UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA,
IRVINE

Viable Crimes and Victorian Gentlemen: Rhetorics of (In)consistency and the 19th-century Novel

DISSERTATION

submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in English

by

Daniel Philip Matlock

Dissertation Committee:
Professor Andrea Henderson, Chair
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2014

DEDICATION

To

My family

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Viable Crimes and Victorian Gentlemen:
Rhetorics of (In)consistency and the 19th-century Novel

By

Daniel Philip Matlock

Doctor of Philosophy in English

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Professor Andrea Henderson, Chair

My dissertation examines the cases of major Victorian con artists in order to show how these men exploited mid-nineteenth-century understandings of gentlemanly identity in order to create believable aliases, under which they would then perpetrate their crimes. Ultimately, I argue, such "character-making" informed how Victorian novelists – and especially those working in the sensational genre (novels focusing on domestic crime) – not only generated their own characters but also understood formal issues more broadly. My various chapters explore, for example, how authors looked to the criminal to generate alternative modes of "realist" characterization, re-conceptualize the dramatic unfolding of plot, and contrive unexpected links between characters and narrative action. My overarching purpose is to bring new understanding to the ongoing critical conversation about narrative/form in the 19th-century novel by reading from a unique and challenging historical context.

In my chapter on Wilkie Collins, I argue that the inconsistent behavior of characters in the author's 1866 novel, *Armadale* – behavior historically read as a mimetic deficiency –

is in fact a focused attempt to integrate the performativity of con artists into middle-class understandings of identity. Collins's characterization, I suggest, registers the ideological bias behind readerly tendencies to equate consistency with realism. Chapter three examines Charles Dickens's attempt to legitimize social "character-making"— a prerogative which he aligns with the novelist's task of misleading and surprising readers for the sake of instructing them. *Our Mutual Friend*'s (1864) gentleman protagonist, John Harmon, creates a secret identity as a vigilante, under which alias he is able to manipulate others and thus "author" the events that drive the plot, ultimately generating an orderly and happy resolution. My final chapter argues that novelistic characterization in *The Way We Live Now* (1875) and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) uses late-century degeneracy theory's interest in criminal etiology to fashion narrative links between the transgressive deeds which rupture plot stability (Melmotte's forgery, Dorian's slumming) and seemingly unrelated, reputable characters. These links, I argue, cast social repute as form of criminal alias.

Chapter One
Dr. Smiles and the "Counterfeit" Gentlemen:
Self-making and Misapplication in mid-19th century Britain

On the morning of May 15, 1855, career criminal, Edward Agar, and his associate, William Pierce, walked away from the London Bridge Station of the South-Eastern Railway Company with over £14,000 in stolen gold. The bullion was the property of The City of London merchants, whose intention had been to ship the bars via train to Dover and then on to Calais by ferry. Security was comprehensive and the success of Agar's *en route* interception was made possible only through labor-intensive planning and meticulous execution. It was the type of job in which the thief specialized. Even before what would become know as the "Great Bullion Robbery," his criminal diligence and self-drive had provided him with the monetary resources to establish himself in the wealthy, middle-class suburb of Cambridge Villas, where he enjoyed a reputation as a consummate gentleman. Throughout the bullion heist, his neighbors remained completely unaware that his home was headquarters to an extensive criminal ring.

The "sensational" train robbery provoked widespread media interest. One first-hand account comes from the young secretary whose own diligence at the railway company had earned him a position overseeing the bullion's safe passage. He recollects, "A great deal had to be done to improve matters. The poor South-Eastern seems to have been regarded as a great milch cow. (And the robbery) originated in (a) desire for having a tug at the great milch cow" (*Autobiography* 198). The secretary's name was Samuel Smiles, the

same man whose soon-to-be bestselling book,[3] *Self-Help*, would become a definitive text of the period, buttressing a market economy of ambitious, upwardly mobile businessmen through its encouragement of energetic individualism and the power of self-made gentlemanliness. The fact that, even as Smiles composed this seminal work, a man like Edward Agar was unabashedly "helping himself" towards such illicit ends within the secretary's very purview might, of course, seem a highly unfortunate turn of fate.

However, while the above episode appears to undermine Smiles and his regimen of gentlemanly self-making, in this chapter, I want to suggest just the opposite – that the exploits of sophisticated criminals such as Agar in fact reinforced self-help's ideology of gentlemanliness.[4] More specifically, I will argue that a rhetoric of "misapplication," used by proponents of self-help in the criminal cases of Agar and like criminals, was a crucial means of countering a central complication in Smiles's work – namely, a conflict between the text's rhetoric of self-making and its figuration of the gentleman as heavily dependent on others for his validity. Rather than an adversative force, the criminal might be seen as a viable complement to the kind of gentleman that Smiles constructs. Thus, I use the biographical intersection between Agar and Smiles to begin investigating "points of continuity and contact"[5] between two figures occupying polar ends of the Victorian social spectrum.

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3 Routledge rejected publishing Self-Help in 1855. At a dinner twenty years later, Smiles was seated next to George Routledge, who said to him: "And when, Dr. Smiles, are we to have the honour of publishing one of your books?" Smiles replied that Mr. Routledge had already had the honor of rejecting Self-Help (A. Smiles, 88).

4 I use a rhetorical view of ideology. "Ideologies as defining positions within the cultural conversation (…) Sets of beliefs and practices serving particular sociopolitical interests in a specific historical context (…) appearing in the cultural conversation as strategic arguments and rhetorical figures" (Mailloux, *Rhetorical Power* 60)

5 My study is influenced by the work of James Eli Adams. In Dandies and Desert Saints, Adams explores "unexpected points of continuity and contact between normative and transgressive masculinities" (19). The kinds of "transgression" that Adams investigates, however, are quite different from those which hold my interest. Gender based, they center on a paradigm of "manly" versus "unmanly."

My argument will take several steps: 1) trace the "rhetorical paths of thought"[6] of "the gentleman" and "character" to explain how *Self-Help* comes to cast the former as an identity based upon persuasive performance and then to anchor that performance in a notion of "consistency" 2) suggest a difficulty inherent within Smiles's paradigm wherein the gentleman's dependence on others for validity conflicts with Smiles's rhetoric of self-making 3) briefly explicate that difficulty through the most direct literary representation of the self-made gentleman, Dinah Mulock Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman* 4) use Smiles's involvement as a victim in the Great Bullion Robbery of 1853 as a means to show how proponents of self-making, through a trope of "misapplication," used the exploits of certain skilled criminals to counter said difficulty.

Ambiguous Gentlemen and *Self-Help*

Self-Help represents an extremely viable and, as yet, largely un-mined resource for conceptualizing Victorian theories of gentlemanliness. Upon its publication in 1859 (four years after the Great Bullion Robbery), the first complete version of Samuel Smiles's treatise met with instant success. The book sold 20,000 copies in its initial year and surpassed a quarter of a million sales within the author's lifetime (Sinnema, iv). "Self help" was adopted as a catchword in social, political, and artistic discourse of the day. New "improvement" journals were built around the phrase; the self-made man appeared in the popular novels of Dickens, Ainsworth, and Eliot; even William Gladstone adopted the term, advising his son at Oxford, first and foremost, to "cultivate self-help" (Morley, 206). The

6 This technique is a key feature of rhetorical hermeneutics. To quote Steven Mailloux, it involves "describing rhetoric as *topic* and *tool* (…) That is (looking) not only at the traditions of rhetoric assumed, discussed, transformed, or ignored in these fields, but also at the tropes, arguments, narratives, and other pieces of (…) rhetoric used in accomplishing (the task)" (*Disciplinary Identities*, 2).

author, himself, achieved "celebrity" status, receiving invitations to lay foundation stones, sit for portraits, and give public speeches (A. Smiles, 94). Such pervasiveness registers the profound impact the book had on cultural thought and practices of the day.

Tracing the development of the work indicates that its widespread success was largely contingent upon an effective tempering of the original scheme. The early rhetoric of Smiles was, in fact, rather narrow in scope. The introduction to the first edition locates the genesis of *Self-Help* in a series of lectures the author gave to the Leeds Mutual Improvement Society in 1845 (6). At the time, Smiles was a committed radical, advocating for household suffrage with the Leeds Parliamentary Reform Association and allying with the Chartist movement. His concern was specifically about the rights of the individual working-class man. "The great object (of self-help)," he had then remarked, "(is) to open up to (working men) new sources of pleasure and happiness" (*Autobiography*, 132). But Smiles's politics grew increasingly moderate over the ensuing decade.[7] By the 1850s, he was comfortably employed in the railway sector,[8] and, though his belief in individual self-drive remained, he had dropped his "explicitly (…) social programme" (Fielden, 175). His writing adjusts accordingly.

The final version of *Self-Help* takes a comparatively restrained political stance; for though the work certainly encourages the "positive and aggressive individualism" which had formed the basis of Smiles's original lectures,[9] it does so by casting it as a socially cohesive rather than dissident force. The opening states, "National progress is the sum of

7 R.J. Morris perhaps overstates when he describes Smiles retreating into a "petit bourgeois utopia" (89). But the general shift in political stance is commonly agreed upon. See, e.g.,Sinnema and Mackay (bio preface).

8 First, as secretary with the Leeds and Thirsk Railway. Then, as an official with the South-Eastern Railway.

9 Historian Oliver MacDonagh has argued that this is the prevailing sentiment of the age (76), a premise that substantiates the prolific impact of Smiles's work.

individual industry (,) which is (…) the only sure guarantee for social security" (18). Using a logic which sees the state as an "aggregate of individual conditions" (18), Smiles is able to cast self betterment as a form of state betterment.[10] In so doing, he rejects prominent, Malthusian theories of political economy, the zero-sum view of which premised an indirect relationship between individual and social interests. He also preemptively contests "survival of the fittest" social theories that would stem from the works of Charles Darwin, whose *The Origin of Species* debuted in the same year.[11] Instead, Smiles forecasts an optimistic, alternative outcome to the rapidly burgeoning growth of the lower and middle classes. Self-making, he suggests, is *the* practice that will unify and stabilize modern society.

Contemporary assessments of *Self-Help* evince the broad appeal of Smiles's moderate position. The book received favorable reviews from both *Chambers' Journal* and *Reasoner* – two magazines that emphasized individualism and improvement – as well as the more middle class oriented *Fraser's Magazine for Town and Country*. Interestingly, the review in the latter journal suggests the importance of Smiles's stressing the notion of "social security" to his middle class audience. The reviewer writes, "(the book highlights) above all, strict conscientiousness in the performance (…) of whatever duty may be nearest us in the common life of everyday" (778-786). The focus here on conscientiousness and duty picks up on the civic-minded strain that runs throughout the text. Further, the

10 Smiles names J.S. Mill as a primary influence, and surely he is in close accord with him here. "Whoever thinks that individuality of desires and impulses should not be encouraged to unfold itself, must maintain that society has no need of strong natures—is not the better for containing many persons who have much character—and that a high general average of energy is not desirable" (On Liberty, 67)

11 Nevertheless, reactions against "Victorianism" which attempted to peg Smiles as a propagandist of cut-throat capitalism proved fairly successful. See, e.g., Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (453), Lytton Strachey's *Eminent Victorians*, and George Orwell, "Charles Dickens" in *A Collection of Essays* (74).

language of commonality registers the appeal of an individualism specifically geared towards stabilizing the newly-gained influence of a generally progressive middle class.

The book's final chapter makes its shrewdest appeal towards the idea of social-stability-via-self-help (especially as regards middle class readers), and it is to this chapter that I want to draw focus. Here, Smiles names the gentleman as the ultimate aim in his regimen of self-improvement. Asa Briggs has called the gentleman "the necessary link in any analysis of mid-Victorian ways of thinking and behaving" (411), and it is certainly difficult to exaggerate the figure's importance. As the core of Victorian social and moral authority, the gentleman was a symbol unanimously venerated and sought after. Any survey of Victorian writers and social critics must inevitably encounter repeated instances of homage to the idea of gentlemanliness – John Ruskin: "the workman ought often to be thinking, and the thinker often to be working, and both should be gentlemen, in the best sense" (182); John Stuart Mill: "In its more elevated signification ["gentleman"] has in every age signified the conduct [...] which, according to the ideas of that age, [...] were expected to belong to persons born and educated in a high social position" (*A System of Logic*, 449); Lord Alfred Tennyson: "the grand old name of gentleman" (120); Gerald Manley Hopkins: "if [the English] left the world the notion of the gentleman, they would have done a great service to mankind" (176); John Henry Cardinal Newman: "[the gentleman's] benefits may be considered as parallel to what are called comforts or conveniences in arrangements of a personal nature" (159). In the more populist genre of the novel, too, the gentleman is a recurring social ideal.[12] But the diversity of the above

12 E.g. Dickens's Great Expectations, Thackeray's Pendennis, Dinah Craik's John Halifax, George Meredith's Evan Harrington, and Trollope's Doctor Thorne.

assortment speaks to an even more important aspect of the figure – its lack of definitiveness. While the gentleman was collectively esteemed, few Victorians were in agreement as to what exactly it meant to be a gentleman. While notions from a long defunct feudal system still lingered, they were unanimously considered insufficient as a basis of definition. A teleology of gentlemanliness thus lent Smiles's method social clout, while simultaneously allowing a degree of leeway for the type of identity that he sought to construct.

Victorian confusion over the idea of "the gentleman" stemmed from a history of ambiguity over the term. "Gentile man," derived from the French "*gentil hom*," which itself is etymologically rooted in the Latin *genere* (well-begotten man), came into use as a designation of rank in England during the 15th century under the reign of Henry V, the ancestral coat-of-arms acting as the visible "sign" of such rank (Castronovo 9). But the pure etymology of the word is a bit misleading, for a long standing English vernacular tradition going back as far as Chaucer uses "gentil" more loosely, as a synonym for "mild" and "tender" (953). Thus, for example, the Elizabethan work, "The Institution of a Gentleman," can feasibly claim that in the gentleman "vertuous and gentle deeds did first appear" (qtd. in Palmer, 75). From early on, then, the word had a clear double-valence – as a designation of rank and of personal virtues.

Up into the early Eighteenth Century, this double-valence was relatively tenable. Ancestry anchored the term – Johnson's 1755 dictionary, for instance, defines it as: "A man of ancestry. All other derivations seem to be whimsical"[13] – while personal virtues were

13 Similarly, the 1701 edition of Bailey's Dictionary defines the gentleman as "one who receives his nobility from his ancestors"

often seen as the natural result of the well-born man's social advantages. Eighteenth century thinking eventually began to place more emphasis on personal virtues, primarily as a reaction against Restoration manners (Carter 57). The nascent genre of the English novel played a primary role in this reemphasis, as "rise of the novel" debates note.[14] Yet a system of exclusion based upon gentry-class interests nevertheless secured the category of gentleman largely to birth, putting it "effectively out of reach (of the rising middle-class population of merchants, industrialists, and urbanites) by the abiding separation of work and income" (Gilmour 7). Only those who received their income without personal labor (i.e. landowners), said a prevailing gentry-class, could rightly be called gentlemen – albeit there was increasing social pressure upon those gentleman to adhere to a prescribed set of virtues.[15]

The period circa 1830 to 1860 saw a significant weakening of this purview. Industrialization, which increased the influence of an urban middle class and de-traditionalized[16] landed interests; and, relatedly, a growing discontent with the Anglican polity among numerous dissenting groups (Clark 11) destabilized the traditional state structure, especially as regards the situation of urban, middle-class men. As Andrew Miles notes in his study, *Social Mobility in Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century England*, male workers' chances of mobility rose from 1 in 3 to 1 in 2 from the beginning of the century to

14 See e.g. Ian Watt's The Rise of the Novel, Michael McKeon's The Origins of the English Novel, 1600-1740, and Homer Brown's Institutions of the English Novel: From Defoe to Scott.

15 Samuel Richardson's comment that the letters of Lord Chesterfield "teach the morals of a whore, and the manners of a dancing master" (qtd. in Roberts, 18) exemplifies the period's emphasis on inner virtue over outward form.

16 I use this term to avoid the oversimplified idea of a strict dichotomy between gentry and mercantile interests. Members of the gentry-class, in fact, were influential participants in industrial development (see e.g. *Land and Industry*, ed. Ward and Wilson). By "de-traditionalize" I mean that landed interests were compelled to reshape their practices.

the end (28). The influence of the burgeoning urban class is evinced in the high number of reforms during the time – most notably the Representation of the People Act of 1832, the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts, the Municipal Reform Act, and, later, the Representation of the People Act of 1867.[17] The Victorian "parvenu" generation,[18] feeling "more modern than [ever] before," (House 93), were contesting the traditions of the old landed families in a far-reaching reconfiguration of social values.

The "gentleman," as the symbolic social ideal now potentially open to an increasingly mobile urban middle-class, unsurprisingly became a central point for such reconfiguration – a means of validating that class' rise. The claims of leisure, which had fixed gentlemanly identity, and, for the most part, had limited it to category based upon birth, were insufficient for a dynamic society grounded in what Carlyle lauded as the "blessedness" of work (271). But, for most of the century, there was no collectively agreed upon alternative to the leisure concept.[19] Karen Volland Waters's study of conduct books and their tendency to "complicate rather than clarify the definition of what a gentleman was supposed to be" (28) shows that even the most straightforward of approaches to the term seemed unable to come to a consensus. Arlene Young argues that widespread

17 The Representation of the People Acts (Reform Acts) dealt with franchise extension. The Test and Corporation Acts were meant to compel allegiance to the Church of England and imposed various civil disabilities on Roman Catholics and Nonconformists. The Municipal Reform Act was a reformation of local government in England and Wales that established a uniform system of municipal boroughs.

18 Smiles expresses his admiration for the parvenu spirit in Life and Labour: "There is no doubt about the parvenus. They are the men who do the great work of the world. They quarry out its grandest thoughts, write the most enduring works, do the greatest deeds, paint the finest pictures and carve the noblest statues. For the parvenus are of the people, belong to them, and spring from them. Indeed, they are the people themselves. In recognising the great parvenu spirit of this age we merely recognise what, in other words, is designated as the dignity of labour, the rights of industry, the power of intellect. For real honour is due to the man who honestly carves out for himself by his own native energy a name and a fortune, diligently exercising the powers and faculties which belong to him as a man" (238-239).

19 Most would agree that the issue eventually gets resolved in the idea of the public school gentleman. See, e.g., Brander (19-20) and Gilmour (8).

disagreement over the gentleman turned it into "a value-laden term that (was) paradoxically empty of meaning. Gentlemanly types proliferate(d); there (was) the gentleman of birth, of wealth, of breeding, of religion, or of education, to mention just a few possibilities" (6). However, taking a more rhetorical angle, I would suggest that the gentleman be considered not as empty, but as an open site for persuasive struggle. The increased malleability of the term, resultant from the dynamic social environment of the period, made the identity of the Victorian gentleman an interpretive process, over which various, competing ideologies struggled for influence.[20]

Gentlemen Performing Character

Smiles's *Self-Help* ideology benefited greatly from the above struggle; largely because Smiles was able, with relative success, to redefine the universally venerated figure of the gentleman into a feasible *telos* for his popular self-making program. The numerous sections of *Self-Help* culminate in a chapter subtitled, "The True Gentleman," wherein Smiles, quoting from the *Times*, sees his regimen leading to "not an aristocracy of blood [but] of Character" (314). The concluding term was ideal for a moderate program which sought to cast individualism as a socially stabilizing force; for the era's two prominent forms of character (one prescriptive, the other descriptive) straddled a crucial divide between individualist and conformist socio-political thought. Bridging this divide through a notion of character that synthesizes both forms, Smiles creates a gentleman who acts as both civic lynchpin and as model progressive-individualist. As the citation indicates, Smiles seeks not the obliteration of the aristocratic ideal but a cooption and re-figuration of it.

20 Here I take a somewhat pragmatic view and imply that the "truth" of "what the gentleman means" be seen as an instrumental one – its "power to 'work'" (James 30).

The version of character closest to its etymological roots as an engraved mark was a descriptive one – that which signified a detailed account of a person's social attributes. This, for instance, is what Thackeray means in *Vanity Fair* when he writes that Rebecca Sharp "found that it was not at all necessary to cultivate (Lady Crawley's) good will (as she was so) void of character as not to be of the least consequence in her own house" (101). Similarly, a Victorian employee would often carry this type of character in his pocket in the form of a written testimony of his diligence as a worker. Character in this sense was relatively static and had more to do with the individual as a unit in the social world than the individual per se – a way of cementing a person's place in a larger public.

But the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century saw character take an increasingly inward turn, to connote a sense of personal, moral development – what Lauren Goodlad describes as a "prescriptive form (of thinking about character which focused on) self-development (and) implied the limitless improvability of all human beings" (24-5). The source(s) of this shift is a point of critical disagreement, but its numerous manifestations and prevalent influence on the period is clear.[21]

The Evangelical Revival was one of the most pervasive strains of thinking about character in this sense. The movement arose primarily within the Anglican Church as a reaction against the depersonalized, "catholicity of ritual" (Curl 8). Instead, it emphasized the importance of individual rigor. As Kathryn Tidrick notes, evangelical Christianity's idea of a transfigured life linked the character of the "changed" person with the moral message

21 Gertrude Himmelfarb cites the Evangelical revival as the source; Walter E. Houghton names a reactionary movement against Regency manners coupled with a fear of free love and of "the literature of prostitution" (357-61). Lauren Goodlad traces the prescriptive view of character through three avenues – civic, Romantic, and Evangelical. For specific, influential authors, she notes T.H. Green, Thomas Chalmers, Mill, and Charles Trevelyan. For more on the pervasiveness of this kind of character thinking, see also Collini, Ch. 3.

of Christ to a degree unprecedented in Judeo-Christian thought (3). It's consequent emphasis on personal accountability before God meant intense self-scrutiny and a sense that one's moral well-being depended not in adhering to a "logical set of beliefs but rather (in) personal experiences" (Bradley, 22). Hannah More put such personalization into the succinct phrase, "religion (…) is a disposition" (*An Estimate*, 146). Evangelism, in other words, generated a sense of character (specifically, "Christian character") that was seen as improvable via a personal struggle to meet the highest standards of Christian behavior. The inward turn of character, in this regard, was validated by the aspiration towards moral goodness.

In more secular forms of cultural conversation, the idea of prescriptive character manifests in a reaction against Utilitarian principles. That emerging political science's attempt to rationalize social phenomenon entailed the depersonalization of character into an objectively measurable unit. Dickens's satire of the Gradgrind School in *Hard Times* with its "Facts (…) nothing but Facts" is a popular version of the reactionary sentiment against Utility (9). Here, the "figures and averages"[22] of political economy are contrasted unfavorably with the imagination and idiosyncrasy of Sissy Jupe. Dickens rejection of Utility favors instead what one could easily interpret as "character" in its inward, moral sense – the "unfathomable mystery" of the individual soul (71).

Perhaps the clearest rejoinder comes from John Stuart Mill, himself once a student of the Utilitarian school. In On Liberty, Mill writes, "A person whose desires and impulses are his own — are the expression of his own nature, as it has been developed and modified

22 In a letter to Charles Knight, Dickens writes, "My satire is against those who see figures and averages, and nothing else – the representatives of the wickedest and most enormous vice of this time" (30 January 1855, *Letters*, 7, p.492).

by his own culture — is said to have a character" (67). Here, we have an explicit rejection of a particularly Owenite spin on Benthamitism. In his third *New View* essay, Robert Owen claims that "the character of man is, without a single exception always formed for him (and) Man, therefore never did nor is it possible he ever can, form his own character"(3). Owen promotes a descriptive view, wherein character is but a product of materialist forces. Mill's dismissal instead opts for one that is uniquely personal; something connected to one's "own"-ness both in origination and in development. Character, for Mill, is a mark of autonomy. It is the locus of "self-making."

But the above forms of thinking about character differ from Smiles's approach on a crucial point – their tendency to cast character as a thing that distinguishes (and, to some degree, protects) the individual from the social.[23] While Evangelicalism was an active political force, it nevertheless was based upon a degree of separation from society. "To be in the world, but not of it" was its fundamental creed; by adhering to it, followers were using their Christian character as a shelter from the evils of the world. Hannah Moore's didactic novel *Coelebs in Search of a Wife*, for instance, repeatedly figures character building as a domestic activity in opposition to "the worldly man" (197). A political theology which draws upon, for instance, Isaiah 2:22 ("Cease ye from man, whose breath is in his nostrils, for wherein is he to be accounted of?") reinforces this stance (364).

A comparable retreat from the social world occurs in *Hard Times*. The personal penitence and character-reformation of Mr. Gradgrind is contingent upon his retirement from a "muddled" social sphere, for which little or no cure is offered. In the "social-

23 This is despite the fact of Mill's antagonism toward the Evangelicals. See, e.g. On Liberty, Chapter 4, where Mill accuses "the Puritans" on the very charge of threatening individualism.

problem novel" more generally, this tactic of recoiling from large social issues into personal solutions is a recurring dilemma, over which numerous critics have contended.[24]

Mill's view of character shows a similar apprehension towards the oppressive power of the social group as does his political theory more generally. In *A System of Logic*, he writes "If they could place us under the influence of certain circumstances, we, in like manner, can place ourselves under the influence of other circumstances. We are exactly as capable of making our own character, if we will, as others are of making it for us" (550). For Mill, self-making requires a retreat from circumstances where outside influence is present. So personal is character that it cannot be built, it seems, unless one places oneself in a context of one's own choosing. John Grey has argued that Mill's view of the individual was influenced by Coleridge,[25] whose thoughts Mill "interpreted as containing a powerful critique of (…) utilitarianism, in which the pleasures of self-cultivation and of the inner life were not accorded their proper place" (13). Mill's notion of "character" seems the locus of this view of the self; its emphasis on retreat directly connects to prevalent Romantic notions of an inwardly-looking, subjective self. This strand of thinking about character persisted in the Victorian sense of self that was largely bound up in the notion of a private life, distinct from the public sphere.

In contrast, Smiles's work strongly emphasizes the utility of character in the public sphere – unsurprising given that he means it to build upon the notion a modern type of civically-oriented gentleman. He writes, "Every man is bound to aim at the possession of

24 See, especially, John Lucas, "Mrs. Gaskell and Brotherhood" and Rosemarie Bodenheimer, "*North and South*: A Permanent State of Change"

25 In his essay, "On Coleridge," Mill acknowledges "the impress (that Coleridge had) so deeply in the opinions and mental tendencies of those along us who attempt to enlighten their practice by philosophical meditation."

good character (317). It carries with it an influence that always tells; for it is the result of proved [...] qualities which [...] command the general confidence and respect of mankind" (314). In Smiles's view, character acts primarily as a persuasive tool, influencing others and validating those who have it based upon the respect which that influence garners. Smiles calls this influence character's "money value" (317). In other words, Smilesian character is rhetorical capital by which individuals declare and reinforce their place in the social sphere. Although, like Mill's view of character, Smiles's is ostensibly an openly prescriptive one – character as something wholly acquirable, a thing for which "every man [can] aim" – nevertheless, its ultimate value comes from its usefulness in relation to others. In this regard, Smilesian character attempts to synthesize inward self-fashioning (prescriptive) with outwardly recognizable display (descriptive).

Grounded in such a notion of character, the Smilesian gentleman's identity gets its validation from a settled negotiation between self-fashioning performer and potentially-affirming receiver. Taking my cue from rhetorical hermeneutics, I would suggest that the Smilesian gentleman be seen as an emergent form of thinking about identity as "interpreted being" (Mailloux, *Disciplinary Identities*, 85) – identity as a combination of how one interprets oneself, how others interpret you, and how one interprets oneself based on how others have interpreted you. The Smilesian model looks something like this: identifying oneself as a gentleman, one performs with character so as to be interpreted by others as a gentleman, which interpretations, if successfully influenced, validate one's initial identification.

The validation of this performed identity hinges upon Smiles's turning of character's associations with valuable inner/moral qualities into presentational behavior. In other words, the Smilesian gentleman practices a form of what Regenia Gagnier has called a "pragmatics of self-presentation," picking up on the "values, expectations, and constraints" associated with character in order to represent himself adequately in the "concrete circumstances of everyday life" (3-4). In 1850s Britain, the moral qualities of character were, of course, largely bound up in Christian virtues, and Smiles references that line of thought, initially naming "truthfulness, integrity, and goodness" as the "essence of manly character" (316). However, he quickly moves on to discuss character as an outward manifestation. He writes, "So little things will illustrate a person's character. Indeed character consists in little acts, well and honorably performed" (321). The sentence demonstrates the high level of significance that Smiles places on the *enacting* of character. According to Smiles's syntax, the actions that "illustrate" character promptly become character's very make-up – the things of which it consists. Of equal (if not more) importance as character's moral qualities per se is action that demonstrates those qualities. Thus, Smiles later specifies his use of integrity as "integrity *in word and deed*" (317, my emphasis). In this manner, *Self-Help*'s gentleman exemplifies what Pocock sees as a nineteenth-century shift in virtue from an absolute quality to a set of increasingly complex social practices (49).

The close connection made in *Self-Help* between character-building and hardship helps to clarify Smiles's move from inward qualities to action. Of the book's numerous case studies which serve as examples of character, all share a similar pattern: a) adversity b)

perseverance against seemingly overwhelming odds c) success. This repeated narrative arc picks up on a widespread religious belief that saw moral character as built through the endurance of a series of God-given difficulties. For example, William Wilberforce (organizing member of the "Clapham sect" and perhaps the most politically influential evangelical writer of the early 1800s) repeatedly cites the Biblical account of Jesus enduring on the cross in order to argue that true Christian morality comes from "ever struggling and combating with the powers of darkness, and with the temptations of the world around him, and the still more dangerous hostilities of internal depravity" (462). Similarly, in his 127th sermon, John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, argues that"(Man) suffers many things (,) but it is to this end, that he may be 'made perfect through' those 'sufferings.'" ("Sermon 127"). Perseverance in the face of intense suffering, then, was an accepted Victorian standard for developing internal, moral character. At the same time, the intractability that was associated with perseverance was thought to allow for a certain degree of moral legibility. As the Nonconformist-Independent Rev. T.T. Lynch wrote in his 1853 *Lectures in aid of self-improvement*, "(others might) judge, with something like certainty, how (the persevering Christian) will act" (150). This particular means of cultivating inward morality, then, was also thought to have an interpretable outward manifestation – consistent conduct.

Smiles's use of integrity as the primary moral quality of the "man of character" is a direct reference to the idea of perseverance – he later attributes the ability to "bear up under difficulty and misfortune" to integrity (316); he also mentions Wilberforce several times in *Self-Help*, specifically noting his "steadfastness of purpose" (217); and in his

Autobiography he claims to have been influenced by memorized passages from another "perseverance text," George L. Craik's *Pursuit of Knowledge Under Difficulties* (222). The term, therefore, taps into a prevalent strain of Christian "character rhetoric," and thereby allows a relatively smooth transition from inward qualities to a legible, outward demonstration.[26] The moral integrity of the Smilesian gentleman, so Smiles claims, shows itself in consistent conduct. Taking into account integrity's etymological roots in *integritas*, denoting "something undivided," and Smiles's construction of character as performance, we might specify the "consistent conduct" of the Smilesian gentleman to mean a repetition of like self-presentations, each promising the continuation of the same behavior.

Smiles clarifies the nature of these like self-presentations when he names "little courtesies ("a graceful behavior towards superiors, inferiors, and equals") [as that] which form the small change in life [and] acquire their importance through repetition and accumulation" (322). Again referring to his money metaphor, Smiles suggest that character as a "money value" is based not simply upon demonstrated and accepted courtesy, but, more specifically, upon the consistent demonstration and acceptance of repeated courtesies. Generating a trust that one's "gentleman performance" is, whether temporally or spatially, always the same, character lends legibility to that performance. This legibility then works to convince others to accept the performed gentleman as a valid identity.

By setting up such a paradigm, Smiles confronts an undercurrent of Victorian thought that desired to see gentlemanliness as patently self-evident. Throughout the period, something like a myth of gentlemanliness continuously avowed that the figure was

26 Of course, Smiles's version is much more tenuous, for Christian character was grounded in the idea that the seeds of one's character were God-given.

naturally recognizable, despite persistent irresolution on how he was to be defined. In other words, the true gentleman, it was often thought, should be known immediately and with certainty almost by inexplicable means. Trollope expresses this phenomenon in *Barchester Towers* when he writes that Dr. Stanhope simply "knew an English gentleman when he saw him" (80) – a sentiment with which the author himself seems to have agreed (*Autobiography*, 40). The works of many other writers, even those more congenial to self-help, evince this same desire. Dickens's Oliver Twist, whose perfect command of the English language stems from no discernable source; or Mrs. Craik's John Halifax, whose aura signals him as a gentleman even when a destitute orphan (31) – both perpetuate the myth of gentlemanly recognition. This cultural undercurrent suggests the conflicted persistence of a certain level of veneration for the gentleman as a specifically aristocratic ideal, despite the progressive tenor of the age. At least some of the gentleman's social clout stemmed from a sense of exclusivity, wherein that category was only the purview of a naturally chosen few. Given this line of thinking, the Smilesian construction of gentlemanly identity based in consistency could seem a rather tenuous one, overly inclusive and lacking definitiveness.

Smiles responds with several attempts to accustom his readers to the more complex hermeneutics of "gentleman-reading" which his program necessitates. His structuring of *Self-Help* as, primarily, a succession of anecdotes serves such a purpose. Instead of prescribing a set of rules for becoming a gentleman, Smiles presents a series of case studies which he "leaves (…) in the hands of the reader; in the hopes that the lessons of (…) self-culture, which it contains, will be found useful and instructive" (8). The conduct book

format was incredibly popular at the time, and Smiles was taking a financial risk in shirking that format. Well-known publisher John Murray even suggested that he pare down the anecdotes, offering to publish *Self-Help* in abbrieviated form on a half-profits system. Smiles promptly rejected the offer, not wanting his anecdotes cut (Smiles, Aileen 87-8). The repetitive case study format is in fact crucial to Smiles, for, by using it, he habituates his readers into recognizing gentlemanliness as consistent action. The characters which serve as examples of self-made gentlemen act accordingly, facing hardships and vicissitudes of fortune with unchanging strength of purpose. The narrative deliniation of these anecdotes – which recounts the gaining of status and repute, and then ends with such achievements narratively "fixed" – inhibits the idea of any possible discrepency between consistency and gentlemanliness. Further, the repetition of case after case effectively illustrating just such a correlation conditions the reader to accept aggregation as fact.

Smiles's use of ethical appeal similarly buttresses the hermeneutical implications of his proposed scheme. With its foundation in the idea of persuasive character, the identity of the Smilesian gentleman evokes the classical notion of *ethos*. Smiles's effective use of this form of rhetorical appeal, therefore, adds credibility to his argument not only in making him a more convincing *rhetor*, but also in habituating his audience to credit an identity based on received presentation.

That Smiles was consciously utilizing the concept of *ethos* is a reasonable assumption. Victorian education was steeped in classics[27] and Martin J. Svaglic has made a case for the prevalence of (particularly Aristotelian) rhetoric in the curriculum of most

27 The teaching of classics in English schools came under attack in the early part of the century, but though it was modified to appease radical and utilitarian interests, remained the dominant curriculum (Jenkyns, 60-1).

educated Victorians (271). Furthermore, though Smiles's parents were by no means well-off, they saw to it that he received a solid education, first at Hardie's School and then at the Classical School near his birthplace in Haddington. Smiles, himself, recalls in his *Autobiography* being trained in classics by a Rector Graham (11), and he names both Cicero and Aristotle as influences in his works.[28]

The introduction to the first edition of *Self-Help* shows Smiles drawing upon concepts of *ethos* outlined in classical rhetoric texts. Aristotle, for instance, proposes the following system for ethical appeal. From *The Art of Rhetoric*: In persuasion "we must have regard (…) to establishing the speaker himself as of a certain type and bringing the giver of judgment into a certain condition (...) There are three causes of the speakers' themselves being persuasive (…) they are common sense, virtue, and good will" (140-1). These categories – common sense, virtue, and goodwill – inform Smiles's address to his readers. In an opening narrative that describes his time in Leeds, Smiles locates the very origins of his book in good will. He recalls being "requested" to deliver a speech for the benefit of a mutual improvement society and having accepted in the "spirit (that) a few words of encouragement, honestly and sincerely uttered, might not be without some good effect" (6-7). The account then tells of how Smiles was inspired to collect, develop, and publish his lectures because a former member of that society visited him several years later "please to remember with gratitude (Smiles's lecture) and even to attribute (to it) some measure of success in his life" (7). Through this anecdote, Smiles performs both himself as a benevolent man, and his audience as appreciative of that benevolence. Thus, he not only

28 For Aristotle, see, e.g. *Character* (148). For Cicero see, e.g., *Thrift* (Ch.2) and *Character* (21).

gives evidence of his own good will, but also shows its confirmation by grateful others. His reading audience, presumably seeking the same guidance as members of the mutual improvement society, is thereby made receptive and willing to respond in kind.

The quote also hints towards an establishment of virtue, doubly emphasizing Smiles's sincerity in the repetitive "honestly and sincerely." This particular "source of trust" Smiles reinforces with a tone of modesty. Here, he seems to draw upon Cicero, who aligns virtue with gentleness, restraint, and an unassuming air (171). Repeatedly, Smiles expresses the humble nature of his own work, asking the reader to peruse it "such as the book is" and stipulating that there is "nothing in the slightest degree new (in his) counsel, which is as old as the Proverbs of Solomon, and possibly as familiar" (7). Such statements cast Smiles as earnest and forthright, simply narrating what experience has taught him not *because* it will be useful, but rather "*in the hopes* that (it) will be found" so (8, my emphasis). His willingness to confess to the limitations of his own work, serve to present him as candid to a charmingly self-deprecating degree. Instead of seeming presumptuous with his advice, Smiles appears to provide information unassumingly for the reader to take at his/her own volition. Of course, given the common Victorian distrust of adorned language (Ong, 8), the humble, "such as the book is," serves in fact as a kind of praise, signaling the work as positively unembellished. Jason Camlot explains this type of move as "Pragmatic Romanticism," wherein the "romantic turn to expression as (non-utilitarian) representation" becomes oddly synthesized with the era's prevailing strain of rhetorical study – a purposive, end-oriented rhetoric[29] – via a shared emphasis on simplicity of

29 See, e.g., Joseph Priestly's *The Rudiments of English Grammar* (1761), George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), and Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828).

language (27-46). Here, seemingly "natural" language becomes the most effective means of achieving an artificial objective. In other words, Smiles persuades through the very act of appearing to eschew persuasion. The expression's appeal would have been particularly effective for *Self-Help*'s intended audience because it specifically exploited a line of thought – such as that expressed in Carlyle's contrast between "Ministries of Windbag" (309) and "Captains of Industry" (367) – which saw inflated language as the enemy of diligent work.

Furthermore, Smiles's modest self-presentation contrasts with the sense of expertise implicitly conveyed throughout the book. Even the comparison to Solomon, itself, while ostensibly revealing a lack of originality, in fact aligns Smiles's imminent discussions with a generally-venerated source. Further, the mere scope of his anecdotes – more than 700 names, ranging temporally (from ancient Greece to modern London), occupationally (from artisans to politicians), and spatially (from England, to Poland, to India) – demonstrates a massive amount of knowledge. Each of these anecdotes is then detailed with precision, indicating the diligence with which Smiles conducted his research. Smiles's commitment to specificity was noted by contemporary journals, at least one of which found his biographies so "extensive" as to claim that "no reader can fail to be struck with the variety and richness of his materials" (562). The epigrams that begin each chapter and come from a variety of well-respected sources[30] add to the sense of Smiles's thoroughness. Such implied intellectual command proves Smiles's modesty unwarranted, much to the credit of his *ethos*.

30 Goethe, Mill, Bacon, Disraeli, Shakespeare, and St. Luke, to name just a few.

Smiles's explanation for what he claims to be one of his book's limitations conveys the third of Aristotle's "sources," sense. Smiles writes that, in contrast to the biography outlined in his previous 1857 work, *The Life of George Stevenson*, those in *Self-Help* will be "busts rather than full-length portraits, and, in many of the cases, only some striking feature has been noted" (8). In *Self-Help*, biographies are a means to an end – a way to illustrate a theory of self-making. By acknowledging that such biographies will therefore only show a small fraction of each man, Smiles shows recognition and respect for the complexities of the figures whom he treats. The technique encourages a confidence in Smiles as a wise, judicious *rhetor*.

Beyond the three traits outlined above (good will, virtue, and sense) Aristotle also notes that a *rhetor* can appeal to an audience via identification – assuming some of their characteristics and then making them feel that they are included in those who might be considered good, intelligent, and honest (150-1, 156). Smiles performs the former task early on. Depicting himself in the process of composing Self-Help, he writes how he "was accustomed to add to the memoranda from which he had addressed (the mutual improvement society); and to note down occasionally in his leisure evening moments, after the hours of business, the results of such reading, observation, and experience of life, as he conceived to bear upon it" (8). The detail of this account stresses the similarities between Smiles's own situation and that of his would-be self-making audience. Smiles illustrates that he has already been enacting the diligence and hard work that he will require of his readers who wish to help themselves. Not only is his leisure time occupied with writing, but it is also well-earned, coming as it does after a day of laboring. Identification with the

audience continues throughout the book in Smiles's use of the pronoun "we," by which he establishes a connection to his audience based upon mutual beliefs (such as "It is well to have a high standard of life, even though we may not be able altogether to realize it" [317] or "What we are accustomed to decry as great social evils, will, for the most part, be found to be but the outgrowth of man's own perverted life" [18]). These appeals, firstly, express what the writer sees as a good, honest, intelligent standpoint; and, secondly, co-opt the reader into necessary accord with that point of view. Cajoled into this perspective, the audience is positioned to accept more readily Smiles's *ethos* and his arguments.

Smiles was also aware of the persuasive effect of one's public identity in a more general sense. He describes, for instance, how Benjamin Franklin attributed his persuasiveness to his "known integrity," which overrode the fact that he was a "bad speaker (…) subject to much hesitation in (his) choice of words (and) hardly correct in language" (316). This broad notion of *ethos* comes from Cicero, whose specifically performative/"oratorical" method extends Aristotle's conceptualization to include, not only the rhetor's speech but also his "way of life" (171). Unsurprisingly, Smiles was careful to conduct himself in accord with his counsel, remaining industrious despite his monetary success. Though he did take time to travel after *Self-Help*, he abstained from "vacationing," choosing instead to turn his journeys into extensive research sessions that would eventually factor into his more than dozen or so subsequent publications. His *Autobiography* (which didn't come out until after his death (1905), but which he had been contemplating since, at latest, 1879) disseminated an account of this "way of life" to the reading public, further cementing the strength of his *ethos*. This, plus the ethical appeals

used within his text, worked to convince audiences (via Smiles's own personal example) that character might be adequately interpreted through the sort of complex hermeneutics which Smiles's system required, thus encouraging receptiveness to his idea of the gentleman as a performed identity.

Recognizing that Smiles was making a concerted effort to engage with what I have called a "myth of gentlemanliness,"[31] clarifies his apparently odd choice of repeated courtesy as the gentleman's mode of consistent performance. Odd, I say, because courtesy seems to tap into traditional notions of the gentleman bound up in an aristocratic social structure (its root being court, as in "court"ly life). But this very connection, in fact, helps "courtesy" naturalize a gentlemanly identity based on repeated performance. The long tradition of courtesy as a form of benevolence shown by superiors to those of a lower rank connects behavior to notions of innate identity. By adopting it within a system that does not recognize rank, Smiles infuses the *actions* of his gentleman with naturalness, while preserving his openly inclusive model. He then is able to assure his readers with a certain level of plausibility that "counterfeits of character" are easy to distinguish from "the genuine article" (317). His use of courtesy can thus be seen as a qualified attempt to reconcile his scheme with the prevalent desire to see gentlemanliness as patent and intrinsic.

At the same time, the notion of repeated courtesies points to what I noted in my thesis as the central problem that Smiles's conceptualization of the gentleman's identity bears upon his self-making scheme; for, it puts heavy emphasis on the second part of

31 To repeat: that backward-looking notion which saw gentlemanliness as the unmistakably legible, natural quality of a select few.

rhetorical hermeneutics' identity paradigm – identity as how others interpret you. The implications of Smiles's notion of courtesy are quite different from that of a rank-system. Rather than bestowals from one whose identity is already, unquestionably a gentleman, courtesies become an appeal to others to validate one's gentlemanliness. To frame it in Smiles's money metaphor terms, the "courtesies" of the gentleman might be thought of as investments, whereby one gives over one's self in the expectation of a greater return (a return that is, essentially, a self "coined" as a gentleman). Such a paradigm of courtesy makes the gentleman a rather passive identity, determined almost entirely by forces outside the self. In this regard, Smiles's rhetoric of gentlemanliness seems a potential hamper to his notion self-help and its idealization of self-making through one's "own free and independent individual action" (18).

The Smilesian Gentleman Fictionalized

The problematic nature of the Smilesian self-made gentleman is evinced in the period's most popular fictional depiction of that figure, Dinah Mulock Craik's *John Halifax, Gentleman*. I want now briefly to investigate this novel towards two ends: one, to explicate more fully self-making's notion of "individual action" and its contrariety to the Smilesian gentleman; two, to foreshadow subsequent chapters of my dissertation by suggesting how the complicated identity of the gentleman affects narrative form.

After the 1854 publication of *John Halifax, Gentleman*, Dinah Mulock Craik came to be known simply as the "author of *John Halifax*" (*The British Quarterly Review*), a soubriquet which endured even beyond her own lifetime.[32] Her exceptionally successful

32 With the exception of her name, these are the first words of her 1887 Athenaeum obituary, written by her close friend, Francis Martin (539).

novel – just one among twenty produced in her forty-one years of writing – ran through four editions in as many years and sold over 250,000 copies by 1897 (Alexander, 24). Apart from its entertainment value, the book's appeal came from its serving as what Sally Mitchell calls "a practical guide to virtue and prosperity" (40). As indicated by a October 1856 reviewer's claim that this account of "the rise of a poor boy (…) to affluence" is a "sermon, as summer is the music to which its flowers are the words" (Brooke, 503-4), readers were apt to turn John Halifax into a role model for the upwardly mobile middle class citizen. However the character's function in this regard was dubious; for, as I will show in this section, Halifax highlights that crucial conflict between self-driven activity and gentlemanliness, which, as I have noted in my analysis of Smiles's work, calls into question the security of the self-making paradigm.

In tracking Halifax's rise, Craik's narrative maintains "self-help" ideology through its extolment of independence and free action. Early in the story, the hero asserts, "I never begged in my life – I'm a person of independent property, which consists of my head and my two hands" (40). Given his position as orphan, John's scorn of beggary bespeaks a remarkable adherence to principles of self-reliance. By aligning independence with the "property" of his physical and mental capacities, Halifax specifically names his ability to work as the locus of his autonomy. A similar idea persists throughout *Self-Help*. Smiles credits men of industry as the backbone of English society and writes that "labour is (…) a blessing (…) as a steady application to work is the healthiest training for every individual (and is responsible for) the vigorous growth of the nation" (37). The activity at the core of

the self-maker is the activity of free labor. Such a notion places him at the heart of newly emerging, middle-class attitudes towards the marketplace.

As a means of distinguishing from the interests of a leisured class, Victorian middle-class veneration for work was widespread. Seen as the successful honing of masculine energy into a productive force, work became a deciding factor of middle-class industrial manhood (Sussman 4), and was therefore especially important to constructions of male identity. Smiles's rhetoric of the self-made man draws primarily upon two popular variations of the Victorian work ethic.[33] The first, a Promethean outlook, encouraged labor as a transcendent means of asserting man's dominion over the universe. Thomas Carlyle expresses such a view when he writes, "The real desire to get Work done will itself lead one more and more to truth, to Nature's appointments and regulations, which are truth" (269). According to this idea, one accesses and comes to understand the surrounding world through labor, thus enabling a discovery of true order and structure. Smiles's assurance that an individual's labor influences events on a national scale speaks to this form of thinking about work. As an aggregate of the state, the free worker, by his labor, grows and orders the nation according to natural rules. Closely related to this idea, the Protean attitude based its respect for labor on the idea that work helps shape the inner character according to sound (usually religious) principles. Smiles use of the words "blessing" and "healthiest" registers this idea, connecting work to inner development. By citing both Promethean and the Protean viewpoints, Smiles characterizes work as the means by which man controls both himself and the surrounding world.

33 For an extensive treatment of the various Victorian work ethics, see Travers (18-47)

Through the alignment of her hero with such "self-making" work ethics at the story's outset, Craik predisposes her readers to understand Halifax's rise to gentlemanly status as the result of his own independent labor. In this vision, Halifax becomes the ultimate male identity, a gentleman by right of his own forceful exertion. However, within the narrative persists a strain of thought, similar to one found in Smiles's work, which runs counter to such a vision. This strain, which figures the gentleman as an "interpreting being" validated by the confirmation of others, works to characterize John as notably passive, thereby destabilizing his supposed autonomy.

The first step in John's progress, in fact, registers such destabilization. The orphan Halifax is walking along the street when, by chance, he runs into a nurse who nearly chases him off with the epithet "vagabond" before abruptly stopping short. Her employer, witnessing the scene and confirming the nurse's implicit reaction that "ragged, muddy, and miserable as he was, the poor boy looked anything but a 'vagabond'" (31), eventually takes John under his wing. Here, John's first move towards gentlemanliness is a random confirmation of his potentiality in the eyes of another. Had John "looked" the vagabond, he would have been promptly labeled and cast aside; but, since the nurse and her employer, Mr. Fletcher, saw him otherwise, he is given the opportunity to acquire a different identity. The rejection of the label "vagabond" (the Victorian representative of inconsistency[34]) is notable here, because it suggests Craik's operating upon an idea of gentlemanliness similar to Smiles's notion of performed consistency. This paradigm of gentlemanliness-via-recognition puts John in a somewhat passive position; and details within the scene further

34 See, e.g., Henry Mayhew's description of "the young vagrant (as) the budding criminal" (*London Labour and the London Poor*, 369). I outline this concept more fully in Chapter Two, "'Creaking' Characters."

highlight that point. John is described as incredibly submissive, "ma(king) way for (Fletcher)" by exposing himself to the rain (31). His actions are tentative almost to the point of inertia. He "scarcely stirred," "took little or no notice," and "kept his eyes fixed on the pavement" (31). Even his prevailing emotion is somewhat obsequious as he feels "grateful" for Fletcher's small act of not shoving him into a puddle. James Eli Adams has noted the feminizing effect of such self-regulation (8); and understanding the scene in this light puts John even further from the ideal of manly self-making. The opening of the novel thus contains a sense of John's nascent gentlemanliness as contrary to active self-making.

Craik's seeming understanding of the gentleman as a figure beholden to others' validation is likewise evident in the novel's voice; for John's rise is told from the point of view of another character, his employer's son, Phineas Fletcher. The whole of John's growth into a gentleman is thus necessarily filtered through another – and Phineas's repeated assurances of John's gentlemanliness (36, 41, 376) bespeak its need for outside validation. These assurances are echoed by other characters in the novel, such as when the heroine, Ursula, defends John against her guardian's attempt to limit him to the title of "bourgeois – a tradesman" (235-6); or, when John's neighbor, the baronet, publicly acknowledges him as "a gentleman (of) highest respect" (299). Importantly, both Ursula and the baronet are associated, to varying degrees, with the gentry. Craik's stressing of their confirmation thus suggests that the book's particular sense of gentlemanliness – a sense that, to an extent, undermines its regard for autonomy via labor – is, like Smiles's notion of courtesy, tied to the lingering cultural weight of old conceptions of the gentleman.

The intra-textual narrator's description of John's most prized physical attribute – his hands – substantiates the disjunction between John's labor and his growth into the status of gentleman. As seen in the earlier quote, John locates his autonomy in the power of his own "two hands." The narrative frequently depicts these hands at work, most notably in John's exertions at the tannery. Here, the drudgery of John's labor is evident in the materials with which his hands must struggle. The tan pits are "revolt(ing), "ill"-inducing, and abhorren(t)" (56). "Deep fosses of abomination" (58), they reek of an "odor (…) borne in horrible wafts, as if from a lately forsaken battlefield" (57). Labor, in this case, is connected with engagement in coarse, toilsome activity. John's hands display his energy by enduring and combating the muck of the tan-yards. But, when Phineas describes John's hands as a mark of gentlemanliness, they take on an aesthetic quality that is quite disparate from such energetic plying: "A strong hand it was (…) browned with labor (connected to) his muscular limbs, his square, broad shoulders, (and) his healthy cheek" (31-2). The idealization and beautification of John's gentlemanly hands separates them from the idea of John's hands as the active tools of his autonomy. While Phineas does refer to "labor," it's a labor devoid of energy – one in which John's hands, rather than exerting control over the tannery, are, in fact, passively tanned (not simply brown, but "browned"). In this bodily description, John's gentlemanly status, as a thing confirmed through Phineas, is disassociated from his active force.

Throughout the novel, John's budding gentlemanliness is linked to markedly passive performance. John's move from work-hand to Mr. Fletcher's official apprentice, for instance, comes not as a result of his hard work, but from his quelling of a riot that

threatens Fletcher's authority. He manages this feat merely by displaying himself. Phineas describes:

> The rioters did not seem to have noticed, or clearly understood (John's presence), till the next lighted torched showed them the young man standing there (…) The sight fairly confounded them (…) I caught many a stray sentence, such as, "Don't hurt the lad" (…) "No, he be a real gentleman." (117-8)

The rioters cease their attack against Fletcher because they interpret John as gentleman and verify him as such. John, doing little to induce such a response, is in this regard a passive article; to such an extent that, at first, he does not even warrant notice. Then, rather than John drawing attention to himself, the scene shows attention being brought to him as indirect object (the torched *showed* him). His aestheticization as a "young man" and "lad" iterates Phineas's sense of his gentlemanliness as feminine and separate from manly exertion. The adverb "fairly" compliments this idea because it works not only as an indication of the degree to which the men are confounded but also as and indication of the manner by which John confounds (i.e. with fairness). Afterwards, Fletcher concurs with the rioter's interpretation of John's passive performance, and, for this reason, bestows a promotion upon the still passive (Phineas describes how he "drew him (…) irresolute and nervous" into Fletcher's office [123]) young lad.

Later in the novel, the moment that is meant to solidify John's position as a gentleman of business betrays a similar passivity. An economic downturn has hit and John, ever prudent with his money, is one of the few people not in financial trouble. However,

this very fact makes him a "pariah of prosperity," maligned by those less prosperous (385). John confides to Phineas "I feel sorry, because of the harm it may do me – especially among working people, who know nothing but what they hear, and believe everything that is told them" (373). Here, John recognizes the dangerous passivity of his gentlemanly identity. Reliant upon others' recognition, John Halifax, gentleman, is subject to the whim of shifting sentiment. The same people who confirmed him as gentleman, now might deny him that status, regardless of his own constant behavior.

To secure his gentlemanly identity, John once again places himself in the hands of others. The day before the local bank is about to foreclose and stop payments, he, against sound economic principles, opens an account. To the banker: "I have the pleasure to open an account with you (…) Allow me to pay in today the sum of five thousand pounds" (391). While granted John takes a somewhat active role here, performing in a concerted manner for effect, his move is far from the vigorous activity of the laborer in the tannery. The performance in fact forces him into passivity – in order for it to work, it seems, he has to evoke old notions of gentlemanly "courteousness," framing himself as a receiver of pleasure and asking for allowance as if being granted favor. Furthermore, his ultimate goal is to subject his identity to the interpretation, acceptance, and verification of others. Reading this scene within the context of "gift-giving" theory, Silvana Colella argues that the performance synthesizes gentlemanliness with business interests. John, she argues, trades money for symbolic capital. This, I think, is true; but business in this sense is quite removed from labor. Here, Halifax comes close to resembling what H.L. Malchow calls the "gentrified" businessman, whose self-removal "from competitiveness and profit-minded

values," hints at possible instability underlying "self-making" ideology's veneration of work (379). Thus, John's identity is confirmed as gentleman only through a distancing from – and perhaps even rejection of – labor.

At least one reviewer drew attention to the dissonance between John's gentlemanliness and his role as energetic worker. Writing in the April 26, 1856 issue of the *Athenaeum*, he claims that while John "might possess all the fine characteristics (of) self-reliance, (and) energy," such traits do not make him "a fine gentleman" (520). By figuring gentlemanly identity as a particular kind of interpreted being still in ways adherent to old conceptions of the word (such as courtesy), Craik generates a figure at odds with self-help's emphasis on autonomy gained through the "individual action" of toil. Of course, this conflict, which also permeates Smiles's work, did not by any means invalidate "self-help" principles or their influence. The popularity of Halifax as a representative "gentleman of industry" suggests otherwise. Furthermore, various rhetorical strategies that were at play contemporaneously worked to combat said conflict. In the next section, I investigate one such strategy.

Misapplication and the "Self-Help" System

Smiles's victimization in the infamous gold robbery with which I opened this chapter, provides a somewhat unconventional segue, by which I now want to suggest that rhetoric about a particular type of criminality served as a fruitful means to contest the central dilemma of the self-help guru's scheme. In the portion of this chapter which follows, I will show how a notion of misapplication, propounded in discussions of illegality such as in Edward Agar's gold heist, rhetorically incorporated aspects of Agar's brand of

unlawfulness into the identity of the self-made gentleman. Specifically, I will argue that the effectivity of Agar's criminal diligence (and that of like criminals) was co-opted in order to buttress an ideology of active, self-made gentlemanliness.

On the surface of it, the Great Bullion Robbery of 1855 seems to substantiate the precarious dilemma of legibility in the Smilesian gentleman – a difficulty which Smiles's incorporation of courtesy was, I have suggested, meant to address. The mastermind behind the heist, Edward Agar, had been a professional thief since the age of eighteen with at least two warrants to his name (Kingston, 107), and, by his late thirties, had become adroit at defrauding the credulous by passing himself off as a gentleman. His ability to come across as genuine was largely due to a successful exploitation of the very type of character-based gentleman that Smiles had rhetorically constructed.

The bullion-robbery scheme was a complicated one, requiring months of meticulous planning; and Agar capitalized upon the professed correlation between consistency and gentlemanliness numerous times in order to execute effectively its various details. Firstly, he established himself on cordial terms with his neighbors in the well-to-do suburb of Cambridge Villas, Shepherd's Bush two years ahead of the robbery attempt (Thomas, 207). The recurrent civility of his behavior over such a long period of time gained him credit as a gentleman, allowing him to operate unsuspected while he studied security timetables and acquired imprints of various keys – crucial elements to his success. After the robbery, Agar's house served as a base to convert the bars into a usable currency. His regularized manner of living there was so typical of a young gentleman – "under the name of Adams, with Fanny Kay, a young woman, who passed as his wife (and) a female servant" (Evans,

495) – that no one suspected he was involved in crime. In this sense, the notion of consistency-as-gentlemanliness deflected attention from his plotting.

In a similar fashion was Agar able to obtain the second key necessary to unlock the safe in which his potential lucre was stored. In his 1890 text, *Celebrated Crimes and Criminals London*, Sir Willoughby Maycock details how Agar, under the false name of Archer, went to the Folkstone station to receive a fake package delivered by his associate, William Pierce (86). The purpose of this ruse was simply to make Agar (Archer) a familiar face at the booking clerk's office where the key was being kept. Agar's concerted effort to acclimate the station to his presence is confirmed in another source, Arthur Griffith's 1884 *The Chronicles of Newgate*, which describes Agar as "hanging about the Folkstone office for some time" (392). The thief even went so far as to frequent the Rose Inn, a nearby tavern where two Folkstone station clerks, Mr. Ledger and Mr. Chapman, spent time. The former describes meeting Agar on several occasions, having supper with him once, and even being invited to "go to the Pavilion and take wine with him" ("Theft"). Agar confirms Ledger's account, adding that he socialized with both men, occasionally "having a game of billiards or a drink with (them)" ("Police"). Agar's extended presence at the station under apparently licit circumstances, along with his courteous acquaintance with the clerks, offers a plausible explanation for the fact that Mr. Chapman eventually opened the station safe in his presence, unwittingly revealing the hiding place of the key. It also helps to explain why Agar was left alone with the key when a tidal train unexpectedly arrived, thereby affording him the opportunity to make a wax impression (Evans 488-9). That Ledger and Chapman and the other employees at the station mistook him for the

gentleman, Mr. Archer, is but a logical outcome of Smiles's system. For the performances to which they were privy looked consistent. Agar had given them a cohesive, repeated performance. The fact that such repetition was limited to a small time frame is one for which Smiles's system cannot fully account.

Agar's success in this regard registers the contextual difficulty of discerning between a gentleman of character and someone who is merely acting "as if" a gentleman – the difference being that the former always enacts the gentleman while the latter plays the gentleman temporarily. Faced with increasing urbanization and modernization in everyday life, Victorians were highly aware of an increasing diversification in social interaction. As Raymond Williams notes, the thoroughly metropolitan environment of Victorian London was a place of brief glimpses, quick expressions, and crowds (154-5). In such an environment, absolute certainty in the consistency of another person's behavior was near impossible, because no one could track the entirety of another's social performance. Ostensibly, then, Agar's case undermines Smiles, exposing a problematic lack of legibility in his paradigm, despite the author's relatively persuasive claims to the reliability of his hermeneutics of "gentleman-reading."

However, the rhetoric surrounding the crime in the dialogue of the trial and in subsequent assessments of the case reconfigures the event into one that, I want to suggest, ultimately benefits the self-help ideology. Specifically, such discourse separates both Agar's gentlemanly behavior and his active energies from his iniquity, and then appropriates those traits in order to perpetuate a notion of the gentleman as, one, legible, and, two, an active figure suitable for self-making.

> To begin with the concluding remarks of the judge at the criminal case:
>
> That man Agar is a man who is as bad, I dare say, as bad can be, but [...] it is obvious, as I have said, that he is a man of extraordinary talent; that he gave to this and, perhaps, to many other robberies, an amount of care and perseverance one-tenth of which devoted to honest pursuits must have raised him to a respectable station in life, and, considering the commercial activity of this country during the last twenty years, would probably have enabled him to realize a large fortune. (Dilnot, *James the Penman* 264)

By defining Agar's "gentleman" role as criminally fraudulent specifically because of his *misapplication* of his talents, the judge's speech separates his deeds and the energy behind those deeds, effectively discounting the possible indivisibility of Agar's energies and his "badness." Agar's success, then, is transformed from evidence of the power of crime and deceit to evidence of the power of self-driven energy in general. It can then be (and in this case is) grafted onto the notion that "honest pursuits" lead to gentlemanly status – redirected, Agar's energies (since they've proven themselves effective) "must" have gained him that "respectable station" which he had only feigned. The judge's speech thus exploits the criminally fraudulent "gentleman's" success as evidence of a direct correlation between self-driven energy and becoming a true gentleman. Further, by alluding to the "commercial activity of the country," the speech locates the rhetorical correlation between self-making and gentlemanliness at the heart of capitalist ideology, thereby working to secure its justifiability.

This correlation is reinforced by language that diminishes the fraudulence of Agar's "gentlemanliness." Throughout the case, Agar was contrasted favorably against his various co-conspirators. Introducing him to testify against William Pierce, the prosecution made the following statement:

> (He) had property of his own, and having been reconciled to Fanny Kay, or entertaining a kindly feeling for her as the mother of his child, he arranged, when he was arrested that Pierce should take possession of all his property, and should provide for Fanny Kay and his child (Dilnot, *James the Penman* 154)

Here, Agar is cast in a noble light, selflessly thinking of the welfare of others in his final moments as a free man. The counselor emphasizes the notion with pathetic appeal, drawing attention to Agar's kindness and role as a father. While the motivation for narrating this incident on the part of the prosecution was primarily to legitimize Agar's testimony against Pierce, it soon became a recurring motif. Accounts of the trial, including those in *The Times*, and subsequent ones such as the above mentioned works by Evans (498), Maycock (91), and Griffith (394) all relate the story. Newspaper reports specify the positive portrayal of Agar by stressing his refined manner. An article in the October 26th 1855 edition of *The Times*, for instance, calls attention to him as "a genteel looking young man" ("Central Criminal Court"). Later editions describe him as "quick and determined in his manners, and possessing some intelligence" ("Great Bullion Robbery"); "in the very prime of his days" ("It is the Fashion"); and highlight his being "well-dressed" at the time of

his capture ("Great Bullion Robbery"). Such descriptions lend him a gentlemanly aura notwithstanding his having been exposed as a fraud.

The concluding remarks of the judge at sentencing, which rehash the Fanny Kay incident, demonstrate more specifically how that occurrence was utilized as a means to downplay the fraudulence of Agar's gentleman performance. Judge Baron Martin:

> "No doubt (Agar) deserves (condemnation), but let it be said that he remained true to you (Agar's associates, Burgess and Tester), that he said not a word about this robbery until he heard of Pierce's base conduct.[35] As he gave his evidence he did not appear to feel towards you that bitter animosity which was so clearly manifested in him, and, I must say, not unnaturally, under the circumstances, towards Pierce. (Dilnot, *James the Penman* 268)

The speech offsets Agar's culpability as a criminal with an allusion to constancy – the fact that he "remained true" until he found that Pierce had failed to provide for Fanny Kay. His culpability as a turncoat is similarly offset; for he is shown to have been disloyal to his associates only because of a greater loyalty to Fanny Kay. The judge thus uses the Fanny Kay incident to fix Agar's seemingly inconsistent behavior as consistency. As a result, Agar appears to gain that trait which Smiles's paradigm defines as the deciding element of gentlemanliness. The speech also disavows his inscrutability by describing his state of mind as "clearly manifested." By depicting him as both gentlemanly and legible, the speech works to diminish his effective deceit. Rather than a powerful tool for wickedness, Agar's "gentleman-counterfeiting" can be seen as the result of a corrupted potentiality as a real

35 Agar was the first to be captured, having been arrested for a different crime relating to forged bank notes. He became a witness for the state only after finding out that Pierce had failed to keep his promise to assist Fanny Kay financially.

gentleman – potentiality which the judge's concluding remarks tie to his self-driven energy. The trial, then, underpinned the ideology of the Smilesian gentleman, because it was able to diminish the danger which Agar represented as a "counterfeit" while simultaneously using him to disguise the problematic dissonance between self-making and gentlemanliness as evinced in Smiles's thought. In doing so, it turned the criminal into a viable instrument of gentlemanliness.

. Utilizing one of the strengths of rhetorical hermeneutics, I have borrowed "misapplication" as a theoretical term from a contemporaneous usage in another prominent Victorian trial, the 1873 prosecution of Austin Bidwell, George MacDonnell, George Bidwell, and Edwin Noyes for the Bank of England Forgery. Here, Sir Harry Poland, Counsel for the Prosecution, used the term to describe the perpetration of the crime as "a capital instance of misapplied genius" (Dilnot, *The Bank of England Robbery* 11). The case involved an elaborate fraud scheme in which the brothers Bidwell (professional thieves who operated in Britain, Europe, and the Americas) robbed the Bank of England of some £102,000. Their design involved passing forged bills of exchange back and forth between two fictional gentlemen, "Mr. Warren" and "Mr. Horton" – bills that the bank unknowingly changed into gold. In his autobiography, Bidwell later explained the plan as originating from the fact that "the banks discounted the paper without making any inquiry as to the genuineness of the signatures, relying entirely on the *character* of the customer who offered the paper for discount" (189, my emphasis). Significantly, Bidwell here attributes the viability of the crime to its exploitation of the cultural capital that Victorians associated

with character. In fact, the plan seems based exactly on the idea expressed in *Self-Help* that "if (a man's) character be of sterling worth, he will always command an influence" (315).

The manner in which Bidwell and his associates gained the fictional Misters Warren and Horton social acceptance links the plot even more specifically to Smiles's conceptualization. Bidwell recalls:

> On the 2nd of December, 1872, Austin (…) opened an account at the Continental Bank in the name of C.J. Horton, depositing 1,300 in bank notes (…) The next day I had a Warren cheque deposited to Horton's account, and the operation repeated (…) from day to day, in order to give the affair an air of genuine business. (Bidwell, *Autobiography* 191)

Performed consistency – the same act repeated day after day – worked to convince the bank to credit the characters of Horton and Warren. That the Bidwells presupposed repetition (as opposed to one legit deposit) as necessary to establish their fake characters suggests the cultural weight of such a notion. Moreover, we get the sense that such repetition was linked to what Smiles specifies as a gentlemanly variety; for Bidwell writes how he took "advantage of the confidence placed in me by gentlemen who received me courteously" (146). The quote places Bidwell's actions within a system of interaction wherein the "reception" of one's performed identity is based upon exchanged civilities. The success of the Bidwell bank robbery, then, much like Agar's bullion robbery, relied heavily upon the gentlemanly ideology of Smiles.

The above usage of the term "misapplication," like the judge's comments in the Agar case, figures the close association between the criminal and the gentleman in a manner that

grafts onto the latter the attributes of effective energy that the former exhibits. In describing Bidwell's self-driven energy as "misapplied" (generally, the"[mis]putting [of a given] something to a use or purpose" [OED]), Poland fixes it as presupposed – an *a priori* asset, unrelated to its illicit usage. At the same time, further inflections of the adjective rhetorically appropriate that *a priori* drive on behalf of the self-made gentleman. Application as "appeal" (used primarily in legalese of the time) aligns Bidwell's self-drive with the system of performance and reception that validates the Smilesian gentleman's identity; while, simultaneously, the prefix "mis" (which, "implies censure only of the manner of the act and not of the act itself" [OED]) separates the fraudulence of his performances from such drive by limiting them solely to the idea of poor usage. Similarly, the term's meaning as "assiduous effort" (OED) evokes the diligence of self-making (Smiles, in fact, devotes a chapter to this sense of the word in *Self-Help* [Chap. 4]); while, again, the prefix restricts the "badness" of Bidwell's diligence to its erroneous direction. Misapplication, then, was used in this mid-century context as a means to conflate the criminal's energy with self-made gentlemanliness, while disavowing its association to the very crimes through which it was evinced.

Poland's classifying of Bidwell's successful energies as a form of "genius" develops upon such conflation. In the mid-nineteenth century, traditional usage of the term was closely related to "talent" (the term used in the Agar case) and denoted a quality that required cultivation and practice. Thus, for instance, Bulwer-Lytton in his 1853 *My Novel*, describes the Squire's "active genius (as) always at some repair or improvement" (175). At the same time, a newer sense of the word, which gained prevalence in the late 18th and

early 19th century, saw, as Thomas De Quincey wrote, "talent and genius (…) in polar opposition to each other" (194). David Minden Higgins decribes this viewpoint as a "'Romantic' emphasis on innate genius as an unpredictable gift" (130). In *Self-Help*, Smiles wavers between both definitions. At times, he aligns genius with self-making, maintaning that "all men have an equal aptitude for genius, (which is) what (all) are able to effect (…) who, under like circumstance, apply themselves" (91). Here, genius equals perservence and practice. Yet he also uses the term in oppositely, such as when he writes, "Energy (…) carries (a man) onward (…) It accomplishes more than genius, with not one-half the disappointment and peril" (190). When genius implies the un-necessity of cultivation, Smiles unsurprisingly figures it as treacherous. He thus uses the term both positively and pejoratively in order to buttress his system on both ends. The term works similarly in Poland's speech, and, in doing so, is able to register both congruence and incongruence with the criminal's energies. If interpreted primarily in its first sense as compatible with self-making, Poland's use of "genius" reinforces the work that misapplication does. Namely, it incorporates the energies of the criminal as evidence of the power of self-drive, while implying that Bidwell's particular energy was wicked simply because it was wrongly practiced. Meanwhile, because of the concurrent sense of the word which lingers in the background, such energies gain something of that naturalness which *Self-Help* attempts to graft onto its gentleman. If, contrastedly, the innateness of Bidwell's genius is foregrounded, his energies become more closely tied to his wickedness; but, in this case, seem to have little relationship to self-making. Further, because this form of genius was commonly accepted as a rarity, such an understanding implies a low probability of

sophisticated criminals, thereby downplaing the dangerous opening that the Smilesian hermenutics of "gentleman-interpretation" entails. Contextualizing Poland's definintion of Bidwell's criminality within the mid-19th century cultural conversation of self-making thus reveals how the phrase worked to resolve complications regarding the Smilesian gentleman on multiple levels.

The idea of misapplication, misapplied talent, misapplied genius, and close variants thereof, became something of a cultural trope in the years between 1837 and 1877. Major criminals of the period such as James Townsend Saward ("Jim the Penman"), William Palmer ("The Rugeley Poisoner"), and Thomas Caseley (the safecracker) were described respectively as "(a) successful ingenuity (turned in) a criminal direction" (Dilnot, 123), "a man of genius (without) scruples" (Trollope, *Can You Forgive Her?* 542), and one whom the jury pitied because he "could have obtained success in any walk of life" (qtd. in Price, 105). Of course, opportunity to employ this trope was ample, given that the same market forces that were facilitating the rise of the self-made gentleman were also opening new and increasingly complex avenues for the practice of fraud. David Mortimer Evans's 1859 work, Facts, Failures, and Frauds, explores the shift in thinking about criminality as the work of the idle and unsuccessful to the province of vibrant but dishonest entrepreneurs – skilled practitioners of what he calls, "'high art' crime" (2-4). Similarly, Henry Mayhew's survey of London street life depicts young criminals as "shrewd and acute," "keen," with "quickness of perception" and "highly enterprising" natures (369-72). Because of their ability to navigate and exploit the dynamic market environment that was the self-made

gentleman's supposed purview, successful criminals became subject to symbolic dissection, their viable components harvested, their unviable ones rejected.

Dissection, however, is a messy process, and the idea that self-makers could so selectively associate with certain criminal traits while appearing to remain entirely detached from others is perhaps unfeasible. Period references to the topic suggest as much, conflating the two figures in various and complicated ways. Self-making and self-made figures, for instance, often take on a degrading, quasi-criminality, such as in Trollope's description of "excelsior" in *The Three Clerks* or Dickens's Josiah Bounderby. At other times, the criminal nearly figures as the epitome of self-made gentlemanliness. One could argue that such is the case in William Harrison Ainsworth's account of Jack Sheppard (1839), for example. Furthermore, the "misapplication" rhetoric which I've traced above was in dialogue with various other rhetorics of gentlemanliness, some of which disagreed as to what aspects of the criminal were viable and what unviable. In its bringing to bear an aesthetic value upon the issue, Evan's use of the phrase "high art" to describe the type of crime used as fodder for "misapplication" foreshadows one such rhetoric, which I will explore in the following chapter.

Chapter Two
"Creaking" Characters:
Gentlemanly Inconsistency in Wilkie Collins's *Armadale*

In October 1859, Charles Dickens wrote to his friend and colleague Wilkie Collins, disagreeing with his advice to draw a more explicit connection between two characters in *A Tale of Two Cities*: "I do not positively say that the point you put, might not have been done in your manner; but (…) it would have been overdone in that manner – too elaborately trapped, baited, and prepared (…) I think the business of Art is to lay all that ground carefully, but with the care that conceals itself" (*Letters*, 9:127-8). Indeed, Dickens frequently complained that Collins's style "creak(ed)" too "loud" (10:22).[36]

Although recent historicist criticism has done much to substantiate the importance of Collins's narrative technique, the above admonition lingers in a tendency to disregard or underplay the heavily-determined formal qualities of Collins's novels vis-à-vis those texts' engagement with contemporaneous cultural issues.[37] Such a trend risks overlooking the

36 In reference to *The Woman in White,* for instance, Dickens wrote: "The great pains you take express themselves a trifle too much, and you know that I always contest your disposition to give an audience credit for nothing" (*Letters* 9:194). Contemporaneous reviews likewise pointed towards Collins's formal heavy- handedness as a source of derision. An 1852 article in the *Leader* faulted Collins's novel, *Basil*, for a degree of contrivance that "makes even commonplace incidents look 'improbable'" (1141). Another claimed that though "Mr. Collins constructs his machinery well (,) he never rises above machinist" (Review *Queen of Hearts* 488). When Collins attempted to defend himself in prefaces against these and like evaluations, fellow writers suggested that he desist lest he draw further attention to his technique (Peters *King* 86). He ignored their advice, and his reputation for over-determinacy lasted throughout his career. Anthony Trollope's 1883 *Autobiography*, for one, evidences the lasting nature of this opinion: "The construction (of Collins's novels) is most minute and most wonderful. But I can never lose the taste of the construction" (81).

37 Monica M. Young-Zook, for instance, implies an inverse relationship between the social import of *Armadale* and its heavy-handed qualities: the "novel is slightly flawed and over-determined, *yet* it represents an attempt to 'speak the truth' about certain gendered expectations in a colonial context" (my emphasis, 234). Similarly, Nathan K. Hensley writes, "*Sensational* (i.e. contrived) *as it may be,* the novel's double-generational plot recapitulates the more serious temporal-political schemes set out by Collins's advanced liberal contemporaries" (my emphasis, 618). Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox also downplay the sensational aspects of Collins's narratives, claiming that critical emphasis on them is part of an "unfair stereotype" (xvi). Speaking of the sensational genre more generally, Lyn Pykett writes that "their 'thrilling' devices (…) may cause the sophisticated late-twentieth-century reader to smile" (13).

messages conveyed *through* those qualities. This chapter attempts to avert such omission by extracting the socio-historical import embedded in the very "creakiness" for which Collins was so often disparaged.

In *Armadale*, the writer's 1866 novel, one of the central characters, Lydia Gwilt, writes in her diary about the possibility of being "never inconsistent with myself, like a wicked character in a novel" (677). Here, the narrative exposes itself as narrative, specifically drawing attention to the "unreality" or constructed-ness of its characters. The act is of the type that Dickens might well have had in mind when composing the above quoted letter. Claims of character artificiality were, in fact, a central point used to support allegations of over-determinacy in the works of Collins and other sensationalists.[38] But, by contextualizing *Armadale* at what I have referred to as a rhetorical "point of continuity" between the identities of the criminal and the gentleman, I mean to draw attention to the social significance of such meta-fictional technique. More specifically, I will show how the novel's "over-signaled" moments as regards character partake in a cultural conversation meant to define what is arguably the period's most significant form of cultural capital – the ideal of the middle-class gentleman. For Gwilt's comment not only calls to mind the "constructedness" of formal character, but also, in its mention of consistency, evokes a particular ideology of gentlemanliness, by which social identity, itself, was being constructed. This ideology claimed consistent conduct as the fundamental marker of the

38 To cite a few pertinent examples: "We feel that every one of (his characters') motions is due, not to a natural process, but to the sheer force and energy of the author's will" ("Review of Armadale" *Saturday Review*); "Such people (the characters in *No Name*) have no representatives in the living world. Their proper place is the glare of the blue lights on a stage sacred to the sensation drama" (Smith 185); "Deep knowledge of human nature, graphic delineations of individual character (…) would be a hindrance rather than a help to a work of this kind" (Mansel 220). Margaret Oliphant, similarly, calls M.E. Braddon's work "false (…) to Nature" ("Sensation Novels" 567).

gentleman, and, by default, aligned inconsistency with crime. The novel's process of characterization, I argue, is a reinterpretation and performance of gentlemanly identity which refutes such rhetoric by orienting inconsistency away from the criminal, and, instead, casting it as a viable component of gentlemanly behavior.

Armadale is a particularly viable choice for a reading of this kind as its back-story is perhaps the most elaborately contrived found in any of Collins's texts. Numerous critics have read its convoluted nature as a sign of a fundamental ambivalence within the novel.[39] I want to take a different tack, however, and focus on how it effectively sets the groundwork for what I am calling the novel's "performance of gentlemanly identity via characterization." To recap: Armadale, English estate owner and property holder in the West Indies, disowns his son, named Allan Armadale, for a Mr. Wrentmore, who thereupon takes the name Allan Armadale. The disowned son then steals the bride of the adopted son with the help of a maid, Lydia Gwilt. The adopted son, in revenge, effectively drowns the first, after which he moves to Barbados, marries, and sires a son, whom he names Allan Armadale. Meanwhile, the widowed bride of the disowned son gives birth to a boy, also christened Allan Armadale. On his deathbed, the adopted Allan Armadale forecasts that the two, third generation Armadales are fated to meet in disaster, and thus begins the events of the main plot. Such a back-story is, indeed, incredibly confused; yet, this very confusion is itself an effective rhetorical move. By rendering near impossible a definitive heir, – as the Allan Armadale in the generation immediately preceding that of the main characters says,

39 Catherine Peters, for instance, calls it "disturb(ing)" that the "harsh novel (offers no) satisfactory resolution" ("Introduction" xii). Jenny Bourne Taylor likewise claims that the novel ultimately fails to "offer a stable interpretation of itself to the reader" (*Secret Theatre* 172). Peter Thoms states that Collins "wants his readers to be uncomfortable" (137). Similarly, Julian Wolfreys argues that "Collins eludes a single position (… he creates) an ambiguous narrative (…) raising for us another spectre" (109-10).

"(the right to the inheritance) was as certainly (the other Allan's) as mine" (38) – it undermines the viability of a conventional inheritance plot solution. No tracing back of a hidden will or claim can satisfactorily confirm a single "character" as, *a priori,* "meant" to be the story's gentleman-heir.

Instead, the identity of the story's gentleman is determined within the forward movement of the narrative. The prologue's description of the Armadale name clarifies Collins's method in this regard. Here, "Armadale" is cast as a vacant placeholder, indicative of an abstract concept of a "gentleman character." A concise description from a hotel-owner's registry supplies the initial bit of information about the name: "First, a high-born stranger (by title Mister), who introduces himself in eight letters – A,r,m,a,d,a,l,e" (8). This report affixes the name to a status while avoiding attachment to idiosyncratic character traits. The reader knows only that this "Armadale" is titled; beyond the title, he remains a "stranger." Jenny Bourne Taylor describes "Armadale" as "a blank space standing for a property that has no […] owner" (*Secret Theatre* 152); and, given the allusion to class ("high-born […] Mister"), one might specify this "property" as the cultural capital attached to gentlemanly status. Thus, the name "Armadale" denotes gentlemanliness – but, at the same time, is not qualified with any one set of traits or affixed to any one person. "Armadale" is gentleman rather than *a* gentleman.

The abstract quality of the name figures it as not only something to be assumed (per a typical inheritance plot), but, additionally, something to be given feature. The unique lettering of the name – "A,r,m,a,d,a,l,e" – corroborates this point. Broken as it is into separate letters, the word is visibly permeable; the dividing commas serve as punctuational

markers of incompleteness. Typographically, the word suggests a need to be both adopted *and* filled. The manner of this fulfillment is clarified when "Armadale" is briefly associated with a particular figure (the registry name is shown to belong to Allan Armadale the elder, who makes his appearance at the end of the first chapter). Collins describes Allan Armadale's invalid state:

> He lay helpless on a mattress (…) his face as void of all expression of the character within him (…) as if he had been dead. (…) The leaden blank of his face met every question as to his age, his rank, his temper, and his looks which that face might once have answered, in impenetrable silence. (12)

The elder Allan leaves "Armadale" largely un-indicative, bringing no viable "character" to the name, causing it to signify the absence which it ostensibly covers. The man's "impenetrable," "leaden blank"ness specifically connects this lack of character to illegibility, thus conflating Allan's expressed lack of mimetic identity with a formal deficiency. "Armadale" is a name that begs fulfillment specifically through the act of narrative. The "name of the gentleman" seeks a "character" which the addition of a plot must provide. And, of course, *Armadale* itself is that plot. The main narrative of the novel follows the struggles of two potential candidates, Midwinter and Allan, regarding the name "Armadale" and the question of whose "character" will eventually restore that designation. Thus, the prologue allows the characterization of the two main-story Armadales to serve as a narrative performance that defines a particular ideology of gentlemanly identity.

By putting forth such an understanding of the *Armadale* narrative I mean to challenge current Victorian criticism in several ways. One, I show how the novel

complicates a prevailing strain of criticism[40] wherein the sensation text, by "(implying) that both personal and class identity in contemporary Britain were fluid and unstable rather than secure, and thus potentially subject to manipulation, misrepresentation, and outright theft" (Liddle, 97), first and foremost, registers what might be called "identity anxiousness." Instead, I suggest that the "fluid" nature of identity in *Armadale* should be seen primarily for its rhetorical effect. I also mean to develop recent theories on Victorian characterization by offering this rhetorically-minded view – a point that I will address more fully in the concluding portion of this chapter.

"Trash or Something Worse": Sensational Fears

In arguing gentlemanly identity through sensation-genre form, Collins's novel was directly contravening a prevalent strain of anti-sensation rhetoric that attempted to denounce the genre[41] as the antithesis of everything gentlemanly. During the periodical and printing "boom" of the late-1850s and 1860s, critics and book reviewers continually attacked novels which they categorized "sensational" as illicit and socially damaging.

Undoubtedly, a crucial point of vulnerability for such reactionary attacks was these fictions' close connection to true crime. Critic Winifred Hughes has illustrated that one of

40 In addition to readings cited throughout this chapter, the following texts contribute to this strain: For readings of sensation as exhibiting class anxieties, see Jonathan Loesberg's "The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction" in *Representations* 13 (Winter 1986), and Ronald Thomas's "Wilkie Collins and the Sensation Novel" in *The Columbia History of the British Novel* (1994). For critics addressing gender anxiety, see: Anthea Trodd's *Domestic Crime in the Victorian Novel* (1989) and Tamar Heller's *Dead Secrets: Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (1992). For a treatment of sensational anxiety over insanity, see Sally Shuttleworth's "'Preaching to the Nerves': Psychological Disorder in Sensation Fiction" in *A Question of Identity: Women, Science, and Literature* (1993).

41 As the section will tacitly show, the term "sensation" was used to categorize works based on content, form, and audience. My interest is not in developing a definition of "sensational" (an impossible task given the diversity of works that, at one time or another, were labeled as such). Instead, I focus on critical reception of serialized novels during the 1850s and 1860s and the common tropes used by critics of the time when labeling certain works as "sensation" fiction. In this sense, I have in mind Jonathan Loesberg's claim that the genre "was as much a creation of the literary journals who grouped the novels together as it was of the novels themselves" (115).

the main precursors to "sensation" was the "Newgate" novel; and this category was so-called because its material was frequently based on the biographies of criminals published in the Newgate Calendar.[42] When "sensation" fiction writers picked up on this thread, they often did so with relative subtlety, basing their tales loosely on particular crimes, while eschewing explicit references. Charles Reade, describing one of his most popular books, used the term "matter-of-fact- romance" to describe such a technique: "*Hard Cash* (is a) fiction built on truths; and these truths have been gathered by long, severe, systematic labor, from a multitude of volumes, pamphlets, journals, reports, blue books, manuscript narratives, (and) letters to living people" (Preface). Here, Reade was defending himself against accusations of implausibility in his plots – the "truths" to which he refers being depictions of transgressions which critics were deeming far-fetched. By his own account, Collins himself employed an analogous technique in the *Woman in White*, the germ of which he describes as taken from "some dilapidated volumes of French crimes" (Reeve, 458) later identified as the late-eighteenth century case of Madame de Douhault, whose legal identity was permanently "stolen" when she was imprisoned by her heirs in a lunatic asylum (Hyder). He was also known to have kept abreast on the latest reports from the Divorce courts and to have collected clippings of press on criminal trials.

Both Reade and Collins recognized their allegiance with crime as strategic marketing. The former took up the technique unapologetically as a means of pandering to an audience which, in his opinion, were primarily "interested in (…) the last great social scandal, a sensational suicide (,) a woman murdered in Seven Dials, or a baby found

42 Edward Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram* (1832), William Harrison Ainsworth's *Rockwood* (1834), and *Jack Sheppard* (1840) were among the most popular of this kind.

strangled (…) The *paying public* prefers a live ass to a dead lion" (Coleman 263-264, my emphasis). Collins, perhaps the most successful of all the sensation writers, not only drew upon court reports of crimes for his plots, but also shrewdly manipulated the serial format of his work in order to enhance its true-crime quality. As Deborah Wynne notes, the issues of *All the Year Round* that contained Collins's *The Woman in White* feature an unusually high number of non-fiction reports relating to forgery, imposters, crime and violence (39). By setting sensation fiction alongside real-life accounts of crime, Collins (and his editors, Charles Dickens and William Henry Wills) lent an intriguing air of veracity to his tale. Interest in a story about criminal deception was fomented by a sort of literary sleight of hand.

Opponents of the genre, however, used the close allegiance between sensation fiction and real-life crime to characterize the genre itself as illegitimate. Alluding to its indebtedness to the Newgate novel, D.O. Maddyn, a critic for the *Athenaeum* wrote that sensation fiction such as *Basil* asks its readers to adopt the "aesthetics of the Old Bailey" (1322-1323). Similarly, an article in the *Westminster Review* on *Armadale* claimed that Collins's story had "all the interest, and also the literary power of a police report" (270). The above quotes display a common strategy, wherein sensation was disparaged via reference to the materials of broadsides and "gallows literature."[43] The latter specifically conflates a presumed formal dullness of court report with the work under review in order to dismiss it as undeserving of attention.

43 For an excellent discussion of Victorian street literature of this kind, see Michael Hughes's foreword to *Curiosities of Street Literature* by Charles Hindley.

The persuasive soundness of this second critic's somewhat complacent approach is questionable, however, given that, as Beth Kalikoff has shown, the English reading public's appetite for non-fictional accounts of crime during the mid-nineteenth century was in fact quite insatiable (57-79); more often, reviewers denounced the genre precisely *because* they fearfully recognized its power. Perhaps the most virulent attack of this kind comes from Henry Mansel's 1863 essay in the conservative-leaning *Quarterly Review*. As Mansel's comments are seminal in defining the genre, they warrant detailed attention. An excerpt:

> The sensation novel, be it mere trash or something worse, is usually a tale of our own times (…) we are thrilled with horror (…) by the thought that such (crimes) may be going on around us and among us (…) All this is no doubt very exciting; but even excitement may be purchased too dearly; and we may be permitted to doubt whether the pleasure of a nervous shock is worth the cost of so much morbid anatomy (222-223)

Here, sensation fiction, though at best "trash," nevertheless has acknowledged impact – a "thrill" gained specifically through its link with contemporary crime. By admitting such force, and then casting it as a distinctively visceral one, Mansel is able to concede the genre's popularity while simultaneously denigrating it through metaphorical comparison to disease. Shocking the nervous system, "sensation" books result in a state of "morbid"ity – the etymology of which word connects the implied reader's very interest to ill health.[44] Elsewhere, Mansel develops the metaphor, speaking of the genre in terms of an unhealthy

44 During the 1860s, the term morbid was in use both in its original, Latinate sense as "sickly" (*morbidus*) and in the sense of an "unhealthy preoccupation with (a) disturbing subject" (*OED*).

appetite[45] – the books "called into existence to supply (…) cravings (…) the want which they supply" (216). In this schema, the very popularity of the works in question becomes the rationale for avoiding them. Their appeal[46] is attributed to a vicious cycle wherein the reader is poisoned into a desire for more of that which poisons. Several years later, in a review of *Armadale*, the idea was even more explicitly connected to crime: "the tendency of the multiplication of these tales is to create a class of criminals, if they do not already exist" (*London Quarterly* 107). Here, the depiction of crime not only causes and perpetuates unhealthy interest in crime but also crime itself. This hypothesized problem, moreover, is closely proportional to the extensiveness – the "multiplication" – of these depictions.

As Patrick Brantlinger has noted, such extensiveness – "sensation" fiction's status as "mass cultural commodity" (163) – was, in and of itself, devaluing; and the metaphor of contagion links this mass-related value-deflation to a prevalent, mid-Victorian class issue – that of sanitation. Frequent description of sensation fiction as "manufactory" (Mansel 216), "machine-made" (Jewsbury *Dangerous* 209), and as a "product of industry" (Review of *The Queen's English* 53), registers an anxiety towards what Dianne S. Macleod identifies as the increasing commodification of art in the early Victorian period and its function as a vehicle for radical-capitalist value inscription (14). But such terms also register eschewal of the factory atmosphere itself and, by extension, the category of people associated with such atmosphere. Mansel's opening line evinces such an idea, naming "sensation" novels as "a

45 Other critiques used the eating metaphor to various effects. Geraldine Jewsbury's review of *The Moonstone*, for instance, referred to the "ravenous hunger" of Collins's readers to discuss how he capitalized upon the serial form (106). In the *Spectator*, a reviewer qualified the "sensational"-ness of a lesser-known novel by describing it as a blend of "murders and mutton, suicides and rice pudding, stolen cheques and thick bread-and-butter" (*Spectator* "Unsigned Review *Lost for Love,*" 1303-1304).

46 On the appeal of the genre, see P.D. Edwards's *Some Mid-Victorian Thrillers: The Sensation Novel, Its Friends and Foes*. Edwards claims that "every novel (of the period) was sensational or remarkable for not being so" (4).

class of literature (that) has grown up around us" (215, my emphasis) – a linguistic slippage that suggests a conceptual movement between the categorization of text and of audience. His reference to disease bears out this shift, making more obvious the socio-political implications of the ideological work being done through genre.

Between 1831 and 1849, a series of outbreaks (including cholera, typhus, influenza, smallpox, measles, and scarlet fever) brought heightened attention to sanitary issues within the London metropolis, particularly in newly created "slum" areas.[47] Accounts such as, most notably, Edwin Chadwick's *Report on the Sanitary Condition of the Labouring Population of Great Britain* (1842) and Hector Gavin's *Sanitary Ramblings: Being Sketches and Illustrations of Bethnal Green* (1848) attempted, as Steven Connor argues, to use disease as a means to "relate bodies to one another" through an understanding of a particular "dynamic process" (216). More specifically, concern with sanitation fostered self-definition of a "professional middle class" whose members demarcated disease as a working class, "slum" problem, and then cohered around a supposedly detached[48] interest to cure it (Bivona and Henkle 4-5). Mansel's linking genre to disease thus "other"-izes sensation fiction in a class paradigm where mere "contact (was) associated with contagion" (Gilbert 3). Part of the article's effect is thus to warn that the consumption of sensation fiction might potentially destabilize the class status of his reading audience.

The trajectory of sensation fiction, meanwhile, suggests a type of counter-rhetoric to Mansel and like-minded readers, as publishers attempted to make the form "decent."

47 The term "slum" came into general use as a term during the first quarter to first half of the nineteenth century to describe "streets or courts forming a thickly populated neighbourhood or district where the houses and the conditions of life are of a squalid and wretched character" (OED)

48 In *The Powers of Distance: Cosmopolitanism and the Cultivation of Detachment*, Amanda Anderson explores the ideology of detachment and the paradoxes inherent in its practice.

One of the most significant new publication trends following the repeal of restrictive printing laws in the late 1850s and early 1860s (Altick 356-357) was the appearance of such family magazines as *All the Year Round* (1859), *Macmillan's Magazine* (1859), and *The Cornhill* (1860). These periodicals targeted a "respectable" audience, meant to include both middle-class families and, in some cases, newly literate members of the lower classes. Collins, himself, expressed this new demographic focus in his "The Unknown Public," written for Dickens's *Household Words*: "The readers who rank by the millions will be the readers who (…) return the richest rewards, and who will, therefore, command the service of the best writers of their time" (222). The superlative "richest" elevates "unknown" readers not simply to equal, but to higher status than "known" ones. A radical statement it would seem – but, as Graham Law and Andrew Maunder note, Collins's enthusiasm must be qualified by the sense of embarrassment conveyed in the generally comic tone of the essay (43-44). Dougald MacEachen's opposing contention that Collins "deliberately wrote for a rank-conscious (…) middle-class reading public" (32) is perhaps overly dramatic on the other end of the spectrum, but, nonetheless, the "known" demographic was always key. An expanded audience was wanted, but only if it could be achieved while maintaining some form of "respectability." The featuring of serialized sensation novels in such magazines was less a defiant gesture than an attempt to legitimize (not to mention financially exploit) the genre.

The publication history of *Armadale* suggests that it was used, to some extent, as an attempt to make such a move; the initial reception indicates, however, that it met with strong opposition. By 1861, Collins's standing as an author was at its peak, making him a

prime candidate for improving the repute of the brand critically denigrated as "sensation" fiction. Certainly, George Smith thought he could sell, offering him as much as £5,000 for his latest book idea.[49] *Armadale* was to be published serially in the *Cornhill Magazine*, a journal at the time widely acclaimed for its non-controversial, family-oriented material. It was Collins's first (and, as it happened, only) work to appear in an upper-grade miscellany accompanied with high-quality illustrations – a technique which several of the top family magazines employed in order to add distinction[50] to their miscellanies. Appearing in November 1864, the first installment was set alongside Gaskell's "domestic" novel, *Wives and Daughters*, as well as articles on middle class education and marriage (Law and Maunder 91). In short, the publishers of *Armadale* couched Collins's sensational work in a "respectable" package.

Reviewers, however, remained largely antagonistic, echoing Mansel's appraisal of sensationalism. Thus, Henry Chorley of the *Athenaeum*: "What artist would choose vermin as his subjects?" (732-3). Likewise, the *Spectator* asked incredulously, "Is (…) the whole truth about the world (…) that it is peopled by a set of scoundrels qualified by a set of fools," and charges the tale for "overstepping the bounds of decency" (638-9). The *Evening Standard*'s reviewer claimed that the character of Gwilt "leaves every feeling revolted" (4). All three reviews – in their use of words such as "vermin," "scoundrels," "decency," "overstepping," and "revolted" – gesture towards the paradigm of disease (and class) typical of anti-sensationalism. *Armadale*'s location in a middle class "family" magazine is,

49 Although this sum was not outrageously high at the time, it was enough for Collins to write, "No living novelist (except Dickens) has had such an offer as this for *one* book." (Collins *Letters I*, 200)

50 I use the term with deliberate reference to Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* in order to emphasize the cultural and symbolic "capital" at stake in the cultural conversation surrounding the sensation genre and readers' "tastes."

here, evidence of an unfortunate impudence; the work itself something tarnished with an unsanitary, "low-class" stain.

Part of the reason this class-based denigration persisted with such tenacity is, as I want to argue now, because of antagonism towards a particular formal quality often cited in criticism of the genre. Throughout contemporary critical reviews, sensation fiction's connection to crime becomes conflated with its formal reliance on tropes of inconsistency. Before best-sellers such as *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Woman in White*, the term "sensation" was applied to "newspaper reports describing the reactions of courtroom audiences to lurid case details" (Boyle 37). The "sensation" of the sensation genre referred similarly to its ability to elicit intense reaction. Mansel describes the process as "preaching to the nerves": "Excitement, and excitement alone, seems to be the great end at which they aim – an end which must be accomplished at any cost by some means or other" (216). Ostensibly, the quote simply evinces Ann Cvetkovich's contention that "affect" was the primary criteria for the sensation tag (14); but Mansel's emphasis on "means" points also towards an awareness of the method by which readers were affected. Sensation books did not simply shock the reader by displaying gruesome events; they impelled the reader forward by jolts and disconcertion. A review in the *Athenaeum* specifies the "sensation method," describing how "the novel-reader must be incessantly stimulated by all sorts of ingenious mystification" (Review *Young Musgrave* 769). This "mystification" comes in the shape of tropes that stress a discontinuity that continually shocks the reader out of his/her sense of coherence.[51] Various, contemporary reviewers identified such tropes as: episodic

51 Concern over the undermining of coherence can be seen, for instance, in an 1867 *Blackwood's* review which states, "The public […] seems to throw itself with more apparent eagerness upon the hectic than the *whole*some" ("Novels" Oliphant 275, my emphasis).

discrepancies – what Margaret Oliphant called "piquant situation and startling incident" ("Sensation" 568); a "breathless rapidity of (plot) movement" which mimics the unpredictable, frenetic pace of modern life (Lewes 894); "disconnected" narrative accounts which baffle the "well-regulated mind" (Butterworth 503); and – a point which I will expand upon shortly – a prevalence of inconsistent characters. In adopting the term "sensation" from the reactions produced in lurid, criminal court cases, literary critics were linking the genre's formal qualities (not simply its subject matter) to crime.

This "criminalization" of formal inconsistency gained rhetorical effect from a particular ideology of gentlemanliness, central to the Victorian middle-class value system. Recent feminist criticism has uncovered the various ways in which certain exemplary texts clashed with idealizations of middle-class womanhood.[52] However, perhaps because less has been written about the subversive masculinity depicted in sensation fiction, the notion of inconsistency and its social significance has been largely overlooked. Critical proclivity towards analyzing femininity in sensation novels likely stems from the fact that Victorian reviewers who were categorizing the fiction so often disparaged it as a genre dangerous to women readers and perpetuated largely by "immoral" women authors.[53] Margaret Oliphant's denunciation on this score is often cited: "The peculiarity of it in England is (…) that it is women who describe these sensuous raptures – that this intense appreciation of flesh and blood, this eagerness of physical sensation, is represented as the natural

52 Kate Flint, for example, locates anxiety over sensation novels in the fact of their proportionately female audience (*The Woman Reader*). Pamela Gilbert discusses how sensation fiction elicited an anxiety wherein the body of the female middle-class reader stood for the permeable body of culture (*Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels*). Lyn Pykett connects sensation and its female readers to later feminist, "New Woman" fiction (*The "Improper" Feminine*).

53 For an especially solid discussion of the gender ideology behind resistance to sensation novels, see Ellen Miller Casey's article "'Highly Flavoured Dishes' and 'Highly Seasoned Garbage': Sensation in the Athenaeum" in *Victorian Sensations*.

sentiment of English girls" ("Novels" 259). Sensation fiction was "unladylike" because it jarred women's "proper" self-control, impelling them into intensity, rapture, and fleshliness. Point taken; but, as James Eli Adams has notably shown, by the 1830s self-control was "increasingly claimed as the (…) distinguishing attribute of middle-class men" (7). A strict regulation of one's behavior had become, at the time of the "sensation boom," a vital component of masculine class status. If "sensation's" effects were "unladylike," they were equally "ungentlemanly." Corroborating this point, Mansel's famous critique counterbalances sensational literature with reference to classics,[54] the main subject of the male-dominated university curriculum thought to train "unique mental and moral discipline" (Heyck 195).

As I noted in chapter one, a significant facet of male "discipline" was the idea of gentlemanly identity as "consistent conduct" – a sense of behavior regularity being a prominent means to stabilize "the gentleman" as a morally and socially valuable identity following the dissolution of relatively secure, rank based social positions in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.[55] Sensationalism's heavy reliance on tropes of inconsistency –its very form – was sorely at odds with this key principle upon which new

54 Mansel both peppers his own text with Latin and cites classical authors to the detriment of the literature under review. Some examples: "The author has about as much appreciation of his hero as the Roman imitators who went with bare feet and unshorn beards in admiration of the virtues of Cato" (233), "Unfortunately, *decipit exemplar vitiis imitabile*; the vice of a great writer has been copied by a hundred small ones, who, without a tithe of his genius, make up for the deficiency by an extra quantity of extravagance" (222), "We have heard of a lady who was persuaded into reading "Plutarch's Lives" by being told that the book was a delightful novel, and who was indignant at the trick, when she discovered that history had won her approbation under the guise of fiction" (219). "We read with little emotion, though it comes in the form of history, Livy's narrative of (…) secret poisonings (…) but we are thrilled with horror, even in fiction, by the thought that such things may be going on around us and among us" (223).

55 Taking my cue from this historical context, I use the term "consistency" throughout this essay to refer to patterns of repetition or correspondence that produce expectations of like continuity. Similarly, I use "inconsistency" to refer to the lack of such patterns or a sudden break from such patterns. I also take "(in)congruity," "(ir)regularity," "discrepancy," and "(in)constancy" as synonyms.

"gentlemen" were constructing their social standing; the forces that compelled the reader forward inherently antithetical to an ideology meant to validate that figure's social influence through "consistency." Thus, via rhetorics of Mansel and like critics, the genre became a complicated nexus of alterity – mass culture, slum contagion, low-class society, crime and inconsistency – against which a popular gentlemanly ideology stood in positive contrast.

"Character"izing the Gentleman: Reading Character

I return now to *Armadale* in order to show how the novel's form, specifically its characterization, subverts the ideology embedded in anti-sensation rhetoric by orienting inconsistency away from the criminal and casting it as a viable component of gentlemanly behavior. Employing a rhetorical hermeneutic approach for this task, I "practice (character) theory by doing history" (Mailloux 45); that is, I bring to bear upon my reading a historically contextualized understanding of character. In this case, such a strategy is twofold: one, it examines Collins's expressed understanding of characterization and considers its practice in *Armadale* (I am discussing "character" here as a narrative element); and two, it situates that practice in relation to contemporary discourse which employed the term "character" to describe the gentleman as a social identity.

To engage with the first point: Collins only published one piece – an article for *The Globe* in 1887 – wholly on the topic of his technique for novel composition; however, he expressed himself frequently on the point, often in heated responses to readerly criticism. Such reactionism is itself significant (even the aforementioned article is constructed as an epistolary reply to a theoretical reader) as it speaks to the centrality of rhetorical effect in

his understanding of fiction writing. Biographer Kenneth Robinson has argued that the central theme of Collins's many prefaces is their "seek(ing) to establish a closer relationship between author and reader" (69), and, for Collins, the construction of his novels hinged upon this engagement between author and audience. After his first full-length serialized novel, *The Dead Secret*, met with lukewarm response (failing to keep the reader sufficiently curious as to its "secret" [Preface 1861]), Collins made it his goal to design plot meant explicitly to "stagger the public into attention" by generating maximum suspense (qtd. in Robinson 141). It would be difficult to find an expression of method where concern for (in this case unabashedly "sensational") effect was more thoroughly woven into narrative process. About the composition of *Armadale*, Collins wrote similarly. His procedure, he tells a curious reader in an October 1865 letter, is essentially a two step one: first, he settles the main events of the story; second, he completes the narrative by deciding "How I shall lead you from one main event to the other (and) how I may yet develop my characters and make them clear to you" (*Letters* 1:259). The writing of *Armadale* is thus envisioned as a theoretical interaction with an assumed audience, wherein the movement of narrative from event to event, the development of the story, is inseparable from preferred effects on the reader.

As the quote also indicates, Collins's understanding of characterization is part of this rhetorical perspective. As early as 1856, the author wrote about the importance of generating readerly response by manipulating character types: "Would readers be fatally startled out of their sense of propriety if the short charmer with the golden hair appeared before them as a serious, strong-minded (…) guilty woman? (This experiment) would be

worth trying" ("A Petition" 81-82). In developing this hypothetical character, Collins has in mind, first and foremost, its role as a persuasive trope. He imagines the initial traits of the character, her shortness and golden hair, as those that will evoke certain audience expectations, and then develops that character and her traits (making her "appear before the reader") specifically towards overturning those expectations. In other words, to adopt some terms from James Phalen's rhetorical interpretation of narrative,[56] Collins theorizes the forward movement of plot activating character "dimensions" ("any attribute [...] considered in isolation from [the text]") into "functions" ("a particular application of that attribute made by the text through its developing structure") for various rhetorical effects (*Reading People* 9). This idea, what Phalen terms "progression," helps to clarify how *Armadale*'s characterization generates its extra-textual effect.

As my reading of the prologue earlier showed, progression for *Armadale*'s two protagonist figures, Allan and Midwinter, constitutes what I call a "narrative performance of gentlemanly identity." The activation of Allan's and Midwinter's dimensions ultimately names one of them to supply "character" to the characterless "Armadale," itself established as a placeholder for gentlemanly status. This bringing of (formal) "character" to the gentleman parallels a widespread, contemporary strain of thought about social identity

56 The rhetorical bent of my approach makes Phalen's theory of character an obvious resource, and I generally find it quite accurate. However, my inherently disconsonant theory of the "gentleman/criminal amalgamation" means to put pressure on Phalen's assumption that "texts are designed by authors in order to affect readers in particular ways" (*Experiencing Fiction* 4). For, while I roughly agree with this statement, I want to show how what might be called the "general intentionality" of the text produces contingent encodings of minute, sometimes enigmatic details into that text's syntax, form, etc. – encodings which can only be uncovered via close reading. For instance, my upcoming discussion of the punctuation of "A,r,m,a,d,a,l,e" and "O.M" does not view this punctuation as, itself, a deliberate technique meant to cue the reader to a certain way of understanding, but, rather, sees it as a by-product of the text's general movement to rewrite gentlemanly identity through Midwinter's brand of criminal inconsistence. I am influenced in this technique by Garrett Stewart's theory of "narrative intension" (25). Also, I deliberately avoid categorizing "progressions" into "synthetic," "mimetic," and "symbolic" interests (Phalen *Experiencing Fiction* 6) as I find such distinctions extraneous to my purposes.

(expressed most notably in Samuel Smiles in *Self-Help*) which defined the aforementioned "consistent conduct" of new gentlemen as a form of "character;" the term here employed as something akin to performative *ethos.*[57] Exploiting the acted/interpretive nature of such an understanding of character, Collins's novel conflates the two meanings of the word, thus allowing the narrative's "character"ization to reformulate and re-perform "character" as it was used to define the gentleman as a social identity. More specifically, *Armadale* re-describes said identity by contrasting Midwinter to the hyper-regular Allan and then activating his dimensions of "criminal" inconsistency into viable components of the Armadale name. In this manner, the novel defends the sensation genre against charges of un-gentlemanliness by narratively redefining the term itself.

To begin tracing the novel's redefinition of gentlemanly identity in detail, one can look at the initial dimensions of the two candidates for the identity of Armadale. The most immediate markers are their names, which become known to the reader before either character appears in the text. The first, Allan Armadale, is shared with the figure whose inheritance is in question, ostensibly suggesting potential for the characteristics of this Allan to transition smoothly into the space of "gentleman." He has, in some sense, a name already prepared for the position. The symmetry of the double "A"s complements this finished quality, lending an aspect of internal integrity, of being self-contained. Even when the name is broken down its totality persists, as it separates syllabically into "*All* an Armadale." Such coherence, however, becomes somewhat problematic when actually judged against the original "A,R,M,A,D,A,L,E" of the prologue. The typographic porousness

57 For an extensive analysis of this point, see Chapter One, "Dr. Smiles and the Counterfeit Gentlemen."

here seems to beg for a certain fluidity, for a name that can permeate the fissures which break the letters apart and that can cohere the broken fragments together. The integrity of "Allan Armadale," in this regard, is a bit stiff and unrelenting – a fact reinforced by the stony, mono-syllabic thud of name most closely associated with Allan, that of his tutor, B*rock*.

The designation of the second candidate, Ozias Midwinter, positions him in opposition to Allan. Here, the "Mid" gestures towards apparent liminality, marking its owner as unsettled. The dissonance between the surname and the Hebrew "Ozias" furthers this sense of unsettledness by preventing internal cohesion. The name reads as fragmented, unable to hold itself together. And yet the very fragmentariness of the name intimates a potential basis for the character's viability as a furnisher of the gentleman name. First appearing as the additionally fragmented initials "O.M.," the name demonstrates that openness that the typography of the original suggests is needed. The capitalized and spaced "O.M." is arranged to fill securely the gaps in "A,R,M,A,D,A,L,E" – the periods between the letters substituting for the commas which mark the latter as unfinished.

Midwinter's ability to complement the role of gentleman is later reinforced by the disclosure that the name is self-chosen. In a novel replete with referential confusion even in its very title (Hensley 617), Midwinter's "alias" hints towards his ability to manipulate and enact his identity to various ends. The narrative accentuates this point when another character claims, "I really think we may feel sure about the man's name! It is so remarkably ugly that it must be genuine" (73). Here, the speaker's aesthetic judgment converts the

fragmentariness of the name into an "ugliness" which then effectively confirms its authenticity in the eyes of the receiver. In other words, "Ozias Midwinter" works to validate said character's performed identity precisely because it is so disorderly. Moreover, the speaker's association of aesthetic demerit and fracturing mirrors that of anti-sensationalists' devaluation of the genre based on its inconsistent form. The name in question, then, not only characterizes its owner as inconsistent; it also begins the narrative's redefinition of gentlemanliness, prefiguring Midwinter's inconsistencies as feasible "dimensions" to be "progressed" into the novel's teleological gentleman role.

Early, direct narrative description increases the disparity between the two protagonists' dimensions. Within the first few pages of "Book the First," Allan's consistency reaches acute levels. He initially appears in the present tense of the story having recently returned from a tour amidst "the spectacle of the great metropolis," a visit which "had diverted (him), but had not altered him in the least" (66). In fact, the passing of five years, the narrator tells, has made "little, if any, change in (his) character" (65). Here, the scale of Allan's immutability shows most directly in the quantitative indicators "five years," "in the least," and "little, if any." That his constancy remains amidst metropolitan spectacle designates it specifically as a sign of that ideology of middle-class gentlemanliness opposed to sensation. In *Techniques of the Observer*, Jonathan Crary notes how Victorians formulated "a plurality of means to (…) regiment" the eye so as to exert control over the potentially destabilizing force of the urban spectacular[58] (24). For Collins's contemporary readers, the most notable London "spectacle" would have been of this kind – the Great

58 In *Victorian Spectacular Theatre*, Michael Booth traces the increasingly spectacular mode of the age through the "special effects" associated with the dynamic metropolis. Thomas Richards similarly traces what he sees as the "era of spectacle," the genesis of which he locates in the Great Exhibition of 1851 (3).

Exhibition of 1851, an event publicized explicitly under that term and in whose year a large portion of *Armadale*'s "present" takes place.[59] Bringing together the products of modernity under one roof, the show meant to secure the worrisome volatility exemplified in such display under the auspices of self-made capitalist-gentlemen, on hand at scheduled lectures to explain a singular "what you ought to learn (…) from the spectacle" (Whewell 9). In other words, the exhibition marked an ideological attempt at exerting control over modern dynamism by subsuming it under the reliable, uniform interpretation of "men of character." By cultivating a "shared spectatorship," the producers of the fair turned gazing into a process where "the correct signs of moral distinction" could be discerned (Montwieler 45). The sameness of Allan's outlook post-London signals his association with such a form of gentlemanly identity – an association stressed in explicit mention of his static "*character*."

Allan is also static *as* a character, and, in this regard, he conforms to "realist" models of the protagonist. Franco Moretti, for instance, notes the tendency of the Victorian *bildungsroman* to construct heroes whose purpose is simply to remain immutable in the "theater of fluctuating and changing identities" (203). Similarly, Peter Brooks argues that the deviance central to plotting leaves the normative – in this case, the hero of the Victorian novel – devoid of energy (139). That Allan fits this criterion does not suggest that he is more mimetically "real" than his counterpart. Rather, taking Richard Nemesvari's idea that "the formulation of 'the sensational' was an essential, constitutive strategy which reified 'the realistic' in ways which had been unachievable before" (17), I suggest that this particular dimension simply aligns Allan with a competing mode of gentlemanliness as

59 Later, Allan's lawyer, Pedgift, explicitly recommends that he attend the Great Exhibition in order to "arrive in no time at the *mens sana in copore sano*"(419) – in other words, to stabilize his mind.

propagated in the realist novel. In this latter model, the hero is always already a gentleman; he only has to remain constant until circumstance (Moretti theorizes specifically the interposition of just law [213]) makes him legible. Within this paradigm, Allan's simple readability – his "frankness," and his "easy and open," "inveterately good-humored" manner (65) – characterizes him as a prime, potential gentleman. As I will show, however, *Armadale*'s plot progression proves the passiveness inherent in such ideology to be problematic; in this regard Allan's "realist" characterization works to combat the ideology of gentlemanliness built into that mode.

The second candidate, who is variously referred to as "the usher," Ozias Midwinter, or some combination thereof, is (as such designation-slippage suggests) hyper-inconsistent. His initial description: "Young, slim, and undersized, he was strong enough at that moment to make it a matter of some difficulty for […] two men to master him. [He had a] tawny complexion, [and] large bright brown eyes […] His dress was a little worn, but his linen was clean. His dusky hands were wiry and nervous, and were lividly discolored in more places than one" (67-8). Midwinter is inherently mixed – "slim and undersized" but "strong," "tawny" but "bright," his clothes are "worn" and "clean," his "dusky hands" are spotted with discoloration. When he is first discovered by Allan and his patron, he contradictorily shows "a horrible sincerity" combined with a "savage rapture of gratitude," which makes his patron "half attracted," "half repelled" (75). His initial actions, and the reactions which they cause, are nearly paradoxical. In this sense, (contrasting Allan) he is deeply embedded in the codes of sensation genre, the jarring contradictions of which evoke intense reaction and anxiety.

The narrative brands Midwinter's inconsistency as criminal by describing him as a "vagabond" (65). In the early nineteenth century, the term was the second of three degrees of vagrancy[60] identified by law as hostile to the social order and therefore liable to imprisonment (Rose 3-5). As indicated by Henry Mayhew's famous assessment that "the young vagrant is the budding criminal" (369), itinerancy was generally considered an initial step on the way to greater crime. Although the Metropolitan Houseless Poor Acts of 1864-1865 meant to de-stigmatize the vagrant by essentially requiring the provision of poor relief without reference to place of settlement (Freeman and Nelson 15), vagrancy remained under the purview of the law throughout the century. Further reformist attempts to demarcate the "socially useful" members of the wandering class only led to segregation of various types labeled "residuum" (Koven 34-35); such that, at the time of *Armadale*'s serialization, Midwinter's status as "vagabond" would have been nearly synonymous with outlaw.

Collins's narrative solidifies the connection between Midwinter's illicit vagabondism and his inconsistency by pinpointing the rationale behind vagrancy's criminalization in unease over the irregular behavior that it was thought to foster. This move would seem to substantiate economic historian Robert Humphreys's claim that Victorian persecution of the itinerant was based in that figure's resistance to "Smilesian virtues" (91). However, while Humphreys maintains that these virtues were primarily economic, leading to what he sees as a dichotomy between idleness and "thrift, diligence, and respectability" (91),

60 Lionel Rose outlines the degrees as: "Idle and Disorderly," "Rogues and Vagabonds," and "Incorrigible Rogues." The criminalization of vagrancy dates back as early as the mid-14th century when the Ordinance of Labourers (1349) and the Statute of Labourers (1351) were enacted to limit geographical mobility in the hopes of reducing mendicancy (Humphreys 26).

Armadale indicates that the anti-social menace of the vagabond was primarily his resistance to the Smilesian virtue of "character." Midwinter's vagrant lifestyle is, in fact, quite active – he lives as schoolboy, gipsy, footboy, sailor's mate, fisherman, peddler, and clerk, to name a few. Its incompatibility with middle class social codes lies instead in its leaving him without "friends to assist him" and "as for relations (…) for all *they* knew *he* might be dead" (74, original emphasis). He therefore cannot "give a proper account of (his) character" (74-75) to Allan's tutor, Mr. Brock. For, by a "proper character," Brock expects verifiable consistency – an expectation shown in his desire for written testimonials (69). Such items were commonly used to confirm character by proving a person's sameness throughout movement from one social sphere to another. The vagabond's presumed lack in this regard excludes him from "proper" social interaction.

And yet this deficiency also afforded the itinerant class a subversive mobility. Mayhew's almost obsessive attempt to demarcate and classify the various types of London transients points towards the anxiety that their "characterless" state evoked. A transcription of one of these transient's responses to Mayhew's inquiries specifies such anxiety. "I tell you the truth," the man says, "because I am known here; and if I tell you a lie, you'll say 'You spoke an untruth in one thing and you'll do so in another.'" (386). The rationale for honest interaction is here based upon the practical expediency of consistent behavior. The speaker imagines a sort of give-and-take scheme where his telling the truth "in one thing," benefits him by persuading others to believe him "in another." Of course, this whole system is contingent upon the idea of a relatively enduring interchange, what

the speaker calls being "known." The implication of his conditional "because" is that he would not speak truthfully were he not "known," having no pragmatic need to do so.

And this being "known" is exactly what the state of the vagabond circumvents. The continuous movement that socially marginalizes him simultaneously leaves him free from the restraints which Mayhew's text imagines prevent deception and fraud. Collins's narrative evokes a similar fear through Midwinter's account of his past. The usher is ejected from an honest position as a servant specifically because he has no "character to appeal to" (110). However, "on the road," this lack of character allows him to assume the false name Midwinter, a deception that he credits as having "allowed me to escape" capture from his stepfather and the authorities (111). Midwinter thereby evinces what Mayhew, in his uneasiness over the treacherous opportunities which social marginalization potentially affords, repeatedly insists is the vagrant's general "shrewdness and acuity" (369). In thus marking Midwinter's dimension of "inconsistency" as criminal, Collins's narrative at first affects to comply with that ideology of character that, I am arguing, its progression undermines.

Central to such undermining is the simultaneous configuration of Midwinter's "criminal" incongruence as a sign of heightened receptivity. By exploiting the critical correlation between sensationalism's jarring tropes and its "preaching to the nerves," the text is convincingly able to frame Midwinter's fragmented nature as a "nervous restlessness in his organization" (73). Critics such as Jenny Bourne Taylor and Monica M. Young-Zook have read this nervousness as a marker of Midwinter's deviation from conventional, "muscular" British manliness and have thereby used it to portray him as, respectively, a

feminine hysteric ("Sensitive" 163) and a colonial "other" (237). But such assessments, in so quickly distancing Midwinter from one form of British manhood, overlook the possibility of his being associated with another. Tamara S. Wagner's claim that Collins's protagonists frequently "hark back to the sentimental heroes of the late-eighteenth-century novel" (471) provides a constructive suggestion in this regard. Indeed, the prevalent understanding that eighteenth-century "sensibility" implied a corresponding physiology (Van Sant 8) situates Midwinter's nerves in this context. His connection to the sentimental hero is textually corroborated when, upon first meeting Mr. Brock, he feels that man's repulsion "long before a man of no more than ordinary *sensibility* would have felt what was coming" (my emphasis, 78). Here, Midwinter's nerves are conflated with sensibility to become the basis for heightened perception. His disharmonious, fractured constitution appears to leave him extraordinarily open to sensory impulses, lending him a peculiar sagacity. Hyper-inconsistency thus becomes a sign of unusual perspicaciousness, an ability to read and discern what others cannot.

Such powers of detection set Midwinter apart in a novel that teems with investigations, surveillance, and spies, both expert and amateur. Generally, the narrative portrays this network of supervision in a negative light. The professional investigator, Mr. Bashwood of the Private Inquiry Offices, shows most odiously as "the vile creature (who is) ready on the merest suspicion to get under our beds (without) a sense of pity or a sense of shame" (627). His gaze is penetrating, but noxious and ultimately one-dimensional – it is a "sense" that lacks higher "senses" (those of "human sympathy" [627] such as pity and shame).

Critic Caroline Reitz has argued that Collins's negative portrayal of the spy in Bashwood is but a foil to be superseded by the much more admirable lawyers, the Pedgifts, as "emerging detective type(s)" (100). However, the Pedgifts' gaze power, while not as readily detestable as that of Bashwood, ultimately proves ineffective. The suspected impostor, Lydia Gwilt, continually subverts their attempts to keep her under the watch of their "pitiless common sense," and ultimately causes their investigation to end futilely (437). She similarly dupes the "essentially unimaginative mind" (88) and "comfortable common sense" (125) of Mr. Brock by turning his gaze against him. Enlisting her maid to dress up in her habit and display herself to Brock repeatedly, she deceives him into spying on the wrong woman. As Lisa Niles notes, Gwilt challenges "Victorian social mores, (which deem that) if (she) is, indeed, a villainess with a degraded character, then her moral corruption should be visible" (67). Her ability to present herself falsely undermines the surety of the Pedgifts' and Brock's observation – not to mention the doubly inadequate gaze of Allan, who "never looked below the surface of anybody's conduct" (180). Importantly, the terms used to describe such vision – "common sense," "comfortable," and "unimaginative" – contrast directly with Midwinter's uncommon and agitated sensitivity. His atypical, "criminal" disposition thus becomes indicative of potential for a discernment more capable of bringing order to an age where "all roguery (…) is careful enough to keep up appearances" (810). In this manner, his viability as a gentleman, in so far as that figure's prerogative is social regulation, begins to emerge.

In fact, the issue of discernment is the hinge upon which the novel's activation of the respective dimensions of Midwinter and Allan – and hence its reorientation of the

gentleman towards criminal inconsistency – turns. It serves therefore as an appropriate segue way into an examination of the novel's character progression.

"Character"izing the Gentleman: Characters Reading

In book one, chapter four, Collins presents readers with an intra-textual dream sequence, which, in potentially confirming the idea earlier proffered that Allan and Midwinter are fated to clash in death, destabilizes the main narrative. Conflict threatens the bond of friendship between the two characters as well as the security of the Armadale name. In the resulting progression, Allan and Midwinter attempt to understand the dream by each developing a hermeneutics based upon their respective dimensions. Allan's common discernment, grounded in dimensions of constancy, sees it as an *in somno* repetition of past experience. The hyper-sensitivity of Midwinter, on the other hand, leads him to read the dream as an ambiguous, semi-incoherent prefiguring of events. Eventually, the main narrative discloses Midwinter's interpretation as the more effective preserver of the Armadale name, and I want to argue further that such disclosure serves to expose the ideological "constructedness" of gentlemanly identity embedded in Allan's hermeneutics. At the same time, I suggest, the narrative performs its own ideological work, re-inscribing that identity with traits of "criminal" inconsistence.

Dreaming serves as a particularly viable avenue for Collins's novelistic re-definition of gentlemanliness; for, in the mid-nineteenth century, scholars of dream interpretation were employing a rhetoric of identity similar to that found in sensation debates. In a concerted effort to shift thinking about dreams away from non-rationalistic forms of thought, "mental scientists" such as John Abercrombie, William Newnham, Robert MacNish,

and Walter C. Dendy cast dreams as incoherencies that needed to be brought into order by "natural (…) governing laws" (Bernard 197).

Most often, they rationalized the necessity for this ordering in terms of mental and physical health. Dreams were seen as the result of an unhealthy nervous disorder within the individual. Newnham, for instance, claims that they "may be generally considered as resulting from some (…) morbid action of the brain" (160). Similarly, MacNish associates dreams with "the sleep of disease" (10), and quotes a Dr. Rush in classifying them as "transient paroxysm(s) of delirium" (45). This final reference hints towards the general concurrence that the root of such "disease" subsisted in variations of what Newnham calls a "peculiar excitement (…) which (disturbs) the nervous system" (169). The excitement might be as benign as a direct physical stimulant at or near the time of sleep –L.A. Maury's experiment where an administered bottle of Eau de Cologne caused dreams of perfume stores in Cairo is a famous instance of this kind (qtd. in Seafield 16). In more serious cases, however, it was categorized as "proximate" – a person's past ideas and actions, recurring in distorted form while asleep (Dendy 45). Such understanding, wherein dreams become agitated disruption, parallels the rhetoric of sickness that typified sensation criticism. (Mansel, himself, employs verbatim the terms "morbid," "disease," and "delirium"). In the same way that critics saw the sensation reader as wanting remedy for the morbid over-stimulation of narrative jolts, so too mental scientists viewed the dreamer's condition as a hyper-excited nervous illness in need of a curative.

Further, mental scientists' conceptualization of dream-as-disease was grounded in a paradigm of the healthy individual analogous to that signaled by the term "character" in

critiques of sensationalism. MacNish, in fact, explicitly states that dreams are closely tied to "character" (62) which he clarifies as "whatever propensities (…) are strongest in the mind of an individual" (64). This definition is particularly important, as the high regard for "propensity" points towards the strong influence of Associationist theories of the individual upon mental scientists' hermeneutics. To interpret the phenomenon of dreaming, MacNish and fellow physicians adopted notions of the mind conceptualized by Locke and filtered through the more recent Associationist work of David Hartley in his *Observations of Man, his Frame, Duty and Expectations* (1749). Hartley's reading of Locke's idea that the mind functioned through the linking of ideas into chains of thought, led him to a model where repetition formed lasting physical vibrations in the brain and thereby established the course of reminiscence and thought generally. Drawing from this model, dream theorists explained the wild ideas and images in dreams as "imperfect associations" (Dendy 39), "the resuscitation or re-embodiment of (former) thoughts (broken) loose from their connecting chain, and (…) jumbled together incoherently" (MacNish 49). By thus setting the metaphor of the chain within an outline of dreams-as-disease, such work implied a dichotomy between consistency (the linking of repetition) as forming the healthy individual and inconsistency (the dream's de-regularizing of the chain) as signifying ill health. In this way, its pseudo-medical framework indirectly reinforced popular ideologies of "character" which equated consistence with the sound, moral individual.

As a result, mental scientists' process of dream analysis aggrandized consistency as an accepted *telos*. Investigation began with the assumption that the initial unintelligibility of dreams was due to internal discord. Newnham, for instance, claims that, in dreams, one

loses the "perfect integrity of the brain" (170) resulting in images which "want at least *one link* to constitute them perfect mental operations" (163, original emphasis). MacNish similarly identifies dreams as the result of a "(dis)quiescence of all the organs which compose the brain" (43). Even as these quotes characterize the dream-state as disharmonious, they simultaneously evince a desire for cohesion – implied in the repeated prefix "con" (compose, constitute) and explicit in the words "integrity," "perfect," and "quiescence." Conceptualizing interpretation as the ordering of fragmented dream-action into coherent understanding, mental scientists presumed to fulfill this desire. The corrupted chain of mental thoughts, it was understood, could be slowly repaired via analysis once again to form a regular thread. The individual's consistency was thus established at the same time that wholeness was restored, perpetuating a notion of the one's indispensability to the other.

Allan's experience of the Armadale dream is essentially a recapitulation of these, mental scientists' theories. Temporarily jolted out of his customary disposition by the seeming unintelligibility of the dream,[61] Allan recovers himself by conceptualizing that unintelligibility as disarranged past experience and then reordering it. He and a Dr. Hawbury use the latter's "rational theory of dreams" to "trace back the whole succession of events (…) to something that he (Allan) has said or thought, or seen or done" (174), thus making his disordered thoughts "take some *consistency*" (178, my emphasis). A variation on mental science, in other words, is used to promote the necessity of reintegrating one's

61 The plot of the dream is, roughly, as follows: After envisioning himself drowning with his father, Allan sees a Shadow of a Woman standing near the margins of a pool. Darkness. He then sees the Shadow of a Man near a window. This figure stretches out its hand and knocks over a statue which falls into fragments. Darkness again. Allan finally sees the two shadows together. They give him a drink whereupon he is absorbed into the darkness of oblivion (172).

actions, erroneously fragmented, into regular, concordant procession. Allan's act of interpretation thereby becomes a self-reflexive move; a means of obliquely validating his own hyper-consistent character dimensions as the requisite traits of sound, gentlemanly "character."

Other aspects of the narrative, however, undercut this argument for requisite consistency of self by signaling Allan's hermeneutic system as overly narrow, marked by omission and ignorance.[62] Eventually, his understanding of the dream proves his dimensions as inadequate to fill the role of Armadale. In this manner, the novel uses dream interpretation to set the prevalent cultural ideology of gentlemanly "character" (consistent conduct) against character as the narratological space of gentlemanliness represented by the Armadale name. Allan's reading thus serves, in its faultiness, to facilitate the novel's overarching, contrary movement towards integrating "criminal" inconsistency into the gentleman.

The account of the event that prompts the dream first encourages the reader to doubt the accuracy of Allan's "mental scientist" methodology. The setting is the wreck of the ship on which Midwinter's father had murdered Allan's father years earlier. The return of this vessel, marked as ominous by its sensational description as gloomy and full of shadow (147-148), substantiates the still lingering influence of the dark history upon the present. The place remains under a malevolent cloud, its literal fracturedness a symbolic reminder of the past fracturing of the Armadale family. At the same time, the narrative

62 In the *Armadale* appendix, Collins claims that he allows his readers "to interpret (the dream) by the natural or supernatural theory, as the bent of their own minds may incline them" (817). This intention holds true to some extent. The narrative never explicitly discounts nor explicitly validates either theory. However, it recognizes the ideological work behind both, and, ultimately, I suggest, its own ideological movement opposes the "natural" interpretation.

juxtaposes this sinister valance against Allan's self-satisfied manner. The narrator describes him "astride on the bulwark, (bursting) into his loudest and heartiest laugh" (147). "Cheerfully," he "saunter(s) humming the chorus of a comic song" (148). The dissonance between such behavior and the disturbing history of the ship, about which Allan is unaware, equates his complacency with ignorance. Further, in the superlative nature of the laugh and the connotations of the verbs "astride" and "saunter," this complacence carries an undertone of audacity, heightening the effect of the dramatic irony which permeates the scene – later, Allan laughs again while looking directly at the cabin where his father was murdered (150). Such irony works to distance the reader from Allan's later interpretation of the dream, as its impact requires indulgence in the notion that the wreck that cues it has greater significance than Allan and Dr. Hawbury will concede. Thus, Allan's posture towards the stimulus of the dream stresses the restrictiveness of his self-possession.

Allan's dream-state, in contrast, is characterized by temporary loss of composure. His "perfect repose" becomes "the distorted face of a suffering man" (163), who awakens in a condition where he must "wait a little till I'm my own man again" (164). The linking of the dream with temporary self-dispersal marks it as a rupture of the ignorance tied to Allan's composure. Fragmented, much like the fragmented ship, he sees in it what his coherent self does not.

His loss of "own"ership over himself, I would further suggest, links his distorted vision to Midwinter and his nervous sensibilities. Earlier in the novel, Midwinter's anxiousness had exhibited a strange communicability. Mr. Brock, for instance, is atypically

"discompose(d)" (73) upon first seeing the usher. Later, recollection of Midwinter causes "his *essential*ly unimaginative mind (…) to stagger" (88, my emphasis). Midwinter's nervousness disarranges Brock at his very essence, and that disarrangement seems to transfer to the latter the extraordinary, imaginative qualities associated with those nerves. The description of Allan in his dream state hints similarly at this nervous influence:

> The dreamer's helpless groaning for deliverance grew louder; his hands raised themselves, and clutched at the empty air. Struggling with the all-mastering dread that still held him, Midwinter laid his hand… (164)

The structure of this excerpt conflates Allan's agitation with that of his friend. The introductory clause of the second sentence defers the noun "Midwinter," allowing the "dread" to "master" Allan as, for a split second, it simultaneously "masters" Midwinter. In this conflation, the former, dreaming, merges with the latter and his heightened sensibilities. The men become united via grammatical arrangement. In effect, the syntax replicates an act of mesmerism, a "science" which, as Lewis Roberts explains, was closely tied to Collins's understanding of dreams (175). Allan, in sleep, is "owned" by his companion. His nightmare vision is thus specifically sold as a projection of the agitated Midwinter, who, unlike Allan, knows of the ship's dreadful history and believes its reappearance to be an ill omen; and whose nervous disorder, as I have pointed out, the narrative generally aligns with acumen. Further, roughly ten years before *Armadale* was published, Collins himself had written of the possibility of magnetism's "open(ing) to our view glimpses into the dim dark regions" ("Magnetic Evenings"). Hence, the reader leaves

the scene prompted in multiple ways to regard Allan's disordered dream state as a moment of insight specifically concerning the Armadale history.

Hawbury's and Allan's interpretation then reads as doubly regressive, closing off the communication with the Armadale past and setting its goal as the restoration of Allan's complacency. The narrative emphasizes the first point through Hawbury's boast that the vision can be traced to events "in the four-and-twenty hours, or less, which preceded his (Allan's) falling asleep" (174). This is a significant alteration of mental scientists' theories of association. As Abercrombie conjectures, dreams consist of both recent events *and* "old events" (258) or "old associations, respecting things which had entirely passed out of the mind, and which seem to have been forgotten" (265). Hawbury's hyperbolic limiting of events to one day underlines the narrowness of his viewpoint. Even while employing a theory grounded in the recurrence of past events, he and Allan leave untouched a large quarry of potentially associative events. Instead, they identify the two shadows in Allan's dream "with such unromantic originals as a woman who keeps a hotel, and a man who physics a country district" (181). The generic unsuitability of this surmise – made "creakily" explicit in the adjective "unromantic" – within the framework of a sensation novel, ensures a failure to satisfy readerly expectation, further discrediting Hawbury's analysis.

The explanation also alienates the ungratified reader from Allan, who, conversely, expresses his full contentment with it. "Not a point missed anywhere from beginning to end" (181) he exclaims, evoking the metaphor of the associative dream chain. His satisfaction is here aligned with the pro-consistency ideology embedded in both mental

science theory and his own character dimensions. The reader, having been cued not to share in this satisfaction, is consequently put at odds with such ideology, and, by extension, the type of gentlemanly identity that Allan represents. The chapter's final description of Allan, accepting the doctor's reading "with the ready reverence of intense ignorance" (181), deepens such contrariety. The already established association between the unsettling nature of Allan's dream and heightened acuity has determined that Hawbury's process of re-settling translate as a type of "perception withdrawal," obfuscating more than it clarifies. Here, the narrative explicitly reinforces that point, designating Allan's reconstitution as a restoration of "ignorance." Thus, in buttressing Allan's dimensional consistency, Hawbury's interpretation is shown to dichotomize that "dimension" against fluency in the narrative's "gentleman"-placeholder, the Armadale name.

The passivity which stems from Allan's dimensional consistence is also here set in opposition to fluency in "Armadale-ness." Contrasting Midwinter's hyper-sensitive receptivity, Allan's "ready reverence" proves him to be indiscriminately open, receiving Hawbury's interpretative retreat from the Armadale past with stupefied compliance. At the beginning of the next book, the narrative develops this split between Allan's passivity and his connection with the Armadale name. When the ancestral Thorpe-Ambrose estate is bestowed upon him, Allan accepts the title but shirks the public reception planned for his arrival. In doing so, he "falls in (his townspeople's) estimation" (241) and, as Catherine Peters argues, shows himself without "right to enjoy the privileges of his new position" ("Introduction" xix). Here, the narrative eschews simple resolution, wherein the bestowal of the estate upon Allan would confirm him as gentleman. Instead, being itself (as I have

suggested) a performance of gentlemanly identity, the novel unsurprisingly figures gentlemanly identity *within* the text as also performative. As indicated by the chapter title, which has "Allan *as* (versus "is") a Landed Gentleman" (201, my emphasis), gentlemanliness is a role that must be enacted. Allan proves only able to receive the position. Because, in his consistency, he overlooks the importance of adapting his behavior to "let (the town) make a public show of him" (229), he cannot actively retain it. The passiveness resultant from his consistency, therefore, undermines his ability to relate to and thus preserve the Armadale title – a fact that becomes critical when conflicts from the Armadale past resurface to threaten the present.

The failure of Allan's dimensions to function in the narratively delineated space of "the gentleman, Armadale" allows for the ingress of those of his counterpart, Ozias Midwinter. The novel constructs his interpretation of Allan's nightmare by tapping into alternative understandings of the dream-state in order to figure dream-related inconsistency as, itself, a purposeful *telos*, and thereby self-reflexively reinforce Midwinter's analogous character dimensions as viable traits towards its own end. The narrative progression then confirms such reinforcement, activating Midwinter's "criminally" inconsistent dimensions into constructive elements of its gentlemanly character space. By erratically wavering between a belief in the dream as a prognostication and doubt in his own conviction, Midwinter is able to reformulate the conflicts embedded in the Armadale name (and reawakened through the return of Lydia Gwilt).

Midwinter's tenuous belief in the dream as a premonition incorporates the sort of hermeneutic paradigm away from which mental scientists were attempting to move.

Dendy, Newnham, and MacNish unanimously reject the visionary power of dreams as, respectively, irrational (70), "groundless (and) inexplicable" (223), and "unphilosophical" (102). Such adjectives correlate the dismissal of supernatural visions with their general incompatibility to mental scientists' preferred modes of thought. Acknowledging the idea of pre-vision would mean disrupting the surety of an associative schema based upon recurrence. MacNish eschews premonition to such an extent that he claims, "I would not have noticed it, were it not advocated even by persons of good sense and education" (102). Significantly, this statement suggests that, despite the scientific counter-movement outlined above, notions of premonition remained prevalent within the mid-Victorian cultural conversation of dreaming.

Indeed, strong spiritualist movements, both secular and religious, pervaded discourses about dreaming and formed a significant resistance to mental science. John Sheppard's *On Dreams, In Their Mental and Moral Aspects* (1847) postulates that the soul is made of minute particles that allow it to pass out of the material body during sleep and gather supernatural messages (48). Thomas Millington similarly writes that "during sleep (…) the mind in its partial abstraction from the body learns from a higher (…) order of spirits (…) future events" (32). Here, both writers cast dreaming as a space where self and body part and transcendental knowledge is acquired. The fractured visions from which mental scientists saw the need to recoup identity are instead relished as a source of higher awareness.

In a related manner, another strain of spiritualist thinking saw dreams as containing messages sent from God, often citing Scriptural prophecy as evidence. Mrs. Blair's *Dreams*

and Dreaming (1843), for example, supports the contention that "the phenomenon of dreaming is inexplicable (…) without taking in the agency and intervention of spiritual beings, to us invisible" (41). Similarly, Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* (1848) argues that man's spiritual connection to God allows a straddling between the material and spiritual world in sleep (10). Like Sheppard and Millington, these writers characterize dreaming as a mystical, semi-incomprehensible state. They explain it by conceptualizing the infiltrated dreamer as a split being, sharing his/her agency with that of a heavenly messenger. And this splitting is invariably positive, a means of obtaining greater moral understanding. In other words, such explanations employ a theological rhetoric to incorporate the ambiguities of dreaming– ambiguities which mental scientists cast as disease – into a framework of ethics. The above samples give some sense of how spiritualists during the period were assigning positive value to dream-state incoherencies in a variety of ways and to a variety of ends, thereby offering numerous alternatives to the mental science process and its ideological bent.

Armadale exploits the cultural authority inculcated by the popular spread of spiritualist viewpoints in somewhat haphazard fashion. A number of spiritualist motifs emerge throughout the narrative, connecting Midwinter's visionary interpretation with prevalent, extra-textual modes of thought. For example, when the narrator relates Midwinter's thoughts as he looks upon the sleeping Allan: "It had come, in the bright freshness of the morning; it had come in the mystery and terror of a Dream (…) There he (Allan) lay – so near in the body (…) so far away in the spirit" (163). Two Spiritualist's understandings present themselves here. The neuter, third-person pronoun's serving as

the subject of the opening sentence taps into notions of the inspired dreamer by giving agency to a presumed external source. At the same time, the separateness of Allan's body and spirit harkens to theories that explained visions as the acquisition of a disembodied soul. Later, the novel hints towards a theological paradigm as Mr. Brock, in a last desperate attempt, encourages Midwinter to view his visions as "the (Christian) providence of God" (624). Given the cultural interest in seeing dreams as supernatural revelations, such allusions would have worked to lend credence to Midwinter's perspective.

Importantly, however, the narrative avoids validating Midwinter's interpretation via recourse to a strictly spiritualist value system. Allan's dream is never proven to be a prophetic message from a higher power. The novel, then, does not simply offer a substitute to mental science and its contingent ideologies. Instead, it pointedly confronts them: Midwinter's spiritualist approach repudiates the notion that the incoherencies of Allan's dream be viewed as a means for re-establishing individual consistency, and instead posits a contrary interpretation which, in recognizing their significance, requires an affirmation of inconsistency as a viable end point. Thus, his reading simultaneously actives his inconsistent character dimensions and self-referentially premises their teleological worth. The narrative progression confirms Midwinter's premise by showing how his activated dimensions prove him able to safeguard the Armadale identity. In this manner, the question as to what extent, if at all, the dream is premonitory becomes irrelevant. Collins's fiction skirts this issue, because what matters is that Midwinter's hermeneutic approach, whether uncovering a prophetic "truth" or not, *works* – it activates Midwinter's basic inconsistency to maintain the novel's representation of gentlemanliness.

The reason that Midwinter's hermeneutics lead him to a conclusion rife with inconsistencies is owing to his belief in the prognostic nature of Allan's dream. Adopting his father's claim that the original, Armadale crime is "ripening again for the future in the self-same circumstance (of) the past" (55), Midwinter concludes that the "Shadow of the Man" in the dream is his future self attempting to murder Allan. Somewhat paradoxically, the abstract pattern of consistency that underlies the fatalism of this idea has embedded in it a necessary inconsistency on the individualist level of "selfhood" where the novel performs the ideological work that I'm addressing.[63] The elder Armadale's belief that his son will harm Allan (thereby repeating his own crime) assumes that this action will riddle him with self-opposition. He fears the event will come despite the fact that Midwinter will "be all that is most repellent to" him (119).

And the scenario in place at the time of the dream establishes that possibility. Midwinter considers his "love for Allan" one of his most worthy feelings (121). For him to accept the shadow as a direct representation of his future self means accepting behavior completely inconsistent with that which he has shown towards Allan, and still expresses, to this point. He confesses exactly this when he tells Brock, "(thinking of this idea,) I struggle against myself" (120) – a point re-emphasized by the narrator's describing "the glaring self-contradictions betrayed in accepting the Dream as the revelation of a fatality" (354). In

63 Because my reading focuses on ideologies of consistency/inconsistency as regards the *formation* of individual character, I favor attending to Midwinter's individual inconsistencies over the consistencies implicit in the idea of fatally inheriting a father's crime. I believe I am on relatively safe ground in choosing this focus as the novel ultimately gives no real credence to the idea that individuality is merely a static construct of fated inheritance. The prophecy is either averted or was never true, either of which choices negates a strictly fatalistic determinism. Further, as I point out, the narrative emphasizes Midwinter's feelings of inconsistency about the reading over any recognition on his part of its conforming to the idea of consistency in Fate.

these remarks[64] and later portrayals of Midwinter's continued self-struggle, the story encourages the reader to understand this inconsistency in Midwinter's reading as more pertinent to his thoughts than the idea of his being consistent to Fate. Thus, the initial point of his spiritualist analysis concludes, first and foremost, with a supposition that self-contradiction be credited as a viable *telos*.

This primary interpretive move also makes contingent a secondary step that requires further acceptance of inconsistency. Taking the dream as a representation of his father's divination leaves no allotted space for the "Shadow of the Woman." Her presence is not part of the scenario upon which Midwinter's hermeneutics are based. Midwinter therefore (perhaps with a vague recollection of the maid figure mentioned by Brock) interprets her as "a person whom my friend has not met with yet" and claims that "the living woman will appear when the living woman is first seen" (182). However, as registered in the somewhat fallacious circularity of the latter claim, such interpretation virtually concedes its inability to incorporate the woman into what, in the case of the man-shadow, seemed so unambiguous a transition from prophecy to dream to future reality. Lacking a clear, prefigured self, the "shadow" of the woman-shadow becomes her primary distinguishing feature. She thus remains fundamentally ambiguous. In this sense, Midwinter's interpretation requires allowance of a sort of internal dissension. It asks for credence in its prophetic reading by virtue of the clarity of the man-shadow even though acceptance of that clarity would make ambiguous the dream's other central component, the

64 The narrative underscores this remark even more so later when Mr. Brock echoes it in a letter: "In what does that belief end? It ends in the darkness in which you are now lost; in the *self-contradictions* in which you are now bewildered" (622, my emphasis).

woman-shadow. In other words, its proposed end point here again makes self-contradiction compulsory.

Midwinter's positing of inconsistency as a viable resolution ultimately gains validation not from the exegesis itself proving correct, but because (in a meta-fictional act) his relationship to that exegesis turns his like dimensions into utile components for the novel's own end. His developing of the interpretation can be seen as the first step in this process; for such development is, in fact, a function of his dimensions – incongruous himself, he reads incongruously. Two significant collaterals result from this action: one, Midwinter's recognition of his supposed future role translates into an intense self-scrutiny that considerably shapes his later interactions with Allan. Contemplating the inward rupture between his present and future selves, he is both drawn to his friend by virtue of the "nobler nature" of his love and repelled from him by the self-loathing thought of his pending fratricide (323). Such dissonance puts him in a liminal mindset, simultaneously fixated on Allan and yet ready to desert him altogether. The second collateral result comes from his resolution to leave the dangerous woman-shadow unidentified. This act transforms his hyper-sensitivity into hyper-suspiciousness – conceptualizing the shadow as an unknown but dangerous variable, he becomes multifariously cautious; as he puts it, "distrustful of even the most trifling misadventures" (187). Both of these attitudes will prove pragmatically valuable in the further progression of the narrative.

Once fully developed, Midwinter's reading further serves to activate his inconsistency into function. Progressing via his dimensionality, Midwinter responds to the reading with an erratic, incongruous position – he maintains a genuine belief in the validity

of its inconsistencies, and yet also conceptualizes such inconsistencies as a reason for doubt. When Hawbury presses him to elaborate upon his understanding of the dream, he blushes "under the lash of the doctor's logic" and yet, the next moment, is again certain that "(it) is my firm conviction" (182-183). Victorian understandings of the blush noted, first, its social "utility" as a facilitator of legible interaction; as Thomas H. Burgess describes in *The Physiology or Mechanism of Blushing* (1839), a genuine blush was thought to make apparent a person's "infring(ing) upon the prescribed laws of society" and also to show his/her capitulation to those laws (49). Midwinter's subordination to Hawbury, here, emphasizes this point, and, moreover, aligns the transgressed rule in question with the inconsistencies of his reading by casting "logic" as the subordinator.[65] In this sense, Midwinter's blush shows his complicit-ness in the doctor's position against himself.

Yet, importantly, Burgess also hypothesized blushing as a sign of "morbid sensibility (…) the chief attribute of men of this temperament (being) inconstancy" (57-58).[66] Such definition gives this blush a second valence, connecting it to Midwinter's dimensions, wherein inconsistency is aligned with hyper-perception. And, indeed, even as Midwinter capitulates to Hawbury, he maintains sufficient confidence in the perspicacity of his inconsistent reading to declare its accuracy moments later. This conflicted position is no momentary one, brought on by idle boasts in the heat of an argument; the narrative

65 Aristotelian "logic," particularly its theory of syllogism, saw a resurgence in the early 19th century, first with Richard Whately's *Elements of Logic* (1826) and then with Mill's empiricist take in the *System of Logic* (1843). Syllogism is a deductive argument that proves sound by the internal consistency of premises and conclusions (Strawson 2).

66 Burgess specifically genders this type of "morbid sensibility"-blushing as a male disease: "The habit of blushing from morbid sensibility is as common with young men as it is with women, and (…) we cannot view it in any other light than as a disease, when it frequently occurs in men" (57, original emphasis). Such gendering suggests that, in the similar cultural conversation regarding sensationalism's morbid effects, the repercussions of reading upon masculine identity would have been a likely concern.

repeatedly depicts Midwinter fluctuating between what it signals as genuine certainty and genuine doubt in the truth of his reading.[67]

In addition, the sensational form of the novel works to codify Midwinter's irregularity – his inconstant-self – by converting it into readerly experience. Collins's narrative, in this case, generates the shocks and jolts so condemned by Mansel and like critics by intermittently coercing the reader into, here, expecting, and, there, discounting that it will ultimately confirm the rule of Fate. The former response is indicated by the profundity which capitalizations of events such as "the Dream," "the Wreck," and "the Adventure" give to narrative occurrences (320, 165). Several times, these hints become more overt "teasers" in mention of "evil hour(s)" and the "fatal Armadale name" (143, 103). Further, the manner in which the narrator parcels information to the reader – such as the response when Midwinter wonders how many days until news of Gwilt: "Not many. The time he was waiting for, was a time close at hand" (288)[68] – assigns to the narrator a *post facto* stance. Even before the story fully unfolds, therefore, it reads as pre-concluded, translating into a vague readerly sense that its events are somehow destined. Such an impression makes it difficult not to read ensuing details – the room at Thorpe-Ambrose

67 One of the most prominent examples of this kind comes during the boating excursion/picnic. Midwinter wanders from the group, and, when Allan finds him, confesses, "'I'm hardly myself to-day (…) I am afraid of something happening to us, if we don't part before the day is out' (…) Allan humored him (…) Midwinter stopped, considered for a moment, then suddenly submitted. 'You're right,' he (Midwinter) said, 'and I'm wrong as usual.'" (319). Here, Midwinter goes from conviction to doubt in the rapid fluidity of the alliterated phrase "suddenly submitted." His opening remark about not being himself works to establish both of his momentary outlooks as apparently genuine. He cannot say "I am myself" because he is both one and the other - as a function of his dimensions, he is amplified into "my selves." Later, ruminating on the dream, "To every error, to every inconsistency, he resolutely confessed" (354), only to believe in it again afterwards.

68 See also, e.g., "Nearer and nearer, the night, and the adventure which the night was to bring with it, came the two friends" (139), "He spoke those words—apparently (as events then stood) the most irrelevant to the matter in hand that had yet escaped him; actually (as events were soon to be) the most vitally important that he had uttered yet" (282), "(it) was a story which coming events were yet to disclose" (415).

(219), Gwilt at a pool of water (320), Midwinter's breaking of the statue (481) – as fated realizations of Allan's dream.

Yet the novel jars the reader out of easy committal to this position by simultaneously undermining a hypothetical adherence to Fate. The same narrative voice that, at times, seems to confirm the idea, at other times, disparages it. The father's prophecy, for example, is called a "noisome exhalation (that) poisoned the mind of the son" (157). The negative connotations of this description separate Midwinter from his reading of the dream by casting the latter as a force hostile to the former. The description is thereby effectively able to exploit the reader's very sympathy for Midwinter in order to turn him/her away from siding with that character's credence in fate. Later, the narrator describes the potential "merit of conquering (…) superstition" (353), a phrase which, by similarly representing belief in prophecy as antagonistic to the believer, assigns positive value to its renunciation. These forms of direct description thus draw the reader away from expectations that proximate, contradictory descriptive patterns work to generate.

The apparent non-fulfillment of the first major event marked as ill-omened likewise jars the reader out of such expectations. I refer to the adventure aboard the ship. Importantly positioned as a threshold into the story's main events, this incident colors the reader's subsequent experience of the narrative. As I have shown, during this scene, the narrative voice aligns with Midwinter's belief in the ominous nature of the occurrence. However, immediately following, it presents the following description: "The light strengthened in the eastern sky (…) the cheering influences of the hour were round (…) How darkly (Midwinter's) forebodings had distrusted the coming time, and how harmlessly

that time had come" (162). The tonal shift here is a staggering one, upturning the expectance of dreadful resolution generated in the reader through the previous scene. It is also "naturalized," filtered as it is through a description of the dawning morning. The reader, therefore, is made not only to question his/her prior expectation, but also to feel it as artificial. Because such upturned expectations mimic Midwinter's intra-textual experience, the narrative censure of Midwinter's "forebodings" can also be seen meta-fictionally as a censure of a readerly perspective that would align itself with that character's belief in fate.

By setting this event and numerous descriptions condemning fatalism alongside a proportionate number of tropes that pull in the opposite direction, the narrative confounds adherence to either position. Nor does it let the reader rest comfortably in ambiguity, for it constantly provokes towards both ends. The experience of engaging with the narrative, therefore, reverberates with an erratic suspense that parallels Midwinter's self-conflicted state.

Sensational reading, then, in addition to sensational form, becomes appropriated into the narrative's attempt to contest denigration of the genre as "ungentlemanly." For, as I will show in the following section, *Armadale*'s climax, through the functioned dimensionality of Midwinter as character, incorporates into its allotted "gentleman space" the state of inconsistency which distinguishes both. Midwinter proves finally able to safeguard the text's gentlemanly name from its damaged past, as embodied in Lydia Gwilt, precisely because of the various results of his activated inconsistence, including his simultaneously gravitating away from/towards Allan, the hyper-cautiousness ensuing from

his understanding of the woman-shadow, and his erratic belief/disbelief in his interpretation of the dream. It is in this way that *Armadale* ultimately redefines gentlemanly identity, making it amenable to sensational reading and writing practices.

Writing-out and Out-writing Gwilt

The catalyst for the novel's redefinition of the gentleman is Lydia Gwilt. Her presence establishes a central conflict, the resolution of which serves as a vehicle for re-inscription of the text's gentlemanly character space. In this regard, Francesco Marroni is, I think, correct in calling her the "prevailing centripetal tension of the novel" (51); yet I disagree with his contention that this makes the novel center around her as protagonist. For, as its title suggests, all forces in the text are ultimately subordinated to the story of *Armadale*.

In fact, the name "Gwilt" characterizes her, principally, as an instrument of the Armadale conflict. Various critics have noted the name's homophonic resemblance to "guilt," and have connected it to topics ranging from English colonial policy to marketplace cosmetology.[69] However, it is useful to note that the move from the one term to the other relies on the addition of "will," a fact which ties the "guilt" contained in Lydia Gwilt's name specifically to the corrupted inheritance (the will) that spurs the revengeful murder of the prior-generation Armadale, and, by extension, the present conflict between Midwinter and Allan. Gwilt, from whose name "quill" might also be extracted, is the person who forged the letter by which the murderer Armadale was betrayed, and her writing plays an important, contributory role to the narrative's main trajectory.

69 For the colonial connection see, especially, Reitz and Young-Zook. For cosmetics, see Niles.

Predominant criticism's inclination to connect Gwilt's authorship to self-making[70] frequently detracts attention from its significance as regards the formation of the Midwinter and Allan identities. Gwilt, after all, is as much concerned with shaping and manipulating others as she is with stylizing her own identity – a fact illustrated in her writing Mother Oldershaw about her frequent attempts to "manage" other characters, including both Allan and Midwinter (193, 514). Sean Grass's notion that she attempts to "order (…) disorder" (212) might be more accurately seen as an attempt to order others according to her ends. And, in this, she has some success. Using an anonymous letter, for instance, she is able to skew Miss Milroy's character in the eyes of her father to such an extent that he decides to send her away from home (600). Her "re-writing" of Bashwood is even more pronounced, as she transforms him from humble weakling into life-risking spy. As such examples illustrate, Gwilt's authorship is by no means entirely self-directed.

The outward force of her pen works most ardently in various attempts to fashion the Armadale character. By forging the consent letter for the Ingleby-Blanchard marriage, Gwilt first re-inscribes "Armadale" with the character of the rejected son. Letter in hand, Ingleby is once again able to "be" Allan Armadale; at least for a time. His death initiates an "emptying-out" of Armadale, a complication that the novel aims to resolve by re-writing that character through the Allan/Midwinter narrative.

Ultimately, it reaches this end through the reinsertion of Gwilt into the text armed with her own, variant plan once again to write the Armadale character, essentially setting her in meta-fictional opposition to it own narrative resolution. Through writing, Gwilt

70 See, e.g., Marroni and Tutor.

attempts to force her "doubly-embedded narrative," a term which Alan Palmer uses to address "versions of characters (that) exist within the minds of other characters" (15), upon the main narrative. Indeed, Gwilt's first-person narration (in her letters and then in her diary) repeatedly interrupts the story told in third-person about the reconciliation of the two Armadales. In the end, though, her authorship here proves a subsidiary function of the overarching narrative movement that I have been tracing. By over-writing Gwilt's attempt to inscribe "Armadale," and, moreover, by displaying Midwinter's inconsistent functions as vital to this process, the novel utilizes the rhetorical technique of Gwilt-as-author to integrate inconsistency into what appears – set against her vengeful effort – a victorious and befitting characterization of the Armadale name.

Gwilt's plan is essentially to write the Armadale character as her deceased, ex-husband. This move entails marrying Midwinter under the signature of "Armadale," killing Allan in order to free the Armadale estate under law, and then returning to said estate under the guise of the "Armadale" widow. Although her plan recognizes Midwinter's presence after its completion as an "obstacle," she decides to meet it "when the time comes" (546). The implication is that she must discard (possibly kill) him, or coerce him into living as her secret husband – either of which would sever his connection to the Armadale name. Her version of the Armadale character, then, would effectively kill the gentleman of the text. Gwilt's self-making, her "claim(ing) the character of the widow of (…) Armadale" (539), is, in this sense, fundamentally tied to the novel's "making" of its eponymous identity.

As one of the narrative's two namesakes, Allan proves woeful unprepared to stop Gwilt's lethal inscription of the Armadale character. His understanding of Gwilt is a static one, based upon the fixed, seemingly impeccable character reference with which she first meets him. When the lawyer, Pedgift, reveals Gwilt's shady history, Allan cries, "Stop! Stop! You're making my head swim (…) I don't understand all these ins and outs" (405). Then, he reconciles the lawyer's report with "one conclusion, and one only (that) forced itself into his mind" (415) – a conclusion in which Gwilt remains innocent as before, a victim of circumstance. Such an approach marks Allan's adherence to regularity as the reason for his failure to secure against the woman who would write the gentleman out of Armadale. Refusing to credit the multitudinous incongruities – the "ins and outs" – that Pedgift's report obliges one to associate with Gwilt and who she is, he instead takes refuge in the hyperbolically singular "one (and) only" conclusion that makes her false deeds mesh with her original, written character. By thus fitting her into a "consistent character" paradigm, Allan remains "entirely unsuspicious of the (actual) character of the woman he had to deal with" (417).

Such imperceptiveness is a development of his earlier, undiscerning dream-interpretation. There, Allan conveniently contained the psychic disruption that the nightmare caused by linking its images into a consistent pattern via Hawbury's rational theory. Restored into his self-possession, he discards the dream as having served its purpose. "Not the slightest recollection of (it) troubled (his) easy mind" (221). His dismissal of the incongruous real-life reports about Gwilt repeats the same pattern. Again, the revelations disturb him. Shocked, he repeats verbatim his words after the dream: wait,

he says, until "I am my own man again" (416). His eventual conclusion similarly works to restore his composure: "His resolution was as immovable as ever to let no earthly consideration tempt him into betraying Miss Gwilt" (422). By reading Gwilt in his particular manner, Allan fixes his own sense of self in "immovable" resolve. The nature of his hermeneutics here, like that of his dream, stems from his constructing his identity upon an idealization of consistent character.

Later, the narrative connects this idealization explicitly to gentlemanly ideology. As the corresponding chapter title indicates, Allan is held "at bay" from pursuing an investigation of Gwilt that might expose her, because he heeds Major Milroy's notion that men should have "a code of honour by which we *regulate* our actions. According to that code, (a man who makes unjustified) inquiries into lady's affairs (…) abdicate(s) the position of a gentleman" (423, my emphasis). Milroy's position echoes that taken by Smiles (and most anti-sensation critics), defining gentlemanliness as the performance of regular, steady behavior. By employing this rhetorical flourish to end Allan's pursuit of Gwilt, the narrative solidifies the link between his choice to read Gwilt's character as constant (and thus reinforce his own constancy) and the ideology of gentlemanliness to which he subscribes.

The consistency model is, of course, a defective gauge by which to track Gwilt, whose very expertise lies in perverting it. Using her talent for deception, she constructs what appear to be consistent characters within limited spatial and temporal frames. Thus, she is able to be known by Oldershaw as a villainess and yet simultaneously keep an excellent character with her landlady (559). Likewise, she is able to appear to switch

characters effectually: at one time, she "introduce(s) (her)self in the character of (a) poor innocent woman" (516), at another, she plays "my new character (in) widow's weeds" (720). Elsewhere she takes a "governess's character" (378), "the character of a Patient" (747), and "the character of a lady who has come to consult (Doctor Downward)" (767). Within the closed system of each of these separate scenarios, Gwilt seems a constant entity. Holistically, however, the manifold "characters" which she performs make her identity incredibly complex.[71] What Dr. Downward calls a "host in yourself" (741), Gwilt is un-amenable to an understanding grounded in strict regularity. Allan's model, by repeating a part for the whole, misses her numerous ulterior aspects.

By contrast, Midwinter's "functioned" inconsistence proves remarkably effective in dealing with Gwilt. Hyper-cautious due to his dream-reading, Midwinter perceives Gwilt's threat immediately upon her arrival. "(He) pointed to the lonely figure, standing with its back turned on them, fronting the setting sun. 'There,' he said, 'stands the living Woman, in the Shadow's place. There speaks the first of the dream-warnings (…)'" (321). Belief in the incongruously ambiguous dream-woman allows Midwinter a preternatural insight into Gwilt. Having accepted the former as a "Shadow," he is able to connect Gwilt to his reading via her analogous silhouette. Later, Gwilt calls one of her deceptive performances a reflection of "the *shadow* of my own circumstances" (539, my emphasis), essentially using the word "shadow" to denote a more accurate sense of the character which lies beneath her performances. Thus, Midwinter's inconsistency (as activated via his dream-interpretation)

71 Rhetorical hermeneutics defines identity as "interpreted being" (see Chapter One). Lydia Gwilt's actions create huge disparities in how others perceive her, nearly all of which perceptions vary in their relationship to how she views herself.

gives him a discernment that, pre-empting Gwilt's ability to trick perception through manipulative performance, nears a clearer understanding of her intentions.

Yet, as I have pointed out, Midwinter's inconsistency also makes him somewhat paradoxically disbelieve the outcomes of his own reading. This trait develops into momentary lapses of distrust in his instinct about Gwilt. When he compares Gwilt to Mr. Brock's description of the "Gwilt" on whom the rector has been spying, he denies that "the woman, in a word, whom he would have known instinctively, but for Mr. Brock's letter, (is) the woman whom he had now actually seen" (338). Midwinter, in this case, discards instinctual perception for congruity – the matching up of descriptions based on Brock's ordinary perception. He exchanges an idea of character as indefinite for one that assumes that character is static. In doing so, he disavows his knowledge of Gwilt's menace; a menace not detected in Brock's report, undermined as it has been by Gwilt's switching characters with her maid (261).

Midwinter's self-contradictorily entertaining both a distrust of Gwilt and a disavowal of her threat, situates him in a liminal relationship with her. Instead of shunning her outright, as his pure instinct would dictate, he befriends her; yet he remains, at heart, wary of her presence. As he explains, even as he courts Gwilt, "I believe that if the fascination you have for me draws me back to you, fatal consequences will come of it" (497). The statement encapsulates the rift in Midwinter's association with Gwilt. He is both drawn and repelled, stuck at a midpoint. As his mention of "fatal consequences" implies, this condition issues specifically from the sense of inconstancy that his dream understanding necessitates. He later confesses to Gwilt, "I am afraid of you (…) of you, and

of myself" (501). Here, Midwinter's fear of Gwilt is coupled with his fear of his own dream-self – a "self" which he recognizes as incongruent with his current sense of "self" as potentially "noble" in his loyalty to Allan. As his repeated "you"s signify, such coupling superimposes his own sense of division onto Gwilt. At this point in the novel, he relates to her as both a menacing nightmare-come-to-life and as a person worthy of friendship.

Interestingly, the narrative marks such convoluted association as an effective method for stymieing Gwilt. Midwinter's medial proximity erodes her deceptive abilities. Playing upon the trope of the *femme fatale*, Collins novel metaphorically localizes these abilities in Gwilt's clothing. Her gloves, which "fit her like a second skin" (455), and the "speckless integrity of her dress" (457) create a sexualized, persuasiveness to "a man's eyes the most irresistible of all" (455). In other words, Gwilt's false characters, her "second skin(s)," depend upon her clothing and its power to give them the outward appearance of "integrity" – that ideological register of good character. When Gwilt meets Midwinter, however, she is metaphorically disarmed. Her diary confesses, "I couldn't bear put my bonnet on; I couldn't bear my gloves (for) the want to look at him" (503). In her attempt to fathom Midwinter, she strips herself of her rhetorical tools. She sheds the very articles that generate the efficaciousness of her false characters. Midwinter "neutralizes" what Rachel Ablow's article on *The Woman in White* calls the threat of public opinion's potential amenability to women's manipulation (160); but, unlike Walter Hartwright, whose neutralizing (per Ablow) confirms his masculine integrity, Midwinter neutralizes chiefly via his erratic dimensions.

For the narrative connects Gwilt's desire to look specifically to Midwinter's conflicted behavior towards her. Gwilt writes to Oldershaw, "What strange absurdity and inconsistency! And yet how I like him for being absurd and inconsistent" (529). For Gwilt, Midwinter's incongruous attitude offers a curiously illegible text to decipher. Her posture towards him thus takes the form of repeated inquiry, which, when left unanswered, leads her into a position where she does not "think (she) ever determined on anything in (her) life as (she) determined on finding out (…) who he really was" (505). The desire that leads her to relinquish her primary source of manipulative power (her ability to play character effectually) is thus compelled and fomented by Midwinter's indiscernibility. Further, such relinquishment puts Gwilt in a relatively unauthoritative position towards Midwinter, a fact voiced in her sudden realization, "What had become of my influence over him?" (505). This lack of authority later translates even to a kind of submissiveness, as Gwilt, "for his sake" (624), temporarily hesitates in her plan to harm Armadale and eventually ceases her threat altogether through deliberate self-destruction.

The suicidal end to Gwilt's menace comes in the story's denouement, wherein the narrative displaces her attempted inscription of the Armadale identity with its own. Casting Midwinter as the foiler of her plan (succeeding where Allan cannot), the novel overwrites Gwilt's inscription with one in which inconsistency emerges as an indispensable quality of the gentlemanly name.

The scene begins with attention drawn to Allan's vulnerability. Having assumed the place of Mrs. Armadale through marriage to Midwinter, Gwilt needs only to kill Allan in order to write "dead character" into the text's gentlemanly space. Ever passive, Allan

proves remarkably pliable to this scheming. When Bashwood, Gwilt's messenger, tries to lure him to the Sanatorium with a fake report about Miss Milroy's health, Allan, harboring no residual suspicion due to his restorative interpretation of the dream, readily consents. He later confesses that he was swayed by Bashwood's "waiting (at the station) night after night" (784), a repetition which he, basing his ideas on a paradigm of character as "consistent conduct," reads as confirming Midwinter's first impression of Bashwood as a trustworthy man. His integrity-dependent posture thus leads him directly into Gwilt's trap.

Midwinter, conversely, proves vigilant precisely because of his functioning inconsistency. Of his unplanned return to England, he says, "A serious anxiety has brought me back" (750). The narrative shortly connects this anxiety to "little irregularities in (Gwilt's) correspondence with him (that) proclaimed themselves to be suspicious" (753). In other words, Midwinter returns into a position to protect "Armadale" because he credits the "sensational," anxiety-producing discrepancies of his wife's text. Instead of attempting to reconcile these pointedly *little* irregularities with a singular idea of Gwilt in her role as ostensibly faithful wife, Midwinter responds with his nerves, allowing an idea of her as incongruous due consideration. His ability to do so is, intra-textually, a functioning of his own incongruity, harkening back to the requisite acceptance of teleological inconsistency implied in his earlier dream interpretation, and, meta-textually, an enactment of sensational reading practices. The effectivity of Midwinter's reading argues for the validity of both.

Once positioned strategically in the Sanatorium with Allan, Midwinter converts his technique of *reading* incongruity into a *displayed* incongruity that successfully preserves

the Armadale name. Gwilt lodges Midwinter and Allan in rooms three and four, respectively, with a plan to leak poison into room four. The description of Midwinter's suspicions: "His mind was occupied in drawing (events') disconnected impressions together (…) – his mind, clouded and confused (…) decide(d) on baffling the conspiracy, whatever it might be, by taking Allan's place" (796). Caroline Reitz argues that the sequence presents a "new, 'self-possessed' Midwinter" taking refuge in facts (99). However, contextualizing this passage within the methods of interpretation I have been tracing shows a following of Midwinter's movement from failed association to acceptance of discrepancy to an internalization, and, finally, projection of that discrepancy. Quickly discarding what would be a quasi-associative attempt to bring "together" the disparities in surrounding events, Midwinter practices instead his "sensational" reading style, finding his "decision" in the "clouded and confused" state where impressions do not match. The sentence next indicates Midwinter's internalization of that state, turning a word that could easily function adjectively to describe the discrepancies that Midwinter reads ("baffling") into a gerundial indicator of his proposed action. This internalization is then converted outwardly into a plan to upset the correspondence between person and room number.

The trope of the two rooms forces a critical reliance on consistency into Gwilt's plan. Akin to the manner in which the narrative earlier squelches Gwilt's "self-making" by abruptly ending her diary and forcing her "to return to the name under which she is best known in these pages" (743), it here reduces her "making" of Armadale into a simple equation wherein Allan and Midwinter function as mathematical constants: (3 – 4 = -1), or, Midwinter (room three) minus Allan (room four) equals the negation of the Armadale

gentlemanly identity (negative one). For the operation to work, the correspondence between person and room number must remain consistent from inception to completion, a necessity exemplified in the fact that Gwilt administers the poison, not to Allan himself, but "into the glass funnel" of room four (801). As such, the plan preys upon the dimensionality of the latter Armadale, who would passively remain in his designated room. Midwinter's switch, however, in rejecting requisite consistency, thwarts Gwilt's scheme.

The narrative allows the reader to trace both the impulse and the outcome of the switch back to Midwinter's dimensional inconsistence. Although Midwinter explicitly retains "no fatalistic suspicion of himself" (796) as he decides to put himself in harm's way to save Allan, he, nevertheless, and more significantly, operates under the residual effects of his fatalism. The fracturing result of his reading – his simultaneous belief in the "nobler nature" of his love for Allan and the self-deprecatory attitude contingent upon crediting his dream-self fratricide – has fostered a devaluation of self in comparison to Allan so great that his choice to risk his own life becomes "the work of an instant" (796). This self-perilous act, in turn, prompts Gwilt's suicide. When she realizes that the men have swapped rooms, she exposes herself to the poisoned air in order to rescue Midwinter. She calls her self-inflicted death "the one atonement I can make for all the wrong I have done you (Midwinter)" (806) – in other words, a last act of that humility first aroused in her by Midwinter's discrepant nature. With Gwilt's passing, the Armadale name symbolically escapes from the annihilation which the hindrances of its past had threatened.

In thus utilizing Midwinter's inconsistent, "criminal" dimensionality to overwrite Gwilt's attempted inscription of its representative "gentleman," the novel's overarching

narrative progression imprints such dimensionality into that figure. The traits embedded in Midwinter vitalize the once characterless state of the *Armadale* gentleman. In this regard, the novel participates in the mid-Victorian rhetorical struggle over how the recently destabilized identity of the gentleman should best be defined, and, through its self-reflexive process of characterization, offers its own construal.

The epilogue's final chapter ends by confirming the implementation of inconsistency into its "Armadale" space. Interestingly, it avoids the most straightforward approach to this process – explicitly naming Midwinter as sole heir, thereby directly putting him (as inconsistent character) into the novel's gentleman "character space." Of course, this option would have involved the deposing of Allan, an overtly radical move which, it seems, Collins was not prepared to make, despite his prefatory invective against "Clap-trap morality" (4).[72] Instead, the epilogue takes a more politic bent. On the subject of the name, Midwinter tells Allan:

> 'You know what the name is which appears on the register of my marriage (…) let us come to a first and last understanding about this. (…) I entreat you to believe that the reasons I have for leaving it unexplained are reasons which, if Mr. Brock was living, Mr. Brock himself would approve.' In those words he kept the secret of the two names. (814-815)

Here, Midwinter, retaining his pseudonym, cedes the estate and the official name of "Allan Armadale" to his friend. However, his keeping "unexplained (…) the secret of the two

72 Collins himself made little attempt to conceal his unconventionality – in fact, he seemed to flaunt it, living with two women in separate households and openly acknowledging an opium habit. However, he nearly always wrote with a view to his audiences' tastes, and unabashedly sought to inculcate into his work an "element of 'popularity'" (Letters 2:309). Collins's choice of ending would have been a commercially pragmatic one given the relatively conservative nature of the *Cornhill* audience.

names" is an important qualification; for, in doing so, he maintains, with the express exclusion of Allan, what reads as a much more meaningful, albeit unrecognized, claim upon the title.[73] "Armadale" thus becomes an uncertain space, inhabited, perhaps but never definitely, by both/either Midwinter and/or Allan. In *Wilkie Collins: Women, Property, and Propriety*, Philip O'Neill claims that the text "never satisfactorily convinces that (it) can resolve contradiction" (19). In this case, I would suggest that contradiction is exactly the point. The entanglements and paradoxes of leaving "Armadale" in such a position are a means of finalizing that narratological process by which inconsistency has come to characterize the novel's gentlemanly name.

Conclusion

My rhetorical hermeneutic approach to *Armadale* has attempted to prove the novel's "creakiness" as a rhetorical strategy meant, first, to expose the ideological constructedness of the gentleman as a "man of *character*" by self-reference to its own *character*ization, and, second, to reconfigure that identity with its own narrative performance. This understanding (which takes a view of character as *ethos*) views literary character as a site of rhetorical struggle wherein social identity is shaped and generated. In this sense, the tag of "unnaturalness"[74] which Victorian critics attributed to sensational characters (and which lingers today in the subordination of genre fiction to a prevailing "realist" model) registers not a mimetic deficiency, but, instead, a resistance to prominent ideological interests which meant to configure individuality in a particular manner.

73 Furthermore, one might argue that Collins, by using "Midwinter" as the final chapter title, implies a coalescence of that name and the one which forms the novel's overall title.

74 See footnote three.

Elucidating Collins's especially self-reflexive engagement in this struggle puts pressure on recent studies about rethinking formal character in 18th and 19th century fiction and its relationship to social identity and selfhood. Two of the most prominent examples of late, Deidre Lynch's *The Economy of Character* and Alex Woloch's *The One Vs. the Many*, offer differing interpretations on the subject; yet, because of their shared interest in (debunking) "realism," both texts interpret characters within particular novels via somewhat monolithic notions of identity.[75] My rhetorical reading calls for a refinement in methodology, revealing how *one* novel can distribute *multiple* ideologies of identity amongst its characters. These characters, in turn, promote various hermeneutics of understanding character, which are then negotiated to diverse ends within the progression of narrative. Such a practice allows novelistic character to operate in a multitude of complex ways which go beyond the relatively generalized tasks of serving as a "coping mechanism" for societal participation (Lynch 5) or perpetuating dominant ways of thinking about selfhood. *Armadale*'s radical fusion of two identities that were predominantly thought to be on opposite ends of the social spectrum evinces just one development of this potentiality.

75 I find Woloch's understanding of "character-space" and "character-system" very useful in tracking the relationship between characters within a text's progression. However, his "Labor Theory of Character," by which novels re-enact industrialization's process of flattening human beings into "increasingly specialized roles" (26) lacks nuance, consigning characters to overly-restrictive functions (as his title implies). Collins's novels, as I have shown, subvert and manipulate characterological "distribution" to various ends. Lynch's "pragmatics of character" (4) is an extremely constructive and elegant theory for tracking how historical shifts in conceptualizations of character affect narrative, but, perhaps because of her broad scope, does not sufficiently consider how single texts negotiate between various ideologies of character.

Chapter Three
"He Do the Police" in Domestic Voices:
Gentlemanly Crime and the Plot of *Our Mutual Friend*

The title of this section comes from a quote in the penultimate chapter of *Our Mutual Friend*'s first book where reference is made to a fairly immaterial character's ability to perform dramatic newspaper readings: "He do the Police in different voices" (198). I evoke the line here, however, to draw attention to what I will argue is a much more significant variety of "police performing" in the novel – the protagonist John Harmon's stint as an underworld regulator while incognito as Mr. Rokesmith. Interestingly, little critical attention has been paid to this facet of Harmon's character. Recent criticism, in fact, tends to disassociate Harmon from the underworld elements of Dickens's last completed novel, arguing that *Our Mutual Friend* is fundamentally bifurcated into two plots – a "realist" one revolving around urbanism/crime and a "sentimental" one revolving around Harmon's marriage.[76]

This chapter re-conceptualizes the novel's plot structure and operation by understanding Harmon's underworld and domestic roles as two parts of a single focal point for rhetorical intersections of gentlemanliness and criminality. More specifically, I show

76 For the two most frequently referenced critiques in this regard, see Lauren Goodlad's *Victorian Literature and the Victorian State* (162-166), and Mary Poovey's *Making a Social Body* (155-181). These two works perhaps draw from J. Hillis Miller's idea that "the novel seems to be a large group of impenetrable milieus with characters buried untouchably at their centers. These milieus exist side by side, but do not organize themselves into a large whole" (316). Although Ruth Livesey, in addressing these authors' claims, suggests that "both plots (…) work through the systems of valuation and representation prevalent in debates on Parliamentary Reform and franchise extension during the mid-nineteenth century," she leaves the premise of the "uneven dual plots" intact (84). Additionally, critics who treat crime in the novel often perform what might be seen as a tacit acquiescence to the idea of the dual plots by simple omission of the Harmon marriage. See, e.g., Eve Sedgwick's "Homophobia, Misogyny, and Capital: The Example of *Our Mutual Friend*," and Jeremy Tambling's *Dickens, Violence and the Modern State* (186-215).

how *Our Mutual Friend* aligns, along Harmon's plot trajectory, discourses within 19th century criminal law reformation and Victorian household economy based upon analogous efforts in those fields to establish a "context of regularity" (wherein situational management facilitates a predominant ideology's requisite for gentlemanliness, reliable conduct). Doing so allows the narrative to utilize the energy generated by Harmon's illicit vigilantism in order to drive its generally conservative progression towards domestic gentlemanliness.

As vigilante, Harmon propels the underworld plot forward through effectively combating the type of deceptive criminal activity which, extra-textually, was undermining the gentlemanly ethos implicit in a beleaguered, Victorian legal system. The novel excuses Harmon's own irregular, dissimulative behavior in this capacity because his situational management's effects in the "underworld plot" successfully generate an analogous situational management within the "domestic plot," by which Harmon ultimately regains his lost status as gentleman. The novel thus operates upon a deviant energy, while simultaneously "cleansing" that energy though recourse to extra-textual cultural conversations.

My final point, however, will be to interrogate the efficacy of this "cleansing." Although the predominant indicator of Harmon's vigilantism – his markedly inconsistent alias-adopting – is shed at the novel's conclusion, I will show how the narrative energy attached to that indicator lingers, complicating Harmon's newly-gained gentlemanliness. Seen thus as a "performance" of identity, *Our Mutual Friend*'s plot progression reveals itself

to be problematic not because of a basic discursiveness, but, quite oppositely, because its segments are so closely intertwined.

Vigilantes and Housewives

John Harmon's narrative progression begins with the concise statement: "Body Found" (22). Extracted from the Thames in the opening segment of the novel, this body generates the global dissonance[77] that must be resolved for the narrative to obtain totality. For the corpse registers a split between how the characters in the novel view Harmon (i.e. as dead and gone, based upon identifying papers secreted in the corpse's pockets) and how the reading audience comes to view him (i.e. as "alive" and waiting to reclaim his identity). Readerly desire seeks a reconciliation of this dissonance – one that eventually comes via the re-making of Harmon into a gentleman as recognized by the readerly audience and as established by the parameters of the text itself. Tracing *Our Mutual Friend*'s engagement in contemporaneous discourses wherein gentlemanliness and crime rhetorically intersect shows how this narrative movement from dissonance to resolution is generated primarily (and somewhat problematically) through Harmon's foray into a distinctly *un*gentlemanly vigilantism.[78]

77 While I borrow the idea of "progression" from James Phelan's rhetorical reading of narrative, I use my own term, "dissonance," to suggest movement via readerly desire to see the novel depict characters recognizing what the authorial audience knows through its dual, mimetic/synthetic experience. The nuances of this category, which incorporate a Brooksean notion of narrative "desire," seem to elude Phelan's distinction between instability and tension – "the first are those occurring within the story, instabilities between characters, created by situations (…) The second are those created by the discourse, instabilities (…) between authors and/or narrators, on the one hand, and the authorial audience on the other" (15).

78 Recent analyses of Harmon tend to subordinate his early time in the novel's "underworld" to an investigation of the family will as that which "re-makes" him. They therefore omit this interesting facet of the novel's progression. The fact that my approach is grounded in a performative model of identity, which encourages me to look beyond the will for confirmation of Harmon's recovered gentlemanliness, is productive in this regard. For interesting articles on Harmon's aliases and his will, see Robert Kiely, Richard Gaughan, and Deirdre David. Kiely argues that Harmon's disguises are an illusion to cover a "dread of having no story" (272). Gaughan claims that no amount of performance can make Harmon anything other than a pawn of his father's will (231). Similarly, David denies the effectivity of Harmon's aliases, viewing the will as inescapable (113).

Indeed, launching the narrative's global dissonance by means of a disruptive body has the immediate effect of originating Harmon's vigilantism at a particular rhetorical intersection between crime and gentlemanly identity crucial to the period – what I am calling the "context of regularity" underlying the reconstruction of Victorian legal policy. For the carcass naturally falls under the purview of the London police department, to whose precinct Harmon, compelled to view the dead body, is drawn and the extra-textual associations of which figure his vigilantism as a (complicated) defender of a gentlemanly ethos.

Between 1829 and 1856, the English police system had undergone extensive restructuring,[79] the main thrust of which, as Home Secretary Robert Peel explained in a February 1828 speech to the House of Commons, was to standardize law enforcement by introducing "a general footing of uniformity" to all its branches (561). Through such systematization, Peel meant to de-personalize police operations, freeing them from what he called the "jealousy" arising from "discordant jurisdiction" – to make them anonymous (561). He meant police presence, in other words, to be a means by which to shape the metropolitan environment into regularity. Though resisted at first, by the late 1850s, the new police had become a generally accepted feature of English life. At that time, Dickens himself had certified Peel's efforts, attributing his praise of the police to their attempt to establish regularity through a "systematically (…) workmanlike manner" ("Detective Police" 100).

79 The Metropolitan Police Act of 1829 established a uniformed police force, separate from the general population. Subsequent acts (1835, 1839, 1856) eventually established county and borough police forces on that same model (Barrie 3).

Our Mutual Friend signals the effects of such de-personalization in characterizing the Night-Inspector who oversees the aforementioned precinct. His proficient imperturbability exemplifies Peel's idea of a disinterested police. Throughout his bizarre encounter with Harmon (incognito), for instance, he suffers "no change of voice or manner," and concludes the interview by "deftly (preparing a pen); then resum(ing) his former attitude" (26). His simple appellation, "Mr. Inspector," further limits his function to a mere representation of his work, prohibiting any irregularities which idiosyncrasy would entail.[80] The official regulatory body of Dickens's novel is thus a model of the dominant principle which was under-girding its non-fictional counterpart's ongoing reformation.

The implications of such a portrayal would have extended beyond constabulary policy, too, as the movement towards standardization also shaped reformist prerogatives in the legal system more broadly conceived. Prior to the developments of the mid-1800s, the main complaint against the English penal code had been its lack of uniformity. The inconsistency of laws, at times ultra-lenient and at others Draconian, was seen as increasingly problematic given the weakening of personalized social networks largely resultant from intense urbanization. Reformers such as William Wilberforce and Samuel Romilly criticized the irrational nature of criminal legislation; the former called it incompatible with "true wisdom or humanity" (393), while the latter was said to have regarded laws as excessive in their "multiplicity (and) capriciously exercised by Judges" (133). Thomas Macaulay, who would later chair the First Law Commission for British India, similarly stated that "a penal code at once too sanguinary and too lenient (was) the

80 In this sense, I read his "minoring" as a function of a specific political movement rather than simply a schematic of a capitalist division of labor (Woloch 27).

curse and disgrace of the country" (qtd. in Clive 436). Construed in their most liberal sense, these calls for "clear and reliable rules of behavior," as Martin J. Wiener has suggested, spoke to an increasing sense of the law as assisting "individuals increasingly cut loose from the moorings of (…) community (to act) confidently (…) in planning their actions" (61). Such a description, however, overlooks the disciplinary facet of standardization.

On the other hand, heavily Foucauldian approaches, in stressing power (generally conceived) as the driving force behind social relations, tend to underemphasize the question as to why standardization, in particular, became such a significant means of Victorian discipline. Basing his account on the nineteenth century interplay between psychiatry and jurisprudence, Foucault explains shifts in the legal system as a movement to command the "interior" of the subject – as a means to manage "the criminal's soul" (18). In this schema, to systematize is simply to exercise control with more "speed and (…) efficiency" (138). Recent criticism generally takes this premise as a presupposed foundation.[81] However, by moving away from the assumption that, in the legal sphere, identity was being conceptualized via a heavy focus on an interiorized view of self, one begins to see a more complex framework of ideas underlying standardization's importance.

81 Perhaps the most prominent works in this regard are D.A. Miller's *The Novel and the Police* and John Bender's *Imagining the Penitentiary*. Both works focus on the novel as systematizing normative practices for more efficient control over an interiorized notion of self. The former explores how the system of novel-reading effectively placated an ideology of the "liberal self" (x); the latter's argument that "novelistic ideas of character" (2) generated an organized system of incarceration defines a major aspect of those novelistic ideas as a sense of "intimate self-consciousness" (5). More recent examples include Sally Shuttleworth's *Charlotte Bronte and Victorian Psychology*, which explains the development of "new techniques of power" as a means to engage more proficiently with "a new interiorized notion of selfhood" (3); also, Jeremy Tambling's *Dickens, Violence and the Modern State*, which describes how state institutions developed in order to support the idea of a self-contained "being with a totality" (5). On a slightly different note, Patrick Atiyah implies a disassociation between proficient administration and discipline of the subject altogether, arguing that, for utilitarian legal reformers, the former was seen as secondary to the latter (354-356).

One aspect of such framework, to which I want draw attention here, is standardization's close association to predominant ideology regarding gentlemanly identity.

In discourse about the systemization of laws and their enforcement, "character" features as a recurrent keyword. As early as 1828, Peel had described the nascent stages of reform as a means to prevent old, inconsistent policy from "destroy(ing) the (…) moral character" of individuals (560). By mid-century, instances of such rhetoric had become common.[82] As I pointed out earlier, the term "character" was most crucially employed in popular attempts to define gentlemanliness as a type of "interpreted being" based in reliable conduct. [83] This same type of thinking manifests in legal discourse. In *A Digest of the Law of Evidence*, the influential barrister, James Fitzjames Stephen, provides a hypothetical example of what Foucault saw as a shift from legislation of conduct to legislation of the subject him/herself:

> The question is whether the administration of poison to A, by Z, his wife (…) was accidental or intentional. The facts that B,C, and D (A's three sons) had the same poison administered to them (…) and that the meals of all four were prepared by Z, are relevant, though Z was indicted separately for murdering A, B, and C, and attempting to murder D (148)

Here the distinction between the criminal Z's self and her conduct breaks down. Instead, Stephen presents a case where what might be called the defendant's "character" is defined

82 John Stuart Mill, in *The Subjugation of Women* (1861), notes what he calls the movement to "efface the influences on character of the law of force, and replace them by those of justice" (560). The year before *Our Mutual Friend* began serialization (1863), James Fitzjames Stephen devoted a substantial part of one chapter in his *A General View of the Criminal Law in England* to a discussion of the relationship between law and moral character (100-110). Although he ultimately concludes that too direct a connection between them is problematic, he recognizes the legitimacy of such a position.

83 See Chapter One, "Dr. Smiles and the Counterfeit Gentlemen." There, I clarify my application of Steven Mailloux's notion of "identity as interpreted being" (85).

as the accumulation of consistent conduct. In other words, this legalistic dialogue echoes the aforementioned notion of gentlemanly identity (albeit in a perverted form, wherein consistent duplicity makes a sort of "bad" character).

Setting Peel's aforementioned comment amid this language hints towards its assumption of a direct correlation between the consistency of law and the consistency of individual behavior. The definitive text for an ideology of gentlemanliness-as-reliable-conduct, Samuel Smiles's *Self-Help*, clarifies this connection. Smiles writes that, as legislation can "exercise but little active influence upon character," its primary function should be "protection" – securing the individual's ability to cultivate his own character, which "can only be effected by (…) better habits than by greater rights" (17). The distinction between habits and rights is an important one, for it implies that (even given Smiles's strong regard for liberty) the chief requirement of good law is not simply that it should grant the freest reign, but that it should prove compatible with a paradigm of individual behavior based upon repetition. And making the law, itself, consistent would seem naturally to allow it to serve this function. The regularity of law facilitates regularity of conduct, thus enforcing a prominent ideology of gentlemanly behavior.[84] In tracing this path of thought, then, the systemization of law, in and of itself, emerges as crucial in the shaping of what Foucault would call the "docile" subject (138).

The establishment of Harmon's progression in *Our Mutual Friend* makes recourse to the intertwinement of such a notion of character with new, systematized law, and, more

84 Smiles defines "the true gentleman" as a "man of character" (314).

specifically, to prevalent societal misgivings over its efficacy. A summary of the initial encounter between the police inspector and the incognito Harmon:

> Mr. Inspector, viewing "the stranger with a searching look (not the first he had cast)," listens with "an attentive ear," and asks, "'You expect to identify, I am told, sir'?" When Harmon refuses to cooperate fully, the inspector asks him to write down his name and then tells his "Reserve" to "take care of this peace of paper, keep him in view without giving offence (…) and find out anything that you can about him" (25-26).

Police technique is here a markedly supervisory one. The inspector scans Harmon both visually and aurally, but makes no move to detain him. The rank of his officer even doubles to signify the general "reserve" of the unit, evoking that reformist trend towards dispassionate, systematic policy.

A different type of enforcement is exercised however – shifted, as it were, into a sort of character management. By emphasizing Harmon's unidentified status with the descriptive "stranger," and then omitting a direct object from the Inspector's "You expect to identify," the narrative conflates the prompt for Harmon to identify the corpse with a cue to identify himself. And the Inspector follows up on this latter request in a manner that implies an underlying ideology of character as reliable conduct. The officer whom he dispatches to observe Harmon's movements takes the paper on which Harmon had identified himself so that he might confirm his character by matching his acts with his stated identity. Dickens's narrative thus locates the influence of the new police system in

their standardizing the metropolitan environment through tracing and managing individual conduct to encourage and ensure its "gentlemanly" reliability.

At the same time, the scene indicates the problematic limitations of such methodology. The dramatic irony of the identity conflation embedded in the inspector's question highlights his approach's potential for inaccuracy. The irony is doubly layered: first, the inspector unknowingly asks the actual Harmon to confirm the identity of the body that he thinks is Harmon; second, in making a linguistic slippage which directs his question also towards the actual Harmon, the inspector turns his inquiry in a more accurate direction – only he does so unknowingly. Of course, for the reader, appreciation for the inspector's ironic position only comes retroactively. The narrative voice does not name the "stranger" as Harmon until later. But this delay, by converting the inspector's position into readerly experience, merely further stresses its ineffectiveness. Moreover, the reader only learns via free indirect discourse from Harmon, himself, of his connection to the "stranger" (372) – a discourse to which the police are, obviously, not privy. Until then, Harmon's multiple aliases read as different characters, narratively exposing the shortfalls of a process of surveillance so tied to consistency.

By 1864, when *Our Mutual Friend* began serialization, these shortfalls were becoming increasingly clear. The idealism of the early reform period had largely flagged, and public opinion had soured on new legal policies (Collins 17). A particularly brutal outbreak of garroting attacks during the years in which Dickens was beginning to compose his novel turned disillusion into panic – a shift fuelled by somewhat salacious reports detailing gruesome variations on techniques for strangulation (*Cornhill* January, 1863 79-

81). Though cases of violent crime were generally on the decline, tellingly, skilled thievery and deception was on the rise. As early as 1839, the *Fourth Report of Her Majesty's Commissioners on Criminal Law* had pinpointed fraud as a source for particular concern (lxxv). By 1859, David Morier Evans wrote that the fraudulent practices of "the last twenty years afford materials for one of the darkest pages in the commercial history of this country" (1). An 1862 article in the *Cornhill* similarly noted that "(instead of violence) the modern thief depends on his skill" (647). Given what Dickens's portrayal of the police suggests about their observatory mode of conduct, it is not surprising that criminals were practicing "character deception" at an increasing rate. In doing so, they were able to assault the standardized system at its weak point – a point largely made vulnerable by an underlying gentlemanly ethos.

It is this type of crime which follows the global dissonance of the "Body found" in Dickens's novel, instigating Harmon into an active vigilantism[85] and, through its necessary association to illicit attacks against "regularity of conduct," eventually channeling that activity into the driving force behind the novel's progression towards gentlemanliness. The unnaturally deceased body, assumed to be Harmon's, allows the river-scavenger, Rogue Riderhood, to accuse falsely the man who found it (his rival, Gaffer Hexam) of murder. This act complicates the global dissonance of the plot; for it generates a local instability between Harmon and Gaffer Hexam by setting the former's incognito status against the wrongful stigmatization of the latter as a murderer. The need to "fix" Hexam's wrongfully accused

85 Dickens's later piece, "The Ruffian," seems to express the sentiment encapsulated in this narrative move. Bemoaning "the consequences of this contemplative habit on the part of the Executive – a habit looked for in a hermit, but not in a Police System" (422), it concludes with a drastic rebuff of the fact that the people "are constantly admonished from high places (…) not to take the law into our own hands" (424).

status propels Harmon into his vigilante role. Under his post-"death" alias, John Rokesmith, Harmon takes the law in hand, somewhat paradoxically using his own cheating of the legal system to resolve the complications produced by the very Riderhood crime that would defraud it.

The ambiguousness of Harmon's functionality as extra-legal regulator merits some investigation; for it offers an explanation as to why the novel's subsequent progression takes such a markedly torturous route. This ambiguity is indicated from the outset in the characterological dimensionality implied by his chosen name.[86] Dickens's early memoranda for *Our Mutual Friend* note *Rokesmith's Forge* as a possible title for the novel (Kaplan 85). Envisioning the alias as a possessive in this manner highlights the sense of autonomy that it connotes – Rokesmith as the narrative's "smith." At the same time, the considered title, due to the etymological connection between forge and forgery, marks the character's smithing as inextricably bound to transgression.

Indeed, Rokesmith begins his underworld stint through an act of forgery;[87] and he is preceded by a number of forgers and frauds in Dickens oeuvre. One of the most well-delineated, Mr. Carker of *Dombey and Son*, prefigures an important aspect of Rokesmith's vigilantism. The early part of that narrative, somewhat facetiously titled, "A Trifle of Business," describes the work by which Carker falsely represents his employer and

86 Harmon also takes the alias "Julius Hanford," but does so only briefly before switching over to Rokesmith, under which character he stays throughout most of the narrative. I, therefore, only treat Rokesmith as the temporary narrative substitute for Harmon.

87 *The Fifth Report on Criminal Law* (1840) defines forgery as follows: "Forgery is the false making of some written or other instrument for the purpose of obtaining credit by deception (…) It plainly extends to (…) all visible marks of distinction by which the truth of any fact is authenticated (…) and consequently where a party may be deceived and defrauded from have been, by false signs, induced to give credit where none was due" (65). On this basis, I consider Harmon's false signature, by which he gains credit from the police for a false identity, an act of forgery.

cheats him out of vast sums of money: "Reading," "backing," "parcelling," "pausing," "dealing," "examining," "sorting," "pondering," – Carker made "himself master of all" (315-316). In the "smooth efficiency" of intensive, hands-on work (Smith 112), Carker represents an idea of fraud as a kind of command gained through proximity. A potent intimateness, distinct from related depictions,[88] characterizes Carker's actions. The control acquired through this close engagement is an important aspect of what Dickens seemed to indicate was lacking from systematized law; it is this same type of control which Harmon's alias gains through his similarly dissimulative function. Yet, while *Dombey and Son* is clearly uneasy about the autonomy of Carker and curbs it through a violence which objectifies him, tearing him into inanimate pieces, *Our Mutual Friend* aligns, albeit somewhat anxiously, Rokesmith's deceitful autonomy with its portrayal of legitimate, middle-class masculinity. In this way, the latter destabilizes the familiar, conservative pattern of tragic fraudulence,[89] which the former ultimately reiterates.

A well-recognized passage midway through the novel refines the quasi-fraudulent nature of Rokesmith's character. Deciding that "Harmon should not come (back) to life" (372), Rokesmith contemplates his new role and his future course of action. Pursuing Carolyn Mackay's idea that this contemplation be read as a rhetorical act of self-making,[90] I want to suggest more specifically that we understand Rokesmith's construction of identity

88 Mr. Merdle in Dickens's own *Little Dorrit*, while symbolic of the charlatanism of the Railroad-share epoch, is not depicted engaging in that profession to any considerable extent. Augustus Melmotte, in Trollope's *The Way We Live Now*, is more of a figurehead for unscrupulous dealers than a skillful criminal. Alaric Tudor in Trollope's *The Three Clerks* commences his fraudulent lifestyle almost unwittingly and is propelled by the momentum of that commencement throughout. All three narratives punish their characters for their transgressions, perpetuating an idea of fraud as ultimately disadvantageous.

89 See previous footnote.

90 While MacKay does excellent work developing the idea that Rokesmith's "problem of identity (…) is intimately connected with his social being" (9), her ultimate aim is to situate the passage within the conventions of soliloquy.

as one of "interpreted being" (Mailloux 85).[91] Rokesmith limits his reason for existing in his current identity to one purpose – "to repair (the) wrong (which Harmon's assumed death has occasioned). In that intent John Rokesmith will persevere, as his duty is" (372). He sees himself, in other words, as duty put into action. How others see him is highly variable as he presents himself in different guises to pursue this one intent. Such inconsistency consequently results in disquiet over how he interprets himself based upon how others have interpreted him, especially as regards those who knew him as John Harmon. "What would I have? If the dead could know (…) how the living use them, who (…) has found a more disinterested fidelity on earth than I? Is not that enough for me?" (373). Seeing his variability reflected back at him in the eyes of others, Rokesmith quavers at its inherent deceptiveness. Although he simultaneously justifies this ungentlemanly behavior via recourse to his "selfless" duty, the instability of this move registers in the negative of his final question. *Our Mutual Friend* thus betrays an ambivalence about the potent dissimulation of its vigilante identity, drawn to excuse it based upon its task-driven commitment while simultaneously belying the weakness of such an excuse.

Ultimately, this ambivalence unfolds in the novel's plot progression. The effective autonomy of the vigilante is textually recognized – converted into narratological impetus: Rokesmith's deviance from reliable, gentleman-like conduct proves the energy that generates narrative momentum. The narrative "cleanses" this energy by diverting it from the underworld into the domestic sphere and framing it as there crucial to the ultimate

91 I discuss this paradigm of identity (specifically its relationship to a prominent Victorian ideology of gentlemanliness) more thoroughly in chapter one. Essentially, Mailloux defines identity as a combination of how one interprets oneself, how others interpret you, and how one interprets oneself based on how others have interpreted you.

restoration of "John Harmon, gentleman of character." The success of this move relies upon a deliberate confusion of the "context of regularity" underlying legal reformation with that underlying contemporaneous domestic discourse.

Rokesmith's illegal regulation inevitably engages with the former "context" by focusing on the rectification of Roger Riderhood's false affidavit. Albert Pionke has noted the importance of Victorian systems of oath-taking in the construction of professional, middle-class social identity (617). Dickens's narrative exploits this close connection between oath and identity in order to, what might be said, re-characterize[92] Riderhood, via his affidavit, into a form amenable to Rokesmith's later enforcement. This process begins with the description of Riderhood in the opening lines of the scene: "There, in the darkness of the entry, stood a something in the likeness of a man" (148). The imagery of such description destabilizes the mimetic component of Riderhood and accentuates the synthetic component.[93] His status as a "likeness," given that this is a *textutally* self-reflexive move, more specifically registers character in its meaning as "script," thus confusing the boundary between Riderhood's person and his imminent, written statement.

Riderhood's demand, "I must be took down" (149), corroborates this confusion. Here, his testimony and his self become syntactically equivalent. The simplistic language of his requirement defines the affidavit not simply as a recording of his words, but as an inscription of his person. Later, the active pen of the lawyer, Eugene Wrayburn, proves "ready to reduce (the informer) to more writing" (150), thereby confirming the slippage in

92 Again, I use here a rhetorical understanding of character (ethos) as a type of "identity as interpreted being," allowing me to see the novel moving seamlessly between character as identity and character as a formal element. (see chapters one and two)

93 Rhetorical understandings of character allow for movement between synthetic, mimetic, and thematic components for effect (Phalen 5-6).

Riderhood's language. The taking down of the river-scavenger's evidence reads quite markedly as a transfer of said character into characters.

That Riderhood fraudulently displays himself to the lawyers greatly problematizes this conversion, for it generates a mistaken interpretation of his identity that, when inscribed, results in the sanctioning of a false affidavit. The self he "presents" to the lawyers is one who supposedly rejected Gaffer Hexam's partnership on a point of conscience and who denies being a thief – fabrications proven untrue by the narrative's portrayal of his excommunication from waterside society (150-151). The gap suggested in this discrepancy between Riderhood's self-performance and the character whom the narrative has previously "performed" to the reader is accented by the rather humorous mistake the informant makes in calling his affidavit an "Alfred David." Through this linguistic slip, he unintentionally names his deceitfully presented self, marking it as something "other." His untruthful accusation that Gaffer Hexam killed John Harmon is then based upon this "other" character. Riderhood makes the allegation, as he says, "on the grounds (…) that I broke the pardnership because I see the danger" (151), referencing, in other words, the "self" which he has dishonestly performed to lend credit to his false charge. As a Victorian oath of identity, then, the affidavit is inherently flawed; it is not a valid inscription of Riderhood, but rather, that of a spurious, intra-narratively constructed character whom we might (taking our cue from the river-scavenger) call "Alfred David."

The ineptness of the narrative's official legal system in dealing with the complications of identity ingrained in the affidavit translates into a lack of narrative resolution to the instabilities it entails. The lawyers are obviously skeptical of Riderhood's

performance. His status as dredgerman would have necessarily marked him, in the eyes of respectable gentlemen, as a near criminal. Henry Mayhew's characterization of river-scavengers, which describes the unsurprising ease by which foraging for discarded material turns into "petty theft" (213), was the conventional attitude. And yet the lawyers' personal assessment scarcely factors into their interaction with Riderhood as legal functionaries. Indeed, the central protest that the lawyers make to Riderhood's claim is simply that he distinguish between "swearing" it and having it "took down" (149). This legal nicety funnels their suspicions into a matter protocol. Once this detail is settled, they take the oath, and, as I have shown, convert the fictional "Alfred David" into a paper "identity."

The statement's further progress through legal procedures only enhances its fundamental speciousness. Examining the Benthamite process of depositions in Victorian law courts,[94] William Holdsworth notes "that there was every chance that, in the course of (…) transcription, (the testimony) would be materially altered" (93). By converting Riderhood's claim into the fictitious, script-based identity, Alfred David, Dickens's narrative is able to connect this reconstructive transcription to the issue of "character" ideology underpinning new systems of law. Meeting with the lawyers, Mr. Inspector receives Alfred David with that systematic reliability indicative of reformist principles. In the course of a paragraph, the narrator iterates the policeman's "composure," "settlement," and "(un)moved" manner (158). The law's regularity (as here represented in the Inspector) then becomes the gauge by which Alfred David is re-characterized. Residual distrust of

94 Holdsworth refers specifically to Chancery Court here, but his analysis extends more broadly to "the legal atmosphere (…) of the first two-thirds of the nineteenth century" (1).

Riderhood becomes a characterological dimension of dependable roguishness in David. The lawyer remarks, "I believe him (Riderhood) to be a thorough rascal. But he may tell the truth for his own purpose, and for this occasion" (155). Here, the description "rascal" is crucial. Modified by "thorough," it initially denotes Riderhood's general undependability. After the conjunction "but," however, it paradoxically signals itself as the very reason Riderhood can be depended upon in this instance – a rascal would not hesitate to turn on his partner for reward. Consequently, "Alfred David," becomes, from a legal perspective, reliable by virtue of Riderhood's *un*reliability.

The Inspector reinforces this dimension by contextualizing it within an assessment of Gaffer Hexam's conduct, done in terms reminiscent of James Fitzjames Stephen's model for gauging criminal character. He tells the lawyer Lightwood "that he himself had several times 'reckoned up' Gaffer, but had never been able to bring him to a satisfactory criminal total" (159). Mr. Inspector's language evokes notions of Utility, specifically implying an understanding of Hexam's character as the calculable accumulation of his deeds. That he expects a satisfactory total suggests, moreover, that such deeds are inherently similar and thus readily computable. Set against this valuation, the affidavit seems to summate the as yet un-tallied criminal deeds of Hexam into a consistent identity. The system thus (mis)manages the identity complications of the affidavit, fitting them into a familiar paradigm of regular conduct rather than recognizing their deceptiveness. Narratively speaking, the law has no resolutory function as regards the local instability that the false affidavit evokes.

Enter Rokesmith, who decontaminates the novelistic representation of the law's "context of regularity" and generates plot movement by purging the narrative of Alfred David. The parameters of his vigilante "interpreted being" work effectually to this end. Through variable self-presentation, Rokesmith exploits the Riderhoods' understanding of him towards his own, "one purpose" – that of generating an account of Harmon's supposed death which does not cast suspicion on an innocent bystander such as Gaffer Hexam; the resolution, in other words, of the local instability made by Alfred David.

He first ingratiates himself into the "Seaman's Boarding House" run by Roger Riderhood's daughter, Pleasant, by enacting a sailor. The narration highlights the cultural capital by which Rokesmith generates this apparent identity. Pleasant takes note of "his familiarly worn rough-weather nautical clothes" (354) and notes that "his manner was the manner of a sailor and his hands were the hands of a sailor (sunburned), except they were smooth" (352). Displaying the social signs that would distinguish him as a nautical man, Rokesmith influences Pleasant to interpret him as such. His smooth hands, however, signal the absence of the physical marks that a consistent performance of "sailor" would entail. When Pleasant notices this discrepancy, Rokesmith compounds his deceit with another lie, countering her doubt with the claim that a temporary sick leave "accounts for my hands" (353). By thus obfuscating access to his past conduct, Rokesmith as vigilante makes this single performance erroneously represent a consistent series, and thereby perverts reliability in a manner akin to Riderhood's own false affidavit.

Such similarity proves the source of his regulatory power over the river-scavenger. Rokesmith persuades Riderhood to revoke his plot-disrupting Alfred David through a

process of identification, wherein he exploits the perjurer through duplicitous self-presentation.[95] Mimicking Riderhood's own low behavior by speaking in river dialect, aping his "surly" manner, and answering him "in the *same* fierce short way, after *returning* his look" (356, my emphasis), Rokesmith convinces him of his being a like, mercenary river-man. The scavenger expresses this point, swearing to Rokesmith that "you know a move" (357).[96] When Rokesmith then "re-plots" the supposed Harmon murder as an enigmatic conspiracy, he is able to pass convincingly, from Riderhood's perspective, as a character who played a shady part in it. Speaking in terse, mysterious riddles, he authors a scenario involving Harmon, a stranger, and a George Radfoot (a man whom Riderhood knew to be involved in a strange incident concerning Harmon). Fleshing out his "character" (as it appears in his narrative) by showing articles which Riderhood would recognize as belonging to Radfoot, he directs Riderhood's reading until that man is forced to proclaim a version of the Harmon murder at variance with his own lie: "It's my belief you mean to tell me to my face you killed him!" (358). Rokesmith thus uses identification and mystification in order to persuade Riderhood to deny the affidavit version of the Harmon murder in favor of one of his (Rokesmith's) own writing.

He then interjects this re-plotted scenario into the main narrative by manipulating the river-scavenger into reneging on his Alfred David. Having identified with Riderhood as a peer, Rokesmith enters into what his listener accepts, albeit suspiciously, as a cooperative arrangement. He tells Riderhood to swear that his affidavit was false. Riderhood

95 I use identification in reference to *A Rhetoric of Motives* here. Kenneth Burke argues that "motives of property" are central to capitalist rhetoric, and that, in engagements of such rhetoric, acts of "identification" blur the line between cooperation and exploitation (25).

96 The OED defines "to know a move" as "to be cunning, shrewd, sharp"

interrupts, "Hear me out, Captain, hear me out! All I was wishing to mention (…) was, your handsome words relating to the reward (for turning in the true killer)" (364). Rokesmith responds, "When I claim it (…) you shall share it" (364). A seeming bargain is made here, wherein like, self-interested parties seem mutually to benefit. Riderhood's use of the epithet, Captain, however, signals the exploitative nature of the arrangement. For "Captain" is the name Riderhood himself had given to Rokesmith in the course of this one encounter, because he "fully look(ed) it" (362). It is the name, not of a consistent identity, but of a limited performance. Duped, Riderhood does not consider that the Captain is an act, whereby Rokesmith simply "passes" as a scoundrel motivated by monetary interest.[97] He therefore unwittingly agrees to a deal with a fictitious entity and retracts his oath, releasing the stigma of murder from Gaffer Hexam. Rokesmith thus "plots out" Alfred David by out-plotting his inventor.

However, in addition to the complication it had created between Harmon and Hexam, Riderhood's Alfred David had also escalated the global dissonance of the plot; for, by naming a "killer," it had corroborated Harmon's supposed death to the fictional world. Narrative ambivalence over Rokesmith's vigilante role precludes his "illicit" resolution of the Riderhood complication directly to resolve also this global dissonance, an act that would tie his vigilantism too closely to his eventual, restored gentlemanliness.[98] In fact, in

97 Although Riderhood at first hesitates to enter the arrangement, he does so only because he thinks Rokesmith might keep the money for himself. He fully believes that Rokesmith is a like-minded rogue.

98 The scene in which Rokesmith confronts Riderhood betrays what I have already noted is a general discomfort over his method. For instance, Rokesmith tells Riderhood that it is "dreadful that any stigma should be attached to (the Hexams via a false accusation) (…) Dreadful! Unforeseen! How could it be foreseen?" (362). Here, his censure of Riderhood turns to self-blame. The origin of the stigma shifts from Riderhood's deceit to his own deceptive act of feigning death. Later, taking his leave of Riderhood, he mutters, "'What a liar you are,' and nodding his head twice or thrice over the compliment, passed out of the shop" (364). While the nodding ostensibly registers Rokesmith's satisfaction with his insult, it also betrays a sense of his own status as liar. Rokesmith seems to nod as if a recipient to his own denunciation.

its most immediate sense, Rokesmith's purging of Alfred David simply shifts the escalation, exchanging Riderhood's false account with an alternative, false version of Harmon's "murder" – the witness scheme of David becomes the conspiracy of the Captain. In other words, Rokesmith does not plot himself into "Harmonly" gentlemanliness via the "context of regularity" which he most immediately sets out to defend.

Instead, the force which resolves the local instability is converted into a momentum for the resolution of global dissonance by threading it through reference to a "context of regularity" prominent in domestic rhetoric. The expulsion of Riderhood's false statement, which removes the stigma of murder from Gaffer Hexam, has the additional effect of vindicating the hopes of his daughter, Lizzie, to manufacture improvement in the Hexam household by bettering her father and brother. Gaffer's being cleared of murder makes Lizzie certain that, apart from his being unlearned, there is "nothing else against him" (73) – a belief that strengthens her commitment to her role as "domestic angel."[99]

An earlier, more explicit definition of such a role evokes a prevalent trend in mid-nineteenth century household economy. Lizzie describes her purpose as "keeping (her father) as straight as I can, watching for more influence than I have, and hoping that through some fortunate chance, or when he is ill, or when—I don't know what—I may turn him to wish to do better things" (30). Her methodology, as she understands it, is one of negotiation between individual action and context. She explains her desire to improve her father as operating, not independent of or against, but *through* the circumstances which surround them. The "more influence than I have" is one that occurs when her actions

99 The idea of the domestic angel as the ideal Victorian woman is a widely accepted and widely disseminated concept in Victorian criticism, and Lizzie's parallels with that model are clearly manifest. For a seminal account of the "angel in the house," see F. Basch's *Relative Creatures* (3-15).

combine in symbiosis with favorable conditions. It is this highlighting of the importance of working improvement through context that links the above technique to popular, middle-class ideologies of the home.

At the time of *Our Mutual Friend*'s publication, numerous household manuals directed at middle-class wives were espousing the importance of context in familial betterment. These works were an offshoot of the etiquette manual, a genre popularized during the 1830s. As Michael Curtin has shown, this variety of text marked a departure from earlier conduct books, focusing not on individual principles of moral behavior but on the codification of minutiae – requirements for proper ball hosting, calling cards, introductions, etc. (31-32). In a similar manner, household manuals concentrated on the material workings of the home and its environs. Their rhetoric, aimed at a "well-situated," middle-class audience – an audience unlike Lizzie, who, subjected to the harsh surroundings of her low-class station, unsurprisingly sees the circumstances of her house as beyond her control (a matter of "fortunate chance")[100] – casts the home as a site removed from the fluctuation of public space and thus readily manipulable.

More specifically, in a move analogous to that driving legal reform, such works taught readers how to regularize the household environment through proficient administration.[101] Isabella Beeton describes such administration in one of the most

100 This is, of course, a large part of the *pathos* of Lizzie's presentation. Despite being trapped in a working-class situation, she, like Oliver Twist and his perfect command of English, inexplicably presents to the reader a middle-class *ethos*. This factor "naturalizes" her trajectory into bourgeois status via marriage to Eugene Wrayburn.

101 In *Good Girls Make Good Wives*, Judith Rowbotham traces the shift in terminology from "household fairy" to "household goddess" to show how the idealized version of the housewife shifted to a more educated, professional model. Rowbotham argues that, by the turn of the century, such a shift resulted in wives "more capable of performing a number of activities outside (their) immediate household" – though she qualifies this statement by emphasizing that the "domestic core of the stereotype (…) remained constant" (12).

popular of these works,[102] *The Book of Household Management* (1861): a wife is "the Alpha and the Omega in the government of her establishment (…) it is by her conduct that its whole internal policy is regulated" (19). The language here – government, policy, establishment – stresses a systematic efficiency reminiscent of that sought in legal reformers' demands for consistent law. And, indeed, Beeton's method operates through codifying the smallest details of the home into standardized forms – establishing "correctness" in everything from what to do during "the half-hour before dinner" to the proper sorting of linen.[103] In propagating this type of codification, household manuals meant to turn the home into a fixed, comfortably "normalized" atmosphere.

This arrangement of space both reflected and advanced ideologies of conduct, not simply as regards the "angel in the house," herself, but also as regards those under her purview.[104] Particularly material to my argument is the relationship of household management to gentlemanly ethos. Beeton, in fact, places the importance of the husband at the forefront of her work, beginning with an epigraph from *Proverbs* about earning a husband's praise through wifely duty (1). She soon clarifies this quote with the adage that that the wife who makes her husband thus happy "reclaims (him) from vice" (1). This sentiment is echoed in a similar work, Sarah Ellis's *The Women of England, their Social*

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102 Beeton's work sold 60,000 copies in its first year.

103 From Beeton's *The Book of Household Management*: In the half hour before dinner, the mistress must suggest "light and cheerful subjects of conversation, which will be much aided by the introduction of any particularly new book, curiosity of art, or article of vertu" (11-12). "The laundry-maid should commence her labours on Monday morning by a careful examination of the articles committed to her care, and enter them in the washing-book; separating the white linen and collars, sheets and body-linen, into one heap, fine muslins into another, coloured cotton and linen fabrics into a third, woollens into a fourth, and the coarser kitchen and other greasy cloths into a fifth." (1493-1494).

104 For an analysis of the Victorian home as "a hieratic structure as complex and delicately graduated as the British Constitution" (34) see Girouard. Most critics who address class and gender issues in the Victorian home focus on its disciplinary nature re the wife. Langland's *Nobody's Angels* is particularly strong in this respect.

Duties, and Domestic Habits. Man's "sisterly services," Ellis alleges, "establish (…) as it were a separate soul for his family" (50). The idea of the Victorian home as a locus of virtue, set against the iniquities of public space, is a familiar one, and it is not surprising to see such morally infused language employed in works of this kind. However, the filtering of it through an insistence on material regularity more revealingly speaks to the importance of "consistent conduct" underlying the idea of (masculine) "virtue" as presented in these manuals.

In discussing ethics, household manuals repeatedly parallel regularity in the home with regularity in a husband's behavior. Ellis writes:

> How often has man returned to his home with a mind confused by the many voices (…) in the mart, the exchange, or the public assembly(;) and while his integrity was shaken, and his resolution gave way (…) he has stood corrected before the clear eye of woman (detecting) the specious act he was about to commit (…) the humble monitress who sat alone, guarding the fireside comforts of his distant home (who) sent him back to that beloved home, a wiser and a better man. (46-47)

Here, the figure of the husband becomes one whose behavior is a manifestation of his circumstances. The inconsistency of material space (the cacophony of the public sphere) becomes an internal inconsistency (the confused mind, the shaken integrity), which, then (through flagging resolution) becomes potentially inconsistent conduct (the specious act). Ellis's rhetoric works to persuade the reader to see this inconsistency as morally negative, a perspective suggested in the term "specious" and consummated in the husband's

resistance to inconsistency making him "better." By contrast, the household, and specifically its comforts (what Beeton equates with its regularization[105]), becomes the force that "corrects" behavior. The "better" man is he who, internalizing the regularized context of his home, does not himself deviate.

Other manuals iterate variations on Ellis's claim. *Cassell's Household Guide* aims to show the wife how to be "the helpmate of man" by combating the increasing "complicated(ness)" of modernity through "set(ting) out accurately, and in something like scientific order, the laws which govern, and the rules which should regulate, that most necessary and most important of all human institutions. The Household" (1). In other words, it maintains the common assumption of household manuals that would equate strict regularity and man's well-being. M.B.H.'s *Home Truths for Home Peace* exclaims that "the unholy work of muddle" imparts upon gentleman of the house a "mingled expression of anxiety, [a] harsh discordant voice, [and a] half-convulsive seeking [manner]" (25) – all of which the author seeks to remedy by "defeating muddle" through an organization of objects and space.[106] Material disorder at home here festers into a hypothesized gentleman's physiological disorder, then manifesting in a behavioral inconsistency that, by transference of the "unholiness" of muddle, becomes itself immoral. "De-muddling" cures this moral sickness.

105 Beeton describes the impetus for her book: "What moved me, in the first instance, to attempt a work like this, was the dis*comfort* and suffering which I had seen brought upon men and women by household mismanagement"(ix, my emphasis). She then calls her organizational schema as a collection of the "arts of making and keeping a comfortable home"(ix).

106 M.B.H. encapsulates the idea of de-muddling as material arrangement via the following verse: "Estimating everything at its real value, / Keeping everything to its proper use, / Putting everything into its proper place, / Doing everything at its proper time, - and / Keeping everybody to his proper business" (56).

In such repeated association of material order, morality, and consistent masculine behavior, the genre of household management, I suggest, perpetuated that widespread rhetorical movement to define the proper, Victorian "gentleman" via regularity of conduct. Even further, it offered itself as a means to ensure that regularity against an increasingly erratic public sector.[107] It, in short, set itself as a "context of regularity" for the "production" of gentleman, alternative to that which, for example, legal reform sought to establish.

It is through household management's "context of regularity" that the novel's underworld regulation ultimately plots Harmon's restitution into gentlemanliness. For Rokesmith's eradication of Alfred David drives Lizzie Hexam's penchant for domestic improvement into what Lauren Goodlad calls the "sentimental plot" of the novel (162). Here, the chief local instability is between Harmon (still under the name Rokesmith) and his intended bride Bella Wilfer, whose spoiled childhood has left her unable to be the "proper" housewife that the former expects. Under the impression that Harmon is the impoverished secretary of her guardians, Bella mercenarily rejects his advances. Lizzie's commitment to domestic influence – prominently signaled in her resolution to keep her father "straight" (a word which pointedly registers a conflation of regularity and virtue) – becomes the momentum that resolves this local instability. Via Rokesmith's vigilantism, the working-class woman's innate familial purity is activated to spur Bella into functioning as a "household manager" in a stricter, middle-class sense and thereby make her a "suitable" wife. This resolution then settles the global dissonance of the plot as Bella's

107 This fact would seem to bear out Richard Sennett's claim that 19th century domestic propriety was founded on chance (140).

newfound function, playing upon the "context of regularity" underlying household management, is able to restore Harmon into a recognized gentleman.

Gaffer Hexam's redeemed status, in fact, generates the impulse which first brings Bella to Lizzie. Bella's worldliness is activated by a recognition "that Lizzie's father had been falsely accused of the crime which had had so great an influence on her own life and fortunes" (516), causing her to seek Lizzie out specifically to confirm that "the retracted accusation (does not) leave any stain upon her" (519). The adverb, "falsely," in the first clause and the leading adjective, "retracted," in the next highlight the narrative energy here as originating specifically from the proven erroneousness of the accusation, rather than from the fact of the accusation itself. In accordance with Bella's character at this point, the concern that drives her to Lizzie appears to extend only so far as Gaffer Hexam's culpability has been publicly discredited. As such, the meeting of the two women is narratively contingent upon Rokesmith's underworld stint – occurring through the disclosure that it generates.

So too, the expulsion of Alfred David initiates Bella's functional change into domestic manager; for it progresses Lizzie's dimensionality as apt homemaker to work towards that end. An excerpt from the conversation in which this initiation occurs:

> (Bella's) nature, giddy for want of the weight of some sustaining purpose, and capricious because it was always fluttering among little things, was yet a captivating one (…)

"Oh, it's all very well to call me your dear," said Bella (…) "But I AM such a nasty little thing! (…) Such a shallow, cold, worldly, Limited little brute!" (…)

"Do you think," inquired Lizzie with her quiet smile, the hair being now secured, "that I don't know better?"

"DO you know better though?" said Bella. "Do you really believe you know better? Oh, I should be so glad if you did know better, but I am so very much afraid that I must know best!" (…)

"I used once to see pictures in the fire," said Lizzie (…) "Shall I tell you what I see down there where the fire is glowing?"

They had risen, and were standing on the hearth, the time being come for separating; each had drawn an arm around the other to take leave.

"Shall I tell you," asked Lizzie, "what I see down there?"

"Limited little b?" suggested Bella with her eyebrows raised.

"A heart well worth winning, and well won. A heart that, once won, goes through fire and water for the winner, and never changes, and is never daunted" (…)

"And the figure to which it belongs" (…)

"Most clearly and distinctly yours." (524-529)

Bella's pending functionality in the Harmon plot is here altered through a re-conceptualization of her identity, specifically as regards her capacity for wifehood. To track this movement: at the outset, Bella interprets herself as the "character" written into

John Harmon Sr.'s original will – a "shallow," "worldly (…) brute," constructed to make her future husband miserable as the antithesis of the domestic angel. Her use of the adjective, "limited" signals her understanding of herself as fixed into this characterological functionality. The narrative voice, however, suggests that her dimensions might be turned towards a different end should some "sustaining purpose" harness them. The exchange offers Bella such purpose, as Lizzie urges her to begin self-identifying as a viable housewife. Lizzie's description of the unchanging, "never daunted" heart more specifically echoes rhetoric found in aforementioned household manuals, turning Bella's potential self-identification towards that particular type.[108]

Bella's coming to see herself as this type re-shapes her dimensions[109] to function differently from what the will has "written," setting her on the track by which she ultimately progresses into the narrative's laudable, middle-class housewife. Lizzie's "knowing better" becomes Bella's wish to see herself as Lizzie sees her ("I should be so glad if you did know better") – to believe, in short, that she is not a "mercenary wretch" (527). This wish directly turns into credence[110] as, leaving Lizzie's lodgings, she tells her guardian's "secretary" that "much has happened – to myself (…) for good" (530). She then takes his proffered arm in hers, a first sign of her turning away from a mercenary development to become his devoted wife – the engenderment, in other words, of the

108 Ellis, for example, writes that it is "the indefatigable exertions and faithful labours of women (…) which fits them for becoming able instruments in the promotion of public and private good" (27). Beeton likewise defines the good mistress as one who bears the "onerous duties" of the household with "continued attention" (19).

109 Specifically, her apparent "shallow, cold, worldly, Limited" nature comes to be seen, in fact, as a "capricious(ness) giddy for want of the weight of some sustaining purpose"

110 Of course, narrative exposition, left out for the sake of brevity here, makes this change much more plausible. A particularly poignant example: "Bella sat enchained by the deep, unselfish passion of this girl or woman of her own age, courageously revealing itself in the confidence of her sympathetic perception of its truth. And yet she had never experienced anything like it, or thought of the existence of anything like it." (528)

resolution of the local instability between Bella and Harmon. The closure which follows finds Bella and Harmon (as Rokesmith) married, the former studiously pouring over "a sage volume entitled *The Complete British Family Housewife*" (682), explicitly associating her shifted functionality with household management.[111]

Lizzie's persuading Bella to see herself anew and thereby causing her shift is itself a function of Lizzie's own home-making proclivities. For Lizzie urges Bella based upon what she sees in the symbolic locus of her "angel in the house"-like qualities, the fire. William J. Palmer describes the fire at the Hexam residence as a symbol of Lizzie's "ability to create an imaginative future" (489). More specifically, however, it serves to reflect her understanding of herself as homemaker – the place where she had envisioned her good "influence (over her father)" and Charley's "go(ing) on better and better" (29). Lizzie's drawing upon it in the above exchange is a narrative activation of that domestic purity into a confident, persuasive promotion of like behavior in Bella as something "well worth winning."

111 My argument is not that Dickens's novel, in incorporating such allusion, necessarily advocates household management as a genre, but rather that he utilizes the ideology prominent in them. For *Our Mutual Friend* clearly ridicules the idea that a text can teach the skills which such books espouse. However, it nevertheless upholds those skills as ideals. The following quote helps to clarify this point: "Mrs John Rokesmith sat at needlework in her neat little room, beside a basket of neat little articles of clothing (…) Whether the *Complete British Family Housewife* had imparted sage counsel anent them, did not appear, but probably not, as that cloudy oracle was nowhere visible. For certain, however, Mrs John Rokesmith stitched at them with so dexterous a hand, that she must have taken lessons of somebody. Love is in all things a most wonderful teacher" (743). Here, the novel not only imparts to Bella qualities of the household manager but also marks them as positive. At the same time, it resists attributing those qualities to the reading of text, favoring instead the sentimentalized explanation, "Love." This move criticizes the "cloudy" style of household management books, but does not by any means resist their ideal of womanhood. In fact, it might be seen as an even stronger recommendation of that ideal, lending it a transcendental aura. Critic Cathy Shuman refutes this idea, claiming that the novel undermines domestic authority by showing Bella "passing a test" as a good wife rather than being a good wife. "Once Bella is installed in her West End mansion," Shuman argues, "she will be too rich to need to read cookbooks" (159). Although I agree that the testing of Bella is crucial, I would suggest that this test is meant to imply continued like behavior, thereby legitimizing her future wealth.

Such activation comes through the effects of Rokesmith's illicit enforcement against Riderhood and his affidavit. In addition to the instability it had caused between Harmon and Gaffer Hexam, the presence of Alfred David had also generated a local instability within Lizzie as character. For the generally credited affidavit had caused her to doubt the efficacy of domestic influence, putting her in self-conflict with her resistant, "angelic" impulses. Though believing that her father did not commit the Harmon murder, she had begun to suspect that, despite her influence, he might be involved in comparably shady dealings. The result was a sort of narratological retardation, wherein her domestic impulses were impeded from progressing into function: "'Nothing, dear father," said Lizzie, attempting to deny the suspicions aroused by the affidavit, "I am certain, in my heart (…) nothing! But it was too dreadful to bear; for it looked—(…) O it looked—'(…) The recollection of his murderous figure, combining with her trial of last night, (…) caused her to drop at his feet, without having answered" (76). Here, though Lizzie remains predisposed to her faith in her domestic influence ("in [her] heart" she believes that her suspicions are "nothing"), her doubt stops such predisposition from being converted into active espousal. She must interrupt herself with misgivings too horrible to name (the unfinished "but…it looked"). Narrative circumstances thus obstruct Lizzie's characterological progress, a fact typographically marked in the interruption of her speech with dashes and the final nullification of her in a swoon. By resolving the local instability which causes such retardation – what Lizzie calls the "great deal (done) for me (by the friend) who caused the charge against poor father to be contradicted" (524) – the expulsion of Alfred David clears the way for her primary dimensions to function, as I have shown, in the advocacy of

household influence which initiates Bella's domestic progress. Thus, through the resolution of the local instability surrounding Lizzie and the affidavit, Rokesmith's un-gentlemanlike protection of the legal system's "context of regularity" generates the plot's movement into the domestic sphere and its analogous context. Here, as I will proceed to show, the global dissonance of the plot is somewhat tentatively resolved.

Kindling a Gentleman

Bella's re-orientation away from mercenariness towards functioning as a type of "household manager" works towards the resolution of the global dissonance by removing the main impediment to Harmon's reclaiming his identity (his desire to avoid entering an arranged, loveless marriage). However, it also generates a local instability that must first be resolved; for, Bella's progression along her non-mercenary path entails that she marry Harmon believing that he is the poor, socially uncelebrated John Rokesmith (such is the reason Harmon enters Bella's household under an alias). This generates an instability between how she comes to identify her husband and how he ultimately wishes to be identified. The novel resolves this problem (and, in consequence, its global dissonance) via recourse to the "context of regularity" underlying ideologies of household management.

First, the narrative casts Harmon's post-marriage deception of Bella – his letting her continue to interpret him as John Rokesmith – as a means for him to further her progress into a domestic angel. Revealing Rokesmith's secret, Mrs. Boffin, Bella's guardian, explains to her ward:

> "You was married (but your husband) wouldn't let us out with it (his original plan to woo Bella under a false identity) then, as was first meant. 'No,' he

says, 'She's so unselfish and contented, that I can't afford to be rich yet. I must wait a little longer.' Then (…) he says, 'She is such a cheerful glorious housewife (…) I must wait (…)' Then (…) 'She is so much better than she ever was (…) I must wait a little longer'" (774)

Harmon's delay in renouncing his alias results in what he describes as a progressive improvement of Bella's household goodliness. Devoting herself to her husband with no thought of monetary or social gain, Bella moves from contentment in the task, to projecting that contentment outward with her "cheer" and skillful housewifery, to being simply "better than she ever was."

Depictions of her actions within the "Rokesmith home" more specifically link her perceived improvement to the skills of household management. In addition to her study of *The Complete British Housewife*, Bella keeps the house "de-lightfully furnished (…) economical and orderly, and do(es) everything by clockwork" (679); she is described as "fast developing a perfect genius for home. All the loves and graces seemed (her husband thought) to have taken domestic service with with her, and to help her to make home engaging" (681); she "always walked with her husband to the railroad, and was always there again to meet him (with) her dress as daintily managed as if she managed nothing else" (681); she makes "the most business-like arrangements for going (about) the household affairs of the day" (681); and she spares "not a moment (…) in the week" (683). All of these details – and particularly their stress on precision, effciency, and repetition – parallel excerpts from the genre of home management, evoking that context of regularity which, according to the rhetoric of such genre, nurtures and maintains gentlemanly

conduct.[112] Thus, the narrative depicts Harmon's deception as working through Bella to establish the basis for what will appear a valid reclamation of his lost status.

Indeed, the narrative marks the impulse that compels Harmon to resolve the local instability between him and his wife (i.e. renounce his false identity and reclaim his Harmon name) as ultimately resultant from his wife's domestic improvement. A chance encounter with Mortimer Lightwood, the lawyer who knows of his past falsity, puts pressure on Harmon's ability to sustain his deception of Bella. He addresses the issue with her:

> (He) said to his wife, who had preserved her cheerfulness: "And you don't ask me, my dear, (about the suspicions evoked by Lightwood)?" "No, John love. I should dearly like to know, of course;" (….) "but I wait until you can tell me of your own free will. You asked me if I could have perfect faith in you, and I said yes, and I meant it." It did not escape Bella's notice that he began to look triumphant. She wanted no strengthening in her firmness; but if she had had need of any, she would have derived it from his kindling face (…) The kindling triumph in his face was bright indeed … what had he done to

112 Various texts use similar details to arrange a domestic context for the fostering of gentlemanly behavior. The first quote above registers the importance placed on household objects such as furniture, to which, for instance, Cassell's guide devotes a general chapter and selective chapters for each room of the house. In naming economy, it echoes a more general strain: "Domestic comfort (…) centers in the practice of a wise economy" (Cassell 1), "Frugality and economy are home virtues, without which no household can prosper" (Beeton 2). Quotes one, four, and five speak to the systematic efficiency by which household manuals meant to arrange every waking moment of a housewife's day. Beeton's work is perhaps the most stringent in this regard, stressing "order and punctuality" as "so important to the comfort (…) of the household that every mistress should set stated hours for meals etc." (17). She outlines this order, moving from the importance of "early rising" (2) to all subsequent "daily duties" – "before breakfast," "after the general superintendence of her servants," "luncheon," "visiting," "invitations for dinner," "the half-hour before dinner," "going to dinner," etc. (2-16). Quote two more closely parallels Ellis's work, which focuses on the importance of "grace," "a generous heart," and "woman's (active) love" (18). Quote three's minute attention to dress registers similar fastidiousness in, for example, Beeton (4) and M.B.H. (114).

> deserve the blessing of this dear confiding creature's heart! … if all the world were against him, she would be for him … if all the world repudiated him, she would believe him … under the worst unmerited suspicion, she could devote her life to consoling him. (758-759)

Through John's opening question, the narrative locates the potential impetus for the resolution of the aforementioned instability in Bella's possible action as character. Having heard of the suspicions surrounding Rokesmith's validity, she has the opportunity to demand an explanation. However, her devotion to her husband (in her "faith" she will not doubt him) transfers the potential impetus back to Harmon. It becomes his "free will" to tell or not to tell her; or, in narrative terms, a matter of his characterological function either to resolve or not to resolve the instability between them.

This move, in turn, instigates Harmon's penchant for idealizing the husband/wife relationship into narrative function. Bella's self-negation produces in him a "kindling triumph;" a recognition that his original plan has come to a culmination. Her willingness to devote herself to an interpretation of him at variance with how the general public interprets him – to commit to what Sarah Ellis calls the cultivation of a "separate soul" for her husband (50) – distinguishes her as the ultimate, steadfast housewife.[113] Catherine O. Frank argues that such "submissive(ness)" registers John's dominating Bella in a manner similar to his father's attempt to dominate him (100). However, while John certainly does practice what might be seen as an unsettling influence over his wife's behavior, Frank's reading fails sufficiently to account for the reciprocity of influence exhibited here. The

113 As Ernest Boll notes, "on Leaf XIX (b) (of the notes for *Our Mutual Friend*) the phrase 'Bella always faithful' is twice under- scored to praise her unquestioning loyalty to young Harmon" (98).

ideological stance, into which this scene taps (a stance disseminated primarily through the household management genre) saw the notion of wifely duty as itself a powerful, disciplinary force.[114] And the novel iterates this notion; Bella's deferential conduct is the act which finally "disciplines" Harmon's inconsistent behavior. Recognizing her having established a space of domestic constancy irrespective of the outside world, Harmon decides to discontinue his attempts to maintain his hidden life – as he states, to "disperse in a moment (the things which) have surrounded me with one of the strangest suspicions ever known" (758). He soon confesses his true identity, renouncing his irregularities and resolving at once both the local instability between he and his wife and the global instability of his non-recognition.

In this manner, Harmon seems not so much to "re-make" himself into gentlemanliness as he seems "re-made" into it through an extremely indirect process; the effects of his vigilantism permeate through Lizzie into Bella, who then helps foster the recovery of his status as "gentleman." This progression allows him to avoid what Michael Cotsell describes as the "cost of self-willed identity," a phrase which captures the novel's general tendency to punish straightforward self-makers (xvi). Of course, the impulse behind such punishments is what Cotsell identifies (and correctly I think) as the novel's generally conservative strain. The fact that Harmon should avoid such a fate due to illicit conduct is, therefore, unsurprisingly a source of narrative tension.

114 Examples of this notion: "Who can believe that (…) years spent in a continual course of though and action similar to this (Ellis's ettitquette for domestic management), will not produce a powerful effect upon the character (…) who thinks and acts, alone, but upon all to whom her influence extends?" (Ellis 25). "Good temper should be cultivated by every mistress, as upon it the welfare of the household may be said to turn; indeed, its influence can hardly be over-estimated, as it has the effect of moulding the characters of those around her" (Beeton 4).

To some extent, the narrative "purifies" Harmon's vigilantism by absorbing it into the "excusable" deception of his wife. The plot, itself – its progressing Harmon's regulation of Alfred David (as Rokesmith) into the resolution of domestic instability between him and Bella – works to such an end. For, exploiting the analogous "contexts of regularity" underlying its two primary settings, it conflates Harmon's situational management's effects in the "underworld plot" (his rectifying the "regularity disturbance" caused by Riderhood's affidavit) with the effective formation of gentlemanly identity produced by his situational management in the "domestic sphere plot" (his "tricking" Bella into the creation of a home regularity that, according to predominant ideology, will eventually regularize him). The vigilante's manipulations discursively produce the gentleman, John Harmon, in one sphere, a fact that obscures their deviance in another.

Early on, the narrative signals such imminent conflation. When Harmon, under the alias Rokesmith, arrives to take lodgings at the Wilfer home, Bella, annoyed at his lack of openness and reference, facetiously says to her father, "Pa (…) we have got a Murderer for a tenant" (40). Ruth Livesey discusses this moment as one which establishes Bella as Harmon's eventual exonerator, her forthcoming trust in him nullifying the necessity for commercial credit in constructing his identity (91-93); a productive argument, but one which misses a key point in not making a connection between Bella's statement and the part Harmon does play in "murder" (via the metaphorical killing of Alfred David). For such connection reveals the moment as one which suggests an early intermingling of his deception of Bella and his deception elsewhere. Bella's identifying Harmon as a criminal during her initial, (and as it turns out) poorly gauged interpretation allows her later change

of mind regarding his worthiness as a suitor also to extend to his criminality. Her exoneration of his pretended self in marriage has the appearance, in turn, of lending a degree of absolution to his vigilante pretense.

The imagery of fire that follows the trajectory of Harmon's progression operates symbolically to buttress this apparent absolution. To track this movement: Harmon first begins his adoption of ulterior identities via the initial *forge*ry at the police station – an act that soon progresses into his "(Roke)smithing." He confronts Riderhood, whose false affidavit is itself a *forge*ry, the "fieriness" of which is emphasized by its being given in between intervals of silence, "broken only by the fall of the ashes in the grate" (155). Harmon re-smiths this forgery, and, in doing so, stokes the Hexam house flames, where Lizzie fantasizes about familial improvement. These fantasies become Bella's "amazing progress in (…) domestic efficiency" (683) within her middle-class home, a location for which the hearth served as a common Victorian synecdoche (Logan 121). The warmth of Bella's hearth then disciplines John by (as the long excerpt quoted above notes) "kindling" his desire to cease his performance of multiple identities. Thus, the fire associated with John's vigilantism becomes subsumed into the hearth of the Victorian home, symbolically purifying his transgressions.

Alone, this imagery would seem to corroborate the conventional notion that Dickens's fiction responds to the social complexities and anxieties of the city by retreating into a "clean and tidy home" (Welsh 142). However, the fact that the construction of such a home in *Our Mutual Friend* comes from a narrative energy based upon urban deviance complicates matters significantly. The novel's ostensible segregation and disposal of

Rokesmith from its "Harmon" character space through allusion to a domestic "context of regularity" (its eradicating him from the plot in a manner akin to his eradication of Alfred David) is destabilized by its inability to contain fully the narrative energy generated by the extra-legal regulation attached to that alias. Ripples from the plot momentum produced by Harmon's stint as vigilante flow forward to challenge his reclaimed consistency.

Such is the case, for instance, at the very moment that Bella's home-making begins to complete her husband's regularization into consistent conduct. Harmon's forgery at the police station, by which he had escalated the global dissonance of his presumed death and had generated narrative space for his vigilantism, had also activated the dimensionally suspicious policeman, Mr. Inspector, into a search for Harmon's true identity – a search that leads to his entering John and Bella's house simultaneously with John's regained consistency (his "kindling triumph"). The Inspector brings with him the "piece of paper on which (Harmon) wrote (his forged signature)" (760), essentially re-introducing the false "character" that Harmon had inscribed into the plot to facilitate his temporary lapse into deviance. Through the Inspector, then, the unsettled public space of the novel (wherein the inconsistent behavior of Harmon's alias continues to produce plot) breeches the allocated space for the narrative resolution of Harmon's deceit – the domestic sphere. The Inspector's demand that Harmon (still under the name Rokesmith) "explain himself" shifts the burden of settling the public instabilities generated by previous inconsistency onto Harmon's function as character.

The result of this shift is a destabilization in his transition towards consistent gentlemanliness. Answering the Inspector's repeated requests for a private discussion,

Harmon says, "(Bella) is satisfied that she can have no reason for being alarmed, whatever the business is" (760). Here, his refusal to leave the purview of his wife exhibits the shift towards his functioning as a loyal, husband – one who wishes to disallow any discrepancy between self-presentation to wife and self-presentation to others.[115] Narratively speaking, however, this move is a static one; it does nothing to resolve the instability that the Inspector's presence has introduced. Instead, it puts the onus of generating momentum back onto the Inspector, who must explain "whatever the business is." However, when the Inspector does so and then forces Harmon to further the plot by "say(ing) whether (you have) some knowledge of (the Harmon murder) that hasn't come out" (761), Harmon quickly abandons his resolution and asks to "step (…) into the next room" (761). This move spatially demarcates Harmon's self-presentation as discrepant, locating differing interpretations of his identity in this room and "the next." In other words, to propel the intrusive "public plot" forward, he temporarily regresses towards his previous function as "Rokesmith the vigilante," whose "interpreted being" had acquired its narrative power through the high degree of variability in how others saw him. The Inspector's description of Harmon's actions as "a game" that has "graveled" him (761) emphasizes both the inconsistency of Harmon's self-presentation and the fact of its narrative force. Of course, the resolution of this local instability quickly re-settles Harmon into regularity as both the Inspector and Bella conclude with an interpretation of him as "John Harmon, gentleman." Still, the scene betrays a sense of purely regularized gentlemanliness as narratively

115 And one who is about to "disperse in a moment (the things which) have surrounded me with one of the strangest suspicions ever known" (758).

deficient – a "dead weight" in the plot; static, or, at best, occasionally acted upon from without.

So, when the final tremors of narrative energy from Harmon's vigilantism burst forth, Harmon again relapses into "ungentlemanly" inconsistency in order to plot them "out." I refer here to Harmon's reclamation of his father's estate. This bit of closure occurs in the wake of the resolution to the narrative's global dissonance. Harmon, now recognized as a rightful gentleman publicly (via Mr. Inspector), privately (via Bella), and from a readerly perspective (via his apparent "domestic regularization"), returns home to take the helm of the company business. Here, an instability arises between his claim and the claims of Silas Wegg, who comes forth to blackmail Harmon, having been propelled forward by the discovery of a lost will resultant from Harmon's long absence while incognito in the underworld.

In order to combat this residual narrative energy, Harmon employs a "Rokesmithian" pattern of fraudulent self-presentation (namely, identification, exploitation, and regulation/resolution). 1) Identification: Meeting Wegg's demand for a conference and confirming the hold that he has over him – "(You have) a will of my late father's, of more recent date than the one proved by Mr. Boffin (…) leaving the whole of (the Harmon) estate to the Crown," he says (787) – Harmon falsely projects himself as a bested victim apparently willing to make a deal. As he later explains, this was the culmination of an on-going plan to "lead (Wegg) on, deluded" into a sense of cooperation (788). 2) Exploitation: Lured in, Wegg plays his hand, asking "what's this paper worth?" (787) – in other words, he commits himself by explicitly demanding a ransom. Harmon

now drops his false presentation and seizes the upper-hand with a secret document that nullifies Wegg's will, leaving Wegg, "to his boundless amazement" (787), attached to an extortion scheme in which he has no clout. 3) Regulation and Resolution: Harmon explains to Wegg the rationale behind his ruse, "I (…) knew enough of you to (…) lead you on (…) to the last possible moment, in order that your disappointment might be the heaviest possible disappointment" (788). Harmon's variable self-presentation, in other words, is calibrated to an assessment of Wegg's character (knowing "enough of you") so that its effects might alter Wegg at his very core. And it works; its resultant deflation turns the function of Wegg's dimensional "avaricious(ness)" from dangerous blackmailing into groveling in "humiliation" to leave "no worse off in life than (Boffin had) found (him)" (789). Thus abased, Wegg is unable to resist his ejection from the narrative; he is promptly thrown out of the house and onto the ashes of a "scavenger's cart" (789),[116] never to reappear.

So "Harmon, the gentleman" claims his estate as his own. However, taking such an active role in the novel's "plotting," it would seem, necessitates taking a short lapse into somewhat ungentlemanly conduct. Only through a bit of "(Roke)smithing" does Harmon ultimately turn the final portion of narrative residuum into "ashes" on a scavenger's heap.[117]

Conclusion: Dis*Harmon*izing

116 An 1876 *Handbook of Rural Sanitary Science* describes the contents of a "scavenger's cart" as including "the waste of house and stable, *ash*pit, and mid-den" (Gardner et al. 194-195, my emphasis).

117 Critical attention to the dust heaps of the novel often correlates them to filth. Pamela K. Gilbert, for example, claims that the heaps represent "the task of the middle-class male (…) to control desire and to contain the body so that it cannot either produce or be penetrated by filth" (82). Catherine Gallagher explores the idea of heaps as excrement in the context of economic circulation ("Bio-Economics" 86-117). Dickens's reference to the heaps as "ashes" (503), however, suggests a link to the overarching theme of "smithing." The heaps, in this sense, signal the narrative residue upon which Harmon's domesticity is plotted.

My interpretation emphasizes *Our Mutual Friend*'s plot as a rhetorical presentation, wherein repeated clashes between various character-functions, each either ostensibly promoting or opposing a gentlemanly ideology of "interpreted being," work to satisfy readerly expectation. By locating this plot's progression in John Harmon's "doing of the police," I destabilize standard criticism's tendency to conceptualize such clashes as a type of narrative attrition, wherein gentlemanly functions simply resist the plotting of anti-gentlemanly ones.[118] Instead, I show how the depicted Victorian gentleman might, in some cases, "plot himself" through the influencing and coercing of anti-gentlemanly and a-gentlemanly functions – that is to say, I suggest how an author's rhetorical manipulations might convincingly attribute active function to a character ideologically aligned with an inherently passive identity.[119] Through the re-functioning of Riderhood, Alfred David, Lizzie, and Bella, John Harmon builds his identity circuitously – a process which self-conceals as the apparently passive "John Rokesmith."

Such rhetorical manipulation generates a level of perplexity that draws the narrative into tension. Despite its torturous diffusion, John Harmon's "doing of the police" necessarily pulls against the ideology of gentlemanliness that it enables the plot to perform, thereby threatening to destroy narrative cohesiveness. Recent criticism of the Victorian novel has hit upon related topics in addressing what Lukács more generally calls the "weak cohesion" of the novel (72). Arguments in this category range from problems of realism

118 As I noted in my second chapter, Franco Moretti describes the tendency of the Victorian *bildungsroman* to construct gentlemen whose purpose is simply to remain immutable in the "theater of fluctuating and changing identities" (203). Similarly, Peter Brooks argues that the deviance central to plotting leaves the normative hero of the Victorian novel devoid of energy (139).

119 In this case, rhetorical manipulations take the shape of recourse to the predominant cultural conversations of law reform and household etiquette.

and representation to the difficulties generated by linguistic "intension."[120] My hermeneutics uncover a different kind of volatility; one generated when plot works through characterological functions determined by a particularly complicated and prevalent rhetoric of gentlemanly identity. Such methodology works to reorient conventional interpretations of the Victorian novel – in the case of *Our Mutual Friend*, by showing how the instability of the novel's structure paradoxically stems from the intimacy of its components rather than from what critics have repeatedly suggested is their incongruity.

120 In terms of the realism/representation paradigm, Daniel Novak, for example, uses Victorian hermeneutics of photography to address the "sense that realist detail disrupts the 'grammar' of (…) novelistic structure" (27). Also addressing the realism/representation paradigm, Caroline Levine argues that *Bleak House*'s discursive threads, each having "the potential to derail and subvert one another," are due to the fact that the novel "hangs its plot on networks rather than persons and families" (518-519). The term "intension" is a coinage of Garrett Stewart, who locates the instabilities of narrative in readerly experience by exploring how "in Victorian fiction (…) the vagaries and undertones of verbal intension (…) make our involvement (…) both discontinuous and hence all the more intermittently arresting" (25).

Chapter Four
Credited Men and Hideous Puppets:
Gentlemanliness and Degeneracy in Late-Nineteenth Century Fiction

The popularization of "degeneracy theory" in England during the latter half of the nineteenth century culminated with the translation of Max Nordau's *Entartung* (*Degeneration*) in 1895. Intensely polemical, the book attacked what Nordau saw as the criminal, "fin-de-siècle mood" of the day (3). That same year, reviewer William James responded with a critique of Nordau which essentially called his theory an anxiety-ridden narrow-mindedness, using science "as an artifice for giving objective authority to (…) personal dislikes" (289). Current criticism generally maintains James's assessment, and, given degeneracy theory's prevalence as a late Victorian cultural conversation, understandably reads contemporaneous, middle-class representations of crime as a relatively consolidated locus of bourgeois unease.[121]

In this chapter, I move my theory of viable criminality into the 1870s and 1880s in order to complicate this manner of reading. In particular, I argue that popular novels often negotiated degenerationism's understanding of criminality in order to continue what I have

121 The opening of William Greenslade's groundbreaking account, for instance, registers an understanding of degeneration as a reactionary, monolithic middle-class movement. "Degeneration," Greenslade writes, "(was) an enabling strategy by which the conventional and respectable classes could justify and articulate their hostility to the deviant, the diseased and the subversive" (2). Explaining degenerationism's lack of influence on institutional structures in England, Daniel Pick argues that degeneracy instead more subtly united a wide spectrum of non-institutionalized middle-class concerns into a "shared emphasis" (5). Sander Gilman uses degeneracy as a means of exploring the act of "othering," thus necessarily focusing on its efficacy in shoring up majority interests (19). The more recent work of Stephan Arata does well in exploring the complex ways in which degeneration became "textually encoded" (6). Nonetheless, he focuses on the theory's nature as a form of Gramsci's "common sense" (16), "thoroughly entwined (…) with the collective anxieties of the bourgeoisie" (32). While I do not at all mean to suggest that these assessments are erroneous, I do think that such a heavy focus on the "collective, middle-class anxieties" of degeneration risks overlooking the variations/contradictions in its rhetorical usage.

claimed is a trend of performing gentlemanly identity via the incorporation of the criminal figure. By highlighting this volatile intersection between degeneracy theory and an alternate rhetoric of crime, I mean to offer new insight into the formal complexities embedded in such novels.

Origins and Deviations

In the 1901 edition of his *The Criminal*, prominent British physician and psychologist Henry Havelock Ellis complained that the "popular use" of the term "degeneracy" had rendered its clinical usage virtually meaningless (xv-xvi). Indeed, in the roughly forty year span since the publication of Benedict-August Morel's *Degeneration and its Causes* (1857), "degeneracy theory" had outgrown its origins in pseudo-scientific fields to become what William Greenslade calls a "fully fledged explanatory myth" (15). Highly malleable and therefore conducive to an array of vocabularies, the hermeneutics of "degenerationism" spanned across topics scientific, aesthetic, and socio-political.

Late nineteenth-century, mainstream depictions of criminal identity, in particular, become saturated with language adopted from specialized theories of degeneracy; and, in the sections which follow, I will examine two novelistic variations of this kind. First, however, I want to outline degeneracy theory's more immediate effect on Victorian conceptualizations of the criminal and then to suggest how that effect might have more broadly impacted formalist considerations of "criminal" characters.

Applied to the study of crime, degenerationism was essentially a means to configure the criminal (or deviant) as a legible text, thereby enabling the detection and containment

of potentially non-normative behavior.[122] The basis for such configuration was Morel's definition of the degenerate individual: "The clearest statement we can make about degeneration in the human species is to say that it is a morbid deviation (…) Degeneration and morbid deviation from the normal type of humanity are, in my thought, one and the same" (91). This typological paradigm worked to characterize deviance as an organic sickness – one later specified as a moral, intellectual, and bodily aberration. By making the criminal a diseased "type," Morel laid the groundwork for a hermeneutical method that, to some extent, circumvented the complexities and potential error built into a system that would define the criminal on the basis of (inconsistent) conduct. The "abnormal" criminal, even if temporarily performing in a consistent manner, could be identified via recognition of the tell-tale "morbid" disease, thereby reducing the possibility that a "deviant" might pass as "normal."

Morel called this practice the reading of "stigmata," translating the marks by which the degenerate could be recognized. In specialist circles, this process became a highly complex semiotics based largely upon Cesare Lombroso's physiognomic/phrenological theories. Positivists such as Eugene Talbot, Daniel Hack Tuke, and Henry Maudsley attempted to interpret "inward (…) faults (…) in breeding" through "outward (…) deformities" (Maudsley 536) via expert and "careful examination (of) certain signs (facial and cranial features as well as nervous habits) which are (degeneracy's) sole expressions" (Talbot 33). Once degeneracy theory came under the purview of popular culture, however, its somewhat elusive stigmata became a set of *tropoi* recognizable to even the untrained

122 As critics have noted, degeneracy in this sense can be seen as a development of what Foucault has identified as the late eighteenth century "medicalization" of the body with all its contingent power structures (34 *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*.)

eye.[123] In its widespread application, then, it appeared to offer an appealingly static understanding of the criminal, one which limited that figure's potent and menacing deceptiveness.

The notoriously tricky issue of inconsistent conduct did not, however, cease to be relevant to the issue of criminal identity within the diagnostic framework of degenerationism. In fact, the aforementioned prominent text, Nordau's *Degeneration*, repeatedly evokes the idea. Nordau describes the state of the fin-de-siècle degenerate as "curiously confused (in) disposition" (2); subject to "momentary impulse" (18); unable to "discipline the disorderly tumult" of his ideas (21); lacking a "well-regulated equilibrium" (29); and, perhaps most pointedly, prone to attempts "to present something that (he is) not" (9). Such rhetoric evokes that line of thinking which defined the criminal via his polarity to the gentleman of "consistent conduct." But, for Nordau and his Morelian-based schema, inconsistency is not the defining factor of the criminal so much as it is a symptom of an already criminal being. He describes these actions as the "manifestations" of "nervous and mental maladies" (15); they are the weaknesses that betray one's criminal nature – not a means to effect criminal action.

123 An epitomic example would be R.L. Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. Victorian readers of this novella would not have failed to note Hyde's "ape-like" manner as a sign of degeneracy (22). Similarly apparent in another exemplary text, Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, are the degenerate registers of the count – his "squat fingers (and) hairs in the centre of the palm" (18). Interestingly, Stephen Arata uses this latter example to make the case for "the troubling multivalence of bodily signs," arguing that "even to eyes as practiced as Professor Van Helsing's in the novel, Dracula is not immediately recognized as a public threat" (20). However, I would suggest that the suspense of the novel hinges upon the dissonance between the intra-textual non-recognition of degenerate signs and readerly *recognition* of those signs. In this sense, the rhetoric of degeneracy in the novel highlights the reliability of "degeneracy-reading" through readerly experience.

This focus on inconsistency as symptom shows also in Nordau's discussion of novels and art. In a tirade reminiscent of Mansel,[124] Nordau lambastes the "'decadent' works" of the day (15). Of "the aesthetic needs of elegant society," he writes, "novel sensations alone can satisfy it. It demands more intense stimulus, and hopes for it in spectacles, where different artists strive in new combinations to affect all the senses at once" (14). In his focus on sensory response and his aversion to severity, newness, and variegation, Nordau perpetuates familiar conceits of anti-sensationalism. However, instead of focusing his energies on criminalizing the inconsistent forms of the artistic representations in question (as Mansel and his ilk were wont to do), he glosses over them as the product of a greater disease, an attempt to meet the "demands" of a morbid audience. Such methodology shows that the fact of inconsistency is, here, of secondary concern to the underlying illness that causes it.

Accordingly, the explication of degenerate morbidity, and, in particular, the locating of its origins becomes the primary emphasis for Nordau and like theorists. Understanding the conditions that make the criminal (rather than theorizing how circumstances might generate *acts* of crime) becomes paramount. Morel's idea, in this regard, was that the "social environment" of the modern metropolis – its "unhealthy" conditions and "poisons" – was the leading cause of organic decay in the individual (91). He further claimed, through an adoption of biologist Jean Baptiste Lamarck's ideas of "use-inheritance,"[125] that this decay could be passed on hereditarily, leading to progressive degeneration. The origins of

124 See Chapter Two, "Creaking" Characters: Gentlemanly Inconsistency in Wilkie Collins's Armadale.

125 Lamarck's idea was that an organism could develop new traits through an effort to adapt to its environment. These new traits could then be passed on as hereditary mutations (Barthélemy-Madaule 72).

degeneracy were, therefore, traceable via investigation of living conditions and/or genealogical study.

Within "professional" circles, writers developed this theory by highlighting its biological overtones. Cesare Lombroso's work was perhaps the most strident in terms of the importance of heredity, fixing the degenerate criminal as a born deviant whose wickedness stems from evolutionary aberrations legible in primitive features such as "sloping foreheads, overdeveloped sinuses (and) large eye sockets" (222). This acute de-emphasizing of environmental conditions, however, was somewhat unique.[126] Nordau, whose *Degeneration* might be seen as an extension of Lombroso's work,[127] more fully weighs environmental factors against hereditary. While he maintains that "an inquiry into (…) pedigree" (17) is one way to trace degeneracy's origins, he focuses his etiology on "the effect of a large town on the human organism" (35).

In pursuing this effect, Nordau pushes the notion of environmental conditions beyond what Morel refers to as the "toxic agents" and "unhealthy (…) hygiene" of the modern city (91). He includes such things as "railway traveling," the "millions of letters (that) must be written," the plethora of "newspapers" and all the various sights and sounds that "cost our brains wear and tear" (39). Organic changes thus seem highly volatile, subject to an array of influences not necessarily under the strict purview of biological science. As John Stokes describes it, Nordau "ties (together) biological behavior (…) social

126 The second edition of Lombroso's *Criminal Man* addresses the issue of environment very briefly, noting that "one of the determining causes of crime, albeit an indirect and external factor, is the weather, particularly heat" (114). Subsequent editions, however, become increasingly engrossed in studies of heredity and atavism.

127 Nordau's opening dedication reads: "To Professor Caesar Lombroso, Turin. Dear and Honoured Master, I dedicate this book to you, in open and joyful recognition of the fact that without your labours it could never have been written" (vi).

conduct, technology and psychology" (12). This relatively loose etiology irked at least one contemporary critic who felt that it threatened to detach the concept of degeneration from "definite reference to the past history of an organism" (Schiller 436). The public, however, was not so exacting; *Degeneration* went into seven editions in just six months.

Novelistic depictions of degenerate crime similarly helped to popularize and broaden the scope of degenerationism's preoccupation with origin. As I will show via two examples, *The Way We Live Now* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, the characterology of degenerate criminals in late nineteenth century novels frequently registers a hermeneutic of origin probing that parallels that of degeneracy theory. More specifically, such novels distribute attention away from the functioning of criminal, characterological dimensionalities in order to account for the "origins" of those dimensionalities in reference to the larger narrative framework. Necessarily under less scientific constraint than professional texts on degenerationism, these works wield their degenerational "origin paradigms" against a wider range of social influences (often making little or no obvious connection to the idea of organic change per se). At the same time, they continue to insist on the notion of criminality as a viable complement to middle-class gentlemanliness, thereby resisting degeneracy theory's own origins as a somewhat anxious attempt to segregate the criminal as other.

Degeneracy and Distribution in *The Way We Live Now*

In his *Autobiography*, Anthony Trollope names as the instigating question behind *The Way We Live Now*, "Can a world, retrograding from day to day in honesty, be considered to be in a state of progress?" (209). His response: "I (…) ventured to take the

whip of the satirist in hand (…) and made an onslaught (on the) vices" of the time (211). By so defining his thirty-third novel as a backlash against a pattern of societal regression, Trollope effectively evokes its engagement in the late-nineteenth century cultural dialogue of degeneration.

Explicit reference to such dialogue comes in the novel's description of its central figure, the shady financier, Augustus Melmotte. Country squire Roger Carbury calls him "a sign of the degeneracy of the age" (2.44). Highlighting the story's chief criminal perpetrator as a sign of degeneration rather than a source, the statement points toward the narrative's characterological utilization of the kind of "origin paradigm" which, this chapter argues, comes to typify the full-fledged degeneracy novel.[128] Indeed, the text devotes much of its attention to configuring Melmotte's degenerate dimensionality as symptomatic of a larger "illness" – one bred out of a corrupt, credit economy.

My purpose in this section will be to show how such particular characterization actually works to distribute degenerate energy away from the financier and onto his network of creditors, thereby allowing him to function into a viable component in the narrative's overarching performance of gentlemanly identity. In this manner, the novel continues the rhetorical intersection traced in previous chapters while simultaneously incorporating into it a proto-degenerationist tactic of theorizing the criminal.

128 Published in 1875, *The Way We Live Now* predates many of the prominent, "scientific" extensions of degeneracy which came to serve as reference points for what I call "full-fledged degeneracy novels" (meaning those that consistently evoke a series of standard tropes which I will soon elucidate in my examination of *The Picture of Dorian Gray*). These include, notably, Lombroso's *Criminal Man* (1876) and Nordau's *Entartung* (Trans. *Degeneration*) (1892). Nonetheless, Trollope's novel does reference degeneracy more generally conceived, and, I suggest, does express a concern with criminality analogous to degenerationism's "origin paradigm." It therefore serves as something of a transitional piece between my previous chapters and my concluding analysis of Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

Analyses of Melmotte typically begin by noting his conspicuous absence from the first third of the novel. Often, however, critics dismiss the pragmatic import of this absence via recourse to Trollope's working notes and their suggestion that, at the onset of composition, Melmotte had simply been intended as a relatively minor character in what was to be "chief"ly a Lady Carbury plot (qtd. in Sadleir 426). Notwithstanding this explanation, Melmotte's deferred appearance has a notable rhetorical impact upon the revised trajectory of the novel (wherein the financier features as a prominent figure). For, by opening space for textual "rumor" to construct him as character, it embeds his dimensionality deep within a narrative network of secondary characters – a move that, in turn, allows for what I see as the eventual distribution of his degeneracy.

The first account of Melmotte prior to his appearance sets his characterological status into close alignment with rumor-based acts of interpretation. The narrator describes:

> Mr. Melmotte had made his wealth in France. He no doubt had had enormous dealings in other countries, as to which stories were told which must surely have been exaggerated. It was said that he had made a railway across Russia, that he provisioned the Southern army in the American civil war, that he had supplied Austria with arms, and had at one time bought up all the iron in England. He could make or mar any company by buying or selling stock, and could make money dear or cheap as he pleased. All this was said of him in his praise, – but it was also said that he was regarded in Paris as the most gigantic swindler that had ever lived (30-31).

The passage establishes Melmotte as a narrative force – a power that "makes or mars" and thereby generates plot. And yet, the dimensions behind this force are obscured, filtered as they are through a series of unverified reports. The recurring passive voice ("it was said") makes Melmotte, as character, the construct of unidentified sources of gossip. Offering incongruent explanations for understanding the "person" behind the force – swindler, praiseworthy entrepreneur, or something in between – this gossip generates characterological ambiguity. Melmotte's absence is significant here because it largely precludes evidence that might be weighed against such gossip in order to attribute to Melmotte a definite character. Furthermore, the narrator abstains from orienting the perplexed reader by eschewing omniscience. Though the narrator's conditionals – "must surely" and "no doubt" – ostensibly suggest certainty, it is a certainty delineated as opinion. The narrator becomes yet another source, perhaps more credible than others, but still accentuated as indefinite – what Tara McGann calls a "noncommittal" voice (155).[129] As virtual narrative truant, then, Melmotte here acts as a site of dimensional indistinctness – his character made manifest as a tenuous conflux of unreliable opinion.

Even Melmotte's most frequently discussed "trait" – his presumed foreignness – serves to accentuate his characterological status as contingent upon vague, intra-textual conjecture. Throughout the novel, the narrator and others allude to Melmotte's probable "otherness." Opinions vary, identifying Melmotte as everything from being an American to being "born a Jew" (2.52) to being the son of "an Irishman of the name of Melmody"

129 McGann argues that the narrator's statements, though from an extradiegetic source, are unreliable because swayed by gossip or simply because they mean to pass on another's limited perspective (155).

(2.449).[130] Of course, none of these widely diverse suppositions are ever wholly confirmed by the narrative, which leaves standing Georgiana Longstaffe's claim that "nobody knows what Mr. Melmotte is" (2.140). The Great Financier's "foreignness," then, rather than demarcating him as an ethnic type, only heightens his obscurity. Tamara Wagner uses Melmotte's indistinctness in this regard to suggest that the novel displaces anxieties about financial instability onto an "international man of mystery" and then expunges those anxieties through that man's self-destruction (1). This reading, however, distracts from the way in which the narrative utilizes Melmotte's characterological ambiguousness (and its connection to other characters' suppositions) in order to anchor his dimensionality in the system of characters that surround him.

The above technique is carried out through narrative recourse to contemporaneous understandings of the expanding credit economy. Cultural and economic historians have meticulously surveyed how the increasing shift in the British financial system during the 19th century towards locating worth in abstracted capital as opposed to landed wealth, and, in particular, the ascendance of the stock-market, radically destabilized confidence in the security of economic value.[131] Increasing pressure to establish trust within a fluctuating

130 Various critics have focused on Melmotte's possible Jewishness. Derek Cohen identifies the novel's portrayal of Melmotte as suggestive of an overarching anti-Semitism (70). In *Is Heathcliff a Murderer?: Great Puzzles in Nineteenth-century Fiction*, John Sutherland poses the question, "Is Melmotte Jewish?" and then traces the fluctuating nature of Melmotte's identity (156-162). For an association of Melmotte with the American characters in the novel, see Annette Van's "Ambivalent Speculations: America as England's Future in *The Way We Live Now*" (76).

131 Historical studies such as George Robb's *White-Collar Crime in Modern England* and Timothy Alborn's *Conceiving Companies* examine, respectively, how the Victorian economic situation opened new avenues for fraudulence (2) and put increasing pressure on companies to "structure, function, and locate (themselves) in the market" (5). Literary critics also examine the issue of economic instability, applying it to changes in literary form. Jeff Nunokawa, for instance, argues that the speculative economy's deflating "the dream of stable estate" registers in novelistic logics of alienation (*Afterlife* 122). Similarly, Barbara Weiss links "the subject of failure (…) in the Victorian novel" to "economic failure (as) a stark fact of life in the Victorian economy" (14). Elaine Freedgood examines how Victorian texts responded to the fluctuating world of industrialization through a particular "form of risk management" (1).

market was put on the notion of credit – a term which, just shortly before Trollope began work on *The Way We Live Now* in 1873, well-known economist Walter Bagehot defined in his widely popular *Lombard Street, a Description of the Money Market*, as "the disposition of one man to trust another" (64). Interestingly, despite (or perhaps even in response to) the increasing depersonalization of market forces,[132] Bagehot offers to his readers an understanding of credit as intensely personal. In this he was not alone; as Christina Crosby notes, financial transactions were often understood in terms of private confidences (even if, in practice, they frequently operated otherwise) (23). Bagehot's description more specifically, in its allusion to persuasion and self-presentation, draws attention to (personal) credit's analogousness with what I have been suggesting was a Victorian trend of thinking about identity as "interpreted being."[133]

As I have noted in previous chapters, one of the most prevalent, 19th-century theories of "interpreted being" was the widely popular Smilesian conceptualization of gentlemanliness, and, in fact, credit was closely intertwined with the stabilizing force behind that "being" – character. Indeed, the two terms often implied one another. The *Dictionary of Political Economy*, for example, urges that, sans sufficient collateral property, "all sound credit should rest on (…) character" (Palgrave 1.505).[134] Taking into consideration the Smilesian schema's definition of "character" as a trait acquired when one's past/present consistency is accepted by others as a gauge of future behavior,[135]

132 Especially influential was the Joint Stock Companies Act of 1856, which introduced general limited liability (Shannon 378).

133 In this sense, it links Victorian thinking to what James Pocock has identified as credit's influence re the late eighteenth-century shift from gentlemanly "virtue" (i.e. the credibility of one's social/economic identity) as a fixed category to gentlemanly "virtue" as a kind of self-performance (49).

134 In *The Character of Credit*, Margot C. Finn provides an excellent account of the "relations among debt, credit, character and connection" (102) from 1740-1914.

135 For a thorough elucidation of this idea, see chapter one, "Dr. Smiles and the Counterfeit Gentlemen."

clarifies its connection to credit; for the latter term entailed a similar temporal continuum. Recent criticism implies how credit spanned across the individual's past, present, and future conduct, noting that credit took the place of a "knowledge of personal history" (Malton 5); then served as the means by which "the individual's existence was transmitted (and) the self circulated" (Baines 14); finally to "entail the emergence of new types of personality (based on) promises to repay in an undefined future" (Nicholson 7). In other words, credit, like character, was treated as a crucial component of rhetorical identity, validated through judgments about one's consistency over time – the idea that the soundness of prior transactions promised like transactions in future. To credit someone, then, (i.e. to trust a person as consistent) was essentially akin to validating him as a man of character.

The Way We Live Now exploits this association in order to entrench Melmotte, characterologicaly speaking, within the investment network for which he serves as director. Melmotte's lack *as* a character – his dimensional contingency upon unreliable opinion – translates into a lack *of* character; as the narrator writes, those around him, inundated with conflicting rumors and therefore unable to deem Melmotte as a consistent identity, suspect that "his character (is) worth but little" (1.34). And yet, entranced by his wealth, they credit him nonetheless, investing in his South Central Pacific and Mexican Railway project and "contented to buy their shares and to pay their money, simply on Melmotte's word" (1.324). This is, of course, a fatal error – an unsafe investment, a speculation.[136] The narrative describes public credit in Melmotte as follows: "The world

136 As J. Jeffrey Franklin has argued, throughout the 19th century, "speculation" comes to signal a corrupt form of investment, which "threaten(ed) to be revealed as depending precariously on nothing but human desire" (902). For this reason, it was often associated with gambling – a fact which Trollope clearly exploits, as those quick to

had received the man as Augustus Melmotte, Esq. The world so addressed him (…) and so inscribed him among the directors of three dozen companies to which he belonged" (1.31). Inclusion of the full name and title is important here as suspicions regarding Melmotte's faulty character upon his arrival in England had localized around his name, which rumor had designated as either Augustus Melmotte or M. Melmotte, depending on whether portraying him as great financier or swindler, respectively. Evincing an understanding of credit as closely tied to character, the passage links financial validation of Melmotte to a particular recognition of his social identity. Melmotte's greed-driven investors give him "character" by resolving the conflicting rumors about his past actions into consistency and hinging their interpretation of him upon an expectation of like future actions; in doing so, they fix him, *as* character, with a dimensionality (i.e. invincible, publicly lucrative financier Augustus Melmotte Esq.) to function in accordance with their own interests.[137]

The narrative critiques such erroneous "characterization" by progressing Melmotte's speculation-based dimensionality into its chief degenerate act – the crime of forgery. As the plot moves forward, conjectures about Melmotte become increasingly outlandish. His investors tremble in awe at his power (1.210); he becomes, as the American Mrs. Hurtle bluntly describes, a man who sees that "wealth is power, and that power is good, and that the more a man has of wealth the greater and the stronger and the nobler be can be"(1.246). Under such principles, the more wealth Melmotte seems to

credit Melmotte are also portrayed as habitual gamblers, constantly exchanging I.O.U.s which they are unable to pay (1.209).

137 Symbolic reinforcement of this conflation of Melmotte's identity with his investment network comes at the crisis point in his railway scheme. To maintain his public image Melmotte takes a compromising document related to his business ventures and literally ingests it. "He put (the document) bit by bit into his mouth, chewing the paper into a pulp till he swallowed it" (2.119). This maneuver translates the characterological blending of Melmotte and his "crediting" into a physical synthesis, wherein the documents of business, the papers of bad credit, actually become part of Melmotte's body.

acquire, the more invulnerable he seems to grow. As an expository passage describes, "(at the height of Melmotte's scheme) all men now regarded him (as a) strong rock, the impregnable tower of commerce, the very navel of the commercial enterprise of the world" (1.331). Though precariously built upon speculation, the financier's dimensional indomitableness regarding economics becomes, via a public opinion entranced by thoughts of wealth, unimpeachable.

At the same time, the increasing frequency of Melmotte's unfiltered presence in the novelistic "world," which occurs in the secondary stages of the novel, necessarily begins to generate, alongside his rumored identity, a non-mediated impression of him as character. Thinking, speaking, and interacting with other characters, Melmotte "presents" himself to the reader directly, oftentimes showing himself at variance with the surety of his "credited self." The narrative exploits this characterological duality – the newly emerging, "direct" presentation of Melmotte and the publicly constructed "Augustus Melmotte Esq." – in order to accentuate the latter's dimensionality as that which progresses into crime, while simultaneously marking the former as the passive victim of such progression. At the height of Melmotte's success, the narrator writes:

> The game that he had intended to play had become thus high of its own accord. A man cannot always restrain his own doings and keep them within the limits that he had himself planned for them. They will very often fall short of the magnitude to which his ambition has aspired. They will sometimes soar higher than his own imagination. So it had now been with Mr. Melmotte. (1.323)

In an evincing of what Colin Nicholson has called the "alienating agency" of credit (10),[138] the momentum behind Melmotte's great "doings" here becomes diffused across an unspecified "game." Prompted by a preceding quote that describes Melmotte's achievements as the "force of the confidence placed in him by the world at large" (1.279), the reader might safely understand this game to refer to the risked "confidence" of those in Melmotte's investment network – i.e. their "crediting" of him. The financier's success is thus tied fast to his publicly "characterized" identity. Such association is strengthened via contrast through the verbs "restrain" and "keep (within limits)," which, in entailing resistance, locate Melmotte, in his unmediated characterological capacity, in futile but defensive counter-position to the "doings" of his "speculated" character as great, financial baron.

Ultimately, the novel attributes the climactic act of forgery to the dimensionality of Melmotte as speculated character – his unassailable greatness – functioning to overwhelm Melmotte as directly-presented character. Narrative pressure for this progression comes from the financier's campaign for a parliamentary seat. Needing funds and influence, Melmotte falsifies a transaction regarding an estate of the wealthy Longstaffe family by tracing the younger Longstaffe's signature on a letter of surrender (2.213). The narrator says of Melmotte's conduct during this period: "(his) arrogance in the midst of his inflated glory was overcoming him" (1.428). By setting Melmotte as the syntactical object of his "arrogance," this description registers the split in his characterological status. Melmotte, as

138 Nicholson is explicitly iterating Marx here. By "alienating agency," he refers to the credit economy's impacting people to see "their own collisions with one another (…) as a system and power independent of them. It became possible to consider whether the prime structure of agency in social affairs was human subjectivity or the objects and practices that had been constructed" (7).

he is directly presented to the reader, becomes the casualty of the speculated character whom the public has "inflated" into an invincible money-maker. Overcome, the former passively internalizes the latter's "credited" greatness by turning equivalently smug.

A later description specifies this process:

> But there had grown upon the man during the last few months an arrogance, a self-confidence inspired in him by the worship of other men, which clouded his intellect, and robbed him of much of that power of calculation which undoubtedly he naturally possessed (2.20).

Again, Melmotte, in his private capacity, serves as the passive object of an arrogance, which, here, is explicitly attributed to those who "worship" him (i.e. his creditors). Furthermore, his ill-treatment is extended to his being "robbed" of prudence, distancing him from the lack of discretion that characterizes his subsequent actions, including, most importantly, the crime of forgery. Indeed, exposition describes the misdeed as "ha(ving) been done (…) under the joint pressure of immediate need, growing ambition, and increasing audacity" (2.214). The crime, in other words, occurs when Melmotte's "speculated" character trait of financial invincibility marginalizes his "character-space"[139] (as he is directly presented to the reader), and, under narrative pressure, expresses itself in a hubristic gesture of invulnerability. The dimensionality that functions into degeneracy, therefore, ultimately filters through Melmotte and onto a much broader network of bad crediting.

As a counterpoint to this system of speculation and its "credited" Melmotte, the novel presents the gentleman, Roger Carbury. Contrasting with the faulty character that

139 I refer here to Alex Woloch's term (20), which I am complicating by incorporating an idea of performance identity to show how a single character might be divided against itself based on conflicting presentations.

Melmotte receives via speculation, Carbury's character comes from a regular succession of landed inheritance. His introductory description: "Roger Carbury, Esq., was Carbury of Carbury (…) The very parish in which Carbury Hall stood, – or Carbury Manor House, as it was more properly called, –was Carbury parish. And there was Carbury Chase" (1.50). The iteration of Carbury titles here emphasizes Roger's identity as grounded in the solidity of real estate. In fact, it is so fundamentally grounded that it becomes indistinguishable from the estate itself (as indicated in the cyclical "Carbury of Carbury"). It is the antithesis of credit, which, as Melmotte himself explains, is as "slight (…) as a mere vapour" (1.379).

The repetition of titles also indicates the estate's fundamental nature as something transmitted in steady procession, lending consistency to readerly understanding of Roger. The narrator later explicitly grounds Roger's characterology in consistent action, describing his dimensionality as follows: "He was a gentleman; (…) not (…) all the money in the city, could alter his notions or induce him to modify his conduct" (1.69). Equating gentlemanliness with reliable behavior, the sentence utilizes and modifies a Smilesian paradigm of identity, fixing consistent conduct as a "naturalized" offshoot of landed institutionalism.[140] Carbury thus becomes a character with genuine "character" via his connection to the land.

At the same time, the description of Roger's gentlemanliness speaks to his problematic detachment from a world driven by an emerging capitalist ethos. As a figure whose dimensions are founded in hyper-strict constancy, Roger functions in opposition to the credit system, rejecting this "new sphere of life" (1.127) as one which fails in his

140 As Patrick Brantlinger has observed, land, for Trollope is the "ultimate 'real'" and that which serves as the basis for true gentlemanliness (171).

principle of "never ow(ing) a shilling that he (cannot) pay" (1.50). Although this is ostensibly to his credit as an honest man – as Hetta Carbury says, putting Roger's consistency in terms of finance, "I think everybody has reason to praise him (…) he never says anything that he doesn't think. If he spent a thousand pounds, everybody would know that he'd got it to spend" (1.361)" – it, nevertheless, belies an underlying anxiety about his seemingly imminent social irrelevance. Isolated at Carbury Hall, Roger reads as an outcast – a man "all alone in the world" whose nearest relatives generally "(do) not care a straw for the old place in the country" (1.51). Narrative fixation on his age, "not much short of forty" (1.51), and his lack of children translates such segregation into inklings of obsolescence.

Formally speaking, Roger's rejection of the "way we live now" analogously leaves him somewhat "minored." Though a significant presence throughout the first quarter of the novel, he is soon overshadowed by Melmotte and that man's development into financial magnateship. As numerous critics have shown, Trollope's novels tend to operate upon economic systems,[141] and Carbury's rejection of the major, underlying system in *The Way We Live Now* translates, it would seem, into his being hindered from any considerable participation in its plot.

Uneasiness over Roger Carbury's anti-credit stance coalesces around his wooing of Henrietta Carbury, his younger cousin. As has been well-documented, Victorian novels often exploited the metaphor of the "marriage market" in order to conflate speculation and

141 Elsie Michie, for example, examines how *The Last Chronicle of Barset* evokes "through the drama of individual characters' financial problems, an entire culture's response to dramatic changes in economic practice and theory taking place in the last third of the nineteenth century" (78). Similarly, Audrey Jaffe links character interrelations in *The Prime Minister* with the necessity of markets "to invest (not) only at home" but also abroad (47).

courtship.[142] Trollope's novel does this most prominently by paralleling risky investment in the fortunes of the Melmotte business with mercenary pursuit of Melmotte's marriageable daughter, Marie, and her equally uncertain dowry. Creditors in the Melmotte enterprise extend their vested interests towards gaining Marie's hand, treating her as a collateral venture in their financial scheming. Sir Felix, for instance, pursues Marie on his mother's questionable advice that "(though) there would be some risk (in proposing) there would be very little (…) He (Melmotte) has nobody else to give his money to" (1.269). Lord Nidderdale and his father similarly conceptualize courtship of Marie as "flying at wealth which was reputed to be almost unlimited, but which was not absolutely fixed" (2.60). Ultimately, however, it is the American, Hamilton Fisker, who wins Marie's hand (2.456); and, given the paradigm of risk and reward implied in the above descriptions, the fact that Fisker is also one of the novel's most successful financial speculators reads as no coincidence. Though the narrative condemns mercenariness in the marriage market as unbefitting English gentlemen,[143] it, nevertheless, via the foreigner Mr. Fisker, divulges a recognition of its effectivity.[144]

142 See, for instance, Elizabeth Ermarth's *The English Novel in History: 1840-1895*, for an analysis of the marriage market in Victorian literature and how "marriage-in-the-making (…) generates plot suspense" (195). Tamara Wagner also notes that "when speculative suitors turned out to be involved at the stock market, the self-consciously literalized metaphor of the mercenary marriage as a form of speculation perhaps most directly spelled out the conversion of traditional courtship and inheritance plots into a different kind of financial plot" (26).

143 Sir Felix convinces Marie to elope with him, but fails to arrive at the appointed time for departure, diverted by another "speculation" – gambling at his club. The narrative later punishes Felix by bringing forth John Crumb to attack Felix for his gambling and womanizing, "obliterating" his handsome features and essentially devaluing his worth as a suitor (2.198). Lord Nidderdale escapes such harsh narrative castigation, but is ultimately shown to have somewhat ignobly "deserted" Marie (2.452).

144 For an elaborate account of how the novel more generally "posits America as an economic frontier space in which speculators can thrive and, hence, cedes the future to the Americans in a move imagined to preserve English values" (75) see Annette Van's above-cited article.

A similar ambivalence works to undermine the efficacy of Carbury's gentlemanliness in his relationship with Henrietta. As the marriage/speculation metaphor extends into this plotline, Carbury's consistency translates into a marked refusal to "play the field." Instead he "fix(es) his heart upon (Henrietta)" (1.75), telling her, "Even were you in truth disgraced (…) I love you so well that I have already taken you for better or for worse. I cannot change. My nature is too stubborn for such changes" (1.72). The squire's reference to "disgrace" here situates Henrietta within a customary, Victorian scale of feminine value, wherein purity serves as the standard of a woman's social worth.[145] His devotion to her regardless of her hypothetical discredit thus becomes akin to a rejection of speculative action, in which conduct is determined by prospective gain within collective system of value. The fixedness of Roger's constant nature prohibits him from deftly maneuvering the marriage market. Of course, the narrative marks this as a noble characteristic – but also a problematic one. For when Henrietta makes it clear that she will never accept Roger's advances, she leaves him compromisingly "invested" with no prospect of return.

Disquiet over Roger's position in this regard manifests in apprehension over his masculinity as traditional landed gentleman. Although, early on, the narrator claims that "a more manly man to the eye was never seen" (1.51), this hyperbolic statement reads as increasingly less tenable as the novel progresses. Roger's virility atrophies under the pressures of plot. Fixated on the unyielding Henrietta, he becomes caught in a state of narrative inertia, unable to "function" his manliness into the producing of a Carbury heir.

145 See my discussion of the "angel in the house" in Chapter Three.

By the end of the novel, Roger has "learn(ed) to regard himself as an old man" (2.469), conceding Henrietta to a younger, more attractive suitor and giving up hope of generating a son. The whole affair with Henrietta the narrator describes as "the disappointment which had so nearly unmanned him (Carbury)" (2.473) – language that borders on metaphorical castration. And, though the qualifying adverb prevents complete emasculation, Roger is left deprived of sexual vigor and fecundity to an extent that tells of an unsettling belief in the pending extinction of him and his ilk. The consistent gentleman's unwavering abstinence from the vulgarities of the speculative market, noble as it may be, is also anxiously tinged with hints of in-virility and outmodedness.

Recourse to the criminal serves to quell this anxiety, as Melmotte's progression brings him into concordance with Carbury, allowing him thematically to shore up that gentleman's failings. Derek Cohen speaks of the textual "contradiction between the denigration of Melmotte as a swindling, ruthless monster of depravity and his genuine fortitude and true charisma" (75), but his analysis does not fully consider how this duality tracks along the development of Melmotte's financial fortunes. For, as I have indicated, Melmotte the "ruthless monster" is the "speculated" construction of his investors – a "character" who is sustained by others' credit. As such, this "Melmotte" largely expires when, upon news of the forgery, such credit flags. The public, no longer seeing the financier as a profitable investment, invalidates his given "character" as a great, reliable businessman, leaving in its wake the other "Melmotte" – the one presented directly to the reader through occasional glimpses and who reads as a victim of the former. This unmediated Melmotte the text imbues with what Cohen calls "fortitude and charisma," a

move which, I will argue, rhetorically figures the criminal as a viable component of gentlemanliness.

More specifically, Melmotte obscures the nervous unmanliness of Carbury's abstinence by representing that gentleman's defining traits of resistance and consistency within the masculine sphere of the market. The financier's de-characterization as an "impregnable tower of commerce" generates a temporary void in his characterological status. The novel counterbalances this withdrawal by fleshing out and reconfiguring Melmotte's character as it has been directly presented to the reader. Shortly after the financier's fortunes turn, the narrator writes:

> Perhaps never in his life had he studied his own character and his own conduct more accurately, or made sterner resolves, than he did as he (now). No; – he could not run away. He soon made himself sure of that (…) and he would do so with courage (…) Nothing should cow him (…) He would go down among the electors to-morrow and would stand his ground, as though all with him were right. Men should know at any rate that he had a heart within his bosom (2.105)

By employing free indirect discourse, this expository passage ostensibly eliminates all mediation and presents Melmotte to the reader as he "truthfully" is. It reads as an examination of "interiority," an exposé made possible by the deflation of Melmotte's credited identity; and one that explicitly signals itself as the most precise account of Melmotte as character to date. What emerges from the description is a dimensionality grounded in fortitude and consistency – a "heart" which functions into "stern resolve,"

"standing (one's) ground," "courage," and a refusal to be "cowed." In short, the trait of inflated arrogance resultant from the credit system's lucre-hungry speculation is, now that Melmotte stands in opposition to that system, reconfigured into a healthy pride,[146] a steadfastness of will.

The metaphor of the heart accentuates the thematic parallel between Melmotte (as he is "un-credited") and Roger Carbury. The financier's deflation has left him, like Carbury, a figure of resistance to market trends. That his "heart" should signal this resistance evokes the "fixed (…) heart" of Carbury in his wooing of Henrietta (1.75). As I have shown, Roger's method of courtship symbolizes that gentleman's aversion to de-regularizing his conduct in order to cater to the market. The "heart" thus figuratively solidifies the overlap in the two men's dimensionalities of steadfastness.

Such an overlap allows Melmotte's progression to conceal the anxiety underlying Carbury's characterization as landed gentleman. For, although the latter's resistance to the market entailed an anxiously "un-masculine" withdrawal to an outdated landed ethos, the former's resistance takes place within the very center of the "new men of commerce's" economic sphere. This move allows Melmotte's actions to disguise the possibility that the defining feature of the "gentleman" (i.e. consistency) is necessarily shy of that emerging locus of male vigor. Indeed, Melmotte's steadfast resolve is marked as decidedly virile. At the height of his defiance, Melmotte concludes, "He must take things as they were now (not) allow(ing) himself to be carried away (…) And if the worst should come to the worst, then let him face it like a man!" (2.295), upon which the narrator immediately confirms that

146 In this sense, Melmotte's characterization exploits the longstanding theme in 18th and 19th century English literature of the fine line between "sinful" and "proper" pride; see, e.g. Claudia Johnson's discussion of that phenomenon in *Jane Austen: Women, Politics, and the Novel* (73-93).

"there was a certain manliness about him" (2.295). Melmotte thereby opens space for a resistance to the masculine sphere of the market – a resistance based upon "gentlemanly" regularity – that the narrative then corroborates as itself masculine. In doing so, Melmotte stabilizes the weakness in the novel's rhetoric of gentlemanliness as performed through Roger Carbury.

Characterization in *The Way We Live Now* thus exploits cultural interest in criminal origins in order to posit that figure as a viable complement to its primary representative of gentlemanliness. By etiologically distributing "degeneracy" away from Melmotte, the text demystifies the generic idea of the forger as anti-social bogeyman, allowing his skillful, manly energies to funnel into its proposed (and problematic) ideal of male identity. The novel's utilization of contemporary thinking about criminality, then, works in service of a rhetoric of middle-class conservatism, even as it simultaneously threatens to expose that rhetoric's instability. In the section that follows, I examine a novel that much more deliberately means to effect such exposure.

"Hideous Puppets": Influence and Degeneracy in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*

> Who wants to be consistent? The dullard and the doctrinaire, the tedious people who carry out their principles to the bitter end of action, to the *reductio ad absurdum* of practice. Not I. Like Emerson, I write over the door of my library the word "Whim." (35)

One year after Oscar Wilde published the above statement in "The Decay of Lying," reviewers were condemning the protagonist of his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*,[147] for exemplifying just such glorification of anti-gentlemanly "whim." Enacting Lord Henry Wotton's hedonistic model of identity, Dorian, such critiques argued, "plunges into every kind of mean depravity" ("A Study in Puppydom" 32), essentially degenerating in a selfish pursuit of unrestrained individualism.[148] From this perspective, Wilde's novel seems to undermine its own dissidence – checking its main character's pursuit of anti-normative, Aesthetic principles with castigation and death. While recent criticism has complicated this strain of interpretation to reveal the text's more productively subversive messages,[149] it nevertheless has left underexposed what I see as a crucial and enlightening rhetoric of deviance underlying *The Picture of Dorian Gray*'s characterization.

By applying, one, my theory of rhetorical continuity between criminal and gentleman, and, two, a consideration of the effect of degenerationism's origin model on novelistic form, this section aims to show how the novel tracks Dorian's progression back, less to Lord Henry, than to Basil Hallward, locating the seeds of his atavism in the figure whom Stephen Arata calls "the principal spokesman for conventional morality" (64). In

147 *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was first published in the July 1890 issue of *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*. The revised, expanded edition was published the following year and is the one on which most critical discussions are based. References in this chapter are to the 1891 text.

148 A review in the June 30, 1890 *Daily Chronicle* similarly emphasizes the degeneration of Dorian, saying that "man is half angel and half ape, and Mr. Wilde's book (specifically Lord Henry's philosophy) inculcate(s) the 'moral' that when you feel yourself becoming too angelic you cannot do better than to rush out a make a beast of yourself" (66). Likewise, Anne H. Warton's review in *Lippincott's* draws attention to how "Lord Henry has corrupted the nature of Dorian Gray with evil books and worldly philosophy" (167).

149 Stephen Arata notably alleges that Wilde's novel makes "'deviance' itself (…) virtually unthinkable" by eschewing organic 'character' for superficial 'personality' (59-60). In a somewhat more unorthodox move, Simon Joyce argues for the subversive nature of Wilde's novel by saying that it critiques an aesthetics of crime, which "had become a conservative and reassuring notion by the end of the nineteenth century" (501). Nicholas Ruddick locates the text's dissidence specifically in its original version, which, he suggests, "proposes (…) that social attitudes towards homosexual acts between consenting adults need to be liberalized" (128).

this manner, Wilde's work radically confounds status quo paradigms, diverting degeneration away from its apparent origin and crystallizing it upon a character that, paradoxically, comes to represent both a Wildean model artist and a prominent bourgeois ideal of gentlemanliness.

That the average Victorian, middle-class critic would have located the source of Dorian's regression in Lord Henry's influence is no surprise; Wotton's dimensionality as a hyper-epicurean in effect solicits the type of polemical attacks which degeneracy theorists had for some time been touting. As Walter Pater noted in an 1891 review, so provocative is Lord Henry's depiction that it nearly borders on a "satirical sketch (…) of a true Cyrenaic (…) doctrine of life" (128). Indeed, Lord Henry's state of "languid" self-indulgence (6) and the "innumerable cigarettes" (5) which he smokes – their unquantifiability signaling the insatiable nature of his appetites – pointedly evoke what Robert Buchanan, in his 1873 essay on the degenerative effects of "Sensualism," called a societal trend of "lust of the gaudiest sort (…) indolent habits and aesthetic tastes" responsible for "all the gross and vulgar conceptions of life" (5-6). The popularity of this style of reactionary writing suggests that many readers would have been quick to make similar associations.

The narrative even titillates readerly apprehension of Wotton re his potential for pernicious influence by referencing the language of poison and contamination found in degenerationist writings from Morel to William Farr.[150] Several times within the first two chapters, Dorian's "purity," "unspotted(ness)" (21) and his susceptibility to corruption are mentioned (22), all of which link to Basil Hallward's plea that Lord Henry not "spoil" the

150 William Farr, regarded as a founder of medical statistics, argued that a lack of "sanitary conditions" could poison "the elements of the body (leading to) decay and degeneracy" (328). Morel's ideas about poison are quoted in the opening section of this chapter.

young man (18). Such rhetoric situates Wotton at the origin point of a common etiological pattern of degeneracy, thus baiting interpretations that would associate his hedonist ideology with degenerative infection.

Dorian's characterological progress, however, subverts such association; for his decay proves to result from a marked *in*capacity to perform the kind of identity postulated by Lord Henry's program. Wotton describes the hypothetical New Hedonist during his first encounter with Dorian: "To influence a person is to give him one's own soul. He does not think his natural thoughts, or burn with his natural passions (…) The (hedonist's) aim of life is self-development (…) to realize one's nature perfectly" (22-23). Lord Henry's model identity is, in other words, defined by the pursuit to actualize a particular notion of self – a self grounded in passions and natures that, as emphasized in the possessives which repeatedly qualify those terms, are particular to each individual. Outside influence is an anathema to this variety of performed being, because its non-particularity threatens to interrupt, or, worse, cause deviation from one's individualized "nature." To identify as a New Hedonist means, first and foremost, to enact a fully self-determined development.

Wotton posits art as the primary vehicle for this development – New Hedonists, the narrative describes, seek to "make themselves perfect by the worship of beauty" (143). Lord Henry elaborates:

> Ordinary people waited till life disclosed to them its secrets, but to the few, to the elect, the mysteries of life were revealed before the veil was drawn away (…) this was the effect of art, and chiefly the art of literature, which dealt immediately with the passions and the intellect (65).

Here, the particularity of New Hedonism translates into an Aesthetic emphasis on edification via subjective experience. Henry's insistence on immediacy contrasts with what he had earlier called art's threatening power to make one "an echo of someone else's music, an actor of a part that has not been written for him" (23) – in other words, to subjugate the viewer to an intermediary influence, trapping him in the thoughts, expressions, and feelings of the artist and/or another interpreter. To perform the development requisite to a New Hedonist identity, one must regard art with the Paterian question, "what is this (work) to *me*?" (*Renaissance* xix-xx). The "pleasurable sensations, each of a more or less *peculiar* and *unique* kind," which Pater claims foster growth "in proportion as one's susceptibility to these impressions increases in depth and variety" (xx, my emphasis), are isolated in what Donald Lawler calls an aestheticism selectively interpreted to emphasize distinctive impression (23 n.6), and, in this capacity, become sustenance for New Hedonist self-determination.

Of such sustenance, Dorian proves unable to partake. His dimensions as character immediately signal the problematic nature of his relationship to Lord Henry's paradigm of development. Dorian's main trait is, of course, his youth, by which the reader is told he is lent "all (of its) candour (…) as well as all youth's passionate purity" (21). Unadulterated and open, the young Dorian would seem ideally "susceptible" to art's self-nurturing impressions per New Hedonist ideology. And yet his youth is also inextricably bound to a semi-erotic appeal which provokes in others a seemingly irresistible craving to manipulate him.[151] Both Henry and Basil fantasize about inculcating a part of themselves into Dorian;

151 Contemporary reviewers expressed outrage at the suggestions of homosexuality in the text. A particularly virulent attack in the July 5, 1890 *Scots Observer*, for instance, paralleled Dorian Gray to a contemporary homosexual scandal, claiming that Wilde was writing "for none but outlawed noblemen and perverted telegraph

Lord Henry dreams of "mak(ing) that wonderful spirit his own" (43), and Basil's painting of Dorian is one into which he claims to have "put too much of myself" (6). These sexualized gestures register Dorian's "openness" as a sort of threatened penetrability. His youthful candor makes him precariously vulnerable to the influences of others – or, in other words, to the intermediary forces which, according to New Hedonism, would strip him of his own, unique discriminatory framework,[152] keeping him from "think(ing) his natural thoughts, or burn(ing) with his natural passions" (22).

This characterological duality serves as the focal point for the novel's rhetoric of degeneracy. Explicit reference to degeneration comes shortly before the launch of Dorian's progression when Lord Henry warns him:

> Realize your youth while you have it (…) Giving away your life to the ignorant, the common, and the vulgar (…) these are the sickly aims, the false ideals, of our age (…) Be always searching for new sensations. (If we give our lives away) the pulse of joy that beats in us at twenty becomes sluggish. Our limbs fail, our senses rot. We *degenerate* into hideous puppets, haunted by the memory of the passions of which we were too much afraid, and the

boys" (76). Wilde's trial, of course, only drew more attention to the novel's homosexual undertones. The subject has been well-document by recent criticism: Ed Cohen's seminal essay, "Writing Gone Wilde," was one of the earliest to focus on how the novel's "depictions of male same-sex experience both reproduce and resist the dominant heterosexual ideologies and practices" (803). More recently, in "The Disappearance of the Homosexual," Jeffrey Nunokawa has countered readings of the novel as a "coming-out" story, arguing that "the expression of homosexual desire cancels rather than clarifies the definition of the character through whom it is conducted" (185). Christopher Craft likewise complicates the subversiveness of the novel's rhetoric of homosexuality, claiming that the polar philosophies of Basil and Lord Henry "define the homosexual possibility (…) as an inescapable double bind: excessive restraint on the one hand, unrestrained license on the other" (122).

152 In the Preface to *The Renaissance*, Pater writes of a similar emphasis on personal discretion: "In aesthetic criticism the first step is to know one's own impression as it really is, to discriminate it, to realize it distinctly" (xix)

exquisite temptations that we had not the courage to yield to. Youth! Youth!

There is absolutely nothing in the world but youth! (28, my emphasis)

Wotton's language echoes the rhetoric of fear common to degenerationism while simultaneously reorienting it to serve New Hedonism's ideology of self-growth. In accordance with an emphasis on individualized sensation, the terror of atavism becomes a terror of intermediacy – and, in particular, the intermediacy of an ignorant normalness. Lord Henry had earlier specified what he calls the "common" as middle-class "society, "which is the basis of morals (that) govern us (and make) the bravest man amongst us afraid of himself" (23). This is, of course, a complete inversion of standard degenerationism, which typically defined the degenerate as, in the language of Max Nordau, "an ego-maniac," an "anti-social (being)" who "commits misdemeanors peculiar to (his) class" (260-261). To the New Hedonist, developing oneself sans consideration of social mores is precisely what staves off atavism. Operating upon this re-conceptualized notion of degeneracy, New Hedonism would activate the former aspect of Dorian's dimensional youth specifically to prevent him from regressing.

In contrast to this framework for triggering for Dorian's youth, the narrative offers Basil Hallward and his reservations about Lord Henry's brand of unbridled self-fulfillment. Basil advises Dorian not to "pay any attention to what Lord Henry says" (22), and, when the young man expresses his desire to aggrandize his youth per New Hedonist paradigms, Basil cries, "'Dorian! Dorian! (…) Don't talk like that" (32), essentially working to check such activation. Later, he elaborates upon his motives:

> Every gentleman is interested in his good name. You don't want people to talk of you as something vile and degraded (...) Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed (...) If a wretched man has a vice, it shows itself in the lines of his mouth, the droop of his eyelids, the moulding of his hands even (164-165)

Basil's iteration of physiognomic science's correlation between visible degradation and sin aligns him with one of the most overtly normative facets of degeneracy theory. His emphasis on what people might say stresses this point, naming degeneracy as an idiosyncratic digression from communal mores. Accordingly, by counter-posing that which is "degraded" to a notion of gentlemanliness as "interpreted being" (Mailloux, *Disciplinary Identities*, 85),[153] Basil offers social intermediation as a preventative for degeneration: to enact one's identity according to a publicly exchanged "name" is to protect against atavism. Thus, Basil represents a characterological prompt which would preserve Dorian by activating that aspect of his youth not potentially stimulated by Lord Henry's ideology – the one which leaves him open to the influence of others – in the hopes of his eventually coming to integrate himself into a social system based in reciprocity.

Ultimately, the implication of the narrative's forward movement is that Basil is the more significant activator; for, although Dorian pursues the new sensations that Henry recommends, his dimensional impressionability functions into a continual ceding to intermediary forces and subsequent failure to find self-expression through the (New Hedonistic) contemplation of beauty. At the same time, narrative progression subverts the

153 For my extended discussion of gentlemanly identity as interpreted being, see chapter one, "Dr. Smiles and the Counterfeit Gentlemen."

theory which Basil advocates by incorporating Lord Henry's re-imagining of degeneracy to show Dorian's decay as resultant from his intermediated state and finally by connecting that decay back specifically to the painter's middle-class influence.

Dorian repeatedly proves unable to engage with art directly, seeing in it instead primarily expressions not his own. Take, for instance, the "yellow book that Lord Henry (sends) to him" in the hopes that it will "reveal much to him that he had not known before" (138, 28). Jeffrey Nunokawa's reading of this volume as a token of exchange in an "act of transference that defines pedagogy," wherein the student translates the teacher's "charisma (into) curriculum" ("Disappearance" 187) suggests its important conflation of text and owner; for the book serves less to trigger unique sensations in Dorian than it does to prompt his co-opting of Lord Henry's understanding of the work. In his perusal, Dorian quickly comes to see the novel's protagonist, whose rendering had triggered Lord Henry's quest "to be always searching for new sensations" (28), as a "prefiguring type of himself" (141). In doing so, he essentially names his impression as a manufactured reiteration of that of Lord Henry, putting Wotton in between him and his experience of art. This is a New Hedonistic failure; to subordinate one's experience in such a manner – to be prefigured – is to cede that particularity which is essential to the identity that such an ideology sets out to construct.[154]

Formally, the novel reinforces its protagonist's lack of success. The greater part of Dorian's scrutiny of various forms of art occurs in chapter eleven. Here, the descriptions become even more lavish than before, the prose inviting the reader to experience that

154 In the famous Life imitating Art passage of "The Decay of Lying," Vivian pointedly exclaims that "a great artist invents a type (…) Life tries to copy it" (55).

"worship of the senses" (144) which forms the basis of New Hedonism. A detailing some seven sentences in length of Dorian's engagement with various exotic instruments, for example, contains fifty-three adjectives and adverbs, evoking the senses of sight (of which eight refer to color), touch, and sound.[155] The protracted length of the sentences, their clauses spilling over comma after comma, carries the reader forward via linguistic momentum, engulfing him/her in the artistry which those sentences simultaneously describe and reflect. The passage, however, ends with an abrupt, contrastive conjunction – "Yet, after some time, he (Dorian) wearied of them" (149) – indicating a developed opposition to the hyper-sensory experience embedded in the reading of it. Dorian thus serves as the syntactical break in what might be called a form of readerly, New Hedonist "worship."

The description of jewelry that immediately follows more specifically delineates Dorian's problematic functioning re Beauty. The four paragraph passage reveals an increasing distance in Dorian's relationship to art. It begins, "On one occasion he took up the study of jewels, and appeared at a costume ball (…) in a dress covered with five hundred and sixty pearls" (149). Here, Dorian's engagement with Beauty is direct; he uses art to self-perform, to enhance his individuality. However, paragraph two opens with his "discover(ing) wonderful stories, also, about jewels" (150) and then describes his learning about the ways in which various historical figures had appreciated jewelry, thus turning his

155 An excerpt to give a flavor of the passage: "At another time he devoted himself entirely to music, and in a long latticed room, with a vermilion-and-gold ceiling and walls of olive-green lacquer, he used to give curious concerts in which mad gipsies tore wild music from little zithers, or grave, yellow-shawled Tunisians plucked at the strained strings of monstrous lutes, while grinning Negroes beat monotonously upon copper drums and, crouching upon scarlet mats, slim turbaned Indians blew through long pipes of reed or brass and charmed--or feigned to charm--great hooded snakes and horrible horned adders" (148).

attention away from his own immersion in the artistic object to that of others. That the two, concluding paragraphs begin with a historical figure as verbal subject and then make no mention of Dorian grammatically reinforces this movement. Again, intermediation – Dorian's connection to an object of beauty interrupted by outside influence.

Chapter eleven's relationship to the novel's overarching plot structure also registers the fettered nature of Dorian's hedonistic self-development. Of the novel's twenty chapters, all, except eleven, narrate events in an immediate past tense, recounting actions of a day or fraction of a day; eleven chapters, in fact, begin with a highly specific temporal marker such as "at half past twelve next day" (37).[156] Narrative movement, then, moves in a tight cause-and-effect sequence, wherein events demarcated within a brief timeframe produce immediate effects on one another. Chapter eleven, however, begins, "For years," (141) and then proceeds to recount Dorian's studies in art over an extended span, using vague temporal markers such as, "there were moments" (142) "after a few years" (155) or "sometimes when he was down" (156). Such technique mitigates the type of closely woven cause-and-effect that generates narrative momentum on both sides of the chapter, signaling "Eleven" as apart from the plot's constructed sense of progress. Indeed, no events in the chapter are necessary in terms of developing or resolving the narrative's instabilities or tensions.[157] In this manner, the chapter and its content – Dorian's study of art – function

156 The quote is from the opening line of chapter three. Subsequent chapters continue the trend: chapter four, "One afternoon, a month later (…)" (51); chapter six, "'I suppose you have heard the news, Basil?' said Lord Henry, that evening (…)" (82); chapter seven, "For some reason or other, the house was crowded that night (…)" (91); chapter eight, "It was long past noon when he awoke (…)" (104); chapter nine, "As he was sitting at breakfast next morning (…)" (119); chapter twelve, "It was on the ninth of November (…)" (162); chapter fourteen, "At nine o'clock the next morning (…)" (178); chapter fifteen, "that evening, at eight-thirty (…)" (192); chapter eighteen, "The next day (…)" (219); chapter twenty, "It was a lovely night (…)" (241).

157 I am discussing plot here specifically as it relates to what James Phalen's demarcates as the aspects of narrative "middles" that deal with movement per se and not readerly understanding of movement (the latter of which would fall under the categories of "exposition" and "interaction") See *Experiencing Fiction* pp. 15-22.

within the overall plotting of the novel as a site of stasis, thereby marking the correlation between Dorian's attempt to develop through art and his overarching progression into degeneracy as one which hinges upon the former's being impeded.

Dorian's affair with Sibyl Vane enforces this connection between Dorian's uneasy relationship to art and his degeneration. Sybil begins as Dorian's ideal model of Beauty. He views her early performances as forms of art that place her outside of mediation. Thus, he does not see her simply as a player enacting prescribed roles; contrary to other performances, where he had, for instance, described the player acting "*as* Tiberius," "*as* Caligula," and "*as* Domitian" (159-160, my emphasis), Dorian says that Sybil "*is* Rosalind," "she *is* Imogen" (58, my emphasis). Her power is that she provides him (at least temporarily) with an awareness of that immediate connection to art and beauty that Lord Henry had marked as the source of self-development. In actually being Shakespeare's characters, she demonstrates the possibility of becoming more than a mere "echo" – the possibility of a relation to art so direct that it and her own life become one.

Of course, the possibility that she represents soon collapses. Sibyl eventually comes to think of her work as highly intermediated, and, in doing so, can no longer *be* the characters that she portrays. Her performance becomes "simply bad art" (94). Sibyl herself explains to Dorian:

> Before I knew you, acting was the one reality of my life (...) I thought that it was all true. I was Rosalind one night and Portia the other (...) I knew nothing but shadows, and I thought them real (...) To-night, for the first time, I became conscious that (...) the words I had to speak were unreal, were not

my words, were not what I wanted to say. You had brought me something higher, something of which all art is but a reflection (96-97)

In disassociating art from a higher "reality," in coming to view art as an adulterated representation – much like Socrates in the Platonic text to which the passage's language of "shadows" and "reflections," I would suggest, alludes[158] – Sibyl grants access to the idea of intermediation. The existence of Rosalind and Portia become merely someone else's words; the "role" becomes a synthetic construct, which Sibyl gladly cedes to its creator. But, in doing so, she loses that that immediate connection to art that had so enticed Dorian. No longer is she able to represent the possible realization of "new Hedonism's" goal of selfhood through art.

Dorian's disillusionment with Sibyl in this capacity is fundamentally connected to degeneracy through the latter's social status. Sibyl's role as an actress of the east-end positions her within a common trope of degeneracy theory which divided London into degenerate and civilized areas based on relative cleanliness. Judith Walkowitz points to journalistic exposés, for instance, and their "perception that (Londoners) lived in a city of contrasts, a class and geographically divided metropolis of hovels and palaces" (27). Social reformers put this demarcation of physical spaces more directly into a degenerate/squalid versus civilized/sanitary paradigm. As early as the 1840s, Edwin Chadwick was in the process of conducting his famous studies on the squalid living conditions pertaining specifically to the urban areas of the working population.[159] By 1861, the east-end had

158 The allegory of the cave in Plato's *Republic* uses markedly similar notions of shadows and reflections to delineate the idea that every object and quality available to human senses is a degraded representation of an ideal form (278-290).

159 Chadwick's most famous work is his 1842 *Report...from the Poor Law Commissioners on an Inquiry into the Sanitary Conditions of the Labouring Population of Great Britain*. There he states as "the subject of this

become sufficiently notorious for John Hollingshead to preface his study of *Ragged London* with the claim, "there are many different degrees of social degradation and unavoidable poverty, even in the east" (40). In the same year which saw the publication of the collected *Dorian Gray*, William Booth's *In Darkest England* divided London into separate spheres – the normal sphere of the bourgeois, and the (generally) east-side sphere of "darkest England," a "parasitical (…) forest," a "tangle of undergrowth," which "sickens the stoutest heart" and threatens to overtake the city with "its malaria and its gloom" (13). Booth's language of sickness and decay shows how, in this type of environmental paradigm, grime, disease and poverty became signs of east-end occupants' degeneration.

Wilde's novel incorporates such paradigms of "localized" degeneracy into its descriptions of Sybil's east-end habitats. On his journey to Vane's theater, for instance, Dorian describes how he "wandered eastward, soon losing my way in a labyrinth of grimy streets and black, grassless squares" (55). Inside the theater, everything is "horrid," "dingy," "depressing," and "wretched" (56-57). Similarly, Sibyl's house is marked by "flies (which) buzz round the table," "stained cloth," "tattered lace," and meager(ness)" (79). Such iterations of degeneracy tropes mark Sybil as a figure for degeneration. Thus, her characterology works to synthesize the novel's depiction of Dorian's problematic relationship with art and its theme of degeneracy.

Moreover, Dorian's realization that he has found in Sibyl only another "echo" causes the first manifestation of his own deterioration. After seeing Sybil's poor performance,

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inquiry: –That the various forms of epidemic, endemic, and other disease caused, or aggravated, or propagated chiefly amongst the labouring classes by atmospheric impurities produced by decomposing animal and vegetable substances, by damp and filth, and close and overcrowded dwellings prevail amongst the population in every part of the kingdom, whether dwelling in separate houses, in rural villages, in small towns, in the larger towns — as they have been found to prevail in the lowest districts of the metropolis" (422).

Dorian upbraids her and departs in a rage. Later, he reflects, "Had he been cruel? It was the girl's fault, not his. He had dreamed of her as a great artist (...) Then she had disappointed him" (102). His brutality towards Sibyl is motivated by her inability to create and sustain a self through art. Her sudden belief in the non-reality of her performance, and hence its inability to function as a facilitator according to "new Hedonism's" conception of individual development, is directly responsible for the first act which mars Dorian's portrait. When he returns home after chiding her, he finds that "touch of cruelty in the mouth" (102) – in other words a physiognomic sign of degeneracy. Narrative exposition emphasizes the connection, having Dorian, between the scene at the theatre and the scene in which he sees his marred portrait, walk through the "dimly-lit streets" of London, past "evil-looking houses (and) drunkards (...) chattering (...) like monstrous apes" (99). Combining evil with reference to alcohol[160] and to atavism in the figure of the ape, Wilde's novel draws attention to the degenerate nature of Dorian's own act of cruelty.

That Dorian's degeneration culminates in Basil's murder and the destruction of his portrait allows the narrative, first of all, to strengthen the connection between Dorian's atavism and his susceptibility to others' influence, and, second, to solidify the idea of this connection's being tied to Basil and his middle-class ethos. The murder occurs after the painter, hearing stories of Dorian's supposed degeneration, insists, "You must give me some answer to these horrible charges that are made against you" (169). Such phrasing registers Basil's understanding of Dorian as highly intermediated – an identity constructed through performance and interpretation. His hope is that Dorian might exonerate himself

160 Nicole Hahn Rafter explains that "the idea of degeneration (…) was a natural outgrowth of the belief, long held by phrenologists and others, that overeating, abusing alcohol and tobacco (…) could affect (…) one's physical, moral, and intellectual qualities (89).

by revealing a mistake in the charges with which he has been publicly received, and, then, by answering those charges, to reconfigure others' opinions of him, thereby interpretively "becoming" a decent gentleman.

As a response, Dorian unveils his degraded portrait. In doing so, he essentially locates his degeneracy in the very mediation which the painter hopes will absolve him; for this symbol of decay, which a strain of criticism has problematically read as reflecting a presumed struggle between good and evil occurring within Dorian's mind,[161] is, it must be remembered, a representation; it is Dorian as constructed by another. The description of the painter's reaction:

> Yes, it was Dorian himself. But who had done it? He seemed to recognize his own brushwork, and the frame was his own design. The idea was monstrous, yet he felt afraid (171)

By omitting a distinction between Dorian as character and Dorian as portrait, the first sentence of the passage conflates the synthetic facet of literary character with the synthetic nature of pictorial representation. Basil's composition of Dorian's portrait becomes, to some extent, a composition of Dorian's character, directing the origin of Dorian's characterological progress back towards Basil. Evocation of the novel's initial description of Dorian strengthens such direction; for, there, the narrative had described Dorian via a "full-length portrait of a young man of extraordinary personal beauty (…) clamped to an

161 Fred Botting describes the picture as "an inverted image (…) like the mirror, bound up with the responsibility of individualised good and evil" (142). Judith Halberstam comes closer to my interpretation, arguing that "the other self (in Wilde's novel) is an outer rather than an inner self (as) the portrait exists apart from Dorian Gray" (70); yet, she does not recognize the exterior forces which construct Dorian's identity, instead seeing the external portrait as Dorian's "hideous other spatially" (70). Linda Dryden works off of both Botting and Halberstam to discuss the portrait as a combination of "a perverse pleasure and a dreaded responsibility" typical to gothic doubling (134).

upright easel (in Basil's studio)" (5), making Basil and his artwork essential to readerly understanding of the youth's first dimension. Basil's ensuing comment that "Dorian Gray is to me simply a motive in art" (15) broadens this link beyond dimension to function, commingling Dorian's narrative actions and the motives behind those actions with the painter's interpretation of his being.

The final murder corroborates Basil's seminal part in Dorian's degeneracy and emphasizes its association with bourgeois ideology. Appalled at the disfigurement of the painting, Basil designates it as "an awful lesson" of the consequences of social deviance and then iterates biblical teachings of forgiveness. Dorian replies, "Those words mean nothing to me now" (173) – a denial that signals a brief rejection of the conventional influence Basil means to exert. The description of the murder follows immediately:

> "Hush! Don't say that. You have done enough evil in your life. My God! Don't you see that accursed thing leering at us?"
>
> Dorian Gray glanced at the picture, and suddenly an uncontrollable feeling of hatred for Basil Hallward came over him, as though it had been suggested to him by the image on the canvas, whispered into his ear by those grinning lips. The mad passions of a hunted animal stirred within him, and he loathed the man who was seated at the table, more than in his whole life he had ever loathed anything. He glanced wildly around. Something glimmered on the top of the painted chest that faced him. His eye fell on it. He knew what it was. It was a knife that he had brought up, some days before, to cut a piece of cord, and had forgotten to take away with him. He moved slowly

> towards it, passing Hallward as he did so. As soon as he got behind him, he seized it and turned round. Hallward stirred in his chair as if he was going to rise. He rushed at him and dug the knife into the great vein that is behind the ear, crushing the man's head down on the table and stabbing again and again (173-174)

Donald Thomas has argued that the portrait transforms Dorian "into a spectator of his own increasingly vulgar life" (187). Significantly, however, that spectatorship is here imposed upon him by Basil and carries with it Basil's moral agenda. His "hushing" counters Dorian's temporary dismissal of accepted ethical codes; his directing Dorian's gaze to the picture has embedded within it his own interpretation of that picture based upon those very codes. He, in short, tells Dorian how to read this work of art according to bourgeois standards of conduct. The fact that the momentum behind the murder stems from the Dorian whose "image (is) on the canvas" overcoming the Dorian who stands before it and struggles to discard Basil's influence, puts the onus of the killing on that character specifically as he is socially intermediated. Basil's interpretation of Dorian as "evil" effectively generates the "evil" act which kills him.

The description of the act itself reinforces the strength of Basil's influence upon Dorian's brutality. Tropes of degeneracy link Basil's painting to the murder as the physiognomic stigma of the "grinning lips" transitions into mad, animalistic passions and wild behavior. The murder weapon establishes a similar thread between the two characters. Resting on a "painted" container, the blade recalls the "long palette-knife" with which Basil had earlier threatened to destroy his work before Dorian had stopped him,

claiming it would be "murder" to do so (33). Finally, the quick substitutions of subject in the penultimate and final sentences, and the ambiguous "he" which begins the latter, conflate the two men's actions, potentially offering Basil as the syntactical subject of the rush and stabbing not explicitly attributed to Dorian until five paragraphs later. Such metaphorical and linguistic moves interweave Basil into Dorian at the very moment of the novel's critical act of degeneracy, suggesting the inseparability of Basil, as character, from the youth's tragic progression.

By pointing towards Basil Hallward and the middle-class ethos that he represents, the narrative's overarching rhetoric of degenerational "origin-tracing" proves multifariously paradoxical. Most immediately, it manages to wield the normative label of degeneracy against normativity itself, thus simultaneously engaging in and confounding that "science's" dominant rhetorical function. Furthermore, by indicating Basil as the orchestrator of his own degenerate murder via his shaping of Dorian's character through his artwork, the text aligns the "ethical" (i.e. untalented[162]) painter with a prominent form of thinking about deviance as artistic genius.[163] Likewise, Basil's picture becomes, from a Wildean perspective, both "bad" art, ingrained with a moral purpose, and a sort of "ideal"

162 The claim in the 1891 preface that "an ethical sympathy in an artist is an unpardonable mannerism of style" (3) is something Wilde's texts repeatedly propound. "The Critic as Artist," for example, offers the idea that "all art is immoral" because it provokes "emotion for the sake of emotion" rather than "emotion for the sake of action" and, therefore, does not contribute productively to a society that forms its moral codes in order to perpetuate itself (152).

163 This strain of thought had been in the popular mindset as early as the 1827 publication of De Quincey's (rather flippant) "On Murder, Considered as One of the Fine Arts," and had seen a more sober resurgence in Victorian texts ranging from newspaper accounts of Jack the Ripper, to Sensationalist novels, to economic treatises such as David Morier Evans's *Facts, Failures, and Frauds*. It proved fodder, too, for Aesthetic renunciations of conventionality; one year before the publication of *Dorian Gray* in *Lippincott's*, Wilde, for example, published "Pen, Pencil and Poison: A Study in Green," a self proclaimed "homage" (99) to the killer Thomas Wainewright which moves seamlessly between discussions of the man's "artistic temperament" and his skill as a "poisoner" (73). Although the extent to which Wilde's work accepts the conflation of crime and artistry is debatable, it and (like references in *Dorian Gray*) were certainly read as doing so. For a more complete discussion of this topic, see Joyce; for more on Evans's rhetoric, see my discussion of misapplied talent in Chapter One.

art, defying conventionality to produce its own deviant "life" in Dorian. Such contradictory outcomes prevent Wilde's novel from becoming a form of that heavy didacticism which he often rallied against. Instead, the narrative performs the kind of intersection which I have been tracing – that between crime and middle-class ideals – specifically in order to expose and flaunt its incongruities.

Conclusion

When the tradition which I have been tracing throughout this dissertation (that of incorporating viable crime into gentleman identity) encountered the late-nineteenth century's widespread re-conceptualization of the criminal, it did not simply give way; instead, it reformulated and adjusted to suit new modes of thinking. In the case of the novel, it interacted with degeneracy's etiological interests to elicit new configurations in characterology. As my two examples are meant to show, these reconfigurations were diverse and multi-purposeful. Trollope's ultra-conservative work disperses degenerate character across a narrative matrix to satirize new rhetorics of masculinity while simultaneously locating the residual energy of crime in its textual performance of landed gentlemanliness. Wilde's novel intertwines degenerate character and its presented middle-class ethos in order to pervert both the highly normative model that underpins the former and the variety of Aestheticism that the narrative presents as a reaction against that model. In either case, elucidating the texts' various negotiations of degeneracy theory alongside attempts to intersect gentlemanly and criminal identities serves to reorient understanding of the late-Victorian novel and its form.

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