

**The Resilient Marian Halcombe:
On Feminine Feeling and Wilkie Collins's Debt to Amatory Fiction**

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"For there is no friend like a sister"

-- *Goblin Market* (l.562)

"My courage was only a woman's courage after all"

-- *The Woman in White* (p.335)

<1> Mid-way through *The Woman in White* (1859), Count Fosco warns his co-conspirator Sir Percival Glyde that they must treat their rival Marian Halcombe as a new breed of woman: "Where are your eyes? Can you look at Miss Halcombe, and not see that she has the foresight and the resolution of a man?" (340). The novel's literary experiments in representing gender norms and gender blending are topics that have dominated much of the critical conversation on Collins, not to mention Victorian studies more generally. Some of the best work in this field focuses not just on Collins's efforts to undo restrictive gender binaries, but also on the political stakes of such representations of gender following the 1857 Divorce Act and the subsequent rise of complex representations of female sexuality and the New Woman. I do not wish to revise this tradition of scholarship; rather, this article builds on this earlier criticism by tracing the legacy of Collins's gender blending not forwards but backwards to eighteenth-century amatory fiction. Marian Halcombe represents a continuation of an older feminine form for a new cultural moment. Over the course of the novel, Marian comes to embrace and therein embodies a form of feminine insight (or "foresight") through feeling, a model which I argue hearkens back to eighteenth-century notions of sensibility and the kind of heroine found in amatory fiction by Eliza Haywood. In works such as *Anti-Pamela* (1741), *Fantomina* (1725), or *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless* (1751), Haywood immerses female characters (and readers, by extension) in the most sensational and alluring temptations. This method of textual immersion is key to Haywood's theory of feminine form, for as she explains in "The Wife" (1756), women's so-called 'softer' emotional nature is their strength in so far as they can withstand and absorb such trials: "the softer sex, being by nature

less warm and violent, bear away the palm from [the men] in the article of patience or fortitude" (113). Haywood's heroine—like Marian, after her—is a capable woman; she has a strong constitution that can "bear away" the strain of excitement and, instead, can use such experiences as the impetus for intellectual growth and foresight.

<2> There is a long tradition of scholarship that celebrates Collins's sensation fiction as participating in the shift in Victorian attitudes towards women and so-called "feminine fiction." Lyn Pykett's *The 'Improper' Feminine* (1992) still stands as some of the best work on this subject. Pykett's work almost single-handedly resuscitated Collins's sensation fiction as a critical link in the rise of late-Victorian feminism and the development of new and complex representations of feminine characters and female sexuality. Her later work in *Wilkie Collins* (2005) offers an in-depth discussion of Collins's fiction in its cultural contexts, showing us the importance of his female characters in light of such developments as the 1857 Divorce Act. Other critics such as Ann Cvetkovich ("Ghostlier Determinations" [1989]) or Pamela Perkins and Mary Donaghy ("A Man's Resolution" [1990]) analyze Collins's use of the sensation narrative as a tool for character development and, in particular, the construction of gendered narrative authority. Focusing exclusively on Marian, Richard Collins's "Marian's Moustache" (2003) argues that our heroine's masculinity is indeed evidence of her intellectual prowess and that this form of gender androgyny was both acceptable and even viewed as natural variation vital to social adaptation.

<3> This article reads Marian's resilient feminine form (both corporeal and narrative) as hearkening back to models of feminine feeling and narrative resistance first made possible by eighteenth-century amatory heroines. I am not, of course, the first to read Collins's fiction as an extension of these earlier eighteenth-century models. In "Overpowering Vitality" (2002), Tamara S. Wagner argues that "[t]he antiheroes of Collins's novels eschew Victorian fashions of a muscular masculinity, anticipating the rise of the new fin de siècle antihero but also harking back to the sentimental heroes of the late-eighteenth-century novel of sentiment or sensibility" (471). Her later book *Longing* (2004) boldly proclaims that "[t]he legacy of the novel of sensibility as recuperated by the Victorian sensation novel is a fascinating topic that has so far been ignored in literary criticism" (194).⁽¹⁾ But while Wagner's interest in this literary lineage focuses almost exclusively on its male heirs, I want to shift attention to the female protagonist who navigates the ongoing danger of excessive or feminine feelings. Over the years, scholars such as George E. Haggerty (*Unnatural Affections* [1998]) and Toni Bowers (*Force or Fraud* [2011]) have offered compelling arguments regarding the role of feminine feeling as a source of strength, not weakness, in eighteenth-century fiction and culture. Both critics describe the sentimental heroine who embraces feeling as a source of insight and in order to produce narratives of resistance. Taking Haywood's amatory fiction as a case study, I argue that these earliest examples of female sensibility inspire Collins's novel and, more specifically, his

representation of Marian Halcombe as a woman who reclaims her emotional interiority and, with it, social and sexual individuality.

<4> Marian Halcombe's independence is made possible precisely by her feminine feeling, which in turn underwrites her capacity for thought and therein makes her a capable narrator in control of the plot's unfolding mystery. Focusing on feminine feeling, the first half of this article traces the link between amatory and sensation fictions. In this section I demonstrate how Marian's form—in both body and narrative—harkens back to Haywood's eighteenth-century amatory heroines whose successful navigation of narratives depends upon a corporeal response that blends together feeling and thought. The second section of this article frames the sensation novel as a continuation of this feminine model. Not unlike earlier amatory fiction, this Victorian novel-genre depends upon a sensitive protagonist who can, through corporeal immersion, see into or decode events and therein drive the narrative. The third section of the article reads *The Woman in White* as a response to the 1857 Divorce Act and the debates surrounding women's independence. Collins's capable heroine suggests that women's independence depends not so much on her ability to act and think like men but rather on those qualities deemed feminine. Her feminine affect and, more importantly, her sentimental love for her sister both motivate and sustain her careful detection and interpretation of the events and threats that surround her. It is also here, in his effort to write a new representation of feminine affect, that Collins shifts the conversation from readers to character. Earlier amatory fiction relied on a rather didactic approach, in which the heroine's failure taught readers a sexual lesson; but in Collins's hands, our sensational heroine is allowed to succeed and, therein, to serve as a new example of gendered and narrative authority.

Amatory Heroines and Narrative Authority

<5> In *The 'Improper' Feminine*, Lyn Pykett argues that 1860s sensation fiction and the New Woman novels of the 1880s and 1890s share in common a heroine renowned for her "variously transgressive nature" (9). These female protagonists "disrupted both prevailing fictional and social stereotyping" and, consequently, paved the way for new plots "which challenged and problematised definitions of the feminine or of 'woman'" (Pykett 10). With her gender-bending combination of masculine and feminine attributes, Marian Halcombe is clearly no exception to this rule. Readers are first introduced to Marian through Walter, who describes her figure as "perfectly shaped" with "symmetrical limbs [that] betrayed their beauty when they moved," but he also notes that her head (the realm of intellect) is marked by a "masculine form and masculine look of the features" (74). Walter's description thus establishes a sharp, or what he labels as "startling," discrepancy between our expectations of a beautiful feminine body and the masculine head (74). Marian's head is coded as masculine because of its association with perception, intelligence, and agency; her eyes are "piercing, resolute," and her expression is

“bright, frank, and intelligent” (74). Referencing these same gendered terms, the novel’s narrative will trace Marian’s gravitation towards feminine feeling as a source of strength and endurance. One wonders why Collins retains these gendered terms and why, by the end of her narrative, Marian embraces the heart as the source of strength and even endurance. To answer these questions, we must first position the novel as a response to earlier amatory fiction and, in particular, eighteenth-century notions of embodied affect and narrative authority.

<6> In “Haywood’s Amatory Aesthetic,” Kathleen Lubey describes how authors such as Aphra Behn and Eliza Haywood saw themselves as writing against male novelists who purported that a disciplined eros was of paramount importance to women. Their work thus stands in stark opposition to novels by Samuel Richardson, for example, in which women are made of ‘softer stuff’ and are therefore vulnerable to the excitement elicited by romances.⁽²⁾ Alternatively, authors Behn and Haywood celebrated feminine feeling as the source of intellect and narrative insight. Speaking of Haywood specifically, Lubey writes, “[w]hile love is indeed ‘the subject and generating ground of [her] plots,’ Haywood chooses amatory content not only as a call to a sexually attuned audience, but as a mode of immersing her readers . . . in states of extreme aesthetic engagement that acquaint them with human experience with an intensity no other material can” (312). *Fantomina* certainly stands as an excellent example of such aesthetic immersion. Early into the story, our titular heroine is overcome by passion for her lover, Beauplaisir: “Strange and unaccountable were the Whimsies she was possess’d of,—wild and incoherent her Desires” (45). What follows is a scene of deception (she disguises herself as a maid in order to encourage his advances) and heightened desires: “—She had now gone too far to retreat:—*He* was bold;—he was resolute: *She* fearful,—confus’d, altogether unprepar’d to resist in such Encounters, and rendered more so, by the extreme Liking she had to him” (46). The repeated reference to *Fantomina*’s “confusion” is surpassed in frequency only by the text’s references to physical passion. And the repetition of both terms suggests their correlation: amatory fiction intentionally plays upon passions and bodily sensations in order to immerse the reader in the material. But “[f]ar from being a degraded form of sensationalist writing,” Lubey continues, “amatory fiction contains the most instructive potential for eliciting readers’ affect *and* calling their attention to the implications of that affect” (312, emphasis in original). In other words, amatory feeling is not separate from but conducive to thought and mental reflection. This is precisely Haywood’s point in the preface to *Lasselia: or, the Self-Abandoned* (1725): “My Design in writing this little *Novel* (as well as those I have formerly publish’d) being only to remind the unthinking Part of the World, how dangerous it is to give way to Passion” (105).⁽³⁾ The reader is, she continues, “cautioned” against inappropriate responses through a kind of total immersion, experiencing the “warmth” of the romance and the subsequent “fall” or punishment (105).⁽⁴⁾ Haywood thereby rejects the notion that feminine affect renders women more vulnerable; rather, it is precisely because they are made

of “softer stuff” that women can absorb sensation and channel this affect into reflection or thoughtful lessons.

<7> At the same time, amatory fiction’s validation of feminine feeling must also be read as a response to eighteenth-century women’s very limited social and sexual agency. In *Unnatural Affections*, Haggerty points out that women writers of this period played a central role in shaping dominant ideas about feminine feeling and sensibility; yet, as he asks, why didn’t these same pioneers write more radical roles for their female characters? The question is rhetorical, for as Haggerty explains, “these novelists both are excruciatingly aware of the limits of novelistic convention, culturally as well as formally, and exist in an oblique relation to the cultural norms that determine the limits of subjectivity itself” (6). Bowers makes a similar point in *Force and Fraud*, in which she persuasively discourages us from demanding that these novels and novelists deliver ahistorical representations of female desire. We cannot assume (or map back onto this period) an easy dichotomy between force and consent, or between mutual seduction as opposed to rape, for these terms presume a form of feminine agency that is anachronistic to eighteenth-century models of gender. Rather, much of the fiction of this period is informed by a Tory-oriented political model that is then complemented by and reproduced through the patriarchal family. The husband/father-as-lord is the absolute authority, making women’s independent sexual identity or volition a logical impossibility. As Bowers adds, “[m]any today take for granted a proposition that eighteenth-century writers [such as Haywood and Behn] labored to establish: that seduction, courtship, and rape are qualitatively different, distinguished by ‘female’ (responsive, subordinate) consent or resistance to ‘male’ (originary, dominant) sexual overtures” (20). Amatory fiction’s attention to feminine feeling and mental reflection thus affords women a certain limited sexual agency, albeit through resistance as opposed to absolute and autonomous consent or rejection.(5) Through immersion and reflection, these tales of seduction produce “a new kind of sexual/political agent—a woman submissive to patriarchal authority yet capable of complex resistance *and* sexual delight, coerced by male desire while full of desire herself, compromised and complicit yet still virtuous—an idealized version of themselves” (23, emphasis in original).(6) These are tales of seduction, for rejection is a political impossibility. Virtue is maintained through resistance, and resistance will depend upon reflection—or on feeling as culminating in thought.

<8> By immersing readers in the world of feeling and seductive temptation, Haywood’s amatory fiction shows us how resistance is also a question of narrative form. As Haggerty explains, eighteenth-century sexual morality requires women’s desire be framed as a response to or filtered through men’s desire: “again and again in the chapters that follow, ‘her story’ cannot be told because of the degree to which it is formulated as an expression of ‘his desire’” (12). But this does not spell an entire erasure of the female; rather, as Haggerty continues, women writers and readers in search of feminine plots and desire simply shift “emphasis from

endings and the resolutions of plots to the processes by means of which plots are developed” (12-13). And in Haywood’s amatory fiction, women’s stories of resistance are made possible by the mutual relationship between feminine feeling and thought. Haywood makes this same point again in her story of Martesia (in *The Female Spectator*), a moral tale about a married woman who is undone by her vanity when she gives in to her lover’s flattering advances: “Her unexperienced Heart approved his Person, and was pleased with the Protestations he made her of it.—In fine, the Novelty of being address’d in that Manner gave a double Grace to all he said, and she never thought herself so happy as in his Conversation” (252). When others take notice of this improper love affair, restrictions are imposed, but Martesia “has a great Spirit, impatient of Controul, and this Restraint serv’d only to heighten the Inclination she before had to favour him;—She indulged the most romantick Ideas of his Merit and his Love” (252). The message is clear: Martesia’s mistake is in favoring indulgence and, with it, passion over and above the moderating effects of restraint, thought included. This lesson is communicated not only through the result, or narrative conclusion, but through the seduction plot as concerned with the tension between indulgence and resistance. Moreover, the plot’s movement from temptation to fall encourages readers to imagine what might have happened had Martesia not given in to her passions—had she resisted, she might have maintained her virtue. In other words, readers are encouraged to move from feeling to thought and, unlike Martesia, to maintain resistance as a safe and sustainable form of desire.

<9> We can find similarities between Haywood’s early amatory works, such as *Fantomina*, and her tales of scandalous and fallen women in *The Female Spectator* (including “A Present for a Servant-Maid”). Like their amatory counterparts, these latter quasi-instruction manuals teach readers that the proper or ‘virtuous’ woman is both a creature of feeling as well as thought. Haywood again warns that women *must* keep their wits about them, for they cannot count on a man to prioritize women’s virtue and therein to moderate his desire. For example, in “A Present for a Servant-Maid” (1743) Haywood offers a long and detailed list of various temptations and tempters. Her passage on “temptations from your master’s son” goes into explicit detail of some of the alluring promises men will make in order to gain the pleasures of a woman’s body: he “flatters your Vanity with Praises of your Beauty; your Avarice with Presents; perhaps, if Circumstances countenance such a Proposal, the Offer of a Settlement for Life, and, it may be, even a Promise of marrying you as soon as he shall be at his own Disposal” (249-50). This is a frank description of women as passionate creatures whose misguided desires (such as avarice and vanity) might place them in vulnerable situations. More importantly, Haywood here foregrounds plots over and above conclusions as a means of feminine resistance. Though the essays are themselves works of non-fiction prose, Haywood relies heavily on anecdotal stories which immerse her readers in and thereby warn of temptation and passion at the expense of reason and moderation. Her method is clear: the lesson (or conclusion) is ineffectual without, and second to, the immersive plot.

<10> Finally, it is also this combination of thought and feeling which then paves the way for women's claim to some kind of private interiority and individual agency. In *Dangerous Women, Libertine Epicures, and the Rise of Sensibility, 1670-1730*, Laura Linker traces this pursuit of feminine agency back to writers such as Aphra Behn and Haywood.⁽⁷⁾ Both amatory writers negotiate competing theories by Thomas Hobbes and Thomas Creech on the mind/body dichotomy. In privileging the latter's work, both women writers produce a representation of the female libertine whose "mind becomes a feeling entity and also, in Creech's translation, a feminized one" (Linker 5). With its blend of feminine feeling and thought, Haywood's amatory fiction "continue[s] the legacy" that earlier writers like Behn (and Catharine Trotter Cockburn) "began" (97). Linker sees in Haywood another author who "look[s] at the female libertine's struggle to express her desires in an unforgiving world," and who asks questions about women's "sexual and intellectual freedom, which writers consistently began to link together" (97).⁽⁸⁾ Indeed, readers of amatory fiction learn (per amatory fiction's emotional immersion) to read female characters in terms of their interior machinations, specifically those efforts to moderate feeling through thought. *Fantomina*, for example, teaches readers that loose women do *not* win the lover, and that it is better to maintain one's virtue as necessary to social standing and marriage. Thought and affect—or mind and body—must therefore work together to resist the temptations of passion. As an extra safeguard, as happens so frequently in Haywood's writing, the narrator is there to encourage reflection. For example, the story of Martesia ends with the narrator's instruction to "Behold her now in a voluntary Banishment from Friends and Country, and roaming round the World in fruitless Search of that Tranquility she could not have fail'd enjoying at home in the Bosom of a Consort equally belov'd as loving" (257). This final reference to her missed opportunity—the 'tranquility' of her husband's home and love—encourages readers to compare different experiences and to weigh the (social) costs of pleasure. As such, amatory experience not only stimulates thought, but it also suggests how this thought might culminate in some form of sexual agency. More importantly, this combination of women's emotional and intellectual interiority produces a powerful aid in processing and selecting safe amatory experiences—i.e. shaping one's own plot.

Marian and Affective Agency

<11> In the 1860 preface to his novel, Wilkie Collins explains how he first conceived of his text as an "experiment" wherein "[t]he story of the book is told throughout by the characters of the book" (618). The result is not only an exciting firsthand account, attesting to the veracity of the rather sensational events, but also a clever narrative method for developing character through both showing and telling.⁽⁹⁾ Marian is an excellent example of this experimental character whose psychological complexity is evidenced in her ability to record and also interpret the data. Positioned midway through the text, her narrative is surpassed in importance only by Walter Hartright's, which in a symbolic act frames her and all other narratives.⁽¹⁰⁾ But because of her

mental prowess, Marian drives the middle plot and thereby implicitly rivals Walter's role as hero. For example, she questions Sir Percival Glyde's intentions towards Laura and, later, his motive in voiding Laura's will. In the course of this early exchange, Marian also betrays an initial assumption that authority—including the right to narrative or “to tell” the story—is both masculine and rational (the mind):

Are you [Laura] to break your heart to set his mind at ease? No man under heaven deserves these sacrifices from us women. Men! They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace—they drag us away from our parents' love and our sisters' friendship—they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel. And what does the best of them give us in return? Let me go, Laura—I'm mad when I think of it! (208)

Marian's shift from the intellectual to the emotional—“I am mad when I think about it”—is marked off by a dash, a signal that Marian resists the latter. More important is how this turn to emotion also signals a breakdown in narrative. Immediately following her angry outburst, Marian quickly complains how “tears—miserable, weak, women's tears of vexation and rage—started to my eyes” (208). Rather than continue, she instead (and with Laura's help) covers her face with a handkerchief “to hide . . . the betrayal of my own weakness—the weakness of all others which she knew that I most despised” (208). At this point in the novel's plot, Marian equates feminine feeling with weakness, as something to avoid insofar as it undermines her challenge to masculine authority. At first glance, then, Marian's rejection of “weak women's tears” would seem to distinguish her from eighteenth-century amatory heroines whose strength depends upon feminine affect.

<12> However, Marian's frustration is not with embodied affect alone. Rather, she explicitly names her feeling as feminine (“woman's tears”), and it is this distinctly gendered mode of affect that culminates in both “vexation” and seeming paralysis. The distinction is important, for it still admits what was a continued interest in sensory perception throughout the nineteenth-century.⁽¹¹⁾ Yet Marian's qualification suggests that, by the Victorian period, the link between feeling and thought has evolved into a gendered phenomenon from which women are often excluded. On this point, Claudia Johnson's *Equivocal Beings* singles out the Romantic era as a critical turning point in codes of sensibility and gendered sentimentality.⁽¹²⁾ Male writers of this period (a category which includes as diverse a range from Edmund Burke to Jacques Rousseau and Oliver Goldsmith) embraced feeling as conducive to masculine authority, which became all the more urgent after the French revolution. Johnson describes this as men's appropriation and redefinition of feeling as distinctly masculine: “sentimentality entailed . . . the ‘masculinization’ of formerly feminine gender traits, and that the affective practices associated with it [were] valued *not* because they [were] understood as feminine, but precisely

and only insofar as they [were] recoded as masculine" (14). Men's monopolization of sensibility as a matter of "chivalric" authority thus left "women without a distinct gender site" or mode of embodied subjectivity (11).

<13> Walter's narrative maturation is often cited as an example of this chivalric authority.⁽¹³⁾ In *The Novel and the Police*, for example, D. A. Miller describes how an "immature" Walter begins the story as too sensitive or "nerve-ridden" to assume his proper role as "male agent" (108). But after a brief stint overseas Walter learns to discipline his body, or to channel feeling into thought. In *the Secret Theatre of Home*, Jenny Bourne Taylor describes this process as one of self-mastery, in which the hero is no longer "incapacitated by anxiety" and can thereby act as "his own and Laura's moral manager" (108). Walter's plot implicitly codes feeling as feminine and, therefore, as potentially "emasculating." This gendered model of affect is not unusual for its time. Published in the same year as *The Woman in White*, Thomas Laycock's *Mind and Brain* (1860) outlines the differences between men and women in physiological terms. "It is," Laycock explains, "in the emotional development of her nervous system that we have the most striking differences" between the sexes (317). "Woman, as compared with man, is the more nervous temperament," and because of this hypersensitivity, she tends toward "excitement" as opposed to insight (317). In Laycock's model, woman is hyper-embodied, and worse yet, her innate sensitivity renders her passive and thus vulnerable to all stimuli. She cannot translate sensation into thought—or as Laycock warns, "her nervous system is therefore more easily acted upon by all impressions, and more liable to all diseases of excitement" (317). Read in this context, Walter's assumption of masculine authority seems like logical counterpart to woman's innate propensity to nervousness and thus dependency. Indeed, his maturation plot reads a very mid-Victorian attempt to naturalize those earlier, Romantic-era models of chivalry (as described by Johnson).

<14> It is clear from her narrative that Marian struggles with this chivalric ideal which denigrates feminine feeling as unproductive and even weak. Yet it is interesting to note that other characters, including Walter, do not perceive her as overly-sensitive and thus vulnerable. Walter notes how, following his account of the *Woman in White*, Marian eagerly claims that she is "all aflame with curiosity" (78); he notices how she readily moves from physical stimulation ("aflame") to mental reflection ("curiosity). Walter also admits that Marian is the first to take action. She pursues the mystery, digging up clues such as her late mother's letter about Mrs. Catherick and her mysterious daughter—the latter is of course Anne, the *Woman in White*. It is Marian who discovers that Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde plan to use Anne in their plot against Laura. And finally, it is Marian who (before Walter) moves beyond data-gathering to piece together and interpret the clues. Whereas the immature Walter is overwhelmed by his emotions, Marian is both able to withstand such shocks and, importantly, to channel this feeling into insight and agency.

<15> Over the course of her narrative, Marian herself learns to recognize and embrace her feminine feeling as a source of both insight and interpretive authority, not weakness. After all, it is her feminine feeling that is the source of her superior skills of detection.⁽¹⁴⁾ In one of the more impressive examples of this process, Marian recounts how she discovered that Count Fosco intercepted and read her letter to the lawyer Gilmore. Inspired by some feeling of “vague distrust,” Marian decides to retrieve and reread her letter; as she explains, “[w]omen, as everybody knows, constantly act on impulses which they cannot explain even to themselves; and I can only suppose that one of those impulses was the hidden cause of my unaccountable conduct on this occasion” (277). But when the seal of her letter easily opens beneath her fingers, she realizes that Count Fosco has in fact opened and read her letter. It is important to note that she reaches this conclusion after she has engaged in a process of logical elimination: “Perhaps I had fastened it insufficiently? Perhaps there might have been some defect in the adhesive gum?” (277). Again, thought and feeling blend together. She doesn’t merely think through a problem; rather her feelings (that “woman[ly]” ‘impulse’) direct her to the problem and, even as she reaches her conclusion, she “feel[s] the third conjecture stirring in [her] mind,” as though thought is still inextricably tied to sensation and the body (277). In scenes such as this, feminine sensibility is more than a means to interiority—a means by which to glimpse woman’s private individualism; instead, Marian channels sensation into interpretation in order to accurately detect and thereby negotiate the threats around her. It is her feminine feeling that makes her a good reader and a good detective.

<16> This turn to reading skills brings us back to Haywood whose amatory fiction, which also frames feminine feeling as a source of insight as well as strength (or resilience). Take for example her later work of female temptation and recovery, *The History of Miss Betsy Thoughtless*, in which the titular heroine allows herself to lapse into passionate encounters at the expense of forethought as well as personal and social safety.⁽¹⁵⁾ She is so “[h]urried by an excess of vanity, and that love of pleasure so natural to youth, [that] she indulged herself in liberties, of which she foresaw not the consequences” (56)—consequences which include the loss of a respectable suitor (Mr. Truworth) and even attempted rape. But most important is *Betsy Thoughtless*’s contrast between women and men’s affect as a source of strength or weakness, respectively. Upon discovering his wife’s infidelity, Mr. Goodman’s emotional pain deepens and then “preyed upon his vitals, and insensibly slackened the strings of life” (301). Mr. Munden, Betsy’s first husband, also stands out as another example of men’s corporeal weakness. After Betsy finally leaves her husband, the town begins to talk and his reputation plummets so low that he loses his patron’s support. Like Mr. Goodman, Mr. Munden cannot withstand such trials, and “the force of the agitation he had of late sustained” “overheated his blood” and culminates in his early demise (613). Men’s bodies are not able to absorb emotional shocks; rather, emotions place an immense and even fatal strain upon men’s bodies.⁽¹⁶⁾ Compare these two men with Betsy, who suffers through both an abusive marriage

to Mr. Munden and then heartbreak when Mr. Truworth (appropriately named) marries Harriot. Yet Betsy's pain only makes her stronger and, indeed, more reflective. She withstands the "shock" of her first husband's death, transforming her genuine "grief" into an opportunity for "meditations" and intellectual growth. By the time Mr. Munden and Harriot both conveniently die, our protagonist has evolved from Betsy 'Thoughtless' to Betsy 'Thoughtful,' and is finally mature enough to select an appropriate partner.(17)

<17> Like those amatory heroines before her, Marian is resilient enough to withstand emotional shocks and disappointment. And also like those feminine forbearers, Marian channels these feelings of pain into thought and action, devising a new means of resistance. Marian admits the "stunning" failure of Laura's pre-nuptial will, but then quickly resumes the struggle with her promise that she will not let her sister become "*his* Laura instead of mine!" (211). Indeed, Marian even brags of women's emotional strength as she plots her confrontation with Sir Percival Glyde: "On my way to the village, I prepared myself for the possibility of meeting Sir Percival. As long as I had him to deal with alone, I felt certain of not losing my presence of mind. Any woman who is sure of her own wits, is a match, at any time, for a man who is not sure of his own temper" (326). In this moment Marian self-identifies as a "woman," suggesting that it isn't necessary to completely abandon her gender in order to seek power in resistance. By this point in the novel, then, Marian has come to terms with her feminine affect. The link between feeling and thought is no longer the exclusive domain of men; rather, a woman may lay claim to both and still remain feminine. In fact, a woman with "wits" is stronger than a man who falls prey to excessive feeling, such as a bad "temper." Whereas amatory heroines must resist or withstand masculine authority, our new and sensational Victorian heroine transforms feminine feeling into a source of strength in order to explicitly challenge masculine authority. When we remember that *The Woman in White* follows hot on the heels of the 1857 Divorce Act, we realize that Collins is making a very bold claim regarding women's capacity for independence.

Feminine Feeling and Authority after the 1857 Divorce Act

<18> The 1857 Divorce Act was the first of many attempts by gender reformers to redefine women's legal and economic roles within and without marriage.(18) As feminist scholar Mary Lyndon Shanley explains, possessive individualism would prove essential to Victorian women's efforts to contract with or challenge their husbands: "a woman had to be able to possess her own property before she could effectively counterpoise her own will to that of her husband" (*Feminism, Marriage, and the Law in Victorian England* 13). Yet the very terms of Victorian common law undermine women's claims to property and, thus, contract. In his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-69), William Blackstone explains how English common law, with its guiding principle of 'coverture,' defines the wife and husband as a single entity, over which

the husband assumes absolute authority. The husband 'covers' and thus appropriates his wife's property and, with it, her legal as well as economic identity.⁽¹⁹⁾ For this reason, Blackstone continues, "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: and therefore it is also generally true, that all compacts made between husband and wife, when single, are voided by the intermarriage" (655). As *femme covert*, the wife's pursuit of a separate economic will (or divorce, even) is impossible, for it assumes the existence of a wife's independent identity. The new 1857 Divorce Act, however, not only helped make divorce more accessible, but it also allowed the newly-divorced wife greater rights and access to her children and material property.⁽²⁰⁾ In her history of the Divorce Act, Catherine O. Frank describes how many (including the Law Amendment Society and the Married Women's Property Committee) were disappointed that the Act did not go so far as to extend the same property rights and, thus, legal autonomy to married women as were enjoyed by their single or widowed sisters. Parliament was, she explains, "willing to amend laws pertaining to the poor, to infant custody, and suffrage," and yet it refused the grant these same rights to wives for fear of upsetting the power hierarchy that had so long defined marriage (111). Indeed, many Victorians objected to the Act on the grounds that women's economic and legal empowerment would spell the end of marriage in general. As Frank explains, these skeptics argued that men would have no financial or legal incentive to take a wife, "thus implying that there was no reason other than financial control and domestic mastery to make marriage an appealing exchange for men" (111). Over the century, a series of marriage acts would offer small progress in the way of women's rights and property, but in general these acts did very little to alter what Shanley refers to as married women's "special status" (125). For the better part of the century wives would continue to be defined by the practice of legal coverture (as *femme coverts*), or by an institution of marriage that continued to deny their claims to a autonomous identity en par with their single or separated sisters (the *femme sole*).

<19> Collins's novel responds to the limited success of the 1857 Divorce Act by giving readers female characters who strive against, or refused to be "covered by," marriage as a form of erasure. The first act of resistance takes place before Laura's marriage to Sir Percival Glyde. By securing the aid of the lawyer Gilmore, the sisters attempt to draw up a will that protects Laura's property and thus preserves her legal autonomy under marriage.⁽²¹⁾ This plan is thwarted, however, and Laura is married without the protection of a pre-nuptial will. A 'post-nuptial will' securing Laura's financial autonomy is of course unimaginable, for common law dictates that the wife must defer to the husband's authority and thereby seek his endorsement in all financial or legal matters. As Frank argues, common law effectively erases the wife's access to a separate will (in both senses of the terms) and thus identity: "To deprive women of the ability to express their personal volition (or at the very least to make that ability contingent on their husband's desires) is to deprive them not only of the means of self-definition during

their lifetimes but of the means of self-perpetuation as well” (Frank 114).⁽²²⁾ Marian appears to understand the legal repercussions of common law when she compares her sister’s marriage with impending death: “Before another month is over our heads, she will be *his* Laura instead of mine! *His* Laura! I am as little able to realise the idea which those two words convey—my mind feels almost as dulled and stunned by it, as if writing of her marriage were like writing of her death” (211). But again, Marian is quick to move from emotional shock to reflection and then action. Indeed, the closing reference to her own “writing” is critical, for this takes us to the second act of resistance: once she realizes that her sister’s marriage to Sir Percival cannot be avoided, Marian takes up her pen and attempts to save her sister through narrative.

<20> In her work on *The Woman in White*, Frank delivers a compelling interpretation of Marian’s narrative as a form of resistance against the closure of the marriage plot. To make this point, she describes how the marriage plot replicates the act of legal erasure under common law: “Narrative closure, like legal coverture, in this context comes to connote both finality—the end of the story—and a literal closing off of options for women” (114). But Marian’s narrative works against this erasure on both levels. As Frank continues, “Marian’s detective story uncovers both of Laura’s deaths (her ‘legal death’ in marriage as well as her fraudulent one in the asylum), but if Marian’s story has been focused on Laura, her story-telling has been a means of drawing attention to herself and, in Fosco’s terms, to her ‘resolution’” (128). As with Haywood and the amatory authors before her, Marian’s narrative calls attention to plot over and above narrative endings; her “detection,” as Frank puts it, writes back into existence the woman who is erased by the closure of the marriage plot (and the correlative murder plot). Frank’s point is well taken in that Marian and Laura represent two very different ways of being, two different narrative subjects. On the one hand Marian resurrects and therein forces one to see and recognize Laura, the married woman who is erased by coverture. On the other hand, Marian’s narrative also records her own central role in the drama. In this way, her written account raises the specter of the *femme sole* who, unlike her married sister, has a right to legal and narrative autonomy.

<21> Building on Frank’s argument, I would add that affective interiority, or the balance between feeling and thought, proves an essential component in Marian’s narrative resistance. Her frustration with feminine feeling is not a rejection of affect, but rather it refers to her rebellion against gendered situations and, specifically, men’s chivalric authority. In accepting feminine feeling as a source of insight, Marian also learns to identify and resist gendered situations (including marriage laws and domesticity) as the real forces limiting her and Laura’s mobility. While her first emotional outburst codes feeling as feminine (“woman’s tears”), her later narrative expresses frustration with her gendered situation. She wishes, “[i]f I only had the privileges of a man, I would order out Sir Percival’s best horse instantly, and tear away on a night-gallop, eastward, to meet the rising sun—a long, hard, heavy, ceaseless gallop of hours

and hours, like the famous highwayman's ride to York" (222). This distinction between feeling and position is essential, for it marks a shift in her attitude toward affect and gender. With this latter reference to riding Sir Percival Glyde's horse, Marian clarifies that she does not wish she were a man but rather imagines how she might usurp the position of men within her and Laura's life.

<22> Armed with this distinct feminine sensibility, Marian finds the power to resist gendered situations and, eventually, narrative containment. The spying scene marks a pivotal moment in this transition from physical to authorial empowerment. Toward the end of her narrative, Marian spies on Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde only to discover their evil plot against Laura. Again, she worries about the limits of her gender: "My courage was only a woman's courage, after all; and it was very near to failing me, when I thought of trusting myself on the ground floor, at the dead of night, within reach of Sir Percival and the Count" (335). Yet it is important to note that Marian does *not* take the ground route; instead, she carefully climbs across the roof so she might listen in at the men's window—at night and in the rain no less! Through this daredevil move, she not only symbolically breaks free of the confines of the home (and the gender conventions of the domestic sphere), but she also infiltrates the men's conversation in which they discuss their plans for the sisters. Listening in on their conversation, Marian discovers that Count Fosco and Sir Glyde are after Laura's money and are even contemplating murder as a means to this end. While Marian is horrified by this revelation, she is also driven by the stronger "impulse" "to preserve those words in writing, exactly as they were spoken" (350). But by now she has learned to trust in those emotional instincts which lead her toward a specific conclusion and course of action. "I remember," she tells us, "the persuasion settling itself in my mind that the words those two men had said to each other, would furnish us, not only with our justification for leaving the house, but with our weapons of defence against them as well" (350). Using the men's own words against them, Marian knows that her record can serve as a "defence" against both physical and narrative containment; she intends to use her own narrative in order to resist and even discredit the men's story about (and thus their authority over) her and Laura.

<23> Just as Walter first recognized Marian's superior skills of detection, so too does Count Fosco see in Marian a new feminine character who rivals his claims to masculine authority. While talking with Sir Percival, Count Fosco insists that Marian is no stereotypical "flimsy" angel of the hearth like Laura; rather, she is a legitimate threat who can blend together "foresight" and "resolution" (340). She is not only "firm as a rock" (in her "resolution"), but she has that penetrating insight which will allow her to interpret the two men and their evil plot. "With that woman for my friend I would snap these fingers of mine at the world," Count Fosco declares; however, "[w]ith that woman for my enemy, I, with all my brains and experience—I, Fosco, cunning as the devil himself, as you have told me a hundred times—I walk, in your English

phrase, upon egg-shells!" (340).⁽²³⁾ Though Count Fosco counts himself as "cunning," he is nonetheless threatened by, but also admiring of, this woman who is driven by the "strength of her love and her courage" (340). This reference to Marian's love is crucial, for it understands that the empowered woman combines *both* feeling and thought—a combination which reminds one of those earlier amatory heroines. But whereas Haywood's amatory fiction tends to focus on affect in the form of sexual passions, Collins instead shifts the attention to feelings of sisterly love. And in emphasizing sisterly love, Collins also shifts the conversation from the *femme covert* to the *femme sole* as the last step in the puzzle that is female agency and independence.

<24> It is, finally, no small accident of Collins's narrative that Marian's strength can be traced back to love for Laura. Appearing three years after the 1857 Divorce Act, *The Woman in White* offers readers a vision of the newly empowered woman who feels for, and acts in support of, other women as distinct legal and narrative subjects. As Count Fosco recognizes, Marian's commitment to the mystery (to spy, even), is inspired by her fierce love for her sister (340). He imagines how wonderful it would be to count such a "grand creature" among his "friends," but Marian's loyalty lies elsewhere, not with male "enem[ies]" but with her sister (340). As Count Fosco understands, it is this sisterly love which stands as a barrier between the men and Laura: "[Marian] stands in the strength of her love and her courage, firm as a rock between us two, and that poor flimsy pretty blonde wife of yours" (340). Her "firm" love then drives her to action, resurrecting her sister from the living death that is women's fate within the marriage plot. Even when Marian falls ill, and claims to be "afraid of [her] head," she looks to this sisterly love for strength: "I see the words. Laura—I can write Laura, and see I write it. Eight or nine—which was it?" (351). Hartright's narrative takes over at this point, but Marian is explicit in her claim that she continues to write and thus resists narrative closure. Moreover, it is this closing image of Laura, her beloved sister, which gives her the resolution to continue in spite of illness. By the end, Marian fully embraces her feminine feeling as the source of insight and strength needed in order to write a record of resistance. It is this revelation of her persistent will that stands as yet another and final testament to feminine resilience in the face of men's self-serving efforts to preserve masculine authority.

Conclusion: New Women to Come

<25> As mentioned at the outset, many critics have already persuasively pointed out the ways Collins's novel presents gender bending as advantageous, even normative. Still other critics, such as Richard Collins, read *The Woman in White* as part of the author's ongoing experiments in gender bending as a defense of feeling implicit in sensation fiction.⁽²⁴⁾ I have, in this article, framed this gender bending as part of a larger move in genre blending, or an effort to look back to and appropriate strategies from eighteenth-century amatory fiction. As with amatory fiction,

Collin's sensation novel offers a feminine literary form that does not believe in a mind/body separation. Both forms of fiction propose a total immersion in bodily sensation as a new form of intellectual training for women. Indeed, this is Marian's lesson, as she moves from those earlier shocks in her narrative—and with them, a detestation of her feminine feeling as vulnerable—to the final acceptance of affect as strength and even necessary to feminine agency. At the peak of her interpretative detection she learns to trust her “feminine impulses” (277) and therein embraces feeling as the guide to insight—she learns “to feel” ideas and conclusions “stirring in [her] mind” (277). It is this capacity for a kind of deep or sensory reading that Count Fosco, her adversary, recognizes and even celebrates in his minor but telling insertion at the conclusion of Marian's narrative. He raves about this “Admirable woman,” her “Stupendous effort,” and her diary which presents an “unexpected intellectual pleasure” (351). Count Fosco's reference to feeling (“pleasure”) and “intellect” is appropriate for the balance between both is essential to Marian's story. And in reading her story, he cannot help but express his “admiration” for its “rare courage, the wonderful power of memory, the accurate observation of character, the easy grace of style, [and] the charming outbursts of womanly feeling” (351). Again, it is her blend of acute observation *and* womanly feeling that makes Marian a very real and thus exciting rival.

<26> As an embodiment of feminine resilience and resistance, Marian offers a powerful template for independent-minded women and gender reformers to come—the kind of women driving and benefiting from the 1857 Divorce Act.⁽²⁵⁾ Yet one wonders whether, by the conclusion, Marian is contained and thereby “domesticated” by Walter's narrative (the watchful eye of a male guardian). In “A Man's Resolution,” Perkins and Donaghy expose Collins's subtle critique of Victorian masculinity as represented through Walter's need for power through narrative authority. Walter's narrative begins and concludes the novel, thus acting as a symbolic frame containing Marian's contribution and, with it, the woman who would rival his status as hero and masculine authority. Indeed, the fact that Marian falls ill immediately after spying might suggest, at first glance, that she is a vulnerable woman incapable of withstanding the shocks and physical trials outside of the domestic sphere. However, as both Perkins and Donaghy point out, Marian may be down but she is far from out when it comes to solving the mystery, saving Laura, and restoring order: “it is she, not Walter who rescues Laura from the mental hospital. She supervises her half-sister's rehabilitation; she eludes the Count by switching their residence; and, at the end of the novel, she takes Laura to claim Limmeridge without Walter's knowledge” (399). And let us not forget that even Walter must, in the end, concede Marian's right in proclaiming “*the Heir of Limmeridge*”: “So she spoke. In writing those last words, I have written all. The pen falters in my hand. The long, happy labor of many months is over! Marian was the good angel of our lives—let Marian end our Story” (Collins 617). Even Walter admits that his influence is not absolute and, instead, concedes Marian's contribution to both plot and, finally, narrative.

<27> The novel's final scene, with its unconventional domestic arrangement, is also reminiscent of amatory fiction's emphasis upon "process" (to use Haggerty's term(26) over and above conclusions or narrative closure. With regards to this same scene, Frank rejects the idea that Collins has "discarded the domestic model of fulfillment," arguing instead that "he has displaced it" (131). In other words, the romance plot is still present, but it is completely overshadowed by the "single woman at the center of the household and of the family" (131). I heartily agree with Frank's interpretation, but I would also add that this shift in focus to the single woman privileges plot and, specifically, her story of resistance. Walter himself models this kind of reading when he admits that his "labor of many months is over," but then quickly turns his attention to Marian as the "angel" who made possible this picture of domestic bliss.(27) In his deference to Marian, then, Walter not only relinquishes absolute narrative authority but he also reminds readers of women's plots (resistance over and above endings). No doubt Walter's pen "falters" because he realizes that Marian once again exceeds his control, his ability to write and therein contain her.(28)

<28> Like its heroine, *The Woman in White* itself stands as a testament to feminine resilience. In *The 'Improper' Feminine*, which is now a touchstone work on the form, Pykett salvages sensation fiction from the dustbins of literary history. As she explains, the critical consensus has long held that sensation fiction and its offshoot New Women's writings, though "a sensation in their own day," "rapidly disappeared from view, leaving (according to the critical consensus) little lasting impression upon the history of fiction" (*'Improper' Feminine* 198). Part of the problem with the lasting importance of sensation fiction is its affiliation with "low-brow" narrative forms and popular topics such as "Wild Women,' 'Revolting Daughters' and the New Woman" (200).(29) Nonetheless, Pykett adds, sensation fiction's contribution to these seemingly 'low-brow' topics and forms anticipates some of the innovative narratives later associated with 'high-culture': "The female sensationalists' interest in marriage as a source of narrative, rather than as merely a device of closure, also anticipated the development of the marriage problem novel by 'high-culture' novelists such as George Eliot (in *Middlemarch* and *Daniel Deronda* in the 1870s), Thomas Hardy, George Moore and George Meredith, as well as the New Woman Writers" (199-200). Like Pykett, I challenge the critical consensus and argue that sensation fiction's legacy runs deep. As a feminine genre, the sensation novel can trace its lineage as far back as amatory fiction and forward to New Women novels and beyond. Collins's sensational novel might stand as a minor genre, but its legacy must be measured in terms of its major cultural shockwaves. In *The Woman in White*, Collins shows us that the female protagonist has always been strong, courageous, and capable. Marian (and readers, through her) need only learn to embrace their feminine feeling as a source of power and, eventually, independence.

Endnotes

(1)Wagner's *Longing* (2004) pays particular attention to sentimental fiction on nostalgia as a moderate blend of thought and feeling.([^](#))

(2)See, for example, the novel's advertisement, in which Richardson discusses romance as "calculated to cherish a taste for light, unprofitable reading, and to inspire, particularly in the youthful mind, a false idea of human life" (Richardson, p.i).([^](#))

(3)In order to recognize such 'danger,' Haywood argues that readers must first be tested in the ways of temptation, or the 'warm' thrills of passion. Hence, critics must "excuse the too great Warmth, which may perhaps, appear in some particular Pages; for without the *Expression* being invigorated in some measure proportionate to the *Subject*, 'twould be impossible for a Reader to be sensible how far it touches him, or how probable it is that he is falling into those Inadvertencies which the Examples I relate wou'd caution him to avoid" (*Lasselia* 105).([^](#))

(4)Not that this is not "virtue rewarded," as in Richardson's *Pamela*.([^](#))

(5)Bowers thus looks at amatory fiction as "dethrone[ing] the liberal fantasy of consent-or-resistance in order to experiment with other relational rubrics, to imagine possible virtuous practices built from quite different ideological presuppositions" (25).([^](#))

(6)Bringing it back to Tory politics, Bowers explains this as "'collusive resistance'—a paradoxical exercise of *resistance through submission*" (4, emphasis in original).([^](#))

(7)On this point Linker cites works by both Rose A. Zimbardo (*A Mirror to Nature* [1986]) and Dolores Altaba-Artal (*Aphra Behn's English Feminism* [1999]) regarding the female libertine and the rise of the novel.([^](#))

(8)Linker is also careful to distinguish the heroine of *Betsy Thoughtless* as a coquette, not a libertine, and therefore as redeemable (see page 146).([^](#))

(9)Collins's preface is a response to those critics, such as the *Saturday Review*, who argued that *Woman in White* "does not attempt to paint character or passion" (628).([^](#))

(10)See also Cvetkovich ("Ghostlier Determinations" [1998]) and Perkins and Donaghy ("A Man's Resolution" [1990]) for more on Walter's narrative authority.([^](#))

(11)See for example Suzy Anger's "Naturalizing the Mind in the Victorian Novel" for more on Victorians' interest in "sense perception" (489). In this essay, Anger focuses on Collins's *Poor Miss Finch* (1871) as invested in "particularly visual perception" which "dominated the new psychology in the second half of the century" (489).([^](#))

(12)Johnson’s history builds on revisionist arguments (such as G. J. Barker-Benfield’s *The Culture of Sensibility* [1996]) challenging prior assumptions that sensibility and sentimentalism always were always coded as feminine (or what J.M.S. Tompkins’s describes as the feminization of culture).[\(↗\)](#)

(13)See also Rachel Ablow’s “Sensational Masculinity” (2004), which reads *The Woman in White* as producing “a model of male identity that relies less on memory or experience than on the ability to feel sensations, to name them, and to convince others of those names’ validity” (159).[\(↗\)](#)

(14)There have been several compelling studies on Wilkie Collins’s contribution to the detective genre, including early work by Robert P. Ashley (“Wilkie Collins and the Detective Story” [1951]), as well as later examples such as Ronald R. Thomas’s *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (1999) and D.A. Miller’s *The Novel and the Police* (1989).[\(↗\)](#)

(15)Though this is not technically an example of the author’s ‘early amatory work,’ the novel clearly employs the same amatory techniques and to the same ends.[\(↗\)](#)

(16)See also Haywood’s “The Wife,” in which she warns that men are quite unable to move from emotional experience, or shock, to reflection and insight (113-14).[\(↗\)](#)

(17)Note, for example, how Betsy weighs the whole of Mr. Truworth’s character—his “admirable endowments, the services he had done her,” “his birth, his estate, his good character, and her own experience of his many virtues”—before she indulges her affections with her “first love letter” let alone accepts his proposal (*Betsy Thoughtless* 627-28).[\(↗\)](#)

(18)See also Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox’s “Introduction” (2006) to the Broadview edition of *The Woman in White*.[\(↗\)](#)

(19)See Book I, Chapter XV “Of Husband and Wife.”[\(↗\)](#)

(20)For more on the public debates around divorce, see Matthew Rubery’s *The Novelty of Newspapers* (2009) on the popular press’s scandal sheets (64).[\(↗\)](#)

(21)Gilmore’s role is, as Frank reasons, “a reminder that women of property had protections through the Courts of Equity before the passage of the Married Women’s Property Acts and that having money can offer protection from the law (in this case common law)” (127, n. 24).[\(↗\)](#)

(22)This is, as Frank argues, the legal perpetuation of wives’ “special status” as married to or defined through husbands. Even the pre-nuptial will would only secure any property held at the time the document was drafted; it would not guarantee goods acquired after marriage. “Not until 1893,” Frank continues, “could a woman’s will ‘speak’ from the time of her death, in other

words, be considered to include all the property at her disposal when she died, as opposed to what she had at the time she wrote her will" (113).^(^)

(23)It is significant that it is Count Fosco who recognizes Marian's sensibility, for he is also repeatedly associated with feminine feeling and 'sentiment' (see pages 242, 245, 246, and 305, for examples).^(^)

(24)See also Ann Elizabeth Gaylin's "The Madwoman Outside the Attic" (2001) and Yu Hsiang Bennett Fu's "Re-Imag(in)ing (Fe)male Subjectivities in The Woman in White" (2000).^(^)

(25)See also Susan Balée's "Wilkie Collins and Surplus Women" (1992) for more on *Woman in White* as a reflection of mid-Victorian debates around marriage and the rising number of single or so-called "surplus" women.^(^)

(26)See Haggerty, pages 12-13.^(^)

(27)Here, Collins's use of the term "angel" suggests an ironic twist on that conventional Victorian idol, the domestic mother and wife as "angel of the house."^(^)

(28)In his 1861 preface to *La Femme en Blanc* (Paris: J. Hertz), Collins describes how fans of the novel had contacted him from as far as Canada and "the furthest limits of America civilization" asking after Marian and expressing their clear desire for this new type of woman (623).^(^)

(29)See also Cvetkovich's "Ghostlier Determinations," Patrick Brantlinger's "What is 'Sensational' about the 'Sensation Novel'?" and D.A. Miller's "Cage aux folles: *Sensation* and *Gender* in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*." These works provide in-depth discussions of Victorian anxieties surrounding gender and the corrupting influence of sensation fiction.^(^)

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