SENSATION FICTION AND THE LAW: DANGEROUS ALTERNATIVE SOCIAL TEXTS AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

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by

ELIZABETH GODKE KOONCE

has been approved for

the Department of English

and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Joseph P. McLaughlin

Associate Professor of English

Benjamin M. Ogles

Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

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SENSATION FICTION AND THE LAW: DANGEROUS ALTERNATIVE SOCIAL TEXTS AND CULTURAL REVOLUTION IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY BRITAIN

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This dissertation argues that nineteenth-century sensation fiction evoked a cultural revolution that threatened to challenge accepted norms for personal behavior and increase possibilities for scripting one's life outside of established norms for respectable behavior. Because of the ways that it threatened to represent new scripts for personal behavior, sensation, which I term a "dangerous alternative social text," disrupted hegemony and provided new ways of thinking amongst its Victorian British readership; it became a vehicle through which the law and government (public discourses) ended up colliding with domesticity and the very private texts surrounding it. Using an expanded definition of sensation, this project analyzes four "sensational" novels from the mid- to late Victorian period – Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Margaret Oliphant's *Salem Chapel*, Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – and connects it chapter-by-chapter to concerns about cultural revolution evoked by the passage of the Infant Custody Acts, the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, the Married Women's Property Acts and the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. It also argues that the laws these novels engage additionally served as dangerous alternative social texts for personal behavior to the Establishment which attempted to bar their passing. It short, the project reads both the laws and listed novels

as versions of sensation. Both sensation fiction and sensational laws legitimized new "dangerous" patterns for behavior and threatened possible changes in the "social text" of England.

Approved:

Joseph P. McLaughlin

Associate Professor of English

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To David and Bozeman

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The Skeleton is out of the Victorian Closet of Respectability: Sensation Novels, the Gothic Tradition and Impending Fears of Cultural Revolution

> We are accustomed both to read and to speak everything that comes in our way in the presence of *jeunes gens*. The habit has so grown upon us that to change it would involve a ***revolution*** in our domestic arrangements. It would involve us in an amount of trouble which very few could face. We should require three or four packets from the library instead of one. We should have the nuisance of separating our children and dependants from our own amusements. We should no longer be able to discuss, as we do now continually, the books that we are reading and the thoughts we are thinking. This is a necessity from which we have been altogether free in the tranquil past; but it is an indulgence which only habit and the long use and wont of public security preserve to us now (Margaret Oliphant's commentary describing the domestic revolution evoked by sensation fiction, appeared in 1857 in "Novels" *"Novels" 102*: 258, bold italics mine).

Margaret Oliphant, Sensation, and the Attack on Victorian Decency and Domesticity

In an 1867 *Blackwood's* article, Margaret Oliphant claims that Britain has a good representative in its realist novels. These novels have "held a very high reputation in the world" because of "a certain sanity, wholesomeness, and cleanness unknown to other literature of the same class." In this same piece, she also praises the notion that "the corruption which has so fatally injured the French school of fiction has … scrupulously kept away from ours." Because British novels are "pure from all noxious topics," families from "cultivated English houses" can regularly practice the "liberty of reading," without fear that respectable British values such as morality, earnestness, cleanliness, decency and pride in traditional family values would be challenged (257). Realist novels afford their readers "a portrait of their own state[s] of mind" (259). For Oliphant, therefore, the realist novel is a symbol of respectability. It serves as a representative of

the "national mind which produced it" (257) and therefore, reifies Victorian values and social mores.[1]

Unfortunately, however, Oliphant fears a new type of literature that seems to be a contaminant to this respectability. Despite her belief that British novels are "the highest development of art," Oliphant feels that the integrity of the British realist novel tradition is being threatened by a new genre of literature containing "nasty thoughts, ugly suggestions and an imagination which prefers the unclean" (275). She accuses "a new impulse," "a new current set in the flood of contemporary story-telling" for exerting a "diminishing power on the English realist tradition." The impulse to which she refers is sensation fiction, which "has been brought into being by society, and … naturally reacts against society" (258). Such novels which are "French" in the ways that they portray overt sexuality and other subversive behaviors, are a threat to English reading habits, because they present a "confused moral world" ("Novels" 194: 169) and have invaded "that perfect liberty of reading which is the rule in most cultivated English households"

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[1] If we consider the nineteenth-century realist novel as a metaphor for England, we consider that it embodies patriarchy, traditional gender roles, nationalism and any other qualities which represent "Englishness." Victorian England was associated with confidence, direction, progress and identity, expansion, imperialism and economic advancement even though the time period actually embodied change and instability, the threat of revolution, the discrediting of old traditions, the use of God as a way to sanction philanthropic and paternalistic means, and the empowerment of women and the working classes (Thomas). Victorian realist novels, therefore, often confirmed these values by attempting to describe the enterprise of "ordinary" life by featuring mainly middle- and working-class characters and leading them through some process of moral development. In *The Realistic Imagination*, George Levine mentions "the astonishing effort both of moral energy and art combined in Victorian realism" (4). Realist novels also set out to "construct from instability a stable and shared sense of self, society and … nation" (Schmitt 13). Any attacks on the novel (vis à vis sensation, or any other literature which does not adhere to realistic literary values), therefore, become transmuted into attacks on the middle-class Establishment and its values.

("Novels" 102: 257).[2] Until the invasion of sensation fiction, with its incipient French values, Oliphant laments that until very recently, in Britain,

> Men did not snatch the guilty volume out of sight when any innocent creature drew nigh, or mature women lock up the book with which they condescended to amuse themselves, as they do in France. *Our novels* were family reading; and the result has been a sense of freedom, an absence of all suggestion of evil, in the superficial studies of ordinary society, which it is possible to overestimate" (257-8, italics mine).

By juxtaposing "respectable" British novels with "immoral," French-style literature, she, therefore, highlights the connection between an "anti-French" British nationalism and perceived threats of foreign intrusion into the British psyche.

For Oliphant, therefore, the intrusion of such sensational French values into the British drawing room via sensation fiction, therefore, reveals a "moral revolution" similar to that which Gerald Newman describes as occurring earlier in the century; both such revolutions pitted the British against perceived French values of "unbelief, moral laxity, ridicule, generalizing philosophy and cosmopolitanism" (397). The language of invasion and revolution, in fact, appears directly in Oliphant's own discussion of the ramifications the invasion of sensation novels will have on English reading habits. Notice the ways that

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[2] The fact that Oliphant presents the virtuous English novel in terms of anti-French rhetoric is not surprising. For centuries, anti-French sentiment and British nationalism have been clearly interlinked. Gerald Newman remarked how, in the early nineteenth century, "the repeated condemnation of French values was also … the deliberate affirmation and exaggeration of their opposites" (409). And the historian Louis Cazamian remarks that "France … is the pole of attraction or repulsion around which English intellectual life, in large measure, tends to group itself" (qtd. in Newman 409). Though both scholars describe conditions in the early nineteenth century, their ideas still apply in Victorian England. Since the British novel is an emanation of that culture and system, we can begin to explore the tensions that are posed by alternative artistic movements which seem to threaten the status quo. The links between sensation fiction and revolutionary trends will be addressed more fully in the following chapter section.

the language of invasion is literally imported into the microcosm of Victorian domesticity:

> We are accustomed both to read and to speak everything that comes in our way in the presence of *jeunes gens*. The habit has so grown upon us that to change it would involve a ***revolution*** in our domestic arrangements. It would involve us in an amount of trouble which very few could face. We should require three or four packets from the library instead of one. We should have the nuisance of separating our children and dependants from our own amusements. We should no longer be able to discuss, as we do now continually, the books that we are reading and the thoughts we are thinking. This is a necessity from which we have been altogether free in the tranquil past; but it is an indulgence which only habit and the long use and wont of public security preserve to us now ("Novels" 102: 258, bold italics mine).

Oliphant's comment here warns that sensation fiction could evoke a "revolution of [regular English] domestic arrangements" at the expense of the sensation fiction that is quite clearly a threat to "Englishness." The viciousness of this invasion, she says is that it strikes at the very heart of Victorian domesticity by attacking its most innocent victims (British children), within the private architectural space of the family home. Sensation creates conditions whereby "readers will have to get "three or four packets [of reading materials] from the library instead of one," so that they can separate the mature material of the adults from that of their children. In short, the appearance of sensation fiction has caused a "revolution in … domestic arrangements" quite frightening to someone who

wants to maintain practices and traditions to which she is accustomed (“Novels” 102: 258). Therefore, traditional family scripts for Victorian behavior – particularly family reading practices – are at risk if a sensational revolution occurs.

Many of Oliphant’s additional concerns about the dangers of sensation fiction also center on the trope of domestic revolution. Oliphant worries that “the picture” painted by sensation will invade the “boudoir and the drawing room” (259). She seems concerned that sensation fiction indicates “secrets” lurking beneath the respectable veneer of British society. Until the sensation novel, she rejoins, there has been an "absence of all suggestion of evil in the superficial studies of ordinary society, which it is impossible to overestimate." Since British realist novels have made English readers "secure and unsuspicious in … [their] reception of everything, or almost everything that comes to … [them] in the form of print” (251), then Victorian readers are more susceptible to misconstruing the values represented in these novels as fact. Sensation, therefore, provides an improper representation of reality, both on artistic and moral levels. Of course, when Oliphant attacks such sensation novelists as Mary Braddon for presenting “unrealistic” notions of life, she fails to admit that realist novels themselves mediate reality in such a way as to present a particular version of the life and the material supposedly representing it (she also doesn’t mention the fact that she’s a prolific novel writer herself and therefore, could be trying to impose her own biased agenda on readers). When Oliphant privileges such “moral” realist fiction as that of Anthony Trollope, she does so on the notion that “deep, tragic passion is not in them” and that “the atmosphere in them is the purest English daylight” (276). The version of reality which Oliphant wants readers to perceive through realist fiction is that of a unified, sane and dignified

Victorian life, where there are no evil secrets lurking behind the scenes to break through and demonstrate that such values are all a sham.

Oliphant's concerns about sensation fiction causing a literal revolution in the Victorian household – represented here by architectural tropes and space – are not unique. Other contemporary critics echo similar concerns about sensation fiction's potential for dismantling important Victorian values and social institutions. For example, in an 1872 article appearing in *The Times*, the Archbishop of York argues that Victorian sensation novels "persuade people that in almost every one of the well-ordered house of their neighbors there is a skeleton shut up in some cupboard; that their comfortable and easy-looking neighbor had in his breast a secret story to conceal." He further worries that such novels teach readers "not to trust appearances" (9). In discussing Mary Braddon, one of the premier authors of sensation, W.F. Rae claims that sensation, which he terms "the literature of the Kitchen" is invading "the favourite reading of the Drawing Room" (204); his comment obviously reflects anxieties about class boundaries and privileges changing in the Victorian household. A critic in the *Spectator* says that her sensation fiction "aspires to the domain of true art" rather than staying in the "basement" (1196).

Concerns about sensation evoking an invasion of domesticity also show up in popular culture. Several attest to the widespread concern that sensation fiction could evoke a cultural revolution. The first such cartoon, appearing on March 14, 1868 shows a young boy in conversation with his mother over his ability to read a sensation novel (Figure 1). This cartoon literally represents sensation fiction as an invasion of Victorian domesticity as we see the rather sinister-looking character of Mrs. Frump – "Author of the Ghoul-Haunted Grange" – attempting to strike up conversation with a respectably-

dressed Victorian mother in a formal domestic space. The mother insists that her child is unable to read so that the novelist/guest cannot impose inappropriate reading materials on the young boy. Of course, the boy literally misunderstands his mother's intentions to protect him and announces the fact that he *can* read, thus exposing his mother's prejudice against such novels. But, though the sensation novelist successfully invades the domestic space of this Victorian household, the insidious reading material goes no further than the parlor; her invasion is unsuccessful since the mother refuses to read said material.

Figure 1. *Punch* cartoon, March 14, 1868

A week later, on March 28th, another such parody about sensation novels appears in *Punch* (Figure 2). This cartoon depicts a conversation between a lodger and one of his servants about a sensation novel.[3] The interaction between lodger and servant exemplifies the dangers which sensation fiction can cause in violating perceived boundaries between middle-class and working class domestic space. As such, the cartoon invokes that "mutual infiltration" of the various social classes and the intermingling between public and private space which Jürgen Habermas insists are signifiers of nineteenth-century cultural revolutions. Presumably, servants should enter the lodgings of those they work for only when they are completing various domestic services. In this instance, however, the servant actively enters the lodger's sitting room because of her own free will to seek her master's sensational text. The man and woman obviously share reading materials, which suggests that literacy is no longer confined to the privileged classes.

[3] We can surmise that the woman is the lodger's maid because of her attire, because she is identified by her first name, because she speaks in dialect using incorrect sentence constructions and because she refers to the unnamed lodger with the title of "sir."

SENSATION NOVELS.

Mary. "Please, Sir, I've been Looking everywhere for the Third Volume of that Book you was Reading."

Lodger. "Oh, I took it back to the Library this Morning, I——"

Mary. "Oh! then will you tell me, Sir, if as how the 'Markis found out as she'd Pisoned 'er Two fust 'Usbands?!"

Figure 2. *Punch* cartoon, March 28, 1868

In short, the type of cultural revolution that sensation literature threatened was one which deconstructs rigid boundaries in both the British nation and the Victorian household – boundaries between high and low, young and old, men and women, etc. Sensation is seen as a revolutionary threat, a social disease and scourge and an apparent sign of cultural revolution. These texts invoked the possibility that readers would be inspired to admire bigamy, suicide and passion in women, would adopt loose morals, and worst of all, that readers would question the authority of the English family, the country

and everything it represents. Readers, therefore, might be prone to misusing the information they glean from sensation novels, causing perhaps an uprising, or following the new alternative moral standards represented through sensation fiction. Readers from other nations might mis-read the English nation too as being somehow tainted or corrupt. This could, in turn, affect the nation's imperial endeavors. Part of the purpose of the dissertation, then, will be to determine whether these critics' prognostications about sensation fiction hold true. Did sensation succeed in invading domesticity? Was sensation fiction a harbinger of moral collapse? Did it evoke a cultural revolution? If so, what was the nature of this revolution and how did it unfold?

Sensation Novels and the Revolutionary Tradition

To start back at the beginning, sensation fiction generally refers to a loosely defined series of crime, mystery and horror novels of the 1860's and 1870's. Sensation novels were very popular with the reading public and often told steamy stories of bigamy, murder, arson, blackmail, madness and persecuted female innocence. The hallmark of sensation fiction is that it contained scenes meant to excite emotion, scenes which were melodramatic (and downright "sensational"). One critic in the *Quarterly Review* describes the genre as that which "preach[es] to the nerves," literature which is based on "excitement, and excitement alone … at any cost," in short, "the sensation novel is the counterpart of the spasmodic poem" (482).[4]

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[4]This critic, later identified as Henry Mansel, produced one of the most well-known attacks against sensation fiction (the *Quarterly Review* article from which these quotes were taken). His definitions for sensation fiction are picked up nearly everywhere as being the characteristics defining the genre, though I must add that plucking the definitions out of his article firsthand is definitely more entertaining. He, like Oliphant, exhibits a very entrenched dislike for the genre's potential dangers.

Sensation fiction is considered by many critics a direct outcropping of the earlier established High Gothic literary tradition; it is usually considered a variety of Victorian Gothic.[5] Cannon Schmitt, in fact, calls sensation literature "Gothic turned inward" (110).[6] If we are concerned with the issue of whether sensation fiction could be considered revolutionary or not, the fact that this fiction is connected with the High Gothic tradition bespeaks much about this possibility. High Gothic fiction, which began with Horace Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and became all the rage with writers like Anne Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, after all, was clearly associated with British anxieties surrounding the French Revolution. Original Gothic fiction reflected, among other things, xenophobic attitudes towards the French and their perceived values, as well as fears that the Revolution in France would literally spread to the British nation. In *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, Karl Marx discusses the ways that revolutions tend to be cyclical. So, it is not surprising to find conversations about impending revolution and vestiges of revolutionary ideas cropping up in Victorian England (and metonymically, in the fiction produced in this time period). The horrors presented by Gothic fiction, in fact, typically reflect the cultural fears of the time period out of which the fiction was written. As an emanation of the Gothic tradition, therefore, it makes sense that sensation fiction would operate in the same way, reflecting cultural and national insecurities on a number of levels.

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[5] This would include critics such as Winifred Hughes, Alison Milbank and others. Though most sensation fiction is considered Victorian Gothic, not all Victorian Gothic is sensation, however.

[6] Schmitt's study, entitled *Alien Nation: Nineteenth-Century Gothic Fictions and English Nationality* also connects the Gothic tradition to revolution, and ideas of British nationhood. Schmitt agrees with my notions that sensation fiction is an outcropping of the Gothic tradition, but his book does not necessarily address the sensation novel debate nor does it discuss revolution in terms of reading practices.

Though no actual physical war ever occurred on the British homeland between the lower-classes and upper-classes during the Victorian era,[7] the residual effects of the democratic ideas embodied by the French Revolution still existed years later at the time that sensation fiction was officially written.[8] Fears that French values might taint the nation – as well as values that would be considered "Un-English" coming from either within or without British borders – were still rampant, as were fears of insurgency and working-class rebellion. British nationalistic sentiments following the Great Exhibition of 1851, as well as Britain's imperial acquisitions increased concerns that other nations might challenge Britain's authority and superiority. Because of a history of Britain defining itself in opposition to norms from other "misguided" nations, when there was any accusation about licentiousness or a slippage in respected British practices (i.e. a change in attitude), it was common that these nations might be blamed as scapegoats. Because of the rise in mass literacy rates precipitated by such advances as the introduction of the railroads, the increase in the number of public libraries and the reduction of printing prices, many upper-class individuals felt that working-class literacy threatened the status quo of England by empowering the masses. The increase in leisure time caused by the Industrial Revolution and the repeal of the Corn Laws created

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[7] I'm certainly aware that Britain was involved in physical and militaristic bloody confrontations elsewhere in the Empire during the mid-Victorian era (i.e. the Indian Mutiny and the Crimean War, etc.). Of course, any such revolutions – albeit internal or external – clearly have an impact on British legal policy because they affect the mindsets of people clamoring to make changes in the laws. My goal in this dissertation project is to focus on the trope of revolution within the geographical British isles, but that doesn't mean that the figurative, cultural and literary revolutions I discuss aren't related to sentiments from revolutionary events elsewhere in the Empire.

[8] Mid-nineteenth century events in France, such as the multiple revolutions of 1848 and the 1871 Paris Commune were, of course, just as shocking for the British as was the formal French Revolution. These continued models of insurgency and overt political instability across the Channel surely caused concerns that revolution would erupt on the British isles as well.

additional concerns that British readers would become morally lax. Social movements like Chartism indicated that the working classes were dissatisfied having no voice in deciding British policies, and legislation such as the 1839 Infant Custody Act, the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, the 1870 Married Women's Property Act and the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act challenged patriarchy, with its coincident rights to property, and men's unquestioned rights and social status. An increase in available cheap reading materials, as well as the 1870 law mandating education in England resulted in increased literacy rates, creating the possibility that the uninformed working-class masses might either use their literacy to empower themselves against the Establishment or read things inappropriately and get incorrect ideas about how to behave properly.

By Establishment, I mean those forces in British society that exercise the most political power, primarily landed men, who have an official voice in the British legal system by having the right to vote and who have substantial political interests in keeping both familial and personal property. In essence, my definition of the Establishment can be seen as synonymous with patriarchy. It includes both middle-class men and aristocrats who would benefit from maintaining the political status quo. As such, it parallels the *OED* definition of the Establishment as "a social group exercising power generally, or within a specific field or institution, by virtue of its traditional superiority, and by the use esp. of tacit understandings … and having as a general interest the maintenance of the *status quo*" and H. Fairlie's definition that the Establishment means more than the "centres of official power … but rather, the matrix of official and social relations within which power is exercised" (qtd. in the *OED* as the *locus classicus* example of the term). Parliament, therefore, serves as a separate entity from the Establishment here. Though

Parliament traditionally reifies hegemonic thinking in England, as a legislative body, it is still capable of passing laws that threaten patriarchy and threaten entrenched, conservative interests of those men who have been in political power for centuries. What was at risk during this series of cultural events was the power of the Establishment. By stripping away the fictions that the Establishment had created around itself – those which enabled society to function as it always had without being questioned – sensation fiction threatened to critique into the very ways that patriarchal Britain defined itself.

Sensation Fiction, the Law, and Alternative Social Texts

Given the above historical background, this dissertation explores the debates surrounding the dangers of sensation fiction, including the ways that sensation can be seen as symptomatic of a range of cultural and national anxieties existing during the middle-to-late Victorian period. It will connect the analysis of four "sensational" novels – Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Margaret Oliphant's *Salem Chapel*, Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – chapter-by-chapter to concerns about cultural revolution evoked by the passage of the Infant Custody Acts, the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, the Married Women's Property Acts and the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act. The metaphors of invasion, infiltration and revolution will be key to my project, which explores the ways that certain sensational, and therefore, dangerous texts pose concerns of cultural revolution for the British Establishment. Sensational fiction can serve as a vehicle for both invasions of the nation from external sources (i.e. from France or the Continent), or the infiltrations of "dangerous alternative social texts" from the underrepresented within

the British legal system and the British nation. I use "dangerous alternative social text" throughout this project as my term for describing texts which run counter to predominant narratives circulating within and throughout England. The "dangerous alternative social text" has the power to disrupt hegemony and provide new ways of thinking amongst its readership. Other versions of this term will appear throughout the project, primarily for the sake of semantic variety, including "alternative social texts," "alternative fictional texts," alternative social scripts or, when referring to characters who resist the dominant social text, "alternative social identity." These terms are virtually synonymous with one another.

All of the novels discussed in this project contain protagonists who create sensational alternative social identities that resist respected British social norms and ultimately raise anxieties about domesticity being at risk in such a way that they could spread the word about these problems to their readership. As such, they are creative "fiction makers" whose "writing process" allows them to create their own kind of fictional space within the oppressive surrounding social text of patriarchy. All of the above figures seek to create sensational alternative fictions as a way to re-figure realities which don't adequately present options needed for their survival. They all share an additional bond in that they operate outside of the law to protect themselves since the system itself doesn't do the protecting that it promises. Though the transgressions of all four characters – including the contaminating "bad" values that their alternative social scripts represent – are punished by the end of their narratives, the mere fact that these

characters' sensational stories are told exerts revolutionary pressure on the hegemony of England.[9]

Therefore, this dissertation will argue that – as an alternative fictional mode – sensation fiction did, in fact, threaten to challenge accepted norms for personal behavior amongst its readership and increase possibilities for scripting one's life outside of established norms for respectable behavior.[10] In other words, sensation served to deconstruct the hegemonic social text and expose it as fictional. It then became a vehicle through which the law and government (public discourses) ended up colliding with domesticity and the very private texts surrounding it. At stake were the very notions which described appropriate gender roles for men and women, as well as respected British social practices, such as attitudes towards marriage, domesticity and sexuality; middle-class family reading habits; and respectable clothing fashions, among others. Since sensation fiction is, as Cannon Schmitt says "Gothic turned inward," the revolutions that take place in this genre of fiction are local ones taking place within the British nation.

For this project, I extend the definition of sensation to include texts later in the century than those 1860's texts which traditionally hold the official "sensation literature"

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[9] The eponymous Lady Audley is "buried alive" in an insane asylum; Mrs. Hilyard, of *Salem Chapel*, is re-inserted back into a marriage with an abusive husband; Lizzie Eustace of *The Eustace Diamonds*, is married to a repressive husband who will ultimately "squash" her individual spirit, and Dorian Gray, of Wilde's novel ends up dead.

[10] My intent here is not to create a binary between realism and sensation fiction, since this binary is itself a "fiction" constructed by critics such as Oliphant and others. Like Pamela K. Gilbert suggests in *Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Woman's Novels*, I wish to make clear the notion that alternative fictional modes (including sensation) were in conversation with dominant literary modes where the "constructed categories" which designate so-called boundaries between genre are more "permeable" and therefore, "more visible" (2). The alternative social scripts offered by sensation fiction, therefore, blend in with dominant values more so than designating a 180º cultural shift in thinking.

label (i.e. other texts which "preach to the nerves" and promote "shock" amongst their readership). Though this definition certainly includes novels from the 1860s, which are traditionally referred to as "sensation fiction," it also includes two later century novels which contain both sensational themes and evoke a provocative social response. As Patrick Brantlinger says, the words *sensation* and *the sensational* can "connote … newness, fast pace and shock of modernity" (145).[11] Fin-de-siècle literature like Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevenson's "The Adventures of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," for example, can be seen as fitting this rubric of sensational themes and literary effects designed both to attract and to shock readers. Both stories refer to sensationalized newspaper accounts and documents, as well as attracting readers through their "shock" value. For example, a book review about Wilde's novel, appearing in *The Daily Telegraph* from April 6, 1895 clearly allies Wilde's novel with trends in sensation fiction criticism; the anonymous reviewer here announces that it "deride[s]" and "abjure[s]" "national qualities" including "the natural affections, the domestic joys, and the sanctity and sweetness of home," and it discusses Wilde as creating "a trail of fetid fashion" which has "penetrated [British] theatres" (reprinted in Goodman 76). [12]

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[11] I'd like to add that even though Brantlinger says this, *The Reading Lesson*, which is his own study about the ways that nineteenth-century novels evoke anxieties about mass literacy, only analyzes traditional sensation fiction in a brief chapter on the genre.

[12] The five major book-length studies that discuss sensation fiction are Winifred Hughes' *The Maniac in the Cellar* (1980), Ann Cvetkovich's *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture and Victorian Sensationalism* (1992), Lyn Pykett's *The 'Improper' Feminine: The Woman's Sensation Novel and the New Woman Writing* (1992), Pamela K. Gilbert's *Disease, Desire and the Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novels* (1997) and Marlene Tromp's *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation and the Law in Victorian Britain* (2000). Marlene Tromp's study comes closest to my own goals in this project because she engages conversations with the law in her analysis of sensation fiction. I agree with Tromp that sensation creates a "chaos in understanding and necessitate[s] new dialogues about violence and married life" (5). Her assessment assumes that sensation represents domesticity as disrupted, that it gives readers new signs of the cultural revolutions existing in society at large at the times that the novels were written. My project differs

My analysis of sensation also broadens in the ways that it discusses jointly sensational fiction (that is, novels) with discussion about new laws that also evoke fears of cultural revolution in Victorian England. Like sensation itself, I argue that certain laws are also capable of constituting "dangerous cultural texts" which play on societal anxieties and could also poison the unwitting newly literate classes (who could then take the laws even farther than the letter of the law intends). Laws, in general attempt to control and/or contain peoples' lives (i.e. "their realities") so that they follow specific scripts for personal behavior. But the legislative acts this project specifically covers – the Infant Custody Acts, the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, the 1870 Married Women's Property Act and the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act – challenge earlier legal "fictions," legitimize new "dangerous" patterns for behavior and attempt to implement them in the status quo. The laws, therefore, are "sensational," in that they serve as dangerous alternative social texts for personal behavior to the Establishment which attempts to bar their passing. Much of the Establishment feared the idea that certain British legislation could threaten to redefine British norms for domesticity and "acceptable" personal behavior. This dissertation argues that though the Establishment is challenged by both sensation fiction and sensational "dangerous legislation" (which Parliament eventually passed in response to increasing dissatisfaction on the part of those who weren't in political power), these efforts ended up impacting patriarchy and the

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from Tromp's in a number of ways, however. Tromp's main lens for inquiry is specifically "marital violence," and her study uses this trope as a way to rethink "the dichotomies that place sensation outside of and opposed to realist fiction" (3). My project does not overtly critique the genre in a formalist sense; rather, it focuses on ways that sensation fiction enables a critique of the Establishment's "fictions" about itself, thereby creating a necessary disruption in the overall "social text" of England. When I use law in the project, I am speaking of debates surrounding specific named legal acts, not simply about dominant norms for discourse.

Establishment just enough to ensure that the Establishment still remained in power and was intact. In other words, the sensational narratives – both fictional and legal – evoke the cultural revolution for the Establishment, but even when the alternative discourse of sensation infiltrates hegemonic thinking, it does so in such a way that the Establishment still retains most of it cultural power.

Domesticity as the Primary Site of and for Cultural Revolution

As has already been discussed, the reviews of sensation fiction, in fact, demonstrate a whole range of anxieties surrounding the British family unit. Considering that the British family is the bulwark of Victorian society, any fracturing of accepted norms for family behavior is problematic.[13] The monogamous family relationship is founded on traditional notions about gender, roles within the family and power relationships between the individuals occupying the various familial roles. Any entity or discourse which threatens to upend the power relationships within this unit – whether sensation fiction or another type of alternative discourse – can be deemed as a threat to the family and, eventually, to the British nation at large. The nineteenth-century movements to increase the rights of women by allowing them the freedom to divorce, the right to maintain independent property, the right to maintain custody over their children, the rights to their own sexuality and the right to achieve more general autonomy in the workplace and the home were all seen as threats to domesticity and family unity. In

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[13] According to Anthony Wohl, author of *The Victorian Family: Structure and Stresses*, "Victorians regarded it as axiomatic that the home was the foundation and the family the cornerstone of civilization" (10). He also quotes Lord Shaftesbury as saying that "the strength of the people rests upon the purity and firmness of the domestic system… At home the first principles of subordination are first implanted and the man [sic] is trained to be a good citizen" (reprinted in Wohl 10).

addition, any change in gender roles – male or female – away from those which propped up traditional notions of the British family was seen as weakening the family structure and threatening the family power balance.

The "dangerous" sensational laws I discuss in this project in conjunction with my literary analysis – the Infant Custody Acts, the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act, the 1870 Married Women's Property Act – are all similar in that they are attempts by marginalized British citizens (i.e. married women) to gain more autonomy, independence and power in a system political system that oppresses them. The final law I discuss in this project – the 1885 Criminal Law Amendment Act – functions quite differently. The goal of this Act, which was from the outset "an Act to make further provision for the protection of Women and Girls" contained twelve sections relating to criminalizing brothels and protecting young women from inappropriate "carnal advances," but it also contained one aberrant section, known as the Labouchere Amendment, that sought to limit what it called "outrages of decency."[14] The aim of the Amendment was obviously to thwart autonomy and to control the sexual activities of homosexual men by making them illegal. The law is indicative of the Establishment's attempts to crack down on what Max Nordau considers "degenerative behavior" which is part of a major public conversation on the subject occurring at the fin de siècle[15] [16]

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[14] The language of this Amendment indicates that "any male person, who in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission, or attempts to commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency, shall be guilty of a misdemeanor, and being convicted thereof shall be liable by the court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years."

[15] Degeneration theory was linked to negative feelings about the fin de siècle representing the end of the useful – and successful – civilization (and, of course, this would be success according the Establishment's standards and standpoint). As Sally Ledger and Roger Luckhurst say, "'degeneration theory' was very much a product of the social and cultural climate of the late nineteenth century … the economic recession of the 1880s, combined with the fear that the great 'Age of Empire' might be short-lived, meant that the

I choose to discuss the dangerous alternative texts of women and homosexual men together because of the fact that they are both marginalized from the patriarchal power structure by all of the various social forces that prop up the Establishment. That is to say, in its current formulation, patriarchy ends up seeing the homosexual male identity as being at odds with itself in such a way that it ends up suppressing and/or resisting this component of society in much the same ways that it resists the same component coming from women. As Gayle Rubin says, "The suppression of the homosexual component of human sexuality, and by corollary, the oppression of homosexuals, is … a product of the same system whose rules and relations oppress women" (qtd. in Sedgwick 3). Women's exclusion from the dominant power structure mimics that of gay men's in many ways and, therefore, analyzing the two as such – via literary texts – can tell us much about the patriarchal power structure. But like Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, I wish to avoid the trap of claiming that women occupy the same social identity as men. That would be terribly reductive. Men and women are not biologically the same, after all, and sexuality and

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ideas of progress were increasingly countered by fears of cultural … decline" (1). Max Nordau, whose famous and controversial book *Degeneration* was translated into English in 1895, argued that degeneracy [is] … *a morbid deviation from an original type*." He also says that

> when an organism becomes debilitated … under any kind of noxious influences … its successors will not resemble the healthy, normal type of the species … but will form a sub-species, which, like all the others, possesses the capacity of transmitting to its offspring … these morbid deviations … [T]he morbid variation does not continuously subsist and propagate itself, like one that is healthy, but fortunately, is soon rendered sterile, and after a few generations often dies out before it reaches the lowest grade of organic degradation. (15)

Degeneration theory explained and provided "justification" for reactions to quash any "morbid deviations" from the norm and added fuel to the Establishment's sudden concerns about homosexuality threatening the national security and the status quo.

[16] It makes sense that my discussion in my project moves outside of domesticity and into the public realm at the end of the century too. Foucault claims that "the last stage of [deploying political control over sexuality] came at the end of the century with the development of the juridical and medical control of perversions, for the sake of a general protection of society and the race" (122). Earlier in the century, the site for controlling sexuality was primarily in the home. At the end of the century, controls over sexuality began to expand outward from this private domain.

gender are two entirely different, singular facets of personal identity. No one would want to be defined exclusively by a single facet of his or her identity. People are much more complex than that.

However, as Sedgwick argues, homosexual men and all women do occupy similar marginalized positions in the patriarchal power structure. According to her, in the hegemonic patriarchal power structure, the homophobia directed against gay men is similar to the misogyny often felt by women. In fact, she argues that "homophobia directed by men against men is misogynistic," meaning that "it is oppressive of the so-called feminine in men, but that it is [also] oppressive of women" (20). In making such a statement, Sedgwick recognizes that because of skewed power relations in current Western societies – which would also apply to the mid-nineteenth-century family structure because of how it is similarly placed as the institutional centerpiece of patriarchy and capitalism – homosexual men fall outside of the fluid male homosocial continuum that props up modern-day patriarchy in the same ways that all women do. Whether lesbian women and heterosexual women's rights activists have seemingly different political agendas, most women still have the common goal of sticking together and bonding. What Sedgwick thus calls the "homosocial continuum" for women is, therefore, "unified" for both "'women loving women,' and 'women promoting the interests of women' [and] extend[s] over the erotic, social, familial, economic and political realms" (3). The female homosocial continuum, Sedgwick tells us, stands in stark contrast to the "male homosocial continuum," which sees male homosexual behavior as a threat to patriarchy. As she explains, "from the vantage point of our own

society … it has apparently become impossible to imagine a form of patriarchy that was not homophobic" (3).

Therefore, the newly invoked "sensational" laws, which promote democracy and further power to the previously underrepresented or maligned, represent a loss of power and rights for the Establishment. Resistance to social change on the part of the Establishment was apparent, for example, by the fact that educational reformers purposefully "embarked on a long campaign to insure that through the press the masses of people would be induced to help preserve the status quo and bulwark the security and prosperity of the particular sort of national life that they, its upper- and middle-class rulers, cherished" (Altick 85).[17] If sensation fiction can infiltrate the common discourse in a dangerous way, so can legislation that challenges the Establishment. The "alternative social texts" represented by sensation infiltrate and invade the British nation and chip away at popular "fictions" that represent British life as unified in its goals and views. Sensational disruptions represented by both the law and art, therefore, deconstruct perceived binaries of high and low, public and private, masculine and feminine.

And those alternative voices that dissented against the power of the Establishment – itself a problematic term – were not unified either. According to Michel Foucault, resistances to predominant power structures – what this project terms alternative social

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[17] In *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, Michel Foucault describes the way that power does not equal any one single institution or structure. Instead it operates as a "complex strategical situation in a particular society." In this schema, power does not emanate from a single point. Rather, "it is the moving substrate of force relations" which are always "local and unstable." Power is everywhere "because it comes from everywhere" (93). So, if we believe this theoretical model, it is inconceivable that the Establishment exerted monolithic, oppressive social control over any individuals not fully participating in it (i.e. those that could not vote). Rather, power was necessarily achieved through nexus of "local centers of power-knowledge" (98). The resistance to the status quo that sensational alternative social texts pose necessarily operates in the same way as well: via gradual infiltration from a number of disparate venues.

texts – are also "mobile" and "transitory" in the ways that they function. Resistance, emanating from a number of different sources, collectively "produce[s] cleavages in a society that shift about, fracture[s] unities, and effect[s] regroupings … cutting them up and remolding them." As this multiplicity of dissenting voices "infiltrated" hegemonic thinking, it evoked changes in predominant thinking patterns that were tantamount to social revolution. Foucault echoes the revolutionary potential that alternative social texts have for altering hegemony when he says that "the strategic codification of these points of resistance" is what "makes revolution possible." If the State "relies on the institutional integration of power relationships" to continue operating without change, therefore, alternative voices that infiltrate and challenge these power relationships, constantly modify the way that power works (96).

Power always emanates from a nexus of "'local centers' of power-knowledge" (98). And in Victorian England, these centers of power are likely to merge in the family, since this is "the most active site of sexuality" (109) and "the crystal in the deployment of sexuality" (111).[18] In the nineteenth century, sex became "something that was administered" and managed (24), and because the procreative, heterosexual family was the lynchpin of Victorian society, the means of administrating sexuality all ended up centering on issues which directly impacted relations in the Victorian family. As Foucault explains, the Victorian family was "an indispensable instrument of political control and economic regulation for the subjugation of the urban proletariat" (122). As such, the primary concern of regulating sex within the middle-class family was not to

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[18] Figures like the hysterical, oversexed woman; the masturbating child, married couples using birth control and "perverse adults" all specifically threaten family unity, but are also defined against family units as well.

repress sex, but to assert the "body, vigor, longevity, progeniture, and descent of the classes that 'ruled'." Its origins involved the "self-affirmation of one class … a defense, a protection, a strengthening," and "an exultation" of itself" (sic 123). And since "the heart of the economic and political problem of population was sex: it was necessary to analyze the birthrate, the age of marriage, the legitimate and illegitimate births, the precocity and frequency of sexual relations, the ways of making them fertile or sterile, the effects of unmarried life or of the … impact of contraceptive practices." After all, "this was the first time that a society had affirmed … that its future and its fortune were tied not only to the number and uprightness of its citizens … but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex" (26). In other words, a well-populated nation was a powerful nation, and the ways in which the family conducted itself were seen as integral to supporting hegemony. Ironically, one proof that the deployment of sexuality did not emanate from a single top-down autocratic approach by the Establishment was the fact that sexuality was moderated most strictly amongst bourgeois British families rather than on the poorer masses which had less of a voice in national political policies. Those who were in political control, therefore, those who had more of a stake in maintaining the purity of hereditary lines of descent also had more of a stake in reifying the status quo.

The Mutual Infiltration of the Public and Private Spheres as a Sign of Social Revolution

In *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into Bourgeois Society*, Jürgen Habermas describes the "mutual *infiltration* of the public and private spheres," as a sign of social revolutions which began to occur in mid-nineteenth-century England in response to liberalism (141, italics mine). Such collapse, according to

Habermas, paralleled other social changes and became possible, in part, because of a dawning awareness that the bourgeois public sphere, which was previously typified as representing the "public voice of England" was not as democratically inclusive as it had originally seemed.[19] For public opinion to be representative of the whole population, it would need to include opinions and voices from all segments of society, including women, non-property owning men and British citizens of various ethnic backgrounds (which it obviously did not).[20] In short, the bourgeois public sphere would need to be dismantled or redefined – and it was – in order to achieve this goal. Habermas argues that this dismantling, taking place via "the transformation of the public sphere" was made

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[19] In the nineteenth century, according to Habermas, the term "bourgeois public sphere," denoted only an exclusive milieu of public conversation and authority that which ended up supporting the Establishment, as described above. Beginning in the late seventeenth century, this "bourgeois public sphere" provided the means of criticizing royal perogatives and the unfair practices by the State. By the mid-nineteenth century, however, the "bourgeois public sphere" had become synonymous with the Establishment's interests. It was, therefore, necessary for other facets of the public sphere (i.e. those voices which were clamoring and speaking publicly against public policies that weren't as democratic as they seemed) to assert themselves in such a way that their voices began to transform the nature of the public sphere. To say that certain groups – i.e. women, working-class men and minorities – were not a part of the "bourgeois public sphere" is not, therefore, the same as saying that these groups didn't participate in meaningful public conversation and/or demonstrations that should result in a change in policy. See footnote #18 for a fuller explanation.

[20] Several feminist critics – including Leonore Davidoff, Joan Landes, Nancy Fraser and Anne Mellor – have taken issue with the fact that Habermas implies that, initially, the public and private spheres were gendered and that for him, women's voices were always relegated to the private realm. For example, in *Mothers of the Nation: Women's Political Writing in England, 1780-1830*, Ann Mellor convincingly argues that women did participate in the bourgeois public sphere quite actively, despite the fact that they were officially ignored by the legal process since they didn't have the franchise. According to her, women were particularly prolific in the literary world during the Romantic period, they participated in equal numbers to men in London debating societies, they "worked in unprecedented numbers: as political canvassers, electioneers, … organizers of jubilees; … as philanthropists and administrators of charitable organizations and voluntary societies; as educators … writers; and as consumers." In these, and various other ways, women "asserted both the right and the duty of women to speak *for* the nation (9). My reason for invoking Habermas in this project is not to claim that women were entirely excluded from the public realm and relegated to a separate private sphere. Nor is my goal to adhere rigidly to a binary. The primary purpose of my dissertation is to argue that the sensational narratives I explore – narratives which are often alternative social texts presented by either female authors or female characters – gradually achieve the effect of impacting and infiltrating patriarchal hegemony. These narratives invoke the same effect that Mellor is arguing for; they play a significant part in "transforming public opinion" (12) such that eventually public legal actions can be taken towards altering some of the social scenarios and institutions that disempower and/or marginalize those groups which don't have the franchise.

possible by such thinkers as G.W. F. Hegel and Karl Marx, who published articles which overtly charged that the bourgeois public sphere no longer functioned as a unit for progressive social change and that this sphere was hypocritical in imagining itself to speak for the entire British public. Habermas describes Marx's critique of the bourgeois constitutional state as follows. According to him, Marx's

> critique demolished all fictions to which the idea of the public sphere of civil society appealed. In the first place, the social preconditions for the equality of opportunity were obviously lacking, namely: that any person with skill and 'luck' could attain the status of property owner and thus the qualifications of a private person granted access to the public sphere, property and education. The public sphere with which Marx saw himself confronted contradicted its own principle of universal accessibility – the public could no longer claim to be identical with the nation, civil society with all of society. Similarly, the equation of 'property owners,' with 'human beings' was untenable; for their interest in maintaining the sphere of commodity exchange and of social labor as a private sphere was demoted, by virtue of being opposed to the class of wage earners, to the status of a particular interest that could only prevail by the exercise of power over others … Private civil autonomy led 'every man to see in

> other men, not the *realization*, but rather the *limitation* of his own liberty' (124-5). [21]

As the above quote demonstrates, Marxist thinking highlights one of the problematic issues within the bourgeois public sphere. The idea of the public sphere being inclusive was a "fiction," a construct which those in political power within the Establishment (i.e. patriarchy) promoted as a means to justifying the status quo of the law, government, and with it, the nation of Britain. But despite this "fiction," as Marx points out, within the mid-nineteenth-century British political system, "human beings" were only recognized as such by the current legal system if they were "property owners." Women and lower-class non-property owning men were disenfranchised, and thereby, had little chance of affecting public policy and the laws that attempted to govern their lives. And the laws which attempted to legislate the lives of these disenfranchised individuals were many. By the mid-nineteenth-century, as Habermas says in the above quote, "the public could no longer claim to be identical with the nation," which was a major problem for a nation which was trying to promote itself as a model for democracy worldwide.

The aforementioned commentary by Marx became indicative of social thinking which described the mid-nineteenth-century ripping away of the Establishment's fictions about itself and the introduction of alternative methods for reading English democracy and English social systems.[22] Any such criticisms or attacks – any alternate readings or

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[21] Habermas' analysis here is based on Marx's "Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of State," printed in his *Early Writings*, ed. Quentin Hoare, trans. R. Livingstone and G. Benton. New York: Vintage Books, 1975. 57-198.

[22] Although Marx was not very well-known in England at this time period and, therefore, would not literally have been discussed amongst many members of the English masses, Habermas successfully harnesses Marxist theories concerning "false ideology" to describe the ways that the British Establishment

"fictions" which challenged the dominant discourse – were deemed inflammatory; any infiltration which invaded the discourse of bourgeois public sphere can be seen as revolutionary since it held the possibility of deconstructing "truths" produced within the social text supporting the Establishment, changing the status quo and altering the Establishment's perceptions of its superiority. According to Habermas, this changing of the public sphere occurred as the dominant "fictions" of bourgeois ideology were challenged by alternative fictions of reality.

Ioan Williams says that "the most fundamental common element in the work of the mid-Victorian novelist … is probably the idea that human life … may ultimately be seen as unified and coherent (qtd. in Levine 18). This fiction of a unity and a coherent British nation is that which the sensational fiction studied in this project seeks to disrupt. Even the terms "Victorianism" and "Britishness," if used unilaterally, generalize much and oversimplify rather complex social attitudes and ideologies. Though the Establishment, for example, projected a fiction of unity in its goals and views, this truly was a fiction. "The fictitious civil society of the legislature" operated on the assumption that British laws represented the realities of British life and set the boundaries for social, domestic and economic interaction. It imagined that legal boundaries were absolute, that there could be only acceptance or defiance of what the laws dictate. Nowhere within the "fictitious civil society" did the Establishment imagine that there was any "in-between-ness" in accepting law. For example, a good wife remained true to her husband no matter what the circumstances; a disloyal wife – even if the husband was at fault – was a bad

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is lulled by "fictions" that it's a totally democratic nation. Since Habermas' theories concerning the "mutual infiltration" of the public and private spheres rely on his analyses of Marxism, I feel that his inclusion of Marxist theory is also useful for my discussion.

wife. Early nineteenth-century laws defining child custody, marriage and family in patriarchy provided no options for and were unsympathetic to personal situations which departed from expected patterns of behavior. Many women were trapped in horrendous marriages with abusive or deserting husbands who did not provide for them in the way traditional marriage intended, many children also were victims of paternal abuse with no possibility of escaping into safe custody with their mothers, and women had virtually no options for retaining personal economic autonomy should their husbands prove profligate. The laws governing the lives of women were particularly harrowing because they provided no sympathetic or creative options to respond to difficult personal crises like violence and abandonment. And since the women were disenfranchised, they had no legal mechanism for inserting themselves into the political conversation which could work towards officially altering their situations. The absence of these official channels for action, therefore, necessarily pushed women – as well as people from other marginalized social groups which Habermas identifies as being part of "the enlarged public" – towards creative solutions to personal hardships not accounted for by the system which saw itself as complete. These individuals ended up having to create their own "fictions" – their own unofficial methods of living life – in order to get by.[23] Both the presence and the frequency of individuals acting outside of the cultural space defined

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[23] The literary analysis portion of this dissertation will give extended examples of these types of creative methods for living life outside of the legal system: Lady Audley of Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* commits bigamy as a way to survive financially when her first husband deserts her, Mrs. Hilyard of Margaret Oliphant's *Salem Chapel* clandestinely secretes her daughter from an abusive husband even though she legally doesn't have custody to do so, Lizzie Eustace of Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamond* "steals" the family diamonds as a way to keep them when inheritance laws don't cede them to her and Dorian Gray, of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, takes on the guise of a guiltless ingénue, even though, all the while, he's constantly breaking multiple British laws for acceptable and ethical personal behavior.

and denoted by the British legal system demonstrated that the official legal system of Britain was itself a fictitious construct. Social, domestic and economic norms in Britain did not mesh with those the Establishment had publicly identified as representing the nation.

Alternative Social Texts in Action

As has already been mentioned earlier in this Introduction, this dissertation analyzes four sensational novels containing protagonists who promote "alternative fictional texts" about themselves that end up resisting traditional British norms and reflecting anxieties about sensation putting domesticity at risk. Each novel re-enacts anxieties surrounding the passage of certain dangerous legal texts being debated in Parliament at the time they were being written. The novels are Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Margaret Oliphant's *Salem Chapel*, Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* and Oscar Wilde's The *Picture of Dorian Gray*. Reviewers of sensation fiction saw sensation as an invasive cultural force. Margaret Oliphant was one of the major detractors of sensation fiction, leading the charge against sensation as a catalyst for cultural deterioration. For me, Oliphant serves as the Mrs. Grundy-esque voice of rigid conservative Victorian respectability and social norms. Her non-fiction critiques of sensation figure her as "the personification of society's judgment" and an upholder of the values at risk by the Establishment.[24]

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[24] According the *Brittanica Student Encyclopedia*, "the imaginary character of Mrs. Grundy typifies the censorship enacted in everyday life by conventional opinion. The personification of society's judgment, Mrs. Grundy appears (but never onstage) in Thomas Morton's play *Speed the Plough* (produced in 1798), in which one character, Dame Ashfield, continually worries what her neighbor Mrs. Grundy will say of

The bulk of my study, however, involves the examination of four "sensational" novels. In Chapter One, I argue that Lady Audley, protagonist of Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, uses domestic deviance as a way to infiltrate and disrupt the British household, the British patriarchal family and figuratively, the nation of England itself by evoking her own revolution from within. Lady Audley's revolution (her invasion from the inside of domesticity propitiated by the creation of her own alternative social text), takes place on several grounds: her deviant actions – including bigamy, attempted murder and pretended innocence – re-define gender, class and marital rules in a way that is, of course, frightening to the Establishment. Her small domestic revolution – which parallels the one that her creator Mary Braddon caused in actually writing the sensation novel itself (also covered in this chapter) – echoes larger societal revolutions that are taking place outside of the home and across England. Both Braddon and Lady Audley engender fears concerning the consequences of their overt and independent actions. *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861-2) was written just a few short years after the passing of the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act. The chapter, therefore, connects Lady Audley's domestic deviance to anxieties surrounding the passing of this Act, as well as its incipient re-definition of British family and the possibilities of independence for women that the Act proposed.

Despite the fact that Margaret Oliphant ended up being a major detractor of the sensation novel genre, she ended up writing at least one sensation novel of her own. My second chapter argues that one such novel, Oliphant's *Salem Chapel*, reflects anxieties

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each development and throughout the play asks, "what will Mrs. Grundy say?" Since then, the term Mrs. Grundy has passed into everyday speech as a criterion of rigid respectability."

surrounding both the Divorce and Matrimonial Act and concerns which were not appropriately addressed in the earlier 1839 Infant Custody Act.[25] In this novel, Mrs. Hilyard, a mysterious seamstress of indeterminate social class ends up creating her own sensational revolution in the small sleepy town of Carlingford when she re-writes her identity, moving from playing a public role as Mrs. Mildmay to pretending to be a widowed spinster as a way to hide her adolescent daughter from the wiles of an abusive father/husband. Mrs. Hilyard creates her alternative social identity in response to a legal system that allows her no "out," no options for a woman who needs to protect her older-than-aged-seven child from an abusive and overbearing husband who has the legal right to custody of his daughter no matter what his actions. In consequence, her novel sends the message that Oliphant is able to harness sensation as a means for raising awareness about social issues that are unfair. The novel's message about the possibility of alternative social texts and the existence of strained marital relations and child abuse complicates the conservative stance that Oliphant puts forth in her book reviews against sensation fiction and her other nonfiction arguing against divorce.

My next chapter, written about Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds*, argues that the sensational story of its protagonist Lizzie Eustace and her diamonds invades, contaminates and revolutionizes domestic tranquility, the family and synecdochically, the nation of England itself. The invasion works on a variety of levels; from the beginning, Lizzie manipulates the British legal system by resisting common legal scripts and creating her own alternative social text for behavior, in order to keep

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[25] It's recently come to my attention that Oliphant wrote at least two other books that evoke sensationalism: *The House on the Moor* (1861) and *Agnes* (1866).

some family diamonds. Lizzie's sensational story – the one of her own creation – manages to infiltrate the British drawing room, the political scene, and eventually the government of England. Her invasion, therefore, symbolically captures many anxieties which were present in 1870's Britain: anxieties about women gaining independence through increased property rights, anxieties about the disintegration of the unified British family, anxieties about British morality, and anxieties about the role of capital in connection with societal power structures. Like the Married Women's Property Act and the anxiety it entails, Lizzie Eustace's keeping of the family diamonds evokes anxieties about her contaminating influence on family unity, on inheritance laws and on previously unquestioned British traditions. In this sense, Lizzie serves as a symbolic embodiment of the Married Women's Property Act and other laws which create new autonomy and authority amongst women who are wives. Both Lizzie and the Married Women's Property Act challenge existing social systems by embodying alternative versions of reality – alternative fictions which exert pressure on the hegemony of patriarchal England. Her actions also bring up questions about how women – those marrying into existing family units as wives – are perceived in relationship to that family unit: are they really perceived as "true" family members with all the accompanying personal rights to respect, etc. or do they occupy a position as outsiders, only allowed provisional family status so that they finish their jobs as producers of the family heirs, but retaining this status only for their lifetime? Lizzie's feisty narrative exposes many of the problems incipient in the Victorian family structure both by manipulating existing laws and creating her own law.

My final chapter argues that Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* evokes another cultural revolution, this time in response to anxieties surrounding the Labouchere Amendment of the 1885 Criminal Amendment Act. The chapter interweaves commentary about Wilde's life, the Queensbury libel trial, responses to the trial and quotes from the novel to argue that British readers – and metonymically the British nation – run the risk of being tainted by the multitudinous "poisonous" texts which Wilde's courtroom experience embodies. First, the novel's protagonist Dorian, poisoned by his yellow book, becomes a poisonous text of his own. Oscar Wilde also becomes a metaphorical poisonous "text," who can taint the courtroom narrative. This "text," as well as that of the trial – which literally embodies readings of passages from the dangerous text *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – then seeps out into the public via the newspapers and trial transcripts. These multi-layered "texts" expose Victorian legal constructs and ideologies for gentlemanly behavior, nationhood, and sexuality as being fictional. The real danger of *Dorian Gray* – picked up on, but not mentioned at Wilde's trial – was that it is an unsettling thematic commentary on a larger Victorian ideology that wants to condemn certain social practices in general (i.e., homosexual behavior, dangerous reading practices), but also wants to see these practices happen so that it can follow the "sensational narrative" that becomes of it. In my reading, Wilde's novel becomes an overt physical commentary on the ways that external surfaces can be mere poses or "fictional roles" that characters and/or real people regularly follow in their daily lives. The novel's perceived dangerousness has to do with the fact that Dorian Gray functions as a mere benevolent "surface" who passes his pose off on both figurative and literal "readers" without the voyeuristic public suspecting the malignant "realities" and

values the character actually represents underneath. My read of both Dorian Gray and Oscar Wilde as dangerous purveyors of alternative social scripts for human behavior draws on concepts of dandyism and performance theory as ways to establish both protagonist and author as dangerous “social posers.”

Chapter One:
The Revolution from Within: Domestic Deviance in Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*

If sensation novels raised the possibility of cultural revolution, as already mentioned in the Introduction to this project, it could arguably be said that Mary Elizabeth Braddon and the protagonist of her famous sensation novel *Lady Audley's Secret* (serialized in 1862-3), started this revolution. Braddon and her works certainly received the largest brunt of invective launched against sensation. Her reviewers criticized Braddon resoundingly for her moral laxity as a writer; her inability to portray characters realistically; and the dangers that her sensation fiction provided for an uneducated and therefore impressionable readership. More specifically, critics invoked the possibility that the novels would inspire readers to admire bigamy, suicide and passion in women, could cause readers to adopt loose morals, and worst of all, could allow readers to question the authority of the English family, the country, and "accepted" Victorian middle-class values. Speculations about why Braddon and her sensational novel generated such a virulent attack will be discussed later on this chapter. However, the fact of the matter seems to be that Braddon and her protagonist represented alternative social scripts for behavior that threatened the patriarchal social text of England. *Lady Audley's Secret* – like the other sensational texts discussed in this dissertation –

apparently held the power to infiltrate and damage accepted national practices for fiction-writing and fiction-reading.[26]

This chapter will argue that Lady Audley, protagonist of Mary Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* causes a domestic revolution which engages Victorian anxieties surrounding divorce when she creates her own kind of "fictional space" in both the literal and "social texts" within which she resides. As the wife of a British soldier, the young Helen Maldon is supposed to experience marital bliss and economic security under the protection of her new loving husband, George. But her circumstances become economically dire when her husband abandons her with a young child, leaving her too poor to reasonably fend for herself. It is only after George doesn't contact her for more than three years, that Helen creates her first fiction when she renames herself Lucy Graham to help shield her penurious past. This new identity gives her some economic security, in that she is able to work as a governess and, therefore, make an independent living. But it also creates a "fictional pose" of her not being married, since Helen's options for divorce are slim to none in a Victorian legal system which – even after the passing of the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 – only allows divorce for men whose wives have deserted them and not the opposite for deserted wives.[27] Though Lucy doesn't solicit new relationships directly, considering how a woman's cultural value

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[26] Fiction-reading, as Pamela K. Gilbert reminds us, is also a social script. As she says, "genre serves as a set of reading instructions, a meta-text situated in [expected] social discourses" (59). With this line of thinking, sensation novels then provide new ways of reading not only books, but also new ways of reading certain personages (like Lady Audley) and new ways of "reading" the nation.

[27] Mary Shanley notes that issues such as rape, sodomy, desertion, transportation, and penal servitude were dismissed as legitimate grounds for a female divorcing her husband, since male legislators did not regard them as being "fatal to the marriage bond." Instead, only incest, bigamy and cruelty, when combined with adultery, were considered grounds for a female initiating a divorce (42).

in Victorian England was based on her making a suitable marital match, it is not surprising that she feels compelled to accept a second marital offer when the wealthy Michael Audley asks. When she opts to accept the offer, she assumes that it's likely that her first husband is dead; her choice thereby improves her social and economic status even further. Though the Establishment clearly doesn't offer double marriages as an option, it really leaves Lady Audley no legal mechanism for divorcing her first husband and otherwise extricating herself from her difficult economic situation. The problem, of course, arises when George Talboys, the first husband, unexpectedly returns from Australia, causing Helen – who is now recognized by everyone as the new Lady Audley – to panic. Lady Audley's actions to conceal her confirmed double marriage lead her to commit a number of desperate and creative acts in order to uphold the alternative fictions which she has created in order to re-define her life; these actions include faking "Helen's" death by posting a notice in the paper (in case George should be in England to read it), pushing George down a well when he does emerge (so that he can't negate her story), and covering up physical evidence of her past life (so that it can't be proven to have existed). Though these actions are, of course, extreme, their existence demonstrates precisely how inhospitable the British social and legal system was in addressing the concerns of women trapped in marriages which did not "protect" them in the ways that the system expected it would. This chapter will examine how Lady Audley's attempts to create a solution for her self-preservation outside of a legal system that works against this self-preservation, reflects greater cultural anxieties about what happens when women begin to gain autonomy and independence in a patriarchal world. The fact that Lady Audley creates "autonomous fictional space" for herself – thereby challenging the truth

of the "realities" promoted by the Establishment – results in her being labeled as deviant and eventually a madwoman.

Lady Audley's creation of her own "alternate fictional reality" as a way to cope with the rigid and unrealistic boundaries which the Establishment sets is especially interesting when juxtaposed with the experiences of her creator, the author Mary Braddon (who also, in a way, represents "alternative fictional" modes as a sensation writer). Both Braddon and her fictional character resist certain "social texts" which attempt to confine them, including accepted gender, national and artistic scripts. In addition, both Braddon and Lady Audley engender fears concerning the consequences of their overt and independent actions. Braddon's own overt actions included her choice to create sensation fiction, her continued publishing in the face of pointedly scurrilous criticisms, and her bold personal lifestyle.

Of course, all sensation novelists were privy to attacks from ardent critics of the genre. However, Braddon personally received a larger share of the brunt of attacks than did most other sensation authors, and many of the criticisms were attacks on the author herself (rather than simply her works). Part of this criticism seems to emanate from the fact that Braddon's sensational fictions were some of the most popular: over the course of her literary career, Braddon wrote over 75 novels, and her books were wildly popular with the public. *Lady Audley's Secret* itself went through eight editions in the first three months of production, and was adapted into several melodramas within a year.[28]

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[28] *Lady Audley's Secret* has never been out of print since its initial publication.

It is interesting to speculate why Braddon inspired such harsh criticism from her reviewers. Possible reasons included Braddon's gender, her history as an actress, her choice to rescue penny dreadfuls for re-publication as "genteel" and respectable British novels, her persistence with publishing in the face of vituperative criticism, and of course, her overall general fame. As one critic says, "an authoress who could make one of her sex play the chief part in such a scene, is evidently acquainted with *a very low type of character*, or else incapable of depicting that which she knows to be true" ([Rae] 190, italics mine). Braddon's connection with sensation fiction – deemed a dangerous promoter of "French" values – additionally puts her at odds with accepted British norms for novel-writing (sensation resists the British national text).

Like the protagonist of her novel, Braddon herself chose to create an alternate social space for herself when the realities of Victorian British law disallowed her from marrying the man she loved. In a pattern which figuratively allies Braddon with her bigamous protagonist, Braddon created an alternate social reality for herself when she first became an actress, then later participated in a prolonged, clearly sexual relationship with her publisher John Maxwell, while the latter's wife was still alive in an insane asylum. Maxwell's inability to obtain a divorce from his ailing wife did not cow Braddon in her efforts to maintain relations with him (since that relationship lasted twelve years before his wife died and the two could marry).[29] Braddon's commitment to resisting the "fictional social text" by maintaining her relationship with Maxwell demonstrates the power that she had to disrupt accepted social practices and expose

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[29] Robert Wolff's biography traces the Maxwell-Braddon relationship in great detail. The facts I list here are gleaned from his text.

accepted traditions as a mere fictional constructs for behavior. After all, the Establishment clearly dictated that women could only have sex within the legally sanctified institution of marriage. Her flouting of multiple social conventions – including her choice to continue having children with Maxwell outside the bonds of marriage and her even earlier choice to follow a career as an actress – situates Braddon as a revolutionary threat to traditionally accepted domestic patterns. As a physical embodiment of errant female sexuality, Braddon's personage alone has the ability to contaminate and infiltrate the British psyche, but since her texts come into contact with an even greater audience, the effects of her fiction are deemed even more scurrilous.

According to Chris Willis, Braddon is one of the four main creators of the 1860s sensation novel genre.[30] Being one of the progenitors of a new genre which was considered scandalous, contaminating and invasive situates Braddon as an extra dangerous influence. After all, if the critics can stop Braddon's literary production by "containing" her fictions – both those of her literal life and those of the pen – then they have accomplished their purpose of stemming Braddon's influence on both the British populace and the British realist novel. Braddon's perceived dangerousness as a novelist is foregrounded by the fact that she literally promoted an intermixing of the types of literature usually kept affiliated with separate social classes. For example, once her career was underway, she purposefully went back and re-published several stories she had originally published anonymously in working-class penny journals (*The Black Band, Rupert Godwin* and *Run to the Earth)*, this time as respectable, triple-decker novels for a

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[30] The other three are Wilkie Collins, Charles Reade, and Mrs. Henry Wood.

middle-class readership. Though Braddon herself recognized her work on these novels as hackneyed and "steeped in violence" (Wolff 7), the real fear about this transference of format had to do with the fact that Braddon's actions visibly allow a "mutual infiltration" of the two previously separate social spheres to take place and signify impending cultural revolution. Rather than middle-class domesticity being represented by wholesome realist literature, with Braddon's influence, now it can be affected and defined by lower-class contaminating influences. W.F. Rae, of the *North British Review,* claims that Braddon has "succeeded in making the literature of the Kitchen the favourite reading of the Drawing Room" (204); his comment speaks to the fact that the classes are intermixing and British society is beginning to change (as are popular modes of disseminating fiction).[31] The collapse between public and private spheres to which Habermas alludes as well as the collapse between clear class boundaries signifying privilege are embodied in Braddon's work. Her work – including the alternative fictional realities which it promotes – is threatening as a sign of immanent cultural revolution (or in this critic's terms, moral collapse).

Braddon's potential role as a harbinger of moral collapse is played out in multiple arenas. For example, at least one of her critics credits Braddon with single-handedly bringing bigamy into fashion. Bigamy here is Braddon's "big black baboon, with which she has attracted all the young girls in the country" (*Westminister Review* 270). The fact

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[31] Jürgen Habermas, Mikhail Bahktin and Elissa Heil all discuss the ways that drawing rooms are an important architectural space which enables the collision of public and private discourses. See my chapter on Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* for a fuller explanation of how the Victorian drawing room is consequently an important point of collision between respectable domesticity and the contaminating effects of sensation.

that this critic likens Braddon's supposed penchant for marketing bigamy to the marketing of a fascinating, yet grotesque animal from a traveling menagerie demonstrates his concern that bigamy (and the novels including this theme) is being unwarily launched on its victims just to make money. "Young girls" are most susceptible to the dangerous influences of baboons and/or bigamy since they are the most innocent segment of the English population (i.e., as children they have not had opportunities to be fully steeped in "proper" British behavioral values. As girls, they are even more sheltered than their male counterparts). Other critics draw attention to Braddon's focus on bigamy by parodying her work. For example, *Beeton's Christmas Annual* of 1864 includes two cartoons of Braddon's novels entitled "Quintillia the Quadrigamist; or the Heir and Hounds" and "Maurora Maudley; or Bigamy in Buttons."[32] Both cartoons make fun of overly zealous bigamous protagonists. The female villainess of "Quintillia" disposes of four separate husbands before the cartoon's end. Of course, Braddon couldn't have "created" bigamy as a possible theme – consider *Jane Eyre*, written a decade and a half earlier – but the cultural impact of the accusations against Braddon for "advertising" this possibility was immense.

Unfortunately, by drawing such overt attention to the author's moral shortcomings, Braddon's detractors seemed more to aid Braddon in publicity for her novels. Braddon's success was rampant, and certain of her texts – *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* were the most popular – seemed to have profound effects on the population, literally infiltrating all levels of the public conversation and discourse. In

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[32] This latter parody is based on *Aurora Floyd*, another of Braddon's sensation novels published just a year after *Lady Audley's Secret*, in 1862-3.

1865, W.R. Rae commented that, “if the test of genius were success, we should rank Miss Braddon very high in the list of our great novelists … Three years ago, her name was unknown to the reading public. Now it is nearly as familiar to every novel-reader as that of Bulwer-Lytton or Charles Dickens” (180). Even Queen Victoria was said to have read *Lady Audley’s Secret*. And according to Ruth Lindemann, E.A. Bennett, author of *Fame and Fiction: an Enquiry into Certain Popularities* (1901) literally describes Braddon as “becoming England” by the end of the century:

> Braddon [was] `a part of England’ who had `woven herself into it; without her, it would be different.’ Much as Agatha Christie’s name would later be synonymous with the mystery, `Braddon,’ according to Bennett, became a word that `ought to be in the dictionaries, a common noun, for she stands for something only schoolboys need ask to be defined’. [S]he notes that while `thousands of tolerably educated English people’ knew nothing of Meredith, Hardy, or Kipling, `you would travel far before you reached the zone where the name of Braddon failed of its recognition’’ (26-7).

Since Braddon is perceived by her attackers as an invasive, disruptive force, her “becoming England” means that the nation is changing, but specifically that the nation is being influenced/infiltrated by the values which the author and her sensational novels embody. Once she’s “become the nation,” the values that Braddon exposes to her readership about weaknesses in the British domestic ideal have begun to seep into the common discourse in such force that they cannot be ignored any longer. And if the Queen – herself the highest symbol of aristocratic power – likes reading “the literature of

the Kitchen," we know that the cultural transformation of Britain by sensation really does demonstrate a collapse between what the Establishment would have seen as two previously discrete social spheres.[33]

Bennett was not alone in her assessment of the far-reaching popularity that Braddon had reached by the century's end. We can see this by comments made by other critics:

> In 1888, the *Spectator* praised her as one of the few novelists who 'for a quarter of a century or more, have been most successful in appealing to the tastes of the person who might vaguely be described as the average novel-reader' … The *Daily Telegraph* accounted her 'the queen of living English novelists,' while the *Academy* commented that 'you would travel far before you reached the zone where the name of Braddon failed of its recognition.' (Willis 3)

Certainly, a figure who has had such far-reaching impact on the public imagination represents a complete infiltration, contamination and invasion of the nation.

Like Mary Braddon, Lady Audley invokes a societal revolution when she chooses to ignore and re-script her position in both the literal text of the book narrative and the "social text" of British life. Lady Audley uses what I call domestic deviance as a way to infiltrate and disrupt the British household, the British patriarchal family and figuratively, the nation of England by evoking her own revolution from within the middle-class Victorian household. As does that of her author, Lady Audley's revolution (her invasion

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[33] Of course, the idea of separate social spheres is also a construction of the Establishment, one which wishes to compartmentalize life according to ideologies that privilege those already in power.

from the inside of domesticity) takes place on several grounds: her deviant actions – including bigamy, attempted murder and pretended innocence – re-define gender, class and marital rules in a way that is frightening to the Establishment. Her "alternative text" challenges prevailing cultural scripts, legal scripts and gender scripts which constitute accepted notions of British nationhood. As with Braddon herself, what makes this revolution so scary is that it is evoked by a middle-class female character who has supposedly integrated seamlessly into her role as an innocent aristocratic wife, someone who normally wouldn't be charged with challenging established traditions, evoking changes and causing pandemonium in the center of patriarchy. Yet, her small domestic revolution echoes larger societal revolutions that are taking place outside of the home and reflects contemporary anxieties about the disintegration of British family, anxieties surrounding the passage of the Divorce Act and possible increases in women's independence in general. The readership of this novel would have been primarily middle-class women, and if we argue – as Katherine Montwieler has – that the novel could be used as a conduct manual for how women can easily "re-script" themselves into aristocratic, designing women – the novel can be perceived as especially dangerous.[34] Add onto this the notion that the novel could also teach women how to disrupt patriarchy in general, and the novel signifies an even larger social revolution. *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861-2) was written just a few short years after the passing of the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act. The Act introduced fears that Victorian women might be inspired by the law to become loose women and independent thinkers who would wish

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[34] See her article, entitled "Marketing Sensation: *Lady Audley's Secret* and Consumer Culture" for further details.

for further rights as individuals. But the passing of the Act drew attention to the fact that the "current social text," exemplified in the laws which sought to mediate women's behaviors prior to the existence of the Divorce Act, was a flawed fictional construct if people could literally script their lives outside of its boundaries. This chapter will, therefore, connect Lady Audley's domestic deviance to anxieties surrounding the passing of this Act, as well as its incipient re-definition of British family and the possibilities of independence for women that the Act raised.

Bigamy, Divorce and the Patriarchal Family Structure

One major issue that identifies *Lady Audley's Secret* as a commentary on the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act is its inclusion of bigamy as a major theme. Another is Braddon's own pseudo-bigamous relationship with John Maxwell and the author's own inabilities to legally marry the man she loved because of his difficulties in obtaining a divorce. Lady Audley's bigamy occurs because the protagonist refuses to let conventional British traditions which deny her a secure existence force her to stay married to her deserting spouse. Mary Braddon's pseudo-bigamy occurs for the same reasons – as a creative way for her figuratively to "marry" Maxwell, to script her own "reality" by brazenly acting against the law which attempts to forbid their union. The Victorian fascination with bigamy is perhaps a big concern because of contemporary fears about the evolution of British divorce laws – including the Divorce Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 – and where they might lead in terms of allowing women to be sexually aggressive, sexually empowered and independent. Prior to the Act, neither women nor men had virtually any legal recourse for divorcing each other since doing so

involved an Act of Parliament, but even after, these means were still extremely limited – women were only allowed to initiate divorces if "a husband was physically cruel, incestuous, or bestial in addition to being adulterous." Women who left their husbands "without first obtaining a divorce" were "guilty of desertion and forfeited all claim to a share of [their husbands'] property" including "that which she brought to the marriage and the custody of their children" [Shanley 9]). And, in fact, after the Divorce Act, women's circumstances in marriage were not literally that much better. As Karen Chase and Michael Levenson remind us:

> The Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 was an act of compromise, not revolution. By setting aside the demands for reform of the property laws, by continuing to make it difficult for those of modest means to pursue a divorce … and by refusing to grant women equal grounds to a petition, the act stands as the cautious outcome to a long public brooding. (191)

But whether the Act invoked real revolution or not, the debates surrounding its passage play on this concept. The fear, of course, was that the law would enable women great autonomy and cause an incipient collapse of the cultural tradition of the patriarchal family. And the scurrilous debates surrounding even this small expansion in the divorce opportunities for women – occurring about the time that *Lady Audley* was written – indicate a Victorian fear that allowing women to initiate divorce might encourage them to

find sexual liaisons outside the traditional patriarchal family unit.[35] Of course, the number of bigamy cases brought up in the British court system between 1853 and 1863 – 884 – indicated that certain British citizens were already creating their own "texts of marriage" which defied those represented by the law. The actions of these bigamous individuals resisted the possibility that current marriage laws could contain, define, or mediate personal behavior. [36] William Gladstone, in fact, warned that expanding divorce options for women might "damage the character of [English] country men" (sic Shanley 41). He further warns about the perceived cultural revolution that the passage of the law would enact, by railing about "the first of an interminable series of assaults" on morality. Chase and Levenson interpret Gladstone's comment to mean that "once the revolution has been legislated, why should it ever stop" (188). And judging from its frequent appearance as a theme in fiction of this time, anxieties about the Divorce Act seemed connected to bigamy.[37] Perhaps bigamy was perceived by certain members of the Victorian public as

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[35] Divorce, as allowed by Parliamentary act was previously seen "essentially as a punitive measure against an adulterous wife, and a way for a man to assure himself legitimate offspring" (Shanley 36). The Establishment was clearly less willing to accept divorce as an option when the situation was opposite. After all, it was difficult, given various rules about family relations permitting even beating of spouses, for men to imagine themselves as being at fault.

[36] These numbers come from the 1868 Report of the Royal Commission on the Laws of Marriage, footnoted in Rebecca Gill's article entitled "The Imperial Anxieties of a Nineteenth-Century Bigamy Case," appearing in the *History Workshop Journal*. Gill notes that these numbers are only the tip of the iceberg as concerns actual bigamy figures, since bigamy charges were only brought forth if one of the two married parties dissented to their partner's relations or marriage to another partner. She also indicates that bigamous arrangements were considered more common amongst the lower classes (perhaps because their bigamy was more easily detected in communal working circumstances). For this reason, bigamy cases brought on against members of the aristocracy were much more scandalous (and, therefore, appealing) to a rumor-mongering public. The goal of Gill's article is to describe the sensationalism surrounding the famous 1861 Thilwell vs. Yelverton bigamy trial. This trial's appeal had much to do with an aristocratic male figure who had two wives, but denied that he'd actually married the lower-class woman.

[37]To be certain, bigamy novels were rampant at this time period. Jean Fahnestock counts twelve English bigamy novels published between 1862 and 63, thirteen in 1864, and sixteen in 1865 (Chase and Levenson 201). And surely Fahnestock wouldn't have located them all. Chase and Levenson note that "bigamy novels" were "the imaginative manifestations of postdivorce culture" because bigamy was a more "'quiet' alternative" to representing "the divorce pandemonium" (203).

being a way to circumvent arduous divorce proceedings. If women were to get the "wrong idea" about being autonomous from their husbands, they might also be "pushed" by literary representations to proceed beyond the confines of existing English law to acquire independence for themselves. One critic overtly accuses sensation novels of improperly allowing representations of divorce; he equates the "score of Frenchy fast sensation stories" with the young female desire to "devour the latest dirt which is dug up in the Divorce Court" and bemoans the fact that these stories "are as false to nature as they are false to art ("Nonsense" 243).

The concept of liberal divorce, in which women and men had mutual rights in suing for divorce, not surprisingly hearkens from the French Divorce Law of 1792, which allowed divorces for many reasons including immorality, cruelty, differences in temperament, insanity, desertion, emigration or mutual consent for dissolving marriages. The fact that the French Divorce Law was born out of the French Revolution seems especially significant in explaining why the English were suspicious of expanding divorce possibilities for women. The logical fear was that replicating any individualistic values from across the Channel (especially those originating from the fervor of the French Revolution) might inspire a similar revolution against the Establishment amongst English women or working-class citizens. If legislators were more lax, another "evil" French value could come across the canal and challenge the "respectable" British values of marriage as the cornerstone of order and stability. Literature was seen as a way in which certain negative values could be engendered. As I discussed in the Introduction to this project, the English defined their own identities against the French, and sensation fiction was stereotypically – fairly or not – allied with French mores. And Braddon's

readers – including Margaret Oliphant, who railed endlessly about how English readers should avoid being contaminated by sensational French ideas – feared her novel because it might spread "French" values through the nation of Britain; in this sense, her novel represented ideas that "resisted" accepted English texts for behavior. It eschewed the national text by attending to social and legal solutions which were seemingly not British.

Lady Audley's bigamous actions, as well as her pushing of husband #1 down the well demonstrate that she is creating her own law and re-defining her social text in her own terms. She refuses to be beholden to existing regulations available to her under English common law, since these laws offer no way for her to extricate herself from a difficult situation.

The Dangers of Fiction Making: Lady Audley's Mask

At the beginning of the novel, Lady Audley's "alternative fictional reality" effectively masks her real purpose and identity. Readers understand Lady Audley, at this point called Lucy Graham, as the ideal paragon of beauty – with "soft and melting blue eyes" "the perfect harmony which pervaded every charm" and "the most wonderful curls in the world … always floating away from her face, and making a pale halo round her head"– an innocence male characters expect of her because of her appearance (5,7). The narrator describes the way that many men in the village came to share this vision of Lucy's innocence and beauty:

> Miss Lucy Graham was blessed with that magic power of fascination by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate by a smile. Everyone loved, admired, and praised her. The boy who opened the five barred gate that stood in her pathway ran home to his mother to tell her of her pretty looks, and the sweet voice in which she thanked him for the little service. The verger in the church who ushered her into the surgeon's pew; the vicar who saw the soft blue eyes uplifted to his face as he preached his simple sermon … everybody, high and low, united in declaring that Lucy Graham was the sweetest girl that ever lived. (5)

From outward appearances, Lucy's marriage to Sir Michael enables her to retain her innocence since she's called a "wax doll," "the hero of a French novel," and a "lovely creature" by three different characters (48). All three of these monikers, plus the constant description of Lady Audley "prattling on" clearly link Lady Audley's childishness, her innocence and her passivity with her attractiveness.

But pointers that Lady Audley's outward appearance is merely a mask for a less-than-benevolent interior occur early on. Once she has married Sir Michael, for example, even though Lady Audley seems a demure middle-class housewife, Alicia's dog growls at her, indicating an instinctual fear and dislike of Lady Audley similar to that shown to Coleridge's witch Christabel. In addition, she obviously tells multiple lies, and embarks on a pattern of conscious deception to construct an overt image of herself as a believable innocent, middle-class wife. Lady Audley's construction of her new fictional identity which enables her to depart from the "traditional social text" of Britain is quite

comprehensive. In order to become a governess when giving up on George, she must change her name from Helen to Lucy. In order to hold onto her new identity and its coincident social status, Lady Audley literally becomes a writer who publishes her fictions in a variety of different public and private spaces: first, she writes a fake obituary of herself in *The Times*. Then, she writes several fake telegrams: one drawing her away from Audley Court when George is set to visit (so she doesn't have to see him) and another ordering Lady Audley's father to pretend that George has left England (to presumably cover up the fact that George might be dead after Lady Audley has pushed him down the well). Lady Audley's malicious story making about herself – and the ways she dangerously lures other people to participate in her fictions – serves as the biggest proof that she is a dangerous transgressor of allowable gender norms. This becomes painfully obvious when we see Robert, the only male character who suspects that Lady Audley is only posing as innocent, charge her with not being a "real female:"

> Henceforth, you seem to me no longer a woman; a guilty woman with a heart which in its worst wickedness has yet some latent power to suffer and feel; now I look upon you as the demoniac incarnation of some evil principle. Unless you will confess what you are, and who you are, in the presence of the man you have deceived so long [Sir Michael]; and accept from him and from me such mercy as we may be inclined to extend to you; I will gather together the witnesses who shall swear to your identity, and at peril, of any shame to myself and those I love, I will bring upon you the punishment of your crime. (292)

The crimes that Lady Audley commits in constructing her new social yet sensational persona are most frightening to Robert because they expose the fact that the Establishment's notion of what defines womanhood is merely a fictional construct, a mask comprised of several expected behaviors.

The fact that Lady Audley's fiction-making enterprise can be deemed very dangerous is apparent in the quote below, when Braddon's narrator muses that Lady Audley's appropriate social place as a female should be the private domestic sphere:

> She looked very pretty and innocent, seated behind the graceful group of delicate opal china and glittering silver. Surely a pretty woman never looks prettier than when making tea. The *most feminine* and *most domestic* of all occupations imparts a magic harmony to her every movement, a *witchery* in her every glance. The floating mists from the boiling liquid in which she infuses the soothing herbs, whose secrets are known to her alone, envelop her in a cloud of scented vapor, through which she seems *a social fairy, weaving potent spells* with Gunpowder and Bohea. What do men know of the mysterious beverage? … How clumsily the wretched creatures attempt to assist *the witch president* of the tea-tray; how hopelessly the hold the kettle … To do away with the tea-table is to rob woman of her legitimate empire ... Better the pretty influence of all the teacups and saucers gracefully wielded in a woman's hand, than all the inappropriate power snatched *at the point of the pen* from the unwilling sterner sex. Imagine all the women of England elevated to the high level of masculine intellectuality; superior to

> crinoline; superior to pearl powder and Rachel Levison; above taking the pains to be pretty; above making themselves agreeable; above tea-tables, and that cruelly scandalous and rather satirical gossip which even strong men delight in; and what a dreary, utilitarian, ugly life the sterner sex must lead (191 italics mine).

The above quote articulates the fact that Lady Audley uses "witchery" and "weaves potent spells" over her steaming kettle in order to complete her disguise as a "pretty" and "innocent" female, but since the commentary refers to "all the women in England," it belies cultural anxieties about the fact that femininity is a social rather than a natural construction. In fact, the disguise that constitutes womanhood here involves not simply "pearl powder" and clothing (obvious trappings that would code someone's social status), rather, it involves the social trappings of certain traditionally female-coded material objects surrounding Lady Audley. In this case, the "tea-table" is women's "legitimate empire" – "a pretty woman never looks prettier than when making tea" – because it reifies and defines women as existing only in the domestic sphere. The narrator avers to the fact that – using Wendy Chapkis' general concepts about female body image – "a 'real woman' would be naturally feminine while she is only in disguise … to successfully pass [as a woman] is to be momentarily wrapped in a protective covering of conformity … To the uninitiated – men – the image" usually remains "a mystery … the tools of transformation are … hidden away as carefully as the 'flaws' they are used to remedy" (93). The biggest part of the Establishment's fear about Lady Audley, therefore, is that she articulates gender as a pose, as an act to be performed only, a social construct. That she is not "naturally" like the angel-in-the-house stereotype of perfect femininity is part

of what renders her dangerous. But that Helen/Lucy/Lady Audley takes an active role in constructing this pose is what is really unforgivable. Additionally, Lady Audley raises the concern that other women may be "posing" (actually are posing) as "feminine" using such arts. Though the quote seems to send the overt message that women need to spend time tending to the "legitimate empire" of the tea-table" rather than becoming like men and "snatching" the "inappropriate power" of fiction-making from men, the quote ironically ends up demonstrating that women are "fiction-making" through tea anyway. We know that Braddon's narrator is ironic in the above depiction of "ideal" femininity because immediately after this diatribe, s/he claims that "my lady was by no means strong-minded," when this is one of Lady Audley's prominent characteristics (191). Braddon herself, as a female writer producing her own fictions in a patriarchally constructed literary marketplace would have been painfully aware of the cultural anxieties attached to the values represented in her own fictions as well as those written by other women. It turns out, in fact, that there's not much distinction between ceremonies of the tea-table and "illegitimate arts" like fiction-making and wearing cosmetics after all. "Illegitimate" and "legitimate" arts blend together and the supposed binaries that are set up to separate acceptable male and female behaviors are shown to be "fictions" themselves. Via the idea of gender transgression, therefore, Lady Audley and Mary Braddon's "fiction-making" also raise the ideas of the "mutual infiltration" of the supposedly discrete public and private spheres. No matter what, Lady Audley's self-

fashioning makes her suspicious, and from the perspective of Robert and the Establishment, it makes her worthy of being punished for her transgressions.[38]

Masking and Unmasking in Lady Audley's Private/Public Boudoir

Once at Audley Court, the private architectural space wherein Lady Audley "self-fashions" her public mask, is, not surprisingly, her boudoir. As Nicole Reynolds tells us "the signifier 'boudoir' … established spatial and semantic limits to the culturally feminine and worked, by way of contrast or exclusion, to define masculinity" (104). Reynolds also reminds us that boudoirs were connected with notions of female literacy and sexuality – that they were likely places within which women readers might have been able to absorb the dangerous messages inherent in books they might read there and could be a place where Lady Audley was likely to have read the scandalous novels to which she often refers. Reynolds' comments are important because they point to two essential components which combine to form Lady Audley's public mask. The boudoir – as Lady Audley's "room of her own" – provides a perfect locus for Lady Audley to compose her personal fictions. Other than simply providing a simple independent space for fiction-writing – as deemed necessary by Virginia Woolf for all women writers – Lady Audley's boudoir provides the secret proof that her identity is just a pose (i.e. the baby bootie indicating that she already has a child, a wedding ring, which defines her former marriage to George) and the material trappings which make her acting convincing (i.e. expensive garments and possibly make up). At least in the initial stages of the novel, Lady

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[38] Of course, Robert is himself a gender transgressor, as will be described in an upcoming chapter section, but the difference is that women are punished more heavily than men for transgressions in a clearly patriarchal social system. Besides, Robert will redeem himself by becoming more "gentlemanly" too.

Audley's boudoir serves as home for the fascinating painting of her, which truly does seem to reveal some secret component of her malevolent and not-what-it-seems character. At a later point in the novel, we see Lady Audley retreating to her boudoir as a way to "guard against the chance of anyone coming in suddenly and observing her before she was aware – before she had had sufficient warning to enable her to face their scrutiny" (283). And boudoirs functionally play the role of allowing their occupants to play dress up there before emerging into any spectacle, public or familial. It is there that

> A well-bred attendant knows how to interpret the most obscure diagnostics of all mental diseases that can afflict her mistress; she knows when the ivory complexion is bought and paid for – when the pearly teeth are foreign substances fashioned by a dentist – when the glossy plaits of auburn hair are the relics of the dead, rather than the property of the living; and she knows other and more sacred secrets than these. She knows when the sweet smile is more false than Madame Levison's enamel, and far less enduring – pearl are more disguised and painted than the lips which help to shape them. (285)

Like a dressing room for a theatrical production, boudoirs are the private architectural space which allows all physical and cosmetic transformations which mold women into the beautiful paragons that they must assuredly be, once they emerge from this environment. The "painted lips" that tell a heroine's story may be fake themselves, as may be the story that emerges from them; they raise the possibility of "false language." The narrator reminds us that boudoirs allow a place for "the lovely fairy" of the

household to "drop her *mask*." Is it here that "all the glittering splendours of the modern Cinderella fade and dwindle into the kitchen-wench's dirty rags" (285 italics mine).

Lady Audley's particular boudoir definitely serves as a locus for the eponymous heroine's masking and unmasking. We see this when Robert is about to expose Lady Audley's true identity and bigamy to Sir Michael and Lady Audley overtly retreats to her boudoir to prepare herself for the role that she must play as an innocent wife. In the following quote, the omniscient narrator allows readers to see how consciously Lady Audley manipulates men by fashioning her appearance to fit the ideal gender role:

> I do not say that even in her supremest hour of misery she [Lady Audley] still retained her pride in her beauty. It was not so; she looked upon beauty as her weapon, and she felt that she had now double need to be well-armed. She dressed herself in her most gorgeous silk; a voluminous robe of silvery, shimmering blue, in which she looked as if she had been arrayed in moonbeams. She shook out her hair into feathery clouds of glittering gold; and with a cloak of white cashmere about her shoulders, went down-stairs into the vestibule. (286)

Clearly, Lady Audley believes she will be more credible as a defender of herself (and as an accuser of Robert for being mad) if she plays the role of innocent-because-stunningly-beautiful wife.

If boudoirs are the place where "vulnerable" or unmasked female readers could be privy to the influences of dangerous reading material, then it is possible that Lady Audley's own personal sensational fiction-making can have received inspiration from the French novels that she has been reading with her servant Phoebe:

> Do you remember that French story we read – the story of a beautiful woman who committed some crime – I forget what – in the zenith of her power and loveliness, when all Paris drank to her every night, and when the people ran away from the carriage of the king to flock about hers, and get a peep at her face? Do you remember how she kept the secret of what she had done for nearly half a century spending her old age in her family chateau, beloved and honoured by all the province as an uncanonized saint and benefactress to the poor; and how, when her hair was white, and her eyes almost blind with age, the secret was revealed through one of those strange accidents by which all secrets always are revealed in romances, and she was tried, found guilty, and condemned to be burnt alive? The king who had worn her colours was dead and gone. The court of which she had been the star had passed away; powerful functionaries and magistrates, who might perhaps have helped her, were mouldering in their graves … she has lived to see the age to which she had belonged faded like a dream; and she went to the stake, followed only by a few ignorant country people, who forgot all her boundaries and hooted her for a wicked sorceress. (91)

Like the villainess in the French novel, Lucy Audley knows that she can commit a crime as long she is beautiful and plays the role of the childlike, passive wife. But the above passage indicates that Lucy is fully aware of the theatricality of her own role as Lady Audley and the means which she must use in order to enable her success. Rather than being a vulnerable receiver of dangerous values coming from sensational fiction, she is a

conscious usurper of the possibilities suggested by these texts – including those French values which sensation's detractors represent as invading the "national text" of pure England – as ways to create an alternative image of herself via her fiction-making. As Kathleen Montwieler says, "Braddon shows us that women who plan can get ahead … A lady's maid knows that being a lady is performance" (57).[39] Lucy Audley's success at committing bigamy and getting away with attempted murder hinges on her appearance, her ability to look the part of the "angel in the house." Like the character in the French novel, when her "hair is white, and her eyes almost blind with age," it will become more difficult for her to play the appropriate role. We see this as the novel progresses. It is fitting that in one scene, Lucy uses a book for concealment, much like a prop for an actress (255). Books are both her mentor in plotting to maintain her newfound social status and a physical way to conceal her inner emotions when they cannot be erased from her face.

Since Lady Audley's boudoir is such a liminal space for both hiding her "real" self and consciously constructing/re-writing her new fictional self, it is significant that it becomes the first place where we see the potential "unmasking" of our heroine and the first place where we see overt external invasions into Lady Audley's private space (and therefore, collisions between the private and public realms). The first such invasion occurs when Phoebe, Lady Audley's personal maid, brings her boorish boyfriend Luke into Lady Audley's boudoir so that he can see "the inside of the house," especially "my

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[39] Lizzie Eustace, protagonist-villain of Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* also performs a role which enables her to evoke a revolution. Causing a revolution from within the system is possible if one can manipulate one's external appearance effectively. Lying and deceit are necessary actions to achieve an effective revolution from within.

lady's rooms," which are "all pictures and gilding, and great looking-glasses that stretch from the floor to the ceiling to the floor" (23). What the two unwittingly discover instead are a baby's booty and "a tiny lock of silky yellow hair, evidently taken from a baby's head" (26). The result is that an intrusion motivated by curiosity – as Luke says "if the inside of the house is so mighty fine, I should like to have a squint at it" – yields a secret personal past to our supposedly virginal and innocent heroine. Luke and Phoebe's uncovering of Lady Audley's possibly sensational past is especially interesting when viewed through the Habermasian lens of the collapse between public and private spheres, a collapse which results in a peculiar infiltration and commingling of lower-class and upper-class values. Here the two working-class servants literally represent this infiltration by sneaking into Lady Audley's personal architectural sanctuary, by touching her personal things, and finally by "unmasking" one of her secrets. The "unmasking " reveals that Lady Audley is not as high and mighty – as different from other people – as her physical possessions and elaborate clothing might make her seem. Their transgression into Lady Audley's boudoir allows the servants to revise the image that she has publicly given out of herself to involve a much more complicated and mysterious past.

A second invasion, which serves to "unmask" Lady Audley in similar ways, occurs immediately prior to George's disappearance, when both George and Robert invade Lady Audley's private boudoir to see her portrait. Though the two English gentlemen would seemingly be less contaminating infiltrators of Lady Audley's private space, since they are at least middle-class gentlemen (and seemingly, more "respectable intruders"), the method of their entering Lady Audley's personal space by crawling there

through a secret subterranean passage – of which the boudoir's owner is unaware – makes the invasion seem even more insidious than the servant's earlier uninvited entry. Though the portrait itself is located in a locked antechamber to the lady's boudoir, the men have to pass through Lady Audley's boudoir to reach it, never once being concerned about whether their actions might be allowed or not. In so doing, the men are able to see that Lady Audley is not the individual she poses as outside this personal space. Clearly, the men's invasion of Lady Audley's female architectural space invokes the idea of gender transgression, since the men cross physical feminine boundaries when entering it. Their actions result in an irrevocable "mutual infiltration" between both the masculine and feminine realms. Lady Audley's portrait allows the men to see that its subject may not be the gentle female that she seems, that there is something hidden and insidious in her character. Viewing the portrait changes the men's opinions about Lady Audley forever. On the other hand, the men's invasion into Lady Audley's domestic space seems to have contaminated her image too. In one of her attacks on sensation fiction Margaret Oliphant said that "there is … nothing of such vital consequence to a nation," as "that a woman … and her race have the duty of being pure" (*Blackwoods* 102:275). Their entry into the boudoir enacts an important point of collision between public and private. The point of contact easily allows some fluidity between the two normally segregated spheres. Nicole Reynolds reminds us that Lady Audley's specific boudoir "offers a fluid intermediary space, framed by [both] the public antechamber and the private dressing room" (120). Any point of intersection between the public and private spheres suggests possible infiltration and contamination between the two. The space is not private if it can be invaded by spectators at any time.

Lady Audley's unmasking literally occurs when the men withdraw the baize cover from her portrait. What the men uncover is a painting which depicts a "lurid brightness," "a pouting mouth with a hard … wicked look" and eyes which are imbued with "a strange sinister light." The painting was:

> so like and so yet so unlike; it was as if you had burned strange-coloured fires before my lady's face, and by their influence brought out new lines and new expressions never seen before. The perfection of the feature, the brilliancy of colouring were there; but it seemed as if the painter had copied mediaeval monstrosities until his brain had grown bewildered, for my lady, in his portrait of her, had the aspect of a beautiful fiend. Her crimson dress, exaggerated like all the rest in the strange picture, hung about her in folds that looked like flames, her fair hair rising out of the lurid mass of colour, as if out of a raging furnace. Indeed the crimson dress, the sunshine on the face, the red gold gleaming in the yellow hair, the ripe scarlet of the pouting lips, the vivid colour of each accessory, in the minutely painted background, all combined to render the first effect of the painting by no means an agreeable one. (60-1)

As can be seen from the above description, Robert is clearly able to detect strains of Lady Audley's personality in her portrait.[40] Robert is clearly disconcerted by viewing the portrait. It enables him to envision a "fiendish" and "sinister" underside to Lady Audley's apparent gentleness and innocence. Robert tries to reassure himself (and

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[40] It is uncertain if he does so because of his imagination or whether the portrait really "speaks" of her buried life, but either way, Lady Audley's portrait represents "bad" character traits for a proper English gentlewoman.

Alicia) that he doesn't have this reading of the portrait, by saying "the picture is the picture, and my lady is – my lady" (61). But Alicia knows otherwise when she says "sometimes a painter is in a manner inspired, and is able to see, through the normal expression of the face, another expression that is equally a part of it, though not to be perceived by common eyes. *We* have never seen my lady look as she does in that picture: but I think that she *could* look so" (61). Robert's response is to say "don't be German … don't unsettle me," but he repeats this remonstrance with "an air of terror" (61).

Though Robert tries to talk himself out if it, the above comments reveal that he is, nevertheless, concerned by certain anxieties: how *could* a gentle-seeming English woman be different from what she seems? how *could* any negative personality traits lurk in Lady Audley's breast, and through her, imply that any negative secrets lurk beneath the respectable veneer of Audley Court? Robert's ability to "read" Lady Audley's portrait as a sign that she contains depths not portrayed by her public "surface" text, as I will argue shortly, seems connected to his pattern of reading sensational French novels – itself an activity which involves reading outside of traditional scripts of how the Establishment dictates that women – or anyone for that matter – should "naturally" behave or appear. Sensation novel reading is typically coded as a "feminine leisure activity," and Robert himself is a gender transgressor. In turn, Robert's identity as a gender transgressor is what ultimately enables him to uncover, re-read and eventually unravel the various texts that work to create the "fictions" which Lady Audley has created around herself, including her gender construct, her legal construct, her cultural text, and the national text upon which her disruption intrudes.

Reading Social Texts: Robert's Unraveling of Lady Audley's Fictions

As many critics have acknowledged, Braddon's novel is largely concerned with Robert's becoming a "true" English gentleman via his process of rooting out and eventually "containing" the evil that Lady Audley represents to established British gender, familial and social norms. As I mentioned in the previous chapter section, Robert's ability to "read" a sinister message behind Lady Audley portrait – he says "there's something odd about it" (61) – is uniquely connected to the fact that he reads sensation fiction. Robert's indolent behavior patterns are repeatedly and inextricably connected to his "feminine" passion for reading sensation. For example, he prepares for the hunting season by the odd practice of bringing "a dozen French novels, a case of cigars, and three pounds of Turkish tobacco" with him to Audley Court, prompting other more "normal" English gentlemen to consider him a "dawdling" person, "utterly unworthy of any remark whatsoever." In addition to toting around books, Robert consciously identifies with the characters and actions embodied by French novels, saying, "I feel like the hero of a French novel. I am falling in love with my aunt"(48). Alicia comments that he is "a poor, spiritless fellow" … good for nothing, but to hold a skein of silk or read Tennyson to Lady Audley" (99). At another point, Braddon's narrator laments that "*it is sad to say* the barrister substituted Paul de Kock and Dumas *fils*" for other types of reading (183 first italics mine), indicating that Robert's behavior is outside of expected norms for "gentlemanly" reading behavior by immersing himself in sensation fiction.

Since sensation fiction is typically coded as female reading, Robert's attachment to sensation reading is one clue that he is a gender transgressor, a character who has not

always fit Victorian social norms for traditional masculinity. Other markers of Robert's gender transgression occur early on in the novel. At first, Robert's activities seem most connected with indolence and domestic affairs, as opposed to public, active demonstrative behaviors. Robert prefers reading to hunting. Instead of participating in the hunt in the traditionally energetic masculine way, he makes "a feeble show of joining in the sports" of regular English gentlemen. Robert is "*supposed* to be a barrister," but he's never even written a brief before (26 italics mine). Robert never seems to notice that his cousin Alicia's constant attentions towards him mean she's interested in marrying him. Of course, Richard Nemesvari, in his famous article entitled "Robert Audley's Secret: Male Homosocial Desire in *Lady Audley's Secret*" also picks up on the fact that Robert is a gender transgressor when he says that Robert's true motivation for figuring out Lady Audley's secret is "driven by his repressed homoerotic desire" for George Talboys (516). Any male who acts on homoerotic impulses and works outside of proscribed expectations for gender behavior clearly qualifies as a gender transgressor.

Robert's personal awareness that gender roles are constructions that one can eschew or revise, combined with the behavioral scripts which he has gained though reading sensation seem to be the tools which best allow him to "read" Lady Audley's "fictions." Robert's special sleuthing skills, then, are possible because he operates outside of strict masculine social constructs and is, therefore, a gender transgressor like Lady Audley. The other male characters in this novel – including Michael Audley, Harcourt Talboys and Harry Towers – are all traditional in the ways that they adhere to strict gender constructs for masculine behavior. As such, they all seem to accept implicitly the idea that women also follow particular, expected behavior patterns. This

makes it difficult for them to question any women who appear benign, beautiful and gentle. Though "dangerous" women exist outside of assigned social standards for gender behavior, these women would presumably look deranged or subversive. Unlike the other male characters in the book, Robert is fascinated with Lady Audley because he questions the fictions that she promotes about herself. Like a sensation novel, Lady Audley both fascinates and repulses her "reader" Robert Audley. He gains his introit into the gentlemanly role by playing the new role of a legal enforcer trying to track her down. His previous reading of these novels is what enables him to follow her trail. His transgression of gender boundaries and expected male roles (by reading the French novels in the first place) is what allows him to "read" outside the rigid British system of expected behaviors and beliefs. Robert uses his experiences reading sensation fiction as a blueprint for his successful detective enterprises (in effect, Robert is also a "fiction-maker" in the way that he overtly "writes himself" into this detective role). Since these novels provide him with "scripts" for his successful tracking down (and containing) of the title heroine, Braddon's novel self-inscribes a message which redeems and promotes sensation fiction as something worth reading.[41]

But Robert has another motivation for wishing to seek out Lady Audley's secrets and condemn her for them: the rooting-out process allows him an opportunity to downplay the gender transgressive tendencies that signify himself as a possible suspected site of cultural revolution and instead perform British masculinity in a way that overtly

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[41] It is important to note that Robert's experiences reading French fiction undoubtedly allow him to re-read the national social text in other arenas besides gender. Presumably texts which question other British values are more readily available in foreign texts too. Robert's suspicion of British norms could be considered unacceptable, but Robert's eventual "rooting out" or solving of the problem redeems him.

masks these tendencies. Robert occupies a liminal social space (or social text) himself. As Nemesvari puts it, both Robert and Lady Audley, as characters, tap into "a series of Victorian anxieties about gender roles and sexual identification (516). Since the modern concept of "homosexuality" literally arose out of "the exact historical moment [that] sensation fiction first achieved notoriety" (515), Robert's threat to the cultural text of Britain is actually quite potent. It is no surprise then, that Robert chooses to use the very public and, therefore, masculine language of the law as a way to circumscribe his female nemesis. Of course, his holding the official job title of "barrister" helps lend authority to his harnessing of legal discourse. As has been described throughout this dissertation, laws have always been the means via which the "fictitious civil society" of the Establishment has most publicly defined itself. As long as Robert proves that he can play the part of an effective English gentleman and lawyer by the end of the story, he can redeem himself for any earlier errors. His earlier transgressions – which other characters really seemed to overlook anyway – nearly disappear by the end. The situation is not so for Lady Audley, whose fiction-making is abjectly rooted out and vilified.

The Battle of the Texts: Robert Audley as Legal Enforcer

Robert's attempt to denounce the text which Lady Audley has written about herself is, not surprisingly, met with much resistance by Lady Audley, who does not want to give up the position that she has gained by marrying Sir Michael Audley without divorcing George Talboys. As such, Lady Audley and Robert participate in a sort of "war of the texts," in which the reader sees the dominant social text of Britain being challenged by Lady Audley's "alternative social text." The stakes are high in this war,

because any leeway that Lady Audley gains in this linguistic battle threatens social change and cultural revolution. In their "war" against each other, Robert continuously uses legal language to try to cow Lady Audley: he collects physical evidence, he compiles lists of circumstantial evidence. His goal is to "convince my uncle that he has married a designing and infamous woman" (204). His legal process will involve an "unmasking" of Lady Audley, the actress "playing a comedy under my uncle's roof" (219). Robert clearly intends to play the upper hand in his sparring with Lady Audley, likening himself to a judge as he begins to lay out all of the evidence he's collected thus far: he claims his just position "by the right of circumstantial evidence which will sometimes fix the guilt of a man's murder upon that person who, on first hearing the case, seems of all mankind the most unlikely" (231). He challenges Lady Audley to meet him on the battleground of his "legal" and supposedly rational discourse by asking her to *prove* her innocence in the following comment:

> Have you no proofs to offer against this evidence? You say to me, 'I am Lucy Graham, and I have nothing whatever to do with Helen Talboys.' In that case, you can produce witnesses who will declare your antecedents. Where had you been prior to your appearance at Crescent Villas? You must have friends, relations, connections who can come forward to prove as much as this for you. (234)

Robert later tells Lady Audley that she must "*confess* what you are and who you are." If not, he threatens to "gather together *witnesses* who shall *swear* to your identity" (292 italics mine). As such, Robert works at "proving" his manliness by invoking specific legal constructs and courtroom actions as a way to deconstruct the gender pose which

Lady Audley is now performing. But Lady Audley refuses to respond to Robert's pleas within the parameters of legal and patriarchal discourse. Instead, she resists accepting the personal narrative which Robert has just ascribed to her and sticks to the fictional construct which she has created for herself. She poses as the innocent wife of Sir Michael Audley and boldly refuses to accept Robert's seemingly ominous legal discourse by changing the game, making her own rules, and calling him "mad." She says,

> If I were placed in a criminal dock, I could no doubt, bring forward witnesses to refute your absurd accusation. But I am not in a criminal dock, Mr. Audley, and I do not choose to do anything but laugh at your ridiculous folly. I tell you that you are mad! … If you choose to go wandering about to the places in which this Mrs. Talboys has lived, you just follow the bent of your own inclinations; but I would warn you that such fancies have sometimes conducted people as apparently sane as yourself, to the lifelong imprisonment in an insane asylum. (234)

Lady Audley's accusation that Robert is a madman is a very creative ploy to undermine patriarchy, the law and everything that that respected process is supposed to represent. She knows that Robert really isn't insane, but her willingness to use the accusation as a "fiction" to manipulate her husband and retain her current social position demonstrates her power as a "dangerous designing woman (she says to herself of Sir Michael: "I can twist him which way I like. I can put black before him, and if I say it is white, he will believe" [241]). Lady Audley's laughing and her body language here identify her as an enigma; her outwardly beautiful and innocent appearance make her seem both innocent of crime and pliable to the standard regulations of patriarchal legal discourse, but her

words challenge and re-direct the conversation. By using what could be considered an oral form of *écriture feminine*, Lady Audley responds with an answer outside of patriarchal considerations and the legal language which supposedly encapsulates it, which might creatively look like this: "no, I will not play your game. The law doesn't apply to me because it has abandoned me. Ergo, I have developed by own survival strategy. Let's see who wins …" In short, Lady Audley's resistance of the legal text is a bold re-writing of patriarchal and legal social texts. Even if she doesn't win the "contest" with Robert, she still presents a disruption, and a dangerous threat as a deviant. This behavior is merely an extension of Lady Audley's blatant and earlier re-writings of a legal script which would have disallowed her from being able to marry twice. Her choices to commit bigamy and attempt murder as ways to re-integrate as a re-named persona in a constrictive society directly challenge the validity of British laws pertaining to marriage and women's rights. They have allowed her to survive in a world which assumes that deserted wives can have no legal autonomy.

The threat of Lady Audley – as author of her own alternative social text issuing from her resistance to multiple behavorial scripts, including gender, national and legal ones – is contained by the novel's end when Robert himself literally re-writes Lady Audley's life script and re-names his "aunt" Madame Taylor. The fact that his fiction-making is rewarded speaks to the sexual double standard when compared to the ways that Lady Audley's fiction making has been the cause of her demise. Robert's method of handling Lady Audley's transgressions involves a re-writing of standard British legal methodology. In placing Lady Audley in an insane asylum on the Continent, Robert has in some senses allowed her to "escape" the legal system that was attempting to contain

her all the while and thereby eschewed his responsibility to rigidly uphold the British laws within which a bona fide lawyer would typically operate. Before her incarceration, Lady Audley had already, in some senses, resisted the dominant social texts of the England by choosing to commit bigamy, attempt murder and take on multiple identities. But her departure for Belgium – even if it is to be incarcerated in a madhouse – represents the fact that Robert is responsible for literally and permanently writing her out of the geographical boundaries of Britain, as well as its legal social text. Though Robert might be presumed to represent the law because of his job title, he eschews English laws altogether by putting Lady Audley beyond their reach. Harcourt Talboys – who literally embodies rigid British values – is uncomfortable with Robert's choice. He says, "it is not for me to blame you, Mr. Audley … for having smuggled this guilty woman out of the reach of justice, and thus, as I may say, paltered with the laws of your country! I can only remark that, had the lady fallen into *my* hand, she would have been very differently treated" (366). Harcourt Talboys is frightened by the fact that Lady Audley received no punishment by the cultural system of the country which she betrayed by transgressing so many "boundaries" in the first place. The failure of the British legal system to punish her points to the fact that the legal system's construct of itself as self-containing (and omnipotent) is a fiction, an idea the Establishment wouldn't want to consider.

But Robert's decision to use a legal framework for "containing" Lady Audley, without actually bringing his uncle's family affairs into a public court of law indicates his desire to suppress Lady Audley's transgressive text more than punish it openly. He, after all, shares the same family name with his uncle, and he doesn't want to tarnish his own

newly gained reputation as a "real" English gentleman for any reason.[42] Robert's gender transgressions, of course, are ultimately forgiven when he successfully works to "contain" the gender, legal and national transgressions of Lady Audley, his much more deviant foe. Any inklings of gender transgression are additionally forgiven when Robert marries Clara Talboys, thereby reinserting himself into that respected English social structure – the patriarchal family – where he becomes both husband and father.

[42] My chapter on Oscar Wilde elaborates on the hypocritical idea that reputation is an important factor in upholding one's gentlemanly status. "Posing as untarnished" is tantamount to being untarnished, just as "posing as bad" is the same as "being bad."

Chapter Two:
Sensation and Conversation in *Salem Chapel*, Margaret Oliphant's own Sensation Novel

In a 1856 *Blackwood's* article entitled "The Laws Concerning Women," Margaret Oliphant anonymously expresses her concern that opening up the possibility of divorce to British citizens is tantamount to the types of cultural revolution already discussed in my chapter on Mary Braddon, saying that

> it is not possible to permit those who have been man and wife to go forth to the world as separate units, uninjured in the failure of so vital an experiment. All *purity*, all certainty, all the sober and steadfast continuance which is the heart and strength of a nation, are periled by such a possibility (382 italics mine).[43]

This comment suggests that the British nation is at risk if divorce is allowed as a social option, that somehow a social system that "permit[s] … man and wife to go forth … as separate units" can taint the "purity" of the British nation. After all, the laws decreeing the indissolubility of the marital bond and coincidentally, "the peace of families" ensure "the safe foundation of the social world" (382).

Not surprisingly, in rhetoric which echoes that which Oliphant later employs in blaming dangerous sensation fiction on a foreign Other, in a second article published in

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[43] It should be noted that most of Oliphant's criticism in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* – a journal for which she wrote for 45 years – was published anonymously, including all of her articles cited in this dissertation and even *Salem Chapel*, the novel examined in this chapter. This anonymity, as I will argue later on, is one reason that her writing persona, though seemingly rigid, can flex when she moves from non-fiction to fiction.

1858, Oliphant cites the dangerous contaminating concept of divorce as emanating from outside of England, particularly coming from France and America. In this article, written just two years after the previous commentary and one year after the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act was passed, she says,

> True, it has not been a hundred years yet since the French Revolution, which was a fiercer overthrow of all the artificial amenities of life than that which the barbarians of the North carried to all the ancient empires of the world; and since it is still a shorter time since all the Continental kingdoms trembled to the echoes of a conqueror's progress, and surrendered for a moment their very identity to make tributary crowns for his relations and dependents. *But among ourselves*, at least, there has been no such catastrophe – the evils of civilization have counteracted themselves without any violent disturbance of the national life. (140 italics mine)

This passage, which evokes clear imagery about revolution, seems to descry any social changes which will "disturb" the complacency of modern British life. She further continues that now, "civilization among us stands at the bar to be judged by domestic juries, for offenses against the social economy" and "in the present case, the complainants are women." Oliphant's public position here echoes that in her other article on divorce: "special instances" of marital strife and/or abuse still don't justify allowing divorce or as she says it, "change the current altogether "(141).

Yet, in 1863, shortly after the publication of these two articles, as well as shortly on the heels of Mary Braddon's publication of *Lady Audley's Secret*, Oliphant published

Salem Chapel, her own sensation novel that recounts the mystery of a transgressive wifely character who eschews the dominant "social text" of England by leaving her abusive husband, writing and living under a new identity as a way to secrete her teenaged daughter from the clutches of her abusive father. Aside from supporting the clear messages around the dangerous and contaminating influence that this transgressive figure might be supposed to represent by looking at Oliphant's rhetoric regarding marital problems, divorce and the necessity of keeping the public representations of British domesticity "sane," "clean" and "pure," the novel seems sympathetic towards its "heroine's" plight.[44] In many senses, the "heroine" of the novel, Rachel Hilyard, is a "fiction-maker" like Lady Audley; her creation of a new fictional identity similarly provides an "out" for her in a system which legally offers no options for a woman who needs to protect her child from an abusive and overbearing husband who has the legal right to custody of his daughter no matter what his actions. As in *Lady Audley's Secret*, the character who creates her own legal text for herself, Mrs. Hilyard, happens to be tracked down by a male character, who, like Robert Audley, becomes interested in the sensational narrative that the mysterious female character represents. Like Robert Audley, Mr. Vincent makes use of his contact with Mrs. Hilyard and her sensational text as a way to improve his life's trajectory. Though both male characters invoke the law as ways to "contain" the dangerous "alternative social texts" represented by the women they follow, both ultimately go outside of the legal system for their final "containment" solutions. But unlike Robert, who uses sensation as a vehicle for reinstituting himself as

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[44] "Heroine" is a loaded term here, since the novel is written from the third person limited omniscient perspective of Mr. Vincent, a small-town minister and male voyeur of the Mrs. Hilyard story. But the interest of the novel primarily lies with the mystery that Mrs. Hilyard's domestic circumstances provoke.

the gentlemanly ideal, Mr. Vincent uses the sensational text of Mrs.Hilyard as a vehicle by which to "free" himself from the shackles which the social and legal texts of Britain place on him as a gentleman and small town pastor.

Though Oliphant's novel comes to readers through the limited omniscient narration of Mr. Vincent and also seems to chart his growth and awareness, the most interesting figure of the novel is clearly Mrs. Hilyard. Though the formal structure of the novel doesn't outwardly position her in the "primary" narrative of the novel, Mrs. Hilyard and her sensational plotline are the most compelling parts of Oliphant's narrative. Mrs. Hilyard's story exposes potential problems which may be hidden within the Victorian family structure, and it exposes the idea that the Establishment has faulty ideas about how its laws "contain," control or prevent husbandly depravity. The idea that families are the bulwark of Victorian society hinges on the notion that family members behave according to the guidelines for behavior which the law indicates that they do. In this way of thinking, all gentlemen are naturally and adequately suited to be husbands and all who do marry are capable of emotionally and monetarily supporting their wives.

Margaret Oliphant's novel, therefore, clearly demonstrates the idea that there are faultlines in the notion that Victorian families should be kept together at all costs. Her novel, written on the heels of debates surrounding the institution of the 1839 Infant Custody Act and the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act clearly articulates the idea that recent legal changes still don't represent the frustrating realities of many British women. At the same time, however, the novel suggests disturbing conservative messages about the need for people to remain married despite the outrageousness of their own personal circumstances, when it reinserts Mrs. Hilyard back into her traditional, yet

abusive and contentious relationship with her husband at the narrative's end. The proximity of *Salem Chapel's* publication to that of Braddon's text (which Oliphant descried resoundingly), the subject matter of her novel, as well as the manner in which the narrative is told bring into question Oliphant's sincerity in her earlier articles about divorce and possible taints to the English nation.

There remain several possibilities as to why Oliphant would have chosen to write about social issues that she publicly descries as inappropriate for representation in Victorian fiction,[45] and why her novel seems somewhat sympathetic when she undergoes this representation. One reason could be that Oliphant changed her mind between writing the pieces about the "Condition of Women," "The Laws of Women" and *Salem Chapel*. Yet, we must remember that Oliphant also writes conservatively about how sensation fiction has served to taint British realist fiction just a few years after *Salem Chapel's* publication. If Oliphant feels that divorce is as "monstrous and unnatural," as she makes it seem in her *Blackwood's* articles (79: 379), then it seems that she would've been less sympathetic towards Mrs. Hilyard's character or perhaps cast her as the female villain when she later retaliates against her husband's cruelty by attempting to murder him. If the regular social script of England doesn't allow for domestic abuse or cruelty in marriage, then it seems that the story of a woman creatively attempting to deal with this aberrant possibility wouldn't be of interest to a writer like Oliphant, who seems that she's

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[45] Readers will be reminded of Oliphant's comment, already mentioned in the Introduction of this project, that respectable English novels need to represent Victorian society as it *really is* and keep the subject matter "the purest of English daylight." ("Novels" 102: 76).

trying to promote and "contain" the conservative status quo through her writing.[46] It seems then that the public representations that Margaret Oliphant gives out of herself in her non-fiction are much more complex. Despite Margaret Oliphant's very public objections to Mary Braddon and the entire sensation genre, *Salem Chapel* seems to indicate that sensational disruptions and/or invasions can be both positive and negative, that though revolutions like sensation are to be feared, they are also sometimes useful. Despite Oliphant's public declamations against sympathizing with women's issues or the social need for laws to change to rectify their situations – equality, she says "is the mightiest of humbugs" (79: 145) – Oliphant's novel ends up complicating and exploring the very cultural anxieties that her other writings claim are much more simplified.

Sensational Disruptions and Mr. Vincent's Re-reading of Private Life

Salem Chapel begins as a third person limited omniscient narrative about a Low Church minister who has delusions of grandeur about his new position in the small town of Carlingford. Because of his "ignorance to the real world" (he's just graduated), Mr. Vincent "naturally project[s] himself into the highest [social] sphere within his reach" and imagines himself consorting with the rich, even though most of his congregation is working-class. In short, though Mr. Vincent has been schooled to believe that "the Nonconforming portion of the English public was *the party of progress*, that the eyes of the world were turned upon the Dissenting interest," readers soon learn that his seemingly revolutionary principles are motivated more by self interest than genuine interest in social

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[46] After all, Oliphant also says that she detests the "picturesque and attractive" focus given to "women's wrongs in literature" and claims that "any real redress of their grievances" against men "would do more harm to the literary world than it would do good to the feminine" (79: 379).

change. Mr. Vincent's primary interest in being a minister – even though he tells himself otherwise – is "to make for himself a position of the highest influence in his new sphere," and instead of enjoying the "humble pretensions," he bemoans the fact that his "flock" is so ordinary and "low" (5-6 italics mine). Though he starts out optimistically, he learns quickly to dread and resist the tedious social duties incumbent upon him. For example, Mr. Vincent worries: will he be obliged to visit the dreaded poulterer's family despite his loathing their company? Will he be able to avoid the unwanted infatuation of Phoebe Tozer? Is there any way for him to consort with more High Society folks (most of whom are not Dissenters or of his parish), without being excoriated by his parishioners? In short, will Mr. Vincent be obliged to participate in social vagaries more irritating than he imagined when he trained to be a minister at Homerton?

Mr. Vincent's seemingly banal life, however, soon becomes disrupted when he encounters, separately, two mysterious women: the first of these is Lady Western, a fair young moneyed dowager, who he idealizes exceedingly and with whom he imagines a fairy tale-like relationship, even though the Lady is far above Vincent's social class and possible aspirations. The second is Mrs. Hilyard, a single seamstress of indeterminate social status, who lives in Back Street Grove and seems to have a mysterious past. As the narrator tells us "womankind in general, which had never entered his thoughts before had produced much trouble to poor Arthur Vincent since his arrival in Carlingford" (35).

Mr. Vincent has not yet spoken with Lady Western when he sees her on the street and forms his first impression of her. In his mind, Lady Western is a

> beautiful dazzling creature, resplendent in the sweetest English roses. Though it was but for a moment, the bewildered young minister had time

> to note the dainty foot, the daintier hand, the smiling sunshiny eyes, the air of conscious supremacy … He scarcely asked himself who was that beautiful vision? The fact that her existence was at the moment too overpowering for any second inquiries. He had seen her and lo! the universe was changed. The air tingled softly with the sound of the prancing horses and rolling wheels, the air breathed and irresistible soft perfume, which could nevermore die out of it. The air rustled with the silken throb thrill of those womanly robes. There she had enthroned herself – not in his startled heart, but in the palpitating world, which formed in a moment's time into one great background and framework for that beatific form … What the poor young man had done to be suddenly assailed and carried off his feet by this wonderful and unexpected apparition, we are unable to say. He seemed to have done nothing to provoke it; approaching quietly as any man might do, pondering grave thoughts of Salem Chapel, and how he was to make his post tenable, to be transfixed all at once and unawares by that fairy lance, was a spite of fortune which nobody could have predicted. But the thing was done … Wherever he lifted his eyes, was not She there, all-conquering and glorious? When he did not lift his eyes, was not she everywhere Lady Paramount of the conscious world? … Who was She? (34-5).

From this moment on, Vincent constantly dreams of meeting, speaking and relating to Lady Western. When he sees her on the street, he acts like a giddy school boy, "dreaming dreams as wild as any Arabian tale," and knowing that "silent adoration,

speechless homage … could not affront a queen. (60, 63). Despite the fact that his congregation sees Lady Western as "out of [Mr. Vincent's] line," (43) and "a lady that is too grand for her place" (41), he's thrilled to be invited to one of Lady Western's garden parties and continues to describe her in fairy tale-like terms throughout, imagining himself on "a road in Fairyland instead of a lane in Carlingford." He figures himself along with "Her" as "Beauty and Love, [the] perennial hero and heroine of the romance that never ends" and has a "vain floating idea in his mind that "triumph of any kind is inevitable" in an imagined love relationship with her (60). Vincent soon realizes, however, that being invited to Lady Western's "Bower of Bliss" (i.e. going to her tea party) doesn't really afford him the kind of status, inclusion and acceptance that he desires. Rather than being an introduction into an accepting and appreciative upper-class society circle, the invitation only serves as a formal kindness which she extends to multiple visitors, most of which to whom Vincent, as a lowly Dissenting minister outside of their upper-class social sphere can't relate. He learns instead that "Society was … cruel or repulsive or severely exclusive, but simply did not know him or could not make out who he was … no link of connection existed between him and this little world of unknown people except himself (72-3). Though he yearns for Lady Western's companionship, Mr. Vincent soon learns that he will never fully assimilate into her social circle. The message here is conservative; it enforces strict societal boundaries between the higher and lower-classes, and the public and private spheres. Just as Mr. Vincent has been disinterested in assimilating with his parishioners that occupy the social class beneath him, except for a superficial way, Lady Western's universe remains closed to Mr. Vincent.

The second disruption in the preacher's ordinary life, however, that of Mrs. Hilyard's, functions very differently. Mr. Vincent's encounters with Mrs. Hilyard end up drawing him into a mysterious scandal in a way that makes Mr. Vincent a fully integrated character involved in a sensational mystery that ends up opening up "the dark ocean of life" for him, and exposing its more "real" narrative to him. From the beginning, we can see Mrs. Hilyard as an outsider: she comes to the Chapel regularly, but sits in the back, keeping to herself. Her character – "who or what she was … [and] how she came there" (23) – is shrouded in mystery and secrecy. When Mr. Vincent first goes to her home to meet her, he is awed by the "worn woman … [who] … looked over the dark world of her own experience … of which he knew nothing" (22). On a second visit, he's intrigued by her intimations of "dangerous strangers" possibly lurking in the vicinity of his family neighborhood (59). But the mystery surrounding her really erupts – as does the specter of mystery bleeding into other aspects of life beyond Mrs. Hilyard – when Mr. Vincent catches her out wandering at eleven o'clock on a cold January night. On a night which is admittedly spooky – the skies are black and the light of the lamps gleams "dismally … with a certain squalid power of reflection" – Mr. Vincent is very "excited" and "curious" to see

> a female figure … [coming] slowly up, dimming out the reflections on the wet stones as it crossed one streak of the lamplight after another … He recognized Mrs. Hilyard instinctively as she came forward, walking, strange woman as she was, with the air of a person walking by choice at that melancholy hour, She was evidently not going anywhere: her step was firm and distinct, like the step of a person thoroughly self-possessed

> and afraid of nothing – but it lingered with a certain meditative sound in the steady firm footfall. Vincent felt a kind of conviction that she had come out here to think over some problem of that mysterious life into which he could not penetrate … To his roused fancy, some incomprehensible link existed between himself and the equally incomprehensible woman before him (87-8).

Like the wandering women in Collins' *The Woman in White* and Coleridge's Christabel,[47] Mrs. Hilyard's night perambulations clearly represent some transgressive force which extends outside of the normal realm of accepted idealized gender roles for women. As has been well-documented, women who left their homes unescorted, particularly at such clandestine-seeming times of night – were considered up to no good. Their actions were considered scandalous and/or sexualized. In the above quote, Mrs. Hilyard is particularly transgressive because she is "evidently not going anywhere" – not only is she a wanderer, but she is "walking by choice," with "a step firm and distinct, like the step of a person thoroughly self-possessed and afraid of nothing" (88). In an era where women were not expected to have any kind of personal autonomy, a woman doing so out in the open is very provocative. It is Mrs. Hilyard's wanderings that initially draw Mr. Vincent into her mystery, awakening bodily sensations within himself and deepening the possibilities of sensationalism. The episode of the wandering woman gets Vincent

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[47] This scenario reminds me in particular of the moment in Collins' *Woman in White* when Walter Hartwright encounters Ann Catherick wandering alone at night and is startled when the woman reaches out and touches him. The moment jumpstarts Hartwright's interest in the mystery of the wandering character – "he is startled by the suddenness … of the extraordinary apparition" who seems to have "sprung from the earth or dropped from heaven" (15). The character of Anne Catherick clearly disrupts Hartwright's reality. It also serves as a key moment of "bodily sensation."

thinking of "evil creatures pondering in the dark, vile schemes against the innocent." He admits that "in such a dark night as this, with such wet gleams on the streets, when I see people at a distance, I always think of something uncomfortable happening" (91).

Before the above incident with Mrs. Hilyard, Mr. Vincent believes the commonly held notion that British homes are immune to evil intrusions. He doesn't allow himself to accept the idea that home can be unsafe, that mysteries actually occur underneath the fabric of daily life. Middle-class British homes, after all, cannot be holders of secrets. But somehow, the above incident changes Mr. Vincent's sentiments. Within pages of viewing his wandering parishioner, Mr. Vincent has to talk himself out of "vague but alarming" sensations and an "indefinite terror" regarding the respectable intentions of his sister Susan's fiancé (whom he's never met, since his sister resides with his mother in another village) (96):

> What danger could threaten Susan? He consoled himself with the thought that these were not the days of abductions or violent love-making. To think of an English girl in her mother's house as threatened with mysterious danger, such as might have surrounded a heroine of the last century was impossible … No mysterious horror, no whispering doubtful gloom, surrounded that house from which the pure, full daylight atmosphere, untouched by any darkness, breathed fresh upon him [Mr. Vincent] out of these simple pages [of his mother's letter giving concerns about the respectability of Susan's fiancé]. Here, in this humble virtuous world, were no mysteries ... Whatever fate might be lingering in the wild

> darkness of that January house, it was not on the threshold of his mother's house. (96- 7)

The above quote is particularly significant in light of Oliphant's mantra about English novels needing to provide the "purest of English daylight," that respectable novels should reveal "real" Victorian society *as it is,* that is to say, they don't imply secrets or reprehensible behavior on the part of the characters. It is also interesting in light of the Archbishop of York's negative comment that sensation novels reveal skeletons in the closet, that they convince people that "their easy-looking neighbor had in his breast a secret story to conceal" (9). The above quote describes just such a mystery, the horror of which is that it's infiltrated the sanctity of a respectable Victorian household, an extreme irony since Oliphant was a major detractor of sensation fiction herself.

Though Mr. Vincent is temporarily able to dismiss the fears of "uncomfortable happenings" and unwanted mystery which Mrs. Hilyard evokes in her perambulations, his abilities to do so soon completely disappear when Mr. Vincent receives incontrovertible proof that evil does exist in the provincial town of Carlingford when he overhears a violent private argument between Mrs. Hilyard and a mysterious figure who he soon learns is Colonel Mildmay. This conversation makes apparent the fact that Hilyard and Mildmay are married though estranged and that Mrs. Hilyard has secretly taken their shared daughter away to get her out of Mildmay's abusive reach. Mr. Vincent listens to this conversation in horror, as he overhears Mrs. Hilyard's threat to kill her husband if he should try to track the daughter down: "if you should ever succeed in tracing her – if you should ever be able to snatch her from me – then confess your sins, and say your last prayers, for as sure as you live you will die in a week" (107). There is

no confusion that this conversation involves revelations about "actual" incidents of domestic abuse and violence; it, therefore, irrevocably changes Mr. Vincent's notions about the capacity for secrets and evil doings in his seemingly provincial small town. The very way with which the omniscient narrator describes the scenes in which the mysteries are revealed emphasizes sensation and Mr. Vincent's bodily absorption and adoption of it. For example, the narrator describes Mr. Vincent's response thus: "There was a pause – something like a hard sob thrilled in the air, rather a *vibration.* Shortly thereafter, the air *palpitat[es]* with a cry" (107 italics mine). The description of the unveiling of the mystery in terms of vibrations and palpitations alludes to the measure of bodily shock which Mr Vincent, as eavesdropper, feels about the nature of the secret and underhanded behaviors buried beneath the veneer of respectability in his society. As I've noted in previous discussions, sensationalism always seems closely allied with bodily reactions. This time, when Mr. Vincent's heart "palpitates," the conversation has a profound effect on Mr. Vincent's sensibilities, arousing in him new feelings of distrust about people, and causing him to relinquish his once solid notions about middle-class respectability. The above sensationalized episode provides the foregrounding for the even greater personal danger when this same man abducts his sister with false wiles. From this point on, "that dark and secret ocean of life … opened up to [Mr. Vincent] immediately thereafter one of its most mysterious scenes" (114).

Mrs. Hilyard's actions and protective role here reflect the fears that contemporary lawmakers' had in response a number of years earlier to the passing of the Infant Custody Bill of 1839: Karen Chase and Michael Levenson cite a critique of the Bill published by John Kemble in the 1838 *British and Foreign Review* as saying that

> it was the most immoral and unconstitutional bill that was ever attempted to be carried through the Parliament of this country … If there was any dangerous or revolutionary measure, the Custody of Infants' Bill is one; not the less dangerous because cunningly veiled.

Kemble also refers to the French Revolution and the fall of the Roman Empire as precedents in his critique, which suggests cultural revolution, a disintegration of the British family and by synecdoche, the British nation would be an immanent result of such a societal change (42). Any rights gained by women – including the ability to divorce their husbands or retain custody of children under age seven – raised the specter of cultural revolution. As Anna Dzirkalis says in her unpublished dissertation, the Bill was fearful because of its

> potential destruction of the family; many believed that if mothers were guaranteed the right of access to their children, they would no longer be compelled to remain in their roles as wives/mothers/queens of the domestic realm. The logical consequence of the Infant Custody Bill, in their estimation, would be a kind of mass exodus on the part of mothers everywhere – the full-scale abandonment that many feared would necessarily result in the corruption and degradation of the former moral arbiters of the home.

It is significant to note that Oliphant herself was suspicious of the sentiments surrounding child custody issues and the ways that this issue was complicated by divorce options, calling "the present state of affairs … frightful, cruel and intolerable" (380). Part of the reason that Oliphant objects to divorce is that it provides no "natural" expedient for

which parent should get the children. In her opinion, "the native right of father and of mother is as equal as it is inseparable [with] … no mode of deciding between them save that expedient of King Solomon's which it would be hard to put into practice" (382). The only real justice, in her opinion, is that children become wards of the State. Judging from Oliphant's published diatribes against divorce, Mrs. Hilyard's abandoning of her marital relationship by hiding her daughter from her husband would seem bad, since no parent naturally has more rights to child custody of his or her children than the other. Yet, in this case, the narrative still seems to be sympathetic towards Mrs. Hilyard rather than vilifying her for her actions.

Whether we read Mrs. Hilyard positively or negatively, as abandoner of the marital bond, she embodies revolution in that she symbolizes a threat to the accepted patriarchal systems upon which middle-class British respectability is based and literally serves as a symbol for sensation.[48] Mrs. Hilyard is a woman of many secrets: she hides the fact that she and her husband are separated by living in an obscure back road, she hides her actions of taking her daughter from her husband by sending her out of town with a governess and – in her ultimate crime – she hides the fact that she has tried to murder her husband for taking back her beloved child. From the beginning, we can see Mrs. Hilyard as a subversive force, and her subversive potential remains until the novel's end.

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[48] Marlene Tromp shares my view that Mrs. Hilyard symbolizes sensation, saying that her function in the text is to commit "the unspeakable acts of sensationalism," and in so doing, "redefine the possibilities for behavior." (183), but her argument focuses on the violence that Mr. Vincent begins to take on as he absorbs the possibilities that Mrs. Hilyard's narrative begins to suggest to him. That is to say, she has a negative reading of the sensation trajectory for all characters involved. Tromp seems to suggest that Mr. Vincent learns abusive behaviors via his contact with the sensation script.

After such a shocking encounter, therefore, it is not surprising that Mr. Vincent begins to embody a suspicious approach to daily life. He also begins to abandon his idealistic notions that he can live a fairy tale existence where he bases his expectations on the "flattering implications" about High Society put out in "public writing" (5). Mr. Vincent's overhearing of Mrs. Hilyard's tragedy makes him question domestic arrangements in his own family circle. Shortly thereafter, Vincent's earlier suspicions concerning the intentions of his sister Susan's fiancé do, in fact, seem to be further corroborated when Mr. Vincent receives an anonymous letter announcing some untoward information.[49] It appears that Mr. Fordham (Susan's intended), intends to commit bigamy by marrying Susan. The anonymous letter – sent to Vincent's mother – is worded as such:

> Madam – Though I am but a poor man, I can't abear to see wrong going on, and do nothink to stop it. Madam, I beg of you to excuse me, as am unknown to you, and as can't sign my honest name to it like a man. This is the only way as I can give you a word of warning. Don't let the young lady marry him as she's agoing to, not if her heart should break first. Don't have nothink to do with Mr. Fordham. That's not his right name, as he has got a wife living – and this I say is true, as sure as I have to answer at the judgment; – and I say to you as a friend. Stop it, stop it! Don't let it go on a step, if you vally the young lady's character and life. I don't add

[49] This trend of the anonymous letter seems typical of much fiction which I categorize as sensational, including the last minute letter breaking up Jane and Rochester's marriage in *Jane Eyre*, the anonymous letters appearing in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*. All of the above texts serve to disrupt, to evoke revolutions in the households into which they intrude.

> no more, because that's all I dare say, being only a servant; but I hope it's enough to save the poor young lady out of his clutches, as is a man that goeth about seeking whom he may devour. – From a well-wisher, though.
>
> A.STRANGER (124)

The intrusion of the above letter-text as "truth" is significant, because its arrival makes Mr. Vincent distrust his earlier notions that nothing tragic can happen in England. The letter, like Mrs. Hilyard, is itself a disruptive force and a sensational text invading the "normalcy" of regular English domesticity. It uses the dramatic language of sensation – "stop it …if you vally the young lady's character and life" – to cause its readers to have heightened emotions. The letter is a transgressive act on many different levels: in one sense, it "creates" reality before this reality can be confirmed or denied by its recipient. It is also transgressive because as a sensation novel substitute, it literally represents the "invasion of the literature of the kitchen into the drawing room" of which many reviewers were fearful; it is written by a servant, yet is given authority when the middle-class Mr. Vincent accepts its message ("Sensation Novelists: Mrs. Braddon" *North* 204). The letter is also significant in the ways that it reveals anxieties about language; the writer here chooses to remain anonymous out of presumed fear for his or her job situation. The letter seems to imply that if the servant had revealed his or her identity, that the above communication would, therefore, seem more suspect. In many ways, the seemingly semi-literate nature of the letter's author gives it more credibility. After all, it seems that only urgent circumstances would require someone with limited writing capabilities to use them. As Mr. Vincent says, the letter "had every appearance of being genuine in its bad writing and doubtful spelling" (133). The cultural effect of this written text is that a

seemingly newfound literacy from a working-class individual is capable of controlling the truth. In addition, the letter invokes the specter of bigamy, which we now know to be of common concern in sensation novels[50]

The significance of Mr.Vincent's piqued interest and his eventual physical involvement in both Mrs. Hilyard's and Susan's mysteries is that these events have a revolutionary effect on the ways Mr. Vincent comports himself as minister. As the minister begins to get involved in the sensational narrative, he becomes consumed with the thrill of finding out the next "chapter" of the mystery and before long, begins physically to embody, enact and spread sensationalism himself. According to its critics, sensation is partly considered dangerous because it blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, making fiction literally become true life. And shortly after he is exposed to sensationalism by eavesdropping on Mrs. Hilyard, Mr. Vincent begins to inject sensationalism into his reality. The first such instance occurs when Mr. Vincent entertains his congregation with an unconventionally and intentionally melodramatic sermon:

> He bade them to remember the dark night which enclosed that town … of those dark streets and houses which hid so many lives and hearts and tragic histories he enlarged upon Mrs. Hilyard's idea of the sentiment of 'such a night,' till timid people threw glances between them, and some sensitive mothers paused to wonder whether the minister could have heard that Tommy had fallen into the fire, or Mary scalded herself, and took this

[50] Bigamy is, of course, also a big theme in *Jane Eyre*, another novel which Oliphant considers dangerous. A deeper analysis of bigamy plots – and why they were considered dangerous – occurs in my Braddon chapter of this dissertation.

> way to break the news. The speech was the strangest that was ever listened to at a tea-party. It was the wayward capricious pouring forth of a fanciful young mind under an unquiet influence … The consequence was that it was listened to with breathless interest—that the faces grew pale and the eyes bright, and shivers of restrained emotion ran through the astonished audience … [W]ith a sudden amusement [he] proceeded to deepen his colours and make bolder strokes of effect. His success was perfect; before he concluded, he had in imagination dismissed the harmless Salem people out of their very innocent recreation to the dark streets which thrilled around them – to the world of unknown life, of which each man for himself had some knowledge – to the tragedies that might be going side by side with them, for aught they knew. His hearers drew a long breath when it was over. They were startled, frightened, enchanted. If they had been witnessing a melodrama, they could scarcely have been more excited. (102-3)

In the above sermon, Mr. Vincent preaches unconventionally. His sermon this time is different from his previous ones; in it, instead of delivering a dry, staid and serious sermon, he evokes sensational language as a way to entertain his congregation. His sermon here is more about "amusement," "colour" and "bold effects" than it is about teaching a morally edifying lesson. In fact, Mr. Vincent's performance, literally allows him to become the author of his own sensationalism here. Yet, when Mr. Vincent reflects on the sermon after the event, it is clear that he has mixed emotions since he experiences "a sensation of mingled self-reproach and amusement." His success at "introducing a

certain uneasiness into the lively atmosphere of the tea-party meeting" is tempered with delight at "his own cleverness" for arranging it so successfully (103). His mixed emotions point to the unconventionality and possible immorality inherent in his word choices.

The idea of a preacher using sensationalist techniques strictly for effect is especially important in light of Anthony Trollope's position that nineteenth-century novels have "taken the place of sermon-writing" in the ways that they instruct their readership (114). In this situation, the obverse seems to have happened: the sermon seems to have taken on the role of providing sensation. In fact, Henry Mansel, one of Oliphant's compatriots in condemning sensation fiction is horrified that this fiction "preaches to the nerves" (482), which is exactly what Mr. Vincent seems to embody here. If we consider this statement in conjunction with Trollope's notion that British realist novels have become instructional substitutes for sermonizing, the fact that Oliphant's novel literally embodies this principle – via the character of Mr. Vincent, a preacher who adopts sensationalist techniques in his sermons – is very significant.

Mr. Vincent, through his sermon and other behaviors from this point on in the novel, therefore, embodies sensation fiction by literally inhabiting the sensationalist plot. As we have seen, critics of sensation fiction were concerned that reading it would promote inquiries into the sanctity of middle-class Victorian households. The blurring of fiction and reality, however, becomes much more tangible when Mr. Vincent physically takes on the role of detective in order to save his sister from possible supposed disgrace. In his first investigative foray, Mr. Vincent attempts to confront his sister's seemingly dishonorable suitor, but he's unable to do so because he discovers that this man, Mr.

Fordham, has left a false address. Vincent's further discoveries that his sister's intended has stolen someone else's identity embroil him deeper into the mystery. Mr. Vincent's motives seem honorable on the surface – he's trying to save his sister's reputation – but in his role as detective, Mr. Vincent feels enlivened more than he ever has before, somehow more "real," and in many ways, Mr. Vincent begins to delve into mysteries beyond that of locating his sister as he becomes aware that his sister's kidnapper has also kidnapped Mrs. Hilyard's daughter. As the narrator says, "Nature awoke and yearned in" Mr. Vincent as he begins to embark on his voyage into solving the double mystery (131). After meeting up with the "violence and passion" of Mrs. Hilyard, Mr. Vincent believes he's perched "on the verge of life" (110). Mr. Vincent's drawing into the mystery seems somehow beyond himself, somehow fatalistic; though he certainly experiences feelings of dread, the narrator tells us that "the capricious fairy played, touching all his anxious thoughts with thrills and sweetness. It seemed an action involuntary to himself, and over which he had no power; but it gave the young (Mr. Vincent) an equally involuntary and careless cheer and comfort (134). He says "What is to be done I must do – and without a moments loss of time" (130), without thinking of the social consequences of abandoning trivial-seeming duties with his "flock." Because he is concerned about public scandal, he makes no efforts to share his secrets with anyone in his congregation (how could he? A respectable English gentleman should have no secrets lurking within his breast!). What Mr. Vincent fails to realize is that his away-from-the-pulpit detective work will likely create an even worse type of distance between him and his congregation.

Arthur's mother, Mrs. Vincent, is different, however, since she realizes the importance of her son hanging onto social decorum as a way to stave off rumors about his

lagging responsibilities. She knows her "duty," including what will be "said by all the connection , when it [is] known that the minister's mother had been in Carlingford without going to see anybody," saying "I know what gossip is in a congregation" (161, 127). And she tries to impress the need for social decorum on her son when she says, "your duty to your flock is above your duty, even to your sister … a minister's family ought to be very careful … I know how little a thing makes mischief in a congregation" (165, 168). She therefore, encourages her son to stave off seeking his sister's kidnapper until after Sunday, when he will preach the first of his promised lecture series. In this sense, Mrs. Vincent serves as the voice of reason, and by extension, the voice of realism. She tries to make sure that Mr. Vincent stays on track with his ministerial duties, because that is his role in life, even though doing so might seem mentally unreasonable at a time of extreme emotional anguish. She knows that her son will begin to lose ground with his congregation if he does not submit to necessary social traditions, such as having regular teas with each of the deacons and prominent families in his church.[51] And Mrs. Vincent is correct: once Arthur begins to pursue a sensational trajectory rather than attending to his "real" duties at home (at least from his mother's and the community's perspective),

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[51]Mrs. Vincent consistently tries to draw attention away from the sensational scandal surrounding their family by putting on a "normal" social face even as the crisis occurs. For example, in one scene, she tries to distract a servant who has entered the room during a family conference by mentioning a smoking lamp. In another, she tries to get her son to take tea immediately after he returns empty-handed from his first foray seeking Susan's abductor. The interchanges between Vincent and his mother on these occasions highlight the vastly different worlds the two occupy in terms of their pivotal concerns in life. Vincent's negative reactions on these occasions – "To think you should talk about the lamp at such a time, or notice at all, indeed, if it smoked like fifty chimneys … this is a matter of life or death" and "If the world were breaking up, I suppose women would still drink tea!" (190) – indicate how clueless he is to the ways that Carlingford society will judge him if he breaches social custom. Mrs. Vincent's attention to such details highlights the importance provincial society will place upon Vincent's seemingly rash and disruptive behavior in leaving town for any pursuit.

rumors begin to fly, the minister's reputation founders, and people begin to consider ousting their once beloved minister because of his perceived straying from his devotions. At this point in the novel, he is more detective than minister, which means that sensational activities have begun to subsume his life.

As we've already seen, Mr. Vincent is fascinated by Mrs. Hilyard throughout the narrative. Yet, even though Mr. Vincent's detective work ostensibly focuses on finding his sister Susan's kidnapper, in many ways Mr. Vincent continues to be drawn through the mystery by an interest in finding out how Mrs. Hilyard will proceed in avenging her kidnapped daughter. In fact, like Robert Audley, also a reader of sensation fiction, Mr. Vincent seems to be "driven" by inexorable forces larger than himself to discover the precise way that Mrs. Hilyard's "story" will end (and he seems more interested in finding this information out than in serving justice himself or stopping a distressed parishioner from committing a crime). At various points in the narrative, we see Mr. Vincent trailing after this woman, considering with "dread calmness" whether "she had started already on this mission of violence?" (163). And even though Vincent knows her intentions full well, he does nothing to stop them, even when Mrs. Hilyard reavows her intent directly to him in the following comment: "if you ever see me again, I shall be a famous woman, Mr. Vincent. You will have a little of the trail of my glory, and be able furnish details in my later days" (193). As his distressed parishoner's comment suggests, Mr. Vincent himself may play a role in Mrs. Hilyard's own "sensation novel" if he does not interfere. By lying back and letting her go, he can "have a little of" her "trail of glory" by filling in the missing dramatic "details" once her deeds are discovered. But he has to follow her to see how her story unfolds. Therefore, like a reader of sensation fiction, Mr. Vincent

follows Mrs. Hilyard around, frightened, yet fascinated by the possibilities which she – a professed intentional murderess – represents. But as a "writer" of sensation fiction, Mr. Vincent is still somewhat paralyzed; that is to say, he is unable to alter the course of the sensational narrative.

Part of what fascinates Mr. Vincent about Mrs. Hilyard appears to be a horror-filled respect with the fact that she avows to accomplish emotions and actions presumably felt by many Victorian citizens but not typically expressed or acted upon.[52] Like Lady Audley, Mrs. Hilyard represents a mysterious "alternative social reality" in the ways that she "writes" solutions to her problems outside of accepted social scripts for behavior.[53] Mr. Vincent himself, a presumably rational clergyman, has shown in several moments that he harbors angry thoughts (for example, at one moment, he laments that the "cursed villain" Mildmay is "Not dead" and snarls that "he shall render me an account!"[296]) but he certainly has no intention of acting on these desires to harm his sister's kidnapper physically. But facing Mrs. Hilyard stalking Mildmay makes Vincent realize that he must be experiencing these emotions himself:

> To see her dogging his steps, with her relentless promise in her steps, with the relentless promise in her eyes, overwhelmed Vincent, who a moment

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[52] In her study entitled *Victorian Murderesses: A True History of Thirteen Respectable French and English Women Accused of Unspeakable Crimes,* Mary Hartman discovers that women murderers were "especially sensitive to problems and tensions which were common to a large number of middle-class households" (2). In this case, Mrs. Hilyard represents the emotions felt by wives in abusive relationships.

[53] In defying the social text, Mrs. Hilyard represents what Nancy K. Miller calls a type of "implausible twist … of plot" that is common in women's writing. Such implausible plots are overt comments on the "theoretical indifference" of the masculine literary tradition to accommodate women's real experiences in writing. They are "a form of insistence about the relation of women to writing" and provide the "extravagant wish for a *story* that would turn out differently than reality" (39-40). Despite all of her invective against sensation fiction in non-fiction *Blackwood's* reviews, I believe that Oliphant wishes to use Mrs. Hilyard's resistant storyline as a less conspicuous way of impacting the realities concerning child custody issues.

> before had thrilled with all the rage of a man upon whom this villain had brought the direst shame and calamity. He could have dashed him under those wheels, plunged him into any mad destruction, in the first passionate whirl of his thoughts on seeing him again, but to see Her behind, following after – pale with her horrible composure, a conscious Death tracking his (Mildmay's) very steps – drove Vincent back with a sudden paralysing touch. He stood chilled and horror-stricken in the crowd, which watched and wondered at him: he … went and sat down on the nearest seat he could find, like a man who'd been stunned by some unexpected blow. He was not impatient when he heard how long he must wait before he could follow them. It was a relief to wait, to recover his breath, to realize his own position once more. That dreadful sight, diabolical and out of nature, had driven the very life-blood out of his heart (sic 228).

When Mr. Vincent does finally catch a glimpse of Mrs. Hilyard after her attempts to murder her kidnapping husband, her physical body serves as evidence of the crime that she has committed even before Mr. Vincent finds this out for a fact: "it was on (Mr. Vincent's) lips to ask "if anyone had committed a crime, but by glimpsing Mrs. Hilyard outside in the dark, he could see that "something had happened." Her face, "gleaming unconscious at the window, betrayed to him much more clearly than any confession, that some new and awful event had been added to that woman's strange experiences in life" (274). Ironically, no other characters seem able to read the "text" of Mrs. Hilyard's body with any success. Vincent, like Robert Audley, has unique insight into her character

because he himself is already a "character" in the sensational narrative surrounding her. For this reason, Colonel Mildmay's attack – he doesn't actually die – is inappropriately ascribed to Mr. Vincent's sister Susan, who is presumed to have tried to kill him in response to her abduction. The presumption of assigned guilt, as we will see in the chapter section below, is deeply connected to inaccurate newspaper accounts of the event and mis-readings of another "bodily text, " Susan's.

Newspapers as an Invasive Sensational Force

From all first appearances, Susan seems to be guilty of the murdering of Colonel Mildmay; after having escaped her abductor, she returns to Mr. Vincent's house in the dead of night bewildered and unable to explain what has happened since her abduction. Because of her mental state and the time of night, Susan's actions – also a wandering woman "reads" transgression – seem necessarily suspicious as does the fact that she is followed into the household by an accusing policeman (who has "authority" in charging her with murder because of his job title, even though there is no physical evidence linking her to the injured man). Though Susan is unable to speak for herself, the "facts" – the reading of her body and of her circumstances – seem proof enough for the *Carlingford Gazette* to report them as "truth" in the next day's paper. After all, what would a "fallen" woman have to lose by killing her ruiner? She already has no place in respectable Victorian society.

Susan's presumed guilt as accused murderess, as mentioned above, begins from several sources: one is a mis-reading of her body as "text," and the other is an invasion of this mis-reading into middle-class Carlingford households via that scurrilous purveyor

of sensationalized accounts: the Victorian newspaper. As critics have reminded us, sensation novels are often closely allied with lurid newspaper accounts of private lives.[54] And the newspaper in this novel literally functions as an invasion of sensation and un-truth into Carlingford households (further perpetuating the theme of revolution). The narrator describes Mr. Vincent's first awareness of this invasion thus:

> While he stood waiting in the lawyers' office, [Vincent] took up listlessly … the newspaper of the day. There he found the whole terrible tale made into a romance of real life, in which his sister's name, indeed, was withheld, but no other particular spared. As he stood wiping the heavy dew from his forehead, half frantic with rage and despair, the quick eye of his misery caught a couple of clerks in another corner of the office, talking over another newspaper, full of lively interest and excitement. It was Susan's story that interested them; the compiler had heightened with romantic details those hideous bare facts which had changed all his life, and made the entire world a chaos to Vincent; and all over the country by this time, newspaper readers were waking up into excitement about this new tale of love, revenge, and crime. (291)

In the above sequence, Mr. Vincent is hyperaware of the ignominy which he has to face from both his parishioners and other townspeople following the scandal represented in the newspaper. The story of "love, revenge, and crime" mentioned in the papers has the effect of destroying his household (and the concept of British nationhood with it).

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[54] The "low" association of cheap newspaper accounts is a theme in both *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as well, further cementing the connections between sensation and newspapers. My other chapters will, therefore, also touch upon this theme.

He is a minister after all, one whose parishioners expect will occupy a household unsullied by lurid romantic accounts. Like Dorian Gray's "poisonous book," the *Carlingford Gazette* holds the possibility of "poisoning" the town of Salem against the minister and his family. For this reason, his further encounters with copies of the newpaper have the effect of sending Mr. Vincent into a physical frenzy: when he sees another copy of the *Carlingford Gazette* "folded out so as to show the mysterious story of Miss –(his sister) … The poor minister took it in his hands with an impulse to tear it in pieces – to trample it underfoot – to give some outlet to the rage and indignation with which he [sees] his calamity turned into a romance for the amusement for the public" (295). His anxiety becomes even more heightened as he visualizes "all the places he [has] seen people gleaning information and amusement from" the paper: "how the little paper, generally so harmless, would amuse and excite his readers today! What surmises there would there be, and how soon the fatal knowledge would ooze out and be talked over on all sides … it was a ruin in every way to the poor young minister, whose credit and living depended solely on the caprice of his 'flock'" (295). In fact, "to have Susan's name exposed to such horrible publicity … almost disabled him from thought at all" (283). In all cases, the minister seems driven by the bodily sensations affiliated with emotional shock. Unlike the stereotypical man of reason, he finds it difficult to control his actions and be reserved (though his mother, ironically, fulfills this role more effectively).[55]

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[55]The above sequence reminds me of the Thomas Paine-like effect of political pamphlets containing radical idea which are associated with the beginnings of the American Revolution. Like the pamphlets, the sensationalized newspaper can work to spread rumor, fear and gossip in a society which ordinarily seems incapable of accepting any notion of scandal or secrets lurking beneath the veneer of respectability. So, in

But the sensationalized newspaper account of Susan's misfortunes seems to be so all powerful that it literally "becomes" the "truth" about her life more so than the actual facts of Susan's experience. The "hideous bare facts" (which we only learn later on are not based on facts at all) condemn his sister for being both a fallen woman and a murderess. The newspaper story has to be controverted in order for Susan to be saved. Making things worse is that fact that the sensational invasion seems to literally erupt into reality on Susan's body when, in a single episode, she regains consciousness enough to produce a shocking outburst which seems to corroborate the "truth" of the newspaper account:

> If they would only kill me! What do they mean to do with me? Oh, God, oh God! but I must marry him if he says so. I must, *must* marry him, though he has told me lies. I must, whatever, he does. Even if I could get through the window and escape, for they will call me wicked. Oh mamma, mamma! and Arthur a minister and to bring disgrace on *him!* But I am not disgraced. Oh no, no; never, never! I will die first – I will kill him first. Open the door; oh, open the door! Let me go! (298)

The above outburst seems, on the surface, suggestive of Susan's guilt as a murderess despite the fact that she is talking in her sleep and cannot tell her complete story. But what is even more interesting is the disruptive force that Susan's combative body, in its physical manifestation seems to take on during the above communications. Susan

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a sense, the newspaper here – and its coincident disruptive power – can be seen as causing a revolution in English domestic affairs. Like sensation novels and the inappropriate values that they seemingly project, newspapers have the power to cause a "revolution of domestic affairs" and threaten the natural-seeming tranquility of the Victorian middle-class lifestyle.

> struggled up in one of her wilder paroxysms. She had thrown herself half out of bed, rising up wildly, and tossing her arms in the air, before her startled brother could rush forward to control her. But as the unhappy girl rose into frenzy, some unseen attendants stole in and took her out of his unskillful hands. The sight was too painful for unaccustomed eyes – for eyes of love, which could scarcely bear, even for her own sake, to see such means of restraint employed upon Susan … Susan herself beat the air and in vain, and entreated, with passionate outcries, to be set free – to be let go. When she was again subdued , and sank into the quiet of exhaustion, Vincent withdrew from this saddest scene of all, utterly despressed and broken-spirited (298).

Until Susan's later exoneration in the *Carlingford Gazette*, the above instance is the only one in which we hear Susan's voice as she languishes unconscious on her sickbed. The newspaper-as-substitute for Susan's personae literally seems to overtake her body. Susan's fever-stricken body is so frightening because it is disruptive (that is to say, it does not fit norms for acceptable womanly behavior).

Strangely enough, it is not that long before the *Carlingford Gazette* exonerates Susan from being either a fallen woman or a murderess. And it is clear that this journal – even though it is the original source for the lurid and unfactual story – represents the measure against which the "truth" of Susan's situation is to be to be judged. The story, appearing under the dramatic title of "The Dover Tragedy," recounts the situation thus:

> Our readers will be glad to hear that the unfortunate young lady whose name has been so unhappily mixed up in this mysterious affair, is likely to

> be fully exonerated from the charge rashly brought against her. In the deposition of the wounded man … he distinctly declares that Miss – was not the party who fired the pistol, nor in any way connected with it … instead of the romantic connection supposed to subsist between the parties, with all the passions of love and revenge naturally involved the ties between them were of the simplest most temporary character … We have now only to congratulate her respectable family and friends on her exoneration from a very shocking charge, and hope her innocence will soon be confirmed by full legal acquittal (340).

The reading of Susan's body (and of the newspaper account of her guilt) constitutes an invasion of the sensational into a decent middle-class Victorian household. We can see the consequences of this "improper" reading by the way that the Carlingford congregation nearly dismisses its own minister for events which don't even turn out to be true.

Following the printing of the first newspaper story about Susan, Mr. Vincent finds himself in a situation where he must defend himself from the invasive gossip which has caused many of his parishioners to be suspicious of his family. In many instances, Mr. Vincent is described as participating in a battle against society: he has "all the heavy front of battle set in array against him" (300). In another instance, he wakes "to behold his battle-ground and field of warfare, in which everything dear to him [is] suddenly assailed" (375-6). His pulpit, therefore, becomes a battleground (Mr. Tozer says, "it's next Sunday as is the battle" [302]) from which he must combat a congregation which

wishes to oust him from for his involvement in the family scandal. This battle imagery is reminiscent of the revolution which Vincent's family crisis evokes.

Containing "Sensationalism"

At the very moment that Vincent is trying to vindicate his family from the crisis by preaching a successful "rebuttal sermon" before Susan's vindication in the newspaper, he glimpses Mrs. Hilyard in the back of the church, and the sight literally "transfixes him:"

> There, among the crowded pews of Salem, deep in the further end of the chapel, half lost in the throng of listeners, suddenly, all at once, had flashed upon him a face – a face, unchanged from its old expression, intent as if no deluge had descended, no earthquake fallen; listening, as of old, with gleaming, keen eyes and close-shut emphatic mouth. The whole building reeled in Vincent's eyes as he caught sight of that thin head, dark and silent, gleaming out in all its expressive refinement and intelligence from the common faces round. How he kept still and went on was to himself a kind of miracle. Had she moved or left the place, he could not have restrained himself. But she did not move. He watched her even while he prayed, with a profanity of which he was conscious to the heart … When she disappeared, he rushed from the pulpit – rushed out – pursued her. (309).

The above quote clearly demonstrates how entranced Mr. Vincent is by the mysteries surrounding Mrs. Hilyard. Her mere presence causes him to lose focus, causes the

building to "reel" in front of his eyes, so much so that he must cut his sermon short and leave the building without accepting the good wishes of his parishioners (a major social faux pas, since they had decided they were willing to forgive him if he would just let them).

Prior to the Colonel Mildmay's shooting, Mr. Vincent has simply been fascinated by the sensational possibilities that Mrs. Hilyard represents. But seeing Mrs. Hilyard after Susan has been implicated and after she has actually shot at her estranged husband seems to change Mr. Vincent's feelings about her. Now, Vincent seems both fascinated and disturbed by Mrs. Hilyard and the alternative social text that she represents. Like Robert Audley, Mr. Vincent suddenly feels the need to assert his masculine authority, become the "writer" of his own sensational narrative and track down and "contain" Mrs. Hilyard (and the sensationalism she represents) by having her arrested for the assault on Colonel Mildmay. Following the church service, therefore, he chases Mrs. Hilyard to her apartment and, in a showdown scene similar to that described in Chapter One between Robert and Lady Audley, he yells for someone to find a police officer and announces to Mrs. Hilyard that "you are my prisoner." As the narrator at this point says, "that was the one fact [Mr. Vincent] cared to know about" (310). But even as Vincent is trying to assert his male authority over Mrs. Hilyard, he realizes that "he was no match of her in any passage of arms" (311). The one thing that he has forgotten is that Mrs. Hilyard is a "needlewoman, confident in her own powers and influence" (312). Therefore, when Mr. Vincent tells Mrs. Hilyard, "you cannot – escape – you shall not escape … nothing you do or say can help you now," she retorts back that

> "Ah! … you have come to the inexorable … most men do, one time or another. You decline meeting us on our own ground, and take to your own … I hope you know what you are going to say to that functionary" (311).

As the narrator describes the situation, Mrs. Hilyard "recognizes here that she ha[s] come face to face with *those blind forces of nature* upon which no arguments can tell" (310 italics mine). In many ways, the narrator's terminology is a bit inexact. The forces with which Mrs. Hilyard is dealing, far from being natural, are, rather, the social and cultural norms of the British Establishment and patriarchy. In choosing to invoke the law as an excuse for containing Mrs. Hilyard, Mr. Vincent is trying to accomplish the same goal as Robert Audley has in imprisoning Lady Audley, herself a dangerous alternative social text operating outside the auspices of the legal texts of England. As Mrs. Hilyard aptly says, even though Mr.Vincent previously expressed protective sympathy and interest in her unusual storyline, his interests change when things get too dangerous and that text threatens his own family space (i.e. with his sister being blamed for murder) and the domestic space of England (i.e with Mrs. Hilyard literally acting on her resolve to shoot her estranged husband). Whereas previously Mr. Vincent was interested in being involved in Mrs. Hilyard's "alternative sensational text," he now "declines meeting her on her own terms" (those which operate outside the hegemonic social text). "Taking to his own terms" is equivalent to "taking to the law," something which "most men do, one time or another." As Mrs. Hilyard further accuses him: "Yes, you are a man … You are deaf – blind! You have turned your back on reason. That is what it always comes to … I believe … you are afraid of me. You think I will stab you or something." (312). When

Mrs. Hilyard complains that Mr. Vincent has lost "reason," she's both saying he has lost his sympathy for her domestic situation, and she is resisting patriarchal discourse by extending the linguistic boundaries of the word itself. Of course, "reason" is traditionally considered the basis upon which laws are determined. What Mrs. Hilyard is able to do, however, is to expose this "truth about law" as a fiction. Laws are not "reasonable" if they do not acknowledge the existence of domestic abuse and familial problems. In invoking the law, Mr. Vincent probably believes he's following the "reasonable" path for action, but she sees his actions otherwise and resists. His new "blindness" and "deafness" to her situation – and in fact, his fear of her – are, therefore, unreasonable.

The fate of Mrs. Hilyard's physical body suddenly seems within Mr. Vincent's control as she "gazed with wild eyes at the man who had it in his power to deliver her over to law or justice." But even as the "carriage wheels [announcing the arrival of the police] came nearer and nearer" (314-5), Mrs. Hilyard indicates the fact that the imprisoning of her physical body will never alter her resolve nor "contain" the dangers that the spirit of her alternative social text represents. She reminds him that "I have certain things still within my power … when I say that I should not have suffered it to go further, I should not have shrunk from any sacrifice" (318). Mrs. Hilyard is willing to make "any sacrifice," including that of her own life, for her daughter, who is still missing with her governess despite the fact that Susan has come home. We now know that she doesn't regret the attempt on her husband's life. Right before the policemen knock, by some touch of fate, Lady Western happens to drop by for a visit. It is this appearance

which allows us to see how heavily Mrs. Hilyard's resolve in sacrificing herself for her daughter is, when she says

> Take me with you, Alice …take charge of me, keep me prisoner until this whole thing is cleared up. I am tired of living a disguised princess. Send up your people for my possessions and take me with you. You will find me safe, Mr. Vincent, when you want me, with Lady Western in Grange Lane. (sic 318)

Though it has not been mentioned previously in this chapter, Lady Western is actually Colonel Mildmay's sister; despite Colonel and Mrs. Mildmay's estrangement, the two sisters-in-law have remained friends. Mrs. Hilyard's request to go back with Lady Western to live in a place where she will surely have contact with Colonel Mildmay is quite chilling, considering that the return puts her in close contact with the abusive husband she has spent so many years escaping. As Mrs. Hilyard wryly tells Mr. Vincent, "I do not think Back Street Grove will do any longer. One may as well take advantage of *the accident* which has brought our family affairs before the world *to come alive* again. It is a thing one must do sooner rather than later" (319 italics mine). Despite the horrible repercussions which such a choice will make to both her personal autonomy and her happiness, Mrs. Hilyard recognizes that "drop[ping] back with her broken heart into the deep silences of *privacy* and *uninvadable domestic life*" (321 italics mine), will be a better scenario for protecting her daughter than if she is literally sent to prison by Mr. Vincent. In this sense then, Mrs. Hilyard's choice to return openly to living with her sister-in-law – though masochistic in the sense that it can only harm herself – is a way to resist the legal authority that Mr. Vincent is attempting to impose upon her quite overtly.

Overtly choosing to hide under the guise of family protection rather than surrender to the law is her way to resist "the legal text" of England. Her physical imprisonment will only be an imprisonment of her body. Her spirit will still be there, even if it is outwardly subdued.

The reality is that Mrs. Hilyard has such a hold over Vincent's imagination, that he is ultimately unable to turn in his "prisoner" once the authorities arrive, requesting that she stay put at her in-laws' household instead and paying off the policemen to leave after telling them that he mistakenly called them in. It is interesting to speculate why Mr. Vincent is unable to act the "manly" role and reinforce societally recognized justice. Part of his hesitancy perhaps comes from the new excitements, the new possibilities for action that someone like Mrs. Hilyard involves. If he contains her, he is admitting a return to his banal former life, something he has eschewed wholeheartedly since the beginning of his sensational adventure.

But despite his "kindness" in allowing Mrs. Hilyard respite from the law's touch, Vincent continues to feel anxieties surrounding her physical "non-containment". He constantly checks on Mrs. Hilyard and worries that she is "going to escape," accusing her of having "broken [her] word" when he finds her wandering the streets of Carlingford trying to find information regarding her still-missing daughter. Mrs. Hilyard responds to this charge indignantly, saying "how do you imagine I was going to escape? Escape! From what? That is the worst – one cannot escape … never more; especially if one keeps quiet in one place and has nothing to do" (353). Mrs. Hilyard – now having publicly resumed her former identity as Mrs. Mildmay – knows that there is no escape from the oppressive patriarchal system. Mr. Vincent keeps demanding that Rachel "give her

word" that she won't escape, but Mrs. Hilyard responds by saying that "the laws of honour don't extend to women. We are weak, and we are allowed to lie" (353). What Mrs. Hilyard really means is that under coverture – the system whereby women have no legal autonomy from their spouses because their being is "civilly merged … into that of their spouses – women can make no "contracts … express or implied" on their own.[56] The fiction of marital unity then, disallows Mrs. Hilyard word from having any legal variance whatsoever. She can say what she likes, but this ultimately means nothing. This issue is best illustrated in her following outburst to Mr.Vincent:

> My word! but women are not bound by their honour; our honour means – not our word … my parole, he means; soldiers and heroes and men of honour give their parole; you don't exact it from women. Words are not kept to us, Mr. Vincent: do you expect us to keep them? Yes,yes; I know I'm talking wildly. Is it strange, do you think? But what if I give you my word, and nobody sends me any further news – nothing about my child? Women are only wild animals when their children are taken from them. I will forget it, and go away for news – news! That is what I want. Escape? … who can escape? I do not understand what it means … Hush!' She said trembling – hush! My *honour*! – and you still trust in it? I will promise … I promise upon my honour. I will not go away – escape, as you call it. If I should go mad, that will not matter … I will obey you and

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[56] This definition of "coverture" comes from www.thefreedictionary.com. A fuller discussion of this concept and its implications for women as it applies to the Married Women's Property Acts of the nineteenth-century will be discussed in the following chapter in my analysis of Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds*.

> go back. You have taken a woman's parole, Mr Vincent … it will be curious to know if she can keep it. Good-bye – good-bye. (354-5)

It is clear from the above text that Mrs. Hilyard realizes that no British laws allow for women to legally give their word. As a legal non-entity, she can have no "official" voice or opinion to be held by. She can promise not to escape, but unlike a prisoner of war, making an agreement not to fight until he is formally exchanged to his own unit, the rules of battle are different for men than they are for women. The criteria by which Mr. Vincent seeks to control her – by her promise, her word – do not apply to her. The legal boundaries that seem absolute to Mr. Vincent cannot seem this way to Mrs. Hilyard since she's been living an "alternative fictional identity" all these years anyway.

Mrs. Hilyard represents the emotions and passions associated with a tangible drive towards obtaining what she most desires. Imprisoning her physical body will not stem the course of these emotions or of the sensation which her character symbolizes, because her angst is caused by impossible psychological and familial circumstances. Mrs. Hilyard proves that she is willing to go beyond the means of the law to track down her missing daughter, just as she has earlier acted outside of the law in secreting her daughter from her abusive husband. Like the revolution that she symbolically invokes, Mrs. Hilyard therefore embodies fears of cultural revolution and change affiliated with the both nineteenth-century infant custody initiatives and the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act. If we believe Mrs. Vincent's commentary about Mrs. Hilyard's actions, then we believe that Mrs. Hilyard's attempt to remove her child from Colonel Mildmay's custody has been coded as wrong. As the narrator says of Mrs. Vincent's opinion, "with a female instinct, she felt but did not understand that Mrs. Hilyard … was

as guilty … as was her guilty husband … They had not succeeded, thank God! … the widow's mind was entirely occupied with this wonderful victory of innocence over wickedness" (421). After all, in her anonymous article "The Laws Concerning Women," Oliphant herself claims that "the only true solution to children of divorcing parents" is that children should "become wards of the state: "let the man and the woman part as they met, solitary and single persons; let the unhappy children, fatherless and motherless, become the children of the State. This is *justice*" (384). But the narrative itself seems to suggest that the daughter Alice's fate is rather positive. She has been officially designated a "ward of the state" because of the problems with her parents' relationship together, but this circumstance allows her the freedom to live permanently with Mrs. Vincent and Susan, solid protectors untainted by the secret problems and vices of her parents and also her "dearest friends" (460).

Conclusions

Many critics of Oliphant have examined Oliphant's ambiguous and contradictory identity surrounding end-of-the century women's issues, as someone standing at the crossroads between ideas which support the New Woman and ideas which are conservative to the core. For example, Merryn Williams and John Stock Clarke view Oliphant as feminist; Valerie Sanders reads her as anti-feminist; and D.J. Trela and Elisabeth Jay view her as a subversive who occupies an intermediate position containing much self-contradiction (Heilmann 216). If critics view Oliphant as contradictory on one such large set of issues, it seems a logical possibility that she would occupy similarly contradictory stances on other theoretical debates. Perhaps Oliphant's identity as an

author standing at the blurred boundaries of sensation fiction and realism can be read in the same way. Whilst she herself condemns sensational writing practices, she ends up embodying them and articulating them in very interesting ways. In fact, the discourse that Oliphant ends up using in her "non-fiction" literary criticism a few years after she penned *Salem Chapel* ends up evoking sensational language and tropes, indicating that perhaps Oliphant's public personae condemning sensation fiction was created as a way to pander to the conservative *Blackwood's* readership that would've expected such things from its literary critics. Since Oliphant's writings for *Blackwood's* were usually published anonymously (including *Salem Chapel* itself) it would've been fairly easy for Oliphant to switch hats on the opinions she expressed in her writing. And fiction leaves a bit more room for innuendo and mixing of ideas than does a traditional critical article or tract.

Of course, in the end, Oliphant's novel offers a very conservative ending wherein Mrs. Hilyard, the erring wife, goes back to her abusive husband and publicly resumes her role as Mrs. Mildmay. This end is disturbing because it suppresses Mrs. Hilyard's narrative disruption, obviating the power that her alternative and revolutionary sensational voice has had in impacting the hegemony of traditional English marriage institutions and reifying traditional notions of Victorian domesticity. However, the ending also presents new narrative possibilities to its male protagonist. After meeting Mrs. Hilyard, Mr. Vincent decides that he doesn't want to stay in the ministry. When Vincent decides to "throw up" the ministry altogether, his decision goes outside of regular social texts for a small-town curate, becoming an "escape" from the realities he had previously known. When Vincent leaves Salem Chapel, he does so with a "sense of

freedom, and a thrill of new power and vigour in his heart" and he "went into literature, as was natural, and became "the founder of the 'the Philosophical Review,' the new organ of public opinion." In fact,

> the Nonconformist went back to his little home with the sensation of an enchanted prince in a fairy tale. Instead of the mud-coloured existence [he had previously led], what a glowing, bright firmament! Life became glorious again under their touch. He could not tell what wonderful thing he might not yet do in this wonderful elevation and new inspiring of the heart. His genius broke forth out of the clouds … After all his troubles, the loves and the hopes can back with the swallows to build under his eaves and stir in his heart. (460-1)

Mr. Vincent's collision with Mrs. Hilyard's sensational text – her "alternative social reality" – has taught him that life can become oppressive if one tries to adhere too rigidly to dominant social constructs for identity or life trajectories. His "mud-coloured existence" is now happy. He imagines "a glowing bright firmament" for his future." We as readers have no specific information about the readership of the new journal Mr. Vincent has founded, but if, in fact, the journal is really the "new organ of public opinion," then Vincent has the potential for creating his own revolution through fiction. That is to say, he can use the journal as a way to instruct his readership– continuing his role as a preacher, but having a wider audience and effect – if this is what he so desires.[57] Vincent's own participation in the sensational text of Mrs. Hilyard's narrative has taught

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[57] I remind readers here of the comment I quoted from Trollope earlier in this chapter saying that that nineteenth century novels have "taken the place of sermon writing" in the ways that they instruct their readership" (114). If Vincent's now a novel writer, he occupies this important cultural position.

him that accurate reporting requires a looking beyond the public construction of the realities presented to him. The "Truth" that he represents, therefore, may (or may not) include some sensational ploys, but at least Vincent has had the experience of re-reading domesticity through Mrs. Hilyard.

The ending also allows Susan's insidious mysteries to be resolved on a positive note, when she is exonerated from the false accusations that she's both a fallen woman and a murderer. And, though the novel is by no means revolutionary in its embracing of sensationalism and Mrs. Hilyard's narrative trajectory, it does suggest the idea that sensationalism can have positive impacts on the changing of reality after all. What we see here is that the disruptive body of sensationalism – the specter of secrets lurking beneath the veneer of Victorian respectability – has the power of disrupting traditional narrative sequences, challenging the Establishment and exposing real rifts in notions that British households ascribe to unified visions of domesticity.

Moving forward from this chapter to the next, it is interesting to note that Oliphant herself loves Anthony Trollope's supposedly realist writing, saying that "deep, tragic passion is not in them" and that they represent only "fair women" and "honorable, unexalted English gentlemen," none of whom "have any terrible secrets in their past which cannot bear the light of day." In her opinion, Trollope deserves our real gratitude" for allowing us not to be "ashamed of our girls" for "they are like the honest English girls we know; and we cannot be sufficiently grateful to him for freeing us, so as long as we are under his guidance, from that disgusting witch" – a metaphor for the traditional villainess sensation novel heroine "with her red or amber hair" ("Novels" 102: 276-7).

In contrast, however, Anthony Trollope argues that novels should be both "realistic and sensational," and that those which aren't are "a failure in art." In an important statement about the nature of art, he says the following: "no novel is anything for the purposes of either comedy or tragedy, unless the reader can sympathise with the characters whose names he finds upon the page. Let the author so tell his tale as to touch his reader's heart and draw his reader's tears, and he has so far done his work well. Truth let there be, -- truth of description, truth of character, human truth as to men and women. If there be such a truth, I do not know that a novel can be too sensational" (sic 129-30). Trollope's comments here reveal that he wasn't a purist of realism even though Oliphant wanted to represent him this way.

Clearly, Oliphant hadn't met the likes of Lizzie Eustace at the time that she wrote this comment. It would've been interesting to see how (and if) Oliphant had new thoughts about Trollope three years later, when *The Eustace Diamonds* came out, since its protagonist Lizzie is dishonest and since Trollope really plays this up by making her a fascinating character.

Chapter Three:
Rumor, Sensational Invasion and the Rewriting of Legal History in Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds*

> Mr. Camperdown's first attempt was made by a most courteous and even complimentary note, in which he suggested to Lady Eustace that it would be for the advantage of all parties that the family jewels should be kept together. Lizzie, as she read this note, smiled, and said to herself that she did not exactly see how her own interests would be best served by such an arrangement. (37-8)

> Widows filch china cups, and a silver teaspoon or two! It's quite a common thing, but I have never heard of such a haul as this. (40)

Previous chapters of this project have addressed the cultural revolutions caused by the "sensational" passing of the 1857 Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act and the Infant Custody Acts, as exemplified in the fiction of Mary Braddon and Margaret Oliphant. These chapters have examined the ways that the sensational fictions of heroines suffering extreme marginalization at the hands of patriarchy have come up with creative alternative scripts for personal behavior that allowed them to circumvent difficult circumstances.

This chapter will identify the ways that Lizzie Eustace, the fictional protagonist of Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamond*s, similarly challenges the Establishment by resisting the legal system that attempts to define her as only a wife, mother and widow but not as a legally independent human being. Just as in the case of Lady Audley and Mrs. Hilyard, Lizzie's vehicle for doing so is to create a fictional "text" of her life, which she controls and promotes independently. This "text," like the Married Women's Property Acts of 1870 and 1882, serves to challenge the "fictions" that the Establishment

promotes about how its publicly decided upon laws are fair and reflect the best interests of all British people.[58] Lizzie's fiction-making action is gendered female because it arises from a story which is all too familiar with women at the time period: she is at risk of losing all personal autonomy and social status once she marries if she does not "author" this fiction. Through the context of the narrative, Lizzie's self-authored text exerts tremendous power on the official legal constructs that are supposed to "contain" and define her. Her "text," which immediately labels her as both dangerous and intriguing, serves as one private story which has the power to "mutually infiltrate" the hegemonic power of the public world surrounding her. As such, her fiction-making serves as one vehicle whereby Habermas' concept of the "mutual infiltration of the public and private spheres" can take place.

Lizzie Eustace and the Married Women's Property Act

This chapter will argue that the sensational story of Lizzie Eustace's diamonds invades, contaminates and revolutionizes domestic tranquility, the family and synecdochically, the nation of England itself. The invasion works on a variety of levels; from the beginning, Lizzie personally manipulates the British legal system as a way to get her desires (and keep the diamonds), and her sensational story infiltrates the British drawing room, the political scene, and eventually the government of England. Her invasion, therefore, symbolically captures many anxieties which were present in 1870's

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[58] Though they are not the specific foci of this chapter, the electoral reforms of 1867 and 1883 – which extended the franchise to men of all classes and exclude property requirements as a prerequisite to having the vote – also engendered similar fears of cultural revolution. No one in power likes to cede or share control by masses that they perceive as mis-informed or interested in a different agenda than the dominant power.

Britain: anxieties about women gaining independence through increased property rights, anxieties about the disintegration of the unified British family, anxieties about British morality, and anxieties about the role of capital in connection with societal power structures.

Lizzie's actions bring on new relevance when looked at against the backdrop of the 1870 Married Women's Property Act (which was coincidentally passed just one year before first serial installments of *The Eustace Diamonds* were published). This Act, which sought to allow women to retain some property separate from their husbands under Common Law, would offer married women more autonomy than they had previously held within their marriages. Prior to the passage of either of the late nineteenth-century Married Women's Property acts, aristocratic women did have the option, via the Equity system, of retaining personal property within a marriage, provided that such an arrangement was arranged for within a legal trust which was executed by an outside legal guardian or advisor.[59] Under such a system, which Joan Perkin says made upper-class English women "the most liberated group of wives in the country and perhaps the world," trust recipients were usually granted separate property with an income they could use without restraint, though such systems usually disallowed them from disposing of the original property; they "could use the interest available from capital, but [they] could not mortgage the capital itself (50). Women with separate property, therefore, retained some

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[59] The Equity Court system operated on different principles than did Common Law. The former, often known as Chancery Court, dealt with issues of equity or justice, and were decided by a judge depending on what seemed "fair" on a personal level. The Common Law courts, on the other hand, operated using legal precedent for making decisions (the actual letter of the law). Cases sent to Common Law Court were decided by juries. For a fuller discussion of the difference between these two systems, see Joan Perkin's *Women and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century England,* pp. 10-31.

– though not total control of their "possessions" – and these actual possessions (usually real estate "capital" with an income) still reverted back to the family (in its traditional patriarchal form) when they died.

Property rights which were available to aristocratic women via the Equity Court system were already viewed as suspicious by certain critics. But the extension of property rights to *all women* via the Married Women's Property Act and other Common Law rulings created even further anxiety. Consider the following comments: Josephine Butler, one of the women working towards getting the law passed, was "convinced that the opposition to married women's property reform was motivated by 'a secret dread' that women's claims would '*revolutionize* society [and] our Homes'" (Shanley 62). Joan Perkin mentions that William Blackstone himself, creator of the 1765-69 *Commentaries* which are used as standard legal textbooks in England and the United States, disliked "Equity jurisprudence," which is the system that provided the loophole whereby wealthy women could have personal trusts, because this system "*invaded* Common Law doctrines and introduced into the laws of England principles akin to those of the Roman law with respect to married' women's property rights." In this sense, what she calls the "*revolution* wrought by Equity" amongst aristocratic women (18 italics mine) might replicate itself in a larger more contemporary revolution when working and middle-class women were also granted a slight modicum of societal autonomy. Notice the italicized terms, which reiterate the key themes of this study: invasion and revolution.

The concern was that letting women retain more personal property might be a slippery slope for further greediness and autonomy. A woman who knows that she can hold some property, the argument goes, will surely clamor for more. From the traditional viewpoint,

any changes to the legal system could result in negative ramifications for the patriarchally and culturally privileged.

One of the issues which the Married Women's Property Act created anxieties about was in the ways that it could enact a revolution in domestic affairs and begin to redefine the unified family structure within England. In other words, it proposed a new storyline for how patriarchal England would define the parameters of its social, domestic and economic space. For centuries on end, English inheritance laws were based upon the system of primogeniture, whereby the family property was ideally passed down from generation to generation to the oldest son via a system of marriage settlements. But, son or no son, the publicly expected purpose of providing family inheritance was *that it was intended to keep family capital unified.* Joan Perkin describes the situation thus. The purpose of the marriage settlement, in most cases was in

> holding the (family estate) together in the hands of a single holder in each generation, while at the same time providing an income or at least a lump sum for every member of the family, including the landlord's widow, daughters and younger sons. Essentially it (the system of passing intact family property down through the generations) ensured that the family estate in each generation descend to the eldest son; it did this by limiting the interest in the estate of the father of the new husband and, after him, of the husband himself to that of a life-tenant, entailing the estate on the eldest son to be born of the marriage. A life-tenant was entitled only to the income of the settled estate for his life, and could not sell or mortgage it for a longer period. (66)

As can be seen, therefore, the above system reifies the traditional patriarchal family unit as an economic one. And as has already been discussed in the Introduction to this project, numerous critics, including Perkin, acknowledge that the British family is the central bulwark of British society. According to Anthony Wohl, editor of *The Victorian Family: Structure and Stresses*, "Victorians regarded it as axiomatic that the home was the foundation and the family the cornerstone of civilization" (10). Therefore, any actions (legal or otherwise), which serve to chip away at the economic unity of this foundational unit can be problematic (as can actions preventing new property from being added to the family coffers). Wohl's book also highlights the ways that notions of English familyhood were intrinsically defined against social systems of other developed nations: "the family was more than a social institution, it was a creed … that family life distinguished England from less moral and stable societies" (10). Sir Alexander Patterson, author of the 1914 *Across the Bridges of Life by the South London Riverside* also comments on the same subject: "it is customary to point to the ideal of a united and homeloving family as the deepest tradition of English life … it is a picture frequently compared with the restaurant life of the Continent, or the greater independence of boys and girls in the United States. So strong is the belief in this family life as the true key to English happiness … that it has become usual to test each social or economic reform that is advanced by calculating its effect upon the national characteristic (sic Wohl 10). Both of these comments reiterate one of the major themes of this dissertation project: sensation fiction is just like those customs of foreign nations against which the pure British family is compared. Sensation fiction – those alternative fictions which seek to disrupt the sanctity of British institutions which define a nation – are sure to lead to "less moral and

stable societies," as Wohl suggests. The image of societal revolution is, therefore, invoked again. And the purity of this domestic system, of course, is dependent on staying free of contamination (i.e. changes) from both internal and external sources.

Like the Married Women's Property Act and the anxiety it entails, Lizzie Eustace's keeping of the family diamonds evokes anxieties about her contaminating influence on family unity, on inheritance laws and on previously unquestioned British traditions. In this sense, Lizzie serves as a symbolic embodiment of the Married Women's Property Act and other laws which create new autonomy and authority amongst women who are wives. Both Lizzie and the Married Women's Property Act challenge existing social systems by embodying alternative versions of reality – alternative fictions which exert pressure on the hegemony of patriarchal England. Her actions also bring up questions about how women – those marrying into existing family units as wives – are perceived in relationship to that family unit: are they really perceived as "true" family members with all the accompanying personal rights to respect, etc. or do they occupy a position as outsiders, only allowed provisional family status so that they finish their jobs as producers of the family heirs, but retaining this status only for their lifetime? My contention is that it is the latter. Though, certainly, Victorian society saw its traditional family structure as respectful of women, that respect was only provisional in terms of the legal rights afforded to them. Lizzie exposes many of the problems incipient in the Victorian family structure both by manipulating existing laws and creating her own law. As such, she is seen as a contaminating influence from page one of the novel, when she begins manipulating "reality" as a way to get what she desires, in short participating in her own system of "fiction making" from the get go. In

patriarchy, a wife who brings up the specter of authoring her own reality raises the possibility that other wives (or all wives) might begin to perceive that they have this right themselves. This concern is quite frightening to those dominating the Establishment.

Lizzie's Sensational "Text": Fiction-Making and Her Early Manipulation of the Law

The novel begins by introducing Lizzie Greystock, as a manipulative young woman who uses her own wiles – that is, her own fiction making – to combat the fact that she's recently been rendered poor by her father's death. In one of the novel's first scenes, we see Lizzie deliberately literally manipulating both "truth" and the British law as a way to get what she desires by pretending not to possess certain jewels needed to pay off her father's debts. She does first this by toying with the jeweler's assumption that she might be getting married (since this is what all orphaned single women must automatically do – put themselves under immediate male protection by getting married!). She then signs a promissory note saying that she'll pay back Mr. Benjamin's loan for the jewels, secretly pawns the jewels to pay for some of her own expenses, then single-handedly manages to obtain a loan from a well-known jeweler to get the items out of hock, using a pretend fiancé as the promissory for payment and lying that she is of age to marry. This action is quite ironic. Even though she's lied about being of age, as a minor, her legal signature has no legal bearing whatsoever. So if her marriage to her pretended fiancé should fall through, she is not liable to repay the debt. Yet, at the same time, Lizzie is consciously aware that an assumed marriage to a wealthy husband under coverture – the legal term indicating that a man and his wife constitute one legal being and share all possessions – will render any future husband liable for the debt.

In the next few scenes, Lizzie manages to make a suitor of Sir Florian Eustace, a young wealthy but dying man, with the intention of marrying him so that she can keep the jewels by paying off her debt. She also manages to convince Sir Florian to leave her an unusually large settlement upon his death: 3000 lb. per annum for life, plus a castle in Scotland. She, of course, says nothing about the jewels to her husband before the wedding; it is only after their marriage that poor Sir Florian is undeceived as to Lizzie's true character and intentions. Lizzie has had him. Two subtexts which run throughout the story are thus set out up front: the issues of lies and deceit and Lizzie's fascination with jewels. The first few scenes of the novel clearly show Lizzie manipulating British law to her own devices – and her own advantages.

The action begins to thicken once Sir Florian dies and Lizzie absconds with some expensive jewels belonging to the Eustace family (called the Eustace Diamonds). It is true that Lizzie was allowed to wear the jewels as Sir Florian's wife, but the Eustace family and its relentless lawyer, Mr. Camperdown, believe that the jewels are a family heirloom that needs to be returned to the family estate upon her spouse's death. Lizzie persists on keeping the jewels for herself, stating that they were a gift from her deceased husband. Herein, the drama begins as Lizzie resolutely resists all efforts, legal and otherwise, which would seem to make her return the diamonds. Lizzie's obstinance allows her to withstand even the threat of a Chancery Court lawsuit to get back her diamonds. Therein begins the intrigue involving the diamonds, the heroine persisting in keeping them, and her fate. But the sensationalist part of the novel really ensues when the diamonds are stolen, and stolen again.

To be certain, from the beginning of the novel, Lizzie's manipulative actions set her apart as a character who is able to act independently to get what she desires. Like an actress, she is able to control the "bodily text" of her life to trick people into believing her everchanging intentions. The control of her "text," includes her ability to manipulate both actions and words. The narrator describes Lizzie's personality thus:

> She was always shamming love and friendship and benevolence and tenderness. She could tell you, with words most appropriate to the subject, how horrible were all shams, and in saying so would be not altogether insincere: – yet she knew that she herself was ever shamming, and she satisfied herself with shams. (125) [60]

In vocabulary very similar to that used to describe an actress, the narrator shows Lizzie consciously playing various roles to dupe people. She plays at being a widow (150); she enjoys quoting poetry in order to project a certain persona: "even though she did not understand the exact bearing" of the poem, she "had so studied her gestures, and so modulated her voice, that she knew that she could be effective" (196). She practices telling one story "before the glass" so that she can "tell her story in a becoming manner" (578). She even "sets the stage" for creating a favorable scene with Lord Fawn's mother (her future mother-in-law) by setting out a Bible so she can appear religious. Occasionally, her acting is overdone, with a manner almost too perfect, with "a little too much of gesture, a little too much gliding motion, too violent an appeal with the eyes, too close a pressure of the hand" (83). But these moments still inspire interest and belief in

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[60] Clearly the link here between "sham[med] love" and words troubles the relationship between language and some external truth or reality.

most of Lizzie's followers, as well as those of whom she takes advantage. Her cousin Frank marvels in "all those scenes which she has so successfully performed" and is amazed that Lizzie can have "sustained her falsehood so well." He smiles when he thinks of "all the confusion … she [has] caused" (643). Lizzie uses her acting throughout the novel to create particular impressions with her various suitors or law officials. Perfection, particularly in beauty, is related to performance here.

Lizzie's conscious theatricality – her ability to create and control the bodily "text" of her life and story with the diamonds is what makes her both so intriguing and so frightening to other characters in the novel.[61] Lizzie's involvement in her own sensational scandal of the diamonds and the attraction that this scandal causes means that, similarly to Mrs. Hilyard in Oliphant's *Salem Chapel*, her life functions like that of a sensation novel. Through acting, she creates the sensation and keeps her "readers" interested in the next "chapter" of her life. Though her experiences are sometimes personally harrowing, she always manages to capitalize upon the effect which she causes on her "readership" (that is people in the public who are following the scandal of her life with intense interest). In the world of textual economies, therefore, Lizzie's story is her capital, her trump card, her way of creating her autonomy and manipulating a system which does not wish to "contain" her excesses. And in a story where keeping capital and the loss of capital are primary issues, Lizzie's ability to retain both this kind of "figurative capital" and the diamonds, a literal form of capital, is truly emblematic of the type of narrative power that she holds. Lizzie's fictions about herself and about the

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[61] Trollope's narrative also refers to Lizzie as text when describing her deceitfulness, though not in precisely the same way: "the charm of her face did not lie in her eyes … This was felt by many men who could not read *the book* fluently" (643 italics mine).

diamonds are problematic because they produce alternate realities which challenge traditionally accepted norms about how an ex-wife should behave. Lizzie is seen as a contaminating and invasive influence on Victorian society, in part, because she poses as things which she is not. Other characters have trouble reading the "text" of Lizzie's body, the realities of what exists beneath her multiple facades. Reality cannot literally be identified for any one person, of course, but Lizzie's reality is totally buried underneath her conscious layers of artifice. Her artifice provides a further layer of her "authoring" her own bodily text. At this point in the novel, Lizzie completely controls this manipulation, much to the chagrin of others. But Lizzie's manipulation of "truth" – her rewriting of "reality" for personal gains – takes on transformative powers when it reaches the public realm via rumors in the newspapers and in Victorian drawing room discourse. The infiltration of her story into the discourse of the Victorian drawing room mimics those transformations of the bourgeois public sphere which Habermas describes and has a revolutionary effect first on the nature of public discourse at large and eventually symbolically on the nation of England itself.

Revolution in the Drawing Room: Rumor, the Diamonds and Public Discourse

The first time we hear mention of the diamonds in public discourse is in Madame Goesler's drawing room, where Lady Glencora Palliser, a woman of great social power, relates the following story about the Eustace diamonds:

> 'But have you heard of the diamonds?' asked Lady Glencora.

> 'What diamonds?' Whose diamonds' Neither of the others had heard of the diamonds, and Lady Glencora was able to tell her story. Lady Eustace had found all the family jewels belonging to the Eustace family in the strong plate room at Portray Castle, and had taken possession of them as property found in her own house. John Eustace and the bishop had had combined in demanding them on behalf of the heir, and a lawsuit had been commenced! The diamonds were the most costly belonging to any Commoner in England, and had been valued at twenty-four thousand pounds! Lord Fawn had retreated from his engagement the moment he heard that any doubt was thrown on Lady Eustace's right to their possession! Lady Eustace had declared her intention of bringing an action against Lord Fawn, – and had also secreted the diamonds (153).

The omniscient narrator, at this point, is quick to remind readers that the above story is "by no means an accurate history" and that "it was absolutely false in every detail," but the public appetite for sensationalized stories is great" (153). And thus, the story begins…[62]

It is significant that Trollope's novel situates nearly all overheard conversation concerning the diamonds in an aristocrat's drawing room, since according to Habermas, drawing rooms – new architectural phenomena connected with the rise of the bourgeois social sphere – were literally "scene[s] of psychological emancipation" as they were the only rooms within this century's middle-class households which simultaneously allowed

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[62] The appearance of Lizzie's diamonds in this scene proves that they exist, but it also, ironically, seems to "prove" that the stories surrounding them must be true.

both private and public functions. In short, drawing rooms embodied the social space through which "the line between public and private sphere extended right through the home" (46, 44).[63] They, therefore, represent an important point of collusion between public and private discourse. Habermas maintains that only the drawing room recalled the spirited discussions and "rational-critical public debate in the sphere of noble society" (45), which was earlier responsible for establishing the bourgeois public sphere in the first place.[64] Now, a century later, the rational-critical debate serving to challenge the Establishment, its public discourse and its "fictions" about itself is happening in the same arena.

If the drawing room is an interstitial space which juxtaposes the public and the private, it, therefore, indicates a "fault line" between public and private space, a place where the two worlds collide and women have political influence. The invasion into politics by women, is therefore, effected by them when they use this public/private domestic space. Once it reaches the public realm, the "text" of Lizzie Eustace and her diamonds is like a sensation novel in the way that it inspires debate and rumors that are so pervasive that they disrupt and invade "normal" aristocratic social activities and discourse (and in so doing, even draw attention away from important governmental debates). The "readers" of Lizzie Eustace's story (i.e., the listeners) care not what is

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[63] Habermas notes that the privatization of life connected with the rise of the bourgeois public sphere in the eighteenth-century was echoed in changes to domestic architectural style: large public spaces became parsed up into multiple, more intimate family spaces. Individual rooms for family members increased in number too. The house became "more of a house for the individual but left less room for the family as a whole" (45). This is why the salon, the arena left open for public discourse within the "enclosed space of the patriarchal conjugal family" is so important.

[64] Habermas literally uses the term "salon" to refer to the rooms maintaining both social and familial functions. Multiple authors, including Elissa Heil use the terms "salon" and "drawing room" interchangeably. The "salon" is merely the French term for the English equivalent of the "drawing room."

morally correct concerning Lizzie's actions with her diamonds; rather, they would prefer to be entertained by the saga which ensues. Lizzie's sensational text can enter the political system most easily through the domestic conduit of the drawing room; it can do so less overtly and without raising suspicious questions about its incipient dangers. Rather than containing and trapping feminine discourse, as do other parts of the intimate family space within the middle-class Victorian household, the drawing room allows gendered speech to leak out, to spread through, to contaminate the otherwise external segregated public discourse.

Elissa Heil notes that Mikhail Bahktin also recognizes the power of drawing rooms as "chronotropes," or "decisive space[s]" for "dialogic confrontations" because of the intersection they allow between both public and private discourse (20). According to her, the drawing room, serves as "an organizing center for narrative events" in Trollope's fiction, in that it

> sets the stage for personal and social conflicts – for a balance between public need and private obligation – and becomes a testing ground for characters put on social trial. As one of the only meeting places where the forms of propriety entitle women to meet men on almost equal footing, the drawing-room is charged with infinite possibilities for the making and breaking of relationships, for the acquiescence to and challenging of established social mores. It emerges at the platform for society's 'language," for society's 'heteroglossia' which reflects society's ideology. (20-21 sic)

Even though Heil makes her comments about the drawing room in relationship to Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, her commentary about drawing room discourse is also obviously relevant for *The Eustace Diamonds*. Madame Goesler's drawing room serves as a perfect place for Lizzie's sensationalized text to enter public discourse, since this locus of invasion would have been perceived as a "normal" place for conversation about women (and by women) to take place. The sensational story of Lizzie's diamonds, therefore, invades, contaminates and revolutionizes domestic tranquility. It takes over the reality that normally exists in such a domestic space and re-writes it in its own sensationalized way.

If the "novelistic drawing-room provides a stage to play out the forces at work in the bourgeois cultural system" (Heil 15), Lizzie functions well as an actress performing the fictional "text" of her life within this socio-political theatrical space. The fact that Lizzie overtly wears her diamonds to the above party, in spite of the fact that her second future husband objects, demonstrates that she wants to be the spectacle in her drama. Because she guesses that Lord Fawn will probably be at the gathering, she consciously makes "up her mind as to wearing the diamonds" (156). Lady Eustace appears, the narrator tells us, as a woman "made to sparkle, to be bright with outside garniture – to shine and glitter." At this point, "the subject (of the diamonds) had been so generally discussed, that the blaze of stones immediately brought it to the minds of men and women" and "there were whispers here and there: 'There she is, with poor Eustace's twenty thousand pounds around her neck … and there is Lord Fawn going to look after them'" answered another man" (157-8). But most importantly, the first pronouncements about Lizzie's value as a societal amusement appear when Lady Glencora announces that

she "like[s] her (Lizzie) for wearing them" (158). Even though it is well-known that wearing the diamonds is a personal affront to her fiancé, the party goers are less scandalized by their appearance than they are fascinated in the story surrounding them.

Reading the above scene through a Habermasian lens allows us to reflect on the consequences of the law and government as important social spaces (and what it means when law and government collide with domesticity). And the changes in authority – working in the microcosm of the drawing room – reflect larger changes in society at large. Life can clearly operate outside of the realities (i.e. the fictions) which are supposedly represented by formal legal documents and actions of the government. If the public sphere is represented by the law, then any intermingling of private discourse, gossip and sensation into this arena can have the effect of impacting its solidity. This scene points to the social construction of knowledge and the ways that it impacts politics.

In The *Eustace Diamonds*, the reading and gossiping public performs the same role that Robert Audley and Mr. Vincent do in their respective narratives; the public becomes more interested in finding out what's happening with Lizzie's diamonds – more interested in reading the next chapter of her "life as book" than it does in having the right thing be done morally. The scandal surrounding Lizzie and her diamonds progresses as Lord Fawn formally breaks off his engagement to Lizzie because of her refusal to return the diamonds to Mr. Camperdown, the Eustace family lawyer. Lord Fawn cannot stand the way that Lizzie overtly flouts any requests by legal authorities to return the diamonds and eschews physical intimidation by the authorities as well. For example, she flatly refuses to respond to any of the legal correspondence Mr. Camperdown sends her about the diamonds, deciding that "her safest course would be not to answer" them at all (42),

and she sticks to this resolve even when Mr. Camperdown accosts her at her own home about the subject. Threats of search warrants and eventually, a lawsuit in Chancery against her do not change her resolve either. One of the things that makes Lizzie a fascinating (and scary) figure, therefore, is her willingness to insist that any legal actions surrounding the diamonds do not apply to her. She, therefore, in effect, creates her own law and repeatedly foils attempts to contain her character. Even though the system denies Lizzie the possibility to script a refusal to legal summons – no one ignores the law! – she re-scripts her response anyway. Her actions reveal that the inheritance laws themselves – supposed by the Establishment to appropriately define and mediate human behavior – are fictional. The laws fail to direct and/or control all human behavior in the way that the Establishment thinks that it will. Lizzie's alternative fiction, therefore, threatens the fictional "reality" supposedly inherent in the British legal system. Not surprisingly, Lizzie is the central figure around whom great anxieties relating to women, power and legal reform circulate.

Lizzie's own resistance to Mr. Camperdown's legal efforts is not the only thing that causes anxiety about Lizzie's sensational claim to the family diamonds, however. In the middle of the narrative, we learn that Mr. Camperdown's claim of the diamonds for the Eustace family estate is not as secure as he has imagined when another lawyer renders a legal opinion in an attempt to help mediate on the case. Mr. Dove, who has unquestioned authority amongst the legal community of London, examines legal precedent and determines that under Common Law, Lizzie might be allowed to keep the diamonds by claiming them as "paraphernalia" (225), which is "a married woman's

personal property exclusive of her dowry."[65] He furthermore rules that the diamonds cannot be proven as an "heirloom" since "the devisor" (i.e. Lord Eustace) did not specifically list the item as such in his family will, and saying that "there is much error about heirlooms. Many think that any chattel may be made an heirloom by any owner of it. This is not the case." But "the law allows claims for paraphernalia for widows" (224-5).[66] Dove's ruling in favor of Lizzie – focusing on the diamonds as personal rather than family belongings – is distasteful to Mr. Camperdown for a number of reasons. Firstly, it means that there is nothing in the Common Law able to "contain" Lizzie's penchant for keeping the diamonds. If she maintains the diamonds, she, therefore, proves that life operates outside of the fictional constructs represented by the law. Her crime is that she raises suspicion about the Establishment and the ideas it represents. But the more critical concern is that Lizzie's independent actions serve *to take capital away from the family*; thus metaphorically, her actions to keep the diamonds represent an invasion and revolution which disrupts the unity of the Eustace family.

Dove's ruling in favor of Lizzie – focusing on the diamonds as personal rather than family belongings – brings on new relevance when looked at against the backdrop of the 1870 Married Women's Property Act, because this Act allowed women to retain personal capital within a marriage without any form of legal trust. As we've already seen earlier in this chapter, laws which previously mediated issues of family inheritance and defined what constituted heirlooms were based on the conception of "holding the family

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[65] From www.thefreedictionary.com. 5 Nov. 2004.

[66] Ibid. According to the www.thefreedictionary.com, an heirloom is "a valued possession passed down by a family through succeeding generations."

estate together" (Perkin 66). The ruling, therefore, pits the issues of personal property and family property against each other and triggers anxieties about the social ramifications which it could enact, such as increased independence of women and a coincident disintegration of the British family (which was, of course, the bulwark of patriarchy and the very nation of England itself). If we follow the Habermasian way of thinking, the social revolution enacted by the Married Women's Property Act was part of an overall nexus of laws breaking down both private family boundaries and attempting to regulate this space. One part of this revolution was that people were no longer defined exclusively by their roles within the family unit, but rather by their individual autonomy. As Habermas says, during this time of time of social and familial change

> the category of a general legal standing – the guarantee of the legal status of the person – was articulated as well; the latter was no longer defined by estate and birth. The *status libertatis*, the *status civitatis*, and the status *familiae* gave way to one *status naturalis*, now ascribed generally to all legal subjects. (75)

He later says that "on a legal level, this new interdependence of hitherto separate spheres found its expression in the breakdown of the boundaries of the classical system of private law" (148). The Married Women's Property Act thusly began to chip away at coverture, the notion that men and women were legally "joined civilly" into a unit, with the wife having no independent voice or legal identity. If women are supposed to be "civilly merged" with their husbands and act as single social units, then any law which weakens this merging can be seen to undercut family. A ruling in favor of the diamonds-as-paraphernalia, therefore, reiterates Lizzie's ability to act autonomously (i.e. on her own,

without heeding any paternalistic family advice) and her ability to abscond what would have previously been considered a family heirloom. Lizzie's actions, therefore, symbolize a revolution within the Victorian British legal system. She personally becomes a symbol of the type of autonomous, frightening woman who already has served to gain power by taking advantage of legal privileges available to her outside of the legal trust system.

The notion of women as autonomous beings was deemed so inflammatory by opponents of the Married Women's Property Act through Parliament that those who originally promoted the law's passage had to change their tactics for doing so. Victorian feminists and other liberal thinkers clearly thought the law needed to be passed because "the automatic expropriation of an adult woman's property upon marriage violated" her individual rights," and that "only when married women had equal rights with their husbands," could "the liberal principles of freedom and equality" be served. (Shanley 57, 12). These thinkers believed that a marriage based upon subordination and domination of one of the two participants could not promote respect and wanted property laws to be passed on this basis. Their thoughts on this issue were obviously echoed by opponents who feared the law for similar reasons. Members of Parliament eventually got the law passed by de-emphasizing the issue of equality between men and women incipient in its passage. Instead, they emphasized the law as a way to protect poor working-classes women's earnings from their profligate husbands, since those women did not currently have the means to do so under the Equity system (needless to say, the fewer indigent working-class wives, the fewer women that the British government would have to provide for in poor houses and the like).

Mr. Camperdown's negative reactions to Mr. Dove's ruling – as indicated by the omniscient narrator – further prove that such anxieties about women and power and changes in the legal system exist. They show his anger that "not only could not the estate claim the necklace as an heirloom, but that greedy siren, that heartless snake, that harpy of a widow, – for it was thus that Mr. Camperdown in his solitude spoke to himself of poor Lizzie … that female swindler could claim it as – paraphernalia? (227). As in multiple other literary and real life instances, Lizzie is called names because she challenges existing legal bounds. She is a "heartless snake" and a "harpy," because she refuses to be "contained" or follow the legal directives suggested by the Establishment. Ultimately, Mr. Dove's ruling is just a suggestion anyway, since it does not prevent a lawsuit from being filed against Lizzie in Chancery. The man of the law is clearly also dominated by his own fictions; he's no "realist" when he calls Lizzie these names.

Sensational Infiltration into Government Social Space

As the story continues and rumors spread, the infiltration of Lizzie's alternate fictional reality goes deeper into the public arena and gradually transforms, taints and infiltrates conversations about important government issues. Some of the listeners believe that the diamonds have really been stolen, some don't. Some listeners – thrilled by the idea that Lizzie could be so extraordinarily clever – believe that she pretends to have the diamonds "stolen" as a conscious ruse to circumvent ceding them to Mr. Camperdown. Rumors about Lizzie's "success" or possible implication in the robberies spreads from drawing room to drawing room, moving metaphorically up into the social hierarchy until they reach that most influential social space in the novel: Lady Glencora Palliser's

drawing room. As the spouse of the future prime minister of England – and a possible stand-in for the government of England – Lady Glencora occupies tremendous political power. Being a woman, she occupies no official communicative pattern in the government, but as a spouse of a Parliamentarian and Cabinet Minister, she exerts considerable influence on both her husband and his immediate social circle. Her words on the subject have the effect of revolutionizing/ altering public opinion by affecting the very core of the nation, those people who work in the government. The extent of Lady Glencora's influence on her social set can be seen in the following quote:

> She … expressed an opinion that Lady Eustace was victim, and all the Mrs. Bonteens, with some even of the Mr. Bonteens, found themselves compelled to agree with her. She stood too high among her set to be subject to that obedience which restrained others, – too high, also, for others to resist her leading. As a member of a party, she was erratic and dangerous, but from her position and peculiar temperament she was powerful. When she declared that poor Lady Eustace was a victim, others were obliged to say so too. (488)

The fact that rumors surrounding Lizzie's "text" have entered this powerful social space proves that her "sensational reality" holds the ultimate power for contaminating, affecting and invading the British government. With Lady Glencora's influence, even those who do not overtly like Lizzie are compelled to participate in her narrative. Once Lady Glencora declares something – whether it be rumor or not – that something somehow gets

renamed as "truth." In the above scenario, Lady Glencora promotes the fiction of Lizzie's innocence since doing so will likely inspire future conversation about interesting events.[67] Lady Glencora's power over the discourse of the drawing room is apparently absolute, but it is interesting to note that Trollope's narrator is also suspicious of the dangerous power which Lady Glencora seems to hold about inviting and privileging certain conversational topics, when he names her "erratic" and "dangerous."

Lizzie's infiltration into governmental discourse echoes a larger infiltration of alternate voices into the governmental discourse happening in society at large during this time period. Early on, it seemed as if true democracy were to be achieved by a change from monarchical to constitutional power in Britain, but by the 1830s, it became obvious that the representative government really did not stand for the interests of the general populace like the Establishment believed that it did. Until the mid- nineteenth century, the government merely served as an elitist representative of a limited social group – men who own property – but as Habermas reminds us, this system began to change by the end of the nineteenth century because of foment amongst the masses. As more men of various classes got the vote and as parliamentary seats are distributed more equitably via governmental changes like the Second Reform Act of 1867, the changes in voting privilege and the widening of governmental representation began to revolutionize

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[67] There's evidence that Lady Glencora really does believe Lizzie to be guilty even though she publicly says the opposite. Her guesses of Lizzie's guilt – "I've no doubt in my own mind who did steal all the things" – seem to be overshadowed by the interest that Lizzie's story inspires. After all, even if Lady Glencora suspects Lizzie has a part in her own robbery, there isn't hard evidence to prove it: "one mustn't mention names in such an affair without evidence" (498). In a patriarchy, legal channels (and the hard evidence that they require for conviction) are the only legitimized channels for guilt. It's, therefore, fabulously interesting that a woman is able to operate outside that system and get away with something that that system defines as a crime.

government, collapsing the previously well-respected boundaries between public and private spheres. Lizzie's invasion into government space, therefore, symbolizes a small scale revolution paralleling that of larger social revolutions caused by changes in voting practices and instruments of public opinion like the newspaper outside.

The literal evidence of Lizzie's infiltration into the public and governmental discourse comes when conversations at Lady Glencora's estate surrounding Lizzie begin to take on political proportions, as believers vs. non-believers form into two distinct political factions as described below:

> before the end of January everybody in London had heard of the great robbery at Carlisle, – and most people had heard also that there was something very peculiar in the matter, – something more than a robbery. Various rumors were afloat … There were strong parties formed in the matter, – whom we may call Lizzieites and anti-Lizzieites. The Lizzieites were of the opinion that poor Lady Eustace was being very ill-treated; – that the diamonds did belong to her, and that Lord Fawn, at any rate, clearly ought to be her own. It was worthy of the remark that these Lizzieites were all of them Conservatives … The whole force of the Government, however, was anti-Lizzieite; as the controversy advanced, every good Liberal became aware that there was nothing so wicked, so rapacious, so bold, or so cunning but that Lady Eustace might have done it, or caused it to be done it (stolen the diamonds herself to avoid having a lawsuit take them away) without delay, without difficulty, and without scruple. (423)

As one can see, in the above passage, the speculations of whether Lizzie was involved in the theft of her own diamonds reach a different level. Not only do the rumors consider Lizzie capable of diamond theft, but they also envision her as capable of committing other "wicked," "rapacious" or "cunning" acts; in short, the rumors idolize Lizzie's presumed creativity in manipulating the law to get whatever she wants. Here, the rumors spread and swell to mock-revolutionary proportions, eventually taking over public discourse causing individuals to take sides on the matter along Parliamentary party lines. The "Lizzieites" – those Conservatives, whose party disagrees with current governmental appointments – support Lady Eustace, and the "anti-Lizzietes" – who include "the whole force of the [Liberal] government" don't.[68] In effect, Lizzie's infiltration into the discourse of British governmental space functions like the inflammatory discourse which Habermas explains is part of the cultural revolution which worked towards changing public opinion from "an instrument of repression" to "an instrument of liberation" (137) and will ultimately end in the combining of the public and private societal spheres. He argues that one of the reasons that the bourgeois public sphere collapses at the end of the nineteenth-century is because the Establishment has become too monolithic, too unable to question itself. Instead, what the culture "needed … was a restricted arrangement to secure for a public opinion finding itself in the minority an influence against the prevailing opinions that *per se* it was incapable of developing" on its own (137). Lizzie,

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[68] The tongue-in-cheek tone with which Trollope's narrator draws out the battlelines functions somewhat like the arguments that occur with Belinda's famous lock of hair in Alexander Pope's "The Rape of the Lock." In both of these pieces, the satirical language criticizes the subject matter, but amuses its readership. Though Trollope ostensibly wrote this book to glorify Lord Palliser as the perfect English political gentleman and to criticize the scheming Lizzie, we can see from the narrator's mock-heroic tone that Trollope is also delighted by Lizzie's power to amuse.

in this instance, in the liminal space of the drawing room represents that minority influence and creates an ultimate distraction from the current government's programs via her sensationalism: "as the controversy advanced, [in fact], every good Liberal became aware that there was nothing so wicked, so rapacious, so bold, or so cunning but that Lady Eustace might have done it, or caused it to be done, without delay, without difficulty and without scruple" (423). But both sides are actively drawn into the debate enough that they are unable to focus on other important Government duties. Most notably, poor Mr. Palliser, current Chancellor of the Exchequer, is unable to trump up interest in the important issue of "altering the value of the penny " because of rumors about the necklace (424). The narrator further notes that "the whole little mystery … has put the ballot, and Mr. Palliser's five-farthinged penny, quite out of joint. Nobody now cares for anything except the Eustace diamonds" (428). This disruption of Mr. Palliser's Parliamentary concerns can be seen as symbolic of the impact that sensational narratives can have on disrupting and de-railing attention to important rational and national concerns.[69] Though Palliser himself is not intended to be the focal point of this novel, the fact that Lizzie's sensational narrative takes precedence over that of Lord Palliser's "penny project" truly represents a disruption in his political trajectory (and the proceeding forth of important British governmental affairs). Lord Palliser – as future prime minister of England in one of Trollope's Palliser novels – symbolizes, therefore, a certain type of rational "Englishness" who, perhaps, Trollope overtly endorses (since he

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[69] Except for a few small details which make Lord Palliser's "penny project" seem tedious, the subject is so elided, so ignored in this scene that perhaps Trollope is sending a message about the banality of some of the actions undertaken by the supposedly rational English government. Perhaps he means to send a message about the need for social change and amusement from time to time in order for the nation to progress.

names a series of novels after him).[70] But at the same time, Trollope's addressing of Lizzie's interesting invasion into common governmental discourse demonstrates the idea that he is fascinated by the entertaining possibilities that she embodies as well and is perhaps interested in satirizing rationality.

The rumors concerning Lizzie's necklace are so rampant, that they spread to all modes of public discourse, including the newspapers and the wire, demonstrating the widespread effect of the sensationalism on the minds of the public as well as Lizzie's successful infiltration into their social realities:

> The mind of Mr. Palliser himself was too deeply engaged to admit of its being interested in the great necklace affair; but, of all the others assembled, there was not one who did not listen anxiously for news on the subject … The old duke … had found it to be a godsend; and from post to post as the facts reaching Matching (the estate) they were communicated to him. And indeed, there were some there who would not wait for the post, but had the news about poor Lizzie's diamonds down by the wires. (425)

Here, the intrusion of Lizzie's little drama into their everyday lives is viewed as a "godsend," and an exciting diversion from monotony. Lady Glencora later says that if Lizzie is eventually discovered as having a role in the robbery of her own diamonds, she ought to be "canonized, – or at least allowed to keep [her] … own plunder (427). She says that "it is so delightful to think that a woman has stolen her own property, and put all

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[70] This is the 3rd out of 6 in Trollope's "Palliser novel" series, all of which feature in some way the political undertakings of Lord Palliser, who ends up being Prime Minister in the 4th book (*Phineas Redux*).

the police into a state of ferment" (431). She doesn't want the police to "unravel the mystery," saying "'I hope it won't come to that … the play is too good to come to an end so soon" (430). The fact that important political and social figures prefer the sensational story to their reality is proof that an invasion of sensation has effectively taken place.[71] Of course, the idea that a robbery is a creative way to head off legal trouble is also intriguing.

As the omniscient narrator reveals to us readers, the suspicions of the drawing room coterie are only somewhat true (though these characters don't know it). Lizzie's diamonds haven't been stolen after all, but only because she had them under her pillow out of fear that someone – Mr. Camperdown or some actual robbers – might try to take them. Lizzie has, in fact, not planned for this robbery to happen. Lizzie's goal all along has been to create her own story, to set her own boundaries for how she need act to ensure that her goals are met. And when the diamonds are stolen, she decides quickly that keeping mum about their whereabouts might resolve her standoff with Mr. Camperdown; after all, he can hardly still pursue legal action to return the diamonds if she no longer has them, can he? But, being in the public discourse means that Lizzie's "text," like any rumor, begins to take on a life outside of her personal control. Like anything revolutionary, its influences spread far and wide, gathering others into its net.

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[71] The public is scandalized that a woman who is allowed to retain so much because of recent British law even clamors for more. Is giving women any property a slippery slope which will enable further greediness?

The Role of Newpapers in the Reconstruction of Truth

Trollope's novel is in many ways about who gets control of the text concerning the diamonds and whose system of operating prevails. Lizzie's constant holding out on cooperating with the authorities about returning the diamonds or admitting that they were not stolen provides a threatening affront to those legal officials – including lawyers or police officers – who usually operate without question as male authority figures within a patriarchal system. In this sense, therefore, the novel highlights a metaphorical battleground between Lizzie's sensational text and a perceived rational national England. The anxieties and interest caused by Lizzie's sensational story get larger and larger, until direct criticisms on the Establishment begin to leach their way into public discourse via the newspapers, which overtly criticize the ineptitude of the police department in solving the crime of the missing diamonds. In a chapter appropriately entitled "Humpty Dumpty,"[72] the narrator describes the situation thus: "it had been asserted over and over again that in no other civilized country in the world could so great an amount of property have passed through the hands of thieves without leaving some clue by which the police would have made their way to the truth" (509). This comment testifies to the anxieties

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[72] According to the East Anglia Tourist Board in England: "Humpty Dumpty was a powerful cannon during the English Civil War (1642-49). It was mounted on top of the St Mary's at the Wall Church in Colchester defending the city against siege in the summer of 1648. (Although Colchester was a Parliamentarian stronghold, it had been captured by the Royalists and they held it for 11 weeks.) The church tower was hit by the enemy and the top of the tower was blown off, sending "Humpty" tumbling to the ground. Naturally the King's men tried to mend him but in vain." (from http://www.zelo.com/family/nursery/humpty.asp on 1 Nov. 2004). The chapter title of "Humpty Dumpty" here indicates that the novel is somewhat of a social satire; the mention of the nursery rhyme and its historically revolutionary roots is significant since it shows how an existing conservative governmental system is under siege by an enemy from within the nation. Lizzie and her "text" operate like the Parliamentarians in the earlier 1688 Glorious Revolution by disrupting and creating doubts about the abilities of British law enforcement to solve the mystery. The government and its constituent legal element are, therefore, under siege here as well. The use of imagery from the seventeenth-century Revolution in a nineteenth-century text brings to mind the both the ways that sensation evokes cultural revolutions and the ways that revolution tends to be cyclical.

which Lizzie's slippage through the legal system for her supposed role in the robbery of her diamonds causes. The British legal system – probably supposed by British citizens to be one of the most "civilized" and rational in the world – is unable to "contain" Lizzie's mystery and its disruption of tranquil, pragmatic mystery solving.

Clearly then, Lizzie's "text," a commodity articulated within and by the newspaper, begins to have tremendous cultural value because of the way that it serves to circulate her story within the public sphere. Habermas reminds us that the identity of the public sphere and newspapers are deeply interconnected as collaborative social forces; he, in fact, calls "the published word" the public's sphere's "decisive mark" (17). Lizzie's story spreading far and wide, therefore, gives her both figurative and literal power. After all, unlike most women, who were "excluded from any share in public authority because they h[o]ld no office" or have no way to have their voice be heard, Lizzie is able to infiltrate the public sphere and discourse (18). The power for her is not in controlling what the story says, but in having a story in the first place. Unlike serving the role for which newspapers were originally intended (to reflect the public authority by presenting politically sanctioned news), Lizzie's text, however, serves as a voice of what Habermas calls the unheard "private public." That is to say, it symbolically enacts a new "democratically revolutionized public sphere 'that wishes to substitute' the real civil society (how people live) for the 'fictitious civil society of the legislature'" (Habermas 127). It distracts the newspapers from reporting "legitimate news" about the workings of the British government and, in fact, begins to openly critique legal systems – like the police department – which are not accustomed to being questioned, but which certainly do not want to investigate the privileged.

From the police officers' perspective, part of what is most galling about the newspaper accounts surrounding Lizzie is that they imply that in order to surmount the critique launched upon itself (an established legal unit of the British government), the police department must invade the privacy of aristocratic families (i.e. another clear part of the Establishment). Doing so, of course, implies a disruption of practices tantamount to a revolution in traditional police detecting practices (which typically seek to retain the privacy of the landed classes from the onslaught of the uncouth uneducated working-class masses). In other words, Lizzie's story provokes a revolution turned within. The policemen of the force are consequently "very angry" about the newspaper situation: "had it been an affair simply of thieves … everything would have been discovered long since; – but when lords and ladies with titles come to be mixed up with such an affair, – folk in whose house a policeman can't have his will at searching and browbeating – how is a detective to detect anything?" (510).[73]

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[73]The following poem which appeared in *Punch* on April 25, 1863 speaks precisely to the types of fears experienced by these policemen mid century. "The danger of upside down" is that once the masses become "educated classes," there will be less separation between them and their higher class counterparts. Every traditional system, therefore, runs the risk of being turned "upside down;" every privileged person runs the risk of being confused with "the lower orders," etc. Established traditions of the law enforcement system will be irrevocably altered when lords and ladies can be treated the same as seemingly less worthy counterparts. An extension of education and the franchise to the lower classes, therefore, is tantamount to causing cultural revolution – and this revolution isn't a good thing for those individuals are accustomed to retaining their current right to be in control.

THE DANGER OF UPSIDE DOWN"

Who are the Lower Orders?
The uneducated masses,
The unintellecutal classes?
They are the Lower Orders.

Who'll be the Higher Orders?
The newly enfranchised masses,
Preponderating classes;
They'll be the Higher Orders.

Yet, the entertainment value of the above possibility still seems to overtake the disgruntled police officers when one of them admits that his rational thought processes about who might have stolen the Eustace diamonds are clouded by the "alluring conviction that a lord had been the chief of thieves" (515). Considerable anxieties seem to exist in the British legal system, therefore, when assignations of criminality transgress expected class boundaries for propriety and "decent" behavior; it's easier to assign guilt (and make an arrest) if the perpetrators fit the criminal stereotype of being uneducated, working-class dimwits. The system, of course, does not assume that upper-class individuals are likely criminals, and this eventuality makes it more difficult to track criminals of this type down (and more frustrating too)[74]. At the same time, the fact that the thieves have gotten away with their crime speaks to the brilliance with which whoever stole the diamonds must be regarded by the rumor-mongering Victorian public.[75]

As they do in *Salem Chapel*, the newspapers here begin to promote new stories about what constitutes reality so often that these stories literally begin to replace reality in

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Who'll be the Lower Orders?
Educate the masses,
Or, educated classes,
You'll be the Lower Order. (181)

[74] At one point, Gager, one of the two police officers assigned to the case comments on how stupid it is police offers to guess how a robbery happened because of circulating rumors. He says, "it is gammon – running away with ideas like them, just as if you was one of the public" (513). Presumably, the British legal system is more "rational" than the ridiculous public, which assigns guilt to a person based upon interesting ideas.

[75] The intermixing of low and high classes represented by the criminal actions in this book is connected to the type of cultural revolution mentioned in my earlier footnote. The two police detectives can't enter the boudoir of the rich to question them because this would constitute an invasion of private space by public processes and discourse (the revolution turned inward). Lizzie's text, therefore, disrupts tranquility, but because she's an aristocrat, her physical surroundings and social class protect her to some extent.

the minds of even those about whom the stories are written, thereby enacting the metaphorical changes to society which Lizzie's enemies fear. For example, the excitement surrounding Lizzie's possible implication in the theft of the diamonds begins to spread to speculations about a titled friend of hers, Lord George's possible involvement in the crime. Though Lord George himself is guiltless, he begins to imagine he were the scandalous character represented in the newspaper stories. This new personae frightens him, especially since he has no control over mediating his new "reality." But, at the same time, the newspaper paints such an intriguing mystery about himself that Lord George ironically gets drawn into the text of his own sensation novel. Consider his comment to his friends about this issue:

> I wish I could get at what you really think. The whole thing would be so complete if the three of you suspected me … I must brazen it out here; and the worst of it is, that I feel a look of guilt creeping over me. I have a sort of conviction growing upon me that I shall be taken up and tried, and that a jury will find me guilty. I dream about it; and if, – as is probable, – it drives me mad. I'm sure that I accuse myself in my madness. There's a fascination about it that I can't explain or escape. I go on thinking how I would have done it if I did do it. I spend hours calculating how much I would have realised, and where I would have found my market. I couldn't keep myself from asking Benjamin (the jeweler) the other day how much they would be worth to him. (454 sic)

The above quote speaks to the ways in which a newspaper's "truth" actually begins to become Lord George's "truth." Though Lord George is a person clearly defined by his

gender and economic position as having a right to participate in the dominant public conversations, he is powerless to stop the momentum that works towards re-defining his own privileged position in society. The infiltration of sensationalized fictions into the heart of that reality demonstrates the danger that they can promote for the Establishment. Habermas reminds us that during the mid-nineteenth century, "the category of a general legal standing" for people was beginning to shift in general so that "the latter was no longer defined by estate and birth" (75). One of the revolutions which Lizzie's text, therefore, evokes is one in which people are no longer defined by their estates, but rather by their individual autonomy.

The Second Robbery and Lizzie's Further Manipulation of the Law

Following a second robbery in Hertford Street – this time the real robbery of her jewels – Lizzie begins to have doubts as to how to play her role as a robbery victim any longer; she begins to question "in what way she would conduct herself when the police should come to her on the following morning … How should she look … How should she bear herself … Must she commit more perjury, with the certainty that various people must know that her oath was false? … All the world would soon know the truth" (471). Lizzie makes a resolution that night "not to be taken to court," and she devises a number of methods – both by creating her own law and by manipulating existing law – for not allowing this to happen. One of these methods using manipulation of the existing law is to consider getting remarried so that her spouse can take the brunt of the legal attack against her. Lizzie knows that if she re-marries, her new husband will have to solve her problem for her since women are legal non-entities and men are constructed by legal

documents. Another strategy is to refuse to speak to any legal officials about the robberies and to refuse to appear bodily in court.[76] In this way, she continues creating her own story, her own system of operation, her own law.

The second robbery merely serves to heighten the already existing exciting sentiments amongst Lady Glencora's social group. The narrator here comments that "the second robbery to which Lady Eustace had been subjected by no means decreased the interest which was attached to her and her concerns in the fashionable world" (485). On the other hand, the second robbery heightens rumors that Lord George, someone equally as fascinating as Lizzie (in terms of the way he's viewed scandalously) may have had a part stealing the diamonds so that Lizzie can avoid her pending lawsuit about them. Mr. Palliser's uncle, who as a duke holds the highest rank of any fictional character in the novel "eagerly says, "I think, you know, that Lord George Carruthers has had something to do with it. Don't you Madame Goesler?" The duke is "anxious that one of his own order should be proved to have been the thief, as the plunder taken was so lordly" (487). The fact that Lizzie's story has piqued interest at the very highest circles of the aristocracy shows that it has infiltrated the very heart of the old world Establishment here. Romantic visions of the "perfect" villain are, therefore, both scandalous and exciting. They even come to affect Lizzie herself.

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[76] This moment – her failure to appear in court is particularly interesting since it exposes the extent to which Lizzie's entertainment value has become almost expected by the British public. Her absence from court "was a great disappointment to the sightseers of London." (707). When the crowd heard that it was "to be robbed of the pleasure of Lady Eustace's cross-examination, there arose almost a public feeling of wrath that justice should be outraged" (706).

Lizzie's One Weakness: Her Desire for a "Corsair"

Lizzie has one significant weakness. Despite her ability to manipulate personal variables outside the law, to be the "fiction-maker" of her own "sensational text," and to consistently defy what is perceived as unquestioned government authority, Lizzie is a romantic and gets "taken in" by the concept that she can find perfect happiness via the types of idealized scenarios found in fiction. So while she has worked so actively throughout the novel to control her "bodily text" and the image which this text represents of her, Lizzie's literally desires to have her life become literature: "poetry was what her heart craved; – poetry, together with houses, champagne, jewels and admiration" (610). Early on in the novel, after reading lots of Byron, she imagines "a possible Corsair who would be willing to give up all but his vices for her love, and for whose sake she would be willing to share even them' (98). [77] She imagines living a life where she "desired to be so in love that she could surrender everything to her love … 'Ah,' she would say to herself … 'if I had a Corsair of my own, how I would sit on watch for my lover's boat by the seashore!" (43). The man who plays the role as Corsair matters little to Lizzie; what's more important is that this unknown hero participate in a fictional life trajectory with her. But by the middle of the novel, Lizzie assigns the "Corsair" title to Lord George, who she imagines will romantically come to her rescue and help her secrete the diamonds when the police return to search her home. Lord George's identity as Lucy's imagined Corsair occurs in the middle of the novel, when we see that

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[77] "The Corsair" Lizzie is referring to is the eponymous hero of his narrative poem of the same name, written in 1814.

> Lizzie Eustace made up her mind that Lord George was the very Corsair she had been expecting ever since she had mastered Lord Byron's great poem. He had a way of doing things and of saying things, of proclaiming himself to be master, and at the same time of making himself thoroughly agreeable to his dependents, – and especially to the one dependent whom he most honoured at the time, – which exactly suited Lizzie's ideas of what a man should be. And then he possessed that utter indifference to all conventions and laws, which is the great prerogative of Corsairs. He had no reverence for aught divine or human, – which is a great thing. The Queen and Parliament, the bench of bishops, and even the police, were to him just so many fungi and parasites, and noxious vapours, and false hypocrites. It was delightful to live with a man, who himself had a title of his own, but who could speak of dukes and marquises as being quite despicable by reason of their absurd position. (395).

What fascinates Lizzie about Lord George is that, like her, he seems to flout many legal and social institutions held dear by most Britons, ridiculing them and in many ways, dismissing them with his own personal behaviors. In short, he exhibits an aristocratic swagger. Like Lizzie, Lord George seems to embody "utter indifference" to the law. What Lizzie ultimately discovers, however, is that when she decides to share the "true" story of her involvement with the diamonds with Lord George, he is unable to rescue her without abandon. He is initially impressed by Lizzie's cleverness and the fact that he believes "she has managed" to plan two robberies as a creative ploy to keep the diamonds. But in the end, he is disgruntled with her progress, saying that her efforts have

been for naught. Though she "had got the kernel to herself … the end of it seems to be that you have lost your property, and sworn ever so many false oaths, and have brought all of your friends into trouble, and have got nothing by it" (sic 678-9). He is, in fact, negatively affected by the rumors which develop concerning his possible involvement in the mysterious robbery and eventually becomes so angered by them that he abandons his possible mercenary attempts to marry her. Lizzie's romanticized versions of what will take place when she needs assistance – those that add to her possible downfall – emanate from her over-reliance on reading practices.

The result of Lizzie's romanticized courting of Lord George (he never reciprocates) is proof that Lizzie's own sensational storyline marks a better and more powerful trajectory to women, in both relationships and legal issues. Society tells women that they must find "Corsairs" to be saved, but in reality, Lizzie is the strongest when she creates and revels in her own created reality. She is the strongest when she is independent and autonomous. Sharing her story is a mistake because it means that she has less control of her "text" once this happens. On the other hand, Lizzie's "text" is still wreaking some widespread effects on the public discourse, meaning that its power will never disappear.

Bigamous Marriages: The Heroine Trumped?

The ending of the novel – when Lizzie finally opts to marry Mr. Emilius – marks a further radical change in Lizzie's power and circumstances. It is here that we learn that Lizzie is ultimately unable to exert the type of control and power which she has held as a single woman because marrying "contains" her in the legal system; as we've learned

from Joan Perkin the traditional British family (and the ways that husbands and wives traditionally relate to one another) serves as a microcosm of patriarchy and conservative English values. When Lizzie accepts Mr. Emilius, she imagines then that in marrying him "should she determine to do so, she might be sure … of dictating her own terms to the settlement" (715). We later learn, however, that despite Lizzie's wholehearted efforts to arrange a way to keep her Portray Castle income for herself, Mr. Emilius agreed to "no settlements prejudicial to that marital supremacy which should be attached to the husband." Because "her betrothals had been made public to all the world" and "she did not dare to recede from another (publicly known) marital engagement, she concedes (720). Both Lizzie and Mr. Emilius are trying to manipulate the legal system to get what they desire.

To be sure, the reason that Lizzie is attracted to Mr. Emilius in the first place is very interesting since he's described by the narrator as being "a greasy, fawning, pawing, creeping, black-browed rascal" with a possibly still living wife in Bohemia (596). Rather, Lizzie likes and accepts the fact that Mr. Emilius lies about himself, because lying implies "a dash of poetry … and poetry … was not compatible with humdrum truth" (667). For Lizzie, lies are "more beautiful than truth" (719). Lizzie is impressed by the manner in which Mr. Emilius courts her even though "she knew, or half knew, that the man was a scheming hypocrite, craving her money, and following her in the hour of her troubles, because he might then have the best chance of success" (718). But when we consider Lizzie's constant romantic quest for someone who makes her feel that "poetry was life and life poetry" (485), we should not be too surprised. Lizzie and Mr. Emilius, after all, have more in common than many couples. Both seem to be at odds with austere

conventionalism, a characteristic which Jonathon Freedman indicates Trollopean Jewish characters always seem to eschew.[78] Mr. Emilius is also a "particularly fun-loving capitalist," like Ferdinand Lopez, another Jew in Freedman's discussion (74), in that he's overt about his intentions to marry Lizzie for money and sets up his plan as one would a desirable business deal (i.e. "here's what's in it for you and for me"). Lizzie, like Mr. Emilius also operates in a similar mercenary and greedy system; both characters involve themselves in "speculation … which involves … the projection of imaginative desires as the making if profit from those desires" (75), and so both characters are somewhat made for each other. And, therefore, both represent "marketplace pleasures and anxieties" about capitalism (59). In short, the characters of Lizzie and Mr. Emilius are both "fiction makers," who construct their own bodily texts of their realities in a way that privileges what they want fellow characters to perceive. Therefore, the characteristics of Mr. Emilius which would normally turn her fellow Victorian characters off – such as his greasy, slinky manner, his suspicious past, and the rumors surrounding his possible living wife – are actually attractive to her. After all, Lizzie's own power depends, in part, on the rumors that circulate about her too. Lizzie's "high friends" – like Lady Glencora – would probably never have associated with her but for her sensational personae and the story which it embodies; the perception that Lizzie is a brilliant manipulator gets her further along on her path to social recognition than does her inherited fortune. Mr. Emilius' appears to wield his power in a similar way.

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[78] Freedman's study, entitled *The Temple of Culture:Assimilation and Anti-Semitism in Literary Anglo-America*, never mentions *The Eustace Diamonds* directly. But his commentary about Jewish-ness and how Anti-Semitic representation functions in *The Prime Minister*, another of Trollope's Palliser novels, seems appropriate for other novels too.

Yet Lizzie's union with Mr. Emilius provides some very real dangers to her economic autonomy and that shared characteristic of "fiction-making," the personal control over her bodily text which has attracted Lizzie to him in the first place. One of the last words the narrator gives readers concerning Lizzie's arrangement hints that she may have received a final come-uppance by her fellow fiction-maker:

> It may be that Mr. Emilius will suit her as any husband that she could find, – unless it shall be found that his previous career has been too adventurous. After a certain fashion, he will, perhaps, be tender to her; and he will have his own way in everything, and be no whit afraid when she is about to die in an agony of tears before his eyes. The writer of the present story may, however, declare that the future fate of this lady shall not be left altogether in obscurity. (721)

Perhaps Mr. Emilius's previous career – an allusion to the fact that he may already be married to someone else – may have been "too adventurous," thereby enabling Mr. Emilius to abscond Lizzie's income without honoring his new marital bond to her. After all, it is quite clear that Mr. Emilius is willing to use the law when it is convenient for him and operate outside of it when it behooves him. Mr. Palliser's uncle reiterates the narrator's concerns when he tells Lady Glencora that "I'm afraid that your friend hasn't what I call a good time before her," echoing the narrator's concerns (726). In many ways, therefore, unlike some of the more obviously respectable representatives of aristocratic gentlemanly behavior (Lord Fawn, Frank Greystock), it is the "nasty, greasy, lying, squinting Jew preacher … a creature to loathe because he's an imposter" (667) that stands up to Lizzie and is finally able to manipulate her into compliance. Mr. Emilius, in part

succeeds because he lures Lizzie in with his "oiliness," his "dash of poetry" and his obvious lying. It is Lizzie's attachment to idealistic and romantic notions from her reading that catches her off guard.

Of course, Trollope's anti-Semitic tone when dealing with Mr. Emilius reveals deep cultural anxieties about what it means that Mr. Emilius becomes its standard bearer in standing up to Lizzie. Mr. Emilius, like Lizzie is also a perceived contaminant to the "pure" British ideals of the Establishment. The Eustace family had earlier expressed a wish that now that the diamonds are gone, "it would be a good thing to get the widow married and placed under some decent control" (601). It is quite unlikely that this is the type of control that they desired, since Mr. Emilius' suspicious foreign identity and ambiguous shady past bring up their own anxieties about who is in control of the income willed to their late son's wife. For Lizzie to be "trumped" by a bigamist suggests that the couple, under coverture, represents additional threats to the hegemony if it were to operate legally as a social unit.

Perhaps Lizzie and Mr. Emilius' relationship, therefore, mimics the collapse of the public and private sphere, which Habermas equates with modernity and which critics like Louis Althusser equate to revolution.[79] Mr. Emilius and Lizzie's relationship does not fit this expected pattern; neither one occupies the position of "correct" authority over the other nor do either fully operate within the law's control. How else could Mr. Emilius have two wives? Bigamy certainly is not legal, but if Emilius is a bigamist, he's

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[79] Louis Althusser demonstrates how a distinction between the public and private spheres is necessary in order for bourgeois law to work (and exercise its authority) (97).

proving that the law does not control his behavior any more than it controls Lizzie's. Both his and Lizzie's patterns of defiance about the law mesh.

The fact that Mr. Emilius seems to have the upper hand by the end of the novel (and that the public is excited by the possible tyranny Mr. Emilius may hold over Lizzie) seems to indicate that for the Victorian public, misogyny and fear of independence in women is more virulent than xenophobia.[80] The reason that "women losing their [submissive] place" is more fearful to society at large is that changes in women's roles and increases in women's independence constitute a direct revolution in domestic affairs (a revolution of the family from the inside out). If women are "contaminated" by things that allow them to eschew their social roles as "angels of the house," there is no end to the harms that can be effected on the nation as a whole. What Cannon Schmitt calls "the Gothic turned inward," that danger occurring to Victorian domesticity from within is much more insidious than those recognized dangers from without. No one suspects British woman to contaminate the family household and/ or try to seize the family capital.

It is appropriate that the novel ends with a recounting of new rumors at the Palliser estate concerning Lizzie's marriage to Mr. Emilius. This time, in a sensational triumph, the rumors invade multiple types of private domestic space, including a Duke's personal morning sitting room and a billiard room.[81] It is clear from the reporting of the

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[80] After all, we have to remember that Mr. Emilius has two counts against him: he's both suspiciously foreign and a possible bigamist. A February 8, 1868 *Punch* cartoon, entitled "The Zulu Bride" confirms the idea that the Establishment's fears about aberrant women are greater than those about foreigners. In this cartoon, a man objects to a Zulu bride marrying an English gentleman on the basis of her possible bigamy. The fact that the cartoon never mentions race when cultural difference is absolutely exaggerated in the drawing – the woman wears a grass skirt, nor any shirt or shoes – highlights the concerns which women behaving outside of the law engender amongst the Victorian public.

[81] And, of course, this crossover means that Lizzie's discourse, her sensationalism, has even reached the more private sanctuaries of the British household.

rumors that even Lizzie's "friends" are more interested in the scandalous stories surrounding her than about her well-being as a newly married wife. Lizzie's marriage to Mr. Emilius and the final scenes of the novel seem to suggest that the tradition of patriarchy ultimately holds more power over Lizzie in the end than Lizzie suspects it will. Lizzie, as an embodiment of the Married Women's Property Act, still proves an enigma. On the one hand, the experiences of her story spreading promote gradual social changes through a ripple effect. On the other hand, her marriage to the repressive Mr. Emilius seems to suggest perhaps that Trollope expected the Act to be fairly ineffective at changing patriarchy up front (even though the Act and Lizzie seem to pose such a threat).

Chapter Four:
Sensation Within the Nation: The Wild(e) Story of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* as a Legal Text

> "There is only one thing in the world worse than being talked about, and that is not being talked about" (2) – Lord Henry to Basil in *The Picture of Dorian Gray*.

> "If I catch you again with that man, I will make a public scandal in a way you little dream of; it is only a suppressed one. I prefer an open one, and at any rate I shall not be blamed for allowing such a state of things to go on. Unless this acquaintance ceases, I shall carry out my threat and stop all supplies, and if you are not going to make any attempt to do something, I shall certainly cut you down to a mere pittance, so you know what to expect" (Holland 215) – letter from Lord Queensbury to his son about the latter's intimate relations with Wilde, dated Tuesday April 3 1894, one year before the Queensbury trial; it was read out loud during the Queensbury court proceedings.

> "Words! Mere words! How terrible they were! How clear and vivid, and cruel! And yet what subtle magic was in them! They seemed to give plastic form to formless things, and to have a music of their own as sweet as that of viol or lute. Mere words! Was there anything so real as words?" (Holland 260). – Quote from *Dorian Gray* about the power of dangerous literature, read out loud in the Queensbury trial

When Oscar Wilde's famous trial for sodomy began, the event was clearly a great public sensation which directly engaged Victorian anxieties about homosexuality – the fact that it really existed and the need for the Victorian public and legal system to condemn it. According to the *Westminister Gazette* from April 3, 1895, the excitement and anticipation of the trial were evidenced by a packed courtroom which was clearly

overloaded with spectators, particularly legal representatives, waiting for the scandalous drama that was expected to ensue. The legal experts, particularly the barristers

> came not [as] single spies, but whole battalions. And, so far as they were permitted, they took possession of every seat which seemed capable of accommodating their person's. They sat in the barristers' seats; they sat in the solicitors' seats; they sat in the witnesses' seats; they sat in the ushers' seats; and, excepting the Bench, they sat in all the other seats which they could capture. And when the seats were all used up, they stood, a serried mass of voluble, grey-wigged, black-gowned humanity, in the gangways and approaches of the court. The only serious rivals to the barristers were the reporters. All the seats that were not occupied by briefless barristers contained reporters … What few remaining places were not occupied by the reporters were filled with an eager, struggling crowd of lookers-on, who had succeeded, in ways on which it were rash to speculate, in prevailing upon the janitors to grant them entrance. Up above, the public proper looked down on the battling crowd beneath. (qtd. in Holland xxvii)

The spectators of Wilde's drama were not disappointed. According to Merlin Holland, Wilde's grandson and editor of the recently published full transcript of his grandfather's trial, unlike most court case defendants, the newspaper accounts and contemporary court transcripts seemed to demonstrate that Wilde was "treating the Court like a theatre" in both his mannerisms and his snide witty responses to official questions (xxix). Wilde lied about his age and then proceeded to entertain the "audience" with a banter which was both obtuse and designed for effect. He prevaricated regularly in his responses, which

were often intended to frustrate the prosecution into asking him questions again and again in order to clarify their position. The court transcripts regularly show that Wilde interacted with his prosecutor, Carson, as follows:

> Carson: I want an answer to a simple question. Have you ever felt that feeling of adoring madly a beautiful male person many years younger than yourself?
>
> Wilde: I have never given adoration to anybody except myself (*Loud laughter*)…
>
> Carson: 'I quite admit that I adored you madly.' Have you ever had that experience towards a beautiful male person many years younger than yourself.[82]
>
> Wilde: I have given you my answer. Adoration is a thing I reserve for myself.
>
> Carson: I ask you 'yes' or 'no,' sir to my question … Then you have never had the feeling that you depict there?
>
> Wilde: No, it was borrowed from Shakespeare I regret to say (*Laughter*).

[82] The phrase that Carson quotes comes from Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray*; it denotes the feelings that Basil Hallward holds towards Dorian Gray and which are supposedly apparent when one views his famous painting of Dorian.

Carson: From Shakespeare?

Wilde: Yes, from Shakespeare's sonnets.

Carson: 'I adored you madly, extravagantly'?

Wilde: Yes.

Carson: Have you ever extravagantly adored?

Wilde: Do you mean financially or emotionally?

Carson: Financially? – do you think we're talking here of finance?

Wilde: I don't know what you're talking about.

Carson: Don't you?

Wilde: You must ask me a plain question.

Carson: I hope I will make myself plain before I am done. 'I was jealous of everyone to whom you spoke.' Have you ever been jealous?

> Wilde: Never in my life.
>
> Carson: Never?
>
> Wilde. Never. What should I be jealous of?
>
> Carson: 'I wanted to have you all to myself.' Did you ever have that feeling towards –
>
> Wilde: I should consider it an intense bore. I should consider it an intense nuisance. (*Laughter*). (Holland 91-2).

Wilde's stubbornness and flamboyant overconfident answers, in fact, extended throughout much of the trial, even after the lawyers – who had hired private detectives to follow him – questioned him concerning case after case of his supposed sodomy. And while Wilde was in control of the courtroom drama, he clearly adored the sensation that he provoked. But as Morris Kaplan says, Wilde eventually went too far in his commentary when he was "asked if he had kissed a youth working as a waiter at one of his dinners" and replied "Oh, no, never in my life; he was a peculiarly plain boy" (238), since this comment seemed to suggest underlying homosexual sentiments. When Wilde eventually lost the case, however, the same public that had adored him moments before broke out into "loud applause and cheering" upon hearing of the verdict condemning his homosexual activities (Holland xxx). Strangely enough, "no bail was allowed, which

was surprising as the offence was classified merely as a misdemeanor" (Holland xxxi). The extreme response seems to have occurred precisely because Oscar Wilde was the poster boy for a social condition and issue that began increasingly to cause discontent and negative currents in the Victorian social scene. Though Wilde had been popular and much beloved when he was only suspected of leading a sensational and avant garde lifestyle, once revelations of his perceived personal practices seemed proven by the preponderance of evidence presented against him at his three trials, the Victorian public abandoned him.[83] Victorians did not want to admit that homosexuality existed, and preferred that those who inhabited this identity would pose as heterosexual. Victorian society, after all, was filled with people who "socially posed" as decent law-abiding and "normal" citizens even though they privately didn't fit the social scripts decided upon by Victorian society as acceptable. Wilde's crime, in reality, is that he refused to adopt the social poses that society expected of him. Wilde, therefore, created and inhabited analternative social text and served as the living reality that alternative lifestyles were possible. In this way, Wilde evokes concerns similar to those offered in other chapters of this dissertation study. He was vilified like Mary Braddon for living a non-traditional life style. And like *Lady Audley's Secret*, *Salem Chapel* and *The Eustace Diamonds*, his sensational novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – parts of which were literally read out

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[83] Much evidence points to the fact that Wilde was adored prior to his trial, but that public opinion about both he and his work drastically changed when he was shown to be a "sodomite" at his second trial. According to Norbert Kohl, author of *Oscar Wilde: The Works of a Conformist Rebel*, *Dorian Gray* was published in seven languages in the immediate years following its publication: Dutch (1893), French (1895), German (1901), Italian (1905-6), Russian (1905), Swedish (1905) and Polish (1906), and in Germany alone, the book went through 20 translations between 1901 and 1967 (139). All indicate his popularity, at least, as a writer. No matter where Wilde went, he always had a strong personal following to this effect. Following his trial, Wilde's plays were withdrawn from public viewing because of the presumed immorality of their author.

loud at Wilde's trial – evoked fears about changing legal statues and daily norms for living that are tantamount to cultural revolution.

Oscar Wilde fits into this dissertation project in the ways that he uses sensational techniques as a method for creating his own kind of fictional "space" within the "social text" of England. Wilde's "fictional space" includes the sensation created within his literal writing (fiction and criticism), but also the sensation of his own self-fashioning as a transgressive nontraditional persona. Part of Wilde's sensationalism has to do with his embracing of a homosexual identity for himself in a late Victorian world which refuses to recognize that such an identity exists. Oscar Wilde's associations with young men – like Dorian's – are tolerated as long as they're not paraded out in the open as proven homosexual encounters. Oscar Wilde, on the other hand, is extraordinarily scandalous and entertaining in his own right. His art is provocative and interesting. Though he poses as a "respectable gentleman," his character exudes just enough mystery to intrigue his reading and viewing public without offending it outright.[84] But this is before the Queensbury trial.

Ultimately, Wilde's trial strips away Victorian fictions promoted by the Establishment: fictions about nationhood, fictions about perceived binaries separating high and low culture, the public and private spheres, and "French" and "English" behavioral norms. Wilde's trial ends up being revolutionary. Because of the insidious "private" persona that seems to emerge during the trial proceedings and the dangerous possibilities that this persona evokes, Wilde exerts tremendous pressure on the hegemony

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[84] This is not to say that Wilde had no detractors before the trial. Of course he did. But according to his biographers, Wilde was absolutely vilified on a grand scale after the fact. The trial truly was a cultural revolution.

of England by creating his sensation, and as such, he plays his role in effecting conversation and eventually social change in a number of arenas. Both he and his work challenge British perceptions about everything: sexuality, the way people live their lives (i.e. he thinks it should be for pleasure and that people should ignore conservative, diligent, and practical ideologies. He descries rational, national England, and feels that the British are too constrained), and artistic trends. He wants to embrace "French-ness," and transgress the cultural divide between perceived French and English values, then replace some British values with those that are "French-like." But also important is the fact that Wilde stages a change in artistic norms. He represents decadence, a "revulsion from realism" – to use the title of *Dorian Gray* book review – a revolution in artistic norms. While he certainly isn't the sole cause for social change, his "fictions" prefigure modernity and challenge traditional definitions of British respectability and acceptable behavior patterns.

Anxieties about Wilde's sensationalism invading the nation of England – his revolutions – come up in a number of places and operate similarly to attacks against Braddon and other sensation novel writers in this project. See for example the following quote from a reviewer of the trial in *The Daily Chronicle* of April 6, 1895 which emphasizes notions of invasion and penetration of the insidious values which were presumably promulgated by Wilde's "fictions" and exposed at the Queensbury trial:

> The trail of this fetid fashion has *penetrated* into our theatres, where it is too much the mode to borrow from the French stage the motives and combinations which season the drama to the jaded appetites of the Parisians. The shame and disgrace of it have *invaded* art, and we are

> asked to admire nowadays specimens from the impressionist and fleshly galleries which are of true serious art merely the burlesque and the mockery. It has passed, with heavy damage to good taste and rightful amusement, into the domain of fiction, so that we see novel after novel aspire to a moment's popularity mainly on the grounds of prurient sexuality or of ignorant disbelief (italics mine).[85]

Consider too the language which describes the poisonous and "fetid" contamination which threatens the English nation, and how this contamination is attributed to French influences.

As my previous dissertation chapters show, *Lady Audley's Secret*, *Salem Chapel* and *The Eustace Diamonds* all overtly challenge legal situations that are unjust to women (the Infant Custody Act of 1839, the Matrimonial Causes and Divorce Act of 1857 and the Married Women's Property Act of 1870) by showing fictional heroines who suffer the consequences of these unjust laws and by making readers aware of their heroines' plights. As a consequence, all three novels – as well as some of the authors – overtly engage the social and legal texts represented by the British government whose legislation denies women certain rights and gives the impression that legislative changes aren't needed. Wilde's novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – as a critical component of the Queensbury trial – actively participates in a cultural conversation about unfair legislation restricting human rights, though this time it was a restriction of rights for homosexual men. In this case, the legislation referred to is the Labouchere Amendment of the 1885

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[85] Reprinted on pg. 76 of Jonathon Goodman's *The Oscar Wilde File*, which is a compilation of complete newpaper articles surrounding the three trials as well as Wilde's imprisonment.

Criminal Law Amendment Act, which outlawed homosexual activities between men just ten years before Wilde's trial began.[86] Though the novel itself seems innocuous, merely a fantastic fiction about a man who lives an indolent life of the senses without addressing any significant social problems or realities, the novel's themes resist the "social" text" of England in ways that are very pivotal to the overall cultural debate about visible homosexuality. Unlike the three previous novels, *Dorian Gray* never overtly engages legal discourse or flouts it. In fact, the language of the novel may seem overly simplistic, even if witty and clever. It is a sensation novel too.[87] This intentional omission of legal and social discourse, including Wilde's organization of the entire novel on the basis of nouveau aesthetic principles, however, is very revolutionary just the same. Wilde's preface clearly situates the book as part of a new literary revolution, a book which stages a change in artistic norms and moving away from realism. And though the book, on the surface, seems to engage few legal questions, few challenges to the social text, the opposite is actually the case. We see this when prosecutors at Wilde's trial use the book as evidence of its author's depravity and when viewers of the spectacle-that-was-Wilde-at-court equate Wilde's own "depraved" private behaviors with those of his protagonist. Dorian is "proof" that Wilde is a depraved homosexual. Dorian is "proof" that Wilde

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[86] The fact that the law was passed just 10 years before Wilde's trial indicates that concerns about homosexual behavior being deviant were a rising social concern.

[87] One only has to look at the book reviews responding to the novel to see this: for example, a July 18, 1890 *Punch* review calls *Dorian Gray* a "weird sensational romance." A June 24, 1890 *St. James Gazette* reviewer complains that Wilde's main goal in the novel is "to shock readers," a comment that certainly echoes Henry Mansel's *Quarterly Review* definition of sensation fiction that which "preaches to the nerves." As I discuss in the Introduction, this project expands the traditional notion of "sensation" to apply to novels which "preach to the nerves," and are written to evoke shock throughout the Victorian era. Though this definition certainly includes novels from the 1860s, which are traditionally referred to as "sensation fiction," it also allows for novels which contain both sensational themes and evoke a provocative social response.

isn't a "real" English gentleman … and this notion is unforgivable. Through these conflations and like its author, Wilde's book – as a legal artifact – ends up literally challenging British social fictions in the most official legal environment possible: within the nation's own court system. This chapter will argue that Wilde's novel – embedded in the trial, itself an additional dangerous sensational narrative – truly serves as a "poisonous" text which exposes Victorian legal constructs and ideologies for gentlemanly behavior, nationhood, and sexuality as being fictional. The trial, therefore, drags a seemingly benign personage/novel into the public conversation and exposes him/it as a "poisonous" threat to the Establishment. Wilde always said that peoples' private lives should be made public, and people believed him. But ultimately, his "private public" self ended up being a construction too. The trial is clearly the touchstone where Victorian anxieties about possibly differing public and private "realities" emerged. Why else would Victorian writers have generated so many Jekyll and Hyde and doppelganger-rich narratives?

One could easily say that *Dorian Gray's* omission of conversations about government, the law and, in short, the "realities" that many other British writers where writing about at the time is so overt as to be conspicuous. The eponymous character Dorian never undergoes hardships, and he doesn't really develop as a character. Even though his actions are malevolent, none of the characters are really able to ascribe blame to Dorian since he doesn't look like the evil character that they imagine would commit crimes, take drugs or harm other people. It is true that some book reviewers expressed concerns that Wilde's book encouraged dangerous moral values, but until his trial, this

negativity seemed subsumed by the thrill that readers got when reading the witticisms and the sensational stories surrounding Dorian's creator.

Dangerous Poses, Dorian Gray and the Labouchere Amendment

Wilde was involved in three trials for his supposed sodomy: the first trial, usually referred to as the Queensbury trial, involved Wilde's charges against Queensbury for libel. This trial is the most famous because it enabled Queensbury to introduce charges of Wilde's supposed homosexuality as his defense that the offensive calling card which had prompted the libel was justified. The second two trials used the information that Queensbury's legal team brought forth in the Queensbury trial as the basis for criminal charges against Wilde's supposed participation in homosexual acts. My analysis here will primarily focus on events occurring in the Queensbury libel trial, since that is the trial in which the *The Picture of Dorian Gray* functionally serves to "prove" Wilde's guilt and since that is the trial where the literary text poses and operates as a perceived dangerous disruption of British legal norms.

The cornerstone of Lord Queensbury's charge against Oscar Wilde in the Queensbury trial was that Wilde was "posing as a sodomite," and this language about Wilde's posing continued throughout the course of the trial.[88] The real issue of the Queensbury trial, in fact, was never to prove that Wilde had actually committed the "felonious acts" which the evidence suggested that he did. As Lord Queensbury said to Wilde, "I don't say that you are it (gay)… but you look it and pose as it, which is just as bad" (Holland 58). And the Victorian public – with the legal system that represented it –

[88] The literal language of the business card which inspired Wilde to bring the libel suit against Queensbury was "For Oscar Wilde posing somdomite" (sic).

clearly followed through with this premise in bringing criminal charges against Wilde for sodomy following the original libel trial. Posing as a homosexual (aka "performing homosexuality") was just as grievous a crime against the understood values of the Victorian public as was actually engaging in sex acts with someone of the same gender.

In order for Queensbury to prove that Wilde was "posing as a sodomite," the lawyers working for the defense first built a case demonstrating that Wilde had frequently solicited adolescent male companionship through an intermediary named Charles Taylor. This legal strategy of justifying Queensbury's case – tracking down male prostitutes whose company Wilde supposedly entertained – was no surprise, since Queensbury never denied that he had called Wilde a "sodomite."[89] What is much more interesting, however, are the ways that Wilde's own fiction – in particular his novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – was brought into the Queensbury trial as proof of Wilde's "sodomitical posing." The defense – in this case, Queensbury's lawyer Edward Carson – contended that Wilde's authoring of the novel containing representations of immoral homosexual desire was "proof" that Wilde at least posed to believe these ideas. The novel – Wilde's art – somehow became conflated with his own life such that his fictional creation was considered more prominent and relevant than other facets of his constructed identity.

Critics such as Michael Foldy, Mervin Holland and Morris Kaplan – all in their own ways – have examined the fact that the Queensbury trial is a watershed historical

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[89] Ironically (or not so ironically), Lord Queensbury himself was no model gentleman either. His wife had divorced him a few years prior for abuse and Queensbury had already had an altercation with his older son, who was said to have committed suicide following an embarrassing revelation related to discoveries that the older son had participated in homosexual actions. The fact that Queensbury had two family members who may have been homosexual served to exacerbate, rather than soften his anger about the threats that homosexuality posed to the Establishment. For further details, see Holland's introduction.

moment which brought to the surface tensions surrounding the Victorian public's unwillingness to accept homosexuality as a viable social construct. Michael Foldy creates his own trial "transcripts" of the three trials using newspaper reports in order to examine the ways that the trials highlight concerns about Wilde's sexual "deviance" and how this fits in with Victorian theories of sexuality. Merlin Holland describes the theatrical nature of the trial and how it challenged public expectations about acceptable sexual behavior. Kaplan analyzes parts of the transcripts to argue that the Queensbury trial became so scandalous because it reiterated two earlier public scandals: the 1871 prosecution of Frederick Park and Earnest Boulton for public crossdressing and a later trial, known as the Cleveland Street Affair, which prosecuted some delivery boys who moonlighted as male prostitutes. Foldy and Kaplan, in particular, have connected Wilde's trials with changing concepts about "social purity" and/or concerns about what happens when private illicit behavior becomes public.[90] And both argue that the public response to Wilde's trial, as indicated in the contemporary press, shows how divided Victorian Britain was in acknowledging cultural acceptance for open homosexuality. Many critics, of course, are also intrigued by the fact that Wilde's immoral fiction was posited as "proof" that its author was also immoral at a legal trial. It is not surprising, then, that many scholars see the value of remembering historical details surrounding the

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[90] Interestingly enough, many of Wilde's book reviewers also picked up on this language of Wilde's book being "poisonous," noxious or unsanitary: *The St. James Gazette* critic says that he will not analyze *Dorian Gray* and offend the "nostrils of decent persons," since it is "curious of ordure," and since it has a "root which draws its life from malodorous putrefaction" (3-4). Another critic, from *The Scots Observer*, says that Wilde "prefers a course of unnatural iniquity to a life of cleanliness, health and sanity" (181). A third critic, from *The Athenaeum* critic calls the book "sickening and vicious" (824), and *The Manchester Guardian* says the book is "brilliant – as a sick man's eye" (295).

trials as a backdrop for examining the homoerotic subtexts of the novel itself.[91] To my knowledge, however, most critics who mention the trials discuss the socio-historical contexts of them (the inherent revolutions engaged by them), without examining closely the novel embedded at the heart of this important cultural conversation and the ways that it evokes themes similar to that of the trial transcript surrounding it. My contention, therefore, is that not only are the Wildean trial transcripts legal texts which challenge the nation of England, but that *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* in all its surface themes and facets, actually serves as a legal text which itself challenges the "social text" of the nation of England, though not in the ways that Wilde's opponents consider it as dangerous.

The court transcripts of Wilde's three trials serve as legal texts in that they document official legal transactions within the nation of Britain. These documents hold significant weight because they normally represent the "public voice" of the Establishment. They are also significant because the stories they document ultimately take place in one of the most public physical architectural spaces in England: the courtroom. Since laws always attempt to proscribe and dictate personal behavior, any legal text which serves to embody challenges to existing behavioral expectations can be deemed threatening to the status quo. Since Wilde's trial itself was seen as a sensationalized fiasco, the embedding of specific excerpts from *The Picture of Dorian Gray* within the transcript of the legal text recording it is especially significant. The *Dorian Gray* passages, of course, resist the "social text" of England – and resist the

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[91] The Norton Critical Edition of *The Picture of Dorian Gray,* for example, publishes a few relevant excerpts of the Queensbury trial alongside both versions of Wilde's novel under the title "Art versus Morality: Dorian Gray on Trial," though it never analyzes what the effects of reading the trial passages side-by-side with the novel may reveal about the novel itself.

hegemony of the English nation – just by virtue of being a part of the trial transcript which embodies Wilde's resistance to social norms for personal behavior. As a physical artifact, the novel certainly ends up being the lynchpin of a huge social debate about what comprises acceptable gentlemanly behavior and what should happen to men who falsely occupy this role. Wilde's opponents in the trial believed that the novel clearly demonstrated Wilde's moral depravity by proving that he "posed as a sodomite." In this way, the text is already automatically inserted into conversations about it being dangerous because it resists a certain "social text" for acceptable behavior (i.e. the "text" that says gentlemen must be heterosexual). But I would like to extend the explorations of *Dorian Gray* one step further to argue that not only is the novel an important physical public artifact, but Wilde's novel resists the "social text" in ways that have not previously been discussed. This paper will argue that the real danger of Wilde's text – picked up on, but not mentioned at Wilde's trial – was that it is an unsettling thematic commentary on a larger Victorian ideology that wants to condemn certain social practices in general (homosexual behavior, dangerous reading practices), but also wants to see these practices happen so that it can follow the "sensational narrative" that becomes of it. In other words, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is a novel which reveals the idea that the public identities which all Victorians project may in fact be mere "poses" which hide all sorts of seedy private narratives beneath them.[92] As Susanne Schmid has argued in "Byron and Wilde, The Dandy and the Public Sphere," the Victorian public was extremely hypocritical: it "wanted privacy staged in public," but yet, it could not cope with a

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[92] Norbert Kohl says that this split in the Victorian identity is "the inevitable result of the conflict between the Victorians' severe public morality and their private need to satisfy their natural desires" (174).

masked privacy" (87). Matthew Arnold had warned in his famous poem that "buried lives" existed, but the notion of buried privacy endangered the Establishment's fictions about itself as being heterosexual, industrious, and above moral reproach. Wilde's omission of any kind of legal or serious language in *Dorian Gray* allows the novel to become an overt physical commentary on the ways that external surfaces can be mere poses. Indeed, the novel itself poses as a mere surface; at first glance, unlike the realist novels before it,[93] it avoids any legal language, and eschews serious subjects for discussion or any interest in overt social analysis. The novel also thematically exposes Dorian Gray to be a "surface" who passes his pose off on an unsuspecting public surrounding him.

Part of the reason that the protagonist Dorian can present a false public face is because supernatural forces within the novel allow a hidden portrait to become the register of Dorian's many sins. Every time Dorian does something depraved and despicable, therefore, the portrait changes appearance and the protagonist's own physical body remains exactly the same. He looks young and faultless no matter what he does or who he becomes. But my read of Wilde's novel also relies on the fact that Dorian – like his author Wilde – publicly plays the role of being a dandy. Historically, dandies advocate decadence as normalcy. Dandyism attempts to negate, refute and re-define

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[93] Sample realist novels would be those of Dickens or Gissing, which work at overtly exploring social issues or the harsh realities of lowly working or middle-class characters. Dickens' *Hard Times*, for example, attempts to bring attention to deplorable factory conditions. Even realist novels that are not "social problem" novels clearly carry a different tone and emphasis on detail than does Wilde's work. The goal of these realist texts is to explain the minutia of psychological motivations behind a given character, many times so that we can see the character grow. Voluminous descriptions of setting and character are included so as a to paint a picture that is supposedly more "realistic" to the reader. This "realism," of course, is ultimately just another type of representation, no more real than any "narrative posing."

social norms, and as such dandies can be seen as revolutionary.[94] As a practice, dandyism specifically arose as a reaction against earnestness, practicality, Puritanism and everything that mainstream Victorian ideology advocated as correct, decent, and "normal," in terms of behavior patterns. Dandies overtly flaunted an alternative lifestyle, and attempted to situate this lifestyle as one of and for the upper-classes. By virtue of its sheer uselessness in terms of contributing to the upkeep of a country, "dandyism" could never become a behavior pattern for the masses. It would always remain on the margins, attempting to invert society, but doing so solely by being the exact antithesis of everything the Establishment wanted to advocate as decent behavior. One effect of dandyism, however, is that its artificiality had the potential to demonstrate that people could choose to adopt certain roles in life. If people could choose dandyism, therefore, they could adopt other alternative behavioral patterns both inside and outside of the mainstream. Dandyism, therefore, helped to expose the daily "realities" of peoples' lives as yet another system of constructs. It helped show that people had options to choose the roles they would play in life, and demonstrated that roles could be switched at will. Dorian-as-dandy, therefore, makes this very public display of decadence, but because his physical appearance shows no evidence that he's guilty of heinous crimes, his decadence goes further than it could under normal circumstances. A dandy's public role, therefore, is clearly one of overt role playing. And his dandyism can be seen as revolutionary too – not just in the ways that Dorian (or Wilde) can been seen to present analternative social text to the reading (or viewing) Victorian public, but also in the ways that his self-

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[94] The first well-known dandy – Beau Brummell – began to "put on poses" during the French Revolution. For more information about the history of dandyism, see Ellen Moers' *The Dandy: Brummell to Beerbohm.* New York: Viking, 1960.

fashioning demonstrates the idea that public and private identities don't always mesh. Dorian's threat, like his author Wilde's, has a good bit to do with his ability to act however he likes and resist traditional Victorian expectations for acceptable behavior.

According to Susanne Schmid, dandies are dependent on the interplay between the public and private spheres. They need a public space to perform their self-fashioning, yet this self-fashioning is a specifically audience-related version of privacy. That is to say, dandies stage a particular version of their subjectivity in which their private lives exhibit a "seeming lack of emotions" and surface. The audience, therefore, gets the impression that "the dandy *is* the surface he presents" (83) and never questions this conflation of public and private identity as being a pose. Because dandies invite audience members into their supposed private spheres by creating an intriguing pose, their method of self-representation both encourages voyeurism and "a turn away from it, because what is exhibited is not the author's own life, but a life that can be measured against the author's (and, thereby, the reader's)" (84). The character Dorian does all of the above things. He embodies a "seeming lack of emotions," and he "*is* the surface he presents. He fascinates the other characters in the novel (in fact, drawing them in, provoking them into being voyeurs), yet his physical appearance rebuffs any real inquiry into his character. Though rumors of bodacious and decadent behaviors surround Dorian, he exposes no physical evidence of a depraved depth. Of course, all of these "readings" of Dorian's seemingly harmless and frivolous character are wrong, which is where the point about social posing will enter my argument.

The Courtroom as a Locus for Social Change and the Intersection between the Public and Private Spheres

As mentioned above, the specific courtroom environment for the Queensbury trial was in many ways staged like a performance.[95] Theoretically, of course, courtrooms are always the official "stage" upon which governments can perform the public rituals that reify their nationhood. Transgressors of the law are publicly called out here and condemned for their resistance to British societal norms (even if the law itself is an unfair one). And personal details about private life are discussed openly here, playing into the prurient Victorian interests in private family details as sensational loci for public viewing.[96] The essence of a courtroom-as-drama, as defined by Lucy Winner, author of "Democratic Acts: Theatre of Public Trials," relies on the fact that official participants (i.e. lawyers, witnesses, defendants, and witnesses) "play specific roles, wear costumes and have specific blocking" (151). But it also relies on the concept that the drama is "staged" to both spectators within the courtroom (i.e. journalists and people physically observing the trial) and those "spectators" outside of the trial (i.e. the public, which rapaciously kept up with reports of the drama taking place within the courtroom via the media). Winner calls the part of the drama where "the wider public uses the trial as a way

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[95] Morris Kaplan really plays up on this trope in his book when he introduces the "Dramatis Personae" for each public scandal that his book covers, including Wilde's trial. This listing includes both names of relevant characters, and their functions in the "drama," as would a regular play script. Merlin Holland also describes the trial as theatrical in his transcript introduction.

[96] Karen Chase and Michael Levenson's *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, referenced in my discussions of *Salem Chapel* and *Lady Audley's Secret* discusses the tensions that occur when domesticity and private family doings are subjected to public scrutiny via the media or other sensational means.

to consider a social issue, form opinions, and organize its experiences … the play *without*" (151).[97]

Because of the cultural conversations and responses it evoked, the Queensbury trial can clearly be said to serve as an influential courtroom drama challenging English nationhood.[98] The actions that take place in this performative space publicly represent and work at reinforcing British codes for acceptable standards and behavior; they also represent an important locus wherein both the private and public facets of Victorian life collide. A closer analysis of the quote from the *Westminister Gazette* article describing the trial and used in this chapter's introduction demonstrates specifically how this performative space functions in regards to Wilde's first trial. The report describes legal experts who are not working just as "single spies," but are fighting in "whole battalions" to make sure that English laws are properly enforced. Each participant in the legal drama sits in his discrete assigned social space within the courtroom area: "the barrister's seats," "the solicitors' seats," "the witnesses' seats," "the ushers' seats" and "the Bench." But there are so many legal experts that many have to sit in "all the other seats they could capture." The only "serious rivals" for the legal experts are the "reporters," who occupy

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[97] Mervin Holland says that following newspaper coverage across the Channel, "the French in particular show[ed] a certain amount of surprise and distaste at what they saw as the British hypocrisy of professing to be shocked and yet reporting as much prurient detail as they could about the case. (xxxii). Again, the above response seems typical of the British, who seemed more concerned with blaming the French for possessing inappropriately lascivious and amoral attitudes than realizing that certain behaviors may be prevalent within its own borders. The difference seems to be that the British Establishment truly believed its own fiction about itself as a being a decent, earnest, and Christian society, which was quick to displace blame for any departures from the social script on the French and their supposedly invasive inappropriate moral code. This means that condemning Wilde in his trial also reifies national perceived norms about acceptable behavior, making it an issue of national identity to demonstrate that sodomy is wrong.

[98] For a fuller analysis of responses to the Queensbury trial, see *The Trials of Oscar Wilde: Deviance, Morality and Late-Victorian Society* by Michael Foldy, particularly his chapter entitled "The Reception of the Trials in the Press" pp. 48-66.

"all the seats not occupied by briefless barristers." And "what few remaining places not occupied" by anyone else are "filled with an eager struggling crowd of lookers-on, who had succeeded, in ways in which it were rash to speculate" about how they had "prevail[ed] upon the janitors to grant them entrance." These spectators, representing the "public" outside of the courtroom "look down on the battling crowd beneath," presumably from a balcony or gallery separated from the rest of the courtroom action (the official "staging" area of the courtroom spectacle, performed on the floor below). The discrete positioning of both the public and the various legal participants in the drama emphasizes the voyeuristic atmosphere in the courtroom, which wants to see Wilde's private persona exposed. The crowding of the courtroom reveals "multiple layers of spectatorial positions" interested in "view[ing], hear[ing], or read[ing] about the spectacle of the trial (Winner 151). And the battalion of lawyers – in fact, the battle imagery used in the *Westminister Gazette's* report – emphasizes the fact that the legal stakes here are high.

Winner suggests that trials are always battles between protagonists "fighting to win control over the courtroom narrative" and that the official narrative of the British courtroom publicly privileges the voice of the nation. In this arena, if a judge says something, "saying it *does* make it so" (151). Yet, Wilde's trial was particularly interesting from this perspective. While the transcript of the trail – the official text of the British legal system – worked hard at "containing," dominating and controlling the drama according to its own traditional patterns, Wilde continually challenged this script. He refuses to admit to sodomy or "sodomitical writing." Yet, his decision to bring forth a libel case in the legal environment which will surely expose Wilde's personal behaviors

to public scrutiny demonstrates that he wants to use the officially sanctioned legal space of the courtroom as a way to present an "alternative social text," which recognizes homosexuals as human beings with the overt prerogative to claim the legal rights of a gentleman. In an environment where saying something "makes it so," not only can Queensbury's lawyers say that Wilde is homosexual because he "poses" as one, but Wilde can claim that Queensbury is guilty of libel because of what the latter's actions look like too.

When Oscar Wilde tried to intrude upon this stage and alter the performance to fit his own "alternative social script," even though he was an excellent performer, his intrusion was not welcome. Wilde – the perennial sensationalist – did everything possible to "play" to his audience and to have control of the courtroom, despite the fact that he wasn't the "official" legally sanctified voice of England.[99] Wilde was used to playing his role as dandy, and was used to putting on airs of superiority and smoothness. As dapper as usual, Wilde seemed to give the impression that he would be able to play out the courtroom drama on his own terms. The players opposing Wilde, of course, were Lord Queensbury's lawyer (Sir Edward Carson) and the entire legal system of England, which contrary to Wilde's presumable expectations, did not play along with Wilde's game.[100] Though Wilde attempted to use the legal environment of the court as a place to publicly

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[99] Merlin Holland even goes so far as to put in "stage directions" indicating basic actions of the court (i.e. "the prosecution continues reading") and also notes when the spectators "laughed" at Wilde's responses or someone responded "sharply." These notations truly give the court transcripts a playful feel, though it's not clear where Holland received this information (whether it be from original court documents, or from newspaper accounts, etc). These notations do not appear in the first more truncated printed versions of the court transcripts edited by Montgomery Hyde and published in 1943.

[100] As Thorsen Botz-Bornstein says, "in the end, [Wilde] plays *their* game, but because only he plays it, it is always *his* game (qtd. in Meyer 103).

seek figurative compensation for the egregious wrongs which he perceived that Lord Queensbury had committed against him, Wilde was doing so in an environment which was defined by the precise and conservative linguistic discourse of the courtroom. Wilde's goals in using a system that saw homosexual activities as illegal by virtue of the LaBouchere clause as a way to redress his wrongs could not have been a mistake. Wilde's comments in the courtroom – and his behavior too – seem to suggest that his overt goal was to challenge the "social text" of the English nation by using the very institution that enforced this text as a means of challenging itself.

One of Wilde's "playing" strategies was that he continually denied or deflected commentary started out by Lord Queensbury's lawyer, refusing to accept the definitions or terms with which he is presented. For example, when Carson tries to get Wilde to admit that the painter Basil Hallward in *The Picture of Dorian Gray* exhibits "an [im]moral kind of feeling for one man to have towards another much younger than himself," Wilde replies that that Basil simply expresses "the feeling of an artist towards a beautiful personality" towards Dorian (Holland 86). In another instance, when Carson asks Wilde if "a sodomitical novel might be a good book according to you," Wilde refuses to accept Carson's terminology by saying" I don't know what you mean by a sodomitical novel" (Holland 81). Wilde also refuses to acknowledge Carson's concept that "an ordinary individual" might believe that Dorian Gray has a "sodomitical tendency" by saying that he has "no knowledge of ordinary people" (Holland 81). Again and again, Carson tries to correlate the themes in Wilde's novel with personal feelings upon which Wilde himself has acted, yet his efforts fall short. He moves from asking Wilde if the feelings between Basil and Dorian are "natural" or "moral," to asking if

Wilde himself has "ever had that feeling towards a young man?" (Holland 89). Wilde refuses to accept this rhetorical strategy and insists on the defense lawyer sticking only to the "words" of his text. Yet, when Carson reads directly from *Dorian Gray* at Wilde's request, the author wrangles over the edition choices that Queensbury's lawyer is using for finding the so-called "illicit" quotes, which ends up creating a disturbance in the traditional and logical courtroom argumentative strategy. Until later on in the trial process, when Wilde finally loses his equanimity, he remains a master at deflecting the barbs with which Carson presents him.

Of course, Wilde's courtroom performance raises the issue that he overtly transgresses social codes for aristocratic gentlemanly behavior and that he advocates transgression as a means to escape the repressive ordering of society. Wilde's transgressive stance challenges the status quo of England, the public's perception of what is right and what is wrong, and the notion that British citizens should try to maintain private personae.[101] Wilde's overt sensationalism infiltrates the void that normally separates public and private realms. As such, his sensationalism invokes the Habermasian collapse of public and private spheres already discussed in other chapters of this dissertation. Prevailing concepts of classical human ideology promoted the concept that people possess "an essential self which is the origin and arbiter of the true, the real

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[101] In his play, *An Ideal Husband*, Wilde demonstrates the fact that people occupy different masks for public and private behavior, and that life is a series of role playing adventures. This, and other work by Wilde, shows his fascination with the idea that public masks always seem to fit only a certain paradigm for behavior and that these behaviors create the worst type of persona because they (the personas) pose the fiction that they represent truth (when they clearly do not). Wilde privileges private behaviors, I think, not because they are more "real" (he's hardly interested in reaching the "true" essence of a person), but because they are less hypocritical. The merging of the private with the public personae, therefore, directly challenges dominant social texts and exposes them for what they are: cultural scripts for behavior that can be moved around at will. Since role playing is an inevitable facet of life, why not "play" with the roles? This seems to be Wilde's personal mantra and one of the motivations behind his fiction.

(and/or the natural), and the moral" (Dollimore 40), and that this self was unified. The autonomous bourgeois subject, under this concept was able to choose to act independently of society. Wilde's challenge to the traditional British "social text" is involved with changing notions of the public and private spheres and identity. Jonathon Dollimore, author of *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde, Freud to Foucault*, describes the way that Wilde attacks prevailing notions of the public and the private and the ways that these attacks are connected to his transgressive persona:

> the public voice which Wilde scorns is that which seeks to police culture; which is against cultural difference; which reacts to the aesthetically unconventional by charging it with being grossly unintelligible or grossly immoral. (8)

Rather than conventionality, Wilde embraces individualism (and art based upon individualism), which for him means

> both a desire for a radical *personal freedom* and a desire for *society itself* to be radically different. So Wilde's concept of the individual is crucially different from that sense of the concept which signifies the private, experientially self-sufficient, autonomous but ultimately quietest, bourgeois subject; indeed, for Wilde 'personal experience is a most vicious circle.' (10)

Wilde's choice to take on the British legal system by challenging the newly passed Labouchere Amendment on the public stage of the British courtroom is a very bold move. Ironically, of course, the persona that Wilde is forced to adopt in court in order to defend Queensbury's rebuttal charge – that Wilde deserves to be called a "sodomite,"

because he successfully "poses" as one – is the opposite of that which Wilde wants the Establishment to accept as legitimate. Rather than pushing forth an agenda that promulgates homosexuality as acceptable behavior, Wilde ends up having to "pose" as a normative heterosexual British gentleman to defend himself. And, of course, when Queensbury's lawyer alludes to the multiple witnesses who he can produce to suggest that Wilde is *not* heterosexual, the personae that Wilde occupies is revealed as being merely a "pose." However, this fact still doesn't obviate the impact, the cultural revolution, that Wilde's transgressive stance evokes. Wilde's elective participation in the trial forces conversations about homosexuality; even while "posing as a heterosexual," he can be accused as "posing as a sodomite." The story of his participation is, therefore, revolutionary.

The transcripts of the courtroom drama document the tensions that Wilde's sensational presence and demeanor in the courtroom caused. As the official record of the Queensbury trial, the transcript becomes both a literary text and a legal artifact containing the official record of legal voice of the Establishment, but it also records Wilde's own resistance to that narrative too. An analysis of the transcript, therefore, will provide interesting insights into the ways that the trial functioned in furthering Wilde's "revolution," and the ways that *The Picture of Dorian Gray* evokes similar concerns about social posing, buried lives and the other consequences of what real private lives may reveal about the Victorian social text and its incipient internal hypocricies.

Oscar Wilde on Trial: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Court Transcript as Legal Artifact

As has been mentioned previously in this chapter, the lynchpin of Queensbury's defense against Oscar Wilde – which, of course, became a cultural charge – was that he was "posing as a sodomite," and that posing of any kind is unacceptable. If we take, therefore, Lucy Winner's concept that trials are always battles between two protagonists "fighting to win control over the courtroom narrative," therefore, we can see the courtroom battleground is set to decide whether the Establishment (and spectators) believe Wilde's claim that he is not "posing as a sodomite" or whether to believe Queensbury's claim that he is. It is important to note that even though Wilde is bisexual – as evidenced by the fact that he fathered two sons with his wife, in addition to the sexual relationships he had with Lord Douglas and other gay men, Wilde is never asked to disprove the charge that he *is* a "sodomite" nor does he have to prove that he *is* heterosexual. This is why the language of "posing" becomes so important here. Any posing is bad. If Wilde is proven to be "posing as a sodomite," this reveals that he's "posed as a heterosexual," and thereby, he has also posed as a "real" British gentleman all along. So, in many ways Wilde's goal is to demonstrate that he is not a "poser," even though "posing" constructs his entire dandiacal identity.

Looking at the ways that the trial transcript reveals tensions about posing provides some interesting clues to the importance of "posing" as a trope in the trial. Queensbury's lawyer, Carson, keeps trying to uncover Wilde's posturing by saying "I want to see what position you *pose* in." Wilde retorts by saying "that is not the way to talk to me – 'to *pose* as.' I am not *posing* as anything." (70 italics mine). And Carson keeps probing Wilde by saying, "I think I may take it that so far as your works are concerned, you pose

as not being concerned about morality or immorality?... 'Pose' is a favourite word of yours, I think?" Wilde responds by saying, "Is it? I have no 'pose' in the matter" (74). Despite Wilde's refusals to adopt the language that Queensbury's lawyers are presenting about "posing," at some points during the trial, Wilde tips his hand by revealing the fact that he plays to and builds his self-image around the idea of performing to a public audience. For example, one time, he says "good heavens! – I don't pose at being ordinary" (110).

Once the courtroom dialogue establishes the possibility that Wilde could be a "poser" in general – that he could have a private life that doesn't match his public persona – the defense is able to bring the conversation around to the issue of proving that Wilde is "posing as a sodomite." Carson's case against Wilde follows two main trajectories: that Wilde is "posing as a sodomite" because he has associated regularly with suspected homosexual or transsexual men and that Wilde is "posing as a sodomite," because he's written "sodomitical works" and allowed his pieces to be published alongside other texts which have "sodomitical" overtones. As is mentioned above, the real issue with Wilde's being accused of "posing as a sodomite" has to do with the fact that his reputation as a "real" gentleman is at risk if the courtroom dialogue does not privilege his explanation of events. Lord Queensbury alludes to as much in a letter read out loud in the trial, when he writes that "*to pose* as a certain thing and *to give occasion for a most odious scandal* which is the talk of the town, *was as bad as the actual thing*" (246 italics mine). As can be seen, posing and scandals go hand-in-hand. Both are bad to one's reputation as a gentleman.

One of the most damning parts of trial proved to be Wilde's association with Charles Taylor, who was involved in a scandalous event which involved crossdressing and was called the Fitzroy Square Affair.[102] The court conversations surrounding first Wilde's familiarity with Taylor's household, and then his familiarity with the scandalous event are as follows:

> Carson: Did you know whether Mr. Taylor had a lady's costume there?
>
> Wilde: I don't know at all…
>
> Carson: Did you ever see him with a costume on – a lady's fancy costume?
>
> Wilde: No, I never have – no…
>
> Carson: Has he told you that he had a lady's costume there?
>
> Wilde: No, he never has told me so…
>
> Carson: And you have never heard of it?"

[102] To make matters worse for Wilde, he and Taylor were tried jointly and on the same charge in the second trial – the criminal one that overtly sought to prove that Wilde *was* a sodomite. In this latter case, Wilde's associations with Taylor were even more damning since the one's legal guilt was tied up with that of the other.

Wilde: No, never. (158)

Carson: Did you know that Taylor and Wood were subsequently arrested together in a raid that was made on a house in Fitzroy Square? (162)

Wilde: Yes, I read that in the newspapers…

Carson: And did you read that that the time they were arrested they were in company with several men in women's clothes? … Didn't you think it was something of a serious thing that Mr. Taylor, your great friend, and Charles Parker, another friend, should be arrested in a police raid at this house?

Wilde: I, when I read it, was very much distressed, but the magistrate seems to have taken a different view because he dismissed the case. (180)

As can be seen in the above interchange, Wilde himself was not present at the time of Taylor's arrest, nor is there any evidence that Wilde practiced cross dressing himself (unless we count his publicity photos where he dresses up as Salomé). The issue still remains that Wilde's association with Taylor, who was then associated with cross dressing practices, led to further suspicion of Wilde as a dangerous character. Cross dressing visually represents a man who is not "posing as a man." And, to the late Victorian public, a man who does not publicly ascribe to the gentlemanly role cannot be a "real" man. Wilde's mere associations with Taylor, therefore, contaminate his

gentlemanly reputation and insinuate the concept that Wilde's version of his private activities may simply be a created reality. Since Lord Queensbury's ultimate charge against Oscar Wilde is that his "posing as a sodomite" is equivalent to him being a homosexual (and therefore, a threat to contemporary definitions of acceptable gentlemanly behavior), there doesn't even need to be proof that Wilde crosses gender boundaries for the spectators in the courtroom to believe that this has happened.

Of course, Carson questions Wilde's identity as a gentleman on other grounds too. Aside from raising the specter of acting like a woman, the defense suggests that Wilde impermissibly crosses class boundaries when soliciting sex from working-class servants and such. The transcript also demonstrates adherence to the rules that gentlemanly reputations deserve to go untarnished when a gentleman who is both an aristocrat and a prominent public figure remains unnamed despite his presumed involvement with Wilde, while most of the lower-class men with whom Wilde is supposed to have had sex are named overtly. This difference in treatment between the man who is upper-class and the other of Wilde's young male associates alludes to rifts in the British concept of "real" gentleman as being taint-free; it also raises suspicions about the legal system being unfairly applied to citizens depending on their social rank. "Real" gentlemen, we learn, don't choose to expose their private lives to public spectacle. Moreover, their private and public lives are supposed to mesh. But even so, Wilde's private affairs are dragged out into the open. For example, at one point, when Carson asks Wilde, "were you anxious about these letters?," and Wilde replies

> what gentleman wants his private correspondence published[?] Anxious, yes … Oh, there were things in them – family matters – that I certainly

> would not have liked to have had published. No one likes their private correspondence to be published (113, 121).

The concern about private identities hiding from the public eye is also raised during the trial when Wilde continually has to defend his choice of meeting with his young male associates in private. The dialogue goes like this:

> Carson: You have dined with [Taylor] … with young men?
>
> Wilde: Oh, yes, often… (158).
>
> Carson: Always in private rooms?
>
> Wilde: Oh no, I have dined in public rooms too.
>
> Carson: Generally in private rooms?
>
> Wilde: Yes, I prefer dining in private rooms. (158, 160)

In this seemingly banal commentary, Queensbury's lawyer refers again and again to the notion that Wilde may be hiding certain unforgivable activities from the prying eyes of the Victorian public via private clandestine meetings. From Carson's perspective, if Wilde has private meetings with young men, he can easily be "posing as a sodomite." The private meetings with the young men, when brought to public awareness, seem to promote the concept that Wilde's "posing" has substance. The Labochere Amendment disallows any homosexual activities, whether public or private.

The most interesting part of the charge that Wilde was a sodomite, however, emanates from the portion of the trial proceedings which try to bolster the case that Wilde "poses as a sodomite" because of his association with "sodomitical writing," in particular *The Picture of Dorian Gray*. Mr. Carson's position is that "anyone who was connected with or would allow himself publicly to approve of [a particular short story] would be posing as a sodomite" (72). In this latter example, someone does not even have to be an author of a text describing a homosexual relationship to be "posing as a sodomite;" presumably, only those who publicly condemn such a piece are obviated from being charged as such. The transcript first mentions the novel *Dorian Gray* in the context of Lord Queensbury's formal plea regarding the reasons he called Wilde a "sodomite." In this charge, Wilde's novel is mentioned thus:

> that in the month of July 1890, Mr. Wilde did write and publish, and cause and procure to be printed and published, with his name upon the title page, a certain immoral and obscene work in the form of the narrative entitled *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which work was intended by Mr. Wilde, and was understood by readers thereof, to describe the relations, intimacies and passions of certain persons of sodomitical and unnatural habits, tastes and practices. (39).

Edward Clarke, Wilde's lawyer, at this point admits that

> to attack Mr. Wilde as being a person showing himself to be addicted to this sort of offense (sodomy), because in the book he states that the person in the book is a vicious creature in all ways, is surely the most interesting inference … I shall be surprised if my learned friend can point to any

> passage within these covers which does more than describe as any novelist may or dramatist may … describe the passions and the vices of life. (sic 43)

But despite Clarke's observations that the defense's strategy, to conflate Wilde's life with subjects appearing in his book, is merely "interesting," this strategy works just fine for the "posing" charge. Wilde is not just any author; he is at this point in the trial suspected of being bisexual. Regina Gagnier argues that *Dorian Gray* was attacked more because of the decadent rhetorical situation surrounding the text (i.e. Oscar Wilde's dandyism, his overt homosexuality, his overall advocating of decadence and his resistance to and condemnation of dominant ideology), as opposed to the textual elements within it (58). She also argues that his "indefatigable self-advertising" exacerbated the situation, since such behavior was "simply not acceptable behavior for a gentleman" (65).[103] Though I will argue later in the chapter against Gagnier's reasoning that the book itself contains no revolutionary textual elements, her point about Wilde enthusiastically embracing, defending and publicizing his novel by his animated discussion of it in the courtroom (rather than distancing himself from his publication) presumably added to suspicions that he was behaving theatrically and that he might be adopting the very poses which he was accused of inhabiting.

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[103] Oscar Wilde's posing as a heterosexual dad is also problematic. A man who is bisexual retains negative cultural markings just as bad as does a gay man, rendering his "posing" as a dad as entirely artificial. That a man could be a good father, a good husband, and also homosexual is completely inconceivable in the Victorian construct.

Poisonous Books and their Effects

In the below famous scene in *Dorian Gray*, the eponymous protagonist encounters dangerous reading material which appears literally to cause his open embracing of decadence, lasciviousness and a life of sensation. At this moment, Dorian Gray literally becomes absorbed in

> the strangest book he had ever read. It seemed to him that in exquisite raiment, and to the delicate sound of flutes, the sins of the world were passing in a dumb show before him. Things that he had dimly dreamed of were suddenly made real to him … It was a novel without a plot, and with only one character, being, indeed, simply a psychological study of a certain young Parisian, who spent his life trying to realize in the nineteenth century all the passions and modes of thought that belonged to every century except his own, and to sum up, as it were, in himself the various moods through which the world spirit had ever passed, loving for their mere artificiality those renunciations that men have unwisely called virtue, as much as those natural rebellions that wise men call sin … *It was a poisonous book*. The heavy odour of incense seemed to cling about its pages and to trouble the brain. The mere cadence of the sentences, the subtle monotony of their music, so full as it was of complex refrains and movements elaborately repeated, produced in the mind of the lad … a form of reverie, a malady of dreaming, that made him unconscious of the falling day and creeping shadows … for years, Dorian could not free himself from the influence of the book. Or, perhaps, it would be more

> accurate to say that he never sought to free himself from it. He procured from Paris no less than nine large-paper copies of the first edition and had them bound in different colours, so that they might suit his various moods and the changing fancies of a nature over which he seemed, at times, to almost have entirely lost control. The hero, the wonderful young Parisian, in whom the romantic and the scientific temperaments were so strangely blended, became to him a kind of prefiguring type of himself. And, indeed, the whole book seemed to him to contain the story of his own life, written before he had lived it. (98-9 italics mine, Holland 95-6).[104]

As can be seen in the passage above, Dorian's contact with the so-called "poisonous book" actually causes a revolution in his personal reading practices. The "yellow book" book is poisonous because it gives the protagonist the idea that life can become fiction and that dangerous books can somehow infiltrate the psyche of their readership. Thealternative social text here is so seductive that it lulls its reader with its "music," its "exquisite raiment," and its "heavy odours." No longer does Dorian entertain himself by thinking of his book as mere entertainment. Instead, he allows the book to take on the role of "prefiguring" his life, creating new sensational scripts for personal behavior. The book embodies sensation too as it transcends normal artistic modes and as Dorian treats it as an aesthetic object to be looked at rather than an object to be read. The book is

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[104] I intentionally list two origins for this citation as well as many others that follow so that readers can see where certain passages occur in both Wilde's novel and in the Queensbury trial transcript recorded by Holland. My intent is to focus my discussion of the Wilde novel primarily on moments of Wilde's text that are brought specifically into the trial, since the goal of this chapter is to explore the intersections of the novel with its external textual frame of Wilde's trial. The majority of the *Dorian Gray* quotes I'm including in this chapter, appear in the trial transcript with just a few small items coming from elsewhere in the novel and necessary for transitional analysis.

sensational in the ways that it embodies French values. As a reader, Dorian is susceptible to the infiltration of scandalous values represented by this very alluring text. The book is sensational, transgressive and alluring.

It is quite clear in Wilde's trial that the Queensbury defense wanted to demonstrate that Wilde's personal and alternative life text was every bit as poisonous to the "social text" of England as the story's narrator tells us that Dorian's own poisonous book is to its protagonist's own character. Carson's goal in the trial was to present both Wilde himself and his novel *Dorian Gray* as poisonous in the ways that they expose illicit values which might seep into the minds of those who would "read" them. Those who read *Dorian Gray* – like those who later read the trial transcript or read of the Queensbury trial in the newspaper – might detect the homosexual and other deviant social subtexts represented within and incorporate these into their own lives. Those who followed avidly the trial or read the novel might be unintentionally "lulled" or influenced by the social narrative that the book and its author, which might provide new scripts for alternate life behaviors by those who were uneducated and/or read the novel unawares. And indeed, those book reviewers who initially responded to *Dorian Gray* as a "noxious" and "poisonous" text literally seemed to prognosticate the book's furthering as such in the context of the trial. Ironically, Dorian's experience with his "poisonous book" prefigures the way that the public responded to Wilde-as-character and the Wilde trial transcript as poisonous in and of themselves.

As has been mentioned earlier in this chapter, prior to the trial, *The Picture of Dorian Gray* was already deemed "poisonous" by some, though not most, of Wilde's

book reviewers.[105] During the trial, of course, Carson picked up on this book-as-poisonous theme and tried to prove that the depravity of Wilde's life equaled the depravity of his book's protagonist. He consciously chose as part of his defense, therefore, to read out loud passages from *Dorian Gray* (including the one listed above) which evoke the idea that texts can "poison" their readers. Dorian's poisoning by his yellow book involves an entire nexus of decadent behaviors, including rape, murder, drug sampling and the soliciting of male prostitutes. In turn, Dorian can "poison" his compatriots by spreading his decadent values to other characters in the book while retaining his seeming virtuous countenance. During the trial, Carson further argues that Wilde's novel is "poisonous" because of its association with Joris-Karl Huysman's *À Rebours*, a decadent, "sodomitical," French novel and Wilde's admitted inspiration for Dorian's fictional yellow book. The thinking is that if Huysman's book is "sodomitical," then its fictitious association with the book in Wilde's own novel demonstrates the idea that *Dorian Gray* evokes "sodomitical" concepts and that its protagonist lives them out. Clearly, from Carson's standpoint, claiming that Wilde is a "sodomitical poser" is not too many steps away. (97-100). Of course, Carson's insinuation that Dorian's novel's "poisonous" origins are French conjures up the idea that Wilde's own decadent-seeming lifestyle and sexual behaviors emanate from suspicious origins as well.[106] British readers

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[105] Certain critics, for example, lambasted *Dorian Gray* as being "stupid and vulgar" (*St. James Gazette,* 24 June 1890) or "unmanly," (*Athenaeum* 27 June 1891) but at one count, Wilde mentions that 213 of the 216 reviews he had seen gave positive opinions concerning the book.

[106] Wilde's "purity" as a "posing English gentleman" is also complicated by the fact that he's Irish. Though the trial proceedings don't really point out Wilde's Irishness – all foreign attacks seem aimed at the French – his literal "foreign" background certainly must also have contributed to suspicious attitudes regarding his accepted gentlemanly status. Being Irish could only hinder not help his case that he wasn't "posing."

– and metonymically the British nation – run the risk here of being tainted by the multitudinous "poisonous" texts which Wilde's courtroom experience embodies: Dorian poisoned by his yellow book becomes a poisonous text of his own, Wilde as a poisonous text can taint the courtroom narrative, which can then seep out into the public at large as the purveyor of additional poisonous values.

Because Carson's courtroom argumentation works to expose the fact that Wilde, like his protagonist and Dorian's yellow book, is a "poisonous readable text" who hides pernicious secrets beneath his shallow veneer of gentlemanly respectability, the proceedings which record what happened in that courtroom also become dangerous and readable, drawing "readers" in to enter the text-that-is-Wilde and allowing them to suspect the idea that Wilde is guilty of homosexuality and other sordid private behaviors (i.e. soliciting young men for services and crossing class boundaries to do so). To be sure, the first public responses to the courtroom drama occurred in press coverage, since the transcripts describing the proceedings of all three Wilde trials were considered "unfit for publication" because of the dangerous subject matter they represented until a full seventeen years after the trials had ended (Hyde 14).[107] The transcripts of Wilde's courtroom drama and the secrets that they expose can, therefore, be read as "poisonous" and revolutionary in their own right. The sensational Wildean courtroom proceedings, as well as the official recordings of the very scripts of the trials themselves, can be

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[107] In fact, some of the earlier "transcripts" of the Queensbury trial happenings were gleaned by compiling together accounts recorded in various contemporary newspapers. Since these weren't based upon "official recordings" of the courtroom events, they suggest an even more frightening prospect about the dangerous nature of this knowledge: newspapers, which are affiliated with lower-class reading practice, serve as a substitute for official reports that can better control, construct or contain could easily be called "the narrative of the nation." Morris Kaplan's transcript, the one I examine in this project, is based on a longhand manuscript of the complete trial, and is held in the British Library.

perceived as dangerous to the British nation. The revolution of the Queensbury transcript is that it reveals the possibility that gender and sexuality can be acted out; they are mere poses rather than natural and moral Victorian "truths." Wilde, Dorian and Dorian's yellow book and the various reports recording Wilde's court proceedings, therefore, evoke a revolution in Victorian "reading" practices. They cause onlookers to question the public identities represented by the protagonists of both narratives. Both Wilde and Dorian provide the window for the Victorian public to reassess its social scripts and question the limitations that the "comfortable script" of respectability provides. This reassessment centers on the figure of the dandy.

Dorian Gray as a Dangerous Dandy

Ironically, besides the above discussed "poisonous book" quote, the other passages read from the novel at the Queensbury trial perfectly demonstrate the ways that the eponymous protagonist of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* sends the same possibly "poisonous" message about surfaces as does Wilde in his own courtroom drama. For example, even before Dorian's portrait literally begins to take on aspects of his aging and physical changes related to guilt, debauchery or any other personal action, Dorian, like Oscar Wilde, is a character who is so fascinating that he absorbs the "whole soul" of the Victorian public, based on the following passage about Basil Hallward meeting Dorian for the first time:

> I turned half-way round, and saw Dorian Gray for the first time. When our eyes met, I felt that I was growing pale. A curious instinct of terror came over me. I knew that I had come face to face with some one whose

> personality was so fascinating that, if I allowed it to do so, it would absorb my whole nature, my whole soul, my very art itself (Wilde 11; Holland 84-5).

Like Oscar Wilde, Dorian is both fascinating and terrifying here, putting Basil in a near "spell" of interest, but causing him to experience "a curious instinct of terror." He plays the role of a typical dandy here in that he functions as someone to be looked at and discussed rather than read deeply. Of course, at this early point in the novel, Dorian's "surface" appearances cannot be perceived by either Basil or readers of the novel as suspicious or dangerous coverings for ulterior and subversive realities. He has not yet wished that his physical body could remain young forever, nor has the famous portrait begun to record the aspects of his private life that can be hidden from public view. Even though Dorian, like Wilde, clearly represents himself as a person to be looked at and discussed, his public personae as dandy implies that that he is all "surface," and that his public image matches the private realities that constitute his personal life.

Dorian's fatal wish that his physical body will never change with age is obviously the "real" point of departure for the narrative about the split between both his public and private selves, and also the real beginning of the portion of the novel that reveals the message that Dorian is seemingly a "poisonous" text. From this point on, Dorian's physical body, which belies any indication of the rift in his personality which later allows him to murder, become a drug user and lead friends to financial ruin retains its surface innocence. Because of the metaphysical change in the portrait which allows it to take on any representations of Dorian's malevolence and guilt, Dorian – unlike Wilde – doesn't even have to pretend that, in the language of Schmid, "he *is* the surface he presents" (83).

The text of his body literally reflects what the other characters expect to see in a properly behaving gentlemanly character. “Posing” as the urbane and entertaining wit who fits stereotypical norms for English gentleman-hood is unnecessary as long as he hides the portrait recording his unseemly private behaviors from public view. Like all dandies, he fascinates his audience, yet for a time, his luck and the supernatural unintentionally repel serious inquiry into his rumored character flaws. The novel, therefore, exposes the insidious possibility that any gentleman may not be what he seems. Dorian’s position as a dandy is integral to sending this message.

Of course, the novel demonstrates that, to use Matthew Arnold’s phrase “doing what one likes” clearly has negative consequences for Wilde’ protagonist. From the moment when Dorian first sees his portrait change after being cruel to Sybil Vane, he becomes intensely suspicious that his servant will sneak a look at the portrait and detect the change, imagining that “there is something sly about him,” and that he “he had thoughtful, treacherous eyes” (93). Later on, he moves the portrait up to the attic in an attempt to further bury his wrongdoing, and he repeatedly visits the attic to try and make sure that the portrait and its evil representations of his private self are safe from external discovery. Dorian eventually becomes wracked with guilt about the consequences of his private behaviors coming into public awareness. For example, though he experiences “monstrous and terrible delight” at viewing “the hideous lines,” “misshapen body” and “failing limbs” of the portrait (99), the fear of “being hunted, snared” and “tracked down” if his secret crimes can be proven begins to “dominate him” (153). And of course, he kills Basil Hallward to cover up the spread of news about his aging portrait once Basil has seen “proof” of his private depravities.

The fact is that if others see Dorian's portrait, his cover will be blown. His participation and acceptance within aristocratic social circles depends on others accepting him as a gentleman. Accepted Victorian constructs for gentlemanly behavior prohibit social and class transgressions, yet Dorian has visited opium dens, encouraged other forms of debauchery and vice and has "filled [other men] with a madness for pleasure" (118; Holland 223). As Basil says, "[your friends] seem to lose all sense of honour, of goodness, of purity … They have gone down into the depths. You led them there. Yes: you led them there, and yet you can smile as you are smiling now" (118; Holland 223). Dorian's "poisonous" effect on his so-called companions becomes his biggest threat. His lasciviousness and debauchery have apparently influenced other unwitting victims to behave similarly.

The fictional space that Dorian Gray creates for himself both resists and adheres to the fictional society which he inhabits. Dorian resists the social text by doing whatever he wants, and keeping these activities private, underneath the surface. But he also adheres to social dictates insofar as his public persona appears to be urbane, civilized and gentlemanly. If Victorians are to trust appearances, therefore, they are to trust Dorian can't be what the rumors purport him to be (i.e. a philanderer, a criminal and a "ruiner" of women).

In order for Dorian to retain his gentlemanly status, Basil urges him to attend to the many rumors that have begun to circulate concerning Dorian's purported unseemly behaviors. Like the rumors surrounding Wilde's own personal behaviors, Dorian's saving grace is that these have never been definitively proven. As Basil says:

> Every gentleman is interested in his good name. You don't want people to talk of you as something vile and degraded. Of course, you have your position, and your wealth, and all that kind of thing. But position and wealth are not everything. Mind you, I don't believe these rumours at all. At least, I can't believe them when I see you. Sin is a thing that writes itself across a man's face. It cannot be concealed. People talk of secret vices. There are no such things as secret vices. 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 (117; Holland 102).

The above quote reveals that reputation is an important factor in upholding one's gentlemanly status. Here, reputation is all. As with Wilde, "posing" as bad – using the thinking of Lord Queensbury – is the same is "being bad." Similarly, someone who is talked about as being "vile," and "degraded," *becomes* the same as being these things. Dorian's only characteristic that seems to belie this "reality," therefore, is his benevolent physical appearance. Rather than having "sin write … itself across [his] face," he retains his beauty, that marker of his innocence. But this reading is entirely wrong. Dorian is anything but innocent. Dorian's "poisonous" potential, then is especially potent. He can share his vices with others while operating under the guise of innocence.[108] A familiarity with Dorian portends a necessary revision of accepted reading practices.

Paintings, or any artwork for that matter, usually portray static surfaces, and human beings – or at least, those not revealed to be "posing" at certain accepted social

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[108] In the sense that he begins to prey on others as a way gains sensations, Dorian's actions here seem a bit vampiric, in the sense that he "infects" others who are unaware of his malignance.

roles – are supposed to represent substance. Wilde's novel, however, questions any such representation as being fixed,[109] starting with his famous preface to the novel, which announces that "those who go beneath the surface do so at their own peril" and "those who read the symbol do so at their peril," moving on to Dorian's concerns that people with be able to "read" the private narrative embedded in his hidden painting and also including Basil's similar concerns that "every flake and film of colour" of Dorian's portrait will reveal his secret "idolatry" for Dorian (16; Holland 89). Whether artistic or human, all representation for Wilde is analogous to some kind of posing. The nature of humanity is that people fulfill certain "social poses" when encountering different life situations and that, in fact, everyone wears these artificial public "masks."[110] The message that people can easily change their social poses – as evidenced by the negative responses to the Queensbury trial and the public "stripping away" of his public identity and revelation that it was a pose – becomes perceived as poisonous. Wilde's novel, therefore, promotes an uneasy message: the Victorians must revise their reading practices to anticipate this posing. This new mode of "reading" represents a revolution in reading practices.

Though Dorian eventually dies for his sins by slashing the painting and killing himself, the negative effects that he has had on many of the other characters who come

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[109] If all representations are poses, so is realism. In this way, both Wilde's words and his art implicitly critique realism.

[110] I think here of Lord Goring in *An Ideal Husband*. Goring is the charming, but unethical dandy. But even so, he represents the most "authentic" (and most likeable) character in the play. The other characters, on the other hand, are exposed in the play as social posers, whose public faces have no variance with the realities lying underneath. The overall message of the play, as represented by the title, is that an "ideal husband" is not one who seems perfect with an untainted past and high moral standards. Rather, an ideal husband (Lord Goring) is absolutely imperfect and therefore, absolutely more interesting.

into contact with him are irretrievable. The characters who he tempts into ruin – such as Adrian Singleton and young Perth – do not regain their gentlemanly respectability and the characters who Dorian "kills" – Sybil, Basil, and James Vane – cannot be brought back to life. Society can do nothing to punish Dorian or decontaminate itself of his "poisonous" reality. The only character who has control over his destiny is Dorian himself, who has self-fashioned his "alternative social text." The novel, therefore, ultimately demonstrates that the Establishment is unable to control behavior in the ways that its laws and legal codes suggest that it can. Dorian, like Wilde, is a "poisonous text" because he offers possibilities for self-fashioning that are not offered in traditional social scripts for gentlemanly behavior. Societal boundaries seem as if they will effectively "contain" such dangerous and inappropriate behavior, but no matter what happens, the "poisonous" inappropriate behavior seeps out into the common discourse.

Sensational Closure

During the trial, Carson, Wilde's lawyer read an excerpt from one of Wilde's responses to a *Dorian Gray* book review; it suggests much about the possible "poisonous" values that the *Dorian Gray* storyline can have for the reading public, now that it's been a subject of conversation in the Queensbury trial. Wilde's response to a reviewer's claims that "in all seriousness [Wilde] has written [*Dorian Gray*] in order that it should be read by the most depraved members of the criminal and illiterate classes," is that

> as this review is grossly unjust to me as an artist, I ask you to allow me to reply … I do not suppose that the criminal and illiterate classes ever read

> anything except newspapers. They are certainly not likely to be able to understand anything of mine" (Holland 220).

If lower-class audiences had previously been unaware of his book, as Wilde suggests, they now can no longer be so because of the way that the trial proceedings had been covered by the media. The newspaper reporting of the trial was massive, so if "criminal" and "illiterate" people read the paper, they could then become familiar with not only the "poisonous" book that is Wilde's novel (if not tempted to read it), but they may become susceptible to the dangerous values which its author and the courtroom proceedings about Wilde seemingly promulgate amongst the masses. The Queensbury courtroom proceedings – spread via the newpapers, invite the lower-class readership to re-read standard middle-class codes for conduct and gentlemanly behavior promoted by the Establishment; they allow the lower-classes to re-imagine representations of life and art, they've been "invited" to resist and/or question social norms. The fact that the Queensbury courtroom happenings themselves literally become a contaminating "poisonous text" which the nation will be glad to get rid of is echoed in a *Pall Mall Gazette* response to the Queensbury trial ending. The writer here says that "the sensational close of the noisome Wilde-Queensbury case has relieved those responsible for the conduct of daily papers of a very oppressive and painful burden," and rejoices that the nation can now "begin to breather purer air."[111] Another reviewer, in *The Daily Telegraph* is pleased that Wilde has been "eliminate[d]" from "the society that he has

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[111] April 6th 1895. Reprinted on pg. 70 in Goodman.

disgraced," since he has already "poison[ed] our stage, our literature, our drama, and [now] the outskirts of our press" (Goodman 77)

In the end, of course, Wilde was ousted from the "stage of England" as being a "poisonous text," left to suffer a two-year term of both imprisonment and hard labor for a crime that was grossly overpunished. Though Wilde essentially staged his own sensational drama at the inception of his trial by playing his role as the witty, charming and innocent dandy, this mask was quickly stripped away to uncover an identity that the Victorian public did not want to face. The sensational narrative of his trial literally challenged and disrupted social norms in England, and this disruption was highly unappreciated. Like his character Dorian, Wilde is figuratively "killed" off by his prison sentence – since imprisonment slowed down his literary production and made him both ill and broken.[112] But fortunately for Wilde, his sensational novel and trial proceedings ultimately had deep cultural impact.

[112] Only two years after his release from prison, Wilde died in self-exile in France. Sadly, Wilde wrote only one volume of poetry and *De Profundis*, his long love letter to Lord Alfred Douglas, in the days between the trial ending and his death.

Conclusion: Mrs. Grundy, Sensational Fiction and the "Confused Moral World" of Fin de Siècle England

In 1890, before he was condemned in his famous trial, Oscar Wilde complained that "Puritanism is always marring the artistic instinct of the English" and says that "there is not a single literary critic in France … who would think for a moment of criticising [art] from an ethical standpoint" (sic *St. James Gazette* June 28, 5). Wilde was, of course, condemning British attitudes for respectability and righteousness that worked towards censoring his "sensational" art (and later on, the dangerous sensational texts that his life comes to represent). At this time, Wilde then joked that "Mrs. Grundy, that amusing old lady … represents the only original form of humour that the middle classes of this country have been able to produce" (*St. James Gazette*, June 26, 1890, 4). As *Encyclopedia Brittanica* tells us, Mrs. Grundy represents norms for "rigid respectability" which "typif[y] the censorship enacted in everyday [British] life." It seems only fitting then that on July 19th, 1890 *Punch* should provide a parody which mocked the interaction of Wilde's "dangerous" text with British respectability in the literal form of Mrs. Grundy (Figure 3). The cartoon shows "Oscar, the Fad Boy in Lippincott's" startling Mrs. Grundy by giving her a volume of *Dorian Gray*, with a caption reading "I want to make your flesh creep!" (25). The anonymous accompanying article says that Wilde's sole purpose in writing *Dorian Gray* has been to produce sensations in his readership and challenge English norms: "perhaps Oscar didn't mean anything at all, except to give us a *sensation*, to show how like Bulwer-Lytton's old-world style he could make his descriptions and his dialogue, and what an easy thing it is to frighten the respectable *Mrs. Grundy* with a Bogie'" (25 first italics mine). It also expresses a fear that "if *Mrs.*

Grundy doesn't read [Dorian Gray], the younger *Grundies* do," creating a potential for corruption amongst the young impressionable reading masses. Young Grundies could take discussions of their scandalous reading material to their clubs and other venues and spread evil information throughout the populace. Young Grundies could "misuse" the sensational material that they had read to wreak havoc on the nation.

PARALLEL.

the Fat Boy in Pickwick, startles the Old Lady; Oscar, the Fad Boy in Lippincott's, startles Mrs. Grundy.

Oscar, the Fad Boy. "I want to make your flesh creep!"

Figure 3. Oscar Wilde, the "Fad Boy in Lippincott's" Startles Mrs. Grundy with *Dorian Gray*, *Punch*, July 19, 1890

In many ways, Margaret Oliphant serves as the Mrs. Grundy incarnation of the Victorian era since the voice she evokes in her *Blackwood's* reviews becomes so representative of conservative Victorian norms for respectability and "Britishness." She is the "character" who expresses the most overt shock at the "sensationalism" that she explains is infiltrating the English nation. She is also as Tom Winnifrith says in the *DLB*, "the barometer of Victorian taste." Yet, like an actor in a play, though her central character type remains the same, she is able to play various roles in response to the sensation phenomena. The above cartoon showing Mrs. Grundy character in a stylized pose of shock becomes emblematic of changes in Victorian taste and the challenge that Oliphant felt by authors who were perhaps less prolific but more popular by the end of the century.

In the 1860's, Margaret Oliphant had lamented that the invasion of sensation fiction would provoke a revolution in domestic reading habits and an "invasion of domesticity." By 1893 – two years before Wilde's scandalous trial and three after the publication of *The Picture of Dorian Gray* – all of Oliphant's fears had been realized. Now, not only was realism no longer the predominant literary trend (not that Oliphant had stuck to realism herself), but also "the confused moral world" which Oliphant feared in her earlier reviews seems to have come to pass when she says that

> It is … notwithstanding the distinction [of a] confused moral world into which we are admitted by the novelists of the day. Supposing our French neighbors were likely to judge us, as we are greatly apt to judge them, by the state of national affairs disclosed in our works of fiction, these lively

> observers must inevitably come to the conclusion that murder is a frequent occurrence in English society, and that the boasted regard for human life, which is one of the especial marks of high civilisation, exists only in theory among us" ("Novels" 194:169).

In this same review, she also complains that "murder, conspiracy, robbery," and "fraud, are the strong colours on the national palette" and that now "law predominates over even romance and imagination" (94). Though it seems strange that Oliphant is seeking approbation from France rather than worrying about the ways that British citizens think of themselves, Oliphant's comments are interesting because they reveal the fact that her anxieties have to do with the *impression* that representations of Britain evoke amongst their readership, rather than the "realities" of British life underpinning these representations. She wants to hang onto the "fiction" that British realities are nice and seemly; she wants to send the "fiction" that murder and fraud don't exist.

The "confused moral world" to which Oliphant alludes isn't pretty. Fictional representations which expose family problems and inequalities of rights for British citizens, such as those covered in this project might – and do – expose the "national mind" as a fictional framework that is both incomplete and fractured. The historical concepts of both Britishness and Victorianism – in all of their emanations – have been challenged by alternate modes of thinking or creating art. The ideology and/or "fictional construct" of what constitutes real "Britishness" has been infiltrated and invaded by competing ideologies, laws and ideas for social progress Perceived binaries that separate high and low, public and private, French and English, masculinity and femininity begin to become blown apart – in many ways deconstructed. These competing ideologies of

"fictions" seem to be revolutionary because they are so different, but really they are part of a necessary growth process towards modernity.

Ironically, Oliphant's anxieties about the "confused moral world" of fin de siècle England and the change in the British nation show up when we see which authors in this project end up having more cultural "staying power" (i.e. the authors that are able – through their sensation – to infiltrate the national discourse more heavily). It turns out, of course, that Braddon and Wilde, the more heavily debated sensational authors, are the ones who remain the most popular and the most remembered, whereas Oliphant is virtually forgotten by all but the most assiduous literary historians. Braddon and Wilde win out. Grundy-ism (aka Mrs. Oliphant) dies out and sensation, as both an artistic movement and as a challenge to rational, respectable English values moves in, infiltrating the discourse and having a role in the gradual changes in British values, laws and artistic modes that figure and prefigure modernity. In many ways, Oliphant's assessments were correct. By the fin de siècle, partially because of sensation, fewer skeletons were in the closet of Victorian respectability, and feelings of British nationalism not quite so unified. But contrary to what Oliphant projects in her non-fiction, the stripping away of the "fictions" which serves to prop up seemingly sacred, and "natural" ideas about British identity is a good thing. By the end of the century, "the public voice of England" was becoming more democratically inclusive that it had previously been, and new legislation had been passed that gave an increasingly larger number of British citizens more rights. It is true, of course, that the newer laws are still public constructs of British identity that can be violated, and no discourse can ever fully replicate reality. It's also true that inequalities in representation are still rampant. But at least the blending of public and

private discourses via sensation does allow for some revolution in thought which would enable readers to question the world which surrounded them. In this sense, sensation enables some very positive effects on both national and artistic norms.

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