

VICTORIAN INTIMATE VIOLENCE AND THE PROBLEMS OF VISIBILITY

VICTORIAN NARRATIVES OF INTIMATE VIOLENCE

AND THE PROBLEMS OF VISIBILITY

By

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Abstract

This dissertation explores the struggle between the impulse to cover up intimate violence and the impulse to make it public and consumable in nineteenth century England. It shows that intimate violence was *both* spectacular and unspeakable, rendering woman abuse a highly contested site of representation. It also reveals, however, that these ostensibly diametric modes of portraying violence worked in tandem to test the limits of what was socially and culturally representable during the period, and, in turn, to challenge hierarchies of genre, gender, class, and sexuality.

This thesis is therefore both a study of the ways in which representations of intimate violence have avowed the imagined differences between members of disparate social categories and a study of how these differences often break down in the face of brutality. Chapter One shows that although street literature's representations of abuse seem invested in spectacularizing working-class violence, they often gesture towards the failures of middle-class domestic life and thus presume a unique vision of cross-class, shared moral experience. Chapter Two explores how feminist poet, pamphleteer, and novel writer Caroline Norton conflates multiple female identities to emphasize the importance of women's creative self-imagining as a means to resist physical violence and the rhetoric that encourages or allows it. Reading Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, Chapter Three intersects discourses on abuse with disability studies to interrogate how the conspicuous bodies of battered women can disrupt male homosocial interactions and complicate discourse on trauma and representation. Finally, Chapter Four considers the ways in which displacements of intimate violence in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman In White* create sympathetic bonds that blur subjective distinctions between abusive men and violated women to test male authority over representation.

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I

The Struggle to Represent Intimate Violence

Representations of intimate violence – physical and emotional brutality in marriage, courtship, or sexual relationships – during the nineteenth century in England were particularly fraught with anxieties about the nature and effects of exposure. This form of abuse has been historically difficult to represent because of rigid protection of private life, but nineteenth-century print culture had an especially vexed relationship with battered women. Typically either sensationalized for its bizarre levels of cruelty or merely hinted at because of its social unacceptability, intimate violence was a site of representational competition during the period involving what could or could not be exposed on and in relation to women's bodies. An 1848 review of *Antigone* in *Punch*, for example, illustrates violence against women while criticizing the performance of brutality, thus characterizing the ways in which contradictory approaches to representing abuse could exist in the same moment. The reviewer criticizes the “cruel effect produced by Mons. Boncage in dragging poor Antigone across the stage by the hair of her head” for the “terrible reality of the situation,” yet nevertheless provides a visual illustration of the violent scene for its readers' enjoyment (*figure 1*). Although this representation does not concern domestic violence *per se*, in his critique the editor parallels the pulling of Antigone's hair with the spectacle of serious domestic abuse, and expresses anxieties about exposing tumultuous private life: “When Rubini used to pummel Grisi ten times

round the stage of her Majesty's Theatre, and they ultimately rolled on to the bed in respective roles as Othello and Desdemona, it was called a tremendous Theatrical Effect....The Latest Effect of this class is now being exhibited at the St. James Theatre, where Antigone is being performed..." (24). As though to justify the apparent contradiction of critiquing the spectacle of private violence while recreating another such spectacle for the readers of *Punch*, the editor suggests that the director "might just as well produce his Great Theatrical Effect upon a dummy" (24). These comments imply that while representations that require actual violence against women are abhorrent, the commodification of violent images – safely distant from the site of real abuse – is completely acceptable. In its illustration and rhetoric the *Punch* review thus exemplifies the nineteenth-century struggle between the need to cover up intimate violence and the compulsion to make it public and consumable.

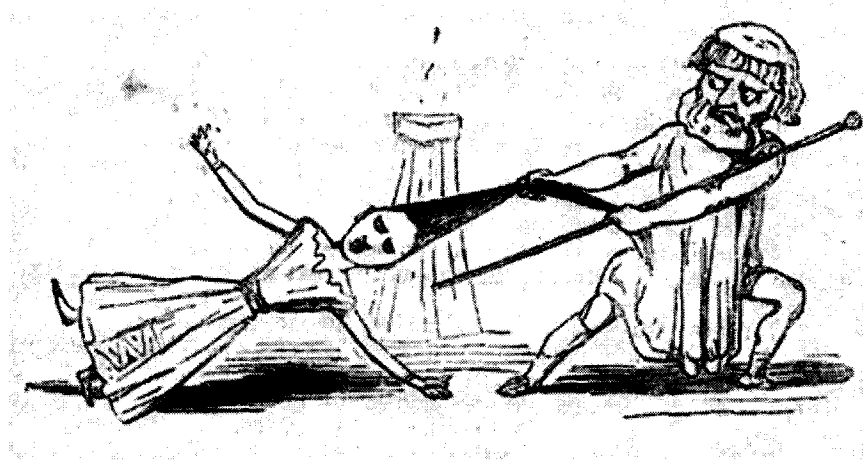


Figure 1: "Great Theatrical Effect" (*Punch* vol. 14, 1848)

My dissertation explores the ways in which the apparent uncertainty about whether or not intimate violence should be exposed in nineteenth-century print culture reflects the renegotiation of class-based social and moral hierarchies. Specifically, I look at how competing representations of intimate violence upset middle-class power and nineteenth-century rules of representability, and, in turn, posited challenges to the relationships among class, crime, violence and morality. On the one hand, the public exposure of violence risked commodifying and spectacularizing injured women, making them sources of entertainment rather than the inspiration for activism. On the other hand, extreme reticence about representing violence interfered with the politicization of an issue that was inextricably bound not just to women's rights, but also to historical understandings of class, morality and respectability. This quandary persisted throughout the period. Nineteenth-century street literature – the subject of my first chapter – often paints grisly pictures of women being battered or-murdered by their male partners. Yet, as I discuss in chapters two through four, novels of the same period frequently avoid this kind of direct representation, using rhetoric that displaces, allegorizes or ignores woman abuse.¹ Intimate violence thus became a kind of paradoxical event in Victorian England, both a brutal spectacle and a non-narratable spectre. I examine why this paradox could exist. I also show how it functioned differently on women's bodies depending on their

¹A number of novels provide excellent examples of this phenomenon, but the following are some of the most conspicuous: Eliot's *Middlemarch* and *Janet's Repentance*; Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and *Man and Wife*; Anne Brontë's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*; Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*; Charles Reade's *A Woman Hater*; Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*; and Caroline Norton's *Woman's Reward*. Some of these novels do, in fact, represent minor cases of physical abuse, but in general all make abuse conspicuously difficult to detect.

social status, the specific historical contexts of their representation, and the literary genre of text in which they appeared.

The fact that street literature's exposures of woman abuse and murder typically refer to the working classes while novels that shroud abuse focus on the middle classes suggests that the level of public access to intimate abuse depended on the social status of the women being hurt. Representations of violence thus reflect class hegemony that regulated the harsh "realities" of many women's lives. My dissertation addresses the intricacies of this regulation, including moments when it breaks down, by exploring two ostensibly disparate versions of intimate violence – explicit and conspicuously obscured – that emerged during the period. The result is both a study of the ways in which representations of intimate violence have perpetuated class stereotypes and a study of how depictions of extreme brutality revealed these stereotypes to be false.

This introductory chapter provides a discussion of the historical contexts of intimate violence during the Victorian period, especially the ways in which legislation and legal doctrine rendered woman abuse always difficult to detect and record. It then addresses how journalism and novels responded to the law's treatment of abuse. One of my chief aims is to explore how the discrepancies in this response alternately support and condemn dominant class ideology, particularly the notion that the middle class was morally superior. The nineteenth century is marked by a perceived movement towards a basic tripartite class system as opposed to an intricate hierarchy of social positions (Cannadine 60). In theory, this new social organization did away with a time honoured

system of rank in favour of larger homogenous groups categorized according to factors such as wealth, education, employment, health and leisure: the upper classes, or educated inheritors of aristocratic land and titles, who were, for the early part of the century, entirely in control of the political process; the middle classes, who gradually earned political rights² and were generally either self-made entrepreneurs or employed in non-physical labour such as medicine or law, and, in the lower middle classes, shop-keeping, journalism, or teaching; and the working classes of skilled and unskilled physical labourers who were generally badly paid and who, for much of the century, did not have the right to vote because they did not own enough property. Each of these groups was imbued with specific moral – or immoral – qualities. While the upper classes were often associated with excess, profligacy and corruption,³ the working classes were stereotyped as drunken, violent and generally rough.⁴ The middle classes, which largely formed the literary voice of the era, increasingly promoted themselves as admirably ethical and respectable.

²The Reform Acts of 1832, 1867 and 1884 gradually extended the franchise to include most middle-class men.

³See, among others, Judith Walkowitz's *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, and Audrey Jaffe's *Scenes of Sympathy*.

⁴See Anna Clark's "Rape or Seduction? A Controversy Over Sexual Violence in the Nineteenth Century", James Hammerton's *Cruelty and Companionship*, and Martin Wiener's *Men of Blood*. Novels like Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist* and broadsides detailing serious, violent crime also tend to depict criminality as a consequence of poverty. Frank Mort also suggests that Victorian morality "referenced a series of codes and practices regulating individual conduct and a range of protocols and procedures about the art of government" while "immorality signified all the practices of working-class life leading to ungovernable and disruptive behaviour: lack of individual self-reliance, ignorance, criminality, the threat of political sedition and of course sexual impropriety" (29).

The idea of middle-class virtue was very much caught up in gender ideology, particularly the division of the “masculine public” and the “feminine domestic” spheres. Over the nineteenth century, the ideal of masculinity evolved such that “the man of substance and repute came to be someone who had a steady occupation in business or the professions” (Tosh 63). As employment came to be understood as a virtuous calling towards independence – running your own business, for example – rather than either inheriting wealth or being employed in service to somebody else (74), moral masculinity began take the shape of distinctly bourgeois participation in the economy. In contrast to the upper classes, which consisted of landed gentry who had not earned their wealth or status, and who were subsequently often represented as libertines, the middle classes stood for the combination of entrepreneurial resourcefulness and honour. Similarly, the posited relationship among working-class violence, drunkenness, lasciviousness and poverty enabled the middle classes to provide a counter-narrative of their own self-control, manifest as industriousness, financial management and familial cohesion.⁵

Complementing middle-class masculine ethics, female morality was very much caught up in the notion that women had essential virtues such as kindness, thoughtfulness and nurturance. Perhaps nowhere was this so pronounced as it was in the domestic novel, a distinctly middle-class, feminized form of entertainment. As Nancy Armstrong argues, nineteenth-century domestic novels tend to describe the desirability of women in terms of

⁵See James Hammerton’s *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life*, Maeve Doggett’s *Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England*, Martin Wiener’s *Men of Blood: Manliness and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* and Mary Lyndon Shanley’s *Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England*.

their inherent qualities rather than their social status (4). Yet these “inherent” qualities nevertheless served middle-class aspirations to power; the desire middle-class men were portrayed as feeling for such a woman could transform them into subjects whose virtue was also essential rather than classed (5), thus naturalizing and authorizing middle-class men’s social, cultural and economic control.⁶

As both Armstrong and Elizabeth Langland point out, the middle-class woman’s “inherent” qualities were directly associated with her ability to run her household effectively (Armstrong 75; Langland 49-52). Accordingly, middle-class female virtue mirrored middle-class male virtue insofar as it was caught up in an economy of management and economic authority. The middle-class woman’s virtue was exemplified through her ability power to hire and fire servants and control household purchases, for instance, suggesting that the construction of bourgeois female morality was as conflated with social hierarchies and economics as bourgeois masculine morality was. As a consequence of this ideological conflation, middle-class female virtue was inflected with the moral instability of the public, industrialized, economic and masculinized public sphere. As Langland and Poovey point out, then, efforts to constitute members of the middle classes as moral subjects capable of domestic management actually also rendered them vulnerable to the negative moral connotations of life outside of the home (Poovey, *Proper Lady* 29; Langland 8). Moreover, the risks associated with entrepreneurialship

⁶The belief that female morality was central to male morality appears in Sara Stickney Ellis’s 1839 *Women of England*, which aims to “show how intimate is the connexion which exists between the women of England, and the moral character maintained by their country in the scale of nations” (38).

meant that the financial stability of the middle-classes was often quite precarious, and that middle-class status and the moral ascendancy it was said to produce were always, on some level, on the verge of self-destruction.

Working-class women were, however, typically depicted as more morally precarious than middle-class women. As women who took jobs outside of the home, working-class women disrupted the doctrine of separate spheres. Operating in the public world of men, these women signaled not just a transgression of gender boundaries, but risked associations with prostitution. Working-class female morality was thus compromised in ways that middle-class female morality was not. As figures of femininity properly contained in the domestic sphere, middle-class women affirmed the doctrine of separate spheres, while delineating class boundaries and protecting middle-class privilege through household management. As Elizabeth Langland points out, the signifying practices performed by middle-class domestic women – dictating proper etiquette and dress, choosing which neighbours to visit and which ones to leave out of particular social situations, managing household purchases and servants – were meant to preserve boundaries between members of different classes (8). Working-class women – who were in the employ of middle-class wives – lacked these privileges.

The notion that society could be easily divided into three distinct categories is of course overly simplistic, and this was not lost on the Victorians. Class was an increasingly politicized issue throughout the nineteenth century, and representations of intimate violence were a major part of the debates surrounding shifts in how the term was

understood. However, reticence about portraying serious abuse among the middle classes seems to affirm the prevailing – and false – notion that domestic violence was either an upper-class or, more often, a working-class problem, and that the middle class was uniquely moral. One consequence of the idea of middle-class morality, then, was the relatively excessive degradation of upper- and working-class women's bodies in print culture. Battered women are often portrayed not only as physically burdened or humiliated, but also as licentious and "fallen." In Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, for example, Madeline Neroni's pretense of upper-class excess is symptomized by physical disability and hints of sexual deviance. As I will show in chapter one, street literature is particularly rife with overtly sexualized images of working-class battered and dead women. This mode of representing intimate violence appears to justify male violence by correlating it with female promiscuity; thus popular representations correspond with legal doctrines of the period that allowed, as I will discuss below, less severe punishments for wife abusers whose spouses had committed sexual indiscretions. In depictions of working-class women abused by middle-class men, this sexual degradation appears to punish women who have attempted to transcend their class status through a romantic relationship with a "superior" man.

Fictional and non-fictional accounts of working-class abuse nevertheless often test the premise that the middle-class was nineteenth-century society's moral authority, and in doing so betray the shared moral – and sometimes immoral – ground of social groups with widely disparate economic and cultural influence. These types of

representations of intimate violence also suggest the idea that, as Cannadine puts it, middle-class consciousness was more a deliberately constructed “rhetorical formation” than a reality (74). In this chapter I delineate the ways in which both street literature and novels of the Victorian period used a variety of representational strategies to critique ideologies regarding the “barbaric” poor and the “moral” middle classes. Although the texts I will explore do little to exonerate the working classes, their implication of the middle classes in domestic turmoil betrays anxieties about bourgeois moral decline that correspond with Matthew Arnold’s depiction of the middle classes as made up of Philistines, or as industrious yet lacking cultural sophistication and moral sense (30-35).

Through displacements, transformations and evocations of sympathetic response, the ostensibly disparate texts I discuss reflect changing understandings of nineteenth-century social and private life reflected by legislative and political landmarks. Because legislation reveals so much about the development of political rhetoric about women’s bodies, my research is generally framed by four legislative landmarks: the Offenses Against the Person Act of 1828 – which ensured that physical assaults were as punishable as assaults on personal property – the three Reform Acts – which gradually extended the franchise – the Divorce Act of 1857 – which made divorce easier and more affordable – and the Married Women’s Property Act of 1882 – which decided that married women were legal persons. However, I do discuss some texts that were published earlier. I begin my discussion of street literature, for example, with a group of broadsides from 1818 on Mary Ashford’s murder by her lover. These papers mark the beginning of the popularity

of journalistic representations of intimate violence in England, a phenomenon that not only preceded and influenced the nineteenth-century novel's treatment of abuse, but also played an important role in political debates on the status of women.⁷ My project therefore extends before the Victorian era, to include newspapers, broadsides, chapbooks and novels published between 1818 and 1878.

Major differences exist between street literature and novels, most obviously that one genre claims to portray events that have actually occurred, while the other purports to engage the experiential without limiting itself to facts. Major differences also exist between the various types of street literature. Respectable papers like *The Times*, for example, targeted affluent readers and refrained from adopting the explicit rhetoric of cheaper papers like *Illustrated Police News*, while the overt political agendas of pamphlets offer a sharp contrast to the sensationalism of most broadsides. The logic of reading these different types of texts together depends on not only their seemingly disparate approaches to representing the same problem, however, but also their shared qualities. What strikes me most about these texts is that they explicitly question the moral basis of nineteenth-century social structures. Studying novels – which certainly had some working-class readers but was largely read by members of the middle class – alongside street literature – which was read by a far more diverse demographic – reveals that this type of questioning was extremely widespread. In fact, the street literature and novels

⁷The conclusions I draw about street literature are based primarily on data collected from The British Library's Victorian newspaper holdings and the Bodleian Library's online collection of nineteenth-century broadsides.

that I discuss in this dissertation not only feature battered women from rural and urban areas, but these publications very often received distribution in dense cities and remote villages alike. The texts that I will be analysing are also all highly concerned with the body's social function. For example, broadsides like "A Copy of the Verses, on the Execution of W.M. Corder For the Murder of Maria Marten in the Red Barn, Polstead" (1828) show how injured women's bodies could be used as evidence of middle-class men's crimes, while Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* positions the female body as a site of male homosocial control. These texts thus reflect the ways in which the human body was becoming a symbol through which to explore socially naturalized truths.⁸

As their interest in the body suggests, the texts that I have chosen are almost invariably sensational. More accurately, they share the generic traits best known as belonging to the sensation novel: mystery, shocking revelations, family secrets, feminine victims and evil male predators. Consequently, these diverse texts may be placed on a continuum of the development and influence of Victorian sensation. As a genre dependent on the depiction of emotions and their accompanying physical feelings, sensation was often treated by critics as culturally dangerous – especially for women – because of its tendency to excite bodily responses and a morbid interest in scandal rather than substance (Cvetkovich 20). Sensation depicts bodies as extremely nervous and as subject to the irrationalities of emotions – particularly terror – and critics feared that

⁸See Erin O'Connor's *Raw Material: Producing Pathology in Victorian Culture*, Lawrence Rothfield's *Vital Signs: Medical Realism in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* and Pamela K. Gilbert's *Mapping the Victorian Social Body*.

readers would catch the “womanly” feelings about which they read (Miller 153). This was particularly problematic for readers of sensational violence. As Steven Bruhm notes in his introduction to *Gothic Bodies*, during the Romantic period – a period when many of the broadsides I discuss were published – sensational violence was seen as capable of causing readers to “become what [they] behold,” rendering “the effects of imagined violence – like those of stage violence – ...much more difficult to control” (xviii).

Sensational violence was a problem not only because it risked perpetuating aggressive behaviour in men, but also because it was considered capable of perpetuating irrational terror among women. That being said, the sensations experienced by characters in many fictional texts are directly related to narrative development and the interpretation of problems related to gender and class ideology. Accordingly, as D.A. Miller puts it, the sensation novel “must always at least imply a reading” of the sensations it depicts and excites (147), rendering feeling an essential aspect of culture and politics. Sensational representations of physical abuse then, even when partially obscured, construct the injured female body as capable of performing ideological work that otherwise largely appeared to occur in the masculine, public sphere.

Contemporary Critical Approaches to Victorian Intimate Violence

A number of critics have addressed how fictional and journalistic representations of intimate violence reacted to and inspired social changes during the nineteenth century. This work is generally divided into studies of infrequent explicit representations – almost

always minor in degree – and studies of more serious violence that remains implicit, “off-stage” and outside of or prior to narrative. Because both explicit and implicit representations of intimate violence appeared at the same time and because both have subversive cultural and political power, I am bringing together these two seemingly disparate approaches to nineteenth-century woman abuse and emphasizing both the historically unprecedented exposure of violence against women as well as those moments when it remained difficult to see.

The explicit representation of abuse is frequently understood as possessing an especially immediate power to write social change into being. James Hammerton, for example, argues that

By the end of the century the exposure of marital misconduct among men of all social classes had brought an unprecedented amount of attention to proper ideals of male behaviour in marriage, so that one result of the long marriage debate was a challenge to prevailing concepts of masculinity. (3)

Similarly underscoring the power of explicit representations to enact social change, Marlene Tromp argues that Victorian sensation fiction’s exposure of domestic violence “participated in a transformation of the terms of the legal debates and disrupted the Victorian vision of violence” (6). Lisa Surridge likewise argues that the public exposure of intimate violence in street literature and novels began to police private relationships and behaviours (9).

These readings of Victorian representations of abuse are extremely valuable for

their discussions of how representations of violence influenced law and society, and I build on them in my own consideration of nineteenth-century print culture's often contradictory approaches to depicting abuse. But because my focus is on how nineteenth-century depictions of abuse were both spectacularly explicit and remarkably restrained, I also draw on Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky's *The Marked Body*, which looks at the conspicuous *absence* of middle-class domestic violence in the Victorian novel. For Lawson and Shakinovsky, the battered middle-class women of the Victorian novel – whose abuse is always at least partially obscured – represent “a tear in the fabric of the narrative, momentarily rendering the invisible visible, reminding us of what is not represented in the realist text, and opening to us briefly the universe of discarded, excluded, and persecuted bodies” (1). In other words, the novel made its resistance to narrating middle-class abuse conspicuous in order to comment on the unspeakable aspects of bourgeois private life, as well as to comment on the limits of so-called realist fiction that was loathe to depict socially unacceptable behaviour among the middle classes.

While it seems as though fiction that blatantly disguises abuse deliberately misrepresents private life, such selective representation is often self-referential and conspicuous in its evasions of intimate violence; thus the act of effacing violence simultaneously draws attention to it. This fact complicates readings of the Victorian novel that describe the effacement of women's injured bodies as itself a violent rhetorical strategy. Helena Michie claims that during the Victorian period “discussions of the

[female] body itself were always immediately supplemented with metaphors from other fields of discourse” (5). One consequence of this supplementation, according to Michie, was that “women became both metaphors for the unknowable, and metaphors for metaphor, their bodies figures of figuration” (*Flesh Made Word* 7). The woman’s body was thus “lost” under rhetorical codes and tropes that enacted the “violent and marked separation of signifier and signified” (8). However, reading the conspicuous absence of violence against women’s bodies in novels as disruptive moments that force readers to question the politics of representation allows us to rethink the Victorian reticence to narrate female corporeality.

By combining these two approaches to reading Victorian representations of intimate violence – for what they depict explicitly *and* for all that they imply – my study highlights the dichotomous representations of intimate violence and assesses their impact on women’s bodies. To some extent, depictions of corporeality depend on a woman’s social rank. Yet nineteenth-century depictions of intimate violence reflect growing uncertainty about such distinctions, frequently rendering the female body one site of a representational struggle regarding the reputed cultural and moral authority of the middle classes. My thesis therefore reconsiders the status of battered women as marginalized and therefore socially and politically insignificant figures and the status of the middle class as representative of Victorian moral ideals. It pursues these claims by exploring how representations of intimate violence positioned abused women as political symbols of anxieties about the lack of a firm foundation for the middle-class claim on morality.

The Historical Context of Intimate Violence

Historically speaking, conceptions and representations of intimate violence involve contradictions. Multiple legal, social and cultural rules meant that, although intimate violence was a recurring theme in the nineteenth century, woman abuse was not particularly easy to decipher. Before I discuss these reasons, I must acknowledge how my own contemporary biases and vocabulary have obscured the problem for me. It is not easy to think about intimate violence outside of a modern context, when terms like “partner abuse” attempt to encompass all violent and otherwise abusive intimate relationships regardless of marital status or sexual orientation. During the nineteenth-century there was no such lexicon, and marriages were far from equal partnerships. This project therefore began as a study of “domestic violence,” or violence that took place in the Victorian home. However, particularly when my research led me to the abundance of nineteenth-century broadsides and newspapers depicting young women who were brutally beaten and murdered by their lovers, I began to realize that “domestic violence” does not accurately describe the phenomena I wish to explore because it excludes violent extra-marital relationships including courtship, adulterous affairs and prostitution. Not only am I wary of understating the impact of narratives about unmarried couples whose relationships are so frequently conceived of as outside of the domestic sphere; I am also wary of assuming that a clear distinction between domestic and public can be made, especially in reference to intimate relationships. Nor do I wish to affirm a hierarchy that assumes that studying the social significance of the private lives of married couples

supercedes the importance of studying those sometimes highly publicized, violent relationships between men and women who were not married to one another. So, because the scope of my dissertation includes woman abuse that occurs inside and outside of the domestic and because it recognizes the slippery nature of any distinction between these two realms, I borrow Martin Wiener's term "intimate violence" to acknowledge the significance of abusive violence among married and non-married couples during the Victorian period ("Alice Arden" 186).

Of course, like "partner abuse," neither "intimate violence" nor "domestic violence" were terms in common parlance during the Victorian period. While I have not found any term that was used during the period to describe abusive violence between men and women who were sexually involved but not married to each other, the Oxford English Dictionary identifies the earliest use of "domestic violence" in reference to a married couple in an 1891 *Times* review of a play (<http://dictionary.oed.com/cgi/entry/5006842>). Rather than "intimate" or "domestic" violence, "cruelty" was the term most often used to describe the abuse of married women by their husbands for much of the nineteenth-century, whereas violence committed by men against their female lovers fell under the banner of regular assault.⁹ However, legal definitions of cruelty shifted significantly between the late eighteenth-century and the mid-Victorian period and came to encompass a broad range of actions. As a result of

⁹See Hammerton's *Cruelty and Companionship*, Doggett's *Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England* and Wiener's *Men of Blood*, which all provide evidence that "cruelty" was the term most often used. William Blackstone's "Commentaries on the Laws of England," and several of the broadsides I will discuss in chapter one provide primary legislative and vernacular examples of the term's use.

these shifts, generally accepted understandings of abusive behaviour are difficult to define for the whole period. In 1780 *Evans v. Evans* established the legal definition of cruelty as physical violence that put a woman's life in danger. Lord Stowell used this case to explain that in order to substantiate cruelty there must be physical peril so great that a wife's household duties – in the middle classes, a woman's expression of moral qualities – could not be performed (Hammerton 120). In 1794, however, Stowell referred to verbal threats of physical violence as cruelty in *D'Aguilar v. D'Aguilar* (121). Severe physical violence or threats thereof thus formed the basis of legal cruelty until the years following the 1857 creation of a civil divorce court (124). In 1869, for example, *Kelly vs. Kelly* set a precedent for defining non-violent abuse as cruelty if any behaviour by a husband put his wife's life at risk (129).

Clearly, then, legal terminology made intimate violence challenging to locate even as legal practitioners and reformers sought to ameliorate the lives of married women. Legislation functioned similarly. The Offences Against the Person Act and the Divorce Act in particular reflect this confusion; both signal a major shift in the visibility of intimate violence, while harbouring contradictory rhetoric or implications. The 1828 Offences Against the Person Act mandated that an individual could be imprisoned for causing serious physical or mental injury to another person either intentionally, recklessly or through neglect. It would seem, then, that the Act ought to have protected battered women by providing them with channels through which to prosecute violent men. The fact that the Act indicates that drunkenness is no excuse for violence suggests

that working-class women were some of its primary beneficiaries, since poor men were stereotyped as a drunken, violent lot. Indeed, Surridge points out that the Act not only signalled the growing nineteenth-century concern with personal violence as opposed to property damage, but also made legal action against violent husbands through magisterial courts more accessible and affordable, and therefore more visible to the public (6-8). However, the threat of public scrutiny likely remained a deterrent to some upper- and middle-class women who would consider abuse to be a barbaric, working-class experience. So, although the Act made it possible for working-class women to protect themselves, the number of complaints made by women in the magisterial courts cannot be considered an accurate indication of the number of actual abuse cases, particularly among the middle and upper classes.¹⁰

Moreover, although the Act expanded offenses against persons to include personal physical and mental damages, it did nothing to redefine legal personhood to include married women. According to the legal doctrine of coverture, wives were “covered” under the legal personhood of their husbands. This meant that married women could not maintain property or individual legal status. Drawing on Caroline Norton’s 1855 pamphlet, “A Letter to the Queen on the Lord Chancellor Cranworth’s Marriage and Divorce Bill” (which I will discuss at length in chapter three), Maeve Doggett

¹⁰Between 1858 and 1882, out of the sixty-nine cases where class is identifiable twenty-eight refer to the gentry, twenty refer to the lower middle-class, and twenty-one refer to the working class. By 1882, out of sixty-eight cases where class was identifiable thirty-five refer to the gentry, seventeen refer to the lower middle-class and sixteen refer to the working class (Hammerton 104, from Principal Probate Registry, PRO files J77, law reports, and *the Times*).

defines coverture as a “legal fiction of unity” that justified the oppression of women (36).

William Blackstone’s 1765 *The Laws of England* provides a detailed account of coverture as it would influence British law until late in the nineteenth century:

By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband: under whose wing, protection, and cover, she performs every thing; and is therefore called in our law-french a feme-covert; is said to be covert-baron, or under the protection and influence of her husband, her baron, or lord; and her condition during her marriage is called her coverture. (1: 430)

Under coverture, Blackstone informs us, “a man cannot grant anything to his wife, or enter into covenant with her: for the grant would be to suppose her separate existence: and to covenant with her, would be only to covenant with himself” (430). It was not until the passing of the 1882 Married Women’s Property Act that wives could buy, sell and own like a man or a single woman. Until then, all personal property that once belonged to the wife would after marriage belong to the husband; even upon engagement a woman’s property was not hers to sell or give away without her future husband’s permission (Doggett 36-7). A husband and wife could not be guilty of conspiring to commit crimes (51), nor could one spouse testify against the other or sue the other (46). This meant, of course, that a spouse had no legal recourse if the other failed to fulfill an agreement, since any legal contract between man and woman became null if the two were married – except

the marriage, that is, which was practically insoluble. As a result, it was particularly difficult for men to be convicted of cruelty towards their wives (45).

The Divorce Act was similarly problematic because of the perception that abuse was a problem faced largely by working-class wives and because women lacked legal personhood. The establishment of a civil divorce court in 1857 meant that divorces could be granted without an act of Parliament or ecclesiastical authority, and the decreased cost of civil divorces lead to even greater levels of public visibility for intimate violence as an increased number of women petitioned for separation and divorce based on cruelty (Doggett 7).¹¹ Nevertheless, divorce was still a relatively expensive luxury that in practice could only protect women with access to wealth. And yet, as Marlene Tromp points out, justifications for the Act continued to focus on the protection of working-class women from their drunken husbands since middle-class violence was not considered to be a consistent reality (73). This glaring contradiction renders the detection of intimate violence particularly problematic since statistics that might shed light on the nature of intimate violence are rendered incomplete by class prejudice and the expense of divorce.

Regardless of class, only one in four women who could afford to petition for divorce was successful in obtaining one (Surridge 31). Until late in the century, a husband could claim conjugal rights and legally imprison his wife in his home, preventing her from petitioning the court at all. Obviously, then, any contemporary

¹¹Hammerton points out that between 1858 and 1866, out of 241 divorce petitions 34% of all divorce and separation petitions cited cruelty, and 56% of wives' divorce petitions cited cruelty (106, taken from Principal Probate Registry, PRO files J77, law reports and *the Times*).

understanding of Victorian intimate violence is clouded by Victorian gender ideologies as much as by the period's class ideologies. But even during the period there was confusion regarding what a husband could legally do to his wife. Blackstone writes that,

The husband also (by the old law) might give his wife moderate correction. For, as he is to answer for her misbehaviour, the law thought it reasonable to intrust him with this power of restraining her, by domestic chastisement, in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his servants or children; for whom the master or parent is also liable in some cases to answer. (1: 433)

Blackstone claims that “with us, in the politer reign of Charles the second, this power of correction began to be doubted” (1:434). Yet Victorian feminist pamphleteer Frances Power Cobbe cites a statute passed by Charles II that allowed a husband to physically chastise his wife with any “reasonable instrument” until 1829 (64). Recently, Doggett calls this statute into doubt, suggesting that there was never any explicit, legal right of chastisement (7). Nevertheless, she points out that the seventh edition of Bacon's *New Abridgment of the Law* in 1832 reads, “The husband hath, by law, power and dominion over his wife, and may keep her by force within the bounds of duty, and may beat her, but not in a violent or cruel manner...” (10). Questions regarding how one can beat one's wife without becoming violent aside, this language suggests that husbands were in fact permitted to exercise physical control and correction. However, Wiener points out that just one year earlier, the language of Burns's *Justice of the Peace* was changed to remove “husband and wife” from the list of relationships in which any one member had the right

to physically chastise the other (173-4).

Gendered double standards also meant that men had a number of legal avenues for justifying violence against their wives. Adultery was a frequent reason cited for beating wives and was even used to defend wife-murderers. On January 17th, 1879 *The Times* reported that Thomas Mumford's lawyers attempted to justify the murder of his pregnant wife with the claim that the accused was "stung to madness by the taunts of his wife as to her previous adultery" (Wiener 11).¹² Drunkenness was also a frequent justification for beating women. Male drunkenness was not thought highly of, yet up until mid-century – in spite of the fact that the Offenses Against the Person Act explicitly states that drunkenness is not an excuse for violence – it was used as a defense in cases of husbands murdering wives because of a supposed link between prolonged drunkenness and insanity (271).¹³ Female drunkenness, however, was freely used to excuse male violence. The abuse of a drunk wife was a crime, but one that was understood to have had two culpable parties. Even Cobbe's "Wife Torture in England" criticizes wives who, "lured to drink by companionship with their drunken husbands," find themselves in violent relationships (232-3).

Husbands' sexual violence was rarely if ever cited in domestic disputes during

¹²There have been no acquittals based on this defense since 1872, although murder charges have been reduced to manslaughter (Wiener 214-5; also see Wiener 218 for a detailed account of the Mumford case).

¹³After the Habitual Drunkards Act of 1879, drunkenness was considered to be a disease in the way that alcoholism is today (Wiener 274). However, *delerium tremens* and "inebriety" still worked often as medical defenses in cases of wife assault until the Inebriates Act of 1898 left sentencing up to individual judges (275, 284).

this period, although it was still a problem for many women. The notion that a married woman implied her consent in her wedding vows merely prevented rape charges from being part of cruelty cases in the courts. Wiener argues that great strides were made over the course of the century in terms of prosecuting the perpetrators of violent sexual crimes against women and that there was a marked shift away from emphasis on the victim's character (76). However, rape was extremely difficult to prove. Often a witness to the act had to be present to prove that actual penetration had taken place (89).

All of these issues meant that intimate violence was only partially visible to the nineteenth-century public and that it remains only partially visible to contemporary historians. Intimate violence was an increasingly prevalent issue in nineteenth-century society, but one which excited so many prejudices based on class and gender ideologies that it was invariably difficult to grasp as either a social or a private problem. Print culture's responses reflect this difficulty; they oscillate between harsh exposures of abuse and implicit critiques of cruelty as though uncertain about the ramifications of representing women's bodies in pain. By looking at these diverse responses together, though, we can see how both exposures and displacements of violence can enter into dialogue with judicial shifts and undo the imagined moral distinctions between subjects of disparate rank.

Print Culture's Responses

I. Street Literature

Through its often contradictory images and narratives of abuse, print culture reflects and responds to the partial visibility of intimate violence allowed by nineteenth-century legislation and ideologies of gender and class. While the courts (perhaps inadvertently) sustained the notion that abuse was a problem associated with poverty but often neglected actually to assist working-class victims, street literature and novels politicized intimate violence, reflected major social ambiguities and promoted social change. Street literature, unlike novels, explicitly depicts abuse and directly critiques those laws and class ideals that obscured abuse. Feminist pamphlet writers, for example, were aware of the dangers of coverture, and frequently described the doctrine itself as violent. Frances Power Cobbe's 1868 "Criminals, Idiots, Women, and Minors" describes marriage under coverture in particularly brutal terms, comparing it to the relationship between two tarantulas:

As most persons are aware, when one of these delightful creatures is placed under a glass with a companion of his own species, a little smaller than himself, he forthwith gobbles him up; making him thus, in a very literal manner, "bone of his bone" (supposing tarantulas to have any bones) "and flesh of his flesh." The operation being completed, the victorious spider visibly acquires double bulk, and thenceforth may be understood to "represent the family" in the most perfect manner conceivable. (20)

Here Cobbe associates marriage for women with violent consumption. The husband swallows up his wife's fortune like the male tarantula swallows up his mate's body. Cobbe's association of flesh and finance signals her understanding that coverture is not only an economic disability for a woman but also a phenomenon that violently eradicates her subjectivity and body. Cobbe's essay thus makes it clear that coverture bore a demonstrable relationship to domestic violence. Cobbe is, however, rather biased in her assumptions about violence against women. In "Wife Torture in England" (1878) she locates brutality almost exclusively among the working class, although she concedes and a measure of violence in the genteel classes and implicates the government in the creation of unequal social structures (74-75).

Perhaps the most famous early feminist pamphleteer resistant to the treatment of married women under coverture is Caroline Norton, a woman who was physically abused by her own husband, and who will be discussed at length in my second chapter.¹⁴ Norton refers to coverture as an "absurd fiction of 'non-existence'" (76) and uses her own experiences as a wife under coverture to critique its doctrine. Due in part to her family's cultural and political status as well as her own reputation as an author, Norton's situation became a conspicuous instance of what Michael Chase and Karen Levenson refer to as the "thrusting outward" of domestic life into public debate (12). In "A Letter to the

¹⁴See also Leigh Smith Bodichon's "Laws Concerning Women" (1854), in which the author condemns the doctrine even as she praises England's new "bolder and discriminating spirit" as opposed to Blackstone's admiration of "every law because it was law" (13).

Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage and Divorce Bill" (1855) Norton recalls that *The British and Foreign Quarterly Review* referred to her as the "She-Devil" and "She-Beast" author of another tract, "On the Separation of Mother and Child," which she did not write. When Norton asked her lawyer to sue the paper, she was informed that as a married woman she would require her husband to prosecute on her behalf. Since Norton's husband, as she put it, "had assailed me with every libel in his power! There could be no prosecution: and I was left to study the grotesque anomaly in law of having my defense made necessary, – and made impossible, – by the same person" ("A Letter" 77).

These pamphlets reveal that, in spite of an extremely problematic legal system, some women had access to a degree of resistance. Thanks to Norton in particular, debates about a number of women's issues took centre stage in Victorian politics and journalism. Norton's pamphlets and political connections ultimately led to the passing of the Infant Custody Act of 1839, which gave divorced women who had not committed adultery the right to custody of their children under seven. Although coverture officially lasted until the passing of the Married Women's Property Act, the debates that lead up to this Act reveal that nineteenth-century England was rife with ever-shifting concepts of women's rights.

Chapbooks, broadsides and newspapers were generally less openly critical of specific legal doctrine, although their depictions of the body tended to be highly detailed and often grotesque. These papers – which range from highly respectable publications

like the *Times* and the *Examiner* to sensationally violent tabloids like *Illustrated Police News*, broadsides like “The Sussex Tragedy!” (*figure 13*) and chapbooks like *The Paddington Tragedy* (*figure 10*) – all seem to have catered to dominant ideology regarding the “depraved poor.” Street literature describing barbarous assaults on and murders of women frequently focussed on the working classes, making poor neighbourhoods like Whitechapel and St. Giles infamous for their brutality. Chapbooks, which sold in the streets for pennies, described the intimate details of wife murder cases – such as “A Memoir of the Life of William Bennison” (1850) – and featured working-class couples almost exclusively. Broadsides especially trumpeted the cruelty of poor husbands. Papers like “A Particular Account of J. Cawthorne, who was executed...for the murder of his wife” (1821) and “Execution of J. Holloway for the murder of his wife at Brighton” (1832), for example, depict the fatal consequences of wife murder for poor men.¹⁵ After 1840, newspaper reporting largely supplanted broadside accounts of wife murder, yet some broadsides, such as the “Cruel and Deliberate Murder at Preston, where a factory hand named Mark Fiddler cut his wife’s throat in the street and afterwards attempted to destroy himself” (1875), continued to figure working-class marriages as particularly barbarous up until the mid-seventies.

These kinds of representations seem to affirm what Wiener refers to as a “civilizing offensive” waged by middle-class institutions such as the press, churches and

¹⁵These types of papers, which proliferated in the early part of the period, but which persisted well into the eighteen-seventies and eighties, look like affirmations of the relationship between crime and poverty. They most often recreate the deaths of poor, violent men and include lurid accounts of their shocking crimes and last dying words.

schools against crude working-class behaviours including domestic violence (11). The legitimacy granted to middle-class moral authority during the period thus allowed for the consolidation of middle-class identity, the undermining of aristocratic privilege and unprecedented scrutiny of working-class behaviour. Unacceptable acts of violence against women were located primarily among the poor, drawing attention away from intimate violence among the middle and upper classes.

As my first chapter will demonstrate, however, street literature was not as straightforward in its treatment of class and intimate violence as it seems. While on the surface these papers appear to support dominant ideologies about the barbarism of the impoverished lower classes and the moral authority of their “betters,” chapbooks, newspapers and broadsides were in fact very much caught up in a project of diminishing the perceived distance between subjects of disparate classes. Explicit images and narratives of working-class violence gloss over the reality of middle-class and upper-class abuse, but in doing so they also draw fascinating parallels between these groups. Chapter one explores the ways in which street literature about intimate violence often gestures towards the moral failures of the middle and upper classes. Towards the latter part of the Victorian period representations of middle-class violence increased, and in the earlier part of the period, broadsides very frequently depicted working-class women in abusive relationships with middle-class men, or constructed cross-class associations through illustrations of working-class women in middle-class attire and distinctly middle-class settings.

Moreover, street literature called attention to legal inequities and class prejudice in the treatment of violent men, a prejudice evinced by the following excerpt from a letter to the editor about James Belaney's acquittal on charges of wife murder in *The Examiner*:

In Belaney's case there was another circumstance in his favour. He belonged to the class of the respectable, which juries are very apt to regard as impeccable. Had he been either higher up or lower down in the world his chance would have been worse; his place was in the golden mean of the middle, nearest to the station of the persons generally composing the panel, and in which jurors are disposed to be incredulous about the existence of any motives not within their own experience. If the decencies have been observed, little weight is attached to the proofs of guilt.

(9)

This letter stresses the problematic ways in which street literature often disavowed the guilt of the middle classes. Its attitude corresponds with James Hammerton's research, which indicates that between 1858 and 1882, the majority of divorce and separation petitions based on cruelty were aimed at men belonging to the upper and middle classes (104). As I have suggested, class prejudice and the expense of divorce make these incomplete records, but Hammerton provides compelling evidence of middle-class violence. Of course, the novel refrained from directly representing this type of violence for much of the century, which contributed to the illusion that middle-class relationships were more genteel than working-class ones. Often, though, novels that render middle-class abuse difficult to detect are simultaneously reacting against the cultural invisibility

of intimate violence.

II. Novels

While the nineteenth-century novel is deeply invested in class relations it seems unlikely that domestic violence plays a large role in novelistic negotiations of class, given that, as Michie points out, Victorian novels frequently shroud most women's bodies – especially married women's bodies – with metaphor, allegory and strategies of displacement. Battered women generally have it even worse; aside from a few small bruises, the effects of intimate violence are rarely portrayed on women's bodies in Victorian fiction, especially in depictions of the middle classes. This tendency to obscure intimate violence risks doubling the wounds of abused women by rendering their injuries culturally intangible. Central to my analysis, then, is an acknowledgment of the existence of two types of coverture in the period: a harmful legal doctrine and a pervasive representational practice. Yet I do not wish to suggest that "literary coverture" is necessarily abusive. To explore how the literary obfuscation of battered women operates, however, it is important first to consider the genre in which it most often occurs. In spite of the fact that the fiction through which I am reading intimate violence falls more or less into the category of sensation, a genre known for its shocking exposures,¹⁶ sensation's focus on relatively minor instances of grabbing or shoving excludes more severe

¹⁶See Marlene Tromp, *The Private Rod*, Ann Gaylin, "The Madwoman Outside the Attic", and Richard Collins, "Marian's Moustache."

violence. The representations of violence in sensation seem less palatable when compared to depictions of domestic violence found in the period's broadsides and newspapers. For example, while Laura Fairlie of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* displays the bruises that her husband has left on her arms to her sister, the reader is never privy to the moment when the marks are actually made. In Collins's *Man and Wife* domestic violence is somewhat more tangible, but whenever Hester Deathridge begins to recall how her husband beat her, she interrupts herself with comments such as "It's needless to tell how it ended" (266). Moreover, Hester's experiences of violence are always several times removed from the reader; they are always memories recounted by other characters from her diary, because she literally cannot (or will not) speak about the abuse that she has suffered. I want to reconsider the idea that exposure is a defining feature of sensation, since viewed in the context of street literature even this most shocking of fictional genres seems to shadow physical abuse rather politely. Rather than discuss the political power of sensation in terms of its unique tendency to divulge, I want to explore its evasions, for it is through these evasions that the novels I discuss participate in the legal and social debates about domestic violence and social differences.

A number of Victorian sensation novelists challenge the legal and aesthetic tradition of coverture by constructing woman abuse as conspicuously absent or partially visible. These authors created texts that were more than mere erasures of abuse, just as the explicit accounts of abuse available in the period's broadsides and newspapers were more than mere exposures of private working-class violence. In looking at the work of

such novelists, I therefore consider the subversive possibilities of the hidden and the shadowed to challenge dominant representational traditions and middle-class assumptions of moral superiority. I look at the ways in which displacements of intimate violence frequently renegotiate the power of the abused woman's body. At times these evasions make women's bodies seem like non-political, sensational fodder for morbid imaginations. At other times, they establish and rework moral-social hierarchies. In Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, for example, abuse makes Madeline Neroni's body relatively immobile, "useless" and ostensibly powerless, but it also turns her into a subject so desirable that she can manipulate the community's political structures.

These kinds of representations also challenge class and legal structures. While Madeline embodies tensions about the morality of the upper classes insofar as her performance of aristocratic privilege depends on her marriage to an abusive man, Laura Fairlie's abuse in Collins's *The Woman in White* comes from a gentleman rather than a working-class husband (although we later find out that Percival has in fact usurped his position). Trollope and Collins thus refuse to relegate barbarity solely to the poor, and instead infuse the middle and upper classes with violent tendencies. Simultaneously responding to the law's inability to protect women, as Surridge points out, the sensation novel resembles a newspaper account of courtroom drama in its narrative form (151). The sensation novel often aims to accomplish what both journalism and the legal system have failed to do. Walter Hartright's justification for telling the story of *The Woman in White* in the novel's fictional preface makes this goal clear:

If the machinery of the Law could be depended on to fathom every case of suspicion, and to conduct every process of inquiry, with moderate assistance only from the lubricating influences of oil of gold, the events which fill these pages might have claimed their share of public attention in a Court of Justice. But the Law is still, in certain inevitable cases, the pre-engaged servant of the long purse; and the story is left to be told, for the first time, in this place. (9)

Walter implies that the story exists because of the law's limitations. Specifically, he takes aim at the judicial system's inability to convey truth. Of course, as I will explore in Chapter Four, Walter also benefits greatly from the law's failures since they justify his narrative and enable him to control women and insinuate himself into their wealthy families.

As a novel that obscures intimate violence, though, *The Woman in White* is conspicuously unable to tell the whole story of Laura's abuse. As Lawson and Shakinovsky point out, then, *The Woman in White* "imitates what it investigates" – the failure of society to protect its vulnerable members (125). Indeed, the limited capacity for narratives of abuse to fully express the complexities of violence against women is a major concern of all of the texts this dissertation analyzes. Quandaries regarding authenticity and realism abound in nineteenth-century fictional approaches to intimate violence. However, these quandaries are more than frustrated reflections of nineteenth-century society's willingness to remain blind to woman abuse. The obfuscation of women's battered bodies allow these texts to negotiate not just questions about class and

status, but also broader questions about the limitations of representation itself.

Summary

What follows is a detailed exploration of how two competing modes of representing abuse – the graphic exposures of street literature and the coverture of novels – negotiate class hierarchies and traditions that dictate what is representable and what is not. My first chapter provides an analysis of broadsides and newspapers that deal with woman abuse. Early broadsides about the murders of wives and female lovers and, later, illustrated crime newspapers with similar themes provide strikingly explicit depictions of women's battered bodies. In these publications, sensational reporting on abuse exposes domestic failures inscribed on the injured or dead woman's body and either relegates these failures to the working class or warn against social intermixing by making intimate violence its often deadly consequence. However, a substantial portion of explicit street literature about intimate violence constructs an implicit relationship among working- and middle-class women. While these papers may focus their attention on working-class violence and thus reflect a dominant class ideology that obscures the reality of middle-class abuse, they also construct the battered working-class woman as a kind of "every-woman" who transcends social difference by virtue of her victimization.

Chapter Two begins to explore those instances of intimate violence that are less clearly represented. It focuses on Caroline Norton because, as a battered woman who was the frequent subject of newspaper articles and the author of pamphlets and fiction, she

embodies the simultaneously excessive and effaced representations of intimate violence prevalent in the Victorian period. What interests me most about Norton is the fact that, although her approach to writing about women's rights in her pamphlets and fiction differs – in the pamphlets she is explicit about her suffering and in her novel she avoids representing serious abuse – she often uses variations of a single technique to convey her message. Norton frequently conflates real and fictional identities, including her own. In her pamphlets, for example, when Norton discusses abuse she depicts herself as both politically influential – as a writer and activist – and politically powerless – as a married woman. Accordingly, she identifies herself with a range of figures: politicians, paupers, slaves and innocent children. In her 1835 novel *Woman's Reward* – a text that draws less obviously on the author's violent past – Norton enacts what Tilottama Rajan refers to as autonarration – the blurring of autobiography and fiction – to construct characters that are always both fictional and “real” (22). These divisions allow Norton to unfix the identity of the middle-class wife and rewrite personal and political history. By positioning herself – the figure of the female artist – at the centre of both her explicit and obfuscated representations of abuse, Norton is able to emphasize women's powers to creatively transform their own identities and, by extension, the legally, socially and physically violent world in which they live.

In Trollope's *Barchester Towers*, the beautiful Madeline Neroni is a battered woman highly capable of this type of transformation yet coded as morally problematic. Trollope's novel, like *Woman's Reward*, is conspicuously reticent about discussing or

representing the abuse it thematizes. Trollope thus makes intimate violence important to the overall plot of the novel, but never depicts it directly. Abuse is therefore a haunting “absent presence” throughout the text; we are lead to suspect that Madeline has been abused because of her conspicuous injuries, but our suspicions are never confirmed. My third chapter will explore how Madeline’s disabled body becomes a trope for the paradoxical visibility of middle-class abuse. Victorian disability, like middle-class abuse, is often associated with both excess and invisibility. Madeline’s disability thus heightens her status as a liminal figure; it further emphasizes the fact that she is both disruptive and hidden and begs readers to look beyond the information provided by the realist narrative. This chapter therefore challenges some assumptions about the nature of Victorian depictions of disability, regarding Madeline’s disabled body as a means for the politicization of female suffering rather than merely as a reminder of her questionable sexual morality.

My final chapter explores Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* to explicitly delineate a theme that runs throughout the dissertation, namely the ways in which representations of intimate violence during the Victorian period became a site through which to renegotiate the imagined distinctions between individuals of different ranks. This chapter is concerned with gaps in sensation fiction’s representation of intimate violence. Specifically, it looks at conspicuous evasions of violence in a genre widely understood to be particularly invested in the shocking power of exposures and examines how these evasions undo a host of differences between socially diverse subjects. The

most sensational moments in *The Woman in White*, for example, occur not during the *exposure* of secret marital violence, but during the conspicuous *displacement* or *absence* of abuse. These sensations – most often physical and emotional responses to terror – force characters mutually to identify with one another, to feel each others' feelings, and therefore to experience life through the bodies of individuals who do not always belong to the same social strata. This temporary undermining of class and gender difference constitutes something like a sympathetic response, an experience of fellow-feeling – and often one that is not desired – that disrupts the authoritative identities of men, including the novel's master narrator and "friend" to battered women.

All three chapters, then, explore the ways in which Victorian representations of intimate violence – be they explicit or implicit – negotiate rank, gender and subjectivity. My readings reveal the ways in which brutality against women's bodies – which were themselves a major trope for social regulation during the Victorian period – signals ideological shifts in thinking about how one belongs to a particular part of the social world. The fact that this relationship occurs through both explicit and implicit representation suggests that nineteenth-century print culture was not just anxious about exposing violence and the female body's suffering, but that novels and street literature were in dialogue with each other as well as with political, legal and social life.

I

Street Literature, Intimate Violence and The Tenuous Boundaries of Class

The alleged rape and murder of twenty-year old Mary Ashford near Birmingham in 1817 began a shift in street literature that would lead to an unprecedented exposure of violence against women in England.¹⁷ In part because the public's intense emotional response to the case meant financial success for broadside publishers – increased subscription fees were justified as a means of financing a retrial upon the accused's acquittal (Wiener 135) – street literature began reporting on and illustrating the grisly assaults and murders of women almost daily. And unlike the novel for much of the nineteenth century, which often thematized domestic violence without representing the violated bodies of women directly, street literature offered sensationally explicit details of women's bruised, battered and dead corpses. This chapter looks at the ways in which these ostensibly direct representations contradicted the notion that the middle classes were the emergent moral authority in England. It therefore also looks at the ways in which nineteenth-century street literature exemplifies the didactic possibilities of sensational, bodily representations of women.

The typical message about abuse in sensational street literature is a warning against crossing class boundaries, either aspiring to "superior" class status, or, for those who already have such status, succumbing to the barbaric behaviours and attitudes of the

¹⁷Broadside published on these crimes include "Mary Ashford's Tragedy, Who was Ravished and Murdered, at Erdington near Birmingham, on the 27th day of May, 1817" and "Horrible Rape and Murder!! The affecting case of Mary Ashford..."

“inferior” classes. However, building on criticism that sees the presentation of the Victorian middle-class woman’s body as central to the period’s public and political domains, I argue that many nineteenth-century journalistic accounts and images of intimate violence question the firmness of social boundaries, particularly those that are based on moral qualities. These texts are fraught with a haunting sense that the relationship between virtue and social status was not only unstable but perhaps imaginary, and they underscore the notion that the primacy of middle-class morality was an illusion created in part to authorize the middle class’s expanding economic power and increased political participation.¹⁸

This chapter establishes that sensationally explicit street literature about abuse was didactic insofar as it used women’s battered bodies to instruct members of its diverse readership in how *not* to conduct their private lives. Studies of Victorian street literature tend to read the genre’s pedagogical function as it operates through men’s bodies, especially through images of criminal men on the scaffold.¹⁹ I argue, by extension, for the importance of what victimized, female bodies could teach readers about the fiction of middle-class moral superiority. The fact that intimate violence was portrayed as a largely

¹⁸ See Langland’s *Nobody’s Angels* (8) and Poovey’s *Proper Lady* (29). Chase and Levenson’s *The Spectacle of Intimacy* (12) also notes that middle-class “during the thirty years of the middle century, a vast machinery – textual, visual, political, personal – installed standards of household behaviour that became proud weapons of the middle classes in their struggle against those on either social flank. And yet persistently these standards were flouted” (12).

¹⁹ See Michel Foucault’s *Discipline and Punish*, Ellen O’Brien’s “‘The Most Beautiful Murder:’ The Transgressive Aesthetics of Murder in Victorian Street Ballads,” and Martin Wiener’s *Men of Blood*, all of which examine how the spectacle of the male, criminal body in street literature signals resistance to dominant class ideology.

working-class problem in newspapers and broadsides throughout the period suggests that street literature's exposures of abuse were more supportive than disruptive of social hierarchies.²⁰ However, studying portrayals of women's injured bodies reveals how street literature queried and even dissolved class boundaries in its reconstructions of intimate violence. Street literature's exposures of intimate abuse and murder exemplify a double discourse on class, one that appears to support the moral authority of the middle class but which frequently undercuts it. Broadsides, newspapers and chapbooks that used highly explicit and sensational material – and were therefore often critically derided as spectacularly morbid – function as a part of feminist activism and class reform.

Sensational Warnings

The sensational, by virtue of our fascination with it and its effects on our bodies, possesses the power to influence its readers. Sensational material often deals with taboo subjects, and evokes and directs particular responses in its audience members, particularly disgust, pleasure, shock and relief. This manipulation works because these responses are so often somatic and are therefore felt to be natural and unfettered by outside influences like custom or socialization. Feelings aroused by sensation novels, according to D.A. Miller, “no longer seem part of a cultural, historical process of

²⁰See Maeve Doggett's *Marriage, Wife-Beating and the Law in Victorian England*, Martin Wiener's *Men of Blood: Violence, Manliness and Criminal Justice in Victorian England* and Kate Lawson and Lynn Shakinovsky's *The Marked Body: Domestic Violence in Mid-Nineteenth-Century Literature* for discussions of the ways in which domestic violence was treated as a working-class phenomenon during the nineteenth century.

signification but instead dissolve into an inarticulable, merely palatable self-evidence” (148). Indeed, sensational material is powerful insofar as it encourages responses that appear to be “just feelings” but which actually do ideological work.²¹ Sensation thus takes on a duality whereby it can affirm particular cultural or political agendas by disarming potentially threatening ideas with the naturalness of feelings.²²

The scandalous portraits of intimate violence in nineteenth-century street literature allowed it to take advantage of this duality more than the relatively reticent sensation novel could. On the one hand, the apparent naturalness of responses to sensational material disguises the fact that they have been *called for* by publishers and are therefore often part of complex systems of social regulation (Cvetkovich 34). The pleasure derived from the horrific experience of reading details about and seeing explicit images of wife beating or murder in street literature affirms already normative social codes of acceptable behaviour. For example, depictions of working-class violence perpetuate class stereotypes. On the other hand, however, the less pleasurable physical responses elicited by these explicit representations also suggest that the relationship between street literature’s represented bodies and the bodies of its audience members had

²¹Ann Cvetkovich’s *Mixed Feelings* similarly discusses at length how Victorian critics of sensation fiction privileged reason over emotion and derided the genre because “feelings and emotions, like sexuality, are construed as natural and, hence, uncivilized and irrational” (22).

²²In *The Melodramatic Imagination*, Peter Brooks locates the origins of melodrama – of which he emphasizes the bodily aspects explicitly in “Body and Voice in Melodrama and Opera” – in the overthrow of corrupt rulers during the French Revolution. Brooks thus treats melodrama’s spectacularly pained bodies as signs of a political and ethical revolution (15).

the potential to subvert dominant ideology, particularly regarding class. Steven Bruhm describes the relationship between readers' bodies and representations of "Gothic bodies" as a space through which the possibility of sharing pain and thus diminishing subjective distance between spectacularized victims and their audience is negotiated and largely de-mythologized (18). Like Audrey Jaffe, Bruhm thus argues that nineteenth-century spectacles of physical suffering also produced an uncomfortable sense of subjective closeness between privileged spectators and victimized objects (Bruhm 18; Jaffe 5). Street literature as a genre was not only more explicit than novels, and therefore more likely to incite horror, raise hairs, send chills and arouse excitement: it also reached a considerably more diverse audience. Unlike novels, which circulated largely among the middle classes, street literature was read by members of the working and middle classes alike, especially by mid-century when newspaper duties were abolished and newspapers became affordable for the working classes (Collison 9). James Hepburn estimates that at this time up to forty percent of broadside readers were upper and middle class (65). Broad-sides were also frequently delivered to remote areas (2), which suggests that urban and rural areas shared knowledge of at least some of street literature's content, and thus were equally exposed to its excitations. As I discuss in Chapter Four, then, sensational depictions of abuse also have the potential to imply the shared experiences of a diverse spectrum of citizens and the typically working-class couples they read about in the papers.

In this way, street literature's represented bodies are both symbols of already

existing meanings as well as entities capable of altering and even creating new meanings. This chapter therefore builds on the work of critics who have turned their attention toward the social and political significance of material corporeality. In *The Body Economic: Life, Death, and Sensation in Political Economy and the Victorian Novel*, for example, Catherine Gallagher delineates how Romantic and Victorian critics and political economists positioned pain as one marker of an emergent concept of “ultimate value” as tied to organic life rather than the abstract, spiritual terms (3). Attending to concepts of physical health, Erin O’Connor’s discussion of the consumptive body in *Raw Material: Producing Pathology in Victorian Culture* explores the ways in which spectacles of sickness informed the basis of political critique regarding industrial life, and argues that the diseased body became a site through which to explore the “human condition” (3). The extreme physicality of nineteenth-century street literature exemplifies this emergent Victorian view of politics, subjectivity and knowledge in general as bound to the body. This chapter therefore also follows Stacey Alaimo and Susan Hekman’s Introduction to *Material Feminisms* and emphasizes the importance of studying not just how language and discourse inform material reality, but also how corporeal experiences inform and produce discourse (5).²³ Recognizing the value of the body as a trope and as an entity capable of influencing discourse and making meaning, this chapter thus looks at the street literature’s corporeality for what it represents and for what it produces and

²³Elisabeth Grosz turns to Darwin’s “open-ended understanding of struggle and development” to ask specifically how biology might facilitate social change (“Darwin and Feminism” 41).

revises.

Victorian gallows literature – broadsides depicting criminals’ executions (*figure 2*) – provides an excellent example of such production and revision. As Ellen O’Brien argues, the body of the poor, condemned criminal encouraged the consolidation of working-class identity by critiquing the violent Victorian judicial system (32), which avowed “hegemonic connections between crime and [lower-class men]” (16). The spectacle of the punished working-class figure serves as a visual reminder of the criminalization of poverty and the lack of options available to poor individuals within the legal system. However, this spectacle signals the existence of a relationship between stereotypically working-class crime and middle-class moral failures. These publications often ask readers to put themselves in the criminal’s position so that they might learn from his mistakes. Typical of early murder broadsides, “Suitable Reflections or the Sorrowful lamentation of Samuel Fallows, for the murder of Betty Shawcross” (1823) begins with an address to the sexually susceptible male: “come all young men both far and near and a warning take by me / beware of passions fatal ways and shun my destiny.” Thereafter, the narrator emphasizes appropriate manly behaviour by recreating the condemned murderer’s confession: “May God above then pardon me for the deed that I have done / for I’m condemned, and must be hung, next Monday at noon / My guilt lies heavy on my soul, have mercy Lord I pray.” The guilty man’s confession is a call for sympathy from the broadside’s readers, which implies that working-class and middle-class readers at least temporarily put themselves in the position of the criminal. The

content of many broadsides depicting intimate violence thus reiterates the duality of sensational material in general: broadsides like this one encourage both identification with and dis-identification from violent abusers and murderers.

More than encourage a sympathetic relationship between the working and middle classes, though, street literature about intimate violence often embeds actual references to the middle classes into their images and narratives. This technique constructs a discourse that, on the one hand, appears to affirm the relationship between poverty and crime, but which, on the other hand, suggests that the middle class is just as susceptible to immoral, violent behaviour. Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* – though it does not discuss abuse – describes eighteenth-century broadsides depicting the executions of criminal men as “two-sided” discourses that disciplined the public yet signalled a “political interest” in rebellion (68). According to Foucault,

The condemned man [in broadsides] found himself transformed into a hero by the sheer extent of his widely advertised crimes, and sometimes the affirmation of his belated repentance. Against the law, against the rich, the powerful, the magistrates, the constabulary or the watch, against taxes and their collectors, he appeared to have waged a struggle with which one all too easily identified. (67)

This understanding of street literature as contributing to a “two-sided” discourse emphasizes the ways in which images of public discipline undermined the explicit agendas of gallows literature by making a spectacle out of crime and heroes out of criminals. Narratives and images of battered and murdered women likewise function as

“two-sided” discourses. However, their emphasis on the woman’s injured or threatened body operates in unique ways, particularly in terms of class. Foucault overlooks the fact that these execution broadsides frequently featured men hanged for murdering their wives and lovers (*figure 2*), the fact that they featured female criminals (*figure 3*) and the fact that street literature saliently featured female victims. Since, as I will now discuss, women’s bodies were central to Victorian class consciousness, it is important to consider how they were represented in street literature dealing with abuse.

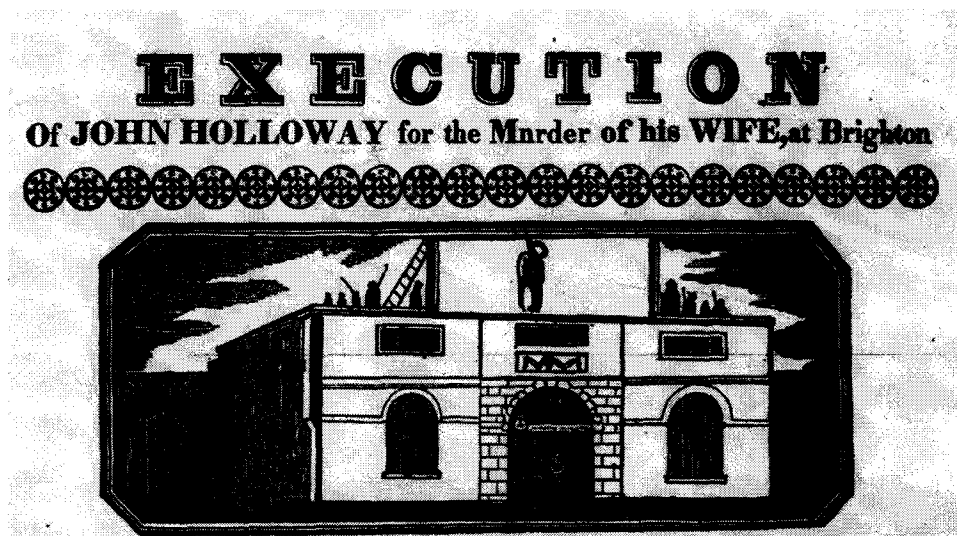


Figure 2: Execution of John Holloway (1831)

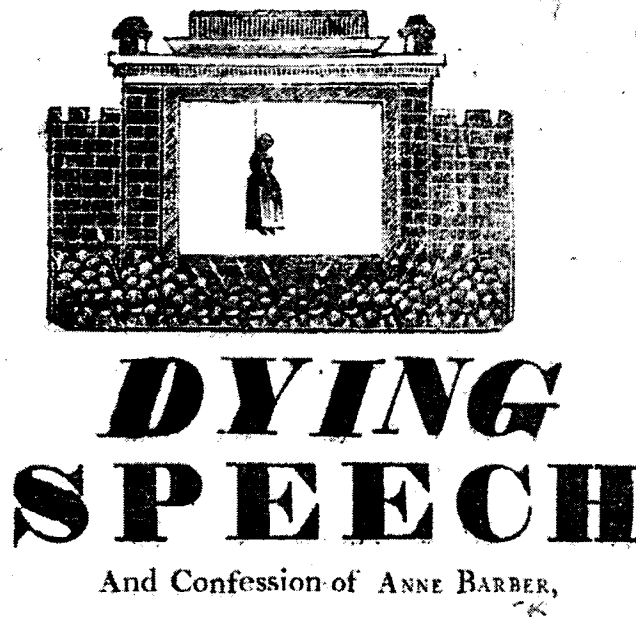


Figure 3: *Dying Speech and Confession of Anne Barber* (1821)

Women's Bodies and Class Ideology

The bulk of critical attention regarding the relationship between Victorian street literature and intimate violence has focused on men. Like Foucault's *Discipline and Punish*, James Hammerton's *Cruelty and Companionship*, Robert Collison's *The Story of Street Literature* and Martin Wiener's *Men of Blood* all foreground men and masculinity in their explorations of nineteenth-century violent crime. Although the study of violent men is obviously highly valuable to contemporary understandings of a broad range of Victorian issues, this approach consistently overshadows one of the most predominant

images in papers about violent crime – the injured woman’s body – and by extension many of the contributions street literature made to Victorian class consciousness. Paying attention to street literature’s battered women allows us to understand how explicit accounts of intimate violence implicate the middle classes in the degradation of domesticity and intimate life. Abused women’s bodies tend to operate as loci of class conflation. Their dresses, their bodies, the settings of their beatings and murders and their relationships with their abusers all render their class status ambiguous. Consequently, even when papers directly indicate a woman’s social position, she is nevertheless constructed as a liminal figure who occupies more than one place in the Victorian social hierarchy. Often, the battered women in street literature belong to the working classes but become associated with symbols of middle-class life, such as expensive clothing or furniture. At other times, signs that might indicate a battered woman’s class status are stripped from her body altogether, as is the case in the broadside “The Sussex Tragedy” (*figure 13*), in which Celia Holloway’s body lies naked on display, a conspicuous reminder that abuse itself cannot be classed. These types of images underscore the possibility of a world in which the prescribed moral authority of middle-class life does little to separate the “barbaric” poor from their “betters.”

The abundance of critical attention on violent men has inspired feminist criticism to emphasize the social and political significance of female victims. Frances Gray’s *Women, Crime, and Language*, for example, faults “ripperology” – the study of Jack the Ripper – for its almost exclusive focus on the presumably male murderer. Gray argues

that, as a result of this kind of male-centred criticism, the Ripper's victims have endured a "double obliteration": violent physical disfiguration and historical/cultural invisibility (44). Figures 4 - 6 exemplify the detailed, graphic illustration of the battered female body in Victorian broadsides and newspapers.²⁴



Figure 4: IPN 2 Dec 1871

²⁴My examples in this chapter are largely from *Illustrated Police News*, a tabloid style newspaper that was popular between the eighteen-sixties and late eighteen-seventies. During this period, a number of similar papers flourished, whose images were often slightly less sensational, including *Illustrated London Clipper*, *Police Recorder* and *The Halfpenny Police Gazette*, or, *London by Gaslight*. These kinds of explicit representations of intimate violence were also prevalent in earlier street literature, although they often relied more on words than images. Some newspapers, including *Brighton Gazette* and *The Times*, also detailed gruesome abuses of women during this early part of the Victorian period. All of these depictions foreground women's injured and threatened bodies, making them central to the spectacle of domestic failure and highlighting the subversive aspects of street literature's appeals to Victorian class consciousness.



Figure 5: *Illustrated Police News* 14 Aug 1846



Figure 6: *IPN* 2 Oct. 1869

Given the prevalence of images like these, it is surprising that more critical attention has not been directed towards the roles that sensationalized, battered women's bodies have played in shaping Victorian class consciousness.

The abundance of images of working-class intimate violence seems to suggest the prevalence of abuse among the working classes, or at least that the working classes were the most appropriate group with which to associate abuse. As James Hammerton points out, although there were many instances of intimate violence among the middle-classes, working-class husbands were thought to be under a unique set of pressures brought on by poverty, industrialization and urbanization – including the threatening rise of cheap female labour – that led to hostile marriages (13). It is not strange, then, that figures 4- 6 all depict working-class violence. Figure four shows a woman working in her own vegetable garden, which indicates that she has no servants in her household. Her dress is extremely plain for the eighteen forties – when crinolines, trailing skirts and flounces were coming into style – which suggests that it was both homemade and inexpensive.²⁵ Figure five exemplifies the lack of privacy that defined working-class domestic life. Not only is the door to the home open so that numerous passers-by on the street can look on in horror; in addition, the window lacks curtains and the glass as well as the walls show holes, all of which invite neighbours to witness the violence. The scarcity of furniture in the home also suggests a working-class income; Michelle Perrot and Roger-Henri

²⁵Many of the assumptions I make regarding women's fashion here rely on Alison Gernsheim's *Victorian and Edwardian Fashion: A Photographic Survey* and Peter Quennell's *Victorian Panorama: A Survey of Life and Fashion from Contemporary Photographs*.

Geurrand note that working-class homes rarely contained more than a table and chairs, a mattress and perhaps a chest and a few cheap decorative items (355).²⁶ Figure six also reflects the relative lack of privacy within a working-class household. The image of a child sharing a bed with his mother tells us that this family is not part of the middle class, whose members could afford separate rooms for children (Hunt and Hall 72). Middle-class domestic ideals involved the orderly use of household space so that the home had clearly definable areas meant for adults, children, servants, men or women. As Chase and Levenson put it, “to imagine a flourishing private life was to articulate space, to secure boundaries and to distribute bodies” (143).²⁷

These sorts of representations of violence are remarkably different from representations of violence among the upper classes (*figure 7*). Like working-class abuse, upper-class abuse was represented more often than middle-class abuse. It appeared, however, far less often than working-class abuse, and was portrayed as far less brutal. Illustrations of intimate violence against upper-class women tend to emphasize material excess, and thus correspond with social criticisms of the privileged classes as hedonistic.

²⁶This scarcity was in part the consequence of working-class pressures to appear respectable in public in spite of a low income. Working-class citizens often spent more money on clothing and appearances than on their own homes, sacrificing private comforts for public fashion (354). Incidentally, this renders it somewhat difficult to identify the class affiliations of street literature’s subjects when they are depicted outside of their homes.

²⁷Perrot and Geurrand argue that the dirt and illness associated with the working-class’s lack of privacy became a reason for the upper class to view the poor as “sexually primitive and uncivilized” (351).



Figure 7: IPN 13 May 1876

In figure seven, “A Baron’s Cruelty to his Wife,” the fact that all of the family members are seated suggests that they are about to eat a meal that has been prepared by servants. The Baron literally throws signs of domestic life – dishes, plates and spoons – into the air. In doing so, he wastes food, destroys his wife’s dress and ruins expensive tableware. In spite of this critique of the family’s waste and excess, however, the image remains relatively non-violent. Although the upended soup tureen suggests the possibility of scalding and bruising, while the knife – aimed directly at the wife’s hand – hints at stabbing, there is no sense of any immediate threat to the wife’s safety. The threatening knife is blunt and the family members – including the husband and wife – stay at the table. This image reflects the notion that the upper class consisted of individuals who

were rude and excessive, yet much less barbarous than the working class.

The relative lack of middle-class domestic violence in nineteenth-century street literature does not mean that broadsides, newspapers and chapbooks were disinterested in bourgeois abuse. While the single extant 1864 issue of *Divorce Court and Breach of Promise Record*, which features nine cases of intimate violence, is conspicuously careful to avoid naming the professions of the perpetrators, *Illustrated Police News* gradually increased its representations of middle-class intimate violence from one in 1864, to three in 1871, to four in 1876. Although working-class violence continued to overshadow middle-class violence in *IPN*, this shift reflects a general increase in reports on abuse among the affluent. A major contribution to this emerging phenomenon came from the establishment of the civil divorce court. After 1857 divorces were more affordable – although still not truly feasible for working-class couples – and courts saw more petitions based on physical cruelty on behalf of middle- and upper-class women. It is not surprising, then, that newspapers in the sixties began reporting on middle-class domestic violence more often and more explicitly. Even earlier than this, however, the seeds had been planted in the public imagination to figure upper-middle-class domestic violence as verifiable. In 1835 George Norton's very public suit against Lord Melbourne for having an affair with Norton's wife led to shocking allegations of wife abuse that shook the foundations of upper-middle-class domestic ideology. Another element that may have led to the narratability of upper-class violence was the fashionable trend of ladies attending the proceedings of murder trials. Throughout November of 1875 articles in *The Times* on

the trial of Henry Wainright for murdering Harriet Lane refer to the fact that society women were often in attendance as lawyers established evidence of the brutal crime.

Figures 8 and 9 exemplify the fact that middle-class abuse was emerging as a clearly discernable theme in tabloids.



Figure 8: IPN 22 July 1876



Figure 9: *IPN* 13 May 1876

Figure 8 depicts upper-class men watching the attempted murder of a lady by a hired assassin. Figure 9 is more intimate, and takes readers into the bedroom of a gentleman who kills his sweetheart. Neither picture, however, is as brutal as *IPN*'s illustrations of working-class abuse. The women remain standing and are not disheveled in any way; their hair and dresses remain intact. Even though *IPN* started to depict abuse among the middle classes, then, it was still quite reticent towards depicting middle-class intimacy as something as barbarous as it was among the poor.

Although these types of middle-class abuse scenarios were uncommon, *IPN* frequently featured stories about working-class violence that, in various ways, implicated

the bourgeois domestic. Two articles published in October of 1869, for example, imbue working-class violence with signs of middle-class life (*figures 10 and 11*). On October ninth, "Double Murder at Wood-Green" depicts a man called Hinson beating his live-in lover to death with the end of shot-gun. In the accompanying image, Hinson wears a stylish suit typical of middle-class men (*figure 10*). The article, however,

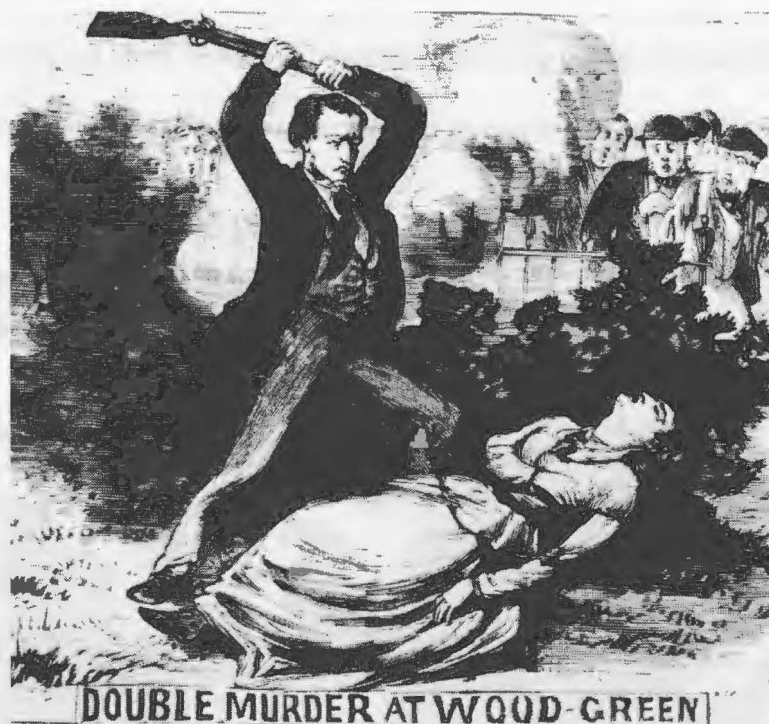


Figure 10: IPN 9 Oct. 1869

describes the murderer as a carpenter. Apparently Hinson killed his lover – the unfortunately named Maria Death – because he was jealous of the time she had been spending with a “gentleman” named William Boyd. The following week *Illustrated Police News* published a follow-up piece that compares Hinson’s shabby shack with Boyd’s expensive-looking home (figure 11). The paper thus ensures that its readers understand the social distance between these two men, and seems to locate the brutality among the poor. And yet one cannot ignore the picture from the previous week, in which Hinson looks like he could just as well be the wealthy Boyd who stole his lover.

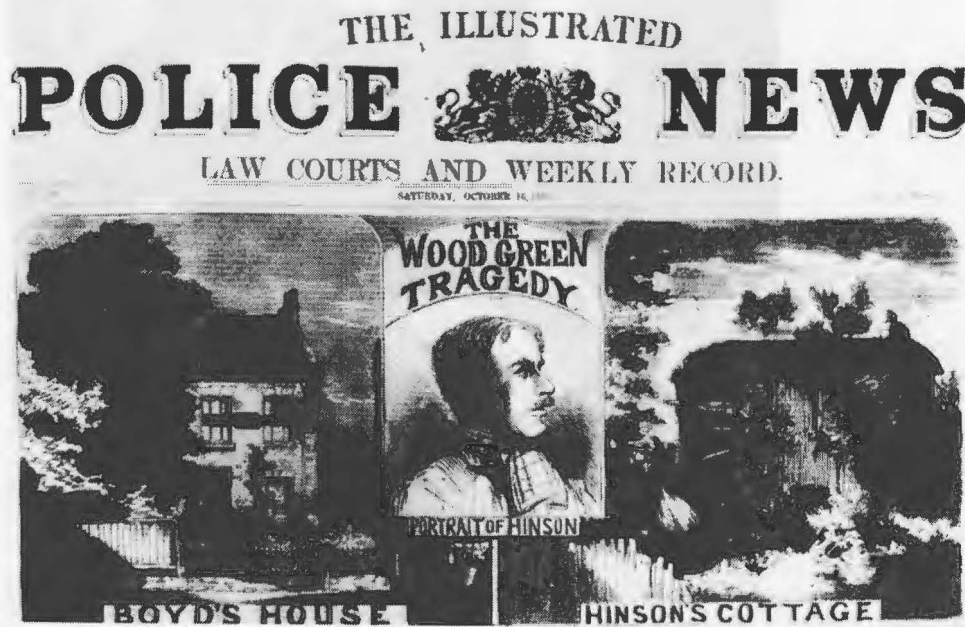


Figure 11: IPN 16 Oct. 1869

As though to encourage readers to question where the true guilt lies, through its visuals the paper blurs a distinction otherwise crucial to its narrative of class and jealousy. Not only do these images shorten the distance between rich and poor, then; they implicate the

middle-class man in the socially constructed hierarchies that have created value distinctions based on wealth, the very distinctions that cause Hinson's supposed jealousy.

The conflation of working- and middle-class abuse did not begin with *IPN*. In fact, a particular subset of broadsides that was especially popular in the twenties and thirties – Wiener characterizes them as “seduction / murder” narratives (135) – provides an excellent example of this phenomenon. Typically in these narratives a wealthy or at least middle-class man beats or murders his poor, working-class lover beyond the confines of the home, perhaps in the woods, by a pond, or in a barn. The murderer is frequently married to a woman who shares his social status. If he is single he often kills his lover to avoid an inferior connection, especially if she is pregnant. As a lover, the working-class victim of male violence figures a threat to middle-class domestic life. Her injury or death in turn signals the violent but reassuring protection of a privileged group. As Wiener suggests, papers depicting poor women being beaten or killed by wealthy gentlemen are ostensibly designed to secure class distinctions (137); they look like warnings against the perils of disrupting rigid social codes. Wiener cites, for example, one particular broadside in which George Caddell – a fictional archetype of the violent, gentleman seducer of poor women – cuts the throat of his working-class sweetheart because she made the error of considering herself to be “an equal match for someone of Mr. Caddell's rank of life” (136). However, although these types of publications certainly seem to perpetuate severe social divisions, I argue that they often also imply that such divisions are impossible to maintain because of the shared moral fallenness of all classes.

By publicizing violent crimes against women by their middle- and upper-class lovers, including crimes that took place beyond the middle-class home, papers found a way to speak about middle-class domestic turmoil and marked a turning inside-out of the bourgeois domestic sphere that created room to question its integrity. Street literature's portrayals of working-class and cross-class abuse often refer to middle-class violence and domestic failures. As a symbol of middle-class morality that overlapped with economic power, the middle-class wife was not an appropriate representative of violent domestic life. But images of working-class women in sexual relationships with middle-class men nevertheless gesture towards the middle-class wives of abusers. It is impossible to know if contemporary readers were generally conscious of this cross-class alignment. Class prejudice would likely have dissuaded middle-class women, for example, from looking at an image of a poor, victim of domestic abuse and seeing herself, or at least from admitting that she saw anything that resembled her own life. However, during the nineteenth century, feminist movements began to rely on the idea that women were united in their suffering, and that an injury to one woman was an injury to all, regardless of class. The repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act, for example, required what Judith Walkowitz refers to as "the cross-class alliance between middle-class women and working men" and "a sense of alignment between these women and prostitutes, their 'fallen sisters'" (6).

Maria Marten

Some of the most popular seduction / murder broadsides of the nineteenth century were those that dealt with a poor young woman named Maria Marten. James Catnach's "Murder of Maria Marten by J.W. Corder" (1828)²⁸ sold over a million copies and generated more money than any other broadside had until this point in history (Collison 37). As the broadside explains, William Corder – a wealthy gentleman living in Polstead, Ipswich – seduced and murdered Maria Marten, the poor daughter of a molecatcher. Corder impregnated Maria and promised to marry her. However, dreading the inferior connection, Corder enacted an elaborate and violent scheme to maintain his freedom. He convinced Maria to rendezvous at a well-known red barn, where they would leave for London and elope. At this barn Corder shot and buried his lover. He then disappeared to London on his own. Back home in Polstead, Maria's mother allegedly had three subsequent dream visions of her daughter dead under the barn floor. Maria's body was located shortly thereafter and Corder was captured by police from London, where he was tried, convicted and hanged.

Like many broadsides of its kind, Catnach's Maria Marten paper places significant emphasis on the injured female body – "she lay bleeding in her gore", "Her bleeding mangled body he threw under the red barn floor" – rendering this cross-class

²⁸The earliest version of this broadside I located was printed by E.M.A. Hodges, circa 1855-1861 [Bodleian library, Harding B 14(239)], although Robert Collison and Leslie Shepard cite the Catnach broadside, published in 1828 (Collison 37; Shepard 195).

relationship as particularly gothic and frightening. The broadside makes Maria's death the ultimate consequence for her involvement with a socially "superior" lover. Another broadside about this case entitled "A Copy of the Verses, on the Execution of W.M. Corder For the Murder of Maria Marten in the Red Barn, Polstead" reads, "And when [Corder's] trial did come on / He at the bar was placed / They brought her heart, her scull, and ribs / and showed before his face," using Maria's body parts as spectacular symbols of the unnaturalness of the cross-class relationship. The male body is also used in this manner, but it does not get described with same gruesome detail. For example, "Copy of the Verses" warns men that their dalliances with working-class women could be fatal: "So all young men take warning / by this untimely end / For blood for blood will be required / By the laws of God and man." Similarly the Catnach broadside ventriloquizes Corder in order to admonish "thoughtless young men" to "think on my unhappy fate to be hanged upon a tree." Yet these papers also indicate that Corder fails to uphold middle-class moral authority – specifically ideals of gentlemanly conduct – especially in comparison to the stable moral power of the working-class Marten family. Mrs. Marten, for example, divines through dreams that Corder has murdered her daughter. She possesses a supernatural power to detect the middle-class man's wrong-doings, a power that ultimately lands Corder on the scaffold. The narrative thus revises the moral hierarchy of early nineteenth-century society, spectacularizing the middle-class criminal's punishment rather than the working-class criminal's punishment, and depicting the working-class woman as capable of exposing violent crime rather than as

the victim of violent crime.

A number of plays were based on these broadsides during the Victorian period. This was quite common; there were also plays written about Mary Ashford's rape and murder. But perhaps the single most frequently performed melodrama of the nineteenth century was John Latimer's *Maria Marten; or, the Murder in the Red Barn*, written in 1840, thirteen years after Corder's trial (Wiener 138). In an introduction to the 1934 edition of the play Montague Slater acknowledges that the tale is entrenched in class conflict, but does not mention how deeply subversive the play in its questioning of middle-class moral superiority. Moreover, he ignores the fact that although the play re-spectacularizes Maria's murder, it is actually quite critical of what the spectacle achieves. *The Murder in the Red Barn* ultimately not only upsets class and gender distinctions but also scrutinizes the ways in which women's bodies are represented.

The play unfolds much like the many broadsides that describe Maria's murder, with a few added details for dramatic effect. When Maria meets the very wealthy Corder at a fair he decides to seduce her. Corder convinces a Gypsy he meets at the fair – Ishmael – to tell Maria that her future lies with him. Ishmael and his family, however, want revenge for Corder's earlier seduction of Ishmael's sister. Ishmael claims that he will help Corder, but secretly plans to ruin him. Influenced by Ishmael's fortune telling, Maria allows Corder to court her, and eventually she becomes pregnant. She thinks that she has convinced Corder to marry her after the baby is born, but Corder has no intention of linking himself with such a poor family. In fact, when Maria's baby falls ill Corder

procures a poison and kills him. He then asks Maria to meet him at the red barn dressed as a man to avoid detection, at which point they will sneak away to London and be married. When Maria arrives, Corder shoots her and buries her under the red barn floor, using a spade bought from Tim, the man who would have soon become Maria's brother-in-law. Corder then flees for London and marries another woman. Maria's mother becomes suspicious of Corder after having three dream visions of her daughter underneath the barn floor. The barn is searched, and Corder is arrested and hanged.

The fair where Maria and Corder meet is important to understanding the play's investment in the spectacle of violence. The audience is introduced to two characters who work at the fair – Flat and Tober – who suggest the play's interest in critiquing the spectacularization of women's bodies. If one were to judge by the final scene – Corder on the scaffold surrounded by a huge crowd – one could argue for Corder as the most important celebrity created out of the spectacle to which this self-aware play refers. Because this is the final image, it would seem that the play is engaging in what Foucault describes as the double discourse of crime broadsides, the tendency for violent men to be seen as both infamous criminals and rebellious romantic heroes through the machinations of celebrity justice. However, earlier scenes repeatedly call attention to Maria's body. The play emphasizes Maria's body through her pregnancy, her murder – performed on stage – and her mother's visions of that murder, which require three re-enactments of the crime. The scenes with Flat and Tober at the fair – the site of so many sensational attractions – also reveal that the spectacle of this injured female body is at the heart of

this play's treatment of a number of social issues. Flat and Tober transform another worker, Jacko, into the proverbial fat woman at the fair. Tim drags "her" out for all to see and shouts, "Oh there's a lark! Now we can see all the show for nothing" (38). The surrounding crowd then begins to pull the pillows out from under Jacko's clothes and, realizing that he is not what he appears to be, beat Flat and Tober with them. This violence foreshadows Maria's murder. The "fatness" of the "woman" gestures towards the spectacle of deviant female corporeality. Specifically, it refers to Maria's pregnant body, which is both a symbol of her moral failure as a woman who has engaged in premarital sex as well as a symbol of Corder's failure to uphold gentlemanly conduct as her lover. The crowd's tearing apart of this "body" signals public anxieties about sexual deviance, particularly sexual deviance that would, through the birth of Maria's illegitimate child, destabilize boundaries between working and upper classes.

The crowd's violent deconstruction of Flat and Tober's illusion also reflects unease with the spectacularization of the woman's socially corrupt body, and exposes the men who have reconstructed it for financial gain. The fact that it is not the "woman" who is hurt by the crowd here but the men who have created her connotes frustration with the makers of the spectacle, those men who would appropriate women and turn them into hollow spectacles. The creation of the spectacle has violent consequences here, a point which references the ways in which Maria Marten has been represented. The "fat lady" scene thus connotes an ironic critique, especially given that it derides making a spectacle of a woman's body in a play that capitalizes on a woman's murder. This scene also

foreshadows Maria's cross-dressing later in the play, when she meets Corder – and her death – at the red barn. It thus links the consequences of Flat and Tober's spectacle of female corporeality with the far more serious violent consequences of Corder's request for Maria to dress as a man. Flat and Tober construct a form of deviant femininity for public display, and are accordingly punished with a riot that exposes their spectacle of as an illusion. Corder's insistence that Maria wear men's clothing symbolizes the total effacement of the female body that takes place where Maria is murdered and literally covered by dirt under a barn floor. His punishment is the exposure of the falseness of his genteel, gentlemanly status, and his death on the scaffold. The similarities between these two cases suggest that the manipulation of female identity and the murder of a woman exist on a continuum of violence and effacement.

The play's critical treatment of class is consistent with street literature's recreations of intimate violence during the Victorian period. Fiction that thematized abuse during this period frequently displaced middle-class violence onto working-class couples. *Murder in the Red Barn* does the opposite. The violent acts committed by the wealthy man here are explicit, whereas working-class abuse is always only hinted at, often veiled in comedy. When Corder arrives at the fair, Tim tells Anne, "Ay, I'll punish thee if I see thee look at that London Chap" (24). When he encounters Anne with Maria, in drag on her way to meet Corder at the red barn, he calls Anne a "hussy" for being out with another man. Tim also threatens violence against the "man" with whom he thinks his fiancée is committing adultery. When he realizes that the "man" is in fact Maria, Tim

resists hitting her, but, embarrassed and irritated, he nevertheless implies that, even if he had known she was a woman the entire time, he would still have been willing to assault her: “do you think if [I had] known it I wouldn’t have smashed her?” (62). As though to associate this suggestion of violence against women with *intimate* violence in particular, Tim and Anne immediately begin to plan their wedding. But although the play suggests the possibility that Tim will beat Anne, such violence does not take place on stage.

Corder’s violence, however, takes place four times on stage: the actual murder and Maria’s mother’s three dream visions. The play thus inverts traditional understandings of the relationship between class and intimate violence by obscuring working-class abuse and rendering middle-class violence perfectly clear. In doing so, Latimer uses the figure of the abused woman to challenge the primacy of middle-class morality, and to suggest the need for social and legal attention towards violence against women in all classes.

In Latimer’s play, as in the popular Maria Marten broadsides, the primary reason Corder decides to kill Maria is to avoid marrying into a poor family. Corder fears the inferior connection, particularly the prospect of being related through marriage to Tim. Rather than a mere warning against class transgressions, though, Latimer’s play represents the ways in which evidence of the abused woman’s body bears on gentlemanly status. Tim’s poverty is ultimately part of what allows Corder to perform his crime; Tim sells Corder the spade that he uses to bury Maria’s body. However, as Tim points out during Corder’s execution at the end of the play, the gentleman never pays. The unfair financial exchange between the upper and lower classes thus complements the domestic

violence narrative, connecting the ways in which domestic violence is an unfair exchange between bearers of unequal power with the ways in which domestic violence has been unfairly read as a lower-class phenomenon. As though to emphasize this injustice, *Murder in the Red Barn* ultimately undoes Corder's privileged class position. The officer who arrests Corder makes a point of telling him that he is no longer a gentleman but a common felon, as though the two terms are mutually exclusive (73). Through the murder of his lover and child, then, Corder loses his status in the eyes of working-class men.

Gender and Classed Morality

Of course, the transformation of a middle-class to a working-class man as a legal ramification of his violent acts against a woman can be read as a means of protecting middle-class moral authority; when Corder kills a woman he gets demoted, and is problematically aligned with the supposedly inferior status of his victim. In some ways, then, *Murder in the Red Barn* clings to class stereotypes about the barbarity of the working classes. After all, the play's working-class men (with the exception of Maria's father) exhibit noticeably violent tendencies. However, the moral tenor of the working-class women remains in tact. *Murder in the Red Barn* constructs the working-class woman as possessing particularly virtuous traits. In the play, as well as in many of the broadsides, Corder goes from middle-class gentleman to working-class murderer, while Maria is transformed from a woman who, in reality, had two illegitimate sons from two different men before meeting Corder (Latimer 19), to a pure, innocent victim. Moreover,

both the play and the broadsides grant Mrs. Marten a retributive power insofar as they indicate that her dreams – not the law men or the working-class men in her family – identify the location of Maria's body. The working-class woman's psyche thus becomes central to identifying her daughter's murderer and bringing him to justice. This emphasis on the heroism of the working-class women involved in the case borrows from and revises the symbolic function of the *middle-class* wife as guarantor of middle-class moral and economic authority; in the play working-class women (even those who engage in premarital sex) set the standards for individual conduct and public and political matters of justice. Specifically, the working-class mother, Mrs. Marten, functions in this way, and thus takes on a role typically understood as belonging to the middle-class mother, since, as Poovey points out, middle-class female morality was predicated on maternal instincts (*Uneven Developments* 7-8).

The inversion of working-class depravity with middle-class ethics still entails the death of the good working-class woman, ensuring that she cannot interfere any more with the genteel classes. This way of representing the working-class woman's redemptive qualities commonly appears in sensational street literature about intimate violence. Like Maria Marten, poor young women are frequently described as "good girls" only to be degraded and grotesquely murdered by middle-class men. For example, "A True and Particular Account of the Bloody and Cruel Murder of Ellen Hanly, on the River Shannon" (1819), stresses that before her gentleman lover paid his servant to murder her, Ellen was "extremely accomplished," and had an "an innocent face." This was not, mind

you, limited to relationships between working-class women and middle-class men.

Illustrated Police News's "A Wife Beater Lynched Near Rotherham" (figure 12) provides an example of how anxiety about the working-class woman's morality manifested even in those abuse narratives that had nothing to do with the middle class. The article and its accompanying image – which depict "a secret society for the avenging of wives who have been wronged" (2) – underscore not just the moral depravity of working-class men who turned to violence, but also the moral superiority of the working-class women who punished them.



Figure 12: IPN 23 Jan 1869

The illustration shows a rough music ritual, a working-class phenomenon whereby a man guilty of wife-beating is being run through streets by his peers. Typically, this type of humiliation would have involved loud music and degrading songs made up about the offender's crimes. They were a highly public critique of intimate violence and other acts,

orchestrated by members of the working-class, and therefore provide evidence that abuse was not entirely accepted among the poor.²⁹ There is some question, however, about exactly how progressive these rituals were. Hammerton cautions that although rough music rituals symptomized disdain for working-class domestic violence, they did not actually reflect changes in violent behaviour among the working class (16). The ritual was controlled by men, and was also used to punish nagging wives, homosexuals and rape victims, suggesting that the humiliation was more about “targeting those who disrupt the patriarchy” – including violent men – than about protecting women (18).³⁰

The image in *Illustrated Police News*, however, features working-class women playing an active role. Although there are several men in the scene, women occupy its foreground. And it is the women, for the most part, who wield weapons here, unlike the numerous images in *Illustrated Police News* that feature men holding phallic knives, shovels, or other implements over their wives’ and lovers’ heads (*figures 4- 6*). The facial expressions of the women (where visible) indicate that they are taking the ritual far more seriously than the men; while all of the men laugh and smile in the picture – one man’s gaze actually rests on the women instead of the target of the ritual – the women appear extremely agitated. The image accordingly positions working-class women in the traditionally male role of the primary domestic disciplinarian, and the traditionally

²⁹Hammerton is careful to point out, however, that while many of these rituals were designed to punish abusive husbands, because “working-class violence on its own was commonplace, and not enough to warrant the ritual – there had to be other offenses, too” (19).

³⁰Of course, rough music rituals represent a class-specific version of gallantry; it is doubtful that many respectable middle-class men would consider such a violent, raucous and very public ritual particularly gallant.

middle-class woman's role of civilizing the working-class. At the same time, though, the angry women wielding phallic weapons correspond with cultural stereotypes of working-class women as inappropriately masculine, and thus validate a cultural cliché that appeared to warrant a decrease in women's participation in the public sphere, even as the article and image condemn wife abuse.³¹ There were clearly a number of contradictions at work in representations of the "good" victims of intimate abuse, which suggests that sensational street literature's explicit representations of violence were anything but univocal in their ideological messages.

Working-Class Couples

As this *Illustrated Police News* article suggests, questions about the relationship between class and morality were not limited to narratives of relationships between affluent men and their working-class lovers. In fact, many papers focused on violent relationships in which both parties belonged to the working classes. One recurrent tactic in representations of working-class couples, however, involved stripping the female victim's body of class identifiers. For example, "The Sussex Tragedy" (*figure 13*) depicts the dead body of Celia Holloway, a working-class woman who had been murdered by her working-class husband, surrounded by a doctor and some mourners who are presumably members of the victim's family.

³¹See Rachel Fuchs', *Gender and Poverty in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, which discusses the ways in which women who worked outside of the home were seen as unwomanly and emasculating (112).



Figure 13: The Sussex Tragedy! Being a faithful Narrative of the inhuman Murder of CELIA HOLLOWAY by JOHN HOLLOWAY, her husband...with the whole of his horrible Confession, and Copies of Letters sent to his Mother and Sister since his Apprehension. (1831)

The doctor lifts a blanket, revealing Celia's naked, mutilated body. Celia's nudity renders her class status ambiguous, while, in comparison, the over-coats, top-hats and bonnets of the people surrounding Celia align her mourners with the middle classes. Two of the women bearing witness to Celia's body wear elaborate poke-bonnets, which Alison Gernsheim argues signaled respectability in the early part of the century (25). The woman on her right wears a dress that appears to have a neckline decorated with lace, an expensive commodity (29). The man on the far left (who appears to be some sort of medical professional, and not a member of Celia's family) wears a variation of the parricide, a stiff collar that was fashionable among men who could afford to dress well (32). The man entering the room also displays his wealth by wearing a parricide and tails. The other two men in the image appear to be doctors, but it is worth noting that one is wearing a scarf cravat, a sign of gentlemanly status (32). The fact that all of these outfits are inconsistent with the Holloways' working-class status suggests that the publisher of the broadside may have consciously inserted signs of middle-class life into an account of working-class domestic strife. Possibly, the contrast indicates that Celia has married beneath her, and that her attachment to Holloway robs her of the status enjoyed by the mourners. If this is the case, Celia's physical death corresponds with a social one; she is robbed of her life and status simultaneously. One might therefore read Celia's death as a punishment for transgressing class boundaries. Nevertheless, the conspicuous contrast between the obvious class affiliation of Celia's mourners and the class ambiguity that accompanies her own nude body emphasizes that intimate violence transcends class, and

that its victims are not part of any one social group.

An 1837 chapbook that depicts the murder of Hannah Brown by her fiancé James Greenacre functions similarly to complicate the notion that intimate violence is a working-class problem. Like “The Sussex Tragedy,” *The Paddington Tragedy* strips its victim of clothing (except her underclothes) that might help to identify her class status (*figure 14*). In this text, though, it is not just the victim’s status that appears ambiguous, but also the criminal’s. According to the chapbook, Greenacre oscillated between the working and the middle classes. He was the educated son of farmers and started his own business as a grocer and tea dealer. He had three marriages, including one to the daughter of a tavern keeper and another to the daughter of a wealthy landowner. When Greenacre was prosecuted by the government for fraud, his tea leaves were seized and he was fined heavily, although he never paid these fines (4). Under these financially precarious circumstances Greenacre lost his business and fled to New York where he patented a washing machine and started a new business as a manufacturer. This business also failed. He then became a regular applicant for charity at the Mendicity Society, at which point he had traversed the roles of a farmer, a businessman and an impoverished cabinet maker (6). It is not clear what sort of work Greenacre was doing when he met Hannah Brown through a newspaper advertisement, but he assured her that he owned property at Hudson’s Bay (7). Greenacre’s class status is not easy to define; his business endeavours and relationships with women aligned him with various social strata at different points in his life. The chapbook thus underscores the precariousness of middle-class status as

predicated on morality and finances. Both, as Greenacre's story illustrates, can be lost.



Figure 14: *The Paddington Tragedy* (1837)

In spite of the fact that Brown was a cook and a widow of a shoemaker (8) the chapbook suggests that Greenacre's attachment to Brown was financially motivated. Greenacre began living with another woman while engaged to Brown. When Brown discovered this fact, she accused Greenacre of having lied about owning property, as

though he was using her for her money but was in love with the other woman (16). Brown then disappeared and her body turned up in pieces over the next two months. The implication of this chapbook – that Greenacre killed Brown to steal her money when she discovered he was poor and he could no longer gain access to her money via marriage – is inconsistent with Brown's actual financial status. However, underscoring the possibility that this was a crime of greed, the text carefully emphasizes that one of the reasons Greenacre was caught for murdering Brown was that he was in the process of pawning Brown's silk gowns, a box of her clothes and her watch. These items must have cost a considerable amount to be worth the risk (12). The author of the chapbook also stresses the fact that Brown's earrings were torn from her ears (11), suggesting not just brutality but an economically motivated form of violence. The fact that Brown was a working-class widow seems incongruous with this picture, as though the chapbook emphasizes certain aspects of the crime in order to blur class distinctions.

The chapbook disrupts middle-class authority by implying the failures of the would-be middle-class man through his destruction of a woman; Greenacre kills Brown for money so that he can sustain the middle-class life he once knew but lost through criminal activities. The chapbook's illustration of the crime scene also implicates the middle-class in working-class violence by marking its working-class subjects with middle-class signs: Brown's dress, her apartment and, to some degree, the suit Greenacre wears. Greenacre stands menacingly over the dead body of his recently murdered and decapitated lover. Brown's partially clothed body reveals little about her class status.

However, the items in her apartment suggest that she might have belonged to the middle-classes. There is a poke-bonnet, for example, hanging by the fire. Her dress, lying on the floor, is embroidered with the letters "EEL." Although these particular letters do not appear to have any significance, the embroidery suggests that Brown once worked on a marriage trousseau, or collection of linen bearing the family initials. The sheer amount of fabric in the room – the full shift, the dress, the curtains and the fabric draped over the chair – in comparison to the homes depicted in figures four and six suggests that Brown's trousseau was sumptuous and expensive.³² The amount of furniture and decorative items in the room also suggests that Brown was quite wealthy compared to the working-class families represented in figures 4 - 6. The silver tea set in the right background of the illustration and the plates hanging on the wall above the mantle – colored yellow likely to signify that they are gold – are inconsistent with Brown's status as a working-class widow. While it is difficult to determine Greenacre's class status from his clothing, one can assume from looking at this picture that Green could afford several suits, since this one does not show any signs of wear. The depiction of Greenacre's gruesome crime, then, divorces his moral decline from more typical scenes of working-class domestic life.³³

³²See Perrot and Geurrand for a detailed account of the degrees of wealth associated with the contents of a woman's trousseau (314).

³³Street literature's treatment of race and crime, however, appears to deny the possibility that British gentlemen could enact what was ordinarily considered to be working-class brutality. This genre frequently racializes the white, middle-class, male criminal as non-British. A Catnach broadside titled "Meet Me in the Willow Glen," for example, "blackens" the skin of a working-class chimney sweep groping at a terrified Caucasian woman. Papers on the Maria Marten case also often depict the white, gentlemanly Corder as either African or as affiliated with Gypsies, shifting the failures of middle-class

Fallen Women

Even if street literature about intimate violence undermined the morality of middle-class men, however, we have to ask to what extent it contributed to reform, given two problems: the general tendency in the period for both class and feminist reform movements to rely on the idea of middle-class moral superiority, and street literature's reliance on images of sexualized pain, fear and subjugation. There is no question that middle-class moral authority was central to much of the social work that was enacted on behalf of the poor. As Wiener suggests in his discussion of the civilizing offensive – campaigns led by middle-class organizations like churches and schools to eradicate barbaric behaviour among the working class (111) – evidence of a relationship between middle-class self-preservation and philanthropy lies in the fact that so many benevolent efforts involved gentrifying the poor so that they could be as civilized as their middle-class “betters.”³⁴

The moral authority of middle-class women was particularly central to how class

moral authority onto the failures of other races. These kinds of representations reflect how the figure of the African was used to promote a range of often contradictory ideologies. As Kathryn Castle points out, various magazines used images of African people to emphasize, in contrast to tribal politics, the good qualities of British government, to enforce the need to protect overseas commerce and colonies, to critique slavery and to critique freed slaves (147-50). Moreover, as Wiener argues, during Queen Victoria's reign “the treatment of women in Britain and in the burgeoning empire became a touchstone of civilization and national pride” (3). However, depictions of racialized men often at times also portray the civilization of the British citizen and the civilization of the “heathen” subject as parallel projects, and question the British capacity to rule (Hall 20-22). The racialization of violent, middle-class, caucasian Britons served to some extent to protect not just the illusion of a genteel middle class, but also a genteel nation, even as it identifies the “racial degenerate” with the British citizen.

³⁴Poovey writes, for example, that middle-class women's philanthropy was often understood in terms of their unique moral instincts (*Uneven Developments* 10), and Christine Stansell argues that “women particularly, strengthened [middle-class reformers'] role as dictators of domestic and familial standards for all classes” (311).

reform intersected with feminist reform. Judith Walkowitz delineates, for example, how middle-class women's organizations like The National Association and the Ladies National Association functioned on behalf of working-class and vulnerable women to expose the Contagious Diseases Acts – which required prostitutes to submit to mandatory, degrading physicals and often long, involuntary hospital stays – as not just sexist, insofar as they held women solely responsible for the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, but also as classist, insofar as they sanctioned violence against prostitutes (2). The gains made by such groups depended directly on an alliance between middle-class women and working-class men, as well as between middle-class women and prostitutes (6), so in a sense they parallel street literature's interest in questioning the moral distinctions between the working and middle classes. However, these gains also depended on the moral authority attached to those middle-class women who worked to repeal the Acts. Because the repeal movement required the idea of middle-class morality in order to obtain cultural currency and authority, the movement perpetuated social hierarchies even as it worked to improve the lives and working conditions of poor women.³⁵ One might wonder, given class and feminist activism's reliance on middle-class moral authority, how street literature that troubled this authority could really participate in social reform.

An obvious argument to be made about street literature's more explicit images of

³⁵In *Uneven Developments* Poovey similarly comments on the ways in which middle-class women's reform often emphasized the virtues of bourgeois domesticity. Specifically, she discusses how Florence Nightingale's mission to provide adequate care for the sick poor in London assumed "that bourgeois domesticity and cleanliness were universally desired" (191).

abused women is that they expose marital violence during a period invested in obscuring the female body and complicate the politics of representation in law and literature.

However, in the double-discourse of intimate violence, even explicit images that expose abuse can constitute forms of the representational cover common to Victorian fiction and legal discourse. This is particularly true of papers that depict women murdered by their lovers and husbands. As Elizabeth Bronfen points out, the image of the dead female body in art inevitably points to issues beyond the death of the woman, often to the anxieties of the male artist who created her and the male-dominated culture in which she lived (xi). In turn, the problem for feminist criticism is that “As we focus on the hidden, the figurative meaning, what is plainly seen may not be seen at all” (x). Paradoxically, explicit images of injured and dead women risk a kind of invisibility by virtue of their plain visibility; since these bodies are written over by symptoms of a usually masculinist set of anxieties, their feminist potential is more difficult to see. Even my own insistence on seeing class issues negotiated on women’s battered and dead bodies risks “covering” the issue of abuse itself. Moreover, pictures of women in nineteenth-century papers – and today – tend to be sensational, unusually violent or deadly, and thus direct attention away from more usual, daily cases of violence affecting so many women. These images cover the realities of abuse under the guise of uncovering it.

This form of representational cover is largely a problem of commodification. To make money publishers had to make abused women into spectacular objects that generated pleasure for their audience by virtue of their shocking and absurd situations.

More than simply obfuscating typical abuse by highlighting the bizarre and extreme, however, this kind of commodification of abuse often sexualizes women. A great number of the abusive scenarios in street literature recreate sexually charged situations, often depicting women on beds, partially clothed or dishevelled (*Figure 6, 16, 17*). Figures 5, 6, 15, 16, 17 and 18 feature men leaning over or straddling women's vulnerable bodies, at times with phallic weapons in their hands, ready to strike.

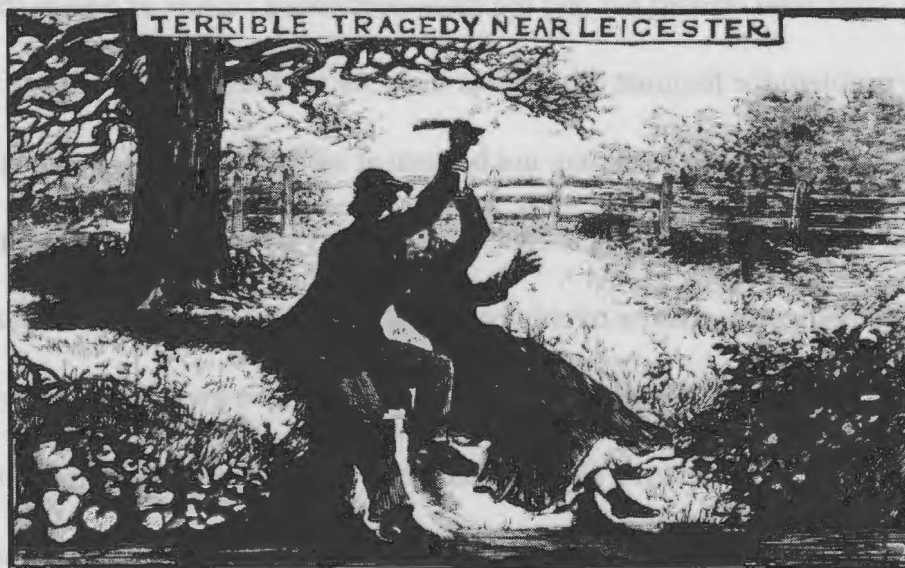


Figure 15: IPN 4 Nov. 1871

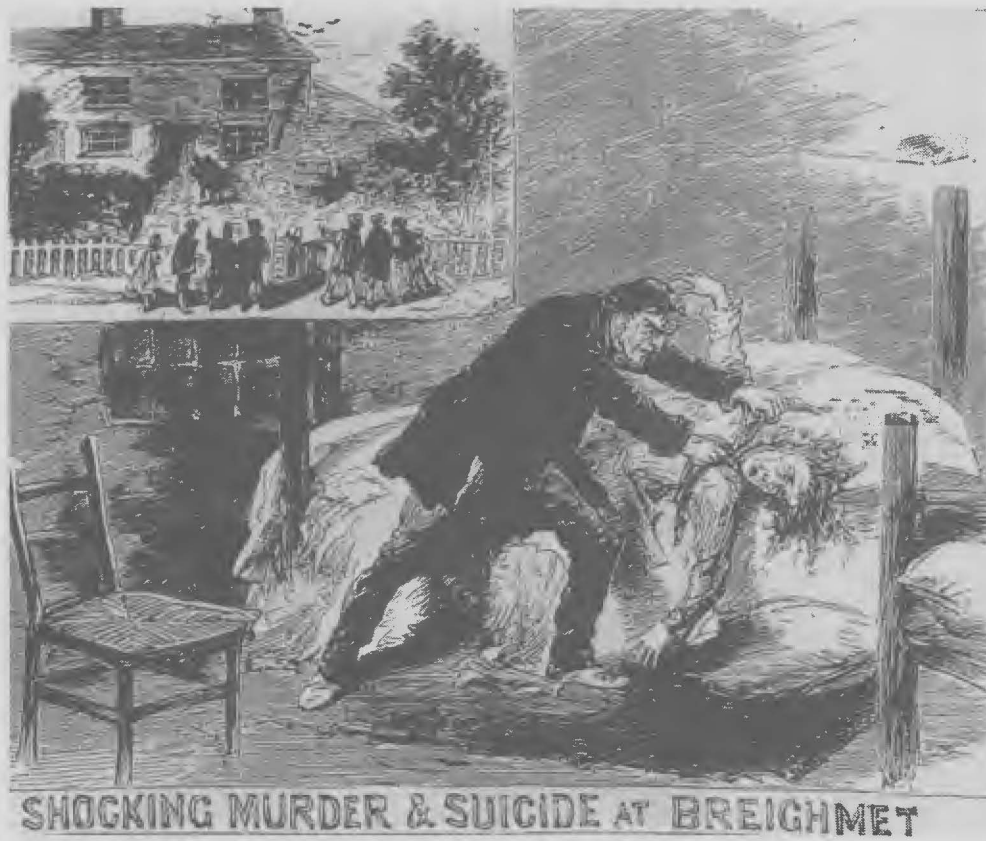


Figure 16 (above): IPN 5 July
1879



Figure 17: IPN 17 July 1871



Figure 18: IPN 2 Oct. 1869

This sexualization threatens to diminish the social power inherent in images of battered women's bodies by emphasizing their supposed immorality or "fallenness."³⁶ In fact, many of these images depict women as literally having fallen, or in the process of falling,

³⁶Patricia Pulham makes a similar argument about nineteenth-century poetry annuals. She suggests that these almanacs constituted a "safe place" for women in the literary marketplace, one that was free from associations with vulgar commodification because it "seemed to be protected by the apparent propriety of the annual form" (12). However, even in this context there existed "a slippage between product and producer" that commodified the poetess and her work (13). This process emerges largely due to the fact that the "femininity and sensuality" of the annuals made them sellable commodities. Pulham describes the annuals as complete with "covers of embossed or gilt leather, or of watered silk, or of floral designs inlaid with mother of pearl" (14) and suggests that they betray a "latent eroticism that compromises their probity" (15). Accordingly, the women who contributed to these annuals were linked to sensuality that undermined their literary value. They were transformed into commodities to be bought and sold, and linked irrevocably with an eroticism that destabilized the moral reputation of the author and compromised any political meanings attached to her poetry.

under the force of the men who are violating them. The depiction of women as physically falling or fallen symbolizes their social fallenness as victims of abuse. Posture thus signals the vulnerability of both women's bodies and their political dimensions as symbols for the blurring of class-based moral distinctions.³⁷ Although sexuality was understood as a healthy and important aspect of domestic life, it was also crucial to defining immorality and deviance (Mort 29). This was especially true for women. Lynda Nead delineates a sexual "double standard" that "condone[d] sexual activity in men as a sign of 'masculinity' whilst condemning desire and arousal in women as a sign of deviant or pathological behaviour" (6). This sexual double standard worked to substantiate the moral differences between the middle and working classes; middle-class female chastity was central to bourgeois domestic ideology. As Nead puts it, middle-class Victorians promoted a "generalized notion of female respectability and oppos[ed] it to the imagined excess, passion and sexual deviancy of the women of the undeserving poor" (7).

Conclusions

This chapter has underscored the prevalence of women's battered and murdered

³⁷These images of fallen women bear a striking resemblance to Dante Gabrielle Rossetti's *Found* (begun 1853) and Augustus Leopold Egg's *Past and Present* no. 1 (1858). Both paintings depict women in literally fallen positions that correspond with their sexual indiscretions. *Found* depicts a prostitute who has been discovered by her former lover. As the lover grasps the woman's hands in an attempt to reclaim her as his own and restore her to innocence, the woman sinks to her knees. *Past and Present* depicts the body of a woman who has committed adultery lying limp on the floor before her husband, who has presumably beat her. The resemblance between these paintings and the images in *IPN* raise important questions about the relationship between high art and sensational tabloid literature. It appears as though newspaper illustrations bear a resemblance to fine art and thus complicate the distinctions between respectable and scandalous representations of the body as they complicate the distinctions between upper and lower classes.

bodies in Victorian street literature, and the ways in which these bodies and their circumstances renegotiated class hierarchies. Middle-class abuse was difficult to represent during a period in which the middle classes effectively advertised the interrelations among their economic ascension and their moral superiority, yet the papers undermined such claims. In this way, street literature differed greatly from the novel, which was a largely middle-class commodity. Newspapers, broadsides and chapbooks appealed to the working and middle classes, and were therefore better suited to a critique of middle-class brutality than the novel was, even if the critiques street literature produced were veiled in the spectacular and voyeuristic.

It would be remiss to conclude this chapter without reference to the fact that the Victorians were quite skeptical of sensational spectacles of violence; they were aware of street literature's tendency to manipulate public attention and thus not blindly influenced by its ideological import. In her discussion of public interest in violent crime Wendy Lesser argues that only since the end of the twentieth-century has the public become critical of the spectacle of violence "for it is only when a powerful sense that the process has already over-stepped the mark that the moral questions are raised in the public domain" (4). However, anxieties about the excessive representation of intimate violence were apparent throughout nineteenth-century street literature. This anxiety was particularly intense by the 1870s. Later nineteenth-century street literature offered numerous critiques of the sensationalism of intimate violence through its own graphic spreads. For example, in an attempt to distance itself from sensational crime papers like

Illustrated Police News, the first issue of the similarly named *Illustrated Police Budget* (30 March 1873) – which also frequently described sensational intimate violence – claimed that “Crimes which appal by their enormity will not be found in *Illustrated Police Budget*; nor shall undue prominence, either by illustration or letter press, be given to any matter whatsoever which, in the interests of public morality and of good taste, should be kept from the public” (2). Further, *Illustrated Police Budget* insists that it does not intend to “unduly obtrude on public notice record of crime, or to foster by means of our illustrations, which can confidently predict will be excellent in design and treatment, a morbid desire for criminal notoriety in the minds of undisciplined persons” (2). This claim reflects the ways in which newspapers were reluctant to expose middle-class abuse even as they pushed the limits of what was representable in terms of intimate violence. As a result, their commentaries on class were perpetually undermined by the tenuous authority of the spectacle, and women’s injured bodies came to occupy a space that regulated not just social roles but also the rules of public representation even as they shook the foundations of these rules.

II

Unfixing Identity and Resisting Violence:

Caroline Norton's Pamphlets and Fiction

In the previous chapter I argued that Victorian street literature's representations of intimate violence gesture beyond individual cases of abuse to implicate the middle classes in what was often understood as a uniquely working-class form of brutality. The image of the battered woman thus came to refer to the domestic failures of a variety of groups, and became an occasion for renegotiating social and moral hierarchies. Since, as Armstrong points out, the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novel was a major vehicle for constructing and promoting the morality of the middle classes (8), it seems likely that its obscure and marginalized representations of abuse aim to shroud middle-class depravity. But in the following three chapters I explore how Victorian novels use evasions and displacements of intimate violence to indict the prosperous classes in the problem of violence. I thus show not only that both explicit and implicit accounts of intimate violence emerged simultaneously, but that they were part of the same political project, a project that questioned the status of women and the validity of class hierarchies even while deploying double and sometimes contradictory discourses. I begin with Caroline Norton, a writer whose accounts of intimate violence construct women's control over their own representation as central to feminist reform and thus emphasize the relationship between violence and rhetoric while delineating a number of strategies women might use to renegotiate their identities.

Caroline Norton is a good starting point because, as a novelist and pamphleteer, she straddled the ostensibly disparate worlds of journalism and fiction. My analysis in this chapter takes a non-chronological approach, first building on the existing criticism on Norton's well-known pamphlets, and then identifying how her earlier, lesser-known novel *Woman's Reward* (1835) can be read through a similar critical lens.²⁵ It accordingly underscores the ways in which novels, which were typically understood as women's writing and relegated to the realm of the sensate and apolitical,²⁶ often shared the techniques and goals of more blatantly transgressive political pamphlets.²⁷ It should be noted, of course, that Norton's pamphlets are very different from the street literature I discuss in Chapter One; they are less sensational than the tabloids, apparently directed towards a predominantly genteel, upper middle-class audience, published by book printers and likely available in book shops rather than hawked on the street (Weedon 11). However, as the ephemeral nature of the political pamphlet suggests, Norton's essays are in fact part of a continuum of journalism. The pamphlet's consistent and direct engagement of contemporary political debates exemplify an editorial style that, as Monica Spiridon points out, resembles the content of many nineteenth-century

²⁵Far less has been written about *Woman's Reward* than has been written about her pamphlets, likely because the novel sold far fewer copies. Chase and Levenson refer to *Woman's Reward* as a "commercial failure" (31).

²⁶See page 10.

²⁷One similarity they share, for example, is the use of melodrama. Elaine Hadley points out that Caroline Norton uses the rhetoric of melodrama to critique aristocratic greed, casting herself as a heroine of melodrama and her husband as the selfish, financially motivated villain. Hadley argues that "melodramatic rhetorical strategies thus substituted for the courtroom sentencing of George that Norton was denied in 1836" (159).

newspapers (231). This editorial style distinguish pamphlets from other forms of prose and suggests that essays like Norton's were highly influential on the Victorian press.²⁸

A great deal of work already exists on Norton's poetic representations of female identity. As Chase and Levenson and Patricia Pulham suggest, Norton's poetic representations of the artistic female present her own identity as unfixed and proliferating, and in turn challenge dominant ideals for women's sexuality and femininity more generally.²⁹ However, neither *Woman's Reward* nor Norton's political pamphlets have been interpreted as similarly invested in the multiplicity of female artistic identity and its potential to transform the status quo either imaginatively or materially. Mary Poovey and Keiran Dolin discuss Norton's construction of dual identity in her non-fictional prose, but focus largely on how the technique was a means of securing an approving audience for Norton's controversial feminist campaigns (Poovey 64-65; Dolin 503). I build on this work and argue that by combining various identities Norton imagines a universe where the artistic woman's identity is capable of constant transformation and proliferation, and therefore is also able to directly affect not just the private domestic sphere, but also cultural, political and legal life.³⁰ In her pamphlets,

²⁸Philip Carr and Victoria Holt argue, for example, that nineteenth-century pamphleteers "moved their platform to the newspapers, and have ever since occupied it there" (156).

²⁹ Chase and Levenson discuss how Norton's shift from depicting the female artist as an "erotic slave" to depicting her as a "coquette" signals an interest in female power, strength and the ability to defer the fulfilment of desire (28). Also exploring the representation of female desire in Norton's poetry, Pulham argues that Norton personifies herself through the mythical Sappho in order to present women as capable of "active love" rather than being merely the objects of male desire (18). See also Helen Groth's "Island Queens: Nationalism, Queenliness and Women's Poetry 1827-1860," which discusses Norton's depiction of Queen Victoria as a model of assertive femininity.

³⁰Norton's portrayal of identity thus anticipates late Victorian representations of identity as emergent and fluid. Walter Pater, who suggests that "To regard all things and principles of things as

Norton draws on personal experience and overlaps her own identity with figures as diverse as the pauper, the male politician, the slave and the child. She thus calls the naturalness of the distinctions among these figures into question, and further implies that her ability to unfix her identities as a wife and a mother is central to her work as a feminist social reformer. In *Woman's Reward* Norton layers the identities of her fictional characters with both actual individuals – including her self, her husband and the man with whom he accused her of having an affair – and mythological figures. Norton thus uses a rhetorical technique that Tilottoma Rajan refers to as “autonarration” – the insertion of personal history into a fictional narrative in order to re-write the past and politicize its implications for the reading public (220) – to play with the distinctions between moral categories like respectability and scandal, and genteel and brutal.

inconstant modes or fashions has more and more become the tendency of modern thought,” argues that individual impressions are in “perpetual flight,” and that “it is with this movement, with the passage and dissolution of impressions, images, sensations, that analysis leaves off – that continual vanishing away, that strange, perpetual weaving and unweaving of ourselves” (219-220).

Norton's writing also anticipates the work of twentieth- and twenty-first-century theorists like Michel Foucault, Judith Butler and Elisabeth Grosz, who resist the idea that identity is fixed, ahistorical, or inherent. These critics share with Norton an expression of individual identity as traced by a plethora of ideas and materialities. Just as Foucault argues that identity consists of “technologies of the self,” or self-conscious practices designed to resemble an authentic “self” (18), and just as Butler supposes that identity – particularly gender – is performative and fluid rather than innate and fixed, Norton emphasizes the constructed nature of identity by developing characters who are conspicuously interested in acting, wearing costumes and cultivating. Focusing on identity's relationship to corporeality, Grosz argues that female identity has been understood as uniquely unfixed because women's bodies have been represented as fluid: “the female body has been constructed not only as a lack or absence, but with more complexity, as a leaking, uncontrollable, seeping liquid....the liquidities that men seem to want to cast out of their own self-representations” (*Volatile Bodies* 203).

Politics, History and the Body

In order to fully understand Norton's pamphlets or novel, one must first understand the past to which they so often refer. Norton's life – especially her marriage – exemplifies the intersection of the female body and the political sphere. As the granddaughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, a well-known Irish playwright and Whig M.P., Norton acquired political knowledge of and acquaintanceships with a number of influential political figures. Nevertheless, as Karen Chase and Michael Levenson point out, without much wealth or pedigree, as a young woman on the marriage market Norton had to rely on her physical beauty and charms rather than her social status (22). The connections of Norton's grandfather allowed her to become a socialite in the inner circles of London, but, according to her biographers, Norton was marriageable largely because her "beauty outweighed her lack of money" (Acland 29). Early in life, then, Norton learned that her physical appearance played a large role in her ability to form social and political connections. Ultimately, she used her beauty to marry George Norton, whose political beliefs were at odds with Caroline's, and who would seriously compromise Caroline's reputation.

Unfortunately, the Norton marriage was not a happy one. In *English Laws for Women* Caroline Norton details at length the abuses she suffered in her marriage to George, including his adultery, his jealousy, his confinement of her, his refusal to allow her to see her family, his lies and his physical violence (43). There are a number of reasons why any marriage fails, and why any husband becomes violent, and it is difficult

to surmise the reasons for the problems between Caroline and George. Alice Acland suggests that Caroline lacked respect for her husband, and that perhaps “if she could have overlooked his faults he could have kept his pride intact and been kinder to her” (33). While Acland’s argument blames the victim, it is quite likely that the Norton marriage did in fact wound George’s pride and cause him to treat his wife poorly. Caroline was arguably more successful than George, and she had more connections among elite intellectual circles than her husband did. Accordingly, in spite of their political incompatibility (Caroline was a staunch Whig in the Sheridan tradition), in 1830 George had to rely on his wife to secure him a judgeship in Lambeth Division of the Metropolitan Police Courts through her friendship with the Whig Home Secretary, William Lamb (who would later become Prime Minister Lord Melbourne).

Ironically, of all of the abuses that Caroline Norton suffered from her husband, the most publicly damaging was the suit George later brought against Lord Melbourne for having Criminal Conversation (sexual relations) with Caroline. George’s suit against Melbourne positioned Caroline Norton’s body at the centre of one of the biggest political scandals of the era. Melbourne’s trial attracted unprecedented public interest. Acland’s biography of Caroline Norton provides a particularly vivid sketch of the press frenzy leading up to the verdict:

By the middle of June the excitement about the coming suit exceeded anything known in that century, with the exception of the trial of Queen Caroline. London hummed and seethed with rumours of the sensational

nature of the evidence Norton would produce, and the newspapers published daily forecasts of the character and result of the proceedings. On the day itself, couriers waited in readiness to carry the news of the result of the trial to every foreign court. The fate of the government was considered to depend on the verdict. (89)

As Acland suggests, a major reason for the intense public interest in the trial was its implications for the political landscape of England at the time. Papers began to suggest that the case was a Tory plot to scandalize and discredit Melbourne in order to upset Whig control over the government. On 12 June 1836 *The Age* referred to the trial as a “disgrace to [the Whig] party” and urged George Norton to resign from the position that Melbourne had secured for him (qtd in Acland 87). Another explanation for the public interest in the trial, however, was that it revealed the intersection of the private and public by constructing a woman’s sexual activity as capable of affecting political life; a wife’s alleged indiscretion now bore on the future of the current government.

Caroline Norton’s essays and fiction betray that this author was very much aware of the relationship between her own body, her personal history and the political sphere. Drawing on the very personal, very physical experiences of an abusive marriage, Norton consistently refers to her body to make arguments for marriage and divorce reform. Whether obliquely alluding to her violent marriage – as she does in *Woman’s Reward* – or making specific and direct comments on it – as she does in her pamphlets – Norton renders her body a constantly shifting trope whose mutability is central to her activist

messages.

Norton in Street Literature

Although Norton's pamphlet writing resembles a more respectable sub-genre of street literature than, say, *Illustrated Police News* or *Divorce Court and Breach of Promise Record*, it shared with these publications the use of shockingly violent details that are "justifiable" because they promote justice for women.³¹ Pamphlet-writing did not, however, free Norton entirely from the constraints of her identity and status as a middle-class woman in Victorian England; she had to always temper her authority to act on behalf of women with illusions of powerlessness in order to defend her reputation and to ingratiate herself to her reading public. As the primary breadwinner in her family, and perhaps more politically influential than her husband due to her high profile friendships, Caroline Norton inverted middle-class ideals of domesticity and respectability, which relied on the middle-class wife's exclusion from the working world (Davidoff and Hall 275). Norton's pamphlets therefore craft an authorial identity that balances the threats she poses to these ideals with the illusion that she is merely an apolitical wife. In *Uneven Developments* Poovey points out that Norton was successful as a reformer precisely

³¹As I point out in Chapter One, *Divorce Court and Breach of Promise Record* explicitly attempts to justify its discussion of marital violence with the claim that publicity is a fair punishment for violent husbands. *Illustrated Police News* is less open about its mandate, although several of its articles are devoted to reporting how violent men have been brought to justice because of gruesome physical evidence of their violent crimes (see especially *Illustrated Police News* Jan 8 1876, page 2, on the murder of Harriet Lane). In both cases, of course, the motive for reporting on intimate violence is likely also the profit that comes with sensational stories.

because she divided her identity. First, Norton authorized herself by aligning her identity with powerful political men (65). She then appeased critics of women who participated in politics by framing her complaints as any obedient wife should: in terms of the dominant ideology, which insisted “that the home should be kept separate from the commercial and political relations, that the sexual double standard was both natural and just” (84). Similar to Poovey, Kieran Dolin argues that Norton embodies tensions between the woman writer’s need to construct an authorial identity for literary success and the “social pressures on women to shun the immodest exposure of publications” (503), implying that Norton manipulated her own public image to disarm critics of her often highly political writing.

Such techniques were necessary given the ways in which Norton was sexualized in the press during George Norton’s suit against Melbourne. Papers focused on what could be taken as the unseemly details of Norton’s relationship with Melbourne, such as the testimony of Norton’s coachman, John Fluke, who claimed to have witnessed Norton lying on the floor beside Melbourne with her skirt hiked up (Acland 89). At times, newspapers reporting on the case “ruled” in favour of Caroline Norton. On 26 June *The Satirist* published a brief mock-correspondence between Caroline and George regarding Caroline’s right to visit with her children, which read as follows:

“My Husband, Permit me to see and embrace our dear children.”

“My Wife, You have my permission to see and embrace our dear children. The youngest is too unwell to be removed. You must, therefore, during my absence,

call here. I am now about to leave home and shall not return till eleven o'clock at night. If you are so infatuated as to remain after that hour, you must abide the consequences. What I shall do to you is fearful to contemplate, therefore beware!" (205)

This conversation turns George Norton's claim of criminal conversations between Melbourne and Norton against him; here it is *George Norton* whose conversation with his wife implies manipulative – violent – behaviour. More often, however, the papers were less compassionate to Caroline Norton. A month earlier *The Satirist* constructed a similar correspondence between Caroline and Lord Melbourne that draws attention away from the political significance of Norton's body to its sexual attractiveness:

"What," asked the Hon. Mrs. Norton of the Premier, "is your opinion of petticoat government?" "Why," replied his lordship, giving the lady one of those looks of affection for which he is so remarkable, "I am a decided advocate for the system, and care not how *high it is carried*." (147)

Here petticoat government – women in politics – becomes a joke, and Caroline Norton becomes an object of sexual farce instead of a political force. This joke undercuts the professionalism of Norton's and Melbourne's relationship, implying that even if Norton believes in her political power her influential "friend" is more concerned with her erotic body. Also significantly, the joke metaphorically exposes the female body: it implies that Melbourne is in sexual thrall of Norton and therefore unfit to govern. Later in May *The Satirist* continued in this vein, publishing a mock editorial request from Runnymede to

Lord Melbourne: “You must think *nought on* a certain lady who has of late engrossed much of your attention: for the future, however, you must leave her to me; I’ll generously undertake to offer myself up to her shrine as a sacrifice for you...” (165) Although Runnymede insists that Melbourne stop thinking about Norton, this piece forces readers to remember the scandal, and to consider the erotic dimensions of the body that is becoming increasingly visible under the metaphoric petticoat of women’s government. Runnymede may attempt to sway Melbourne away from thinking about Norton’s body, but he is clearly interested in that body himself. This interest – “you must leave her to me” – is not purely sexual, as the offer suggests; it also hints at violence, and betrays the relationship between sexualization and brutality. Runnymede’s offer also suggests the exchangeability of women between men and likens Norton’s body to a slave’s body, a rhetorical strategy that Norton would later use to link feminist concerns with abolitionist ones. This editorial signals the ways in which violent rhetoric compounds the abuse Norton suffered.

As Dorothy Zaborsky argues, “public dislike of Norton bore on her sexual identity because she railed against the ways she was misused” (399), so it is no surprise that she tempered the threat that her work as an activist author posed to the political status quo with endless reminders of her disempowered status as a woman and wife. In addition to soliciting her audience’s support for her cause, however, Norton’s perpetual refashioning of her persona underscores the importance she places on women’s creative self-representation in countering the twin threats posed by rhetorical and physical

violence against women. One of the best examples of such creative self-representation occurs while Norton was still writing under the male pseudonym “Pearce Stevenson.” Writing as a man, Norton detached the sex scandal and the erotic female body from her political agenda, manipulating her own identity to both protect her reputation and to critique a legal system that refused to allow women to represent themselves. In her earlier papers the pseudonym granted her ideas a degree of authority that they would not otherwise possess. Specifically, by positioning women as naturally subordinate, “Stevenson” constructs his own authorial identity as in line with dominant patriarchal ideology, and as a means of constructing a credible voice prior to making more politically controversial claims. Stevenson discusses the Norton case and reminds the reader of Mrs. Norton’s inferior social and political position in relation to her husband. *In A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill* (1839), for example, which argues for women’s rights to custody over young children, Stevenson also couches the rhetoric of reform in the rhetoric of domestic ideology. He begins the essay by pointing out that men have “the divine prescriptive right” over their children, and comments extensively on the “inferior” position of wives and mothers. ‘Stevenson’ asserts that “to say that a wife should be otherwise than dutiful and obedient to her husband, or that she should in any way be independent of him, would be absurd” (5-6), and goes on to argue in favour of the legal double standard regarding adultery: “The sin of adultery is the same in man and woman; but on the part of the woman that sin may be productive of greater social evils, and therefore it satisfies our ideas of natural justice that

she should receive a heavier punishment” (8). Stevenson thus makes it perfectly clear that wives and mothers are, and should be, granted fewer rights and privileges than their husbands.

This essay points out that women are currently excessively oppressed, however, when it refers directly to the fact that married women, as legal non-persons under the doctrine of coverture, could not represent or defend themselves in law:

The greatest instance of injustice, among those enumerated by Lord Brougham, is the fact, that where an action for damages is brought by the husband against the supposed lover of his wife, she can make no defence; that she is not an acknowledged party to the suit, although hers is the character at immediate issue; although in fact she is the person prosecuted; although the sole object of the suit is to prove her guilty. (9-10)

Modifying his earlier adherence to double sexual standards, Stevenson refers to George Norton’s suit against Melbourne and contends that women’s subordination becomes problematic when her husband’s interests interfere with her ability to portray her own character and interests. Norton could not speak on her own behalf in the trial, although she was named in it, and this compromised her reputation and character. Writing as Stevenson, though, Norton could deride the system that prevented her from representing herself fairly, precisely by enacting her own creative self-representation outside of the institutional regulations of the legal system.

Writing as a man to call for female autonomy is of course problematic insofar as

it suggests that women must adopt and thus submit to patriarchal rhetoric in order to succeed in feminist reform. Norton's later pamphlets – which she wrote under her own name – are less reliant on this type of rhetoric. Possibly Norton made the decision to write in her own name because over the years following the trial she realized that her reputation was lost regardless of her political writing. The trial affected the reputations of Melbourne and Norton in drastically different ways. In spite of George Norton's accusations, Melbourne met with little social or political difficulty, and ultimately became personal advisor to Queen Victoria. Caroline Norton, on the other hand, was permanently marked by the scandal. She was no longer considered fit to be in the Queen's presence, now described in papers as “an adulterer and a scheming revolutionary” (Chase and Levenson 37, 43). James Hoge points out that Norton hoped for Melbourne's support to be admitted in the Queen's presence, an “official recognition of respectability,” but that “the queen was exceedingly sensitive about reputation, and indeed she was reluctant to receive, and thus tacitly approve, anyone to whom the slightest taint attached” (145). Norton, then, unlike the man once accused of being her lover, was unable to recover her reputation, and the “taint” of sexual misconduct shut her out of legitimate social and political circles.

Whatever her reasons, in *English Laws for Women* (1854) Norton emphasizes the connections between creative female self-representation and resistance to unjust laws not by writing as an authoritative man, but by writing as herself and associating her status with subordinate, exploited, and abused men. In manipulating her identity in this manner,

Norton also links social and legal systems that fail to represent women as symbolically violent. *English Laws for Women* thus reiterates Norton's attitude in a letter to the editor of *British and Foreign Review* almost twenty years earlier, in which Norton writes, "I have just read, with some astonishment, a very long, very coarse, and very violent attack upon me in the *British and Foreign Quarterly*, apropos of the discussion of the Infants' Custody Bill." The letter, reprinted in *The Examiner* on 26 August 1836, was written in response to an unfavourable review of *A Statement on the Wrongs of Women*, which Norton insists that she did not in fact write. Norton identifies several falsehoods in the review because "silence might seem to admit that what you have stated is no more than the truth." She expresses curiosity about why the response to her writing has consisted of damaging lies, which she refers to as "violence," since her work remains "non-violent," which, by contrast, the reader is meant to understand as honest (531). This suggests not only that Norton understood the violence in language as a phenomenon closely related to physical violence proper, but also that she understood the ways in which her own words and self-representation were capable of self-defense against the violence of misrepresentation.

In *English Laws for Women*, Norton depicts herself as slave-like to further expose men's refusals to represent women or to allow them to represent themselves. At the same time, she implies, through the act of drawing such analogies, that women's creative self-representation can work towards resisting *both* symbolic *and* physical violence.

Comparing her suffering under English law to the continuing suffering of slaves in the United States and the recent historical suffering of slaves in British Colonies, Norton draws on a contract signed between a Mr. J.N. Patton and his slave, Sam Norris, that would allow Norris to purchase his freedom with money he was permitted to earn working in Covington. Norton compares this contract to one she signed with George Norton that allowed George to raise money with Caroline's earnings from writing in exchange for her future freedom. Norton points out that both Patton and George were legally able to change their minds because neither slaves nor wives were legal persons under the law:

My husband being desirous to raise money settled on me and my sons, to employ on his separate estate, and requiring my consent in writing before that could be done, gave me in exchange for such consent a written contract drawn up by a lawyer, and signed by that lawyer and himself. When he had obtained and employed the money he was desirous to raise, like Mr Patton of Virginia he resolved to 'rescind the contract.' When I, like the slave Norris, endeavoured to struggle against this gross breach of faith, – I was informed that by the law of England, 'a married woman could not make a contract, or have monies of her own.' When I complained of it, – I was punished by a flood of libelous accusations, published in all the English newspapers; libels for which, though proved falsehoods, I could obtain no redress, because they were published by my

husband. (18-19)

Here, Norton suggests that wife cruelty is tantamount to slavery, aligning her crusade for fair marriage law with the abolitionist movement. This kind of rhetoric certainly creates the illusion that the author is relatively non-threatening while getting across a number of threatening ideas about the rights of women. However, it is also a way of linking the legal status of married women to slavery, which entails, almost by definition, a degree of physical violence and abuse. Slavery was also a problem that was much more widely acknowledged in Victorian society than, say, the problem of middle-class domestic violence.³² The anti-slavery movement emerged in Britain at the end of the 1780s, so by the time Norton was writing abolitionism was already an established moral issue.

According to Seymour Drescher, so widespread was the anti-slavery movement in Britain in the early nineteenth century that petitions designed to abolish slavery achieved more signatures than other campaigns, including Catholic emancipation (29). Moreover,

³²Norton was not the only woman writer who used this strategy. In *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* Mary Wollstonecraft had already likened British women to slaves in order to emphasize the debasement of all parties involved in such a grossly unequal distribution of power, arguing that women “may be convenient slaves, but slavery will have its constant effect, degrading the master and abject dependent” (4). These women took advantage of wide public support for the emancipation of slaves in order to garner similarly sympathetic responses to women’s causes. Charlotte Brontë deployed the wife/slave comparison throughout *Jane Eyre*, perhaps most obviously when Rochester tells Jane that “it is your time now, little tyrant, but it will be mine presently: and when once I have fairly seized you, to have and to hold, I’ll just – figuratively speaking – attach you to a chain like this” (269). Norton draws on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, which similarly parallels wives with slaves. Authors like Brontë and Stowe took advantage of wide public support for the emancipation of slaves in order to garner similarly sympathetic responses to women’s causes. Contemporary work that discusses British female activism and slavery, and which also comments on the complexities of the parallels between women and slaves includes Karen Sanchez-Eppler’s *Touching Liberty: Abolitionism, Feminism, and the Politics of the Body* and Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart’s *Women’s Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*.

Drescher points out, “accounts of the abolitionist campaigns almost always conveyed the impression that, in gathering and signing, the public was playing a unique role in precipitating changes in parliamentary opinion and in the legislative process” (32).³³

Abolitionist rhetoric was accordingly a useful tool for feminists seeking to improve the rights of women; by unfixing her identity and likening married British women to slaves, who were popularly understood as in need of public support, Norton positions women as deserving of sympathy, bodily autonomy and a measure of public agency,³⁴ and aligns doctrine that constructs a married woman’s identity with proliferating violence against the person. Norton makes clear the connection between physical suffering and the legal system’s refusal to represent married women by referring to the trial as “the crowning example” of “the many instances of violence, injustice, and ill-usage” she suffered in her marriage (49).

In her pamphlets, then, Norton merges her identity with diverse figures to present herself as both powerless and powerful. In doing so she tempers the threats she posed to social and political life as an activist author who had insulted her husband and the Tories in *Woman’s Reward*, and who had been at the centre of a major political scandal. In this way, Norton’s approach to wife cruelty made a number of contributions to Victorian

³³The emancipation bill abolished slavery in Britain in May 1833, but failed to account for colonial slaves. It was not until 1838 that the government put an end to this “apprentice system” (Drescher 41).

³⁴One reason for the popularity of the abolitionist movement among middle-class women was the fact that, as Lori Merish and Deborah C. De Rosa both point out, abolitionists often employed sentimental rhetoric similar to that found in the domestic novel to obtain the sympathies of middle-class female readers (Merish 194, De Rosa 43).

legal and social developments. By rhetorically manipulating her identity, Norton was able to speak publicly about her abuse, and to imply to her readers that women's control over their own representation will lead to the mitigation of oppressive marriage laws, gendered rhetorical violence and physical abuse.

***Woman's Reward*, "Autonarration," and Female Identity Transformation**

Norton's manipulation of her public image in *Woman's Reward* has yet to receive the critical attention that her pamphlets have garnered. In *Woman's Reward* (1835) Norton creates a number of identities that refer to both mythological and "real" world individuals through single bodies. Norton includes herself among these individuals, particularly through references to her violent marital history. She thus mobilizes one of her political causes – eradicating the legal and physical abuse of wives – by amalgamating numerous feminine personages, types and social categories.

Because *Woman's Reward* is a relatively unknown novel, I will provide a brief summary of its plot before discussing its unfixing of identity. *Woman's Reward* charts the relationship between siblings Lionel and Mary Dupré. Mary is a good, chaste woman, who devotes herself to the care of others. Lionel, however, is a violent, quick-tempered and spoiled man who jealously insists that his sister love only him. As children growing up in Madiera, Lionel and Mary become intimate with a young girl by the name of Annie Morrison, and Lionel's cruelty to Annie foreshadows the cruelty he will later impose on

his wife. This acquaintanceship is severed when the Duprés' father dies and the children are taken to England to live with the Bigleys, Mary charged with the responsibility of caring for Lionel. Lionel quickly becomes a disruptive force in the Bigley household. Ever the spoiled child, Lionel is disappointed that the Bigleys seem rather vulgar. Mr. and Mrs. Bigley, however, wish to match Lionel with one of their daughters. Mr. Bigley has two children from his first marriage – Henry and Jane – and three – Hyacinth, Rosabel and Catherine – with his current wife. The Bigleys first try to foist Hyacinth upon Lionel. However, considering Hyacinth too ugly and sickly (she ultimately dies from a fever), Lionel prefers to flirt with Rosabel. Lionel is consistently cruel, and often disobedient. When his tutor, Mr. Lawrence, attempts to assert authority and refuses to allow Lionel to join a hunt, Lionel exposes Lawrence's affection for Jane. In doing so, Lionel virtually forces Lawrence out of the home, for his vocation renders him financially unsuitable as Jane's husband, and it is not prudent to continue an attachment to a woman he cannot marry. Ironically, Lionel is far less suitable as a husband; he breaks his promise to marry Rosabel, and impregnates another woman.

Mortified by a proposal from Henry Bigley, Mary agrees to live with her grand-aunt, Catherine Bolton, when Lionel leaves for school. Away from her brother, Mary meets and falls deeply in love with William Clavering. Upon Mary's request, Clavering provides Lawrence with a living that would make him a suitable husband for Jane in the eyes of the Bigleys. The kind natures of Clavering and Mary are useful for Lionel when

he runs for a seat in parliament. Although Mary convinces voters that Lionel is extremely charitable, word gets out about his breach of promise to Rosabel Bigley and Lionel starts to lose votes. However, when Jane informs the source of the gossip that Mary helped to secure Lawrence's living, the rumours disappear and Lionel and Clavering are able to secure seats as Tory and Whig M.P.s respectively.

While hunting, Lionel falls from his horse. As a test of his strength upon recovery, he, his friend Jack Conolly and Mary go to the theater, where they witness an actress succumb to grief on stage because of the death of her child. Horrified by the audience's violent response to the actress's inability to perform her role, Mary goes backstage and tries to help. Mary learns that the actress is in fact Annie Morrison, Lionel's childhood sweetheart. She also learns that the recently deceased child was Lionel's and that her brother abandoned Annie while she was pregnant. When confronted by his sister, Lionel refuses to marry Annie or provide her with any financial assistance because Annie is an unrespectable roving actress. Mary gives Annie some money and pleads with her to give up her career. Annie refuses. Meanwhile, Catherine Bolton dies and leaves Clavering her property so that he can wed Mary. Lionel falls ill again and manipulates Mary into refusing. Lionel then elopes with Lady Clarice Lyle, against the wishes of her father, Lord Altonby, who wants Clarice to be married to William Clavering. Mr. Bigley then sues Lionel for breach of promise to Rosabel. Shortly thereafter, Lionel loses his seat in parliament along with his reputation when he punches

Mr. Bigley during a political speech. Additionally, Lionel's marriage to Lady Clarice is a very unhappy one. Not only is Clarice jealous of Lionel's roving eye and his obsessive control of Mary, but she is also frustrated by her husband's inability to keep her in the manner to which she has become accustomed after he loses his position. During one final row, Lionel strikes Clarice in public. Clarice then leaves Lionel, who falls ill yet again and finally dies. This death frees Mary to wed Clavering.

Woman's Reward – with its focus on family violence and female resourcefulness – can be read as “autonarration,” a term Rajan uses to describe a hybridization of autobiography and fiction that brings the author's personal experience into the fictional text (220).³⁵ As Rajan describes it, autonarration blurs the generic boundary between fiction and personal history through characters who have obvious resonances with the author (220). This blurring encourages readers to understand the issues taken up by the fictional text as real, important and continuing. By blurring the line between history and fiction, autonarration not only authorizes the novel's projects, but also implicates the reader in these projects (213). It fictionalizes and personalizes the past in order to offer a revised view of how history could have transpired and to open up the present to

³⁵ Rajan's subject matter is Mary Hays's 1796 novel *Memoirs of Emma Courtney*, which draws on aspects of Hays's life, particularly her unrequited love for the social reformer William Frend. Hays's novel was published two years before Mary Wollstonecraft's *Wrongs of Women*, which also fictionalizes an author's personal relationship scandal to rewrite events through the lens of individual experience. As these examples suggest, Norton's *Woman's Reward* likely draws on a tradition of feminist writing that use romantic love to revise history and foreground the complex relationship between individual experience and its representation.

generative futures. Although, as Rajan puts it, autonarration “recognizes ‘experience’ as discursively constructed” (213) – that the author’s personal history is always remembered according to her own perspective and motivation – it reconsiders and experiments with social norms while projecting fictional/factual narrative onto a yet unresolved future.

Such effects are precisely what *Woman’s Reward* achieves by conflating fictional and mythological identities with ones from Norton’s personal history. Mary’s promise to her dying father that she will care for her brother – a violent, ill-tempered, overly passionate man – from childhood into adulthood reproduces the marriage vow Caroline Norton made to George Norton. When Mary’s father pleads, “Promise me never to forsake him – to prefer him to other ties, if they should be incompatible with the love I depend on you shewing him” (I: 20), he makes a request that, as Chase and Levenson suggest, underscores “Norton’s thoughts on marriage as not merely a mistake, but an involuntary entanglement” (32). Mary is to Caroline Norton, then, as Lionel is to George Norton. Lionel, like George, is a violent Tory whose political career suffers and requires a woman’s help to secure his position. Mary does for Lionel what Caroline did for George: both female figures use their connection to politically influential men to secure seats for the men they love. In *Woman’s Reward* this politically influential man – the dashing Clavering – thus refers to Lord Melbourne. Like Lamb, Clavering is a Whig who helps a Tory gain a political position. He is also a close friend of the woman who requests his help. Evoking George Norton’s suspicions of Lord Melbourne, Lionel is

fiercely jealous of Clavering and forbids his sister to marry him.

Lionel's two lovers often also refer to Caroline Norton. Both Annie Morrison and Clarice Lyle serve as ancillary versions of Mary that allow Lionel to act on his displaced attraction to his sister. As children, Annie and Mary give very similar declarations of devotion to Lionel; Annie promises "never [to be] anybody's 'little wife' than his" (32), and Mary vows to her father that she will "prefer [Lionel] to all other ties" (23). Lionel's first act after forbidding Mary to wed Clavering is to elope with Clarice, whom he knows has been promised to Clavering by her father. He is thus able to keep his celibate sister to himself while becoming sexually involved with the woman who would, if Lord Altonby had his way, take Mary's place in Clavering's heart. Annie and Clarice also evoke Caroline Norton insofar as they are victims of a man's violence. As we learn from the pamphlets published after *Woman's Reward*, Norton was physically abused by her husband. Annie and Clarice each suffer because of Lionel's violence: Annie as a child whose garden is destroyed when she will not obey Lionel's whims, and Clarice as an adult who is struck by her husband when she protests against his adulterous ways.

Clarice also clearly refers to Lady Caroline Lamb, a woman known by Norton to have ended a romance with Lord Melbourne in favour of Lord Byron. Similarly, in *Woman's Reward*, Clarice leaves Clavering for Lionel, who resembles not only the violent George Norton but also the purportedly licentious Byron. If Lionel displaces his desire for Mary onto a series of women, Byron – according to persistent rumors –

fathered his half-sister's daughter. By linking Lionel to Byron, Norton critiques particularly inappropriate and extreme passion and sensuality: desire so unbounded that it turns to violence. Moreover, as Chase and Levenson point out, Norton's characterization of Lionel aligns his Toryism with Byronic carnality: "Tory love is Byronic passion, which, after treating others cruelly, turns to consume itself" (34). Indeed, early in the novel Norton's narrator points out that "Petrarch turned out a dreamer, Byron one of the most selfish sensualists who ever pretended deep feeling" (I: 13). Lionel's "Tory love" is violent passion; like Byron (according to Norton), Lionel is guided by selfish passion, and like George, Lionel strikes his wife and is cruel to women. Whiggery, on the other hand, represented through the enduring love between Mary and Clavering, "chastens sensuality, defers pleasure, seeks justice" (Chase and Levenson 34). Since Mary's identity overlaps with Norton's, the author aligns herself with this "chaste Whiggery" in opposition to her violent husband's sensual, Byronic Toryism. Norton's autonarration thus inscribes her own personal and political history in a fictional text. This process constructs a universe where Norton's past is capable of evoking multiple interpretations and outcomes. Using fiction to supplement experience, Norton critiques what she identifies as social "flaws" – Toryism, extreme passion and, of course, cruelty towards women – by re-imagining historical, social and political interactions between politicians and their lovers. Norton is not, however, entirely supportive of extreme chasteness, either. Mary's refusal to marry Clavering because her brother forbids it indicates that the

chaste woman's vulnerability to male authority will inevitably lead to her unhappiness. Mary's marriage to Clavering fictionalizes and legitimizes a hypothetical union between Norton and Melbourne, and refuses to accept feminine submission to domestic tyrants.

Norton's technique of multiplying identities also applies to her thematics in *Woman's Reward*, in which moments of physical violence mirror men's attempts to control women's identities. Throughout the novel, Norton makes the garden a symbol for the cultivation of female identity. Just as a gardener cultivates nature, so men cultivate women, shaping their interests and attitudes. Often, men's attempts to cultivate women in this way – symbolized by their interactions with nature, particularly flowers and gardens – are violent.³⁶ Because gardens are a reflection of contemporary ideals, often both public and private insofar as they are intended for display but also provide quiet, hidden places – often, but not always, at individual homes – and distinctly separate from the industrialized city, they are an appropriate metaphor for Victorian women (Fletcher 9). Like the garden, the ideal Victorian woman embodied the preferred relationship between public and private; she was simultaneously put on display and protected in the home, usually under the careful watch of patriarchal society or male authority figures. And yet women were charged with tending to their homes, husbands and children and with

³⁶As Pauline Fletcher argues, whereas Romantics claimed to be inspired *by* nature, the Victorians were more conspicuous in their projection of pre-existing moral ideals *onto* nature (7). For Fletcher, this is particularly true of gardens: "Man finds the wilderness, although he may project his own emotions onto it, but he creates the garden, and since it is created for pleasure rather than utility it embodies his own idea of himself, or of his society" (8-9).

organizing their households; thus women can also be read as metaphoric gardeners. Norton's novel grapples with the complex significance of garden metaphors, and explores not only the consequences of women being cultivated by men, but also the potential for women to work on their own gardens, and to thus shape their own identities and to make themselves into a reflection of their own moral ideals.

The first significant reference to a garden in *Woman's Reward* occurs when, as a child, Lionel destroys a currant bush that Annie has planted for him in the garden they created together. This happens because Annie claims that she would rather look at her new Chinese costumes than play with Lionel. In a rage, the young boy tears up the roots of the currant bush and smashes their pet chameleon to death with a stone (16, 17). This moment is significant not only because it foreshadows the violence that Lionel will enact on his wife (and the violence that George Norton does enact on his wife), but also because it hints at the relationship between violence and the control over female identity. The currant bush, as a part of the garden, is an aspect of nature controlled according to the arbitrary whims of aesthetic value. Annie has grown the bush to please Lionel, a symbol of a woman's efforts to conform to an aesthetic design pleasing to a man. The currant bush can thus be read as an extension of femininity, and Lionel's destruction of it his attempt to master the woman who has been "grown" for him. If the currant bush represents the woman's physical and social identity, though, Annie's tending of it can also be read as a sign of her emerging ability to control how she presents herself to the

world. Lionel's violence therefore signals the precariousness of his control over Annie. When Lionel kills the chameleon he and Annie share, he destroys a creature who has the ability to transform its own appearance, a power which Annie has begun to harness through her preference for her costumes over play time with Lionel.³⁷

The novel contains a number of other less obvious examples in which physical violence and attempts at controlling female identity are articulated simultaneously. When Henry Bigley proposes to Mary, he is in a garden, pruning a rose bush. Mary's apparently inexplicable anger at the proposal can perhaps be explained by the fact that the rose bush resonates with the currant bush destroyed by Lionel. Mary cannot be "pruned" or controlled like a bush or flower. However, the two Bigley's daughters who attempt to marry Lionel – Hyacinth and Rosabel – are named for flowers, and behave as such. Bigley's daughter Jane, however, is not a flower but an expert gardener, and is thus uninterested in Lionel's "charms." Lionel's rival, Clavering, gives Mary a book entitled *Experimental Botany*, so that she, too, can learn to be the gardener rather than the garden.³⁸ Botany, notably, signified differently than gardening during the nineteenth

³⁷This scene can also be understood as a reworking of the Christian story of Adam and Eve. Eve "falls" when a reptile tempts her into tasting fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, a tree which God the Father created but forbid her from enjoying. Annie, however, "falls" when she becomes an actress following Lionel's cruelty, foreshadowed here as he destroys the fruit-bearing plant that *Annie* planted. Norton's version draws attention to male responsibility for female "fallenness." The tree also symbolizes the lurking potential of prohibited appetite or desire, foreshadowing Lionel's quasi-incestuous attachment to Mary, solidified through the vows Mary makes to her father, and foreshadowing the secret affair between Lionel and Annie, which results in an illegitimate child.

³⁸Amy King's *Bloom* argues that nineteenth-century novels drew on the notion that the flowers of plants constituted its sexual organs, and the fictional references to blooms encode the "erotics of courtship" (13).

century. As Ann Shteir notes, the study of botany by women emerged during the Enlightenment, when popular science was “an antidote to frivolity” (2). According to Shteir, during the early nineteenth century botany “represented intellectuality...social cachet, social reform, spiritual satisfaction, or economic advantage” (2). However, in the eighteenth thirties, when botany became more serious and medicalized, it was defeminized in accordance with general anxieties about women’s participation in the sciences (5). By giving Mary a book on botany during this same time period, Clavering is signaling his willingness to accept a woman’s involvement not just in the masculinized sciences, but also in the intellectual, reformist, spiritual and economic pursuits that botany had come to represent in the previous decades.

Norton’s depictions of Lionel’s violence in the garden liken a man’s attempts to control female identity to actual physical violence. However, her depiction of Mary as a capable gardener and botanist suggests that those women who can take control over their own identities can resist this violence. Annie Morrison, for example, who plays with costumes instead of a violent boy, becomes an actress who embodies resistance towards sexual identity categories for women. As an actress with the *nom de guerre* Miss Fitzharris, Annie recalls the artist Norton; just as the actress becomes different people on stage and takes on a public persona distinct from her own, the author recreates herself as different fictional women in her novels and writes pamphlets under a pseudonym. Norton thus positions her ability to transform female identity – including her own – as central to

her political projects.

In spite of her willingness to stand up to Lionel and choose her own costumes as a child, Annie is sexually and financially injured by Lionel as an adult. Annie is particularly unhappy when Mary encounters her as an adult. Mary assumes that this is not only because Lionel has abandoned her and her child has died, but because of her itinerant, unstable life in the theater world. She therefore tries to convince Annie to take money from Lionel and to live a more respectable life. But what does Mary find so unrespectable about being an actress? Annie's profession is associated with discourses of sexuality, excess and profligacy. As Julie Hankey points out, for example, the imagined relationship between acting and prostitution grew out of a seventeenth-century tendency to conflate all women who accepted money for "displaying themselves," particularly since actresses and prostitutes often worked in the same theaters, worked at night and wore revealing clothing (227). She suggests that this association intensified during the Victorian period because it was a time when the middle-class home was viewed as a sacred spiritual haven that women were supposed to oversee. The actress, who worked in a highly public manner, embodied the abandonment of ideal femininity, the disintegration of the home and thus "robbed men of their chance of spiritual recuperation" (227).³⁹

³⁹Kerry Powell also argues that actresses were seen as "hopelessly remote from, and incompatible with, what was often termed the 'real' life of domesticity," and underscores a Victorian tendency to construct a relationship among acting, prostitution and disease (41). Not unlike Norton, then – a woman who was conflated with the sensual texts in which her work appeared (see Chapter One, note 25), and whose publications made her the primary breadwinner in her household – Annie depends on a career that compromises her integrity (which is already compromised by her status as an unwed mother).

Annie's breakdown on stage therefore excites deep sympathy from Mary, who begs Annie to help herself and stop acting. However, Annie defends her profession as more honourable than taking Lionel's money:

There is no *real* disgrace in my profession...it is far, far more honourable than being the pensioned mistress of a man who has deserted me. I know all that you would urge against it; the common prejudice which attributes profligacy and extravagance to the whole class; and which is so false and cruel. A few yield to temptation which the habit of depending on uncertain and unequal resources holds out, and a few to the flatteries which idle and hot-headed young men are ever ready to bestow on a favourite actress; but there always have been, and always will be, many, many examples of high honour and noble virtue amongst them. (2: 49)

Here Annie stresses to Mary that she prefers taking to the stage and transforming her identity nightly to taking Lionel's money and remaining under the control of a man who had attempted so violently to control her identity as a child and to ruin her reputation as an adult. In fact, taking money from Lionel would align Annie with prostitution more strikingly than acting would. Besides, she insists that the disreputable associations are, for the most part, stereotypes.⁴⁰ It is no wonder, then, that Mary, as a representation of

⁴⁰Norton seems to be drawing on the fact that, as Lynda Nead's *Myths of Sexuality* points out, anxieties about prostitution itself were grounded in the ways in which working women compromised the rules of the bourgeois market and feminine virtue. Nead argues that prostitutes signaled "social chaos" (94) insofar as their "sexual excesses" were aligned with socialism, radicalism and revolution, as well as the

Norton, sympathizes with Annie even before she knows who she is; Annie embodies the prejudices that Norton had suffered as a political woman and as a writer. Moreover, Annie's ability to defend her career choice reflects the novel's overall investment in women's creative self-representation. As Tracy C. Davis notes, "Victorians were deeply suspicious of women whose livelihood depended on skills of deception and dissembling, and the circumstances of actress' work belied any pretences to sexual *naïveté*, middle-class immobility, or feeble brain power" (3). Norton's book lauds women's abilities to unfix their identities; Annie's ability to act, like Norton's own ability to blend her identity into others, is precisely what allows her to resist containment and abuse.

As though to accentuate the discrepancy between public prejudice against actresses and the realities of the theatrical lifestyle, Annie performs the role of a virgin on stage. As a woman who is a virgin in the theatres and a profligate according to polite society, but who, in reality, is neither, Annie represents the impossibility of maintaining fixed female identities. In fact, in spite of middle-class prejudices regarding the actress, she too benefitted at times from her multiple enactments. Annie thus gestures not only toward Norton, but toward an early nineteenth-century actress by the name of Maria Foote, who often played the beleaguered heroine. Offstage Foote's life proved equally dramatic when her fiancé deserted her and she sued him for breach of promise. As Susie

effacement of the boundaries between public and private vice (113-115). Nead argues that the prostitute raised anxiety precisely because she "can never be completely possessed by the buyer. The prostitute is able to sell her self/sex again and again" (99).

Steinbach points out, Foote's case stands out as part of a unique group of breach of promise petitions that favoured women in spite of their reputations as "loose" (1).⁴¹ Steinbach claims that Foote was successful largely because her roles on stage were often melodramatic. The rhetoric of melodrama, Steinbach argues, was often used in courtrooms to fashion female petitioners and prosecutrices as innocent, virtuous heroines (4). Foote's melodramatic theatrical roles and her role in the courtroom worked in tandem, encouraging public sympathy in spite of the fact of her less than respectable profession and her evident sexual misconduct. Foote thus complicates understandings of female sexuality during the Victorian period as caught up in the virgin/whore dichotomy, and allows that feminine virtue might encompass women who are not entirely virginal.⁴²

In the dramatic role of Phoebe, Annie achieves this same unfixing of binary constructions of femininity. Through the layering of a virginal mythological figure onto her already multiple identities, Norton adds a third dimension to her autonarration. Phoebe is also known as Diana, goddess of the wilderness and hunting. The daughter of Uranus and Gaia, Phoebe married her brother, Coeus. Phoebe is also known as Artemis, whose twin brother Apollo killed the children of Niobe. Early in *Woman's Reward* Norton's narrator describes a portrait of Lionel as Apollo watching the arrow which

⁴¹Foote's reputation was compromised by the fact that she had two illegitimate children from a previous relationship (Davis 5).

⁴²Poovey argues that this is precisely what Norton achieves in her pamphlets when she manipulates the rhetoric of melodrama and construct herself as one part innocent, female victim and one part manly hero (*Uneven Developments* 67).

struck these children down (99). While Norton's inclusion of real, political events alongside fictional events politicizes her novel's themes and projects, her inclusion of mythological figures alongside realist, semi-autobiographical ones authorizes and mythologizes the novel's themes and projects. That is, by conflating the real world with the realist fiction world and the mythological world, Norton imbues the novel's issues – and the work of realist novel writing itself – with the universality often associated with mythological narratives. By using Phoebe in particular, Norton challenges the fixity of female sexual identity, and thus the sort of identity control attempted by Lionel when he destroys the currant bush and the chameleon. During the Victorian period, the normative binary between feminine and masculine worked to uphold the divisions between public and private and respectable and unrespectable, typically privileging male authority. However, as Poovey points out, “this depended, among other things, on limiting women's right to define or describe themselves” (80). Norton thematizes this problem by depicting women's abilities to portray themselves in various forms, to take control over their identities, as a type of resistance to male violence. Phoebe symbolizes a chaste ideal of womanhood; Zeus grants her (as Artemis) eternal virginity. Annie thus signals both active sexuality – as a mother and actress – and chastity – as Phoebe/Artemis and Mary the chaste Whig. However, just as Annie is not perfectly chaste, her portrayal of Phoebe literally falls apart on stage. The major sign of her sexuality – her child, or rather her grief over the death of her child – destroys the illusion of the ideal, virginal woman for

the crowd, as the actress bursts into tears on stage. When Mary visits Annie backstage, Annie's bodice is loosening (1: 36), symbolizing the dissolution of the fantasy of the eternal virgin.

Annie may represent resistance to the polar fantasies of the virgin and the hypersexual woman, but in doing so she excites the anger of her viewing audience. This anger underscores the degree of violence Norton associates with desires to construct female identity according to male fantasies. Reminiscent of the moment when Lionel kills the currant bush and the chameleon, when Annie falls out of the virginal character she plays on stage, her audience revolts:

Yells, hooting, whistling, groans and exclamations resounded through the house; and when the manager, a pale, fine-looking man, in the dress of a brigand chief, appeared, he was assailed with hisses and continued yells, while orange peel and other things were thrown on the stage with a rapidity and violence which compelled him to retreat. (2: 25-26).

The violence here is directed towards the theater manager, but is nevertheless the result of a woman's failure to conform to a particular ideal of femininity. Whereas Lionel has a violent tantrum when Annie chooses her own costumes – her own mode of self-representation – over time with him, the audience rages over Annie's inability to sustain the illusion suggested by the costume she wears. The crowd's displeased, angry response to the interruption of the play by Annie's grief therefore signifies a brutal interpolation of

womanhood.

Unlike Annie, whose acting tends to resist symbolically violent male fantasies of femininity, Clarice's "acting" seems to support them. Lionel does not approve of Annie's acting; in an attempt to free himself from the responsibility of supporting Annie and his child, he asks, "what sort of wife would the woman make who *could* turn strolling actress?" evoking the disreputability of the theater and calling the paternity of the child into question (2: 55). However, although Lionel's primary attraction to Clarice is jealousy – he believes she has some sort of attachment to Clavering – his desire also derives from her willingness to transform herself in order to fulfil men's desires. Clarice is not an actress, but she "has a passion for disguises" (2: 199). As she tells Clavering, she is all too eager to alter herself to please men: "I would break myself of habits that displeased you if you took the trouble to tell me of them" (2: 85). Although he often wonders "what in heaven's name would a man do with a creature like that, *for a wife!*," Clavering responds he would "not alter" Clarice (84). Clavering thus reveals that he, unlike Lionel, does not enjoy viewing women through the violent, patriarchal, transformative gaze. However, because Clarice is willing to "break herself" of her habits to please men, she is, in a sense, a participant in her own oppression. She ultimately chooses a violent, controlling man. And, when she secretly elopes with Lionel, Clarice dresses as Psyche, the beautiful mortal whom Venus had Cupid trick into falling in love with a contemptible man. Not coincidentally, Clarice is the only woman in the novel who

is directly represented as a victim of intimate violence.

Generally speaking, Norton's use of autonarration – the blurring of personal and political history with fiction – renders the fictional issue of intimate violence a political problem. It also constructs men's control over female identity as a form of representational violence against women that is as serious, recurrent and politicized as physical brutality. Norton suggests that those women who possess the power to shift and transform their own identities – symbolized through costumes, acting, gardening – possess the power to participate in a resistant identity politics. These characters enact identity transformations that resonate with Norton's strategies as a writer who conflates a number of identities in a single body. This makes Norton's own history of abuse difficult to detect in the novel; personal history is obscured by layers of references. When Norton's personal history *is* detectable in the narrative, the alignment of the author with Annie Morrison imbues this personal history with a kind of sexuality and profligacy that was unacceptable in polite society. It might seem, then, that *Woman's Reward* both covers abuse and renders the female form a highly disreputable object. However, Annie's identity transformations, especially when read together with those of Mary, signal resistance to the construction of female sexual identity as static and singular.

Conclusions

Caroline Norton's response to domestic violence deploys a rhetorical strategy

that, as the remainder of this dissertation will point out, is not unique among Victorian writers. In fact, just as Norton split her identity and the identities of other real and fictional individuals in order to comment on domestic violence and encourage social change, so many authors would construct characters who embody multiple identities – especially genders and classes – in order to critique Victorian social and legal attitudes towards abuse. While novels continued to relegate intimate violence to the margins of narrative in several ways, then, by emphasizing the shared experiences of individuals who differ with respect to gender and class, they use intimate violence as a trope through which to revise social hierarchies.

Admittedly, making abuse a trope risks diminishing its material significance; if intimate violence always gestures to something that it is not, the serious physical and political implications of abuse can become secondary to other issues. Nevertheless, using representations of abuse to explore issues of class, gender and identity – which are, to be sure, inextricably connected to the problem of intimate violence – also signals the myriad of possibilities for female identity.

III

The Spectacle of Disability and the Traumatic Return

in *Barchester Towers*

Barchester Towers provides more evidence of the ways in which the unfixing of female identity signals feminist resistance in Victorian texts about woman abuse. Like Norton's *Woman's Reward*, Anthony Trollope's *Barchester Towers* thematizes intimate violence, but resists describing it in any detail. However, while Norton makes the abuse plot conspicuous through layered and often veiled references to her own violent past, Trollope does so by portraying the body of a middle-class, battered woman – disabled by the abuse she has suffered – as paradoxically both on display and carefully concealed. Trollope thus uses the partial visibility of middle-class abuse (as I have been describing it in the previous three chapters) as a rhetorical tool, encouraging his readers to wonder how this woman sustained her injuries and to fixate on that which remains unsaid and unshown in relation to bourgeois domestic life. Madeline's conspicuous disability – disfigured legs that compromise her posture and her ability to walk – implies that she has suffered abuse, but the equally conspicuous manner in which she edits the presentation of her body underscores that this abuse is not entirely visible on her body, in the novel or in many aspects of Victorian culture. As Lawson and Shakinovsky argue, then, Madeline's body is a "textual mark" that signals taboo subjects that exist beyond the "proper bounds

of narrative interest” (41, 47).⁴³ In this chapter I argue that, in addition to gesturing towards the unspeakable aspects of bourgeois domestic life that the realist novel typically renders oblique, Madeline’s disability suggests that the liminality of middle-class abuse actually facilitates the rhetorical formation of middle-class women and their bodies as materially and psychologically diverse and mutable.

A number of critics have commented on the ways in which representations of disabled bodies function much like representations of abuse, rendering certain individuals simultaneously hyper- and non-visible at once. As Helena Michie points out in her discussion of Dickens’s novels and Ato Quayson suggests of contemporary representations,⁴⁴ because of their conspicuous physical abnormalities disabled bodies invite a plethora of interpretations even as they are rendered invisible insofar as they are stereotyped or considered unable to engage in certain “normal” activities (Michie, “Who is This in Pain?” 199; Quayson 2). The paradoxical (in)visibility of Madeline’s body is accordingly made acute by the fact that she is *both* abused and (consequently) permanently disabled. It is precisely this heightened contradiction that allows her to move beyond a one-dimensional figure of abuse to occupy a number of ambiguous yet powerful positions, and to influence the hierarchical and homosocial structures of Barchester.

⁴³Lawson and Shakinovsky suggest that such taboos include not just middle-class violence but also abject female sexuality; Madeline’s disabled body makes her an object of both desire and repulsion. (50)

⁴⁴According to Michie, the bodies Dickens’s heroines “occupy the space of the unrepresented, the unspeakable” but are often conspicuous because of “illness, scarring, and deformity” (199).

This chapter begins with a discussion of how Trollope constructs Madeline's body as central to the novel's ambiguous class divisions, and thus as central to an indictment of middle-class behaviour and aristocratic pretenses. It explores the codification of middle-class abuse and identifies how Madeline uses the fascination men have for her partially visible disabled body to invert these codes. The chapter concludes with a discussion of how Madeline's ability to affect men in this way offers an alternative vision of abuse and disability as empowering rather than exclusively traumatic. Although *Barchester Towers* constantly alludes to scenes of abuse and thus appears to be, in a sense, haunted by violence it cannot depict, the novel also suggests that the violated body of the middle-class woman can disrupt dominant ideology and social structures precisely because its half-effaced manifestations are so recurrent.

Ambiguous Class Status

Madeline's marriage to Paulo Neroni and the consequent evidence of abuse on her body are crucial to Trollope's exposure of middle-class hypocrisy. However, because Madeline often signals concealment and obfuscation, she does not appear to be a particularly major character in the novel. *Barchester Towers* is, on the surface, a novel about male competition. It begins when Bishop Grantly dies, establishing a major theme in the novel: the question of which man should occupy which position of power. While the majority of the men in the community believe that the Bishop's son, Archdeacon

Grantly, should become the new Bishop, the position goes instead to an outsider, Dr. Proudie, who is consistently influenced by his domineering wife. Thus the second major theme of the novel is established: the question of how much power women ought to possess. Bishop Proudie's chaplain, Mr. Slope, takes particular exception to Mrs. Proudie's influence, and the two battle for control over the Bishop's decisions throughout the novel. In particular they fight over who should have wardenship of Hiram's hospital. Mrs. Proudie wants it to go to Mr. Quiverful, who has a large family and is in need of the money it would provide. Slope, however, would like to see the wardenship remain with Mr. Harding. Having decided to court Harding's widowed daughter Eleanor Bold, Slope foresees the financial advantages of securing the wardenship for a man whom he hopes will one day become his father-in-law. But Slope is even less popular than Mrs. Proudie; he is an evangelical who seeks to alter the practices of the church. A social microcosm of Victorian England, *Barchester Towers* focuses on a competition or "moderate schism" (188) between Harding's camp of traditional clergymen and Slope's disruptive evangelism. Harding and Grantly accuse Slope of being abominably insulting and ambitious (255) when he preaches against "intoning in parish churches" (250), undermining their practices and, consequently, their religious authority. Dislike of Slope among the other clergymen becomes particularly pronounced when it becomes evident that he is attempting to woo Eleanor. When the St. Ewold's parsonship becomes available, Archdeacon Grantly summons Mr. Arabin from Oxford to fill the position and

to strengthen resistance against Slope.

The novel is thus overtly concerned with struggles regarding status and influence. After leaving her husband in Italy and returning to live with her family, the Stanhopes, Madeline becomes the subject of speculation and male interest, but does not appear to play a significant role in these problems. Yet from Trollope's first description of Madeline he links her battered body to an indictment of codified male violence that allows her to undermine the authority of the middle-class clergymen and to assume a very powerful position in the community. The class status of Madeline's abusive husband, Paulo Neroni, is highly ambiguous. He is "a man of no birth and no property, a mere captain in the pope's guard, one who had come up to Milan either simply as an adventurer or else as a spy" (74). Madeline's calling card bears a gold coronet, a sign of nobility, even though "Paulo Neroni had had not the faintest title to call himself a scion of even Italian nobility" (77). Nevertheless, Madeline's Italian husband calls himself a count and symbolically functions as a violent, upper-class counterpart to the novel's non-violent, middle-class Britons. Madeline "would often allude in a mysterious way to her married life and isolated state, and, pointing to her daughter, would call her the last of the blood of the emperors, thus referring Neroni's extraction to the old Roman family from which the worst of Caesars sprang" (77). In doing so, Madeline draws attention to the enigma of her past and emphasizes the relationship between her husband's "nobility" and his violence. The novel thus seems to caution

against cross-class relationships in a fashion similar to early seduction / murder broadsides like “Murder of Maria Marten by J.W. Corder” and uphold dominant ideology regarding class and abuse. Rather than condemn relationships between working-class women and middle-class men, however, *Barchester Towers* appears to warn against relationships between the middle and upper classes. The tumultuous cross-class marriage and the Neronis’ middle-class pretenses to aristocratic luxury can each be understood as a critique of class transgression. However, as a battered woman whose class status, like her husband’s, harbours ambiguities, Madeline also necessarily symptomizes the shared vulnerability of women who belong to each of the disparate social groups. Trollope’s choice to depict Madeline’s abuse as having occurred in an Italian and “aristocratic” family is therefore not merely a device designed to protect middle-class morality, but one that stresses the fact that women of all classes might be subject to the same levels of cruelty and suffering. In fact, as though to make certain that the middle-class family is not merely seen as a refuge from upper-class violence, Trollope infuses the novel with hints of bourgeois brutality. As D.A. Miller argues, for example, Trollope uses a number of war metaphors to describe how Harding, Grantly and Slope interact: “the mock-heroics of the war metaphor turn war into a war game, so diminished in its aspirations and consequences that no one sustains serious bodily harm” (13), but still conspicuous enough to imply an underlying willingness to become socially, if not physically, violent.

These hints of bourgeois misconduct are most obvious, however, in Slope’s

aggressive behaviour toward women. Not only does Slope woo Eleanor and Madeline during the same period of time, but his attempts to control women verge on violence. Slope “is gifted with a certain kind of pulpit eloquence, not likely indeed to be persuasive with men, but powerful with the softer sex” (27). This gift lies in the fact that “[i]n his sermons he deals greatly in denunciations, excites the minds of his weaker hearers with a not unpleasant terror, and leaves an impression on their minds that all mankind are in a perilous state, and all womankind too, except those who attend regularly the evening lectures in Baker Street” (27). Slope favours the violent God of the Old Testament over the merciful Christ of the New; he represents wrath and discipline and “[t]o him the mercies of our Saviour speak in vain” (28). Slope thus reflects patriarchy at its most paternalistic and narrow-minded. Yet his name connotes an even darker aspect of his personality. The narrator repeatedly refers to Slope as greasy. It is no coincidence that Trollope creates a relationship between a “greasy Slope” and Madeline, a woman who has fallen physically – her explanation of her injuries – and fallen socially in terms of her reputation. Slope embodies physical brutality and the social power to make women fall.⁴⁵ At the end of the novel, when Slope loses his struggle for power over the Bishop to the Bishop’s wife, he accordingly warns her, “remember this, madam, that you yourself may still have a fall” (543).

⁴⁵Edward Kelly points out that Trollope frequently gives his characters names that reflect their nature. Mr. Quiverful, for example, has too many children, and his name refers to “an overflowing nursery” (28).

Slope also exhibits behaviour with Eleanor that hints at middle-class intimate violence. During a walk, the narrator notes that Eleanor considers Slope's use of her Christian name to be a particularly unwelcome assumption of intimacy between them. When Eleanor asserts her uneasiness by reminding Slope that her name is Mrs. Bold, Slope playfully instructs her to "be not so cold" and leads her on a walk to a spot "nearly enveloped by shrubs" (355). At this private spot, Slope places his arm around Eleanor's waist, as an "outward demonstration of that affection of which he talked so much" (355). This act seems relatively innocent, until Trollope notes that "it may perhaps be presumed that same stamp of measures had been found to succeed with Olivia Proudie" (356). Given Slope's history of conflict and competition with Olivia's mother, the Bishop's wife – especially his warning that she too might have a fall – the "stamp" becomes a symbol of aggressive control. Eleanor accordingly jumps away and deals Slope "a box on the ear with such right good will, that it sounded among the trees like a miniature thunder clap" (356). I will return to this moment between Eleanor and Slope later in this chapter to discuss in detail Trollope's codification of bourgeois abuse. For now I merely want to emphasize that there are in fact several instances when Trollope suggests the existence of middle-class brutality in the novel and that, accordingly, Madeline's return to the middle-class from her abusive husband provides an ambiguous form of refuge.

Madeline's violent marriage and its class ambiguities provide our first clue that *Barchester Towers* is not merely about male competition, but also about the codification

of middle-class violence. This codification sustains the partial visibility of violence in the novel; brutality is always difficult to detect, but always also highly conspicuous in the context of Madeline's body, a constant reminder that abuse is not bound by class.

Disability and the Gaze

Madeline exposes middle-class behaviours that are not readily perceptible in Victorian culture, but ironically, she is able to further test the authority of Barchester's men because of what she conceals from the public. Madeline's deformed legs suggest that she has been injured in some manner, but it is never clear what exactly has occurred, and she works to sustain that ambiguity. Madeline claims that her legs have been destroyed in a particularly bad fall:

She had fallen, she said, in ascending a ruin, and had fatally injured the sinews of her knee; so fatally, that when she stood she lost eight inches of her accustomed height; so fatally, that when she essayed to move, she could only drag herself painfully along with protruded hip and extended foot in a manner less graceful than that of a hunchback. (74)

Nevertheless, "[s]tories were not slow to follow [Madeline], averring that she had been cruelly ill used by [her husband]" (74). As Madeline's brief discussion with Bishop Proudie at his wife's reception suggests, such stories were entirely hypothetical. When Madeline asks the Bishop if he knows her "sad story," he pretends that he does, but in

reality, “[t]he Bishop didn’t know a word of it. He knew, however, or thought he knew, that she couldn’t walk into a room like other people, so made the most of that” (98).

Madeline deliberately draws attention to the mysterious origins of her disability by portraying her body as simultaneously spectacular and hidden. Rather than walk, Madeline spends her days reclining on a sofa, even when she leaves her home:

She had still frequented the opera at Milan; she had still been seen occasionally in the saloons of the noblesse; she had caused herself to be carried in and out from her carriage, and that in such a manner as in no wise to disturb her charms, disarrange her dress, or expose her deformities. Her sister always accompanied her and a maid, a manservant also, and on state occasions, two. (75)

These types of visual cues – Madeline laying on a sofa, her conspicuous refusal to walk and her careful arrangement of her dress – emphasize her deformed legs and, at the same time, the fact that they cannot be seen.

Trollope’s description of Madeline’s dramatic entrance at Mrs. Proudie’s reception stresses that the Countess’s body is attractive precisely because of the paradox of visibility her disability appears to mandate:

And very becoming her dress was. It was white velvet, without any other garniture than rich white lace worked with pearls across her bosom, and the same round the armlets of her dress. Across her brow she wore a band of red velvet, on the centre of which shone a magnificent Cupid in mosaic, the tints of whose

wings were of the most lovely azure, and the colour of his cubby cheeks the clearest pink. On the one arm which her position required her to expose she wore three magnificent bracelets, each of different stones. Beneath her on the sofa, and over the cushion and head of it, was spread a crimson silk mantle or shawl, which went under her whole body and concealed her feet. (91)

Madeline's flesh is decorated and therefore made conspicuous with lace, pearls and bracelets, but her self-presentation is also carefully edited. Even as they draw attention to her body, Madeline's adornments deflect attention away from it. Most notably, while pearls accentuate her bosom and arms, a crimson silk shawl conceals her feet. The shawl itself signals a paradox of visibility; the party guests are prohibited from seeing Madeline's feet, but the very fact that the feet are concealed invites individuals to gaze upon them, to ask what it is they are prohibited from seeing, and to question why. Trollope's consistent depictions of men's interest in Madeline's body thus suggests that this attraction to that which is prohibited has an erotic dimension.

Madeline's spectacular concealment excites the curiosity of Barchester's men – especially Slope – which ultimately allows her to influence the community and play a role in the resolution of the novel's problems. Bishop Proudie is fascinated by Madeline's mysterious body before he even meets her. When his daughter Olivia informs him erroneously that Madeline has no legs and that Madeline “has to be kept lying down, and three or four men carry her everywhere” (88), the Bishop is “dying of curiosity about the

mysterious lady and her legs” (89). Emphasizing both the cryptic nature of Madeline’s body and identity – which here overlap – and the mistaken assumptions born out of such ambiguity, when the Bishop’s youngest daughter gives him Madeline’s name, he repeats it incorrectly as “La Signora Madeline Vicinironi” (89).

Slope’s fascination with Madeline has a direct relationship to the Signora’s disability. Slope defends his interest in Madeline, asserting, ““But she’s lame, Mrs. Proudie, and cannot move. Somebody must have waited upon her”” (106). Later, Mrs. Proudie further emphasizes the fact that Slope’s desire for the Signora involves the mystery surrounding Madeline’s her deformed body: “Do you think I have not heard of your kneelings at that creature’s feet – that is if she has any feet – and of your constant slobbering over her hand?” (543). In the chapter ironically titled “A Love Scene” Madeline’s awareness of the power the disabled body wields over men becomes apparent when Trollope refers to male desire with the clichéd subordinate position of being at a woman’s feet. Madeline “cared no more for Mr. Slope than she did for twenty others who had been at her feet before him” (270). Yet Madeline allows Slope to dote on her, aware of the power she obtains through his devotion: “It was necessary to her to have some man at her feet. It was the one customary excitement of her life. She delighted in the exercise of power which this gave her” (270). Madeline’s feet therefore acquire significance both materially – as body parts that heighten her mysteriousness and physical liminality – and metaphorically – as body parts that symbolize, by extension, her authority over those

who gaze upon her.

While a woman's choice to remain still – bound to a sofa, unable (or unwilling) to get away – may indicate her complicity in her own objectification, Madeline uses the *appearance* of her vulnerable position to fascinate the gaze and resist objectification. This process hinges on another contradiction regarding Madeline's body; not only is it both spectacularized and hidden, but it is both attractive and repellant:

Her eyes were long and large, and marvelously bright; might I venture to say, bright as Lucifer's, I should perhaps best express the depth of their brilliancy.

They were dreadful eyes to look at, such as would absolutely deter any man of quiet mind and easy spirit from attempting a passage of arms with such foes. (75)

Here Trollope likens Madeline to the fallen angel Lucifer. Whereas Lucifer falls from Heaven, Madeline falls socially – a disgrace symbolized by her supposed fall while ascending a ruin – when she leaves her husband in Italy. Lucifer's sin is his aspiration to usurp God's power. As evinced in the above passage, Madeline also represents a dangerous form of power to threaten the status quo, specifically the ability to deter those clergymen who gaze upon her and attempt to contain or objectify her. Like the angel that fell to become Satan, then, Madeline represents power that rivals sanctioned, distinctly patriarchal and religious authority. In this way, she departs from the conduct expected of a disabled woman as much as she departs from the conduct expected of a wife. Although Madeline is separated from her husband, as a technically married woman under coverture

she does not have the freedoms of a single woman or widow. Her flirtations with Slope and Arabin – especially her willingness to see Slope privately – signify her rejection of her expected role in polite society. The threat Madeline poses through this rejection *seems* to be tempered by her disability. As a disabled woman she is marked as weaker, more dependent and less autonomous than a regular wife (Holmes 187). Yet Madeline uses the allure of her victimized body to subvert rules regarding women's roles; she is able to manipulate the community and influence political processes because her body makes her appear so useless and benign.

Trollope portrays Madeline as capable of resisting objectification not only by likening her eyes to Lucifer's, but also by constructing her as able to symbolically cripple those who gaze upon her body just as that body itself has been crippled. Merging Christian and Pagan imagery, Trollope depicts Madeline as Medusa-like as she freezes all eyes on her body, making it impossible to look away and rendering Mrs. Proudie's guests as still as she is: "Dressed as she was, so beautiful and yet so motionless...it was impossible that either man or woman should do other than look at her" (92). Like Medusa, Madeline is alluring and repulsive at once.⁴⁶ Just as Medusa's power to turn men to stone has been read by Freud as symbolic of a powerful, masculinized and therefore repulsive woman's ability to arouse men (274), Madeline's ability to "cripple" her

⁴⁶Lawson and Shakinovsky similarly read Madeline's body as both attractive and repulsive, suggesting that members of the Barchester community are both drawn to and disgusted by that which is hidden underneath Madeline's clothes (50).

onlookers is associated with the troubling sexual attractiveness of her disabled body. Lawson and Shakinovsky suggest that Madeline's body signals the conspicuous covering up of not only violence but also the sexual taboos she embodies as a desirable woman of ill-repute (49). It seems logical to assume, then, as Cindy LaCom does, that Trollope's construction of Madeline's body is his way of coding her body as sexually deviant (192), or as Jane Nardin does, that Madeline's "unrestrained sexuality" is what caused her to get "maimed and knocked up and deserted" (391). These critics are right to suggest that the disabled woman's body was frequently used to negotiate moral sexual standards during the Victorian period. However, the disabled woman's sexuality could also signify female power from within this framework.⁴⁷

Madeline transforms the power of the viewing subjects by appropriating the status of the injured female object. The novel's allusions to Lucifer and Medusa accordingly symbolize that Madeline is capable of both resisting objectification and capable of occupying a number of identity positions. In fact, Madeline's overdetermination stresses the impossibility of fixing her identity and status. In this way, Madeline plays with subjugation; she borrows the meanings that the clergymen have associated with her body – lack, helplessness and by extension, desirability – by visually arresting the male

⁴⁷Helena Michie points out, for example, that in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* the crippled Jenny Wren is able to transform her disability into "narrative power" (200). Martha Stoddard Holmes sees Jenny as powerful only insofar as she is able to locate a "safe space for the articulation of female sexuality" – safe because as a disabled child, Jenny "cannot" have sex, and can therefore be sexually attractive without being threatening in a society that understood disability through discourses of contamination (10).

audience that finds the mystery of her past, identity and physicality so attractive.

Madeline also “cripples” Slope socially through his interest in her liminally visible body. Having positioned the Chaplain at her feet, Madeline takes advantage of Slope’s desire for her disruptive physicality, and through several intimate conversations learns that he is an extraordinary hypocrite. She then reveals to the community that Slope wooed both herself and Eleanor Bold during the same period, chiding Slope with the verse “It’s gude to be off with the old love – Mr. Slope, Before you are on with the new” (500). Madeline thus further compromises her own reputation in order to ruin the Chaplain’s career: “She little recked how those who heard her would, in their own imaginations, fill up the little history of Mr. Slope’s first love. She little cared that some among them might attribute to her the honour of his earlier admiration” (501). This act suggests that Madeline refuses to consider herself vulnerable to the social rules regarding female behaviour, or rather that, because Slope has more to lose and because his crimes are more severe, her already tenuous respectability is worth forfeiting. Madeline stresses the severity of Slope’s indiscretion by hinting at violence. She asks Slope to describe his proposal to Eleanor: “Tell us with what words she accepted you. Was it with a simple ‘yes,’ or with two ‘no no’s,’ which make an affirmative? or did silence give consent?” (499). Madeline thus implies Slope’s willingness to force himself on Eleanor, recalling the liberties he took earlier in the novel with Eleanor and her defensive slap, which also in itself implied the violence of Slope’s admiration.

Madeline thus makes Slope a spectacle and an object, leaving him “red as a carbuncle and mute as a fish; grinning just sufficiently to show his teeth; an object of pity” (500). She accordingly violates Slope as she herself has been both physically, by her husband, and socially, through the objectifying “admiration” and interest of the Barchester community (which she ultimately uses to her advantage). In doing so, Madeline sets off a chain of events that accomplish the aims of Harding, Grantly, Arabin and even Mrs. Proudie, and asserts her power in the community. As a result of Slope’s exposure, Mrs. Proudie has an excuse to have the Chaplain dismissed, Eleanor pleases her father by ending the friendship and the clergymen no longer have to worry about Slope’s evangelical influence. Quiverful is accordingly granted wardenship of Hiram’s, which he desperately needs. Yet Harding does not suffer, not only because his daughter is a wealthy widow, but also because her future husband – Arabin – obtains the Deanship of Barchester Cathedral instead of Slope.

Significantly, Madeline is also responsible for the relationship between Eleanor and Arabin. Although her role in encouraging the relationship appears to be an effort to prevent Slope from gaining more power in the community, Madeline’s treatment of Arabin can also be read as a genuinely benevolent gesture made because Arabin does not attempt to objectify Madeline in the way that other characters in the novel do. Arabin’s gaze “is one of wonder” at Madeline’s speech and the audacious character it reveals, “and not of admiration” at her body (408). Nevertheless, Madeline uses her

conspicuously disabled body to match-make and in turn manipulate the power hierarchies of the community. In an effort to make Eleanor see how Arabin admires her, Madeline exclaims to the widow, "What would I not give to be loved in such a way by such a man, that is, if I were an object fit for any man to love!"(491). She thus coyly indicates her status as, in Slope's words, "a helpless hopeless cripple" who is "unfitted to be chosen as the wife of any man who wanted a useful mate" (269), to disarm the threat Eleanor imagines she poses to the union.

The Limits of Female Power

Inasmuch as it disrupts Slope's plans and position a woman's body as central to the organization of the Church, however, Madeline's part in resolving the political and romantic problems of the text merely affirms one form of patriarchal power over another. The novel is extremely ambivalent about women's roles in the reordering of social hierarchies. Although Madeline does manipulate Slope, she does so to restore an even more traditional, if less overtly violent, form of patriarchal authority exemplified by Harding's non-evangelical Anglicanism.

In fact, the novel frequently points out the limits of female power, particularly in terms of its disruption of male authority. Descriptions of Mrs. Proudie exemplify this anxiety about women taking on men's roles:

I cannot think that with all her virtues she adds much to her husband's happiness.

The truth is that in matters domestic she rules supreme over her titular lord, and rules with a rod of iron. Nor is this all. Things domestic Dr. Proudie might have abandoned to her, if not voluntarily, yet willingly. But Mrs. Proudie is not satisfied with such home dominion, and stretches her power over all his movements and will not even abstain from things spiritual. In fact, the bishop is henpecked. (22)

In contrast to Mrs. Grantly, who “knows what should be the limits of a woman’s rule”(22), Mrs. Proudie rules with the “iron rod” and transgresses beyond the boundaries of proper female domestic authority. The image of the rod signifies masculine, phallic brutality, a symbol I explore in detail in Chapter Four as a marker of domestic violence and control. Apparently, Mrs. Proudie’s symbolic wielding of the rod extends female power too far, and she is accordingly the target of much criticism and ridicule in the novel.

Mrs. Proudie’s aspirations to power and authority are therefore constructed as less acceptable than Madeline’s, which depend on feminine wiles and the attractiveness of her body. The novel stages a competition between the women’s distinct management styles which humiliates the Bishop’s wife. Both women exert power beyond the realm of the domestic, but Trollope appears to favour Madeline, who influences the organization of the male homosocial world through feminine allure, and thus without asserting too much overt or masculinized power, over Mrs. Proudie, who has “almost more than feminine

vigour” (257). Mrs. Proudie envies Madeline’s influence; she refers to Madeline as a “painted Jezebel” (106) and resents her ability to command crowds (105). However, at Mrs. Proudie’s reception, Madeline symbolically defeats her rival. Bertie Stanhope decides to move Madeline’s sofa because it was “so placed that those who were behind it found great difficulty in getting out” (95). The placement of the sofa corresponds with the interest the guests take in Madeline; she is, like the sofa, capable of trapping those who come near her. In fact, the sofa in this scene functions as a symbolic extension of Madeline herself. When Bertie moves the sofa, it unexpectedly moves into the centre of the room and Mrs. Proudie’s dress catches in its wheel:

...unfortunately the castor of the sofa caught itself on her lace train, and carried away there is no saying how much of her garniture. Gathers were heard to go, stitches to crack, plaits to fall open, flounces were seen to fall, and breadths to expose themselves; – a long ruin of rent lace disfigured the carpet, and still clung to the vile wheel on which the sofa moved. (95).

Here Mrs. Proudie momentarily resembles her female rival. Her clothing literally tears open and falls, rendering her body on display. Yet Mrs. Proudie’s body is not exposed; the torn fabric merely hints at the possibility of exposure and thus draws attention to the flesh that the clothing hides. In this state of half-undress, Mrs. Proudie temporarily – if unwittingly – possesses the power Madeline wields with her body. Bertie immediately “rushed over to the sofa, and threw himself on one knee before the offended lady” (96),

placing himself at the leg, if not the foot, of a woman whose corporeality has suddenly become a spectacle. Significantly, this all happens when the leg of the sofa – an extension of Madeline – literally come into contact with Mrs. Proudie (96).

Mrs. Proudie cannot embrace this more stereotypically feminine – although more scandalous – mode of power that Madeline exhibits. Although both women work towards the same end of divesting Slope of power, Madeline succeeds because she takes advantage of the interest people take in her corporeality, capitalizing on the heightened feminine weakness of the disabled and the allure of the partially obscured, rather than openly adopting masculine assertiveness. Mrs. Proudie is horrified by interest in her body and screams at Bertie to unhand her dress. Madeline, the clear victor, laughs as though to mock Mrs. Proudie's inability to occupy her powerful position (97).

The novel thus clearly complicates any sense that women can occupy typically male power positions by constructing social and political power as more readily available to women whose behaviour corresponds with dominant gender ideology. Although the power Madeline accrues derives from her non-normative conduct as a woman who refuses to act as if shamed by her misfortunes, it is nevertheless dependent on her ability to appear submissive to hegemonic codes. Madeline accordingly embodies yet another contradiction. As the mysterious nature of Madeline's abuse suggests, the Signora embodies a multiplicity of possibilities regarding the significance of her physicality and status. She is not merely a traumatized victim, and not just a castrating Medusa figure,

but a woman capable of assuming several different fantasies in order to manipulate the world around her. However, Madeline's powers are themselves possible because of the male gaze. As Miller argues:

The signora's siren act is also a willing assumption of the male power fantasies that have been literally pounded into her. Made by male violence to figure as the castrated woman, she returns the favor by playing to the hilt the role's other face: the castrating woman... (142)

Female influence thus remains inevitably tied to – and dependent on – the dominant masculine institutions and desires, and the fact that Madeline can translate disability into desire is nevertheless undercut by the fact that, even if she embraces her role as alluring, mysterious victim, she risks subjugation.⁴⁸

Traumatized Returns and Redress

As though unable to reconcile its various contradictions regarding female power,

⁴⁸There also remains the problem of Madeline's erasure from the novel and the community. Unlike Eleanor, who is ultimately contained in a marriage that resolves a major plot of the novel, Madeline leaves Barchester. We do not know where she goes or how she lives; we only know that she leaves. Lawson and Shakinovsky argue that "Trollope makes Neroni the site of containment and defilement and solves the problem by having her cast out" (43). In other words, she contaminates the community, so she must be sent away. Madeline thus corresponds to what Martha Stoddard Holmes identifies as a Victorian trend in representing disabled women. According to Holmes, women with disabilities are often used to support the marriage plots of other women, but are rarely afforded opportunities of their own to marry or have children because they were frequently figures of moral and physical contamination (7). Rather than enter into marriages, disabled women often disappear from novels when they end, because the moral crises they help other women to negotiate have been resolved (6). Madeline must leave Barchester in the end, but her departure – and the departures of many disabled women from Victorian novels, one could argue – also connotes a future as unknowable as her past; she becomes a perpetual question mark.

Barchester Towers alludes repeatedly to the abuse of women, but resists directly depicting violence. These references – Slope’s evangelical emphasis on wrath combined with his ability to effect women, Slope’s overly familiar advances, Harding’s and Grantly’s attempts to control Eleanor and constant references to the mystery surrounding Madeline’s injuries – all suggest that the novel is itself haunted by that which it does not express. This condition, I argue, can perhaps best understood through trauma theory.

The discourse of trauma seems highly appropriate for explaining why Victorian novels avoid depicting intimate violence among the middle classes: novels are caught between the desire to disclose and the inability to fully articulate painful experiences. As trauma theorists from Sigmund Freud to contemporary writers such as Cathy Caruth, Jill Matus and Juliet Mitchell point out, trauma is marked by the sufferer’s inability to narrate or make sense of an event in spite of her compulsive desire to do so. As Caruth (following Freud) puts it, rather than possess a memory of the experience, the sufferer is in essence possessed by the memory, trapped in a perpetual cycle that replays a version of the experience again and again, but without being able to understand it, narrate it, or move past it (5).

This cycle emerges consistently in Victorian novels about domestic violence. Women who experience abuse are rarely able to speak about it and, therefore, they are destined to relive their experiences of violence through events that are evocative of but not identical to the painful brutality they have suffered. Lawson and Shakinovsky

accordingly argue that the obfuscation of middle-class domestic violence in the Victorian novel often gestures towards the ways in which the dysfunctional bourgeois home had become an unspeakable source of trauma for many women (17): the *signs* of middle-class abuse that permeate many novels remind us that “the subject who has experienced trauma is unable to access it or forget it, so the subject carries an impossible history within” (18). In fact, these painful histories are rarely narrated at all. Instead, past abuse is reiterated through events that are not immediately recognizable as violent. For example, in Anne Brontë’s *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* (1848), Helen Graham never narrates what the reader is led to assume is her history of physical abuse, but her detailed diary compulsively returns to symbolically violent moments, like her husband’s destruction of her art tools. The corporeal violence is always only hinted at, never fully narrated or addressed. As a result, Helen cannot escape her past and is forced to perpetually revisit it through her memoirs. In Wilkie Collins’s *Man and Wife* (1877) Hester Deathridge actually becomes mute. But like Helen, she compulsively revisits signs of her painful past; she clings to a diary that refers to but never fully reveals the details of her abuse, predicts another woman’s violent marriage and even lives in the same house as an abusive husband. Hester cannot attribute meaning to her violent experiences because she cannot speak of them or give them narrative coherence. They continue to possess her and to control her actions. In both cases, the battered woman is portrayed as unable to escape her containment as the traumatized victim. She remains a symbol of incoherence and

compulsion that reflects her effacement from Victorian culture.

I agree with Lawson and Shakinovsky that the Victorian novel does suggest symptoms of women's trauma as it marginalizes middle-class abuse. However, the socially and politically subversive nature of the battered woman's body that I discuss throughout this dissertation is not always easily reconcilable with the emotional and psychological *dysfunctions* associated with trauma or victimization. Rather, it suggests that battered women were highly capable of engaging Victorian politics and law, not in spite of, but through a re-articulation of their victimized positions, as though novels about abuse are themselves traumatized by intimate violence.

In *Barchester Towers*, for example, Trollope does more than construct a female victim of abuse as traumatized. Rather, he constructs his novel itself as traumatized by the violence it cannot openly depict. As Geoffrey Hartman points out, "the knowledge stored by the traumatized subject is inaccessible to ordinary memory but signals its presence in the form of intrusive return" (537). That is, events too horrible to narrate or understand become the stuff of "flashbacks" that are difficult to recognize as having anything to do with their origins (537). But it is the narrator of *Barchester Towers*, not the battered woman, who consistently reiterates references to abuse, which suggests that the novel as a whole is traumatized and haunted by those events that it cannot, as a predominantly middle-class form of entertainment, express. Returns are not part of the Madeline's experience, but part of the psychology of the novel itself, as though the story,

and not the woman, is traumatized. This way of re-articulating female victimization, I will argue, recasts trauma itself as a means of codifying and thus negotiating issues that are otherwise unspeakable and ostensibly unresolvable.

The most obvious example of this sort of traumatic symptom in *Barchester Towers* appears to be Eleanor's violent encounter with Slope. Yet as I will argue, this return to intimate violence goes beyond merely haunting the text with an issue it cannot fully explore. In this scene Eleanor's body becomes almost interchangeable with Madeline's, and Slope's advances gesture towards the violence of Madeline's husband. Because Eleanor reacts and defends herself against Slope's coercion, the encounter revises the abuse we assume Madeline has suffered. Through this scene Trollope is able to address and respond to middle-class abuse without expressing it clearly. He thus shows how a traumatized text can perform the work of negotiating the problem it dare not express. Trauma, in this case, is therefore more than a frustrated, static position occupied by a psyche unable to get past a troubling experience; it is a process of revisiting and subtly altering history and positing a different kind of future.

Throughout the novel, references to Eleanor often constitute negotiations of the violence Madeline has endured. Eleanor and Madeline appear to represent two seemingly opposite types of femininity. While Eleanor remains pious and honest, Madeline is highly sexualized and manipulative. Dan Wiseman suggests that Eleanor "fulfills the reader's and Barchester's shared notion of what it means to be a 'natural' woman. She is pious,

motherly, chaste, devoted to her lost husband, and above all a suitable mate for the novel's conventional hero, Mr. Arabin”

(<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~trollope/results.html>). Madeline, on the other hand, “serves to accentuate Eleanor’s goodness by providing a model of everything Eleanor is not: overtly sexual, amoral, and unchaste.” Unlike Madeline, who exercises a great deal of autonomy, Eleanor is constructed as childish and in need of male guidance. Whereas Madeline is still and unmoving – in terms of her injured legs and her independent thought – Trollope describes Eleanor, after her marriage to Arabin, as pliable, like ivy that shapes itself according to whatever supports it:

When the ivy has found its tower, when the delicate creeper has found its strong wall, we know how the parasite plants grow and prosper. They were not created to stretch forth their branches alone, and endure without protection the summer’s sun and winter’s storm. Alone they but spread themselves on the ground, and cower unseen in the dingy shade. But when they have found their firm supporters, how wonderful is their beauty; how all pervading and victorious! (525)

Nardin accordingly suggests that, “in the beginning Eleanor is like ivy – clinging to her [first] husband’s faults like ivy does to imperfections in an oak” but later “mistakenly thinks she can be the oak” when she decides to befriend Slope against her father’s wishes (384). Although Eleanor ultimately takes on some active tendencies, she cannot be the oak; the moral of her story is that to embrace ideal femininity she must shape herself

according to the ideals of Harding and his friends. She ultimately realizes that her father was right about Slope, that she should never have befriended him and that she ought to marry Arabin.

Yet Madeline and Eleanor have more in common than it seems. In fact, they share a connection that allows depictions of Eleanor to work through the violence to which Madeline more obviously alludes. Like Madeline, Eleanor is more than a “delicate creeper.” Slope finds both women attractive and woos them both at the same time. Both women – Madeline more obviously – suffer from a degree of violence. Just as Madeline has presumably suffered her husband’s abuse – which is replayed in the text through her relationship to the evangelical Slope – Eleanor endures the Chaplain’s violent love making. But Eleanor is able to stand up to Slope. When Eleanor hits Slope, the Chaplain immediately conflates her with Madeline in his mind. His anger with Eleanor quickly translates into a frustrated sense of debasement that he links to his relationship with Madeline. Slope then feels an overwhelming urge to preach – his method of exercising wrath and exerting control – not to Madeline, but “*against* Mrs. Bold” (357, emphasis mine). Moreover, the sense of public shame that Slope feels following Eleanor’s “box” – “he conceived himself to be lowered in his dignity” (355) and “fancied everyone who looked at him would be able to see on his face the traces of what he had endured” (356) – foreshadows the actual public shame he later faces when Madeline reveals the chaplain’s hypocrisy to Mrs. Proudie.

This encounter is not, then, a mere return or flashback to a traumatic moment; Eleanor fights back and shames her aggressor. Eleanor thus achieves directly with her hand what Madeline achieves indirectly with her self-display – the reversal of a typical power relationship – insofar as she humiliates a man who symbolizes a particularly violent form of patriarchal authority. Moreover, as the encounter also conflates two disparate constructions of femininity – the hypersexualized, amoral countess and the pious middle-class widow – it tests the notion that women’s characters necessarily take binary forms. Eleanor, when threatened, is as capable as Madeline of undoing authoritative masculinity. In fact, in the plot involving Eleanor, Trollope ameliorates Madeline’s character.⁴⁹ When Eleanor strikes Slope the narrator imagines that the reader will assume that the widow “has no idea of the dignity of matron” because “at one moment she is romping with young Stanhope; then she is making eyes at Mr. Arabin; anon, she comes to fisticuffs with a third lover; and all before she is yet a widow of two year’s standing” (356). The narrator assumes that the reader will “lay down the book in disgust,” and decide that “the heroine is unworthy of sympathy” (356). He himself admits that “she derogated from her dignity” and suggests that perhaps if she had “lived longer under the rule of a husband, she might, perhaps, have saved herself from this great fault” (356). But Eleanor “was too keen in the feeling of independence, a feeling dangerous for

⁴⁹Although, as Lawson and Shakinovsky observe, Trollope does not describe even Madeline’s injuries with the same degree of sympathy with which he describes Eleanor throughout the novel (47).

a young woman” (356). Of course, Trollope is using sarcasm here to stress the absurdity of criticizing Eleanor’s character based on her behaviour with Slope. Since his description of Eleanor here echoes the community’s feelings towards Madeline, who is disparaged because of rumours of her un-lady-like behaviour and numerous romantic conquests, it seems that he is also stressing the absurdity of criticizing Madeline’s character. This return to Madeline’s abuse, then, does much more than signal a traumatized inability to make sense of middle-class intimate violence; it reverses a power relationship and conflates female types, thus giving obfuscated abuse coherent and subversive meaning.

Conclusions

By withholding all scenes of actual wife-beating from the narrative, by avoiding having Madeline speak openly about her abuse, and by refusing to grant the abusive event any kind of narrative specificity while making conspicuous Madeline’s disabled body, Trollope explores the multiplicity of identities women are capable of encompassing as they become influential participants in public life. The conspicuous confusion surrounding Madeline’s injuries emphasizes the cryptic nature of the battered female body – especially the battered middle-class female body – in Victorian fiction and

culture, and the fact that we cannot understand what we cannot see.⁵⁰ It therefore raises a number possibilities for what lies beneath the codes of Trollope's novel and Madeline's very carefully edited presentation of herself, and suggests that female identity is multi-faceted rather than singularly tied to victimization.

Barchester Towers constructs the paradox of the battered woman's visibility as capable of reshaping power structures. Madeline's injuries allow her to reverse an objectifying gaze and subvert the power of an ambitious, hypocritical clergyman who, at times, exhibits physical and social brutality. Of course, Trollope's treatment of domestic violence is troubling; wife abuse does not signify female empowerment. If his fiction creates a space where temporarily we can refuse to read abuse exclusively in terms of trauma and identify its capacity to effect reform, it is nevertheless haunted by the realities – the pain – of the world out of which it was written. At the same time, however, *Barchester Towers* reflects this changing world insofar it constructs the battered woman as a politically inscribed entity representative of shifts in female power.

⁵⁰The "cryptic" nature of the middle-class battered woman's body was sustained by nineteenth-century marriage and divorce legislation. See page 8 of the introduction.

IV

Sensational Sympathy in *The Woman in White*

This dissertation has looked at the ways in which representations of intimate violence tend to subvert dominant hierarchies that are rationalized by the idea that class dictates morality. I have been arguing that street literature and novels both position the battered woman as a figure of liminality that can deconstruct class taxonomies. Generally speaking, my analysis has addressed the implications of either exposing or artfully displaying abused bodies. In this chapter, I shift my attention towards the effects of these bodies on those people who encounter them. Significantly, the figure of the battered woman participated in the formation of middle-class male identity and subjectivity in the nineteenth century. In *Barchester Towers*, for example, Madeline Neroni's body facilitates a critique of Slope's brutal puritanism, while in *Woman's Reward* Mary Dupré and Annie Morrison undermine Lionel's decadent, Byronic Toryism. Focusing largely on Wilkie Collins's novel *The Woman in White*, I argue in this chapter that Victorian sensation's obfuscation of abuse extends to other kinds of erasure, notably the socially and politically radical erasure of the affective distance between victims and perpetrators. Although Collins's novel is somewhat ambivalent in its attitude towards women's rights (Heller 9), its tendency to displace explicit scenes of abuse onto more benign events excites psychic exchanges between its villains and heroines that undermine male privilege on multiple levels. Most novels that thematize intimate violence also explore

the reception of abuse by its “witnesses” and thus provide considerable insight into the relationship between viewers and victims.⁵¹ *The Woman in White* uses the partial visibility of woman abuse to inspire in his characters a momentary compulsion to feel for and like the victims of abuse, a variety of sympathy that temporarily disrupts male authority in terms of marriage, class, gender and even authorship.

Contemporary criticism on *The Woman in White* tends to focus on either its status as one of the first sensation novels or on the novel’s relation to feminism.⁵² Karen Gindele and Michael Loesberg, for example, explore the ways in which these sensational elements use shocking exposures to create physical feelings in their readers and thus translate bodily reactions into political responses (Gindele 2, Loesberg 130). Similarly, Ann Cvetkovich, D.A. Miller and Jenny Bourne Taylor all explore how sensations negotiate the ambiguities of “natural” and “unnatural” phenomena.⁵³ Addressing the

⁵¹I put the term “witnesses” in quotation marks because there are rarely any actual witnesses to intimate violence in Victorian fiction, but instead characters who either suspect abuse or who witness events that resonate with abuses of which they are not consciously aware.

⁵²Maria Bachman and Don Richard Cox, for example, look at the ways in which Collins works to “reshape and expand the contours of nineteenth-century literary realism” by infusing his texts with both realistic and sensational elements (xvi).

⁵³In her reading of *The Woman in White* Cvetkovich suggests that “one of the social functions of sensation is to make events seem arbitrary, change seem miraculous and extraordinary to obscure the nature of social determinism” (95). Miller stresses the fact that although sensation is often thought to “occupy a natural site of meaning,” sensation novels like *The Woman in White* encourage us to question the meanings associated with physical and emotional feeling (147). Taylor sees *The Woman in White* as “a complex investigation of the interaction of psychic and social forces; an exploration of the ways in which social identities are formed by and within particular frameworks of perception, which in turn determine and are determined by social and sexual hierarchies”(99).

question of the novel's feminism, Tromp and Surridge focus on the ways in which the novel draws on nineteenth-century legal discourse to foreground and support women's issues (*The Private Rod* 8; *Bleak Houses* 141), whereas Tamar Heller suggests that Collins is much more ambivalent in his attitude towards women, pointing out that "any of [Collins's] most feminist pieces end with the containment of women and reinforce the division between male labor and female domesticity" (8). I argue that Collins's treatment of sensations and his treatment of women's rights are deeply connected. I begin by identifying a phenomenon I refer to as "sensational sympathy," an exchange of physical feelings and emotions that occurs between abusive men and female victims during the novel's most sensational moments. Significantly, I depart from typical discussions of sensation fiction and argue that its most effective scenes disguise and occlude events and revelations rather expose them. In such scenes, in which male figures confront victims whose histories remain obscure, sensational sympathy disrupts men's control over representation, itself often violent. I conclude that withholding and disguising prove to be effective tools for Collins to express his feminist concerns and, within the novel, for female characters to practice resistance.

Sensational Sympathy and Partially Visible Intimate Violence

Two main interpretive problems attach to my reading of this novel. One involves

the difficulty of investigating the impact of intimate violence on authoritative men when direct representations of abuse are withheld from the text. Because the novel focuses on the domestic trials of an upper middle-class couple, its depictions of abuse are never explicit, but rather hinted at through events that appear to have little or nothing to do with intimate violence. The most significant sensations felt by characters in the novel, then – those pangs of sympathy that threaten male authority by causing them to feel like victimized women – occur in the absence of violence. When these sensations are felt, though, the non-narratable event becomes inscribed on the bodies and psyches of powerful and often violent men, and sensational sympathy begins to cause a temporary reversal of roles between victims and perpetrators.

The other major interpretive problem is that sympathy is an unstable mode of identification infused with ambivalent class and gender politics. As Jonathon Loesberg suggests, Victorian sympathy reflects anxieties about “a fear of a general loss of social identity [that results from] the merging of the classes” (117). Victorian understandings of sympathy derived from an earlier eighteenth-century belief that social problems could be overcome through fellow-feelings.⁵⁴ Yet because sympathy involves responding to the

⁵⁴Benjamin Daffron similarly locates sympathy as “a solution to social disintegration” in mid-eighteenth-century culture (2). The hope that experiencing the feelings of others as one’s own might help to overcome troubling social differences was central to Victorian reform. Mary Lenard’s *Preaching Pity* describes in detail the ways in which authors like Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, Elizabeth Gaskell, Frances Trollope, and Charles Dickens appealed to readers’ sympathies to encourage the re-evaluation of social

suffering of others and thus potentially experiencing this painful sensation, it was not always considered to be a positive phenomenon in nineteenth-century culture. As Audrey Jaffe points out, during the Victorian era, sympathy was understood as particularly threatening to middle-class identity (5), giving rise to a plethora of conflicting intense emotions. Sympathy, for example, readily couples with disgust, revulsion and fear. As Jaffe demonstrates, the experience of walking by homeless people limits sympathy and evokes anxieties about protecting one's social position.⁵⁵ In this instance, the viewer imagines herself in the place of the sufferer and internalizes that victim status as a subject under threat of actual suffering. No real vision of reciprocity or mutuality emerges in this model of sympathy, however, since identification immediately leads to a re-articulation of binaries whereby the spectator considers a threatening reversal in positions. Collins similarly portrays men's sympathy for battered women as both a benevolent sentiment and as an anxiety-inducing threat to male authoritative identity and privilege. This chapter explores how the ambivalence of sympathy, combined with the obfuscation and

hierarchies (5). This "sentimentalist social reform," as Lenard calls it, transformed the emotionality associated with Victorian women into a culturally powerful influence (5) Ellen Argyros likewise points out in her study of George Eliot's novels that evoking sympathetic responses from Victorian readers always signaled major shifts in social power relationships (2).

⁵⁵Jaffe draws on Kaja Silverman's account of encountering a beggar to exemplify how sympathy can threaten social stability: "The act of looking, in [Silverman's] account, fills the spectator with anxiety of bodily contagion, the fear of inhabiting the beggar's place. That anxiety is warded off by imagining a self victimized by the mere sight of a person without a home." (5)

displacement of the abuse that excites this sympathy, upsets men's authority as not only husbands and law-enforcers, but also speakers, narrators and representers – particularly representers of women's experiences.

Since there are no scenes of actual violence in *The Woman in White*, the sympathetic exchange emerges out of moments that imply abuse rather than those that make it obvious. This fact complicates much scholarship on the novel and the genre to which it belongs. *The Woman in White* is widely known as one of the first – if not *the* first – sensation novels. Sensation fiction tends to describe intense physical and emotional responses in its characters – and, in turn, to evoke affective responses from its readers – after relieving prolonged suspense with shocking revelations. As a genre dependent on the body, feeling and the exposure of closely guarded secrets, sensation fiction frequently offers unique portraits of the relationship among intimate violence, representation and identity. The genre is therefore often praised by critics for its tendency to expose domestic violence – particularly among the upper classes – in ways that most realist fiction does not.⁵⁶ However, while sensation may make intimate violence more accessible than other literary genres of the period, it was still remarkably reticent when compared to the kinds of explicit representations of abuse available in street literature.

⁵⁶ Marlene Tromp, for example, refers to the popularity of the genre in the 1850s as “a marker of a liminal moment, the pivot on which a cultural shift occurred, generating a kind of chaos in understanding and necessitating new dialogues about violence and married life” (5).

Sensation novels frequently focus on wife abuse in ways in that realist fiction does not.⁵⁷ Rather than ignore or merely hint at battery, authors of sensation fiction often depend on abuse as a plot device. Typically, as Cvetkovich points out, “sensational events often turn on the rendering visible of what remains hidden or mysterious, and their affecting power arises from the satisfaction or thrill of seeing” (24). This thrill of seeing has been read as uniquely political. Marlene Tromp, for example, reads the exposure of marital violence in sensation as a marker of a broad shift in domestic ideology, particularly in terms of resistance towards the unjust treatment of wives (5).⁵⁸

Novels like *The Woman in White*, *Man and Wife* and *A Woman Hater* may refer to scenes of intimate violence, or even describe women’s injuries, but the details of serious assaults are most often left out of the sensation novel’s narrative. Rather, intimate violence is displaced onto seemingly non-violent events and thus resembles what I refer to in Chapter Three as a textual traumatic return. In a genre notorious for exposure and scandal, any obvious gaps in narration appear self-conscious and meaningful.

Accordingly, the most sensational moments in *The Woman in White* – the moments that

⁵⁷As Bachman and Cox have noted, the typical novelistic preface to Collins almost invariably “provides a consistent and principled blueprint of his aesthetic vision - a commitment to reshape and expand the contours of nineteenth-century literary realism” (xvi).

⁵⁸Due to the visibility afforded by sensation, Tromp argues, its depictions of abuse constituted “early portraits of resistance and were profoundly popular in a culture believed to be silent on [marital violence]” (6).

most blatantly inspire severe physical and emotional disturbances in male characters – are not those that *expose* secret marital violence, but those that *displace* it onto other, more benign events. These sensational moments, moreover, cause violent men to feel like abused women – to experience fear, terror and nervousness – and thus appear to dissolve a number of social, gender and class differences.

This exchange – or “sensational sympathy,” as I will refer to it throughout this chapter – is an undesirable phenomenon for the men who experience it because it marks a destabilization of identity that disrupts their authority over various forms of representation. *The Woman in White* begins with Walter Hartright giving an account of how he saves the life of Professor Pesca, an Italian political refugee. In return, Pesca secures Walter a job as a drawing master to Laura Fairlie and her half-sister Marian Halcombe, nieces to Frederic Fairlie, a nervous invalid. On his way to Limmeridge House to begin work, Walter encounters a woman in white. He later learns this woman is Anne Catherick, who has escaped from a mental asylum and who bears a striking resemblance to Laura Fairlie. Walter falls in love with Laura when he meets her, but unfortunately she is already promised to Sir Percival Glyde, the man who has imprisoned Anne because she knows the secret of his illegitimacy. After Laura and Percival wed, Walter leaves for Central America and the couple moves to Blackwater Park, where they are joined by the malicious Italian, Count Fosco. Under Fosco’s influence, Percival

violently attempts to force his wife to sign away her marriage settlement. Upon her refusal, Percival and Fosco drug Laura, switch her identity with that of Anne (who has now died) and imprison her in the asylum in Anne's place. Ultimately, Marian recognizes Laura, helps her escape and the two half-sisters live with Walter in poverty. The three friends spend the remainder of the novel trying to verify Laura's identity as the rightful heir of Limmeridge, which requires evidence that her trip to the asylum in London took place after Anne's death. Walter ultimately finds this evidence along with Percival's secret: Percival has altered a marriage registry to disguise his own illegitimacy and usurped social status. He dies in a fire at the church where Walter discovers that Percival is not the heir to Blackwater Park. Walter learns that Percival and Fosco locked Anne away because she knew Percival's secret. Locking Anne away was a means of protecting another secret: Anne is Laura's illegitimate half sister. It seems, then, that Percival and Sir Philip Fairlie colluded to "erase" Anne Catherick and help each other disguise their threatening family secrets. In the end, Walter relies on Pesca to force a written confession from Fosco, a process made easier by the fact that Pesca knows Fosco as an exiled traitor of an Italian secret society. Walter then marries Laura and has a son who, as Marian reminds him the novel's last lines, is the new heir of Limmeridge (626-7). As these events unfold Collins correlates moments that are evocative of intimate violence against women – Walter grabbing his cudgel in a park when Ann Catherick approaches him, for

example – with changes in the abilities of authoritative male characters like Walter, Percival and Fosco to speak, write and, represent. When intimate violence is displaced onto seemingly non-violent events in this novel – a meeting on a dark road, the violation of a woman’s diary – so are the feelings of anxiety, fear and duress. Most significantly, such heightened emotion reduces men to speechlessness, identifying them with the abused women. A mental and physical exchange occurs, whereby authoritative men momentarily know their world through the context of a vulnerable, pained and silenced subject position, and women assume a kind of “manly” authority to speak and represent the world around them. Collins’s sensational sympathy accordingly involves a degree of gender blending that allows women to occupy typically masculine positions of authority.

The main reason that Collins’s male characters find sensational sympathy so undesirable, then, is that it threatens to rob them of their power to narrate and represent their worlds as they see fit. They accordingly try to find ways to counteract it. These often include real and symbolic attempts to control language and representation that appear markedly violent. Collins constructs clear parallels between this type of representational control, on the one hand, and physical violence on the other. For example, the marks that Fosco leaves in Marian’s diary when he writes in it provide a counterpart to the bruises that Percival leaves on Laura’s skin; both are attempts to control women, and both provide physical evidence of male violations and cruelty. The

fact that Walter – whose narration frames the entire novel – frequently turns the narration over to other characters (including servants), but neglects to include Anne and Laura – the novel’s two most conspicuous victims of male violence – likewise suggests a link between the protection of men’s control over representation and woman abuse.⁵⁹

Because feeling like or for the novel’s disempowered women threatens masculine authority, the primary male characters – Walter, Percival and Fosco – either avoid or feign sympathy. Walter, for example, embodies a type of sympathy based less on actually feeling for women than on convincing others that he can feel for them and describe it accurately. Walter’s identification of Laura after she has been put in the mental institution under Anne’s identity saves the object of his affection from obscurity and, as Rachel Ablow points out, implies that an intimate, sympathetic bond exists between them (2). However, the impression of sympathy is in Walter’s best interest. If he can use it to prove that Laura is alive, he can still marry a wealthy woman and not be forced to rely on drawing for a living. Moreover, as Ablow also argues, when Walter recognizes Laura he “legitimizes their marriage by reducing class difference in the face of the sympathetic

⁵⁹Tamar Heller suggests that Walter’s power to control narrative evokes Collins’s role as author (7). Both Walter and Collins are professional men working among women, Walter as a drawing master to two women, and Collins as a man writing in a feminized genre (7). Similarly, Ablow links Walter’s power as a narrator to “persuade other people that they should feel, that they do feel, and that they should effectively pay him for feeling, as he wants them to” (2) with Collins’s power as an author.

bond” (8).⁶⁰ Walter, however, does experience sensational sympathy, an undesirable, unnerving trading of places with women that forces him to feel and act as suffering women have been forced to feel. For example, as I will discuss in more detail, when Walter encounters suffering women he frequently feels unaccountable sensations of fear and horror and temporarily loses his privileged position as master narrator.

Traditional understandings of sympathy and sensational sympathy differ, then, insofar as the latter is distinctly unwanted. Moreover, sensational sympathy does not necessarily rely on the explicit spectacle of suffering that regular sympathy does.⁶¹ In *The Woman in White*, it is the displacement and partial obscurity rather than the exposure of intimate violence that leads to the disruption of manly authority.⁶²

⁶⁰The concept of a sympathetic bond between husbands and wives was central to arguments on both sides of the debates over marital coverture. As Ablow points out, “both those who sought to reform the legal doctrine of coverture and those who wanted to preserve it identified marital sympathy as a goal” (10). On the one hand, then, there existed the belief that the consolidation of two individuals into one legal subject signaled the unity and fellow-feeling between husbands and wives. On the other hand, however, because coverture was not a reciprocal arrangement, there was also the competing belief that if husbands truly sympathized with their wives they would not favour laws that suspended women’s legal existence. By “covering” women, coverture ensured that husbands and wives experienced marriage on grossly different terms, and prevented the possibility of anything like fellow-feeling.

⁶¹Argyros argues that sympathy is central to social reform precisely because it derives from some kind of spectacle of suffering that helps to formulate an understanding of difference between subjects. David Marshall follows the examples set by Marivaux, Rousseau, and Diderot by approaching the very subject of sympathy through theatricality, and asking what effect the presentation of pain and suffering has on viewing subjects.

⁶²In constructing a relationship between displacement and sensational sympathy, Collins draws on the invisibility of battered women in Victorian culture. Just as Jaffe notes that “Silverman’s ‘studious avoidance’ of looking [at the homeless], for instance, remains a well-known stance the middle-class subject prepares to take when sighting the beggar up ahead” (13), the conspicuous moments of obscured abuse in Collins’s novel mimics the stance taken on violated female bodies in Victorian law and literature. While they are frequently marginalized in typical Victorian realist fiction, wives were, under coverture, non-

Perhaps most emblematic of this type of critique through exposure in *The Woman in White* is the conversation Marian has with Laura about the bruise Percival has left on her arm. Marian tells Laura, "That mark is a weapon to strike him with. Let me see it now - I may have to swear to it, at some future time." Marian explains that she wants to see Laura's bruises because "our endurance must end, and our resistance begin, to-day" (299). She promises to tell their lawyer, Mr. Gilmore, about the marks, suggesting that the law can protect abused women if the violence they have suffered becomes visible. As Lisa Surridge points out, Marian is "counting on exposure" here; it is an act she believes can save her sister (143). For Surridge, *The Woman in White* thus "reveals the household as a forum for potential witnesses and exhibits" (145). However, when Laura warns Marian that the exposure of the bruises "will drive [Percival] to desperation...and increase our dangers tenfold," Marian is forced to admit that Laura speaks a "disheartening truth" (301). And although Laura might reveal her bruised arms to Marian, no other character is privy to their appearance, and Marian immediately agrees not to "think too seriously of it" as Laura covers them back up with her sleeve (299). In a culture that allowed its weekly papers to depict women's bodies being hit, stabbed, mutilated, thrown into fires and drowned, sensation fiction can only be understood as

existent by law. Although battery cases were heard in courts and depicted in the papers, it was relatively easy to enact Silverman's "studious avoidance" of abused wives at this point in history.

particularly explicit in its treatment of intimate violence in relation to other types of novels.⁶³ There has been too much emphasis on sensational exposures, or at least not enough emphasis on its obfuscations and displacements, in the effort to link sensation to major shifts in discourses on marriage. These moments of conspicuous displacement are some of the most sensation-inspiring moments of the novels, and the ones that accordingly signal the chaotic undoing of social and physical difference enacted on and by the battered woman's body.⁶⁴

The novel's first instance of sympathetic exchange entails the meeting between Walter and Anne as he makes his way to Limmeridge House to start his work as a drawing master to Laura and Marian. From this momentous scene forward, the novel repeatedly links the sympathetic exchange with displaced intimate violence. Up until this point, Walter has portrayed himself as entirely in control of the narrative. Although in his preface to the narrative Walter insists that "the story presented will be told by more than

⁶³Surridge argues that the sensation novel alone cannot be credited with exposing marital violence given that the divorce court and divorce court journalism were operating before many of the many of the books that deal with abuse, and eleven months before *The Woman in White* began serialization (135).

⁶⁴The socially threatening renegotiations of identity and subjectivity that emerge out of sensation's displacements and obfuscations are often mitigated by the illusion of the femininity and apoliticality of physical and emotional feelings. As D.A. Miller points out, the genre is accordingly invested in the apparent ambiguity of the relationship between the body and meaning (148). The illusion that bodies are not intellectual sites of interest exists to disarm any threatening ideological import of a novel – or of a particular scene within a novel – that explores the loss of authoritative male identity. In this way, as Ann Cvetkovich suggests, "the Sensation novel performs the cultural work of representing social problems as affective problems" (7).

one pen" (9), including those that belong to servants and women, he is always its master narrator and editor. Moreover, although Walter does not always speak, he always possesses the power to choose who will be able to tell their part of the story, when they are allowed to interpret and in what capacity. Essentially, he controls this tale of cruelty towards women.⁶⁵ However, when Walter first meets Anne Catherick this authority becomes precarious. Walking along a dark path at night, Walter feels an eerie touch from a person standing behind him. He remarks, "in one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder" (23). Walter immediately prepares to assault this person: "I turned on the instant, with my fingers tightening round the handle of my stick" (23). Walter's preparation to club Anne signals displaced intimate violence, specifically, the terrible cruelties that Anne has suffered at the hands of men: as an illegitimate child she has been

⁶⁵In an earlier scene when Walter saves Professor Pesca from drowning, however, we see the tenuousness of Walter's control over representation. Just as Walter is the novel's master narrator, as a teacher of languages, Professor Pesca signals linguistic authority. When Pesca disappears below the surface of the water, Walter temporarily loses an embodiment of the power and authority of language that mirrors his own. When faced with the threat of drowning that symbolizes this loss of linguistic authority, Walter experiences sensations of "horror and amazement" (12). Pesca's linguistic authority is perhaps more in keeping with Collins's than Walter's is. As a teacher of languages – and not any one specific language – Pesca specifically embodies the heteroglossic voice(s) of Collins's novel. More accurately, he embodies the notion that heteroglossic voice(s) can exist under the authority of one man. Both men, then, to some degree, represent the narrative authority of the author himself. Lisa Surridge argues that the novel's multiple narratives are a major signal of its relationship to divorce court journalism, which likewise relied on several witnesses. For Surridge, this is another reason why the sensation novel alone cannot be said to be solely responsible for exposing marital violence (135).

cast out and as a threat to Percival's reputation she has been confined in a mental institution from which she has just escaped. It also signals the abuse that Laura, her double, will experience.

In representing the initial meeting between Anne and Walter, Collins deploys a tactic that recurs frequently in the novel: male characters, overwhelmed by emotion, lose control over their speech. As Walter testifies, "I was far too seriously startled by the suddenness with which this extraordinary apparition stood before me, in the dead of night and in that lonely place, to ask what she wanted," so "the strange woman spoke first" (25). Anne does most of the talking for the next few pages of the novel, and Walter points out that he was "too bewildered – too conscious of a vague sense of something like self-reproach – to speak to [his] strange companion for some minutes" (27). The feeling "like self-reproach" that Walter experiences hints at the displacement of intimate violence suggested by his grasp on his cudgel (26); Walter feels guilty because he was about to hit a woman. As an apparent result, he becomes as silent as the battered women are for most of the novel, while Anne is temporarily granted the role of primary speaker (albeit through Walter's narration). When both Walter and Anne are quiet, Walter recalls, "it was *her* voice again the first broke the silence" (27, emphasis mine). Anne's command over language and narration here compared to Walter's relative speechlessness connotes an inversion of Walter's role as master narrator; he cannot speak, but one of the few

characters in the novel who is not given narrative voice speaks to him at length. Although Walter retains his control over the narrative frame of the story, this scene implies the precariousness of his authority. Of course, since Walter is ultimately always in charge of how the novel is presented as its master narrator, this moment can also be read as a deliberate representation of himself as a victim, designed to elicit sympathy for himself rather than as a reflection of the anxiety he experiences at the moment. Even if this is the case, though, Walter's appeal to readers' sympathies aligns him with the female figures he also wants his readers to feel sorry for, and thus positions him as a feminized victim. Not only does Walter claim to have felt his blood stop, and not only does he claim to have felt self-reproach but he admits that his identity as authorial narrator was temporarily shared with a victimized, vulnerable woman. If Walter is manipulating his readers into sympathizing with him here, he is relying on the power of the image of the suffering woman to authorize his position.

Walter even goes so far as to acknowledge that Anne's words have the power to shape his own, reversing his role as narrator and framer of her words. Recalling how Anne convinced him to promise his help, Walter obsesses over the "Yes" he utters: "One word! The little familiar word that is on everybody's lips, every hour in the day. Oh me! and I tremble, now, when I write it" (26). Walter struggles with this word because it signals the ways in which his authorial identity and masculine confidence have been

destabilized:

It was like a dream. Was I Walter Hartright? Was this the well-known, uneventful road, where holiday people strolled on Sundays? Had I really left, little more than an hour since, the quiet, decent, conventionally-domestic atmosphere of my mother's cottage? (27)

Walter does not know who he is, where he is, or where he has come from. He is literally lost outside of the "conventionally-domestic" world he knows, thrust into what he regards as the unconventional world of Anne Catherick – a world, he will find, that is plagued by cruelty and violence. The threat posed by the woman in white is thus not only that she knows Percival's secret, but that she can disrupt the authoritative identity of the masculine narrator who describes her, thus making the novel's master narrator feel like a vulnerable, silenced subject.

Sensational Sympathy and the Body as Text

As I have been suggesting, Walter represents his own sympathetic responses to women in order to position himself as a victim who also needs sympathy from his reader, thus in a sense authorizing his role as the novel's primary representer. However, Collins depicts that role as a markedly violent one. Writing, speaking, drawing and beating are often connected in the novel; a number of sticks, rods and other phallic objects are used

violently by men to make marks which correspond with violent representational authority and actual physical cruelty. For example, the marks that Percival leaves in the sand when he frustratedly pounds his walking sticks into the ground call to mind with the bruises he leaves on Laura's flesh.⁶⁶ Fosco's pen similarly connotes an extension of his potentially violent body; as I will discuss in more detail, the Count symbolically rapes Marian when he writes in her diary. Walter's readiness to attack Anne with his cudgel anticipates these symbolically violent acts against women's bodies, including acts of representation. Each man's stick leaves, or would leave, a mark, be it on sand, paper, or female skin. Walter's grip on his cudgel gestures to more than his desire to protect himself against a figure on a dark street; it signals his desire to assert his power as the master narrator of the novel and the legal case it fictively assembles.

Just as Walter reaches for his cudgel when threatened by Anne, he has reached for his pen to write *The Woman in White*. Both the cudgel and the pen can be used to control women: the cudgel with brute violence and the pen through its power to represent and exclude. And, both the cudgel and the pen have the potential to leave their mark: the cudgel on Anne's skin, and the pen on the page. Walter uses his pen to write Anne – whose white dress figures the emptiness and blankness of a page (Elam 50) – into being,

⁶⁶For Tromp, Percival's pounding of walking sticks into the sand is "a mirror of his brutal yet ineffective attempts at coercing Laura"(80).

just as he almost “writes” on her body with his cudgel. In fact, Walter describes Anne as without a name or history. Anne is also lacking insofar as she has no legitimate family connections. Disowned by her father, Anne lacks the nurturing and education that her half-sister Laura receives. As an adult, Anne is literally a missing person as an escaped mental patient. Her supposed insanity likewise connotes absence, for she is said to lack reason. Anne’s entire life serves as an example of the violent ways in which men write women; she has been made by Philip and Percival into a hollow, semi-visible, illegitimate and insane figure of irreferentiality, and she is understood as such by Walter, who treats her like a blank page or conundrum that he can complete through his own narrative. But this is not all that Collins does to draw parallels between certain types of representation and violence. The fact that Anne’s body – which has been abused but not beaten – is essentially interchangeable with Laura’s body – which is, in fact, beaten – underscores the symbolically violent aspects of men’s representations of women.

However, Anne is not the figure of irreferentiality that Walter would take her for. She is, like Madeline Neroni in *Barchester Towers*, a conspicuous reminder of what is being withheld from the narrative. Like so many abused women in Victorian fiction, Anne haunts the novel with all the things it leaves unsaid, imploring the reader to look

beyond the text's surface.⁶⁷ As Anne's knowledge of Percival's secret suggests, the woman in white represents the major referents in the novel that other characters are missing: the truth about the abusive man's illegitimacy, and the visible evidence of Sir Philip's secret affair. Walter may want to write on / over Anne's body to protect his own authoritative identity, but Anne's blankness ultimately exposes the weaknesses of male authority.

Anne is threatening because the type of sympathetic reversal she invites tends to blur gender distinctions. When Walter encounters Anne, he is forced to feel and communicate as a woman, while Anne is able to take over his role as primary speaker. Walter accordingly hedges when attempting to locate her in terms of gender and class norms: "not exactly the manner of a lady, and, at the same time, not the manner of a woman in the humblest rank of life" (24). Walter suggests that Anne is unlike other women insofar as she does not seem like either an upper-class lady or a lower-class woman. He also suggests that Anne is not like a lady or a woman insofar as she is somewhat masculine. He notes also that she is "rather above average height" (24) and seems uneasy about her aggression and lack of "womanly tenderness" (25).

When Walter meets Anne he becomes involved in a suggestive scene of displaced

⁶⁷ Elam similarly suggests that Anne, as the titular woman in white, paradoxically signals blankness and reference, "haunting the representational claims of the realist novel and thus upsetting its claim to present the truth" (50).

intimate violence that leads to his sensational sympathy for – and gender blending with – the woman in white. When he meets Marian, however, the process changes. With Marian, Walter experiences gender blending *before* he becomes involved in a scene of displaced intimate violence. Gender blending *causes* Walter to engage in a behaviour evocative of intimate violence; Collins seems to be suggesting that the narrator is gradually developing into a more conscious participant in women's oppression and that he is becoming more guided by anxiety over his threatened male authority than guilt over the suffering of women. When Walter first encounters Marian he only sees her from behind and describes her as "tall, yet not too tall; comely and well-developed, yet not fat; her head set on her shoulders with an easy, pliant firmness (34). Walter is, at this point, attracted to Marian, and part of this attraction seems to stem from the firmness of the woman's head on her shoulders. However, the incongruity of Walter's attraction with the appearance of Marian's apparently ugly face shocks him into "a sense of surprise which words fail [him] to express." (34) Already, Marian signifies the breakdown of the authoritative, professional, narrative through her subversion of expectation. Nevertheless, Walter continues his attempt to explain Marian's effect:

...never was the fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied....The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and

jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead. Her expression – bright, frank, and intelligent – appeared, while she was silent, to be altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability, without which the beauty of the handsomest woman alive is beauty incomplete. To see such a face as this set on shoulders that a sculptor would have longed to model – to be charmed by the modest graces of action through which the symmetrical limbs betrayed their beauty when they moved, and then to be almost repelled by the masculine form and masculine look of the features in which the perfectly shaped figure ended – was to feel a sensation oddly akin to the helpless discomfort familiar to us all in sleep, when we recognize yet cannot reconcile the anomalies and contradictions of a dream. (35)

According to Walter's description, Marian resembles what readers from the late nineteenth century forward might recognize as Sigmund Freud's Medusa, not only in her coal black hair and piercing eyes, but also in her gender blending and its unsettling allure. For Freud, Medusa turns her victims to stone because, as a manly woman, she both attracts and repels. She is both a figure of lack – as a woman – and excess – as a usurper of phallic symbols typified as masculine ("Medusa's Head" 273). Marian's face – complete with moustache and thus evocative of both masculinity and the vulva – freezes

Walter in a combination of attraction and repulsion. Walter is accordingly threatened by Marian, but not only because she looks like a man; this scene foreshadows how Collins will construct Marian as particularly phallic – capable of assuming the power to narrate, describe and understand the world – and as a threat to Walter’s authority.

Just as the only way to kill Medusa is to cut off her head, so Walter attempts to symbolically divorce Marian’s manly head from her womanly body to restore her proper femininity. Because Medusa’s head is severed by a male figure that, in Freud’s reading, would have experienced castration anxiety himself upon the sight of her lack (274), Medusa’s decapitation can be read as an archetypical, defensive gesture against male loss. Indeed, Walter admits to a familiar helpless sensation when he sees Marian’s face, and then mentally and linguistically decapitates her. That is, his description makes the phallic woman seem unnatural by emphasizing the incongruity of face and body. In doing so, Walter enacts a kind of representational violence that repeats the mythical Perseus’s decapitation of Medusa.⁶⁸ Marian’s gender blending and her ability to render Walter speechless – which foreshadows the ways sensational sympathy robs Walter of his manly

⁶⁸Richard Collins similarly notes the Freudian connotations of this encounter, but suggests that *The Woman in White* can also be read in terms of what Umberto Eco refers to as “intertextual archetypes,” particularly images of the hermaphrodite from popular culture with which Collins would have been familiar (133). Collins accordingly diminishes the psychoanalytic connotations of the novel’s gender hybrids and instead reads them as recognizable allusions that evoke a sense of déjà-vu that is not universally appealing but historically specific (133-4).

authority – causes him to feel like the novel's disempowered, abused women and ultimately to become symbolically violent towards a woman. Given the attraction that Walter initially feels for Marian, and the fact that he and Marian share a domestic space, this scene resembles intimate violence and positions his emotionally and symbolically violent reaction as the paradoxical consequence of too much fellow feeling – gender blending and sympathy – between men and women.

Before I explain this phenomenon more completely, I am obligated to explain my use of the term “phallus.” I am referring to the phallus here as that which sets the conditions for knowability, especially of self and not-self. To be phallic in *The Woman in White*, then, is to narrate, to describe, to explain, in ways that convince others. Freud conflates the phallus with the penis in “Medusa's Head” since the child defines self and other according to his own genitals. Decades later Jane Gallop, in turn, blames Lacan's “disembodied phallus” for raising “maleness, a bodily attribute, to the realm of the spirit, leaving femaleness mired in inert flesh” (8). That is, Gallop understands that the phallus is not a penis, but refuses to believe that it can escape referring back to the male organ. Gallop's notion of the phallus therefore imbues it with the specifically male power to create meaning for the female “other.” The punishment for women who usurp this type of power is symbolic decapitation, or, as Hélène Cixous puts it in “Castration or Decapitation?”, imposed silence (43).

Throughout the entire novel Walter seems invested in separating manly heads from womanly bodies. His very first words as narrator are “This is the story of what a Woman’s patience can endure, and what a Man’s resolution can achieve” (9). This enduring patience – in a novel about women being beaten and imprisoned – inevitably refers to the female body (and its abuse), whereas resolution refers to the male province of decision, reason and authority. To paraphrase Gallop, whoever controls the meaning of the phallus has the phallus, and symbolic castration denotes the loss of this privilege of *description* (126), the very power Walter commands as master narrator. When words fail Walter, then, he experiences a kind of symbolic castration anxiety – a fear of being unable to lord over the story, to describe and to assign meaning. Accordingly, he divorces Marian’s body from her manly head, ensuring that it is separate from reason and meaning and from his province as manly narrator.⁶⁹

In *The Woman in White*, a novel obsessed with narrative authority and domestic violence, the phallus thus extends beyond the body to that which sets the conditions for the reader’s understanding of the fictional universe – voices that narrate and pens that write – but is nevertheless inevitably attached to the male body. A man controls the

⁶⁹D.A. Miller’s psychoanalytic reading of *The Woman in White* similarly suggests that Marian is phallic. Miller claims that there is no visible phallic symbol on Marian’s body, but merely signs of that symbol (presumably assuming that the only phallic symbol can be a penis). According to Miller, then, Marian reflects castration anxiety because if the phallic symbol “isn’t on her it must be in her,” and she represents a space in which one could lose the penis/phallus inside the female body (180).

narration of the novel and men use pens and narrative voice to control women and serve their own often malicious interests. Marian's phallic power is therefore treated as a masculine quality. Not only does Marian look like a man; she also behaves in conventionally masculine ways. When Count Fosco reads Marian's diary he admires her stereotypically masculine "excellence of stratagem" and "marvelous accuracy" (337). He asks Percival, "Can you look at Miss Halcombe, and not see that she has the foresight and the resolution of a man?" (324). Marian's appropriation of "manly" narrative authorial identity is apparently more complete than Anne's, which really only temporarily silences Walter. Although Walter makes no mention of speechlessness when he encounters Marian, as soon as she turns around and faces him she speaks uninterrupted for three solid pages of text. When Walter finally has dialogue again Marian interjects with "*you don't say so, Mr. Hartright!*", underscoring her narrative authority (38, emphasis mine). Moreover, Marian then directs Walter's narrative, inverting his power over the text as a whole, asking, "May I hear it?" (38) and thus assuming the authority to allow him to speak once more. Marian also enjoys the privilege of narrative voice that is denied to both Anne and Laura. In fact, Marian gets the final dialogue in the novel, introducing Walter to his son: "Are you aware, when I present this illustrious baby to your notice, in whose presence you stand? Evidently not! Let me make two eminent personages known to one another: Mr. Walter Hartright – *the heir of*

Limmeridge” (626-7). Although this speech is sanctioned by Walter – he decides to “let Marian end our Story” (627) – its content suggests that Marian retains a good degree of representational power in the text. It is Marian, after all, who must inform Walter who his son is. In doing so, of course, Marian enunciates Walter’s prestige and worldly success; Marian is still not the master narrator, but rather continues to speak the words that support Walter’s desires.

When Walter first meets Marian, then, symbolic decapitation – displaced intimate violence – is the consequence of the unwanted exchange of gender roles that Marian’s body and voice signal. Similarly, although Fosco praises Marian for her manliness, he uses her appropriation of typically non-feminine forms of communication as an excuse to enact the novel’s most famous act of symbolic violence. When Fosco steals Marian’s diary, the narrative of her sister’s abuse at the hands of the count’s friend, he not only reads it, but also writes in it. This unseen act overwrites the novel’s most outspoken woman and represents a kind of textual rape. Fosco takes erotic pleasure from the act, referring to it as “unspeakably satisfying” (336). With “large, bold, and firmly regular” penmanship (338) Fosco transforms Marian’s textual body, and thus Marian herself, who “goes from being the narrative subject to the narrated object, and is thus redefined as properly feminine” (Gaylin 318). Fosco’s pen is not only symbolic of the phallus, the power to create meaning, but of the violence inherent to denying or stealing that power,

which is precisely what Fosco does as he alters Marian's construction of the world in her diary's narrative. This textual rape recalls an earlier interference taken by Fosco, who convinces his wife replace a letter that Marian has written to her lawyer, Mr. Gilmore, about Laura's bruised arms with a blank piece of paper.

Fosco thus attempts to imbue Marian with the same blankness of meaning that is forced on her sister and on Anne Catherick. This erasure of Marian's resolution, insight and planning, however, can only occur when Marian is incapacitated after eavesdropping on his conversation with Percival about the scheme to take Laura's property. In a novel written by a male author and narratively framed and edited by a male speaker, *The Woman in White* privileges the male voice even as it allows women some opportunities to speak. Marian's eavesdropping signals an infraction of the rules of narrative agency. As Anne Gaylin points out, eavesdropping is "an improper activity on the border between inside and outside, private and public" (304). For Gaylin, "an eavesdropper steals the secrets of private life and controls their dissemination in the public" and is therefore a highly transgressive figure (304). The act of eavesdropping and its consequences are entangled in the novel's preoccupation with the relationship between violence and manly narrative authority. Gaylin argues that as Marian eavesdrops, she literally removes signs of femininity from her body (316). Marian removes her "white and cumbersome" underclothes so she can move more freely and notes that in her "present dress...no *man*

could have passed through the narrowest spaces more easily than I” (Collins 336, emphasis mine). Gaylin also emphasizes the fact that Marian eavesdrops on men in the library, “the room which embodies male narrative power and the written evidence of its authority” (317). For Gaylin, then, eavesdropping is a crime in this novel because the “acquisition and transcription of oral to written is an activity that must be controlled because it confers legitimacy to story and teller and public account” (308), and this legitimacy in *The Woman in White* is primarily masculine.

Accordingly, Marian is symbolically, violently punished for her illegitimate interception of male communication. In order to access Fosco’s conversation with Percival, Marian not only has to remove her underclothes, but expose herself to the rain, because of which she catches a fever. Collins here imagines the female body as weak and susceptible by representing the cause and effect relationship between Marian’s behaviour and her illness in this way. While Marian is ill, Fosco steals her diary, reads it and writes in it. Fosco thus renders Marian’s textual self-representation a symbolic page to be rewritten, associating sexual violence against women with a representational covering over of a woman’s story of violence with a man’s. He disciplines her for usurping his desired position as a manly plot-maker, just as the novel as a whole punishes her for entering into the realm of male communication and transgressing her feminine role by reducing her to a pathological body. However, this textual rape disrupts Fosco’s control

over language even as it appropriates Marian's voice. Fosco's encounter with Marian's words, like Walter's encounter with her body, renders him unable to express himself; the satisfaction he takes in writing in her diary is, after all, "unspeakable" (336). The textual rape is therefore another form of displaced intimate violence that occurs because Marian poses the threat of a sympathetic relation between masterful narrating men and victimized women; she can make men feel and act like voiceless, vulnerable women. However, the disruption of Fosco's authority over language as evinced during his textual violation seems to be a function of his attraction to the woman he reads as manly. Fosco's speechlessness derives from the delight he takes in momentarily trading places with Marian; as he assumes a woman's voice in a private space – the diary – he assumes a woman's silence in a quasi-public space – the novel's narrative – but this silence marks the pleasure that Fosco takes in transcending the boundaries of gender perhaps more than it signals his loss of power. In this context, a man's inability to speak is part of a fantasy of his own feminization and vulnerability, a fantasy that can only be enacted, however, because of his power to usurp feminine space.

Silence and Power

Just as Fosco's speechlessness indicates his covert authority, so silence operates subversively at times for the women in the novel. Although this chapter emphasizes the

powers of feminine narration and representation, I would therefore like to close with a discussion of the potential in women's refusal to speak or write. If I am arguing that both explicit and obscured representations of abuse in Victorian culture participate in the same political projects, it would be remiss to ignore the role of the unspoken in Collins's novel. Refraining from speaking is, like usurping manly modes of communication and narration, a means of struggling over representation. Although much of the novel suggests that he or she who controls representation possesses the phallus and authority over the fictional universe, points in the novel nonetheless emphasize the subversive powers of creating gaps in representation.

The power of the withheld, displaced, or partially visible is suggested by the failures of Percival's explicit, obvious violence. Of all the men in the novel, Percival is the least effective at controlling women. He cannot force Laura to sign away her property to him – which would secure his financial status – even when he beats her. In fact, it seems as though Percival cannot achieve his goals of usurping economic or social status *because* he makes violence against Laura so conspicuous. As I have already suggested, by leaving bruises on Laura's arms, Percival gives the women a potential weapon to be used against him in court. Moreover, the more aggressive Percival becomes, the more the fiction of his class status falters as he begins to resemble the stereotypical, violently

drunk, working-class wife abuser.⁷⁰ Fosco even warns Percival not to be obviously violent because he will look like a criminal, part of the “brutal lower orders” (345). Conversely, Fosco, whose brutality is largely symbolic, represents the power of violence that is difficult to detect. As Tromp notes, “Fosco covertly oversees his wife with the help of the infamous Victorian staff....The concealed rod remains outside the bounds of legislative and social authority, and indeed, its haunting presence amplifies its power” (83). Fosco gets what he wants because he disguises the violence of his methods; his control over representation is secretive and insidious.

If this is true of Fosco, then, it is also true of Walter, whose apparent sympathy for women is in fact a form of covert control over the narrative and the reader’s response to his actions; as I have argued, Walter’s tendency to write himself as though he experiences women’s feelings during moments of displaced intimate violence makes him appear in need of our sympathy and thus disguises the fact that he, more than any other male character in the novel, controls how women behave as well as how they are represented. Walter seems kind and benevolent, even weak at times, but these traits –

⁷⁰Through this process *The Woman in White* responds to the Divorce Act’s exclusive protection of working-class women from their husbands, or the assumption that middle-class men were not violent. However, the nature of this response is somewhat ambivalent given that Percival has usurped his class status to begin with, and really is a working-class wife abuser. We are left wondering if Collins is implying that Percival’s violence is more a reflection of his “true” working-class colours than the reality of cross-class domestic abuse.

feminized in this novel – shroud the true nature of Walter's power.

But these kinds of covert operations are not reserved for men. It may seem as though Anne and Laura – ostensibly figures of blankness and absence – are less subversive than Marian, and they are certainly less powerful than the male characters in the novel because they lack narrative voice. However, their silence at times points towards their resistance. It is important to remember that, even when Marian takes over the narrative, her voice is always framed and presumably edited by Walter's. By not narrating, though, Anne and Laura escape this type of ventriloquism, which, as I have been arguing, is symbolically violent. In this way Anne and Laura affirm the inherent power of the unseen and unsaid in an ironic play on Fosco's private rod. These women manipulate language even without their own legitimate voices. Generally speaking, this manipulation occurs in terms of the language of a contract: for Anne the promise she forces from Walter, the "yes" that troubles him so much early in the novel, and for Laura, a refusal to promise.

Even before Laura makes an appearance in the novel Walter is preoccupied with her absence. When he first speaks with Marian, Walter reminds the reader that "at this time, there were no signs of Miss Fairlie. We finished our luncheon; and still she never appeared. Miss Halcombe, whose quick eye nothing escaped, noticed the looks that I cast, from time to time, in the direction of the door" (49). When Walter does finally meet

Laura, he immediately associates her with absence:

Mingling with the vivid impression produced by the charm of her fair face and head, her sweet expression, and her winning simplicity of manner, was another impression, which, in a shadowy way, suggested to me the idea of something wanting. At one time it seemed like something wanting in *her*, at another, like something wanting in myself, which hindered me from understanding her as I ought....Something wanting, something wanting – and where it was, and what it was, I could not say. (53)

Like the child in Freud's version of the Medusa myth, Walter is attracted to the lack he thinks he detects because it has the potential to provide him with a number of opportunities. Laura is lacking in some respects, particularly in comparison to Marian, who possesses linguistic power and, as Richard Collins suggests, "wears her sex on her lip" (154). Unlike Marian, Laura is relatively silent and asexual. Like Anne, she dresses in white and represents a virgin blankness to be written on by men. However, whereas Freud's child unwittingly reads the mother through his own lack (castration anxiety), Walter acknowledges that he may be projecting his own lack onto Laura. In fact, Walter's attraction to Laura can be traced back not only to the "something wanting" in her, but also to that which Walter himself lacks: class status which he might gain through marriage to her. For the reader, Laura's resemblance to Anne connotes Anne's

lack of identity, sanity, legitimacy, education, nurturing and, most importantly, the family that Laura is lucky enough to have. Yet the doubled figures of Laura and Anne indicate that which is missing from the upper-class family. First, the illegitimate daughter Anne, with her eerie resemblance to Laura, embodies the secret desires and illicit sexuality of her father. Second, Laura's vulnerable position betrays the absence of a reliable, respectable patriarch in her upper-class family. Walter is attracted to Laura because he will go on to fill the various voids she represents; particularly, as her husband Walter will replace the failed paternal figure Sir Phillip and thus provide himself with the social position that he currently lacks.

When Walter reveals Anne's secrets, he also undoes Percival's position and takes Laura as his own wife, thus legitimizing the authority he assumes throughout the novel as master narrator. Walter notes that, "The woman who first gives life, light, and form to our shadowy conceptions of beauty, fills a void in our spiritual nature that has remained unknown to us till she appeared" (52), but a marriage to Laura would fulfill a social and economic void for Walter as well. Whereas Percival and Fosco assume authority based on their wealth and social positions, Walter's authority initially rests solely on the fact that he is telling the story. Becoming the patriarch of the upper-class family naturalizes this authority and allows Walter to compete with the other upper-class men in the novel. If Walter can replace all that is suggested to be absent by Laura's body, he can solidify

his social and economic power.

Laura's power to resist male violence originates with the same sense of lack that Walter finds so attractive. Although the absence of Laura's narrative from that text may imply that she lacks phallic power as I have been describing it, her refusal to sign Percival's contract suggests otherwise. Laura belongs to an entirely different signifying economy than the men in the novel – her power is marked, surprisingly, by silence. Here, silence implies not castration or violence, but resistance to and disavowal of the very language that masculinizes the phallus, granting men the legitimate power to rule women with words, laws, contracts. Through this absence of speech Laura affirms the power of the unseen and unheard, in as effective a manner as Foco's private rod.⁷¹

Whereas Marian disrupts Walter's manly narrative authority through her "excessive masculinity," then – her assertive use of speech and writing – Laura does so through the more properly "feminine silence." Laura lacks the qualities that Marian exhibits, and this lack corresponds with Walter's descriptions of her as white, nameless and blank. However, the lack to which Walter refers here leaves him *unable to speak* its origins. Thinking of Laura he frustratedly asks,

⁷¹Tromp makes a similar argument about Fosco's wife, who rarely speaks, and certainly has no narrative voice. For Tromp, silent women mark "the threat of something their text might have produced, something that must be excluded" (99).

How can I describe her? How can I separate her from my own sensations, and from all that has happened in the later time? How can I see her again as she looked when my eyes first rested on her – as she should look, now, to the eyes that are about to see her in these pages? (51)

Walter's inability to describe Laura calls attention to his failures as a narrator. He has to describe her based on a water-colour drawing he has since made of her; he admits that his understanding of Laura is based on nothing more than his own memory and imagination. Walter even acknowledges that the portrait fails: "Does my poor portrait of her, my fond, patient labour of long and happy days, show me things? Ah, how few of them are in the dim mechanical drawing, and how many in the mind with which I regard it!" (52) Early in the novel, then, readers are given clues that Walter's representations are flawed. Walter's portrait is analogous to the entire narrative of *The Woman in White* insofar as it cannot be regarded as accurate since it is based entirely on one man's imagination and desire.

Although Walter means to legitimize his authority through Laura, then, the sensations that he experiences in the face of what he reads as Laura's unsettling lack result in the disruption of his already suspect status as master story-teller or describer.⁷²

⁷²Rachel Ablow similarly suggests that Walter's claims to know and sympathize with Laura are a means of securing his financial and social position (2).

Walter acknowledges this disruption, claiming that he “let the charm of [Laura’s] presence lure me from the recollection of myself and my position” (55). He notes the ways in which his authoritative role is compromised by Laura’s absence: “I should have remembered my position, and have put myself secretly on guard...All the discretion, all the experience, which had availed me with other women, and secured me against other temptations, failed me with her” (65). Laura’s lack, symbolized by her refusal to sign Percival’s contract and her withholding of narrative voice and the blurring of her identity with Anne’s, subverts masculine representational power just as effectively as Marian’s phallic voice.

Conclusions

The fact that Laura’s true identity is only regained through her marriage to Walter seems to undermine the subversiveness that she embodies as a silent, resisting woman. In the end, when Laura marries Walter she becomes increasingly childlike and dependent. Walter pretends that he will allow her to contribute financially to the family, but ultimately refuses to sell her art (83). As Lillian Nayder suggests, the novel thus “evades the issue of married women’s rights [underscored by Laura’s unhappiness in her first marriage] by making Laura happy in her second marriage” (85). Similarly, Marian’s appeal to patriarchal power after the textual rape and Walter’s trip to Central America –

“Father! Strengthen him. Father! Help him in his hour of need” (430) – suggests that the novel’s transgressive women are properly contained in ideal femininity by the end of the novel. *The Woman in White*’s conclusions are thus not entirely indicative of a successful subversion of male authorial identity. One possible reason for this apparent ambivalence is Collins’s position as a male author working in a feminized genre. Heller argues that “Collins was both in a masculine and feminine position – associated with low and feminine genres of the Gothic and sensation fiction, but an active participant in the process of professionalization” (7). In order to take up women’s rights and maintain his own authority, even “many of his most feminist pieces end with the containment of women and reinforce the division between male labor and female domesticity” (8). However, the novel is not as ambivalent towards female agency as Heller suggests. Rather, as I have been arguing, Collins manipulates the social and cultural erasure of women and their abused bodies from Victorian law and literature to transform absence, displacement and silence into conduits for sensations that disrupt masculine, phallic power to describe and reify the world, especially women and their suffering.

In *The Woman in White*, the absence of abuse, when made conspicuous through strategies of displacement, constructs a kind of sensational sympathy whereby men who typically dominate representation experience their worlds through vulnerable, feminized, subject positions. During these moments, Collins critiques the tendency to look away

from suffering, and turns egotistical fears of identity loss into material identity disruption. Collins disrupts the certainty of authoritative, masculinist narrative control over the significance of female corporeality – even his own – by refraining from narrating assaults on women's bodies.

Conclusion

Historically, representations of woman abuse in popular culture have been treated as non-serious or non-political because of their sensational content. This dissertation emphasizes the importance of reading these representations as significant contributions to shifting cultural ideals. It therefore reflects the value not of seeing past sensationalism, but of understanding how sensational content – in all of its ostensibly irreconcilable manifestations – has been central to negotiating formulations of class, gender, and power. My research has therefore studied the ways in which Victorian representations of intimate violence constituted sites of resistance and subversion that undermine the notion that the middle-class was the natural arbiter of nineteenth-century ethics. It is intended to supplement studies of the Victorian period that focus on the fear of blurring social, economic, and gender boundaries rather than the progressive potential that inheres in locating sameness and shared experience.⁷³ However, I am not suggesting that all Victorian representations of intimate violence reflect progressive movements towards reform. As I conclude, then, I would like to gesture towards two particularly problematic elements in Victorian representations of violence against women: the construction of

⁷³See Jennifer Brody DeVere's *Impossible Purities: Blackness, Femininity, and Victorian Culture*, Kelley Hurley's *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the Fin-de-Siècle*, and Rajani Sudan's *Fair Exotics: Xenophobic Subjects in English Literature: 1720-1850*, which all emphasize the ways in which literature responds to fears of miscegenation.

working-class intimate relationships as symbols for moral degradation that occurs largely in street literature's explicit representations of abuse, and the alienation of women from their bodies that accompanies the withholding of serious scenes of violence.

This dissertation has argued that novels and street literature worked together, albeit in drastically different ways, to construct representations of abuse as highly political sites of meaning. Thus it has also emphasized the ways in which different forms of representation could appear to be polar opposites yet strive for the same social goals. By foregrounding this fact, I shift attention onto sensational street literature as a viable venue for social critique. I also stress that the novel withheld certain forms of representation not only because it had to in order to maintain its respectability, but at times because not-saying and not-showing are powerful ways of encouraging readers to look more closely at that which is not readily visible in the culture more broadly.

~ During the Victorian period, genre significantly impacted representations of the body, as it continues to do today. Not only does print culture – novels, newspapers, and broadsides – construct the body, but the body's presence helps to construct the social meanings attached to these cultural forms. As a consequence, neither novels nor street literature could be entirely forthcoming about middle-class abuse, and instead often focused on working-class brutality. At times, as I point out in chapter one, street literature created subtle connections between the violence of the poor and the middle

classes by attaching signs of gentility to working-class scenes of abuse, showing that wealthy citizens were subject to the same degradation as poor ones. This strategy often facilitated a blurring of moral distinctions between the affluent and the poor, and thus challenged the emerging ideology of middle-class ethical ascendancy. However, it nevertheless established the working class as symbolic of attitudes and behaviours to which the middle class should not succumb, of a fallen state that more affluent citizens risked embodying if they acted in certain ways. Newspapers and broadsides in particular tend to use depictions of working-class bodies to comment on a type of brutality that members of the middle class were required to avoid lest they lose their prestige. In this way the genre often affirms the relationship between poverty and deviance.

Indeed, it seems as though nineteenth-century publishers were often quite happy to validate the moral degeneration of the poor. This willingness to degrade the working class is perhaps most problematic in the execution broadside. Like seduction / murder broadsides, these types of papers – which proliferated in the early part of the period, but which persisted well into the 1870s and 80s – appear to criminalize poverty. They most often recreate the deaths of poor, violent, men, and include lurid accounts of their shocking crimes and last dying words. Because many early publishers had a limited supply of woodcuts with which to illustrate their subject matter, the faces of these men are often extremely similar in appearance. This aesthetic quality reinforced constructions

apparent in the lower classes as a homogenous group of reprobates (*figures 18 and 19*).

The fact that these broadsides were produced in and often sold to denizens of London's impoverished Seven Dials district also encouraged an association between amorality and material deprivation – or at least an association between dubious taste (that is, deriving pleasure from reading about violent crime) and working-class status. Accordingly, the execution broadside seems to pair poverty and questionable character. In this sense it corresponds with dominant understandings of the working classes as a drunken, violent, and generally rough group.

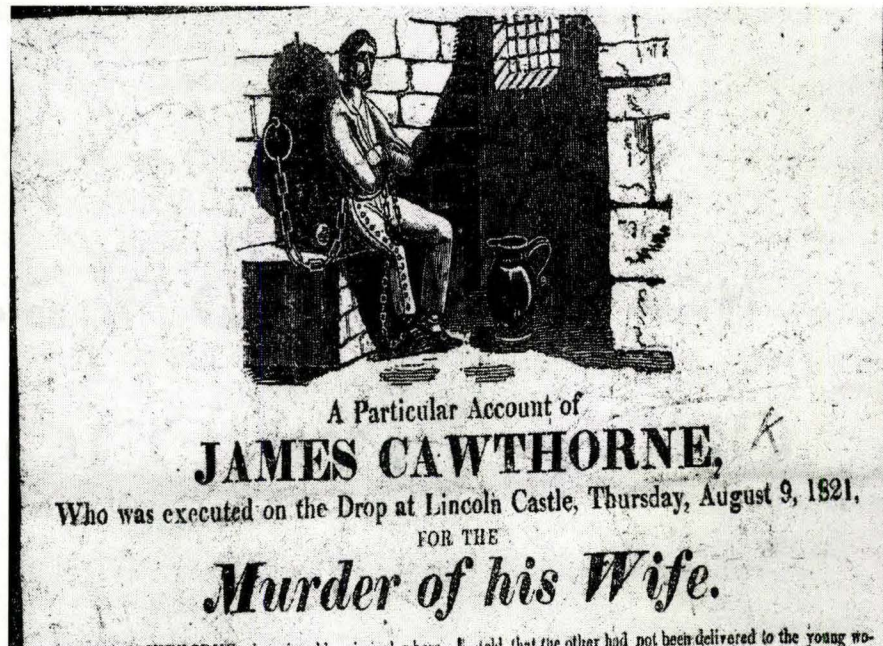


Figure 18: "A Particular Account of James Cawthorne, Who was executed on the Drop at Lincoln Castle, Thursday, August 3, 1821, for the Murder of his Wife"

by aligning female victims of violence with distinct literary modes of representation. While Collins deploys realistic techniques in constructing the character of Anne, obscuring the violence she suffers, he describes the ominous cook Hester Deathridge with Gothic codes – particularly ghostliness and liminality – that disrupt the realist plot and infuse it with hints of physical cruelty. Through these two women Collins engages critically with realism's evasions of domestic violence. He thus makes a social and legal problem an aesthetic one, too, positioning the battered wife on the margins of Victorian novels as a site through which to negotiate artistic questions. At the same time, by supplanting the story of abuse with the story of realism's limitations, Collins also alienates his female characters from their bodies. If withholding the representation of intimate violence in novels encourages readers to question the limits of realism, the limits of what is sayable in public spaces, and the limits of women's participation in culture, it also risks reiterating those same limits.

Clearly, then, both overt and covert representations of intimate violence in street literature and novels function in troubling ways, particularly in terms of their constructions of class and femininity. This dissertation has been premised on the idea of multiplicity: the sensational as both extravagant and pedagogical; women's battered bodies as both signs of trauma and symbols of resistance; class as rigid yet mutable; the power of narrative authority; and the power of refusing to participate in a patriarchal

signifying economy. It is equally essential to view representations of abuse as capable of encompassing a myriad of meanings. There are very real social consequences to how abuse is represented, and these should not be taken lightly. However, it is as dangerous to ignore the subversive potential of troubling portrayals of dysfunctional private life as it is to ignore the ways in which such representations reiterate and perpetuate classist and sexist ideology.

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