

THE SENSATION NOVEL: A REFLECTION OF CONTEMPORARY TROUBLES AND FEARS

A study of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, Ouida's *Under Two Flags* and
Marie Corelli's *Wormwood*

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1.Introduction

Nowadays the Victorian period (1837-1901) is mostly remembered as a period of peace and relative stability. At the same time however, it was also a period of drastic changes and innovation which were all showcased for everyone to see in The Great Exhibition of 1851 (A.H. Miller 9). Although the technological evolutions such as the emergence of railway travel and the invention of photography are the most memorable, the cultural field was also characterized by some eventful developments. The emergence of the decadent movement and names associated with it such as Oscar Wilde and Huysmans are probably ingrained as general knowledge into the brain of the average culture lover. In sharp contrast to Oscar Wilde, names such as Wilkie Collins, Ouida or Marie Corelli might not ring a bell. This is not surprising as these three aforementioned authors were part of a literary movement which was all the rage back then, but has softly dwindled into obscurity, namely sensational fiction. Although sensationalism is a very broad term that can be used to identify a multitude of novels, in its strictest form it refers to a literary genre that emerged in the early '60s and in a short amount of time became extraordinarily popular only to disappear a few decades later. Nowadays it is considered to be a "minor, marginal and short-lived form" (Pykett, "Sensation Novel", 12). The sensation novel however, is an invaluable treasure of information about the Victorian period. Quite remarkable about this particular genre was the fact that it was very closely linked to a particular socio-historical context. The fact that the sensation novel was so much a product of its own particular historical moment clarifies why it was such a short-lived and temporal phenomenon, but at the same time its temporality is also the reason why the sensation novel is able to offer the twenty-first-century reader an interesting insight into Victorian troubles and fears.

Due to the fact that the sensation novel was such a short-lived form it has been an understudied genre throughout the centuries. Recently however, academics have started to value the genre accordingly by emphasizing the fact that the sensation novel due to its topicality offers an interesting insight into Victorian life. Especially academic Lyn Pykett has continually asserted that the sensation novel is particularly valuable because it mirrors and reflects contemporary Victorian ideas, debates, fears and troubles. In light of this premise I have taken a closer look at three very different sensation novels Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859) , Ouida's *Under Two Flags* (1867) and Marie Corelli's *Wormwood* (1890). At first sight these novels seem to have nothing in common, however all of them are sensation novels from the strictest sense to the broadest sense of the word and each novel is an interesting intervention into contemporary social debates. In consultation with my supervisor, I have chosen three novels that were published at very different times to cross the span of the whole sensationalist movement. Each novel represents a different type of sensation novel from the prototypical sensation novel *The Woman in White* to Ouida's sensational romances and Marie Corelli's *Wormwood* which is not a sensation novel pur sang, but a sensation novel in the broadest sense of the word. As these three novels are so distinctly different they are also reflections of very different troubles and fears which confirms that the sensation novel was a topical product of a specific socio-historical context.

First of all, I will give an extensive overview of all the different sensations that enticed the Victorians such as murder, sex scandals etc. After that I will examine how this Victorian fascination with sensation cultivated in the emergence of the sensation novel. Last but not least, I will analyse Collins's *The Woman in White*, Ouida's *Under Two Flags* and Corelli's *Wormwood* by looking at the way in which each novel is an intervention into social contemporary debates

and a reflection of Victorian views and anxieties. A thorough analysis of the topicality of three novels does of course not suffice to make definitive statements about every sensation novel or the sensationalist genre in itself. This particular thesis however, aims at analysing how these three novels, which were very carefully chosen, are reflections of their own age. These analyses can then be used to add weight to the statement that the sensation novel is a reflection of contemporary troubles and fears, a statement which has never before been asserted by accurate examples.

2. Sensationalism

2.1 The Victorian fascination with sensation

In order to thoroughly comprehend what the term ‘sensation novel’ entails, it is indispensable to have a foregoing knowledge about the general Victorian fascination with sensation as it is this initial attraction to sensationalism that was intrinsic to the popularity of this particular literary genre in the 1860s. Even though the Victorian middle-class was known for highly valuing self-repression, decorum and moral continence, they still enjoyed scandals and sensational events as much as we do (Diamond 1). This love for sensation is something inherent to human nature, as Michael Diamond states: “Curiosity, the inclination to idolize and demonize prominent figures, the tendency to wallow in emotion – the Victorians suffered from these weaknesses just as we do” (Diamond 6). The public had thus always had a taste for sensation and to satisfy this craving one only had to pick up a newspaper.

Due to “unprecedented developments of the press” the Victorians, in contrast to their predecessors, had more opportunity to enjoy these sensations (Diamond 1). The “taxes on

knowledge”¹ were abolished which made the newspapers more affordable and resulted in the newspaper being read by the less privileged as well (Diamond 1). Next to the removal of taxes on knowledge, this period also saw the removal of taxes on newspaper advertising (1855) and the repeal of both stamp duty and paper duty in 1861 (Diamond 1-2). These were all developments that led to a wider distribution of newspapers and a larger reading audience, thus resulting in more people being susceptible to the enticing power of all these different sensations which were to be found in the newspapers on a daily basis.

According to Diamond these different Victorian sensations can be split up into different broad categories – royalty, politics, religion and morality, sex scandals, murder mysteries, and to a lesser extent, sports and disasters.² Due to the adamant social hierarchy which characterized the Victorian age, sensations were more interesting and scandalous if the protagonist came from the higher ranks of society (Diamond 6). As stated by Diamond: “In life, in fiction and on the stage, even a wicked baronet always seemed wickeder than a villain without a title” (Diamond 6). The high and mighty also tried to cover up their own misdemeanours in order to maintain this adamant social hierarchy which only resulted in a greater explosion when the truth was disclosed (Diamond 1). As already stated, the higher the rank of the people concerned, the bigger the sensation and who then would be more likely to cause a sensation than the monarch and her heir (Diamond 7). Events such as births, marriages and deaths within the royal family evoked strong emotions in the people as those were “milestones which marked their own lives” (Diamond7). This newfound fascination for the royal family was closely linked to the rise of imperialist and

¹ The taxes on knowledge which were imposed on newspapers made them more expensive and thus only accessible to people with a higher income

² As Michael Diamond’s work *Victorian sensation or the Spectacular, the Shocking and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-century Britain* is the only academic work that gives a complete overview of all the different Victorian sensations. As it is such a I will almost exclusively use this source for this overview

nationalist feelings (Diamond 7). The multiple attempts to assassinate Queen Victoria and the accusations of adultery against her son were among the main sensations concerning the royal family (Diamond 22).

The same nationalist feelings that generated a revived interest in the royal family were also the cause of many political sensations. These national feelings among the Victorians and their drive for reform in combination with the belief that they belonged to the greatest nation on earth, but that the political system “failed to further their interests”, resulted in many Britons coming together to protest against or support certain political ideas. (Diamond 41). It was especially the Chartists movement that brought about mass rebellion more than any other political movement, which resulted in its reputation as “the greatest movement of popular protest in British history” (Diamond 41). The sensational highlight of this Chartist movement was the Chartist march in Newport in November 1839. In Victorian melodrama, characters were either “gloriously heroic” or “deeply villainous” and this black and white thinking extended itself to political figures who were either passionately hated or intensely loved (Diamond 41).

Not only political figures aroused strong passions, so did religion. Most Victorians were devout protestants as Diamond explains: “Protestantism was seen as an essential element of national identity, and an inspiration behind Britain’s emergence as the most powerful country in the world” (Diamond 83). The inhabitants of Spain and France, “Britain’s historic enemies”, were devout Catholics (Diamond 83). Religion was thus closely linked with national identity. Furthermore, it was also closely intertwined with morality as religion was considered to be a reflection of your morals. This link between religion, nationalism and morality accounts for the fact that religion was the cause of many stirrings and sensations back in the nineteenth century (Diamond 83). Morality was not only closely linked to religion, but also to decorum. If one

discussed an immoral subject among respectable people, one was “besmirched by it” (Diamond 102). Moral campaigners who tried to reform sexual mores became inextricably associated with sensation. Especially women who tried to break taboos were “assailed with abuse and ridicule” (Diamond 102).

Symptomatic for the paradoxical nature of the Victorian middle-class was that they were opposed to any sort of discussion that challenged established sexual mores and were repulsed by things such as birth control and venereal diseases. However, at the same time they were extremely fascinated by sex scandals. These sex scandals mostly “emanated from the courts, which had a unique obligation to get at the truth.” (Diamond 120). This meant that in court private diaries and letters were read out, something which would not be justifiable in any other context. It was especially the Divorce court, founded in 1858, that was the main source of sensation (Diamond 120). This divorce court was the most enthralling innovation for the sensation seeker thus far. First of all, Victorians were not only hungry for sensation, but chiefly for sensations involving sex. The divorce court was an excellent place to go for an outrageous sex scandal as most divorce cases were brought about by one of the partners being unfaithful (Diamond 153). Secondly, only the high and mighty were able to pay for a divorce and it were especially the disreputable secrets and misdemeanours of the higher classes that the public was interested in (Diamond 124). The details of all these cases of bigamy and divorce were made even more public by publishing them in newspapers with an ever-widening readership (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 2). When the sensation novelist Charles Reade listed the subjects he thought the public were interested in, “an aristocratic divorce suit” was at the top of his list, followed by “a sensational suicide from Waterloo Bridge, a woman murdered in Seven Dials, or a baby found strangled in a bonnet-box at Piccadilly Circus” (Reade qtd. in Coleman 263-264).

The public was not only interested in sex scandals and divorce cases. They were also intrigued by “a stunning good murder” (Henry Mayhew qtd. in Diamond 154). Nevertheless, there were too many murders for a murder to always be considered sensational. The murder was only deemed sensational if the victim was of high social standing or if there were other compelling factors about the crime. The excitement surrounding a murder manifested itself in the tendency of the people to visit the scene of the crime and take in a view of the house in which the horrible deed took place (Diamond 154). In an ideal murder drama of the nineteenth century, there were three acts to the sensational event: the crime, the trial and the hanging. The trial was the most important part as every detail of the crime was reiterated. Some fortunate Victorians were not only able to read about the trial, but were also able to attend it (Diamond 155). Although the trial was the most important part of a murder case, the murderer’s confession, which preferably took place on the scaffold, was the most sensational one (Diamond 156). This was so popular that sometimes writers of newspapers just invented a confession to please the reader and to pump up their sales (Diamond 156-157). The greatest murder sensation of the Victorian era was that of ‘Jack the Ripper’. The fact that the Ripper never got caught allowed for different rumours, speculation and an uncertainty that only attributed to its status as ‘the greatest Victorian sensation of all’ (Diamond 188). Few sensations lasted as most of them were bound to a specific temporal context and thus not relevant for following generations. However, there were two Victorian sensations that ‘survived’ past the nineteenth century, respectively Jack the Ripper and Oscar Wilde’s fall (Diamond 288). Both sensations are exceptional for their longevity which is attributable to the fact that they speak to moral questions we are still interested in today such as misogyny and homosexuality. Although almost all sensations were ‘ephemeral’, the general feeling they excited still lives on in the sensation novel.

2.2 The sensation novel

The 1860s was arguably the most sensationalist decade as it was not only the period of sensational events and sensational reporting, but also the era of sensational writing (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 1). Scandalous subjects such as shootings, poisonings, adultery and bigamy sold newspapers, so it is not surprising at all that the same themes sold novels as well (Diamond 189). Not only did newspapers and sensation novels deal with the same subject matter; a lot of the time sensation novelists drew on newspaper reports on specific crimes for their novels. For example, Charles Reade always said that he found his plots in the pages of *The Times*, and Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens both admitted that some of their works were inspired by real-life murder cases (Diamond 189). This shows that in many ways sensation novelists were businessmen who worked according to the economic model of supply and demand. They wrote about subjects of which they knew that they would appeal to the “downright depraved tastes” of the Victorians, as a response to the public’s insatiable craving and continuous demand for sensation (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 3). If a scandal occurred that generated a lot of interest, the sensationalist would be at hand to turn it into a novel: “If a scandal of more than usual piquancy occurs in high life, or a crime of extraordinary horror figures among our causes célèbres, the sensationist is immediately at hand to weave the incident into a thrilling tale” (Diamond 189).

Wilkie Collins, Ellen Wood and Elizabeth Braddon were the first novelists who ‘responded’ to the public’s demand for new and thrilling sensations. At the beginning of the 1860’s they each published a novel, respectively *The Woman in White* (1859), *East Lynne* (1861) and *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862), that would establish the genre of Sensationalism. The terms ‘Sensation novel’ or ‘Sensational fiction’ were first used when critics started to review these

particular works (Loesberg 115).³ Throughout the 1860s these novels and the novels that followed their example were extraordinarily popular and the subject of many debates due to their morally ambiguous nature (Loesberg 115). This extreme popularity, however, was short-lived, resulting in the sensation novel being regarded as a “minor, marginal and short-lived form” (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 12). This is due to the fact that the sensation novel is so closely linked to a particular socio-historical context. This close-knit relationship between the sensation novel and its context is caused by its thematisation of topical sensations, a modern nervousness and particular fears of the Victorians which were all temporary. It is thus a genre so much the product of its particular historical moment that it was unable to survive that moment (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 12). So although the sensation novel was deemed sensational and topical in its own period, it somehow lost its topicality and consequently its ability to shock readers. These days some of its ‘thrilling devices’ might come across as rather outdated and stereotypical (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 13). Nevertheless, sensation novels are still able to offer the twenty-first-century reader an ‘exciting’ read. Especially Wilkie Collins remained in demand with readers throughout time and has achieved a place in the canon of English literature as the father of the modern detective narrative (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 12). What is more interesting, however, is the way in which the sensation novels offer the twenty-first-century reader an intriguing way of ‘reading’ mid-Victorian culture as they can be seen as interventions in contemporary social debates and are, as already mentioned, produced by and re-produced mid-century anxieties (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 13).

³ According to the OED the term was first used in a literary context in 1863. Kathleen Tillotson however, in her preface to *The Woman in White* (Boston, 1969), xii, gives two examples of the term used in 1861. Both examples are citations by contemporary reviewers. (Loesberg 135)

2.2.1 A definition of the Genre?

The fact that the sensation novel was inextricably linked to a specific socio-historical context also meant that the genre was inherently different from literary genres that preceded it. Although it differs from its predecessors, an attempt at giving an accurate definition of the genre would be virtually impossible as this would be an attempt at fixing something which might more easily be seen as a fluid category (Pykett, "Sensation Novel", 8). However, the different sensation novels have some distinguishing features concerning contents and narrative form which, in summary, might constitute a working definition of the genre. Among these different features the most prominent ones have to do with the content, which is morally ambiguous and pernicious in comparison to the prudish moral tone that characterized popular fiction of the 1850s (Schroeder 87).⁴ A content that at the same time is also influenced by and is a reflection of social changes and anxieties among the Victorians. However, the sensation novel formally also distanced itself from its predecessors by using certain innovative narrative techniques. Although this might be a less prominent trait of the sensation novel, it allows for the reader to gradually uncover the central secrets of the novel, but this will be dealt with in detail later on.

As already mentioned above, the most remarkable trait of the sensation novel was its sensational and scandalous plot. In most sensation novels the plot was linked with horror, mystery, suspense and secrecy (Pykett, "Sensation Novel", 4). The best sensation novels were, as Kathleen Tillotson points out, "novels with a secret" (Brantlinger 1-2). This 'secret' gradually unfolds and generally has to do with crimes such as blackmail, murder etc. Thomas Hardy once described the sensation novel very accurately as following: "a long and intricately inwrought chain of circumstance," involving "murder, blackmail, illegitimacy, impersonation,

⁴ Two examples of the moral tone that characterized literature of the 1850s are Charles Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852) and Charlotte Yonge's *The Heir of Redclyffe* (1853)

eavesdropping, multiple secrets, a suggestion of bigamy, amateur and professional detectives” (Pykett, “Sensation and the Fantastic”, 211). Next to that, the sensation plot was also concerned with the persecution or seduction of a young woman, illegal incarceration and various cases of fraud and forgery (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 4). This sort of sensational content led to various different names for subdivisions of the sensation novel such as, “crime novels”, “adultery novels” and “bigamy novels” (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 5).

However, it is important to note here that a plot built up around terror, secrecy and mystery was not new or intrinsic to the sensation novel. This sort of plot was already to be found in the Gothic novel, which in many ways can be seen as the antecedent of the sensation novel. However, there is a critical difference between the sensation novel and the Gothic novel. This difference especially lies in the fact that the sensation novel took these secrets and terrors and placed them within an everyday domestic setting, whereas the Gothic novel’s plot was set in the past or in a remote location. The influence of the Gothic novel on the sensation novel and its differences will be elaborated on in the section entitled ‘The sensation novel as a hybrid’.

2.2.2 The sensation novel and modernity

As already mentioned before, the content of the sensation novel was pernicious as it consisted out of poisonous plot elements such as blackmail, fraud and murder. However, at the same time the sensation novel was both an embodiment of a specific modern nervousness, caused by a rapidly modernizing world, and a thematisation of multiple Victorian fears. In general, the term “modernity” is often mistakenly categorized as a late nineteenth-century or early twentieth-century phenomenon as it is often confused with the term “modernism”, which is indeed a philosophical movement that found its origins in the late nineteenth-century (Daly 464). However, when looking at modernity as a process of moving away from a ‘traditional’ society to

a ‘modern’ society, one could state that it is an earlier development that already found its origins in the late Renaissance and reached its highpoint during the industrial revolution. One of the most famous ‘products’ of this industrial revolution undoubtedly was the emergence of railway travel.

The rise of railway travel was an important ‘invention’ for obvious reasons, but even more remarkably it brought about dramatic changes in the Victorian perception and experience of space and time. Especially the concept of time was completely transformed as railway travel generated an “acceleration of the pace of everyday life” and was the driving force behind the introduction of standard time, which obliged the Victorian traveller to have a watch on hand at all time (Daly 472). Railway travel did not only alter the concepts of space and time, but also became a supplier of new potentially harmful situations as evidenced by the fact that the first encounters between the passengers and this new mode of transport were not always happy ones (Daly 463). Both the change in the pace of everyday life and the potential harm that railway travel entailed, caused a feeling of uneasiness among Victorian subjects. Victorians were now faced with ‘new’ fears such as anxiety about being too late and missing their trains and a fear for possible deathly collisions (Daly 470). Daly also states that the traveller was “overloaded with sensory stimuli that he or she [could not] accommodate properly” (Daly 470). In general the railway journey thus appeared to be a “constant assault on the fragile nervous system” of the Victorians (Daly 470).

The emergence of railway travel was also the main catalyst in the rapidly increasing success of the sensation novel as this new way of transport was “a significant factor in the development of market conditions for sensation fiction” (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 8). These ‘good’ market conditions were due to the fact that railway travel presented the sensation novelist with a new ‘audience’, namely the railway traveller. The sensation novel perfectly

accommodated to the newly speeded-up world of railway age and perfectly met the needs of the railway traveller (Daly 464). The sensation novel turned out to be the perfect product to put on the railway bookstall as it was something that could “entice the passenger and relieve the dullness of the journey” (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 8). However, the sensation novel did not only accommodate this newly modernized world, but at the same time also registered the nervousness and unease that this modernisation brought about by creating a community of nervousness within the novel (Daly 463).

An example of a ‘community of modern nervousness’ within a novel is Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* (Daly 463). In this novel, numerous references are made to the characters’ nervous states of mind of which the following excerpts are examples: Laura’s “sensitive lips, subject to a light nervous contraction” (Collins 41), Mr. Fairlie’s complains about “the wretched state of [his] nerves” (Collins 33), Fosco’s “nerves so finely strung that the starts at chance noises” (Collins, 199) (Daly 463). This repentance of the nervous disposition of the main characters aims at creating a similar effect among the reader out of sympathy; the sensation novel thus addresses itself to the reader’s “sympathetic nervous system” (Daly 463). By doing so the novelist created a ‘bond’ between the reader and the character, but at the same time also makes the reading experience an experience of unease (Daly 468). By preaching to the reader’s nerves, the sensation novel tries to create a subject perfectly adjusted to that modern world: “The sensation novel is in effect a machine for the production of suspense, and that suspense works to retool the subject of modernity, who without such training risks being overwhelmed by modernity” (Daly 477).

2.2.3 The sensation novel as an embodiment of Victorian fears

The sensation novel can thus be seen as the product of a rapidly modernizing world. A world in which railways, newspapers, the electric telegraph and so on, were transforming conceptions of space and time. As mentioned, the sensation novel was not only the product of modernization, but also a reflection on it as it displayed a “specifically modern nervousness”, which was due to the aforementioned modernization and technological revolution (Pykett, “Sensation and the Fantastic”, 223). This feeling of unease and nervousness, however, was not only due to technological changes, but more so brought about by social changes that resulted in an adjustment of the “social and moral status quo” (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 10).

Often times the plot and the central preoccupations of the sensation novel dealt with the Victorian fears about social changes. Especially anxieties concerning the nature and status of family were thematised in many a sensation novel. This can be seen by the fact that most sensation novels are stories about a family with a plot that eventually reveals that the ‘ideal’ Victorian family has some dark secret tucked away (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 10). This anxiety about the family also shows in the novel’s preoccupation with legal matters. Most sensation novels have intricate legal plots, involving laws of bigamy and divorce, wills, the inheritance of property and issues which stem from women’s lack of legal identity and rights (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 10).

Fears about social infiltration due to social mobility are also prominently present in most sensation novels. This fixation on class hierarchy becomes noticeable in the sensation novel’s preoccupation with plot elements related to the loss of identity (Loesberg 117). In the sensation novel loss of identity is not a psychological problem, but more so a legal problem that results in the loss of class identity (Loesberg 117). The loss of social identity due to the merging of the

classes was a fear that was highly topical at the time as it was touched upon in the debates over social and parliamentary reform in the late 1850s and 1860s. Loesberg states that “sensation novels evoke their most typical moments of sensation response from images of a loss of class identity” (Loesberg 117). It is mostly because of the topicality of class merging that the loss of social identity was a plot element that could create the most suspense in the sensation novel. To a lesser extent fears and anxieties about financial insecurity, played out in plots about fraud and bankruptcy, were touched upon as well (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 10-11).

The most prominent fear among the Victorian middle-class, however, was that of the nature of the feminine coupled with uncertainties about gender roles (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 10). This fear about the feminine nature was evoked by the fact that in the 1860s women started to rebel against their inferior position within society. This kind of female rebellion also found its way into the sensation novel, which portrayed strong women who took matters into their own hands (Diamond 5). In general, female characters were central in almost every sensation novel and virtually every time they were depicted as strong, assertive and resourceful women who are capable of solving mysteries (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 6). Marian Halcombe, the most prominent female character in Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White*, could be considered the first in a line of strong women in sensational fiction (Diamond 197). The sensation novel thus partially paved the way for further ‘discussions’ about the woman’s role in society and marriage in New Woman fiction. Characters such as aforementioned Marian Halcombe, Valeria Woodville⁵ and Magdalen Vanstone⁶, were in some ways the ancestors, or even archetypes, of the ‘New Woman’ (Diamond 217).

⁵ Valeria Woodville is a strong female character in Wilkie Collins’s *The Law and the Lady*

⁶ Magdalen Vanstone is once more a strong female character depicted by Wilkie Collins in his novel *No Name*

Not only did the sensation novel feature powerful women, it was perceived as a feminine phenomenon regardless of the gender of the novel's characters or the gender of the writer (Pykett, "Sensation Novel", 41). This can be explained by the fact that women were remarkably more interested in everything sensational. Women were avid sensation seekers. For example, when a newspaper had an interesting sensation trial to report, women were the first to buy it (Diamond 4). This female fascination for sensation also extended itself to fiction as women became avid writers and readers of sensation fiction (Diamond 5). As Pykett states: "Sensation novels were, in the main (or so it was thought), written by wicked women, about wayward girls and wicked women, for consumption by women whose waywardness and potential for wickedness was signalled by the very fact that they read such material" (Pykett, "Sensation Novel", 40).

Women were thus not only readers of the sensation novel, they also contributed to the genre's success by turning to the writing of sensation novels themselves. There were a lot of female names counted among the sensationalists of that time, of which the most famous were Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Ellen Wood, Rhoda Broughton and Ouida. This prominence of female writers probably was the most sensational thing about the sensation novel (Pykett, "Sensation Novel", 40). Not only was this presence of woman writers sensational, it was also a matter of concern for contemporary critics. Contemporary reviewers expressed their concerns about "the feminine nature of the writing" (Pykett, "Sensation Novel", 44). They complained that the sensation novel, if written by a woman, was written in a language of excess. This meant that they found the style of women writing to be a style that was too extravagant, embellished and ornate; a style which also dwelt on certain passages too long and too lavishly (Pykett, "Sensation Novel", 44).

2.2.4 The sensation novel as a hybrid

The preceding paragraphs evidenced that the sensation novel's content was 'dramatically' different from literature of the 1850s as there was a close-knit relationship between the sensation novel and the contemporary socio-historical context. As already mentioned, the sensation novel was a thematisation of topical sensations, a modern nervousness and particular fears which were all topical and consequently set the sensation novel apart from its predecessors. However, in sharp contrast to those topical plot elements, the plot build up around terror, secrecy and mystery was not only intrinsic to the sensation novel. This sort of intricate and mysterious plot, was already a prominent element in the Gothic novel. In some ways, the sensation novel can be seen as an heir of the Gothic novel, if we consider the Gothic as the paradigmatic form of the fantastic in the Victorian novel. These Gothic tales of mystery and especially the almost supernatural terrors of Mrs. Radcliffe and her successors, were the most important and prominent 'ancestors' of the sensation novel (Brantlinger 8). Both the mid-century sensation novels and the decadent novels that flowered in the late nineteenth century, can be seen as mutations or modernizations of the Gothic (Pykett, "Sensation Novel and the Fantastic", 211). This modernization especially lies in the mixing of conventions of realism and the journalistic into the Gothic which makes the events in the novel seem more probable (Brantlinger 9).

In sensation novels the archaic, exotic and foreign settings of the Gothic were replaced by more 'realistic' domestic settings. This domestication of the higher and more romantic Gothic mysteries was probably one of the most shocking and thrilling aspects of sensation fiction. Henry James also acknowledged the terrifying effect created by putting villains and their antagonists together in a domestic environment:

Those most mysterious of mysteries, the mysteries that are at our own doors. This innovation gave a new impetus to the literature of horrors. It was fatal to Mrs. Radcliffe and her everlasting castle in the Appenines ... Instead of the terrors of Udolpho, we were treated to the terrors of the cheerful country house, or the London lodgings. And there is no doubt that these were infinitely the more terrible (Henry James qtd. in Pykett 221)

Not only the domestic setting made the sensation novel more realistic than its romantic counterpart the Gothic novel, but also the incorporation of journalistic events attributed to the air of realism that the sensation novel emitted. By “sensationalizing” modern life, the novelist were actually merely making fictions out of events that filled newspapers. The best example here is Wilkie Collins whose main sources included press reports of murder cases (Diamond 4). He also subtly referred to famous cases in his novels. In *The Woman in White* he referred to the famous murdercase of the Mannings, which I will elaborate on in my analysis. The sensation novel was thus a generic hybrid in its combination of the domestic and the exotic, the fantastic and the journalistic, art and no-art (newspapers). Sensation fiction in short can be summed up as an unique mixture of domestic realism with Gothic romance (Brantlinger 1).

2.2.5 New narrative techniques

The content of the sensation novel is without a doubt its most prominent, alluring and emblematic feature. However, there is also something to be said about the sensation novel’s new innovative narrative techniques which were used to support and emphasize the sensation novel’s mysterious plot. The best sensation novels were “novels with a secret” and narrative strategies were developed that enabled the reader to gradually discover these secrets (Brantlinger 1). These particular narrative strategies used by sensationalist writers, were strategies or techniques of

concealment, delay and deferral, which all aimed at tantalizing the reader by not divulging all the information at once (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 5 & Brantlinger 2).

The most famous example of a narrative technique that results in a slow and gradual uncovering of “the central secret” was the split or shared narrative (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 5). Once more, Wilkie Collins was the innovative force behind this new narrative ‘technique’ as he introduced it in *The Woman in White*; a story narrated by multiple narrators, all of which do not possess the whole story (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 5). *The Woman in White* has no omniscient narrator, instead there is some sort of ‘detective’ figure and the only information that the reader gets, is the information that is “possessed or discovered by the detective” (Brantlinger 18). The story thus gradually unravels before the reader’s eye in at the same rate of the detective’s discoveries, which puts the reader in the same position as the detective, namely a position of gradual discovery. Furthermore, the use of the multiple narrators of which all are unable to fathom the mystery, only adds to the inexplicable and puzzling air surrounding the mystery.

2.2.6 The sensation novel and contemporary critics

Not only the content and innovative techniques were unique traits of the sensation novel, its reception among contemporary critics was rather remarkable as well. The paragraph on the sensation novel and the new woman already briefly touched upon the fact that critics denounced the feminine nature of sensation novels which, according to them, generally resulted in a ‘language of excess’. However, their main issue with the genre did not lie in its feminine nature, but in the genre’s potential corrupting influence on the morals. According to one “overheated critic” the influence of the sensation novel was

on the whole, so infamous, the principles contained in many of them so utterly demoralising; the conversations retailed so revolting for their looseness,

wickedness and blasphemy; the seen represented so licentious or so horrible, that it becomes the duty of each one who can find his way into print to protest against it (Diamond 190)

This notion of the sensation novel as corrupting and pernicious literature, was mostly due to the fact that the sensation novels introduced subjects that ‘good’ Victorians considered disreputable and contemptible (Brantlinger 7). As already mentioned, sensation novels dealt with subjects such as adultery, bigamy, fraud, murder and were above all characterised by a focus on bodily sensations such as anxiety, fear and sexual feeling. It was thus not surprising that novels with this sort of subject matter were deemed pernicious and considered a dangerous challenge for established mores by the ‘prudish’ Victorian middle-class. Especially novels that dealt with bigamy, could not escape harsh judgement by contemporary critics, who considered such novels to be the equivalent of the ‘extremely dangerous’ French novels (Brantlinger 6).

Furthermore, the portrayal of strong women in the sensation novel, which was mentioned before, was also greeted with some critical backlash. According to contemporary critics the representation of the female protagonist as an active character that also actively desires, attributed to the status of the sensation novel as morally ambiguous as it shows a novel that questions established virtues and domesticity, at least by implication (Pykett, “Sensation Novel and the Fantastic”, 222). Not only were the critics appalled by the use of these morally ambiguous and sensational themes, they were more so disgusted by the exploitative approach to these controversial issues (Brantlinger 6). Subjects such as bigamy or adultery were not touched upon to support a divorce law reform or to proclaim greater sexual freedom. Such subjects were merely used in an exploitative manner. This disturbed critics as it showed how easily writers put their moral ideals aside to exploit the interest of the public.

2.2.7 A definition

As shown in the previous sections, the sensation novel was not a monolithic phenomenon that can be captured in a one-sentence definition. However, after looking at all the different facets of the sensation novel, one can try to capture the essence of the sensation novel in a more comprehensive definition. The sensation novel originated in the late 1850s and was an “exciting page-turner” due to its sensational and pernicious content (Pykett, “Sensation Novel”, 50). Next to this timeless subject matter, which was already to be found in the Gothic novel, the sensation novel was also the product and reflection of its own time. The sensation novel was both a response to the public’s insatiable demand for sensations and a reflection of topical scandals, a modern nervousness and particular fears of the Victorians. This balance between time-bound and timeless elements makes the sensation novel an exciting read for both the 19th century and 21st century – reader.

3. Wilkie Collins

It is virtually impossible to write a thesis about sensationalism and the sensation novel without mentioning Wilkie Collins, as he is the uncontested ‘father’ of the sensation novel; a status which he achieved after the serialization of *The Woman in White* in Charles Dickens’s weekly *All the Year Round*. However, not all the work of Collins was as sensational or as celebrated by the readers as *The Woman in White*. In fact, the reception of his early work did certainly not foreshadow the success of his later works. His first work, a romance titled ‘*Lolani, or, Tahiti as It Was*’ remained unpublished throughout his whole life (Law 98). His second work, a memoir about his father⁷, however did manage to get published, but also did not grow into the success that Collins was hoping for (Phillips 20). When his third work, the historical novel *Antonio*

⁷ Collins’s father was a painter by profession who died in 1847 and had asked his son, Wilkie Collins, to write his biography (Marshall 27)

(1850), was finished, Collins was almost forced “to finance its publication personally” (Law 98). Although his early work was not known to the larger public, it did manage to catch the eye of Dickens. Dickens saw tremendous potential in Collins and consequently gave him the chance to contribute to his weekly magazine *Household Words* in which Collins in 1857 published his first serial novel *The Dead Secret* (Marshall 36). This period in Collins’s career is one of “increasing involvement with Dickens” (Trodd 27). Collins became a regular contributor to *Household Words* and eventually got hired by Dickens as staff member (Nayder 2). Working with Dickens who was considered ‘the greatest writer of the years’ helped Collins develop his own writer’s voice and his “distinctive narrative method”, which involved the use of multiple narrators (Trodd 35).

Although Collins had already written a considerable amount of works, his actual breakthrough only happened when *The Woman in White* appeared in *All the Year Round* from 26 November 1859 to 25 August 1860 (Marshall 56). This signalled the birth of the sensation novel and established Wilkie Collins’s name as a writer. From the get-go *The Woman in White* “aroused wide interest” and “caused queues on publication day and raised the circulation into six figures” (Law 97). *The Woman in White* even became a true marketing product as its title got printed on every possible saleable product: “every possible commodity was labelled “Woman in White”. There were “Woman in White cloaks and bonnets, “Woman in White” perfumes and ... toilet requisites, “Woman in White” Waltzes and Quadrilles” (Law 98). The success of *The Woman in White* also did not remain limited to Britain as the novel rapidly became translated into other languages (Phillips 20). Collins sometimes referred to his foreign audience as being “more appreciative than the native” (Phillips 21). *The Woman in White* signalled the beginning of Collins’s glory decade of the 1860s in which he went on to write *No Name* (1862), *Armadale*

(1866) and *The Moonstone* (1868), the works for which he is almost exclusively reminded now (Dolin 10).

As already mentioned before, Collins's earlier work showed no signs of the success that was to come. Unfortunately, his later work also showed little signs of the success that had been. Taylor states that: "the last two decades of his life are generally regarded as a long-drawn-out creative twilight, punctuated by 'fitful gleams' (Taylor, "The Later Novels", 79). His later works mostly engaged with social issues and he had the tendency to do this in a "heavy-handed" manner, causing his work to become less 'enticing' and consequently less popular with the overall public (Taylor, "The Later Novels", 79). However, it is not surprising that Collins's later work became riddled with social protest, as his earlier work already showed Collins's tendency to offer social critique on contemporary institutions or events. Collins's social engagement makes him an ideal subject for this thesis as even his earlier work provides an accurate and topical reflection of certain contemporary 'troubles'. However, his novels managed to remain in demand throughout the years as they appeared to be novels that offered contemporary social critique, but still managed to maintain a universal and timeless appeal.

3.1 *The Woman in White* as the prototype of a sensation novel

As already mentioned it was *The Woman in White* that was considered to be the first true sensation novel. However, it was definitely not the first Collins novel that had sensationalist features. *Basil* (1852), Collins's second published novel and his most famous work before *The Woman in White*, also had many sensationalist traits (Pykett, "Collins", 54). However, the popularity of *The Woman in White* combined with its new innovative narrative technique and a plot that reached unforeseen sensational heights, made *The Woman in White* the first novel that

could be considered the start of a 'new literary genre'. Furthermore, through the years the novel has maintained its status as the prototype of a true sensation novel.

Hardy has said of the sensation novel that it is "a long and intricately inwrought chain of circumstance" (Thomas Hardy qtd. in Pykett 211). The plot of *The Women in White* is indeed a very long and complicated chain of circumstance, which makes it difficult to summarize. However, in order to understand how the novel is a reflection of its own period, it is necessary to understand the basic plotlines, which will be laid out in the following paragraphs. A linear retelling of the story is also not facilitated by the fact that the story is told by a "sequence of narrators" which implies that there is no chronological step-by-step development, but more so a "series of sudden revelations" (Kendrick 26).

That *The Woman in White* is narrated by multiple narrators is attributable to the fact that none of the narrators possess the whole truth, but merely a little piece of the big puzzle:

When the writer of these introductory lines (Walter Hartright, by name) happens to be more closely connected than others with the incidents to be recorded, he will describe them in his own person. When his experience fails, he will retire from the position of narrator; and his task will be continued, from the point at which he has left it off, by other persons [...] Thus, the story here presented will be told by more than one pen. (Collins 1).

Walter Hartright, the pseudo-detective of the story and the first narrator, appears to have collected all possible evidence and testimonies and has put together a narrative of the events after their completion so that the reader might hear them "as the judge might once have heard it".

Walter thus takes on a sort of ‘lawyer’ role offering and summing up all the evidence and presenting it to the reader (i.e. the judge) (Pykett, “Collins”, 57).

Not only is Hartright the one who ‘compiled’ the complete story, he is also the first narrator as the novel starts with Walter’s narration about how he met the woman in white during his walk to London after visiting his mother. This first meeting between Walter Hartright and the woman in white is the primal sensational scene of the novel. Not only is it sensational, the meeting also has a supernatural air surrounding it as according to Hartright the woman appeared out of thin air: “I only wondered at your appearance to the road, because it seemed to me to be empty the instant before I saw you” (Collins 19). Hartright offers to help the lady to get into London safely only to find out moments later that she escaped from an asylum. Although Hartright is disturbed by everything that happened that evening, he decides not to dwell on it any longer. The next morning he leaves for Limmeridge House where he “was to superintend the instruction of two young ladies in the art of painting”. (Collins 12). The Limmeridge household consists of the two young sisters named Laura and Marian and their only remaining relative, their uncle Mr. Fairlie. The woman in white however, remains an unsolved mystery that keeps haunting Hartright who discovers that Laura Fairlie, one of his students, shares a striking resemblance to the woman in white. Furthermore, the woman in white had mentioned to Hartright her love for Limmeridge House and Mrs Fairlie, the mother of Marianne and Laura. Both the woman in white’s resemblance to Laura and her apparent connection to Limmeridge House and Mrs. Fairlie, raises so many questions that Walter Hartright and Marian decide that “the time had come for clearing up the mystery of the woman in white” (Collins 45). In her mother’s letters to her husband Marian discovers that a child named Anne used to attend her mother’s school and that that same girl was dressed in white by Mrs. Fairlie at which she had

exclaimed “I will always wear white as long as I love. It will help me to remember you, ma’am” (Collins 60). Although this did not explain the woman in white’s confinement in an asylum and her resemblance to Laura, it does offer them an answer as to who she is and why she knew Mrs. Fairlie.

The woman in white becomes even a bigger mystery when she writes a letter to Laura in which she warns her not to marry Sir Percival Glyde. However, Laura does marry Sir Percival Glyde and moves with her sister to Blackwater Park which is Sir Percival’s home. As Hartright is not there to witness the events anymore, the story is now narrated by Marian Halcombe in the form of her diary which she kept during her stay in Blackwater Park. The marriage between Laura and Sir Percival Glyde is not a marriage that originated out of love; it is only a way for Sir Percival to pay off all his debts. Together with Count Fosco, his Italian friend, Percival tries to trick Laura into signing an agreement which would bring him into possession of her money. However, Laura refuses to do so and Fosco and Glyde, seeing no other option, set an evil plan into motion. They trick Laura into moving to London under the false pretences that Marian is there as well, but instead of taking Laura to London they make use of her striking resemblance to Anna and take her to the asylum where Anne used to be confined. At the same time they bring Anne, who is dying of heart failure, to Limmeridge House and once more make use of the striking resemblance between the two ladies to convince everyone that it is Laura whom is dying. Laura is thus locked up in the asylum as Anne and Anne dies in Limmeridge House as Laura. Seeing as Percival is Laura’s husband, he becomes entitled to all her money after her supposed death which was the goal of his evil scheme all along . Marian however visits the asylum where Anne used to be confined to find out more about why she was so fixated on warning Laura about Percival Glyde. In the asylum, Marian immediately recognises that the woman confined there is

not Anne, but her sister Laura. In a long chain of event where Walter and Marian try to prove Laura's true identity, they also find out that Sir Percival Glyde's parents were actually never married, which makes Percival an unrightful heir to his title or estate. Eventually the true identity of Anne Catherick is also revealed when her mother admits that Anne is the lovechild of her and Mr. Fairlie, the father of Laura, which also explains the mystery of the striking resemblance between the two girls.

This plotstructure does indeed qualify as a "a long and intricately inwrought chain of circumstance" (Hardy qtd. in Pykett 211). However, the sensation novel is only a true sensational novel as this chain of circumstance consists out of the following plot elements: "murder, blackmail, illegitimacy, impersonation, eavesdropping, multiple secrets, a suggestion of bigamy, amateur and professional detectives" (Hardy qtd. in Pykett 211). *The Woman in White* does indeed appear to be the prototypical sensation novel as it combines all this plot elements in varying degrees. In *The Woman in White* the most prominent sensational plot elements are the illegitimacy of both Percival Glyde and Anne Catherick which consequently also reveals Mr. Fairlie's infidelity and the illegal incarceration of Laura which is a form of unwilling impersonation. Both these sensational plot elements are at the same time also the plot elements that are a reflection of contemporary troubles or issues.

3.2 *The Woman in White* as a reflection of contemporary troubles and anxieties

As already mentioned before, the sensation novel is closely linked to its particular socio historical context as it is a thematisation of topical sensations, a modern nervousness and particular fears of the Victorians which were all time-bound (Pykett, "Sensation Novel", 12) . At the same time the sensation novel also aimed at "electrifying the nerves of the reader" which had the most success if the setting and situations related in the novel were extremely topical and relatable to its readers

(Pykett, “Collins”, 52). As Pykett states “sensation novels were modern; they were tales of ‘our own times’” (Pykett, “Collins”, 52). Many a sensation novel thus based its plot on sensational events which could be found in the newspaper as nothing was more topical than a newspaper report (Pykett, “Collins”, 52).

Not only sensational murders or crimes made it into the newspapers, so did contemporary influential changes. For example, The divorce court, founded in 1858, is an example of a contemporary ‘innovation’ that captured everyone’s attention. Newspapers were brimming with report after report about sensational bigamy-divorce causes. People were drawn to tales about bigamy, adultery and even illegitimacy (Pykett , “Collins”, 52). Unsurprisingly, this contemporary change thus found its way into the plot of the sensation novel. Not only sensational reports about divorces, murders and crimes filled the newspapers and periodicals, there was also place for debate about “women and their changing roles both within and beyond the family” (Pykett, “Collins”,52). In the sensation novel this resulted in plotlines dealing with prostitution or the ‘wrongful incarceration of the vulnerable women in asylums” (Pykett, “Collins”, 52). In *The Woman in White* Collins mostly touches upon these two very topical ‘sensations’ as both the subject of illegitimacy and the wrongful incarceration of women in asylums takes up a prominent place in *The Woman in White*’s plotline.

3.2.1 Illegitimacy

As already mentioned several times now, the greatest scandals were to be found in the divorce court. Each divorce case back then was always caused by adulterous actions of either one of the partners as adultery was the only reason why a divorce would be granted (Diamond 124). However, the case became even more sensational if not only adultery was committed, but if there was a possible illegitimate child involved as well. An example of this was the Chetwynd v.

Chetwynd divorce case in which the husband not only accused his wife of being adulterous, but also subtly implied that ‘their’ child probably was not his: “he remarked upon the conduct of the respondent in instructing his counsel to drag before the public the fact that his wife was delivered of a child very soon after the marriage” (Diamond 126). An illegitimate child was not only a sensation for the public to feast on, but also one of the Victorians biggest fears.

As mentioned before, the Victorians highly valued decorum as a means of keeping up appearances. A family scandal, as family was the epicentre of Victorian life, was consequently one of the Victorians biggest fears. However, the fear surrounding illegitimacy mostly stemmed from the pattern of inheritance in 19th century England (Finn 25). It was the common custom back then that all of the property and wealth descended through “the male line” (Finn 25). This meant that in the Victorian period the wife’s fidelity was thus of the utmost importance, otherwise men would blindly be giving away all their belongings and property to a “spurious” child (Finn 25). The fear of Victorian men about the legitimacy of their children was thus a “by-product of the system of direct patrilineal descent to male heirs” (Finn 25).

The ‘problem’ of illegitimate heirs however, went beyond the fear of the wife’s possible adultery. The nineteenth century aristocracy was also haunted by claims of imposters as McWilliam states that in the nineteenth century “unexpected claimants to wealthy estates were not uncommon” (McWilliam 70). Imposters were then also considered “illegitimate persons” as they took on an “indeterminate and unauthorized form of identity” (McWilliam 85). It is not surprising that the nineteenth century was characterized by middle-class claims on ancient aristocratic titles. The nineteenth century was namely characterized by the rise of liberal and democratic values and the rise of the middle-class that went hand in hand with these liberal changes (McWilliam 69). The middle-class thus felt empowered, but quickly noticed that the real

power still belonged exclusively to the aristocracy. In order for one to get ahead and obtain any power, one thus had to prove that they belonged to an aristocratic family.

One of the most famous cases of an imposter claiming to be the heir of a wealthy estate was the affair of *smyth v. smyth* in 1853 (MacWilliam 76). In this case Thomas Provis claimed to be a baron as he argued that he was the son of the late Sir Hugh Smyth. In court he even showed a recording of his parents' marriage and his own baptism. However, they soon discovered that the documents were forged and that he was just an imposter who tried to pass himself off as the legitimate heir to Sir Smyth's title and estate. According to MacWilliam this case was so well-known that inspired the theme of the lost heir who comes to claim his inheritance in nineteenth century fiction (MacWilliam 78). As this case was so well-known it would have probably caught Collins his eye as well; a hunch that is affirmed by the fact that Sir Percival Glyde's fraudulent actions in *The Woman in White* share striking resemblances to the *smyth v smyth* case.

In *The Woman in White* Sir Percival Glyde is also an example of the lost heir who comes back to claim his inheritance. Both in the *smyth v smyth* case and in *The woman in White*, the imposters' claim that they are the rightful heir does not only obtain them a wealthy estate, but also the title of baronet. Furthermore, both Provis and Sir Percival Glyde undertook fraudulent actions to be able to present a recording of a marriage between their parents'. In *The Woman in White*, Percival Glyde offered Mrs. Catherick all sorts of expensive presents in order for her to give him the key to the vestry in which the marriage-register was stored. He then added the marriage of his father and mother to the marriage register: "He was some time getting the ink the right colour (mixing it over and again in pots and bottles of mine), and some time, afterwards, in practising the handwriting. But he succeeded in the end – and made an honest woman of his mother, after she was dead in her grave!" (Collins 594).

However there is a big difference between Percival's case and the case of Thomas Provis. Whereas Provis untruthfully claimed that Sir Hugh Smyth was his father who also had married his mother, Percival did not lie about his parentage. Percival's "father and mother had always lived as man and wife" (Collins 592). So Percival would have been the legitimate heir to his father's estate except for the fact that his parents never married, which made him an illegitimate child according to the definition of illegitimacy that states that every child born out of wedlock is illegitimate (Finn, Loban & Taylor 3). Mrs. Catherick also mentions the reason why the parents of Percival never married: "The truth being that she was really a married woman; married in Ireland, where her husband had ill used her and afterwards gone off with some other person" (Collins 592). The narrative told here is actually the story about an illegitimate heir, an imposter who through unfortunate circumstances could not obtain the title and estate he actually was entitled to. Even Mrs. Catherick, who detests Percival, justifies his actions:

He knew no more than any one else of what the state of things really was between his father and mother, till after his mother's death. Then his father confessed it, and promised to do what he could for his son. He died having done nothing – not having even made a will. The son (who can blame him?) wisely provided for himself. (Collins 592).

Furthermore, she also mentions that if not to Percival, the property would have gone to "a distant relation, who had no idea of ever getting it" (Collins 592). Mrs Catherick twice tries to defend the actions of her sworn archenemy, which consequently makes the reader question whether Percival's actions were righteous or not. Collins, through the voice of Mrs. Catherick, almost subtly asks his readers the 'rhetorical' question whether a distant relative is more entitled to the property than the child of the father even though it is born out of wedlock. Collins portrays a

narrative about illegitimacy in which the actions of the imposter although fraudulent are understandable. Mrs. Catherick even subtly implies that Percival was more so entitled to the property than the distant relative. Instead of showing a clear-cut narrative about an illegitimate imposter, which would be a self-evident choice, Collins goes out of his way to give Sir Percival Glyde, the ultimate evil character of the narrative, some redeeming features. We could conclude that Collins thus deliberately problematizes the rigid rules about legitimacy and illegitimacy in nineteenth century law. In a noticeably lesser extent this question about ‘the righteous heir’ also gets mirrored in the plotline about Anne’s illegitimacy. Walter Hartright and Marian discover that Anna and Laura are actually half-sister and the fact that Anne is the elder of the two is mentioned multiple times. For example in the letter of Mrs. Fairlie to Mr. Fairlie: “Four days ago Mrs Catherick came here to see me, and brought her only child with her, a sweet little girl about a year older than our darling Laura” (Collins 58). Once more, one could ask itself whether this does not make Anne, as she is Mr. Fairlie’s firstborn, the righteous heir to her father’s estates (MacDonagh & Smith 280).

The fact that Collins plays with the fine line between legitimacy and illegitimacy in *The Woman in White* and thus challenges the rigidity of law, must come as no surprise. Collins was known for criticizing contemporary law as he already somewhat does in the first lines of *The Woman in White* when Hartright mentions: “But the Law is still [...] the pre-engaged servant of the long purse” (Collins 1). In so the illegitimacy of Glyde was not his parents’ fault, but once more the fault of the law. In this particular case the malefactor is the divorce law that withheld Percival’s mother from getting a divorce. The divorce laws which “[provided] the wife with no legal remedy” if her husband left her are thus “the ultimate cause of Percival’s illegitimacy”

(Macdonagh & Smith 284). As Mrs. Catherick said: “It was not his fault that his father and mother were not married; and it was not his father’s and mother’s fault either” (Collins 594).

3.2.2 Female Imprisonment in the Asylum and beyond⁸

The social critique of Collins did not limit itself to the law system; Collins was also closely involved in the mid-nineteenth-century debates on asylum reform (Taylor, “Introduction”, 3). When *The Woman in White* first became serialised in *All the Year Round* it was often times also surrounded by articles on “asylum abuse” (Pykett, “Collins”, 56). This shows the remaining topicality of asylum abuse even after the asylum reform which already took place in the early nineteenth century. In appendices A and B, pages are included of instalments of *The Woman in White* in *All the Year Round*, respectively those of the 21st of January and the 4th of February 1860. In both cases the instalment of *The Woman in White* is immediately followed up with a piece about the confinement of women in hospitals or ‘madhouses’. This shows how the asylum debate remained topical and sensational throughout the nineteenth century. Although madness might not have been as sensational as a good murder case or a filthy sex scandal, it still proved to be a very sensational topic. Academic Catharine Coleborne states that “from the earliest times of the institution known as the ‘asylum’, sufferers of mental illness, or those incarcerated and designated ‘mad’, became the objects of a public gaze” (Coleborne 104). Watching lunatics became some sort of sport that gave the public their sensational fix (Coleborne 105).

Consequently, the theme of female imprisonment and escape was a very popular one in nineteenth century fiction, definitely among female writers⁹ (D.A. Miller 119). In *The Woman in*

⁸ The Oxford Dictionary refers to an Asylum as “a sanctuary place of refuge and protection”. For the purpose of this thesis however, the meaning of the term Asylum will be the one to which it has become popularly restricted: “Asylum for the mentally ill”

White Wilkie Collins also incorporates the story of female imprisonment and escape as both Laura and Anne are unrightfully incarcerated in a private asylum. However, Anne's mother, Mrs. Catherick, does admit that there is something to be said about Anne's mental health as she states that her daughter has always been "weak in the head" (Collins 597). However, Anne's existing mental disorder "is only plausible pretext for confining her on other grounds" (D.A. Miller 122). When Walter Hartright finds out that Anne escaped from the asylum his first thought is not as to why she was incarcerated, but that he probably helped an innocent woman: "What had I done? Assisted the victim of the most horrible of all false imprisonment to escape" (Collins 26). Hartright's response is very telling as it reveals an age in which imprisonment of innocent women was apparently quite 'normal' and a non-surprising practice as Anne being innocent is apparently more plausible than her belonging in the madhouse. Although Anne's incarceration is somewhat medically justifiable, Laura's is definitely not. Her imprisonment is solely the product of an evil scheme plotted by Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde.

The illegal incarceration of both Anne and Laura might seem unlikely to a 21st century reader, however it is not as farfetched as one might believe it to be, as was already apparent from Walter Hartright's reaction to Anne's escape. Back in 1819 there also was a famous case of Jane Horsman who was admitted to a private asylum. However, Jane's incarceration appeared to have little or nothing to do with her mental health, but was an ingenious plot designed by her uncle "to secure the substantial pension which she received from her brother, a wealthy East India Company official" (Brown 426). Because this was not an isolated incident as there had already been reports of similar occurrences, there came a parliamentary inquiry into the state of madhouses

⁹ Miller gives the self-evident example Of Charlotte Brontë as a female writer who wrote about female imprisonment and escape

which resulted in a “drastic change in the management and treatment of the insane” (Brown 427). Although this case occurred in the early nineteenth century, it would have been highly unlikely that Collins was not aware of the Jane Horsman case as it singlehandedly set in motion the whole asylum reform and would consequently have been basic knowledge to someone as interested in everything asylum-related as Collins. Although there was no case like Jane’s anymore after 1819, at least not publically, the general condition in asylums remained deplorable throughout the nineteenth century. Especially the sanitary provisions left much to be desired as they simply could not accommodate the continually growing amount of people admitted to asylums (Smith 173).

It is important to note here that Collins as a social activist was interested in the concept of female ‘madness’ which explains why he is one of the few male writers who incorporates the theme of female incarceration and escape in his work. Although a very topical subject, his work does not offer a true insight into the general condition of the Victorian asylums (D.A. Miller 113). The incarceration of the girls is only vaguely described as both Anna and Laura cannot or refuse to speak about their experiences in the private asylum. Where the illegitimacy of Sir Percival Glyde is complicated by Collins as a way to raise questions about the law, the illegal incarceration of the women appears to function more as a thrilling narrative device than as an indictment of the institution. However, *The Woman in White* might try to assert that the imprisonment of women remained a horrible truth, even though it did not always appear in the public eye due to the fact that the imprisoned had a voice that was not heard. In *The Woman in White* Laura’s voice is not heard either, even though she repeatedly tries to convince everyone that she is Lady Glyde and not Anne, but these statements get chalked up to her presumed madness.

Although the illegal incarceration of Anne and Laura in the asylum is the most obvious case of female imprisonment; the idea of imprisonment is echoed throughout the whole novel. Laura feels ‘imprisoned’ in her marriage as she is not able to do as she wants or go where she wants. Eventually Laura’s room is even turned into a prison as Percival bluntly admits to Marian: “‘Am I to understand, Sir Percival, that your wife’s room is a prison, and that your housemaid is the gaoler who keeps it?’ I asked. ‘Yes; that is what you are to understand,’ he answered” (Collins 324). Percival even threatens to turn Marian’s room into a prison too: “‘Take care my gaoler hasn’t got double duty to do – take care your room is not a prison, too’” (Collins 324). Not only does he literally and figuratively imprison Laura and Marian, Mrs. Catherick also suffered the same fate as she was not to go anywhere without getting permission of Percival:

I was not to stir away from Welmingham, without first letting him know, and waiting till I had obtained his permission. In my own neighbourhood, no virtuous female friends would tempt me into dangerous gossiping at the tea-table. In my own neighbourhood, he would always know where to find me” (Collins 596).

Numerous examples of female imprisonment at the hands of Sir Percival are to be found in *The Woman in White*. All four main female characters are imprisoned in either an asylum, a room, a town or feel imprisoned in the institution of marriage.

3.3 Conclusion

A true sensation novel is a thematisation of topical sensations, a modern nervousness and particular fears of the Victorians. *The Woman in White* is a thematisation of all possible sensations as it involves murder, a hint of adultery, illegal incarceration and so on. It had thus all the main ingredients to capture the attention of the 19th century sensation lover. Both the illegal incarceration of Anne and Laura and the illegitimacy of Percival and Anne are more than just a

sensational narrative device as they are a reflection of contemporary ‘troubles’ and ‘fears’. Collins’s engagement with topical subjects is most noticeable in the fact that he clearly seemed to be inspired by real-life cases that had been reported in the newspapers such as the *smyth v smyth* case or the case of Jane Horsman. In most of his novels he also makes subtle references to other cases, although this is lost on a 21st century reader. An example of this is his reference to the murdercase of the Mannings: “I have asked whether Henry the Eighth was an amiable character? Whether Pope Alexander the Sixth was a good man? Whether Mr Murderer and Mrs Muderess Manning were not both unusually stout people?” (Collins 239). For the 19th century reader however, this reference would undoubtedly have been an exciting reminder of a truly sensational case.

Collins *The Woman in White* remained in demand throughout the centuries due to the time-less sensations which also manage to entice the 21st century reader. However, for the observant 19th century reader *The Woman in White* was more than mere a sum of multiple sensations. For those readers *The Woman in White* was also an intervention in contemporary social debates, a reflection of their own fears and in some ways even a test of their knowledge of popular illegitimacy divorce and murder-cases.

4. Ouida

Unlike Wilkie Collins who achieved canonical status, Ouida’s contribution to Victorian literature has often been undervalued and neglected. However, as Andrew King rightfully states Ouida was “a crucial figure in Victorian popular culture” (King 1). This is evidenced by the fact that the magazine *Bow Bells* called her “the leading female writer of England” and Max Beerbohm, an English writer and essayist, called her “the miracle of modern literature” (Moore 483). Her apparent ‘popularity’ was mostly due to the fact that Ouida’s work appealed to a very

heterogeneous audience (King 1). Her work was read by both a male and female audience and by people from all different social strata (Schroeder and Holt xii). Not only her audience, but her work was also very diverse as it ranged from high society novels to romances, political adventure stories and social satires (Schroeder and Holt xii). In total she wrote over thirty novels all of which were an intervention into social contemporary debates in varying degrees.

Her earliest novels, respectively *Held in Bondage* (1864), *Strathmore* (1865), *Chandos* (1866) and *Under Two Flags* (1867), made Ouida a literary celebrity over the course of only three years (King 5). Especially the publication of *Under Two Flags* solidified Ouida's status as one of the leading female sensation novelist. These early novels were mostly sensational romances of 'high life' in which she combined adventure with topical sensational plot elements such as crime and bigamy (King 16). As I already mentioned, Ouida did not only write sensational romances, but was known for an oeuvre that was very diverse. In the 1870s she moved to Florence and this change of environment coincided with the first drastic change in her writing. Her novels changed from novels of 'high life' to novels about the Italian countryside. At the same time her novels also became metafictional contemplations on the position of art in society (King 20). During this period Ouida was at the peak of her popularity and would write and publish a novel almost every year (Gilbert "Disease, desire", 140). Similarly to Collins's literary evolution, her later novels became almost solely devoted to social causes (Gilbert, "Disease, desire", 140). While her earlier novels were high society novels, her later novels took "a sharply critical stance toward the wealthy and powerful" (Gilbert, "Disease, desire", 140). By the end of the nineteenth century Ouida fell out of favour of the general public which seems to be a fate that almost every nineteenth century writer was confronted with (King 2). Up until today Ouida remains one of the most understudied and undervalued Victorian writers. Recently

however, academics have acknowledged Ouida's importance in the field of Victorian literature. Talia Schaffer in her work on forgotten female aesthetes, called Ouida the "forgotten mother of the 1890 aesthetic movement" (Schaffer 122). Other academics have also acknowledged that Ouida despite her reputation as misogynist has constantly depicted heroines in her novel that have inspired the 'New Woman' of the 90's. Moreover, her work remains valuable for its "manifestations of late Victorian ideas regarding sexuality, masculinity, femininity, commodification, marriage and family" (Schroeder and Holt, xiv)

4.1 Under Two Flags: un Roman Français écrit en Anglais

Although Ouida resisted the label herself, her earlier novels definitely fit the label of sensation novels (Moore 491). Although they are novels that do not feature crimes such as blackmail or fraud à la *The Woman in White*, they still managed to shock the reader as they featured sensational topics such as desire, bigamy and extramarital affairs. *The Academy* even observed that Ouida's novels are "almost exclusively about lovemaking" (Jordan 248). As already mentioned before, Ouida's novels were read by a very large and heterogeneous audience, consequently she had more influence than other female sensation novelists of that time such as Elizabeth Braddon and Henry Wood. Because her novels reached such a large audience, Ouida was considered to be the most "morally dangerous" female sensation novelists out there (Jordan 247). Her 'corrupting' influence even reached young girls which worried contemporary critics. Critics already feared that women would take everything that they read to be true and consequently worried that young girls would be even more susceptible to the dangerously enticing powers of the sensation novels. *Victoria Magazine* also published an essay which stated that Ouida's novels were the most dangerous especially because they were read by "the tender blossoms of the school-room [and] maidens in their earliest teens" (Schroeder 89).

The fact that Ouida had such a heterogeneous reading public and thus such a widespread influence was attributable to the fact that she was one of the only female sensation writers whose novels were “stocked by the leading circulating libraries” (Jordan 247). Her novels were tolerated by these circulating libraries because they were not “definitive sensation novels”, but sensational romances (Jordan 247). Furthermore, her novels also took place outside the “middle-class domestic realm” (Hager 237). The dangerous women who advocated a policy of free love were placed outside Victorian middle-class life and were thus perceived to be less of a treat to “the bastion of Victorian civilization, the middle-class home” than for example Lady Audley (Hager 237).¹⁰ Ouida’s novels due to their setting in a distant location, such as Algeria in *Under Two Flags*, had a fantastical air about them, which gave Ouida more freedom to deal with serious and sensational content (Jordan 248). Her novels were also tolerated because people perceived them to be “French novels written in English” and the public tolerated open sexuality in French novels more than they did in English novels as they chose to read French novels especially for that particular quality (Jordan 249).

Under Two Flags, Ouida’s fourth novel, differs somewhat from the previous three as it does not have “the art of making love” as one of its principal themes (Schroeder and Holt 41). *Under Two Flags* however, remained sensational as it shocked readers with its portrayal of socially condoned adultery and women’s ambition for individuality and power. The novel tells the story of Bertie Cecil whom as a part of the Royallieu Household lives a fabulous aristocratic life in England. His brother however, has a serious gambling addiction and constantly lives on the verge of bankruptcy. To solve his money problems Bertie’s brother forges the Seraph’s signature to lend money on his behalf. Bertie is unrightfully accused of the crime, but he cannot clear his

¹⁰ Lady Audley is the main character in Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862). This novel was considered to be more ‘dangerous’ as it placed sensational crimes such as bigamy, poisoning and murder at the centre of the Victorian middle-class home

name without sending his brother to prison and ruining the honour of the married woman who could have served as his alibi. Bertie only sees one solution for this problem and that is to leave England with a ruined reputation and to join a French legion in Algeria. He serves in the Franco-African army for twelve years while everyone back home believes that he has died in a train accident. While serving in the Franco-African Army, he meets Cigarette. Cigarette who grew up in the army has become the army's mascot, a nurse for the wounded soldiers and a respectable soldier herself. She becomes completely infatuated with Bertie and eventually saves his life as she takes a bullet that was intended for Bertie. Although Cigarette dies, she has made sure that Bertie's name has been cleared so that he could return to England. The novel ends with a happy ending as Bertie is reunited with the Seraph, who has always believed in his innocence, and marries the Seraph's sister. Although the novel tells the story of Bertie's exile to Algeria and his restoration to the English aristocracy, the most remarkable character of the novel is undoubtedly Cigarette. Her character is especially interesting as it offers the reader an insight into women's rebellion against their prescribed role in society.

4.2 The Woman Question

As already mentioned before, women started to rebel against their inferior position in society from the 1860s onwards. The sensation novel which emerged during the same period was a reflection and according to critics also the direct cause of women's self-assertion. On the one hand the sensation novel portrayed strong female characters who took matters into their own hands thus reflecting the ongoing 'rebellion' of women against their prescribed social roles. On the other hand critics also believed and worried that the sensation novel encouraged women to question their role in society as it "touched upon one of the hidden ills of Victorian society: the repressed and unfulfilled lives of women" (Schroeder 87). By portraying strong assertive female

characters the sensation novel evoked in its female readers the desire to lead a similar life as those of their favourite heroines, a life of individuality and power (Schroeder 87). The fact that the sensation novel aroused such feelings among its readers was extremely problematic according to Victorian critics as it was a severe treat to established values such as those of family and the woman's role within that family. The sensation novel thus reflected "women's experiences and women's aspirations", but at the same time also the "anxieties about women" (Pykett, "Improper Feminine", 5-6).

The subject of women's role in society was already broached in the sensation novel in the 60's and grew to become "the central concern of New Women discourse" in the 90's (Hager 238). The sensation novel's heroines who subversively move beyond their appointed habitat can thus be regarded as the archetype of the 'New Woman' who reaches the highest level of rebellion and subversiveness by taking on "traditionally masculine roles" (Gilbert, "Ouida", 174). Ouida's *Under Two Flags* also reflects the contemporary attempts of women to fight against the conventional ideal of what a woman should be or do (Schroeder 90). Ouida's Cigarette can be considered a heroine who finds her roots in the tradition of sensational literature to depict strong female characters, but who moves beyond the subversion of the typical sensational heroine such as Marian Halcombe. She is a 'New Woman' *avant la lettre* who tries to assert herself through overt sexuality and aggression.

The first description of Cigarette that Bertie offers the readers immediately shows that Cigarette is a character that crosses gender boundaries. He describes her as being "very pretty, audaciously pretty, though her skin was burned to a bright sunny brown, and her hair was cut as short as a boy's" (Ouida, "Under Two Flags", 145). However, not only her physical appearance somewhat resembles that of a boy, but she also behaves like a boy as she smokes and drinks,

habits which were inextricably associated with masculinity. According to Bertie she was “never so handsome as when a cigarette was between [her lips]” and she could “toss off her brandy or her vermouth like a trooper” (Ouida, “Under Two Flags”, 145). Her habitual smoking habit is so extensive that it becomes the main feature of her identity as she gets named after it. Almost every heroine depicted by Ouida shares with Cigarette this habit of drinking and smoking. A satirical verse in *Fun* once described the Ouidian heroine as following: “[women] who smoke and bet, and talk with graceful unrestraint, and slang, and cheat, and drink, and paint” (Jordan 248). This is evidenced by the fact that Cigarette is not the only female character in *Under Two Flags* who drinks or smokes like males do. Both Lady Guenevere and the Zu-Zu also indulge in these male habits. About Lady Guenevere Bertie states that she was “a coquette who would smoke a cigarette” and about the Zu-Zu he mentions the fact that “she dressed perfectly, but she was a vulgar little soul; drank everything, from Bass’ ale to rum-punch and from cherry-brandey to absinthe” (Ouida, “Under Two Flags”, 51). Smoking which was a symbol that signalled masculinity would later on be adopted by the New Woman as a sign of their rebellion. However, the ‘New Woman’ did not only challenge conventional gender roles by smoking, but more so by advocating a “policy of free love”. According to academic Natalie Schroeder both sexuality and self-love are ways for women to achieve power and self-assertion (Schroeder, 90). Cigarette as a ‘New Woman’ *avant la lettre* also advocates a policy of free love as she uses her sexuality to satisfy her own wants and needs. Furthermore, she is not free of self-love and vanity as she admits to having had thousands of lovers, none of whom she loved as much as herself: “She had had a thousand lovers, from handsome marquises of the Guides to tawny, black-browed scoundrels in the Zouaves, and she had never loved anything, except the roll of the pas de charge and the sight of her own arch, defiant face, with its scarlet lips and its short jetty hair” (Ouida, “Under Two Flags”, 148).

So far Cigarette does qualify as an ancestor of the New Woman of the 90's as she adopts male drinking and smoking-habits and follows the policy of free love. Furthermore, the fact that she is not afraid to engage in battle is not immediately a New Woman-trait, but it is still consonant with the persona of the New Woman as it attributes to her rebellion against the position of women within society (Gilbert, "Ouida", 174). Remarkably she has to save Bertie's life three times in battle. This is a noteworthy reversal of gender roles as gender roles prescribe that the man is the saviour and the woman the one who gets saved. Cigarette however, shoots a man which is anything but feminine behaviour. She is well aware of her own subversive act and postulates that Bertie should be grateful for the fact that she is 'unsexed'; if she had been a stereotypical woman, he would not be alive anymore:

It was well for you that I was unsexed enough to be able to send an ounce of lead into a drunkard!' she pursued with immeasurable disdain. 'If I had been like that dainty aristocrate down there – pardieu! It had been worse for you. I should have screamed, and fainted, and left you to be killed, while I made a tableau. Oh, ha!

That is to be 'feminine,' is it not? (Ouida, "Under Two Flags", 217)

Even after the murder both Cigarette and Bertie remain trapped in the reversed gender roles. Bertie exclaims that he does not know what to do with the body: "I scarcely know what to do" (Ouida 219). Once more, Cigarette takes the lead and decides on their course of action: "'Leave that to me' said Cigarette decidedly, and with a certain haughty partronage" (Ouida, "Under Two Flags", 219). Most soldiers admire these traits in Cigarette. Her artists friend, who painted her years ago, recognises her subversive nature, but states that there still "a million of commonplace women ready to keep up the decorous traditions of their sex" (Ouida, "Under Two Flags", 245). Bertie however, worries about the fact that Cigarette does not "participate in her own

commodification as marriage material” (Schroeder and Holt 49). Bertie throughout the novel serves as “the voice of conventional society” by condemning Cigarette’s behaviour and showing the implications of her lifestyle for the future:

Cigarette was charming now [...]. But when this youth that made it all fair should have passed, when there should be left in its stead only shamelessness, hardihood, vice, weariness those who found the prettiest jest in her now would be the first to cast aside, with an oath, the charred, wrecked rocket-stick of a life from which no golden, careless stream of many-colored fires would rise and enchant them then. (Ouida 245).

Cigarette however, is not wholly “unsexed” as Bertie states that she “had the delicious fragrance of youth, and had not left a certain feminine grace behind her, though she wore a vivandiere’s uniform, and had been born in a barrack, and meant to die in a battle; it was the blending of the two that made her piquante, made her a notoriety in her own way” (Ouida, “Under Two Flags”, 145). Not only her appearance, but also her behaviour is characterized by this duality of both masculine and feminine features. Throughout the novel there are also multiple instances in which Cigarette starts to question her own identity and falls back into her traditional role as a woman. Throughout the whole novel Cigarette returns to her traditional gender role by stepping up as a maternal caretaker. Bertie becomes the centre of Cigarette’s caretaking as she is constantly looking out for him. She decides to take vengeance for the fact that he called her unsexed, but instead her ‘weaker’ side takes over. She contemplates that in constantly helping Bertie and thus abandoning her revenge she becomes weak which she finds to be a character trait of the female sex:

“I swore to have my vengeance on him. It is a droll vengeance, to save his life, and plead his cause with Vireflau! No matter! One could not look on and let a set of Arbicos kill a good lascar of France [...] A grand an misty generality which consoled Cigarette for an abandonment of her sworn revenge which she felt was a weakness utterly unworthy of her, and too much like that inconsequent weathercock, that useless, insignificant part of creation, those objects of her supreme derision and contempt, those frivolous trifles which she wondered the good God had ever troubled himself to make – namely, “Les Femmes” (Ouida, “Under Two Flags”, 222).

Cigarette looking out for Bertie comes from a place of love, which she finds to be a weakness. She does not only pay attention to Bertie, but takes care of every soldier as a true Friend of the Flag:

Yet there were tales told in the barrack-yards and under canvas of the little Amie du Drapeau that had a gentler side. Of how softly she would touch the wounded; of how deftly she would cure them. Of how carelessly she would dash through under a ranking fire, to take a draught of water to a dying man. Of how she had by an old Grenadier’s death-couch, to sing to him, refusing to stir, though it was a fete at Chalons, and she loved fetes as only a French girl can. [...] Of a surety, she missed virtues that women prize; but, not less of a surety, had she caught some that they miss. (Ouida, “Under Two Flags”, 148)

She takes care of the wounded soldiers which is something that originates from a maternal instinct inherent to her female nature. She sings songs to the wounded soldiers that their mothers used to sing to them when they were little. The mothers of the soldiers are not able to be by their

side if and when they die, so Cigarette takes on that role: “Cigarette knew each and all, and never erred by any chance, but ever sung to every soldier the rhythm familiar from his infancy, the melody of his mother’s cradle-song” (Oudia, “Under Two Flags”, 237). She even refers to the wounded soldiers as her own children: “She knew, too, that it was for the sake of this man, lying dying here from the lunge of a Bedouin lance through his lungs, that the ivory wreaths and crosses and statuettes had been sold. And Cigarette had done more than this ere now many a time for her ‘children’” (Ouida, “Under Two Flags”, 241).

Although Cigarette refers to women as “that useless, insignificant part of creation”, she starts to question her own ‘masculine’ identity. After seeing the aristocrat, whom is referred to as Mme. la Princesse, she starts to doubt her own identity and becomes jealous of Princess Venetia Corona’s femininity:

Now, for the first time, the sight of one of those aristocrats smote her with a keen, hot sting of heart-burning jealousy. Now, for the first time, the little Friend of the Flag looked at all the nameless graces of rank with an envy that her sunny, gladsome, generous nature had never before been touched with – with a sudden perception, quick as thought, bitter as gall, wounding, and wift, and poignant of what this womanhood, that he had said she herself had lost, might be in its highest and purest shape. ‘If those are the women that he knew before he came here, I do not wonder that he never cared to watch even my bamboula’ (Ouida, “Under Two Flags”, 209).

Although this duality between feminine and masculine features made Cigarette all the more ‘piquante’, it brings her to confusion. Her feminine side seems completely incompatible with her strive for independence. This is especially prominent in the fact that she wants to remain an

independent woman, but simultaneously remains drawn to the idea of love and marriage as she is hopelessly in love with Bertie (Schroeder and Holt, 48). She is however painfully aware of the fact she does not fit in the category of 'marriageable females' (Schroeder and Holt, 48). Every time she sees Princess Venetia Corona whom is the definition and embodiment of a marriageable female, Cigarette starts to question the life she chose for herself:

Cigarette was proud with an intense pride of all her fiery liberty from every feminine trammel, of all her complete immunity from every scruple and every fastidiousness of her sex. But, for once, within sight of that noble and haughty beauty, a poignant, cruel, wounding sense of utter inferiority, of utter debasement, possessed and weighed down her lawless and indomitable spirit. Some vague, weary feeling that her youth was fair enough in the sight of men, but that her older years would be very dark, very terrible (Ouida, "Under Two Flags", 356)

In the end Cigarette's love for Bertie is so selfless and heroic that she gives her life for him by taking a bullet for him. It is only then that Bertie starts to understand the extent of Cigarette's love for him and it is the only time that Cigarette can finally admit that she loves Bertie as some of her last words are: "But I have loved you. All is said!" (Ouida, "Under Two Flags", 412). Ironically this final act shows the duality that characterized Cigarette throughout the novel. She dies in a heroic act as a true soldier, but ultimately it was an act driven by her love for Bertie which she found to be a weakness associated with the female sex. So she dies the hero she always wanted to be, but this heroic act was ultimately driven by her ultimate weakness, her love for Bertie. Eventually the novel ends with the typical 'happy' ending in which all gender tensions have disappeared. Cigarette has died embracing "the force of her feminine side" and Bertie marries the Seraph's sister whom personifies the conventional 19th century female (Schroeder and

Holt, 49). This ending was a way to satisfy the general public as Mid-Victorians did like a “proper and happy ending” (Bigland qtd. in Schroeder and Holt, 50). Although sensation novelist for the most part bowed to conventions by punishing their heroine’s assertive behaviour, these females still live on in the pages of these novels (Schroeder 99).

Although Cigarette does not really qualify as an ancestor of the ‘New Woman’ as she ultimately gives in to her femininity, Ouida still chose to portray a strong assertive woman who is undoubtedly the most likeable character of the novel. Many academics have noted that Ouida’s portrayal of likeable assertive women is not in accordance with Ouida’s tract called ‘The New Woman’ from which speaks a complete denunciation of the ‘New Woman’ as she calls them one of the “unmitigated bores” (Ouida, “The New Woman”, 610). Ouida, however does not condemn the self-assertion of women, but she does not approve of the way they try to achieve it. She states that the ‘New Woman’ makes the mistake of trying to imitate male behaviour: “she imprisons herself in men’s ateliers to endeavour to steal their technique and their methods, and thus loses any originality she might possess” (Ouida, “The New Woman”, 613). Ouida then goes on to compare the ‘New Woman’ to an agriculturist who completely ignores his own farm: “The New Woman reminds me of an agriculturist who, discarding a fine farm of his own, and leaving it to nettles, stones, thistles, and wire-worms, should spend his whole time in demanding neighbouring fields which are not his” (Ouida, “The New Woman, 618). Cigarette also makes this ‘mistake’ as throughout the novel she tries to be a self-asserted women, but solely tries to do so by taking over male habits. In this way Cigarette underwrites the patriarchal society as her behaviour depicts how women cannot achieve liberty or self-assertion without adopting a male persona. Cigarette takes this even further by completely distancing herself from her own sex. On multiple occasions she ridicules females by calling them “the useless, insignificant part of creation” (Ouida “Under

Two Flags”, 222). instead of striving for self-assertion for all women, Cigarette completely distances herself from her sex by adopting a male persona and male point of view on femininity. Instead of challenging the patriarchal society, Cigarette underwrites it with her male behaviour and her general loathing of women. Cigarette ultimately fails at repressing her own gender and instead of achieving her self-assertion she gives up her liberty so that the “the loved male can have access to power, wealth and status” (Gilbert, “Ouida”, 184).

4.3 Conclusion

As already mentioned multiple times now, the sensation novel was a thematisation of topical sensations and particular fears of the Victorians. Ouida’s *Under Two Flags* perfectly fits that description as it reflects both women’s experiences and their aspirations, but at the same time also the “anxieties about women” (Pykett, “Improper Feminine”, 5-6). Especially Cigarette embodies women’s aspirations as she rebels against her role within society. To a lesser extent Lady Guenevere and the Zu-Zu also portray subversive behaviour. Not only does Cigarette embody the aspirations of women, she also singlehandedly turns *Under Two Flags* into a sensation novel by her subversive behaviour. As already mentioned, the sensation novel aimed at electrifying the nerves of the reader and the sensation novelist succeeded in this if the setting and situations related in the novel were extremely topical and relatable to its readers (Pykett, “Collins”, 52). Although the setting of *Under Two Flags* was not exactly relatable to the larger audience, the ‘rebellion’ of Cigarette definitely was. The topicality of this particular novel then lied in the fact that it was written in 1867, a period in which women started to rebel against the limitations imposed on their sex for the first time.

Interesting about Ouida as a novelist is that she witnessed the start of women’s dissatisfaction with their role in society and was still writing 30 years later when the ‘New

Woman' was born. One can thus compare Ouida's depiction of Cigarette and other strong women in her novels and compare them to the 'New Woman' and Ouida's vision on the 'New Woman' which she formulated in an essay accordingly entitled 'The New Woman'. Ouida's heroines of her earlier novels have been called the foremothers of the 'New Woman' and in the same breath Ouida has also been referred to as anti-feminist or even a misogynist. These might seem paradoxical statements which are irreconcilable, but that is mostly due to the fact that neither statements are nuanced or completely true. Cigarette and other Ouidian heroines do indeed reflect the contemporary attempts of women to assert themselves, mostly by taking over male customs and habits. However, it is important to note here that Ouida's heroines eventually give up on their self-assertion and liberty because of their desire for a man hence restoring the patriarchal society within the novel. Ouida did represent strong female characters because she had a sympathy for self-asserted women. This stems from the fact that Ouida was a very strong and self-asserted woman herself who has always singlehandedly provided for herself and her mother. She did however criticize the way in which women tried to reach their goals as they completely neglected their own feminine qualities and solely focussed on adopting a male persona. Ouida was thus anything but a misogynist as she emphasized women's greatness from within and pushed women to use their own qualities to self-assert themselves. At the same time Ouida's heroines are strong female characters who signal the beginning of women's rebellion, but they cannot be called 'New Women'. First of all, because using this term in the '60s would be anachronistic. Secondly because they fail to preserve their own liberty as they give in to their desires as females. Although Ouida's Cigarette becomes "emasculated" at the end of the novel, Ouida still managed to communicate a subversive message and the erotic and self-assertive Cigarette lives on in the pages of *Under Two Flags* (Schroeder 100).

5. Marie Corelli

One of Ouida's most fervent admirers was Marie Corelli who appeared on the literary scene in 1886 with the publication of her first novel *A Romance of Two Worlds* (MacLeod, "Introduction", 15). Although critics unanimously agreed that the novel was anything but a masterpiece, the public loved it and therefore Corelli became an "overnight sensation" (MacLeod, "Introduction", 9). Her path to success however, was not an easy one. Her early work, which mainly consisted out of Shakespearean poems, brought in little or no money. It was only when George Bentley, the leading publisher of that time, made Corelli his "protégée" that her literary career finally set off (Coates and Bell 14). With every novel that Corelli published, her popularity increased which sent the sales of her novels through the roof. Her novels were so popular that they "sold in the hundreds of thousands – at least twice as many copies as those of her nearest competitors, including H. Rider Haggard, Hall Caine, Mrs. Humphrey Ward and H.G. Wells" (DeCoux 90-91). Her novel *The Sorrows of Satan* (1895) sold more copies than any other book on its first publication and is nowadays still considered to be the first literary bestseller (Felski 115).

While she truly managed to capture "the public's imagination" as a true Oprah Winfrey avant la lettre, critics kept berating her (MacLeod, "Introduction", 9). Among the highbrow critics she was condescendingly referred to as "the idol of suburbia" whose "appeal was only to the unthinking classes" (MacLeod, "Introduction", 9). Eventually Marie Corelli who longed for the critical acclaim she felt she deserved, gave up and stopped sending her novels to the press for review (DeCoux 91). Her popular appeal however, only continued to grow which she attributed to the fact that she "served as the voice of her age" (MacLeod, "Introduction", 11). As John Lucas states her novels do indeed "clearly reflect opinions, wishes, likes and dislikes of the nineteenth century" (Lucas 283). Corelli's massive success however, came to an end as her

popularity slowly but surely started to fade (MacLeod, “Introduction”, 20). After her death Corelli became almost completely “[erased] from cultural memory” which is attributable to the fact that her novels were so much the reflection of their own time (Federico 7). Unlike Collins’s novels, whom managed to maintain a time-less universal appeal, Corelli’s novels were inextricably linked to a specific socio-historical context. Especially *Wormwood* (1890), her fifth novel, perfectly represents the Francophobia that prevailed throughout Britain in the nineteenth century (Macleod, “Fin de Siècle”, 16).

5.1 *Wormwood*: a sensation novel?

Wormwood tells the story of Gaston Beauvais whom is a respectable banker in the firm of his father. While at a party for Pauline’s homecoming at the house of the Comte de Charmilles, he falls head over heels in love with Pauline: “I felt that I loved Pauline de Charmilles – loved her as I should never love any other woman” (Corelli 83). Although Héloïse, Pauline’s cousin, warns Gaston multiple times against pursuing Pauline because Pauline does not yet “understand what love is”, Gaston still asks for Pauline’s hand in marriage (Corelli 95). Pauline accepts, but she immediately doubts whether she made the right decision. She knows that Gaston is a good, kind and clever man, but she cannot get herself to truly love him. In an unfortunate twist of events, Pauline falls in love with Silvion Guidèl. She admits this to Gaston in an attempt to make him break off the engagement: “You can save my by one generous act, - break off our engagement and say to all the world that it is by our own mutual desire!” (Corelli 150). Gaston walks the Champs Elysées that evening, contemplating whether he should break off the engagement, when he meets André Gessonex whom he refers to as a “poor wretch of an artist” (Corelli 159).

Persuaded by Gessonex’s encouragements to drink absinthe, Gaston takes his first sip of the medicinal green drink in the hope that it will offer him “a brief respite from the inner fret of

tormenting thought” (Corelli 166). Under the influence of the drink Gaston decides not to forgive Pauline and Silvion Guidèl. He proceeds in his plan to marry Pauline, but publically humiliates her on their wedding day as he makes her ‘infidelity’ known to all the guests. After this terrible humiliation Pauline runs away from home and Gaston’s father demands that Gaston leaves Paris to reflect on his actions. Gaston does leave the house, but remains in Paris where he becomes a habitual absinthe drinker. Under the influence of absinthe, Gaston murders Silvion Guidèl and drives Pauline to suicide. The novel ends with a delirious Gaston who does not repent or change as he shrieks: “What should we want with Victory? – We have ABSINTHE!” (Corelli 366).

Marie Corelli’s *Wormwood* was first published in 1890 so technically it could not be considered a true sensation novel like Collins’s *The Woman in White* and Ouida’s *Under Two Flags* as this literary genre supposedly ‘ceased to exist’ at the end of the ‘70s. Sharp distinctions between different genres, although useful, are almost never a truthful representation of the reality. The term sensationalism in its strictest form does indeed only apply to novels published in the 1860’s or early 1870’s. Marie Corelli’s *Wormwood* however, can also be considered a sensation novel, but in the broader sense of the word. As I already mentioned before, the sensation novel of the ‘60s set out to shock and electrify the reader’s nerves which had the most success if the setting and situations related in the novel were extremely topical and relatable to its readers (Pykett 52).

Just like a prototypical sensation novel *Wormwood* has its fair share of sensational elements such as murder, suicide and love-betrayal. However, *Wormwood*, and every sensation novel for that matter, only evokes its most sensational moments when it addresses contemporary issues. Corelli’s *Wormwood* is extremely sensational in its representation of the degenerate

bohemian lifestyle and the consequences of drinking absinthe, as those were very topical subjects in light of the ruling Francophobia in Britain at the end of the nineteenth century. The effective sensationalism of Marie Corelli did not go by unnoticed as a reviewer for The Kensington Society admitted to being “carried away by the sensationalist aspects of the novel” (MacLeod, “Introduction, 50). Corelli’s *Wormwood* cannot be considered a sensation novel or decadent novel *pur sang* which evidences that not every novel fits perfectly into rigidly fixed genre categories. Marie Corelli’s *Wormwood* is both sensational and decadent as it is Marie Corelli’s own form of Realism in which she uses both decadent tropes and sensational subject matter.

5.2 A novel with a purpose

Marie Corelli herself described *Wormwood* as “a novel with a purpose” (Corelli qtd. in MacLeod, “Introduction”, 27). Its ‘purpose’ consisted out of warnings against everything that was inherently ‘French’ such as the bohemian lifestyle, the French drinking culture and Naturalist and Decadent literature which originated in France. Although *Wormwood* is Corelli’s first novel that tackles the dangers of French culture, Corelli’s novels were almost always a moralistic intervention. She liked to offer her public examples of negative models against which they could positively assert themselves (DeCoux 100). These moralistic interventions attributed to her status as a guru on “religious and spiritual matters [and] issues of social reform”(MacLeod, “Introduction”, 9).

5.2.1 Francophobia

As already mentioned, Marie Corelli’s novel *Wormwood* is a warning against everything that is inherently French. This Francophobia was not only present in *Wormwood*, but was a common sentiment among most Victorians in fin-de-siècle Britain. The fear of everything that was considered French was due to the fact that fin-de-siècle France as a result of its political and

social turmoil had become inextricably associated to “dangerous political radicalism, lax social and moral values and a corrupt literary and artistic culture” (MacLeod, “Introduction”, 11). The fact that Britain felt threatened by these French developments was the result of Britain’s own vulnerability at that time as it saw its economical and imperial powers dwindle. In that political context, France’s lax morals and political radicalism were feared as they could serve as a catalyst for Britain’s demise. The pernicious literature produced by naturalist and decadent writers, the French bohemian lifestyle and the French drinking only validated these pre-existing anti-French sentiments.

Marie Corelli’s *Wormwood* is most obviously a condemnation of the bohemian lifestyle and the drinking of absinthe as already speaks from the dedication that precedes the novel: “À Messieurs, Les absintheurs de Paris, Ces fanfarons du vice qui sont la honte et le désespoir de leur patrie” (Corelli 68).¹¹ However, to a lesser extent *Wormwood* also addresses the danger of naturalist and decadent literature. Emile Zola, who was the most prominent figure of the literary school of Naturalism, gets insulted in the novel on multiple occasions. The novel’s most prominent example of harsh judgment passed on Zola is when Gessonex expresses his feelings about Zola’s work: “The city that permits the works of a Victor Hugo to drop gradually into oblivion, and sings the praises of a Zola who with a sort of pitchfork pen turns up under men’s nostrils such literary garbage as loads the very air with stench and mind-malaria” (Corelli 266). Not only Gessonex, but also Gaston voices his opinion on Zola by referring to him as the “literary scavenger of Paris” (Corelli 303). Although the opinions of characters do not necessarily represent the author’s own beliefs in the case of Corelli we can assume that this is the case as she mentions her antipathy for Naturalism, and Zola in particular, in a letter to Bentley:

¹¹ Kirsten MacLeod translates this as following: ‘To the gentlemen, the absintheurs of Paris, those who brag of their corruption and who are the shame and despair of their country

Believe me my dear Bentley, if I could bring myself to write a daring, powerful, absolutely materialist book, depicting in strong and merciless colouring the most hideous side of human nature à la Zola, I should be a fortunate author! As far as reputation and cash could carry me; - for this is what the modern public want ... But so long as I live I will never pander to the taste for atheism and stage-morality; if my pen has any power at all it will be used to condemn such abominations till it can write no more (Corelli qtd. in MacLeod, "Introduction", 30)

By passing harsh judgment on the most prominent figure of Naturalism, Corelli indicts the whole movement. Next to the remarks on Zola, Gaston in a delirious state of mind ridicules the want for Realism (i.e. Naturalism) among the people of Paris:

Dear people of Paris, you want Realism do you not? Realism in art, realism in literature, realism in everything? ... You want to look at the loathsome worms and unsightly poisonous growths that attend to your own decomposition and decay? You want life denuded of all poetical adornment that you may see it as it truly is? (Corelli 74)

A big part of the ruling Francophobia in Britain had to do with pernicious literature from France as Victorians "perceived a link between the literature and the health of the nation" (MacLeod, "Introduction", 39). This is evidenced by the fact that Britain's Francophobia reached its highpoint in the mid '80s with the translations of Emile Zola's work (MacLeod, "Fin-de-Siècle Francophobia", 68). Especially the translations by publisher Henry Vizetelly were, according to the public's opinion "insufficiently expurgated" (Jordan 257). Eventually these insufficiently censored translations gave rise to the anti-Zola debate that "pre-occupied the House of Commons and the National Vigilance Association in 1888" (MacLeod, "Fin-de-Siècle Francophobia", 66).

In the aftermath of the anti-Zola debate Corelli wrote a novel that can be perceived as one long argumentation against the works of decadent and naturalist writers, especially Emile Zola.

Although *Wormwood* is infested with Corelli's disapproval of French literature, it appears to be "a full-fledged work of Decadence in its own right" (DeCoux 90). Corelli even includes verses that "evoke [absinthe's] seductive powers" (Federico 74). An example of this glorification of absinthe can be seen in the following verse by Charles Cros:

Avec l'absinthe, avec ce feu
on peut se divertir un peu
jouer son rôle en quelque drame! (Corelli 175)¹²

Furthermore, Corelli also gave Bentley specific instructions about the cover of the book. She demanded that the book should have an absinthe-green cover with a snake woven through the capital letter 'W' (DeCoux 89). What was even more remarkable is that she sent the novel to Arthur Symons, an obvious "celebrator of Decadence", because she thought he would most definitely enjoy the novel (Federico 72). Eventually Bentley voiced his concern as he feared that the novel might "draw readers in with its alluring portrait of the absintheur" (DeCoux 89). However, there is no doubt about the novel being a moralistic intervention as is already obvious from the novel's dedication, but also from the introductory note by Corelli in which she discloses the deplorable situation in France: "The morbidness of the modern French mind is well known and universally admitted, even by the French themselves; the open atheism, heartlessness, flippancy, and fragrant immortality of the whole modern French school of thought is unquestioned." (Corelli 61).

¹² Kirstin MacLeod translates this as following: "With absinthe, with this fire / One can amuse oneself a little / Play one's role in some drama" (175)

In her introduction Corelli also states that she believes absinthe to be one of the main causes for the “low standard of moral responsibility” in Paris: “There are, no doubt, many causes for the wretchedly low standard of moral responsibility and fine feeling displayed by the Parisians of to-day, - but I do not hesitate to say that one of those causes is undoubtedly the reckless absinthe-mania” (Corelli 61). The novel does not show the dangers of reading pernicious French novels it only condemns them, but the novel does not only disapprove of the drinking of absinthe, but also shows the dangers it entails. When Gaston physically starts to suffer due to his excessive drinking of absinthe, a doctor gives him an explanation of the medical consequences associated with the drinking of absinthe:

I must inform you that if you persist in drinking absinthe you will become a hopeless maniac. Your braincells are still heavily charged with the poison, and a violent irritation has been set up in the nerve-tissues. Your blood is contaminated – and its flow from the heart to the brain is irregular, - sometimes violently interrupted; - a state of things which naturally produces giddiness, swooning, and fits of delirium which resemble strong epilepsy. Such a condition might make you subject to hallucinations of an unpleasant kind. (Corelli 354).

The doctor goes on to state that drinking absinthe might also cause irreversible damage to the human body as in Gaston Beauvais’s case: “‘You had hoped it was merely temporary,’ I said. ‘Ah, I understand! But if disease has actually begun, what is the remedy?’ ... ‘There is no remedy,’ he replied reluctantly. ‘Disease of the brain is incurable’” (Corelli 355). If the readers of *Wormwood* are not already apprehensive about drinking absinthe after seeing Gaston’s entire life ruined by the green fairy, the medical account of the results of excessive drinking must certainly scare them off. Ironically enough Corelli was the first author to write a novel about absinthe,

even before British Decadents did (MacLeod, "Introduction, 36). According to Corelli the absinthe craze was both a symptom and the reason behind France's degeneration. Just like with the translations of Emile Zola's oeuvre, Britons were afraid that the habit of drinking absinthe would find its way into British culture. Corelli already remarks on this 'dangerous' spread of the absinthe craze in her introduction:

It has crept into the brain of France as a nation, and there breeds perpetual mischief, - and from France it has spread, and is still spreading, over the entire Continent of Europe. It must also be remembered that in the many French cafés and restaurants and cafés which have recently sprung up in London, Absinthe is always to be obtained at its customary low price ... who can predict that French drug-drinking shall not also become à la mode in Britain? (Corelli 62)

This fear of the spread of absinthe throughout Britain was very topical as is also evidenced by the remarks on it in Coates and Bell's biography about Corelli which was written in 1904. Both Coates and Bell thus lived in the same time-period as Corelli and also expressed their views on the growing absinthe-mania: "Marie Corelli does not overstate the case when she declares that absinthe has taken a grim and cancerous hold of Paris ... and we may well be thankful that the drinking of it has not grown upon us as it has grown upon the Parisians." (Coates and Bell 125).

As mentioned before these Francophobic sentiments were mostly attributable to Britain's fear of its own demise. As MacLeod explains: "France served as powerful image for Britain in concretizing the nation's more general fear of its own demise" (MacLeod, "Introduction", 11). However, to justify their 'racist' Francophobia, Victorians made use of the 'scientific' degeneration theory. This theory presumed that if any sort of species could evolve and progress, it could also "regress or degenerate" (MacLeod, "Introduction", 39). These degeneration theories

also explored how madness or mania could be passed on generation after generation (MacLeod, "Introduction", 39). Essential to this theory was the belief that madness and mania could be passed on to the next generation and almost always became more prominent in the following generation. An example of this process of degeneration through the generations is the beast-like boy who lives with Gessonex. Gessonex himself relates to Gaston how the boy has become a savage through heredity: "I know his pedigree, just as one knows the pedigree of a valuable dog or remarkable horse, - and it is full of significance." (Corelli 253). According to Gessonex, the grandfather of the savage boy was a mad scientist whose degeneracy was due to his "atheism and positivism" (MacLeod, "Introduction", 39). This man's son (i.e. the father of the savage) was an absintheur and maniac. The child that this absintheur produced is "an even lower rung on the evolutionary ladder" (MacLeod, "Introduction", 39). The child is portrayed as a complete illiterate savage who seems to have returned to a primitive stage. Even physically he resembles a human from an earlier stage of development or even a monkey:

There's a boy for you! He would do credit to the antediluvian age, when Man was still in process of formation. The chin, you see, is not developed, - the forehead recedes like that of the baboon ancestor, - the nose has not yet received its intellectual prominence ... He is an animal, made merely, if we quote Scripture, to 'arise, kill and eat' (Corelli 250-251)

Corelli thus places her warning against the drinking of absinthe within the 'scientific' framework of degeneration. Absinthe is thus not only dangerous to the self, but gets passed through generation after generation.

Although Gaston's father was not mad or did not drink absinthe, Gaston still ends up living the exact same lifestyle as the savage boy. Even though Gaston lives the typical Parisian

lifestyle, when he is delirious due to the drinking of too much absinthe he often reflects on the deplorable state of France, and Paris in particular. This is Corelli's chance to voice how degenerate France truly is in a novel that sometimes appears to glorify this particular lifestyle as the first person narrator personifies this lifestyle. There is one passage in which Gaston reflects on the demise of Paris and France and if one would not know better these words could be Corelli's own:

Paris, steeped in vice and drowned in luxury, feeds her brain on such loathsome literature as might make even coarse mouthed Rabelais and Swift recoil, - day after day, night after night, the absinthe-drinkers crowd the cafés, and swill the pernicious drug that of all accursed spirits ever brewed to make of man a beast, does most swiftly fly to the seat of reason to there attack and dethrone it;- and yet, the rulers do nothing to check the spreading evil,- the world looks on, purblind as ever and selfishly indifferent, - and the hateful cancer eats on into the breast of France, bringing death closer every day.(Corelli 335).

5.2.2 Le crime passionnel

As already mentioned, according to the degeneration theory the absintheur did not only ruin his own life, but that of his potential offspring as well. In *Worwmood* however, the potential of absinthe drinking to ruin one's life goes beyond heredity as Gaston in his delirious state of mind, brought about by absinthe, ruins the life of both Pauline and Silvion. He kills Silvion and is the indirect cause for Pauline's suicide. When Gaston kills Silvion this is not premeditated as he explicitly states himself, but brought about by anger after listening to Silvion talking about the love between him and Pauline: “Here we two have tasted the divines joy that life can ever give,

or death take away, - joy that you have never known, Gaston Beauvais! –no! for my darling never loved you! Your touch never wakened in her one responsive throb of passion; - she loved me, and me alone!” (Corelli 239). This declaration drives Gaston mad:

‘You boast of that?’ I said hoarsely. ‘You dare to boast of that?’ ... Canting hypocrite! – vile traducer! – worse in my sight than ever for his braggart pretence of piety! Quick as lightning flash the suppressed ferocity of my soul broke forth, - and without warning or premeditation I threw myself savagely upon him (Corelli 240)

These crimes of passion in which by definition a murder is committed out of sudden rage instead of premeditation almost always had to do with a love story gone wrong (Ferguson, “Gender and Justice”, 1). Fin-de-Siècle Paris saw a huge rise in crimes of passion which was due to a new modern urban lifestyle and the decay of certain values such as family (Ferguson, “Gender and Justice”, 2). Furthermore, the perpetrators were generally met with an acquittal. One could thus commit a crime without necessarily having to worry about the consequences. Ironically fin-de-siècle France had a high acquittal rate (acquittal for serious assault rose from 27% in 1860 to 78% in 1890 and acquittal for murder grew from 15% in 1860 to 34% in 1890), but was also the country with the most crimes (Ferguson, “Judicial Authority”, 293).

Gaston is also aware of the fact that if his murder were to be found out, he would probably only get a light punishment or an acquittal as his murder qualifies as a crime of passion: “Extenuating circumstances would no doubt have been found sufficiently strong to save me from the guillotine, - but I really should not have cared particularly for the renown thus attained!” (Corelli 248). Gaston’s murder spree does not end with his murder of Silvion as he also indirectly

kills Pauline by disclosing to her that Silvion is dead. He acknowledges that the reader might be shocked by his actions, but explains that his are no exception; crime is commonplace in Paris:

Mark me here, good reader, whosoever you are! – do not imagine for a moment that my character is an uncommon one in Paris! Not by any means! The streets are full of such as I am, - men, who, reeling home in the furia of Absinthe, will not stop to consider the enormity of any crime, - human wolves who would kill as soon as look at you, or kill themselves just as the fancy takes them,- men who would ensnare the merest child in woman's shape, and not only outrage her, but murder and mutilate her afterwards, - and then, when all is done, and they are by some happy accident, caught and condemned for the crime, will smoke a cigar (Corelli 270-271)

His actions and those of other Parisians are caused by the lax of morality and the resulting neglect of important values which goes hand in hand with the drinking of absinthe. However, Ferguson attributes the rise of crime both to the decrease of values and the rise of modernity. Gaston underwrites this by stating: “but for modern men what does it avail? Who attempts to “noble things” nowadays without being deemed half mad for his or her effort.” (Corelli 314).

The killing-mania of Gaston gets echoed throughout the whole novel as there are many occasions in which Gaston admits to thinking about murder or where he gets accused of murder. Gaston states that he would murder anyone for some money: “As I tell you, if I had wanted money that night, I would have murdered even an aged and feeble man to obtain it!” (Corelli 271). Furthermore, he also admits to Héloïse that he is dangerous company and capable of murdering her:

You have been in dangerous company, Héloïse, to-day!- be thankful you have escaped all harm! You have talked of past love and passion to a man who has fire in his veins instead of blood, - and who, had he once let slip the leash of difficult self-control, might have thought little of taking his fill of kisses from your lips, and killing you afterwards. (Corelli 313).

Gaston has indirectly driven Pauline to her death, but before that he also threatened to kill her: “I sprang upon her swiftly – I covered her mouth – I grasped her slim throat and stifled her shrieks. “Silence, fool!” I whispered hoarsely. ‘I told you I would kill you if you screamed. Another sound, another movement, and I will keep my word.’” (Corelli 325). When Gaston meets his father, his father also states that Gaston is killing him as he cannot stop worrying about his son’s self-destruction. Héloïse also accuses Gaston of having killed Comte de Charmilles as he died shortly after Pauline ran away which was essentially Gaston’s fault. In short Gaston has killed, has thought about killing or has been accused of killing almost every character in the book.

Corelli thus once more touches on one of the troubles that France has to deal with, namely the rise of crime in Fin-de-Siècle Paris. There are multiple occasions in which Gaston reflects on the rise of crime and admits the harsh truth of Parisian life: “Yes suicides are on the increase, - so are murders; and love and revenge and hatred and jealousy” (Corelli 331). As Ferguson links the rise in crime with a modern mind-set and the neglect of values, Corelli takes it one step further and directly links Gaston’s urge to kill to his absinthe addiction. By linking absinthe to the degeneration theory and the killing mania of Gaston, Corelli displays how the drinking of absinthe is not only dangerous for the self, but also for the fellow human being.

5.3 Conclusion

Out of all the three novels that have been discussed in this thesis, Marie Corelli's work is undoubtedly the most moralistic intervention within contemporary debates. Her novel is more than just a mere reflection of contemporary troubles and fears as it passes moral judgment on multiple French practices. First of all, *Wormwood* condemns decadent and naturalist literature as both Gessonex and Gaston voice their unfavourable opinions on Emile Zola's work. *Wormwood* however, is more than a mere condemnation of decadent and naturalist literature as it mainly serves to warn the reader against the dangers of drinking absinthe. According to Corelli the consequences of consuming too much absinthe are threefold. First of all, the drinking of absinthe has consequences for one's mental and physical health as becomes obvious from the doctor's explanation of the medical consequences associated with the drinking of absinthe. Secondly, Corelli uses the 'scientific' degeneration theory to depict how the drinking of absinthe does not only have consequences for the absintheur, but also negatively affects the lives of the absintheur's descendants. Finally, she portrays how absinthe is the direct cause of Gaston's urge to kill people thus making absinthe not only a danger to the absintheur and his descendants, but also to the innocent bystanders. In short Corelli's *Wormwood* is a manifest against the deplorable French habit of drinking absinthe, which she considers to be the cause of almost every French ail. On a more symbolic level, absinthe throughout the novel serves as a symbol for all "French debased values" (MacLeod, "Introduction", 50). The Victorians did not only fear the drinking of absinthe, but feared that the general moral laxity and awful moral values of the French would contaminate British soil.

6. Conclusion: the sensation novel as a reflection of contemporary troubles and fears

In my introduction I stated that the analysis of three different sensation novels would not suffice to make conclusive statements about each and every sensation novel. My aim was to give an explanation for the topicality of the genre and to offer a thorough analysis of the topicality of three novels to add weight to the following premise: the sensation novel is a reflection of contemporary troubles and fears. Most sensation novels are indeed interventions in contemporary debates and reflections of Victorian troubles and fears. This is attributable to the fact that the sensation novel set out to shock its readers and aimed at electrifying the reader's nerves which was most successful if the events narrated were relatable and hence topical. As the three novels discussed in this thesis stem from different time-periods they are reflections of intrinsically different fears and anxieties. Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* is a reflection of fears surrounding illegitimacy and the troubling unlawful incarceration of women. Ouida's *Under Two Flags* offers an interesting insight into the rebellion of women against their restricted social role within society and Marie Corelli's *Wormwood* thematised the ruling Francophobia in fin-de-siècle Britain. Although all three novels deal with very different subject matter, they have two things in common. First of all, they are all sensation novels, although each one a different kind of sensation novel. Secondly, each novel is a reflection of contemporary fears or troubles that were very topical for their readers at that time.

Although this has been an interesting research into the topicality of the sensation novel, the research does have its limitations and leaves place for further exploration. One of the biggest questions that remains is whether the topicality of the sensation novel caused the nineteenth century reader to have an entirely different reading experience than the twenty-first-century reader and if so in what ways. As the topicality of the sensation novel was partly used as a

thrilling device, one can only assume that the reading experience for the nineteenth century reader must have been more 'thrilling' and thus drastically different from our reading experience. Although the sensation novel might have lost some of its shocking value, it remains a thrilling read and a treasure of information about Victorian life.

Appendices

Appendix A

290 [January 21, 1860.]

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

[Conducted by

abandon the just rights of your niece, and of all who belong to her. Let me state the case to you once more, and for the last time."

Mr. Fairlie shook his head, and sighed piteously.

"This is heartless of you, Gilmore—very heartless," he said. "Never mind; go on."

I put all the points to him carefully; I set the matter before him in every conceivable light. He lay back in the chair, the whole time I was speaking, with his eyes closed. When I had done, he opened them indolently, took his silver smelling-bottle from the table, and sniffed at it with an air of gentle relish.

"Good Gilmore!" he said, between the sniffs, "how very nice this is of you! How you reconcile one to human nature!"

"Give me a plain answer to a plain question, Mr. Fairlie. I tell you again, Sir Percival Glyde has no shadow of a claim to expect more than the income of the money. The money itself, if your niece has no children, ought to be under her control, and to return to her family. If you stand firm, Sir Percival must give way—he must give way, I tell you, or he exposes himself to the base imputation of marrying Miss Fairlie entirely from mercenary motives."

Mr. Fairlie shook the silver smelling-bottle at me playfully.

"You dear old Gilmore; how you do hate rank and family, don't you? How you detest Glyde, because he happens to be a baronet. What a Radical you are—oh, dear me, what a Radical you are!"

A Radical!!! I could put up with a great deal of provocation, but, after holding the soundest Conservative principles all my life, I could *not* put up with being called a Radical. My blood boiled at it—I started out of my chair—I was speechless with indignation.

"Don't shake the room!" cried Mr. Fairlie—"for Heaven's sake, don't shake the room! Worthiest of all possible Gilmores, I meant no offence. My own views are so extremely liberal that I think I am a Radical myself. Yes. We are a pair of Radicals. Please don't be angry. I can't quarrel—I haven't stamina enough. Shall we drop the subject? Yes. Come and look at these sweet etchings. Do let me teach you to understand the heavenly pearliness of these lines. Do, now, there's a good Gilmore!"

While he was maundering on in this way, I was, fortunately for my own self-respect, returning to my senses. When I spoke again, I was composed enough to treat his impertinence with the silent contempt that it deserved.

"You are entirely wrong, sir," I said, "in supposing that I speak from any prejudice against Sir Percival Glyde. I may regret that he has so unreservedly resigned himself, in this matter, to his lawyer's direction, as to make any appeal to himself impossible; but I am not prejudiced against him. What I have said would equally apply to any other man, in his situation, high or low. The principle I maintain is a recognised principle among lawyers.

If you were to apply, at the nearest town here, to the first respectable practitioner you could find, he would tell you, as a stranger, what I tell you, as a friend. He would inform you that it is against all rule to abandon the lady's money entirely to the man she marries. He would decline, on grounds of common legal caution, to give the husband, under any circumstances whatever, an interest of twenty thousand pounds in the event of the wife's death."

"Would he really, Gilmore?" said Mr. Fairlie. "If he said anything half so horrid I do assure you I should tinkle my bell for Louis, and have him sent out of the house immediately."

"You shall not irritate me, Mr. Fairlie—for your niece's sake and for her father's sake, you shall not irritate me. You shall take the whole responsibility of this discreditable settlement on your own shoulders, before I leave the room."

"Don't!—now please don't!" said Mr. Fairlie. "Think how precious your time is, Gilmore; and don't throw it away. I would dispute with you, if I could, but I can't—I haven't stamina enough. You want to upset me, to upset yourself, to upset Glyde, and to upset Laura; and—oh, dear me!—all for the sake of the very last thing in the world that is likely to happen. No, dear friend—for the sake of peace and quietness, positively No!"

"I am to understand, then, that you hold by the determination expressed in your letter?"

"Yes, please. So glad we understand each other at last. Sit down again—do!"

I walked at once to the door; and Mr. Fairlie resignedly "tinkled" his hand-bell. Before I left the room, I turned round, and addressed him, for the last time.

"Whatever happens in the future, sir," I said, "remember that my plain duty of warning you has been performed. As the faithful friend and servant of your family, I tell you, at parting, that no daughter of mine should be married to any man alive under such a settlement as you are forcing me to make for Miss Fairlie."

The door opened behind me, and the valet stood waiting on the threshold.

"Louis," said Mr. Fairlie, "show Mr. Gilmore out, and then come back and hold up my etchings for me again. Make them give you a good lunch down stairs—do, Gilmore, make my idle beasts of servants give you a good lunch."

I was too much disgusted to reply; I turned on my heel, and left him in silence. There was an up train, at two o'clock in the afternoon; and by that train I returned to London.

On the Tuesday, I sent in the altered settlement, which practically disinherited the very persons whom Miss Fairlie's own lips had informed me she was most anxious to benefit. I had no choice. Another lawyer would have drawn up the deed if I had refused to undertake it.

My task is done. My personal share in the

events of the family story extends no farther than the point which I have just reached. Other pens than mine will describe the strange circumstances which are now shortly to follow. Seriously and sorrowfully, I close this brief record. Seriously and sorrowfully, I repeat here the parting words that I spoke at Limmeridge House:—No daughter of mine should have been married to any man alive under such a settlement as I was compelled to make for Laura Fairlie.

WITHOUT A NAME.

THE following communication, authenticated by the writer herself, has been addressed to the Conductor of these pages. It appears to him so remarkable and affecting, that he publishes it exactly as he received it, and without even giving it a title. The confidence voluntarily reposed in him by this correspondent, in the fulness of a grateful heart, he of course holds sacred. She lives by the exercise of an accomplishment, and is one of the large number of educated and delicate women who do so in this city.

The sense of gratitude for unmerited kindness is sometimes oppressive. And only by making a public acknowledgment of gratitude to my benefactors can I get quit of the oppression which is now upon me. Should I annoy them by so doing, they will pardon me if they reflect, that it affords me pleasure to chronicle their goodness. I *know* that they will pardon me, because they delight always in giving happiness and pleasure to those under their charge, and being absent from them I am yet overshadowed by their protection, and feel always like an adopted child away from its home.

Can Bethlehem Hospital be a home?

Weary of life, heart-sick, and utterly despondent, I found refuge within its walls. And my readers will surely forgive all imperfections of style in my narration when they know that for several months I was a patient in this Royal Hospital for lunatics. Had it not been for the unwearied kindness of those under whose authority I was placed, I should not now be able, coherently and quietly, to write down my remembrance of the past, for I should either be the inmate of an asylum for the insane, or I should have passed unrepentant and hopeless into the "Silent Land."

It can interest none to know the cause of my insanity, it may interest many to be made aware of the manner in which my restoration to health of mind was affected.

One lovely summer afternoon I am conveyed, melancholy and utterly indifferent as to my future fate, to the building over whose doors I read plainly Dante's often quoted words,

Leave Hope behind all ye who enter here.

Sensible to all I see and hear, but ever silent and moody, I part from the relatives who have accompanied me, and meekly accept the proffered

arm of the kind-looking attendant who is summoned by the physician's bell, and ordered to take me to "No. 3." Anticipating that some fearful torture awaits me in "No. 3," I yet allow myself, tearless and unresisting, to be conveyed up some broad stone stairs, and find myself presently in a long, light gallery, in which stand, sit, or walk, several women of different age and appearance. The song of birds greets my entrance; the sight of green plants and bright-hued flowers refreshes the eyes accustomed to gaze for many days on the walls of a bedroom, in which my friends had thought it advisable to immure me. Am I in Fairyland? A pretty girl, becomingly dressed, advances with a smile to meet me. This is— But no, I must neither describe nor name the individuals who afterwards became my associates, who bore patiently with the disagreeable moodiness of my manner, who assisted to amuse and cheer me, and who performed for me many acts of disinterested kindness. I often see some of them now; others I may never see again; but I forget none who were kind to me in the time of my need. Sitting—still silent and absorbed in wretched thoughts—at the further end of the gallery, I see, advancing from the door, a lady of dignified presence. She approaches me with slow and decided steps, and a pleased feeling of security steals over me as I gaze upon her benevolent face. No torture will be practised upon me, for I feel certain she will permit no cruelty. The lady wears a black dress and a red shawl; and I have ever since associated a black dress and a red shawl with kindness of heart and suavity of manner. She listens patiently to all who throng around her, and answers all with gentleness; then she pauses beside me. Instinctively I rise. Very pityingly looks the dear lady upon me with her large brown eyes, very soothingly she speaks to me in her musical voice; and, with a gentle caress she leaves me, still silent, although not quite so moody, and pursues her round to comfort those capable of being consoled, and to feel pity for those who cannot feel for themselves. Shortly afterwards, while sitting always at the extremity of the gallery, I see two gentlemen walking, as the dear lady had walked, only perhaps not quite so slowly, towards me. And I feel frightened. For, perhaps, I shall be sent away from the pleasant gallery, and perhaps I shall never see the lady in the black dress and the red shawl again. I had read such fearful tales about Bedlam! But as they approach me, I see that the shorter gentleman is the same who consigned me to the care of the kind-looking attendant, and the taller looks mild and smiles, although I think a little sadly.

They stand looking kindly down upon me, as I sit, shrinking from their gaze, and fearing lest they should read the wicked thoughts always, always stirring within me—the thought that, as for me, there remains no hope of happiness, either in this world, or the world to come: it would be better, had I only the courage, to

Appendix B

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ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

[Continued by]

ever. In three words—how glibly my pen writes them!—in three words, I hate him.

21st. Have the anxieties of this anxious time shaken me a little, at last? I have been writing, for the last few days, in a tone of levity which, Heaven knows, is far enough from my heart, and which it has rather shocked me to discover on looking back at the entries in my journal.

Perhaps I may have caught the feverish excitement of Laura's spirits, for the last week. If so, the fit has already passed away from me, and has left me in a very strange state of mind. A persistent idea has been forcing itself on my attention, ever since last night, that something will yet happen to prevent the marriage. What has produced this singular fancy? Is it the indirect result of my apprehensions for Laura's future? Or has it been unconsciously suggested to me by the increasing restlessness and agitation which I have certainly observed in Sir Percival's manner, as the wedding-day draws nearer and nearer? Impossible to say. I know that I have the idea—surely the wildest idea, under the circumstances, that ever entered a woman's head?—but try as I may, I cannot trace it back to its source.

22nd. Such a day of confusion and wretchedness as I hope never to see again.

Kind Mrs. Vesey, whom we have all too much overlooked and forgotten of late, innocently caused us a sad morning to begin with. She has been, for months past, secretly making a warm Shetland shawl for her dear pupil—a most beautiful and surprising piece of work to be done by a woman at her age and with her habits. The gift was presented this morning; and poor warm-hearted Laura completely broke down when the shawl was put proudly on her shoulders by the loving old friend and guardian of her motherless childhood. I was hardly allowed time to quiet them both, or even to dry my own eyes, when I was sent for by Mr. Fairlie, to be favoured by a long recital of his arrangements for the preservation of his own tranquillity on the wedding-day.

"Dear Laura" was to receive his present—a shabby ring, with her affectionate uncle's hair for an ornament, instead of a precious stone, and with a heartless French inscription, inside, about congenial sentiments and eternal friendship—"dear Laura" was to receive this tender tribute from my hands immediately, so that she might have plenty of time to recover from the agitation produced by the gift, before she appeared in Mr. Fairlie's presence. "Dear Laura" was to pay him a little visit that evening, and to be kind enough not to make a scene. "Dear Laura" was to pay him another little visit in her wedding dress, the next morning, and to be kind enough, again, not to make a scene. "Dear Laura" was to look in once more, for the third time, before going away, but without harrowing his feelings by saying *when* she was going away, and without tears—"in the

name of pity, in the name of everything, dear Marian, that is most affectionate and most domestic and most delightfully and charmingly self-composed, *without tears!*" I was so exasperated by this miserable selfish trifling, at such a time, that I should certainly have shocked Mr. Fairlie by some of the hardest and rudest truths he has ever heard in his life, if the arrival of Mr. Arnold from Polesdean had not called me away to new duties down stairs.

The rest of the day is indescribable. I believe no one in the house really knew how it passed. The confusion of small events, all huddled together one on the other, bewildered every one. There were dresses sent home, that had been forgotten; there were trunks to be packed and unpacked and packed again; there were presents from friends far and near, friends high and low. We were all needlessly hurried; all nervously expectant of the morrow. Sir Percival, especially, was too restless, now, to remain five minutes together in the same place. That short, sharp cough of his troubled him more than ever. He was in and out of the house all day long; and he seemed to grow so inquisitive, on a sudden, that he questioned the very strangers who came on small errands to the house. Add to all this, the one perpetual thought, in Laura's mind and mine, that we were to part the next day, and the haunting dread, unexpressed by either of us, and yet ever present to both, that this deplorable marriage might prove to be the one fatal error of her life and the one hopeless sorrow of mine. For the first time in all the years of our close and happy intercourse we almost avoided looking each other in the face; and we refrained, by common consent, from speaking together in private, through the whole evening. I can dwell on it no longer. Whatever future sorrows may be in store for me, I shall always look back on this twenty-second of December as the most comfortless and most miserable day of my life.

I am writing these lines in the solitude of my own room, long after midnight; having just come back from a stolen look at Laura in her pretty little white bed—the bed she has occupied since the days of her girlhood.

There she lay, unconscious that I was looking at her—quiet, more quiet than I had dared to hope, but not sleeping. The glimmer of the night-light showed me that her eyes were only partially closed: the traces of tears glistened between her eyelids. My little keepsake—only a brooch—lay on the table at her bedside, with her prayer-book, and the miniature portrait of her father which she takes with her wherever she goes. I waited a moment, looking at her from behind her pillow, as she lay beneath me, with one arm and hand resting white on the white coverlid, so still, so quietly breathing, that the frill on her night-dress never moved—I waited, looking at her, as I have seen her thousands of times, as I shall never see her again—and then stole back to my room. My own love! with all your wealth, and all your beauty, how friendless you are! The one man who would give his

heart's life to serve you, is far away, tossing, this stormy night, on the awful sea. Who else is left to you? No father, no brother—no living creature but the helpless, useless woman who writes these sad lines, and watches by you for the morning, in sorrow that she cannot compose, in doubt that she cannot conquer. Oh, what a trust is to be placed in that man's hands to-morrow! If ever he forgets it; if ever he injures a hair of her head!—

THE TWENTY-THIRD OF DECEMBER. *Seven o'clock.* A wild unsettled morning. She has just risen—better and calmer, now that the time has come, than she was yesterday.

Ten o'clock. She is dressed. We have kissed each other; we have promised each other not to lose courage. I am away for a moment in my own room. In the whirl and confusion of my thoughts, I can detect that strange fancy of some hindrance happening to stop the marriage, still hanging about my mind. Is it hanging about *his* mind, too? I see him from the window, moving hither and thither uneasily among the carriages at the door.—How can I write such folly! The marriage is a certainty. In less than half an hour we start for the church.

Eleven o'clock. It is all over. They are married.

Three o'clock. They are gone! I am blind with crying—I can write no more—

EASTERN LUNACY, AND SOMETHING MORE.

THE Greek madhouse of Constantinople lies out far beyond the Seven Towers, and outside the walls. I went to it alone, with a letter of introduction to a Dr. Morano, a native of Salonica. I could get no information at first where the Greek madhouse lay, nor, indeed, did I even know that it was a Greek establishment that I was going to visit. All I knew was, that Dr. Morano presided over the Demir-Khan to which I was bound.

I asked and walked till I was footsore. Every one knew where it was, and showed me a different way. I went every way I was told, and nowhere found the Demir-Khan. I found myself in the old clothes bazaar, in the tent bazaar, in the street of the coppersmiths, among the pipe-makers, in the horse market, in a mosque court railed at by an old Turkish priest, on the Bosphorus in the cushioned cradle of a caïque, in the valleys, on the hills, threading an aqueduct arch where fig-trees grew leafily out of the walls, in burial-grounds among cypresses, near barracks—but never at the madhouse.

At last, as I was resting to take some sherbet at a stall, almost worn out—my head feeling as dry and crusty with the heat as a well-baked quarter loaf—I saw in the distance a Turkish doctor whom I had met at a prison hospital, riding along, preceded by his pipe-bearer.

May your shadow never be less, and the hairs of your head never decrease. Demir-Khan? Why, miles away outside the wall, out by the Sea of Marmora, beyond the Seven Towers.

I thank him, hire a horse from one of those numerous rows of hacks that stand ready saddled in every public place of Constantinople, and push off, calling out "Demir-Khan?" inquiringly to every body I meet, be he pasha, or peach-seller, Turk, infidel, heretic, or heathen.

Miles through lonely suburb streets, rough-paved and shadowy, and I at last emerge, in full blaze of the broad sun, through a city gate into the open country beyond the Seven Towers, and strike far to the left, beyond all the long regions of leek gardens and melon beds, and the rows of samboas and cherry-trees that follow the triple line of ruined wall that girds the old city.

Here I get "warm," as children say, in a double sense. I am getting near the Greek Demir-Khan. I pass an Armenian convent overlooking the blue sea, and there alight to let my horse drink at a delicious fountain, sparkling, cold and pure. I trample down the wild gourds and other weeds to reach the edge of the cliff, and there, looking over to the beach beneath, see some Greek fishermen ankle deep in water, joining hand in hand, and dancing their national Romaika: not without shouts and splashings, they being in the spirits that dabbling in sea water without any clothes on seems always to produce.

I arrive at the gate of a huge enclosure, and, going in, pass up through a garden that seems all mulberry-trees and sunflowers. I am informed that the doctor is not at home, but that the superintendent, a little servile man in a brown holland pinafore, will be proud to do the honours.

He claps his hands, in the Arabian Nights manner, and instantly appears "to him" an agile Greek in white voluminous plaited kilt and black embroidered greaves, who bears in one hand a shovelful of hot charcoal upon which lazily smokes some incense, yielding a fat blue fume and a pungent ecclesiastical odour.

He precedes us for sanitary reasons, and leads us about the huge charity: first to the old men's ward, then to the school; from room to room, but not a word about the mad people. I believe, after all, I have got to the wrong place, for now the lean, dried up pedagogos makes the classes of coarse young Greeks go through various manœuvres to surprise the visitor. One young Anastase is held up to me as the object of special wonder, from his progress in acquiring Greek hymns, and for his power of singing them, which I am afraid he is going to do for my edification; but I am preserved.

I descend at last, and go down among the madmen, who scowl and gibber at me, pray at me, and curse me. The special sight of the place, as the turnkey thinks, is what I am at once taken to see, the smoking incense preceding me in a small pillar of cloud that sets the madmen whispering. It is a Greek sailor, chained down in a chair in a state of paroxysm, hands tied, feet tied, and a girdle round the waist; yet still he

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