical knowledge.’⁴³ This intersection between the literary and the medical found its epitome in newspaper publications. As Bates remarks in her chapter dedicated to ‘Sensational Suicides and Their Interpreters,’ popular media often recorded gruesome self-murders in more or less detail. These papers even included engraved illustrations, thus giving readers a pictorial representation of such deaths as twenty-three-year old Margaret Moyes’s jump from the London Monument in 1838.⁴⁴ There was a growing concern, however, that such detailed reports would incite people to carry out similar acts of suicides, especially after fifteen-year-old Richard Hawes jumped from the same monument and in the same manner as Moyes in 1839. Politicians and physicians shared such fears and promoted caution—even going as far as trying to censor records of suicide, as Gates notes.⁴⁵ A short medical publication of 1867 reporting on a ‘Strange Cause for Suicide,’ however shows that efforts to curb suicidal ideation in the late 1830s were not particularly successful as the author writes at the start of his article that ‘we trust that none of our readers will study the relationship so deeply as to tempt them to follow the example of the unfortunate Titusville man.’⁴⁶ Newspapers were, however, not the only source of inspiration for people contemplating suicide: literature, both in novelistic and poetic forms, was also under scrutiny. Scholars have identified Goethe’s *The Sorrows of Young Werther* as one of the most striking examples of the influential power of literature on this matter.⁴⁷ In their

⁴² Winslow, *The Anatomy of Suicide*, p. 61.

⁴³ Barbara T. Gates, *Victorian Suicide: Mad Crimes and Sad Histories* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 16.

⁴⁴ Gates, *Victorian Suicide*, p. 38.

⁴⁵ Gates, *Victorian Suicide*, p. 42.

⁴⁶ ‘Strange Cause for Suicide!’, *The Dental Register*, 21.12 (1867), 535–36 (p. 535).

⁴⁷ Holly A. Laird, ‘Between the (Disciplinary) Acts: Modernist Suicidology’, *Modernism/Modernity*, 18.3 (2011), 525–50 (p. 536); Gates, *Victorian Suicide*, pp. 23–24.

respective explorations of the history of suicidology, both Barbara Gates and Holly A. Laird write about an ‘epidemic’ of Wertherism in late eighteenth-and-early-nineteenth-century England that proliferated in different literary genres, including sensation novels.

Suicidal ideation has always been part of the literary canon, regardless of the popular consideration attached to it in different eras. A contributor to the *JPMMP* noted, in an 1856 article reviewing French psychiatrist Alexandre Brierre de Boismont’s work, that ‘once, a suicide was a title to honour; then, it was a deadly sin; now, it is a disease,’ thus marking the mutability of the act.⁴⁸ The writer furthermore claimed that:

one thing is certain—that whether we investigate the phenomena of suicide by the treacherous light of pure philosophy; whether we test them by the precepts of a divine religion; or whether we submit them to medical analysis,—suicide is essentially and above all a psychological question.⁴⁹

This assertion may help explain why suicide has been an engaging subject for literary production. The exploration of individuals’ psyche through philosophy, religious beliefs or pathology is certainly one of literature’s main purposes and will therefore include reflexions on individuals’ wishes to end their life. Yet, despite such marked affiliation, noticeably few scholarly works have been published on suicide in literature. While ‘the suicides of fictional characters have often been discussed by critics,’ Kevin Grauke notes, ‘these critical discussions are usually limited to the novels in which a suicide appears.’⁵⁰ English literature scholar Andrew Bennett has also noted the paucity of publications on the representation and significance of suicide in literature, identifying, as Grauke does, Al Alvarez’s 1971 *The Savage God*, as ‘the only book-length overview of suicide in English literature.’⁵¹ Yet, Alvarez stated that his ‘subject [was] suicide *and* literature, not suicide *in*

⁴⁸ Anon, ‘On Suicide and Suicidal Insanity’, *Journal of Psychological Medicine and Mental Pathology*, 9.3 (1856), 445–65 (p. 445).

⁴⁹ Anon, ‘On Suicide and Suicidal Insanity’, p. 445.

⁵⁰ Kevin Grauke, “‘I Cannot Bear to Be Hurt Any More’ Suicide as Dialectical Ideological Sign in Nineteenth-Century American Realism”, in *Representations of Death in Nineteenth-Century US Writing and Culture*, ed. by Lucy E. Frank (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, Ltd., 2013), pp. 77–88 (p. 77).

⁵¹ Andrew Bennett, *Suicide Century: Literature and Suicide from James Joyce to David Foster Wallace* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), p. 21.

literature' (emphasis in the original text), since his interest lay more in 'the power the act has exerted over the creative imagination' than in any in-depth reading of literary representations of suicide.⁵² Even more importantly for our purpose here, in his seven-section analysis of suicide and literature through the ages, Alvarez jumps from the romantics to twentieth-century literature with just a brief overview of mid-nineteenth-century fiction, mainly through the work of Dostoevsky. Victorian literature therefore does not receive any scrutiny in his work. Probably due to its frequent treatment of suicide, Romanticism seems to have overshadowed Victorian literature and its various genres in the study of suicidal representations, and the few works investigating this issue have either glanced at or ignored sensation fiction.⁵³

Barbara Gates's 1983 article 'Wilkie Collins's Suicides: "Truth as It is in Nature,"' partly reprinted in *Victorian Suicide*, remains one of the very few scholarly works investigating suicide in sensation novels. In Pamela K. Gilbert's *Companion to Sensation Fiction*, several contributors mention suicide as a key feature of the genre alongside murder, bigamy and mystery—without dwelling on the suicide scenes of the novels they investigate. One may however disagree with such an assertion considering that, if given a closer look, suicides are not as conspicuous in sensation novels as murder and bigamy might be, despite obvious expectations to the contrary, in light of the genre's nature. Identifying Wilkie Collins as one of the few sensation writers to actually deal with suicide, Gates notes that 'the secrecy and mystery of suicide were not subjects that most sensation novelists wanted to reveal, and Collins's avidly read fellow sensationalists included few suicides among their high toll of violent deaths.'⁵⁴ When suicide does appear in sensation novels, it is more often than not the source of an unsolved mystery taking place outside of

⁵² Al Alvarez, *The Savage God: A Study of Suicide* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), p. 166.

⁵³ Margaret Higonnet, looking at female suicides in the nineteenth century does not mention any of the female characters committing suicide in sensation novels in 'Suicide: Representations of the Feminine in the Nineteenth Century', *Poetics Today*, 6.1/2 (1985), 103–18; Ilana M. Blumberg, despite having both a chapter on 'Suicide, Sin, and Self-Sacrifice in *A Tale of Two Cities*' and on 'Collins' Writerly Sacrifice,' does not mention any suicide scene in sensation novels in *Victorian Sacrifice: Ethics and Economics in Mid-Century Novels* (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2013).

⁵⁴ Barbara T. Gates, 'Wilkie Collins's Suicides: "Truth As It Is in Nature"', *Dickens Studies Annual*, 12 (1983), 303–18 (p. 305).

the main narrative line, as in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Eleanor's Victory* (1863) or Collins's *The Law and the Lady* (1875), and the reader therefore does not witness any violent death. Predominantly, however, sensation novels approach suicide in its anticipation rather than its realisation. This feature of the genre was first recognised by nineteenth-century epidemiologist J. N. Radcliffe who published a thought-provoking review of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* in the *Medical Critic and Psychological Journal* in 1863, noticing the peculiar 'manner in which the authoress plays with the idea of suicide.'⁵⁵ This peculiarity, Radcliffe noted, had 'not hitherto received the attention it deserves,' a statement still crucially relevant today. While *Lady Audley's Secret* is not the sensation novel that would immediately spring to mind when considering the issue of suicidal ideation, Radcliffe insightfully heeded several instances of Braddon's allusions to self-murder. Braddon ascribes suicidal thoughts to all three of her main protagonists—Lucy Audley, Robert Audley and George Talboys—at different points in the story, thus 'giving singular ghastliness' to the novel.⁵⁶

While suicidal thoughts never influence the plot of the novel in any way, they highlight the different causes for suicide most commonly identified in the nineteenth-century. George Talboys shamelessly tells a stranger aboard the ship taking him back home that, before he decided to desert his wife and son, he had contemplated the more drastic solution of throwing himself into the sea 'so as to leave [his] poor girl free to make a better match' (LAS: 23). It is indeed because of money matters that George flees to Australia, a particularly common cause for suicide among men according to most physicians at the time.⁵⁷ Radcliffe also noted Robert Audley's hint to self-murder at the end of the novel when he asks Clara:

do you think I can read French novels and smoke mild Turkish until I am three-score-and-ten, Miss Talboys? [...] Do you think there will not come a day in which my meerschaums will be foul, and the French novels more than usually stupid, and life

⁵⁵ J. N. Radcliffe, 'Baits for Suicide.—"Lady Audley's Secret" and "Aurora Floyd"', *Medical Critic and Psychological Journal*, 3.12 (1863), 585–604 (p. 585).

⁵⁶ Radcliffe, 'Baits for Suicide', p. 590.

⁵⁷ Howard I. Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity in Nineteenth-Century Medical and Social Thought', *Journal of Social History*, 26.3 (1993), 461–90 (p. 469); Gates, *Victorian Suicide*, pp. 18–19.

altogether such a dismal monotony that I shall want to get rid of it somehow or other?
(LAS: 372)

Robert's admission to weariness of life and boredom fits another common cause for suicide. In the anonymous 1856 *JPMMP* article previously mentioned, the author reviewed Brierre de Boismont's statistical analysis of the causes for suicide among 4,595 recorded cases, which included 'idleness' in fifty-six cases, 'want of work' in forty-three, 'ennui, weariness of life' in 237, and 'feeble, exalted, sad or hypochondriacal character' in 145.⁵⁸ These justifications, found in testimonies left behind by the suicides, refer us back to Chapters One and Two of this thesis which examined the impact of idleness on the mental health of sensation characters, as well as my previous exploration of melancholia and sadness. Braddon brings forth Robert's lack of energy and exertional powers, which I have considered in relation to the diagnoses of hypochondria and melancholia in previous chapters, as the reason for his volatile desire to end his life, much like physicians observed in real cases. Furthermore, while I have discussed Robert's hypochondria and melancholia in relation to his domestic situation and desire for a stable home, I relate his suicidal thoughts to similar considerations. Robert's confession to Clara Talboys follows, at the end of the novel, a three-week period of domestic bliss in the Talboys mansion, in which 'Robert had a prim bed-room, and an uncompromising dressing-room allotted him,' from which he 'emerged prim and blue [...] as the clock in the hall struck seven, to join the master of the house in his ante-breakfast' (LAS: 370). Robert is only saved from his suicidal thoughts by the prospect of domestic settlement with Clara Talboys in the little cottage he proposes to build on the few acres of land he purchased, and after engaging in a 'life of serious work and application' (LAS: 372). Robert's rousing from a life of self-deprecating idleness is highly contingent on Clara's agreement to marry him and provide him with the domestic support he longs for, as Robert muses that he would work, 'and do it earnestly, if

⁵⁸ Anon, 'On Suicide and Suicidal Insanity', p. 455. The author however clarified that he attached 'much less importance to this table than does [M. de Boismont]. The assigned cause is, in most cases, simply the obvious or presumed immediately exciting cause. To discover the real cause, we must go back further in the history of the victim's life; we must know more of his physical organization, more of his psychical *indoles*' (emphasis in the original text).

I could be sure of a reward for my labour. If she would accept my reputation when it was won, and support me in the struggle by her beloved companionship' (LAS: 372-3).

Radcliff also noted two instances of Lady Audley's suicidal thoughts which are, again, in agreement with contemporary medical beliefs on potential causes for self-murder. The morning after setting fire to the inn where Robert was staying, Lucy Audley looks at her medicine cabinet containing, among other things, a bottle labelled 'Opium—Poison,' trifles with the bottle's stopper and finally puts it aside thinking 'if I could! [...] if I could only do it!' (LAS: 285). Later, when Lucy Audley has been admitted to the *Maison de Santé* and Robert visits her, she expresses no remorse and displays remaining vindictiveness, telling Robert 'I would kill myself and defy you, if I dared. But I am a poor, pitiful coward, and have been so from the first' (LAS: 334). These two instances corroborate not only the then-common beliefs that, when women died by suicide, they predominantly did so by ingesting poison, but also that women were less likely to die by suicide than men, because they lacked the courage to do so.⁵⁹ Bierre de Boismont believed suicide required 'a degree of energy, of courage, of despair, which is not in conformity with the weak and delicate constitution of women,' which explained the statistical difference between genders.⁶⁰ As Howard Kushner has shown, the increase in the number of suicides witnessed in the nineteenth century was often correlated with civilisation, so much so that 'suicide developed into a barometer for social health,' which discriminated men and women according to their domestic roles.⁶¹ 'Because middle-class ideology, as opposed to social reality, emphasised the role of women as mothers and as guardians of the family,' Kushner furthermore argues, 'theorists assumed that women were better positioned than men to resist the chaos ascribed to modernity' and therefore better positioned to resist the temptation for self-destruction as well.⁶² Braddon, however, seemed to hold a different opinion on women's mental health. In her novels, domesticity does not safeguard women against suicidal ideation but rather incites it, as *The Doctor's Wife* exemplifies.

⁵⁹ Winslow, *The Anatomy of Suicide*. 'Whilst the men have used firearms and cutting instruments, the women have almost alone [*sic*] had recourse to poisons and voluntary falls' (p.277); 'It has been clearly established that suicide is less frequent among women than men' (p.269).

⁶⁰ Cited in Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity', p. 468.

⁶¹ Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity', p. 461.

⁶² Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity', p. 461.

In her 1864 novel, Braddon engages even more with suicide than she did in *Lady Audley's Secret*, published two years earlier. Isabel's fascination for death is made clear early in the novel, long before she marries George Gilbert and has to repent for a badly thought union. When we are first acquainted with Isabel and her unhealthy love for novel-reading—according to the narrator as well as the characters in the novel—, we learn that 'she wanted her life to be like her books; she wanted to be a heroine,—unhappy perhaps, and dying early. She had an especial desire to die early, by consumption' (TDW: 28). Isabel's desire to 'die early' is repeated throughout the novel since 'she had always fancied that the next best thing to marrying a duke would be to fade into an early grave before the age of eighteen,' and deplores having already passed the age of twenty (TDW: 234). However, Isabel's mere hope of dying in a most dramatic and sensational way—either after taking part in an imagined Revolution, or under the 'cruel hands [of] an aristocratic Bill Sykes' (TDW: 72) or by consumption—is soon replaced by a more assertive thought of bringing about such death herself. Here again, Braddon suggests that it is only a lack of courage that saves the young girl from acting on her suicidal impulses, as we read that:

if she could have the courage to go down to the water's brink, and to drop quietly into the stream where Roland Lansdell had once told her it was deepest? It was not any consciousness of the suicide's sin that held this ignorant girl back from the desperate deed, which took a soft and sentimental shape in her mind. It was only a shuddering horror of the plunge, a vague and shapeless terror of the 'something after,' familiar to every creature who ponders (even in the most frivolous spirit) upon Hamlet's solemn question; it was only dim fear and apprehension that saved this girl from the rash impulse of her sorrow-stricken heart. (TDW: 223)

However, Braddon does not altogether dismiss Isabel's suicidal thoughts as light childish whims. The narrator intercedes here in a powerful first-person omniscient capacity, declaring: 'I know that she was alike wicked and silly; I know that it must be difficult to win sympathy for a grief so foolish, an anguish so self-engendered; but her sorrow was none the less real to her because it seems foolish in the eyes of wisdom' (TDW: 223). The omnipresent narratorial voice expresses here what I would argue is the real strength of Braddon's novel, in that it acknowledges Isabel's disappointment in her 'commonplace'

domestic situation and her indecision towards Roland Lansdell as legitimate explanations for her depressive spirit.⁶³ No rational reason is needed to justify ‘the sharp pain of a purely mental struggle’ that Isabel is bearing (*TDW*: 302). Braddon only asks the reader to sympathise with her character.

Much like Emma Bovary’s reasons for ending her life in Flaubert’s eponymous novel, Isabel’s constant wish to die emanates from a profound unhappiness. Emma’s suicide is brought about by a deep-seated depression rather than more practical matters such as her rejection by her lovers, her dire financial situation, or even her remorse. Jacqueline Merriam Paskow argues that Emma’s motives are not as self-evident as one might think, considering that ‘well before the financial rejections by her lovers, we already know from listening to her inner monologue that her unhappiness has been chronic.’⁶⁴ While Braddon’s rewriting of Flaubert’s novel sometimes blatantly deviates from the original—both in style and substance—we find in it the same chronic unhappiness in the female lead character. *The Doctor’s Wife* has received some scholarly attention in both past and recent years, especially in regards to its liminal position between sensation and realistic domestic genres, as well as its reflection on Victorian reading habits.⁶⁵ If several writers

⁶³ The omniscient narrator’s insistence on Isabel’s dissatisfaction with the lack of grandeur and glamour in her life is rendered through the repetitive use of the adjective ‘commonplace’ forty-two times in the novel, to qualify her life, her husband George, her house, or the village they live in.

⁶⁴ Jacqueline Merriam Paskow, ‘Rethinking Madame Bovary’s Motives for Committing Suicide’, *The Modern Language Review*, 100.2 (2005), 323–39 (p. 331).

⁶⁵ Anne-Marie Beller has identified a tendency ‘to focus on its discourse on reading and readers,’ especially through an analysis of the figure of the writer Sigismund Smith, while herself looking at ‘the way in which it also implicitly contrasts two very different ideologies of literary composition through an inferred comparison between Smith, the sensation novelist, and Roland Lansdell, the Byronic hero’ in ‘Popularity and Proliferation: Shifting Modes of Authorship in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *The Doctor’s Wife* (1864) and *Vixen* (1879)’, *Women’s Writing*, 23.2 (2016), 245–61 (p. 250); Jennifer Conary is interested in Braddon’s defense of the sensation genre in ‘Never Great, Only Popular’; Joyce E. Kelley connects Braddon’s satirical portrayal of a sensation writers with satires appearing in popular newspapers in ‘Beating Them to the Punch: Satirizing Sensation from the 1860s Comic Journal to Braddon’s *The Doctor’s Wife*’, *Victorians: A Journal of Culture and Literature*, 119 (2011), 67–89; Tabitha Sparks places the novel at a crossroad between three different genres—sensationalism, sentimentalism, and realism—mostly through an analysis of Isabel’s reading habits, in ‘Fiction Becomes Her: Representations of Female Character in Mary Braddon’s *The Doctor’s Wife*’, 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. 197–211.

have also spent time analysing the connection between Braddon's novel and Flaubert's, few have yet really discussed the main difference between the two, that is, the fate of their main character. Isabel's suicidal thoughts, which pervade the novel, are seldom mentioned in scholarly criticism of the novel, which, I would argue, has resulted in a failure to identify one of the novel's main points of interest. While Jennifer Conary begins her paper on the *The Doctor's Wife* with a comparison to *Madam Bovary*, thus establishing the potential reason for the former's popularity, she does not mention the main divergence between the two stories anywhere in her article.

Catherine J. Golden remains one of the few scholars who interrogated this contrast through a compelling comparative literature piece. Further to arguing that *The Doctor's Wife* 'pales in comparison to [...] *Madame Bovary*,' Golden notes the ways in which Braddon's novel departs from Flaubert's, not least in terms of Isabel's 'avoidance of sensuality, [...] which might also explain how she remains sexually innocent in her affair with Lansdell.'⁶⁶ Isabel's survival and moral atonement at the end of the novel, despite 'pointed references' to her death wish, 'dismiss Emma's adultery and suicide by poisoning' in favour of reformation and reward for Braddon's heroine.⁶⁷ One may indeed see, like Golden does, Braddon's rejection of suicide as a way to forestall censoring, considering the reception of Flaubert's novel in France, especially since Braddon had strong misgivings about the novel's morality herself, writing to her friend Edward Bulwer-Lytton in 1864 that 'the idea of the Doctor's Wife is founded on 'Madame Bovary,' the style of which struck me immensely in spite of its hideous immorality.'⁶⁸ Isabel's chastity as well as her resistance to the sin of suicide is how Braddon distances herself from French literature, considered too immoral for a British reading public. Braddon correlated 'improper French novels' to 'other immoral [subjects]' (TDW: 307), as most of her contemporaries did. In his review of suicidal ideation in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd*, Radcliffe noted that 'suicide is an act neither unfamiliar in England, nor ignored by

⁶⁶ Golden, 'Censoring her Sensationalism', pp. 30; 37.

⁶⁷ Golden, 'Censoring her Sensationalism', p. 39.

⁶⁸ Mary Elizabeth Braddon, quoted in Robert Lee Wolff, *Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1979), p. 162 Also quoted in Golden, p. 30.

English writers of fiction. But for a parallel to the fashion in which self-murder is dealt with in [Braddon's novels], recourse must be had to the most debased works of French novelists.'⁶⁹ Radcliffe refers to French literature in such deprecating terms throughout his review, even going as far as imputing a rise in youth suicides in France to the literature they read. Compared to French novels, then, Braddon's early novels remain rather decent, yet only a year after Radcliffe's publication, Braddon seems to both give credit to and challenge his interpretation of her work by publishing a novel that is, on the one hand, a rewriting of one of the basest of French novels, but that, on the other, shies away from fully committing to its improper plot.

If Radcliffe took issue with Braddon's references to suicide in *Lady Audley's Secret*, we may assume that he did not look kindly on *The Doctor's Wife*, as the Victorian surgeon had claimed that even though Braddon had 'not as yet become the open apologists of [suicide],' the injury still remained, as 'the gravity of the evil is to be measured by the insidiousness of its operation rather than by its patency.'⁷⁰ The insidiousness of suicide is driven further in *The Doctor's Wife*, as, even more so than in *Lady Audley's Secret*, the narrator invokes it time and again 'as a legitimate means of escape from evils of our own creation.'⁷¹ After learning that 'the Lansdells were not a long-lived race' (TDW: 144), Isabel felt 'a thrill of pain shot through her breast as she thought of this,' 'yet,' the narrator writes, 'I doubt if she would have had it otherwise. It would be almost better that he should break a blood-vessel, or catch a fever, or commit suicide, than that he should ever live to have grey hair' (TDW: 176). Suicidal ideation permeates every aspect of the novel, even the customarily happy prospect of a marriage proposal:

[Roland] had a vague idea that he would go there some morning, and ask his cousin to marry him, and so make an end of it; but he deferred the carrying out of that idea indefinitely, as a man who contemplates suicide may postpone the ghastly realisation of

⁶⁹ Radcliffe, 'Baits for Suicide', p. 589.

⁷⁰ Radcliffe, 'Baits for Suicide', p. 596. I have not come across, through my research, any further review of Braddon's work by Radcliffe and can therefore only conjecture on his reading of *The Doctor's Wife*.

⁷¹ Radcliffe, 'Baits for Suicide', p. 592.

his purpose, keeping his loaded pistol or his prussic acid handy against the time when it shall be wanted. (*TDW*: 324)

Such a comparison between marriage and death, conveyed by the finality of the word ‘end,’ not only renders suicide a constant and lingering thought in the reader’s mind, but also suggests that Roland, himself a profoundly sorrowful character, keeps a loaded pistol and poison at home for this very purpose. *The Doctor’s Wife* therefore gives even more prominence to Radcliffe’s critique of Braddon’s early novels, in which suicide is:

intruded into the brightest as the darkest aspects of the stories; it is suggested in their pleasantest as well as their most miserable scenes; it serves as the foil to happiness, the legitimate accompaniment of wretchedness, folly, or wickedness, and it is made to give sharp point to a playful simile.⁷²

Considering Braddon’s insistence on suicidal thoughts, it is even more surprising to see Isabel overcome her glorification of death at the end of the novel rather than share Emma Bovary’s fate. Any reader familiar with Flaubert’s novel would expect, upon coming across so many references to self-murder, a similar death-by-poison ending for Isabel Gilbert, and Braddon’s plot twist may have been both a way to preserve British morality and to sustain the suspense of the sensational genre she was so used to. I would also argue, however, that Braddon’s allusions to suicide without any actual realisation of it serves to emphasise the protagonists’ deep unhappiness and overall depression, all the while guarding against any possible diagnosis of insanity from readers or critics who so often chose to believe that suicide only concerned the insane. The *JPMMP* critic mentioned above acknowledged that ‘insanity has no part in these suicides from *ennui*—from melancholy,’ furthermore quoting M. de Boismont’s claim that ‘it is by no means necessary to be mad in order to be gnawed at the heart, at the present epoch, by *ennui* and weariness of life.’⁷³ As I have argued throughout this thesis, insanity is not what makes sensation characters so miserable, it is rather the Victorian doctrines and social expectations that do, chiefly in the domestic roles they assign to both men and women.

⁷² Radcliffe, ‘Baits for Suicide’, p. 589.

⁷³ Anon, ‘On Suicide and Suicidal Insanity’, p. 458 Emphasis in the original text.

A powerful example of the extremes to which characters of sensation novels can be driven by unhappy domestic positions is Magdalen Vanstone's desperation in *No Name*. In previous chapters, I have shown how Magdalen's lack of domestic stability after her parents' death led to the development of her obsessive behaviour, which finds its culmination in her desire to end her life. In a similar vein to Braddon, Collins maintained a rather morbid atmosphere in his novel with recurrent references to death. Not long before her marriage to Noel Vanstone, while on a carriage ride with Mrs Wragge, Magdalen tells her companion 'suppose the carriage was upset, [...] and suppose I was thrown out and killed on the spot? Nonsense! don't look at me in that way. I'm like your husband; I have a dash of humour, and I'm only joking' (NN: 400). Such a light and seemingly-humorous allusion to her death informs the reader that Magdalen often thinks of her own death, and even hopes it may come. Collins progressively lays the foundations of the suicide scene by showing how Magdalen's initial mere wish to die by accident turns into a resolution. In the week preceding her marriage, she

lit her candle and went upstairs again into her room. As she returned to the old place by her toilet-table, the vain hope in the three days of delay, the vain hope of deliverance by accident, came back to her—this time in a form more tangible than the form which it had hitherto worn.

"Friday, Saturday, Sunday. Something may happen to him; something may happen to me. Something serious; something fatal. One of us may die. [...] I may be the one."
(NN: 396)

The conditional mood expressed in this passage is soon replaced with a more assertive one on the night before her wedding when Magdalen inspects herself in the mirror after having written her suicide letter to her sister and thinks to herself 'how pale I look! [...] Shall I be paler still when they find me in the morning?' (NN: 407). However, Collins distinguishes himself from Braddon in this novel by fully engaging with the image of suicide in a four-page-long description of Magdalen's state of mind as she most dramatically hesitates between 'the journey to the church [and] the journey to the grave!' (NN: 406). At one point Magdalen declares that her 'choice is made,' writes her farewell to her sister and looks at the bottle of laudanum in her hand before 'she removed the cork and lifted the bottle to her

mouth,' and at another her 'strong young life' is fighting 'with the whole frenzy of its loathing against the close terror of Death' (NN: 407). Readers almost experience Magdalen's dilemma themselves as we are led to believe that the main protagonist of the novel may indeed die two hundred pages before the end of the novel. An 1863 review of *No Name*, which qualified Collins's novel as 'a work of Art,' described 'the scene before [Magdalen's] marriage, when she approaches the idea of self-destruction' as 'most forcible.'⁷⁴ The author furthermore grants that 'Mr. Collins indicates, and very powerfully, the inward repugnance which convulsed her during her solitary hours,' thus noting Collins's own aversion to suicide.⁷⁵ Despite Collins's own views on the subject, however, he did not shy away from affording it the legitimate place it held in a story of utter misery, therefore acknowledging the real magnitude of human suffering. Sue Lonoff also considers this scene as 'fully credible despite its melodrama,' focusing particularly on Magdalen's decision to let fate decide whether she should live or die by counting the boats as they pass her window, writing that 'the exercise of counting random objects has obviously parallels in ordinary life, and the terse explanation gives the numbering process a psychological validity.'⁷⁶ Readers are indeed highly invested in Magdalen's psychological state and need no further explanation for her suicidal thoughts than the current of events they have been previously privy to.

While Sue Lonoff dedicates some lines to Magdalen's near-suicide scene in her exploration of Collins's rhetoric, few scholars have given it the attention it deserves. Lewis Horne, in his analysis of the ways melodrama and tragedy are interwoven to account for Magdalen's both physical and spiritual peril, does not mention this scene as a case in point,⁷⁷ nor does Helena Ifill in her exploration of willpower and internal conflict in *No Name*.⁷⁸ This scene is also conspicuously absent from Andrew Mangham's reading of *No Name* in *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction*, despite the psychological violence of

⁷⁴ H.F. Chorley, 'No Name', *The Athenaeum*, 1836, 1863, 10-11, quoted in *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by Norman Page (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 133.

⁷⁵ Chorley, 'No Name', p. 11.

⁷⁶ Sue Lonoff, *Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship* (New York: AMS Press, 1982), p. 105.

⁷⁷ Horne, 'Madgalen's Peril'.

⁷⁸ Ifill, *Creating Character*.

Magdalen's suicidal dilemma.⁷⁹ Barbara Gates's forty-year-old article dedicated to 'Wilkie Collins's Suicides' therefore remains one of the only lengthy explorations of the subject. In it, Gates contends that 'Collins's novels involving suicides are not formulaic. No suicide in Collins is unmotivated, nor is self-destruction divorced from the painful social conflicts that beset character.'⁸⁰ One such conflict, I would argue, is the one Victorian women were subjected to, in terms of their function in life and the space they were allowed to occupy in domestic and public places. As Kushner explains, when women's suicides were not connected to disappointed romances, they were often tied to their transgression of gender norms, and moralists, as well as physicians, believed that 'when women left the security of their families, [...] they substantially increased their risk of suicide.'⁸¹ Magdalen's forced departure from her family home as well as her self-inflicted dissociation from her sister and her governess marks the first step towards her unhappy existence. However, it is society's refusal to let her adopt a role considered improper—her calling for the stage—that decidedly sets her on a path of no return. The part domesticity plays in Magdalen's 'suicide-despair' (NN: 451) is exhibited through the space she chooses for its scene. Magdalen does not envision her self-murder in the sea surrounding her house in North Shingles Villa, nor in a public space as Margaret Moyes did in 1838, but rather in the enclosed domestic space she despises so much. By setting the scene of her suicide inside the home—which, for her, is only a house—, Magdalen transgresses the ideology of the home as a place of safety. She even asserts this transgression by ensuring that her bedroom will look like any proper, respectable young woman's chambers, and she, the perfect 'angel in the house':

After placing the enclosure by the letter to Norah, she rose and looked round the room. Some few little things in it were not in their places. She set them in order, and drew the curtains on either side at the head of her bed. Her own dress was the next object of her scrutiny. It was all as neat, as pure, as prettily arranged as ever. (NN: 406)

⁷⁹ Mangham, *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction*.

⁸⁰ Gates, 'Wilkie Collins's Suicides', p. 306.

⁸¹ Kushner, 'Suicide, Gender, and the Fear of Modernity', p. 470.

Unwilling to be found, on the next day, in a dishevelled state and in a disordered room, which might be interpreted as evidence of her insanity, Magdalen stages an apparently orderly and harmonious interior that will all the more upset Victorian propriety when it becomes the scene of a crime.⁸² According to Andrea Kaston Tange, who explores women's domestic spatial limitations in Victorian literature, sensation novels 'propose that challenging the physical boundaries of women's places might lead to more stable, less contingent identities.'⁸³ Magdalen's near-suicide scene is pivotal in the novel not only because it sets the course of the rest of the story once fate has decided she will live, but also because it helps Magdalen reaffirm her position in the home by challenging its safety. When Captain Wragge sends Magdalen's maid to her room the next morning because she is late for breakfast and he 'felt uneasy at the long silence'—probably suspecting what Magdalen herself contemplated the previous night—, the maid returns with the assurance that 'she looks beautiful, [...] and she's sleeping as quietly as a new-born child' (NN: 408). If Magdalen had indeed died by suicide, we may imagine that her maid would have wrongfully reported the same thing upon glancing at Magdalen, lying still in her bed, at home.

Both Braddon's and Collins's constant reminder of the threat of suicidal thoughts serve several purposes. On the one hand, it helps maintain the suspense in sensation novels with a persistent threat of crime towering over both characters and readers. The one-volume edition of *No Name* published in 1864 included a frontispiece by painter John Everett Millais, already famous for his 1852 painting of Ophelia's drowning, depicting the very scene of Magdalen's near-suicide. On it, viewers can see a young lady sitting by a window overlooking the sea, some writing material in the background, and a sealed vial on the window sill. She appears to be reaching for the vial, with a faraway look in her eyes. When analysing this illustration, Clare Douglass contends that it was for suspenseful purposes

⁸² Gates reminds us that in the nineteenth century, suicide was still considered a crime, so much so that 'it became an aphorism to say that in England you must avoid suicide on pain of being regarded as a criminal if you failed and a lunatic if you succeeded' (*Victorian Suicide*, p. 6.) Suicides could furthermore be buried at a crossroad with a stake through the heart, which might explain Magdalen's note to her sister, asking to be buried with their parents 'if the cruel law will let you' (NN: 407).

⁸³ Tange, *Architectural Identities*, p. 220.

that Collins selected it, arguing that ‘it heightens the anxiety of the text by freezing this gripping moment in the life of Magdalen.’⁸⁴ However, building suspense is not the only reason for this choice, because the capturing of Magdalen’s movement to grasp the vial, Douglass furthermore argues, ‘conveys a physically and emotionally suspended moment, heightening the audience’s experience of the text.’⁸⁵ Millais’s illustration informs the reader of the importance emotions bear in the novel, before they have even started reading the first page. Not only will readers expect to encounter characters undergoing severe mental distress, they will also anticipate that these will culminate in suicide if they pay close attention to the illustration. Collins’s choice of illustration confirms his own preoccupation with his character’s mindset and the importance he placed on this pivotal scene. This leads us, however, to wonder why, both in Braddon’s and Collins’s novels examined at length here, neither of the heroines eventually loses her life to suicide. The question bears even more significance when we consider that Braddon was working on a rewriting of *Madame Bovary* in which the lead protagonist ends her life, and that Collins was not afraid to include actual suicides in his other novels. I argue here that, through their emphasis on suicidal ideation rather than realisation, Braddon and Collins sought to underline the deep and constant sadness of their characters, showing that such despair did not necessarily have to culminate in either madness or self-destruction to be rightfully acknowledged by readers. In his review of Braddon’s sensation novels, Radcliffe remarked that ‘a morbid exaggeration of feeling is peculiar to all the works of this class of fiction,’ noting that ‘sentiment’ is to be held as the main criterion to understand the characters’ experiences as sentiment ‘in fact, usurps the province of judgment.’⁸⁶ As readers, we are indeed asked to judge the characters’ actions and thoughts on the emotions they feel and share with us through the narration. Such emotions are, as I have argued here, entwined with the characters’ symbiosis—or lack of—with the domestic environment, which is profiled as the main root of their mental suffering in most sensation novels.

⁸⁴ Clare Douglass, ‘Text and Image Together: The Influence of Illustration and the Victorian Market in the Novels of Wilkie Collins’, in *Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Andrew Mangham (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), pp. 56–73 (p. 64).

⁸⁵ Douglass, ‘Text and Image Together’, p. 60.

⁸⁶ Radcliffe, ‘Baits for Suicide’, p. 592.

Conclusion

Sensational Excesses

In *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present*, a book both academically and popularly acclaimed for its compelling exploration of mental health, Lisa Appignanesi explains that part of her motivation for writing it emerged from the startling discovery of twenty-first-century statistics on the general population's mental health. These statistics revealed how many of us are, have been, or could be diagnosed as suffering from some form of mental disorder, leading Appignanesi to wonder 'whether we had entered a century where sadness and madness, let alone attendant badness, had really grown to terrifying proportions.'⁸⁷ 'In other words,' Appignanesi continues, 'had what we now term a mental disorder come to encompass something more than, or different from, what it had while I was growing up in what now seems like a distant last century, let alone in the century before?'⁸⁸ The author's emphasis, in her introductory pages, on the transitory essence of mental health diagnoses and perception is of key importance. We are continuously enlarging and adjusting our understanding of mental health, taking into account extrinsic elements ranging from social to political or geographical, in order to better assist people in need of care, as the numerous current research projects and publications in the Health Humanities field show. Part of this process, I believe, involves the creative art of fiction writing—and its subsequent analysis—, an art that enjoys the freedom of depicting mental health in all its spectrum and intricacies.

As Charley Baker and others have noted in their own survey of madness literature, written or spoken stories 'help to make sense of bewildering, consuming, or overwhelming events and experiences,' which more factual and realist medical accounts may struggle to do.⁸⁹ This team of researchers has also noted how instrumental fictional accounts of mental

⁸⁷ Lisa Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad: A History of Women and the Mind Doctors from 1800 to the Present* (London: Virago, 2009), p. 3.

⁸⁸ Appignanesi, *Mad, Bad and Sad*, p. 3.

⁸⁹ Baker and others, *Madness*, p. 2.

ill-health can be in ‘shaping public perceptions of madness itself [...], and furthermore in forming stereotypes of individuals deemed mad themselves.’⁹⁰ The arguments they put forth can also be extended to states of mental health falling outside the scope of madness but still engendering bewildering experiences for those affected. The present book is therefore intended to offer literature scholars, healthcare practitioners, and readers in general a new insight into experiences of mental ill-health and its consequences on individuals through the exploration of the fictional—yet universal—stories of characters populating sensation novels. The health humanities field of research has shown us the importance of individualised perceptions and recognitions of human suffering over generic medical conceptualisations. Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon contributed to this by portraying characters whose social circumstances, not least in terms of their personal relationship to home, contributed to their mental suffering and, to some extent, even helped explain it. While these authors may not always offer consistent, sympathetic or responsible depictions of how individuals cope with extreme circumstances such as imposed home-confinement, their narratives can still inform modern perceptions and practices relating to similar issues, particularly at a time when health-care practitioners aspire to grasp the impact of the pandemic-related lockdown on the population’s mental health. The narratives on hypochondria and obsessive disorders found in Collins’s and Braddon’s novels furthermore reflect the lived experiences of Victorian men and women that may have been overlooked by more clinical explorations of such ailments. This thesis therefore invites healthcare practitioners to emulate the nineteenth century effort of drawing from such narratives in order to access new perspectives and perhaps use them in their modern conceptions of and practices relating to health studies and care. While it is important to always consider these narratives within their limitations and subjectivity, we may consider them as legitimate insights into the human psyche and, beyond that, into how individuals wish to be seen, acknowledged, and accepted.

As I have argued here, Wilkie Collins’s and Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s works of fiction have served both purposes of helping readers make sense of mental conditions they either experienced themselves or witnessed loved-ones experience, and of moulding

⁹⁰ Baker and others, *Madness*, p. 3.

readers' perceptions of them, for better or for worse. Like Mr Raymond in *The Doctor's Wife*, both sensation writers seem to have been 'as tender and pitiful of the diseases of the mind as a great physician is of the ailments of the body' (244). Braddon's narrator rhetorically asking if Mr Raymond had not 'dissected the mind, and discovered it to be subject to quite as many and as complicated disorders as those which beset the wonderful structure of flesh and blood and bone in which it has its mysterious lodgment?' (TDW: 244) could likewise be extended to the two writers of sensation novels. Through the exploration of *The Doctor's Wife*, *Lady Audley's Secret*, *No Name* and *The Woman in White*, we witness Braddon's and Collins's own dissection of the human mind and the myriad of complicated disorders they seek to expose, elicit, and understand.

In the novels analysed in this thesis, Collins and Braddon are particularly concerned with the depiction of excesses: excessive behaviours, excessive thinking and excessive emotions. These in turn lead to mental health disorders themselves defined in terms of excesses. Hypochondria, in its somatic expression, was connected to an excess of black bile in the body, and in its more psychological expression to excessive thinking. F. P. Atkinson wrote in 1872 that the cause of hypochondria was 'always found to be either excess of or too little mental exertion,' which concurred with a previous assertion by physician Edwin Lee, who believed that 'over anxiety of mind' invariably induced 'excessive nervous irritability, and a perverted perception of sensation.'⁹¹ More significantly still, as I have shown in previous chapters, hypochondria characterised itself by an exaggerated sense of ill-health as well as an immoderate desire to talk about one's illness. Hysteria, the more feminine form of nervous disorder, as it was believed, shared similar traits in that it assumed an 'excessive emotional state into which, according to nineteenth-century medical discourse, all women were perpetually in danger of falling,' as Lyn Pykett reminds us.⁹² Such definitions of hysteria, Andrew Mangham contends, revealed 'a central preoccupation with excessive and fragmented forms of behaviour' that was also visible in those obsessive disorders in which Victorian physicians and the wider

⁹¹ Atkinson, 'Hypochondriasis: Its Nature and Treatment', p. 438; Lee, *A Treatise on Some Nervous Disorders*, p. 145.

⁹² Pykett, *The Sensation Novel*, p. 25.

population shared an interest.⁹³ Monomania, for example, as Esquirol first described it, implied an exaggerated interest in or passion for a single object or idea, rendering the subject unable to abstain from thinking about or acting on it. This feature is also present in Prichard's own exploration of partial insanity, as his diagnosis of moral insanity subsumed excessively morbid perversion of the feelings or emotions, thus maintaining a close connection to the more ancient diagnosis of melancholia which was characterised by 'a feeling of misery which is in excess of what is justified by the circumstances,' as D. Hack Tuke later defined it in his 1892 *Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*.⁹⁴ These definitions and historical explorations of nineteenth-century mental-health diagnoses thus substantiate Janet Oppenheim's claim that excesses were the 'omnipresent object of Victorian dread,' a fixation that found its arena in sensation novels.⁹⁵

In her exploration of psychological disorders in sensation fiction, Sally Shuttleworth notes that:

while Victorian psychiatry sought to demarcate the boundaries of sanity and insanity, of pathological and acceptable behavior, thus conferring the authority of science on bourgeois norms of respectability, the sensationalists seemed to privilege pathology, to locate normality not in the realm of psychological control and socially disciplined behavior, but rather in the sphere of turbulent excess.⁹⁶

The turbulent excesses Shuttleworth mentions here are found everywhere in Collins's and Braddon's novels, from Isabel's insatiable love of novel-reading in *The Doctor's Wife* to Count Fosco's enormous size and appetite in *The Woman in White*, or to Lucy's almost enchanting beauty in *Lady Audley's Secret*. In *No Name*, Collins does not portray Magdalen's desire to restore her inheritance and right to her name as only legitimate reactions to the catastrophe that befell her family, but rather as typifying the excessive behaviours of individuals suffering from obsessive disorders. Roland Lansdell's love for

⁹³ Mangham, 'Hysterical Fictions', online resource.

⁹⁴ *A Dictionary of Psychological Medicine*, edited by D. Hack Tuke, as cited in Radden, *The Nature of Melancholy*, p. 12.

⁹⁵ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 163.

⁹⁶ 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, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1993), pp. 192–222 (p. 192).

Isabel in *The Doctor's Wife* similarly does not limit itself to the romantic aspirations of a young man but rather is compared to 'the jealous delusions of a monomaniac' by the novel's narrator (TDW: 192). Yet, despite these examples, the region in which the motif of excess reaches its culmination in sensation novels remains the home. It is around the issue of domesticity that both Braddon and Collins locate some of their characters' most meaningful and problematic excesses. Working on masculine attachments and attitudes to the home in two sensation novels, Richard Nemesvari writes that we often find that 'domesticity [...] generates manful sensations of conflicting passion and restraint, a fraught situation which sensation fiction, with its emphasis on excess of all sorts, is uniquely positioned to anatomise.'⁹⁷ We may also extend this analysis, I believe, to women's 'sensations of conflicting passion and restraint' at home which, as I have argued in the first chapters of this thesis, are densely explored in the genre. In their stories of excessive idleness inside the home and excessive industry outside of it, Braddon and Collins seem to warn against extremes and appeal for balance.

Throughout the pages of all four novels, both authors explore the correlation between the deep unhappiness of their characters and their domestic situations. Either struggling to come to terms with a life of seclusion at home devoid of any meaningful occupation, or continuously striving to reach a state of homely stability they are lacking, the characters of sensation novels rarely appear fulfilled in their domestic lives. This is particularly true of female characters who, representing a number of Victorian middle-to-upper-class women, were urged to find the right balance between too much and too little activity. Noting the change in medical theory in the nineteenth-century from a stress on 'the dangers of mental underemployment and physical inertia,' to arguments cautioning 'against intellectual overexertion and excessive physical strain,' Oppenheim shows that 'middle-class women faced grim alternatives.'⁹⁸ The historian furthermore explains that women 'were told that they could become ill through idleness, but they faced equally certain punishment, in the form of nervous collapse, if they denied the natural differences

⁹⁷ Richard Nemesvari, 'Manful Sensations: Affect, Domesticity and Class Status Anxiety in *East Lynne* and *Aurora Floyd*', in *The Victorian Novel and Masculinity*, ed. by Phillip Mallett (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), p. 89.

⁹⁸ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 200.

between the sexes and attempted to compete with men' in being active.⁹⁹ In this thesis, I have shown that both Braddon and Collins present examples of such extremes in their novels. In Collins's work, Laura Fairlie exemplifies the dangers of idleness and seclusion at home in the form of her nervous disposition and subsequent depressive state. Magdalen Vanstone, on the other hand, shows that Collins also cautioned his readers against any excess of physical and mental exertion outside the domestic sphere by afflicting his character with a pathological obsession for her great purpose. Both of these female characters are described throughout the novels as extremely unhappy yet unable or unwilling to change their situation. We find similar examples in Braddon's work as Isabel Gilbert is the quintessential representation of domestic boredom induced by idleness, the excess of which culminates in the young woman's radical desire to end her life, while Lucy Audley serves to show the consequences of women's active part in the governance of their own lives. Yet it is not only in female characters that Collins and Braddon find the right canvas to paint the perils of excesses.

Many male characters of sensation novels serve to show that excesses of any kind were not only damaging to the female population. Through the character of Frederic Fairlie, Collins almost comically shows how withdrawal into oneself may lead to dramatic consequences. Fairlie is an egregious case in point for Nemesvari's claim that sensation novels deal with 'excess of all sorts,' as the bachelor is not only living the aristocratic secluded life at home many people of this class did, but he also lives recluse in his own chambers, never meeting any society nor any of his relatives living under his roof. Similarly, his nervous prostration meets all the symptoms of hypochondria referenced in nineteenth-century medical publications to the highest degree. Frederic is insufferably concerned with his own state of health and talks of his pain in all circumstances. Collins's portrayal of this character is so exaggerated that we may see in it a meaningful warning against masculine idleness and reclusion at home, especially considering Frederic's unaffected death at Limmeridge House. Noel Vanstone resembles Frederick Fairlie in many ways, not least in his exaggerated passivity at home and reliance on others, which, when read together with Frederick Fairlie, highlights the author's condemnation of male

⁹⁹ Oppenheim, *Shattered Nerves*, p. 200.

domestic inertia. Braddon's Roland Lansdell fits a similar tableau as the author relentlessly comments on the uselessness of any man leading a life of idleness as the young squire does. Roland's portrayal is not a subtle reminder that men ought to be active, but rather an unequivocal censure of any unproductive man. Yet Braddon also seems to condemn overwork and excessive industriousness through male characters such as the country doctor George Gilbert whose extremely busy working days render him oblivious to the domestic crisis happening at home. George's death after catching typhoid fever from one of his patients may elevate him to martyrdom as he, unlike Roland Lansdell, dedicated his life to others, yet it may also be read as a warning against overexertion and disinterest in domestic affairs as the narrator remarks, when the country doctor refuses to rest, that 'George was resolute; these quiet people always are resolute, not to say obstinate' (*TDW*: 312). George's obstinacy is yet another extreme to which sensation readers are treated, as Braddon did not choose to marry Isabel Gilbert to an ordinary doctor but rather to one that, quite literally, worked himself to death.

The excesses to which sensation characters are subjected, or to which they subject themselves, represent, I argue, the root of their unhappiness and mental disorders. The novels' endings in turn serve to press the argument further by concluding the stories with the promise of a happy domestic future. We may note in this regard the fitting endings for each of the characters. Both Frederick Fairlie and Noel Vanstone, who indulge in their domestic reclusion and idleness throughout the novels, die in their homes without any semblance of reformation, thus typifying the condemnable excesses of their class. Isabel Gilbert, who has expressed her unhappiness in the standard role of middle-class housewife, is promised a potentially more fulfilling future as the rich heir to the Lansdell property and some little philanthropic work to perform. In the last pages of the novel, the narrator's insistence on Isabel's new happiness, conveyed through the repetition of the words 'happy' and 'calm' and their derivatives, indicates Braddon's desire to show that domestic contentment is to be found in a balanced life. Isabel is now 'useful, serene, almost happy' (*TDW*: 402), which sharply contrasts with her former 'idle, useless life' (*TDW*: 23). While Braddon is still condemning Isabel for being a 'foolish wife who neglected all a wife's duties' (*TDW*: 402), we may see in her new domestic freedom Braddon's absolution of her character's inability to conform to Victorian domestic expectations. Braddon follows a

similar path in *Lady Audley's Secret* with Robert's restoration to a 'fantastical dwelling place' (LAS: 378) with a wife and children, relatives who often visit them, and a successful legal career, all of which combine to form the perfect equilibrium desired for a happy home existence. Lucy Audley does not enjoy such a balanced life at the end of the novel however, as the oxymoron 'living grave' (LAS: 333) she uses to talk about her *maison de santé* shows. Her excessive plotting, to which the narrator alludes once 'the game had been played and lost' (LAS: 316) comes to an end in a place where she can no longer hope to scheme her way out of, and where she must instead patiently wait for her death. We find in Collins's novels resembling endings. Walter Hartright also gains a wife, son, and property, while maintaining a healthy working life. In the last chapter, Walter informs us that, before inheriting Limmeridge house, he was still living in rented apartments with Laura, Marian, and his son, living 'so simply and quietly that the income which I was now steadily earning sufficed for all our wants' (TWW: 625). This picture of domestic steadiness and bliss is only slightly tarnished by the reader's potential scepticism about Laura Fairlie's happiness in this domestic situation which, aside from her true affection for her new husband, will very much resemble her past existence of aristocratic idleness. We may express similar doubts concerning Magdalen's happiness at the end of *No Name* after finding a loving man to marry, since her past excesses, from which she is supposed to have reformed, may still hinder her suitability for the role of a dutiful housewife. Margaret Oliphant's decry of Collins's happy ending for such an erring heroine, which sees Magdalen 'restored to society, with a good husband and a happy home,' should therefore be considered in full light of Collins's earlier portrayal of his formerly vindictive character.¹⁰⁰ Happiness and domesticity, if ever they can be found together in the pages of sensation novels, will be found in lives rid of excesses and spent quietly, resolutely and actively at home.

¹⁰⁰ M. Oliphant, cited in *No Name*, p. x.

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