VICTORIAN SENSATIONAL FICTION

THE DARING WORK OF CHARLES READE

RICHARD FANTINA

Victorian Sensational Fiction

Previous Publications

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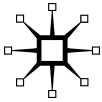

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To Martha Tejada Cotero

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Introduction

Recognized in his own day as a controversial author of the first rank, Charles Reade produced fourteen novels, twenty-six plays, and over two dozen stories in a career that spanned four decades. Authors of the Victorian era published, according to John Sutherland's estimate, some 50,000 novels (160). Many of these authors gained little notice at the time and less from posterity. Reade is one of many authors whose work sold in the hundreds of thousands and whose names were known throughout the English-speaking world, but who are now forgotten, their works long out of print.[1] Yet, so singular were Reade's achievements and so individual his voice that both his champions and his detractors compared him to George Eliot. Although Henry James referred to him as a "distant kinsman of Shakespeare" (207) and Swinburne felt that his work should "live as long as the English language" (346), the decline in Reade's critical standing was complete by the end of the nineteenth century.

Eliot E. Smith attributes this critical decline to Reade's reliance on "old melodramatic formulae of black-white delineation" but adds that Reade although "a stylistic conformist was at the same time a topical rebel" (9). Early in life, like one of his characters in *Hard Cash* (1863), Reade had begun to "chafe at the social cobwebs" (44), and even critics who praised *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861), his historical novel, felt that many of his domestic novels, like those of Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, exceeded the bounds of decency and decorum. Hostile critics—"canting dunces," as Reade called them in *Griffith Gaunt* (1866: 72)—labeled him with the derogatory epithet "sensation author" because many of his stories dealt with fraud, murder, madness, bigamy, and other extreme acts and conditions. Reade, however, felt comfortable in the popular association of his name with those of his friends and colleagues, Collins and Braddon.

Reade relished his role as an iconoclast and outspoken advocate for reform in social institutions, most famously his campaigns for

improvement in the conditions in prisons and lunatic asylums in novels such as *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* (1856), *Hard Cash* (1863) and *A Terrible Temptation* (1871). In *A Woman-Hater* (1876) and other works, Reade promoted equal rights for women. His frank portrayals of sexuality, including passages in which homoeroticism seems obvious to today's readers, outraged many critics. Reade participated emphatically in contemporary debates regarding the social function of literature. Many mid-century reviewers felt that the "proper office" of literature was "to elevate and to purify" (a phrase used repeatedly by critics),[2] and they often acknowledged George Eliot and Anthony Trollope as authors who fulfill this mission. In contrast, Reade and other sensation novelists (including Collins and, at times, Dickens) felt that part of the purpose of the novel should be to comment upon socials evils, thereby prompting action to reform institutions and behavior. Critics and authors agreed, of course, that whether a novelist wished to "elevate and purify" or to effect social change, his or her primary purpose should be to enable the active engagement of the reader in a compelling story. Reade, who based all of his fiction on facts (collected by personal interviews, observation, and press clippings that he filed in his voluminous notebooks), clearly considered himself a realist in that he felt that "the union of fact and imagination is a kind of intellectual copulation, and has procreated the best fiction in every age" (qtd. in Besant 206). In her review of *Never Too Late to Mend,* George Eliot writes that Reade's novel might appeal to those "whose sympathies are more easily aroused by fiction than by bare facts" (*Selected Essays* 382). Essentially agreeing with Eliot on this, Reade based his own novels of protest on contemporary events reported in the newspapers and in government blue book reports. Reade asserts, in the closing pages of *Put Yourself in His Place* (1868), that he has "laboured to make my readers realize those appalling facts of the day, which most men know, but not one in a thousand comprehends…until fiction—the highest, widest, noblest of all the arts—comes to his aid" (317). In the preface to *Bleak House* (1853), Dickens subscribes to this theory as well, writing that "everything in these pages concerning the Court of Chancery is substantially true" (41). Contemporary events, of course, informed novels by many other authors of the time such as Trollope's *The Way We Live Now* (1875) and Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871), but Reade sought to create a distorted mirror image of reality, changing some names and melodramatically exaggerating some elements of factual material.

Reade's very public activism to reform conditions in prisons and lunatic asylums, along with his championship of other causes,

demonstrates his commitment to a specific philosophy of realistic literature. Commenting on the success of *Never too Late to Mend,* Reade boasts that "at last they saw that I was right.... I am, on a small scale, a public benefactor" (*Readiana* 358). Collins too wrote novels with social missions, including some of his most sensational ones such as *Man and Wife* (1870), in which he throws light upon the often hidden secret of domestic violence.[3] Collins addresses other social issues including a condemnation of vivisection in *Heart and Science* (1883) and a woman's right to the custody of her children after a divorce in *The Evil Genius* (1886). In these cases and others like them, the advocacy fiction of Reade and Collins employs a blend of often shockingly realistic details and poignant melodrama, informed by an idealistic impulse, to improve the quality of human experience.

Among sensation novelists, perhaps only Reade and Collins had a self-conscious social agenda. Braddon, despite her novels' challenges to social norms and the storm of critical abuse heaped upon her because of it, does not appear to have advocated fundamental social changes. Nor does Ellen Wood, whose *East Lynne* (1861) punishes a transgressive woman far more severely than do many more canonical works such as Dickens's *Bleak House* (1853) and Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859). Yet the depiction of female passion by Wood in *East Lynne* and by Braddon in *Aurora Floyd* (1862) as well as Sheridan Le Fanu's surprisingly vivid portrayal of female same-sex desire in *Carmilla* (1867) suggest that contemporary critics recognized these works as subversive. The best recent critiques of these novels seek to explore and validate those qualities that most disturbed their nineteenth-century counterparts.

Sensation fiction has gained a new readership thanks to its rediscovery by scholars of the past 25 years, including Kathleen Tillotson, Winifred Hughes, P.D. Edwards, Ellen Miller Casey, Sally Mitchell, Jenny Bourne Taylor, Tamar Heller, Lyn Pykett, D.A. Miller, Andrew Maunder, Marlene Tromp, Pamela K. Gilbert, Natalie Schroeder, and many others. Explorations of sensation fiction by many of these authors demonstrate that the genre dared to dwell on themes that go well beyond what many of their contemporaries only allude to elliptically or do not touch upon at all. Sensation fiction exposed contradictions in the public sphere of institutions (in works by Reade, Collins, and Dickens), as well as in the domestic life of the family (in Reade, Collins, Braddon, and Wood). Yet even many Victorian novels that take an oppositional stance (such as the best of Dickens's work) often accept the premises of the prevailing systems of knowledge and

power, that is, they remain within what Michel Foucault calls, in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, the "field of strategic possibilities" (40). By presenting characters and situations that fall outside of that field, challenge institutions, and question fundamental elements of social relations, Reade's work expands the epistemological horizons of his era. Reade consistently returns to fictional and dramatic explorations of the dynamics of human sexuality, often as it intersects with emerging institutions of punishment and madness. His exposés of conditions in prisons and lunatic asylums question two fundamental pillars of the evolving systems of disciplinary power a century before Foucault addressed these concerns more theoretically. Sympathetic portrayals of female transvestites as well as a recognition and apparent toleration of male homoerotic desire as seen in many of Reade's works are exceedingly rare in Victorian literature. Reade's portrayals of women often include titillating passages that border on sexism but these are redeemed by the compelling depictions in his work of female agency—intellectual, social, and sexual.

After having established his reputation as a novelist with *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* (1856), Reade returned intermittently to his passion for the theater where he had worked as a playwright in the 1840s and the 1850s. In 1865, after a nine-year hiatus, Reade adapted *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* for the stage (but not before it had already been pirated) and he continued writing plays, as well as producing them, running theaters, and managing actors, all of which cost him a lot of time and money and brought very limited success. Reade frankly states that "I am known, I believe, as a novelist; but my natural gift was for the drama; my greatest love was for the drama" (*Readiana* 290). One could reasonably argue that Reade's failure as a playwright created the financial necessity that led him to write his best novels, all of which, in contrast to his plays, paid him very well. Aside from the 1865 stage adaptation of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*, I do not discuss Reade's plays in any detail in these pages.

However, Reade's theatrical work is important because he brought his love of the spoken word to his fiction. As Walter C. Phillips notes, "from two fifths to one half the entire bulk of the characteristic novel by Reade consists of words in the mouth of some fictitious character" (204). In her review of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*, George Eliot criticized this tendency in Reade as she writes, "The habit of writing for the stage misleads him into seeking after those exaggerated contrasts and effects which are accepted as a sort of rapid symbolism by a theatrical audience, but are utterly out of place in

a fiction" (*Selected Essays* 383). However, Phillips contends that this reliance on dialog "imparts to Reade's scenes a rapidity which few novelists ever maintained" (205). Collins too presents many of his stories though the words of his characters, but this usually comes in the form of diaries, depositions, or other written documents within the text. Reade's rhetorical technique differs in that his characters' words are spoken, giving them an immediacy that would be lacking in a more formal document composed with time for reflection. Writing in 1918, at the time of an emerging modernism, Phillips suggests that Reade's style, "with its business-like repudiation of ornament, lyrical effect, and sentiment, would have seemed more at home had it come from an Englishman of a century earlier or a half a century later" (210). The rapid, colloquial, and often undifferentiated dialog bears some affinity to modernism. Reade also uses typographical "tricks," such as the liberal use of illustrations, boldface type, and upper case letters that recall Sterne's *Tristam Shandy* (1759–1767). Reviewers often criticized this reliance on capitalized sentences. Eliot finds it tiresome, writing that "we find Mr. Reade endeavoring to impress us by suddenly bursting into capitals" (384). However, Reade's use of such devices can serve to amuse or to jar, keeping the reader engaged with the text.

In these pages, I will make the case that Reade's work and much sensation fiction by other authors present an alternative set of readings, almost a counter-canon, to what has come to be known as classic Victorian realism. Heavily steeped in the tradition of melodrama, sensation novels present an implicit (and often explicit) critique of social norms that engages readers on an emotional and visceral level. A closely related critique of social institutions is reformulated in the analytical writings of Foucault and in many present-day critics and scholars who see their work as inherently oppositional. This is especially the case with several of the varieties of gender theory through which many works by Reade and other sensation authors can be usefully explored. Part of the function of literary criticism lies in the effort to bridge the gap that necessarily results from the generic differences between the novel and theoretical work. Sensation fiction has provided the occasion for many scholars to deploy oppositional theories because the novels so often already present challenges to systems of political and social power, and to the prevailing sex and gender system.

Reade's works often possess the ability to surprise us, even if they do not shock us as they did many of his contemporaries. Because of

Reade's preoccupation with contemporary constructions of gender and sexuality and his examination of institutions of control, his work lends itself readily to recent literary theoretical approaches to the novel and to cultural studies in general. In the pages that follow, I examine Reade's body of work as a singular cultural production of the mid-Victorian era by locating that work within the social and cultural debates that characterized the period. In addition, I suggest possibilities of how today's reader might evaluate Reade's work as a reflection of similar current debates, including those over issues of power, art, the law, medicine, and gender.

This book examines Reade's work in three primary areas. Chapter 1 focuses on some of the characteristics of the highly popular genre of sensation fiction and discusses some of the factors that combined to force, until relatively recently, its exclusion from the literary canon. Following the lead of other scholars, I briefly discuss how the sensation novel came to be designated and disparaged as a genre distinct from realism. Despite the historically negative assessments of Reade's work, Mary Poovey, in a recent essay employing Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the "literary field," argues for more serious attention to Reade. Poovey's work analyzes the ideological and cultural contests, along with the alliances and attitudes that characterized the production of literature in the middle years of the nineteenth century, that ultimately led to the formation of the canon in English Studies. Bourdieu writes of the "orthodox" and the "heretics" among the players in the literary field. Reade and other sensation novelists can be considered heretics in that their work often challenged a literary establishment that in turn distrusted and often denigrated them. As the canon continues to expand, authors such as Reade are still excluded, largely through the bias of tradition.

Chapter 2 focuses on Reade's controversial novels: *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* (1856) and *Hard Cash* (1863). These two texts provide fictional examinations of the mechanisms and administration of power in prisons and lunatic asylums that prefigure some of the principal arguments developed by Foucault in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) and *Madness and Civilization* (1965). The concern of Reade's work with questions of power in social institutions and with individual sexualities links it thematically with Foucault's ideas. Where Reade worked toward specific reformist goals, Foucault developed an overarching theory of the encroachment of "biopower," emerging primarily in the nineteenth century, in which the state, along with the prevailing cultural apparatus, exerts control over the physical bodies and

social attitudes of its subjects. The most overt symbol of this power is the prison, which Foucault sees as emblematic of institutions such as the hospital, the workplace, the school, and even the home. Reade's work often serves as a contemporary point of resistance to this emerging regime of biopower in that it contests the way prisons and mental hospitals operate, and also because it presents alternatives to contemporary norms of gender and sexuality. My discussion here questions some of the premises of *The Novel and the Police* (1989), D.A. Miller's landmark study in which he applies Foucault's ideas and suggests that Victorian novels generally served to uphold hegemonic systems of power relations. In contrast, I argue that Reade's novels often work to undermine, rather than to uphold, a prevailing bourgeois worldview.

Chapter 3 discusses several of Reade's works that actively challenge mid-Victorian gender constructions and sexual mores. Reade's posthumous "Androgynism, or Woman Playing at Man" (1911) presents particularly rich opportunities to apply feminist and queer theories, such as those of Judith Halberstam, Judith Butler, Anne Cvetkovich, David M. Halperin, and Lillian Faderman. Several of Reade's characters in other works offer similar examples of texts that lend themselves to recent gender theory. These include the cross-dressing heroine of *The Wandering Heir* (1872), the lesbian-feminist heroine of *A Woman Hater* (1877), and the young woman who advocates what was later referred to as "rational dress" for women in "The Bloomer" (1857). Reade presents, in addition to these protagonists, a brief but significant passage in the 1868 novel *Foul Play* (cowritten with Dion Boucicault), in which we find an example, rare in Victorian fiction, of two male characters whose depiction suggests a committed monogamous relationship.

Elaborating on several points raised in the preceding section, Chapter 4 provides a closer reading of Reade's *Griffith Gaunt* alongside Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* (1862). These two novels are emblematic of sensation fiction in that marital irregularities (including bigamy) are essential to their plots, and they both feature vibrant and transgressive heroines who face accusations of murder. *Griffith Gaunt* and *Aurora Floyd* provide particularly strong evidence that much sensation fiction undermined Victorian values. Braddon's novel faced harsh criticism by many reviewers, while Reade's, receiving generally positive notices in England, was reviled by some North American publications. Both novels were popular with the public.

The fifth and final chapter examines the troubling depictions of racialized characters in *It Is Never Too Late to Mend, A Simpleton* (1873), and *The Wandering Heir*. In this, Reade's work falls short of that of Wilkie Collins in novels such as *The Moonstone* (1868) and *Armadale* (1866). I conclude that while these characterizations uphold contemporary racial and colonial discourse and thus, like many novels of the period, implicitly accept the logic of imperialism, many of the passages in these texts, and in much of Reade's body of work, should be recovered for their startling challenges to other elements of Victorian domestic ideology.

Because his narrators are frequently autobiographical or close in their traits and opinions to Reade himself, I have occasion throughout these pages to detail some of the events in his life to show his intimate connection to mid-Victorian social and cultural institutions at the same time that he critiqued many of them. The biographical details that appear selectively in the following pages are drawn from several sources. After Reade's death, his nephew and literary executor, the clergyman Compton Reade, collaborated with Reade's "godson" (actually his illegitimate son) Charles Liston Reade, in assembling a memoir: *Charles Reade, D.C.L., Dramatist, Novelist, Journalist. A Memoir Compiled Chiefly from His Literary Remains* (1887) (subsequently referred to simply as the *Memoir*). It predictably features the author in a highly flattering and morally upright light. John Coleman's *Charles Reade as I Knew Him* (1903) presents a more down-to-earth picture of its subject than the *Memoir*. Coleman was an actor and theatrical manager who worked often with Reade from the 1860s onward. Scholars question the accuracy of some of the dialog and details in Coleman's book but grant it at least a limited legitimacy as the account of a close friend. Coleman's book, along with the *Memoir*, Malcolm Elwin's biography, and critical studies by Wayne Burns and Eliot E. Smith provide the clearest available insights into Reade's life and work.[4]

Reade's reputation as a major novelist was secure by 1856, at a time when, as the *Memoir* remarks, "George Eliot, Wilkie Collins, Ouida, and Miss Braddon were as yet unknown" (235) to a mass public. Reade reluctantly abandoned his theatrical ambitions, but only for time, while he consolidated his status as a novelist. Coleman notes that "amidst his continually-increasing successes as a novelist he still hungered for the glamour of the footlights and the applause of the audience" (163). The lure of the theater always remained strong for Reade and, as Elwin writes, "he never received a large sum of money

without casting greedy glances upon stage-doors" (206). A final remark by theater scholar Michael Hammet seems to capture some of the essence of Charles Reade:

> He cannot . . . simply be seen as a don who took to writing; or as a novelist who took to turning out plays; nor can he be regarded as an author who took to management, as a vexatious litigator, as a comfortably-off reformist, as a reclusive misanthrope; as a misogynistic stage-door-johnny; or as a moralizing gold-digger. As his plays attest, he was all of these at the same time. (2)

It is telling, perhaps, that Reade designed his epitaph to read in this order: "Dramatist, Novelist, Journalist." It is primarily the second of these titles that forms the subject of this book.

This study concentrates on several of Reade's major novels, two of his short stories, and the dramatic version of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*. Throughout, I focus on Reade's generally adversarial position toward many Victorian institutions and norms of propriety that makes his work a candidate for recovery by scholars in contemporary literary and cultural studies.

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Chapter 1

Sensation Fiction and the Emergence of the Victorian Literary Field

Often maligned by critics, sensation fiction was a controversial genre that emerged primarily in England in the mid-nineteenth century, and much of Charles Reade's work fits comfortably into its often vaguely defined parameters. The widespread critical abuse of sensation fiction often took an ideological turn as the genre presented stark challenges to Victorian notions of propriety. A review in the *Christian Remembrancer* typifies what many contemporary critics felt: "The one indispensable point in a sensation novel is that it should contain something abnormal and unnatural" (qtd. in Phillips 26). The increasing popularity of the genre led an anonymous critic in the *Westminster Review* to warn that "a virus is spreading in all directions" (October 1866: 269). Commenting on reviews such as these, Walter C. Phillips remarks that "the increase in the reading public, combined with a reform in national manners led to almost incredible smugness and prudery" in the comments of establishment critics (93). Writing in 1919, Phillips adds that there is "something ludicrous" in the intensity of the critical reaction to the sensation novel that "is only comprehensible when one bears in mind the smugness and sanctimoniousness of the Victorian middle-class public" (34). Phillips's remark is perceptive but might have been more to the point if he had qualified it by referring to the journalists and clergymen who represented themselves as speaking for the public, for a mass audience composed of all classes eagerly awaited new works of sensation fiction that were often read in the cheaper periodicals that catered to a newly literate working class. Middle-class readers, the primary subscribers to the lending libraries, also devoured sensation fiction despite the many harsh reviews. Although many critics, both then and later, feel that sensation fiction owes its popularity primarily to its shock value and its appeal across class lines, few can deny

that it was daring in its readiness to question a range of contemporary Victorian norms relating to class, gender, race, and sexuality.

At mid-century as Richard Nemesvari notes, "the Victorian novel was on the verge of an epistemological crisis" (2006:15) as the bourgeoisie found itself the dominant class and groped toward a means of properly representing itself artistically. The ascension of bourgeois values brought along with it a celebration of nineteenth-century England as the apogee of civilization. To convince others (and itself) of this, the triumphant middle class sought to portray itself as superior in art and culture to communities from past eras, especially to its immediate predecessor in the eighteenth century. The new realism was heralded by many critics as the highest form of art to which the novel could aspire, and in relation to which the sensation novel appeared as an anomaly. Patrick Brantlinger notes that "the development of the sensation novel marks a crisis in the history of literary realism" (1982: 27). Walter M. Kendrick writes that the "major significance" of sensation "was the demonstration that novels could be successfully, even brilliantly written according to principles which seemed to contradict those of realism" (19). Those who appeared to follow eighteenth-century trends in literature were disparaged, in particular the Newgate novels, which were seen as direct descendants of the gothic novels of the late eighteenth century that had fallen out of favor. Harrison Ainsworth actually presented *Rookwood* (1834), a work that can justifiably be referred to either as a gothic or as a Newgate novel. But critical reception favored Walter Scott and Jane Austen who came to be considered the first great authors of the new age, and many emerging writers cited their work as influential.

After decades of rapidly expanding literacy, revolutions in the publishing industry, and a series of debates over intrinsic merit versus popularity, idealism versus realism, and the proper function of art and literature in general, what is now known as Victorian realism emerged triumphant in the closing years of the nineteenth century. Subsequently, many enormously popular authors—such as Reade, along with Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Wilkie Collins, Rhoda Broughton, Sheridan Le Fanu, and others—were effectively ignored by critics and scholars and hence forgotten, drummed out of the canon, and neglected in academic and popular circles. Jonathan Loesberg observes that although many today view it "as one of the subgenres belonging to the amorphous category of popular literature, sensation fiction was often found in the same journals publishing what both we and Victorians thought of as works of serious

literary significance, and it was reviewed in those journals, albeit often in terms of pejorative comparison" (115). Although many studies of Collins and Braddon, along with new editions of many of their novels, have appeared in recent years, Reade continues to suffer critical neglect. An index of this neglect finds expression in recent remarks by Maria E. Bachman and Don Richard Cox on the decline in popularity of Collins's novels after the 1860s: "His friendship with a lesser novelist, Charles Reade, is also sometimes seen as having a negative influence on the fiction of his last two decades, and this may or may not have been the case" (11).[1] Reade was most emphatically not a "lesser novelist" in his own time and is considered as such now only because of the sometimes arbitrary laws of the critical tradition and the canon.

In a discussion of the decline of Reade's place in the creation of what Pierre Bourdieu refers to as "the modern literary field," Mary Poovey notes, "It took a mere thirty years [after his death in 1884] for Reade's reputation to collapse," a collapse that she attributes to a complex series of factors including the "imperatives of professional journalists, periodical editors, and the titans of the circulating libraries," all of whom sought a stable definition of *Literature* and who enforced "the exile of writers like Reade from the literary canon" (434–35). Poovey carefully outlines the history of debates concerning the "function" of literature that took place from the late eighteenth century up to the time when New Criticism assumed a dominant position. Poovey refers to "the abortion of critical interest in Reade" (450), especially in the wake of the ascendancy of New Criticism. Because it is so pertinent to an understanding of the absence of Reade criticism in the past century, and to the critical neglect of sensation fiction in general until the late 1960s, it is useful to take a closer look at some of Poovey's remarks and at Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the "literary field."

Bourdieu defines the literary field as a "social microcosm" that includes the industry built up around literature (including "professional journalists, periodical editors, and the titans of the circulating libraries" to which Poovey refers), as well as the authors themselves (Bourdieu 451). The field produces a "space of possibilities . . . marked by an ensemble of intellectual benchmarks, often incarnated in intellectual 'stars' or various 'isms.' These must be mastered, at least in practice, in order to participate in the game" (541). Bourdieu goes on to say that "this space functions as a sort of common reference system that situates contemporaries, even when they do not consciously refer to each other, by virtue of their common situation

within the same intellectual system" (541). Bourdieu notes that "this logic obtains for literary research too" (541).

For the purposes of this study, I would like to focus more closely on Bourdieu's remarks on the players in a given literary field:

> The social microcosm that I call the *literary field* is a space of objective relations between positions—between that of the celebrated artist and that of the avant-garde artist, for example. One cannot understand what is going on without reconstructing the laws specific to this particular universe, which, with its lines of force tied to a particular distribution of specific kinds of capital (economic, symbolic, cultural, and so on), provides the principle for the strategies adopted by different producers, the alliances they make, the schools they found, and the art they defend. (544)

Elaborating on this, Bourdieu writes that the

> process that gives work momentum is produced by the struggle between the "orthodox" and the "heretics"; between on the one hand, actors who tend toward conservatism, to defend the routine and routinization, in a word, the established symbolic order and the academic institutions that reproduce that order, and on the other hand, those who incline to heretical breaks, to criticism of established forms, to the subversion of current models. (545)

The literary field, as Bourdieu defines it, is a site of contestation and of advocacy. The Victorian literary field presented such a site of contention as various factions sought to impose their views on the function of literature on society as a whole. Although the analogy is not altogether accurate, we can think of Bourdieu's example of "the objective relations" between "orthodox" and "heretics" as representing some elements in the contest over the value of the genre of sensation fiction. The battle was fought by the sociological actors, namely, in Bourdieu's terminology, literary critics, editors, lending libraries, and the authors themselves. Bourdieu writes of the social agenda of the competitors in this field:

> In brief, the strategies of actors and institutions involved in literary or artistic struggles depend on the position that they occupy in the structure of the field, that is, within the structure of distribution of capital or the prestige (institutional or not) accorded them by their peers and by the public at large, and by their interest in preserving or

> transforming this structure, in maintaining the rules of the game or subverting them. (545)

It may be useful to consider authors such as Thackeray, Eliot, Trollope, and (with some reservations) Dickens, among the "orthodox" interested in "maintaining the rules of the game," and to view the sensation novelists as "heretics" whose work tends to subvert these rules by pushing the boundaries of what is acceptable in fiction, especially in matters of gender and sexuality. Generally, the former were supported by the other "actors" in the emerging literary field, such as journalists, libraries, and members of the clergy who occasionally weighed in on literary matters. The "heretics," although they had some allies in the established field, often found themselves condemned by these same elements. The work of both groups appealed to a mass public and was, therefore, sought after by publishers, but only the first group achieved the cultural currency of eventual canonical status.

Charles Reade appears to have relished his role as a "heretic." He was by anyone's standards an irascible and combative author whose character, one sympathetic contemporary critic noted, "is disfigured by a self-conceit which amounts to something like mania, and an impatience of criticism which occasionally makes him all but a laughing-stock" (McCarthy 192). Richard Altick writes of Reade's "innate combativeness" (181). Introducing him in her essay, Poovey remarks on "the antagonism that festered between one novelist and his reviewers" (434). She discusses the evolution of journalistic reviews of literature from the eighteenth century when the practice of anonymous reviewing first began, primarily in the *Monthly Review* beginning in 1760. By the turn of the nineteenth century, other journals such as the *Edinburgh Review* and the *Quarterly Review* had adopted the practice that became the norm in the Victorian era. Anonymity led, in Poovey's words, to "a mode of writing long on descriptive bombast and short on analysis of any kind" (438). She goes on to describe the abuses inherent in this system, among them the practice of allowing authors to review their own books (something of which Reade was himself guilty on at least one occasion), and assigning many books to one journalist to review in a single article, a practice that further "encouraged reviewers to subordinate careful judgments about what they read (or pretended to read) to displays of their own vituperative style" (439). This "vituperative style" was often applied to Reade's work. Related to this was the practice of "double reviewing" in which a critic could place with impunity multiple reviews (either positive or negative) of the same book in

several periodicals. Reade railed against this practice, writing that the double reviewer pronounces judgment on a book "in one organ of criticism, then flies to another, and says the same thing in other words" so that "the duped public believes that two disinterested judges have condemned its favorite" (*Readiana* 354). Poovey quotes a review of Reade's *A Terrible Temptation* (1871) that provides a particularly colorful example of vituperation as it refers to the novel as "a piece of carrion literature" (439), the tone of which is similar to another review that referred to the same book as "a mass of brothel garbage" and to its author as "a narrator of vice" (*Sun*, qtd. in Elwin 218). This "vituperative style" was not, of course, an innovation of the Victorian era, nineteenth-century critics deployed it with a particular gusto.[2]

According to Poovey, debates about literature centered on the question of whether a novel should be considered on its merits or by its appeal to the public. Poovey cites comments by Margaret Oliphant who bemoaned the literature being produced for the "undiscriminated multitudes" of "people whose education consists solely in the power to read," especially in the serial publications that catered to them (439). Oliphant may be referring to the "penny press" that, she felt, was responsible for lowering literary standards. Writing in 1858, Wilkie Collins takes a different view and refers to the readers of the penny press as "The Unknown Public" and estimates that as many as three million people consume their fiction in "penny-novel-journals" (*My Miscellanies* 159).[3] Collins grants the penny press "the credit of having discovered a new public," and he goes on to write that "the future of English fiction may rest with this Unknown Public" and that its readers represent "such an audience as has never been known" (177). According to Phillips, *The Penny Magazine* had a circulation of 200,000 in 1832, its first year of operation (3). The *Halfpenny Journal*, which ran from 1861 to 1865 and was advertised as "A Magazine for All Who Can Read," brought inexpensive novels and other material to a mass public. Both Braddon (with *The Trail of the Serpent* [a.k.a. *Three Times Dead*, 1860], the antislavery *The Octoroon* [1861], and other titles) and Reade (with the potboiler *White Lies* [1857]) published their fiction in the penny press. Dickens, of course, trusted the opinion of the mass public who had made his reputation, and several of his novels, including *Oliver Twist* (1837–1839), *Hard Times* (1854), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), and *Great Expectations* (1861), were serialized in periodicals, including his own. But in addition to merely hoping to make a living by appealing to a newly literate mass public, many authors, including most of those known as sensation novelists, sought, in their differing

ways, to educate this public as well. Kimberly Harrison points out that in the case of Braddon's *The Octoroon* (1861–1862), the editors of the *Halfpenny Journal* emphasized their readers' "empowerment to bring about change" and, combining commerce with idealism, "argued that by subscribing to the paper and by encouraging others to subscribe the readers were actually behaving heroically" (Harrison 216) to end the "hideous traffic in Human Beings that the exigencies of Slavery both foster and sustain" (*Halfpenny*, qtd. in Carnell xi–xii). Reade's novels go further than most in their attempt to effect change by calling attention to a variety of social abuses. As Altick notes, Reade "turned fiction into a vehicle for outright reformist social propaganda" (80).

In her analysis of the debate over merit versus market, Poovey surveys the related controversy of realism versus idealism. Although it is common to view "Victorian realism" as the preferred description of canonical works of the period, authors (and critics) often preferred a hybrid of the two, stressing either one or the other. Eliot calls for realism when she writes that "our social novels profess to represent the people as they are, and the unreality of their representations is a grave evil" (*Selected Essays* 110). Yet Eliot also argues that art should answer a "moral sentiment" in the reader (110). Eliot's realism certainly contains a large element of idealism, reflected in her moral concerns. In his analysis of the literary field in nineteenth-century France, Bourdieu writes that "realism in effect was a partial, and failed, revolution [that] did not question the tendency to mix aesthetic value and moral (or social) value, which continued to guide critical judgments" (560). One could adapt this view to the British novel as well by noting that many—including Eliot and Trollope, who favored "realism"—insisted on a moral imperative that upheld many contemporary values.

Most contemporary critics stressed the need for a literary idealism that would "elevate and purify" readers' souls. These critics favored works that would lead the reader to the kind of reflection that ultimately upheld contemporary values of duty to God and to country as well as followed middle-class sexual morality. The work of Reade and that of other sensation novelists (and some not quite fitting that category, including Dickens and Elizabeth Gaskell) often grounded itself in the darker side of the Victorian reality. Within the genre of sensation fiction, there were differing degrees of adherence to what we can call an early form of social realism. To varying degrees, the work of these authors served to promote a reformist project. In doing so, Reade relied primarily on facts taken from newspaper accounts, other written material, and first-hand experience, even if these facts were not usually

discussed in fiction. Collins, for example, writes in the introduction to *Basil,* "I have not thought it either politic or necessary, while adhering to realities, to adhere to everyday realities only" (v). Collins also states his conviction "that the novel and the play are twin sisters in the family of fiction; and that one is drama narrated as the other is drama acted; and that... strong emotions that the play-writer is privileged to excite, the novel writer is privileged to excite" (v). This reference to the playwright is significant because many of the sensation writers had close ties to the theater. When Reade first became recognized as a playwright in the 1850s vogue of melodrama, a young actress in one of his plays was, perhaps not coincidentally, Mary Elizabeth Braddon (Carnell 48, 63). Similarly, Dickens and Collins wrote and performed in their own melodramas such as *The Frozen Deep* (1857).

Despite a century of critical disparagement, melodrama reveals itself as a gateway to the exploration of themes once considered untouchable. Recent critics, both in literary and performance studies, have begun to revise judgment on the nature and quality of melodrama, especially since the publication of Peter Brooks's *The Melodramatic Imagination* (1976). To Brooks, melodrama

> represents a victory over repression. We could conceive this repression as simultaneously social, psychological, historical, and conventional: what could not be said on an earlier stage, nor still on a "nobler" stage, nor within the codes of society. The melodramatic utterance breaks through everything that constitutes the "reality principle," all its censorships, accommodations, tonings-down. Desire cries aloud its language in identification with full states of being. Melodrama partakes of the dream world... and this is in no wise more true than in the possibility it provides of saying what is in "real life" unsayable. (41)

Brooks suggests that part of the reason for the critical disparagement of melodrama lies in its very airing of such raw human emotions:

> The critical resistance and embarrassment that melodrama may elicit could derive from its refusal of censorship and repression—the accommodations to the reality principle that the critical witness himself then supplies, from his discomfort before a drama in which people confront him with identification judged too extravagant, too stark, too unmediated to be allowed utterance. (42)

Brooks comment on melodrama's "victory over repression" is pertinent when we consider the divide that separated many of the literary

and theatrical critics, and much of the public who eagerly consumed the works. All too often the critics were willing, as Brooks suggests, to supply the "censorship and repression" while the audience indulged itself in the emotional charge provided by the works.

The emergence of melodrama coincides with the rise of industrialism in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Melodrama appealed to a broad audience, including many newly literate members of the working classes, because it provided a highly visual and emotionally powerful impact. Michael Booth asserts that "because melodrama was always in touch with the social concerns and cultural tastes of its audience it quickly absorbed the new industrial proletariat onto its structure" (101). Referring to Brooks's classic reading of melodrama, Ellen Bayuk Rosenman finds that its appeal lies in its ability to make "visible a moral order obscured by unequal social relations," often focusing on "conflicts between virtuous working-class women and their aristocratic tormentors" (22). Rosenman sees sensation novels as "domestic melodrama which focuses on tensions within the Victorian middle-class home" (22). In her study of domestic melodrama, Martha Vicinus finds that it "provided the means for exploring social and political issues in personal terms" (1981: 128) and that it "always sides with the powerless" (130). Vicinus adds that "melodrama's focus on the passive and powerless within the family made it particularly appealing to the working class and women" (131). Proletarian audiences were particularly receptive to the form because, as Vicinus notes, it typically presents "the theme of the mighty brought low"; women appreciated it because it presented "a reflection of the contradictions in their own lives" (132). Sensation novels were highly sensitive to the appeal of melodrama and they worked it in new ways to appeal to a mass audience.

Referring to the sensation novel's simultaneous reliance on some melodramatic formulae and its often controversial themes, Hughes writes that the novel "was a throwback to an earlier era and a more progressive groping for alternative values to those propounded by the realists" (100). Hughes's comment suggests that Reade and the sensation novelists employed melodrama with its powerful depictions of good and evil but that they also recognized the breakdown of many traditional values and sought to redefine good and evil along lines other than those proposed by Victorian propriety. Hughes's chapter on Reade is aptly titled "Charles Reade and the Breakdown of Melodrama," and one of Burns's chapters in his study of Reade is subtitled "Melodrama with a Difference." Much of Reade's work can

be read in light of his background in theater and his opinion that *Hamlet* represents Shakespeare's supreme achievement as a "philosophical melodrama" (qtd. in Burns 75).

In opposition to Reade and the sensation novelists, other artists and most critics felt that the purpose of the novel was not nearly so public but rather that it should provide an individual experience for the reader leading him or her to contemplation of "higher truths." Poovey refers to George Eliot, who "tended to maintain that what critics called realism could also approach higher truths through detailed but imaginatively interpreted descriptions of everyday things" (443), and Margaret Oliphant, who felt that "the role of literature was to inspire contemplation" rather than action (444). Such a view often found that dealing with social evils, including crime, as the sensation novelists often did, was not conducive to contemplation.

This debate was not new to the mid-Victorians but echoed a similar controversy that emerged in the Romantic period. The reputations of authors of gothic romances such as Ann Radcliffe and Matthew Lewis, though popular with a then much smaller reading public, began to decline in the face of the critical and commercial success of Walter Scott's novels and the increasing critical acclaim for Jane Austen's. Critics generally considered the work of Scott and Austen more wholesome than what were considered the gothic excesses of the late eighteenth century, not to mention the earthy novels of Fielding, Sterne, and Smollett. Phillips notes of the sensation genre's debt to the gothic, "The summary vengeance dealt out with the sword of the Byronic hero becomes stealthy murder, and the violence to her person always threatening Mrs. Radcliffe's heroine becomes adultery" (34). With the advent of the Newgate novels, such as *Rookwood* and *Jack Sheppard* (1840) by Harrison Ainsworth and *Paul Clifford* (1830) and *Eugene Aram* (1832) by Edward Bulwer-Lytton, the gothic appeared to take on a new life, this time with tales of sympathetic criminals (especially highwaymen). Many of the criminal themes in these novels found a central place in sensation fiction. Rather than drawing upon crimes committed by seductively evil aristocratic Italians or corrupt monks, Newgate novels took their characters from the common lot of humanity. Dickens's *Oliver Twist* (1839) fits squarely within this genre.

A democratic impulse that chose common people (including criminals) as sympathetic characters concerned some critics more than anything else about the Newgate novel, and its successor the sensation novel. Thackeray, in what he intended as a satire on the

Newgate novel in *Catherine* (1840), writes ironically that "to make people sympathise with virtue is a vulgar trick that any common fellow can do; but it is not everybody who can take a scoundrel, and cause us to weep and whimper over him as though he were a very saint" (164). Thackeray had opposed the Newgate novel as early as the 1830s in anonymous reviews attributed to him in *Fraser's.* In *Catherine* (serialized in *Fraser's* 1839–40), he announces that "no man shall mistake virtue for vice, no man shall allow a single sentiment of pity or admiration to enter his bosom for any character in the piece, it being from beginning to end a scene of unmixed rascality, performed by persons who never deviate into good feeling" (168). In *Catherine,* Thackeray refers to *Oliver Twist,* Bulwer-Lytton's *Eugene Aram* (1832), and Ainsworth's *Jack Sheppard* (1839) as examples of the type of novel he is opposing. Trollope reveals his opinion of the relative merits of Dickens and Thackeray in his autobiography in which he writes of Dickens's characters: "There is a drollery about them . . . very much below the humour of Thackeray, but which has reached the intellect of all; while Thackeray's humour has escaped the intellect of many" (71). Commenting on this attitude, Phillips finds that "it is clear, then, that the realism that became ascendant with *Vanity Fair* was in a sense 'high-brow' fiction" (23). Phillips explains the conservatism and class bias of much of the negative criticisms: "Behind it are the fear of a rowdy and unclean press and serious concern for English institutions and society" (93). Most of the critics and many of the authors of fiction shared this class bias.

The attack upon the Newgate novel, and later upon the sensation novel, has obvious class elements. Critics tended to prefer works such as those of Thackeray, Eliot, or Trollope, what they considered more "refined," to the novels of Collins, Reade, and Braddon. Dickens was something of an exception here because his incredible popularity made it difficult to dismiss him outright. This is not to say that the critics favored authors with an upper-class background, for if that were the case, Reade would have been a clear favorite.[4] Writing in 1872, Justin McCarthy illustrates this point by arguing,

> In the reaction against literary Bohemianism, which of late years has grown up in England, and which the *Saturday Review* may be said to have inaugurated, it became the whim and fashion to believe that only gentlemen with university degrees, only "blood and culture," as the cant phrase was, could write anything which gentlemanly persons could read. (193–94)

McCarthy remarks that the *Saturday Review* "for a long time affected to treat Dickens as a good-humored and vulgar buffoon" but that "Charles Reade is what in the phraseology of English caste would be called a gentlemen [with]... classical achievements... far wider than those of Thackeray" (194). But McCarthy adds that in the *Saturday Review* Reade "was treated merely as the clever, and audacious concocter of sensational stories" (194). These comments correspond to the critical divide between the "orthodox" and the "heretics" that characterizes Bourdieu's concept of the literary field.

However, critics did not seem to prefer novels with characters drawn solely from the upper classes, as their warm reception for Eliot's *Adam Bede* (1859) demonstrates. Conversely, sensation novelists often dealt specifically with upper-class characters, although many were presented in a highly unfavorable light. Examples include the decadent and effeminate aristocrats Frederick Fairlie and Count Fosco in Collins's *The Woman in White* (1860) and the idle rich slumming in Reade's *Christie Johnstone*.[5] Dickens, of course, also portrays the upper classes negatively in many of his works. Nor did the critics simply demand a narrative closure that restored contemporary values in which virtue is rewarded and vice punished. To be sure, the punishment of Hetty Sorel in *Adam Bede* pleased critics, as did the happy marriage of Adam and Dinah. Such resolutions were a "fixed rule," according to Trollope's narrator in *Barchester Towers* (1857), who complained of the necessity to invoke "promises of two children and superhuman happiness" and the "assurance of extreme respectability carried to an age far exceeding that usually allotted to mortals" (481). Sensation novels generally followed this tradition, even if grudgingly, as Reade did in *The Cloister and the Hearth* in which he opens the final chapter with the following words: "In compliance with a custom I despise but have not the spirit to resist, I linger on the stage to pick up the smaller fragments of humanity I have scattered about" (439). Moralistic critics were not fooled by the insertion of a conclusion that purported to uphold contemporary values but were rather concerned about the manner in which "vice" was portrayed throughout the novels. They resented the propensity of the sensation novelists, in Hughes's words, to "sympathize with their own abominable creations, or to make light of their ingenious crimes" (30). Adhering to both the financial and the moral interests propounded by Charles Mudie's Select Library and other defenders of middle-class propriety, critics such as the anonymous reviewer in the *Living Age* generally found sensation novels to be "violently opposed to our moral

sense" (August 22, 1863, 354). Comments such as these show that the struggle for hegemony in the literary field that began in the early Victorian era accelerated at mid-century, but it was not resolved, as Poovey argues, until the twentieth century.

A common criticism of Reade's work and sensation fiction in general derives from its alleged overreliance on the themes of inheritance, bigamy, poisoning, drug abuse, and adultery, and from its frequent employment of the *deus ex machina* and other startlingly improbable coincidences. However, with the possible exception of bigamy, the same critique could be made of Victorian fiction as a whole. The extramarital relationships in Reade's *Griffith Gaunt* and Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861) are just as necessary for the development of those novels as for that of *Adam Bede* or *Bleak House*. The chance meeting of Captain Kirk and Magdalen in Collins's *No Name* (1862) is certainly no more of a *deus ex machina* than the death of Grandcourt in *Daniel Deronda* (1876). And the use of drugs such as laudanum is standard fare in Victorian novels—one has only to think of *Silas Marner* (1861) or *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (1870), if not of De Quincey. But it is the use to which such devices and themes are put that distinguishes the sensation novel.

Victorian fiction in general is replete with scenes of shame visited upon its characters, and sensation fiction also utilizes the theme of public disgrace. Bulstrode's fall in *Middlemarch* (1871) is of a piece with the exile of Mr. Thorpe in Collins's *Hide and Seek* (1854). But whereas Bulstrode's disgrace, which he suffers with the loyal support of his wife, is used to reinforce Victorian notions of shame, Thorpe's fall eventually liberates both his wife and his son to realize their own personalities. Hetty Sorel's punishment for her extramarital affair and pregnancy in *Adam Bede* represents, perhaps, a primary example of the Victorian view of the wages of sin, while sensation novels often seem to reward similarly transgressive behavior. For example, in Reade's *Griffith Gaunt* and *A Terrible Temptation*, and in Collins's *The Dead Secret* (1857) and *No Name*, illegitimate children are presented positively or nonjudgmentally.

Some critics faulted sensation authors for their supposed lack of forceful characters and for subordinating character to plot. In a celebrated review, H.R. Mansel finds that characters in sensation novels are "but so many lay-figures on which to exhibit a drapery of incident" (486). He objects to the absence of the ideal of the heroic "character," which derives in no small degree from the influence of Thomas Carlyle. "Character," a variation on Carlyle's model of the "hero,"

was what many critics sought. Sensation novelists countered this by inventing characters who did not fit the "great man" (or woman) theory. Reade consciously opposed Carlyle's view of the great man, and he expresses this opposition often as in the opening passage of *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861): "Not a day passes over the earth but men and women of no note do great deeds, speak great words, and suffer noble sorrow" (5). Late in his career, Reade echoes the same theme: "The public itches to hear what people of rank and reputation do and say, however trivial. We defer to this taste: and that gives us the right to gratify our own now and then, by presenting what may be called the reverse picture, the remarkable acts, or sufferings, or qualities, of persons unknown to society" (*Readiana* 222). Like many other authors of the period, Reade draws characters from the middle and upper classes, but not exclusively. Nor do the contemporaries with whom he has most affinity—Dickens, Collins, and Braddon.

In addition to their antiheroic stance and despite Mansel's criticism, the characters in sensation novels are nearly always explicitly defined. Collins seldom introduces even the most minor characters without elaborate physical descriptions along with an in-depth psychological profile. Reade and Braddon give similar attention to details of personality. Readers may be surprised at the actions of some of these characters, but upon reflection their motives become both obvious and logical based upon their own internal drives and the force of circumstances. These fully developed characters, drawn from every station of life, provide studies of often common and unexceptional people and are often self-consciously opposed to Carlyle's view of the "great man" or hero. In *Hard Cash* (1863), Reade directly expresses his disdain for Carlyle's ideas as a character states, "Heroes are my horror" (285). Peters writes of Collins's "attempt to show how the potentially dramatic and extraordinary lies hidden in the characters of ordinary people" and of his "instinctive democracy" ("Introduction," *Hide and Seek* viii, xiii). Reade's earlier novel *Christie Johnstone* offers a critique of Carlyle, similar to that provided by Trollope in *The Warden* (1855). This "anti-Carlylean" focus of Reade and other sensation novelists deserves more critical attention (see Burns 54–57).

While the debates raged over whether realism or idealism and whether artistic merit or public reception should be privileged, other forces were at work that sought to define the shape of the novel. Scott's popularity enabled his publisher to steadily increase the price for his works from just over one pound for *Waverley* in 1814 up to over one and half pounds for *Kenilworth* in 1821. As Phillips

notes, that last date and figure is significant because from that time "it remained the standard price for a first edition of almost any novelist who could achieve three volumes not too bad to print" (39). The advent of the penny press and other slightly more expensive periodical outlets allowed the growing consumer base to read novels in installments and, depending on how many novels came out per issue, got them for a price ranging from as little as a few shillings up to one pound, still well below the price for a first edition triple-decker (Phillips 44–45). Eventually, novels such as *Bleak House, Dombey & Son* (1848), and *Vanity Fair* (1848) that were first issued in pamphlet form entered the market in volume form at a slightly lower price, often just over a pound (21 to 26 shillings). But even that was a considerable amount for most people to lay out in one sum rather than on a weekly or monthly basis. It is important to remember that many of these periodicals serialized several novels in each issue so that a consumer purchasing fiction in this format got much more for the money. So a price of 21 or 26 shillings, considerably more than what most workers earned in a week, is still artificially high.

And this price was kept high by the institution of the circulating library. Poovey reviews the tyranny over the market exercised by this institution, in particular Mudie's, which emerged during the mid-Victorian era. The circulating library, for purely market considerations, demanded that publishers supply them with three-volume novels so they could lend one title to three clients simultaneously. Mudie could guarantee sales of 500 copies (and often much more) to publishers who would provide him with acceptable novels in that format. This guaranteed market enabled the publishers to keep the price of novels at an artificially high level for over half a century. In an 1885 letter to the *Athenaeum,* responding to an attack on his monopoly by George Moore in the *Pall Mall Gazette*, Mudie described the state of his empire, listing "87,210 volumes of history and biography, 50,572 of travel and adventure, 165,445 of fiction, 87,856 of science, religion, and miscellaneous" for a total of 391,083 volumes (Phillips 49). Under this system, with its demand for triple-deckers, Reade's early one-volume novels, *Peg Woffington* (1852) and *Christie Johnstone,* reached a very small audience. No one can know how many other works stood no chance of being published because of the almost mandatory three-volume format.[6] Poovey writes that, in this process of consolidation,

> the libraries introduced two alternative definitions of literary value, neither of which had anything to do with merit or the market. The

> first of these was purely formal; it derived from the three-volume format... The second definition was narrowly ethical; it turned on the librarian's judgment about the kind of writing fit for women and young girls, who were the libraries' most valued and most voracious subscribers. (441)

Poovey's latter point is essential. The libraries' self-appointed role as guardians of public morality has been investigated by many critics, including Guinevere L. Griest, Kate Flint, and Catherine Golden.[7]

Mid-century critics often acted as self-appointed guardians of public morality, playing directly into the hands of Mudie, who considered himself devout and believed strongly in censorship. Mudie imposed his own moral views on the market by refusing to order books he found immoral. Sensation novels often ran into trouble with Mudie's and the critics, especially in their depiction of transgressive female characters such as Lydia Gwilt and Magdalen Vanstone in Collins's *Armadale* (1866) and *No Name.* In a letter to his mother, Collins writes about the positive resolution of his problems with the publication of *Armadale,* stating that "a great pressure was put upon 'Mudie' by my faithful public—and an unexpectedly large demand was the consequence" (*Letters* 277). Collins's reference to "a great pressure" from readers may explain why Mudie's Select Library circulated so many volumes that critics considered immoral. Certainly, Mudie suppressed some works that he considered inappropriate for families, including Reade's *Cream* (1858) and George Meredith's *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel* (1859).[8] But Mudie generally placed his financial interests above moral considerations for he appears to have enthusiastically circulated all of Braddon's novels and gave only token resistance to most works by Collins and Reade.[9]

Braddon's novels—beginning with *Lady Audley's Secret* (1861) and followed shortly by *Aurora Floyd* (1863) and later by some eighty others in a career that lasted until 1915—often featured heroines as dangerous as those of Collins. Her novels were singled out by Margaret Oliphant (257–60) and others as especially dangerous to young female readers. *Lady Audley's Secret* and *Aurora Floyd* as well as some of Reade's novels were treated harshly by many critics especially for the portrayal of women as something other than angels in the house. Oliphant, in *Blackwood's*, complained that in Braddon's work "this intense appreciation of flesh and blood, this eagerness of physical sensation, is represented as the natural sentiment of English girls" (259). An anonymous critic, also in *Blackwood's,* faulted Reade's

Griffith Gaunt for concluding the accounts of bigamy, adultery, and murder with "various scenes which are very artificial, a perfect reconciliation ensues, with babies galore, and other orthodox evidences of conjugal beatitude" (October 1869, 498, qtd. in Smith 77). Despite the wayward heroines of their novels, both Reade and Braddon usually conform to the "fixed rule" of the restorative ending described by Trollope.

Related to what were believed to be negative portrayals of feminine virtue, the sensation novel, nearly always set in the domestic sphere, undermined the Victorian façade of the harmonious home. Here the sensation novels diverge from the model of Dickens, who, as Nemesvari points out, "stood second to no-one in his celebration of Victorian domesticity" (2006: 16). In the sensation novel, the institution of marriage is often portrayed as a weapon wielded for financial gain, and Victorian ideals of love are often subverted. Percival Glyde marries Laura Fairlie in *The Woman in White,* solely to dispossess her. Magdalen in *No Name* weds Noel Vanstone to regain a purloined fortune. Braddon describes a marriage in *Lady Audley's Secret* as "a dull, jog-trot bargain" (6). In the same novel, another character wonders how to judge which will be the "one judicious selection out of nine hundred and ninety-nine mistakes" (204). Clearly, this genre explicitly questions the sanctity of the institution of marriage. In Collins's *The Dead Secret* and Reade's *A Terrible Temptation*, women conspire successfully to deceive husbands about their biological paternity. In Reade's novels, parents occasionally imprison their own children on false pretenses (*The Cloister and the Hearth, Hard Cash*) for the most venal of motives. In Collins's *Man and Wife* (1870), one character attempts to kill his wife, and another has murdered her abusive husband. These families present a counterpoint to the sentimentalized and cloying goodness of the home and hearth portrayed in so many Victorian novels. The critics reacted accordingly.

Reade and other sensation novelists often portray loving "families," but many of these do not fit the traditional norm. Consider the charming and apparently traditional nuclear family depicted in the opening chapters of Collins's *No Nam*e with its loving parents and daughters. Collins, however, soon reveals this family as anything but traditional, as the parents are unmarried and the daughters, therefore, illegitimate. *No Name* argues forcefully for the viability of families that do not conform to the Victorian ideal, suggesting that families do not necessarily need to consist of a patriarch and his brood, and that loving people can raise loving children regardless of

conventional ideas of sexual propriety. The premise of the novel has implications today with the ongoing controversies surrounding the issues of gay marriage and adoption by same-sex couples, subjects, if not unthinkable, certainly unprintable in the Victorian era. However, several authors, including Reade, depicted same-sex attraction, usually elliptically, while Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla" (1872) presents a rare case of overt same-sex desire. While scholars have identified homoerotic elements in *Lady Audley's Secret* and *The Woman in White,* few have identified such elements in Reade's work, though a reading of several of his texts readily reveals this (see Chapter 3).[10] But since the subject of same-sex desire was often relegated to the realms of science or criminology and, therefore, considered inappropriate for introduction into the middle-class home, most contemporary critics did not choose to engage in it and appeared more concerned with Reade's frank depictions of heterosexual desire.

Like most of the sensation novelists, Reade was often pilloried by critics. In 1866, his novel *Griffith Gaunt* began its serial run in the monthly *Argosy*, edited by Ellen (Mrs. Henry) Wood. Excerpts of the most damning portions of a particularly negative review of *Griffith Gaunt* in the American publication the *Round Table* were reprinted in the *Toronto Globe* and in three British periodicals (*London Review, The Stationer*, and *Public Opinion).* The *Round Table* review reads, in part, "Griffith Gaunt is one of the most immoral, indecent, irreligious, and worst stories that has been printed since Sterne and Fielding and Smollett defiled the literature of the already foul eighteenth century" (June 9, 1866).[11] This is just one example of how Victorian critics saw their age as superior to previous eras; they were especially harsh on the eighteenth century. It is telling that Reade chose to set two of his novels in that century and one in the fifteenth century, perhaps to allow for greater sexual content. The *Round Table* followed up this review with another, under the heading "An Indecent Publication," which included more invective, calling *Griffith Gaunt* "one of the worst novels that has appeared during this generation, the worst perhaps, that has ever been produced by the pen of any writer of position." It goes on to insist that the publishers, Ticknor & Fields of the *Atlantic Monthly*, "have no right . . . to insult young girls and virtuous women by thrusting upon them what no modest woman can read without a blush," adding that "it is an unpardonable insult to public morality" (July 1866). Such negative criticism of *Griffith Gaunt* highlights the quarrel between Bourdieu's "orthodox" and "heretics," between those interested in "in maintaining the rules of the game"

and those interested in the "subversion of current models" in the literary field (545).

Reade reacted to the negative reviews quickly and was counterattacked by firing off an open letter to the American Press calling his critics "Prurient Prudes." Reade defines such a critic as one who is "strong in the shelter of the Anonymous, which hides from the public his own dissolute life and obscene conversation, reads his neighbor by the light of his own corrupt imagination, and so his prurient prudery takes the form of slander, and assassinates the fair fame of his moral, intellectual, and social superior" (*Readiana* 373). Reade sued the *Round Table* for its reviews and the *London Review* for reprinting excerpts. The case against the *London Review* was settled when the foreman of the jury announced, "We find for the plaintiff. Damages, six cents."[12] Reade was pleased enough that he had made his point, and the resulting publicity helped make *Griffith Gaunt* a bestseller.[13] Bourdieu writes of the importance within the literary field of the "the distribution of capital or the prestige (institutional or not) accorded them [authors] by their peers and by the public at large" (545). That Reade's novels and other sensation fiction sold so well despite negative publicity underscores the stakes in the literary struggles of the mid-Victorian period. Negative institutional criticism had little effect on the prestige that the general public bestowed upon the authors, even if they were sometimes condemned by their peers.

A well-known sidelight to Reade's actions in the *Griffith Gaunt* case is the response of Charles Dickens. Wilkie Collins wrote to Dickens on Reade's behalf asking him to testify in court in defense of *Griffith Gaunt*. Dickens responded by writing, "I have read Charles Reade's book, and here follows, my state of mind—as a witness—respecting it. I have read it with the strongest interest and admiration. I regard it as the work of a highly accomplished writer and a good man" (Letters 318). However, Dickens declined to defend the novel because

> if I had read to me in court those passages about Gaunt going up to his wife's bed drunk and that last child's being conceived, and was asked whether, as Editor, I would have passed those passages, whether written by the Plaintiff or anybody else, I should be obliged to reply No.... Asked if I should have passed the passage where Kate and Mercy have the illegitimate child upon their laps and look over its little points together? I should again be obliged to reply No, for the same reason. Asked whether, as author or Editor, I should have passed Neville's marriage to Mercy and should have placed those four people [Kate, Griffith, Mercy, George] in those relative situations toward

> one another, I should again be obliged to reply No. Hard pressed on this point, I must infallibly say that I consider these relative situations extremely coarse and disagreeable. (Letters 318)

Dickens's comments on *Griffith Gaunt* represents again what Bourdieu refers to as "the struggle between the 'orthodox' and the 'heretics' " (545).[14] Reade, along with Collins and Braddon, consciously depicted sexual situations that, although not explicit, remain highly suggestive even today. Overt depictions of carnal love remained a forbidden topic, a proscription that sensation novelists consistently challenged. Reade conflates physical and spiritual love, commonly viewed as opposites by Victorians, in several of his novels (*The Cloister and the Hearth, Griffith Gaunt*, and *A Terrible Temptation*).

Of the Victorian concern with the conflict between the spirit and the flesh, Wayne Burns writes that many novelists generally "sought to eliminate the war altogether, declaring the triumph of the spirit, for all decent people, in all matters pertaining to man-woman sexual relationships" (2002: 46). Burns notes that Dickens's letter to Collins invokes a moral code "that all novelists had been at pains to cope with for over forty years" (45). Dickens also cautioned Collins to tone down some of the sexual allusions in *No Name* and *Armadale*. Some authors, such as Thackeray and even Trollope, expressed occasional regrets over the necessity to uphold this moral code, even identifying its hypocrisy, but they generally did so, in part, to maintain an aura of respectability. In *Vanity Fair*, Thackeray had complained that "one scarcely dares to allude to that kind of company which thousands of our young men in Vanity Fair are frequenting every day [because] the most squeamish if not the most moral of societies is determined to ignore [it]" (570). Yet Thackeray himself upheld the moral code that he criticizes here. As Frank Palmeri points out, Thackeray "wanted the reputation and the entrée into the best society that mass popularity gave him" and so he accommodated his writing to "the canons of decency in literature that he had observed and helped establish" (771).

Reade, Collins, and Braddon, despite occasional expressions of allegiance to conventional morality, flaunted it in their fiction, as well as in their private lives. Collins was especially outspoken, as when he referred (in marginal notes published posthumously in the *Pall Mall Gazette*) to John Forster's biography of Dickens as an example of "this wretched English claptrap [that] means that the novelist is forbidden to touch on the sexual relations which literally swarm all around him, and influence the lives of millions of his fellow-creatures."[15] Dickens,

despite the many fallen women in his fiction, scrupulously avoids any direct sexual references and did not approve of these in the works of others either. The Victorian novelists who were the first to be enshrined in the canon, such as Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, and Eliot, were those who conformed to the invisible moral code. Reade, like Collins and Braddon, long excluded from the canon as "lesser authors," consistently attempted to expand the limits of permissible literary expression, especially in matters of gender and sexuality.

Five years after the publication of *Griffith Gaunt*, the reviews of Reade's *A Terrible Temptation* were even more negative. Again the American press led the attack. A reviewer in *Turf, Field, and Farm* wrote of the novel,

> Within the sacred precincts of the domestic circle it will have the effect, like a leper in a vale of flowers, of poisoning the purity of virtuous maids, and its slime will besmear and fester, and render unclean all with whom it comes in contact. (LL 5 II3, 28)[16]

A letter to the editor of *The Sentinel* asked,

> What gentleman would read, without skipping, aloud to respectable ladies, the first chapters of Charles Reade's new story "The [*sic*] Terrible Temptation," any sooner than chapters from Fielding or Smollet? The last named are more coarse in expression, but in what essential are they more indelicate, or more immoral? (LL 5 II3, 28)

And a clipping from an unidentified periodical (perhaps the *New York Mail*), in a column entitled "Press Pith," writes of *A Terrible Temptation,* stating that

> Charles Reade has already written in it enough that is bad to blast forever his fame as a reputable writer, but the chapters before us in this issue give deliberate hint—not to be mistaken by the purest—of a sin so utterly and coldly horrible as "not to be named among Christians." (32)[17]

The extraordinary language of the reviews reflects the view, expressed by Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1842) and by other observers, that Americans were generally more self-righteous than British Victorians. One of the characters in Dickens's novel finds America "like a bat for its short-sightedness, like a bantam for its bragging, like a magpie for its honesty, like a peacock for its vanity, like an ostrich

for putting its head in the mud" (581). Although the American media could lionize Dickens (at least before *Martin Chuzzlewit*), some of its representatives remained vigilant against moral contamination from the mother country and found examples of foreign corruption in *A Terrible Temptation,* with its portrayal of extramarital relations, a profile of a courtesan, and relatively explicit suggestions of the sexuality of children. The critiques of Reade's work read like literary caricatures of the negative comments of British critics. Because of their extreme language, such reviews throw the conflicts of the literary field into sharp relief. But as in England, negative reviews stoked sales of Reade's novels in America.

Reade might have anticipated such reactions to *A Terrible Temptation,* for in October 1870, he had written in his diary, "I have lately signed with Cassell and am languidly working on a weekly serial. Have written one number. Rather smart, I think, but also rather loose. I fear it will offend the mothers of families. Query: Will Cassell publish it?" (*Memoir* 364). He also wrote a memo in which he expresses a fear "that the librarians will all band against it, as usual; and at 57 years of age, plenty of hot water coming" (qtd. in Elwin 218). An apologetic Compton Reade states in the posthumous *Memoir* that "we forbear to linger over this unfortunate book" (366).

The *Times*, in its review, also warned parents not to allow their daughters access to *A Terrible Temptation.* Reade's apparent lack of enthusiasm for this novel may account for his initial unusual calm in the face of the critical assaults on the book. McCarthy notes that "in the case of the *Times* and its attack on *A Terrible Temptation*, Mr. Reade adopted the unexpected tone of mild and even flattering response" (197). Uncharacteristically, Reade does not appear to have sued anyone over the novel. Reade informed the editors of the *Times* that many of his novels were based on stories he had read in its pages, reminding them that they had covered the same material before him and that it was hypocritical for them to censure him for elaborating on scandalous stories they themselves had featured to sell their newspaper. Reade implicitly makes the point that writers of newspaper articles have more freedom of expression than novelists. This again is a function of the conflicts in the literary field and the struggle to establish artistic hegemony in fiction. Because they were considered popular reading, newspapers were free to report an array of scandalous stories, from crimes of passion, to civil cases involving divorce and adultery. Novels were held to a different standard and were expected to "elevate and purify" its refined readers.

When the *Times* dismissed Reade's letter with "a rude and ungenerous reply," Reade countered it with another in which he informed the editors that "my English circulation is larger than that of the *Times*; and in the United States three publishers have already sold three hundred and seventy thousand copies of this novel—which, I take it, is about thirty times the circulation of the *Times* in the United States, and nearly six times its English circulation" (*Readiana* 378–79). Despite Reade's own misgivings about the novel, it achieved a great success. Elwin attributes the success of the novel in part to the negative publicity, suggesting that "the charge of immorality, as always, served as a potent stimulant instead of a sedative to the appetite of the reading public" (219). The notoriety of the novel, as with much other sensation fiction, guaranteed brisk sales.

As Poovey notes, Reade "actively participated in the cultural contests" that led to the establishment of the modern literary field from which he has been generally excluded. Part of Reade's work in this field consisted of his campaigns in the area of international copyright law and his efforts to prevent flagrant piracy and other violations. Throughout much of the Victorian era, pirated editions of British novels were published with impunity in the United States, and dramatic versions of novels were performed on the British stage without the participation, approval, or remuneration of the author. Reade's novel *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* was adapted and pirated on the London stage, years before he dramatized it himself. Reade sued the producers and won a partial victory. In *Reade v. Conquest* (1861, 1862), the judge ruled "that if an author will take the trouble to dramatise, however crudely, his narrative prior to its publication, his rights are absolute" (qtd. in Coleman 165). This ruling explains why so many Victorian authors staged hastily produced plays based on their novels, sometimes running a single night, to protect their copyright and to prevent piracy.

Reade worked tirelessly to strengthen a variety of copyright laws. Around the time of his lawsuits over *Griffith Gaunt,* Reade wrote to his American lawyer, William D. Booth, "I mean to found a society for the protection of British and foreign authors. Are you disposed to join us? Your learning & zeal in our defence claim a place for you in our ranks, and you will find yourself in good company."[18] Reade then set about soliciting recruits. The Parrish Collection at Princeton contains many letters from Wilkie Collins and others seeking to join Reade's "society." The American lawyer, whose papers are now at Princeton, agreed to take Reade's case. On the opening page of his documents, most of which deal with *Griffith Gaunt*, is a dedication: "Presented

to Agnes B. Lippincott by her father, Wm. D. Booth; 'The first copyright suit ever filed in America and the one which settled (in fact *made*) the copyright law in the United States.'" Despite Booth's claim, copyright laws often remained arbitrary.

Reade also had cordial relations with French authors, some (but not all) of whom he paid and credited (including Emile Zola for the drama *Drink*) for his "adaptations." Despite his occasional unauthorized adaptations, Reade sought to protect French intellectual property from being pirated in Britain, a practice that was quite common. That Reade himself indulged in piracy early in his career accounts, in part, for his reputation as a plagiarist. Although Reade often paid the authors whose plays he "adapted," he then presented his adaptations as his own work.[19]

Ironically, Reade, who came to defend the rights of authors, has been accused of flagrantly violating those rights himself, especially early in his career. Some of these accusations are clearly well founded. After one such accusation, Reade exclaimed, "Of course I am a plagiarist. Chaucer was a plagiarist. Shakespeare was a plagiarist. Moliere was a plagiarist. We all plagiarise, all except those d—d idiots who are too asinine to profit from the works of their superiors" (qtd. in Coleman 246).

Reade usually gave credit to the French authors whose work he employed (by inserting the line "adaptation from…"after his title), and he sometimes paid for the rights without acknowledging the source, as in his *White Lies* adapted from Auguste Maquet's *Le Chateau de Grantier*. One contemporary reviewer wrote of Reade's plagiarisms that

> he made no particular effort to conceal them, and even declared them justifiable on the ground that he paid living authors liberally for what he used of their work, and that what he took from the dead was common property. In fact, he proceeded upon the theory that ideas were to be bought and sold precisely like merchandise. (House 157)

Keeping in mind his early "adaptations" from the French and in light of his later efforts on behalf of authors, it seems almost incredible that relatively late in his career, Reade would adapt, without permission, the work of one of the most renowned authors of the day—Anthony Trollope. Thomas Mallon, a recent critic, speculates that Reade's plagiarism was due to a mental disorder, thus echoing the contention of others that Reade's eccentricities bordered on madness (86).

Shortly after his novel *Ralph the Heir* was published in 1872, Trollope went on an extended visit to Australia. Believing the novel would make an excellent play, Reade wrote a stage adaptation, rechristening it *Shilly-Shally*. He then wrote to Trollope presenting him with a fait accompli.

> I have been so delighted with "Ralph the Heir" that I have dramatised the story,—in 3 acts. Though the law, as I know to my cost, gives any one the right to dramatise a novelist's story, I would not have taken this liberty without consulting you if you had been accessible. Having done it I now propose to give the inventor that just honor, which has too often been denied him in theatrical productions.
>
> This will, I venture to think, do you no discredit, and will open the theatre to you . . . [and] you ought to make a good deal of money by it if produced in Australia under your own eye.[20]

Reade's naïveté here seems incredible. He might have known that he and Trollope had vastly different styles and aesthetics. In addition, Trollope had no respect for Reade's work, nor had Reade for most of Trollope's work, having referred to him as "that milk-and-water specimen of mediocrity" (qtd. in Cornwallis 583). On top of that, his letter assumes that Trollope, at the height of his career as a novelist, would want to risk theatrical ventures. (Perhaps Reade believed that everyone was as enamored of the theater as he was.) And finally, *Shilly-Shally* was produced on the stage before Trollope could do anything to prevent it. Trollope did not take long to reply, blasting Reade's audacity in the *Pall Mall Gazette*.

Reade answered Trollope in the *Daily Telegraph:*

> Permit me a short reply to Mr. Trollope's letter, dated "Melbourne 1st June" . . . Mr. Trollope decomposes my theory and objects to his name being connected with the play, though two-thirds of the lines are from his pen. . . . I submit, and therefore his only connection shall be with the receipts. . . . I hope Mr. Trollope and his friends will review my judgment with more respect, and my conduct with more kindliness and candour, than they have done up to this date (qtd. in Smith 46).

Trollope later wrote of Reade in his autobiography that "of all the writers of my day, he has seemed to me to understand literary honesty the least" (79). Trollope, who was personally friendly with Reade despite their aesthetic clashes, adds, "So good a heart, and so wrong a head, surely no novelist ever before had combined" (80). The Reade-Trollope controversy resulted in another lawsuit but not between the

two authors. *Shilly-Shally* received several negative reviews from critics who again found Reade's work indecent. The critic for the *Orchestra* wrote that Reade "*will* say things in his books and pieces that no gentleman should utter in the presence of ladies" (original emphasis) and especially rebuked the playwright for language "foisted on an innocent story of Mr. Trollope, of all authors—Mr. Trollope who is so careful never to offend" (qtd. in Smith 46–47). This comment too reflects some of the same differences between what came to be known as classic realism and the "lesser" genre of sensationalism, and again it focuses on the need to protect women from exposure to literary or theatrical expressions of sexuality. Writing of *Shilly-Shally,* the *Morning Advertiser* wrote that "it is well that intending playgoers—men who intend to take their young sisters, daughters, or sweethearts to the theatre—should know what modest women needs must hear in sitting through this piece" (qtd. in Smith 47). Reade sued the *Morning Advertiser* for libel and was awarded 200 pounds.

In a letter commenting on Reade, George Eliot wrote of "the inflated plagiarisms of a man gone mad with restless vanity and veracity" (*Letters* 2:422). Yet it should be added that many have accused Eliot of plagiarizing Reade because her medieval novel *Romola* (1863) appeared after *The Cloister and the Hearth*.[21] The quarrel between Reade and Eliot provides a perhaps telling footnote to Victorian literary history. As they occupied opposing positions in the literary conflict between the realist and the sensational, it follows only naturally that they should disparage each other's work. Reade's relationship with George Eliot was primarily one of rivalry. After the deaths of Dickens and Thackeray, both Reade and Eliot wished to be known as the greatest living English novelist. Each had defenders and detractors. In 1903, the periodical *The Bookman* renewed this old controversy by reprinting a letter by Reade, along with some comments from other critics. In an 1869 article in the New York publication the *Galaxy,* Justin McCarthy, who admired Reade, nevertheless expressed his opinion that George Eliot "is the greatest living novelist in England" (qtd. in *Bookman* 252). The *Bookman* reprinted Reade's response to the editor of the *Galaxy* that begins, "Dear Sir: You side with fools and liars against me" (253). He goes on to say, "This George Eliot is all very well as long as she confines herself to the life and character she saw with her own eyes down in Warwickshire when she was young. But the moment imagination is required she is done" (253). Reade then goes into a discussion of the relative merits of *Romola* and *The Cloister and the Hearth*, maintaining

that Eliot's novel features a heroine who is "not mediaeval at all, but a delicate-minded young woman of the nineteenth century... and a hero who is—Mr. George Lewes" (253). Reade continues by outrageously suggesting that "all her best novels and best idea is stolen from me and her thefts are not confined to ideas and situations; they go as far as similes, descriptions, and lines of text" (253). Near the end of the letter, Reade expresses his wish that "the English press will, I hope, excuse this burst of bile" (253). As if this were not enough, in 1872, Reade resorted to a practice he had often condemned by writing an anonymous profile of himself in the pages of *Once a Week* (reprinted in the same 1903 issue of *The Bookman*), again extolling his own merits and deprecating Eliot (254–60).

The quarrel between Eliot and Reade highlights the divide between the "orthodox" and the "heretics." In the *Westminster Review* (October 1856), Eliot contributed a mixed but generous appraisal of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* that nevertheless infuriated Reade. In her review, Eliot writes that Reade "errs by excess, and he wearies our emotion by taxing it too repeatedly" (*Selected Essays* 383). Eliot's remark goes directly to the different approaches of the two authors as representatives of the two schools of realism and sensation: reflective and cerebral opposed to vivid and sensual. Eliot also disparaged Braddon's work and her success and admitted in a letter that she would sometimes "sicken again with despondency" when comparing the sales reports of her own recent novels to those of Braddon's, indicating that economic rivalry was also an important factor (*Letters* 4:309). Reade too provides evidence that economic success was clearly an indicator of an author's place in the literary field. In an entry in his notebooks comparing the reception of *A Terrible Temptation* to the general critical reaction to all of his work, Reade writes, "Through my whole career it has been so: a little faint reluctant praise. Bushels of insolent vituperation" (qtd. in Elwin 242). Reade continues by boasting that with

> the proceeds of a pen that never wrote a line till I was 35 years of age I have got me three freeholds in the Brompton Road, a leasehold in Albert Terrace, a home full of rich furniture and pictures and a few thousands floating, and so I can snap my fingers at a public I despise, and a Press I know and loathe. (242)

These remarks, although ungracious, demonstrate that both Reade and Eliot, and nearly all authors for that matter, seek vindication in the marketplace.

Reade's controversial place in the literary field throughout the mid-Victorian era adequately demonstrates Poovey's remark on "the antagonism that festered between one novelist and his reviewers" (434). We can add that the antagonism was present also between Reade and some of his fellow authors. Clearly Reade was a "heretic," in Bourdieu's sense of that term, who relished his role. One of the primary areas of difference of opinion between the two camps remained the question of the fictional depiction of frankly sexual material and the position of women in society. The conservative view held that the ideal woman should be portrayed as demure, sexually innocent, and relatively helpless, and if she is vapid (like Dora in *David Copperfield*), that is not considered a serious fault but rather adds to her submissive charm. According to this same view, the fallen woman should be punished, or occasionally redeemed after she repents and permanently renounces sex (as does Emily in *David Copperfield)*. Few of Reade's portrayals of women follow this unwritten code. His women are independent, intelligent, and carnal, and even the most libidinous among them (such as Edith Archbold in *Hard Cash*) remain unpunished. Collins and Braddon present similarly independent female characters, and although some (such as Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale* and Lady Audley) are punished, others (such as Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name* and Aurora Floyd) emerge triumphant. Conservative reformers, such as Dickens, Carlyle, and Ruskin, wrote passionately and persuasively about the need for social and economic justice, but their critiques did not extend to the separate spheres of gendered relations as did the sensation novels.

Several of Reade's novels focus specifically on the abuses in two of the most visible symbols of state power: the prison and the lunatic asylum. Chapter 2 discusses *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* and *Hard Cash* primarily in light of Michel Foucault's theories of the "disciplinary society." Reade's novels constitute a dissenting element within the archive of the period that most informed Foucault's work on the emergence of the marriage between state power and scientific knowledge.

Chapter 2

Saying "No" to Power: *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* and *Hard Cash*

Aside from *The Cloister and the Hearth* (1861), his great historical novel, Charles Reade's fiction was known among his contemporaries for its sensationalism and its advocacy of social reforms. Among the causes he championed most famously were the reform of prisons and lunatic asylums and the campaign for women's rights. This chapter focuses on two of Reade's controversial novels: *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* (1856) and *Hard Cash* (1863), which reveal the corruption and brutality in two discrete but related contemporary institutions: the prison and the insane asylum.

These two novels invite comparison with several works by Michel Foucault, such as *Discipline and Punish* (1979), *Madness and Civilization* (1965), and the earlier, shorter work *Mental Illness and Psychology* (1953). Foucault's texts have provided remarkably versatile theoretical tools that have enabled scholars to interrogate the genealogies of knowledge in diverse fields, from anthropology to literary studies. My purpose in the following pages is to isolate, through Reade's work, a historical moment in the nineteenth century (an important moment in Foucault's arguments), and to discuss, in light of Foucault's historical and theoretical concerns, one author's literary-historical testimony concerning two important disciplinary institutions.

Although Foucault has been accused, by Marxists and other progressive critics, of theorizing a regime of power that is impervious to political activism, he denied that this was his project. Foucault hoped that his explorations of the simultaneous pervasiveness and the relative invisibility of disciplinary power would enable others to more effectively combat it without self-delusion. Reade's purpose, in contrast, was more direct. He saw the novel as an instrument for

social improvement, commenting, in relation to *Never Too Late*, that

> black facts... have been told, tolerably well told, by many chroniclers. But it is my business, my art, and my duty to make you ladies and gentlemen REALIZE things which the chronicler presents to you in his dim, stolid, and shadowy way; and so they pass over your mind like wind. (*Memoir* 244)

The purpose of Foucault's writings, which to Reade might represent the work of a "chronicler," is not all that different. Foucault writes that his "investigation makes use of 'true' documents, but in such a way as to furnish not just the evidence of truth but also an experience that might permit an alteration, a transformation, of the relationship we have with ourselves and our cultural universe" (qtd. in Halperin 25).[1] Both Reade and Foucault ultimately make use of "true" documents in an effort to transform their contemporary realities. Reade's novels can serve as a complement, and sometimes as a corrective, to Foucault's ideas; whereas Foucault writes abstract historical genealogies of the prison and the asylum, Reade highlights specific material details of the workings of these institutions. In the pages that follow, I focus primarily on Foucault's theoretical works that are far better known and more influential than his activist writings for several causes.

It is important to stress that Reade's project was far more circumscribed than Foucault's in that it did not offer a systematic probing of the mechanisms of power. Reade focuses attention on the most obvious abuses of power, more or less in isolation from one another, such as the persistence of modes of physical force in prisons and asylums and financial corruption in the contemporary management of madness, whereas Foucault is far more interested in the evolution of the forms taken by power. Perhaps, in much of his work, Foucault sees the violence and brutality of power as its least important and most unsophisticated manifestation. However, Reade's novels demonstrate that physically coercive techniques were never fully abandoned but simply hidden for hypocritically humanitarian purposes. The novels suggest that institutions of power never completely abandon physical violence but merely seek to keep it out of public view. The authorities do not hesitate to employ the instruments of violence when other means fail.

Foucault shows his awareness of this persistence when, for example, in *Discipline and Punish* he writes of "the 'physics' of power,

the hold over the body, [that] operates according to the laws of optics and mechanics, according to a whole play of spaces, lines, screens, beams, degrees, and without recourse, in principle at least, to excess, force, or violence" (193). Foucault's recognition that violence is held in abeyance only "in principle" makes it clear that the "physics" of power relies precisely on this ever-present threat of violence. Although Reade is disturbed by the emerging physics and mechanics of power, as his representations of and comments on the innovations in the administration of prisons demonstrate, he places far more emphasis on force and violence as the primary targets of his polemics.

Foucault traces the origins of the modern prison and the asylum to the late eighteenth century when, largely as a result of Enlightenment ideas, reforms in both institutions began to be introduced across Europe. Foucault discusses at length the reforms in the treatment of the insane led by Philippe Pinel in France and William Tuke in England. Reforms in prisons began to be instituted at around the same time. In theory, these reforms were intended to protect the human rights of inmates by reducing or eliminating physical punishment. But Foucault reads these reforms as serving to increase the networks of power and to further strip prisoners of their rights.

Although Foucault was certainly aware of systematic violence in prisons and asylums, as his activism in the prisoner and anti-psychiatry movements demonstrates, in *Discipline and Punish* and *Madness and Civilization*, he focuses almost exclusively on more subtle means of control. Much of the power that Foucault describes in these two works is characterized by what we might call a "theoretical purity," in that it is invisible and comprised of a set of rules, regulations, and indeed an entire philosophy that is internalized by the inmates of the prison and the asylum so that it works almost automatically. Reade's work, however, looks at the lived reality of those subjected to this power and finds, instead of a relative purity, a violent and corrupt reality. Both Foucault and Reade examine refinements in the administration of prisons and asylums that were meant to improve the systems; however, whereas Foucault, in *Discipline and Punish* and *Madness and Civilization*, devotes little attention to the continued use of physical coercion and almost none to official corruption, Reade focuses largely on those two points. So while a reading of *Never Too Late* and *Hard Cash* can serve to sustain many of Foucault's points about increasingly effective networks of power, it can also serve to critique his lack of emphasis on violence and corruption in two of his major works.

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault makes, perhaps, his most comprehensive statement on the emergence of a "disciplinary society" that developed through a meshing of the production of knowledge and the exercise of power, or more directly, through the marriage of social science and political power. According to Foucault, scientific knowledge served as an indispensable adjunct of power and did so nowhere more effectively than in institutions such as the prison and the asylum where it was granted relative autonomy. The prison, as the ultimate manifestation of this convergence of power and knowledge, maintains itself primarily through the exercise of surveillance, examination, interrogation, and what Foucault refers to as a "normalizing judgment" (177). Medical science contributed to the formulation and circulation of a new kind of power. Science provided a rationale and a legitimacy for what was primarily the arbitrary dictates of power. The effects of these systems of control allow those in authority to exercise power with relative ease and, because of a scientific sanction, instill in the inmate, through surveillance and judgment, a constant reminder of his or her inferior status, whether by reason of morality or health. One of the goals of punishment is the transformation of the individual both physically and mentally into a "docile body."

Foucault sees the body develop as "object and target of power" in many eighteenth-century institutions and provides the example of the soldier who before the eighteenth century had an individual identity and exhibited individual characteristics such as strength and courage (136). By the end of next century, the soldier becomes a dispensable automaton, a docile body that can be "made out of formless clay" and serve the interests of power in the form of cannon fodder (135). In much the same way, the prisoner was transformed from an individual, perhaps dangerous and deserving punishment, into a docile body. Previously, each person remained an individual whose personality and idiosyncrasies were recognized. But the new systems of power sought to dissolve individuality into the docile body of the subject.

As the evolution in prison discipline was still in progress in the nineteenth century, Reade's novel reveals some of the innovations that Foucault describes. In *Never Too Late*, Tom Robinson has been to prison several times. The narrator describes the alarming changes since his last visit as he is led into the prison:

> Instead of being turned adrift among seventy other spirits as bad as himself, and greeted with their boisterous acclamations and the friendly pressure of seven or eight felonious hands, he was ushered

> into a cell white as driven snow, and his housewifely duties explained to him, under a heavy penalty if a speck of dirt should ever be discovered on his little wall, his little floor, his little table. (64)

The new prison discipline, with its "housewifely duties," feminizes the male prisoner, domesticating him and preventing him from participating in homosocial male bonding. Robinson had expected a warm reception from old colleagues, but since his last stretch, the prison has undergone the transformation described by Foucault. Robinson's alarm increases when, after he asks a question, the turnkey replies, "Talking not allowed out of hours" (64). Among the most dehumanizing conditions of the new form of imprisonment was the interdiction of speech. Robinson finds himself being transformed into a docile body by the new system.

Foucault terms the system of surveillance as "hierarchal observation" and describes it as a "mechanism that coerces by means of observation; an apparatus in which the techniques that make it possible to see induce the effects of power" (170–71). This power to see all is important not only for the jailer but also for the inmate because "the means of coercion make those on whom they are applied clearly visible" (171). In Reade's novel, the prison yard is flanked by two large towers from which the prisoners can be easily observed. The inside of the main building is designed so that observation is not impeded:

> Passing into the interior of the vast building, you find yourself in an extensive aisle traversed at right angles by another of similar dimensions, the whole in form of a cross. In the center of each aisle is an iron staircase, so narrow that two people cannot pass, and so light and open that it merely ornaments, not obstructs, the view of the aisle. (62)

In addition, peepholes dot the doors of each cell to provide the warden or the turnkeys with constant access to the prisoner's most private moments.

The few occasions on which the male prisoners are permitted to mingle serve to further feminize the men as they are permitted to socialize to a very limited degree only at meals or church services, mirroring traditional occasions for women to socialize. The prisoners' identities are further eroded by the uniform they are compelled to wear:

> Nearly all the inmates of this grim palace wear a peculiar costume and disguise, one feature of which is a cap of coarse materials, with a

> vizor to it, which conceals the features all but the chin and the eyes, which last peep . . . through two holes cut for that purpose. (62)

The narrator describes a group of prisoners with "eyes glittering like basilisks' or cats' through two holes, features undistinguishable" (65). This outfit adds bestialization to the prisoners' emasculation. The prisoners' vision is severely restricted by this vizor while the vision of the keepers is virtually unlimited.

As he researched *Never Too Late*, Reade investigated conditions at several prisons—in Durham, Reading, Oxford, Newgate, and Birmingham—and discovered that brutality toward the inmates occurred routinely. And despite the humanitarian reforms that had been heralded, Reade could still report as justified the reactions of his fictional creation Tom Robinson upon observing the outrages committed against a young fellow prisoner named Edward Josephs (modeled after a figure in a widely reported case in Birmingham Borough Prison in 1853). Robinson witnesses Josephs being beaten, starved, soaked, and bound to a wall in a straitjacket:

> He had always been told the new system discouraged personal violence of all sorts; and in all his experience of the old jails he had never seen a prisoner abused so savagely as the young martyr in the adjoining cell. . . . He was uneasy, and his heart was heavy for poor Josephs; but he dared not even cast a look toward his place of torture, for the other executioners had returned. (72)

Foucault sees the "humanitarian" amelioration of the more overt and repressive forms of power as a function of that power's ability to refine and to insinuate itself into the workings of the everyday life of its subjects, as well as to make its exercise more palatable to the public. Reade's novel, however, suggests that such humanitarian reforms are largely fictional.

Part of the difference in the approaches of Reade and Foucault lies in the very different generic forms in which they worked. Reade, as a novelist steeped in the tradition of melodrama, wrote his fictions to engage the emotions of his readers. In the individual reader of whatever social station, he wished to inspire passion and anger rather than sober reflection. Foucault's philosophical works are products of an academic discipline, directed at highly educated readers. Foucault sought to convince his colleagues and other intellectuals of the need to question inherited assumptions regarding power and knowledge. His theoretical works are self-consciously dispassionate and assume

the threat of violence as an element of power that hardly needs discussion. Reade's fictions are just as self-consciously passionate and are directed at the reader at a visceral level. Because of this, in *Never Too Late* and *Hard Cash*, Reade could concentrate almost exclusively on naked brutality as well as on political and financial corruption.

Writing of Foucault's lesser known activist writings, David M. Halperin notes that "Foucault did not feel at all inhibited about appealing to truth when attempting to expose the realities of torture, police brutality, and governmental injustice" (161). At this present dangerous historical moment, it is useful to remember Foucault's advice, provided in his introduction to *Anti-Oedipus* by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, that always "the strategic adversary is fascism" (xiii). By focusing on fascism in several of his texts and lectures, Foucault invokes a system of power that relies on overt violence.[2] Addressing the more subtle manifestations of power, Foucault adds that we should be aware of "not only historical fascism…but also the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behavior, the fascism that causes us to love power, to desire the very thing that dominates and exploits us" (xiii). Foucault's interrogation of the more subtle manifestations of power and its ability to be internalized by its subjects should not blind us to his own acknowledgment of that power's repressive violence that is more apparent today than when he wrote. At the same time, we should keep in mind that fascism, political violence, and repression are not the primary concerns of Foucault's most influential works.

Reade's critique of abuses of power in the administration of prisons and madhouses, although more limited in focus than Foucault's complex formulations, serves the same purpose and forms part of the same effort to throw light on the mechanisms of power. In *Discipline and Punish*, although Foucault focuses almost exclusively on the increasingly invisible mechanisms of power rather than on overt violence or coercion, he never dismisses reformist efforts as useless or foolish, or, even worse, as consciously designed to enable the spread and/or maintenance of power. Halperin refers to "Foucault's own well-documented practice of political engagement" and notes that his work inspired the anti-psychiatry and prison reform movements in France (23–26). Foucault emphasizes the necessity of combining theory with practice when he writes, in a 1978 essay that theory must "put itself to the test of reality, of contemporary reality, both to grasp the points where change is possible and desirable, and to determine the precise form this change should take" ("What Is Enlightenment" 46). Reade felt he knew where change was necessary and possible, and his work

consciously attempted to effect such change in the contemporary reality of mid-Victorian England. Reade's work bolsters Foucault's study of the genealogy of power in the nineteenth century, and it provides a loud negation—annoying to those with an interest in maintaining existing modes of management of prisons and asylums—of some of the complacent acquiescence or blindness in his own society to the persistence of physical cruelty and even its refinements.

In addition to offering contemporary evidence that supports Foucault's theories of the "disciplinary society," much of Reade's work can also serve as a critique of some of these theories. In his determination to analyze the more subtle forms of power in *Discipline and Punish* and *Madness and Civilization* (as well as in *The History of Sexuality, Vol.1*), Foucault all but ignores the role of the repressive measures employed by regimens of power (even if he addresses matters of violence elsewhere). Foucault's great contribution was to place the idea of "co-optation" into a theoretical framework. Power will co-opt what it can, and when Foucault wrote his great works, power was demonstrating a great flexibility in its methods to contain dissent. Today, however, we live in an altered reality. Established agencies of power have become increasingly willing to demonstrate their repressive potential while continuing to absorb, co-opt, and inhabit individuals and institutions.[3] For this reason, Reade's focus on the active role played by physical repression serves to critique Foucault's ideas even while it supplements them.

I will discuss Reade's prison novel in greater depth below. But first I offer a selective analysis of an influential literary study that has presented perhaps the most systematic reading of the nineteenth-century novel in light of Foucault's theories.

D.A. Miller and the Police

Anyone who wishes to claim, as I do, Reade's work and other examples of sensation fiction as an alternative discourse that runs counter to the affirmations of a prevailing bourgeois hegemony in many nineteenth-century novels, must contend with the argument of D.A. Miller in *The Novel and the Police* (1988). In an exploration of the "policing function" of the novel, Miller specifically includes "these traditions: Newgate fiction, sensation fiction, detective fiction, realist fiction" (2). He poses the following question: "how does the novel—as a set of representational techniques—systematically participate in a general economy of policing power?" (2). Miller seeks to

show that the novel, "whose literary hegemony is achieved precisely in the nineteenth century—in the context of the age of discipline," formed an important element in the emergence of a new system of power (18). *The Novel and the Police* represents an innovation in that it employs the theories of Foucault in an analysis of the disciplinary work done by novels, something Foucault himself never attempted in any systematic manner.[4] Focusing on the work of several nineteenth-century authors, Miller suggests that his argument applies across a broad range of Victorian fiction.

Unlike Mary Poovey, Miller generally does not employ Pierre Bourdieu's concept of the "literary field" and relies heavily on the theoretical framework developed by Foucault. In his essay "Flaubert's Point of View" (1988), Bourdieu finds that Foucault's theory works to "transfer into the heaven of ideas the oppositions and antagonisms rooted in the relationships between the producers and users of cultural works" (543). He insists that "it is not possible to consider the cultural order as a system totally independent of the actors and institutions that put it into practice and bring it into existence" (543).[5] While Bourdieu may overstate Foucault's lack of interest in the microsystem of contending forces that ultimately shape discursive fields, Miller's reliance upon Foucault's macrosystem allows him to view the Victorian novel as a monolithic agent in the regime of power. In his essay, translated in the same year that Miller's work appeared, Bourdieu critiques totalizing projects, citing the example of Russian formalism. And although Bourdieu could not have read *The Novel and the Police* at the time of his writing, his comments can apply to Miller's theory as well. Bourdieu writes that a totalizing approach "ties works directly to the world vision or to the interests of the social group which are supposedly expressed through the artist acting like some kind of medium... The notion of the *field* (artistic, scientific, juridical, and so on) was elaborated against this form of reductionism" (544). Rather than isolating the competing elements of the emerging literary field, Miller's book treats that field as virtually complete and unified by the mid-nineteenth century, and he interprets novels as inevitable ideological expressions of the vision of the dominant social group.

Miller relies on Foucault's "disciplinary society," in which power is exercised through "a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets" (D&P 215). Foucault theorizes a new era of control and regimentation in nineteenth-century Western society that arose largely through the new bourgeois need for order in the nuclear family, in the workforce, and in society as a whole.

He writes of "the swarming of disciplinary mechanisms" that developed into "a faceless gaze that transformed the entire social body into a field of perception" and identifies these "thousands of eyes posted everywhere" in institutions such as the family, the school, the workplace, the hospital, the asylum, and the prison (D&P 211, 214). Agreeing with Foucault, Miller asserts that "discipline attenuates the role of actual supervision by enlisting the consciousness of its subjects in the work of supervision" (18). His argument suggests that authors of Victorian novels and their readers, following an invisible imperative, enforce contemporary social norms because their consciousness and behavior are already structured by a triumphant middle-class ideology. Abandoning the traditional exercise of power through force or coercion, the new "disciplinary society" is, in Miller's words, "interested in putting in place a perceptual grid in which a division between the normal and the deviant imposes itself" (18). For Miller, the novel serves as a cog in the machinery of Victorian discipline in its overt or covert enforcement of cultural authority.

Miller contends that, by its very nature, the novel inevitably reaffirms the values of the society in which it is produced. One of the novelistic devices that Miller identifies as part of such a disciplinary practice is the omniscient narrator. According to Miller, "As it forwards a story of social discipline, the narrative also advances the novel's omniscient word.... It is frequently hard to distinguish the omniscience from the social control it parallels" (27). His point is valid, if by social control he is referring to the general tendency in canonical nineteenth-century novels to uphold Victorian values, such as the sanctity of marriage and the family, the idea of separate spheres, and the prevailing notions of propriety and religion. Yet he discounts any subversive potential in novels that question these values by implying that they too inevitably conclude by reaffirming them. He writes, "Whenever the novel censures policing power, it has already reinvented it, in *the very practice of novelistic representation*" (original emphasis 20). According to Miller, whatever wayward paths the characters in novels may take, the omniscient narrative voice ultimately restores order, morality, and discipline.

Miller devotes chapters to *The Woman in White* (1860) and *The Moonstone* (1868), two of Collins's novels that have found a place in the canon in recent decades through important work by scholars, many of whom have analyzed the transgressive moments in these texts. These two novels question a range of Victorian values both in their fragmented narrative structure and in their sensational content. In

The Woman in White, Collins presents the story of the nominally principal characters Walter Hartwright and Laura Fairlie through a series of documents provided by Walter and "authored" by himself and many of the other characters in the novel. Collins's use of multiple narrators undermines the omniscient voice, but here Miller sees the narrative of *The Woman in White*, with its multiple "authors" who contribute depositions or letters in a sort of "quasi-legal document," as an indication that the novel "aligns itself with extra-, infra-, and supralegal modern discipline" (157). Miller contends that this form of narrative too works to contain challenges to power. This makes a potentially compelling and counterintuitive point, but it is at odds with Miller's previous assertion that one of the characteristics of the novel as a disciplinary device is the presence of the omniscient narrator, which Collins radically eliminates in *The Woman and White, The Moonstone*, and other works.[6]

According to Miller, both the omniscient narrator of so many Victorian novels *and* the fractured narrative voice of *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White* further the interests of power. Miller's theoretical overview is so broad that it allows him to take two distinct, even opposed, modes of narrative technique and find that each supports his theory of the novel's policing function. The ability of his thesis to encompass such disparate elements represents a theoretical weakness, rather than a strength.

Following the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish*, Miller argues that the very diffusion of the discourses of power allows it the flexibility to inhabit disparate forms of social and cultural manifestations. And although disciplinary power is resilient and adaptable, Miller's argument considers it virtually impossible to identify an imaginative work of the nineteenth century that could contest or resist that power. Miller's overall thesis sees the novel too monolithically as part of the disciplinary apparatus that Foucault elaborated in *Discipline and Punish*, but this was not Foucault's last word on power.[7]

In my discussion of Reade and of sensation fiction, I compare Foucault's theoretical arguments to the treatment of historically specific issues in these works. Many of the sensation novels of Collins, Braddon, and Reade present significant challenges to established institutions in their presentations of highly subversive characters and critiques of social networks. Miller might counter that, despite their airing of transgressive views and lifestyles, and their frequent challenges to powerful forces (be it the very tangible police and courtroom or the more ephemeral manifestations such as social norms of propriety), sensation novels usually restrict such wayward inclinations

by imposing a socially acceptable conclusion that enforces the very same values that had been placed under attack. Yet the very airing of the transgressive behavior (especially by female characters) in, for example, Collins's *Armadale*, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, and Sheridan Le Fanu's "Carmilla" undermines the notion of containment, despite the concluding punishments of Lydia Gwilt, Lucy Audley, and Carmilla, and the apparent restoration of patriarchal authority. (I do not include a work by Reade in these examples because his novels seldom, if ever, punish transgressive women.)[8]

Miller sees the ending of *The Woman in White* as restorative of contemporary norms. He correctly notes the power of the novel to produce bodily reactions in the reader "whose fear and desire of violation displaces, reworks, and exceeds his constitutive fantasy of intact privacy" (163). He refers to the "shock" that readers feel when, in a scene often compared to a rape, Count Fosco violates Marian Halcombe's diary. In chapter 10 of the "Second Epoch" of the novel, Marian's diary provides the narrative. At a crucial point, the reader learns that the villainous Fosco has invaded Marian's private space and has added a "personal note" to her diary (338). He has violated her privacy in an especially personal manner. This passage produces one of the more significant shocks of *The Woman in White*, but Miller feels that "the novel (like any good administration) will work to absorb [that shock]" (164). Miller finds that, after playing significantly with traditional gender roles—especially in the characters of the masculine Marian and the effeminate Fosco—Collins works to re-stabilize these roles according to prevailing norms later in the novel, especially at the end in "the most banal moment in the text," after the villains have been vanquished and Walter and Laura are safely wed (165).[9]

It may well be that the very banal conclusions of *The Woman in White* and other novels in the sensation genre represent the authors' less than sincere concession to the conventions of the novel in which he or she is working. In *Narrative and Its Discontents*, an earlier work, Miller argues that while novels often build toward a "closure . . . they are never fully or finally governed by it" (1981: xiv). Yet in his discussion of Collins's text, Miller suggests that the use of an ending that purports to contain the transgressive moments it had released represents the novel's wish to "abolish itself: to abandon the grotesque aberrations of character and situation that have typified its representation, which now coincides with the norm of the Victorian household" (165–66). However, such an unlikely ending as Collins contrives here (and in *No Name*) often serves to underscore the "aberrations"

that occupy much of the text. The text exhibits an obvious tension between its transgressive moments and its recuperative conclusion. The ending of *The Woman in White* is scarcely believable and hardly restorative because the sedate bourgeois marriage of Walter and Laura comes about only after they have been cohabiting.[10] The domestication of the aggressive Marian appears forced and unlikely, but Collins undermines her taming by placing her center stage at the conclusion. As we have seen, Reade directly addresses the requirement of the restorative ending in the closing chapter of *The Cloister and the Hearth*, in which he clearly states that he is concluding the novel "in compliance with a custom I despise but have not the spirit to resist" (439). The containment that Miller sees as reinforcing cultural norms may be little more than "compliance with a custom," provided grudgingly by the authors.[11]

In *The Dialogics of Dissent in the English Novel* (1994), Cates Baldridge discusses works such as Miller's and remarks on "a number of ingenious—even brilliant—readings of novels once touted by a more sentimental, essentialist, and Romantic hermeneutic" (3).[12] Baldridge suggests, however, that "to paint the genre [of the novel] as always and everywhere complicit with hegemonic forces is to turn a blind eye to social complexity and succumb to an essentialism just as misleading" (6–7). Readers can appreciate Miller's contribution to the study of the novel even without accepting the full application of his theory to all sensation novels or all Victorian novels. In the pages that follow, I analyze ways in which Reade's *Never Too Late* and *Hard Cash* critique contemporary authority, while conceding that in some respects their reformist project itself may work to uphold prevailing Victorian values. The very reformism that drives Reade's texts precludes him from questioning the ultimate legitimacy of institutions such as prisons and madhouses. Unlike Foucault, he does not consciously trace their evolution and see them as part of an emerging network of an all-encompassing power. Yet his work serves a compelling social purpose by identifying and challenging the dehumanizing characteristics of these institutions.

The Victorian Prison

It Is Never Too Late to Mend

As a self-conscious reformer, rather than a revolutionary, Reade wished to outrage the public into demanding reforms in the prison system. His reformism is similar in some respects to the domestic

social projects of Dickens, Ruskin, and even Carlyle, all of whom advocated institutional reforms. All were bound by many of the premises of their own Victorian reality, and all held some distinctly conservative views. Yet Reade goes considerably further than most in critiquing contemporary social institutions. *Never Too Late* represents his first effort at a "novel with a purpose."

Foucault writes of the disciplinary society's ability to "make the technology of power the very principle of both the humanization of the penal system and of the knowledge of man" (D&P 23). This view sees reforms in the administration of prisons as a refinement in the system of power. Reade's novel discusses some of the reforms introduced in prisons but contends that the new humanitarian regulations are not enforced in many institutions. The novel also describes innovations that do not rely on brutality but are nonetheless degrading—such as the "silent system" and the introduction of labor-inducing devices and practices, both discussed below. Reade's novel upholds Foucault's argument in *Discipline and Punish*, even while it offers an alternative to the view that power no longer needs to rely on physical coercion.

In writing *Never Too Late*, Reade resurrected the plot of his old play *Gold* (1853), onto which he added the long and melodramatic prison episode for which the novel is chiefly remembered. The story begins in a farming community in England. George Fielding, a struggling farmer, falls in love with Susan Merton, but her father will not consent to a marriage until George can produce 1,000 pounds. Mr. Meadows is a rich landlord who also covets Susan's hand. He uses his influence to drive George deeper into debt and to make Mr. Merton financially beholden to him. George's friend Tom Robinson is arrested for theft and sent to prison, later to be transported to Australia. George too goes to Australia to seek his fortune so he can return to claim Susan in marriage. The action of the novel moves from the farming community, to the prison, to Australia, and back to the farm where virtue is rewarded as George and Susan eventually marry, and evil is punished as Mr. Meadows is ruined. Against the backdrop of this melodramatic plot, Reade fashions a searing indictment of conditions in contemporary prisons.

As part of his project of reforming prison practices, Reade collected data from many locations, but his primary model was the notorious Birmingham Borough Prison where a young prisoner hanged himself in 1853, prompting a damning Royal Commission Report that Reade used extensively. *Never Too Late* exposes the miserable conditions in prisons that had supposedly been made more humane by Victorian

progress. Reade presents a catalog of horrors as he demonstrates, in merciless detail, how the prisoner's human identity is stripped away by the assignment of a number instead of a name, by constant surveillance, by sensory deprivation, by meaningless work on the crank, and by constant physical violence or the threat of it.

The crank, invented in 1847, was a device employed in Victorian prisons to keep the inmates working. The narrator of *Never Too Late* describes this device as Tom Robinson is led from his cell by a warder into the prison yard where he finds yet more cells:

> In each of these little quiet grottoes lurked a monster, called a crank. A crank is a machine of this sort—there springs out of a vertical post an iron handle, which the workman, taking it by both hands, works round and round... The iron handle goes at the shoulder into a small iron box at the top of the post; and inside that box the resistance to the turner is regulated by the manufacturer, who states the value of the resistance outside in cast-iron letters. Thus: 5-lb. crank. 7-lb. crank. 10, 12, etc., etc. (70)[13]

The crank has no productive function. Its sole purpose is to prolong a deadening physical exertion. Each refractory inmate is given a quota of so many revolutions of the crank to be completed within an allotted time. In Reade's novel, Tom Robinson's quota is set at the seemingly impossible high level of 8,000 turns per day (72). Prisoners who fail to meet the quota are punished. Elsewhere Reade calls the crank "a truly hellish invention to make labour contemptible and unremunerative" (*Readiana* 358). The use of the crank in British prisons was not generally abolished until 1898.

The crank does not rely on brutal treatment of prisoners. It may have been considered by some as a humane innovation in prison technology. Reade's narrator describes the terrible simplicity of this device as Tom Robinson operates it:

> Though no mortal oversaw the thief at his task, the eye of science was in that cell and watched every stroke and her inexorable finger marked it down. In plain English, on the face of the machine was a thing like a chronometer with numbers set all round and a hand which, somehow or other, always pointed to the exact number of turns the thief had made. (70)

The crank constitutes an innovation that allows those in power to operate almost invisibly. Reade's novel notes that "the crank was an

autometer, or self-measurer, and in that respect your superior and mine" (70). The prisoner could be left unsupervised, as the machine recorded for the attendants whether or not the assigned quota had been fulfilled.

Divorced from production of any kind, work for its own sake—as exemplified by such nineteenth-century innovations as the crank, the treadmill, and the shot-drill[14]—became a common feature of the prison. Foucault notes that at the outset "pointless work, work for work's sake, was intended to shape individuals into the image of the ideal labourer" (P/K 42). But this idea evolved over time. In *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault stresses "the purely repressive nature of this work, beyond any concern for production" and notes that by the late seventeenth century "the relation between the practice of confinement and the insistence on work is not defined by economic conditions, far from it" (60, 58). Rather, he writes that "the very requirement of labor was instituted as an exercise in moral reform and constraint" (60). Labor in the institutions of confinement was not intended to be productive but was primarily a means of punishment. By the nineteenth century, according to Foucault, the goal was "not to teach the prisoners something, but rather to teach them nothing, so as to make sure that they could do nothing when they came out of prison" (P/K 42). Prisoners gained no skills from work on the crank or the treadmill.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault writes of the increasing isolation of prisoners in the new nineteenth-century prison system: "Each individual, in his place, is securely confined to a cell from which he is seen from the front by the supervisor; but the side walls prevent him from coming into contact with his companions" (200). In Reade's play (1865), based on his novel, he anticipates Foucault's analysis as the inmate Robinson, in a monolog, says, "They keep a fellow from the sound of his neighbor's voice, ay, even from his own. They hide the light of day" (136). In the novel, Reade describes the differences between the old prison system and the new, in lines that could have been written by Foucault a century later: "The two systems vary in their aims. Under the old, the jail was a finishing school of felony and petty larceny. Under the new, it is intended to be a penal hospital for diseased and contagious souls" (63). To Foucault, "penal imprisonment, from the beginning of the nineteenth century, covered both the deprivation of liberty and the technical transformation of individuals" (D&P 233). These comments indicate the increasing similarity of the prison and the mental hospital in mid-Victorian England. Reade refers to the prison as a "moral hospital" (78). According to Foucault, Victorian

society's new concern with health—physical, mental, and sexual—helped shape many of the era's new institutions of control in which the function of the prison overlaps with that of the mental hospital, each seeking to cure or rehabilitate the patient or the prisoner.

Never Too Late describes the evolution of prisons by commenting on the experience of Tom Robinson who "had not been in jail this four years, and, since his last visit great changes had begun to take place in the internal economy of these skeleton palaces and in the treatment of their prisoners" (63). The narrative then describes the kinds of prisons in England at the time: "In some new jails you may now see the non-separate system; in others, the separate system without silence; in others, the separate and silent system; in others, a mixture of these, *i.e.,* the hardened offenders kept separate, the improving ones allowed to mix" (63). Reade focuses on the most severe of all these, writing: "The victims of the Inquisition would have gained but little by becoming the victims of the separate and silent system" (74). Foucault generally takes prison reform as a given and as a part of the logic guiding the development of the disciplinary society. Reade, however, argues against some of the new reforms—for example, the silent and separate systems and labor-inducing devices such as the crank—that may have been intended to supplant harsh treatment of prisoners. And Reade's novel further insists that raw brutality is still common in Victorian prisons.

This long prison section—almost one-third of the narrative—forms the most significant and sensational part of Reade's novel and was the reason for its great success. In his diary, preparing the novel, Reade wrote, "I propose never to guess where I can know... I have therefore been to Oxford Gaol and visited every inch, and shall do the same at Reading [and] Durham Gaol" (qtd. in Sutcliffe, AL, 1946, 344). The catalog of physical and psychological tortures presented in the novel—beatings, punishment jackets, solitary confinement in the "black-hole," sleep deprivation, starvation, mock-crucifixions, and more—could hardly fail to raise a public outcry. Although a few critics doubted that the novel painted a true picture and others found artistic faults, the book was generally a critical and popular success. Reade's reputation as a major author was established by this novel.

For the London theatrical production of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* in 1865, Reade insisted on installing an actual treadmill on the stage to enhance the realism. On the opening night, the unrelenting portrayals of brutality shocked audiences—particularly the mistreatment of the teenaged prisoner Josephs (who, in a reversal of public Renaissance performances, was played by an actress); he is bound in

a choking "punishment jacket" and strapped spread-eagled to a wall. The novel describes the scene of Josephs in this jacket,

> A lad about fifteen years of age was pinned against the wall in agony by a leathern belt passed round his shoulders and drawn violently round two staples in the wall. His arms were jammed against his sides by a straight waistcoat fastened with straps behind... A high leathern collar a quarter of an inch thick squeezed his throat in its iron grasp. His hair and his clothes were drenched with water which had been thrown in bucketsful over him, and now dripped from him on the floor. His face was white, his lips livid, his eyes were nearly glazed, and his teeth chattered with cold and pain. (71)

The torture of Josephs presents a powerful visual image of a punishment that both the novel and the play repeatedly refer to as a crucifixion (96, 134). Josephs, a poor boy, was jailed for stealing a handful of potatoes for his hungry mother.

In the dramatic version, the warden, Hawes, is informed by the increasingly troubled turnkey, Fry, that prisoners are hanging themselves at an alarming rate. Hawes remarks, "Fry, do you falter? Do you doubt the *system*?" (134); to which Fry answers, "Laws forbid sir. The *system* is a grand *system*, a beautiful *system*, dissolves the varmints into tears, and grinds 'em into bible texts and bone; but somehow they do hang themselves *systematic*, to get out of the *system*" (134). In the novel, Josephs succeeds in hanging himself. In the play, after being released from his bonds by Fry, Josephs attempts to hang himself but is too weak; so he instead dies slowly on stage from a combination of starvation, beatings, and exposure to the cold. *Never Too Late* serves as a grim antidote to the self-congratulations of those middle-class Victorians who believed their society represented the pinnacle of progress, and who deceived themselves and believed that brutality in prisons no longer existed. As one of the characters in Reade's novel remarks, "God forgive us! How came this to pass in England in the nineteenth century?" (193).

Foucault writes that the system of discipline and incarceration, characterized by hierarchy, judgment, surveillance, and interrogation, became formalized throughout Western Europe and America during this period. Foucault's "pantopicism" takes its name from the nineteenth-century realization of an eighteenth-century architectural design by Jeremy Bentham. Reade devotes attention to the architecture of the prison: "Two round towers flank the principal entrance.... Between the central towers is a sharp arch, filled by a huge oak door of the same shape and size, which, for further security or ornament, is closely studded with large diamond-headed nails"

(61–62). When Tom Robinson is taken out for exercise in the yard, he discovers more architectural innovations:

> The promenade was a number of passages radiating from a common center; the sides of passage were thick walls; entrance to passage an iron gate locked behind the promenader. An officer remained on the watch the whole time to see that a word did not creep out or in through one of the gates. (66)

Foucault too discusses in detail the architectural characteristics of the prison according to Bentham's design:

> at the periphery, an annular building; at the centre, a tower; this tower is pierced with wide windows that open onto the inner side of the ring; the peripheric building is divided into cells, each of which extends the whole width of the building; they have two windows, one on the inside, corresponding to the windows of the tower; the other, on the outside, allows the light to cross the cell from one end to the other. All that is needed, then, is to place a supervisor in a central tower and to shut up a madman, a patient, a condemned man, a worker or a schoolboy. (D&P 200)

Although Reade's description of the prison does not exactly match Foucault's (and Bentham's), the two descriptions share characteristics—the imposing architecture, the ease of surveillance, the closeness of the cells—that give a sense of the invisible power behind panopticism. What Foucault refers to as "discipline," represented by panopticism, "is a type of power, a modality for its exercise, comprising a whole set of instruments, techniques, procedures, levels of application, targets; it is a 'physics' or an 'anatomy' of power" (215). Its ultimate goal is to "induce in the inmate a state of conscious and permanent visibility that assures the automatic functioning of power" (201). The genius of the system lies in "the perfection of power . . . [that] render[s] its exercise unnecessary" (201). The architecture of the prison allows for almost automatic surveillance. Reade's novel refers to unobstructed views and Foucault invokes a central "eye" of a single watcher who can see all while the prisoners' vision is consistently restricted.

In Reade's novel, when Tom Robinson is told to prepare to go to a church service, his low spirits improve: "Now I shall see a face or two, perhaps some old pals" (65). But he is soon disappointed:

> On reaching the chapel he found, to his dismay, that the chapel was as cellular as any other part of the prison; it was an agglomeration

of one hundred sentry-boxes, open only on the side facing the clergyman, and even there only from the prisoner's third button upward. Warders stood on raised platforms and pointed out his sentry-box to each prisoner with very long slender wands; the prisoner went into it and pulled the door (it shut with a spring). (65)

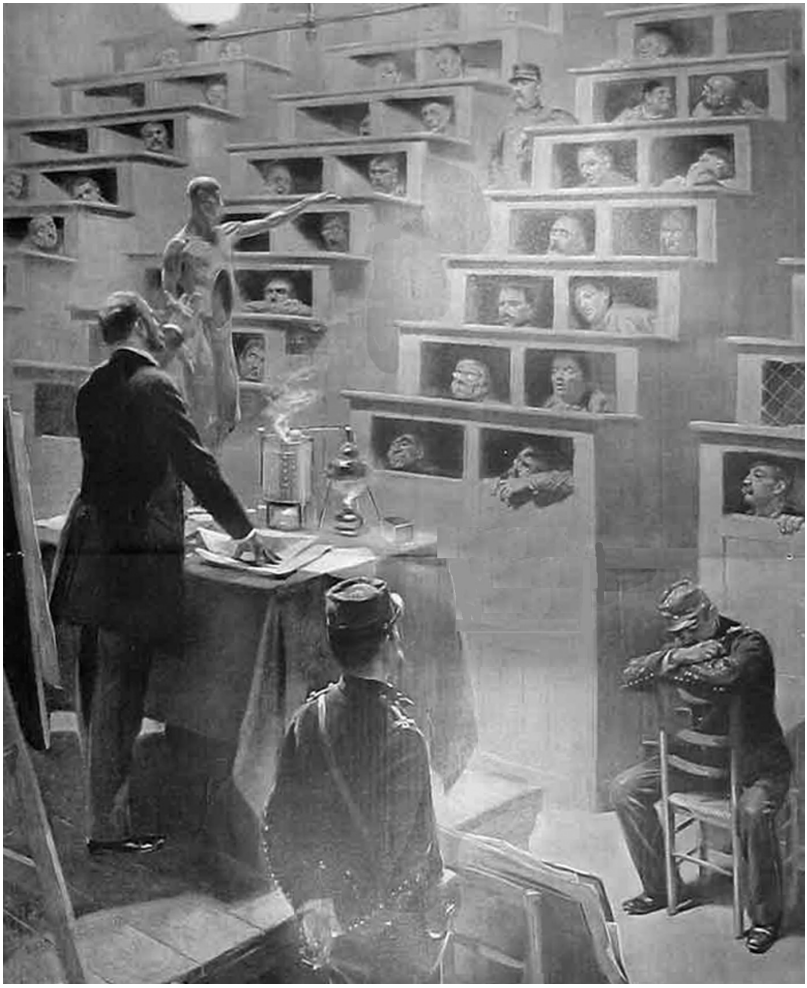

Figure 1 **Lecture on the evils of alcoholism at the prison at Fresnes, France, from *Wood Engravings from The Graphic*, 1903, by Andre Castaigne.**

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault reproduced a drawing by Andre Castaigne (plates following page 169 in the Vintage edition) of an auditorium at the prison in Fresnes (founded in 1896)—which matches nearly exactly Reade's depiction of the prison chapel. At some point in the book, a man is described as giving a lecture in the auditorium to prisoners on the evils of alcoholism. The auditorium is dotted with miniature cells, from each of which a prisoner can watch and hear the speaker but cannot see each other.

All these elements contribute to a "panopticism," a metaphor for the new societies of control that represent, according to Foucault, "the gradual extension of the mechanisms of discipline . . . their spread throughout the whole social body, [and] the formation of what might be called in general the disciplinary society" (209). The police and the prison form the most visible examples of the disciplinary society, yet Foucault's body of work demonstrates how the panoptic system of surveillance informs also the school, the hospital, the madhouse, the barracks, and even the nuclear family home.

In Reade's play, in a scene that presents stark violence that leaves little to the imagination, Josephs dies melodramatically as he prays to heaven in the arms of the chaplain, and as the older thief Tom Robinson curses the warden. On its opening night, the play nearly precipitated a riot: when one outraged critic rose to denounce the "brutal realism" of the boy's treatment, other patrons shouted down the critic, the author himself joining in the fray (Hammett 14). Another critic, Henry Morley, referred to the "repulsive excrescence" of the performance (qtd. in Elwin 181). This production might be seen as a precursor to Antonin Artaud's "Theater of Cruelty" nearly a century later.

However, it may be useful to provide an anecdote related by Justin McCarthy in 1872. Learning of its subject matter, the manager of a theater in the working-class East End decided to see Reade's play to determine if his audiences might enjoy a production of *Never Too Late.* After viewing the play at its West End theater, he is said to have remarked, "It would never do for *me* . . . Not like the real thing at all. *My* gallery would never stand it. Bless you, they know the real thing too well to put up with *that*" (qtd. in McCarthy 196). The comment suggests that conditions in English prisons were even worse than Reade depicts them. For despite Reade's boast that his novel had effected penal reform, the 1865 Prisons Act (passed the very year his play was produced) legalized many stringent punishments for inmates. This act, according to Sir Edmund du Cane, assistant director of prisons,

ensured the legislators that prisoners would face, "Hard Labour, Hard Fare, and Hard Board" (Stamp 84). Coleman's biography of 1903 notes that Reade "had the courage to denounce the infernal system" but that "much remains to be done . . . for the amelioration of the condition of the wretched prisoner" (162). Wilde's *The Ballad of Reading Gaol* (1898) demonstrates that the Victorian prison retained many of its harshest features throughout the nineteenth century.

In addition to the violence depicted in *Never Too Late*, the novel also features some vivid melodramatic characterizations. Tom Robinson, the good-hearted criminal whose presence is so crucial to the prison scenes of the novel, also features in Reade's "Autobiography of a Thief" (actually a deleted excerpt from the novel), which offers engaging and often sympathetic looks at the London underworld. The prison chaplain, Mr. Eden, who takes the prisoners' side against the warden and who comforts the dying Josephs, was praised by a contemporary review in *The Critic.* The review describes how when portraying clergymen a novelist often "falls into one or the other of two errors: either he represents him in an unfavorable light as a canting, worldly-minded hypocrite . . . or he makes a saint of him" (qtd. in *Memoir* 237). But *The Critic* adds that in *Never Too Late*, "Mr. Eden is a man—a man of passion with us all—a man who feels for another" (qtd. 237). Mr. Eden also provides the novel's title when, considering the case of Tom Robinson, he uses the cliché "it is never too late to mend."

Near the end of the prison section in a memorable bit of dialog, Eden, who has finally succeeded in getting action from the authorities, unleashes his pent-up anger onto the defeated Warden Hawes. He says, in part,

> "Madman, to your knees! . . . The land contains no criminal so black as you. . . . I, a minister of the Gospel . . . tell you that if you die impenitent, so surely as the sun shines and the Bible is true, the murder of Edward Josephs and his brothers will damn your soul to the flames of hell forever—and forever—and forever! Begone, then, poor miserable creature! . . . Fly from this scene where crime and its delusions still cling round your brain and your self-deceiving heart. . . . The avenger of blood is behind you. . . . Away! away! Wash those red hands and that black soul in years and years of charity, in tears and tears of penitence, and in our Redeemer's blood. Begone, and darken and trouble us here no more." (196–97)

The narrator refers to Mr. Eden's indignation as "thunder and lightning" (197), and his long diatribe provides an example of

the melodramatic pronouncements that Reade so often favored. Mr. Eden is used also to introduce one of the author's melodramatic influences directly into the text of the novel. Feeling that Fry can be "reached," Mr. Eden decides to persuade the turnkey to read Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. Eden muses,

> "Who knows? The cases are in a great measure parallel. Prisoners are a tabooed class in England, as are blacks in some few of the United States. The lady writes better than I can talk. If she once seizes his sympathies by the wonderful power of fiction, she will touch his conscience through his heart. This disciple of Legree is fortified against me; Mrs. Stowe may take him off his guard." (134).

Although the comparison of the plight of English prisoners to the conditions of those in bondage provides a promising suggestion, Reade never follows through on it here, or in any of his other work.

Reade concludes the prison section of the novel in directly polemical terms. After a few platitudes—such as a reference to England as "a kind-hearted nation," and a description of Victoria as "the most humane sovereign the world has ever witnessed"—Reade focuses again on the case of the young prisoner (200)—he writes, "Josephs has committed the smallest theft imaginable.... For this the law, professing to punish him with certain months' imprisonment, has inflicted capital punishment... Sum total... Josephs a larcenist and a corpse. The law a liar and a felon" (200, 201). Although Josephs does not receive an actual death sentence, in a later collection of miscellaneous works Reade again speaks out against capital punishment.[15]

Reade's novel makes clear that prison reforms in the nineteenth century did not bring about a continuing improvement in the lot of the inmates. Because he focuses so relentlessly on brutality, some readers might see his project as distinct from Foucault's; noting the absence of any significant discussion of physical abuse in *Discipline and Punish* and the author's far greater interest in the more subtle manifestations of power, they may misunderstand Foucault's work to imply that prison reform was a fact. Indeed, some of Foucault's words may have contributed to this misunderstanding, such as the remark quoted above, in which he sees "the technology of power [as] the very principle of both the humanization of the penal system and of the knowledge of man" (D&P 23). However, in 1971, Foucault had created the GIF (Group for Information on Prisons), a group that advocated prisoners' rights. In announcing the goals of the group,

Foucault wrote that it "does not propose to speak in the name of the prisoners: it proposes, on the contrary, to provide them the possibility of speaking themselves and telling what goes on in prison" (qtd. in Eribon 227). Reade does much the same in his novel in the characters of Robinson and Josephs. But there is a difference in the two approaches.

In Reade's novel, the Reverend Mr. Eden, after vanquishing Warden Hawes, transforms the prison into a rehabilitative ideal as the prisoners perform satisfying and productive tasks for which they are paid. Under the administration of Mr. Eden, "jail is still a grim and castellated mountain of masonry, but a human heart beats and a human brain throbs inside it now.... The prisoners no longer crouch and cower past the officers, nor the officers look at them and speak to them as if they were dogs, as they do in most of these places" (233). Reade firmly believes in the power of his fiction to effect social reform. In contrast to this, Foucault writes that "the GIP does not have reformist goals; we do not dream of some ideal prison" (qtd. in Eribon 227). Despite the difference in approach, we can see a direct link between Foucault's work in the twentieth century and Reade's in the nineteenth.

Because Reade's indictment of prison discipline is the most relevant part of his novel to a discussion of his work in light of Foucault's theories, I have refrained from commenting at length on the other subplots of *Never Too Late* that arguably disrupt its narrative unity. In this novel, and especially in *Hard Cash*, Reade injects sometimes tedious developments of secondary stories—apparently to expand the novels to fit into the three-volume format demanded by publishers. Reade had earlier expressed his doubts about his ability to write a work long enough to fulfill publishers' requirements and had confided defensively in a diary that "I can *invent* too, if I choose to take the trouble. And it *is* a trouble to me, I confess" (original emphasis, qtd. in *Memoir* 196). The inclusion of disparate features in the two novels detracts from their narrative power. Although *Hard Cash* is generally known as a novel that focuses on the abuse in private lunatic asylums, madness does not become a concern until the second volume, the first being mainly taken up by a long adventure at sea, complete with battles with pirates, that involves only one of the central characters. In both *Never Too Late* and *Hard Cash*, these subplots involve racialized characters, whose presentation by Reade is less than edifying, bordering—as it sometimes does—on racism. This troubling element of Reade's work is considered in Chapter 5.

The Lunatic Asylum: Corruption and Discipline

Hard Cash

> *Madhouses are large and only too numerous; yet surely it is strange they are not larger, when we think of how many helpless wretches must beat their brains against this hopeless persistency of the orderly outward world, as compared with the storm and tempest, the riot and confusion within:—when we remember how many minds must tremble upon the narrow boundary between reason and unreason, mad to-day and sane to-morrow, mad yesterday and sane to-day.*
>
> *—M.E. Braddon, Lady Audley's Secret (205)*

In *Hard Cash*, Alfred Hardie, is unjustly confined in an asylum. Addressing the reader directly, the narrator suggests, "Pray think of it for yourselves, men and women, if you have not *sworn* never to think over a novel. Think of it for your own sakes: Alfred's turn to-day, it may be yours to-morrow" (233). Just as Foucault's genealogy of the systems of discipline evolved from his early formulations in *Mental Illness and Psychology* through *The Birth of the Clinic* and *Madness and Civilization* to *Discipline and Punish*, so too did Reade's reformist critique of prisons in *Never Too Late* lead to his exposé of conditions in lunatic asylums (especially those that were privately administered) in *Hard Cash.* Many commentators had called for reforms in the administration of the private asylum for over a century before Reade's novel appeared. In a study of the history of these critiques, Peter McCandless points out that in 1763 Daniel Defoe, in a broadside, "Demand for Public Control of Madhouses," had charged that many men, with the aid of corrupt doctors and administrators, used these institutions to dispose of wives of whom they had tired (366). Reade's work fits into a long tradition of anti-psychiatry.

The frame narrative of *Hard Cash* relates the story of the love of Alfred Hardie and Julia Dodd. Alfred's father is a wealthy banker whose financial mismanagement has recently driven him to the point of ruin, but he keeps this a secret from his family. Julia's father, Captain Dodd, an officer in the East India Company, returns from a long and dangerous sea voyage with a small fortune in "hard cash." Upon his arrival, he deposits 14,000 pounds with Mr. Hardie, Sr., who quickly embezzles it and denies ever having received it. Alfred is committed to a lunatic asylum after he begins asking too many questions of his father, both about 5,000 pounds missing from his trust

fund and about Captain Dodd's missing money. After the distractions of the first volume, *Hard Cash* settles into its primary business of exposing corruption and brutality in private lunatic asylums.

In 1858, Reade took a personal interest in the case of young man named Fletcher who had escaped from a private asylum. Fletcher, whose parents were both dead, had been certified insane by two doctors at the behest of relatives who wished to cheat him of his inheritance; his case was thus much like Alfred's in *Hard Cash*. In 1858, Reade wrote a series of open letters "to the Gentlemen of the Press" (reprinted as "Our Dark Places" in *Readiana* 393–400), publicizing the case of Fletcher, whom he refers to anonymously as "my maniac" (394). Reade hired his own doctors to examine Fletcher, and they certified him as sane. Largely through Reade's effort, the case went to court, and Fletcher was eventually restored to society.

Reade writes of his "maniac" that "the keeper of the madhouse told him he should never get out of it. This, if true, implies the absence of all intention to cure him. He was a customer, not a patient" (395). In *Hard Cash*, basing his characters on real people and situations on real events, Reade is primarily concerned with such corruption in the private asylums. He does not offer a thorough analysis of the institutions of madness as a whole, as Foucault would do a century later. Instead, according to his reformist program, he seeks to highlight abuses and to inspire public opinion to pressure the authorities to release sane persons held against their will and to ameliorate the treatment of the "truly insane."

Foucault's works, *Mental Illness and Psychology* and *Madness and Civilization*, demonstrate how the concept of insanity evolved in the modern era from earlier times when it was accepted as a fact of life, or even cherished as a sign of divinity. Foucault discusses at length what he refers to as "The Great Confinement" in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and the way the increasing number of hospitals served a social function by confining an excess population (whether mad or not) and an economic function by putting the inmates to work inside the institutions. In times of economic growth, asylum keepers profited from the labor of inmates, while in times of stagnation, inmates were forced to work both as punishment and as moral therapy (Foucault, M&C 58–59). Eighteenth-century reformers expressed outrage that the mad were confined along with common criminals and advocated not their release but their separation into discrete institutions.

Foucault describes the foundation by William Tuke of a retreat for the insane at York. Guided by a philanthropic vision and by his

Quaker religion, Tuke sought to create a model institution where he could, in Foucault's words, "construct around madness a milieu as much as possible like that of the Community of Quakers" (M&C 243). Inmates were instructed in religion, made to perform useful labor, and encouraged to practice self-restraint. Tuke's typical keeper emphasized to the inmates that he had, in Foucault's words, "no desire to use the means of coercion at his disposal" but that if the inmate could not control him- or herself "it would be necessary to go back to the old ways" (246). Through this combination of indoctrination, work, and the threat of force, Tuke's retreat became the new model for the private asylum. Tuke's experiment represented to many a humanitarian improvement, especially as coercion was considered an extremity to be used only as a last resort.

According to Foucault, however, "Tuke created an asylum where he substituted for the free terror of madness the stifling anguish of responsibility" (247), as inmates, more controlled than ever, were expected to internalize a consciousness of their own inferiority. Foucault notes of the asylum that "everything was organized so that the madman would recognize himself in a world of judgment that enveloped him on all sides; he must know that he is watched, judged, and condemned" (267). In addition to innovatively aiming to transform the morality of the inmate, the new asylums inherited from the old the idea of purification through work.

The emphasis on labor is important here because what distinguishes the mad from the rest of society is that they did not fit into the emerging bourgeois order of the Victorian era. Foucault writes that "the common category that grouped together all those interned in these institutions was their inability to participate in the production, circulation, or accumulation of wealth... their inability to work" (MI&P, 68). A person is defined as mad when he "crosses the frontiers of bourgeois order of his own accord, and alienates himself outside of its sacred ethic" (M&C 58). These people had sinned against trade and lived outside the world of work, and the emerging middle-class culture constructed a new model of insanity to deal with them. In Reade's novel, many of the inmates are confined because they are unproductive (while others, such as Alfred, are confined on the orders of corrupt doctors and avaricious relatives). Foucault dates the beginnings of this new model to the seventeenth century, but the institutions for containing madness were most developed and refined in the Victorian era.

According to Foucault, the allegedly "humane" treatment in new asylums "did not relax the old practices of internment; on the

contrary, they tightened them around the mad" (MI&P 70). The new asylums were said to be more humane but, in fact, practiced a "moralizing sadism" (71). The new institutions of madness were ostensibly designed to instill in the inmate a feeling of belonging to the asylum as his or her home. But Foucault notes that in practice this meant that the inmate was subject to "uninterrupted social and moral supervision; curing him was to mean reinculcating in him feelings of dependence, humility, guilt, and gratitude," and the means used to achieve this might include "threats, punishment, deprivation of food, and humiliation" (71). These practices, like those of the prison, which included constant surveillance and the utter denial of privacy and which did not rely overtly on physical brutality, were introduced into the new private asylums. But these "humane" institutions locked the doors on the "alleged insane" just as tightly as the older madhouses, and overt brutality always remained an option to deal with recalcitrant inmates.

Like Foucault, Reade does not accept that reforms in the system of managing madness either improved it or lessened its power. As Foucault notes, power no longer needs to be physically coercive to function. Reade writes of the development of the more humane "non-restraint" system that was meant to dispense with physical coercion:

> Non-restraint implied a great many attendants, and constant vigilance. Moreover, the doors were strong, the windows opened only eight inches, and that from the top: their framework was iron, painted like wood, &c. It was next to impossible to get into the yard at night: and then it looked quite impossible to get any further, for the house was encompassed by high walls. (257)

This system of non-restraint is related to the "silent and separate system" in the prison in *Never Too Late.* Both the prison and the asylum in Reade's novels present a version of the panopticon that Foucault sees as a metaphor for the meshing of knowledge and power in society as a whole. In *Hard Cash* and *Never Too Late*, Reade is more interested in examining and correcting the immediate symptoms than exploring the growth or the roots of the phenomenon. As Reade's novels were based on contemporary research, his accounts confirm some of Foucault's ideas on the growth of the disciplinary society.

For example, in *Madness and Civilization*, Foucault writes that by the end of the eighteenth century, most modern asylums employed,

for the first time, a "medical personage" in charge of daily operations. The rise of the medical expert in the asylum would "authorize not only new contacts between doctor and patient, but a new relation between insanity and medical thought, and ultimately command the whole modern experience of madness" (269). Foucault also notes, in a comment that is relevant to Reade's novel, that, "from the end of the eighteenth century, the medical certificate becomes almost obligatory. Within the asylum itself, the doctor takes a preponderant place, insofar as he converts it into a medical space" (270). In *Hard Cash*, an attendant tells the imprisoned Alfred that the director of the asylum "could be punished for confining a madman in this house without an order, and two certificates; but he couldn't for confining a sane person under an order and two certificates" (234). Another character, the honest Dr. Sampson, says, "a medical certificut is just an article o'commerce,—like an attorney's conscience" (374). Reade's narrator refers to doctors as "the most venal class upon earth" and presents fictionalized case studies in several of the medical men who run the various private asylums featured in *Hard Cash* (233).

Mr. Baker runs the asylum at Silverton where Alfred finds himself confined on the day he is to be married. When he protests to one of the staff that he is being held illegally and against his wish, the attendant responds, "Illegally, Mr. Hardie! You deceive yourself; Mr. Baker told me the order was signed by a relation, and the certificates by first-rate lunacy doctors" (234). The narrator describes Baker: "He was a full-blown pawnbroker…whom the legislature, with that keen knowledge of human nature which marks the British senate, permitted, and still permits, to speculate in Insanity, stipulating, however, that the upper servant of all in his asylum should be a doctor" (238). Then addressing his readers in the second person, as he often does, Reade's narrator says, "As you are not the British legislature, I need not tell you that to this pawnbroker insanity mattered nothing, nor sanity: his trade lay in catching, and keeping, and stinting, as many lodgers, sane or insane, as he could hold" (238). Similarly, Alfred's second asylum is run by Dr. Wycherly, another "collector of mad people" (294) and one of the keepers of a private "non-restraint" asylum.

One of the primary goals of Reade's novel is to expose the political, legal, and medical corruption in the administration of lunacy law, topics not directly addressed by Foucault. Reade devotes much attention to the legal system charged with overseeing the institutions for containing madness and to the corruption it invites by allowing

the "frequent detention of sane but moneyed men" (287). Although Alfred is portrayed as an industrious young man poised to inherit great wealth, the novel also enumerates several cases of inmates who are wealthy but were unproductive "on the outside." The novel demonstrates how the legal system encourages such abuses: "For when an Englishman, sane or insane, is once pushed behind his back into a madhouse, those relatives who have hidden him from the public eye... can grab hold of his money behind his back... In Lunacy Law... the British senator plays at Satan; and tempts human frailty and cupidity" (287). Here again Reade addresses the financial motives that confined many inconvenient relatives to private asylums.[16] One attendant tells Alfred, "Do you think them as sent you here will let you spend your money? No, your money is theirs now" (234). Once a person was committed, the private asylums connived with the relatives of the "insane" to agree on a price for his or her continued confinement. Reade alleges that this practice was widespread.

Reade devotes many pages to fictionalized case histories of people falsely committed. At one hospital, "besides Alfred, there were two patients in Drayton House who had never been insane; a young man, and an old woman... There were also three ladies and one gentleman, who had been deranged, but had recovered years ago" (302). The narrator notes that "recovery, is followed in a public asylum by instant discharge; but, in a private one, Money, not Sanity, is apt to settle the question of egress" (302). Reade compares the private asylums to those run publicly, which are supported by taxes, have fixed rates, and cater to the poor and the indigent. He provides these statistics in support: "In public asylums about forty per cent are said to be cured. In private ones twenty-five per cent... most of them poorish" (302). In a particularly polemical passage of *Hard Cash*, Reade writes,

> Once in a mad-house, the sanest man is mad, however interested and barefaced the motive of the relative who has brought two of the most venal class upon the earth to sign away .his wits behind his back. And once hobbled and strapped, he is a *dangerous* maniac, for just so many days, weeks, or years, as the hobbles, handcuffs, and jacket happen to be left upon him by inhumanity, economy, or simple carelessness. (233)

On Alfred's first night at the asylum at Silverton, his keepers enter his room and order him to strip and "compelled him to make his toilet &c. before them, which put him to shame" (234). After this, the keepers "hobbled him, and fastened his ankles to the bed, and

put his hands into muffles" (234). But they do not confine his body completely because "they had lost a lucrative lodger only a month ago, throttled in a straight-waistcoat" (234). This occurs in an asylum that professes to practice non-restraint.

Alfred is confined in a series of institutions that require a medical certificate, but this item is easily obtained by bribes from his father. At first, Alfred does not understand why he has been taken, but an attendant opens his eyes saying, "there's mostly money behind when young gents like you come to be took care of" (234). Once inside, Alfred learns how perilous his situation has become. He finds that once one is committed to a private asylum it is nearly impossible to get out. The narrator relates, "The tenacity of a private lunatic asylum is unique. A little push behind your back and you slide into one; but to get out again is to scale a precipice with crumbling sides" (287). The second asylum in which Alfred is confined is run by Dr. Wycherly, one of the doctors who signed the certificate to commit him in the first place after diagnosing his case as "erotic monomania... a very ordinary phase of insanity" (182). Before committing him to the asylum, Alfred's father invites the doctor to surreptitiously diagnose his son. Wycherly speaks disingenuously of the difficulty faced at times while discerning madness. Alfred's sister Jane asks the doctor, "How is one to know a genius from a madman?" and her father interjects, "If I understand the doctor right, the two things are not opposed" (185). Dr. Wycherly assures him that that is, indeed, the case and remarks, "One half of the aggregate of the genius of the country is at present under restraint; fortunately for the community; and still more fortunately for itself" (186). Wycherly sees madness everywhere. The more mad people he can identify, the more patients he can place under restraint, the more money he will make. Remarks such as Wycherly's indicate how thoroughly, Reade believed, some of the medical professionals were invested in the maintenance of the idea of madness as a source of wealth.

At Drayton House, his third asylum, Alfred finds that even under the new "non-restraint" system, the authorities conspire with the keepers or turn a blind eye to abuses in the asylum. The narrative relates the impending visit of state inspectors to this institution, run by a Dr. Wolf:

> One fine morning the house was made much cleaner than usual; the rotatory chair, in which they used to spin a maniac like a tee-totum, the restraint chairs, and all the paraphernalia were sent into

> the stable, and so disposed that, even if found, they would look like things scorned and dismissed from service: for Wolf, mind you, professed the non-restraint system. (312)

The cosmetic improvements have the desired effect: after the inspectors' visit, the daily routine returns and continues as before. Reade portrays some of the inspectors from the Lunacy Commission as incompetent or corrupt and some as diligent, but in either case they are outsmarted by operators such as Dr. Wolf. At Silverton, the narrator notes how easily the keepers deceive the inspectors, most of whom are aged and senile or have been bribed in advance. When asked by the inspectors if they have any complaints,

> the mad people all declared they were very kindly treated. The reason they were so unanimous was this: they knew by experience that, if they told the truth, the justices could not at once remedy their discomforts, whereas the keepers, the very moment the justices left the house, would knock them down, beat them, shake them, strait-jacket them, and starve them. (242)

Alfred takes advantage of an opportunity to talk to an honest inspector, Mr. Tollett, and tells him, "the beds want repaving; the vermin thinning; the instruments of torture want abolishing, instead of hiding for an hour or two when you happen to come... The madmen dare not complain to you, sir" (244). Alfred believes he has succeeded with the inspectors because they "examined patients apart, detected cruelty, filth, and vermin under philanthropic phrases and clean linen... They ordered all the irons, body-belts, chains, leg-locks, wrist-locks and muffs to be put into Mr. Tollett's carriage" and threatened the directors with closure of the asylum (245). Yet, despite this, Alfred has not convinced the inspectors that he is sane; such is the stigma attached to being confined in an asylum to begin with. And for talking to the inspectors, Alfred receives the usual brutal punishment.

The narrative of *Hard Cash* is not devoted solely to exposing the abuses in the institutions of confinement for madness. As in many of his works, Reade here depicts powerful sexual desire in several of his female characters. A senior female attendant at the asylum at Silverton is Mrs. Edith Archbold, one of the most vibrant characters in the novel. She is an example of the type of melodramatic character that Martha Vicinus refers to as "a secondary figure, bordering on villainy, who embodie[s] female rebellion" and who permits an

author to depict the heroine (in this case Julia) as "an unsullied angel while still portraying women's energy and anger" (1981: 133). Reade demonstrates his great interest in his creation of Edith Archbold by an unusual plot device. After writing her out of the novel when Alfred is transferred from his confinement at Silverton, Reade reintroduces her in a new position of employment at the asylum at Drayton.

Upon their first meeting, Mrs. Archbold "cast on Alfred one of those swift, all-devouring glances, with which her sex contrive to take in the features, character, and dress of a person from head to foot, and smiled most graciously on him, revealing a fine white set of teeth" (239). The formidable Mrs. Archbold quickly becomes enamored of Alfred. In addition, her assistant, the "muscular young virgin," Nurse Hannah, begins to fawn over Alfred as well (247).

The text describes how "Mrs. Archbold's fancy for Alfred . . . smouldered, and smouldered, till from a *penchant* it warmed to a fancy, from a fancy to a passion" (247). Mrs. Archbold uses her influence to have Alfred made one her charges, and she is assisted by the timid but athletic Nurse Hannah in handling his case. Alfred, who has been repeatedly beaten, cuffed, and hobbled by the male attendants, is first relieved and then alarmed by all this female attention:

> Here was a fresh complication! The men had left off blistering, torturing, and bullying him; but his guardian angels, the women, were turning up their sleeves . . . and plenty of the random scratches would fall on him. If anything could have made him pine more to be out of the horrid place, this voluptuous prospect would. (251)

Alfred is determined to stay true to his Julia, and he has a good deal of trouble warding off the advances of Mrs. Archbold and Nurse Hannah. In one passage, Mrs. Archbold "held his hand between her soft, burning palms, and her proud head sank languidly on his shoulder" (251). The narrator adds, "Morals apart, it was glorious love-making" (251). After Mrs. Archbold discovers Alfred bestowing a kiss on Nurse Hannah, she seeks him out and threatens, "if you kiss her before me, I shall kill her before you" (251). Alfred finds himself threatened both by violence and by sexual harassment.

Later, Mrs. Archbold sneaks into Alfred's room while he is sleeping and steals a kiss from him. Like a succubus, "she had sucked fresh poison from those honest lips, and filled her veins with molten fire" (252). Mrs. Archbold exudes an air of unbridled and aggressive sexuality, yet she is portrayed sympathetically by Reade. She constitutes

an extreme example of the type of woman Reade favors in his fiction. These women are typically physically dark, powerfully built or otherwise athletic, carnal, and outspoken. In Edith Archbold, with her frankly acknowledged desire and her commanding physical presence, Reade created one of the women with whom he is most fascinated. She is portrayed as both intimidating and desirable as a powerful, if arbitrary, female figure of authority. I return to a discussion of Mrs. Archbold and of Reade's other portrayals of women and gender in the following chapter.

While Alfred remains in the series of asylums, madness continues on the outside as well. Alfred's sister Jane is a "member of a religious party whose diction now and then offends one to the soul" (271). Like Miss Clack's in Collins's *The Moonstone*, Jane's constant distribution of tracts to all her friends and acquaintances drives them to distraction. Julia's mother refers to Jane as a "FIDGETY CHRISTIAN" who is "eternally taking her spiritual pulse . . . pesters one night and day with the millennium" (222). Jane's peculiarity is harmless compared to that of James Maxley who has gone mad (though he is not confined) after losing his life savings through the corrupt management of the bank owned by Mr. Hardie, Sr. The text describes the fatal encounter of Maxley and Jane:

> Maxley was coming down the road, all grizzly and bloodshot, baited by the boys, who had gradually swelled in number as he drew nearer the town. Jane was shocked at their heathenish cruelty, and went off the path to remonstrate with them. On this, Maxley fell upon her, and began beating her about the head and shoulders with his heavy stick. (270)

Jane later dies of these wounds. Nothing prepares the reader for this seemingly random act of violence. Perhaps Reade wished to make a point about the sins of the father, or he felt compelled to bring the violent events inside the asylum to the outside as well. Later in the novel, Alfred's father too goes mad. Many of the characters in *Hard Cash* go mad, spend time in asylums, or have friends and relatives who are confined by the lunacy establishment.

In *Hard Cash*, events at Drayton House finally come to a climax when a pyromaniac inmate sets a series of fires. The conflagration burns the asylum to the ground, providing the confusion in which Alfred can escape from Mrs. Archbold and the madhouse. The rest of the novel concerns Alfred's successful attempt to vindicate

himself, be reunited with Julia, and claim his inheritance. He also files a civil lawsuit against Dr. Wycherly and other private asylum administrators. Alfred's lawyer asks Wycherly, "Is it consistent with your dignity to tell us whether keepers of private asylums pay you a commission for all the patients you consign to durance vile by your certificates?" (392). Wycherly reluctantly admits that he receives a 15 percent commission from the asylums for every patient he certifies insane. The jury awards Alfred 3,000 pounds.

One of the targets of Reade's attack in *Hard Cash* is The Lunacy Commission, established by Parliament, with some good intentions, by the 1845 Lunacy Act. The commissioners were charged with the establishing of a network of county (public) asylums, and with the removing of pauper lunatics from workhouses to public or private asylums. The commissioners were also charged to inspect all licensed madhouses and to report their findings to the lord chancellor. The law also stipulated that each asylum was to employ a resident medical attendant (A. Roberts 5.13). The commission consisted of three doctors, three lawyers, and a floating number of honorary members. Reade's novel portrays the commissioners of lunacy as generally corrupt or incompetent, allowing flagrant abuses and overlooking financial corruption in the institutions they were in charge of regulating.

Hard Cash was originally serialized in Dickens's *All the Year Round* in 1863–64. As soon as the installments dealing with lunatic asylums began to appear, influential readers began to complain. In *Hard Cash*, Reade portrays the Lunacy Commission as having little interest in actual lunatics; in a letter to the press, he referred to its members as "small men afflicted with a common malady, a commonplace conscience" (*Readiana* 396). Dickens's friend (and later biographer) John Forster was secretary to the Lunacy Commission while the serialization was in progress. In addition, Dickens was a personal friend of Dr. John Conolly, a psychiatrist who had advocated the "non-restraint" system in county (or public) asylums.

Conolly had been active in the asylum reform movement and embraced many of the ideas of William Tuke who founded the Retreat in York referred to above. Conolly published several treatises—including *An Enquiry Concerning the Indication of Insanity* (1830) and *The Treatment of the Insane without Mechanical Restraints* (1856)—advocating reform in the public asylums; he was appointed to head several of these institutions. However, John Sutherland writes that, "by the end of the 1850s, Conolly had descended to the condition of a psychiatric harlot, exploiting his reputation for whatever money

it would bring" (77). Conolly sold his services as an expert witness to government prosecutors intent on dismissing pleas of insanity by defendants in criminal cases. While testifying to the sanity of criminal defendants in these cases, Conolly certified many sane people as mad in civil cases in which relatives sought to prove an incarcerated family member insane and requiring confinement.[17] Despite such actions, Conolly appears to have continued to enjoy the confidence of Dickens for a time. It has been suggested by some scholars that Forster and Conolly convinced Dickens's wife Catherine to agree to a separation by threatening her with confinement in a private asylum (Sutherland 77–80).[18]

In addition to portraying the Lunacy Commission as inept, *Hard Cash* presents in Dr. Wycherly a thinly veiled portrait of Conolly. In the novel, Wycherly refers to his pet theory of "the Incubation of Insanity" that, as Jenny Bourne Taylor points out, parodies the title of Conolly's book *Indications of Insanity*. Wycherly's fixation on *Hamlet* wickedly parodies Conolly's 1863 "Study of Hamlet." In the novel, Wycherly, like Conolly, displays an obsession with Hamlet and his madness. Alfred's questioning of Hamlet's insanity enrages Wycherly so much that he stomps around the room and finally falls to the floor "in a fit of an epileptic character, grinding his teeth and foaming at the mouth" (296). With such an unmistakable and devastating portrait of Conolly in the character of Wycherly, Reade must have known that Dickens would raise objections; to Reade's credit, he defied an artist whom he regarded as his superior in most matters.

Apparently, Foster and Conolly complained to Dickens about the portrayals in *Very Hard Cash* (as the novel was known in its serialized form). Dickens was obviously concerned for his friends and, as editor of the periodical serializing Reade's work, found his position "perfectly shocking" (qtd. Sutherland 60). Dickens took the unusual step of inserting two editorial notes distancing himself from the novel during the course of its serialization. One of these states, "The conductor of this journal desires to take this opportunity of expressing his personal belief that no public servants do their duty with greater ability, humanity, and independence than the Commissioners of Lunacy" (qtd. in Phillips 115). The second note in the final number states, in capital letters,

> statements and opinions of this journal are, of course, to be received as the statements and opinions of its conductor. But this is not so in the case of a work of fiction first published in these pages as a serial

> story with the name of an eminent writer attached to it. When one of my literary brothers undertakes such a task, I hold that he executes it on his own . . . I do not feel myself at liberty to exercise that control over his text which I claim as to other contributions. (qtd. in Phillips 115–16).

The clear implication is that Dickens wished to censor Reade's novel to protect his friends but did not feel "at liberty" to do so. Sutherland writes that "Conolly's hypocrisy and unprofessional conduct must have revolted Dickens when he was belatedly made aware of it" (82). Sutherland suggests that this is the reason that Dickens did not intervene more directly with Reade during the serialization of *Very Hard Cash*, and that "the most he would do, and this was less than nothing, was to insert his equivocal capitalized statement at the end of the serialized run" (85).

In a compelling analysis of *Hard Cash*, Ann Grigsby finds the novel to be a critique not just of madhouses, but of nineteenth-century bourgeois values as a whole. She writes that "Reade's purpose became linking the materialistic obsession of Victorian society with the insane and their asylums" (156). Further, Grigsby writes that in the novel, "Reade displays his empathy with the insane, and others who feel the negative effects of being branded as 'other'" (151). Grigsby notes "the personal engagement of Reade the artist with those, like the insane, marginalized by Victorian society" (141). This identification with the marginalized finds expression in much of Reade's work. In addition to displaying an understanding of marginalized victims in *Never Too Late* and *Hard Cash*, Reade demonstrates empathy in his depictions of the limited freedom granted to women, and in his portrayals of transgendered characters. The issue of insanity was for Reade a metaphor for far greater restrictions on individual rights. Reade's critique of the systems of power and discipline in the prison and the asylum carries over into his more general critique of Victorian propriety. He defends the rights of individuals not to be productive, not to conform to rigid gender codes, not to be constrained by contemporary standards of dress, and not to conform to an array of dictates imposed by the tyranny of Victorian propriety. In the following chapter, I focus on some of Reade's more memorable women, his depictions of male and female homoerotic desire, and his surprising and sympathetic portrayals of women who pass as men for a variety of reasons.

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Chapter 3

Sex and Sexuality, Gender and Transgender

Many nineteenth-century reviewers and most of those few who have since studied his work remark on Reade's compelling portrayals of female characters. Conan Doyle writes of "the humanity and the lovability of his women" (42). To William Dean Howells, Reade's novels "winningly impart the sense of womanhood" (43). A partial description of Margaret Brandt, when Gerard first encounters her in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, provides an example of Reade's creative power in depicting beauty in female characters:

> The young woman was dressed in plain russet cloth; yet snow-white lawn covered that part of her neck the gown left visible, and ended half-way up her white throat in a little band of gold embroidery. And her head-dress was new to Gerard; instead of hiding her hair in a pile of linen or lawn, she wore an open network of silver cord with silver spangles at the intersection; in this her glossy auburn hair was rolled in front into solid waves, and supported behind a luxurious and shapely mass. (11)

Despite such blazoning physical descriptions, recent critics have found other elements to admire in Reade's women. Laura Hanft Korobkin describes "Reade's intelligent, realistically sexual heroines" (45). Similarly, Winifred Hughes writes that "Reade stands nearly alone among mid-Victorians . . . in his perceptive creation of women as full, intelligent, sexual beings" (103). Hughes's comment identifies one of the primary features in Reade's portrayal of women—his focus on their sexuality. Female sexuality was increasingly distrusted and feared in the Victorian era, and the emerging science of sexology, along with legislation such as the Contagious Diseases Acts, sought to contain it. Foucault writes that in the nineteenth century medical discourse began to see women's bodies as "thoroughly saturated

with sexuality" (HS 104); although Reade appears to agree to some extent with that assessment, rather than condemn that estimation as so many contemporary moralists did, he celebrates it.

Reade endows his female characters with an unprecedented degree of latitude in their pursuit of social privileges and sexual desires. And although he may often seem to conflate gender and sexuality in an eccentrically essentialist manner, Reade's work also features several characters who defy prevailing norms of gendered behavior. This chapter discusses Reade's work in the context of several recent theories of gender and sexuality, among them Foucault's "repressive hypothesis," Judith Butler's theory of the performativity of gender, Judith Halberstam's "female masculinity," and Lillian Faderman's historical analysis of cross-dressing women.

Foucault, the Nineteenth Century, and the Repressive Hypothesis

In *The History of Sexuality, Vol. I* (1978), Foucault rejects the conventional wisdom of what he calls "the repressive hypothesis" that views the Victorian era as prudish and reluctant to acknowledge sex (15). Rather, according to Foucault, from the seventeenth century onwards there evolved an "incitement to discourse" on sexual matters. Foucault's revisionist view has had enormous influence in literary studies, but according to Gary Taylor, "as a historical explanation it suffers from disastrous weaknesses," and he finds it naive for some scholars to have accepted what he refers to as "so simple a binary opposition" between repression and incitement (99).[1] Taylor, a Renaissance scholar, argues that the nineteenth century was indeed more repressive than the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. As an example, he "contrasts the relatively uncensored quarto editions of Shakespeare published in the late sixteenth century with Henrietta Bowdler's expurgated edition of 1807" (100). Catherine Belsey notes that there "can be no doubt that Elizabethan heroines, whether tragic or comic, whether Juliet or Rosalind, are permitted to be more outspoken in love than their Victorian counterparts" (262). In addition, Mihoko Suzuki notes that during the Renaissance, "women's political participation most often takes the form of tragedies, rather than comedies; these tragedies apparently punish the female transgressors, even while dramatizing their rebellious speech and acts" (5). This generally holds true of the sensation novel as well, in that women in these works defy prevailing gender norms and are often punished,

but not before their exploits command reader attention. Reade's novels in particular, frankly and sympathetically express women's desires—social, political, and sexual—without, however, inflicting retribution.

Although Taylor's critique is a refreshing rebuttal to the wholesale adoption of a binary opposition between repression and incitement, it is important to remember that Foucault was primarily interested in opening up new avenues of investigation into the genealogy of modern sexuality. He writes, "The doubts I would like to oppose to the repressive hypothesis are aimed less at showing it to be mistaken than at putting it back within a general economy of discourses in modern societies since the seventeenth century" (11). And to further emphasize this point, he adds,

> Let there be no misunderstanding: I do not claim that sex has not been prohibited or barred or masked or misapprehended since the classical age... I do not maintain that the prohibition of sex is a ruse; but it would be a ruse to make prohibition into the basic and constitutive element from which one would be able to write the history of what has been said concerning sex starting from the modern epoch. (12)

Foucault's great contribution to the history of sexuality lies in his enabling an understanding that sexuality is not a continuum—that a radical departure occurred in the social views on sexuality in the modern era from those of earlier times. His counterintuitive argument states that this radical shift, often seen as a teleological move toward greater liberation, is rather a movement in the direction of greater regulation of sexuality

Some have interpreted Foucault's theory to argue that the Victorian era was no more repressive than any other, which was not, of course, his thesis at all. Sexuality, in Foucault's reading, was increasingly acknowledged so it could be more readily codified, categorized, pathologized, and criminalized except in its most acceptable form—in marriage and as a means of reproduction (104–05). In an interview after the publication of *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault states that, "in the nineteenth century, an absolutely fundamental phenomenon made its appearance: the inter-weaving, the intrication of two great technologies of power: one which fabricated sexuality and the other which segregated madness," and he points to the "medicalization of sexuality itself, as... an area of particular pathological frailty" (P/K 185, 191). We have seen how as early as 1863, Reade could write of the diagnosis of Alfred Hardie in *Hard Cash* as a case

of "erotic monomania" (182). Later, in the new nineteenth-century science of sexology, we find an "incitement to discourse" as authors from Krafft-Ebing to Freud sought to define sexual normalcy and abnormality, publishing case histories they knew would be shocking to a public long accustomed to reticence in sexual matters, while professing a scientific and nonjudgmental stance.

Foucault's work unsettles the repression/liberation binary by showing it to be a false dichotomy. As Halperin writes, Foucault's "critique of liberation in *The History of Sexuality, Volume I*, should not be read as a condemnation or disqualification of it" (59). Foucault's reading allows us to view the nineteenth century as increasingly concerned with discussions of sexuality at the same time that it actively prohibited a wide variety of sexual expressions. At the heart of Foucault's reading is his comment that "perhaps it is not the level of indulgence or the quantity of repression but the form of power that was exercised" (HS 41). This power often derived from the new social sciences of sociology, anthropology, and psychology, whose findings were soon codified into law.

As Judith Walkowitz, Anita Levy, and others have shown, the new legislation emerged out of sociological studies by Henry Mayhew and, earlier, G.C. Stonestreet and became a weapon used primarily against the working classes.[2] One need only note the Criminal Law Amendment Bill of 1885. Labeled as "an Act to make further provision for the Protection of Women and Girls, the suppression of brothels, and other purposes," the bill continued a trend begun with the Offences Against the Person Act of 1861 and the Contagious Diseases Acts of 1864, 1866, and 1869, all of which imposed new penalties for specific sexual offences including abortion, bigamy, prostitution, and male homosexuality, or any "gross indecency" whether "private or public."[3] Foucault points out that "sexuality is originally, historically bourgeois, and that, in its successive shifts and transpositions, it induces specific class effects" (127). Referring to the Contagious Diseases Acts, Levy notes that "these laws enacted the logic of sociological discourse by shifting the perceived sources of pollution and criminality from male to female, from exterior to interior features, from the middle class to the working class" (45). An emerging middle-class society sought to define a healthy sexuality for itself.[4]

It is precisely because of the Victorians' obsession with sex that its practice became so regulated. Such ordering enforced the maintenance of the integrity of the nuclear family as the centerpiece of

the bourgeois worldview and social order. According to Foucault, "the legitimate couple, with its regular sexuality, had a right to more discretion" and "what came under scrutiny was the sexuality of children, mad men and women, and criminals; those who did not like the opposite sex," among others (38). The concern with sexuality in children, women, and "perverts"—all of whom were viewed as potential threats to the patriarchal family—represents "a completely new technology of sex" (116). Reade's texts deal directly with the sexuality of "perverts" (in "Androgynism," and *Foul Play*), of children (in *A Terrible Temptation*), and of women (throughout his work).

In addition to placing legal constraints, the primary mechanism of control over sexual aberrations became the family itself. Here Foucault writes that "via the medium of the family... a system of control of sexuality, an objectification of sexuality allied to corporal persecution, is established over the bodies of children" (P/K 56). The sexuality of children became a subject of investigation; as Foucault states, "Educators and doctors combated onanism like an epidemic that needed to be eradicated" (HS 42). A logical development of this thinking led to the increasingly common practice, from the 1850s, of circumcision to curtail sexual desires in male children, and to treat masturbation and "hysteria" in female children of middle-class families.[5] Any straying from sexual normalcy represented an aberration and the possibility of incipient madness that required radical treatment. Although Reade's work does not address the question of masturbation in children, his novel *A Terrible Temptation* includes a passage that directly portrays the sexuality of children.[6]

Foucault writes of the nineteenth century's "hysterization of women's bodies... whereby the feminine body was analyzed—qualified and disqualified—as thoroughly saturated with sexuality; whereby it was integrated into the sphere of medical practices, by reason of a pathology intrinsic to it" (104). The Contagious Diseases Acts codified the surveillance of women and gave the police broad powers to identify and register "common prostitutes," especially among the working classes. Levy notes that the acts "identified the female body as the source of contagion" and that "registered women were forced to undergo invasive vaginal exams" that many of them considered akin to rape (45).[7] Reade specifically addresses this issue in *A Woman-Hater*, discussed below.

Regarding the perversions, Foucault describes "the first great global dynasty of sexual aberrations," identified in 1840 by Heinrich Kahn in *Psychopathia Sexualis* (*Abnormal* 280).[8] Foucault writes of

Kahn's categories, "there is *oanania* (onanism); there is pederasty, loving prepubescent children; there is what he calls lesbian love, which is the love of a man or a woman (it does not matter which) for someone of the same sex; the violation of corpses; bestiality, . . . making love to statues" (279–80). This list would be greatly expanded in the ensuing years. If a woman was seen as too interested in her sexuality, she was stigmatized as a nymphomaniac, a disorder first identified in 1775. Krafft-Ebing coined the terms "sadism" and "masochism," after the names of two authors, to the horror of the one still living at the time.[9] This absurd new taxonomy of abnormalities reached a fever pitch during the late nineteenth century and saw itself validated in the trial of Oscar Wilde, the last great expression, perhaps, of the triumphalism of Victorian morality.

Foucault writes that "the growth of perversions is not a moralizing theme that obsessed the scrupulous minds of the Victorians. It is the real product of the encroachment of a type of power on bodies and their pleasures" (48). This encroachment is part of what Reade and the other sensation novelists, at times perhaps unconsciously, rebel against. Reade did not, of course, theorize these concerns, and he held some views that by today's standards appear conservative. However, like other sensation novels, Reade's work cannot be reductively assessed by twenty-first century ideas of liberal and conservative thought. As an artist, Reade presents intensely sexual characters and, despite his disclaimers, several of his works demonstrate a fascination with both transvestism and same-sex attraction, newly identified as chronic perversions by sexologists in the nineteenth century.

Reade's Challenge to Repression

According to several commentators, Reade's *Griffith Gaunt* "offers a more fundamental criticism of accepted Victorian sexual mores than any other novel of the time" (Burns 311). This critique is present in nearly all of his novels. Reade was not a libertine, nor does he appear to have been a "sexual fetishist" as John Sutherland has called him (84).[10] Nor did he advocate promiscuity. On the contrary, he was almost fanatically in favor of marriage. Yet he was uncharacteristically tolerant (for a Victorian), especially in sexual matters, of what he refers to as "frailty." Reade knew well that he lived in a repressive era, and he refers fondly to earlier times much as Thackeray does in the preface to *Pendennis* (1851) in which he writes, "Since the author of Tom Jones was buried, no writer of fiction among us has been

permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN.... Society will not tolerate the Natural in our Art" (lvi). In *Griffith Gaunt*, set in the eighteenth century, Reade writes nostalgically that "morals were much looser then than now" (73). In *The Cloister and the Hearth*, the narrator relates that "nature was in that day what she is in ours but manners were somewhat freer. Then, as now, maidens drew back alarmed at the first words of love; but of prudery and artificial coquetry there was little, and the young soon read one another's hearts" (19). With several of his novels set in the distant past, Reade appears to have recognized the "encroachment" of power "on bodies and their pleasures" described by Foucault (48). Reade rebels against sexual repression in nearly all of his work, especially in the portrayals of female characters.

In negotiations with *Blackwood's Edinburgh Quarterly*, Reade admits that he takes risks with his fiction. Writing to John Langford, the journal's representative, Reade notes, "I see that Mr. Blackwood thinks—and I do not complain for many think with him—that I incline towards prurient or ticklish subjects," and then he frankly admits that "I have gone outside sexual matters more than my contemporaries" (qtd. in Elwin 292–93). Reade was more tolerant of female sexual "frailty" than most Victorian authors. Indeed, he often celebrates it in both licit and illicit relationships. When a critic referred to *A Terrible Temptation* as "unclean" because it portrays extramarital relations, Reade responded, "Illicit connections are vicious but they are no more unclean than matrimonial connections.... Whenever in a newspaper you see the world 'filth' applied to adultery or other frailty, the writer is a lewd hypocrite, a prurient prude" (*Readiana* 354–55). Reade's works are replete with examples of vibrant, carnal women such as Julia Dodd and Mrs. Archbold in *Hard Cash*, Margaret Brandt in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, and Kate Peyton in *Griffith Gaunt*. His fiction nonjudgmentally portrays courtesans, concubines, female transvestites, unmarried mothers, and "female rakes," all in central roles. In addition, he portrays men who are submissive to their wives and strongly alludes to male homoeroticism. His unprecedented depictions of an array of alternative gender positions, from fashion to performance, are far ahead of his time.

Diana C. Archibald suggests that "through the very playfulness of [Reade's] romantic, picaresque works he consistently sets up startling challenges to conservative notions of femininity and domestic ideology," and adds that, "even if he does so merely to knock them down and thus bolster traditional values, his vivid characters and

plots nonetheless attack those values by stealth" (149). Archibald's comment helps to explain the sometimes contradictory nature of Reade's work with its simultaneously conservative and radical elements. However, in a harshly critical essay, Nicola Thompson claims that Reade "successfully replicated conventional middle-class notions of Victorian womanhood" (204). Yet even a superficial reading of Reade's texts clearly refutes this assertion.

Thompson bases her claim upon *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* and on the comments of a handful of critics and extrapolates from there to judge the whole body of Reade's work as excessively masculinist. Thompson misquotes an essay by Walter Besant that has him assert, "Reade has found the perfect woman. She is always in the house.... What he loves most is the true, genuine woman with her perfect abnegation of self" (qtd. in Thompson 204).[11] Yet in the same essay, Besant writes that "the woman whom Charles Reade presents to us is not, at all events, insipid; no real women are; if she is artificial, he shows the real woman beneath" (211). Besant favorably compares Reade's portrayals of women to "the pretty dummies of Dickens; the insipid sweetnesses of Thackeray; the proper middle-class (or upper-class) girl of Trollope; the conventional girl of the better lady novelists" (211). Of course, Besant is reviewing Reade's body of work up to 1882, while Thompson is concentrating on just one novel from 1856, in which Reade himself felt his heroine was "a third-rate character" (qtd. in Elwin 112). But Thompson uses this example as representative of Reade's work as a whole and concludes that "we cannot repress our repulsion" for the author (211).

While noting that "Victorians strongly identified women with novel-reading," Thompson admits that "information about readership has often to be inferred" because of the lack of accurate statistics (198). Yet Elwin quotes from a letter from S.S. Conant, editor of the American *Harper's Weekly*, who wrote to Reade about the volume of letters received in response to *A Woman-Hater* (1877): "Your most intelligent readers here are women" (304).[12] Nevertheless, in an effort to support her thesis that Reade's work is inherently sexist, Thompson asserts, without evidence, that his novels were read by a disproportionate number of men, a view that contradicts many Victorian and later critics who point to Reade's broad popularity, often despite critical neglect or disdain. Thompson may be correct to point to Besant as a supporter of many traditional Victorian values because he wrote a ridiculous and embarrassing antifeminist novel, *The Revolt of Man* (1882). But Besant was a sometimes astute critic, and it is a tribute

to his abilities that a dying Wilkie Collins chose him to finish the writing of his last novel, *Blind Love* (1890). Ultimately, Thompson seriously misrepresents Besant's appreciation of Reade.

Reade lived and worked in the era of the feminine ideal of the "angel in the house." As Foucault and others have shown, along with this ideal construction came the new analysis of "the hysterization of women" and the "thorough medicalization of their bodies and their sex" (HS 146). Victorian medical discourse held that the female body needed to be contained and protected from its own desires. Unlike the works of many male authors of his era, Reade's fiction comfortably incorporates, even celebrates, female sexuality. As Korobkin notes, Reade's *Griffith Gaunt* had the effect of "encouraging female readers toward a more assertive sexuality" (51). The same could be said of many of his works.

Reade opens "Androgynism" with these words: "Women waste all their treasures: bestowing their affections on men . . . yet one must not be over-cynical at the expense of a sex superior as regards the quality of passion, and far more lavish of heart to us than we to them" (10). Coleman quotes Reade as saying in conversation,

> Give me . . . a woman—none of your skin-and-bone abominations, but a real live woman . . . with a heart in her body, limbs, and plenty of 'em; limbs she knows how to use, 'hair of what colour it shall please heaven,' a voice I can hear—a voice that fires me like a trumpet or melts me like a flute. (270).

As this comment suggests, Reade's work often displays a preoccupation with female physical traits and his portraits of women often contain a strong element of titillation. What redeems Reade's work from accusations of sexism is his consistent endorsement of women's physical and social autonomy. Reade's emphasis on passion and corporeality elevates women in a manner that runs directly counter to the Victorian ideal of the "angel." Michael Hammet observes that Reade's female characters "are not represented as morally perfect, indeed they can be suspected of falling short of perfection in sexual matters," but none of them "are incompetent, while some of his men are" (34). Elton E. Smith echoes this insight when he writes of Reade's "laudatory judgment of women and pejorative judgment of men" (74). The women Reade admires are adventurous, independent, and carnal; often his men too defy Victorian standards of manhood.

Sometimes Reade's female characters exhibit superior physical prowess, as when, for example, in *Christie Johnstone* and "The Bloomer," heroines rescue men from drowning. Reade depicts powerful sexual desire in many of his female characters, such as Julia in *Hard Cash* who, after a meeting with the handsome Alfred, "fluttered up the stairs to her own room with hot cheeks, and panted there like some wild thing that has been grasped at and grazed" (26). In the same novel, the "female rake" Mrs. Archbold, "an artful woman of thirty" and an official at the asylum, yields to her passion for the imprisoned Alfred and exerts her power in an attempt to seduce him (407, 299). What's more, Mrs. Archbold has a rival in her physically capable Nurse Hannah; as the narrator relates, "that muscular young virgin was beginning to sigh for him herself with a gentle timidity that contrasted prettily with her biceps muscles" (247). In this novel, as I noted in the previous chapter, Alfred becomes the passive sexual object of these two women, both with "masculine" attributes and in positions of social power over him, thus reversing contemporary views of sexual desire. Discussing *Griffith Gaunt*, Lillian Nayder refers to Reade's "use of sex and illegitimacy to represent women's wrongs and challenge the double standard," favorably comparing Mercy Vint's son in that novel, born out of lawful wedlock, to Dickens's Esther in *Bleak House*: "The illegitimate child in Reade's novel indicts a wayward father rather than a wayward mother" (138).

Reade's work resists the emerging codification of gender and the regime of sexuality described by Foucault. As a new system of regulation was more rigorously imposed upon human sexuality, the means used to enforce this control were ultimately the prison, the hospital, and the madhouse—institutions that Reade critiques as a contemporary witness in *Never Too Late*, *Hard Cash*, and other texts. Foucault writes of "the psychiatrization of perverse pleasure" in Victorian discourse that sought out "anomalies" and employed a "corrective technology" to adjust them (105). Such "peripheral sexualities" as homosexuality, sodomy, onanism, tribadism, and masochism—which had been practiced since the beginning of recorded human experience and been previously condemned as "vices" or "sins" to which any person might be prone—now became medical perversions, diseases, and "frauds against procreation" associated with distinct individuals who were liable to land in prison or in an asylum (117).

With the emergence of the new medical discourse, which would find fuller expression later in the nineteenth century with the "science" of sexology, the idea of sodomy, for example, was displaced

by the identification of the homosexual as a species unto himself/herself. In an often-cited passage, Foucault writes,

> We must not forget that the psychological, psychiatric, medical category of homosexuality was constituted from the moment it was characterized (1870)... less by a type of sexual relations than by a certain quality of sexual sensibility, a certain way of inverting the masculine and the feminine in oneself.... a kind of interior androgyny, a hermaphrodism of the soul. (43)

Sexual outlaws were forced to proclaim their "crimes," to make "obligatory confessions" that were used to develop a new medical taxonomy of perversions (*Abnormal* 169). The process that Adrienne Rich has referred to as "compulsory heterosexuality" developed throughout the Victorian era as both gender and sexuality became increasingly codified. In the separate spheres of Victorian gender relations, fluidity was not an option. Yet Reade's work challenges such rigidity and often presents self-consciously androgynous characters.

Despite his rejection of the repressive hypothesis, Foucault refers to "the new persecution of peripheral sexualities [that] entailed a new *specification of individuals*" as an innovation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (original emphasis 42–43). Adding to the major categories grouped under the term "homosexuality," Foucault names some of the "new" aberrations: "Krafft-Ebing's zoophiles and zooerasats, Rohleder's auto-monosexualists, and later, mixoscopophiles, gynecomasts, presbyophiles, sexoesthetic inverts, and dyspareunist women" (43). Reade's notebooks contain clippings concerning such sexual curiosities. Like his Victorian contemporaries, Reade played a part in the "incitement to discourse," but unlike many of them, he did not seek to pathologize individuals. His interest is motivated more by a sympathetic curiosity than by a scientific impulse to taxonomy.

Reade's notebooks contain a miscellany of both natural wonders and the extremes of human behavior. We find miscellaneous clippings on accidents, disasters, fires, murders, bigamy, baby-farming and baby-murder, shipwrecks, female suffrage (including a full page drawing of a women's suffrage meeting), articles on women's property, illustrations of women prizefighters, and an illustration of a woman exchanging clothes with her inmate-husband so he can escape from prison (LL21 TV8). Reade's notebooks and novels demonstrate a particular interest in women who transgressed social norms.

Reade's challenges to repression did not take a partisan political form. He appears to have been generally supportive of the political power structures that governed England. His essentially reformist position allowed him to see abuses as an aberration in an otherwise just society. In matters of sexuality, he knew well that he was out of step with his contemporaries. Knowing that the sexual mores in his time were more rigid than in previous periods, he pushed the limits of what was acceptable in literary expression. In addition, he did not have a Victorian's knee-jerk negative reaction when confronted with alternative sexualities. And he consistently supported the expansion of women's rights.

Transgender I: "Androgynism; or Woman Playing at Man"

In two installments in 1911, *The English Review* serialized a story by Reade entitled "Androgynism; or Woman Playing at Man." I have been unable to discover the circumstances under which *The English Review* obtained this manuscript or the exact date of its composition.[13] But evidence suggests that Reade wrote a draft of the story, based on entries in his notebooks, as early as 1862, and revised it in 1883 shortly before his death. That he apparently never sought to publish it during his lifetime suggests that he realized that the female same-sex desire depicted in "Androgynism" transgressed a boundary of censorship that even he could not cross.

In "Androgynism," two women fall in love with each other, although one is portrayed as believing that the other is a man. While the term "androgyny" is problematical, it was the only one available to Reade (or in his version, "androgynism") to describe a phenomenon that interested him. The trouble with the term "androgynous," meaning "being both male and female," lies in its acceptance of essentialist and traditional gender constructions that assume male and female, or masculine and feminine, as binaries. But given Reade's time period, we can perhaps accept his use of the term even if Judith Halberstam's "female masculinity" might be appropriate for some of the characters he describes.

Halberstam maintains that "women have made their own unique contributions to what we call modern masculinity" and that "what we recognize as female masculinity is actually a multiplicity of masculinities" (46). Reade's "androgynous" women characters as well as his athletic women present a great multiplicity in their styles of dress, physical performance, and, ultimately, choice of sexual object.

Due to the limitations placed on fictional expression in his time, Reade does not, of course, describe the sexual activity of the characters in "Androgynism." Indeed, he disingenuously denies that any takes place. As late as 1931, Emerson Grant Sutcliffe, one of the most prolific Reade scholars, could write, "art and abnormal sexual psychology may have been mated by Proust, but it is reasonably safe to say that transvestism is unacceptable artistically outside farce, Shakespeare, and the pantomime" (1931: 1271). In the same essay, Sutcliffe more temperately writes that "Reade's interest in androgynism and female savagery is akin to his interest in feminine athleticism, the most attractive quality on the sexual border-line" (1273). While condemning female transvestism, Sutcliffe correctly notes that Reade's interest in that topic is related to his appreciation for female athletes.

So great was Reade's research and interest in androgyny that he reports in his story, "between the years 1858–62...instances of androgynism occurred, or were brought to light, with unusual frequency, and I devoted a folio of 250 leaves to tabulating them" ("Androgynism" 11). According to Sutcliffe, this folio "seems to be no longer extant" (1270), but in both the London Library collection and the Parrish archives at Princeton, Reade's notebooks contain many pages on "Woman Playing at Man," including press reports of the events he records in his story.

One of the notebooks contains press clippings of similar cases along with marginal comments by Reade. On one page he notes a date, "A.D. 1858," and writes of

> Elizabeth Anne Holman, age 23. A woman who says she "will wear man's clothes and do man's work though she should be transported for it." Said this, I think, before the mayor of Exeter. Has two bastards. Mayor, instead of punishing her, gave her money from the poorbox. (LL 38: 3)

He also includes a note reminding himself to find a "female bricklayer at Liverpool married for years to another woman" (LL 38: 3).

Another press clipping (dated by him "June or July 1861," from an unidentified source) refers to the case of a Mr. Thomas Green, "between thirty and forty years old," who was arrested for debt and contempt of court and brought before the Salford County Court. After the prisoner complained of the unfairness of the judge and caused some trouble in the jail, the account reports that "warders thought a

bath (probably Turkish) would tone his nervous system" (LL 38: 10). When ordered to strip, Green objected and the warders "laid hands on the prisoner" discovering that Mr. Green was a woman. The officials huddled, debating "the legality of detaining the 'lady'" (LL 38: 10). The article relates that "one of the officials [of the county court] was summoned, the result was that 'Mrs. Thomas Green,' after being subjected to a curious interrogation, was dismissed to her affectionate wife" (LL 38: 10). The clipping concludes with a brief description of the development of this transvestite: "After leaving service [as a page], 'Mr. Green' worked in a mill as a hooker and stitcher, drawing men's wages. Being tolerably well off and lonely, he married. Mr. Green's marriage, the neighbors say, has been a very happy one" (LL 38: 10).

Other examples in the notebooks include clips with headlines such as "A Female Duelist," "A Girl in Boy's Clothing," "A Gang of Female 'Smashers,'" and, in the account of the case of Thomas Green above, "Extraordinary Case of Concealment of Sex" (LL 38: 8, 9, 10). A clipping from the *Oxford University Herald* (January 12, 1861) reports another "singular case of concealment of sex," as it reports the death of a 97-year-old man, John Murphy. The *Herald* reports that "after the decease, it was found that John Murphy was really a woman of the name of Betty Lavin, She had thus been disguised for a period of 50 years." (LL 38: 9). The *Pall Mall Gazette* (January 6, 1870) reports the arrest of "Mary Anne Walker, 39, a woman of masculine appearance" (LL 38: 11). Walker, charged with stealing 3£ 10*s*, appeared in court dressed in "a pea-jacket, shirt, collar, tie, and peaked cap—all as worn by men"—and, after giving evidence, "was discharged with a caution" (LL 38: 11).

An item from the *Yorkshire Gazette* reports the case of Thomas Stewart, "A jolly-looking sailor boy, dressed in a guernsey frock, a pair of tight duck trousers, with strap about his waist, and a cap" who, on shore leave, "'took freely of the cheering cup,' and soon began to display his vocal powers."[14] A constable, growing suspicious of "his voice and appearance at once suspected he was not what he represented himself to be, 'sailor boy,' but a young woman in a sailor's garb" (16). Appearing before the magistrates, "she stated she looked a strapping lad, and she was sure she was a strapping lass, and went to sea to get an honest living" (16). Impressed with her case, "the bench recommended the superintendent to see her safely out of town, and to give her 3s, out of the poorbox, which was accordingly done" (16).

Another clipping from 1860 reveals the tragic case of a female American transvestite who, in a soldier's uniform, attended upon a

U.S. army captain in the capacity of a servant. She answered to the name of "Charley." The provost marshal detected her disguise and had her arrested. Her captain spared her incarceration on the condition that she begin wearing women's clothes, which she did. But when the story leaked out and she became the subject of the gossip of "a thousand tongues," she took her own life. Reade's comment, "A Strange Sense of Shame" (LL 23: 151). Clearly Reade was fascinated by female transvestism. Although he includes marginal notes on many pages of the notebook—such as "you have the basis of a good story"—*The Wandering Heir* (1872) and the posthumous "Androgynism" represent the only occasions on which he addressed the issue directly in a sustained manner (LL 38: 10, LL 14: 151).

Lillian Faderman writes that "transvestites were, in a sense, the first feminists. Mute as they were, without a formulated ideology to express their convictions, they saw the role of women to be dull and limiting.... Only in convincing male guise could they claim for themselves the privileges open to men of their class" (61). Faderman also considers the circumstances under which female transvestites were either persecuted or left in relative peace. She writes that "women who managed to live as transvestites without uncomfortable interference from the law generally were those who were able to cut such colorful figures that they were regarded fondly—they were humored and not taken very seriously" (56). Faderman suggests that women of wealth, celebrity, or notoriety could often engage with impunity in such transgressive behavior. She points to the examples of Queen Christina of Sweden and Mary Frith (the model for Moll Cutpurse in the 1611 comedy *The Roaring Girl* by Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton). Faderman's list of exceptions does not fully account for the relative leniency shown toward some of the examples—primarily working-class women—in clippings in Reade's notebooks. However, because, as Foucault points out, the working class "managed for a long time to escape the deployment of 'sexuality,'" these women did not present as great a threat to Victorian patriarchy as middle-class women behaving similarly could (121). In addition, most of the cases presented by Reade date from the 1850s and early 1860s, before the science of sexology had become part of the network of power and had thoroughly pathologized same-sex desire.

Before discussing Reade's story, it might be useful to revisit Judith Butler's view on cross-dressing, first articulated in *Gender Trouble* (1990), that "the notion of an original or primary gender identity is often parodied within the cultural practices of drag, cross-dressing,

and the sexual stylization of butch/femme identities" (137). Here, Butler refers primarily to camp and conscious efforts at parody, practices that are far removed from individuals trying to "pass" in everyday life in the nineteenth century. In *Undoing Gender* (2004), Butler elaborates upon her concept of the performativity of gender by noting that "categories like butch and femme were not copies of a more originary heterosexuality, but they showed how the so-called originals, men and women within the heterosexual frame, are similarly constructed, performatively established" (209). If we can understand the concepts of "man" and "woman" as constructions or copies, then transgender appears just as viable and "authentic." Butler's consistent opposition to dogmatic notions of sexual difference can be applied to Reade's work because his transgendered characters occupy a variety of subject positions, some of which we might anachronistically refer to as "butch" or "femme."

Reade presents the story of "Androgynism" factually and, as the notebooks confirm, the case is a true one taken from the periodical *Loyd's* of September 9, 1860. Reade interviewed Kate Tozer, the principal actor in the real-life drama on which "Androgynism" is based, and recorded (and embellished) her words in the story. Reade, who more than most authors based his fiction on contemporary news reports, emphasizes that the tale he relates in "Androgynism" was not uncommon in those years, suggesting the presence of a good number of similar individuals in London and other English cities. Many of these were from the working class.

The story begins when Kate Tozer and Tom Coombe, a young and impoverished married couple, decide to move to the town of Woburn in search of work for the husband, a painter. When Kate learns that "work was more plentiful than hands in the town" (16), she decides to take the initiative. After an outing one day, she returns home and presents herself to her husband in full male dress. When he asks, "Why, Kate, what the dash—?" the rejoinder is "I'm not Kate, I'm Fred. That's me and you've got to recollect it'" (17). The narrative continues, "Two hours ago she sallied forth in seedy female attire . . . She stands now before her appalled spouse no longer to outward view feminine, but androgynous, sartorially epicene . . . and by no means unbecoming" (17). When Tom objects Kate replies,

> "Listen, Tom. . . . It takes the work of four hands in this country to keep two people . . . if I can bring grist to the mill the wage will be doubled and the pair of us may live pretty comfortably. I can't do

> the work of a charwoman and won't. I'm not up to the better class of woman's work such as dressmaking. But my head is cool and steady. I can climb a ladder as easily as any man. It won't take a lifetime to learn how to mix paint and use it. Tom, from henceforth I'm your son, Fred. . . . Who will be the wiser? Don't I look every inch a man?" (18)

Kate's initial motive for assuming masculine garb is economic—so she can find work as a painter's apprentice. As Faderman notes of many cross-dressing women of the past, "It can only be speculated whether the initial impulse of these transvestites was sexual or social" (54). Bored with her lackluster life with Tom and tired of living on his meager wages, Kate seizes the initiative by changing her gender for economic reasons. But Tom presents a legitimate objection when he asks, "What'll the police say, Missus?" adding, "I don't like the risk" (18). Kate assures Tom that everything will be fine "unless you let the cat out of the bag by calling me Missus, or Kate, or old gal" (18). And hitting on an uncomfortable truth, she tells him, "'Tain't as though you and I was over head and ears in love with each other" (18). Still resisting the idea as dangerous, Tom asks what the magistrates might say if they discover Kate's masquerade. As the story progresses, the police and the magistrates will have much to say about Kate, not because of any indiscretion on Tom's part but because Kate/Fred develops a powerful attraction toward another woman.

Faderman suggests that for many transvestites, sexual interest in other women "developed as their male roles developed," and Kate in Reade's story follows that pattern (54). After Tom is persuaded to go along with Kate's cross-dressing and he becomes "an accomplice in the fraud," Kate/Fred quickly assumes the male role more completely and, passing herself off as Tom's son, she finds work as a painter's apprentice (19). Reade takes his reader further into the masquerade of Kate/Fred as her androgynous beauty captivates the innocent Miss Nelly Smith, who feels she has met "the very most charming specimen of the hideous sex it had been a pretty maid's small fortune to encounter" (20), and "down went the poor little heart before this beautiful thing as the corn before the sickle" (20). Kate returns the affection and pursues Nelly because "overpowering instincts" had "repelled her from the male sex" (21). As the narrator relates, "Nelly not only loved Fred; Fred also loved Nelly" in what might be read as an unambiguous expression of lesbian desire (20).

However, Halberstam questions the term "lesbian" as an appropriate descriptor for women like the cross-dressing Fred/Kate in

Reade's story. She writes that "the name 'lesbian' is the term we affix to the pleasurable and cumbersome intersections of embodiments, practices, and roles that historical processes have winnowed down to the precise specifications of an identity" (50). She adds that the "sexual history for the masculine woman will at various times diverge sharply from what has been called lesbian history" (52). This raises the question of whether Kate/Fred desires Nelly with a masculine or a feminine subjectivity. Butler notes that "butch desire may, as some say, be experienced as part of a 'woman's desire,' but it can also be experienced, that is, named and interpreted, as a kind of masculinity, one that is not to be found in men" (2004: 197). These comments also raise questions about the subjectivity of the heroine of Reade's *The Wandering Heir,* discussed below.

We might decide that Kate/Fred's desire for Nelly is something other than what we now consider lesbian desire. As Fred develops further in her masculine self-assurance, her relationship with Nelly moves onto another level of both self-identification and desire. Halberstam writes that for some nineteenth-century masculine women, "desire is structured much less by romantic friendships and a shared refusal of patriarchy and more by unequal desires, sexual and gender roles, ritualized class relations, and an almost total rejection of sexual sameness" (66). Although the case of Fred and Nelly does not appear to give evidence of "ritualized class relations," their relationship conforms in other respects to Halberstam's formula. Although Reade as narrator maintains that the relationship never evolves into significant sexual activity, the gender roles of both Fred and Nelly are clearly defined according to the masculine/feminine divide. And Kate's later remark explaining her love for Nelly—"Perhaps I craved for something to cuddle and cherish, and pet and look down upon" (211)—conforms to Halberstam's remark on "unequal desires."

Regarding the question of sexual activity, Reade insists that the relationship was characterized by "its unsullied purity" and that Nelly remained chaste throughout (22). It should be emphasized here that Reade spent a good deal of time denying the implications of his own texts in lawsuits and in broadsides issued against those who accused him of indecency, but here he does so within the text itself. And when he insists upon Nelly's chastity, he may be conforming to the dictates of a prevailing "ideology of chastity" that, according to Valerie Traub writing of the Early Modern era, "depends on the belief that, although women may share beds, caresses, and kisses,

such phenomena do not 'count' as sex" (61).[15] Fred and Nelly may have gone considerably further than Reade would have us believe.

We can speculate that they may have used a sexual supplement for penetration, or engaged in tribadic activity that, as Traub points out, does not necessarily involve penetration.[16] Tribadism is not unlikely in this case, especially as Fred would not have needed to reveal her true sex to satisfy Nelly. Halberstam discusses the case of a "female husband," Anne Lister, in the early nineteenth century who received pleasure from her partner by "tribadically rubbing on her" (70). In Lister's case, there was no masquerade involved as she always dressed as a woman despite her masculine appearance, and her lovers knew she was female. Kate/Fred would have had to be careful not to reveal her biological sex to Nelly and probably denied her lover access to parts of her anatomy. What Halberstam writes of Lister's affairs with her lover might apply to Kate/Fred and Nelly as well: "[Her] tribadic practices, the restrictions she places on her lovers' access to her body, and her self-identification with masculinity should be read for what they are—signs of an active, functional, and pre-identitarian female masculinity" (72). And while Kate/Fred may attempt to conceal her biological sex, it seems not unlikely that Nelly at some point becomes aware of it, and it simply remains unacknowledged.

The narrator in this story presents the case quite sympathetically to Kate/Fred. Anticipating moralistic objections, Reade alternately glosses over or vehemently denies that a physical relationship occurred, and he refers to Kate's love for Nelly as spiritual. He writes, "If I am called a fool for asserting that such a passion can scorch a human heart, I reply in the pregnant language of paradox, 'Credo quia impossible'" (21). Reade unconvincingly denies any possibility of a sexual relationship, although throughout the story he presents a situation that strongly suggests one.

Defending his protagonist, he observes, "You may regard Kate Coombe . . . as an eccentric, brazen and brutal in her defiance of natural law, as a violatrix of the Mosaic rule; but I who have seen her shed a tear and am acquainted with the story from beginning to end, can place something to the credit of her account" (21). As in his late novel *A Woman-Hater*, for which he relied on the account of the lesbian doctor Sophia Jex-Blake, Reade obtained his material first-hand from parties involved, and in both cases from women who loved other women. His disingenuous denials of the possibility that there was a physical element in the relationship between Kate and Nelly

can be seen as a concession to conventional Victorian morality, even though the story was not published in his lifetime, for he spells out the conditions that would seem to allow the love affair to develop. The narrator explores Kate's possible motives,

> Marriage for her had proved a fatal blunder. Since then life had sludged on somehow, with a husband for a friend and protector but not for a lover. Overpowering instincts, as I have hinted, repelled her from the male sex; though she had taken a working place among those from whose very rough touch she revolted. (21)

Kate had succeeded in becoming Fred and in the process gained more freedom of movement and put more bread on the table. But s/he remains unfulfilled until meeting with Nelly.

While maintaining that Nelly was the victim of a "detestable deceit" and that Kate/Fred had behaved as a "naughty hussy" (21), Reade advises the critic "to spare rather than squander sarcasm" (25). When Nelly brings Fred home to meet her family in a neighboring town, they react "kindly to Nelly's young man" (26). Fred writes letters to Mrs. Smith, addressing her as "Our Very Dear Mother" and signing them "F. and N. Coombe" (27). During their periods of separation, Fred writes love letters to Nelly and finally buys a ring and convinces her to elope. Nelly, who had originally pressed the issue of marriage, now reluctantly agrees because she feels guilty for deserting her family.

Fred and Nelly, with Tom in tow, move to Moulton, where they rent lodgings at a rooming house run by a Mrs. Whiting whose later account provided an important source for Reade. Fred forbids Nelly to contact her family, a prohibition that, as the narrative states, "invited, indeed rendered inevitable, police interference" (195). After three weeks without a word from Nelly, her frantic parents try to track down the couple with the aid of the police and, finally, Nelly's father contacts Tom's family for any information about his missing daughter who may be in the company of a couple of painters. The reply from Tom's mother gives the first clue as to the true identity of Nelly's "young man." The letter states, "the elder man, the painter, is my son, a married man with no family.... I expect the young *man*, as you call him, is no other than his wife, and, if so, cannot conceive why they have acted as you describe" (196). The authorities overtake the threesome at Moulton. Upon entering their rooms, the police inspector points to Kate/Fred and asks Tom directly, "We want to

know, and we mean to know, whether that person there is a man or a woman, whether it is your son or your wife?" (199). The hapless but good-natured Tom then says, "You've done it, Kate; I always know'd you would. Make the best of a bad job if you can" (200). After some feeble denials and attempts to avoid the inevitable, Kate is taken to Northampton jail where she reflects that "the chances were strongly in favour of her having to pay dearly for this amusing and exciting game" (201). Kate knows that she can be imprisoned, or worse, for her actions.

Nelly claims to be mortified by the revelation that Kate/Fred is a woman but is not angry or vindictive. Although her father wants to prosecute Kate to the fullest, Nelly says, "I don't want her to be punished... I'd rather she was left alone" (204, 205). These statements suggest that Nelly may not have been as ignorant of Kate's anatomy as she claims. After Mr. Smith reminds her that the family name is at stake, Nelly reluctantly agrees to take part in the prosecution, but as events turn out, she is never called to testify.

Kate is "arraigned on the only charge the statute would permit, that of vagrancy" (205). Throughout this period, Kate continues to dress as a man and by the time of the trial, the narrator relates, she "had pulled her wits together, smartened her masculine attire, and looked every inch a pretty fellow for a maid to pitch her heart at" (205). The narrative continues by noting that her "black hair had grown longish in front, and this, falling over her forehead, imparted rather an epicene touch" so that "she might easily have been mistaken for a boy in his teens" (205). When Nelly's father is called as a witness, he is outraged by "the jaunty pose of the prisoner, who twisted her natty little boy's cap, stood on one leg, and looked ten thousand defiances" (206). But after hearing Mr. Smith recount the pain he had suffered during his daughter's disappearance, Kate is moved and nearly sheds a few tears. The prosecuting attorney is quick to tell the court, "It's all very fine for the prisoner to resort to these crocodiles... but I think when your worships read these letters, these abominable letters designed to play upon the holiest affections of an innocent girl, you will appreciate that piece of hypocrisy at its proper worth" (207). The chief inspector is called as a witness and testifies that in his opinion this is a clear case of abduction. The prosecution does not call Nelly Smith as a witness, in part because of her reluctance, but also because if she tells the truth, she would confirm that she had gone with Kate voluntarily.

Nelly's lack of cooperation with the prosecution suggests that, despite her portrayal as an ingénue, she knows more about Kate's

true identity than she is willing to reveal. In *The Female Husband* (1746), Henry Fielding fictionalizes another true story, that of Mary Hamilton who is said to have married fourteen women in succession before wedding Mary Price. Writing of the case, Terry Castle observes, "After three months of marriage, apparently including sexual relations, Mary Price realized the fraud and had Hamilton arrested" (604). A press report at the time claimed that Price had been deceived by "certain vile and deceitful Practices not fit to be mentioned," and Hamilton was convicted of vagrancy and sentenced to be publicly whipped and jailed for six months (qtd. in Castle 604). Hamilton's case suggests that there may have been a degree of willful self-delusion in the women with whom she had relationships. These women may have become aware of Hamilton's true sex but allowed it to remain unacknowledged. Society encouraged young women to remain sexually ignorant, to retain, in Fielding's words, "their natural innocence and purity" (qtd. in Castle 609). Some women may have used the ruse of this prescribed ignorance to their advantage in same-sex relationships because it allowed them to deny sexual knowledge and, therefore, culpability. Such a strategy may account for Nelly's reluctance to testify against Kate.

By the time Kate is called to the stand, she has regained her composure and, pointing to Mr. Smith, says, "This charge rests on the allegations of that man . . . He tells you I decoyed his daughter. That is not so. She came away from Bedford of her own free will" (209). Significantly, Kate does not deny her love for Nelly but insists that she did not abduct the girl. The prosecutor then suggests that "the letters constitute . . . in themselves a clinching proof of intention on the part of the prisoner . . . Her behavior had been so insanely ridiculous that she ought to be placed in a lunatic asylum" (209). Kate agrees that, "of course [,] it was all very ridiculous, but I did not abduct Ellen Smith away. She came of her own free will and she dare not contradict me. Why has she not been examined as a witness? There she stands and your worships can question her" (209). But still the prosecution declines to call Nelly, and the case is dismissed with this closing statement from the judges:

> "The prisoner deserves punishment for her cruel and deceitful conduct, and in this we regard her husband as an accomplice. We recommend you, however [addressing Mr. Smith] to seek your remedy in a civil court. You have an undeniable loss of your daughter's services, and the expenses incurred, and we trust that you will punish these

> people in the way they will feel it the most acutely—namely, through their pockets. I desire to add publicly that although the relations between your daughter and this man and woman were to all outward appearances equivocal, the evidence of Mrs. Whiting goes to prove that there was no misbehaviour on either side, and we are glad to congratulate you on your daughter's character having been thoroughly vindicated. The prisoner is discharged." (210)

Nelly's father responds to the judgment, "Thank your worship . . . But I bain't agoin' to throw good money after bad. Let the slut go!" (210). The main section of the narrative of "Androgynism" ends as Kate and Tom are escorted out of the courthouse by the police through "a hissing, hooting, jeering, vicious flock of Northampton lambs" (210), and they are finally released after clearing the crowd.

In the closing paragraphs, Reade describes his interview with Kate Tozer. He relates how at their meeting she was dressed in women's clothing—"inflated with crinoline"—but that "at my request extracted her masculine properties from the recesses of her wardrobe" (210). He describes her as a "tall, straight, graceful creature with fine features [and] intelligence to match" and finds "a total absence of ordinary feminine instincts, though not I opine of modesty . . . and a total indifference towards unlucky Tom Coombe, who seemed tied to the tail of a meteor" (210–11). In response to Reade's question about the sincerity of her affections for Nelly, Kate replies that she cared for her "Dearly, truly!" and adds, "I have suffered too . . . It will take me a long time to get over it" (211). She refers to Mr. Smith as a "kind old man" but adds that "he need not have turned spiteful" (211). And when Reade asks her about her original motives for assuming male dress, she answers in words that support Faderman's argument:

> "You want to know the origin of all this mischief? I answer—the injustice of man. Women's labour is shamefully underpaid. To get fair wages, I put on the breeches. That I was not found out by inferior work shows that to refuse me a man's wage because I wore a petticoat was a real injustice." (211)

In his comments on this case in the notebooks, which likely predate the composition of the story and the interview with Kate Tozer, Reade writes,

> What was the first origin of all this mischief? The injustice of man. Women's labor is ridiculously underpaid. Fred saw this and, to get fair

> wages, donned the breeches: that she was not found out by her inferior work thus it was a real injustice she baffled. This cause has operated as above hundreds of times before Frederica. (LL 38: 2)

Reade's unpublished notes and the words he puts into Kate's mouth are so similar that one critic, Elton E. Smith, convincingly suggests that he tailored her words to coincide with his own convictions (40). In the interview, Kate regrets the outcome of what happened with

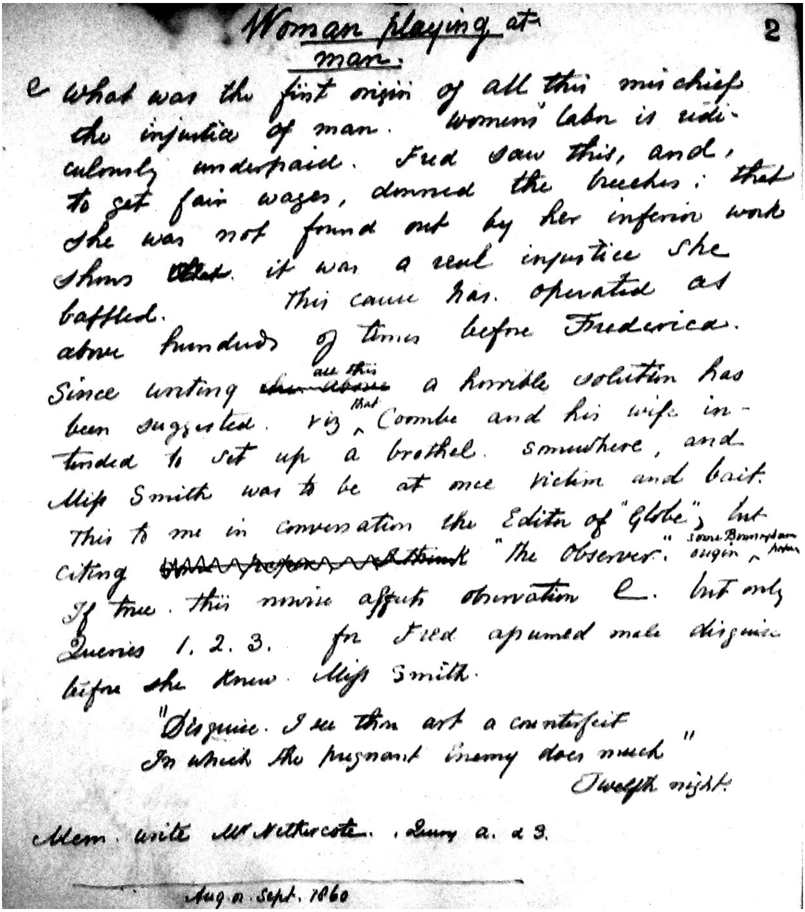
Woman playing at man. 2
Q What was the first origin of all this mischief
the injustice of man. Women's labor is ridi-
culously underpaid. Fred saw this, and,
to get fair wages, donned the breeches: that
she was not found out by her inferior work
shows ~~that~~ it was a real injustice she
baffled. This cause has operated as
above hundreds of times before Frederica.
Since writing ~~the above~~ all this a horrible solution has
been suggested, viz that Coombe and his wife in-
tended to set up a brothel somewhere, and
Miss Smith was to be at once victim and bait.
This to me in conversation the Editor of "Globe", but
citing ~~[illegible]~~ "The Observer." "Some Birmingham [illegible]" origin [illegible]
If true this [illegible] affects observation Q. but only
Queries 1. 2. 3. for Fred assumed male disguise
before she knew Miss Smith.
"Disguise, I see thou art a counterfeit
In which the pregnant enemy does much"
Twelfth night.
Mem. write Mr Nethercote. Query a. & 3.
Aug. or Sept. 1860

Figure 2 Second page, in Reade's handwriting, from his notebook section entitled "Woman Playing at Man." Used by permission of the London Library. (LL 38:2)

Nelly but not her adoption of men's clothing. She confesses, "I wish I had let her in on the secret. We might have been friends now" (211).

Reade apparently wrote a draft of this story in the early 1860s and revised it after the emergence of the New Woman who often dressed in "masculine" clothing. But in the final draft of 1883, he comments, "Fred's short hair in 1860 was an outrage... In 1883 the Kates one meets are cropped *à la militaire*, and parade with gold-headed sticks like bedells" (212). He adds facetiously, "The sex is following Kate to do evil," and comments on "the rate of progress androgynism is making" (212). In New Woman fiction, seldom, if at all, do we find anything nearly as queer as Kate/Fred's love for Nelly. Although early in the text Reade, as narrator, alludes to lesbianism and states that he "would blush to be suspected of advancing the faintest scintilla of apology for such monstrous perversity" (22), that is what he effectively does throughout the story.[17] The narrative of "Androgynism" contains many patronizing remarks by Reade about Kate—such as "the jade never rose above the poor level of vulgar eccentricity" (19)—yet the sincerity of his admiration for her is unmistakable in other passages, as when he writes, "Women ere now have married other women for filthy lucre. But here is a case of mad love on the side of the actress. In our analysis, therefore, I am of the opinion that we can afford to be equitable and charitable" (22). Reade's comments express a rare tolerance for female same-sex desire at a time when sexologists were actively pathologizing it.

The real-life relationship of Fred and Nelly was so incomprehensible to the authorities that although they sought to explain such "perverse" behavior as criminal they had no real case. In the notebooks, Reade notes a possibility they considered: "Since writing all this, a horrible solution has been suggested viz. Mr. Coombe and his wife intended to set up a brothel somewhere and Miss Smith was to be at once victim and bait" (LL 38: 2). But Reade points out that Fred had assumed male garb even before s/he ever met Nelly Smith and concludes that the transformation was not intended to trap anyone. In the notebook, Reade writes that "after a long talk with Mrs. Whiting, whom the two lodged with, I am convinced that the brothel situation is all bunk. Fred is in figure and in mind an eccentric woman, does not care much for her husband, and had a sort of passion for the girl. And is this so *very* uncommon?" (original emphasis LL 38: 7). Although the authorities and the medical profession sought criminal or pathological motives for same-sex desire, Reade's remark indicates that such desire was not "uncommon." Same-sex desire

must have been known at all ranks of Victorian society but censorship (including self-censorship) refused to acknowledge it except in medical discourse or pornography, which effectively placed it in the realm of either science or criminology.

The suspicion by the authorities that Kate/Fred might have been an aspiring prostitute or madam fits into nineteenth-century sexual discourse. Halberstam points out that in the nineteenth century, masculine women and prostitutes were often conflated because "the prostitute and the masculine and possibly predatory woman both exhibit extramarital desires" (51). The events in the story predate the passage of the Contagious Diseases Act of 1864 that enabled the authorities to incarcerate and medically examine any women suspected of prostitution, a repressive measure opposed by contemporary women's rights advocates and supported by moralists. Prostitutes were known to congregate together for quite understandable reasons, but as Donald E. Hall points out, such female assemblies fed the "deep-seated and complex male fear of groups of women spreading sickness" both physical and moral (180).[18] Women acting in concert outside the boundaries of acceptable behavior were considered a threat, and the authorities instinctively saw Kate's masculinity and the mutual desire between her and Nelly as akin to prostitution.

Reade spends much of the story justifying Kate's behavior. In one of her letters to Nelly, Kate writes, "Did ever man love as I love you? I believe never" (191–92). Reade comments that the saying "Passing the love of women" (which reflects Faderman's title, *Surpassing the Love of Men*) is "a descriptive definition of the purest affection" (192). He adds that in the case of Kate,

> This, however, was a woman's love, and not something beyond it, or above it.... I have the very best of reasons for rejecting the theory of this being mere low scoundrelism.... Is it conceivable that the logic of an idolatress should transfer her worship to an object... say to one of her own sex, radiant with a loveliness infinitely superior to that of Apollo? Mrs. Fred said, "Yes," and I accept her as a true witness as regards her own highly exceptional case. (192)

Reade's nonjudgmental and often positive comments on his "perverse" characters, mingled with disingenuous denials and condemnations—what Winifred Hughes calls "the cautious hedging and the inevitable disavowals that tend to undermine every one of his novels"—show him to be free of many of the prejudices of most of his contemporaries on these matters (103). Reade's insistence that

the relationship of Kate/Fred and Nelly was "pure" demonstrates an ambivalence, whether sincere on the part of the author or mandated by the dictates of public morality. What Terry Castle writes of Fielding's presentation of Mary Hamilton, the transvestite heroine of *The Female Husband*, can apply in some respects to Reade's portrayal of Kate: "From one part of him she elicits anxiety, but from another she draws engagement and identification—for the purity of her daring, the beauty of her sham" (619). Reade, however, is more impressed with Kate's energy and intelligence than is Fielding with his subject. When Castle describes Hamilton's "usurpation of masculine sartorial and sexual privilege" (noting that "the two indiscretions are profoundly related"), her words can apply to Kate as well (603). But whereas Castle finds in *The Female Husband* a vehicle for Fielding's "antifeminist sentiment," no such feeling characterizes "Androgynism" (603). For the most part, Reade's anxiety appears to be directed at the sensibilities of his readers, rather than reflecting any discomfort with his subject. His engagement and identification with Kate are apparent throughout the text.

But let us consider Reade's assertion that the behavior of Kate/Fred "may be reconcilable with moral weakness, but does not inevitably imply moral obliquity of the carnal type" (201). Does Reade's story allow, despite or because of his hedging, for a sexual relationship between Fred and Nelly? If not, does the story of the real Fred and Nelly—which Reade fictionalizes from the events described in the newspaper source in his notebook, adding to it his own investigation, interviews, and, of course, opinions—allow for such a reading? And does it matter after all? Referring to writers of lesbian history, Halberstam quotes Martha Vicinus's comment: "How are we to ever know, definitively, what someone born a hundred or two hundred years ago did in bed? . . . does it really matter so much?" (qtd. 51). Halberstam answers the last question affirmatively: "I think it really does indeed matter if only because lesbianism has conventionally come to be associated with the asexual, the hidden, the 'apparitional' and the invisible" (51).[19] Halberstam seeks a considerable broadening, or rather a fragmenting, of the concept of "lesbian": "Once we establish that the kinds of sexual desires and acts that the term 'lesbian' claims to represent are multiple and various," she writes, "the category itself comes under serious pressure" (51). Can we call Kate a lesbian? Can we anachronistically refer to Fred's female masculinity as "butch"? Should we refer to her with both or either names, Kate or Fred, and should we use the masculine or feminine pronoun? Reade

himself occasionally uses the term "Mrs. Fred" to describe Kate/Fred, and while this is probably done for humor, it also raises the question of whether or not Fred and Nelly were in some real sense man and wife. And if Kate/Fred performed the role of the "female husband," should we not instead refer to Nelly as Mrs. Fred?

In *An Archive of Feelings*, Ann Cvetkovich devotes a chapter to "Trauma and Touch: Butch-Femme Sexualities" (49–82). Cvetkovich asserts that the "complexity of butch (and femme) lives exceeds any theoretical abstractions that might presume to describe it" (79). Because of this complexity and because of the relatively superficial insights provided in "Androgynism," we can only speculate on the subjectivity of Kate. But on a couple of occasions, the text provides clues. We know that Kate revolted from the "very rough touch" of men and that she looked to Nelly as someone to "cuddle and cherish, and pet" (21, 211). Expanding upon Halberstam's work, Cvetkovich argues that "untouchability" is an important attribute for many butch women who consider it their sole prerogative to do the touching. Cvetkovich writes that "untouchability has been a vexed area of debate about butches—a quality often stigmatized as a sign of pathology, rigidity, and (bad) male identification" (67). We recall that in "Androgynism," Kate asks her husband, "Don't I look every inch a man?" (18), and that the narrator describes her as "every inch a pretty fellow" (205). These lines indicate that Kate has successfully made the transition into the appearance and the subjectivity of the opposite sex, suggesting that she provides an example of a transgendered individual, possessing what Halberstam would refer to as a "pre-identitarian female masculinity" (72). When Reade meets her after the events in the story, Kate still has her male clothing and, we can assume, still intends to wear it.

Cvetkovich is "especially interested in the relation between emotional and sexual untouchability, which can be continuous but are not necessarily equivalent" (67). We can speculate that Kate denied Nelly access to parts of her body and that she refused to allow Nelly to touch her physically in certain ways. We also see how Kate tries to remain emotionally untouched when Nelly's father testifies in court. Reade's notebooks are more explicit on this point than the text. Referring to the newspaper story, he writes insistently of the "falsehood[s] in the last section of Loyd's account.... Fred did not weep once when Mr. Smith detailed his paternal suffering. Her eye was moist. No more" (LL 38: 7). Yet the text also presents Kate as caring and solicitous of those around her in public and suggests that

she can be vulnerable privately. Indeed, Reade claims that "a tear started to her eye" when he asked about her feelings for Nelly (211). Cvetkovich finds that the untouchability of the butch "convey[s] a sense that vulnerability is not a sign of disempowerment but a privilege that is often unavailable and harder to achieve than the conventional stereotype of woman as sentimental would have it" (69). When Kate "put on the breeches," she consciously chose the attribute of untouchability as part of her pre-identitarian transgendered identity (211).

In her study *Intimate Friends* (2003), Martha Vicinus presents a selective history, from 1778 to 1928, of female friendships characterized by passionate attraction that often included homoeroticism. Her subjects are primarily women from the middle and upper class who left behind diaries and letters. Vicinus notes that descriptions of female friendships among working-class women, such as those portrayed by Reade in "Androgynism," are rare in the Victorian era. Writing of working-class women, Vicinus comments, "isolated reports of women who passed as men and took wives appear in newspapers, but we know little about these couples unless they ran afoul of the law; their personal lives remain largely unknown" (xvi). This relative invisibility makes Reade's story all the more valuable despite his often patronizing remarks and his insistence—his protesting too much—that the relationship of Kate and Nelly was "unsullied" by "obliquity of the carnal type" (201). For despite Reade's occasional editorializing, "Androgynism" allows Kate Tozer to speak in her own voice, and the narrative seldom loses an opportunity to express admiration for both the extent of her daring and the depth of her passion for Nelly.

In an intriguing reading of "Androgynism," alongside Reade's play *Masks and Faces* (1852) and his novelization of it, *Peg Woffington,* Jennifer DeVere Brody suggests that "each of these works theorizes about the instability of gender categories in Victorian culture" (98). Because Reade's narrator writes of Kate's "escapade being due to an eccentricity of the entire system rather than to gross criminality" (201), Brody suggests that "Androgynism" "functions as an indictment of an inadequate system of representation" and "sets the stage for broader claims about Western culture's inadequate system of sexual difference" (123). Ultimately, Brody sees Reade "and his attention to identity as performance as Wilde's predecessor. . . . Both Reade and Wilde were figures who worked to blur the boundaries between art and life, mask and face, theater and home" (127).[20]

Brody's reading of these texts echoes remarks by Butler on gender and performance, and Halberstam's comment on "many models of same-sex desire" (50).

Transgender II: The Wandering Heir

The Wandering Heir (dedicated to M.E. Braddon), Reade's 1872 novella, is set in eighteenth-century England and Ireland and in the American colonies of the time and presents an extension of the some of the elements in "Androgynism." Although the gender play is significantly different, it is no less remarkable for its time. In this case, a man, James, falls in love with someone he believes to be another man, Philip, but who is actually a woman, Philippa, in disguise. Philippa is another of Reade's cross-dressing masculine women, one to whom he often refers in his later theatrical production, based on the novel, as his Rosalind. However, unlike Kate in "Androgynism," Philippa chooses a man as sexual object. Here again it is useful to borrow from Halberstam who writes that "sexual history for the masculine woman will at various times diverge sharply from what has been called lesbian history" (52). *The Wandering Heir* demonstrates this as the cross-dressing Philippa falls in love with a man.

Early in the novel, Philippa tells her pastor, "'t is but the price of a coat and waistcoat and breeches . . . and then I *am* a boy. Oh! 't will be sweet to have my freedom and not be checked at every word, because I am a she" (60). Philippa's comments reflect Faderman's point that many females "became transvestites in the first place because they desired greater freedom than women were permitted" (54), but that once identified as male they often became attractive to other women, as Nelly becomes smitten with Kate/Fred in "Androgynism." In contrast, in *The Wandering Heir*, Philippa's cross-dressing presents an example of female masculinity, but not of lesbian or same-sex desire.

Born into a wealthy family, Philippa is orphaned early and raised by corrupt caretakers with an eye to her inheritance. She is "a most daring girl; and she always played with the boys, and picked up their ways, and, by superior intelligence, became their leader" (54). When a parson pleads with her to "consider that she was now thirteen years old, and must begin to play the gentlewoman," Philippa responds, "gentlewomen are such mincing apes. The boys, they scorn them; and so do I; they make me sick" (60). Philippa presents a classic case of the tomboy on that cusp between childhood and adolescence as her pastor urges her into her proper gender role. Halberstam describes

this period in a young girl's development, "If adolescence for boys represents a rite of passage... and ascension to some version (however attenuated) of social power, for girls, adolescence is a lesson in restraint, punishment, and repression" (6). Philippa suffers these constraints as well, but some years later she matures into "a tall, beautiful girl; even her black brows became her now, and dazzled the beholder" (61–62). She had also become "extremely shy; she avoided the boys whenever they spoke to her, and played the prude" (63). As a teenaged girl, Philippa has moved from consorting with the boys to shunning their company.

Her aversion to one boy in particular leads to Philippa's adventures in America. Goaded on by his father, Silas, the son of one of her caretakers, decides to propose marriage to Philippa before leaving home for boarding school. The narrator relates that "It did not go smooth. The girl was ready to give Silas a civil good-by; but, at the very mention of love, she laughed him to scorn" (64). When the determined Silas boldly "threw his arms round her neck and dragged her to him" (64), Philippa responds physically herself:

> She struggled violently, and screamed; and, when nothing else would do, she tore herself clear, with a fierce cry, all on fire with outraged modesty and repugnance, and gave him a savage blow on the bridge of the nose with her little hoe; it brought him to one knee: and with that she was gone like the wind, and flung herself, sobbing, into a garden seat out of sight. (64)

Upon seeing this, the boy's father charges out into the yard and proceeds to strike Philippa "a great many times about her petticoats," crying, "let that teach thee not to be so ready with thy hands, thou barbarous, ungrateful jade!" (66). After this humiliation, Philippa disguises herself as a young man, assumes the name "Philip," flees home, sells herself as an indentured servant in the colony of Delaware, and soon becomes the major-domo of a plantation where she meets James.

The character of James Annesley is loosely based both on a historical character from 1743, and on the claimant in the Tichborne Affair, a case that attracted a great deal of attention and demonstrates the Victorian fascination with inheritance.[21] James, a genial and passive young man, has been defrauded of his fortune by wicked guardians who sell him into slavery as an indentured servant, a calamity that brings him to America where Philippa (now Philip) becomes his protector.

Philip tells James, "You are a good, worthy young man, but you know you are something of a milksop" (101). Philip's sense of superiority over James is absolute. Because of both a mutual attraction and similar backgrounds, the two form an immediate friendship, but Philippa has the clear advantage as she falls in love with James and tries to prevent his attraction to other women. James tells his friend Philip,

> "Do not you trouble about me; for I am not in love with any young woman, and never was. What I love is the liberty I have lost, and the country I have been banished from. Love is not for a slave. If ever I get home again, I may fall in love; but I think it will be a dark woman; they have always been my best friends. So never you mind me. 'Tis you that are in danger from these girls, not I." (91)

Philippa, of course, is a "dark woman." Throughout the long section of the novella in which Philippa is disguised, the narrator consistently refers to "Philip" or "the boy" and uses masculine pronouns.

James is clearly smitten by Philip. When Philip feigns an illness by chalking up his face to avoid performing his duties on the plantation, the narrator describes "James gazing at him with the tear in his eye, and a look of wonderful affection" (100). He becomes so worried that Philip reveals the ruse, prompting James's outburst: "Oh, thou dear good, sweet, wicked boy, for playing so with the hearts that love thee; let me kiss thee" (100). But Philip protests, "I hate to be slobbered," and James again repeats his feelings: "thou art such a dear, good, artful young fellow, to sport with the feelings of those that love thee" (101). When the pair becomes separated, James pines, saying, "His head was all wit; his heart all tenderness, his face all sunshine.... and now, when Fortune seems to shine, he has deserted me. Oh, Philip! Philip!" (144). While these comments by James strongly suggest homoerotic desire, the text soon reveals that his affection for Philip is not based on gender.

When James and Philip are reunited, and when the latter reveals herself as Philippa, their love intensifies. But even with her new gender identity, Philippa remains stronger, both emotionally and intellectually, than James and continues to dress in men's clothing when she wishes "to speak her mind more freely" (179), or to set an example whenever she needs to pluck up her lover's courage. Well after she has revealed her female identity and when James suffers from melancholy because his claims to his inheritance seem to be dashed, Philippa appears before him, "in a riding dress made so

masculine that she could speak her mind more freely in it," and puns to him, "'Your spirits want a *philip*, Sir,' said she, 'and I must give them one'" (original emphasis, 180). The narrator adds, in an apparent endorsement of an androgynous sensibility, that "she was Philip one moment, all vivacity and cheerfulness; Philippa the next, all tenderness; and neither out of place" (180). But only when she assumes the role of a man can Philippa stir the lethargic James to action.

The Wandering Heir is one of Reade's minor works. It is a short novel of just over 50,000 words composed in part to capitalize on the Tichborne Case, but it offers a remarkable example of how Reade plays with gender performance. It presents another case of female masculinity, one that, because it is heterosexual, falls largely outside of the scope of Halberstam's study of the topic. But Halberstam does refer in passing to female masculinity as "a unique form of social rebellion" that is "often the sign of sexual alterity, but occasionally marks heterosexual variation [and] every now and then it represents the healthful alternative to what are considered the histrionics of conventional femininity" (9). Indeed, what marks Reade's work from its inception is this very concern with these "healthful alternatives" to prescribed gender performance for women. This can be seen in his many portrayals of athletic women, his numerous attacks on the corset, and his consistent espousal of proto-feminist causes. And he repeatedly criticized the "histrionics of conventional femininity" from *Christie Johnstone* through most of his work. His fascination in the 1850s and the 1860s with "androgynism" indicates, in part, his search for alternatives to conventional femininity.

Women Professionals and Lesbian Desire: *A Woman-Hater*

Reade's novel *A Woman-Hater* (1877) advocates the right of women to enter the medical profession, a theme he had raised as early as 1863 in *Hard Cash* (32) and one that is reflected in one of his notebooks, in which he writes, "Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell and her sister. Try to know a doctoress. See whether it unsexes her."[22] Reade here refers to Blackwell, an Anglo-American woman who became the first certified female physician in the United States and who moved to England where she continued her practice for some years before returning to America in the face of prejudice from her male colleagues (Finkelstein 332). In *A Woman-Hater*, Reade drew his main character, the female doctor Rhoda Gale, from the lives and careers

of Blackwell and Sophia Jex-Blake, who led the effort to break the gender barrier at the University of Edinburgh's medical program between 1869 and 1876 and whose actions at one point precipitated a small riot.[23] Reade interviewed Jex-Blake at length and almost certainly learned that she was a lesbian. Reade's decision to write *A Woman-Hater* coincides with his longstanding desire to employ his art to effect social change. And as the struggle of women to enter the medical profession took place in Edinburgh, Reade chose to publish his novel serially and anonymously in the conservative *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*.

David Finkelstein has provided an in-depth look at how it came about that the conservative publisher John Blackwood chose to allow a work by Charles Reade, with his reputation as a radical firebrand and "an inveterately salacious writer," to appear in the pages of his respected journal (Elwin 292). Finkelstein relates that *Blackwood's* had long been interested in Reade's work because of its great marketability and had even bid on *Griffith Gaunt* but found the asking price too high. Reade approached *Blackwood's* in 1876 with a proposal that the journal publish *A Woman-Hater*, which he described as "a story of strong sexual interest but no improprieties" (qtd. in Finkelstein 335). Blackwood's assistant Joseph Langford felt that Reade's spirit could be "controlled" and brought "into harmony" by a firm, guiding hand and wrote of the author to his employer that "he is a queer temper but has never yet met his match in a publisher" (qtd. in Finkelstein 335). Finkelstein writes of *Blackwood's* that the journal sought "never to raise a blush to the cheeks of middle-class maidens," and of its intended audience that it was one "likely to vote Conservative . . . [was] suspicious of social change and unwilling to tolerate challenges to the literary and social status quo" (336). Finkelstein's account demonstrates that despite Reade's cautious attempts to reassure Blackwood, the publisher remained wary of his author.

Finkelstein writes that "John Blackwood could not help but approach Reade's controversial output with suspicion" (336). Indeed, from the beginning, Blackwood warned Reade that he would be the final judge of the material submitted. Indeed, he compelled Reade to make several alterations to the text such as changing the word "sexuality" to "sexual feelings," but Reade refused to change the word "lovely," for as he wrote to Blackwood,

> I will not alter the word "lovely," because the speaker is not my good J. Blackwood, but a girl, and this is a girl's favorite adjective, and they

> continually apply it to men. Women have quite as keen a sense of beauty in men as men have in women, and the artist in fiction must either realise this or not really be an artist. (qtd. in Elwin, 311)

Finkelstein refers to "insignificant substitutions of words and phrases deemed vulgar or inappropriate, such as 'left' instead of 'sacked,' 'lover' instead of 'fancy man'" (341). Some critics feel that Reade capitulated to Blackwood by accepting many of the suggested revisions. Hughes, for example, considers that Reade "was reduced to writing cringing letters, explaining away the implications of his novel and surrendering the final control over his own words," and that he submitted to "Victorian censorship at its cruelest and most nonsensical" (104–05). However, the changes Reade permitted at Blackwood's behest were largely cosmetic, for the novel forcefully makes its case for women doctors and includes a lesbian as a principal character.

Blackwood's had a history of opposing the admission of women to the medical profession. In a diatribe in the August 1862 issue of the magazine, W.H. Aytoun wrote that, "we must protest against the institution of the female doctor" because women are ill-equipped to learn practical anatomy and "all who feel a sincere interest in the welfare of the girl" would be "indignant" at the thought that she might "pass through the ordeal of a dissecting room" (197). Aytoun also suggests that women doctors making housecalls would be subject to rape, adding, "Nor would public sympathy be largely lavished upon the victim of such an outrage" (197). Although Florence Nightingale had made the profession of nursing acceptable for women, the idea of female doctors still met with strong resistance. Aytoun gives another reason: "We reverence and bless the nurse who applies an emollient—very different, indeed, would be our feelings if we saw a bare-armed fury striding into our chamber with a bistoury in her hand to perform a surgical operation" (197). Reade's novel answers all these charges and concerns.

Blackwood was clearly nervous about printing *A Woman-Hater*, but during the serialization, he expressed his relief in a letter to Reade informing him of "distant mutterings of wrath or surprise and sorrow among the doctors, but none of them have addressed me on the much-vexed Lady question" (qtd. in Elwin 312). Although Blackwood was no supporter of "lady doctors," he proved willing to allow Reade to make his case so long as he provided a lively story and did not write anything "that could neither please my readers or myself" (qtd. in Finkelstein 336). Blackwood appears to have agreed with Aytoun's

arguments that allowing women into the medical profession was unwise because mixed classes would make for lax discipline; professors would shrink from frank discussions of anatomy; and women were simply unqualified to practice medicine. Finkelstein quotes a member of parliament:

> "God sent women to be ministering angels, to soothe the pillow, administer the palliative, whisper words of comfort to the tossing sufferer. Let that continue to be a woman's work. Leave the physician's function, the scientific lore, the iron wrist and iron will to men." (qtd. 334)

In *A Woman-Hater*, Reade parodies these sentiments as Rhoda, his aspiring doctor, paraphrases to a friend a speech she heard by a preacher:

> "Women's sphere is the hearth and the home; to impair her delicacy is to take the bloom from the peach; she could not qualify for Medicine without mastering anatomy and surgery—branches that must unsex her. Providence, intending her to be man's helpmate, not his rival, had given her a body unfit for war or hard labor, and a brain four ounces lighter than a man's, and unable to cope with long study and practical science. In short, she was too good and too stupid for Medicine." (117)

This is just one paragraph taken from two complete chapters (XII and XIII) of *A Woman-Hater,* in book form (the same material ran for two consecutive issues in *Blackwood's*), that comprise Rhoda's narrative of efforts to admit women into the medical schools. John Blackwood may have fumed but he passed the material, after compelling Reade to make minor cosmetic changes.

Reade appears from the beginning to have been willing to make these compromises because he sincerely wished to see *A Woman-Hater* published in Edinburgh, the city he considered second only to London as a cultural and intellectual center. Finkelstein suggests that Reade had an ulterior motive in choosing *Blackwood's* for serializing the novel in the pages of "a bastion of conservative opinion, published in Edinburgh, the city which had seen the bitterest opposition to women physicians to date, was a way of striking at the heart of the enemy" (338). Echoing this point in her biography of Jex-Blake, Margaret Todd observes that Reade "was deeply interested in 'the fight'" and that the novel "achieved no small success…within the very gates, so to speak, of the enemy's citadel" (435). The coincidence

of the location and the timeliness of the story led Reade to long to "strike while the iron is hot, that is to say, while the ladies are still struggling," adding that by doing so he would "serve a good cause and perhaps make a big hit" (qtd. in Elwin 298). To do this, he was willing to allow Blackwood to make editorial changes to his manuscript, so long as the essence of it remained. He promised Blackwood that "there is to be no bigamy, concubinage, seduction, nor anything the most prudish person may not read" (qtd. in Finkelstein 340). He did not include same-sex desire in this description, perhaps because references to such desire were so proscribed by the norms of Victorian propriety that he assumed its portrayal would go unnoticed.

Some of the points in *A Woman-Hater* demonstrate Foucault's remarks on the insensitivity of the new "medicalization" of the female body that became open to medical discourse as a field of study and inspection. In telling her story to a sympathetic listener, Rhoda recalls that in Zurich where she previously studied, when the women medical students were kept out of the infirmary, "female patients wrote to the journals to beg that female students might be admitted to come between them and the brutal curiosity of the male students, to which they were subjected in so offensive a way" (125). As Finkelstein notes, this passage, and others like it, caused Blackwood some concern, for he felt it could be construed as an assertion that male doctors routinely rape female patients (340).[24] Reade accordingly toned down some of the passages to assuage Blackwood's objections. But as the above quotation indicates, with its reference to "the brutal curiosity of the male students," Reade retained the suggestion in a modified form. Because of the debate about women entering the medical profession and the necessity of the doctor placing hands on intimate body parts, Rhoda insists that women's hands are more appropriate for touching women patients.

In addition to the gender-egalitarian sentiments, the overtones of lesbianism in *A Woman-Hater* are quite clear to anyone who reads the novel today—in the relationship of Rhoda to two other female characters, Zoe Vizard and Ina Klosking.[25] As we have seen, Rhoda's career is based on the careers of Elizabeth Blackwell and Sophia Jex-Blake, a lesbian.[26] Although Todd's biography of Jex-Blake—which quotes her as writing, "I believe I love women too much ever to love a man" (65)—did not appear until 1918, Reade puts similar remarks in the mouth of Rhoda.

Although many of Reade's contemporaries found his work "indecent," they do not appear to have accused him of depicting lesbianism

in *A Woman-Hater,* perhaps because that term had not entered common usage nor had the practice been pathologized. Despite John Blackwood's misgivings over Reade's "love of plain speaking and warm flesh tints" (qtd. in Finkelstein 340), he was more worried about *A Woman-Hater*'s support for women in the professions than by any suggestions of lesbianism. The rare references to sexual desire among women continued to go almost unnoticed because it still had not been pathologized to the same extent as desire among men. Indeed, eight years after the appearance of the novel, when male homosexuality became a crime (and remained so until 1967) under the Labouchère clause of the Criminal Law Amendment Bill, sex between women was ignored by the statute. As Queen Victoria is said to have remarked at the time, "Women do not do such things." Yet the lesbian theme in *A Woman-Hater* is clear to modern readers.

At one point in the novel, Rhoda warns the villain, Severne, to stay away from Zoe whom he is attempting to court: "Unless I see Zoe Vizard in danger, you have nothing to fear from me. But I *love* her, you understand" (original emphasis 207). Although he remains her rival, Rhoda agrees that Severne is both charming and something more than handsome: "He is beautiful," she says, "If he was dressed as a woman, the gentlemen would all run after him" (197). Later after she has transferred her affections from Zoe to Ina, Rhoda declares, "I love her better than any man can love her" (236). Rhoda and Ina pass an idyllic time in a country town where, as the narrator relates, Rhoda "cooked for her, nursed her, lighted fires, aired her bed, and these two friends slept together in each other's arms" (275). The two are reunited after a brief separation, and Ina "enveloped Rhoda in her arms, and rested a hot cheek against hers" (282). Ina performs at a theatre where "she dismissed her dresser at Rhoda's request and Rhoda filled that office. So they could talk freely" (283). Later that night, the narrative relates, "the two friends communed till two o'clock in the morning: but the limits of my tale forbid me to repeat what passed" (283). Finally however, when Ina becomes engaged to be married, Rhoda complains, "This is nice!...There—I must give up loving women. Besides, they throw me over the moment a man comes, if it happens to be the right one" (294). Reade may have felt free to place such material in his novel, believing it would be lost on moralists who were often blind to suggestions of female same-sex desire, as apparently was John Blackwood.

Jen Hill reads *A Woman-Hater* "as response to and result of a sort of panic about women entering the medical profession...a panic that revolved around women's access—sexual and other—to other

women's bodies" (Hill). Reade, ever ready to dwell on the charms of women, exploits this panic in a sometimes titillating narrative. But, as he so often does, he provides an ending that conforms to Victorian cultural norms. As Hill points out, "the lesbian doctor Rhoda eventually settles into a kind of neutered beneficent presence who heals women, making them fit for heterosexual union."[27] Despite the nod toward containment at the ending, Hill finds that *A Woman-Hater* "is a novel that at once recognizes woman-woman desire without pathologizing it" (Victoria listserv, June 4, 2003). As in "Androgynism," Reade demonstrates sympathy with those who embrace alternative sexualities and gender positions.

Griffith Gaunt contains a scene that may offer another representation of lesbian desire. In his analysis of the novel, Swinburne writes that, "the forty-third chapter is to my mind simply one of the most beautiful things in English literature" (365). This is the same chapter that Dickens regarded as "extremely coarse and disagreeable" (Letters 318). In this passage (which I discuss further in Chapter 4), Kate Peyton, in prison awaiting trial for murder, is visited by Mercy Vint. The two have never met and fully expect to have a tense encounter because both have married the same man. But Mercy arrives to offer testimony proving Kate's innocence and asks for Kate's love in return:

> The words were scarce out of her lips when Mrs. Gaunt caught her impetuously round the neck with both hands, and laid her on that erring but noble heart of hers, and kissed her eagerly.
>
> They kissed one another again and again, and wept over one another.... They slept in one bed, and held each other by the hand all night, and talked to one another, and in the morning knew each the other's story, and each the other's mind and character, better than their oldest acquaintances knew either the one or the other. (208)

Certainly these passages demonstrate deep female friendships characterized by a powerful physical element that suggest expressions of lesbian desire.

Gendered Fashions

"The Bloomer"

In "Propria Quae Maribus" (often known simply as "The Bloomer"), Reade's 1857 story, the heroine Caroline Courtney is hosting a party proselytizing for Amelia Bloomer's alternative dress for women. To

lend a humorous air of authority to her words, Caroline is dressed for the occasion in the "masculine" cap and gown of an Oxford don. Caroline advocates tolerance and diversity as she exhorts her guests to "dance in your own way, dress in your own way, and let your neighbors have their way; that is the best way!" (313). Reade's interest in the Bloomer is reflected in the clippings in his notebooks from the 1850s. As "The Bloomer" was published in 1857, one should keep in mind that the Rational Dress Society was not founded until 1881; thus both the Bloomer and Reade's story are far ahead of their time.

The notebooks contain numerous items on fashions in relation to which Reade includes the following marginal comment: "A Note on Dress—Dress is mutable. Who denies it?" (LL14 IV.1, p. 71). Nearby are clippings from newspapers on "Turkish Dress" for women and three articles on the Bloomer. One of these consists of a summary of a news report from Oswego, New York, that describes "the excitement produced at the steamboat landing…at the appearance of a couple of ladies with the short Turkish dress." The paper (Reade's note indicates "*Times* 27 May 57") states that the ladies "were travelling in company with gentlemen and were evidently people of cultivation," then comments that "the personal comfort of the Turkish dress must be most agreeable, in addition to its beauty" (LL14 IV.1, p. 71). The same article describes another event, an antislavery meeting in New York State:

> Mrs. Burleigh and the two Misses Burleigh, the wife and daughters of the poet Burleigh, entered the meeting. They were dressed in the new costume that is now being adopted by the ladies. The upper garment was close fitting, and reached the knee. Underneath was a loose trouser reaching to the ankle. The feet were enclosed in buskins and gispy straw hats crowned all.…The eyes of the meeting were immediately turned towards the ladies. (LL14 IV.1, p. 72)

The articles, no doubt, provided Reade with the raw materials for "The Bloomer."

In the story, Reade advances an early elaboration of the social construction of gender as the heiress Caroline, an "intelligent young beauty," champions the cause of the Bloomer, both by wearing the outfit and by encouraging others to do so (317). A friendly parson tries to dissuade her from wearing such a "masculine" outfit and argues that

> "There are plenty of boys of sixteen or seventeen, who could be dressed as women and eclipse all the women in a ball-room; but it

> would be indelicate and *unmanly;* you, with your youthful symmetrical figure, could eclipse most young men in their own habiliments; but it would be indelicate and *unwomanly*." (318)

Ignoring this advice, Caroline dresses in the robes of Oxford and promotes the Bloomer at the party referred to above. Of Caroline's drag outfit, the narrator relates that "she was more beautiful in this than even in a Bloomer" (310). Caroline presents the reader with a layering of gendered images: a woman dressed as a man whose outfit would be considered "feminine" but for his socially sanctioned position that only a man can hold. Caroline provides entertainment for the guests. One of the performances consists of actors who represent people of other nations whose dress is less restrictive than contemporary British fashions. After some pro-Bloomer songs, Caroline announces, "Ladies and gentlemen... I am now to prove that pantaloons are not necessarily masculine, nor long skirts feminine" (311). To prove her point, "two Persian women in gorgeous costume and very spacious trousers" assume center stage and show off their comfortable outfits.[28]

Caroline's priggish boyfriend Reginald feels so embarrassed by her dress and performance that he abandons her for a time, but he soon misses her so much that he is ready to forgive her Bloomer. The same kindly clergyman who had advised Caroline against wearing the Bloomer now sets up a reunion and arranges for Reginald to visit her at home. Caroline decides to greet Reginald dressed in a Bloomer to test his willingness to accept her. As he approaches her home, while crossing a bridge over a stream, "some portion of the rotten wood gave way, and splash went Reginald into the water.... Caroline laughed; but her laughter was soon turned to dismay. Reginald sank.... He was too proud to cry for help, but he was drowning" (319). Reade places Reginald in the role traditionally assigned to the "damsel in distress," and Caroline must come to his rescue:

> [Caroline] dashed into the stream like a water spaniel; in two strokes she was beside him and seized him by the hair. One stroke took her to the remnant of the bridge.... The moment she saw him safe she began to laugh again, and... set off running home full pelt before he could say a word to her. He followed her, crying: "Caroline, Caroline!" It was no use, she was in her Bloomer, and ran like a doe. (319)

The text reverses traditional masculine and feminine roles in presenting Caroline as quick to react to danger, deliberate in her response,

and athletic in execution, while Reginald flounders helplessly, first in the water and then in Caroline's arms as she rescues him.

Once she installs him safely on the bank, Caroline runs away because she has changed her mind and, pitying Reginald, does not wish to humiliate him further by showing herself in a Bloomer. She leaves Reginald in the company of her friend Harriet who tells him to go home and change his clothes. But wishing to thank Caroline, he tells Harriet, "At least please tell her she shall wear what she pleases" (320). Again, this story bows to convention at its conclusion as Caroline and Reginald marry. A year after their wedding, Caroline, who has apparently been submitting to her husband's wishes by dressing in traditional women's clothing ever since, decides to give her old Bloomer to one of the stable hands. But Reginald exclaims, "What, the dress you saved my life in?... I would not part with it to a prince for the price of a king's ransom" (320). As he often does, Reade accommodates his tale to a relatively conservative position in the ending, but much of the preceding narrative and even the husband's final wish to keep the garment undermine the closure that would uphold prevailing values.

As much of the foregoing indicates, Reade was especially interested in women's physical strength. In *A Perilous Secret*, his posthumous novel, a Colonel Clifford tells the heroine, Grace, "Certainly you are a fine girl, and broad-shouldered. I admire that in man or woman—but you are so delicate, so refined, so gentle." Abashed, Grace replies, "For all that, I am an athlete" (218). Reade admired female athletes, especially swimmers. His notebooks contain many clippings of women in sports. He clipped and pasted a story titled "The Champion Lady Swimmer," which includes a full page illustration of an American woman, Eliza E. Bennett, diving into the Hudson River in New York in a brief (for its time) swimsuit (LL36, p. 276). In Reade's first novel, the working-class heroine, Christie Johnstone, saves the effeminate Charles Gatty from drowning. The athletic Christie dives into a stormy sea, and "her nails touched his hair, her fingers entangled themselves in it, she gave him a powerful wrench and brought him alongside... [and] tumbled him, gasping and gurgling like a dying salmon, into the bottom of the boat" (173). In both *Christie Johnstone* and "The Bloomer," men are engulfed and helpless in the feminine element of water.

In a study of incidents of drowning in the work of Dickens, Vybarr Cregan-Reid suggests that "the idea of water being embodied as a feral animal emerged around the 1850s" and marked a break with

an earlier Romantic view of drowning as a "return to the earth and to nature" (20, 22). By the mid-Victorian period, Cregan-Reid suggests that the "concepts and anxieties of gender, sexuality, degeneration, and the oblivion of identity, all collect round and connect to the trope of drowning" (22). Death by drowning became more terrifying in the imagination than previously and men were particularly threatened by it. Fierce inundations with great loss of life became a theme in novels, featuring prominently in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860), in which the young female protagonist drowns, and in Reade's *Put Yourself in His Place* (1868). In both "The Bloomer" and *Christie Johnstone,* men are rescued from drowning and symbolically reborn through the agency of the heroine.

And as in *Christie Johnstone*, "The Bloomer" portrays women as robust and men, especially those of high station, as effete. Caroline is not from the lower class, but she is American, and Reade seems to feel that even privileged American women are far more liberated than their English counterparts of the middle- and upper-classes. In "The Bloomer," Reade approvingly presents a woman who espouses a proto-feminist cause in the manner of dress but, in a heavy-handed and apparently less-than-sincere effort to conform to traditional Victorian notions of relations between husband and wife, he contains his critique by having Caroline submit to her husband's original demand that she abandon her independent mode of dress. But her husband eventually comes around to an acceptance of her ideas—or perhaps merely an acceptance of her pants remaining in the house (in the closet?)—thus fatally compromising the containment.

Corsets and Tight-Lacing

Although Reade's novels contain many corrupt or incompetent male doctors, *A Woman-Hater* (1876) demonstrates that he welcomed the advent of women into the profession to counter them. In one of his notebooks, Reade wrote, "Let there be intelligent persons of their sex qualified by real study to tell them science is difficult and life not to be trifled with by quacks."[29] Yet occasionally Reade presents an enlightened male doctor, such as Sampson in *Hard Cash* and Christopher Staines in *A Simpleton* (1873).

In the latter novel, Reade launches an attack upon the corset as the young heroine Rosa wastes away with an unspecified illness that baffles her family doctors. Her lover, the young doctor Christopher, brought into the case by her father, discovers that the cause of her suffering is her stays. Addressing Rosa and her father, Christopher

announces, "if she would be healthy and happy, let her throw that diabolical machine into the fire.... Off with it, take my word, you will be one of the healthiest and most vigorous young ladies in Europe" (42–43). Yet Rosa resists for "she could really not go about without stays" (43) and becomes so incensed that she gives Christopher a backhand slap in the face and then "turned her hand and gave it him direct" (45) and calls him "rude, indelicate" and "a tyrant" (45). But reason finally prevails, and Rosa ultimately gives up her stays. In Reade's preface to the novel, he maintains that the story is again based on fact: "The whole business of the girl spitting blood, the surgeon ascribing it to the liver, the consultation, the final solution of the mystery, is a matter of personal experience accurately recorded" (4). Reade's opposition to tight-lacing complements his positive view of the Bloomer and comfortable and practical dress for women.

In *A Woman-Hater*, Reade again abandons the anonymous narrator's voice altogether to make another statement on gendered dress. Reade renews his assault on "tight-lacing," which he had begun in *A Simpleton*, and indulges in straight polemic, using the corset as a metaphor for the restricted choices for most women, ingrained in them from the time they are young girls:

> Their very mothers—for want of medical knowledge—clasp the fatal, idiotic corset on their growing bodies....So the girl grows up crippled in the ribs and lungs by her own mother, and her life, too, is in stays—cabined, cribbed, confined; unless she can paint, or act, or write novels, every path of honourable ambition is closed to her. (307)

As in "The Bloomer," Reade critiques the values his society places on gendered fashions and sees them as emblematic of far wider restrictions on women. It is significant that Reade uses as examples of honorable endeavors the women who "can paint, or act, or write novels." Although very few women painters gained prominence in nineteenth-century England, many were renowned as actresses or authors; and although women on stage were still thought of in some quarters as little better than prostitutes, Reade genuinely admired actresses. We have seen how his first theatrical success (*Masks and Faces*) and his first novel were based loosely on the life of Peg Woffington.[30] Later in his career, he managed the career of one of the stars of the Victorian stage, Ellen Terry, who starred as Philippa in the theatrical productions of *The Wandering Heir* and other plays by Reade.[31] Most significantly, Reade lived with the actress Laura Seymour for over

two decades.[32] Throughout his career, Reade remained egalitarian on the question of women in the professions and the arts. In the passage above from *A Woman-Hater*, he uses the metaphor of the corset to add emphasis to his feminist statements.

Male Homoeroticism

Foul Play

Reade depicts an apparent homoerotic relationship among men in the characters of the sailors Samuel Cooper and Tom Welch in *Foul Play* (1868), cowritten with playwright Dion Boucicault. The hero, Robert Penfold, falsely accused of forgery, is transported to Australia where he finally escapes and assumes the disguise of a clergyman under the alias of Rev. John Hazel and attempts to voyage back to England to clear his name. The ship is scuttled with great loss of life by unscrupulous men hoping to collect the insurance on worthless goods that have sunk to the bottom of the sea. Several survivors cram into a lifeboat that finds its way to a deserted island in the Pacific.

During the ship's initial journey Rev. Hazel, a close observer of human nature, has been keeping a diary. He records his impressions of the two sailors:

> There are two sailors, messmates, who have formed an antique friendship... Welch is a very able seaman and a chatterbox. Cooper is a good sailor, but very silent... I asked Welch what made him like Cooper so much. And he said, "Why, you see, sir, he is my messmate, for one thing, and a seaman that knows his work"... I asked Cooper why he was so fond of Welch. He only grunted in an uneasy way at first; but, when I pressed for a reply, he let out two words—"Capital company"; and got away from me. (37)

Hazel is clearly unfamiliar with relationships such as that of Cooper and Welch. He writes in his log that "their friendship, though often roughly expressed, is really a tender and touching sentiment. I think either of these sailors would bare his back and take a dozen lashes in place of his messmate" (37). Hazel rather admires the friendship of the two as he remains curious but nonjudgmental.

In the passage above, describing the camaraderie of the two seamen, the text uses the terms "antique friendship" and, in a later passage, "a friendship as of the ancient world," which are allusions to the classical Greek celebration of sex between men (37, 82).[33] At around the same time *Foul Play* was published, at Oxford, where Reade

held a position during this period, Walter Pater was beginning his career. Pater and his circle would go on to espouse a neo-Hellenism, a term that Richard Dellamora refers to as "a euphemism for desire, including sexual desire, between men" (33, see also Linda Dowling). Though Reade was not associated with Pater and the group (which later included Oscar Wilde) that was pioneering Aestheticism, because of his proximity to Oxford and his voracious appetite for information, he may have been familiar with its ideas, or perhaps his references were simply drawn from his own classical education.[34] In addition to the references to Hellenism, the text provides several clues in the men's behavior. Cooper's answers to Hazel's questions are evasive. Welch is "uneasy" at Hazel's question and "got away" from him as quickly as possible. Reticence, dissembling, and uneasiness at probing questions would be a natural response for most gay men in nineteenth-century England.

In "How to Do the History of Homosexuality," David M. Halperin writes of "four prehomosexual categories of male sex and gender deviance," one of which he identifies as "friendship or male love" (92). Halperin writes of a tradition, beginning at least with Aristotle, that acknowledges "equality, mutuality, and reciprocity in love between men" whose intimate bond "leads to a merging of individual identities, and hence to an unwillingness to live without the other, a readiness to die with or for the other" (100). In a series of moving passages in *Foul Play*, Cooper and Welch embody the traits that Halperin describes.

In a dramatic scene in a lifeboat after the shipwreck, Cooper is mortally wounded while trying to prevent cannibalism among some of the crazed survivors. He lingers on for a few days. The narrator relates his dying words to his friend:

> "Messmate," said he, in a voice that was now faint and broken, "you and I must sail together on this new voyage. I'm going out of port first; but" (in a whisper of inconceivable tenderness and simple cunning) "I'll lie to outside the harbor till you come out, my boy." Then he paused a moment. Then he added softly, "For I love you, Tom." (82)

After the death of his friend, Welch "covered the body decently with the spare canvas, and lay quietly down with his own head pillowed upon those loved remains" (82). Shortly after this, the other survivors decide to bury Cooper at sea but Welch protests, "No, no; I can't let Sam be buried in the sea. Ye see, sir, Sam and I, we are used to one

another, and I can't abide to part with him, alive or dead" (83). He tells Hazel, "My heart isn't altogether set toward living," and, referring to Cooper's dying words, adds, "Sam, here, he give me an order; what, didn't ye hear him? 'I'll lie to outside the bar,' says he, 'till you come out.' He expects me to come out in his wake" (83). Pleading with Hazel, Welch concludes, "I want to lie alongside Sam. But if you bury him in the sea, and me ashore, why, d—n my eyes if I shan't be a thousand years or so before I can find my own messmate" (83).

This crisis is averted as land is sighted and the lifeboat pulls ashore on a deserted island where Sam Cooper is finally buried. Soon afterwards Welch dies, as if in empathy with his companion, and his body is found "with his arms hanging on each side of the grave, and his cheek laid gently on it . . . with a loving smile on his dead face" (94). Nowhere in *Foul Play*, or in any of his other works, does Reade depict overt homoerotic acts, and, as we have seen, he claims to consider homosexuality a "monstrous perversity." Yet this novel comes closer to a direct expression of homoeroticism than most Victorian novels dared. While Reade does not explicitly embrace or endorse such transgressions, that he portrays them, sometimes with such relish and humor and at other times with such pathos, points to his readiness to question Victorian sexual values.

We have seen how several of Reade's works directly portray alternative sexualities and gender identities and how others challenge traditional ideas of gendered fashions. The following chapter discusses *Griffith Gaunt*, one of Reade's most well-known novels, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*, both of which were commercial successes and received wide critical attention in the 1860s. These two best-selling novels depict many of the features of sensation fiction, especially in their female characters, that most disturbed contemporary moralist critics.

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Chapter 4

Sensational Paradigms: Reade's *Griffith Gaunt* and Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*

Reade's *Griffith Gaunt* (1866) and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* (1863) present the reader with two of the most notorious novels in the sensation genre. Although both authors had established reputations by the time of the publication of these novels, sales were undoubtedly stoked by alarmist and negative reviews that focused largely on gender and sexuality. And while Braddon apparently suffered the critical abuse in relative silence, Reade, true to form, fought back with gusto. Both novels feature a passionate heroine—the eponymous character of *Aurora Floyd* and Kate Peyton in *Griffith Gaunt*. Both Aurora and Kate display athletic prowess as expert horsewomen. Both novels dwell on the theme of bigamy. Aurora unwittingly commits bigamy, believing her first husband dead. Kate's husband, Griffith, knowingly commits bigamy, believing that his wife has been unfaithful. Both novels include a memorable cast of secondary characters who fill out the text, but the primary business of *Aurora Floyd* and *Griffith Gaunt* lies in the portrayals of their indomitable heroines. As passionate and often aggressive women of property, both Aurora and Kate present challenges to prevailing gender norms, particularly in their negotiations of the institution of marriage. Both novels undermine the Victorian ideal of the harmonious middle-class home with separate spheres, and each concludes with a dubious containment that raises further doubts about proper domestic arrangements. Both present sexualized descriptions of their heroines as highly desirable women who find themselves involved in complicated and compromised marriages. In addition, each heroine faces an accusation of murder, and each must resolve her situation by defying patriarchal institutions.

After a discussion of these two novels, the chapter will touch briefly on several of Reade's other texts, including *The Cloister and*

the Hearth and *The Wandering Heir*, that actively play against gender stereotypes. In those works, as in *Aurora Floyd* and *Griffith Gaunt*, female characters assume dominant positions in relationships with the submissive men in the lives, suggesting one of the defining features of heterosexual male masochism.

Kate Flint writes that *Aurora Floyd* is "sensational from beginning to end, and was frequently taken as a paradigm of the genre" (286). The novel relates the story of a beautiful and athletic young woman with masses of blue-black hair, fiery black eyes, and an impulsive and passionate nature. Aurora loves the outdoors and animals, especially horses and dogs, that her wealthy and indulgent father provides for her. After the teenaged Aurora commits an indiscretion at home, Mr. Floyd sends her to a finishing school in France, from which she elopes with her former groom, James Conyers, a handsome rake with an eye on her fortune. The pair has a brief and stormy relationship on the continent before separating. Aurora later hears that Conyers has died in a steeplechase accident in Prussia—news that frees her to marry again.

Although the other characters in the novel do not learn it until later, the reader becomes aware early that Aurora, despite her youth, has had sexual experience from her elopement with Conyers. Fallen women in Victorian fiction often renounce the flesh after their "sin," as Emily does in Dickens's *David Copperfield*. P.D. Edwards suggests that Braddon "could have chosen to make [Aurora] acceptable to squeamish readers by the easy and well-established expedient of portraying her as so scorched by shame and guilt as to have lost all desire for sex and marriage" (xiv). Instead, Aurora loses no time in acquiring suitors after her debacle with James Conyers. Back home, Talbot Bulstrode, a straitlaced ex-officer bound by conventional notions of the relative status of men and women, finds Aurora to be "everything that is beautiful, and strange, and wicked, and unwomanly, and bewitching; and she is just the sort of creature that many a fool would fall in love with" (93). But when Talbot finally realizes that Aurora is untamable, he surrenders his claim to her.

John Mellish, a fair-haired and hulking country squire, loves Aurora unconditionally. Though initially impressed by Talbot, the strong-willed Aurora opts for John, both for his goodness and his pliability. Whereas Talbot "had set his pride and his pedigree between himself and his affection," John willingly "submits to the petty tyrant with a quiet smile of resignation" (196, 197). Shortly after her marriage to John, Aurora learns that the report of James Conyers's death in an accident was false (he was badly injured and left partially

lame) and that the man she had so impulsively married is alive, news that confirms her as a bigamist. Conyers himself soon reappears and, to Aurora's horror, her legal husband is hired by her second and illegitimate husband as the keeper of his stable. Aurora meets Conyers surreptitiously and seeks to ensure his silence by agreeing to pay the blackmail he demands. Shortly thereafter, Conyers is found shot to death and Aurora is suspected of his murder.

The plot of *Griffith Gaunt* presents equally complex turns. Griffith has long been in love with Kate Peyton but finds her pursued by another admirer, George Neville. After inheriting an estate in Cumberland and a fortune that was expected to have passed to Griffith, Kate feels so guilty and sorry for him that she marries him. Griffith is so much in love with Kate that he gladly tolerates her passionate Roman Catholicism until the handsome new priest, Brother Leonard, begins to devote too much attention to her as the novel subtly portrays the potential overlap between physical and spiritual love. Finally, Griffith confronts the pair alone in the garden and, after assaulting the priest and stomping him on the ground, flees his home in a jealous rage, shouting, "I must go, or kill. Live, and be damned for ever, the pair of ye" (118).

Griffith rides away, "with the face, the eyes, the gestures, the incoherent mutterings, of a raving Bedlamite" (119), and arrives exhausted and sick, under an assumed name, at the Packhorse Inn, a day's ride away in Lancashire. He is nursed back to health by the pious Mercy Vint, the beautiful young daughter of the proprietor, for whom Griffith develops an affection that—though born of gratitude—quickly turns to love. Mercy has a suitor but Griffith's jealousy is such that, despite his married status, he intervenes and convinces her to marry him instead. They wed, Griffith knowingly committing bigamy, and have a child. After receiving news from Cumberland, Griffith begins to suffer pangs of guilt over Kate, contrives an excuse to travel, and sets off to visit his former home. At first he is welcomed as the prodigal son and, for the first time in a year, he shares a bed with his wife. But when she learns of his bigamy, she threatens to kill him. On the night he leaves home for the second time, neighbors hear the sound of a body falling into the "horse-pond" on the grounds of the estate. By the time the body is recovered, it is unrecognizable, having been gnawed by fish, but everyone assumes that it must be the absent Griffith Gaunt. Kate is put on trial for murder.

Before continuing a discussion of the novels, it might be useful to look at their contemporary context. Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*,

serialized in 1862–1863, enjoyed the same scandalous success as *Lady Audley's Secret*. The nearly simultaneous publication and extraordinary successes of Collins's *The Woman in White*, Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, and Ellen (Mrs. Henry) Wood's *East Lynne* established the sensation novel as a genre with which hostile critics felt obliged to contend, as described in Chapter 1.

So many sensation novels began to be published that by 1863, *The Quarterly Review* could print a long essay review by Henry Mansel of twenty-four novels, condemning the genre. Mansel wryly observed that "sensation novels must be recognized as a great fact in the literature of our day, and a fact whose significance is by no means of an agreeable kind" (512). Mansel also notes the ubiquitous theme of bigamy, writing that "so popular has this crime become, as to give rise to an entire sub-class in this branch of literature . . . [it is] astonishing how many of our modern writers have selected this interesting breach of morality and law as the peg on which to hang a mystery" (490). Jeanne Fahrenstock explains the attractiveness of bigamy by suggesting that it appealed to nineteenth-century readers' "desire to sin and be forgiven vicariously" (48). Fahrenstock suggests that sexual fantasy played a role in the novels' popularity as "in the midst of their devoted family circles, the Victorian husband and wife of the 1860s fantasized on the delights and penalties of having another spouse" (47). Expanding on this idea, Lynette Felber notes that sensation fiction,

> with its mix of lurid details and conventional moral resolutions—offered Victorian readers an opportunity to experience fantasies of bigamous sex, voyeuristic indulgence in luxurious commodities, and the thrill of violent crimes from the safety of their armchairs, seemingly without an overt challenge to their complaisant morality.[1]

Bigamy plays a central role in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* and Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* and remained popular throughout the "sensation decade." Rather unfairly, Fahrenstock refers to *Griffith Gaunt*, with its prominent use of bigamy, as a "novel whose vulgarity outraged the critical audience in 1866" (65). In this novel, Reade examines the motive for Griffith's jealousy; without condoning bigamy, the text certainly forgives him.

The Yelverton Case, a complex legal battle with bigamy as its central issue, captured the imagination of the British reading public in 1861. Because the case has been discussed by Fahrenstock and others, there is no need to recount its details here. It is enough to note that

it involved a Captain Yelverton who "wed" Theresa Longworth in a "Scotch marriage" and later married an heiress. Longworth brought him to court for bigamy and the trials produced scandalous copy for the press. Although it did not create the national interest in bigamy, the Yelverton Case certainly attracted public attention as the sensational coverage in the daily newspapers lent an air of truth to novels that represented the practice. Longworth herself produced a fictionalized account of the affair as *Martyrs to Circumstance* in 1861. That same year J.R. O'Flanagan published another fictionalized account of the case in *Gentle Blood; or The Secret Marriage*. Fahrenstock points to Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847), Dion Boucicault's drama *The Colleen Baun* (1860), and Tennyson's *Enoch Arden* (1864) as other contemporary examples of works that feature the theme of bigamy. As George Augustus Sala noted in an 1867 article in *Belgravia*, "*Jane Eyre* was to all intents and purposes a 'sensational' novel, and some fastidious parents might have forbidden their daughters to read a book in which there is a deliberate attempt at bigamy" (614). Even George Eliot comes close to depicting bigamy in *Daniel Deronda*.

As early as 1865, Henry James observed that Braddon's novels "are censured and ridiculed, but they are extensively read," and that her work displays an intimate knowledge of "much that ladies are not accustomed to know, but that they are apparently very glad to learn" (114, 115). Fahrenstock understates the reaction to Braddon's novel when she writes that "*Aurora Floyd* raised eyebrows for it introduced the admirable bigamist" (54). Writing of Aurora, Mansel finds her "tame after Lady Audley" (492). He sees Aurora as "inferior to Lady Audley, as a pickpocket is inferior to a thug" (492). What concerns Mansel (and other critics) most is "this important difference—that Lady Audley is meant to be detested, while Auora Floyd is meant to be admired" (492). However, it seems clear that Braddon created both characters to be admired to different degrees.

Winifred Hughes notes the sensation novelists' general willingness to "sympathize with their own abominable creations," adding that to contemporary critics, "M.E. Braddon is judged the particular offender" (39–40). W. Fraser Rae, one of these critics, in an article in the *North Britain Review*, asked his readers, "Have we found her to be a creator of new types, a copyist of living personages, or a creator of unnatural monstrosities?" (201). Rae finds Braddon's work dangerous because it presents "revolting topics" with a skill that "hinder[s] the startled reader from tossing her volume away in sheer disgust" (201). Unabashedly revealing his bias, Rae states directly that "the

impartial critic is compelled, as it were, to unite with the moralist in regarding them [sensation novels] as mischievous in their tendency, and as one of the abominations of the age" (203). Yet *Aurora Floyd* sold nearly as well as *Lady Audley's Secret*, and the novel's subversive achievement lies in the fact that the heroine inspires reader sympathy. As Farhrenstock notes, the fact that Aurora "comes through midnight meetings, blackmail, and suspicion of murder and is still regarded with continued love is a rather daring innovation" (54). In *Griffith Gaunt*, Kate Peyton too becomes a murder suspect but never loses reader sympathy.

Unlike Aurora, Kate does not commit bigamy but rather learns that her husband has abandoned their home and that during his absence he has married Mercy Vint. At first, thinking him dead, Kate dresses in black until her faithless husband reappears unexpectedly. Despite Griffith's conscious decision to commit bigamy, the reader is urged to forgive him, for he has driven himself mad with jealousy. At one point, Griffith is paralyzed as "the potent poison of jealousy was coursing through all his veins and distorting his ghastly face" (112). He laments that "it gnaws my heart, it consumes my flesh... I envy the dead that lie at peace," before falling into an epileptic fit (113). Griffith has lost the ability to reason as he is "gnawed mad by three vultures of the mind—doubt, jealousy, and suspense" (114). While Kate and Mercy are wronged by Griffith's bigamy, the narrative offers his psychological state as a mitigating circumstance. Fahrenstock notes that although "motivation is thus provided for the reader, it is not necessarily accepted," at least not by many critics (65).

Although Aurora's bigamy comes about by accident through misinformation, many critics nevertheless condemned the novel. In the pages of *Blackwood's* and elsewhere, Margaret Oliphant repeatedly criticized Braddon's work as potentially dangerous to young women. Oliphant laments that before the rise of sensation fiction, "our novels were family reading and the result has been a sense of freedom, an absence of all suggestion of evil" (257–58). Writing in 1867 and in agreement with the remark by Salas, Oliphant finds that a change has come over the British novel, perceptively suggesting that it "began at the time when Jane Eyre made what advanced critics called her 'protest' against the conventionalities in which the world clothes itself" and that there "have been many 'protests' since that time" (258). Before Braddon's novels, Oliphant writes, young women in fiction did not "pant for indiscriminate kisses, or go mad for unattainable men" (260). Referring directly to *Aurora Floyd* and to Braddon's later novel,

The Doctor's Wife (1864), Oliphant writes of "women who marry their grooms in fits of sensual passion; women who pray their lovers to carry them off from husbands and homes they hate" (259). Revealing her class bias, Oliphant writes that Braddon and authors like her "might not be aware how young women of good blood and good training feel," implying, of course, that Braddon lacks breeding (260).

Comparing Braddon to Trollope, who is often cited by moralizing critics as a standard of good taste, Oliphant writes, "Mr. Trollope's charming girls do not . . . call forth half so much notice from the press as do the Aurora Floyds of contemporary fiction" (260). We have seen how one critic of Reade's adaptation of Trollope's *Ralph the Heir*, for his play *Shilly-Shally*, was dismayed that "excrescences of club-room wit should be foisted on an innocent story of Mr. Trollope . . . who is so careful never to offend" (qtd. in Smith 47). This comment reflects the divide, referred to earlier, between the "wholesome" school of realism represented by Eliot, Thackeray, and Trollope and what the *Athenaeum* called the "unwholesome literary school" represented by sensation novelists such as Collins, Braddon, and Reade (December 4, 1852: 1322, qtd. in Page 48).

It was largely because of the phenomenal commercial success of her novels that Braddon was so singled out for condemnation by her critics. Unlike Reade, she does not seem to have reacted publicly to these attacks, but she confided her feelings in letters to her "mentor," Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Agreeing in part with the comments of critics, Braddon writes, "I have written as conscientiously as I could; but more with a view to the interests of my publishers than with any great regard to my own reputation" (qtd. in Wolff 10). In another letter, she writes, "I have learnt to look at everything in a mercantile sense, & to write solely for the circulating library reader, whose palette [*sic*] requires strong meat, & is not very particular as to the quality thereof" (qtd. in Woolf 22). These comments suggest that Braddon internalized, to some degree, the comments of her critics that her writing was inferior, commercial, and sensational, but she need hardly have justified herself to Bulwer-Lytton, who had been widely reviled for his Newgate and "silver-fork" novels of a generation earlier.

Reade too at times felt that he was writing "down" to popular taste. When Coleman suggested that *The Cloister and the Hearth* was his greatest novel, Reade answered,

> "I write for the public and the public don't care about the dead. They are more interested in the living, and in the great tragi-comedy

> of humanity that is around and about them and environs them in every street, at every crossing, in every hole and corner." (qtd. in Coleman 263)

Accurately pointing to readers' interest in the extremes of human behavior, an interest that reflects his own, Reade adds,

> "An aristocratic divorce suit, the last great social scandal, a sensational suicide from Waterloo Bridge, a woman murdered in Seven Dials, or a baby found strangled to death in a bonnet-box at Picadilly Circus, interests them more than the piety of Margaret or Gerard's journey to Rome [in *The Cloister and the Hearth*]." (qtd. in Coleman 263)

Brantlinger notes that, "of all the sensation novelists, Reade was the most dependent upon the newspapers" (1982: 10). He asked an American friend to "buy for me any copies (I don't care if the collection should grow to a bushel of them, or a sack) of any American papers containing characteristic matter,—melodramas, trials, anything spicy" (qtd. in Cornwallis 584). Reade's voracious appetite for news of current events informed his work, giving it an immediacy that resonated with the public. This same trait also marks him, perhaps, as the most modern of Victorian novelists, one who anticipates the "information age."

Griffith Gaunt was originally serialized in Ellen Wood's *Argosy* in England, and in *The Atlantic Monthly* in the United States. Reade set his novel in the eighteenth century, perhaps so he could safely include more sexual content. But if that was his aim, the critics did not excuse him on those grounds. The New York *Round Table* began its review of Reade's novel by calling it "one of the most immoral, indecent, irreligious, and worst stories that has been printed," adding that, "for the first time, one of Mr. Reade's novels is grossly impure" (June 9, 1866).[2] The review, cited briefly in Chapter 1, is worth quoting at more length here as it presents an example of what Poovey refers to as the "vituperative style" of criticism often employed against the sensation novel (439):

> [*Griffith Gaunt*] is replete with impurity; it reeks with allusions that the most prurient scandal-monger would hesitate to make; it deals throughout with vice so familiarly, so much as a matter of course . . . as to divest it of all the repulsiveness it should wear. . . . [Reade's] splendid talents only aggravate his offence. . . . They [the publishers] have no right to introduce into thousands of virtuous families, and to children and girls whose parents accept it unquestioned on their

> endorsement, such reading as is only fit for the columns of the *Police Gazette*. (June 9, 1866).

Not content with this, the *Round Table* published another review (briefly cited in Chapter 1) the following month under the heading "An Indecent Publication":

> It is not too much to say that *Griffith Gaunt* is one of the worst novels that has appeared during this generation, the worst perhaps, that has ever been produced by the pen of any writer of position.
>
> Its publishers have no right to use it, as they are now doing, to insult young girls and virtuous women by thrusting upon them what no modest woman can read without a blush, and what no man should think of placing before his wife or sister or daughter, whose perusal modesty and purity cannot survive untainted. It is an unpardonable insult to public morality. (July 10, 1866).

The article concludes with a call for an authors' boycott of the *Atlantic Monthly* as it suggests that Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and others may be "not likely to contribute their articles to appear side by side with Mr. Reade's delineations of adultery" (July 10, 1866).

The *Round Table* also included a letter from a reader who writes of "the rumor that *Griffith Gaunt* was first offered to some of the lowest sensational periodicals of New York City, and they rejected it on the ground that they did not dare undertake its publication" (August 11, 1866). Words such as these predictably ignited Reade's temper. He filed libel charges against the *Round Table* and other publications that had quoted the review. He also wrote a response entitled "The Prurient Prude," discussed in Chapter 1.

Moralizing readers and critics could find much to object to in Reade's novel, and simple bigamy may have been the least of their concerns. Reade's depiction of the overlapping of spiritual and carnal desire in *Griffith Gaunt* may have especially offended some critics. As Griffith increasingly spends his evenings at the local tavern "to chat and sing with the yeomen and rollicking young squires," Kate remains at home where her "dreamy eyes seemed still to be exploring earth and sky in search of something they had not yet found" (72, 73). At this perilous moment in their marriage, the handsome new priest arrives to take over the ministry of the local Catholic community.

Kate finds herself becoming enamored of Brother Leonard, "her mind constantly recurring to one person. . . . [but] in her calm solitude

and umbrageous twilight, her mind crept out of its cave, like wild and timid things at dusk, and whispered to her heart that Leonard perhaps admired her more than was safe or prudent" (88). Yet despite Kate's misgivings, she finds herself unable to control her own attraction to the priest. When she hears one of Leonard's sermons, Kate becomes "thrilled, enraptured, melted…And by this means she came hot and undiluted to her husband" (77). Winifred Hughes observes that "Reade employs terms with sexual connotations for ostensibly religious situations"; she compares the feelings of Kate to those of Dorothea in Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1873), with the difference that "the object here is a sexually attractive Causabon—a fact that disguises and encourages sexuality, rather than submerging it" (102). As in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Reade here conflates spiritual and sexual desire, seeking to find a way to reconcile the two, and contradicting a fundamental tenet of his age.

Especially objectionable to some (including Dickens) was the incident in Chapter XLIII (in some versions, XLII), discussed in the previous chapter, in which the two wives of Griffith Gaunt, Kate and Mercy, spend an evening in each other's arms in Kate's cell as she awaits trial for murder. We have seen how Swinburne referred to this chapter as "simply one of the most beautiful things in English literature" (365). Given Swinburne's interest in lesbianism, this should come as no surprise.[3] We have also seen that Dickens found parts of the book "extremely coarse and disagreeable" (Letters 318). In this chapter, Mercy has traveled, at considerable trouble and expense, from Cumberland to Lancashire, solely to testify on behalf of Kate (whom she has not yet even met) in her upcoming murder trial. She brings her child (Griffith's son) with her. At first, Kate believes Mercy has come with some ulterior motive. But stunned by the innocent Mercy's simplicity, Kate muses, "If this creature is not sincere, what a mistress of deceit she must be" (205). When Mercy confirms that Griffith is alive and that she has borne their child, Kate says, "I begin to think he has wronged you almost as much as he has me" (207). To which Mercy replies,

> Worse, madam, worse. He has robbed me of my good name. You are still his lawful wife, and none can point the finger at you. But look at me. I was an honest girl, respected by all the parish. What has he made of me?…Here I am, a poor forlorn creature, neither maid, wife, nor widow; with a child on my arms that I do nothing but cry over. (207)[4]

Moved by Mercy's story, Kate relents, and both women fawn over the child:

> They looked him all over, discussed his every feature learnedly, kissed his limbs and extremities after the manner of their sex, and comprehending at last that to have been both of them wronged by one man was a bond of sympathy, not hate, the two wives of Griffith Gaunt laid his child across their two laps, and wept over him together. (207)

This is one of the passages that disturbed Dickens in his reply (quoted more fully in Chapter 1) to Collins's request that he, as a former editor of Reade, defend *Griffith Gaunt* in court: "I should say that what was pure to an artist might be impurely suggestive to inferior minds... Asked if I should have passed the passage where Kate and Mercy have the illegitimate child upon their laps and look over its little points together? I should again be obliged to reply No" (Letters 318). It is unclear to what Dickens objects here. But remarks by Hall in *Fixing Patriarchy* may provide a clue.

Hall notes that Victorian men often felt threatened by women acting in concert. He provides evidence from other scholars that this fear was largely responsible for the passage of the Contagious Diseases Acts that were ostensibly aimed at prostitutes, but it placed any woman at risk of incarceration and medical examination and had the effect of branding all women as potential prostitutes and, therefore, dangerous to society.[5] In a discussion of several novels by Dickens, Hall writes that women acting in concert without male control were "branded as dangerous and virulent by numerous male writers—[and] still generate intense anxiety in Dickens, [and] evoke fears of conspiracy and desire out of control" (188). In her study of *Communities of Women* (1978), Nina Auerbach writes how such women "have haunted our literary imagination [as] emblems of female self-sufficiency which create their own corporate reality, evoking both wishes and fears" (5). Both Mercy and Kate have been seduced and victimized by Griffith Gaunt and, though both still harbor a grudging affection for him, they act together to liberate Kate from the false accusation of having murdered him.

The prominence of the illegitimate child in the laps of Kate and Mercy not only suggests the centrality of Griffith as the father of the child and husband to both women but also highlights his irrelevance. As Kate and Mercy have "kissed one another again and again, and wept over one another," slept in each other's arms, and, by morning,

known "each the other's mind and character" (208), they have essentially displaced Griffith (at least temporarily). It is significant that this chapter dwells on two women whose actions are suggestive of homoeroticism and who fawn over an illegitimate child; this may suggest to modern readers a lesbian couple as parents. Although such a possibility may have seemed remote in 1866, Dickens's keen perception may nevertheless have detected something radically unsettling in this chapter with its simultaneous depictions of bigamy, illegitimacy, sensuality, and women working together to disprove a patriarchal accusation. The different reactions of Dickens and Swinburne to this chapter are significant. Dickens's prudishness leads him to read it as "impurely suggestive" (Letters 318), while Swinburne, with a reputation for wantonness, finds himself almost at a loss to describe the beauty of "so exquisite an interlude" (365).

Both Braddon and Reade celebrate their heroines by lavishing upon them descriptive passages that showcase their beauty and physical prowess. In Braddon's novel, the narrator's description of the young Aurora provides the reader a clear portrait of her striking appearance and independent personality:

> She said what she pleased; thought, spoke, acted as she pleased; learned what she pleased; and she grew into a bright, impetuous being, affectionate and generous-hearted... At seventeen she was twice as beautiful as her mother had been at nine-and-twenty,... You rarely, in looking at her face, could get beyond these eyes and teeth; for they so dazzled and blinded you... What if those masses of blue-black hair were brushed away from a forehead too low for the common standard of beauty? A phrenologist would have told you that the head was a noble one; and a sculptor would have added that it was set upon the throat of a Cleopatra. (62)

As in *Aurora Floyd*, in *Griffith Gaunt* we learn early about the leading female character's fondness for nontraditional activities: Kate is a horsewoman and enjoys the thrill, if not the blood, of the foxhunt; as the narrator describes a typical afternoon in hunting season,

> It was a gallant chase, and our dreamy virgin's blood got up. Erect, but lithe and vigorous, and one with her great white gelding, she came flying behind the foremost riders, and took leap for leap with them; one glossy, golden curl streamed back in the rushing air, her gray eyes glowed with earthly fire, and two red spots on the upper part of her cheeks showed she was much excited without a grain of fear; yet in the

> first ten minutes one gentleman was unhorsed before her eyes, and one came to grief along with his animal, and a thorough-bred chestnut was galloping and snorting beside her with empty saddle. (4)

The text describes Kate here in language that suggests sexual excitement. An "erect" and "much excited" Kate surpassing the male riders presents an image tinged with eroticism, reflecting Reade's admiration for athletic women, as well as his sexualized objectification of their bodies.

When Kate catches up with the fox, she "thrilled at the sight of him," but when she observes "all the signs of his distress," she allows it to escape. To her outraged fellow hunters she later explains, "I looked at him... and I pitied him. He was one, and we are many; he was so little and we are so big; *he had given us a good gallop*; and so I made up my mind he should live to run another day" (5). This passage may reflect Reade's own attitudes. As he was the son of a country squire, the foxhunt formed part of the socialization of his class. Elwin reports that Reade enjoyed hunting well into his adult life until, under the influence of Laura Seymour, "he developed a humane antipathy towards predatory sports" (50). This antipathy reveals itself in Kate's actions.[6]

Kate and Aurora's expertise on horseback enhances their sexual appeal. Horses have been associated with sexuality at least since Plato; Freud linked the image of the horse to the irrational and uncontrollable. In an essay on the symbolic use of horses in the novels of George Eliot, Sarah Wintle suggests that the "deep aspect of the equine idiom which links women with horses and men with riding them fleetingly carries with it the idea that boundaries are transgressed when it is women who do the riding" (36). Riding was considered by many as a pleasure, one that according to Dorothea in *Middlemarch*, should be "enjoyed in a pagan sensuous way" (qtd. in Wintle 28). For this reason, many disapproved of women's participation in riding and foxhunting. In an appendix to their edition of *Aurora Floyd*, Richard Nemesvari and Lisa Surridge present an anonymous article from 1854 in *The Field*: "Six Reasons Why Ladies Should Not Hunt." Among the reasons the author provides are the following:

> It is not becoming in a gentle and modest Englishwoman to be seen careening across country, surmounting every variety of obstacle that presents itself with the liability to meet with a fall at a fence, or to have a rent made in her habit by a thorn-hedge, and thus occasioning the display of more of her person than is generally considered to be in accordance with the rules of propriety. (553–54)

The anonymous author also points out that at the end of the hunt, often a lady's "horse is seen distressed and in a lather of sweat, and the frequent application of her handkerchief to her own face, shows that her own exertions have not been trifling" (554). In *Griffith Gaunt*, Reade describes Kate on horseback as a "scarlet Amazon" (41) and her horse as "bathed with sweat and lathered with foam" (4), inviting the reader to imagine her in a similar state of exertion and excitement.

Referring to the company assembled for the hunt, the author of the article in *The Field* points out that in addition to "the best in point of birth, wealth, and station," there are inevitably those "whose position and character are very different" and that "a lady is unavoidably liable to be seen jostled and mixed up at gateways, gaps, and fences, with company that husbands, fathers, and brothers, cannot witness without approbation, or without annoyance" (554). Here the author refers to horse-breakers and grooms. Significantly, Aurora Floyd's unsavory first husband, James Conyers, had been employed as her groom. The novel relates that the young Aurora "spent half her time on horseback . . . attended only by her groom—a dashing young fellow, chosen by Mr. Floyd on account of his good looks for Aurora's especial service" (64). Even after her separation from Conyers, Aurora maintains a keen interest in horses, to the dismay of one of her later suitors, Talbot, who is "shocked" to find her "poring over" a sporting journal (100). Talbot eventually abandons Aurora to marry her submissive and passionless cousin Lucy.

In contrast to the alliance of Kate and Mercy, Braddon's Aurora has no female accomplices as she sets about challenging patriarchal laws and customs. Significantly, Braddon repeatedly compares Aurora to Cleopatra in her physical appearance and haughty manners, suggesting a powerful and sensually dangerous woman as well as a foreign Other. The text invites the reader to imagine Aurora as a highly desirable but threatening woman who would make a formidable enemy. As in *Griffith Gaunt*, the portrayal of bigamy in *Aurora Floyd* was considered scandalous, but as Flint notes, "it was not the bigamy, distressing though some found it, which most perturbed reviewers, but Aurora's capacity for spontaneous action, and violent anger" (276). Her apparently wild behavior often shocks her husband.

Aurora's impulsiveness gets her into serious trouble on several occasions. Her ill-considered marriage to the rake Conyers causes most of her subsequent problems, including her encounter with the stablehand Steeve Hargraves, who, in a famous scene, infuriates Aurora by kicking her beloved old dog. She responds by physically

attacking Hargreaves in an often-quoted passage:

> Aurora sprang upon him like a beautiful tigress... catching him by the collar... The grasp of those slender hands, convulsed by passion, was not to be easily shaken off... she towered above him, her cheeks white with rage, her eyes flashing fury, her hat fallen off, and her black hair tumbling about her shoulders, sublime in her passion... She disengaged her right hand from his collar and rained a shower of blows upon his clumsy shoulders with her slender whip... stinging like a rod of flexible steel in that little hand. (193)

This is arguably the most famous passage in the novel, one that, as Edwards notes, "revolted but clearly fascinated the reviewers," who were quick to censor such an unladylike performance (xviii). Chris Willis adds that "Braddon could not have been unaware of the strong sexual overtones of her writing in this scene, which became notorious."[7] Willis continues by observing that "convention prevented her from writing openly about sexual matters, but the scene had strong elements of sexual titillation which undoubtedly added to the book's popular appeal." After administering the beating, Aurora is livid with rage and excitement, and nearly spent: "'How dared you!' she repeated again and again, her cheeks changing from white to scarlet in the effort to hold the man with one hand. Her tangled hair had fallen to her waist by this time, and the whip was broken in half-a-dozen places" (193). In this passage, Aurora is depicted as an avenging angel rather than the Victorian ideal of the angel in the house. Natalie Schroeder observes that "sensation novels indirectly voiced women's ambitions for individuality and power" and suggests that "aggressive violence makes Aurora appear more sensual" (87, 95). Aurora's passionate and very physical reaction to the stablehand's provocation may have conjured images of identification in disempowered female readers and desire in men.

In *Griffith Gaunt*, Kate too can be impulsive at times. Griffith's rival for Kate's affections, George Neville, insults her by comparing her to a coquettish character in a play by Molière: "Miss Peyton rose from her seat with eyes that literally flashed fire, and, the horrible truth must be told, her first wild impulse was to reply to all this Molière with one cut of her little riding-whip," an instrument that both she and Aurora seem always to have ready at hand (17). Later Kate threatens violence against her husband. After learning of his bigamy, she cries,

> "Go back to her!... So, this was your jealousy! False and forsworn yourself, you dared to suspect and insult me. Ah! and you think I

> am the woman to endure this? I'll have your life for it! I'll have your life.... I'll soon be rid of you... You have seen how I can love, you shall know how I can hate." (168)

These threats and recriminations, overheard by the servants, lead to Kate's indictment for murder after Griffith's disappearance. The accusations against Aurora and Kate reinforce their status as transgressive heroines; they are suspected of perpetrating violent crimes of passion against their husbands, and of thereby defying the expectations of their class and gender roles. Kate further steps out of her role by acting as her own attorney at trial.

Denise H. Gravatt suggests that the violent scene in *Aurora Floyd* in which the heroine beats Steeve Hargraves, evokes the dominant woman of masochism and that Braddon depicts such a powerful woman from a female point of view. This is especially significant in that the novel appeared several years before Leopold von Sacher-Masoch celebrated the dominant woman in *Venus in Furs* (1869). In Krafft-Ebing's view, masochism, occurring almost exclusively in men, is an inversion in that the "masochist considers himself in a passive, feminine role" (237). Psychoanalysis endorsed that view and generally interprets masochism as primarily a male fantasy, dismissing the agency of the dominant woman by seeing her as merely an actor in the masochistic scenario.

Even Gilles Deleuze, in a radical revision of the Freudian concept of masochism, holds that the dominant woman "belong[s] essentially to masochism, but without realizing it as a subject" (40). However, Gravatt writes that "Braddon's literary depiction of alternative heterosexual relations intimates that male masochism was not an exclusively male-gendered cultural fantasy, but rather one that appealed equally to women" (113). Gravatt's analysis of *Aurora Floyd* contests the view that the dominant woman must be solely a player in a male fantasy. Aurora, and other Braddon heroines, including Lucy Audley and Violet in *Vixen* (1879), display active, even aggressive, personalities and demonstrate self-conscious dominance both sexually and socially. Violet fantasizes about horsewhipping her stepfather and, by throwing a lamp at him, accidentally burns down the family home (229). Discussing *Vixen*, Ellen Miller Casey observes that "Braddon sees through Victorian propriety to a counterworld of female rebellion" (81). Reade's heroines also often exhibit similar rebellious traits.

Some of the descriptions by Braddon, indeed, seem to prefigure Sacher-Masoch's dominatrix. As Talbot observes Aurora—the text

refers to her as an "imperious creature, this Cleopatra in crinoline" (78)—he compares her in his mind to another dangerous woman, "Charlotte Corday with the knife in her hand" (93). The dominant traits of the women of the two novels are complemented by the submissive qualities in the men. Even before the appearance of the handsome priest, Griffith displays extremes of jealousy over George Neville, "a brisk, bold wooer... Handsome, daring, good-humored, and vain" (13). Griffith asks Kate, "could you love any man but me? Could you be so cruel?" and adds, "let me get off my horse, and lie down on this stubble, and you ride over me, and trample me to death. I would rather have you trample on my ribs, than on my heart with loving any one but me" (6).

Similarly, in *Aurora Floyd*, John Mellish's attraction to the heroine is so complete that "He loved her, and he laid himself down to be trampled upon by her gracious feet" (198). In their domestic life, John follows Aurora's lead, and their marriage is a happy one: "It was impossible for any quarrel to arise between the lovers, for John followed his mistress about like some big slave, who only lived to do her bidding; and Aurora accepted his devotion with a Sultana-like grace, which became her amazingly" (184). Gravatt suggests that "Braddon's novel ends in domestic bliss and offers the re-negotiation of gendered roles, through male masochism and female dominance, as a prescription for mutual conjugal contentment" (121). In this regard, *Aurora Floyd* presents a radical subversion of the traditional marriage plot.

Reade's novel also clearly expresses the ascendancy of Kate in her relationship with Griffith. After their marriage, a subtle tension underlies their relationship. The text relates that Griffith "was the happier of the two, for he looked up to his wife, as well as loved her, whereas she was troubled at times with a sense of superiority to her husband. She was amiable enough, and wise enough, to try and shut her eyes to it; and often succeeded; but not always" (73). In these remarks, the narrator makes clear Kate's dominance over Griffith, even if it is often more subtle than Aurora's over John Mellish in Braddon's novel. Both novels make a case for female superiority in domestic relations.

In *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Margaret, who has borne Gerard's illegitimate child and who is "neither maid, wife, nor widow" (357), begins to despair of his return from abroad. A suitor appears in the person of Luke, having "the body of a man but heart of a girl" (356), who idealizes Margaret and offers to carry her linen-basket twice a week to ease the burden of her solitary life as a single mother in

Rotterdam, and to otherwise do her bidding. Catherine, Gerard's mother, muses to herself, "If he [Luke] is fool enough to be her slave for nothing, all the better...," and finally advises Margaret, who is too grief-stricken over the missing Gerard to look after herself, "I think the best use you can put [Luke] to is to marry him" (352). Luke continually asks Margaret to put him to work, and she finally suggests that he make a cart for her crippled sister, Kate: "The slave of love consented joyfully, and soon made Kate a little cart, and cushioned it, and yoked himself into it, and at eventide drew her out of the town, and along the pleasant boulevard, Margaret and Catherine walking beside" (355). The townspeople jeer at Luke for drawing a cart like a horse and ask him "how a thistle taste[s], and if his mistress could not afford one with four legs" (355). When Kate tells Luke, "I'd liever ride no more than thou be mocked for 't," Luke answers her, "Much I care for their tongues... I shall draw you 'till my mistress says give over" (355). Finally Margaret hears rumors of Gerard's return to Holland and sends a willing Luke, "the slave of love" (355), to meet him and bring him home (356). Luke submissively bows to her will as he obeys her again and goes in search of the man who would replace him in the affections of his beloved.

The submissive posture of men toward women represents a respected legacy of the tradition of chivalry and courtly love that was accepted until the nineteenth century when it became stigmatized as the "perversion" of masochism. Carol Siegel criticizes both Freud and the Victorian tradition for an "epistemological dependence on a particular, anti-courtly concept of gender difference" (152). Siegel seeks to "reach a perspective from which we may look back, otherwise than psychoanalysis dictates, over the dynamics of power between men and women" (139). She maintains that "the knight who displays his love wounds like medals and kneels to receive more no longer stimulates sympathy and reader identification. Rather, in our era of the egalitarian love ethic, he is read as repellently exhibitionistic and masochistic" (140). Through a selective examination of literary traditions, Siegel demonstrates that, despite its pathologization, what can be properly called male masochism surfaces even in some Victorian novels. Referring to Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1861), she writes, "when Estella glides onto the scene, female domination and punishment of males is eroticized" (142). The novels of Reade, as well as those of Collins and Braddon, can also be viewed in this light with their many celebrations of indomitable women and submissive men.

We have seen that Griffith Gaunt and John Mellish are portrayed, at times, as slavish to their wives, and they visualize their women trampling upon them. Further male abjection occurs in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, as Gerard, after hearing the false report of the death of his auburn-haired Margaret, becomes a priest and acts as a mendicant during his travels and as a hermit after his return to Holland. When they are reunited, he is reluctant to give up his vow of celibacy and, "moaning at the pain he had caused her he loved, put[s] on the . . . cilice of bristle [because] now he must give himself every aid. The bristle might distract his earthly remorse by bodily pain" (406). At Gerard's death, shortly after Margaret's, the priests discover under his linen "a horse-hair shirt" and beneath the pentitential garment "they found a long thick tress of auburn hair" (438). Throughout the period of his self-denial, Gerard had carried this fetish as a means of remaining close to Margaret.

Aggressive female violence is often featured in the work of Collins and Braddon. Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale* is a literal man-killer, as is Madame Fontaine in *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880). Braddon's Lady Audley pushes her husband down a well, while in *Aurora Floyd*, as we have seen, the heroine horsewhips a man, and Violet in *Vixen* considers doing the same to another. We have seen how in *The Wandering Heir* Philippa is forced to flee England after an encounter with an overbearing suitor to whom she administered "a savage blow on the bridge of the nose," knocking him senseless and bleeding to the ground (65). In *A Simpleton*, Rosa gives her boyfriend, Christopher, a backhand slap. In *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Gerard witnesses Princess Claelia administer a beating to a female servant who had offended her. Claelia's "high-bred nostrils suddenly expanded like a bloodhorse's" as her "antique toga left quite disengaged a bare arm, that now seemed as powerful as it was beautiful: it rose and fell like the piston of a modern steam-engine and heavy slaps resounded one after another on Floretta's shoulders" (296). After interceding on the servant's behalf by scolding Claelia, Gerard remarks, "I wish I could have drawn you as you were beating that poor lass. You were awful, yet lovely. O, what a subject for a pythoness!" (296–97). Shortly thereafter, Claelia warms to Gerard and the narrator relates how his eyes "fell on the shapely white arm and delicate hand that curled round his elbow like a tender vine, and it flashed across him how he had just seen that lovely limb employed on Floretta" (297). Of course, Collins, Braddon, and Reade do not advocate female violence against men. What makes these novels remarkable is their acknowledgment that it can and does occur.

In his study of Reade, Wayne Burns devotes a part of a chapter to this incident with Gerard, Claelia, and Floretta, titled "Sex, Sadism, and *The Cloister and the Hearth*" (309–21), in which he identifies Reade's "sadistically humanitarian passages" (312). Elsewhere he writes of Reade's "sadistic frenzy" (185). Referring to *Never Too Late*, Hughes writes of Reade's "sadomasochistic combination of fear and enjoyment at scenes of torture" (90). But as subsequent scholars have shown, the impulse to depict scenes of aggressively violent, dominant, and beautiful women springs from what Gaylyn Studlar calls a "masochistic aesthetic" (14), which has little in common with the classic psychoanalytical paradigms of sadomasochism.[8]

Deleuze, for example, asserts that he is "questioning the very concept of an entity known as sadomasochism" (13) and insists that "the concurrence of sadism and masochism is fundamentally one of analogy only; their processes and their formation are entirely different" (46). Deleuze argues forcefully that the two concepts do not represent binaries. Studlar identifies the "masochistic aesthetic" in men who seek to celebrate the power of woman, often with much awe and abjection, and Reade's work often expresses such a combination of attitudes. Elton Smith finds that Reade's women are "unspeakably superior in heart, brain, and strength to the heroes whom he commands them to love" (60). That Reade presents so many strong female characters indicates that he felt no threat to himself before the presence of an intelligent, powerful woman.

Both *Griffith Gaunt* and *Aurora Floyd* conclude with unrepentant heroines consolidating their marriages. In Reade's novel, a chastened Griffith returns, and he and Kate are happily reunited. Their relationship is solidified after a dramatic scene in which she falls ill and he literally gives his blood to her in an early fictional account of a transfusion. Earlier, Kate had played matchmaker, bringing together her old and new friends, George Neville and Mercy Vint, who marry and settle close to the Gaunts. Because all the members of the two couples have had relatively intimate relationships with each other, "folk whispered and looked" when all four of them happen to appear in town together. Although they decide, for propriety's sake, not to meet publicly, "the wives, however, corresponded, and Lady Neville easily induced Mrs. Gaunt to co-operate with her in her benevolent acts, especially in saving young women who had been betrayed, from sinking deeper" (224).[9] *Aurora Floyd*'s closing paragraphs tell of Aurora's exoneration of the charge of murder in a scene that finds her and her husband in Nice, visited by her ex-lover Talbot and his

wife, Aurora's mild cousin Lucy, with "a blue-eyed girl-baby" in tow (548). While in France, another baby, "a black-eyed child," is born to Aurora (548), demonstrating that her genes as well as her personality are dominant. The novel ends in an unconventional but happy marriage for Aurora and her submissive husband.

The marriages in both novels survive the taint of bigamy. Fahrenstock writes that *Aurora Floyd* "was the first bigamy novel to exploit the plot calisthenics required to carry a fragile vessel of innocence over some very rough ground" (55). That Braddon can convince her audience (if not her critics) that Aurora remains a virtuous woman at the novel's end is no small accomplishment. The novel's popularity suggests that Victorian readers were far more tolerant and accepting of female agency than were many of the moralizing critics. In *Griffith Gaunt*, Kate's marriage survives both her husband's bigamy and her own spiritual adultery with Brother Leonard.

As in most of Reade's novels, transgressive women go unpunished, as here both Kate and Mercy are rewarded. Both *Griffith Gaunt* and *Aurora Floyd* end with unconventional heterosexual marriages. Of the two marriages in *Griffith Gaunt*, Dickens felt that placing "those four people in those relative situations toward one another... [is] extremely coarse and disagreeable" (Letters 318). Again, Dickens perceives something wrong, perhaps in the complex triangulation that characterizes the relationships of Kate, Griffith, Mercy, and George. What may be amiss is that the arrangement here does not conform to Eve Kosofky Sedgwick's formulation, based on that of René Girard, of the homosocial triangle operative in many Victorian novels.[10] The social and erotic desire of Kate and Mercy is mediated through the men—Griffith and George—rather than a woman.

Fahrenstock suggests that novels featuring bigamy allowed Victorian readers "to 'have it both ways,' to sin and be innocent, to renounce a desirable object and then be rewarded with it, to see unsocial desires fulfilled and duly punished" (65). The refusal of Braddon and Reade to punish their bigamous characters marks their work as a departure from the norm of containment. The bigamists of *Aurora Floyd* and *Griffith Gaunt* end the novels triumphantly, in marked contrast to the fate of such characters as Lucy in *Lady Audley's Secret* and Isabel Vane in *East Lynne*. Although readers may have secretly sympathized with Lucy Audley, Braddon was careful to make sure she paid a price for her transgression. In *Aurora Floyd*, however, the heroine ends the novel almost defiantly, despite an indiscretion that would have been seen as her ruin by many.

Fahrenstock also suggests that the appeal of the bigamy novel may "reflect a contemporary disillusionment with the institution of marriage" (65). And although *Griffith Gaunt* and *Aurora Floyd* both conclude with marriages fully restored and the stain of bigamy erased, the unions portrayed are highly nontraditional and hardly reflect the Victorian ideal. Both Aurora and Kate hold the upper hand in their relationships with their husbands. In Reade's novel, Kate controls the family fortune and exercises economic control over Griffith. Aurora Floyd enjoys her father's wealth and enters into her marriage with John Mellish on terms of economic equality. This financial independence, in part, enables both heroines to confront patriarchal institutions more readily than most women of their times.

Writing of Aurora's suitors, Edwards suggests that the "crucial exercise of Aurora's power consists of the total trust, and total surrender of their will to hers" and that she "wields her power, moreover, with apparently unequivocal support of the narrator, and presumably from Braddon herself" (xix). Reade's admiration of the power of women takes many forms, some of which invert the patriarchal presumption that the male is the physically and intellectually stronger of the sexes. The nineteenth century saw the beginnings of the deterioration of this paradigm. Reade's work participates in this process and, in that sense, anticipates the work of Thomas Hardy, George Gissing and, later, some modernists. Reade's view resembles that of his friend Wilkie Collins, whom Catherine Peters calls a "most unpatriarchal man" (355), one who "liked women who were intelligent and gifted and spoke their minds" (122). Reade accepts the reality of female superiority in many spheres and gladly acknowledges and bows to it when he finds it appropriate; as we have seen, physical strength, even violence, is often an element of this distinction. Each novel's heroine displays physical strength, a sense of firm resolve when facing danger, and also an occasional weakness of the flesh—traits typically reserved for male heroes.

Chapter 5

Reade, Race, and Colonialism

Throughout this study, I have argued that Reade's work in particular and sensation fiction in general present a significant alternative to what often seems like a monolithic presentation of Victorian values in nineteenth-century British fiction. As D.A. Miller has shown, the Victorian novel can often be read as complicit with the trappings of power. And although I disagree with Miller regarding many aspects of the sensation novel, I identify an area of complicity in those parts of Reade's works that touch on race and colonialism. More than most Victorian authors, Reade portrays racialized characters and colonial locales, in works such as *It Is Never Too Late to Mend, Hard Cash, The Wandering Heir*, and *A Simpleton.*

Despite all the qualities in his work that run counter to the dominant views of his age, as in the work of nearly all of his contemporaries, Reade seems to have accepted the reality of and the need to believe in the inherent justice of the British Empire. Patrick Brantlinger notes that for "middle- and upper-class Victorians, dominant over a vast working-class at home and over increasing millions of 'uncivilized' peoples of 'inferior' races abroad, power was self-validating" (1985: 166). Edward Said has written that what "the full roster of significant Victorian writers saw was a tremendous international display of British power virtually unchecked over the entire world... It was both logical and easy to identify themselves in one way or another with this power" (1994: 105). Reade, unfortunately, was not exceptional in this regard, and Said classifies his work as belonging to the "genre of adventure-imperialism," along with the novels of Rider Haggard, Kipling, and Conrad (155). In my research, I have found no evidence that Reade joined Dickens's calls for reprisals against the participants in the Sepoy Rebellion, or that, like Ruskin, Carlyle, and Arnold, he voiced his support of Governor Eyre's brutal suppression of the Morant Bay uprising in Jamaica in 1865, neither have I found

evidence that he opposed them. But many passages in Reade's work suggest that the subtlety he brought to his depictions of gender, for example, remains glaringly absent in his racialized characters. So although Reade cannot be described as anti-imperialist, neither can he be convincingly accused of jingoism.

Troubling passages in several of Reade's texts demonstrate an implicit support of English foreign policy and an acceptance of the logic of colonialism. Although he does not present virulent racism, his characterizations of racial difference are insensitive at best, even for his time. His work features many nonwhite characters, usually in minor roles, such as the native Australian Jacky in *Never Too Late*, the black sailor Vespasian in *Hard Cash*, and the South African woman Ucatella in *A Simpleton.* These portrayals can be called racist in that they are condescending and patronizing. Reade's depictions of these characters demonstrate a degree of affection, but it is of the type often afforded to children or pets. At times these characters recall Harriet Beecher Stowe's simple heroes in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, a work that Reade admired. But whereas Stowe's abolitionist fervor seeks to dignify her characters for her predominantly white audience, Reade too often seems to subject his non-European or dark-skinned characters to ridicule, often employing them for comic effect.

In *Never Too Late*, one has a right to expect better after reading the comments by the narrator describing Stowe's novel as

> a story which discusses the largest human topic that ever can arise; for the human race is bisected into black and white. Nowadays a huge subject greatly treated receives justice from the public, and "Uncle Tom" is written in many places with art, in all with red ink and with the biceps muscle. (134)

Reade continues his praise of the novel—"Great by theme, and great by skill, and greater by a writer's soul honestly flung into its pages"—as the heroic chaplain offers Stowe's novel to a repentant prison guard, comparing the lot of prisoners in England to that of slaves in America (134). But Reade does not follow the logic of what he writes in these pages and apparently never advanced a serious argument about race. Indeed, in the same novel, Reade contradicts his praise of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* with the introduction of the ridiculous character Jacky, an aboriginal Australian.

In his novels, Reade's racial others are often portrayed affectionately like those of Stowe but just as one-dimensionally. Just as Stowe

sets up her black slaves as morally superior to the Southern plantation class, so does Reade elevate the moral virtues of the Africans in *A Simpleton*, far above the white "degenerate Boers . . . dirty descendants of clean ancestors" (300, 303). Reade contrasts the cleanliness of the black African persons and homes to the squalor he attributes to the Boers (327). But the African and Australian characters he portrays are essentially childlike and not quite civilized. Routinely, he refers to the South African blacks in *A Simpleton* as Hottentots and Kafirs, terms now considered slurs, but in the nineteenth century such designations could hardly be avoided. *A Simpleton* even presents a mammy type in Ucatella who seems to care more, in a motherly way, for a deranged white man than for most of her own people. Reade can show appreciation of the physical beauty of nonwhites; in describing Ucatella, the narrator refers to her "grandeur, majesty, and repose" as qualities that "have vanished from sculpture two thousand years and more" (289). And Reade had at least a passing interest in the intellectual achievements of nonwhites as the following jottings in the notebook entitled "America" suggest: "College. Negro blood. Not admitted to them. Why?" and "Distinguished negros (*sic*): Ferdinand (*sic*) Douglas, a lecturer."[1] However, although Reade does not explicitly endorse racism or the colonial project on the grand scale, at least two of his novels feature white men taking advantage of the presumed naiveté of blacks. In both *Never Too Late* and *A Simpleton*, white men essentially swindle small fortunes from amiable blacks who do not realize the Western value placed upon gold and diamonds. There is a disturbing lack of authorial censure for these activities.

The first volume of *Hard Cash* features a long sea voyage with a crew, led by Captain Dodd (father of Julia), that includes Mr. Fullalove, a Methodist parson, and several racialized characters. Mr. Fullalove takes an interest in the black sailor Vespasian, who has exhibited exceptional bravery in a battle against pirates. In gratitude, Fullalove exclaims, "O the great African heart! . . . Of all men, negroes are the most capable of friendship; their affection is a mine: and we have only worked it with the lash; and that is a ridiculous mining tool, I rather think" (108). Fullalove expounds what he refers to as his "African Theory," which holds that "the races of men started equal but accident upon accident had walked some miles up a ladder of civilization, and kicked others down it" (107). Another point of this theory insists that, given "favorable circumstances" in a relatively short time, blacks would be "equal in mind to the best contemporary

white" (107). Although this theory allows for eventual equality, it also reflects the argument used by the Apartheid regime in South Africa over a century later, that blacks were not yet ready for full citizenship. It appears that, on an intellectual level, Reade's impulses were egalitarian, but in practice he proved unable to overcome the sense of white superiority that his culture embraced.

As Michael Hays notes, Reade's dramatic version of *Never Too Late* appears to endorse the colonial project in Australia. The play has three distinct settings, the most famous of which is, of course, the prison. But the story begins and ends in the farmlands of Berkshire in England and includes a long interlude in Australia where the principal character, George Fielding, struggling and wracked by debt at home, has emigrated to seek his fortune either in farming or in prospecting for gold. Hays suggests that the colonial outpost in Australia provided a safety valve to relieve poverty among small farmers and others in England in that the imperial vision of a better life offered hope for those left behind by the prosperity at home (136). To the British nationalist and colonial mentality, a poor Englishman ranked far above a colonial subject. As Ann Laura Stoler notes, "nationalist discourses were predicated on exclusionary cultural principles that did more than divide the middle-class from the poor. They marked out those whose claims to property rights, citizenship, and public relief were worthy of recognition and whose were not" (8). Dickens's *David Copperfield* enacts this process at the end of the novel, as characters who had lived in poverty and debt at home, like Mr. Micawber and Mr. Mell, achieve success after emigrating to Australia. With no reference to native Australians, Dickens effectively renders them invisible, lending support to the myth that the colonies were virtually uninhabited. Reade's *Never Too Late* depicts a similar perception of Australia as a promised land, but unlike Dickens, he does portray aboriginal people, though with unfortunate results.

The Australian story centers upon George, who must prove his financial worth to persuade the father of his sweetheart, Susan Merton, to consent to his marrying the daughter. An emigrant friend who needs a hand in Australia proffers an invitation, so George leaves his home to try his luck in the colony. Because Australia also served as a penal colony, Tom Robinson, who features so prominently in the prison scenes and serves as the link tying the different parts of the novel together, is transported there and joins George, an old friend of his. In the opening scene of the play, Robinson is already urging George to emigrate by calling England "a dead sea to a poor

man" (122). Although Robinson acts as a spokesman for class discontent here and in the prison scenes, he loses his concern for fairness and equality when he begins to hunt for gold in Australia.

Never Too Late voices opposition to inequalities in England but appears to see injustice abroad as the remedy for injustice at home. Apparently, Reade did not consider the irony that the problems George faces at home and the bitter experience that Robinson endures in prison are products of the same system that runs the empire. Although some critics consider the Australian and prison plots to be essentially unrelated, Hays finds them functionally significant rather than merely coincidental in that

> fictions of English superiority over the colonized other invert and dispel the real conditions of lower-class existence, while the image of the imperial domain provides the idea of distant land and wealth as compensation for the otherwise painful need to submit to the actual constraints . . . that define life in metropolitan England. (144)

Hays writes that Tom Robinson, who

> would have been cast away in one of the white colonies in Australia [, is] "reformed" and then recast as a legitimate participant in a new national order that promises a new harmony . . . based on a new understanding of interpersonal relations at home and common mastery of subject peoples abroad. (141)

From these subject peoples, Reade draws the character of Jacky. Although throughout his career Reade showed sympathy for working-class aspirations, he apparently did not understand the implications of his novel and its dramatization.[2]

Though he never traveled to Australia, Reade received praise from some of his contemporaries, including Henry James, for his depictions of that country. When Reade was planning his play *Gold*, the precursor to *Never Too Late*, he wrote in his diary, "I will hunt up two men who have lived in Australia, and are very communicative; from them I will get warm facts" (qtd. in Sutcliffe 1946: 339). Burns notes that Reade familiarized himself with recently published and popular books by travelers to the continent. But for all of Reade's boasting that he conducted painstaking research and engaged in "long, severe, systematic labour," he obviously did not care to get to know the aboriginal people of Australia if Jacky is the best he could depict. Jacky performs the demeaning comic role often assigned to

blacks on stage in the nineteenth-century English-speaking world. Despite Reade's claim of accuracy, Burns, with justice, refers to Jacky as a "stage darky with a boomerang [who] actually speaks a dialect like that of the Southern negro" (146). Some of Jacky's dialog even uses constructions that characterize the popular conception of how Native Americans speak English. The character lacks any semblance of authenticity. Yet some contemporary critics found this character endearing. In a mixed review of the novel, George Eliot writes, "the delightful Jacky . . . is a thoroughly fresh character, entirely unlike any other savage . . . drawn with exquisite yet sober humour" (*Selected Essays* 382). Few present-day readers can share this view.

As Jacky becomes the native guide for Fielding and Robinson, a typical line of his dialog in the play reads, "Oh. Massa George, Massa Tom: Jacky seen the dibble," with the following added stage direction: "*he glares horribly*" (original emphasis 147). When he is given matches, Jacky says, "Loramassy! Jacky clebber fella, make fire like white man" (148). Aside from Jacky, the only other native people presented in the play are a few "male and female savages" whose only line of dialog is "Kalingaloonga!", repeated several times (153–54). "Kalingaloonga" is Jacky's "black name" as chief of his people (154). Jacky compliments the other savages with the phrase "Berry good" and boasts that he is "de most iniquitous, good, abominable chief . . . the most preposterous, good, sanguinary, delicious, obscene chief" (154). In his biography, Coleman reproduces a photograph of the actor Stanislaus Calhaem, half-naked and in blackface, portraying "the one and only Jacky" in a contemporary production (200).

Ian Henderson notes that Calhaem's performance received acclaim from critics and cites the reviewer in the *Illustrated London News* who felt that "the moral nature of the native was capitally well-indicated" by the actor, while the *Era* praised his "remarkable vivacity and picturesque force" (qtd. 95). Henderson finds that the play's "imperial scheme" enables the contemporary "audience's ability to suspend and sustain disbelief" in the performance, as it laughs with and at Jacky while being reassured by the presence of the white actor in blackface (105, 106). In a study of the origins of blackface in the United States, Eric Lott asserts that although minstrelsy "arose from a white obsession with black (male) bodies that underlies white racial dread to our own day, it ruthlessly disavowed its fleshly investments through ridicule and racist lampoon" (23). Lott refers to the exploitation, coupled with a sense of envy and dread, implied in blackface minstrelsy, as "an affair of dollars and desire—of theft and love" (27).

The Australian adventure ends as Jacky happily leads his "massas" to an enormous gold nugget, and the heroes head back to England, leaving Jacky as a chief in his homeland and bequeathing to him their farm and their livestock. In the play, Fielding and Robinson leave with a paternal respect for Jacky—"these poor savages have an eye like a hawk for nature" (152). As Hays remarks, the point here is that "the Aborigine *desires* to help his white master to empire and economic well-being [which is] the Englishman's compensation for being cut off from nature" (143). If Reade did not make a fortune on the many productions of *Never Too Late*, the play at least provided employment for many actors and stagehands, replicating, in a sense, the exploitation of Australia and Jacky by Fielding and Robinson.

In a 1976 lecture, published in *Society Must Be Defended* (2003), Foucault asserts that racism developed into a biological imperative when Social Darwinist ideas transcribed "political discourse into biological terms," allowing "Racism [to] develop with colonization, or in other words, with colonizing genocide" (257).[3] In "Genocide in Australia" (1999), Colin Tatz records how, throughout the second half of the nineteenth century, the systematic killing of the Aborigines of Australia proceeded as white settlers continued to colonize the continent. A British high commissioner wrote to Gladstone in 1883 that "the habit of regarding the natives as vermin, to be cleared off the face of the earth, has given the average Queenslander a tone of brutality and cruelty in dealing with 'blacks'" (qtd. in Tatz 324). Royal Commissioner Archibald Meston, in his 1896 *Report on the Aborigines of North Queensland*, called the treatment of the native population "a shame to our common humanity" (qtd. in Tatz 324).

Reade's novel invokes the "common humanity" of Fielding and Jacky, as he attempts to portray the latter sympathetically (353). In the novel, as Jacky solemnly leads the white men through his people's ancient cemetery, the narrative relates, "In this garden of the dead of all ages they felt their common humanity, and followed their black brother silent and awestruck" (353). Yet, despite this apparent reverence for aboriginal culture, late in the novel the narrator states, "Hasty and imperfect as my sketch of this Jacky is, give it a place in your notebook of sketches, for in a few years the Australian savage will breathe only in these pages, and the Saxon plow will erase his very grave" (403). This comment expresses a qualified protest against the British treatment of the aboriginal people of Australia, and despite its ambivalence and the narrator's many attempts to portray Jacky as a simple and sympathetic savage, it demonstrates Reade's awareness

that the encounter with Europeans could well result in complete genocide for the natives of the colony. Reade fails to effectively use his novel to protest this injustice as he had protested the injustice in British prisons earlier in the novel.

While identifying the "complex racism" in the dramatic version of Reade's story, Henderson finds in Jacky more than a demeaning stereotype and believes that his rejection of many European customs, coupled with his acceptance of others, suggests that he "knows when to take from the white man and when his own ways are best" (107). This ability, Henderson suggests, will "point the way to cultural survival" for Australia's aboriginal people (108). Henderson suggests the dual name, Jacky/Kalingaloonga, represents a "double vision," and the character's contradictory views of European culture represent "the multiple and confusing views of the postcolonial condition" (108). Implying that Jacky demonstrates a form of subtle resistance to the Europeans, Henderson sees him as getting "the last laugh in a postcolonial joke" (107) and finds him "the most postmodern subject of any in Reade's work" (108). Jacky, especially as portrayed onstage by a white actor in blackface, provides an example of what Homi Bhabha refers to as "colonial mimicry" that contains "potentially and strategically an insurgent counter-appeal... that radically revalues the normative knowledges of the priority of race, writing, history" (91). In this view, the "stage black" Jacky challenges the assumed cultural superiority of author, reader, and audience.

Despite Henderson's generous view of the play, the best that can be said of Reade's creation of Jacky is that he apparently meant it to be both humorous and affectionate. The novel version also questions the British treatment of the aboriginal people of Australia, although this is not explicitly stated. The novel tells us that Jacky and his people quickly abandon the house and lands left to him by the white Europeans, an action that can be read as a questioning of the inherent value of Western mores, customs, and modes of living. But nowhere in the novel are these implied critiques advanced in any sustained manner.

Race often plays a wild card in class relations as the ruling class co-opts and dissipates the discontent of workers by pointing to the threats or the opportunities posed by the racial other. The legacy of the American Civil War provides many examples of this strategy, such as the passage of Jim Crow laws designed to appease poor whites and to assure them that they were socially superior to blacks. In addition, what Nathan Huggins refers to as the "corrupt tradition"

of minstrel shows and blackface began in the United States in the early nineteenth century and found an audience in England as well (291). As Brantlinger notes, because the British abolished the slave trade in 1807, and slavery itself in 1834, Victorian audiences, rather hypocritically, "displaced the blame for slavery onto others—onto Americans, for example" (1985: 173). Reade may have seen some of these minstrel performances, leading him to reproduce such stereotypes in his work, while feeling that as an Englishman he acted with a clear conscience. Although his racism does not appear to have been visceral or virulent, it was nonetheless real enough to severely mar several of his works.

Reade sets part of *The Wandering Heir* in colonial America where slavery is practiced. Indeed, the two principal white characters, James and Philippa (traveling incognito as Philip), are indentured servants themselves on a plantation in Delaware. The owner's daughter, Christina McCarthy, ignores the pair "as if they were dirt, her lofty affections being fixed on a big mulatto slave [named Regulus]. Such an attachment was repugnant to the feelings of white men, and contrary to law" (110). Christina plans to steal her father's money and elope with Regulus. When James learns of this plan, he pleads with her:

> "Madam, for Heaven's sake, look at the consequences.... If you fly with Regulus, and take your father's money, you will be caught one day and set on the gallows, and be publicly whipped.... And if you steal naught, yet marry a mulatto, 'tis against the law, and your children will be illegitimate, and you will lose your father's estate." (113)

Then, echoing *Othello*, James tells Christina, "Sure, that mulatto must have bewitched you, that none so fair as you should cast an eye of love on anything so foul" (114). Appalled that her secret is out, Christina pretends to agree that it must have been witchcraft and promises to break with Regulus, though she has no such intention. Instead, when James and Regulus simultaneously appear under her window one night, she exhorts her lover to "Kill him!" (119). James and Regulus battle briefly but flee when the neighbors are roused.

The brief portrayal of Regulus invests him with far more dignity than Reade allows racialized characters in his other novels. In his few lines of dialog, Regulus speaks the same English dialect as the other characters, unlike Jacky in *Never Too Late* or Ucatella in *A Simpleton*. Although the relationship of Christina and Regulus is portrayed by Reade as passionate and sincere, the words of James and Philippa,

with whom the narrative takes pains to establish reader sympathy, convey disapproval of the union, along with a grudging respect. Part of James's motive for wishing to break up the pair is that he is falling in love with Christina, much to Philippa's outrage. Philippa says of Christina, "The unnatural beast! that would rob her own father, and wed with a brown!" (116). Although James finds the interracial affair "disgraceful" and "contrary to nature," he suggests to Philippa that if Christina breaks with Regulus, he (James) "could take the brown's place, as you call him, any day; and, really 'tis a temptation" (110, 117). Roused to jealousy, Philippa exclaims, "Are you a match for that artful jade, think you? . . . Think you, when once a woman hath loved a woolly mulatto, she can so come back to wholesome affections?" (117, 118). Reade's primary purpose may be to show Philippa's jealousy, a common theme in his other work, but his use of this racist cliché indicates at best an insensitivity and at worst the white male envy and fear of the supposed superior sexual prowess of black men. This episode ends with Philippa and James anonymously causing the love of Christina and Regulus to be revealed to her father. After the lovers' plot is exposed, the outraged father has Regulus flogged: "Then they drummed the mulatto out of the district, and sent Christina to a farm in Massachusetts, to clean pots and pans in the kitchen for a twelvemonth and a day" (134). In the confusion, James and Philippa escape and head off for another adventure.

In *The Wandering Heir*, Reade had the opportunity to portray slavery, what he had referred to twenty years earlier in the novel version of *Never Too Late* as "the largest human topic that ever can arise" (134). Yet he does very little with it, focusing instead on the adventures of two white indentured servants, a luckless heir, and a cross-dressing woman. When the novel focuses attention on slavery, it does so to depict an interracial love affair that, in itself, is an achievement. Yet the text expresses disapproval of the relationship in the words of the principal characters and ultimately breaks it up and punishes the interracial couple. Despite this, Reade depicts passionate physical love between a black man and a white woman, thus suggesting the authenticity and validity of miscegenation. But it is so qualified, both in the comments of the other characters and in its denouement, that it ultimately undermines its own apparent acknowledgment of the legitimacy of interracial sexual relationships. And although other incidents in this novella present daring challenges to gender ideology (discussed in Chapter 3), we can see that part of Reade's work does little to counter Victorian racial ideology.

In *Readiana* (1882), his late collection of articles, letters, and miscellaneous writings, Reade directly advocates another kind of imperialism. Writing to the *Daily Telegraph* after the Russian pogroms of 1881, Reade congratulates the editors for their "denunciation of the lawless cruelties perpetrated on the Jews of Russia" and "the cowardly cruelty of this Tartar tribe to God's ancient people" (252). However, convinced that a protest by England would be ignored, Reade proposes another solution in the form of a proto-Zionism, writing that, "if by any chance this recent outrage should decide the Jewish leaders to colonise Palestine from Russia, let us freely offer ships, seamen, money—whatever we are asked for" (255). Reade believes this would benefit England: "It will be a better national investment than Egyptian, Brazilian, or Peruvian bonds" (255). Here we can see how Reade by this time (after the death of Laura Seymour) comes very close to what George Eliot advocates in *Daniel Deronda.* In this letter, relying on scripture and prophecy, Reade asserts that "the Jews are to repossess Palestine" (254). Reade's views here coincide with those of Lord Shaftesbury and Sir Laurence Oliphant, influential religious men who had similar reasons for hoping for a Jewish restoration to Palestine. These zealots studied scripture and decided that the reestablishment of a state of Israel in Palestine would hasten the Second Coming of Christ. Oliphant is on record as having been "anxious to fulfill the prophecies and bring about the end of the world."[4] This belief resonates with some contemporary Christian fundamentalism in the United States and elsewhere.

In a paper on this topic, Farid al-Salim notes that Shaftesbury was the son-in-law of Lord Palmerston, British prime minister during parts of the 1840s and 1850s. The interest that Palmerston, the inventor of "gunboat diplomacy," had in creating Jewish settlements in the Middle East had little to do with religion but much to do with establishing a European Jewish presence in the region with England as its "protector." As early as 1840, Palmerston encouraged the Sultan at Constantinople to allow Jewish immigration by noting, "It is well known that Jews of Europe possess great wealth" that would benefit "any country in which a considerable number of them choose to settle" (qtd. in Farid al-Salim 9). Susan Meyer demonstrates how proto-Zionism became a policy option in England before official Zionism existed, revealing its imperialist component. This policy sought first to prop up the ailing Ottoman Empire against a Russian threat, then to despoil it and to graft some of its Arab provinces onto the British

Empire. Near the conclusion of her discussion of *Daniel Deronda*, Meyer asserts that "the internal structure of the novel reveals its continuity with what was disturbing in British gentile proto-Zionism" (754). When Theodor Herzl started the Zionist movement, he had many allies in England who, either for reasons of religion or for *realpolitik*, hoped for a Jewish return to Palestine. Apparently there was no concern for the people who actually lived in Palestine. In his critique of *Daniel Deronda*, Edward Said writes that toward the Arabs, "Eliot expresses the complete indifference of absolute silence" (1980: 63). Echoing this point, Clare Brandabur refers to "Eliot's profound indifference to the indigenous inhabitants of Palestine who would have to be removed to make room for the incoming Jews" (224). Guided by his newly found religious ideas adopted in the wake of Seymour's death, Reade too was guilty of this indifference as he wrote his letter to the *Telegraph* shortly before he died. It is ironic that both Reade and Eliot, rivals in so many ways, endorsed a Jewish return to Palestine; although their motives were humanitarian, they played into the hands of British imperial policy.

Other sensation authors too chose to depict race in their fiction and drama. M.E. Braddon's *The Octoroon; or the Lily of Louisiana* (1861) endorsed abolition and accepted race-mixing, however cautiously. The same year, Dion Boucicault's *The Octoroon; or Life in Louisiana* was produced on the London stage after its success in New York in 1859. Boucicault, Reade's friend and later his coauthor of *Foul Play*, presents a powerful antislavery message in *The Octoroon*. Both Braddon's novel and Boucicault's melodrama responded to the unprecedented popular success of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, which so captivated London readers and theatergoers in the 1850s. According to one estimate, eighteen different dramatizations of Stowe's novel appeared on London stages in 1852 alone (see Burns and Sutcliffe 337). In succeeding years, countless productions inspired by *Uncle Tom's Cabin* were produced, of which Braddon's novel and Boucicault's play are examples. These were the years of Reade's first concentrated efforts at playwrighting, but despite his comment on the great theme of slavery, he did not devote any real attention to the issue.

Critics have also explored the racial and colonial issues raised by Wilkie Collins. Sympathetic racially hybrid characters such as Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone* and Ozias Midwinter in *Armadale* have led some critics to contend that those novels offer a compelling counterargument to racism and colonial ideology. Several critics have commented on the tolerance displayed in *The Moonstone* for Indian

characters and point to its significance because the novel appeared just a decade after the Indian Mutiny, the exaggerated reports of which inflamed British public opinion against its colonial subjects. Like *The Moonstone*, *Armadale* reveals a series of colonial crimes committed by white Englishmen that lead to the dramatic events in the novel and the love affair between the mixed-race Midwinter and the very sympathetically portrayed villainess, Lydia Gwilt.

One would have hoped Reade's work to contain subtleties of character and situation in racial or colonial contexts, especially because he chose to include colonial locales and racial others in many of his texts. In the portion of his work that includes demeaning racial characterizations and derivative stereotypes, Reade's work does not contest racialist and imperialist ideology. Hays convincingly demonstrates that Reade's dramatization of *Never Too Late* represents a perhaps unconscious endorsement of one aspect of British colonial policy, and that his support, late in life, of an imperialist proto-Zionism represents another.

We have seen that Reade employed the British Empire as a backdrop for several of his novels. Unlike many authors, he occasionally attempted to portray the indigenous people of the colonies. Although he never traveled outside of Europe, his trust in his research led him to believe that he had accurately captured the character of his African or native Australian characters. It may never have occurred to him that he was replicating racial stereotypes because he felt he was relying on "facts." As Burns notes, "he accommodated his facts to his melodramatic preconceptions," thus creating "conventionalized stage types togged out in factually correct dress" (147). All of the subtlety that Reade applies to female characters such as Kate Peyton, Margaret Brandt, Edith Archbold, and Kate Tozer vanishes when he is confronted by a racial other. In this respect, his work falls far short of that of Collins, who portrays Ezra Jennings and Ozias Midwinter as characters who are often far wiser and more perceptive than many of the "pure" Englishmen with whom they interact in *The Moonstone* and *Armadale*. Reade's racial others represent one- or two-dimensional figures from his fact books, who are then often imbued with demeaning comic attributes.

Yet Reade's work remains important in part for this very reason. Edward Said has written of European humanists who "are unable to make the connection between the prolonged and sordid cruelty of practices such as slavery, colonialist and racial oppression, and imperial subjection on the one hand, and the poetry, fiction, philosophy

of the society that engages in these practices on the other" (1994: xiv). Although Reade presents an oppositional voice to many of the domestic practices in his contemporary England, he remains blind to abuses in the colonies. His work can be read as an example that proves Said's point. In this regard, Reade can be compared to his contemporaries such as Dickens, Ruskin, Mill, and many others who voiced opposition to conditions at home but, implicitly or explicitly, endorsed British imperialism. Although Reade's acquiescence to colonialism apparently did not take a political form, in matters of race and empire, his work compares unfavorably to that of Collins and Braddon. It is difficult to describe so combative an author as Reade as complacent, but that word accurately describes his attitude toward British foreign policy.

Coda: Recovering Reade

In *A Terrible Temptation*, Reade offers a fictional self-portrait in the character of Mr. Rolfe, an eccentric novelist who reveals, through his work, abuses of power in society, and who relies on recorded facts for his inspiration. The description of Rolfe and his home bears out Reade's dedication to collecting factual information, and to finding in it the seeds of his fiction. Rolfe's work room contains "five things like bankers' bill-books, into whose several compartments MS. notes and newspaper cuttings were thrown . . . a formidable array of note-books . . . about twenty large folios of classified facts, ideas, and pictures" (101–102). The narrator states that the disordered clutter of Rolfe's room would "shock those who fancy that fiction is the spontaneous overflow of a poetic fountain fed by nature only" (101), a comment that reflects Reade's identification of his own difficulties in the process of invention.

Of Rolfe's person, the narrator relates that "he was rather tall, very portly, smallish head, commonplace features, mild brown eye not very bright, short beard, and wore a suit of tweed all one color. Such looked the writer of romances founded on fact" (102). In *A Terrible Temptation*, Rolfe uses his catalog of facts to expose corruption and physical abuse in private asylums. Shortly after meeting the heroine, he tells her that her husband's examination and seizure by medical authorities "were wicked and barbarous acts, contrary to God's law and the common law of England, and, indeed, to all human law except our shallow, incautious *Statutes de Lunatico*" (102). The image of Reade that emerges from this self-portrait, and from a study of his life and works, is that of a typical middle-class Victorian, but with eccentricities and with considerably more of both conscience and tolerance than many of us would associate with that image. In George Orwell's words, "He was simply a middle-class gentleman with a little more conscience than most" (37). Reade did not see himself as an outsider in his society. His intentions represent a reformist impulse and he proudly stated that some of his work, which we would today call

"muckraking," had only "modified, not disturbed the national experiment" (*Readiana* 358). His goals appear modest, even conservative at times, to a twenty-first century sensibility.

Yet, Reade's work often "disturbed" his contemporaries and some of the positions he advocated go beyond an attempt to modify "the national experiment." Despite Reade's lack of a clear sense of racial justice and his apparent endorsement of some aspects of British colonial policy, we should not forget his passionate campaign for the human rights of prisoners; his battle against brutality, corruption, and incompetence in the administration of lunatic asylums; his support for women in the professions; and his highly original portrayals of gender and sexuality. From his earliest published writings, such as *Christie Johnstone* and *Peg Woffington*, to his last, the posthumous *A Perilous Secret* and "Androgynism," Reade's work features characters who challenge conventions of Victorian normality and mark a clear break with many of the values of "the national experiment."

Two examples can demonstrate some of the ways in which Reade's work disturbed many of his contemporaries. The historical epic *The Cloister and the Hearth*, his most ambitious work, although not often referred to as a sensation novel, contains many elements common to sensation fiction, including depictions of unmarried parents, strong women, scenes of violence, and a condemnation of religious intolerance. *A Terrible Temptation* lacks the mystery that often characterizes sensation fiction but includes a portrait of a courtesan, wrongful confinement in a lunatic asylum, and another child born out of wedlock. Today, single women account for 40 percent of births in the United States. In addition, independent female characters now appear regularly in many books, films, and television programs, as do scenes of violence. And media's portrayal of religious intolerance is more prominent today than a decade ago. These phenomena indicate the relevance of Reade's work to a twenty-first-century audience.

Often, Reade's characters defy Victorian convention while appearing to uphold traditional values. Tom Robinson, the thief in *Never Too Late*, has no serious quarrel with the authorities for sending him to prison. Yet he and the novel present a forceful indictment of the failed prison reform at mid-century. Grace in *A Perilous Secret* is described as both delicate *and* athletic. Reade depicts the characters of Welch and Cooper in *Foul Play* as bound by love to each other, *and* as examples of stoic masculinity in their work as sailors. In *Christie Johnstone*, Reade offers a sustained paean to the institution of marriage while the model for the heroine of that novel was

the woman with whom he conceived a child out of wedlock. Perhaps most timely for our own era, are Reade's fictional indictments of bank fraud in *Hard Cash*, insurance fraud and bank failures in *Foul Play*, and corporate greed in *Put Yourself in His Place*. Reade's exposés of greed, like Trollope's in *The Way We Live Now* (1875) and Dickens's in many of his works, reflect today's headlines and condemn the excesses of unfettered capitalism.

Characters such as Margaret in *The Cloister and the Hearth*, Edith and Julia in *Hard Cash*, and the two Kates in *Griffith Gaunt* and "Androgynism," along with Braddon's Aurora Floyd and Vixen, and many characters in Collins's novels, present a constellation of female characters that challenges the conventional understanding of the role of women in Victorian society. Despite the ubiquity of the transgressive (Becky Sharp in *Vanity Fair*) or fallen (Nancy in *Oliver Twist* and Hetty Sorel in *Adam Bede*) woman in Victorian fiction, it took the sensation novel to raise such women above sheer venality or tragic weakness. Reade's female characters stand at the forefront of the most vibrant women in Victorian literature and anticipate the novels of other male authors sympathetic to the "woman question," such as Thomas Hardy and George Gissing. And in his presentation of sympathetic queer characters, such as Kate Tozer in "Androgynism," Rhoda Gale in *A Woman-Hater,* and the sailors Welch and Cooper in *Foul Play,* Reade stands nearly alone among Victorian authors.

Reade's compulsive reading and collecting of newspaper clippings fed his style of sensational realism, a fiction that consciously endeavored to present dramas of everyday life, an intention reflected in the subtitles to so many of his books: *A Matter-of-Fact Romance* and A *Story of Today*. As noted, Reade's novels, although praised by some, were singled out by many critics for abusing his authorial power in passages considered immoral, and for employing literature as a vehicle to promote social causes. His novels did not meet the contemporary standard—"to elevate and to purify"—but were generally more concerned with improving the physical reality in which he and his fellow citizens lived their daily lives. Reade's work clearly seeks to enhance the social status of women, mitigate the suffering of the imprisoned, and release those wrongfully confined in lunatic asylums. Reade's work also implicitly advocates tolerance of sexual minorities. He shares the sentiments expressed in the words, previously quoted in Chapter 3, of Caroline the heroine of "The Bloomer": "Dance in your own way, dress in your own way, and let your neighbors have their way; that is the best way!" (313).

Poovey attributes the decline in Reade's critical reputation to the increased emphasis on form, noting the "Art of Fiction" debates that began in 1884 (the year of Reade's death) and that engaged the attention of Henry James, Walter Besant, Robert Louis Stevenson, and others (see Poovey 445–450). The emphasis on form and the enshrinement of literature as "Art" reached its zenith with the advent of New Criticism in the twentieth century. The text itself assumed central importance, and context was often ignored. More recently, literary studies has seen expansion of critical attention to cultural and historical context. New generations of scholars have rediscovered the work of many noncanonical authors. The study of literature no longer appears to be the province of specialists whose work often appeared to have little relevance to everyday reality.

In light of current trends in criticism and theory, Reade's work can now be usefully examined. His novels, more than most others, are historical documents in themselves as they are based on contemporary contestations over mores and power. The work of Charles Reade presents an important opportunity for the critical recovery of a major Victorian author.

Notes

Introduction

1. Many of Reade's works have recently been made available by Dodo Press, a subsidiary of the innovative new publisher The Book Depository in the UK.
2. The critic for the *Dublin University Review* stated that "the taste of the age has settled the point, that its [fiction's] proper office is to elevate and purify" (qtd. in Page 50). The *Athenaeum* used the same phrase in its negative review of Collins's *Basil* in which the critic writes, "the proper office of Art is to elevate and purify" (qtd. in Page 48). In his essay on Milton, Thomas Babington Macaulay praises the work of the poet for its ability "not only to delight but to elevate and purify" (28).
3. For an excellent discussion of *Man and Wife*, see Lisa Surridge, "Unspeakable Histories: Hester Dethridge and the Narration of Domestic Violence in *Man and Wife*" (*Victorian Review* 22.2, Winter 1996: 161–85).
4. I have not consulted first-hand the critical biography by Leone Rives, *Charles Reade: sa vie, ses romans* (Paris: Imprimerie Toulousaine, 1940).

1 Sensation Fiction and the Emergence of the Victorian Literary Field

1. Bachman and Cox do not provide evidence to support their statement on Reade's possible influence on Collins although Peters also makes a similar but qualified statement, "He has sometimes been implicated in the supposed decline of Wilkie Collins's fiction; but it is too simple to suggest that Reade took over from Dickens as Wilkie's mentor" (282). Nicholas Rance writes of Collins that "Charles Reade, gout, and…remarkable quantities of laudanum…have commonly been blamed for the withering away of the novelist" (129). These remarks are curious and misleading, for Reade does not appear to have

influenced Collins. On the contrary, Reade greatly admired Collins's powers of invention, a quality he felt was lacking in his own work. He once wrote, "I lack the true oil of fiction" (qtd. in *Memoir* 198). When Reade was serializing *Put Yourself in His Place* for *Cornhill*, he asked for Collins's advice. Collins wrote a detailed letter that included many suggestions but was generally quite positive. Reade noted on the letter, "I was so fortunate to please him at last" (qtd. in Peters 282).

2. In 1836, the notorious Irish critic William Maginn of *Fraser's Magazine*, who had made his reputation with this kind of vituperative reviewing, found himself challenged to a duel by Grantley Berkeley, the author of a book *Berkeley Castle* (1836) whom he had maligned. Before challenging Maginn, Berkeley assaulted and injured publisher James Fraser with a whip.
3. In a footnote, Collins is careful to note "the distinction between a penny journal and a penny newspaper" (159). The journals, rather than the newspapers, supplied the public with new fiction.
4. The youngest of nine children, Reade was born to a landed but not wealthy family in 1814. His father acted out the role of the typical country squire but his mother exhibited some exceptional qualities. In her early life his mother's intellectual circle included such famous figures as Franz Joseph Haydn, Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and William Wilberforce, but during her married life she converted to an evangelical Low-Church variety of Christianity. She urged Reade to go to Magdalen College at Oxford where she expected him to eventually take orders. Reade inherited his mother's sensitive and intellectual nature as well as, perhaps, her domineering personality, even as he rejected her evangelical Christianity. At the age of seventeen, Reade reluctantly agreed to attend Magdalen and apparently spent a stormy but highly successful time there as an undergraduate. Despite his nonconformism, he passed his examinations with honors, won an essay prize, and found himself, at age twenty-three, with a "demyship," which, upon completion of his studies, entitled him to a lifetime fellowship at Oxford that included a perpetual, if modest, stipend and a suite of rooms. For most of his life, Reade maintained this lucrative part-time job, even though it was a quasi-religious position that mandated celibacy, a regulation that Reade bridled against his whole life.
5. Christie Johnstone is based on Reade's own experience. In the late 1830s, Reade journeyed to Scotland where he met and apparently fell in love with a young woman, invariably described by biographers as a "fishwife" and the model for the title character in Reade's novel *Christie Johnstone*. Reade and his "Christie" apparently worked in a modest herring-fishing enterprise. The unmarried couple conceived a son, Charles Liston. According to Burns, "Reade lived with this girl (whenever his circumstances and Mrs. Reade permitted) from 1838

or 1839 up to the time of her death in 1848, following the birth of her son" (37). J.M.S. Tompkins, in a review of Leone Rives's untranslated critical biography *Charles Reade: sa vie, ses romans* (Paris: Imprimerie Toulousaine, 1940) writes of Reade's "ten-year series of holidays in Scotland" (363). Apparently no record survives of the true nature of his relationship to his common-law wife and son during those years. According to Burns, Reade's domineering mother who had become well aware of her son's wayward lifestyle, compelled him "to treat Christie as a mistress, his son as a godson—as a means of preserving his Fellowship and as the price of retaining her own love and respect" (38).

Although the "godson," Charles Liston, later collaborated on the *Memoir*, a document that purports to be full record of Reade's life, its reticence on the nature of Reade's relationship with his son and the mother of his son is puzzling. Aside from Coleman's anecdotal account, my research into Reade's life and work has turned up little information about the life of Charles Liston from the time of his birth, until the time that Reade formally "adopted" him, apparently in the 1870s. The mother's name is apparently either unknown to or unrevealed by biographers and critics. In *Christie Johnstone*, in which several characters are named Liston, Reade compares favorably the vibrancy of the relatively humble Scottish people who worked in the fishing industry with the affectations of those of the middle and upper classes.

6. There were exceptions to the three-volume rule. One of the most prominent examples is George Eliot's *Silas Marner.* According to Lewis Roberts, in 1861, Mudie placed an order for 3,100 copies of that book ("Trafficking in Literary Authority," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34, 2006: 3).
7. See Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837–1914* (New York: Clarendon Press, Oxford University Press, 1995); Catherine Golden, *Images of the Woman Reader in Victorian British and American Fiction* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2003); Guinevere L. Griest, *Mudie's Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970); and Lewis Roberts, "Trafficking in Literary Authority: Mudie's Select Library and the Commodification of the Victorian Novel" (*Victorian Literature and Culture*, 34, 2006: 1–25).
8. Reade's *Cream*, a one-volume work, consisted of two stories: "Autobiography of a Thief," material cut from *It Is Never Too Late to Mend*; and "Jack of All Trades." Although Mudie claimed that *Cream* was "quite unworthy of Mr. Reade's high reputation, or of a place in any select library" (qtd. in Griest 141), he may have banned this book more because of its format than its content. *Richard Feverel* was Meredith's first novel, and Mudie may have felt comfortable banning it as the work of an unproved author.

9. According to Griest, when Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* was published to obvious popular acclaim, Mudie vied with other circulating libraries "to see which firm would purchase the largest number of copies" (22). Griest also notes that Braddon, who lived until 1915, was one of the few authors to actively resist the demise of the three-volume novel in 1895, so successful had that form been for her (204–07). Braddon enjoyed an unusually cordial relationship with Mudie's and, in 1868 in her periodical *Belgravia*, she published a series of "Mudie Classics" that she dedicated "in compliment to the eponymous chief of the circulating library" (qtd. in Griest, 148).
10. See Schroeder 1988, Nemesvari 2000, Rosenman 2003, Kushnier 2002, D.A. Miller 1988, Nemesvari 2002 (*English Studies in Canada).*
11. This and the following quotation are found in Reade's notebooks. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. CO171, No. 91. All references to the Parrish Collection are published with permission of the Princeton University Library.
12. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. CO171 Box 91.
13. In a letter, probably written some years later, to Wilkie Collins, Reade refers directly to all his various lawsuits on issues from libel to copyright infringement. He regrets not stopping by to see his friend before leaving town because of an illness "brought on I believe by the worry and anxiety of Reade v. this thief, Reade v. that rogue, and Reade v. the other swindler." Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. CO171 Box 21. Published with permission of the Princeton University Library.
14. Although Elwin suggests that Reade's admiration for Dickens "verged on idolatry" (191), problems in their relationship flared up at times. When Reade's *Hard Cash* began its serialization in *All the Year Round*, Dickens felt compelled to try to neutralize some of the attacks on medical professionals but in the end settled for inserting an awkward disclaimer (see Chapter 2).
15. Collins reflections on Forster's 1872 three-volume biography, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, were first printed in the *Pall Mall Gazette* (January 20, 1890, 3) and extensively excerpted in the *New York Times* (February 16, 1890). Reprinted at: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=9B0CE0D6143BE533A25755C1A9649C94619ED7CF>
16. The citation "LL," followed by a volume number and page number, here and throughout, refers to the Charles Reade Collection at the London Library.

17. The phrase "a crime not to be named among Christians" is a fairly explicit reference to sodomy. William Blackstone, in his *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1769), refers to

> the infamous crime against nature committed either with man or beast. A crime which ought to be strictly and impartially proved and then as strictly and impartially punished.... I will not act so disagreeable a part to my readers as well as myself as to dwell any longer upon a subject the very mention of which is a disgrace to human nature. It will be more eligible to imitate in this respect the delicacy of our English law which treats it in its very indictments as a crime not fit to be named; "peccatum illud horribile, inter christianos non nominandum" (that horrible crime not to be named among Christians). (Vol. IV, 215–16)

The comment by the American reviewer sent me back to *A Terrible Temptation* several times in vain efforts to find a reference that could possibly suggest sodomy, after which I can only conclude, with Reade, that some of his critics were indeed "prurient prudes."

18. This quotation and the one that follows were transcribed from documents in the Morris Parrish Collection in the box labeled "Scrapbook of the attorney William D. Booth who represented Charles Reade, Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and other literary lights and theatrical lights in the American law courts, with his clients' original autograph letters." The scrapbook consists of a copy of *Griffith Gaunt* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co. 1869) with letters from Reade pasted in the front pages and back pages. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists. Morris L. Parrish Collection. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. CO171, No. 91. Published with permission of the Princeton University Library.
19. Reade's ideas on copyright can be found in *The Eighth Commandment* and in "The Rights and Wrongs of Authors" in *Readiana*.
20. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. CO171 Box 21. Published with permission of the Princeton University Library.
21. Although Reade and Eliot wrote unflattering comments about each other, they actually met socially from time to time. Elwin describes Reade's feeling for Eliot as "one of respect for having the courage to live with Lewes as his mistress" (266). Elwin also recounts a visit to Reade at Magdalen in 1873 by Eliot and Benjamin Jowett. Several critics in periodicals, including *Once a Week*, described Eliot's *Romola* as an imitation of Reade's *The Cloister and the Hearth*. Posterity has been much kinder to Eliot than to Reade, in part for reasons explained by Poovey who places responsibility for canon-formation on "critics [who]

gradually distinguished their work from journalism [and] gained a home and a function in American and British universities" (448–49). Poovey's argument suggests that criticism from the nineteenth century still exerts a powerful influence over the literary canon.

2 Saying "No" to Power: *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* and *Hard Cash*

1. Halperin quotes from *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Troubadori.* Trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext(e), 1991): 37–39.
2. See also Foucault's 1975–76 lectures at the College de France in *Society Must Be Defended*, Ed. Mauro Bertani and Alessandro Fontana. Trans. Françoise Ewald and Alessandro Fontana (New York: Picador, 2003).
3. One need only consider events sponsored by the U.S. government since September 11, 2001, such as the Patriot Act, legalized torture, wiretapping, Guantanamo, and secret prisons in Europe, most of which are still in operation as of this writing.
4. Miller remarks that "the most notable reticence in Foucault's work concerns precisely the reading of literary texts and literary institutions, which though often and suggestively cited in passing, are never given a role to play within the disciplinary processes under consideration" (viii, n.1). Carla Freccero suggests a reason for this: "Foucault may not have used much fiction, because it could not be easily generalized into the theoretico-historical sweep of the argument" (42).
5. Bourdieu's critique of Foucault's methodology is briefly stated in "Flaubert's Point of View." He refers specifically to "Réponse au cercle d'epistémologie" (*Cahiers pour l'analyse* 9, Summer 1968: 9–40):

> Michel Foucault undoubtedly made the most rigorous formulation of the bases of structuralist analysis of cultural works. Retaining from Saussure the primacy accorded relationships and well aware that no work exists by itself, that is, outside the relationships of interdependence that connect it to other works, Foucault proposed the term "field of strategic possibilities" for the "system of regulated differences and dispersions" within which each particular work is defined. But, close to the use that semiologists make of a notion like semantic field, he explicitly refused to seek elsewhere than in the field of discourse the explanatory principle of each discourse in the field. Faithful to the Saussurian tradition and to its division between internal and external linguistics, Foucault affirmed the absolute autonomy of this "field of strategic possibilities," of this episteme. He dismissed as "a doxological illusion" (why not just say sociological?) the claim to discover what he calls

"the polemical field" and in "the divergence of interests or mental habits of individuals" (which is to say, everything that I was covering at about the same time with the ideas of field and habitus) the explanatory principle for everything that takes place in "the field of strategic possibilities," the only reality with which, according to him, a scientific approach to works has to contend. (542–43)

6. Going further than his two now-canonical works, in *No Name* (1862) Collins presents a similarly nontraditional narrative as he constructs the novel to emulate a theatrical production with "scenes," instead of "books," chapters within the scenes, and intervals "between the scenes" (Collins had previously tampered with convention by referring to the volumes in *The Woman in White* as "epochs," as Harrison Ainsworth had done in *Jack Sheppard*). And although *No Name* is unified by a general narrator, this unity is consistently interrupted by long letters and statements from the characters that undermine the authority of the omniscient voice. Magdalen, the heroine of *No Name*, is a consummate actress who consistently changes her identity and enlists the aid of a professional conman to deceive family and friends in an effort to reverse and avenge the injuries done to her by "the Sense of Propriety" (228). Moreover, in *Armadale* (1866) Collins gives half of the narrative over to his sympathetically portrayed villainess, Lydia Gwilt. Collins's novels encourage reader sympathy for these wayward women and consistently question the moral universe in which they live. In their fragmented narrative structure and in their implicit lack of faith in a moral center, Collins's novels point ahead to the experimentation of many modernist works.
7. In an interview well after the publication of *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes his work as an attempt to avoid such a totalizing system: "I am attempting, to the contrary, apart from any *totalization*—which would be at once *abstract* and *limiting*—to open up problems that are as *concrete* and *general* as possible, problems that approach politics from behind and cut across societies on the diagonal" ("Politics and Ethics," 375–76). As examples of concrete and general problems, Foucault includes "the relation between sanity and insanity; the question[s] of illness, of crime, of sexuality," themes often addressed in sensation novels. Foucault adds that "it has been necessary to try to raise [these issues] both as present-day questions and as historical ones, as moral, epistemological, and political problems" (376). Miller bases his argument, not on Foucault the activist but primarily on the Foucault of *Discipline and Punish*, which represents what I have called a "theoretically pure" approach that ignores some contemporary realities. Miller takes these theoretical tools and employs them in a totalizing theory—"abstract and limiting"—in the analysis of an entire field of literary expression.

8. Le Fanu's novella presents a particularly vivid example of the way the apparent intentions of an author can run directly counter to the implications of his work. Le Fanu was an Anglo-Irish reactionary who, more than most authors, upheld the tangible trappings of power of Victorian society. He supported the British colonial presence in Ireland and promoted other conservative views through his proprietorship of several Protestant newspapers in Dublin. Yet Le Fanu's fiction reveals little of his political views or his professed moral values. We can read the ending of his famous novella—with the decapitation of the lesbian vampire Carmilla—as his overt expression of disapproval of challenges to patriarchal heteronormativity. Yet along the way, "Carmilla" presents aggressive lesbian desire as exciting, attractive, and titillating. Readers coming to the end of the story are unlikely to forget the ravenous and insatiable sexual appetite that Carmilla embodies in the text. Nineteenth-century readers who reached the conclusion of such a novel (and many others) must have been intrigued by the considerable and often highly unruly actions of the women and felt that experience of sympathy or identification cannot be nullified by a seemingly unambiguous lesson in morals or civics. Rather, the representation of transgressive behaviors or challenging characters produces an effect that cannot be entirely erased by the punishment of such improper actions.

   Collins presents conscious opposition to the tyranny of propriety. In *No Name*, Magdalen, states, "I have lived long enough in this world to know that the Sense of Propriety, in nine Englishwomen out of ten, makes no allowances and feels no pity" (228). Magdalen has been scorned by society and robbed of her inheritance when it is revealed that her parents were not married. As she tries to regain her fortune, she uses deception to overcome the formidable obstacles placed in her path, and she succeeds through trickery in marrying the man she hates the most, the man who is the beneficiary of her purloined inheritance. After she has achieved her goal, Magdalen triumphantly states, "I am no longer the poor outcast girl, the vagabond public performer, whom you once hunted after. I have done what I told you I would do—I have made the general sense of propriety my accomplice this time" (436). In *No Name*, Magdalen inhabits a variety of identities to pursue her legally questionable but morally just purposes, and she represents, perhaps, Collins's most profound indictment of the Victorian sense of propriety. Still, even in *No Name*, Collins resorts to an improbable and conventional ending as Magdalen, after her temporary triumph, is brought to the brink of ruin only to be saved by her sister Norah who, after stoically suffering disgrace, ends the novel by fulfilling the requirements of the domestic marriage plot.
9. Discussing endings in Victorian novels, Joseph Allen Boone notes how critics have come to view them as either "closed" or "open," and

that the former usually applies to those works that conclude with a successful marriage and generally uphold cultural norms. And although most critics view the "open-ended" novel as an innovation of modernism, Boone contends that novels such as *Daniel Deronda* (1876) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) are similarly open in that they do not conclude with a traditional resolution of the marriage plot (146–47). He sees such works as part of a "countertradition" to typical narratives of heterosexual love. Boone concedes that some critics (including Miller in an earlier work) have pointed out that "the repressed 'discontents' of *any* narrative ultimately violate its sense of finality" (original emphasis 146), but he nevertheless finds that a "closed" ending generally works to restore order. However, some novelists, such as Collins, seem "artificially" to force this closure, as if trying to shut a Pandora's box of transgressions against cultural norms that the novels have unleashed. Boone notes that the adoption of more "open-ended" narratives in the "modernist breakthrough . . . was the result of many converging forces, [and that] of these, the revolt against marriage themes had an impact" (147). In many sensation novels—such as *The Woman in White, No Name, Lady Audley's Secret, Aurora Floyd, Griffith Gaunt*, and *A Terrible Temptation*—marriage figures as a weapon for gain, for revenge, or for other motives, or as a travesty. In this sense of the distrust of the institution of marriage, a line can be drawn from the sensation novel to the works of late Victorians such as Gissing and Hardy, straight through to the modernists.

10. Walter and Laura share a house with Marian Halcombe while Walter plots the downfall of Count Fosco. At one point, he feels it necessary to marry Laura ostensibly to protect her. There is very little attention devoted to the actual wedding of Walter and Laura. Walter, as narrator, simply states, "Ten days later we were happier still. We were married" (581). The text gives no explanation whatsoever of how Walter could legally marry Laura, who at this time was presumed dead by society. One explanation may be that when Walter says, "We were married," he is telling the reader that he and Laura had consummated their relationship and were now living together as man and wife. In light of Collins's own irregular living situation with Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd, this seems plausible.
11. Despite his reading of *The Woman in White* as complicit with disciplinary power, Miller offers an otherwise compelling analysis of the novel in which he presents perceptive insights into Collins's manipulations of contemporary gender constructions. Particularly insightful are his comments on "homosexual panic" and the general displacement or misrecognition of sexual desire in several of the novel's characters. Miller suggests that "nervousness," traditionally recognized as a feminine characteristic, spreads to all of the novel's major characters "who are variously startled, affrighted, unsettled, chilled, agitated,

flurried" (149). Suggesting that "the novel makes nervousness a metonymy for reading," Miller finds that "every reader is consequently implied to be a version or extension of the Woman in White, a fact that entails particularly interesting consequences when the reader is—as the text explicitly assumes—male" (151, 153). Miller concedes Collins's skill in achieving an uncertain gendered response in the reader. He refers to the famous remark by Karl Ulrichs, the nineteenth-century German advocate of homosexual rights, who spoke, in a phrase he is credited with originating, of "a woman's soul trapped in a man's body."

Ulrichs's comment suggests to Miller three related phenomena: "(1) a particular fantasy about male homosexuality; (2) a homophobic defense against that fantasy; and (3) the male oppression of women that...extends that defense" (155). However, from this illuminating discussion, Miller concludes that by confusing the gender identification of its readers, the novel is ultimately concerned with "enclosing and secluding the woman in male 'bodies,' among them institutions like marriage and madhouses" (155–56). Miller adds that the novel is concerned not just with policing "women, who need to be put away in safe places or asylums, but men as well, who must monitor and master what is fantasized as the 'woman inside' them" (156). Miller strains to identify "male bodies" with institutions such as madhouses to permit the text to fit into his overarching theory of the novel. As Donald E. Hall remarks, "Miller is not convincing when he claims that women are effectively 'contained' in *The Woman in White*," and he argues that "Marian remains strong and subversive" at the novel's end (164). Although Miller is correct to find that *The Woman in White* raises anxieties in the male reader about the potential "woman inside" him, the very banality of the novel's ending does little to allay this uneasiness.

The diffuse narrative voices of Collins's novel scarcely authorize placing women in madhouses, for the confinements of both the title character and the heroine are presented as grossly unjust. And except for the admittedly banal ending, the novel portrays marriage as a trap for women. Aside from his conclusion on these points, Miller's analysis here is compelling. Nearly all his comments about "nerves" and gender have a resonance that enhances our reading of *The Woman in White*. In an essay on the same novel, Richard Nemesvari relies to some degree on Miller's work. And although he too suggests that the novel attempts to contain the forces it had released and explored, his conclusion is much more tentative. Nemesvari writes of Collins's novel that "in its nervous acknowledgement of secrets that cannot be fully named, it reveals what it is trying to hide and foreshadows the collapse of the authority that it is struggling so hard to create" (2002: 626). Miller contends, on the contrary, that the novel succeeds in creating or bolstering that authority. In her study of affect in the sensation novel *Mixed Feelings* (1992), Ann Cvetkovich comments on the

"impossibility of separating the mechanisms of subversion and recuperation or designating a particular text as intrinsically liberatory or reactionary" (55). The readings of Miller and Nemesvari highlight this difficulty in *The Woman in White*: Both find the novel eager to uphold contemporary values but they take different views of the success of the novel's supposed project. Yet Nemesvari's analysis identifies some of the contradictions that make this novel in particular and sensation fiction in general so compelling. Written for a predominantly middle-class audience, this novel, after taking its readers into a dark world of madness, crime, and deception, concludes with improbable banalities that can hardly restore order.

12. Baldridge also acknowledges Nancy Armstrong's *Desire and Domestic Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), Leonard J. Davis's *Resisting Novels* (New York: Methuen, 1987), and John Stratton's *The Virgin Text* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987).
13. In the novel, after the dismissal of Warden Hawes, Mr. Eden has the crank examined and finds that "the value of their resistance stated on their lying faces was scarce one-third of their actual resistance" (197). In a footnote, Reade explains, "Men for two years had been punished as refractory for not making all day two thousand revolutions per hour of a 15 lb. crank, when all the while it was a 45 lb. crank they had been vainly struggling against all day. The proportions of this gory lie never varied. Each crank tasked the Sisyphus three times what it professed to do. It was calculated that four prisoners, on an average crank marked 10 lb., had to exert an aggregate of force equal to one horse; and this exertion was prolonged, day after day, far beyond a horse's power of endurance" (197).
14. Invented in 1818, the treadmill, sometimes called treadwheel, was a large device on which groups of prisoners, placed side by side, were forced to tread on steps or "paddles," thereby powering a machine similar to those used industrially (which employed the labor of horses or oxen rather than humans) to pump water or to grind corn. However, in prisons the treadmill was a punishment device and nothing was produced by the power generated by the prisoners. A huge wheel turns by the power generated by the prisoners and if a convict could not keep pace, he or she would fall off the device. In 1838, vertical separators were installed on treadmills to enforce an inmate's isolation from his neighbors on either side. The treadmill was still in use in England late in the century and Oscar Wilde's *Ballad of Reading Gaol* refers to it:

> We banged the tins, and bawled the hymns
> And sweated on the mill,
> But in the heart of every man
> Terror was lying still. (124)

The shot-drill was a commonly practiced exercise in prison in which an inmate was compelled to carry a cannonball from one location to another, and then carry it back again to its original location. Or alternately, it was an exercise in which prisoners passed, from one to another, a cannonball down a line. Reade does not refer to this punishment in *Never Too Late to Mend.*

15. Reade argued against the death penalty in specific cases. It is unclear whether he opposed capital punishment in principle. See "Protest against the Murder at Lewes Gaol" (347) and "Hang in Haste, Repent at Leisure" (329–42) in *Readiana.*
16. In "Our Dark Places," Reade writes, "A relative has only to buy two doctors . . . and he can clap in a madhouse any rich old fellow that is spending his money absurdly on himself instead of keeping it like a wise man for his heirs; or he can lock up any eccentric, bodily-afflicted, troublesome, account-sifting young fellow" (*Readiana* 395–96).
17. Jenny Bourne Taylor cites the case of Eliza Nottridge, a "wealthy and eccentric spinster, who insisted on living in a millennial community, the 'Abode of Love.'" This institution is the subject of the 1956 novel by Aubrey Menon, entitled *The Abode of Love: The conception, financing, and daily routine of an English harem in the middle of the 19th century described in the form of a novel*, as well as a recently published "memoir" *Abode of Love: Growing Up in a Messianic Cult* (2007) by Kate Barlow, the granddaughter of a cult member. Taylor implies that Eliza Nottridge was a harmless eccentric but that Conolly, in the pay of her relatives, testified that she was "imbecilic, visionary, and fanatical" and should be confined to an asylum (qtd. in Taylor 40). Taylor notes how this contradicts Conolly's earlier judgment that "no lunatic should be confined unless dangerous to himself or others" (qtd. 40).
18. Lillian Nayder believes that by the time of the separation, Catherine needed very little convincing because of Dickens's cruel treatment of her (Private correspondence. August 14, 2005). Nayder is at work on a biography of Catherine Hogarth Dickens.

3 Sex and Sexuality, Gender and Transgender

1. As a case in point, Taylor suggests that "the seventy-five men executed for sodomy in Holland between 1730 and 1732 would probably not share [Foucault's] indifference to the reality of sexual repression" (99). As late as 1836 in *Sketches by Boz*, Dickens recounts a visit to Newgate Prison where he observed "three men, the nature of whose offence rendered it necessary to separate them from their companions in guilt," an oblique reference to their convictions for buggery (202). Dickens notes that "the fate of one of these prisoners is uncertain, some mitigatory circumstances having come to light since his

trial" (202). As for the two others, the turnkey tells Dickens that they "are dead men" (202). Undoubtedly Dickens had visited John Smith and James Pratt, convicted sodomites who were hanged at Newgate in 1835. It is uncertain whether these were the last executions in England for the crime of buggery, but even if the case of Smith and Pratt is unusual, it supports, to some degree, Taylor's point that sexual repression was very much alive at the beginning of the Victorian era. Sodomy was also a capital crime during the early modern era, a generally far less repressive period. Severe legal sanctions against sexual "crimes," although seldom invoked, often remained on the books even in sexually permissive societies. Only in 2003, did the Supreme Court strike down antisodomy laws in the United States.

2. Levy discusses Henry Mayhew's *London Labour and the London Poor* (1861) and early nineteenth-century texts by Stonestreet (see Levy, 28). Although Mayhew's text is often sympathetic to the working class, it was used to justify new legal codes.
3. Ironically, although the 1885 law was designed to be used primarily against the lower classes, its most celebrated victim was the upper-class Oscar Wilde in 1895.
4. Of the class nature of the emergence of sexuality, Foucault writes, "The primary concern was not repression of the sex of the classes to be exploited, but rather the body, vigor, longevity, progeniture, and descent of the classes that 'ruled.' This was the purpose for which the deployment of sexuality was first established, as a new distribution of pleasures, discourses, truths, and powers; it has to be seen as the self-affirmation of one class rather than the enslavement of another: a defense, a protection, a strengthening—at the cost of different transformations—as a means of social control and political subjection" (HS 123).
5. Circumcision came to be widely practiced, ostensibly for reasons of health, in the mid-nineteenth century. See Robert Darby on the history of male circumcision in Europe and America (737–57). See also Ornella Moscucci's study of male and female circumcision in the Victorian era (60–78). It is significant that, in contrast to today's customs in parts of Africa where it is practiced primarily among the poor, female circumcision (including clitorectomy), although never widely employed in England and the United States, was generally imposed on girls from middle- and upper-class families who, according to their parents and doctors, showed too much interest in their genitals. Foucault notes that, "at the end of the nineteenth century, at any rate, great surgical operations are performed on girls, veritable tortures: cauterization of the clitoris with red hot irons was, if not habitual, at least fairly frequent at that time" (P/K 217). Intersex activist Cheryl Chase points out that the practice persisted in the United States, at least in cases of children with "ambiguous genitalia," until it was

banned in 1996. Chase notes that "now they call it 'clitoral reduction' or 'clitoral recession' or 'clitoroplasty' because the word 'clitorectomy' has come to be equated with barbarism, child abuse, and mutilation" (Hegarty and Chase 76). Chase adds that "the distinction between African 'clitorectomy' and Western 'clitoroplasty' is purely political" (76).

6. In Chapters 38 and 39 of *A Terrible Temptation*, two seven-year-old cousins, a boy and a girl named Compton and Ruperta, develop something very close to a love affair. The boy's mother Lady Bassett is indulgent of their friendship but the text relates, "Whether she would have remained as neutral, had she known how far these young things were going, is quite another matter; but Compton's interviews to her were, naturally enough, very tame compared to the reality, and she never dreamed that two seven-year-olds could form an attachment so warm as these little plagues were doing" (174).
7. Judith Walkowitz discusses how women fought the acts with "lurid tales of 'instrumental rape'" and how at "public meetings repeal spokesmen would display the vaginal speculum and explain its use to a horrified audience" (109). She quotes a woman who refers to "these monstrous instruments" and how the medical men "tear the passage open first with their hands, and examine us, and then they thrust in instruments, and they pull them out and push them in, and they turn and twist them about; and if you cry out they stifle you" (qted. 109).
8. Kahn's *Psychopathia Sexualis* is not to be confused with Krafft-Ebing's more well-known work of the same name published in 1886.
9. Leopold von Sacher-Masoch was outraged that Krafft-Ebing used his name to label a sexual perversion. Krafft-Ebing defended himself in this way: "I refute the accusation that I have coupled the name of a revered author with a perversion of the sexual instinct, which has been made against me by some admirers of the author and by some critics of my book. As a man Sacher-Masoch cannot lose anything in the estimation of his cultured fellow-beings simply because he was afflicted with an anomaly of his sexual feelings" (160). Krafft-Ebing's remark is disingenuous because he must have known that Sacher-Masoch would certainly lose the estimation of many of "his cultured fellow-beings" by being branded a pervert. We need only look at what happened to Wilde a decade later.
10. Sutherland probably bases this assessment of Reade on some of the more unusual clippings in the notebooks.
11. This excerpt is problematical for several reasons because Thompson essentially misquotes Besant in addition to supplying the incorrect page number. She does not indicate that the first sentence is a paraphrase of two sentences in Besant's article (211), and she (or her editor) neglects to place an ellipsis between the first and second sentences,

and within the third sentence. The third sentence that Thompson quotes—without using ellipses—is a radically condensed version of a long sentence by Besant. Thompson quotes him: "What he loves most is the true, genuine woman with her perfect abnegation of self." What Besant wrote is that "what he loves most is the woman whom fashion has not spoiled; the true, genuine woman, with her natural passion, her jealousy, her devotion, her love of admiration, her fidelity, her righteous wrath, her maternal ferocity, her narrow faith, her shrewdness, even her audacity of falsehood when that can serve her purpose, and her perfect abnegation of self" (211–12). These unacknowledged omissions fundamentally alter Besant's meaning. Among the comments by Besant that are left out are the following: "She is exactly like man, like ourselves but with womanly qualities. Like ourselves, she ardently desires love" (211); the following completes the sentence of which Thompson provides only the first few words: "She is always in the house and therefore her mind runs in narrow grooves" (211). Besant may have written this passage to expand on a comment he made earlier in the same essay: "It is a great injury, for instance, what we have done to women in withholding from them the liberal education" (200). In that, Besant agrees with Reade's sentiments expressed throughout his work.

I have spent some time discussing Thompson's misreading of Reade because hers is one of the few critical analyses of this neglected author in recent years. Work by Ann Grigsby, Mary Poovey, and others is discussed elsewhere in this text.

12. Elwin also quotes "a letter addressed to Reade from the members of the Women's Medical College of the New York Infirmary, expressing their pleasure that 'your keen-pointed pen has been used so effectively on behalf of our English sisters, and so on behalf of all women'" (312).
13. It is reasonable to assume that Reade's natural son, Charles Liston Reade, still living in 1911, arranged for the publication of "Androgynism" in *The English Review.* Although he was Reade's heir, because he was illegitimate he was subjected to greater inheritance taxation than a child born in wedlock would have been. Several of his letters to his lawyers complain of this situation, and he may have sold the rights to the story to raise money.
14. The quotations in this clipping from Reade's notebooks, and the two that follow in this paragraph, are from a column called "The Weeklies" (perhaps in the *London Times*, July 15, 1860) that includes brief summaries of articles in regional newspapers. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. CO171, No. 99, p. 16. Published with permission of the Princeton University Library.

15. Traub refers to an "ideology of chastity" in early modern England. And although this ideology evolved, many of its elements hold true for the Victorian era as well.
16. Of tribadism, Traub writes that, "despite the rhetorical focus on penetration, [the discourse on the tribade] actually fail[s] to distinguish carefully between specific sexual acts: vaginal or anal penetration, rubbing of clitoris on thigh or pudendum, and autoerotic or partnered masturbation" (194–95). Regarding a sexual supplement, Terry Castle identifies a dildo in Fielding's *The Female Husband* (1746) in a reference to an item of a "vile, wicked, and scandalous a nature" found in the protagonist's trunk (610).
17. Reade's brief and hollow condemnation of this "monstrous perversity" is similar to Henry Fielding's rote condemnation of "unnatural lust" in *The Female Husband.*
18. Judith Walkowitz writes that "a strong female subculture was a distinguishing feature of nineteenth-century prostitution" (25–26) and that "prostitutes were well-known to aid each other in times of distress, to 'club together' to pay for a proper funeral or to raise money for bail or a doctor's fees" (27).
19. Halberstam's comment that "it really does indeed matter" is relevant also to Reade's relationship with Laura Seymour. Does it matter whether or not they had a sexual relationship? I believe it does because such knowledge would point to Reade's intimacy with female sexuality—a fact that would add validity to his sympathy and estimation of women.
20. As noted below, Reade never met Wilde. But it may be significant that Reade's close friend and eulogist Robert Buchanan was one of the few public figures who defended Wilde both before and after his conviction. In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* of April 16, 1895, Buchanan wrote, "Is it not high time that a little charity, Christian or anti-Christian, were imported into this land of Christian shibboleths and formulas? Most sane men listen on in silence while Press and public condemn to eternal punishment and obloquy a supposed criminal who is not yet tried or proved guilty.... I for one wish to put on record my protest against the cowardice and cruelty of Englishmen towards one who was, until recently, recognised as a legitimate contributor to our amusement, and who is, when all is said and done, a scholar and a man of letters." Qtd. in Michael Foldy, *The Trials of Oscar Wilde* (Yale University Press, 1997): 60. reprinted on the internet at: <http://mysite.wanadoo-members.co.uk/robertbuchanan/html/wilde.html>
21. According to John Lockhart, Walter Scott's *Guy Mannering* (1815) and Tobias Smollet's *Peregrine Pickle* (1751) included incidents on the case of James Annesley who claimed to be heir to the estate of the Earle of Annesley in Ireland in 1743 (*Memoirs of the Life of Sir Walter*

Scott. Bart.: A New Edition, Vol. IV. Boston: Ticknor and Field. 1861: 211). The Tichborne case has been covered by many. The University of Texas Tarlton Law Library presents a in-depth description of the case from *Famous Trials of the Century* by J.B. Atlay, M.A. (London: Grant Richards, 1899) reprinted at < http://tarlton.law.utexas.edu/lpop/etext/atlay/tichborne.htm>

22. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. CO171, No. 99, p. 10. Published with permission of the Princeton University Library.
23. See Jex-Blake's account of the incident, reprinted by Helena Wojtczak on the website, *Notable Women of Victorian Hastings*, <http://www.hastingspress.co.uk/history/19/sjbspeech.htm>
24. Hall notes that Josephine Butler, a Victorian feminist, "decried the forced medical examination of prostitutes as a form of legally-sanctioned sexual assault" (192).
25. See Finkelstein, "A Woman Hater and Women Healers: John Blackwood, Charles Reade, and the Victorian Women's Medical Movement"; see also Hill, "Examining Women: Charles Reade's *A Woman Hater*, Lesbian Contagion, and the Debate on Medical Education for Women."
26. Jex-Blake, Finkelstein 342.
27. This and the following quotation are from a posting by Jen Hill, Victoria listserv, June 4, 2003.
28. Reade favored extremely baggy pants for his own dress. Ellen Terry refers to "his loose trousers, each one a yard wide at least" (55).
29. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. CO171, No. 99, p. 11. Published with permission of the Princeton University Library.
30. In the late 1840s, Reade spent many evenings at the Garrick Club where he noted a picture on the wall of a celebrated eighteenth-century actress and wrote, "I am in love with Peg Woffington," whose life he later fictionalized in a play and a novel (qtd. in *Memoir* 194). Throughout his life, Reade continued to be fascinated by actresses. In 1846, he met the popular actress Fanny Stirling who introduced him to Tom Taylor, one of the leading playwrights of the day. Like Reade, Taylor had an academic background and had been a scholar at Cambridge. Also, like Reade, he rejected many of the trappings of contemporary academia, in particular the piety. Taylor and Reade succeeded in cowriting *Masks and Faces* (1852), a tribute to Peg Woffington. The play was conceived by Reade but was polished by the more experienced Taylor. The process of composing the play proved painstaking as Taylor had to continually tear up much of Reade's excessively wordy dialog. The play, starring Fanny Stirling in the title role, became one of the hits of the season

of 1852–1853 at the Haymarket Theatre. Reade developed a serious passion for the actress and sought to collaborate with her in theatrical ventures, and perhaps much more. The incipient affair was thwarted by the intervention of Reade's mother when she surprised the couple in person, driving Mrs. Stirling away (see Coleman 89). It must have been humiliating for Reade, at the age of 37, to see his mother intervene again in his personal life as she had in her refusal to accept Christie Liston as his wife. Around this time, Reade suffered his breakdown(s) and retired from London to spend time at sanitariums in Malvern and Durham. When he recovered, he returned to the theater in London where he embarked on his second significant romantic relationship: again, the object of his affections was an actress.

31. For Ellen Terry's account of Reade, see her autobiography, *The Story of My Life*

32. Laura Seymour, who had acted in one of Reade's earlier, unsuccessful plays, is described in the *Memoir* as "a brave and benevolent woman" with "brains" who was "well-looking off the stage" and "knew every one who was any one in the land of Bohemia" (179–80). She provided Reade with valuable advice on both his plays and novels, proving to be a supportive companion throughout the rest of his life. As the *Memoir* notes, "She was his literary and dramatic partner, and with her he discussed his plots, situations, and characters. To her criticism he submitted his dialog. She possessed the faculty of perceiving at a glance how the lines would play and how each chapter would read" (242). In addition, she administered their household and served as host at the couple's many private functions attended primarily by theatrical people. Despite all these shared projects and activities, many still believe that Seymour served merely as Reade's close friend and housekeeper for the rest of her life, and that the couple did not have a physical relationship.

    At the time of the success of *It Is Never Too Late to Mend* (1856), Reade's first major novel, Seymour was married to a man who had run up considerable debts. To assist her, Reade moved into what the *Memoir* describes as "a spacious mansion in Bolton Row" in London and, in "an eccentric arrangement," provided a home for Seymour and her debt-ridden husband who was lodged in "a suitable retreat below stairs," a phrase that suggests a servant's quarters (234). In addition to Mrs. Seymour and her husband, Reade housed two boarders inherited from Seymour's former home (234). When Seymour's husband and one of the lodgers died, and the other moved on, she and Reade continued to live together. They lived in Bolton Row until 1869 when they moved to Knightsbridge where they both resided until their deaths. Seymour died in 1879.

    Heartbroken at her death, Reade finally surrendered to the call of religion, falling in his last years under the influence of a puritanical

clergyman, the Rev. Charles Graham, although he bridled at times under this man's teachings, according to which, Reade had lived a life of sin. Graham unsuccessfully urged Reade to give up his passion for the theater. Graham later wrote, "he said to me, 'I have now cut off the right hand and cast it from me: I am done with the theatre.' But here it is only right to say that in the meshes of that evil net he allowed himself to be again entangled" (qtd. in Elwin 355). Elwin notes that "religious scruples rapidly evaporated" when the theater called, and that Reade embarked on a last theatrical venture in 1882 (355). With our knowledge that Reade revised "Androgynism," the sexually ambiguous story, in 1883, we can question the ultimate sincerity of his devotion to a rigid Victorian Christianity. He lingered on for several years after the death of Seymour and died in 1884.

Many of the published obituaries refer to Reade's attachment to Seymour and his decline after her death. Tellingly, these obituaries do not mention her name or, in some cases, even refer to the nature of their relationship. The *Times*, for example, wrote that "about six years ago a heavy sorrow fell upon Mr. Reade, and the light of his life seemed to be extinguished" (LL8, April 12, 1884, 6). The *World* reported in its obituary that "some half a dozen years since, Charles Reade's life was saddened by a great loss" (LL8, April 16, 1884, 20). The *Graphic* referred to "the effects of a severe domestic bereavement" (LL8, April 19, 1884, 22). If Reade and Seymour had been married, the published accounts would certainly have mentioned her name, but because of Victorian notions of propriety the periodicals resorted to euphemisms.

Part of the epitaph on Seymour's tomb reads,

> Here lies the great heart of Laura Seymour, a brilliant artist, a humble Christian, a charitable woman, a loving daughter, sister, and friend, who lived for others from her childhood. . . . When the eye saw her it blessed her, for her face was sunshine, her voice was melody, and her heart was sympathy. . . . This grave was made for her and for himself by Charles Reade, whose wise councillor, loyal ally, and bosom friend she was for 24 years; and who mourns her all his days. (LL8 *Evening Standard*, April 15, 1884, n.p.)

Reade's biographers, Compton Reade, John Coleman, and Malcom Elwin, unanimously dismiss the idea that his relationship with Laura Seymour was anything but platonic, insisting that they were never lovers, and that they lived for a quarter-century together as master and housekeeper. In an article for *Harper's* published just after the author's death in 1884, Robert Buchanan writes, incredibly, that Reade "lived and died a bachelor" and that his relationship with Seymour, "from first to last, was one of pure and sacred friendship" (602). The *Memoir*, always eager to present its subject as an upright

Christian gentleman, asserts that Reade "would have punished the man who dared to insinuate that Mrs. Seymour was his mistress" (183). In a review in the *Atlantic Monthly*, E.H. House rightly criticizes the *Memoir* for presenting Reade as "endowed with more than mortal properties…unexampled in nobleness, purity, and moral majesty" (145). Yet House too insists that Reade and Seymour lived together chastely and faults Reade for not marrying her to preserve the reputation of their eccentric relationship and to "save her from cruel scandal," even though "there was no passionate attachment on either side" (153). To modern readers this belief strains credibility.

We know that Reade did not take seriously the vow of celibacy mandated by his position at Oxford, because we have the evidence of his common-law marriage to Christie Liston in the 1830s and the 1840s. Tompkins convincingly writes that "it does not seem that this resentful victim of a celibacy enforced by the conditions of his Fellowship at Magdalen was ever long without a stable and domestic, even though imperfectly sanctioned, union with a woman" (363). Even if we know little about the identity of Christie Liston, we have the very tangible physical evidence of Charles Liston, whom Reade himself acknowledged as his son late in his life. We know that both Reade and Seymour were denizens of a Bohemian theatrical milieu not known for conforming to conventional notions of morality. Yet, Compton Reade feels compelled to insist on a nonsexual relationship because "if Charles Reade's partnership with a practical woman of the world was of the nature of a morganatic marriage, their lives would have been a brazen fraud" (183). Reading this statement, we must remember that Compton Reade was a Victorian clergyman related by blood to his subject, and that he collaborated on the *Memoir* with Reade's son. He had a vested interest in presenting his famous relative to the world in a whitewashed condition. His denials are either disingenuous or hypocritical or both.

Perhaps more surprisingly, Elwin in his 1931 biography, although considering it "unlikely" that Reade and Seymour had a carnal relationship, states that

> if we remember Reade's reputation as an eccentric and a Bohemian, it would be wonderful if he contrived to live openly with a mistress for twenty-five years in the heart of the Victorian era, without such a clamour of scandal that its reverberations must have resounded in the ears of the next generation. (94)

With this remark Elwin too dismisses the idea. Yet, one need only look at the relationships of George Eliot and George Henry Lewes; Wilkie Collins and Martha Rudd (*and* Caroline Graves); Mary Elizabeth Braddon and John Maxwell; or even Charles Dickens and Ellen Ternan, or to consider the irregularities in the relationships of

Dante G. Rossetti, John Ruskin, and William and Jane Morris, to realize that some artists did "brazenly" defy the standards of the era. In her biography of Collins, Catherine Peters notes that Eliot, Collins, and Reade were not welcome in polite company, such as parties given by publisher George Smith, unless they left their companions at home. Peters asserts that "Reade and Eliot insisted on having their partners recognized" and that Collins had no problem with that condition (281). Burns is nearly alone when he writes, "That Reade lived platonically with Mrs. Seymour seems altogether unlikely," but he adds that such an arrangement was "by no means impossible" (321). According to Tompkins, Leone Rives (Reade's French biographer) "reasonably refuses to regard as Platonic" the relationship of Reade and Seymour (364). But in general, scholars who have studied Reade's life and work either deny or skirt the possibility that Reade and Seymour were lovers. Yet it seems inconceivable that they were not.

33. In *De Profundis*, Wilde refers to his relationship with Lord Alfred Douglas ("Bosie") as "our ancient affection" (3).
34. Reade and Oscar Wilde apparently never met but one day they nearly encountered each other. Coleman reports the following:

> During the unfortunate Oscar Wilde's "green carnation-and-sunflower" period, Reade remarked:
>
> "Ah! That airy young gentleman is a *poseur*, there's no mistake about that; but he's a deuced sight cleverer than they think. A fellah doesn't take a double-first at Oxford for nothing; besides he has written some noble lines. Then he knows a lot about painting. I saw him, one morning at the Academy, spot, with unerring accuracy, every picture worth looking at. It's true there were not a great many; but such as they were he spotted 'em."
>
> (At, or about this time, happening to meet this hapless genius at a garden-party at Miss Braddon's, I mentioned incidentally what Reade had said.)
>
> "Bai Jove!" exclaimed the creator of the Green Carnation, "I'm delighted. I saw the old lion that day at the show, and longed to introduce myself; but he looked so austere and unapproachable that, with all my cheek, I dared not. Tell him so, and say, had I only known what he said to you, I should have been the proudest 'fella' in the Academy that day!" (266)

4 Sensational Paradigms: Reade's *Griffith Gaunt* and Braddon's *Aurora Floyd*

1. See Felber's "The Literary Portrait as Centerfold: Fetishism in Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*," *Victorian Literature and Culture*, Vol. 35, No. 1. Sept. 2007: 477–88.

2. This quotation from *The Round Table* and those immediately following are transcribed from documents in the Morris Parrish Collection at the Princeton Library, box CO171 No. 91, labeled, "Scrapbook of the attorney William D. Booth who represented Charles Reade, Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and other literary lights and theatrical lights in the American law courts, with his clients' original autograph letters." The scrapbook consists of a copy of *Griffith Gaunt* (Boston: Fields, Osgood, & Co. 1869) with letters from Reade pasted in the front and back pages. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists, Box CO171, No. 91. Published with permission of the Princeton University Library.
3. See John Vincent's discussion of Swinburne's *Lesbia Brandon* in *Novel Gazing*, edited by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, Duke University Press (1997): 269–97.
4. *Maid, Wife, or Widow* is the subtitle of *The Cloister and the Hearth*, and it refers to the uncertain social status of the heroine Margaret Brandt.
5. See Judith Walkowitz's discussion in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*.
6. Another example of Reade's aversion to blood sports can be found in *A Simpleton* when, in Africa, the protagonist Christopher Staines has an eland in the sights of his rifle:

   > He aimed long and steadily. But just as he was about to pull the trigger, Mind interposed, and he lowered the deadly weapon. "Poor creature!" he said, "I am going to take her life—for what? for a single meal. She is as big as a pony; and I am to lay her carcass on the plain, that we may eat two pounds of it. This is how the weasel kills the rabbit; sucks an ounce of blood for his food, and wastes the rest.... Man, armed by science with such powers of slaying, should be less egotistical than weasels.... I will not kill her. I will not lay that beautiful body of hers low, and glaze those tender, loving eyes that never gleamed with hate or rage at man, and fix those innocent jaws that never bit the life out of anything, not even of the grass she feeds on.... Feed on, poor innocent." (358–59)

7. This and the following citation from the late Chris Willis are taken from "Mary Elizabeth Braddon and the Literary Marketplace: A Study in Commercial Authorship" on *The Mary Elizabeth Braddon Website*, <http://www.chriswillis.freeserve.co.uk/meb2.html>
8. See Gilles Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty," 1969; Gaylyn Studlar, *In the Realm of Pleasure*, 1986; Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins*, 1992, Carol Siegel, *Male Masochism*, 1995.
9. Here again, we see how Reade demonstrates sympathy for, rather than judgment of, the "fallen woman." The wayward woman is seen as "betrayed," rather than judged as a sinner.

10. See Sedgwick's *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985); and Rene Girard, *Deceit, Desire, and the Novel: Self and Other in Literary Structure*. Trans. Yvonne Freccero (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

5 Reade, Race, and Colonialism

1. Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists. Manuscripts Division, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. CO171, Box No. 94, pp. 2, 18. Published with permission of the Princeton University Library.
2. Reade's *Put Yourself in His Place* is known as a broadside against violence perpetrated by trade unions, but a reading of the novel (not discussed here) would show that it portrays the abuses of organized capital as much as or more than those of organized labor. In the *Memoir*, Compton Reade correctly notes that "the author was no more a friend of the tyranny of capital than the tyranny of labor" and refers to the "judicial attitude of a writer who had as little liking for the brutality of plutocracy as for the brutality of rattening" (341, 342). *Put Yourself in His Place* bears some comparison to Dickens's *Hard Times* (1854) but the former demonstrates considerably more subtlety in its depictions of capital and labor.
3. Foucault sees racism as part of the same process of "biopower" that "made it possible to execute or banish criminals,... The same applies to madness, and the same applies to various anomalies" (258). Foucault's statement relates to his thesis in *Discipline and Punishment*, *Madness and Civilization*, and *The History of Sexuality*, all of which argue that "biopower" seeks to segregate those who do not conform to a standard.
4. See entry on Laurence Oliphant, *Notable Names Data Base*. <http://www.nndb.com/people/972/000102666/>

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