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The Churchyard in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*: Issues of Madness and Illegitimacy

Abstract: The churchyard in Collins's *The Woman in White* represents an aesthetic metaphor for the Victorian social order and, in its enclosure, it seems to perpetuate its values and cultural tenets. In the course of the plot, however, it gradually transfigures itself into a gothic/fantastic space in which Anne Catherick's voice powerfully resonates and puts the Victorian legal system under discussion, in particular in her identification with madness and in her quality as illegitimate. Collins's sensation fiction thus mirrors the period's political and legal debates and powerfully destabilizes its acknowledged social relations, demonstrating that the role of literature is not only to create culture but to contest it as well.

Keywords: Victorian literature, social order, illegitimacy, legal status, female voice

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1 Introduction

Sensation novels exposed and exploited the social and legal tensions of the Victorian period. In particular, through a re-reading of the characteristics of the gothic tenets, they reached deep into the sanctioned image of the family and its contradictions, thus revealing “the dark underside of a supposedly respectable society.”¹ Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* investigates questions related to

¹ Helen Debenham, “The Victorian Sensation Novel” in *A Companion to the Victorian Novel*, eds. William Baker, Kenneth Womack (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2002), 209–222, 210. See also Lyn

marriage and the family as social institutions as well as the laws and conventions that support them. The novel achieves its real “sensational” effect precisely by showing that authority, convention, and morality can be and are actually questioned.

The Woman in White features two illegitimate characters, Sir Percival Glyde and Anne Catherick, who are treated in different manners; the former rebels to his condition of illegitimacy by forging a legitimate social status for himself; the latter represents the real challenge to the Victorian conception of the family and embodies Collins’s disruptive position towards the period’s tenets. Anne Catherick and Sir Percival Glyde share the lack of their narrative voice in a novel that, as it is well known, is structured as a series of written testimonies by the different characters involved in the plot. However, Anne’s voice resonates distinctly, though mediated by Hartright’s narrative, and it powerfully emerges in the churchyard scenes, configuring such setting as a real “garden of justice.”

2 The churchyard as a site for contestation

The churchyard in *The Woman in White* is situated

in a little valley, so as to be sheltered from the bleak winds blowing over the moorland all round it. The burial-ground advanced, from the side of the church, a little way up the slope of the hill. It was surrounded by a rough, low stone wall, and was bare and open to the sky, except at one extremity, where a brook trickled down the stony hill-side, and a clump of dwarf trees threw their narrow shadows over the short, meagre grass.²

The whole effect is that of a private, landscaped park³, its access regulated by stone stiles in specific positions along the wall. There are no signs of habitation in

Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*, 2nd rev. ed. (Horndon: Northcote, 2011), 8 and 13: “One of the most shocking and thrilling aspects of sensation fiction [...] was the fact that the action of these fast novels of crime and passion usually occurred in the otherwise prosaic, everyday, domestic setting of a modern middle-class or aristocratic English household.” In particular sensation novels exploited “the fear that the respectable Victorian family had some dark secrets at its core.”

² Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 89: further references in the text, abbreviated as *TWW*.

³ See also Julie Rugg, “‘A Few Remarks on Modern Sepulture’: Current Trends and New Directions in Cemetery Research,” *Mortality* 3.2 (1998): 111–128, 112. “Churchyards may be defined as the small areas of land owned by the church and attached to church buildings, and were the main form of burial provision until the mid-19th century.”

the immediate vicinity, as the cottage of the clerk and sexton of the parish lies in the opposite direction beyond the wall, and on one side of it lies the church; therefore, “the burial ground was left in the lonely possession of the dead” (*TWW*, 90). This “gathered morphology”⁴ renders the space of the churchyard a *hortus conclusus*, an enclosed garden, which forms a parallel setting for the main themes of Collins’s novel. Its enclosure initially seems to mirror and confirm the predominant social order; however, it gradually transfigures itself into a fantastic/gothic space which stages the upheaval and disruption of the same social order it was meant to represent.

The graveyard as a garden represents an aesthetic metaphor for law and order, the site for the interplay of power relations⁵ and the repository of the cultural tenets of society: “the places of the dead are pivotal landscapes, where past and future values and beliefs are held in balance or negotiated.”⁶ The mortuary ritual expresses the social persona and in this way it naturalizes and legitimizes the hierarchical social order: the world of the dead becomes thus a microcosm of the world of the living.⁷

Collins’s churchyard seems to reflect social hierarchy⁸: the space is carefully organized and a white marble cross “distinguished Mrs. Fairlie’s grave from the humbler monuments scattered about it” (*TWW*, 89) in the maintenance of class standards even in death. As a matter of fact, by law “anyone who died in the village had a right to be buried in the parish churchyard,”⁹ but in the case of the pauper’s funeral, the erection of a monument and its related cost of the stonework were not included. The pauper’s funeral “proclaimed the deceased’s total

4 Ken Worpole, *Last Landscapes. The Architecture of the Cemetery in the West* (London: Reaktion Books, 2003), 9.

5 Eve Darian-Smith, “Legal Imagery in the ‘Garden of England’,” *Indiana Journal of Global Legal Studies* 2.2 (1995): 395–411, 402 and 407.

6 Worpole, *Last Landscapes*, 10.

7 Kenneth L. Ames, “Ideologies in Stone: Meanings in Victorian Gravestones,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 14.4 (1981): 641–656, 641. With regard to this, see also Paul K. Wason, *The Archaeology of Rank*, 67 and 69; Michael Parker Pearson, “Mortuary Practices, Society and Ideology: An Ethno-archaeological Study” in *Symbolic and Structural Archaeology*, ed. Ian Hodder (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 99–113, 101.

8 Rugg, “‘A Few Remarks on Modern Sepulture’,” 123. See also Agatha Herman, “Death Has a Touch of Class: Society and Space in Brookwood Cemetery, 1853–1903,” *Journal of Historical Geography* 36 (2010): 305–314, 305: “Victorian cultures of mourning and attitudes to death [. . .] were strongly shaped by the representations of class.”

9 Mary Elizabeth Hotz, *Literary Remains. Representations of Death and Burial in Victorian England* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009), 8. See also Worpole, *Last Landscapes*, 64.

lack of possessions and hence of social worth.”¹⁰ Treatment in death was therefore closely related to social position in life.

In *The Woman in White* there are three churchyard scenes, which correspond to the main turning points of the novel. The first one takes place in chapter XIII of Hartright’s first narrative; the setting is introduced through gothic undertones¹¹ as he describes a “dreary scene and a dreary hour,” characterized by the “dreary rustling of the dwarf trees near the grave and the cold faint bubble of the brook over its stony bed” (*TWW*, 92). In such atmosphere he encounters Anne Catherick, “the one centre of interest and the one source of information” (*TWW*, 94) for his doubts and investigation:

Under the wan wild evening light, that woman and I were met together again, a grave between us, the dead about us, the lonesome hills closing us round on every side. [...] we now stood face to face in the evening stillness of that dreary valley. (*TWW*, 95)¹²

The gothic atmosphere soon dissolves and the churchyard becomes a parallel dimension for the acknowledgement of the “awe-full” power of the female within the dominant and legal structure of Victorian patriarchal society, which comes to constitute the real gothic setting.¹³ The burial ground is the site in which Anne Catherick’s voice powerfully resonates and disrupts the Victorian boundaries which try to enclose and constrict her personality.

10 Herman, “Death Has a Touch of Class,” 306. See also Hotz, *Literary Remains*, 16.

11 With regard to this, see Worpole, *Last Landscapes*, 17: “Burial grounds and cemeteries somehow seem to fix a time and a place in a culture forever, carrying the past into the present and even into the future in perpetuity. [...] Death exercises a powerful grip on both landscape and the human imagination. [...] There are few settings which conjure up th[e] equivocating feeling of the sublime more than the places of the dead.”

12 The scene seems to reproduce the circumstances of their first encounter, an “extraordinary apparition [...] in the dead of night and in that lonely place,” (*TWW*, 20) i.e., the outskirts of London, where “in the middle of the broad bright high-road – there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven – stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments.” (*TWW*, 20) Anne is often associated with a spectre; in her first encounter with Walter she “emerges from the shadows in a ghostly fashion”, during the course of the novel she is often described to be “as pale as a ghost [...] she is mistaken for a ghost [...] and both living and dead she haunts the novel.” (Jane Jordan, “The Law and Sensation” in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Pamela K. Gilbert (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 507–515, 509).

13 See Sidia Fiorato, Chiara Battisti, “Women’s Legal Identity in the Context of Gothic Effacement: Mary Wollstonecraft’s *Maria* or *The Wrongs of Woman* and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *The Yellow Wallpaper*,” *Pólemos* 6.2 (2012): 183–205, 193. See also Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness. A Poethics of Gothic* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), xi.

From her first appearance, Anne is closely associated with a taint of madness which she constantly tries to counteract. Actually, she is never pronounced as insane in the novel but she is referred to as a person of “unsound mind” through a set of conventions and allusions related to her odd behavior.¹⁴ Anne seems to suffer from a form of monomania (that is, an *idée fixe*, a single pathological preoccupation in an otherwise sound mind) more than madness. Such definition is mirrored in Mrs Fairlie’s letter where we read that Anne’s “intellect is not developed as it ought to be”, but that she is no idiot. According to the doctor’s opinion, “her unusual slowness in acquiring ideas implies an unusual tendency in keeping them, when they are once received into her mind” (*TWW*, 58–59). Partial intellectual mania “does not necessarily render a person *non compos*, or so impaired in mind as to be no longer responsible for his acts.”¹⁵

Anne’s inscription into mental disability is therefore to be intended as a metaphor for her social disability¹⁶, due to her condition as illegitimate, as will be explained later in the novel, but also to her disruption of the feminine passive ideal through her assertive will. For this reason, Anne repeatedly suffers attempts at her containment; Sir Percival has her committed to an asylum not only in order to restrain her physically, but also to deprive her of speech. Scared that she might have learnt about his secret [his status as illegitimate] and that she might reveal it, he manages to put her in a context which delegitimizes her linguistic authority.¹⁷ As he will comment, almost confessing his responsibility in Anne’s internment, “She’s just mad enough to be shut up and just sane enough to ruin me when she’s at large” (*TWW*, 337). As a matter of fact, Anne is the only female character who manages to assert herself, both in speaking and in writing in the context of the

¹⁴ Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988), 105. See also Isaac Ray, *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1838), 170–174: Individuals suffering from general moral mania “are capable of reasoning or supporting an argument, or any subject within their sphere of knowledge that may be presented to them [...] perform most of the common duties of life with propriety [...] but yet take violent antipathies [...] indulge strong propensities [...] are easily excited and with difficulty appeased. [...] On some occasions they [...] are a prey to fear and dread from the most ridiculous and imaginary sources [...] There is unquestionably a great tendency in this affection to pass into intellectual mania [...] a form of mental alienation consisting exclusively of morbid excitement of the passions and feelings.”

¹⁵ Ray, *A Treatise on the Medical Jurisprudence of Insanity*, 239.

¹⁶ See Jessica Cox, “Representations of Illegitimacy in Wilkie Collins’s Early Novels,” *Philological Quarterly* 83.2 (2004): 147–169, 172.

¹⁷ Marlene Tromp, *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation and the Law in Victorian Britain* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 78.

plot: she becomes the spokeswoman for the denunciation of specific legal provisions which were under debate in the Victorian period, such as those related to women internment in asylums and the problem of illegitimate offspring.

Walter participates in this process of containment, too, as his meetings with Anne imply a confrontation with his acknowledged cultural frame and most significantly with its repressed aspects, that is, “that which has not yet been determined, which is not mapped in advance by law’s *regula* or calculus in the institutional form of knowledge as recognition.”¹⁸ She represents the disruptive potential of the repressed,¹⁹ a sublime experience, which threatens patriarchal and social boundaries between Walter himself as a responsible subject and something outside himself; at the same time it is an uncanny experience, which confronts him with something long repressed but does not allow the breakdown of such boundaries, at least not yet. For this reason, he tries to keep the effect of his encounters with Anne at bay, by interpreting it through conventional social tenets, albeit in an indirect way: upon reading the letter which Anne had anonymously written to Laura trying to warn her about her future husband’s wickedness, he suggests to Marian that it seems the writing of a “woman whose mind must be –” and stops before completing the sentence, which is significantly concluded by Marian’s voice “Deranged? [. . .] It struck me in that light, too” (*TWW*, 80). Anne appears as a character “wandering the [acknowledged] borderland of sanity and insanity”²⁰, who threatens and moves beyond the boundaries of the ‘orderly outward world’ [. . .] that were founded on [her] exclusion.”²¹ She uncannily confronts Victorian culture as she embodies something long repressed or forgotten which now comes to exert a disruptive haunting effect²² and for this reason she is perceived as anomalous, deviant, or insane. In Foucaultian terms, she is socially constructed as insane and would be confined in order to “eliminate from the social order a figure which did not find its place within it”²³ (both as a supposed madwoman and mostly as an illegitimate daughter) and who denounces in her turn the

18 Peter Goodrich, *Oedipus Lex. Psychoanalysis, History, Law* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 13.

19 See Tamar Heller, *Dead Secrets. Wilkie Collins and the Female Gothic* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1992), 125; Donna Heiland, *Gothic and Gender* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), 3. Anne appears to be a woman in white also in the sense that she represents a blank upon which the other protagonists try to impose their own meanings. (See Valerie Pedlar, “Drawing a Blank: The Construction of Identity in *The Woman in White*” in *The Nineteenth-Century Novel. Identities*, ed. Dennis Walder, (London: Routledge, 2001), 79).

20 Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*, 36.

21 Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, 15.

22 Heiland, *Gothic and Gender*, 3.

23 Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 2001), 109.

constructedness of Victorian society. Anne therefore occupies a liminal space in which she is neither sane nor insane and from there she threatens the social order as well as the legal order by which it is supported; for this reason, she represents Collins's true female image,²⁴ a palimpsest²⁵ whose ambiguous spiritual origins and story will subvert the novel's texture.

In the first churchyard scene, after recognizing Walter for the man who had previously helped her in London while she was escaping from the Asylum, and after learning that on that night she had been followed in order to prevent her escape, we witness an assertion of Anne's will and of the rightfulness of her actions. In fact, the first question that she asks Walter is "You don't think I should be back in the Asylum, do you?", which is soon after repeated "You don't think I ought to be taken back, do you?" (*TWW*, 99, emphasis by the author). Such direct questions, which eagerly solicit the addressee to forcefully express his point of view, seem to invite Walter to resolve his own doubts about Anne which he had left suspended after their first encounter. At that period, after having seen the people from the asylum trying to retrace her steps to bring her back, first he had self-assuredly declared: "the idea of absolute insanity which we all associate with the very name of an Asylum has, I can honestly declare, never occurred to me, in connection with her." Soon after he had however asked himself: "What had I done? Assisted the victim of the most horrible of all false imprisonments to escape; or cast loose on the wide world of London an unfortunate creature, whose actions it was my duty, and everyman's duty, mercifully to control?" (*TWW*, 28–29)²⁶

In the churchyard Anne also talks about the method of her escape from the asylum: "It was easy to escape [. . .] They never suspected me as they suspected the others. I was so quiet, and so obedient, and so easily frightened" (*TWW*, 99), thus revealing a strong will and a cunning ability to impersonate the role of the lunatic imposed on her to her own advantage.²⁷ Moreover, she acknowledges that the hard part of her escape was finding London, not the planning of the escape and its realization, nor the decision where to take shelter (see *TWW*, 99), thus

24 Nina Auerbach, *Woman and the Demon. The Life of a Victorian Myth* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1982), 139.

25 Heller, *Dead Secrets*, 119.

26 As the explanatory notes of the reference edition explain, the period of 1858–59 was characterized by panic about false imprisonment and this led to a parliamentary action on the matter in 1862. See *TWW*, 672 and the therein quoted Richard Altick, *Victorian People and Ideas* (New York: WW Norton & Co, 1974).

27 As Sir Percival himself will recognize later in the course of the plot, she had managed to fool her guardians: "She was the best behaved patient they had – and, like fools, they trusted her." (*TWW*, 337)

denoting initiative, autonomy of action and self-assurance on her part. Actually, during their previous encounter on the outskirts of London, Anne had insisted that Walter promised “not to interfere with me, and to let me leave you, when and how I please”, a plea repeated soon after “Only say you will let me leave you when and how I please – only say you won’t interfere with me. Will you promise?” (TWW, 22 and 23) These words seem to point to a request for the recognition of her liberty of action and to purposefully stand in opposition to the condition as a lunatic she is escaping from. As a matter of fact, internment in an asylum required a certificate of lunacy, signed by a doctor, which reduced the patient’s status from that of responsible adult to dependent minor. As a consequence he/she was placed under “complex medico-legal and administrative tutelage or ‘guardianship’”²⁸ which prevented any kind of action on his/her own behalf. In this perspective, Anne’s words reclaim her own individual responsibility and status.

Anne therefore is more than simply the victim she initially appears to be. She is characterized by a “vindictive remembrance of the wrong inflicted on her by her confinement in the Asylum” (TWW, 104), and a constant plea for its redressing. In the Victorian medical discourses about madness, “madwomen synecdochically represented madness, and madness defined femininity as potentially chaotic, mysterious and even dangerous.”²⁹ In this way, the Victorian normative system interposed a ‘legal screen’ between the subject and the social gaze, filtering the objects of vision and determining the way in which the individuals saw and were given to the world to be seen³⁰; insanity was the label society attached to female independence of will and female assertion, self-interest and outrage.³¹ Anne therefore embodies the typical nineteenth-century madwoman, “the devi-

28 Michael J. Clark, “Does a Certificate of Lunacy Affect a patient’s Ethical Status? Psychiatric Paternalism and its Critics in Victorian England” in *Doctors and Ethics: The Earlier Historical Setting of Professional Ethics*, eds. Andrew Wear, Johanna Geyer-Kordesch (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1993), 274–294, 275, 278.

29 Heller, *Dead Secrets*, 120.

30 Costas Douzinas, “Sublime Law,” *Parallax* 14:4 (2008): 18.

31 Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness and English Culture, 1830–1980* (London: Penguin, 1987), 72. Madness was “the standard explanation for any act of feminine passion, self-assertion or violence.” (Elaine Showalter, “Victorian Women and Insanity” in *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen. The Social History of Psychiatry in the Victorian Era*, ed. Andrew Scull (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 326). With regard to this, see also Fiorato, Battisti, “Women’s Legal Identity,” 195: “From its origins, the gothic genre has been strictly linked with patriarchy, its structure and the elements that might threaten it. In particular, it has celebrated a male creative power that demands the suppression – and sometimes the outright sacrifice – of women.”

ant, energetic woman who defies familial and social control”³² in her resistance to her disempowered position.

In the first churchyard scene Anne also reveals the name of her incarcerator, thus bringing to conclusion the elements hinted at during her first encounter with Walter, where she had denounced “I have been cruelly used and cruelly wronged” (*TWW*, 25). The revelation takes the form of a scream which pierces the graveyard’s silence as soon as Walter mentions Sir Percival’s name, and this becomes an official accusation.

The instant I pronounced that name she started to her feet, and a scream burst from her that rang through the churchyard, and made my heart leap in me with the terror of it. [...] Not even a last doubt now remained. [...] A man had shut her up – and that man was Sir Percival Glyde. (*TWW*, 105)³³

Anne’s passion is directed against injustice, the injustice she and Laura suffered on the part of Sir Percival.³⁴ Her capacity for action emerges once more in a subsequent encounter with Laura at the boat-house of Blackwater Park, where she goes at the risk of being caught and brought back to the Asylum.³⁵ Here she once again denounces Sir Percival Glyde as responsible for her imprisonment in the asylum; she refers to him as “a man who had shut me up in a madhouse and who would shut me up again if he could” (*TWW*, 284). Anne wishes to offer Laura the possibility to rebel against her husband’s wickedness by revealing to her what she knows about him: “If you know his secret he will be afraid of you, he won’t dare use you as he used me. He must treat you mercifully.” (*TWW*, 285) When she is prevented to do so, she finds the means to leave Laura an explanatory note; also in her illness, when she has already fallen in Count Fosco’s trap, she “seemed to want sadly to speak to somebody who was absent from her somewhere” (*TWW*, 410). This behavior denotes her utmost resistance against being silenced: Anne defiantly refuses to be enclosed in the asylum. Such unjust confinement “was popularly regarded as one of the greatest indignities an individual could suffer.” As *The Spectator* reported in 1839,

32 Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*, 37.

33 As Sir Percival will say to Count Fosco, Mrs Catherick’s compliance to her daughter’s internment, “exonerate[ed] me from any bad motive for putting her under restraint” (*TWW*, 338).

34 See Leila Silvana May, “Sensational Sisters: Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*,” *Pacific Coast Philology* 30.1 (1995): 82–102, 87.

35 As she tells Laura, “To speak to you alone [...] I have risked being shut up in the madhouse and all for your sake” (*TWW*, 283).

A lunatic, in law language, is *civilitus mortuus* [. . .] If committed unduly, he receives in his single person nearly all the civil injuries that can be inflicted; for not only is his liberty thereby taken away and his property removed from his control but he suffers an imputation which operates with all the force of a libel [. . .] A party detained on a charge of insanity may be acquitted and restored to liberty; but we all know that this is a question of such a nature that it cannot even be raised without attaching suspicion ever after to the individual to whom it relates.³⁶

Anne seems to be well-aware of this when in their first encounter she asks Walter “You don’t think the worse of me because I have met with an accident?” (TWW, 22), where “accident” indicates her internment in the asylum.

In the first churchyard scene, she is also led to acknowledging the writing of the letter delivered to Laura: Walter is convinced that the warning it contained points against Sir Percival Glyde even though it does not directly mention his name. With regard to this, it has to be noticed that the letter reporting Anne’s true voice, which therefore represents the only reported instance of her direct expression, is belittled in its contents as it is presented as triply embedded: in a dream, in a letter, in a deranged person.³⁷ Actually, even if in the novel it is repeatedly stated that Anne did not actually know the secret but was only aware of its existence and that therefore she could not have brought any revelation in the context of the plot³⁸, the dream appears to contain it. In her dream, Laura advances in the

36 Peter McCandless, “Liberty and Lunacy” in *Madhouses, Mad-Doctors, and Madmen*, ed. Scull, 339–369, 342. See also Clark, “Does a Certificate of Lunacy,” 279: “the mere fact of being certifiably insane was generally held to justify, or at least to render unproblematic, a drastic reduction in the patient’s moral or ethical status and a corresponding curtailment of his or her legal rights. Such was the stigma frequently attached to an episode of mental disorder that even recovery and discharge often failed to make good this loss of credibility and status, as many ex-patients found to their dismay and indignation.” This is the figure of legal exclusion characterizing Agamben’s homo sacer: “The homo sacer is not simply excluded by the law. Instead, the homo sacer is an inclusionary exclusion, where having been stripped of his/her political rights and excluded from normal law, the body of the homo sacer is still in the grips of sovereign power. [. . .] the homo sacer’s exclusion to a zone of indistinction reveals the structure of sovereign exceptional power.” (See Shampa Biswas and Sheila Nair eds., *International Relations and States of Exception: Margins, Peripheries and Excluded Bodies* (London: Routledge, 2009), 165).

37 Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, 111.

38 See TWW, 485: Mrs Clements tells Walter that: “She [Anne] said her mother had got some secret of Sir Percival’s to keep, and had let it out to her [. . .] and when Sir Percival found she knew it, he shut her up. But she never could say what it was when I asked her. All she could tell me was that her mother might be the ruin and destruction of Sir Percival, if she chose. Mrs Catherrick may have let out just as much as that, and no more. I’m next to certain I should have heard the whole truth from Anne, if she had really known it.” Moreover, Mrs Catherrick in her letter to Walter explains that in order to prevent her daughter’s confinement in the asylum, she had tried to assure Sir Percival Glyde that Anne did not really know his secret, as she had just repeated the

church with a man with a wicked heart, and “the clergyman looked for the marriage service in vain: it was gone out of the book” (*TWW*, 79). On a retrospective reading this assumes the tones of a hidden revelation, which the interested parties fail to acknowledge, about Sir Percival Glyde’s act of forgery. As we will later learn, in order to legitimate his own position in society, he had forged textual evidence of his parents’ marriage ceremony in the blank space of the church register, but not on its copy, in which his parents’ marriage service has “gone out of the book” (*TWW*, 79).

3 The churchyard as the site for the sanctioning of identity

In the first churchyard scene Anne is portrayed while she attempts to clean the tombstone of Mrs Fairlie’s grave. As has been observed before, the churchyard mirrored social hierarchy; the funeral publicly displayed the wealth and power of a family and the presence of a tombstone identified the higher status of the deceased. “Victorian families usually took great care in their choice of gravestone inscriptions” and were concerned about the possible neglect of family graves; therefore they tried “to maintain the plot as a pleasant place of remembrance, planting shrubs, renewing flowers and keeping it tidy.”³⁹ Anne considers Mrs Fairlie’s grave as a site for consolation and remembrance which evokes a “sense of closeness to the dead person”⁴⁰ and a longing for what she represented.

Actually, here she expresses the wish to be buried “under the marble cross” (*TWW*, 285), together with Mrs Fairlie, “Oh, if I could die, and be hidden and at rest with YOU!” (*TWW*, 103, capitals by the author), a wish that she renews later in the plot while talking to Laura: “if I could only be buried with your mother! [. . .] But there is no hope of that, [. . .] no hope for a poor stranger like me” (*TWW*, 285). These words open the second issue Anne brings to light in the context of the graveyard, which becomes for her a space for the denunciation of her discriminated social condition.

In the first churchyard scene the dialogue between Walter and Anne hints at the woman’s illegitimacy. When Walter asks her “Had you no father or mother to

words her mother [Mrs Caterick] had pronounced the day before, when she had not mentioned any precise detail about it. (See *TWW*, 550).

³⁹ Pat Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 194, 292, 294.

⁴⁰ Jalland, *Death in the Victorian Family*, 291.

take care of you?”, she significantly answers “Father? I never saw him; I never heard mother speak of him. Father? Ah, dear! He is dead, I suppose” (*TWW*, 100). As will become clear in the course of the novel, Anne is Mr Fairlie’s illegitimate daughter, and a retrospective reading of the scene underlines its critical undertones.

According to English laws, a legitimate child was the one who was born in lawful wedlock and as lawful heir, he/she was entitled to the rights of maintenance, protection and education. An illegitimate child was the one who was not only begotten but also born out of wedlock and he/she did not enjoy the same rights.⁴¹ Anne therefore has no right to bear the name of her father, whom she has never met, but with whose family she has come in close contact, in particular with Mrs Fairlie during the period she had spent at Limmeridge with her own mother. Mrs Fairlie, struck by the extraordinary resemblance between Anne and her own child Laura, had taken a fancy to the girl and had welcomed her in her family; she had invested her of the status of the Fairlies by giving her the white dresses the girl would later dote so much upon. Actually Mrs Fairlie herself, as well as Laura, used to wear white in a symbolic sign of belonging to the family; the dresses represented thus a metaphor for social status and inclusion in the family. This points to the suggestion that Mrs Fairlie might have suspected the paternity of her husband, as she always wrote to him in very passionate terms about Anne.⁴²

In the first churchyard scene, Anne wishes to be buried together with Mrs Fairlie, thus symbolically renouncing her father and also seemingly her natural mother⁴³: she considers Mrs Fairlie as “The friend who was better than a mother

41 See William Blackstone, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002 [1765]), Book I, Ch. 16: differently from the other European laws, English law did not contemplate the possibility for a subsequent legitimation of children after the parents’ marriage, who therefore remained in such status. This exclusion was explained with the necessity to avoid the possibility of frauds, to prevent a discouragement to the matrimonial state, to defend the principle of the protection of infants which in the case of the legitimation of an adult son/daughter would lose its significance, and to defend decency as regards the absence of limits to the number of bastards who could be legitimated.

42 I therefore tend to dissent with the version presented by Walter towards the end of the novel, which sustains the ignorance on Mrs Fairlie’s part of her husband’s paternity: “Mrs Fairlie’s letter to her husband [...] – the letter describing Anne’s resemblance to Laura, and acknowledging her affectionate interest in the little stranger – had been written, beyond all question, in perfect innocence of heart” (*TWW*, 568). It has to be noticed that Mr Fairlie’s possible answer (or absence of answer) to his wife’s letter is never mentioned and/or commented upon.

43 Carolyn Dever, *Death and the Mother from Dickens to Freud: Victorian Fiction and the Anxiety of Origins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 20. Anne “tellingly remains loyal to the mother’s love rather than the father’s law.” (Sanders, “A Shock to the System”, 72).

to me” and appeals to her in the following terms: “Be my darling and my mother once more, and tell me what to do for the best” (*TWW*, 103). Her wish is granted a first time, albeit under false name. As a result of Count Fosco’s conspiracy her identity is exchanged with that of Laura and after her death she is buried as Lady Glyde in what appears to be the Fairlies’ family tomb. As the “Narrative of the Tombstone” reports:

SACRED to the Memory of Laura, Lady Glyde, wife of Sir Percival Glyde, Bart., of Blackwater Park, Hampshire, and daughter of the late Philip Fairlie, Esq., of Limmeridge House, in this parish. Born March 27th, 1829; married December 22nd, 1849; died July 25th, 1850. (*TWW*, 414)

In the inscription, therefore, Anne is identified as Lady Glyde: actually, such identity does not exist as Sir Percival is an illegitimate child and therefore a usurper of the title of baronet: “there never was a Lady Glyde (because there never was a Sir Percival Glyde).”⁴⁴ However, the inscription also declares the person buried in the tomb as “daughter of the late Philip Fairlie” in a sort of first veiled acknowledgement of Anne’s true identity.

After learning about Lady Glyde’s death, Walter returns to Limmeridge to visit Laura’s grave. This second churchyard scene takes place in an analogous setting to the first one: we read in fact of “the hills encircling the quiet burial ground, the brook bubbling cold over its stony bed. There was the marble cross, fair and white, at the head of the tomb – the tomb that now rose over mother and daughter alike” (*TWW*, 417). In such a setting, at a time when “[t]he last of the day was cold and clear and still in the quiet valley of the dead” (*TWW*, 418) Walter meets Laura, almost transfigured into Anne, as is evoked by the same terms describing the scene:

She stopped on one side of the grave. We stood face to face with the tombstone between us. She was close to the inscription on the side of the pedestal. Her gown touched the black letters. [. . .] ‘Sacred to the Memory of Laura, Lady Glyde –’ Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription, and was looking at me over the grave. (*TWW*, 419)

Once again the gothic imagery fades before the reality of Fosco’s conspiracy and the situation calls for immediate action, because “In the eye of reason and of law, in the estimation of relatives and friends, according to every received formality of civilised society, ‘Laura, Lady Glyde,’ lay buried with her mother in Limmeridge churchyard. [. . .] socially, morally, legally – dead. And yet alive!” (*TWW*, 421)

⁴⁴ May, “Sensational Sisters”, 99.

Walter determines therefore to restore Laura to social and legal life and this process passes precisely through, and will be sanctioned by, the inscription: “a lie which records her [Laura’s] death has been written on her mother’s tomb” and Walter’s pledge is that “that lie shall be publicly erased from the tombstone” (TWW, 454). Actually, this process will restore both Laura’s and Anne’s identities at the same time.

Anne is finally revealed to be Laura’s unacknowledged half-sister, thus bringing to light Philip Fairlie’s sexual misconduct. It has to be observed that although Glyde’s secret (his illegitimacy) is the only one Collins capitalizes, Philip Fairlie’s turns out to be at least as important⁴⁵ and seems to remain curiously understated⁴⁶, although it determines and influences all the main events of the novel. The cause of the particular resemblance of Laura and Anne remains in the past, uninterrogated, pointing to a resistance to discussions of Anne Catherick’s personal story. Walter reports his discovery in the following terms:

Knowing, now, that Mr Philip Fairlie had been at Varneck Hall in the autumn of eighteen hundred and twenty-six, and that Mrs Catherick had been living there in service at the same time, we knew also – first, that Anne had been born in June, eighteen hundred and twenty-seven; secondly, that she had always presented an extraordinary personal resemblance to Laura; and, thirdly, that Laura herself was strikingly like her father. Mr Philip Fairlie had been one of the notoriously handsome men of his time. [...] thoughtless of moral obligations where women were concerned. Such were the facts we knew – such was the character of the man. Surely the plain inference that follows needs no pointing out? (TWW, 567–568)

By this process of narrative elision, Anne simply remains the unacknowledged daughter and the unpropertied outcast. Walter’s reports are usually specifically

⁴⁵ Jerome Meckier, *Hidden Rivalries in Victorian Fiction. Dickens, Realism, and Revaluation* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1987), 108–109. See Jerome Mecker, “Collins’ *The Woman in White*: Providence against the Evils of Propriety,” *Journal of British Studies* 22.1 (Autumn 1982), 120: “Although she [Mrs Catherick] was not unfaithful to Catherick with Sir Percival, her conception of Philip Fairlie’s child is the well-kept secret from which the novel’s complexities originate.”

⁴⁶ See TWW, 568: “It [...] seemed doubtful, on consideration, whether Mr Philip Fairlie himself had been nearer than his wife to any suspicion of the truth. The disgracefully deceitful circumstances under which Mrs Catherick had married, the purpose of concealment which the marriage was intended to answer, might well keep her silent for caution’s sake, perhaps for her own pride’s sake also – even assuming that she had the means, in his absence, of communicating with the father of her unborn child”. The novel seems to try to present Mr Fairlie as unaware of having fathered an illegitimate child, and therefore less culpable; in my opinion this does not diminish the social consequence of his act in the context of the period and this is also Collins’ stance when he decides to officially sanction Anne’s identity through the inscription on the tombstone, as the present paper tends to demonstrate.

scrupulous about questions of legacy and fairness as one of the aims of the novel is the restoration of a legally and morally legitimate succession. This is shown by the treatment of Sir Percival Glyde's case: after having learnt of his secret and having purported to use it for his own means, Walter is assailed by moral doubts concerning the deceit of the rightful heir for his personal gain (that is, the possibility to denounce the conspiracy and subsequently marry Laura).⁴⁷ However, there are no analogous hints regarding the fact that Anne Catherick could have a financial claim on the Fairlie family; being her father's first-born, she would be the family heiress. Nor is Anne's death mourned in the text, but is completely "subsumed into the celebration of the 'proof' it ensures of Laura's life."⁴⁸

As a matter of fact, Walter expresses a reflection on the events of the conspiracy which would not have been possible without the strong resemblance between Anne and Laura, who are actually half-sisters. The wrong committed by Mr Fairlie, which led to Anne's illegitimate birth had subsequent repercussions on both children⁴⁹, who both fall victim to Fosco's conspiracy. As far as Anne is concerned, Walter thinks about

the little Cumberland churchyard where Anne Catherick now lay buried. [...] Through what mortal crime and horror, through what darkest windings of the way down to Death, the lost creature had wandered in God's leading to the last home that, living, she never hoped to reach! In the sacred rest, I leave her – in that dread companionship, let her remain undisturbed. So the ghostly figure [...] goes down into the impenetrable Gloom. Like a Shadow

⁴⁷ With regard to this, we read: "Could I have made my discovery a marketable commodity, even for Laura's sake, after I had found out that robbery of the rights of others was the essence of Sir Percival's crime? Could I have offered the price of my silence for his confession of the conspiracy, when the effect of that silence must have been to keep the right heir from the estates, and the right owner from the name? Impossible!" (TWW, 539).

⁴⁸ See Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home*, 101; Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*, 39; Gwendolyn MacDonagh and Jonathan Smith, " "Fill Up All the Gaps": Narrative and Illegitimacy in *The Woman in White*," *Journal of Narrative Technique* 26.3 (1996): 274–291, 280; Dever, *Death and the Mother*, 78. With regard to Collins's attitude to his female characters it has been observed how: "He was intent upon exploring the female sensibility in ways foreign to other Victorian novelists, and he created heroines quite unlike those of his male contemporaries. [...] It is hard, however, to see him in any contemporary sense as a feminist. [...] He was more willing to champion women as outcasts rather than to praise those who had achieved independence. [...] Yet this is not to minimize his importance in the re-creation of female character in the English novel. He was, in that sense, a pioneer." (Peter Ackroyd, *Wilkie Collins* (London: Chatto & Windus, 2012), 105).

⁴⁹ See TWW, 568 and Wilkie Collins, *No Name* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 138: "I am far from defending the law of England, as it affects illegitimate offspring. On the contrary, I think it a disgrace to the nation. It visits the sins of the parents on the children."

she first came to me, in the loneliness of the night. Like a Shadow she passes me away, in the loneliness of the dead. (*TWW*, 569)

At the beginning of his reflections he seems to recognize Anne's right to remain buried with Mrs Fairlie and seems to comply with her fate, i.e., to remain buried under a false name, to have her identity unacknowledged; in fact, at the end he refers to her as a Shadow. However, Anne continues to haunt the novel even from her grave, in particular through the body of Laura, in whom she is uncannily mirrored: Walter therefore is lured into investigating the real mystery of the woman in white, "the one doubtful question still remaining to be solved – the question of Anne Catherick's parentage on the father's side" (*TWW*, 566).

The only character mourning Anne's demise is Mrs Clements who is concerned about the funeral she might have had; in fact, she asks Walter "did you say that she had been nicely buried? Was it the sort of funeral she might have had, if she had really been my own child? [. . .] It would have broken my heart [. . .] if Anne had not been nicely buried" (*TWW*, 487). This remark points to the fact that "Victorian cultures of mourning and attitudes to death [. . .] were strongly shaped by the experiences and representations of class, [in t]he equation between funerary expenses and the social worth of the deceased."⁵⁰ Actually, "interment as Mr. Fairlie's niece involved a more splendid ceremony than Mrs. Clements could have provided,"⁵¹ and the renewal of such ritual dominates the third churchyard scene with the final *denouement*.

The restoration of Laura's identity takes place through a ceremony which inverts her funeral ritual, as it sanctions her status of living person which entails, at the same time, an acknowledgement and sanctioning of Anne's identity:

I [Walter] invited all the persons present [. . .] to follow me to the churchyard, and see the false inscription struck off the tombstone with their own eyes. [. . .] Not a voice was heard – not a soul moved, till those three words, "Laura, Lady Glyde," had vanished from sight. [. . .] One line only was afterwards engraved in its place: "Anne Catherick, July 25th, 1850." (*TWW*, 635–636)

The countrymen restage the crowd of mourners walking to the churchyard, and witness the official erasure of the false name and inscription of the authentic one on the tombstone. This ceremony sanctions the conclusion of the life of one member of the community and has a social value: "The headstone inscription is the sema replacing the absent soma, a form of biography [. . .] meant to preserve the

⁵⁰ Herman, "Death Has a Touch of Class," 305. Mecker, "Collins' *The Woman in White*," 107.

⁵¹ Mecker, "Collins' *The Woman in White*," 107.

individual in the collective memory.”⁵² *The Woman in White* underlines the fact that truth can be established only through texts that document the body's history: the inscription is shown to possess such documentary value because it symbolizes a visible link between living and dead, establishing and perpetuating the deceased's textual and social identity.⁵³ For Collins, “the inheritance of a name is as significant as the inheritance of property – both problematic issues for the illegitimate child.”⁵⁴

Anne is therefore finally included in the family of her father, through her burial in the Fairlies' family tomb, with her putative mother. The inscription on the white marble assumes the symbolic significance of the recognition of her name and of her right to be in that precise place with the Fairlies, but with her own surname, in an implicit recognition of her status as illegitimate, but also of her rights as illegitimate. The tombstone recognizes her as a legal persona (though not an *equal* legal persona, since her illegitimate status is being implicitly referred to): the inscription on the marble, parallel to the forged inscription on the blank page of the register by Sir Percival – albeit in a different context, represents the acquisition of a legal name.⁵⁵ Anne in fact does not create her own legal status but is recognized a legitimate place in relation to the extant order of power, which

52 Elisabeth Bronfen, *Over Her Dead Body* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), 302.

53 See Hilary Lees, *Exploring English Churchyard Memorials* (Stroud: Tempus, 2002), 11. See also 104: inscriptions were considered “mirrors of the social scene.” Ronald R. Thomas, “The Letter of the Law in *The Woman in White*” in *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*, Ronald R. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 60; Roy Porter, “Preface” to Sylvia M. Barnard, *To Prove I'm not Forgotten: Living and Dying in a Victorian City* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), x.

54 Cox, “Representations of Illegitimacy,” 163–164. This is also the condition of Sir Percival Glyde, who, as an illegitimate child, “has no legal right to the title he bears, to the property on which he lives, or to the income that he draws. Percival's father had failed to protect his son with a will and died suddenly. [. . .] Percival's access to class status, income and identity all result from his successful forgery of [his parents'] marriage record.” (Tromp, *The Private Rod*, 75–76)

55 Collins expresses sympathy also for Sir Percival's case: “the failure of Sir Percival's parents to marry is also the result of the shortcomings of the law”, in particular of those laws that permitted a husband to abuse his wife and then abandon her, while providing the wife with no legal remedy. (MacDonagh and Smith, “‘Fill Up all the Gaps’,” 284). Sensation Fiction “gives strongest expression to women's frustration with the injustices of divorce law and the rigidity of England's lawmakers.” (Jordan, “The Law and Sensation,” 509). Sir Percival Glyde is a victim before becoming a criminal: “Had he not tampered with the marriage records, England's inheritance laws and the prevailing social prejudice against bastards would have declared him penniless. [. . .]. In Collins's sarcastic epitaph for Sir Percival, scorn for the criminal does not conceal a criticism of society for having produced this tormented soul and his futile sense of propriety: Glyde, the novelist exclaims, committed a forgery that ‘made an honest woman of his mother after she was dead in her grave!’.” (Mecker, “Collins' *The Woman in White*,” 113)

extends itself in order to allow her inclusion within the order of social life, although posthumously, in the social microcosm represented by the churchyard.

As Goodrich underlines, “[a]t its strongest, the legal definition of the person (*ius personarum*) is determined by the theory of images as the form of human appearance, of human presence. The legal subject itself is in one respect to be understood or recognized as a visual fiction drawn upon the natural person.”⁵⁶ In order to enter the realm of the law, it is necessary to be a legal subject, which is by definition a question of being both already a subject of law and of wearing the mask, the sign, of the legal institution: it is only as a legal sign that one can enter the discourse of law. In instituting life, the law founds subjectivity as a place, as sign or mark, from which the subject speaks. Here Anne’s mask is the tombstone which acknowledges her identity, and this passage has to be witnessed in its visual quality. As Goodrich asserts, without an appreciation of its visual and aesthetic forms, it is impossible to comprehend the procedures by which Law as judgment and measure inscribes itself upon everyday life.⁵⁷ Actually, after the proclamation of Laura’s identity in Limmeridge House, Walter brings the people to the graveyard to witness, to see the official bureaucratic sanctioning of Laura’s identity. Such scene has a relevant side effect: not only is Laura acknowledged and sanctioned as a living person, but Anne’s identity is officially acknowledged as well.

In this way, Collins renders Anne’s story a case. He does not openly tell his readers that his aim is a critique of the injustice of the English law of illegitimacy and of commitment to asylums; he rather assimilates and resists the contradictory set of contemporary discourses on such issues in the novel’s texture. He allows the story to develop and to express its main issues⁵⁸, that is to say, the “brutal marginalization” of categories of persons which were constructed by social prejudice, and confirmed by legal prescription.⁵⁹ In this way, he presents a case history,

⁵⁶ Peter Goodrich, “Specula Laws: Image, Aesthetic and the Common Law,” *Law and Critique* 2.2 (1991): 233–254, 233.

⁵⁷ Goodrich, “Specula Laws,” 235.

⁵⁸ Dougal Maceachen, “Wilkie Collins and British Law,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 5.2 (1950): 121–136, 123–124. See also 125: “Not until 1926 did Parliament enact a law altering the legal status of illegitimate children. By the terms of the legitimacy act [. . .] a child born out of wedlock was legitimated on the marriage of its parents, provided they were domiciled in England or Wales at the date of marriage and provided that neither one of them was married at the date of the child’s birth. By this Act also, legitimated children were entitled to a claim on their parents’ estate, and an illegitimate offspring could succeed to the intestate estate of his mother provided there were no legitimate issues. By the passing of the Act the two grievances which Collins brought to attention of the English public in *No Name* in 1862 were finally remedied.”

⁵⁹ Ian Ward, *Law and the Brontës* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 52.

in line with the tenets of the common law, which extrapolates broad principles from particular cases.⁶⁰ The churchyard garden thus opens up a disruptive supplemental space of difference, the space of the feminine and of the illegitimate, united in the character of Anne Catherick, who escapes the control of the law and threatens the symbolic order from its borders (where she has been confined by Victorian tenets). Collins's narrative, in a re-reading of gothic tenets, "self-consciously links the extremity and isolation of these figures with the social groups they confront through the mirroring and antagonism of doubling," thus infiltrating the mainstream Victorian social representation of individuals.⁶¹

The novel actively engages with contemporary social debates; its multi-voiced structure enables the expression of a variety of arguments which reflects the "ideological battles, contradictions and confusions of the mid-Victorian period."⁶² In particular, "[i]t tells the story of how the protagonists [...] acted on their own behalf to right various wrongs without the formal assistance of the law."⁶³ Collins's attention is particularly focused on 'authorized' identities and a potential extension of their boundaries⁶⁴; his suggestion is that mistreatment of the illegitimate and the attribution of the taint of madness is grounded in society's hatred for exceptions to its rules and its resistance to change, in particular, a resistance to potential reforms that would broaden tolerance or extend privilege.⁶⁵ With regard to this, a particular relevance is assumed by his oblique attitude towards Mr Fairlie, whose "betrayal of propriety through adultery and illegitimate birth" lies at the origin of the novel's/the woman in white's mystery.

By exposing the danger of this threat to the order of society, Collins rejects the parliamentary notion that "dangerous" and "spurious offspring" can only attend from a woman's infidelity despite the widely accepted argument that a wife "might without any loss of caste [...] condone an act of adultery on the part of the husband" [...]. Collins challenges the conviction that only women can endanger the order of society.⁶⁶

⁶⁰ See Maceachen, "Wilkie Collins and British Law," 133–134; Ward, *Law and the Brontës*, 6.

⁶¹ Peter K. Garrett, *Gothic Reflections. Narrative Force in Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), 3. See also Sue Chaplin, *The Gothic and the Rule of Law, 1764–1820* (Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007), 3, 34.

⁶² Jordan, "The Law and Sensation," 510–511.

⁶³ Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*, 32.

⁶⁴ Margot Finn, Michael Lobban, Jenny Bourne Taylor, *Legitimacy and Illegitimacy in Nineteenth-Century Law, Literature and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 2.

⁶⁵ Meckier, *Hidden Rivalries*, 110.

⁶⁶ Tromp, *The Private Rod*, 79. See also Sanders, "A Shock to the System," 72: "Mr Fairlie, the authoritarian father who endorsed Glyde's suit, turns out to have been a hypocrite: he himself fathered an illegitimate child [...] His sexual history discredits his authority as matchmaker and by extension that of the gender-class conventions that he represents"; Elisabeth Langland, "*The*

As Mr Gilmore sustained in the novel, “It is the great beauty of the law that it can dispute any human statement made under any circumstances, and reduced to any form” (*TWW* 132). Literature becomes the space for such dispute, as it not only invites deeper ethical consideration of legal issues, but stages also their necessary political complement.⁶⁷

Woman in White and the New Sensation” in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, ed. Gilbert, 196–207, 203: “*The Woman in White* mounts a dramatic challenge to the established patriarchal order by representing corrupt or ineffectual male authority figures.”

⁶⁷ See Ward, *Law and the Brontës*, 5; Tromp, *The Private Rod*, 69.

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