

**Mimetic Sensations:  
Sensation Genres, Victorian Realism, and the Transmission of Feeling**

Jessica Simon

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy  
under the Executive Committee  
of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

2019

© 2019

Jessica Simon

All Rights Reserved

## Abstract

Mimetic Sensations: Sensation Genres, Victorian Realism, and the Transmission of Feeling

Jessica Simon

My dissertation, *Mimetic Sensations: Sensation Genres, Victorian Realism, and the Transmission of Feeling*, focuses on the little explored subject of how Victorians imagined feeling to transfer both within fictional scenes of representation and between fictional scenes and the real bodies of the audience or readers consuming them. Turning to mid-nineteenth century criticism, Victorian theories of emotion and physiology (primarily by Alexander Bain), sensation genres across different media (novels and plays by Wilkie Collins, the sensation dramas of Boucicault), along with the “high” realism of George Eliot, I contend that sensation was envisioned as crucial to the transfer of fictional feeling into real feeling. Realism operates not only in how it converts the raw materials from real life into a fictional form of verisimilitude, but in how the fictional representation becomes reconverted into lived, embodied feelings in the real world through those who witness it.

## Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	ii
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	iii
<i>Dedication</i>	iv
Introduction	1
Chapter One: A New Sensation? The Emergence of Sensation Culture in Victorian England	21
Chapter Two: “Too Sensational” and “Painfully Real”: Networks of Sensation and Sympathy in Boucicault’s <i>The Streets of London</i>	77
Chapter Three: “Catching Fire of the Witness”: The Melodrama of Emotional Transmission in Collins’ <i>The Red Vial</i> , <i>The Woman in White</i> , and <i>No Name</i>	131
Chapter Four: “We watch the audience as well as the actors”: Mimetic Circuits in <i>The Bells</i> and <i>Daniel Deronda</i>	195
Bibliography	255

## List of Illustrations

- Figure 1: “Awful Apparition!” *Punch* (April 6, 1861), 140. 1
- Figure 2: Playbill, *The Streets of London*, August 1864, 129  
Boucicault Collection, University of Kent,  
UKC-POS-BOUC-THEPRS.0648154.
- Figure 3: Advertising Card, *The Streets of London*, 1864, 130  
V&A Museum n. S.2520-1986,  
[www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk).

## Acknowledgements

This dissertation could not have been written without the support of advisors, professors, friends, and family, all of whom I am grateful to have the opportunity to thank here. First and foremost, I would like to thank my dissertation committee advisors Sharon Marcus, Nick Dames, and Bill Worthen for their always thoughtful, engaged, and indispensable advice and feedback on this work. Not only do I appreciate their guidance and support, but I'm lucky enough to have a committee that provided inspiration for some of my intellectual interests as they emerged before this project: Nick Dames work on Bain, physiology, and affect made me read work differently, Sharon Marcus' work on Victorian Theatre and her "Theatre and the Novel" course in my second year, encouraged and provided a way to explore my interests in theater and the novel, and Bill Worthen's "Performance Theory" course opened up my reading of performance and texts alike.

I'd also like to thank former professors like Katherine Biers, Jim Adams, Eileen Gilooly, and Maura Spiegel, whose first-year seminar on affect, literature, and film greatly influenced my interests. I would not be a doctoral student without the intellectual home that was the MAPH program at the University of Chicago, and the mentorship of David Levin, Heather Keenleyside, and Elaine Hadley. Taking Elaine's Victorian Literature course on those snowy mornings in Chicago is what set me in the direction of pursuing Victorian Literature. I'm also grateful to the feedback of both the Nineteenth-Century Colloquium and Theatre Subcommittee Colloquium at Columbia, and to friends and colleagues, especially, Lucy Sheehan and Joseph Cermatori. My time at Columbia would not have been the same without you.

Finally, I'd like to take some time to thank my family. To my in-laws, Susan and Aaron, who have been nothing but supportive: thank you for your patience. And, to my parents, Elena and Bill, there isn't a way I can convey how much your love and support has meant to me, it has been everything to me, really, and I thank you both so much for all that you do, for all your advice, for how all my intellectual curiosity was awakened by you both, whether it was by bringing me from age two onwards to London, putting me in the back of your classrooms when I was very young, playing all your records, or sitting on the porch and "contemplating the universe"—you taught me to care, to think, and to listen. And, to my companion in this crazy journey, to the person who without fail makes me laugh, and who has been here for me in sickness and in health, my sweet husband, Zev, I love you so much, and this one is dedicated to you.

*For Zev*

## Introduction

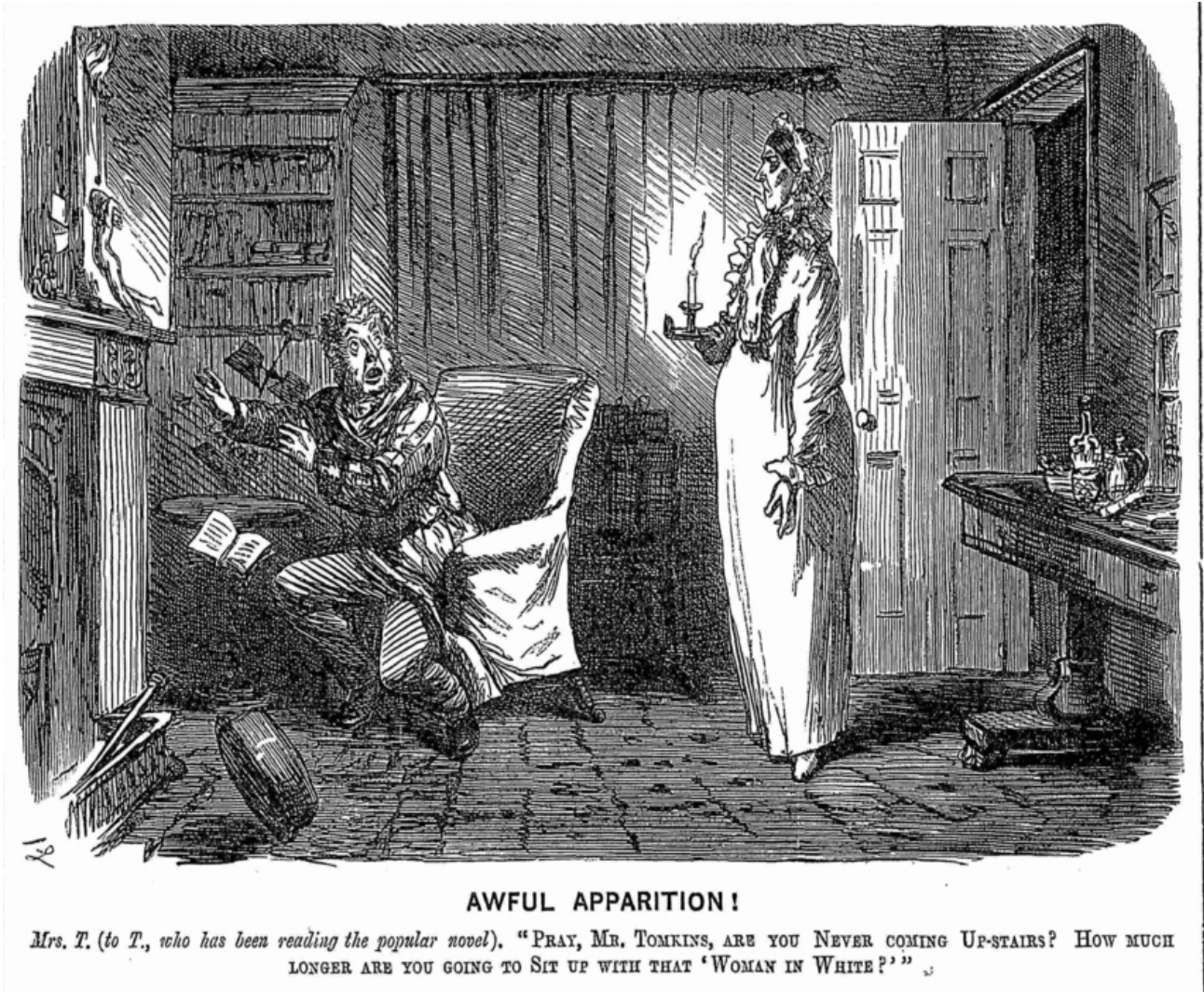


Figure 1: "Awful Apparition!" *Punch* (April 6, 1861), 140.

In the 1861 *Punch* cartoon, "Awful Apparition!" the illustrator satirizes the sensation novel—the popular page turner full of mystery and crime that emerged as a dominant and controversial literary genre in the 1860s. Turning to the most famous sensation novel, Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*, the cartoon humorously depicts its own version of one of its most famous scenes—the sudden appearance of the 'woman in white' as the protagonist is walking down a dark road late at night. As the novel's protagonist is startled by the appearance of the woman, here, too, the reader is startled. The image advances the idea not only that the feelings of the protagonist and his fright at an



unexpected encounter are “caught” by the reader consuming its pages, but that the scene he is reading in the novel becomes materialized and reproduced, albeit in a different and comical form, in his drawing room. The scene of the novel effectively becomes real through a somatic feeling “caught” from reading its pages.

The Punch cartoon was not alone in the specific way it chose to represent and parody sensation culture and *The Woman in White*. Watts Philips’ 1864 satirical play, *The Woman in Mauve; A Sensation in Three Spasms*<sup>1</sup> deployed a similar strategy for rendering the experience of the novel. As a character reads aloud on stage the same famous scene in which the protagonist, Walter Hartright, is startled by the mysterious woman appearing on the dark road, the scene emerges from beyond the pages:

Jocelyn: (*reads*) “in one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop---“ (*Harvey approaches Jocelyn stealthily, the latter continues to read*) “by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder, from behind me---“ (*Harvey places his hand on Jocelyn’s shoulder, who with comic start, springs to his feet, upsetting some books etc. in his surprise*)<sup>2</sup>

The satire of the scene hinges on feelings and sensations that become real and reproduced outside of the original frame of representation. The space between the page and that beyond it—here yet another layer of imitation, the stage—becomes porous. When the character again resumes reading the novel, a similar disruption occurs:

Jocelyn :Ah! I’ve found my place! (*reads*) “I turned on the instant. There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road—there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth, or dropped from the heavens—stood the figure of—” (*as he reads the last words, the window in front of him opens suddenly, and with the quickness of the lightning’s flash, a Woman advances towards the table. Springing to his feet, the book in his hand*) A Woman! (*as she advances, he recoils, upsetting the chair...*)<sup>3</sup>

In both satires, rendering how the reader is startled by what they are reading leading to the scene emerging out of its frame of representation, conveys a broader idea about how the novel was imagined to impact its audience. The readers here could be any reader. The satire in part works

---

<sup>1</sup> Watts Philips, *The Woman in Mauve* (London: Lacy Acting Edition no 76). It appeared in Liverpool in 1864 and in London at the Haymarket in 1865. On the title, see: “Music and the Drama,” *The Athenaeum* (March 25, 1865), 428.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-10.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

through recognition—the audience would remember the scene, but perhaps also remember the feeling of reading the novel, and being startled themselves.

As any good satire accomplishes, these depictions appear to capture some shared, recognizable experience of the sensation novel and sensation genres; after all, it was not only parody, but Victorian criticism that returned to this foundational scene of the sensation novel, analyzing it in more theoretical, but, indeed, surprisingly similar, terms. In Margaret Oliphant's 1862 essay "Sensation Novels," widely held as the first and most important commentary on the genre, Oliphant considers at length this scene of Walter encountering the woman in white on the road and another scene in which Walter sees Laurie Fairlie and is struck by her resemblance to the mysterious woman. In doing so, she advances the now famous idea that when reading these scenes, "the reader's nerves are affected like the hero's."<sup>4</sup> Not only does Oliphant posit that the reader experiences sensations similar to what they are reading on the page, but even further, as she describes, the nerves here matter; the feelings that move from page to reader "do not take their power from character, or from passion, or any intellectual or emotional influence. The effect is pure sensation."<sup>5</sup> That is, this transfer or sharing of bodily feeling, is purely sensation based and produces a purely physical effect—it might produce chills, or make the hair on the neck stand on end, but these kinds of physical effects are situated apart from deeper emotional or intellectual responses. Oliphant's positioning of the purely sensational, nerve based, physical effects of the sensation novel have largely become critical commonplace. For instance, as D.A. Miller encapsulated it in *The Novel and the Police*, the sensation novel operated through "characteristic adrenalin effects: accelerated heart rate and respiration, increased blood pressure" and "'fight-or-flight' physiology."<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Margaret Oliphant, "Sensation Novels," *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (May 1862), 572.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 146.

Yet, as I will explore, in the hands of sensation novelists, dramatists, and the emergent physiological psychology of the period from writers like Alexander Bain, nerves and sensation, or “adrenalin effects,” did not serve as an *endpoint* that precluded other responses, but operated as an affective *entry point* that precisely interlinked with emotional and intellectual responses. Even a closer look at other moments in Oliphant’s essay complicates the idea that sensation genres offered “pure sensation” detached from emotional and intellectual responses. For instance, Oliphant discusses how the novel produced the emotions of “wonder” and “terror” and cultivated the “sympathies” of the reader, how it deployed strategies that created legitimate and illegitimate representational and affective effects, and how sensation genres reflected and embodied the shocks and events of contemporary life, in turn reproducing shocks not only within the novel, but for the reader consuming it.<sup>7</sup>

As this last idea suggests, Oliphant’s essay in fact subtly advances a conceptual nexus between forms of sensation, affect, and imitation itself. Returning to the scene of encountering the woman in white on the dark road, Oliphant not only contends that “the shock is as sudden, as startling, as unexpected and incomprehensible to us as it is to the hero of the tale,” but that even further when the woman on the road suddenly reaches out her hand and touches Walter Hartright, “the silent woman lays her hand upon our shoulder as well.”<sup>8</sup> Much like the parodies, her essay posits a relationship between the transferred feeling—that we too feel shocked and bewildered, itself already emotions beyond pure sensation—and the imitation itself becoming real and material. The reader is imagined to be so immersed in the scene that it feels as if someone has reached out and touched us. The scene comes to life, through shared and communicated feeling.

While excellent criticism exists on emotions and Victorian literature, it still often situates feeling as a quality statically contained in texts. For instance as one account frames it, “as readers we

---

<sup>7</sup> Oliphant, 566, and 564-565.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 571.

can find representational reservoirs of emotions in texts, stored there for our collective cultural memory.”<sup>9</sup> Less, however, has been written on, first, how Victorians imagined the circulation and movement of sensation and feelings within fictional representations and between the page and reader or stage and spectator, and second, how this envisioning of the circulation and flow of feeling is inseparable from conceptions of the scene of mimesis and workings of imitation. This project draws upon work that attends to the affective dimension of form and the envisioning of the scene of consumption, such as Nicholas Dames’ *The Physiology of the Novel*, with its recovery of nineteenth-century novel theorists’ attention to the “novel-as-mode-of-consumption”<sup>10</sup> Rachel Ablow’s attention to the affective experience of Victorian reading in *The Feeling of Reading*, as well as accounts of sensation culture like that of Ann Cvetkovich’s *Mixed Feelings*, that reclaim how embodied strategies in representation might be used for social and political aims in sensation genres. However, if, as Cvetkovich argues, “sensational events and bodily sensation or affect”<sup>11</sup> could serve as a “tactic” with deeper social and political dimensions, we need a more clear conception of exactly how Victorians defined sensation, how they imagined it to link with other modes of response, and how the structure of feelings transfer was theorized to operate.

---

<sup>9</sup> Gesa Steadman, *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotions, 1830-1872* (UK: Ashgate, 2002), 2. For other works on the Victorians and Emotion, see, for instance: Rachel Ablow, “Victorian Feeling and the Victorian Novel,” *Literature Compass* 4.1 (2007); Ablow, “Victorian Feelings,” *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, Ed. Deirdre David, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*, Ed. Rachel Ablow, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Nicholas Dames, “Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies: the Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories,” *Victorian Studies* 46.2 (Winter 2004), Dames, “1825-1880: The Network of Nerves,” *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*, Ed. David Herman, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2011); Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003); Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1995); Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); Tiffany Watt Smith, *On flinching: Theatricality and Scientific Looking from Darwin to Shell Shock* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

<sup>10</sup> Dames, “Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies,” 209.

<sup>11</sup> Cvetkovich, 23-24.

As such, my project will be animated by the following questions: if the mid-century was considered the apex of “sensation culture,” how was sensation imagined to work, what (aesthetic, political) labor was it thought to perform? How did Victorians envision form to carry and communicate feeling? Even more broadly, and extractable from the Victorian period, my research asks: how do aesthetic forms act upon readers and spectators? Answering these questions requires attending to formal qualities ranging from moments when texts and plays explicitly stage feeling transferring within the fictional representation, to a work’s structural rhythms, imagery, gestures and expressions that embody and describe feelings and their transfer, to moments recording the inner physiological movements of the body (e.g. the pulse quickening). It also requires investigating Victorian theories of emotional transfer and transmission, authors discussing the affective aims of their work, and critics in the periodical press recording an audience’s, or their own, emotional reaction to a form of representation. As I will argue, the sensation novel and sensation drama often established complicated knots between sensation, emotion, and intellect, between feeling and imitation, between theater and the novel and viewed the circulation of feeling and the conversion between fictional affect and “real” affect as crucial to the processes of imitation. Looking at these genres, and the controversies that erupted between them, emphasizes how the mid-century envisioned illusion to be created in the space between page and reader, stage and spectator.

The 1860s are, of course, not the only period in which one could discuss the transmission of feeling. Inasmuch as the sensation genres of the 1860s track the physiology of embodied feeling, they do so not isolated from, but congruous with, currents at work in realism and cannot be thought of as separate from these concerns. In Charlotte Brontë’s 1853 novel *Villette*, for instance, the protagonist watches the performance of the famous tragedienne, Vashti, based on the real life tragedienne Rachel Felix, and traces her own sensational responses to what she is witnessing: “the strong magnetism of genius drew my heart out of its wonted orbit; the sunflower turned from the

south to a fierce light...I had seen acting before, but never anything like this.”<sup>12</sup> Vashti’s on-stage death scene metaphorizes a scene of the communication of feeling, in which “her throes, her gaspings” suddenly cause a stir in the auditorium, the smell of smoke becomes present, and yells of “Fire” ring out.<sup>13</sup> While this moment of spectacle—and I would suggest communicated feeling—in Bronte, would undoubtedly be treated by critics as a site of depth and complexity, it remains critical commonplace to treat moments of spectacular sensation as revealing little about Victorian conceptions of realism and the way works were imagined to produce and induce affect in audiences.

This project, however, makes a case for why the sensation drama and sensation novel’s circulation of spectacle, sensation, and feeling—the ways it envisioned the channels of sympathy to work—should not be so easily dismissed. I turn to the decade of the 1860s, beginning in psychological texts and periodical press from 1859-1864, turning to sensation drama and sensation novels in the 1860s, and ending with two works in the 1870s that rework elements of the sensation decade—for several reasons. First, not only in this period were critics identifying the emergence of a new genre of theater and literature—the sensation drama and sensation novel—but the fierce controversies that erupted around these genres form a site that tests how Victorian critics conceived of the operation (and limits) of realist representation, the scene of mimesis, and circulation of feeling through both. Victorian critical accounts exhibited anxieties around the borders and boundaries between genre and medium, but above all they focused on what constituted legitimate and illegitimate means of representing reality. The attention fixed on the issue of “appropriate” representation centered at once on how the work was formally constructed, but additionally on the legitimate and illegitimate affective responses a work might induce and reproduce. Critics often discussed the sensation novel in terms of melodrama and sensation drama—the idea in circulation that it was “a series of narrative melodramas,” emerged both in its construction, that it was as one

---

<sup>12</sup> Charlotte Bronte, *Villette* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008/1853), 259.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

critic put it, “stage effects are as conspicuous as paint and canvas can make them”<sup>14</sup> but, crucially, in terms of its affective world, and cultivation of excitement, or the way it “is [an] appeal to the nerves rather than to the heart.”<sup>15</sup> As we saw with Oliphant, the debate driven by the sensation novel and sensation drama often distinguished works by the affective responses they elicited—that its effects might result in “pure sensation” rather than other types of responses. A critic’s description that the sensation novel “use[d] illegitimate means to produce an effect on the reader,”<sup>16</sup> highlights the extent to which the question of means was inseparable from the effect produced on the reader’s body and mind, or the affective effects or feeling produced in the reader consuming it. The sensation period, therefore, becomes an amplified field for thinking through how Victorians imagined realist representations to produce affects and effects.

Another reason, however, that this dissertation focuses on the mid-century sensation period is that as the aesthetic controversy played out over the modes of representation and impelled response in spectators and readers over the sensation drama and sensation novel, another strand was concomitantly emerging within the field of psychology that remained highly relevant to those debates. Works like George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859), Herbert Spencer’s *The Principles of Psychology* (1855), and most importantly, Alexander Bain’s *The Senses and the Intellect* (1855), *The Emotions and the Will* (1859), *Mental and Moral Science* (1868), and *Mind and Body* (1873), newly theorized the relation between mind and body and the status of feeling and physiology structuring and propelling these. As Victorian psychology’s most important figure, Bain’s work fused

---

<sup>14</sup> “Philosophy of ‘Sensation,’” *St. James Magazine* (October 5, 1862), 344.

<sup>15</sup> “Our Female Sensation Novelists,” *Christian Remembrancer* (July 1864) in Andrew Maunder, ed., *Varieties of Women’s Sensation Fiction: 1855-1890* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), 106.

<sup>16</sup> “Sensation Novels,” *Spectator* (August 8, 1868).

physiology, or the workings of the nerves, with associationism, or the empiricist philosophical trend emergent since Locke, that sensations interlink to form ideas and knowledge.<sup>17</sup>

Bain's physiological psychology offered a complex network in which nerves, sensation, emotion, thought, and action cannot be separated from one another; the neural diffusion of sensation and bodily feeling leads to, and cooperates with, emotion and thought. In his interlinking of mind and matter, he outlines three categories: "feeling," or what Bain defines as "pleasures, pains, and certain modes of excitement" that include sensations and emotions; "Will or Volition" which he defines as "the actions of human beings in so far as impelled or guided by feelings"; and "Thought," or cognition, or the ability for "perception, memory, conception, abstraction, reason, judgment and imagination."<sup>18</sup> However, these categories lose some of their distinction and instead intertwine. As Bain argues, "the mind can seldom operate exclusively in any one of these three modes. A Feeling is apt to be accompanied more or less by will and by Thought."<sup>19</sup> In other words, while sensation critics like Oliphant were speaking of "pure sensation" disassociated from other responses like emotion or thought, physiological psychology was producing a very different account in which sensation, emotion, and thought all imbricated and could not be separated. Bain's nineteenth-century definition of feeling also poses an interest for contemporary affect theory more broadly. Affect theory has distinguished, as Brian Massumi does, between affect as an "intensity" and emotion as "subjective content" or the "socio-linguistic fixing of the quality of an experience which is from that point onward defined as personal,"<sup>20</sup> or as Jameson has recently encapsulated it, between affect as "generalized sensation" that "eludes language" versus emotion as "named

---

<sup>17</sup> On Bain's status and contribution, see for instance: Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Nicholas Dames, "The withering of the individual?: Psychology in the Victorian Novel," *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel* Ed. Francis O'Gorman (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

<sup>18</sup> Alexander Bain, *Mental and Moral Science: A Compendium of Psychology and Ethics* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868), 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect," *Cultural Critique* 31 (Autumn 1995), 88.



emotion...love, hatred, anger, fear, disgust, pleasure..."<sup>21</sup> In Bain, however, the distinction between "affect" and "emotion" rather blurs as emotion encompasses, "feelings, states of feelings, pleasures, pains, passions, sentiments, affections."<sup>22</sup>

This form of enmeshing and interlinking in Bain's work also occurs in what I will suggest is one of his most crucial insights, that has thus far been overlooked, but which this dissertation will explore in depth: his extensive mid-century theories of sympathy. Sympathy, in this context, means not the feeling of pity or compassion for another, although it might facilitate that specific emotion, but instead refers to the structural process of feeling or emotion—any feeling or emotion—transferring or transmitting to another person. It is thus closer to the word that would emerge in the early-twentieth century, empathy, which Suzanne Keen defines as, "...a sharing of affect, [that] can be provoked by witnessing another's emotional state, by hearing about another's condition, or even by reading it."<sup>23</sup> Curiously, accounts of Victorian sympathy by contemporary critics<sup>24</sup> tend to exclude the mid-century theories of sympathy offered by Bain. Even, for instance, scholarly overviews like *The Encyclopedia of Victorian Literature's* entry on "Sympathy," or *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel's* essay on "Victorian Feelings," either mention Bain's theory only in passing, or not at all. Additionally, monographs on Victorian sympathy and literature turn back almost a full century earlier to the theory of sympathy articulated by Adam Smith in his 1759 treatise, *The Theory of Moral*

---

<sup>21</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 28-29.

<sup>22</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 3.

<sup>23</sup> Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.

<sup>24</sup> On accounts of sympathy, see, for instance: David Marshall, *The Figure of Theatre: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) and *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Rae Greiner, "Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel" *Narrative* 17.3 (Oct 2009), *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), "Sympathy," *The Encyclopedia of Victorian Literature* First Edition (Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2015); Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy* (London: Anthem, 2007); Miranda Burgess, "On Being Moved: Sympathy, Mobility, and Narrative Form," *Poetics Today* 32.2 (Summer 2011); Lorri G. Nandrea, "Desiring Difference: Sympathy and Sensibility in *Jane Eyre*," *Novel* (Fall 2003/Spring 2004); Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); Carolyn Burdett, "Is Empathy the End of Sentimentality?" *Journal of Victorian Culture* 16.2 (August 2011); Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions*.

*Sentiments*. Yet, Bain’s mid-century revision of the “scene of sympathy” departs from Smith’s in several ways. For Smith, sympathy relies upon distance and imagination, as “we can never form any conception of what are his sensations,” we instead rely on our own sensations to imagine what the other person is feeling.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Bain aligns with, while also expanding upon, a Humean model—in Bain’s view, feelings are “caught” and “render[ed] infectious to all beholders.”<sup>26</sup> As he describes it, sympathy involves being “possessed for the time by the very same feeling.”<sup>27</sup> This model of highly embodied emotional contagion, importantly, does not just transpire through some amorphous quality, it specifically relies on formal representation:

Sympathy is a species of involuntary imitation, or assumption, of the displays of feeling enacted in our presence; which is followed by the rise of the feelings themselves. We are supposed to give way to the manifestations of another’s feelings, to imitate those manifestations, and as a consequence to be affected with the mental state conjoined therewith. Even when we do not repeat the displays of feeling to the full, we have the idea of them, that is, their embodiment in nervous currents, to which attaches the corresponding state of mind. We come under the influence of every pronounced expression of feeling, and if the circumstances be favourable, reproduce it in ourselves...It is thus that we are affected by an orator, or an actor, or by the enthusiasm of the multitude.<sup>28</sup>

In Bain’s account, sympathy operates through form and imitation: people see or sense other people’s feelings as represented in signs, mimetically embody them to some degree outwardly or inwardly, and thus fall under the influence of the feeling. This kind of highly embodied mode of sympathy as a “species of involuntary imitation,” aligns with the same conditions we saw at work in both the satirical depictions in which falling in with a feeling effectively reproduces it beyond its representational frames, or with Oliphant’s explication that not only are the reader’s nerves affected like the hero’s, but the imitation itself feels as if it expands beyond its borders.

This crucial intertwining of the transmission of feeling and representation is only reinforced by how Bain situates them within *The Emotions and the Will* and *Mental and Moral Science*. In both works, Bain places “Sympathy and Imitation” in the same chapter, thereby linking the transfer of

---

<sup>25</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, ed. Knud Haakonssen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004/1757), 11.

<sup>26</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: John. W. Parker and Son, 1859), 213, 196.

<sup>27</sup> Bain, *Mental and Moral Science*, 277.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 277-78.

feeling and the process of representation and reproduction. As Bain writes, “imitation, voluntary and involuntary, from its resemblance to sympathy, is elucidated by a parallel exposition”<sup>29</sup> and “both mean the tendency of one individual to fall in with the emotional or active states of others.”<sup>30</sup> In both, form, as well as the “susceptibility” of the person on either side of the sympathetic and imitative process, matters. For instance, while there are several factors that mitigate or enhance the likelihood of sympathetic interaction, a notable one centers on the formal properties witnessed, for, as Bain writes, “the energy or intensity of the language, tones, gestures, necessarily determines the strength of the impression and the prompting to sympathy.”<sup>31</sup> As this attention to language, gestures, tone, and intensity suggests, the process of sympathy and imitation Bain explores cannot only be applied to interpersonal encounters in everyday life, but also extends into fields of representation or the arts—after all, as he wrote in the last line of the above large paragraph, “it is thus that we are affected by...an actor.” The formal properties of a work of art create the conditions for the process of sensation-based emotional transfer.

Bodily sympathy is not an erasure of representation or pitted against it, they’re intertwined. Bain’s theories of sympathy and the act of fictional and non-fictional witnessing thereby not only present a model that connects the processes of sympathy and imitation in ways productive for Victorian realism and melodrama,<sup>32</sup> but his theories, poised on the one hand, between eighteenth-century elaborations of sympathy by Smith and Hume, and the late-nineteenth century movement

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>30</sup> Bain, *The Emotions and the Will*, 210.

<sup>31</sup> Bain, *Mental and Moral Science*, 278.

<sup>32</sup> This dissertation sees theatrical melodrama as itself a different mode of realist representation. If we talk about melodramatic modes at work throughout Victorian realism, including “high” realism, popular realism, etc., we should also attend to melodrama’s strategies of realist representation, and the points of convergence and divergence between each.

towards theories of crowd psychology and contagion,<sup>33</sup> stand as an important mid-century physiological revision of sympathy highly worthy of further attention.

Bain's enmeshing of sympathy, imitation and contagion merits further scrutiny for all of these reasons. Additionally, however, it warrants it because precisely at the time that Bain's physiological psychology advanced new theories of the interrelation of nerves, sensation, emotion, and thought, and of the structural affiliations and shared space of sympathy and imitation, as I will argue, sensation novels and sensation dramas pursued their interrelation. While a sensation novel and sensation drama might have a direct impact on the nerves, and work initially through the shocks and stimuli of the nervous system, these nervous shocks were envisioned to relay into different forms of emotional, cognitive, and active responses. Most importantly, as this project will explore, the works themselves staged scenes of emotional and affective transfer, often bearing witness to the movement and spread of feelings and imagining how representations assumed a force of life beyond their bounds. The sensation genres situate the concept of witnessing in an embodied way as a crucial part of the scene of imitation and its currents of representation.

Moments like those found, for instance, in one of the most famous sensation novels of the period, Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1860-61), registered the sensation novels' conceptualization of its own emotional effects. After the protagonist, Lady Isabel Vane, is seduced by another man and leaves her home, she subsequently experiences a series of hardships—a railway accident, an injury—and is left alone in the world and thought to be dead. She then returns to her home to take care of her children in disguise as a governess, becoming, in effect, a witness or spectator to her own past life. One evening, her husband's new wife, Mrs. Carlyle, tells the woman she knows simply as the family's governess, Madame Vine, that she “will tell [her] the tale. It is worth the telling.”<sup>34</sup> It is a

---

<sup>33</sup> On late nineteenth-century crowd theory and contagion see, for instance: Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions*; Christian Borch, *The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>34</sup> Ellen Wood, *East Lynne* (Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1860-61/2008), 492.

mystery that has vexed Mrs. Carlyle for years: her brother was falsely accused of murder and she has now figured out who the true murderer is. What she doesn't know is the governess is actually Isabel in disguise, and what Isabel/Madame Vine doesn't know is the man who seduced her was actually a murderer:

... 'It is a mercy for her that she is no longer alive. What would her feelings be?'  
What were they, then, as she sat there? A murderer! And she had— In spite of her caution, of her strife for self command, she turned of a deadly whiteness, and a low sharp cry of horror and despair burst from her lips. Mrs. Carlyle was astonished. Why should her communication have produced this effect on Madame Vine?...  
'I beg your pardon, Mrs. Carlyle,' she shivered: 'I am apt to picture things too vividly. It is, as you say, so very horrible.'<sup>35</sup>

In this moment of a tale impacting a listener, Isabel/Madame Vine the governess, cannot contain her reaction to what she has just heard; the words of the horrible deeds in turn trigger her own horror. This "tale" is further aligned with novelistic form, with Mrs. Carlyle describing of what she has just recounted, that "It tells like a fable out of a romance."<sup>36</sup> In attending to her affective response to the tale, the novel raises its own transfer of feeling to those who witness it. While Madame Vine tries to dismiss her response as merely the effect of an over-active imagination, a tendency to "picture things too vividly," in fact the opposite has taken place: the events for her were too real, the shock cannot be contained and produces an immediate effect.

While the novel first rehearses the telling of its own tale and its emotional impact on one person hearing it, shortly after this scene, it moves the tale out to the public square, thus even further framing the issue of audiences' responses. With a crowd gathering to hear the results of the election coming in, the scene is interrupted by the sudden arrest of the murderer, who is standing for a parliamentary seat:

"I'm sorry to do it in this public place and manner," said the officer... "Sir Francis Levison, I arrest you for the willful murder of George Hallijohn."  
The crowd fell back; the crowd was paralysed with consternation; the word was passed from one extreme of it to the other, back, and across again and the excitement grew high... Some of them turned pale at the sight of the handcuffs, and Mary Pinner, an excitable girl, screamed...<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 496.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 497.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 526.

Here the novel traces the collective reaction spreading through the crowd, and the embodied response of the crowd feels suggestive of the embodied response of the audience or reader who is also witnessing the story unfold. Even further, this movement of feeling interlinks with a moment of reproduction or imitation. After another man is arrested as an accomplice, the novel describes the reaction of the crowd: “you may be sure, the whole assembly was arrested, too—figuratively; and stood with eager gaze and open ears.”<sup>38</sup> The literal arresting becomes reproduced as a figurative arresting, one that depicts the audience’s sense-driven engagement with, and receptivity to, the “scenes” before them.

To take another example from Boucicault’s sensation drama, *The Octoroon* (1859), the question of feeling and reproduction weaves itself through the play’s climax, in the way it stages two extraordinary moments of spectacle in quick succession. While one character is accused of murder and a crowd calls for their head, the evidence of the crime becomes foregrounded: the murder, it turns out, had been caught on film. The sensation scene of the murder that the audience had witnessed in an earlier act was captured on a photographic plate, and the photograph proves that it was a different person who committed the crime. This dramatic reveal of the true murderer relies upon the play’s previous sensation scene becoming (re)produced in another medium as a kind of mechanical tableau, with the play tracing the spread of excitement this causes among the on-stage crowd watching. Yet, this complex exchange immediately joins with yet another spectacular moment of sensation: a steamship catches fire, and is staged “float[ing] on at back, burning.”<sup>39</sup> My interest lies in considering how a moment of spectacle like this, and the proximity between the two scenes, becomes a crucial locus of affective production and imitative reproduction. The play effectively

---

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 527.

<sup>39</sup> Dion Boucicault, “The Octoroon,” *Selected Plays of Dion Boucicault* (Buckinghamshire: Colin Smythe, 1987/1859), 173-175.

relies on both scenes to reinforce the illusion through a concentrated spread of sensation and feeling aimed at the audience.

In his contemporary adaptation of Boucicault's melodrama, *An Octoroon* (2014), playwright Branden Jacobs-Jenkins struggled with the very question of what work the sensation scene performed within the play and what it meant to Victorian audiences, in order to figure out how to capture its feeling for a contemporary audience. In the form of an exchange between the character "Playwright," based on Boucicault, and the character, "BJJ," based on Branden Jacob-Jenkins, the adaptation precisely registers the problem posed by the sensation scene:

Playwright: but it's your last chance to really hit the audience with something big—

BJJ: like your best "theatre trick," if you will.

Playwright: You have to push everything—actors, props, set, light—to the limit somehow.

BJJ: It's usually called the Sensation Scene—

Playwright: because the idea is to overwhelm your audience's senses to the end of building the truest illusion of reality—

BJJ: regardless of whether or not it has anything to do with the plot.

Playwright: You're just supposed to make people think, for just a second, that what they're seeing is real and dangerous and sort of novel.<sup>40</sup>

This exchange highlights much of the debate over sensational representation that occurred in the Victorian period: was the sensation scene part of the plot, or was it a mere stage trick? The idea of pushing everything to the "limit" also has resonance for the ways in which sensation genres sought to capture the shocks, ruptures, and violently disruptive events at work in the everyday. But, perhaps most importantly, it also encapsulates an idea at work in the 1860s, that sensation's operation was imagined to be crucial to how "the illusion of reality" is created; or, as the playwright later advances, how "part of the thrill, part of the Sensation of the scene, was giving people back then a sense of having really witnessed something."<sup>41</sup> Witnessing—in particular a highly embodied mode of witnessing—becomes constitutive of the production of illusion and imitation.

---

<sup>40</sup> Branden Jacobs-Jenkins, *An Octoroon* (New York: On Stage Press, 2014), 114-115.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 121.

As I will explore, Victorian writers sometimes explicitly characterized the scene of representation as a form of witnessing and these kinds of reflexive moments that bear witness to the movement of feeling are crucial for thinking through how Victorians imagined fictional works to produce affects, as well as for how fiction across media captured traumatic shocks and ruptures. In the first chapter of my dissertation, “A New Sensation? The Emergence of Sensation Culture in Victorian England,” I turn first to the mid-century physiological psychology of Alexander Bain, to derive a specific account of what the word “sensation” meant in the Victorian mid-century, and how it was seen to interface with other registers of response. As I have been discussing, Bain physiological psychology elaborated a fluid relationship between sensation, emotion, and intellect, one that in fact minimized the role of sensation as a purely automatic set of effects with a discrete endpoint. However, Victorian periodical press criticism offered a very different account of the sensation novel and sensation drama, insisting that it thrilled the nerves, but not emotion and cognition, thereby confounding physiological psychology’s account of their interrelation and instead adopting binaries and hierarchies around types of affective responses. As I argue in this chapter, these binaries in the Victorian periodical press criticism share an affinity with earlier discussions of theater that divided genres and mediums by the “legitimate” and “illegitimate” affective responses they elicited. I turn to the overlooked historical fact that a debate about the sensation drama and the affects of melodrama more broadly, preceded the debate about the sensation novel, and shaped many of the terms of its debate.

My next two chapters turn to sensation genres themselves: my second chapter, “The ‘Too Sensational’ and the ‘Painfully Real’: Sensation and Sympathy in Boucicault’s *The Streets of London*,” reconstructs a sensation drama of Boucicault that has never been examined before and places it and his overlooked theoretical writings on theatre in relation to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century accounts of sympathy, in particular the way he defines mimesis by the way it transmits and produces



affect. As I argue, *The Streets of London*—from its network of images and structure, to the detail of its representation of the sense-driven experience of the city, to its “sensation scene” of a building catching fire as an on-stage audience watches on—both staged scenes of the transmission of feeling, and even further, it aimed to excite, tune, and channel its spectators’ nervous system responses into sympathetic “conditions of mind” that forged a possibility for ameliorative actions beyond the walls of the theater.

My third chapter, “‘Catching Fire of the Witness’: The Melodrama of Transmission and Traumatic Disruptions” turns to the leading sensation novelist of the period, Wilkie Collins. I examine Collins’ staging of emotional transfer in *The Woman in White* by placing it in relation to his previously ignored melodrama written right before it, *The Red Vial*, and his novel of shock, or what would soon be called trauma, written right after it, *No Name*. Collins outlined his objective in “storytelling” as an affective one: he aimed to “excite” interest and emotion, and, as I argue, one of the reasons *The Woman in White* is the paradigmatic sensation novel is that it continually stages scenes of the transmission of sensation and feeling. The novel elaborates a “melodrama of transmission,” that corporealizes print and develops a structure of emotional transfer in which the reader can “catch fire of the witness.” I contend that *The Woman in White*’s staging of the circulation of feeling between characters, and the circuitry of how words represent and produce embodied feeling, carries with it a legal or political valence—it draws attention to the affective circumstances of divorce law, cruelty cases, and the felt experience of coverture. It makes law into a matter of sensation and affect, and makes sensation and affect into something with legal stakes. *No Name* extends this corporealization of the law by capturing the sensation-based ruptures, or trauma, that the law can produce.

My final chapter, “We watch the audience as well as the actors”: Mimetic Circuits in *The Bells* and *Daniel Deronda*,” turns to a moment after the sensation decade to see how two very

different works—a play acknowledged as a transitional work in Victorian theater, Leopold Lewis’s *The Bells* (1871), and George Eliot’s high realist opus *Daniel Deronda* (1876) to trace the extent to which each absorb and rework elements of the sensation genres. As I argue, what we see in these two works is a turn towards a “disruptive mimesis,” an interest in moments that shatter the frame of representation and imagine words and actions being materialized and given life.

As these summaries suggest, I turn to both theater and the novel because of the way they enmesh in this period—not only did sensation novels incorporate strategies from the sensation drama and melodrama, but a sense of their legitimate and illegitimate modes of affects and representations were often directly discussed in terms of theatrical representation. Even further, the interrelation of theater and the novel, melodrama and realism throughout the Victorian period call for accounts that do not pit them against each other, but recognize the extent to which problems of realist representation were framed in terms of one another. It matters, for instance, the extent to which Eliot draws upon theatrical forms to ascribe a ‘liveness’ to words in *Daniel Deronda*, as much as her use of Dutch painting frames a window into a conception of realism in *Adam Bede*.<sup>42</sup>

Theater and the novel’s staging of reality often tested and pushed against each other’s boundaries and limits of what could be represented—of how print embodies, of how theatrical forms’ visual presence contends with its other mediums of imitation. In the novel, *The Doctor’s Wife*, inspired by *Madame Bovary*, the sensation novelist Mary Elizabeth Braddon includes in her story a satirical take on “a sensation author,” Sigismund Smith, who encapsulates an issue at work in the sensation novel’s modes of representation and its affective aims:

I like writing for them. There’s only one objection to the style—it’s apt to give an author a tendency towards bodies... Why, you see, the penny public require excitement,’ said Mr. Smith; ‘and in order to get excitement up to a strong point, you’re obliged to have recourse to bodies. Say your hero murders his father, and buries him

---

<sup>42</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: Penguin, 1859/2008), 193-197. Carolyn Williams’ also notes the affinity between pausing the story to focus on the picture for a time and melodramatic tableau. See Williams, “Melodrama and the Realist Novel,” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama* Ed. Carolyn Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 219.

in the coal-cellar in No.1. What the consequence? There's an undercurrent of the body in the coal-cellar running through every chapter, like the subject in a fugue or symphony.<sup>43</sup>

While the passage is referring to the mystery produced by a dead body hidden away just out of the scene, but continually making its presence felt across the pages, it also captures something about sensation fiction's "tendency towards bodies" more broadly. Unlike theater with its present bodies, by virtue of its medium, print precisely retains an undercurrent of the missing, absent body making its present felt across the pages. The sensation novel's emphasis on embodiment raises with it questions about how words aim to produce feeling, come to life, and make the body present, and the sensation drama's emphasis on spectacular visual immediacy and bodily presence raise with it questions about how mediated these modes are while aiming for their effects on an audience. Taken together, the controversies that accrued around the sensation genres reveal insight into Victorian conceptions of representation and the role the movement of affect played within it.

---

<sup>43</sup> Mary Elizabeth Braddon, *The Doctor's Wife* (Oxford: Oxford World's Classics, 2008/1864), 46-47.

**Chapter One:**  
**A New Sensation?**  
**The Emergence of Sensation Culture in Victorian England**

In his 1872 assessment of Dickens' literary contributions, "Dickens in Relation to Criticism," George Henry Lewes chides critics for their own biases and preconceptions that lead to overly general responses to an author's work. He attempts instead to provide a "sympathetic recognition of his efforts" that avoids misrepresentation by turning to rigorous evidence instead of individual judgment and opinion. In appraising "the sources of that power" and popularity of Dickens' work instead of focusing on its technical defects, however, the assumptions underlying Lewes approach to his evidence represent broader aesthetic judgments structuring Victorian criticism.

His analysis of what has caused Dickens' success across different classes of readers ultimately arrives at three interrelated points. The first focuses on the form of Dickens' fiction itself: his characters might be "vividly presented," but are little else than puppets or vivisected frogs whose actions are "as uniform and calculable as the movements of a machine" and his "*mise en scène*" contains "a striking selection of incident" and "intense vision of physical details."<sup>44</sup> Second, these formal conditions of his work in turn structure its affective and cognitive currents—as Lewes explores, "thought is strangely absent from his works...compared with that of Fielding or Thackeray, his was merely an *animal* intelligence, i.e. restricted to perceptions"(151). Finally, this overly material or perceptual focus with its almost animal "absence of the reflective tendency"(151) lacking in any engagement of the "higher faculties"(144) in turn shapes and accounts for its power over a wide audience: "the vividness of...presentation triumphed over reflection" in his readers as well (146). As Lewes explains, "think how little the mass of men are given to reflect on their impressions, and how their minds are for the most part occupied with sensations rather than ideas, and you will see why Dickens held an undisputed sway"(146). Concluding his analysis, Lewes

---

<sup>44</sup> G.H. Lewes, "Dickens in Relation to Criticism," *Fortnightly Review* (February 1872): 149, 151.

proceeds to overlay these physiological and aesthetic considerations onto one of medium: in Dickens, he claims, “we do not turn over the pages in search of thought, delicate psychological observation, grace of style, charm of composition; but we enjoy them like children at a play, laughing and crying at the images which pass before us”(154). While Lewes’ own investments in theatre as a critic and playwright should dissuade us from taking this merely as an instance of anti-theatricality (as the last sentence of the piece suggests, what allows him to criticize Dickens for being “stagey and inartistic” is his commitment to and familiarity with theatrical representations), nonetheless, the essay proliferates binaries and hierarchies that become entangled, among them sensation and perception against reflection and thought, animal against human, child against adult, lower against higher faculties, an incorrectly mechanical form of representation against a correct one, a material outward presentation against a more life-like inwardly organic one, the play against the page.

This chapter, however, will not focus on Dickens and Lewes, instead it concentrates on how these physiological and aesthetic dynamics of the kind accrued in Lewes in 1872 circulate in particularly amplified form in an aesthetic debate that emerged about a decade earlier, in the rise of the sensation genres around 1860. The sensation novel—a Victorian genre known for its page-turning action centered on contemporary life that produced embodied effects on its middle-class readership—generated as much of a “sensation” for critics as for its readers. The genre became intensely controversial, with critics anxious about what its rampant success meant for the aesthetics of the novel and cultural tastes more broadly. In recent decades, a significant amount of attention has been focused on the sensation novel and the controversy it produced, with scholarly accounts placing the novels and criticism in relation to anxieties about mass culture and readership, new marriage and divorce laws, the gender politics of female writers and readers, changing patterns of

consumption, empire, the “shocks” of modernity, and discourses on physiology and psychology.<sup>45</sup>

While these accounts tend to trace the sensation novel’s genealogy through the Gothic novel and earlier popular literature, and many of these note in passing that the sensation novel also bears broad affinities with staged melodrama, comparatively little criticism has been devoted to sensation drama.<sup>46</sup>

Contemporary scholarly accounts have not examined how exactly the terms “sensation drama” and “sensation novel” entered into circulation in Victorian England, nor have they examined the earlier controversies about the sensation drama and debates about early-nineteenth century melodrama that shaped them. As I will argue, these controversies focused on melodrama and the sensation drama are crucial not only for our understanding of Victorian theatrical aesthetics, but for our understanding of the ways that these debates implicitly and explicitly structure sensation novel criticism. My interest lies in how these Victorian critical debates on melodrama, the sensation drama, and the sensation novel fuse physiological concerns with aesthetic hierarchies. If I aim to explore how the relationship between sensation, emotion, and thought is configured by physiological psychology, by sensation genre works themselves, and most of all within this chapter, in sensation genre criticism, I will do so both by attending to when the criticism establishes seeming binaries, and

---

<sup>45</sup> See, for instance: Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992); Patrick Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998); D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988); Christopher Herbert, *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008); Pamela Gilbert, *Disease, Desire, and The Body in Victorian Women’s Popular Novel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Lynn Pykett, *The Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel* (Devon: Northcote House Publishers Ltd, 2011); Andrew Radford, *Victorian Sensation Fiction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Laurie Garrison, *Science, Sexuality, and the Sensation Novel: Pleasure of the Senses* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Nicholas Dames, “1825-1880: The Network of Nerves,” *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*, Ed. David Herman, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2011); Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of the Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988); Allison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998).

<sup>46</sup> The works that include a chapter on sensation drama are: Lynn Voskuil, *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), Nick Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) and *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation, or the Spectacular, the Shocking, and Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Anthem Press, 2003); *Companion to Sensation Fiction* ed. Pamela Gilbert (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2011); Richard Altick, *Victorian Studies in Scarlet* (New York: Norton, 1970).

the ways in which these binaries are more structurally intricate than they initially appear. Within sensation genre criticism, physiological and aesthetic hierarchies inform both genre and medium, but in ways that complexly attend to the formal conditions of the representation itself, the modes of affective circulation that inhere within these representations, and the mode of response induced within the spectator or reader consuming them.

The first section of this chapter turns to the physiological psychology of Bain and Lewes that appears in the late 1850s in an attempt to clarify definitions of the term sensation that are relevant to the sensation debate. It also questions why sensation novel criticism divides sensation from other modes of emotional and intellectual response when the physiological psychology offers a more fluid account of their interrelation. The second section aims to complicate accounts of how the sensation genres enter Victorian England by tracing the emergence of sensation drama in England in 1860-61. This section also turns to the legal distinction established between legitimate and illegitimate theatre arguing for its relevance within the sensation debate. The final section considers how debates on melodrama and sensation drama shape and infiltrate sensation novel criticism. I explore how debates about legitimate and illegitimate forms and affective responses shaped debates about melodrama and the “new” sensation drama, and how in turn these debates that often explicitly centered on theater infiltrated criticism of the sensation novel and structured its considerations of the genre’s legitimate and illegitimate forms of representation and affective currents in explicitly physiological terms.

### *Section 1—“Pure Sensation”: Physiological Psychology and The Sensation Debate*

In contemporary criticism of the sensation novel, the term “sensation” has assumed a stability and coherence that elides the fluidity the term maintained across multiple discourses in the mid-nineteenth century. As scholars have argued, Victorian criticism of the sensation novel asserted that the genre, as Henry Mansel’s frequently invoked phrase characterized it, affected its readers by

“preaching to the nerves.”<sup>47</sup> The “sensation” of the sensation novel—at least when the genre is not exclusively treated as a set of thematic concerns and content<sup>48</sup>—becomes synonymous, both in Victorian and contemporary rhetoric, with the physiological effects of the nervous system, with “making the flesh creep, causing the hair to stand on end” or in other words, with the way it *directly addresses itself* to the nervous system aiming to produce in readers’ bodies a set of “shocks” that stimulate their nerves.<sup>49</sup>

Yet, much of Victorian criticism of the sensation novel pressed beyond this model—the shock or stimulus of the nervous system did not constitute the first stage of its “effects,” that eventually leads to, or immediately joins with, other subtle forms of emotional and cognitive responses from the reader. Instead, Victorian criticism focused on how the genre’s effects were *purely* sensational. As a critic for the *Christian Remembrancer* writes of the sensation phenomenon in 1864:

Sensation writing is an appeal to the nerves *rather than* to the heart. But all exciting fiction works upon the nerves, and Shakespeare ‘can make every particular hair to stand on end’ with anybody. We suppose that the true sensation novel feels the popular pulse with *this view alone*. . .sensationalism does this by drugging thought and reason, and stimulating the attention through the lower and more animal instincts, *rather than* by a lively and quickened imagination. . .<sup>50</sup>

The passage relies upon a set of familiar dichotomies that it implies are mutually exclusive: the nerves against heart; sensation or sensationalism against thought or reason; and the category of attention directed towards the lower animal instincts instead of the higher faculty of imagination. This preoccupation with the exclusively physiological aim of sensation fiction was not unique; it instead represents a broader pattern of concern that appeared throughout the sensation fiction debate. To return to Henry Mansel’s famous 1863 condemnation of the genre, he does not merely

---

<sup>47</sup> [Henry Mansel], “Sensation Novels,” *Quarterly Review* 113 (April 1863): 482. See, for instance, Garrison, Pykett, Daly *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s and Literature, Technology, Modernity, 1860-2000*, Radford.

<sup>48</sup> See, for instance, Patrick Brantlinger, “What is Sensational about the Sensation Novel,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37, no. 1 (June 1982): 1-28.

<sup>49</sup> “Prospectus of a New Journal,” *Punch* (9 May 1863), 193. For more on this point, see Garrison.

<sup>50</sup> “Our Female Sensation Novelists,” *Christian Remembrancer* (July 1864) in Andrew Maunder, ed., *Varieties of Women’s Sensation Fiction: 1855-1890* (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004), 106; my emphasis.



suggest the genre “preach[es] to the nerves” but rather, as the full quote insists, that it “preach[es] to the nerves *instead of* the judgment...”<sup>51</sup> As he elaborates, the problem with sensation fiction emerges from how this “class of literature” molds the minds of its generation “and [does] so principally, we had almost said exclusively, by ‘preaching to the nerves’...Excitement, and excitement *alone*, seems to be the great end at which they aim.”

As I touched upon in the introduction, this critique of the sensation novel’s aesthetic of “pure” sensation receives perhaps its most important articulation in Margaret Oliphant’s now famous 1862 essay, “Sensation Novels.” While her appraisal that retroactively establishes Wilkie Collins’ *The Woman in White* as the ur-text of the genre departs from critics’ outright condemnations of the nascent genre, she is one of the first commentators to highlight the sensation novels’ “simple physical effect.” Turning to two scenes from the novel—one where our protagonist Walter Hartright encounters a mysterious female figure dressed in white while walking along a road one night and the other when he is seized by the uncanny resemblance between his love object and this mysterious woman in white—she writes, “these two startling points of this story do not take their power from character, or from passion, or any intellectual or emotional influence. The effect is pure sensation, neither more nor less.”<sup>52</sup> And yet, this tendency of Oliphant and others to locate sensation fiction’s mode of interaction *exclusively* within one aspect of nervous system response (that of “pure sensation”), separating it from any other mode of nervous-based response (be it emotional or intellectual), should lead us to pause. It raises two questions about the status of the term “sensation” in the mid-nineteenth century: first, what, exactly was meant by the term “sensation,” and relatedly, how was “sensation” related to the nerves, and second, what models existed that attempted to explain the relationship between “pure” sensation and other elements of the mind, like the emotions, or intellect in the period leading up to the emergence of the sensation genres?

---

<sup>51</sup> Mansel, 482; my emphasis.

<sup>52</sup> Margaret Oliphant, “Sensation Novels,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (May 1862), 572.

In current scholarly criticism, the term sensation has frequently been broadly defined as a “shock” to the nervous system.<sup>53</sup> For instance, as Patrick Brantlinger contends, “both critics and novelists in the 1860s use sensation in a way that dissociates it from the epistemological empiricism that informs fictional realism from Defoe to Trollope. Instead of a basic unit of sense perception, sensation now means some extraordinary shock or thrill to the reader’s nervous system.”<sup>54</sup> Yet, as critics like Nicholas Dames have argued, sensation fiction precisely highlighted or amplified concerns about “embodied minds,”—or the interface between mind, brain, and spine, and role of the nervous system’s relay of sensation in the formation of consciousness (as Bain famously captured it “no currents, no mind”)—that had haunted realist fiction. As he argues, “Sensation Fiction emerged as a consequence of mainstream realist fiction’s interest in embodied minds rather than the reverse, its...appeals to the reading public simply took an explicit position in regard to the question domestic fiction had come to negotiate: what is the mind if not the body.”<sup>55</sup> If the term “sensation” was not quite dissociated from “epistemological empiricism” in the way that Brantlinger suggests, that is in part because the “shocks” of the nervous system were not quite dissociated from sense perception in the way he suggests. The “physiological psychology” that emerges in the work of Alexander Bain’s *The Senses and the Intellect* (1855) and *The Emotions and the Will* (1859) and G.H. Lewes’ *The Physiology of Common Life* (1859) draws upon eighteenth-century moral philosophy (Locke, Hartley, Hume, Reid, Brown, Hamilton, Mill), nascent psychology (Spencer), and physiology (Muller, Hall, Carpenter), that each posed multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory definitions of the role and function of “sensation” in relation to perception, bodily feeling, and in the case of the later group, the nervous system.<sup>56</sup> As Lewes lamented in his 1876 article, “What is Sensation?”

---

<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, Daly, *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s and Literature, Technology, Modernity*, 1860-2000.

<sup>54</sup> Brantlinger, *The Reading Lesson*, 143.

<sup>55</sup> Dames, “The Network of Nerves,” 218.

<sup>56</sup> Helpful discussions of Bain and Lewes theories include: Rick Rylance, *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000; Nicholas Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of*

The many difficulties which lie in the way of psychological investigation are complicated by the deplorable and inevitable ambiguity of communication, resulting from an absence of strictly defined technical terms...I select Sensation for illustration. The term will be found employed with such widely different meanings, even in the same treatise, as to render many propositions in which it occurs truisms, or transparent absurdities, according to the interpretation.<sup>57</sup>

Bain and Lewes work might offer something of an exception: Bain in particular was applauded for the sheer rigor and comprehensiveness of his work, and yet, even within Bain, his definitions changed across subsequent editions, and for Bain and Lewes, even within an individual edition, the term “sensation” accrues complex and shifting meanings.

One knot within the sensation debate, and by extension within the physiological psychology of the period, that deserves further attention involves precisely how “sensation” or the “sensations” were understood to relate to the nervous system. That is, why is it called “sensation” fiction and not, for instance, “nerve” fiction or “stimulus” fiction? Why are these words seemingly used synonymously and interchangeably? Do various treatises appearing before the advent of the sensation genres discuss them interchangeably? One way to address this question would be to return to a moment from Hume’s *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Discussing the associational relationship between impressions (derived from sensation and reflection) and ideas, Hume writes of sensation that “an impression first strikes upon the senses, and makes us perceive heat or cold, thirst or hunger, pleasure or pain of some kind or other...”. But Hume then proceeds to bracket how these impressions actually operate and translate into bodily “feeling” or sentience: “the examination of our sensations belongs more to anatomists and natural philosophers than to moral; and therefore shall

---

*Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) and “Wave Theories and Affective Physiologies: The Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories: *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 206-16; Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). Other helpful background includes: Edwin Clarke and L.S. Jacyna, *Nineteenth-Century Origins of Neuroscientific Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California, 1987); Edward Reed, *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Peter Garratt, *Victorian Empiricism: Self, Knowledge, and Reality in Ruskin, Bain, Lewes, Spencer, and George Eliot* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> G.H. Lewes, “What is Sensation?” *Mind* (April 1876): 157.

not at present be enter'd upon."<sup>58</sup> Of course, as the term “physiological psychology” implies, the importance of Bain and Lewes mid-century treatises rests in the fluid interrelation they develop between matter and moral, or between the cerebro-spinal and mind, or nerve, sensation, emotion, and intellect, that fuses physiology with moral philosophy. Sense perception, and as we will later explore, consciousness itself, cannot be conceived apart from the currents of the nervous system.

Yet, “sensation” and the nerves are not exactly synonymous. For Bain, the “network of nerves” which he often suggestively likens to a railroad network, or network of telegraphic wires, functions “to transmit impressions, influences, or stimuli, from one part of the system to another.”<sup>59</sup> In this view, impressions or stimuli initiate nervous currents that in turn produce sensations, or bodily feeling. As Bain writes, “by sensations, in the strict meaning, we understand mental impressions, feelings, or states of consciousness resulting from the action of external things on some part of the body...such are the feelings caused by tastes, smells, sounds, or sights”(SI 101). While I will return to the crucial question of sensation’s role in consciousness and mental and emotional feelings, of more immediate concern is that sensation is not precisely the stimulus itself, or the nerve itself, but the bodily sentience produced by transmission of a stimulus through the nerves. As Lewes writes of the relationship between the nerves and sensation in *The Physiology of Common Life*, “a sensation, properly so called, is the reaction of Sensibility, stimulated by an impression—the activity of a nerve-centre awakened by the Neurility of a nerve.”<sup>60</sup> Sensibility, for Lewes, corresponds essentially to nerve centers or ganglia, while neurility refers to the nerve fibre; therefore sensation is essentially, the production of the nerves activating nervous centers, not precisely the original impression itself. For both Bain and Lewes, the brain is not the sole nervous center; the body

---

<sup>58</sup> David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.1.2.

<sup>59</sup> I have consulted the first and third editions of Bain’s *The Senses and the Intellect*, but decided to work with the editions that would have appeared before the sensation debate, therefore all citations are from the first edition: Alexander Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1855), which I will henceforth shorthand as *SI*. *SI*, 38.

<sup>60</sup> G.H. Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life* (London and Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859), 278.

instead consists of an interlinked network of nervous centers, of which the brain is an important one. Additionally, both stipulate that sensation does not exclusively emerge from external stimuli, but from internal stimuli that involve the organ(ic) functions of the body. As Lewes describes the phenomenon,

the stimulus may be external, or internal...while, on the one hand, the *kind* of sensation is determined by the nature and degree of the stimulus, it is, on the other hand, determined by the peculiar structure and organic disposition of the part affected...all those sensations which arise in the organic processes, or which, belonging to the general system are not localized in any special organ, I call systemic sensations; whereas those, on the contrary, which are localized in special organs—the eye, the ear, the nose, the tongue, and the hand—I call sense-sensations (*Physiology* 276-78).

As the passage affirms, the term “sensation” did not appear utterly tethered to the impressions received from the senses. Sensation, at its most broad, corresponded in mid-century physiological psychology with the bodily feeling produced by a wave of nervous currents initiated by internal (organs, viscera-based) or external (senses-based) stimuli.<sup>61</sup>

If by “pure sensation...no more no less” or “pure physical effect,” Oliphant and others essentially invoked the idea of a pure bodily (as opposed to emotional) feeling induced by a stimulus to the nervous system, it nonetheless remains to be explored why sensation fiction criticism depicted this response as unaccompanied by other forms of response, especially since, as Nicholas Dames has explored, this is the period in which Bain’s and Lewes’ work places the “network of nerves” at the core of consciousness, and “‘mind’ and ‘brain’ in the increasingly materialist psychologies of the period, were if not one and the same, then at least too intimately related to be separated easily.”<sup>62</sup>

Writing in the introduction to *The Emotions and the Will* about his overarching project in both *The Senses and the Intellect* and his new book, Bain explains:

But although we must always speak of feeling, or consciousness, as a fact apart, and not resolvable into solidity, colour, taste, motion, or any mechanical or chemical property of bodies, we are yet compelled to admit a connection of dependence between it and a material organization...In the former treatise I have dwelt upon the evidence that goes to prove that the workings of mind are dependent on the brain, nerves, and organs of sense and movement. It was a point there dwelt upon, that the senses and the moving organs co-operate with the brain and nerves in the various mental acts, not merely in the obvious cases where we receive outward

---

<sup>61</sup> For a similar point, see Bain, *SI*, 120.

<sup>62</sup> Dames, “The Network of Nerves,” 218.

impressions and perform bodily movements, but in the more inward processes, such as memory, or imagination. Under the present division, which is to embrace Emotion, Feeling, or Consciousness...I shall attempt to define the nature of those material accompaniments as closely as the present state of our observations will enable me.<sup>63</sup>

If Bain draws upon physiology to comprehensively reveal how feeling, consciousness, emotion, and “inward process” “depend on” or are “co-operative” with the material conditions of the nerves, the model he proposes for their interrelation stands out for how actively interwoven and interpenetrating each of these elements are.

One way of understanding this model of interrelation between the nerves, sensation, emotion, action, and thought in Bain, is not precisely that of interpenetration, but of diffusion: once a stimulus occurs that activates the nerve force (and Bain sometimes refers to the stimulus as a “shock” or “thrill” to the nerves [EW 619-20]), it extends out like a wave: “the structure of the nervous system is consistent only with the idea of current action, or the circulation of influence from one part to another throughout the whole mass”(EW 10). This structural network of diffusive action embodies, quite literally, the model he poses between sensational bodily feeling, movement, emotions, and embodied expression joining or co-operating with action and thought.<sup>64</sup>

Even if *The Senses and the Intellect* and *The Emotions and the Will* have different emphases, they both abide by and trace a model of co-operation and concurrence, a reciprocal movement between nerves, sensation (feeling), emotion, action (or will), and thought (intellect) in which to speak of one is to speak of the others, even if each retains crucial differences. As Bain has it,

Mind, according to my conception of it, possesses three attributes or capacities. 1. It has Feeling, in which term I include what is commonly called Sensation and Emotion. 2. It can Act according to Feeling. 3. It can think (SI 1).

If the fluid links established between sensation, emotion, and action are visible here, it might appear as if thought is situated apart from these, but a reading of *The Senses and the Intellect* reveals how

---

<sup>63</sup> I have consulted the first and second edition of *The Emotions and the Will*. All citations come from the first edition: Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: John. W. Parker and Son, 1859), which I will henceforth shorthand as *EW*. *EW*, 4.

<sup>64</sup> *EW*, 339. See also, *EW*, 339-40: He examines that the diffusive wave of emotion is technically separate from that of action; however, they co-exist and the former can lead to the latter: “I have throughout this work noted in the description of the various sensations and emotions, the tendency of each to excite action in a greater or less degree.”

intertwined thought is with sensation: “sensation is intellect already in act”(SI 340) once we begin to discriminate between sensations. As Lewes glossed Bain’s contribution in a review of *The Senses and the Intellect* and *The Emotions and the Will*, “in making experience the source of all knowledge and sensation the basis...he is careful to show the cooperation of intellect even in the experiences of sense. In sensibility itself he discerns the germ of discrimination and in discrimination lies the germ of all cognition.”<sup>65</sup>

‘Co-operation’ emerges as the term crucial for understanding the model of interaction between sensation and other forms of knowledge: even if Bain occasionally labels the relationship between mind and body as one of “dependence,” as Lewes gestures towards, Bain more often posits a more nuanced sense of interpenetration, concomitance, co-operation, co-occurrence, co-herence between the senses, intellect, emotions, and will. The reviews of Bain’s work consistently highlight how he advances an *active* rather than *passive* view of the relations between the sensation, emotion, the will, and intellect, or the “lower” and “higher” faculties. Placing Bain’s work in relation to *a priori* philosophies of mind and *a posteriori*, associationist philosophies of mind, John Stuart Mill’s review of Bain’s treatises contends that Bain offers a corrective to a reductively materialist view associated with the sensationalism of Condillac:

Those who have studied the writings of the Association Psychologists, must often have been unfavourably impressed by the almost total absence, in their analytical expositions, of the recognition of any active element, or spontaneity, in the mind itself. Sensation, and the memory of sensation, are passive phenomena; the mind in them, does not act, but is acted upon; it is a mere recipient of impressions...Mr. Bain has made a great advance on this theory...He holds that the brain does not act solely in obedience to impulses, but is also a self-acting instrument.<sup>66</sup>

As Mill proceeds to discuss, activity emerges in Bain in several ways—first, through the role that discrimination and attention plays within the sensations that form and inform consciousness, and second, in the prominent status Bain confers to spontaneous movement, or “the exercise of active

---

<sup>65</sup> G.H. Lewes, “Critical Notices,” *Fortnightly Review* (1 May 1866): 767.

<sup>66</sup> John Stuart Mill, “The Senses and the Intellect,” *Edinburgh Review* (Oct 1859): 301-02. On this point of Bain’s active conception, see also: [DM] “Bain on the Senses and the Intellect,” *Fraser’s Magazine* (February 1856).

energy originating in purely internal impulses, independent of the stimulus produced by outward impressions”(SI v-vi). As Bain argues, “If we were the subjects of purely passive sensation...our recognition of the external world might be something very different from what we now experience. The state of consciousness would then, so far as we are able to imagine it, be the nature of a dream...But in us sensation is never wholly passive, and in general this is much the reverse”(SI 371). The idea that sensation is never “wholly passive” relates to how it conjoins with, or contains the germ of, discrimination, how it can become subject to attention, and how it exists within the active energies and spontaneous movements of the body.<sup>67</sup>

If I will soon return to the question of sensation’s purported activity and passivity—or, even more specifically, sensation’s complicated relationship to consciousness, attention, and the configuration of the “automatic,” “reflex action” and mechanical habit within Bain, Lewes, and physiologists like William Carpenter—I aim to do so by first strolling back to that scene Oliphant highlights as so crucial to the sensation novel’s transmission of “pure sensation,” that scene that has been described as an “ur-scene in the depiction of Victorian consciousness”<sup>68</sup>: Walter Hartright’s late-night walk down an otherwise empty road from Hampstead to central London in *The Woman in White*. As critics have examined, the scene continually gestures to the mechanical and automatic, or nervous activity happening below the threshold of (attentively) conscious thought.<sup>69</sup> When we meet Hartright, winding his way across the Heath, we find his “mind remained passively open to the impressions produced by the view; and I thought but little on any subject—indeed, so far as my own sensations were concerned, I can hardly say that I thought at all.”<sup>70</sup> As Bain and Lewes might have it, Hartright is conscious of his own sensations and the impressions affecting them, even if he does not

---

<sup>67</sup> Lewes’ vision of the activity of the nerves in part emerges from how he insists they are not merely passive conductors, but instead retain a force of their own. See Lewes, *Physiology*, 18.

<sup>68</sup> Dames, “The Network of Nerves,” 215.

<sup>69</sup> See, for instance, Dames; on reflexes and the sensation novel more generally, Winter.

<sup>70</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* ed. Matthew Sweet (London: Penguin, 2003), 23.



attend to them, for, as Lewes explains of the relationship between sensation, attention, and consciousness, “to have a sensation and to be conscious of it are one and the same thing; but to have a sensation and to attend to it are two different things. Attention is the direction of the consciousness—not the consciousness itself.”<sup>71</sup> While it might initially appear as if the passage will contrast sensation and thought with one another, this relationship will change, although not immediately: once Hartright reaches the network of roads and “mechanically turn[s]” down the road toward London, another set of ostensibly mechanical reactions take place: he’s “idly wondering”

...when, in one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me.  
I turned on the instant, with my fingers tightening round the handle of my stick.  
There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road—there, as if it had that moment sprung of the earth or dropped from heaven—stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments (24).

And, of course, this moment—this shock or stimulus of touch followed by few “purely” reflexive actions (the change in pulse, the fingers tightening)—is taken to embody the “sensation” of sensation fiction: the stimulus or shock creates a thrill of “unconscious” (or inattentive) bodily responses. However, even in this moment, through a Bainian logic, the element of discrimination or attention implanted within this sensation—that it is discerned and distinguished from the rest—would already join or lead to another set of affective and cognitive responses. That is, the passage still has another eight pages remaining, pages that will dismantle the idea that Hartright’s response amounts to “pure sensation”—the “physical effect” will instead diffuse into, or operate with, a series of emotional and intellectual responses. Almost immediately, Hartright attempts to “discern distinctly” who this person before him is (“what sort of a woman she was, and how she came to be out alone in the high-road...I altogether failed to guess”[24]); however, even if he fails to guess her identity, his process of discernment involves a complex relay of memories and past associations that make it clear enough to determine who she is not (i.e. a prostitute).

---

<sup>71</sup> Lewes, *Physiology*, 53.

This process of intellectual discernment (inasmuch as it involves memory, retentiveness, etc.) also quickly melds with a set of moral affects and emotions. As Collins writes of our first-person narrator: “The loneliness and helplessness of the woman touched me”(25) Here, the physical stimulus (“the touch of a hand”) leading to a bodily sensation morphs into, or is co-incidental with, an affective response of sympathy (“she touched me”). The touch radiates outwards so far, that eventually Hartright not only begins to question the parameters of his own reality, but also his own boundaries of autonomous self-hood and the habits and rhythms of domestic life: “Was I Walter Hartright? Was this the well-known, uneventful road, where people strolled on Sundays? Had I really left, little more than an hour since, the quiet, decent, conventionally-domestic atmosphere of my mother’s cottage?”(27). If at once, this stream of thought precisely registers the anxieties articulated about sensation fiction—that reading it essentially penetrates the parameters of self and disrupts the conventions of domestic space by throwing the purity of that space into doubt—it also reveals how this “shock” does not remain “purely” physical, but works its way quickly, in ever increasing concentric circles outward to all aspects of emotion, cognition, and even autobiographical consciousness. That touch, of course, will set in motion a whole narrative, one that in this moment is further complicated by the premise that Hartright is recording this story in first-person in his journal, thus reviving the past experience of previous sensations, layering memory and a dual temporality and spatiality within the scene.

Drawing on this example, the actual works of sensation fiction would appear to posit a much more fluid Bain-ian circuitry of nerves, sensation, emotion, and thought within its pages, and, by extension, between the page and the reader. When Hartright interjects, as he records his narrative, “I tremble, now, when I write it”(26), it carries with it an implicit reciprocal movement in which we, the reader, tremble now when we read it, but then swiftly enter into a similar loop that leads to something like emotional feeling, memory, and intellectual reflection. What seems new is how they

place nervous stimulus, reflex actions, and shock at the beginning of their own network of affective relay—the touch or thrill that accelerates the pulses, that quickens breathing—acts as a precondition or tuning for other responses, like sympathy, imagination, memory. Epistemological empiricism does not disappear—it becomes accessed through the nerves. If, as D.A. Miller, has famously encapsulated it, “the genre offers us one of the first instances of modern literature to address itself primarily to the sympathetic nervous system [part of the autonomic nervous system], where it grounds its characteristic adrenalin effects: accelerated heart rate and respiration, increased blood pressure, the pallor resulting from vasoconstriction, and so on,”<sup>72</sup> we have to contend with how addressing itself *primarily* to the nervous system does not mean addressing itself *exclusively* to “adrenalin effects” or automatic reflex actions.

That is, if a work like *The Woman in White* might adhere to a logic of physiological psychology in which the touch, the blood standing still, the automatically clenched hands, leads to or is cooperative with another set of affective and cognitive responses (from a touch to “being touched”), the question remains: why does Victorian criticism, as we will see in more depth, separate sensation, emotion, and thought, arguing that the sensation novel *only* induces a set automatic, “adrenalin effects”? As Mansel sardonically suggested, sensation novels should essentially be classified by “the kind of sensation they are calculated to produce.” Drawing on a list from the philosopher William Hamilton of “sneezing, horripilation, shuddering, the feeling of setting teeth on edge,” Mansel contends that there are “some which gently stimulate a particular feeling; and others which carry the whole nervous system by steam...some which aspire to set his hair on end...while others...are strongly provocative of that sensation in the palate and throat which is a premonitory symptom of nausea.”<sup>73</sup> This vision of the sensation novel’s aim—to “mak[e] the flesh creep” or to “caus[e] the hair to stand on end”—situates these physical effects as the sole aim or end point of its mode of

---

<sup>72</sup> Miller, *The Novel and the Police*, 146.

<sup>73</sup> Mansel, 487. Mansel is referencing philosopher William Hamilton’s notes to *The Works of Thomas Reid*, 854.

readerly response. The criticism does not lament that these automatic actions have become the basis or foundation for higher modes of cognition; instead, it suggests that these modes fail to link with any other mode of engagement. Yet, all of these kinds of physical effects—sneezing, horripilation or goose bumps, the hair standing on end, nausea—all represent a very specific set of physiological responses, or subset of sensations, that of the reflexes, or involuntary, automatic physiological responses.

Instead of activating the reader's imagination, intellect, or will, critics suggested that sensation fiction only operates by producing involuntary, mechanical responses. However, as the scene from *The Woman in White* raises, even if the novel explores mechanical responses, it seems perhaps more accurate to say it invests in considering how these automatic responses relate to other kinds of sensation, emotion, and forms of cognition. Even if *The Woman in White* will weigh a particular strain of materialist thought that treats the human as a kind of machine, or automaton—that the delightful villain Fosco might ask, “What are we but puppets in a show box...Mind, they say, rules the world. But what rules the mind? The body...I will reduce his mind, by the action of his body, till his pen pours out the most abject drivel that ever degraded paper”<sup>74</sup>—Fosco's experiment should not necessarily be considered Collins' mission statement on the sensation novel.

Instead, it appears that the sensation novel—just like the physiological psychology of Bain and Lewes appearing in 1855–1860—complexly engages in debate about the place of automatism and reflex physiology in the life of mind. As Edwin Clarke and L.S. Jacyna explore in their book *Nineteenth-Century Origins of Neuroscientific Concepts*, essentially the movement towards a mind/body monism developed from earlier nineteenth-century physiology's new insights into the relationship between the cerebrum and spinal cord. First, new vivisectionist experiments revealed that the spinal cord retained a degree of autonomy from the brain as it could “execute reflex movements even

---

<sup>74</sup> Collins, *The Woman in White*, 602.

when separated from the brain.”<sup>75</sup> The spinal cord’s own complex generating of automatic bodily effects thus challenged the previously held idea that the brain constituted the center seat driving the rest of the nervous system. Instead, as Clarke and Jacyna maintain,

Ideas of the structure of the cerebrospinal axis underwent a revolution between 1800 and 1840. Quite literally, an inversion of previous modes of conceiving the axis took place: instead of proceeding from above downwards and seeing the spinal cord as a process of the brain, anatomists began to go from below upwards and to describe the brain as the culmination of the spinal cord.<sup>76</sup>

This new “bottom up” relationship—or to use the more precise language often invoked, this movement from “lower” to “higher,” from “simple” to “complex” established between the spinal cord and brain also carried with it crucial ramifications for the role of reflex, or automatic functions. If some physiologists, like Marshall Hall, maintained a bifurcated view of the nervous system that, to put it broadly, associated the brain with exclusively voluntary responses and the spinal cord with exclusively involuntary, or reflexive ones—that is, that separated reflex actions from sensation and volition—others, like Thomas Laycock advanced the role of reflexes in cerebral life.<sup>77</sup>

William Carpenter, who would more fully advance the theory of “unconscious cerebration” (a kind of “thinking without thinking”) in the 1870s, retained a complex view of the relationship between reflex bodily actions and human cognition in his work in the 1840s and 1850s.<sup>78</sup> His work tracks an ascendancy through the animal kingdom based on the nervous system. The lowest creatures with the most simple nervous systems, invertebrate animals, exhibit “purely-reflex action”: any muscular response to a sensation from an internal or external source does not involve the intervention of volition; all reactions happen mechanically or automatically. This shifts as we ascend through the animal kingdom and encounter increasingly complex nervous systems. If Carpenter critiques a materialist doctrine espousing that man is but a “thinking machine,”(548) affirming that

---

<sup>75</sup> Clarke and Jacyna, *Nineteenth-Century Origins of Neuroscientific Concepts*, 30.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 30-31.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-148.

<sup>78</sup> On “unconscious cerebration,” see, for instance: Vanessa Ryan, *Thinking without Thinking in the Victorian Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). All quotes from Carpenter are from: William Carpenter, *Principles of Human Physiology* 5<sup>th</sup> Edition (London: John Churchill, 1855).

the difference between man and lower animals is that in his highest stage of development all automatic, or purely reflex actions “save those which are absolutely essential to the maintenance of organic functions [e.g. respiration, circulation of blood, processes of digestion]” become subordinated to Reason and Will (439), he still traces the movement of reflex actions from the “lower” to the “higher” acts of the cerebrum. The state of early human life, or infancy, our condition is “but little (if at all) in advance of that of the higher Invertebrata”(439), or another words, it involves mostly reflex action. As we develop, the automatic does not disappear, but can manifest itself in the “reflex activity’ of the cerebrum” driven by suggestion and habit, rather than volition (440). Yet, his view still relies upon the integrity and unity of the cerebro-spinal axis, and the movement from the spine to a cerebrum capable of assuming control over its automatic reactions—again, with the exception of those reflex actions based in organic function:

The excitor impression travel[s] in the *upward* direction, if it meet with no interruption, until it reaches the cerebrum, without exciting any reflex movements in its course. When it arrives at the Sensorium, it makes an impression on the consciousness of the individual, and thus gives rise to a sensation; and the change thus induced...becomes the occasion of the formation of an idea. If with this idea any pleasurable or painful feeling should be associated, it assumes the character of an emotion, and either as a simple or and an emotional idea, it becomes the subject of intellectual operations, whose final issue is in a volitional determination, or act of the Will...controlling or directing the current of thought (444).

In other words, every other action and impression which could become automatic, and would in invertebrates—other than the automatic movements of breathing, and the circulation of blood, and digestion which are always automatic in humans—travels upward entering a relay that transforms and at times subsumes every potential automatic response.

Carpenter does not conceive, however, that reflex actions exclusively belong to the organic functions of respiration, circulation, digestion, secretion, etc.; reflex actions can also be related to sensory impressions—for instance, the movements of the pupil in relation to light, coughing or sneezing provoked by an external or internal irritant, nausea produced by a bad smell, involuntary laughter produced by tickling, and the like (510). Reflex movements also complexly manifest themselves in the form of seeming states of reverie in which humans perform habitual movements

ostensibly disconnected from conscious thought or attention to those movements (511) and, as Carpenter explores, “even the Cerebrum responds automatically to impressions fitted to excite it to ‘reflex’ action, when from any cause the Will is in abeyance and its power cannot be exerted either over the muscular system or over the direction of the thoughts” as in dreaming, reveries and “artificially induced” states like mesmerism (445). Yet, Carpenter still maintains that the sensory ganglia of the spine cannot be separated from cerebral activity, unless one specific condition occurs: “if this ordinary upward course [from the sensory ganglia of the spine to the cerebrum] be anywhere interrupted, the impression will then exert its power in a transverse direction, and a ‘reflex’ action will be the result”(445). In other words, we become subject to “pure” reflex if the spine no longer relays to the cerebrum.

Alexander Bain’s view of reflex or automatic actions draws upon and revises Carpenter’s conception of them in several ways. First, he somewhat constricts Carpenter’s account of what constitutes a reflex action. For Bain, a reflex action includes all of the organic actions like digestion, respiration, the circulation of blood, and things like vomiting, coughing, sneezing, the winking of the eye, and reflexes associated with externally derived sensations like the mouth’s contortions to a bitter taste, the pupil’s movement in response to light, etc. However, he also restricts some of Carpenter’s ideas of reflexes—for instance, laughter produced by tickling, the fidgets—arguing that these are “movements and effects due....to the proper diffusive influence of emotion.”<sup>79</sup> In his analysis, only a very limited number of processes do not immediately become associated with a diffusion of feeling, and even acts that are associated with feeling but might not be volitional are still a part of consciousness.<sup>80</sup> In Bain’s view, feeling constitutes the intervening force, and therefore he further clarifies and qualifies how habitual actions can be considered automatic, or “secondarily automatic”:

---

<sup>79</sup> Bain, *SI*, footnote 260. As Rick Rylance notes in *Victorian Psychology and British Culture*: “Bain was not an automatist”(191).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.* On this point, see also *EW*, 11.

Actions habitual...in some cases approach to the unconscious and automatic, like the movements of the heart and lungs; and almost appear to become independent of feeling either to originate or to control them. Notwithstanding, such actions cannot be held as excluded [from the sphere of mind], when we consider that they had their rise in feelings, and merely, in virtue of a plastic operation truly mental in its nature, grow less and less objects of consciousness. Although a musical performer should play an air with an almost entire absence of mind, we should still consider the performance as an effort of mind in the sense of the definition; for the power was acquired step by step under the prompting and guidance of sensations and emotions (*SI* 5).

While certain habitual action might appear to work merely as reflex action, Bain reminds the reader that they should not actually be considered reflexive—they originally were impressions associated with feeling, sensation, and even emotion. As he later explains, the diffusive wave that used to accompany them has since contracted:

The first time that the hand clenches a wooden or iron handle, a sensation is produced having all the characters of a feeling fully manifested. There is, perhaps a pleasurable or painful consciousness, an occupation of the mind, a responsive expression and attitude of the whole body. All sensations have originally these characters; they are conscious states, and for the time being constitute the exclusive mental experience, and impart movements of expression to the members that are in alliance with the cerebral system. But at a later stage, such an action as the grasping of a handle agitates the brain almost through one solitary channel of influence... (*EW* 11-12).

Inasmuch as Bain explores how even the most ostensibly routine, habitual actions were at once not merely mechanical, but immediately diffused in full feeling, it becomes very tempting to return to the two scenes that Oliphant discusses as “pure sensation” in which “the readers nerves are affected like the heroes” and view them as scenes interested in a kind of re-sensitization. That is, Hartright’s response to the touch of the woman in white on the road in which reflex actions (the blood standing still) immediately diffuse into a stream of sensation, emotion, and cognition, and the reactivation of the same diffused sensations when he sees Laura Fairlie against the moonlight and is seized with a recognition of her uncanny likeness to the woman in white, marks an attempt to break the reader from their mode of habitual action—the routines of daily life, even, perhaps, the routine process of reading and return them to a state of sensitized diffusion—to reanimate or re-sensitize the pathways between sensation and sympathy, the embodied-ness of the real and the disembodied paper of the page. That is, to say sensation fiction consists of pure shocks and pure sensation that summon merely automatic responses would be like saying *East Lynne*’s plot consists solely of a railroad



accident, without accounting for how its scenes of “shock” link, co-operate, and remain continuous with its other affective fields and investments.

In the very least, as these treatises, and perhaps even the sensation novels themselves attest, the automatic and reflex maintains complex relationships to sensation, emotion, cognition and consciousness: it was not simply that (most) physiologists and physiological psychologists were saying that we were only nerves and automatic responses, but that the nerves and automatic responses informed, formed, and cooperated with feeling and cognition. That is, for contemporary criticism to contend that sensation fiction generically attempted to “shock” or “physically stimulate the body”<sup>81</sup> overlooks that in the physiological psychology in the period leading up to sensation fiction, and as I will argue, in the works themselves, to affect the nervous system—to preach to the nerves—is not to exclusively preach to nervous reflex action. The nerves are the pathways to all other modes of response. To stimulate the nerves, is—unless one is talking about a vivisected frog or an invertebrate animal—to enter into a current of feeling that shapes consciousness and conjoins with other modes of emotional, volitional, intellectual consciousness. As Alison Winter describes it, “the route from page to nerves was direct. Readers did reflect on and sympathize with characters, but they also reported a direct physiological response that was prior to, and perhaps in many cases, more powerful than, self-conscious thought.”<sup>82</sup> To speak directly to the nerves is not to speak only to the nerves; nervous response propels, is inseparable from, and occurs prior to or nearly concomitant with sympathy, reflection, and self-conscious thought. In other words, we should not take for granted that Victorian criticism of the sensation novel advances a potentially surprising claim: to say that sensation fiction only produces sensation, or only produces a set of reflex responses, actually relies upon a very specific understanding about a subset of nervous action in physiology. In a sense Victorian criticism of sensation fiction conceives of its readers as either

---

<sup>81</sup> Garrison, *Science, Sexuality, and Sensation Novels*, xi.

<sup>82</sup> Winter, *Mesmerized*, 324.

existing in invertebrate animal state of pure reflex, or it breaks the cerebro-spinal axis in half: readers become—as the criticism argues, due to the aesthetics of the works itself—either pure animal or pure spine. Instead of a Bainian fluid network, the criticism posits an understanding of the aesthetic that is governed by familiar hierarchies between lower and higher, simple and complex, animal and human, material and imaginative or intellectual. Of course Bain’s works themselves never entirely dismantle these dichotomies even if he does complicate and disrupt them. As Rick Rylance maintains in *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880*,

the relational aspect of Bain’s work is clear from the simple titles of his books: both *The Senses and the Intellect* and *The Emotions and the Will* relate one of the higher faculties—intellect and will—to what would at the time have been regarded as subaltern mental phenomena, sensations and emotions. In *The Senses and the Intellect*. Bain insists that sense should not be seen as inferior to the supposedly ‘higher’ forms of mental life...<sup>83</sup>

If, on the one hand, Bain poses a fluid interrelationship or bundling of sensation, emotion, volition, and intellect, in which as Rylance writes “sense should not be seen as inferior to the supposedly ‘higher’ forms of mental life,” Bain nonetheless preserves a sense of ascendancy. In a moment that somewhat contradicts and complicates the model of interpenetration the book otherwise proposes—in which volition arises through feeling and sensation contains the germ of intellect, and these elements all quickly mingle and accrue—Bain acknowledges a different model:

In the First Book, which is to comprehend the MOVEMENTS, SENSATIONS, APPETITES and INSTINCTS, I propose to deal with what may be termed the inferior region of mind, the inferiority being marked by the absence, in a great degree, of Intellect and cultivation. This is the region wherein man may be most extensively compared with the brute creation, whose intelligence and education are comparatively small. When the powers of superior intellect, and the example of former generations are super added to the primitive Sensations and Instincts, there results a higher class of combinations, more difficult to analyze and describe...(SI 8).

While Bain’s use of the conditional and passive here (“what may be termed”; “man may be...compared”) highlights how this moment gestures towards his critics potential doubts about the fluid model of combination he offers rather than entirely embracing this position, the tension that Rick Rylance—discussing the work of James Mill—describes as one between “systems based on

---

<sup>83</sup> Rylance, 170.

ascending hierarchies” against one based upon “flat networks”<sup>84</sup> seems productive to consider in relation to the sensation debate. If, as I have tried to propose, each locus or node within this debate—the Victorian criticism on the sensation novel, the sensation novels themselves, the physiological psychology and physiology these works explicitly or implicitly drew upon, as well as our own critical practices and assumptions—pose very different variations or takes on an “ascending hierarchy” vs. “network” model. If I have briefly explored how Victorian criticism of the sensation novel appears to abide by an ascending hierarchy that reduces the models offered by physiological treatises in the mid century by separating lower readerly responses from higher readerly responses thus configuring the reader of the sensation novel as either a lower animal, or all spine, it remains to be seen how these implicit and explicit invocations of physiology in these critics become tethered to assumptions about aesthetics and aesthetic response. In other words, we have to turn to Victorian criticism of the sensation genres more comprehensively to examine how these hierarchies and separations manifest themselves in other ways, and how physiological conceptions inform the realm of the aesthetic. In doing so, I will not be looking for a form of causality that explains why the sensation criticism inflects a particular physiological model of “lower” and “higher” with a set of assumptions about “lower” and “higher” aesthetic forms and modes of response, I will instead, in a Bainian spirit, pursue homologies, structural affinities, and divergences to see how these physiologically-infused models constellate with other structural models, networks, and dichotomies.

### *Section 2—Legitimate and Illegitimate Responses: The Emergence of Sensation Genres*

If, however, the term sensation at once has a complicated life in the sphere of moral philosophy, physiology, and physiological psychology, it also appeared within other contexts before its emergence in the form of sensation genres in England in 1860. In this section, I will explore two

---

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 60.

questions: first, how was the term sensation already circulating and mapping onto other conditions, aesthetic and otherwise, and second, at what point and in what ways do these modalities of sensation and the “sensational” assume the form of the discernable genre known as “the sensation novel”?

Turning to both journal sources and an array of dictionaries across from early in the nineteenth century to the publication of the *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* (what would become the OED) beginning in 1884, it emerges that the term sensation could be found to mean something close to one of the many definitions the OED granted to the term in its first edition: “a condition of excited feeling produced in a community by some occurrence; a strong impression (e.g. horror, admiration, surprise) produced in a audience or body of spectators and manifested by their demeanor,” as in the examples the OED provides, “his death produced what in the phraseology of the present day is called a great sensation...a universal commotion” (R. Southey, 1810), or “a slight sensation was perceptible in the body of the court” (Dickens, *Pickwick Papers*, 1837).<sup>85</sup> As these examples, among many others similar to them suggest, the “excited feeling” discussed here works upon the collective body, the body of the public sphere, in a way that almost elides the response of any individual body in question. That is, the relationship between an individually embodied sensation and the sensation of the collective body needs to be explored further. If at once the term sensation could mean an excited hum and stir of a crowd or group entity, other related colloquial uses of the term circulated that potentially were directed at the individual body: as the OED offers, it could also be “a strong emotion (e.g. of terror, hope, curiosity, etc.) aroused by some particular occurrence or situation,” and after the sensation decade of the 1860s, it expands to mean “the production of violent emotion as an aim in works of literature or art.”<sup>86</sup>

---

<sup>85</sup> “Sensation,” James Murray, *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* vol. 8 part 2 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909).

<sup>86</sup> While we see “violent feeling” before the sensation debate in other dictionaries, examples of the latter definition arise in the 1860s.

Contemporary accounts often turn to Wordsworth's "Preface to Lyrical Ballads" (1800) to demonstrate how the idea of sensation as shock is hardly new in the mid-nineteenth century, but instead represents a broader pattern of concern focused on urbanization, class, and industrialized modernity:

For the human mind is capable of being excited without the application of gross and violent stimulants...For a multitude of causes, unknown to former times, are now acting with a combined force to blunt the discriminating powers of the mind...the most effective causes are the great national events which are daily taking place, and the increasing accumulation of men in cities, where the uniformity of their occupations produces a craving for extraordinary incident...to this tendency the literature and theatrical exhibitions of the country have conformed themselves...I had almost said the works of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German tragedies...<sup>87</sup>

Even if Wordsworth does not use the term sensation in this passage, there are certainly affinities with the discourse that arises in response to the sensation novel, particularly in the way that violent stimulus and the desire for incident becomes aligned with certain aesthetic forms—in this case, the Gothic novel, the gothic drama, and emergent melodrama against legitimately canonical English forms like Shakespeare and Milton. The structural relation established between a mode of embodied response, a trigger of that response existing in the form of the work itself, and a sense that both sides of this exchange become contaminated in the act of consumption is not, therefore, an entirely new phenomenon, even if, as we will see, in the sensation debate it assumes a particularly acute form. Of course the specific genres that he mentions only highlight the extent to which the sensation genres of the 1860s must be placed—and were placed in Victorian criticism and have been by contemporary scholars—in relation to the “sensational” elements of the Gothic, and popular literary genres that emerge in the 1830s and 1840s, namely the Newgate novel, and the penny journal urban mysteries of Sue and Reynolds, just as it is also the case that sensation and embodiment more

---

<sup>87</sup> William Wordsworth, “Preface to Lyrical Ballads,” *Lyrical Ballads* (London: T.N. Longman and O. Rees, 1800), xviii. On sensation and British Romantic poetry see, Noel Jackson, *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

broadly played a role in debates about sensibility and the form and impact of the novel in the eighteenth century.<sup>88</sup>

And yet, if other genres are said to be broadly “sensational”—usually meaning that they contain violent crime, or shocking incident, or that they produce some embodied response—this does not quite answer how the specific genre of the sensation novel emerged as a critical term in Victorian England. If the Victorian sensation novel retains close connections to the British Gothic, emerging sensational journalism, and popular literature typically designed for the working classes appearing in penny papers, and indeed, as we will see, this later strain of influence partially informs how sensation novel criticism positions aesthetic hierarchies, this still ignores a crucial channel of influence. As scholars have increasingly noted, the circulation of the term in America informs its circulation of the term in England. Not only was the “sensation” phenomenon recognized as an American phenomenon, with, for instance, *Punch*’s 1861 satire “Sense v. Sensation” proclaiming: “some would have it an age of Sensation...The word’s not Old England’s creation/But New England’s over the sea,”<sup>89</sup> but the critical term for the genre—“the sensation novel”—circulated in America before it arrived in England.<sup>90</sup> However, the term “sensation novel” as it circulated in the 1850s in America meant something quite different than it would come to mean in Victorian England around 1862. Even if the work of Poe and Hawthorne was labeled “sensational” in the US and England,<sup>91</sup> the term “sensation novel” referred to the “cheap” penny publications in story newspapers, pamphlet novelettes, and dime novels. As Sally Streeby maintains in *American Sensations*,

---

<sup>88</sup> On sensibility see, for instance: Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Paolo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996); Janet Todd, *Sensibility: An Introduction* (London: Methuen, 1986); Ildiko Csengei, *Sympathy, Sensibility, and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

<sup>89</sup> “Sense v. Sensation,” *Punch* (July 1861).

<sup>90</sup> The term appears in America by the 1850s—see for instance, “Bank Defalcations,” *New York Times* (17 March 1858); “New Books,” *New York Times* (14 May 1859). In England, the article “The Enigma Novel,” *The Spectator* (28 December 1861) has been traditionally taken as the earliest discussion of the sensation novel. An example of a slightly earlier use of it appears in an article that mentions the sensation novel in America (“Rambles at Random Southern States,” *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* [January 1860]) and within the context of Gothic novels (“Literature and Art” *Illustrated London News* (8 June 1861).

<sup>91</sup> See, for instance, Oliphant, “Sensation Novels,” 565.

sensational literature in the US was “the equivalent[...] of early sensational British cultural production” like the urban mystery novels of the 1840s,<sup>92</sup> which are understood in Victorian scholarship to be related to, and yet distinct from, the sensation novel genre of the 1860s, since the latter is aimed at a middle-class readership and moves the violence in its action from rookery streets and gin-soaked criminal dens, to the domestic sphere of the parlour and bedroom.

While the Victorian “sensation novel”—as it assumes its force as a critical term with the publication of Oliphant’s essay “Sensation Novels” in May 1862 which retroactively applies the term back to Collins’ 1860 novel, *The Woman in White*—engages with these many strains of influence, the term itself actually emerges in England through a different pathway. In late December 1860, advertisements appear for the “91<sup>st</sup> representation of the great sensation Drama, THE COLLEEN BAWN.”<sup>93</sup> And what seems like an inconsequential detail hints at a broader prehistory to the sensation novel that has not been excavated. Not only does the term “sensation drama” enter into circulation slightly earlier than the term “sensation novel” and begin to immediately accrue a critical weight throughout 1861—roughly a year earlier than the debate about the sensation novel appears—but as I will later explore, the genre and medium “sensation drama” and its relation to other forms of melodrama, play a significant role within the debate about the sensation novel.

While scholarly accounts of the sensation novel often note that the genre was in some broad way influenced by, or connected to Victorian theatrical forms, and a few scholars have noted Richard Altick’s observation that the term entered into the vocabulary from theatre,<sup>94</sup> no attention

---

<sup>92</sup> Sally Streeby, *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), 29. See also, Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America* (London: Verso, 1987).

<sup>93</sup> “Advertisements,” *The London Review* (22 December 1860), 605. See also, “Advertisements and Notices,” *The Era* (23 December 1860).

<sup>94</sup> Works that mention this potential connection in passing include: Richard Altick, *Deadly Encounters: Two Victorian Sensations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986); Radford, *Victorian Sensation Fiction*; Andrew Maunder “Mapping the Victorian Sensation Novel: Some Recent and Future Trends,” *Literature Compass* 2 (2005); Tom Gunning, “The Horror of Opacity: The Melodrama of Sensation in the Plays of André de Lorde,” *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* eds. J.S. Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill (London: BFI, 1994).

has yet been directed towards the specificity of this transmission, the circulation of sensation drama in Victorian criticism, or how the sensation novel debate relates to this initial debate. However, from its initial entrance in advertisements and playbills in late 1860, the use of the term quickly begins to proliferate. Across the winter, spring, and summer of 1861, it appears both in advertisements and increasingly in reviews, with critics highlighting the novelty of the term, applying it to the works they were reviewing as examples of “the last new sensation drama, as we are told to call the Adelphi tragedies or melodrama.”<sup>95</sup> In *Punch*’s July 1861 satire “Sense v. Sensation,” after tracing the extent to which the term “sensation” has flourished across America, the poem registers the movement of this “vulgar excitement” from across the Atlantic to England’s shores by tying it to the performances of the acrobat Blondin, minstrelsy, and theatre: “If a drama can boast of a run,/by dint of a strong situation,/The posters e’en now have begun/to puff the thing up as ‘Sensation.’”<sup>96</sup> Another early parody of the phenomenon of “that idiot word, ‘Sensation,’” *Fun*’s “A Sensation Song” of November 1861, also ties the form exclusively to the drama, asking of Boucicault’s wildly successful *The Colleen Bawn* “why should this drama draw me out/ in honest indignation/ by putting epithets to rout/except the word, ‘Sensation.’”<sup>97</sup> It wasn’t only parodies of sensation that tied it exclusively to the medium of theatre, codifying its emergence as a genre. Thackeray, writing in his “Roundabout Papers” in *Cornhill Magazine* in September 1861 refers to the Northumberland Street affair through recourse to the new genre: “At the theatres they have a new name for their melodramatic pieces and call them ‘Sensation Dramas.’ What a sensation drama this [the Northumberland Street crime] is!” He then proceeds to describe the “header” or drowning scene from *The Colleen Bawn* as the nascent form’s exemplary scene.

---

<sup>95</sup> “Music and Drama,” *The Literary Gazette* (6 April 1861). For other instances, see: “Book Review,” *The Literary Gazette* (19 January 1861); “The Amusements of Whitsuntide,” *The Era* (26 May 1861); “Queens Theatre” *The Caledonian Mercury* (28 July 1861); “The Theatres,” *The Era* (6 October 1861); “Lyceum Theatre,” *The Times* (11 November 1861); “The New Sensation Drama,” *The Spectator* (23 November 1861).

<sup>96</sup> “Sense v. Sensation” *Punch*.

<sup>97</sup> “A Sensation Song,” *Fun* (23 November 1861).



Inasmuch as early instances of the emergent genre tend to cite *The Colleen Bawn*, which premiered in September 1860, as its progenitor, a word can still be clarified about how the term itself comes to appear in advertisements and then enters into circulation. The term “sensation drama” emerges in America slightly before it appears in England. However, it is not affixed to the original American production of *The Colleen Bawn* staged during Boucicault’s residency there; instead it emerges in England later into the play’s run.<sup>98</sup> While a few scholars have attributed the phrase to Boucicault noting that, “Boucicault seems to have invented the term ‘sensation drama’ and applied it to his *Colleen Bawn*,”<sup>99</sup> elements of the public record, at least, contradict this account. In January 1861, *The Literary Gazette* attributed the term to a different source, “‘sensation-dramas’ (to use a word which we see Mr. B. Webster has applied to the ‘Colleen Bawn’)” referring to the manager of the Adelphi Theater, Benjamin Webster. Both Boucicault and Webster—whose relationship was so tumultuous across the early 1860s that it ultimately culminated in a lawsuit in 1862<sup>100</sup>—claimed credit for introducing it. In a letter responding to *The Times*’ claim in an article in March 1862 that “one result of the enormous popularity of the *Colleen Bawn* at the Adelphi has been the introduction of a new word into the theatrical vocabulary...sensation drama...and the sensation scene,” Boucicault concedes that he “was the means of bringing [it] into use” but then immediately repudiates it: “It is a bad word, and I beg pardon for it.” Webster himself would also lay claim to it

---

<sup>98</sup> I have not yet found it attached to Boucicault’s plays in America; *The Colleen Bawn* was referred to as “the Irish Drama,” in the US and in the beginning of its run in England. See, for instance: *New York Herald Tribune* (19 April 1860). The NYT review refers to it as a drama: “Amusements,” *New York Times* (31 March 1861). Initial reviews and advertisements in England do not refer to it as a sensation drama: “The Drama,” *The Literary Gazette* (15 September 1860); “Music and the Drama,” *The Athenaeum* (15 September 1860). However, the term “sensation drama” was in circulation in America in the 1850s. See, for instance: “Amusements,” *New York Times* (2 February 1858); “Music and the Drama,” *Evening Post* (20 June 1859).

<sup>99</sup> Michael Booth, *Hiss the Villain: Six English and American Melodramas* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964), 31. Daly cites Booth in *Literature, Technology and Modernity*. However, Booth never offers evidence on this point. We might infer that he was drawing upon Henry Morley’s observation in *Journal of a London Playgoer* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974), 234 that Boucicault imported the term sensation scene from America.

<sup>100</sup> “The Adelphi in Chancery,” *Saturday Review* (21 June 1862). The acrimony between the two, which largely centered on the artistic management of the Adelphi in 1861-62, can be traced across copies of letters held in the Boucicault archives of the University of Kent, and newspaper articles. While Boucicault had artistic control by contract in 1861-62, Webster was in charge of advertising, etc. in 1860, during *Colleen Bawn*’s run. For more on the relationship between Boucicault and Webster, see Richard Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1979).

testifying to the Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses and Regulations of 1866 that “Sensation drama is a word which I took from the American dramatic element.”<sup>101</sup> While it is difficult to discern how much the deterioration of their relationship influenced these claims, focusing on this pedantic point obscures a more important one: it is not just who introduced the term, but instead how controversies began to accrue around it.

The initial reviews of the *Colleen Bawn*, however, seemingly suggest a different story. The play itself was well-received, with one critic writing of the “sympathetic enthusiasm” of the spectators at the sight of its most famous scene, which would come to be known as a “sensation scene” or a scene of spectacular effect thought to define the genre, in this case the moment where someone attempts to murder our eponymous hero by pushing her off a cliff into a lake, where she is just barely saved from drowning.<sup>102</sup> However, once the term sensation drama entered into the critical vocabulary, the definitions of it, and objections to it, begin to solidify into discernible patterns. Critics routinely discuss it in terms of the embodied responses it produces, concentrating on its “tendency to a sort of physical force.”<sup>103</sup> This idea of “physical force” in turn relies upon a binary that critics established between the physical and mental, mind and body, nervous response and higher emotions and intellect. For instance, a reviewer in an article “A *Feuille Volonte*, Apropos of Tastes of the Day”(October 1861) considers how the success of a sensation drama lies,

in its melodramatic element, in the thrill of horror it sends through the nerves of its spectators, in its gratification of that same low thirst for excitement that gather crowds round Robert’s house in Northumberland Street...It pleases the palate of the majority better to have their nerves strung to concert pitch by the loathsome terror of well-imitated murder, than to enjoy mere intellectual gratification.<sup>104</sup>

As this passage advances, the “thrill of horror” that travels through the nerves is induced by the work itself—representation and imitation stimulates cravings and bodily thirst for more stimuli that seemingly bypass the intellect. And this article was hardly alone in disaggregating the thrill of the

---

<sup>101</sup> “Report from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses and Regulations,” (27 April 1866) 3326 *Parliamentary Papers*.

<sup>102</sup> “Theatres&c.” *The Era* (1 October 1860).

<sup>103</sup> “The Theatres,” *Illustrated London News* (8 June 1861).

<sup>104</sup> “A *Feuille Volonte*: Apropos of Some Tastes of the Day,” *Bentley’s Miscellany* 50 (October 1861), 375.

nerves from the workings of intellect while precisely aggregating the bodies this worked upon, by linking it to the crowd, or that collective body of bodies.<sup>105</sup> As one reviewer—writing of Boucicault’s second “sensation drama,” *The Octoroon*—expressed it in *The Athenaeum* in November 1861:

After many postponements, the new sensation-drama was produced on Monday. ‘The Octoroon’ is one of a series of plays which have been tried and proved by Mr. Boucicault in America, as remarkably effective with that mixed class of audience which requires in a drama an exciting story, with a scene or two calculated to cause a thrilling sensation in the majority. And it is a ‘sensation’ properly so called;—not an emotion of the mind, not a tragic feeling in response to passion, not sympathy with suffering or heroism, but the impression made on the nervous system by an actual occurrence passing before the senses, calculated to awaken fear or expectation, or wonder, and to give a shock, not always pleasant to the frame. Here, as it were, the whole audience meets on the same level, receiving an impression affecting the lower powers of the mind.<sup>106</sup>

Sensation is the force that, in effect, levels classes: a “mixed class of audience” becomes a homogenous, de-individuated “whole” driven by nervous system response. Steering this response is the form of the narrative itself (“an exciting story” with “a scene or two calculated to cause a thrilling sensation”) and condition of medium. For this reviewer, the response consists of a “‘sensation’ properly so called” because it mimics the structure of “real” sense-based response (“the impression made on the nervous system by an actual occurrence passing before the senses”). Here, presence matters: the actual and material passing before the eyes constitutes it as a proper sensation. However, the sense-stimulation fails to generate a stream of affective response that travels upwards to the “higher” powers of the mind; the sensation or impression only effectuates response in the “lower powers of the mind” thus binding the audience together on the same (lower) level.

If the passage, however, ostensibly establishes a strict binary between a “lower” response of the sensation and nerves against a “higher” response of “an emotion of the mind,” a “tragic feeling in response to passion,” or “sympathy with suffering and heroism,” the logic of the passage also complicates this hierarchy by associating the current of sensation with other (lower) emotions, like

---

<sup>105</sup> See Winter, *Mesmerized*, 328-335 for a discussion of the crowd, reflex physiology, and the political stakes of the “mass” in relation to the Second Reform Bill. The quote she isolates from Walter Bagehot’s *English Constitution* that “the elements which excite the most easy reverence will be the theatrical elements—those which appeal to the senses...that which is brilliant to the eye; that which is seen vividly for a moment, and then is seen no more” Walter Bagehot *English Constitution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 9 quoted in Winter, 335 is relevant to this discussion.

<sup>106</sup> “Music and the Drama,” *The Athenaeum* (23 November 1861), 694.

fear, expectation, and wonder. It maps a set of aesthetic responses—fear, expectation, wonder, on the one hand, and “tragic feeling,” “sympathy with suffering and heroism,” and emotions of mind, on the other—implicitly and explicitly associating them with different theatrical genres, namely, melodrama’s “aesthetics of astonishment” as Peter Brooks defines it in *The Melodramatic Imagination*,<sup>107</sup> and tragedy’s heroic passions (“sympathy” itself stands as the more complicated and problematic term to reconcile since it travels between the registers of sentimental, the melodramatic, the tragic, and the realist; nonetheless, the passage itself separates sympathy from sensation).

In invoking a set of aesthetic hierarchies between genre (melodrama against tragedy) and between a presumed corporeal and emotive or lower and higher response of the audience to each genre, the passage subtly injects a legacy of recent eighteenth and nineteenth century theatrical history into the emergent sensation debate. This legacy—the division between “legitimate” and “illegitimate” theatre—arose from the Licensing Act of 1737 and the accompanying Act of 1752. These acts worked on several fronts: the first act conferred a monopoly on the production of tragedy, comedy, opera and “other forms of entertainment” to theatres that had been granted patents under Charles II (the Drury Lane and Covent Garden) and it strengthened the regulatory power of the Lord Chamberlain, requiring all plays staged at the patent, or major theatres to be submitted for his approval.<sup>108</sup> The second act established a licensing system for the minor houses enabling them to stage “music, dancing, and other entertainments of the like kind.” As Jane Moody characterizes the implications of this act in *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840*, “no provision was made for the textual scrutiny of these entertainments” as they were assumed to occupy “a non-

---

<sup>107</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995). In *The Emotions and the Will*, Bain effectively places wonder, surprise, and astonishment at the beginning of his classification of the emotions, relating it to the sensations: “It would then be seen that this emotion would appropriately come after the sensations of the senses, and before the other classes of emotions” (*EW* 67). As he writes, “The feeling of wonder or astonishment may be characterized as a strong excitement, often, but not always of the pleasurable kind, but without much delicacy, sweetness, or charm. In fact, it is rather a coarse pleasure, like the mere intensity of sensation or violent bodily exercise. When the system is fresh, and full of nervous and muscular vigor, a very keen enjoyment is derived from it” (*EW* 69).

<sup>108</sup> 10 Geo 11 xxvii.

dramatic sphere of bodily performance utterly distinct from the drama staged at Drury Lane and Covent Garden.”<sup>109</sup> The acts and the theatre cultures they structured, as Moody maintains, at their core relied upon “an unwritten ban on the spoken word” in the minor theatres.<sup>110</sup> In other words, the system of licensing and regulation effectively established a “legitimate” theatre of the word and text against an “illegitimate” theatre of the body, gesture, and music, aligning this binary between media with binaries between genres both established and “pure” (tragedy, comedy) and emergent and hybrid (melodrama, burletta, burlesque, pantomime, which each developed as creative formal responses to and circumventions of the ban on dialogue and words unaccompanied by music). In turn, these medial and generic divisions internalized and perpetuated assumptions about elite and popular culture, class, and national identity.

It bears repeating just how strange this legal distinction between legitimate and illegitimate theater was: precisely at the time of the novel’s emergence, another key art form—perhaps the key art form in terms of popularity—was not only divided into aesthetic hierarchies that pitted its media against one another (text vs. body, word vs. music, discursive aurality vs. the visual), but these hierarchies between presumed higher genres and media against lower genres and media were actually codified in law (even if these binaries were constantly undermined—with minor theatres creating innovative ways to sneak in dialogue, and major theatres responding to the popularity of melodrama by increasingly staging it). Nonetheless, one can only imagine what would have happened to the novel in England as a medium if it had not only been subject to censorship, but the bounds of what constituted its legitimate and illegitimate modes of representation had been enshrined in law: this novel can have narration, but this one can only have dialogue; this novel can only feature a tragic tone, while this one can only rely on sentiment; this novel’s text and print cannot be too saturated by oral culture, whereas this one can be structured by it and even read aloud.

---

<sup>109</sup> Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 18.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

It is worth noting, as Moody does, that the important categories of “legitimate” theatre and “illegitimate” theatre did not arise from the language of the acts themselves, but entered into discourse in the late 1790s.<sup>111</sup> And, as Moody persuasively argues, the terms can be traced to Edmund Burke’s positioning of legitimate and illegitimate representation within the political sphere in *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790). Forms of legitimate and illegitimate government and political action—including the ultimate illegitimate act of murdering the monarchy—were, as she argues:

imagined as an act of generic miscegenation—that ‘monstrous tragic-comic scene’...In Burke’s argument, revolution is imagined as the collapse of monarchical genres: the National Assembly, antithesis of legitimate government, has exchanged the sanctity of political hierarchy for the anarchy of ‘profane burlesque.’<sup>112</sup>

This scene of slaughter for Burke, I would add, is not only saturated in perversions of genre, but perversions of formal representation and response. In Burke’s hands, Thebes meets the Newgate calendar: he renders the scene as one of “atrocious spectacle” in which “the most splendid palace in the world...[is] left swimming blood, polluted by massacre, strewed with scattered limbs and mutilated carcasses,” and once “their heads were stuck upon spears...the royal captives who followed in the train were slowly moved along, amidst the horrid yells, and shrilling screams, and frantic dances...”<sup>113</sup> However, he implores his English audience to look at this spectacle “correctly” “because when kings are hurl’d from their thrones by the Supreme Director of this great drama...we behold such disasters in the moral...we are alarmed into reflexion; our minds (as it has long since been observed) are purified by terror and pity.” If tragic viewing demands specific responses based upon (English) moral reflection, Burke also envisions the form of bad spectatorship, or the hungry (French) audience misapprehending the spectacle before them. Citing a supposed representation of the St. Bartholomew Massacre on stage, Burke asks:

---

<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 52-53.

<sup>113</sup> Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France* ed. L.G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 71-72.

Was this spectacle intended to make the Parisians abhor persecution, and loath the effusion of blood?—No, it was to teach them to persecute their own pastors; it was to excite them...It was to stimulate their cannibal appetites (which one would think had been gorged sufficiently) by variety and seasoning...<sup>114</sup>

Instead of inducing moral reflection and Aristotelian passion, the spectacle inflames, it stimulates, it excites and stokes the appetites of the hungry crowd.

This image of stimulation, excitement, and consumption not only appears in modified form in the sensation debate of the 1860s—the known revolutionary crowd becomes the slightly more benign and yet still insatiable “unknown public”<sup>115</sup>—but it also appears in an earlier aesthetic debate across the early- to mid-nineteenth century about melodrama as a form, and the form of emotional response it induces. With the emergence of “the monster melo-drame”<sup>116</sup> in the first decade of the nineteenth century, and only increasing with the spread of its popularity, critics immediately began to lament the decline of the legitimate and national drama, which they associated with pure tragedy (the Greeks), pure comedy (Sheridan, etc), and above all the poetry and passions of Shakespeare. These accounts usually abide by a similar structure: they long for dramatic poetry and the pleasures of imagination and intellect received through the ear, and lament the increased emphasis on visual spectacle and the mere “gratification of the eye.” As one critic asked in 1825, why would we expect respectable audiences to attend the theatre only

to have their ears dinned with the noise of trumpets, cymbals, and screaming choristers; their eyes tired to aching with watching procession after procession, with painted banners and ginger-bread carts, and spot-be-daubed horses, and painted men and women, who are sometimes swallowed up at the last scene in an eruption of Mount Vesuvius, about 20 feet high, very curiously represented by shaking a painted sheet over some red fire; or sometimes, tumbled head over heels, in the funniest manner possible, under the stage, by what is called an *earth-quake*; to say nothing of the perpetual smoke and stink of powder, with attends the several explosions, requisite for the full effect of the performance.<sup>117</sup>

Instead of listening to the poetry of “pure tragedy,” the “mongrel offspring melo-drama” with its “spurious and baser species of entertainment”<sup>118</sup> is figured as an assault on the senses: the ears hear

---

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>115</sup> Wilkie Collins, “The Unknown Public,” *Household Words* (21 August 1858).

<sup>116</sup> “The Monster Melo-Drame,” *The Satirist* (January 1808), 339.

<sup>117</sup> DDG “State of the Drama,” *Drama* (25 September 1825), 9.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 11.

nothing but noise and the eyes are overwhelmed and fatigued by spectacular “effects.” The criticism tends to associate this kind of “base” entertainment with the “base” or “vulgar” audiences of the minor theatres, or “transpontine” playhouses (even if many minor theatres were not on the south side of the Thames). In many nineteenth-century discussions of melodrama, the criticism ties low and high configurations of genre, to low and high forms of media, to low and high configurations of class by linking those categories with low and high forms of spectatorial response.

The distinction between legitimate and illegitimate representation becomes tethered to, or even arises from, a distinction between the legitimate and illegitimate modes of feeling they induce. In an article “On Melo-Drama,” (1818), a critic for the *Theatrical Inquisitor* argues that in order to distinguish melodrama from the legitimate drama, we must “demonstrate its fascination to arise from a different operation of the mind” and consider “those faculties which it addresses and which are under its dominion.”<sup>119</sup> As the article continues, “the dramatic muse has but two legitimate daughters, tragedy and comedy.” While the former aims to show man “the hidden workings of his own nature, the properties and operations of his mind, the progress, combinations and effects of his passions” and lead him to “regulate his own conduct,” the latter aims “to instruct” via “ridicule and satire.” Even if comedy is not “of that high order of faculties which must combine in a good tragedy,” the article maintains that both legitimate forms require a similar structure of engagement from the audience: “to enjoy and appreciate them requires some exertion of intellect on the part of the spectator; to the mind and the heart they are addressed.”<sup>120</sup> If the legitimate drama provokes the operation of intellect, regulation, and self-reflection through the passions of the “mind” and “heart,” conversely melodrama “affects neither the intellect nor the feelings.” Instead, as the author suggests, not only are those “faculties [are] lulled into a slumber” by the form, but one’s faculties are possibly predisposed to this form of reception:

---

<sup>119</sup> EH “On Melo-Drama.” *Theatrical Inquisitor, and monthly mirror* (March 1818), 158.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 159.



The taste, then, for melo-drama, must arise from an inertness in the minds of the spectators, and a wish to be amused without the slightest exertion on their own parts, or an exercise whatever of their intellectual powers. True, such amusement is childish and puerile, it is transient, expires with the moment, and leaves no impression; it is indicative of intellectual feebleness... Whether the minds of our theatrical audiences are kept in a state of so painful tension during the day, that they can relish only this soothing sort of charm, instead of any more lively relaxation, is a question I will not attempt to answer.<sup>121</sup>

The passage indicates a more pervasive trend at work in criticism of melodrama across the period: that it enthralls and excites but does not edify or promote reflection, that it abandons intellectual powers and moral passions in favor of “lower” faculties. In a telling exchange between the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature and the playwright Douglas Jerrold in 1832 on the differences between the legitimate drama and melodrama, the articulation of their distinction assumes a familiar form:

2843. How do you describe the legitimate drama?—I describe the legitimate drama to be where the interest of the piece is mental; where the situation of the piece is rather mental than physical. A melo-drama is a piece with what are called a great many telling situations. I would call that a melo-drama. I would not call a piece like the Hunchback a melo-drama, because the interest of the piece is of a mental order.

2844. A piece rather addressed to the ear rather than the eye?—Certainly. <sup>122</sup>

While the distinction between the physical and the mental, or the lower and higher, the eye and the ear certainly appeared within other aesthetic debates, in nineteenth-century England, the distinction between forms of response becomes as much constitutive of generic (and here legal) difference as the actual form of representation. To contain “many telling situations” is to address specific orders, faculties, and senses against others; distinguishing one form from another in a legal sense relies upon distinguishing which senses they address and which sensations they create. Furthermore, this disaggregation of the senses both from one another (eye vs. ear) and from other modes of emotional and intellectual response (physical vs. mental) did not disappear even after the official 1843 act that dismantled the legal distinction between legitimate and illegitimate theatre. Instead, melodrama’s “supplanting” of the drama, as a representative article characterized it, amounted to the idea that a physical response had supplanted an emotional and intellectual one, or that: “appeals to the senses

---

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>122</sup> “Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature,” (29 June 1832) 2843-44 *Parliamentary Papers*.

are much more generally responded to, by the mixed multitude who now fill our theatres, than appeals to the heart; incitements to pleasure more profitable than calls to virtue.”<sup>123</sup>

This genealogy of legitimate and illegitimate representations mapping onto, and even legislating, legitimate and illegitimate modes of response sediments and structures the criticism of sensation drama in the early 1860s: to say, as the critic for the *Athenaeum* does, that the “exciting story” of the play fails to incite a “tragic feeling in response to passion” or “sympathy in relation to suffering and heroism” but instead produces “sensation properly so called,” or an “impression made on the nervous system” inflects previous discourses on legitimate and illegitimate theatre with emergent physiological understandings of the nervous system. Critics registered that the “new” sensation drama was not really that new at all, or as an author in *All the Year Round* described it in 1862, “closely on the decline of the Legitimate Drama has followed the full development of the Sensation School,”<sup>124</sup>; the sensation drama was viewed as the logical end point, or full development of the illegitimate theatre. As an article in the journal *Twice a Week* explained, in the sensation drama, “all the poetry of passion disappears; nothing but the bare, bald act is left, heightened by a great scenic ‘effect.’ It is not the aim of the author to picture a crime to the imagination, but to show it to the senses.”<sup>125</sup> Leaving the bare, bold action to perform its work without the poetry of passion in the play initiates the reciprocal movement of leaving the bare, bald senses to perform their work without imagination in the audience. As yet another writer captured it in the article “Shakespeare and his Latest Stage Interpreters,” (December 1861):

[Boucicault] has seen that our modern audiences must be attracted through the eyes; through their sensations rather than their emotions. Give them sufficiency of action, a story, suspense, excitement, thrill their nerves with some strong effect, just short of absolute horror, please their senses with fine scenery, and they are

---

<sup>123</sup> “Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Schiller,” *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine* (June 1851): 660.

<sup>124</sup> “Small Beer Chronicles,” *All the Year Round* (29 November 1862): 281. For articles that similarly relate the sensation drama to illegitimate drama see “An Old Sensation Drama,” *London Review* (10 January 1863); “Music and Drama,” *The Athenaeum* (1 February 1862). “Not a New Sensation,” *All the Year Round* (25 July 1863) relates it to Lewis’s Gothic Drama, *The Castle Spectre*.

<sup>125</sup> “Half Hours with New Books,” *Twice a Week* (25 October 1862), 399. See also, “Small Beer Chronicles”; “A Theatre For Brompton,” *Punch* (24 January 1863).

content. Poetry, passion, elevation of character or thought, are of little or no account...there was a time when this sort of thing was reserved for the minor theatres.<sup>126</sup>

Consistently, early criticism of sensation drama invokes this familiar narrative: the representation itself (a story of suspense, action, and effect) precludes the involvement of certain affective responses. The genre emerges as an inheritor of an illegitimate aesthetic that poses the physical against the mental. The vocabulary of the nerves, however, constitutes the new addition to this account. Since physical and mental response were increasingly understood in the physiological psychology of the period to be grounded in the nervous system, the idea of sensation carries with it the charge of thrilling or impressing the nerves. However, since the Sensation Drama was viewed as the culmination of a trajectory of illegitimate corporeal aesthetics of the senses against passion or thought, these aesthetic hierarchies might have impacted and re-shaped more fluid accounts of the relation between sensation, emotion, and intellect posed by the physiological treatises. Instead, the legacy of aesthetic divisions between illegitimate sensation and legitimate moral emotion and intellectual reflection, acutely exemplified in the division between legitimate and illegitimate theater, but not restricted to it,<sup>127</sup> colors and helps generate a language of (to use Oliphant's phrase) "pure physical effect," or nervous effects against other modes of response that appears across the sensation genre debate.

### *Section 3— "Piling Up Effects": The Sensation Novel and Illegitimate Culture*

Of course the idea that forms associated with action and spectacle constitute a less rigorous mode of engagement or artistic enterprise is hardly a new one. One only needs to consult his or her Aristotle

---

<sup>126</sup> "Shakespeare and his Latest Stage Interpreters" *Frasers Magazine for Town and Country* (December 1861), 772.

<sup>127</sup> Nineteenth-century theater becomes a privileged site for viewing the divisions between legitimate and illegitimate aesthetics because a moral and aesthetic debate translated into a legal one, and the discourse around it explicitly invoked these terms. However, I am not suggesting that the terms "legitimate" and "illegitimate" (and the ideas behind them) exclusively belonged to the theater; they also implicitly shaped discourses on the novel and other art forms and emerge within aesthetic philosophy and political philosophy. Furthermore, other hierarchies informed the division of the faculties in philosophy. Please see footnote 38 for more on this point.

to find his reminder that “fear and pity may be aroused by spectacular means; but...this effect by mere spectacle is a less artistic method” since “we must not demand of Tragedy any and every kind of pleasure, but only that which is proper to it.”<sup>128</sup> Furthermore, a representational strategy thriving on action, suspense, and incident should not exclusively be associated with the medium of theater; after all, before the 1860s, critics like Alexander Bain recognized this strategy as part of the domain of the novel, and as I have noted through reference to the Gothic and Newgate literature, the sensation novel can productively be considered a new genre subsumable to the more general category of “the Literature of Plot-interest” and the putative responses these forms induced.<sup>129</sup>

Contemporary scholarly accounts of the sensation genres of the 1860s have not, however, explored how debates about legitimate and illegitimate forms and affective responses shaped debates about melodrama and the “new” sensation drama, and how in turn these debates that often explicitly centered on theater infiltrated criticism of the sensation novel and structured its considerations of the genre’s legitimate and illegitimate forms of representation and affective currents. Even further, these various engagements with melodrama and sensation drama in sensation novel criticism should not merely be assimilated under the umbrella of an antitheatricity that pits “the novel” against “theater”<sup>130</sup>; after all, drama was pitted against other forms of drama by their respective affective productions. Instead, I would suggest, there is a more complicated network of form, genre, medium, and presumed affective circulations flowing through the sensation genres

---

<sup>128</sup> Aristotle, *Poetics* ed. Francis Fergusson (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), 78.

<sup>129</sup> Bain, *EW*, 196. We can find instances of these divisions in earlier criticism of the novel; see, for instance, Richard Griffith, “Novels” Vol. 1 of *Something New* (1772) in *Novel Definitions: An Anthology of Commentary on the Novel, 1688-1815* Ed. Cheryl Nixon (Toronto: Broadview Press, 2009), 233, “For in passion are sown the seeds of all our virtues...But the love we mostly meet with, in such Circulating Library books, is devoid of passion; has more of sensation, than sentiment, in it. More desire than wish. Were brutes but suddenly gifted with speech and reason, they would express their instinct, in the style of modern Novelists.”

<sup>130</sup> Sensation and modes of affect enmesh genres of melodrama with novelistic genres in ways that complicate accounts of theater and the novel based on a “foil/threat” or “longing/regret” model. See, for instance: Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth Century Novel* (Berkeley: University of California, 1992); Emily Allen, *Theater Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003); David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012)

themselves and the debate they engendered because the criticism considers physical feeling and emotive feeling across multiple registers: as a property of the form itself, as an aim of the writer choosing a particular form to induce specific responses, as a physiological response of an individual body, as a response of a collective body, and as a property of certain aesthetic categories that are inherited and transformed.

That is, although it might be tempting to tie the binary of “sensation” vs. emotion and thought, or the physical against the mental tie onto a clear cut dichotomy between theater and the novel, the sensation novel criticism is much more nuanced than that. Which is not at the same time to suggest that Victorian criticism entirely avoided these binaries; they appeared well before the sensation novel debate. For instance, in her 1855 article “Modern Novelists—Great and Small” (a title certainly suggestive of aesthetic hierarchies), Margaret Oliphant derides the novels of Nathaniel Hawthorne by comparing them to theater:

they are not stories into which you enter and sympathise, but dramas of extraordinary dumb show, before which, in darkness and breathless silence, you sit and look on, never sure for a moment that the dimly stage before you is not to be visited by the dioramic thunders of an earthquake, falling houses, moaning victims, dismay and horror and gloom.<sup>131</sup>

Oliphant essentially posits an implicit legitimate form of novelistic representation (that the reader “enters into” and sympathizes with) against an illegitimate novelistic form in Hawthorne that comes too close to the conditions of illegitimate theater (relying on dumb show, spectacle, and inducing “breathless silence” in those engaging with it). As with Lewes’ discussion of Dickens, an illegitimate mode of novelistic engagement is understood by or depicted in explicitly theatrical terms; in this case, not just in broadly “theatrical” terms, but in the specific corporeal, non-discursive aesthetics of the illegitimate theater.

This division between legitimate and illegitimate representation shaping the sensation drama debate in 1861, begins to subtly weave its way into the criticism of the sensation novel that emerges

---

<sup>131</sup> Margaret Oliphant, “Modern Novelists—Great and Small,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* 77 (May 1855), 563.

in 1862-1863.<sup>132</sup> While scholars have suggested that the sensation novel was in some way related to melodrama, they have not examined how earlier debates on melodrama and sensation drama work their way into Victorian criticism of the sensation novel. But a curious phenomenon takes place in Oliphant's May 1862 article, "Sensation Novels," that has not been addressed. She refers to the scene when Walter Hartright is walking down the dark road when suddenly the hand of the woman in white reaches out and touches his shoulder as "in its perfect simplicity, a sensation-scene of the most delicate and skillful kind."<sup>133</sup> In doing so, she borrows the terminology of the sensation drama with its sensation scene to consider and retroactively anoint *The Woman in White* as a sensation novel: in the novel there might be other "sensation scenes of a very closely-wrought plot, which naturally increases in excitement"(573) which implicitly might resemble those of the stage (the church catching fire, for instance). However, this scene, and the scene of Hartright's sudden uncanny feeling upon seeing Laura Fairlie against the moonlight constitute legitimate sensation scenes that subtly produce a shock that is "delicately powerful." At different junctures of the article, Oliphant implicitly invokes the sensation drama against legitimate drama and uses this distinction to consider the differences between Wilkie Collins novel and other novelistic forms:

It is only natural that art and literature should, in an age which has turned to be one of events, attempt a kindred depth of effect and shock of incident. In the little reflected worlds of the novel and the drama the stimulant has acted strongly...Shakespeare, even in the excitement of a new interpretation, has not crowded the waning playhouse, as has the sensation drama with its mock catastrophes; and Sir Walter himself never deprived his readers of their lawful rest to a greater extent with one novel than Mr. Wilkie Collins has succeeded in doing with 'Woman in White.' We will not attempt to decide whether the distance between the two novelists is less than that which separates the skirts of Shakespeare's regal mantle from the loftiest stretch of Mr. Boucicault...(565).

In Oliphant's formulation, the little worlds of the novel and the drama not only reflect the larger world they aim to represent; they also reflect each other. Not only does Oliphant subtly establish a chronology in which the sensation novel reflects elements of the sensation drama, but she also

---

<sup>132</sup> See footnote 45. The most important edited collection of Victorian sensation novel criticism, Andrew Maunder's *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction* begins with "The Enigma Novel"(1861) and Oliphant's "Sensation Novels"(1862). With the exception of one other essay from 1862, the rest of its materials are culled from 1863 onward. Oliphant's essay is considered fairly early—the criticism of the sensation novel emerges in 1862 and begins to proliferate in 1863-64.

<sup>133</sup> Oliphant, "Sensation Novels," 571.

considers the media to be reflecting back each other's respective aesthetic hierarchies, even if, at least in this passage, she does not attempt to create as stringent a hierarchy between Scott and Collins as she allows between Shakespeare and Boucicault. Instead, she praises Collins for turning away from an illegitimate mode of representation associated at once with the Gothic novel and staged melodrama. For Oliphant, Collins' artistry emerges from the "legitimate nature of the means used to produce the sensation"(566), which in effect emerges from the delicacy of his realism. As she writes,

When we are to see a murder visibly done before our eyes, the performers must be feeble indeed if some shudder of natural feeling does not give force to their exertions; and the same thing is still more emphatically the case when the spiritual and invisible powers, to which we all more or less do secret and unwilling homage, are actors in the drama. The distinguishing feature of Mr. Wilkie Collins' success is that he ignores all these arbitrary sensations, and has boldly undertaken to produce effects as startling by the simplest expedients of life...A much more delicate and subtle power inspires [the story's] action. We cannot object to the means by which he startles and thrills his readers; everything is legitimate, natural and possible; all the exaggerations of excitement are carefully eschewed...as if it had been a domestic history of the most gentle and unexciting kind...(566).

If the visible representation of murder on the stage and the invisible elements of the supernatural on the page induce only "arbitrary sensations" that exaggerate and overly excite, Oliphant contends that Collins' form of representation is "legitimate" because its excitement derives from the unexciting mysteries of the everyday, from the "mysterious thrill of...sudden touch" as opposed to the depiction of murder, a building suddenly seized in conflagration, or the appearance of an apparition. (Of course, as I will later explore, while many critics recognized the sensation novel's departure from a gothic supernatural, they took the opposite position about the unnaturalness of extreme events: after all, murders and fires shaped the everyday of Victorian urban and rural life as well).

Nonetheless, the rosy view Oliphant offers—at least in this moment of the decade—of Collins' sensation novel emerges from her view that it subtly, legitimately re-works other illegitimate, and illegitimately sensational choices, that he could have incorporated. Even some early reviews of *The Woman in White* advanced a similar argument about its legitimacy: as one reviewer for the *New Quarterly Review* described the novel, in order to "make [the] flesh creep" some writers might attempt

to produce this effect “by all manner of melo-dramatic contrivances and unnatural horrors”; however, “Mr. Collins sets to work in a more legitimate and artistic style.”<sup>134</sup>

Not all critics, however, agreed with this sanguine assessment of the sensation novel’s legitimate effects against melodrama’s illegitimate ones; instead many reviewers turned to illegitimate theatre to analyze the sensation novel’s illegitimate effects. In an article “Modern Novel and Romance,” a writer for *Dublin University Magazine* uses theatrical forms to consider changes to literary forms: “burlesques, full of abominable puns, alternate at our theatres with sensation dramas; debased comedy divides the throne with debased tragedy. We see the same in literature.” The writer then proceeds to analyze how novels neither can be considered purely comic nor purely tragic; they instead operate as “debased” or contaminated genres that insist on “piling up the agony.”<sup>135</sup> A critic writing in the *London Review* of a theatrical adaptation of *Lady Audley’s Secret* but quickly shifting into a discussion of the sensation novel in general—thus highlighting another area in which theatrical and novelistic forms collided in the 1860s—similarly invokes illegitimate theater to discuss the debased genre of sensation novels:

We have already expressed some dislike, on grounds of morality and good taste, for this class of novels. These narratives of unredeemed depravity, while pandering to the morbid thirst for violent ‘sensation,’ can neither chasten, refine, or invigorate the mind. They fail to perform that high function which was assigned by Aristotle to the tragic art when he said that its true use is ‘to purge the heart of man by pity and terror’...Such, indeed, was the object of the earliest tragedians...And such, too, was the aim of our own Shakespeare...It may, however, be admitted that a story is not always bound to supply express moral edification. To enlarge our sympathies...is still more properly its aim...<sup>136</sup>

Again, the illegitimacy of the genre derives from the illegitimacy of its effects on audience: the genre fails to address the mind by morally instructing it through purgation of pity or through enlargement of sympathy. If, on the one hand, a critic might turn to distinctions between tragedy and illegitimate modes of representation to evaluate the moral failings of the sensation novel, others invoked this distinction to consider its artistic defects. An 1868 article in *The Spectator* praised a satire of the genre

---

<sup>134</sup> “The Woman in White” *New Quarterly Review* (September 1860), 321.

<sup>135</sup> “Modern Novel and Romance,” *Dublin University Magazine* (April 1863), 438.

<sup>136</sup> “‘Lady Audley’ On the Stage” *The London Review* (7 March 1863), 244-45.



for precisely “hit[ting] the great artistic fault of the sensation novel, the use of illegitimate means to produce an effect on the reader.” As it continued to explore, its illegitimacy emerges from how it locates its incidents within modern life instead of setting them in the past:

An exact illustration is afforded by the difference between tragedy and melodrama. Tragedy deals with historical or legendary persons and events, and gains a liberty which could not otherwise be accorded to it...Where could we find greater horrors than in the story of Oedipus?...But it was made enduring by the remoteness of the time. This softened the effect of the horror...Melodrama achieves its success under easier conditions, but achieves it at the sacrifice of art. It deals with the same subjects as tragedy, but it vulgarizes them, because it removes them from the associations which legitimize and ennoble them...The fault of the sensation novel is artistic rather than moral. If the writer might be credited with any object beyond those of amusing his reader and enriching himself, he might assert that his aim is identical with that which Aristotle states to be the aim of tragedy—‘to purify the passions by emotions of pity and terror.’ These are certainly the emotions to which the sensation novel, as we understand the term, commonly appeals. And though we readily allow that the artistic defect interferes with the moral purpose, we cannot concede that it makes it immoral.<sup>137</sup>

In this account, the sensation novel might abide by an artistic aim of stirring and releasing tragic passions; however, it fails in this aim by focusing on the contemporary, thus becoming nothing more than a vulgar melodrama. In an echo of the *Twice a Week* article that claimed sensation drama removed poetry and passion leaving nothing but bare action and pure sensation, the writer in effect argues that placing the action in modern life removes a cushioning effect leaving the action too proximate and exposed: “the offence” the critic argues, “arises from the *nearness* of the events which are narrated.”<sup>138</sup>

Even if, in this case, “nearness” refers to the temporal *present*, other instances of sensation novel criticism invoke melodrama to consider the novel’s overly material *presence*. I suggest that this sense of material presence extends into two simultaneous and reciprocal spheres of concern—the infringement of the spectator/reader’s body and the flimsy “scenic effects” of the novel’s depiction of the real. In “The Philosophy of ‘Sensation,’” (October 1862) a critic for *St. James Magazine* traces a temporal and spatial “trans-Thamesiac” movement of sensation or “thrills” that creeps from the minor theaters of southbank to the patent theaters of the Drury Lane and Covent Garden early in the century, to the sensation drama that emerges mid century, ultimately arriving at the pages of the

---

<sup>137</sup> “Sensational Novels” *The Spectator* (8 August 1868), 932.

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

sensation novel. In this account, in other words, the sensation novel becomes acutely sedimented by theatre history; to understand how sensation works in the sensation novel, the critic considers where it first achieved its “greatest success,” and as the essay implies, its most intensified form. Drawing upon an anecdote about a bread company that produced “bread with gin in it,” the writer relies on this metaphor of “illicit manufacture” and illicit consumption to describe the operation of sensation: “those who take upon themselves to supply the demand for sensation appear to have reversed this process in the separation of similar elements in diet intended for the mind—they furnish alcohol without the farina.”<sup>139</sup>

This distillation was first and most powerfully effectuated in theatre, according to the structural logic of the piece, which essentially offers an “origins” story for sensation from “thrilling the pit and galleries of the Surrey from a quarter to half century ago” to the circulation of sensation on the current pages of the sensation novel.<sup>140</sup> These early melodramas and the sensation dramas indebted to them produce unwholesome bodily appetites—“the craving for similar excitement,” the “unwholesome thirst for excitement,” or the stimulant unbuffered by the grain.<sup>141</sup> The *Athenaeum* article might help tease out the logic of why the hunger seems particularly acute or distilled within the material conditions of theater: as the *Athenaeum* article suggests, the play (but we might extract this to a play) relies upon “sensations properly so-called...the impression made on the nervous system by an actual occurrence passing before the senses.” Or, in other words, the material presence of theater emerges from the idea that even though it imitates or represents an action, a material reality is physically present before the spectator, the senses are stimulated “directly,” or at least through a different kind of mediation than encountered in the mediation of print on a page. That is,

---

<sup>139</sup> “Philosophy of ‘Sensation,’” *St. James Magazine* (5 October 1862), 340.

<sup>140</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 342.

if, as Alison Winter argues, in the sensation novel “the route from page to nerve was direct,”<sup>142</sup> I would suggest that condition cannot only be accounted for by considering the mesmerizing effects of print; instead, within the sensation debate, the mesmerizing effects of print were understood in peculiarly theatrical, or more specifically, illegitimately theatrical terms. That Oliphant refers to moments of *The Women in White* as sensation scenes, that other critics similarly discuss how in the sensation novel “we have here incident upon incident related in the most easy and attractive manner; we have ‘sensation scenes’ through which the reader’s attention never for an instant flags,” or yet others discuss sensation novels by considering “the plots of these wonderful productions—the stage machinery which directs the actors in these plays. No easy task does the sensation author, in this character of scene-shifter, perform; the ‘dramatis personae’ must all be kept moving” raises with it not only a point about the chronology of the sensation drama emerging before the sensation novel.<sup>143</sup> Instead, these instances suggest that the representational strategies of the sensation novel were in various ways understood to preserve a kind of theatrical materialism or keep alive an assumed condition of illegitimate theater (that it worked on the senses directly and bypassed states of mental reflection and that its corporeality directly intervened within the corporeal subjects it addressed).

That is, criticism of the sensation novel consistently invokes illegitimate theater to consider how the sensation novel works structurally and achieves its effects. As the critic characterized it in the “Philosophy of ‘Sensation,’” the sensation novel functions as “a series of narrative melodramas” in several different ways. First, the novels seem to distort everyday reality by instead focusing on extremes. Right after a passage that weaves together Dumas and Hugo with the drowning sensation scene of the *Colleen Bawn*, the critic explains, each

---

<sup>142</sup> Winter, 324.

<sup>143</sup> “Lady Audley’s Secret,” *The Critic* (December 1862), 179; “Sensational Literature,” *The Rose, The Shamrock, and the Thistle* (August 1864), 389.

is made to produce a vivid impression on the excited mind by a dramatic *tour de force*, as nearly as possible as striking in its way as the drowning scene in the *Colleen Bawn*. . . In excuse for such writers it has been advanced that incidents equally violent occur in our daily experience; and the tragedy that lately occurred in the neighborhood of the Adelphi and a half dozen similar revolting dramas of real life are confidently quoted. Nature, to be sure, produces earthquakes and volcanoes—but both are phenomena. In the state of society sensation novelists represent, they insist upon giving us earthquakes as matters of course, and volcanoes as every day occurrences.<sup>144</sup>

In this account, the sensation drama's emphasis on sensation scenes—extreme situations of buildings catching fire, steamboats exploding, near drownings, railway accidents, etc.—structures the analysis of the extremes found in the sensation novel. The media cannot be separated from one another: the critic essentially critiques both the sensation drama and the sensation novel for an illegitimate mode of realism that ignores the “subtle movements” of everyday life in favor of violent extremes that are actually rare occurrences.

This focus on extreme incident also works itself into a critique of incident in general. As Henry Mansel characterizes it, the sensation novel “abounds in incident. . . it consists of nothing else. . . the human actors in the piece are, for the most part, but so many lay-figures on which to exhibit a drapery of incident.”<sup>145</sup> Other reviews tied this problematic relationship between plot or incident and character explicitly to a distinction between melodrama and legitimate drama. As one reviewer of Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Aurora Floyd* described:

the wheels in the machinery of the story. . . are instruments for working out the principal situation—instead of characters to the full development of which the principal situation is subservient. This is, indeed, the proper characteristic of melodrama, as distinguished from drama. In melodrama you perceive a position of highly strung suspense and suit your figures to it, so as to give it its full effect upon the nerves; in drama if the conception of the characters and that of the framework of events are not actually simultaneous, the latter is rather subordinated to the former. . .<sup>146</sup>

Sensation novel criticism consistently echoes this concern about the flattening of character, and character's puppet-like subservience to the plot. In an 1867 review Geraldine Jewsbury described the position of characters in sensation novels through recourse to the world of children's toys. These works rely upon “a conventional similitude. . . produc[ed] by mechanical means, which vary from the

---

<sup>144</sup> “Philosophy of Sensation,” 343.

<sup>145</sup> Mansel, 486.

<sup>146</sup> “Aurora Floyd” *The Spectator* (31 July 1863), 1586-87.

archaic simplicity of piece of twine requiring only a dextrous twitch, to the elaborate mechanism of costly automata, jeweled birds and well-dressed human figures producing prodigies of curious imitation when carefully wound up for the purpose.”<sup>147</sup> The idea that the sensation novel amounts to a performance of puppets or automata embodies what she elaborates as its larger problem: in the genre, a crass materialism displaces psychological realism, “the author keeps entirely to material and outward decorations. He leaves untouched the dark workings of the human soul.”<sup>148</sup> In other words, if I have focused on how audience response constitutes aesthetic hierarchies, these hierarchies were still very much seen to arise from the representation itself. Indeed, these critiques share a similar sphere of concern—not only did sensation novel criticism focus on an overly physical, material, or mechanical response from the spectators/readers experiencing it, but they also exhibited an anxiety about the overt materiality and machinery of its plot and characters.

And yet, the machinery of these material effects was often described in theatrical terms, thus blurring the boundaries between the two media by enmeshing their similar generic characteristics. As Henry Morley encapsulated it, “the ‘sensation’ novel and play...is that which depends wholly upon the heaping of crime, mystery, and surprise, and relies on tricks of plot or stage-effect, without making use of the story as means for the subtle development of character, and without any charm of wit or wisdom in the language through which all is told.”<sup>149</sup> Both media, Morley suggests, depend on stage effect and tricks over language and character; his claim that they both consist of “a threadbare narrative style” echoes the idea we have already encountered that the sensation genres appear unbuffered by poetry, passion, and therefore leave sensation unattached to moral emotions and higher forms of cognition. The “Philosophy of ‘Sensation’” extends this idea one step further, arguing that this threadbare, exposed materiality accounts for the evanescence of its pleasures that

---

<sup>147</sup> “Miss Jane, The Bishop’s Daughter” *The Athenaeum* (1 June 1867), 720.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>149</sup> Morley, *The Journal of a London Playgoer*, 302.

leave its audience with an “unwholesome craving” for more. Writing of *The Woman in White*, the critic proceeds to blame this unsatisfying pleasure on the work’s over-investment in verisimilitude:

In no modern fiction with which we are acquainted has the semblance of reality been better kept up throughout the story; and the artistic arrangement of its machinery very much assists in the illusion it creates. But when the excitement produced on the imagination by these well-simulated scenes has evaporated, and a cool judgment proceeds to analyze the materials of the fascinating fiction, their thoroughly artificial character becomes apparent. The stage effects are as conspicuous as paint and canvas can make them—moreover, they are not new.<sup>150</sup>

While scholarly accounts have examined how criticism of the sensation novel often discussed it in explicitly mechanistic terms and as I will explore in the next chapter, Victorian criticism of the sensation drama often focused on the verisimilitude of the sensation scene, this passage appears to conflate the two. The attempt to capture the “semblance of reality” might produce a temporary flush of excitement, but once the materials are reflected upon afterwards, it emerges that this aim not only reveals the mechanical illusion producing the semblance of reality as thoroughly artificial, but that this aim in fact only amplifies the conspicuousness of the illusion or artifice. A full-fledged legitimate realism of the novel proper is replaced within the sensation novel by a flimsy illegitimate realism rendered explicitly in the terms of a theatrical materiality: the sensation novel’s effects are mere stage effects, its conjuring of material reality relies upon nothing but a crude rendering of it in paint and canvas. Additionally, in separating the scene of reflection and analysis from the actual experience of reading, the passage remains consistent with the sensation criticism we have encountered that separates sensation-driven responses from intellectual ones and ostensibly arguing that these responses cannot take place simultaneously.

If I have suggested that sensation novel criticism often turns to illegitimate theater to consider the modes of direct and indirect response induced in its readers as well as elements of the form itself—its temporality, its depiction of character, its emphasis on plot, its rendering of material reality, its focus on extremes—there were other critics who turned to theater in a very different way.

---

<sup>150</sup> “Philosophy of ‘Sensation,’” 344.

Some used the legitimate theater to defend the illegitimacy of the sensation novel, and the illegitimacy of sensation more broadly. For instance, in Henry James 1865 review of *Aurora Floyd* entitled “Miss Braddon,” after famously situating the sensation novel as an updated Gothic that moves the terrors from the faraway Apennines to the spatially proximate “terrors of the cheerful country-house and busy London lodgings,” James quickly shifts into a discussion of legitimate theater:

Crime, indeed, has always been a theme for dramatic poets; but with the old poets its dramatic interest lay in the fact that it compromised the criminal’s moral repose. Whence else is the interest of *Orestes* and *Macbeth*? With Mr. Collins and Miss Braddon (our modern Euripides and Shakespeare) the interest of crime is in the fact that it compromises the criminal’s personal safety. The play is a tragedy, not in virtue of an avenging deity, but in virtue of a preventive system of law; not through the presence of a company of fairies, but through that of an admirable organization of police detectives. Of course, the nearer the criminal and the detective are brought home to the reader, the more lively his ‘sensation.’<sup>151</sup>

Curiously substituting the word play for the word novel, James establishes the sensation novel as an inheritor of a strain within legitimate theater (here explicitly tragedy) that was similarly preoccupied with exploring criminality. Even if the system of punishment transforms from an “avenging deity” to the “preventative system of law,” he appears to claim morality never fully disappears from the aesthetic realm of the sensation novel. Echoing the arrangement of legitimate and illegitimate theater in which moral and aesthetic horizons morphed into legal distinctions, the sensation novel itself shifts its moral concerns into the letter of the law and detection. In linking the sensation novel to a genealogy of legitimate theater, James not only legitimizes the sensations of the sensation novel, but also attempts to address readers’ skepticism of “the assumption by a ‘sensation’ novel of the honors of legitimate fiction” by using legitimate theater to support its legitimacy, thus militating against the danger that the “nearness” of this fiction might otherwise pose.<sup>152</sup>

Others would engage similar strategies of defending the sensation novel by invoking the sensationalism of legitimate culture. This critical tendency perhaps received its most full articulation

---

<sup>151</sup> Henry James “Miss Braddon,” *The Nation* (November 1865), 593.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*

in George Augustus Sala's 1868 article that castigated critics for their "Cry of cries" against sensationalism, arguing that "in the opinion of dolts and dullards and envious backbiters, everything is 'sensational' that is vivid, and nervous, and forcible, and graphic, and true."<sup>153</sup> If he wishes to revive and reclaim the vivid, nervous, forcible, graphic, and true as categories necessary to the functioning of the aesthetic, he in part does so by invoking the sensationalism that pervades legitimate artistic representation, focusing extensive attention on Shakespeare:

What is Sensationalism and who is Sensational? I will strive to tell you. The late Mr. William Shakespeare was an arrant sensational writer. He wrote the play of 'Macbeth' which is founded mainly on murder and witchcraft. He wrote 'Hamlet,' in which there are many murders, a suicide, a suspicious of madness, and a ghost. He wrote 'Othello' in which there is jealousy, and also murder...<sup>154</sup>

His treatment of Shakespeare as a sensationalist provoked at least one journal writer to condemn the soundness of this approach. Writing in response to the charge that Shakespeare's legitimacy was already impregnated with the germ of illegitimate culture, a critic for *The Orchestra* attempted to reassert a definition of the sensational, in the process launching one of the most multi-faceted attacks of the genre:

Nothing in exterior nature is sensational; not even an earthquake, for earthquakes, although exceptional, arrive in the natural course of events. The term sensational, applied in reproach, is used where in fiction the natural course of events is warped in order to strike the beholder with astonishment. A sensational artist piles up his effects without any regard to causes: he does not cunningly mingle chemical agents so as to produce due explosion, but he exhibits catastrophes in situations and under circumstances in which they are least likely to occur. His phenomena are all out of place and unprovided for: his men and women are mere puppets, the strings of which he loosely holds, and the actions of which he arbitrarily guides without reference to their relations one with the other. By elaborate detail as to minor things—the furniture of a lady's boudoir, or the effect of sunlight on her red hair...he hopes to invest with life that which is lifeless, to make real that which is out of natural proportion. Then he flings in a murder, or a bigamy as the situation of his book or play, and calls on the spectator to marvel at the passion never fostered, at the catastrophe for which there is neither likelihood nor reason. To say that Shakespeare is sensational because he deals with great events and great crimes is to misunderstand what sensationalism means.<sup>155</sup>

In accumulating critique after critique—from the sensation novel's puppet-like characters, non-coherent plot, attention to material detail—the writer ultimately focuses on the arbitrariness of the genre's material effects as its true aesthetic failure. Instead of representing a natural course of events

---

<sup>153</sup> George Augustus Sala, "On the 'Sensational' in Literature and Art," *Belgravia* (February 1868), 453, 457.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 456.

<sup>155</sup> "The Sensational in Art" *The Orchestra* (29 Feb 1868), 362.



in which an effect always arises from a cause, in this conception, the sensation novel's aesthetic failure derives from the way it generates an arbitrary movement and materiality. The genre resists natural development and a kind of organic realism as it aims to "strike the beholder with astonishment"; everything in the novel emanates from that one desire, which in turn leaves pure effect without any cause. This concept of "striking the beholder with astonishment" also carries with it connotations of illegitimate theater not only in the Brooksonian way that melodrama traffics in astonishment. It also emerges in the way the passage proceeds to exchange the book and the play suggesting that both rely on a mode of spectatorship and act of beholding, and this exchange or leveling between a sensation play and sensation novel is further bolstered by the way the illegitimate mode of engagement of each becomes clearly differentiated from the legitimate theatrical culture of Shakespeare.

Yet, one of the most impassioned defenses of sensation drama and fiction—and critiques of sensation genre criticism—appearing in an issue of *All the Year Round* in 1864 used precisely the opposite strategy, attempting to legitimize sensation culture through recourse to the illegitimacy already contained within legitimate culture. The article, "The Sensational Williams," which may have been written by Charles Dickens,<sup>156</sup> culminates in a mock review of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* from the point of view of "anti-sensational critics" ("Mr. Shakespeare is really becoming an intolerable nuisance...he has no idea of tragedy apart from the merest horrors of melodrama...he would do very well as a writer of farces and of show pieces; but his injudicious friends have flattered him into the belief that he is a great tragic poet..."), complete with the typically long and detailed plot summary featured in Victorian theatre reviews ("The play opens in good melodramatic (or, rather,

---

<sup>156</sup>The submission is unsigned, Wellesley Periodicals does not index AYR, and the index that compiles some contributors to AYR (Ella Ann Oppenlander, *Dickens 'All the Year Round': Descriptive Index and Contributor List*, (Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing Co., 1984) does not list a contributor for this particular article. As Andrew Maunder writes in *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction*, "there has been some speculation that this defense of the aesthetics of sensation fiction may be by Dickens himself"(97). Examples of sources that attribute it to Dickens include: Kate Flint, *The Woman Reader, 1837-1917*; Andrew Radford, *Victorian Sensation Fiction*; Susan David Bernstein, "Ape Anxiety: Sensation Fiction, Evolution and the Genre Question" *Journal of Victorian Culture* 6:2 (2001): 250-271, among others.

pantomimic) fashion with a dark scene; thunder rolling and lightning flashing, and three witches talking gibberish in rhyme”).<sup>157</sup> Before this parody, however, the author argues not only that sensationalism has always been a part of legitimate culture, but that it should be considered just as legitimate to represent life’s extremes as to represent its quiet moments:

The anti-sensationalist critic will tell you that, if you would write a novel or a play that is fit to be read by any one with tastes superior to those of a butcher boy, you must confine yourself strictly to the common events of common lives, have nothing whatever to say to any of the extremes of passion or of action, leave murder to the penny papers, be ignorant of suicide, have no idea that there are dark shadows in the world. . . . But why is all art to be restricted to the uniform level of quiet domesticity? To say nothing of the supernatural regions of imagination and fancy, the actual worlds includes something more than the family life; something besides the placid emotions that are developed about the paternal hearth-rug. It has its sterner, its wilder, and its vaster aspects; adventures, crimes, agonies; hot rage and tumult of passions; terror, and bewilderment and despair. Why is the literary artist to be shut out from the tragedy of existence, as he sees it going on around him? . . . Let it be granted that such things are sensational; but then life itself is similarly sensational in many of her forms, and art is always sensational when it is tragic. The Oedipus of Sophocles is in the highest degree sensational; so are half the plays of Shakespeare, so is the Satan of Paradise Lost; so is Raphael’s Massacre of the Innocents; so is the Laocoon.<sup>158</sup>

In legitimizing the effects of sensation drama and sensation novels through recourse to tragedy, the passage implicitly re-connects melodrama and sensation drama to tragic form. Tragedy as an aesthetic category moves out of the past to reflect the contemporary realities of everyday life: it resides in “existence as he sees it going on around him.” In positing extremes as part of the structural experience of everyday life, it bears an affinity to Dickens’ defense of his novel’s tonal shifts in the famous “streaky bacon” passage of *Oliver Twist*, which in effect also offers a defense of melodrama by registering how shifts between extremes are legitimized by the “violent transitions and abrupt impulses of passion or feeling” that exist in everyday life. Interestingly, the passage also avoids associating sensation genres exclusively with sensation, instead highlighting the legitimacy of their affective extremes and passions. If, as I have explored, most of sensation genre criticism considered its effects to be that of “pure sensation” we have also encountered a few alternatives: that sensation genres function only within one affective current of fear or astonishment and, as this essay posits, that sensation genres traffic in “extremes of passion.” Therefore, we are left with a

---

<sup>157</sup> “The Sensational Williams,” *All the Year Round* (13 February 1864), 15.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

question: what was the relationship posed between sensation, variations of emotion, and intellect in the works themselves? In the following chapter, I will examine how these modes interacted in sensation drama.

**Chapter Two:**  
**“Too Sensational” and “Painfully Real”:**  
Networks of Sensation and Sympathy in Boucicault’s *The Streets of London*

Attempting to define the new genre that emerged with the appearance of Boucicault’s *The Colleen Bawn*, an 1862 article in *The Times* highlighted one specific element within it: “a manager who brings out a piece in which the interest of the audience is violently concentrated on one particular scene, which thus stands in relief to the rest of the action, boasts that he has produced a ‘sensation drama,’ and the scene which justifies the use of this term is the ‘sensation scene.’”<sup>159</sup> As the article suggests, in order to qualify as a sensation drama, the play must include a sensation scene, or a scene that, according to *The Times*, violently seizes the attention of the spectator, and formally stands apart from the narrative action, outside, or in excess of, its structure. Offering some examples of the heightened spectacle of a sensation scene—the Water Cave near drowning and subsequent rescue in the *Colleen Bawn*, the scenic realism of the quarry scene with its imperiled bodies in *Peep O’ Day*—*The Times* wonders whether or not “this tendency of the public to witness a play for the sake of one particular effect” may be “unwholesome.”

In isolating the “effect” concentrated within this part of the play’s whole, *The Times* was not alone. Other critics aligned the sensation drama’s defects—its direction to the senses and not the imagination—with the effects of the sensation scene. As one critic asserted, the recent public insatiability for sensation dramas could only be understood to arise from “the one scene of novel effect, which works strongly upon the sensations of the audience,” or as another offered, a sensation drama is nothing more than “an exciting story, with a scene or two calculated to cause a thrilling sensation in the majority.”<sup>160</sup> The startling incident and spectacle of the sensation scene—a steamship exploding, a building erupting in flames, a body lying helpless on the tracks as a

---

<sup>159</sup> “Lyceum Theatre,” *The Times* (12 March 1862): 12.

<sup>160</sup> “Shakespeare and his Latest Stage Interpreters,” *Frasers Magazine for Town and Country* (December 1861), 772; “Adelphi,” *The Antbenaem* (23 November 1861): 694.

locomotive races towards it—was considered the locus of the play’s “sensational effect.”<sup>161</sup> As we have already seen in chapter one, these “striking situations” and “scenic effects” were often understood to ignore “movements of emotions and passions in their nicest gradations and strongest impulses” instead offering mere “excitement.”<sup>162</sup>

Much of the scholarly criticism written on the sensation drama as a genre has mirrored this emphasis on the sensation scene, drawing particular attention to the new staging techniques that allowed these effects to assume an increased verisimilitude that heightened the stage’s ability to thrill and shock spectators. As Richard Altick has described it, with new “mechanical and technical innovations...it became possible to produce physical effects on an audience on an unprecedented scale and with unprecedented realism. To the thrill of situation was added the thrill derived from visual action that seemed a transcript of perilous, suspenseful moments in real life.”<sup>163</sup> Critics like Nicholas Daly in his *Literature, Technology, and Modernity 1860-2000* and Ben Singer in his *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and its Contexts* have persuasively argued that the sensation scene was shaped by and helped shape the public’s experience of the perceptual shocks of urban modernity. As Daly argues, these scenes “produced a sort of ‘training’ in modernity, acclimatizing people to the pace of industrial urban life through homeopathic doses of shock and suspense.”<sup>164</sup> Additionally in his book *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s*, focusing on how the temporal dynamics of the sensation scene proffered in *The Colleen Bawn* informs an industrial pastoral in which “sensational modernity” is displaced into a pastoral vision that still relies on industrial time, Daly makes the case that with sensation genres the question of “how attention might be solicited in the age of crowds” should not be seen as a “politically neutral phenomenon” given sensation culture’s

---

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.; see also “The Lyceum—Peep O’Day,” *The London Review* (16 November 1861): 616; “The Theatres,” *The Saturday Review* (23 November 1861): 538.

<sup>162</sup> “Public Entertainments,” *The London Review* (22 February 1862): 192.

<sup>163</sup> Richard Altick, *Deadly Encounters: Two Victorian Sensations* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 139.

<sup>164</sup> See Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, and Modernity 1860-2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5; *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Ben Singer, *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

position in the age of the Second Reform bill.<sup>165</sup> In her book *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity*, Lynn Voskuil connects the verisimilitude of the sensation scene to a reading of a commodity culture capable of forging “national feeling” based on recognized shared somatic responses. Here the spectacular culture of the commodity “cultivate[s] a collective sensational experience”<sup>166</sup> that acts as an “adhesive” within the public sphere.

While these accounts offer productive ways to consider the sensation drama, they also tend to perpetuate some of the assumptions that have circulated around the genre, leaving questions unexplored that will animate this chapter. For instance, Nick Daly argues that sensation scenes aimed “not only to draw the crowds, but hold them in rapt attention. Last-minute rescues, exploding river boats and burning buildings were only some of the set pieces that appeared, titling the balance of drama away from dialogue and towards pure spectacle.”<sup>167</sup> But when exactly does a spectacle become “pure”? Rather, what kinds of work were sensation scenes performing, how did they interact with the play as a structural whole, and what kinds of affects might they transmit?

If scholarly criticism has not entirely questioned an assumption about purity of sensation scenes’ spectacular effect—that is, the assumption that it existed in relative isolation from or remained superfluous to the narrative and affective movement of the play around it—perhaps this owes to slippery definitions of the term “effect” itself. As we have seen both in the previous chapter with Victorian critics’ assessments that the sensation genres merely “pil[e] up effects without any regard to causes” or seek to “thrill their nerves with some strong effect,” or rely merely on “sensational effect,” or are designed to “give its full effect upon the nerves,” it emerges that the term

---

<sup>165</sup> Daly, *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s*, 5.

<sup>166</sup> Lynn Voskuil, *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 93.

<sup>167</sup> Daly, *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s*, 55.

“effect” continually appears across the sensation debate.<sup>168</sup> It often bears the weight of the most sustained critiques of the genre: the effects, and transmission of effect, account for how the genre as a whole rely on the eye not the ear, sensation not emotion, the physical not the mental, the nerves not the imagination. However, as Martin Meisel highlights in *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*, the term “effect” functions as a kind of keyword across narrative, pictorial, and theatrical arts in the nineteenth century, accumulating with it an array of meanings.<sup>169</sup> And, of course, we can see some of these different meanings across the sensation criticism: sometimes “effect” is used to refer to the representation itself and the staging techniques that help create a moment of visual intensity (“a scene of...novel effect”), at other times it becomes more pejorative, moving closer to stage tricks (“well-simulated scenes” are nothing more than cheap “stage effects.”<sup>170</sup>) In other instances, it refers not to the representation itself, but rather to its effect on the audience—the effect acts on and activates the nerves, or “gives full effect”—or in other words, effect cannot be separated from the affect these effects induce. It also appears along the line from cause to effect (“piling up effects without causes”). And lastly, sensation dramas themselves seem concerned with the relationship between their stage effects and actions that can be effectuated in the real world.

This chapter seeks to understand how these multiple valences of “effect”—from stage effects, to effects creating affects, to affects being called upon to take effect outside the walls of the theatre—circulated in sensation drama, thus calling into question an account of sensation drama that

---

<sup>168</sup> “The Sensational in Art,” *The Orchestra* (29 Feb 1868), 362; “Shakespeare and his Latest Stage Interpreters,” 772; “Aurora Floyd,” *The Spectator* (31 July 1863): 1586.

<sup>169</sup> Martin Meisel, *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 69-85.

<sup>170</sup> “Philosophy of ‘Sensation,’” *St. James Magazine* (5 October 1862), 344. ” It is tempting to align critics’ sense of cheap stage effects—that “in no modern fiction with which we are acquainted has the semblance of reality been better kept up throughout the story; and the artistic arrangement of its machinery very much assists in the illusion it creates”—with Barthes’ conception of the “reality effect” or what he conceives as realism’s “trick” of the “concrete real” referent supposedly displacing or eliding the signified. Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” *The Rustle of Language* trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968/1986), 141-148.

relies on a vocabulary of “pure” spectacle, instead seeking to understand how sensational spectacle could be understood to link with “higher” forms of feeling like sympathy, and sympathy was imagined to transform into imitative ameliorative action. Instead of establishing a relationship in which “pure spectacle” results in a response that is, to return to Oliphant’s phrases, “pure sensation” or “pure physical effect,”<sup>171</sup> or that precludes the involvement of other affective responses, sensation dramas instead establish streams of interrelation between effect and affect.

In order to explore the transmission of effects that a sensation drama could embody, I will turn to one of the most popular sensation dramas of its day: Boucicault’s *The Streets of London*, a play that premiered at the Princess’s Theatre in 1864, and centered on the damage caused by financial panics, tracing the effects of financial fraud on a family struggling to maintain their lives on the cold streets of the metropolis. Based on Brisebarre and Nus’ *Les Pauvres de Paris* (1856), Boucicault adapted—or naturalized<sup>172</sup>—the play to the topography of each city that staged it, appearing first as *The Poor of New York* at Wallack’s Theatre in New York in December 1857 and *The Poor of Liverpool* at the Royal Amphitheatre in Liverpool in February 1864.<sup>173</sup> Appearing in the capital 209 consecutive nights, and revived at least three times by the end of the decade, critics recognized it for its “astonishing *vraisemblance*,” with *The Times* commenting that “never, perhaps, was reality more exactly reproduced on the stage.”<sup>174</sup> While scholarly accounts often mention *The Streets of London* in passing, and there are a few pieces that analyze *The Poor of New York*, there has not yet been an analysis of *The Streets of London*.<sup>175</sup> This has in part transpired with good reason: no extant script of the drama

---

<sup>171</sup> Margaret Oliphant, “Sensation Novels,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (May 1862): 571.

<sup>172</sup> On “naturalization,” see Sharon Marcus, “The Theater of Comparative Literature” *Companion to Comparative Literature*. Eds. Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas (Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2011), 148.

<sup>173</sup> Dion Boucicault, *Plays by Dion Boucicault* ed. Peter Thomson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 231.

<sup>174</sup> “Advertisements and Notices,” *The Era* (20 March 1865) records the last night of the run. It appeared again in January 1867, December 1869, May 1877, July 1883, July 1896—for the productions see The V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, Blythe House, Plays Boucicault Prompt; “The Drama,” *The Reader* (6 August 1864): 176; “Princess’s Theatre,” *The Times* (3 August 1864): 11.

<sup>175</sup> For sustained analyses of *The Poor of New York*, see Jane Moody, “The Drama of Capital: Risk, Belief, and Liability on the Victorian Stage,” in *Victorian Literature and Finance* ed. Francis O’Gorman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009),



appears to exist in the archives; therefore part of the project of this chapter involves reconstructing it from several sources: the licensing copy of *The Poor of* ---- submitted to the Lord Chamberlain to cover the first production in Liverpool,<sup>176</sup> reviews of *The Streets of London*, and theatrical poster playbills that contain a lot of information about its staging.

After analyzing Boucicault's theories of theatre and Victorian critical responses to the play, I examine the networks of sensation at work in the play itself, tracing the physiology of its structure and tropes. I then consider the aim to which these networks conduced, placing the play in relation to eighteenth and nineteenth-century accounts of sympathy and further exploring how the play envisioned the audience's feelings to be channeled into actions outside of the playhouse. I focus on how sensation becomes crucial to the transmission of effect into affect and the conversion of fictional feeling into real feeling. *The Streets of London* exemplifies how the form of a sensation drama could excite, tune, and channel its spectators' nervous system responses into sympathetic passions and "conditions of mind." While Boucicault has not been ignored within Victorian theatre studies, his plays have been of little interest to those immersed in Victorian novelistic realism. Within theatre studies, Boucicault and the rest of British nineteenth-century theatre tends to be treated as an embarrassing, particularly naïve, popular version of illusionism to be passed over in favor of "modern" drama. However, considering realism across the arts—including the theatrical realism of melodrama—only sharpens our accounts of how the Victorian period theorized the transmission of realism, accounted for the movement of "fictional" and "real" affects within the scene of mimesis,

---

106-110 and Tony Williams, *The Representation of London in Regency and Victorian Drama 1821-1881* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2000), 161-172; William Steele *The Character of Melodrama* (Maine: University of Maine, 1968); Judith L. Fisher, "The 'Sensation Scene' in Charles Dickens and Dion Boucicault," in *Dramatic Dickens* ed. Carol MacKay (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989), 152-167. For passing mention of *The Streets of London* see, for instance, Daly, *Literature, Technology, Modernity*; Michael Diamond, *Victorian Sensation, or the Spectacular, the Shocking, and Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (London: Anthem Press, 2003).

<sup>176</sup> On the peculiar status of the licensing copy—the way it leaves locations blank to be filled in for each city it is staged in—see Justin A. Blum, "Adaptation, Copyright, and the Case of Dion Boucicault's *The Poor of*," *Performing Arts Resources* Vol. 28 (2011): 127-34. The licensing copy is found at the British Library, Add. MS 53029.O, Jan/Feb 1864. My archival material on the production has been drawn from Dion Boucicault Collections, University of Kent and V&A Theatre and Performance Archives.

conceived of the operation of sympathy, and imagined the relationship between embodied sensation, feelings, cognition, and action.

### ***Section 1: Theorizing the “Contemporaneous” “Realistic” Drama: Boucicault’s Essays on Theatre***

While critics have examined the social relevance of individual sensation dramas, considering Boucicault’s plays in relation to racial politics (*The Octoroon*), or the imperial representations of Ireland (*The Colleen Bawn*, *Arrah-na-Pogue*) and India (*Jesse Brown, or, The Relief at Lucknow*),<sup>177</sup> *The Streets of London*’s relative absence from scholarly criticism owes perhaps not only to the precariousness of the archive, but to the way the play seemingly epitomizes the worst of sensation drama, amounting to little else but scenic excess, empty spectacle, and a push for profits. For instance, as one scholar writes of *The Poor of New York*, it “owed its success not to substance but to sensation: audiences thrilled to the conflagration of the final act and the appearance of a real fire engine to extinguish it.”<sup>178</sup> The damning proof that the play embodies “sensation over substance” is frequently cited as no less reliable a source than Boucicault himself.<sup>179</sup> Writing in a now notorious letter to Edward Stirling, Boucicault cynically encompassed the value of his latest stage contribution:

I have tried the bold step of producing—originally in the provinces—a sensation drama, without aid or assistance of any kind. The experiment has succeeded. I introduced *The Poor of Liverpool*, a bob-tail piece, with local scenery, and Mr. Cowper in the principal part. I share after thirty pounds a night, and I am making a hundred pounds a week on the damned thing. I localize it for each town, and hit the public between the eyes;

---

<sup>177</sup> See for instance, Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Daphne Taylor, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006); Sarah Meer, “Boucicault’s Misdirections: Race, Transatlantic Theatre and Social Position in *The Octoroon*,” *Atlantic Studies* 6.1 (May 2009): 81-95; Mary Trotter, *Ireland’s National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001); Stephanie Pocock, “The Judicial and the Melodramatic Stage: Trial Scenes in Boucicault’s *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *The Octoroon*” *Theatre Journal* 60.4 (2008 Dec): 545-561; Deirdre McFeely, *Dion Boucicault: Irish Identity on Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); J.S. Bratton, ed *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991).

<sup>178</sup> Alan Fischler, “Guano and Poetry: Payment for Playwriting in Victorian England,” *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 62.1 (March 2001): 43-52.

<sup>179</sup> For critics who incorporate this quote, see, for instance: Thomson, *Plays by Dion Boucicault*; Fischler, “Guano and Poetry”; Anthony Jenkins, *The Making of Victorian Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); Meisel, “Dion Boucicault,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature* ed. David Scott Kastan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Richard Fawkes, *Dion Boucicault: A Biography* (London: Quartet Books, 1979); Samira Basta, “The French Influence on Dion Boucicault’s Sensation Dramas,” in *Literary Interrelations* eds. Wolfgang Zach and Heinz Kosok (Tubingen: G. Narr Verlag, 1987).

so they see nothing but fire. Eh voila! I can spin out these rough-and-tumble dramas as a hen lays eggs. It's a degrading occupation, but more money has been made out of guano than out of poetry.<sup>180</sup>

In critiquing the current state of playwriting, Boucicault would appear to confirm every worst suspicion of the sensation drama: that it is merely designed to reel in audiences with the lightest entertainment possible; that it lacks any kind of literary and aesthetic value (here envisioned as imaginative language, or poetry); and that its sole purpose rests in one sensational scene (the fire), meant to assault the audiences senses, seemingly forestalling any other mode of engagement with its materials. And yet, as I will explore, not only does the play itself complicate the relationship between sensation and “substance,” but Boucicault’s neglected writings on theatre offer a much more nuanced, thoughtful account of the aims of realistic “sensational” stage effect.<sup>181</sup> His depiction of the interaction between the senses, theatrical realism, and emotion are relevant not only to *The Streets of London*, but to the sensation drama’s position as a form of theatrical realism. In part, I turn to *The Streets of London* because it thoroughly embodies many of the concerns and assumptions directed at sensation drama and other sensation genres by Victorian critics and still circulate in contemporary scholarship: that it speaks only to the eye, that its realism can only amount to the most reductive vision of copy, reproduction, rather than imaginative depiction, that it seeks only to thrill an audience (even though, as we’ve seen physiological psychology suggest, the thrill of the nerves did not necessarily amount to only thrilling the nerves, but were seen as a beginning point to other modes of affect and cognition).

In a set of essays that appeared in periodicals across the 1870s and 1880s, Boucicault reflected on his own theatrical practices and the trends of the day, offering a vision of theatrical realism that extends along multiple trajectories and should be considered alongside both a reading of his actual plays and, although less formally compelling, even alongside Wilde’s late century revisions

---

<sup>180</sup> Townsend Walsh, *The Career of Dion Boucicault* (New York: The Dunlap Society, 1915), 95.

<sup>181</sup> There are very few accounts of Boucicault’s writing on theatre. The notable exception is A. Cleveland Harrison, “Boucicault’s Formula: Illusion Equals Pleasure,” *Educational Theatre Journal* 21.3 (October 1969).

of realism such as “Shakespeare and Scenery” and “Decay of Lying.” In an 1889 piece that reflects on his earlier years as a playwright in the 1850s, “Leaves from a Dramatist’s Diary,” Boucicault describes how the “poetic and romantic drama” has passed its day and been replaced with “the actual, the contemporaneous, the photographic.”<sup>182</sup> As he elaborates in the third person of a formative moment in the development of his style,

it was in turning over the *Illustrated Journal* that the idea struck him that the stage might be employed in a similar manner to embody and illustrate the moving events of the period. The Russian war, the Indian mutiny, the adventures of Dr. Kane in polar regions, the slave question, were all live subjects in that period.<sup>183</sup>

In this description, Boucicault offers a vision of the theater as a proto living newspaper thoroughly engaged with the social issues of the day and capable of animating the events of the period through its various media of representation—the corporeal (“embody”), the visual (“illustrate”), and interior and exterior kinetics (“moving” carries with it the charge not only of physical, but emotional movement as well). He places his original adaptation of *The Poor of New York* alongside *The Octoroon* and *Jessie Brown, or The Relief of Lucknow* as plays immersed in immediate social concerns.<sup>184</sup> As he writes of the theatre’s connection to its time period in an essay from 1877, “the drama is the necessary product of the age in which it lives, and of which it is the moral, social, and physical expression...the contemporaneous drama possesses archeological value. It is the only faithful record of its age. In it the features, expression, manners, thoughts, and passions of its period are reflected and retained.”<sup>185</sup> In this account, not only is the “physical” inseparable from the moral and social, but the “archeological value” which is often associated only with depicted material detail—from Kean’s productions of Shakespeare, to the so-called “cup and saucer” drama emerging alongside the

---

<sup>182</sup> Dion Boucicault “Leaves from a Dramatist’s Diary” *The North American Review* (August 1889): 230.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 230-31.

<sup>185</sup> Dion Boucicault, “The Decline of Drama: (An Epistle to C\*\*\*\*\* R\*\*\*\* From Dion Boucicault,” *The North American Review* (September/October 1877), 236-237.

sensation drama, for instance<sup>186</sup>—extend from the world of objects and things into expression, gestures, thoughts and passions. In other words, Boucicault’s formulation of reflecting and recording modernity are more capacious than only scenic precision and reproduction, but seem invested in how “physical expression” works within the interrelated web of the material and gestural; the emotional and mental; the social and moral.

In Boucicault’s most systematic approach to the craft and purpose of dramatic writing, “The Art of Dramatic Composition”(1878),<sup>187</sup> Boucicault uses Aristotle’s *Poetics* as a basis for defining drama, essentially rewriting it for the mid-nineteenth century. After establishing a definition of drama—importantly not tragedy—largely borrowed from Aristotle, but with compelling updates (“a drama is the imitation of a complete action formed by a sequence of incidents designed to be acted, not narrated, by the person or persons whom such events befall. Its object is to give pleasure by exciting in the mind of the spectator a sympathy for fellow-creatures suffering their fate”[41]), Boucicault elaborates a theory in which a play’s action—its defining feature—functions as a kind of body.<sup>188</sup> The body abides by a precise relationship between part and whole: “nothing can be taken away or added without injury to the rest and to the whole”(45). A drama’s “symmetrical form”(46) arouses a set of responses of “expectation, suspense and reflection” and, as Boucicault maintains, these “feelings must be excited in this order” to attain full development.

---

<sup>186</sup> On the archeological precision of material detail in Victorian spectacle, see Michael Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981). While the so-called “cup and saucer drama” has been understood as a reaction against melodramatic affect and excess, it’s supposedly “quieter” drawing room strain of realist depiction still involved the kind of attention to verisimilitude witnessed in sensation drama. For more on the “cup and saucer drama” see Patricia Denison, “Victorian and Modern Drama: Social Convention and Theatrical Invention in T.W. Robertson’s Plays,” *Modern Drama* 37.3 (Fall 1994): 401-420 and Richard Schoch, “Theatre and Mid-Victorian Society, 1851-1870,” in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre* Vol 2 ed. Joseph Donohue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

<sup>187</sup> Dion Boucicault, “The Art of Dramatic Composition: Part I,” *The North American Review* (January/February 1878).

<sup>188</sup> As he writes in “The Art of Dramatic Composition,” for instance, “art may be considered to be the body”(40); “so much for the body of the action. But now as to its movement”(45); using sculpture to explain the development of action in drama: “as he gradually develops the body, our desire to see the rest increases, but the feeling is not satisfied until we can regard the entire figure...”(46).

Echoing the relationship between part and whole is an emphasis on cause and effect. Action can only exist with reaction: Boucicault argues that the drama follows “generative” actions and what arises from them, or their “result”(50). He judges action the most important aspect of drama because as, “it is the cause of the suffering; for persons suffer in consequence of what they do, or of what is done to them”(43). His entire definition of drama rests on the idea of depicting, experiencing, and witnessing the causes and effects of suffering; as he writes, “the drama, therefore, has two parts: the action which causes suffering, and the persons who suffer”(42). In resituating the contemporary drama against the tragic, Boucicault argues that whereas “tragedy is regarded as a series of noble thoughts,” the drama consists “of a sequence of important incidents producing a suffering, of which noble thoughts are the issue.” In other words, his theory is aware of a dual sense of cause and effect: in the first, the represented fictional action traces “generative” moments that cause suffering followed by moments that trace the effects of suffering, and in the second, these scenes of suffering produce an effect on the audience that further result in “noble thoughts.”

Boucicault, however, is quite specific about the affects these represented effects aim to produce: in a subtle shift from Aristotle’s vision of purgation or catharsis achieved through pity and terror, Boucicault claims the aim of the current drama is to “give pleasure by exciting in the mind of the spectator a sympathy for fellow-creatures suffering their fate.” Even if Boucicault concludes “The Art of Dramatic Composition,” with the line that “art is not a church; it is the philosophy of pleasure,” pleasure should not just be viewed as a substitute for “pure” entertainment; instead, it maintains affinities with the pleasures of catharsis with the crucial difference that this “philosophy of pleasure” emerges not through the act of pity, but the act of sympathy.

Sympathy is situated as the foundational effect and affect of the drama. The action must have a cohesion and focus that is neither so contracted that it forestalls sympathy, nor so various that “the spectator cannot feel simultaneously sympathy with them all”(44). Boucicault calls upon

drama's visuality to heighten the spectators' ability to sympathize: "we feel more deeply for those whose sufferings we see, and we believe in a thing we see done to a greater degree than if we heard the same things narrated"(42). Most importantly, sympathy becomes the "sole object" of the drama (50), crucial to, or even constitutive of, its "theatrical illusion."

In what I would suggest is the most important insight to emerge from "The Art of Dramatic Composition," Boucicault rewrites our understanding of what theatrical illusion is. As he argues,

If such an imitation of human beings, suffering their fate, be well contrived and executed in all its parts, the spectator is led to feel a particular sympathy with the artificial joys or sorrows of which he is the witness. This condition of his mind is called the theatrical illusion. The craft of the drama is to produce it, and all its concerns conduce to, and depend on, this attainment (44).

Instead of relying on a vocabulary in which "theatrical illusion" refers to the machinery of the stage, or the scenic effects, here, the theatrical illusion is less the representation itself—although "well contrived scenes" necessarily support it—but the "condition of mind" that the representation induces. It resides in the movement from fictional and to real feeling. Witnessing "artificial joys and sorrows" if formally "well-executed" creates a real response, or feeling in the mind of the spectator, a "particular sympathy" with the events before them. The theatrical illusion emerges from the way fictional feeling converts into a condition of real feeling—and this process, this "condition of mind," in Boucicault's formulation, is the aim of drama. Boucicault stipulates in another essay that it can only be achieved in the "contemporaneous or realistic drama," not the "transcendental or unreal drama": the theatrical illusion that produces sympathy can only be elicited through a depiction in which "the personages are life-size, the language partakes of their reality, and the incidents are natural."<sup>189</sup> As Boucicault elaborates in different essay, this illusion actually consists of several interrelated elements:

---

<sup>189</sup> Dion Boucicault, "The Decline of Drama: (An Epistle to C\*\*\*\*\* R\*\*\*\* From Dion Boucicault," 236.

A drama is an imitation of a human suffering by persons skilled in counterfeiting emotions, so the spectators may be led to sympathize with the feelings they witness, and thus a species of illusion is created in their minds to the extent of believing the scenes they behold, and the feelings in which they share, are real.<sup>190</sup>

In this account, the illusion (again, a condition of mind, a bodily and mental process of consumption) both rests in the way fictional, counterfeit emotion on stage becomes a real emotion (of sympathy) in the audience and in turn, the spectators believe in the reality (and reality of feeling) in the scene and in themselves. In other words, not only does the reality of the representation give force to real feeling, but real feeling in turn gives the force of realism to the scene of representation. The idea of fictional feeling converting into real conditions of mind that help foster the reality of the depiction seems crucial not only to a reading of Boucicault's plays, but to a broader theorization of realism that wonders not only how the real becomes fictionally represented in art forms, but how real feelings then emerge and become reanimated within real bodies in the real world represented, in which sensation and embodied feeling becomes crucial to the transmission between effect and affect, and a sentient human body is always placed within the scene of transmission between signifier, signified, and referent as a mediating force.<sup>191</sup>

Boucicault's defense of action, incident, visibility as designed to forge specific affective relationships, is also, I would suggest, highly relevant for a reading of his sensation dramas. With his theories of theatre in mind, it emerges into focus why the 1862 *Times* definition of the sensation drama as, "a manager who brings out a piece in which the interest of the audience is violently concentrated on one particular scene, which thus stands in relief to the rest of the action, boasts that

---

<sup>190</sup> Dion Boucicault, "The Opera," *North American Review* (April 1887): 341. Some of the ambiguity of this formulation hinges on whether "the feelings in which they share" refers to the feelings represented in the scene or the feelings being felt in the spectator's bodies. The point here is the movement between fictional and real feeling is crucial to the fictional representation assuming a reality or becoming real.

<sup>191</sup> Boucicault's theorization of the drama appears consistent with what Nicholas Dames has shown of Victorian criticism of the novel—that it was often discussed as a "mode of consumption" with attention to its "poetics of affect." Nicholas Dames, "Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies: the Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories," *Victorian Studies* 46.2 (Winter 2004), 207, 209. I'm also here returning to Barthes: if the "reality effect" loses the signified, it would seem to imply losing the cognitive processes in a human reader moving between sign, idea, and referent, whereas realist works—yes, here, even Boucicault—seem very aware of this process of mental conversion taking place within those consuming it.



he has produced a ‘sensation drama,’ and the scene which justifies the use of this term is the ‘sensation scene,’” would provoke a sharp rebuke from Boucicault. Writing in a letter to the *Times*, Boucicault refuses a definition of the sensation drama that relies on the sensation scene, arguing that his dramas, specifically in this context the *Colleen Bawn*, far from “owing their value to one trick effect” instead rely on the development of the whole, not the part. In a letter written in response, The *Times* clarifies that they did not mean to “conve[y] the opinion that the attraction of the piece depended on the ‘water-cave’ alone. There is no doubt that the drama was effective throughout.” The *Times* eventually distinguishes between offering an etymology of term “sensation drama”—that the term originates or emerges from the word “sensation scene”—rather than arguing that a sensation drama only consists of a sensation scene. Instead, as they maintain, the sensation scene constitutes the “symbol of the piece.”<sup>192</sup>

And, for as much as critics isolated the sensation scene of the sensation drama as its only draw, others echoed this line of thought, questioning the relationship between part and whole, and between what created the genre’s immense success. As a critic in *Punch* wrote, dismissing the idea that its sole attraction was the sensation scene: “Still I can’t believe the Strand would have ever been blocked up with Colleen cabs...on account of this one aquatic feat. I am more inclined to think that play-goers have been pleased by the care and completeness wherewith the piece is played, and the attention given to whatever can enhance the illusion of each scene or add a whit to the heightened of effect.”<sup>193</sup> While “effect” here is still the defining feature of the sensation drama, instead of associating it with a kind of passive reception, the critic emphasizes that its interest rests in the interrelated forces forming it and the audience’s awareness of the detail and care of its construction.

---

<sup>192</sup> “‘Sensation’ Dramas,” *The Times* (14 March 1862): 5.

<sup>193</sup> “Our Dramatic Correspondent,” *Punch* (4 May 1861): 186. In an article in *The Spectator*, “The New Sensation Drama,” one writer critiques French critic Jules Janin and English critics for saying the success of the *Colleen Bawn* owes only to its “header,” instead suggesting that the play serves a crucial purpose: it provides “that almost unattainable luxury, an hour’s respite from daily life.” “The New Sensation-Drama,” *The Spectator* (23 November 1861): 1284.

One reviewer of the first “sensation drama,” *The Colleen Bawn*, pushes even further in his assessment of what constitutes the uniqueness of the new genre. Comparing the play to the “Adelphi Drama,” or what could be termed the most “sensational” version of melodrama to be staged before the emergence of the sensation drama, the writer highlights the play’s formal innovation. While the sensation drama shares some elements in common with the “Adelphi Drama” such as “a striking plot...powerful appeals to pity and terror; and a certain air of domestic naturalness, preserved with miraculous art throughout a tissue of exaggerated incidents,” it also differs from it in one key respect: it no longer contains “startling alternations of tragic emotion and outrageous fun.” In other words, it revises one of the key elements—the abrupt tonal shifts—that had defined melodrama for much of the century. As the reviewer notes of this structural and thus affective change,

[No one] come[s] in every now and then to interleave its grim solemnity, just as dances used to be introduced formerly, between the acts. In lieu of this element...we have a snatch of sly humor with grave interest pervading it...There is no dislocation anywhere for the sake of diversifying the drama with streaks of motley. Every character in the piece has a clear right to be there, and has something to do with the plot. Effects are never snared unlawfully; and every scrap of dialogue is more or less necessary to the illustration of the general design, or the direct progress of the action.<sup>194</sup>

In this account, the sensation drama’s interest and innovation emerges from its formal cohesion and the way all of its elements weave together toward the movement of its action, thus also streamlining its affective currents as well. Here we can see the possibility of Boucicault’s theories in practice: the tighter composition of the sensation drama, the way its actions and affective action coalesce, the greater the chance the drama will “conduce” towards its aim of the theatrical illusion, or converting its fictional events and affects into real feeling.

---

<sup>194</sup> “The Colleen Bawn,” *The London Review* (15 September 1860): 255.

## *Section 2—“Theatric Realism” and The Streets of London*

If I have explored what some of Boucicault’s aims might have been with the sensation drama, as well as discovered and analyzed some alternative accounts about how it works, it remains to consider how these theories worked in practice within an actual play. The production of *The Streets of London*, and the critical reactions to it, constitutes a case study for considering the structural work of a sensation drama, and how the various rhythm of its “effects” related to the aims of producing sets of affects.

But first an overview of the plot itself: *The Streets of London* unfolds over a prologue and three acts. The prologue, set fifteen years before the main action, opens at Crawley and Co. Banking House on Moorgate Street. Aware that his bank stands at the edge of ruin, the owner, Mr. Crawley, prepares to abscond to New York taking all of the bank’s remaining money with him. When a sea captain set to sail to China, Captain Fairweather, enters to invest his life savings, £20,000, for the safekeeping of his two children, Paul and Lucy Fairweather, Mr. Crawley accepts the money without hesitation, thus defrauding him and his children. Once the sea captain hears rumors on the street of the bank’s imminent demise, he immediately returns frantic to get his deposit back, but Crawley refuses, and in his passion, the Captain dies of a fit of apoplexy. Badger, Crawley’s clerk, the sole witness to the entire transaction, surreptitiously secures a copy of deposit receipt that proves the Captain’s investment in the ruined bank, and leaves for America. Crawley keeps the £20,000, using it to avoid financial failure for his family.

The action then shifts to fifteen years later. While Crawley lives a life of gilded ease in his Regent’s Park villa supporting the luxurious tastes of his daughter Alida, the orphaned Paul and Lucy are near starvation, surviving in a house on Drury Lane on the good graces of a humble pie-maker’s family, Puffy, Mrs. Puffy, and their son Dan, who are themselves barely scratching out an existence against the threshold of poverty. The play weaves together a network of subtle financial

interrelation and dependence: Puffy is soon arrested and his family evicted when his landlord—Mr. Crawley—finds out he is letting unknown people (in actuality Paul and Lucy) stay in his house without paying rent; Lucy's work as a seamstress requires her to sew Alida's ball gown; Lucy's beau Mark Livingstone, now broke from American speculation, but still from an old family of solid social standing, becomes the object of Alida's aim to secure a social status beyond her wealth. Meanwhile, Badger, the former bank clerk, returns to London broke from his speculative pursuits in California, and confronts Crawley about the receipt, threatening to expose his fraud; Crawley has him arrested and intends to send Paul and Lucy to Australia so they never find out his secret.

Paul and Lucy, however, stay in London, and as the play unfolds, the audience witnesses each character sink further into poverty with Badger out on the streets around Covent Garden Theatre selling matches and theatre programs, Puffy on the streets around Charing Cross selling potatoes, and Paul and Lucy trying to find work every day and reduced to begging. In an act of desperation emerging from their poverty and impending eviction, they lock themselves in their garret tenement flat in Bedfordbury and attempt to suffocate themselves with charcoal fumes. While Livingstone and Dan arrive just on time to save Paul and Lucy, Badger, who lives next door, is left for dead by Crawley, who has arrived at the tenement to search for the receipt. Badger, however, survives. Livingstone, using money provided by Alida that the play consistently signals is never actually hers, establishes the Puffy family, Paul, and Lucy at a cottage in Hampstead, securing an appointment with the police for Badger. In Crawley's debt, he is to marry Alida and when her money comes to him, give it back to its rightful owners, Paul and Lucy.

However, Dan observes Crawley—who in his obsession to destroy the receipt has purchased the tenement building in Bedfordbury that he believes holds the proof of his crime—lurking about the inside of the building with a jar of petroleum and rushes to tell Badger of Crawley's incendiary plan. Badger rushes to the scene, where the tenement has become enveloped in flames and enters

the burning building to save the document. Livingstone reveals the whole truth of Crawley's original deceit and incendiary crime to Alida and Badger returns with the receipt in hand and a warrant for Crawley's arrest. Given her father's crimes, it looks as if Alida will fall into poverty the way Paul and Lucy have fallen; however, Paul saves her from experiencing their fate. He declines to press charges against Crawley, on the condition that Crawley restores his father's life savings to its rightful inheritors. Mark is released from Alida and is finally free to marry his true love Lucy and the play closes with Lucy's plea to the audience to extend their hands to the poor of London.

Drawing on the traditions of English melodrama, in which the forces of the institutional marketplace express themselves in scenes of familial suffering and bodily pain,<sup>195</sup> and revealing its affinities to the French well-made play, in which 'a scrap of paper' ostensibly drives much of the action, London critics were unequivocal about what made *The Streets of London* a sensation drama and a runaway success. It was not the originality of its plot—in the late 1850s, adaptations of *Les Pauvres de Paris* had already appeared in the capital under the name *Fraud and its Victims* and *Pride and Poverty* and Charles Reade had drawn upon the play in his novel *Hard Cash*<sup>196</sup>—but rather, its striking innovation resided in the thoroughness of its scenic realism. As the newspapers effusively admired, never before has such “striking and realistic effect been surpassed,” that in rendering the streets of the city, the play has achieved scenic moments that are “the very culminating point of modern realism” and in “the completeness of its pictorial illusion...such a vivid representation of reality the Stage has, probably, never furnished.”<sup>197</sup> Critics praised the opening scene of the Banking House on Moorgate Street where “the foreground of the stage is occupied by the bank parlour, the clerks are seen through the large window at work in the bank beyond, and further off is a view of the

---

<sup>195</sup> See Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1995).

<sup>196</sup> Almost all of the reviews note this prehistory. See, for instance: “Drama,” *Daily News* (2 August 1864).

<sup>197</sup> “The Drama, Music, &c.” *Sporting Gazette* (6 August 1864): 622; “The Streets of London,” *The Saturday Review* (27 August 1864): 271; “The Theatres, &c.” *The Era* (7 August 1864)

street.”<sup>198</sup> They universally extolled the breathtaking realism of the fire scene—what most described as the play’s sensation scene—as “the most exciting and realistic they ever saw,” with one paper saying it was wise that the bill prepared the audience for the fire scene because if the program “had been less communicative, the surprise of the spectators might have been exceeded by their terror.”<sup>199</sup> However, critics reserved their highest praises for a different scene “more impressive in another and more legitimate way” that can also be thought of as a sensation scene: a representation of Trafalgar Square, Northumberland Street, and Charing Cross on a snowy winter’s night so vivid that “the stage actually seemed expanded to the dimensions of the open space it is supposed to represent....”<sup>200</sup>

It is worth attending in some detail to how the reviewers described the realism of these scenes, as these accounts tend to offer subtly conflicting assessments of what constitutes the play’s realism that are important to a reading of nineteenth-century theatrical realism and realism across other art forms as well. As some suggest, the play’s realism rests in its pictorial precision: some of the reviewers refer to its scenes as static “elaborate realistic pictures,” tableaux, or “photographs of everyday life,”<sup>201</sup> and describe them in ways analogous to a description of a painting:

The spectator is supposed to be placed in St. Martin’s-lane, looking towards Charing Cross and Northumberland House, with St. Martin’s church on his left... Real lamps run down either side of the way; the chemists shop on the right throws its crimson, violet, and green lines of colour across the street; broughams and cabs in the distance—reduced to the proper perspective—are seen driving by Spring Gardens and shooting into the Strand. In short, the scene is a perfect diorama.<sup>202</sup>

If some emphasize that these scenes capture little else but a *pictorial exactitude* of the streets of London, others emphasize that these scenes capture something of *the experience* of being on the streets of London. As a critic for *The Reader* suggests,

---

<sup>198</sup> “The Theatres, &c,” *The Era*.

<sup>199</sup> “The Drama: Mr. Dion Boucicault’s *The Streets of London*,” *The Reader* (6 August 1864): 176; “The Theatres, &c,” *The Era*.

<sup>200</sup> “Princess’s,” *The Athenaeum* (6 August 1864): 186; “Princess’s Theatre,” *The Times*.

<sup>201</sup> “The London Theatres,” *The London Review* (6 August 1864); “Public Amusements: The Streets of London at the Princess’s Theatre,” *Reynold’s Newspaper* (7 August 1864)

<sup>202</sup> “The Drama, Music, &c.” *Sporting Gazette* (6 August 1864): 622

In both these scenes not only are the architectural features of the localities reproduced with almost photographic exactness of detail, but the life and action of the places are given with astonishing *vraisemblance*. Cabs, tiny in the distance roll across the space from Cockspur Street to the Strand; the police-relief marches from Chandos Street into Heming's Row; Puffy is at the end of St. Martin's Lane with a 'tater-can' and Badger—trying to sell Lucifer matches and a 'bill of the play'—is glad to warm his benumbed fingers at the char-coal fire of a roasted chestnut-seller.<sup>203</sup>

Here the emphasis rests on “the life and action” of the scene; the *vraisemblance* emerges through the movement, flow and sensations of the streets: the motion of the multiplicity of figures cutting across the space, or stopping to warm themselves by a fire. As one paper suggested, “the action was reality itself. Playgoers crossed, policemen strutted, street-arabs tumbled, piemen tossed, advertising-mediums with illuminated hats walked, early coffee shivered, and late cabs rattled.”<sup>204</sup> The scene, in other words, evoked the array of sense stimulation a city street can offer: proprioceptive kinesthetics, background and foreground sonics and even here, through the shivering coffee, a sense of smell, taste, and touch. Other papers similarly suggested that the novelty of the play emerged from how it captured the embodied position of sense-driven experience: “the idea you get of depth, or real extent, of the very coldness...of the scene it represents, is wonderfully full and exact down the minutest particular.”<sup>205</sup> The play was not only capable of conjuring the experience of external, extending space, but the palpable coldness of the city streets in winter. Other papers also offered insight into what it really meant for a play to capture the life of the city streets. As one reviewer described the play's “excellent representation of London street life,”

There is a genuine scene in Drury Lane, with Mr. Puffy's pie-shop, and then a picture of Charing-cross which has never been surpassed on the stage. It is a night scene in winter with snow upon the ground. Every house is perfect and lit up into warmth. Hansoms and Gowlers drive about, and a miscellaneous crowd are all trying to do something to get something to eat and drink. Then comes a view of Covent Garden; and the garret scene is surmounted by a snow picture of London from the housetops. London from Hampstead Heath follows, and the whole is crowned with the house on fire, which is the most admirable piece of stage effect ever known. At least, it looks exactly like a house and there is no doubt about a fire. The red and black rafters fall with explosive noise; the neighbors rave in night-shirts from their windows; there is an engine, horses, and firemen with hose and ladders, and a crowd in which it is a hundred to one in favour of having your pockets picked. These scenes are got up in an inconceivably life-like manner. There are boys singing “Polly Perkins” and

---

<sup>203</sup> “The Drama: Mr. Dion Boucicault's *The Streets of London*,” *The Reader* (6 August 1864): 176.

<sup>204</sup> “Theatrical Lounger,” *Illustrated Times* (6 August 1864): 87.

<sup>205</sup> “Art and Literary Gossip,” *Manchester Times* (13 August 1864).

tumbling cat'un wheels...with piemen and patters and bill of the play...an all the thousand things that go to make up the streets of London.<sup>206</sup>

In this account, capturing street life involves the continuous temporal movement from scene to scene, from telescopic vantage points to close-up interiors radiating warmth, space that simultaneously projects inward and outward, and the sounds of the streets. The passage also suggests the play simulates the experience of being in the middle of these dissonant yet symphonic elements: the reviewer does not just record the presence of seeing the crowd at a distance during the fire scene, but describes it as if the spectator is in the crowd, directly experiencing it, with the chances, “a hundred to one in favour of having your pockets picked.” The scene relies on a loop that draws upon the spectator’s own associative memories to animate the scene, while the scene animates or surrounds the spectator with an experience that re-projects outward to the real streets of London. This relay functions through the multi media of theatre engaging and depicting the multiple sensory streams encountered on the real life streets: the emphasis lies in how the play was able to capture “all the thousand things” that animate and give them life.

Other critics, however, questioned whether *The Streets of London’s* representational strategies captured anything about actual city life, instead suggesting that the depiction only abided by a “rough, inartistic realism.”<sup>207</sup> These attacks on its limited realism tended to extend along three trajectories. The first centered on the tensions between the global and local, the transnational and national, the generic and specific. In this account the play was tainted by its foreign source material: a French play (*Les Pauvres de Paris*) adapted into an American play (*The Poor of New York*), adapted into an English regional drama (*The Poor of Liverpool*) and then a drama of the English capital city (*The Streets of London*). As a reviewer for the *The London Review* essentially described it, *locale* is not the same as the local: the traces of the play’s foreign lives make it,

---

<sup>206</sup> “Public Amusements: Princess’s Theatre,” *Lloyd’s Weekly Newspaper* (7 August 1864).

<sup>207</sup> “Theatric Realism,” *The Spectator* (15 October 1864): 1182.



indistinct and cosmopolitan. The supposed characteristics of London low life...have evidently not been drawn from observation, and they are represented by actors who indulge in uncertain Norfolk and Irish dialects...it wants all Dutch fidelity...but with the exception of two boys—taken, we presume from the gutter—who sing ‘Polly Perkins,’ we see nothing but the scenery which reminds us of the real ‘Streets of London.’<sup>208</sup>

If here again the charge is essentially that the play’s realism lies only in the visual and scenic, a reviewer in *The Saturday Review* would extend this even further into a critique of drama as a medium against the novel, arguing that drama always leaves a sense of a national character vague, where narrative fiction does not: “Let M. Paul de Kock describe a Parisian *gamin*, and Mr. Charles Dickens a London street-boy, and there will not be the slightest resemblance between them. Put them on the stage their difference fades away, and what is left of it belongs more to the *costumier* than to the dramatist.”<sup>209</sup> The critique centers on medium: while (written) narrative can capture difference, and even a (literary) dramatist could capture difference, the reviewer treats visual signifiers as theatre’s only medium, and considers the visual a particularly threadbare way to capture anything of national character.

If some would argue that the play didn’t naturalize itself enough to the life of the people on the streets—or didn’t naturalize across all of its media—others suggested its faulty realism originated in naturalizing itself too much to its habitat. In this account, the boundaries between reality and representation become indistinct and blur together. As one reviewer contended in an essay “Theatric Realism,” it was not even that the production too closely replicated reality, but that it substituted reality for representation: the people on stage “are as real as if just hired out of the streets, as is very likely the case.”<sup>210</sup> In turn, critics worried about how this promiscuous intermixing of everyday reality and fictional representation impacted the audience’s experiences of each. On the one hand, critics believed that the problem was the audience had, “seen and heard nothing except an indifferent repetition of what they see every day,” or rather, that the play diminished the status of

---

<sup>208</sup> “The London Theatres,” *The London Review*, 153.

<sup>209</sup> “The Streets of London,” *The Saturday Review*, 272.

<sup>210</sup> “Theatric Realism,” *The Spectator*, 1182.

the fictional by too closely replicating or copying the everyday.<sup>211</sup> On the other, as a critic maintained, the issue was that “there is nothing to be seen at Charing Cross which is not shown at the Princess’s,” or, the experience of reality might itself be diminished by its exhaustive stage treatment.<sup>212</sup>

All of these accounts share a concern not only over what constitutes “reality effects” in the first place, but what effect this depiction of reality has on spectators. However, again, the reviews of *The Streets of London* contain very conflicting accounts of how the play’s media work to convert energies into productive affects. As the critic from *The Saturday Review* framed it, the problem with the “realistic taste” in drama is that it acts as mere “decoration” that is “hostile to the interests of the literary drama.” In this account, narrative and plotting maintain a purity from its surrounding object-driven sensory environment (which in drama, the reviewer suggests, only amounts to decoration). Instead of existing in a fluid relationship of interdependence, they can be isolated from one another. As the reviewer writes,

The man of business who met a business acquaintance at the corner of Trafalgar Square would, if he plunged into some important topic, at once abstract himself from all surrounding objects that have nothing to do with the affair...But a modern public is not so much interested in a fictitious story that it desires to dismiss those objects which in actual life would either seem to be vexatious interruptions or not be seen at all.<sup>213</sup>

If here the reviewer sets plot and narrative (the important business) apart from environment, place, space, and objects (the extraneous distraction or decoration), later in the passage he identifies his true concern: while narrative is the basis of the literary as it propels the imagination and therefore allows “sympathy with imaginary grief” to take place, conversely, the merely decorative imitation of reality distracts from the aim of sympathy. As the critic maintains, the audience becomes delighted by the hansom cab on stage and ignores the fictional suffering of the people represented. In this account, not only is imitative reality on stage associated only with the scenic and curiously severed

---

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> “The Streets of London,” *The Saturday Review*, 271.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid.

from other modes and media that form and inform imitation in theatre—achieved for instance, through the rhythm and structural movement of the plot, characterization through acting, etc.—but narrative must maintain a purity and isolation to achieve the aim of sympathy, and furthermore, sympathy can only be achieved through the imagination (although, as I will examine later, physiological psychology complicates this position).

And yet, other reviewers allowed for a different possibility: it is not that sympathy is degraded by a strand of imitative realism, but rather that the multiple media forming the imitation cannot be segregated from one another; instead, the play's media worked to exert a "direct force" on the audience. It's "the reality imparted to the scene" that "produces an unmistakable force on the nerves of the audience."<sup>214</sup> The question remains, however: what kind of work could this "direct force" of reality perform in a sensation drama? As one reviewer critiqued this sense of force, "*The Streets of London* notwithstanding some capital *bits*, is too sensational, and the sensational (which only means the *painfully* real) is the death of the ideal."<sup>215</sup> If sensation is inextricably connected to the real and to transmitting a painful reality, how might a sensation drama work towards the admitted moral ideal that has shaped British nineteenth-century realism across an array of media of producing sympathetic feeling? How might the play's media and structure directly channel—or to return to Boucicault's phrase—conduce, towards the aim of sympathy? If as one reviewer encompassed *The Streets of London*, "the sympathies of the audience are kept in full play throughout the drama,"<sup>216</sup> I will explore how the play's scenic, rhythmic, imagistic movements cannot be separated from the act of witnessing suffering, but only serve to amplify and tune the audience for sympathetic response.

---

<sup>214</sup> "Princess's," *The Athenaeum*, 186.

<sup>215</sup> "Theatrical Lounger," *Illustrated Times* (6 August 1864): 87.

<sup>216</sup> "Music and Drama," *Bell's Life in London* (6 August 1864): 8.

### *Section 3: Action and Diffusion—Sensation Networks in The Streets of London*

Before, however, tackling the *aim* of these effects, this section will first consider the interrelated cycles of cause and effect within Boucicault's *The Streets of London* itself. Drawing on Boucicault's metaphor of the action of the play as a living body, I will aim to follow the structural organization of that body: its circulations, inflows and outflows, and movements. At its most macro level, the play's prologue and three act structure obtains its rhythm from the cycle of financial panics: while the dates are even more explicit in the American version of the play, in which the prologue opens in 1837 and Act I takes place in 1857, the prologue in the British version retains the detail that a recent "fall in the market" is the "finishing stroke [of] ruin"<sup>217</sup> for Crawley and Co. Banking House, while the following acts take place fifteen years later (act one and two at the same time; act three two months later) in the midst of another downturn, with several characters returned from failed speculations, and another commenting on his current state selling matches as a "consequence of the present state of the money market"(23). If the play's structure, then, invests in how public boom and bust cycles inform personal home economics, disrupting domestic spaces and creating a new wave of the impoverished that reemerge into public spaces, the cyclical structure also overlays with a more linear sequence of cause and effect. Essentially, the play's prologue—Crawley's defrauding of Captain Fairweather's life savings and by extension, his complicity in his death—acts as the stimulus or shock that diffuses across the system of the play's three acts, saturating and structuring Crawley and Alida's rise into new wealth and Paul and Lucy's descent into poverty. Or, to return to Boucicault's language, the play begins with a "generative action" and then moves forward in time to trace its

---

<sup>217</sup> All citations for *The Streets of London* are from "The Poor of ----," Add. MS 53029.O (Jan/Feb 1864), British Library, 1. I have layered the licensing copy with the reviews to check for any differences between the Liverpool and London version and I have matched the script with the advertisements and reviews to see what settings the London production used. For the American version see, *The Poor of New York in American Melodrama* ed. Daniel Gerould (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983). *Pauvres de Paris* opens in 1840 and continues in 1855, but maintains a sprawling seven-act structure, see Édouard Brisebarre and Eugène Nus, *Pauvres de Paris* (Paris: Michel Levy Frères, 1856). On the panics, see, for instance, Charles Kindleberger and Robert Aliber, *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises* Sixth Edition (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011).

continuing ripples or “results”; it precisely traces “the action that causes suffering and the persons who suffer.”

In a small, but suggestive departure from *The Poor of New York* script, however, the British licensing copy marks the circulations of capital and the cycles of financial panic and ruin as an explicit dimension of sensational experience and sensation culture. As Crawley muses of his bank’s imminent demise: “What a sensation for [London?<sup>218</sup>]! To-morrow, yonder street will be filled with a howling multitude, for the house of Crawley, the banker, will fail, and in its fall will crush hundreds who have their fortunes laid up here”(1).<sup>219</sup> Inasmuch as the ruin, or fall of the house cannot be separated from a diffusive wave of sensation extending outwards across the crowd and city, this image also cannot be read in isolation from a literal fall of a house that will happen later in the play: the sensation scene of the house on fire. Consumed from within, with its rafters falling and floors giving way, the sensation scene not only evokes and echoes this conflagration of capital,<sup>220</sup> but similarly relies on a sensation spreading among the onstage crowd and extending into the audience within the auditorium as well. In its system of resonances, I would suggest the play can be productively read through a motif<sup>221</sup> or imagistic network in which images always have later echoes and “sensational effect” continually reduplicates across the play assuming different, but necessarily related, forms. The play overlays multiple diffusions and circulations of sensation and this echo network troubles any reading of its sensation scenes as “pure spectacle” isolated from the logic of

---

<sup>218</sup> Again, the licensing copy leaves the city blank to be filled in by each production.

<sup>219</sup> The New York script does not use the word sensation, it just says: “tomorrow, yonder street now so still, will be filled with a howling multitude...” *American Melodrama*, 33.

<sup>220</sup> On the *The Poor of New York*’s depiction of the illusions of capital and the illusions of theatrical representation, see Moody, “The Drama of Capital.” My interest in this strand lies in how the financial—like other networks circulated in the play—assumes the condition of the physiological. As Timothy Alborn explores, banking in the city was sometimes thought in terms of physiology of the body, see Timothy Alborn, “The Moral of the Failed Bank: Professional Plots in the Victorian Money Market,” *Victorian Studies* 38.2 (Winter 1995): 207; David Evans, *The City; Or, The Physiology of London Business* (London: Bailey Brothers, 1845).

<sup>221</sup> I’m drawing on Nicholas Dames argument about “how a consumer of temporal art forms cognitively registers a sequence of sensations”(127) that he discusses in relation to the leitmotiv and *Daniel Deronda*. Obviously, here, however, we are not dealing with elongated form. *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

the play as a whole. The idea that “the house is ready to burst up,”<sup>(2)</sup> as Badger the clerk describes the bank’s situation in the prologue, will travel throughout the play’s many houses, but will manifest itself in different forms from the ruin of a bank, to eviction (the Puffys on Drury Lane, Paul and Lucy in the Garret apartment), to an actual conflagration subsuming a house, to the threatened fall from Regent Park villa life when Crawley’s crimes are discovered.

But the organizing image of a house in peril about to “burst up” also extends outwards to converge with another network of images and impressions centered on the “body in pain” and physical suffering.<sup>222</sup> The prologue’s image of the “house ready to burst up” finds its correlative in the form of a physical body ready to burst up: Captain Fairweather’s attack of apoplexy, a medical condition akin to our modern concept of a stroke, or a blood vessel literally bursting and hemorrhaging in the brain. As Andrew Mangham writes of apoplexy in relation to the undead and the sensation fiction of Mrs. Henry Wood, in the nineteenth century, the condition was often considered the direct result of “excessive forms of feeling and behavior.”<sup>223</sup> Like a steam pipe ready to burst from too much pressure, apoplexy relied on a vocabulary of force leading to rupture. And this logic of pressure and bursting precisely works its way into a complete fusion of the physical and mental in the prologue of *The Streets of London*. When Captain Fairweather reenters the bank to get his life savings back, the stage directions link his emotional state and with their physical expression: he enters “agitated,” tries “to restrain his emotion” but quickly builds in anger, “tearing at his cravat” and speaking “furiously to Crawley,” then experiences a pain in his head which leaves him “staggering” with “strange feeling.” Soon his face turns purple, he feels he is “suffocating,” “breaks into a loud sob” and “after some convulsive efforts to speak” he is overcome and dies. As Badger

---

<sup>222</sup> I’m here invoking Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>223</sup> Andrew Mangham, “Life after Death: Apoplexy, Medical Ethics, and the Female Undead,” *Women’s Writing* 15, no.3 (2008): 287. It’s worth noting the google n-gram of the term “apoplexy” places the peak of its usage in texts in the sensation decade of the 1860s—1866 to be precise.

diagnoses it afterwards: he is dead because “this excitement has been too much for him”(5). In other words, too much sensation has caused the opposite: the end of all feeling and sentience. This form of “sensational effect” is also underscored within the play by music, with the script calling for “soft music” to play across the Captain’s death scene.

If the bursting head echoes the bursting house, however, it also extends outward into its own network of imperiled bodies caught between too much sentience and suffering and possibility of its opposite. The play circulates different figurations of the body in pain: not only does it open with the violent image of apoplexy, but in Act I we find out Paul is recovering from an illness; Paul and Lucy across all acts are bordering on starvation with Paul losing his strength and almost fainting from fever and hunger; even when they are indoors, they risk freezing from the cold seeping inside their flat (“we shall die of cold”[27]); Paul and Lucy’s attempt to suffocate themselves with fumes from burning charcoal echo not only their father’s sensation of choking and suffocating in the midst of his apoplectic fit in the prologue, but also anticipate the logical opposite of freezing—burning alive in the flames and fumes of the fire scene to come. These converging thematic streams serve to highlight and amplify the extent of the suffering witnessed; suffering becomes “painfully real” through a relay of sensations.

This somatic network of stimulus and diffusion, or cause and effect also interlinks with another spatial and kinesthetic network with its own set of circulations of the senses, sensations, nerve pathways, arteries, and intersections: the streets of the metropolis itself. Just as the networks of capital cannot be separated from the city, and the physical and mental state of its citizens become inexorably linked to its own spatial logic, it too assumes the form of a living being inseparable from the action of the narrative, but directly shaping its characters, and drawing upon and shaping the audience’s perceptions. The play examines the city’s anatomy from multiple perspectives and vantage points: the prologue begins in the interior of a business space with a view outwards towards

the streets, the first act focuses entirely in interior spaces that juxtapose business spaces with domestic spaces across classes (an interior scene in Puffy's shop is followed by an interior scene in Puffy's house then an interior in Crawley's office is followed by an interior in Crawley's drawing room). The second act then shifts to major outdoor public spaces of the city: Trafalgar Square and the outside area in front of Covent Garden Theatre. The rest of the play—at least until its final scene—then mixes interior and exterior spaces simultaneously: the interior of garret apartment also contains a rooftop view of London, an interior of a cottage in Hampstead also has a view of London from Hampstead Heath. Conversely a scene that takes place entirely outdoors—the fire scene—seems particularly invested in watching interior space become consumed: the audience traces the first glow of the fire appear and “spread from room to room” until it becomes consumed from within, “the shutters of the windows fall away, and the inside of the house is seen gutted by the fire”(33).

If here the play contains a microcosm of the spread and circulation of flames throughout a whole circuit or system in the image of the spread of flames in one building, this logic also extends to the play's movements over the geography of the metropolis. I would suggest that here the critical vision of nineteenth-century London as a Gothic city, city of “mysteries,” or a city whose spatial poetics can be read as itself a melodrama (complete with tonal shifts, shifts in pace, lost and found connections and relations of interdependence, thrilling sensory experience) converges with another strain of criticism that places eighteenth- and nineteenth-century urban planning in relation to the physiology of the body. As Lynda Nead explores in *Victorian Babylon*, drawing on Richard Sennett's exploration in *Flesh and Stone* about how discoveries about the circulation of blood in the human body affected later urban discourses:

By the nineteenth century the virtues of respiration and circulation shaped attitudes to urban reform and modernization. The metaphor of circulation enabled health reformers to conceive of the city's water supply, drains and sewers as its arteries and veins. This constant motion should continue without cessation in the streets of the city...Any blockage or accumulated refuse could result in a crisis of circulation in the social body



and consequent breakdown—stroke or heart attack...The streets of the city were the most visible signs of its progress or degeneration. They were sites of passage, communication and transaction of business [but] to many...they were indirect, narrow, and obstructed. Rather than facilitating the flow of movement, they constituted an aneurism in the most vital parts of the metropolis.<sup>224</sup>

In this reading of the city as a place of arteries and vessels with the potential for both open circulation and blockage followed by rupture, *The Streets of London* depicts a physiology of the streets. On the one hand, the play can be read through the movement of capital—beginning in the city on Moorgate and diffusing outwards across the streets of the metropolis. But perhaps even more compellingly, it traces spaces of “open” flowing circulation contrasted with sites of blockage. While this can be followed across multiple levels (for instance, when the play turns to parks, what Sennett terms the “lungs of the city,”<sup>225</sup> versus narrow streets; when it features an expansive, telescopic view of the city versus a close up confined to street level), it becomes perhaps most apparent in the location of its two sensations scenes: the view of Trafalgar Square and the house that catches on fire at 19 ½ Pipemaker’s Alley, Bedfordbury. If Trafalgar Square was a still a relatively new construction from the 1840s, a public, open expanse that celebrated empire and circulated people through the converging arteries of the city (the Strand, Whitehall) running through it, then the alley way in Bedfordbury, although quite near the expansive square, was its logical opposite. As an area crowded with “mazy courts and dark abodes,” between St. Martin’s Lane and Drury Lane, it was “the poorest part of St. Martin’s parish.”<sup>226</sup> As George Augustus Sala described the area in 1859,

There is a wretched little haunt called Bedfordbury, a devious, slimy little reptile of a place, whose tumble-down tenements and reeking courts spume forth plumps of animated rags, such as can be equaled in no London thoroughfare...Confound the place! its rags, its children, its red herrings and its turpentine-infected bundles of firewood!<sup>227</sup>

---

<sup>224</sup> Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000): 16.

<sup>225</sup> Richard Sennett, *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization* (New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1994), 325.

<sup>226</sup> Christopher Hibbet, et al. *The London Encyclopedia* Third Edition (London: Macmillan, 2010), “Metropolis,” *The Ecclesiastical Gazette* (10 December 1861), 155; Henry Benjamin Wheatley, *London, Past and Present* Volume 3 (London: Murray, 1891), 160.

<sup>227</sup> George Augustus Sala, *Twice Around the Clock; Or, The Hours of the Days and Night in London*, (London: Robson and Sons, 1859), 164-65. In 1861, the Bedfordbury Mission House opened; Pipemaker’s Alley would be torn down in the 1880s by the Peabody Donation Fund (now Peabody Trust), see [www.coventgarden.uk.com/streets/bedfordbury](http://www.coventgarden.uk.com/streets/bedfordbury).

Following Sennett and Nead's lead, the alley near Bedfordbury exemplifies the sites of blockage and congestion that still persisted the modern metropolis and it makes sense that in the logic of the play, this narrow alley would be the site of rupture and "bursting up" in the form of fire.

While the play traces and circulates networks of "sensation effects," (and I'd add, sensation causes), or stimulus and diffusion at multiple levels—across its thematics, its images, its sense of space, its depiction of the body, and channels multiple streams of converging media to do so—there is yet another direction this attention to circulations of sensation assumes: reflexivity about sensation genres and media themselves. When Badger returns from California and threatens to reveal Crawley's fraud, he narrates the past events he witnessed as if reading it from a novel he wrote in parts, ending each piece of the crime with "End Chapter One. D'ye catch the interest...End of chapter Two—to be continued in our next." While this moment appears in *The Poor of New York*, here its connection to sensation genres is made explicit in the British version with Badger introducing his tale by telling Crawley it is a "sensation novel"(17). In circulating the dramatic action as if were a sensation novel, the play draws attention to fluid currents between the sensation drama and novel, while also revealing an awareness of position within the circuits of mass media. Spectacle here cannot be separated from narrative, medium cannot be separated from medium, and a work cannot be separated from its circulation among the public—yet again, sensational networks continually converge and overlay in the play.

#### *Section 4: "Touching and Tuning Your Hearts"*

In my account thus far, I've explored the multiple converging currents of sensation that flow throughout the *The Streets of London* in order to suggest that the play precisely prevents any separation between environment and its representation, narrative action, and its effects or impacts on the bodies shaped by them. This section, however, explores a question that I have not yet addressed:

what exactly was the aim of the play's networks of sensation and even more importantly how might the play's networks work on an audience to achieve this aim? If I have briefly suggested that these networks heighten a sense of the "painful reality" suffered on stage and conduce towards an aim of sympathy with this suffering in the audience, I have not yet explored how the play envisions its effects turning into affects or emotion within the audience members.

But first, it can be clarified exactly what the play's aim was—in assuming the name *The Streets of London*, Boucicault never loses sight of the title he preferred, *The Poor of London*.<sup>228</sup> As the play's final scene of direct address to the audience—a scene I will examine shortly in some depth—makes clear, it aimed to "touc[h]your hearts" and "caus[e] a tear of sympathy to fill your eyes"(37). This response induced by the fictional representation is then explicitly called upon to adjust the audience's relation to the poor of London they see out on the real streets. While it may not be surprising given Boucicault's theories of drama that sympathy is the feeling the play aims to induce, it is somewhat surprising how explicit the play is about articulating this aim. Its very visible rendering of its aim, however, makes it a particularly interesting case study for how effects can be deployed with explicit affective dimensions; indeed, *The Streets of London* explicitly thematizes how scenes of fictional representation induce real feeling.

It deploys several interrelated strategies for "tuning" the audience's bodies for sympathetic response to the fictional poor on stage and in turn, the real poor off stage. One of these emerges in its handling of the specific individual against the general or type, or the specific fictional identities (Paul and Lucy) instantiating broader types of real individuals that are often conceived by their class or category ("the poor"), effacing their individuality (a person with a name and story that led them to the street and with little option but to beg for money). While the play never entirely strives to

---

<sup>228</sup> That title had recently been taken by a different production at the Grecian Theatre forcing him to change its name—Looking over that script, however, it does not appear to be an adaptation of Boucicault's play. See, "Princess's," *The Athenaeum*, 186.

restore the full individuality and specificity of the real people who constitute the poor—after all, it ends with a plea for the audience to give money to “the poor creatures” that still anonymously constitute “the poor of London”—like other strands of realist fiction, it deploys specific fictional individuals to create sympathy for non-specific real ones. As Catherine Gallagher captures sympathy in relation to the novel in *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace*,

Fiction, then, stimulates sympathy because, with very few exceptions, it is easier to identify with nobody's story and share nobody's sentiments than to identify with anybody else's story and share anybody else's sentiments...But paradoxically, we can always claim to be expanding our capacity for sympathy by reading fiction because, after all, if we can sympathize with nobody, then we can sympathize with anybody.<sup>229</sup>

Of course this formulation whereby “nobody's” story allows us to sympathize with anybody's story becomes necessarily complicated within the medium of theater; with the presence of the actor's actual body there is, in a sense, always a somebody. However, as *The Streets of London* attests, this “somebody” can still shift through variations of specificity and anonymity that conduce towards the play's aim of inducing sympathy in the audience.

While the beginning of the play (the prologue and Act I) weds the specific instance of Crawley's financial fraud to the specific impacts it has on several families, the opening of Act II compellingly enlarges the scope of this specificity. With the move outwards to the night scene at Charing Cross/Trafalgar Square, the specificity of character is projected outwards onto the city's anonymous cast of characters. Characters that used to know each other no longer recognize each other and become strangers: Puffy and his son Dan do not see that the man they just gave bread to is in fact Paul, not some “chap in the corner” that “looks bad”(23). By defamiliarizing a character that the audience in fact knows—that is, by creating a clear affinity between the Paul they see on stage and an anonymous “chap in the corner” near Trafalgar Square on stage—the play also attempts to defamiliarize or estrange (in the Shklovsky sense of look differently at, or at least not

---

<sup>229</sup> Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 172.

look mechanically at<sup>230</sup>) the real anonymous “chap in the corner” sleeping on the real snowy streets of Trafalgar Square. Somebody morphing into anybody in the fictional representation allows the anybody of the real world to become a somebody with a backstory, who could be read, like Paul, as an individual whose specific set of circumstances brought him or her to the streets. This oscillation between the audience perceiving a somebody who could be an anybody within the fictional facilitating them to see an anybody as a somebody in the real, is only heightened by the number of anonymous typologies that emerge in the scene. The characters we have become familiar with are essentially cast in roles the audience would have encountered on the real streets of London: Puffy becomes “the tater seller”; Badger becomes “the peddler” of matches and playbills and inasmuch as the play has him sing and dance, he also evokes the category of “the minstrel” performer; Lucy almost becomes “the beggar” and barely avoids entering into a metonymic link with “the prostitute.” Additionally, the scene adds other anonymous figures that require the audience to draw upon and equate what they are seeing on stage with categories of people they meet in their actual urban environment most notably, two “ragged children” who follow a gentleman around on stage, importuning him for bread.

If the play facilitates sympathetic identification by subverting the lines between the specific individual and the anonymous figure, it also matters that precisely the key moment it does so is during one of the play’s sensation scenes, or at least the scene the critics singled out along with the fire scene for its “sensational effect” and “vivid representation of reality.” I would suggest that given the actual work taking place in this scene between individual and type, that takes the local story of these specific people and asks the audience to read it as a broader story they might encounter on the city streets, it becomes difficult to see how the scene functions as “pure spectacle.” Instead, the material attention to visual detail—the perfect recreation of the street scene—serves to amplify and

---

<sup>230</sup> Viktor Shklovsky, “Art as Device,” in *Theory of Prose* trans. Benjamin Sher (Illinois State University: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991), 5-6.

strengthen the audience's sense of sympathetic identification. It does so by recreating precisely the competing interests, or multiple sensory avenues of distraction (cabs going by, sudden noises, people moving about) that can render individual specificity lost amidst the background in the first place thus reaffirming that what they are seeing on stage should be applied to the streets outside, while at the same time estranging this reality by offering it for representation.

There is another way, however, to consider this relay between the fictional representation, the real being represented, and the audience watching the representation: physiologically. In Gallagher's account of sympathy in Hume, she writes, "Hume notes that the quality of one's sympathy for a fictional character differs from that feeling elicited by people we believe to be real. The strength and duration of an impression, he argues, are partly determined by the perceiver's belief in the reality of the object."<sup>231</sup> While she proceeds to qualify this connection between "the air of truth and reality" as Hume calls it and the "force" or strength of the impression because Hume is contradictory on this point,<sup>232</sup> the sensation genre criticism is decidedly less contradictory, and more physiologically oriented, about it. As we have seen a reviewer from *The Athenaeum* capture the effects of *The Streets of London* (in this moment, specifically, the fire scene): it "produces an unmistakable impression on the nerves of the audience, such is the reality imparted to the scene." The reality imparted to the scene exerts and heightens the "direct force" on the nerves, or to return to the language from the reviewer for the *Illustrated Times*, the "too sensational" amounts to or "only means the painfully real." As I explored in the last chapter, sensation genre criticism tended to organize around three main interrelated complaints: first, the drama or novel in question worked directly on the nerves or senses as opposed to the imagination; second, it was therefore thought to bypass any higher order forms of response, for instance, "sympathy with a passion"; and third, it was criticized

---

<sup>231</sup> Gallagher, 172

<sup>232</sup> See Gallagher 172-173 and also David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 1.3.10.

for offering a kind of vapid realism, one that did nothing but excite and stimulate, but like so many “stage tricks,” ephemerally vanished producing no real emotions or thoughts at all, (no idea of the referent, just an illusionary referent itself).

Turning to *The Streets of London*, I have attempted to stress that this “astonishing *vraisemblance*” wasn’t quite so vapid after all: instead of acting as pure spectacle and entertainment devoid of any connection to narrative action and character, the multi-media reality depicted in a sensation drama through its reduplicating imagistic network, depiction of environment, etc. served to amplify the force of sensation exerted on the audience in order to tune the audience for sympathetic response (that at once gave the force of reality to the depiction, and emerged as a force to apply outside on the real streets). As Bram Stoker captured this tuning process in a review of *The Streets of London* from the 1870s: “antithetic characters, strong situations, humorous, pithy dialogue, and exciting sensation scenes are all pressed into service” so that “the feelings of the audience are worked up to the required pitch.” In Stoker’s account, all the aspects of *The Streets of London*, work their “separate parts” but all stream or channel towards the result of tuning or pitching the audience’s “feeling.” Or, as Boucicault glossed this “feeling” in his essays on theatre, the drama aims to “excit[e] in the mind of the spectator a sympathy for fellow-creatures suffering their fate.”<sup>233</sup> Here excitement functions not only as an end or mere effect, but also as a stimulus that results in further feeling, specifically, sympathy, that can in turn generate its own actions.

### *Section 5 Sympathy and Sensation—Smith, Hume, Bain*

In order to clarify the relationship between sensation and sympathy that I suggest the play maintains, however, we need to briefly turn to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century configurations of sympathy’s operation. On the whole, as I have touched upon in the introduction, scholarly accounts of

---

<sup>233</sup> Bram Stoker, “The Streets of London,” *Dublin Evening Mail* (2 April 1872) in Catherine Wynne, ed. *Bram Stoker and the Stage: Reviews, Reminiscences, Essays, and Fictions* Vol. I (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012), 16.

Victorian sympathy somewhat over-rely on Adam Smith's conception of sympathy from *Theory of Moral Sentiments* even though there were competing conceptions that are equally relevant.<sup>234</sup>

The scene of Smithian sympathy—defined as “fellow-feeling with any passion whatsoever” as opposed to the specific emotion of pity or compassion—as critics have long noted, relies on the workings of the imagination. For Smith,

As we have no immediate experience of what other men feel, we can form no idea of the manner in which they are affected but by conceiving what we ourselves should feel in the like situation...our senses will never inform us of what he suffers. They never did, and never can, carry us beyond our own person, and it is by the imagination only that we can form any conception of what are his sensations.<sup>235</sup>

In this account, while the sensations play a crucial role in the approximation of another's feeling, the imagination is the key mediating force that allows for the exchange; as he makes clear, it is not a fluid link between the sensations of one person spreading to the sensations of another that creates sympathy. Instead, “it is the impressions of our own senses—not those of his—which our imagination copy.”<sup>236</sup> Through our imaginative processes, we may—and may matters since Smith allows for the possibility that we may not—begin to approximate “an idea of his sensations.”<sup>237</sup> This view of sympathy facilitated by the imagination helps explain some of the concern directed at the sensation genres that we've already encountered in the previous chapter and in reviews of *The Streets*

---

<sup>234</sup> On sympathy and Smith, see, for instance: David Marshall, *The Figure of Theatre: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986) and *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Rae Greiner, “Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel” *Narrative* 17.3 (Oct 2009) and *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012). For accounts that also include or focus on Hume: Adela Pinch, *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996); Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007); Brigid Lowe, *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy* (London: Anthem, 2007); Miranda Burgess, “On Being Moved: Sympathy, Mobility, and Narrative Form,” *Poetics Today* 32.2 (Summer 2011); Lorri G. Nandrea, “Desiring Difference: Sympathy and Sensibility in *Jane Eyre*,” *Novel* (Fall 2003/Spring 2004).

<sup>235</sup> Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2009), 15, 13. On the distinction between sympathy and the later term empathy see: Suzanne Keen, *Empathy and the Novel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Mary-Catherine Harrison, “How Narrative Relationships Overcome Empathic Bias: Elizabeth Gaskell's Empathy Across Social Difference,” *Poetics Today* 32.2 (Summer 2011).

<sup>236</sup> Smith, 13.

<sup>237</sup> Smith, 14. While all critics emphasize the impartial spectator and the workings of the imagination, some critics note that while imagination is the key force, the text is actually slightly more contradictory. For instance, as Smith concedes, “The passions, upon some occasions, may seem to be transfused from one man to another, instantaneously”; nonetheless, as he maintains, “This, however, does not hold universally”(15).



of *London*: if the imagination is sympathy's conduit, then a play thought to bypass the imagination and only work on the nerves cannot develop a sympathetic response within the audience that cultivates the ideal of compassion. However, of course, another way of framing this might be that sensation genres somewhat frustrate the Smithian model of sympathy.

Taking Smith's emphasis on mediation, imagination, and impartial spectatorship as the only conception of sympathy also creates something of an impasse about immediacy, the body, and sympathy that has played out in some strains of scholarly criticism. This impasse appears in the form of a false choice between immediacy and embodiment, on the one hand, and mediation and disembodiment, on the other. For instance, in her book *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction*, Audrey Jaffe focuses on how the scene of Smithian sympathy "do[es] away with the body" replacing it with a set of specular and spectacular representations—the mental pictures of an impartial spectator.<sup>238</sup> Arguing against the way Ann Cvetkovich in *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* centers the sensation novel around immediacy and embodiment, Jaffe argues this loss of the body transpires in sensation fiction, too: "rather than grounding affect directly in the body" sensation novels "affirm[ed] less the immediacy of sensation's effects on the body than the role of cultural representations...as mediators of sensation and its meanings."<sup>239</sup> If, on the one hand, I would suggest that Cvetkovich's crucial insight into the sensation novel—that "emotionally charged representations produce bodily responses, that, because they are physically felt, seem to be natural and thus to confirm the naturalness or reality of the event"—over invests in the

---

<sup>238</sup> Jaffe, 11 and 13.

<sup>239</sup> Jaffe, 96. Jaffe concludes that Cvetkovich and Miller's discussion of the sensation novel's "communication of nervousness from character to reader" amounts to "an erasure of representation." I'm not convinced that representation recedes entirely in their arguments, however. While I'm focusing on this exchange between Cvetkovich and Jaffe, it can also be seen in more recent accounts of sympathy. For instance, in *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*, Rae Greiner asserts that sympathy should not quite be considered an embodied emotion, but a cognitive process. Drawing on Smithian sympathy she writes: "sympathy is a way of thinking about others, not an embodiment of their emotions"(3). Conversely, in her book *Victorian Sympathy and the Insights of Sympathy: An Alternative to the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, Brigid Lowe argues for a return to a Humean vision of the "bodily manifestations of sympathy"(10) instead of impartial distance.

undescribed vocabulary of what “seems to be natural” (I think, as Sedgwick suggests, because she never specifies or historicizes what she means by affect, or I would add, sensation<sup>240</sup>) but even more importantly, it somewhat loses sight of the complex relay taking place between the real raw materials converted into the fictional representation and then reconverted into a real mediated by the body, embodied feeling, and cognition.

Instead of sensation merely “confirming” the real by a feeling of the “natural,” I’m suggesting that sensation becomes a crucial conduit for the transmission of the real and the oscillation between fictional and real feeling. It helps facilitate how the real is converted into a fictionalized scene of representation; how the form of the fictionalized representation in turn circulates its own fictional sensation and affective currents; and how spectators or readers are placed in relation to this fictional form by the aims and strategies of the work and can be “pitched” or “tuned” by it. But lest this seems like it renders the consumer of the material entirely passive, the sensations produced also only develop through a constant relay to the readers’/spectators’ own actual experiences and past sensations. Finally, these sensations do not end in “pure sensation” but enter into a stream of diffusion that leads to other forms of response and can reattach to real objects, effectively allowing the fictional to assume the force of the real and be reconverted again into the real. Or, rather, the real is at least processed a little differently by the “condition of mind” that emerges through this relay.

As this relay suggests, separating the body and immediacy from mediation, representation, and reflection is not only a false choice because these mental pictures precisely rest on embodied sensations—sight does not exist apart from the body—but also because immediacy doesn’t amount to a lack of mediation, as much as it amounts to mediation that works differently. And, even further,

---

<sup>240</sup> Sedgwick maintains Cvetkovich’s idea of affect is “only very cursorily specified”(109). Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992), 23.

the body is itself a site of mediation, converting and reconvertng sensations and sense impressions into feelings and thoughts, as well representing interior feelings via exterior signs and registering and reading external signs and expressions.

This interrelation between mediated immediacy and embodied representation emerges more clearly in other configurations of sympathy. Hume, for instance, as Adela Pinch and others remind us, presents a different model of sympathy that acts as a kind of emotional contagion, or “mechanism by which people can catch the feelings of others.”<sup>241</sup> As the often quoted passage from Hume captures how sympathy amounts to a transpersonal transmission of feeling between people: “As in strings equally wound up, the motion of one communicates itself to the rest; so all the affections readily pass from one person to another, and beget correspondent movements in every creature.”<sup>242</sup> However, as Pinch explores, this communicative process actually consists of several stages: the impressions of one person manifest themselves in expression, which gives another person an idea that is reconverted into an impression in their own body, or as Hume writes:

When any affection is infus'd by sympathy, it is at first known only by its effects, and by those external signs in the countenance and conversation, which convey an idea of it. This idea is presently converted into an impression, and acquires such a degree of force and vivacity, as to become the very passion itself.<sup>243</sup>

In this account, while the idea might initially appear to play a similar role as the imagination in Smith, as Pinch reminds us, ideas for Hume are “the fainter copies of impressions,” and therefore the real transaction taking place here involves an exchange between different degrees of force moving between bodies.<sup>244</sup> It is worth noting, however, that this flow of currents would not take place without the intervening step of expression, or “the external signs in countenance and conversation” necessary for conveying or facilitating the transmission of feeling. In other words,

---

<sup>241</sup> Pinch, 24.

<sup>242</sup> Hume, 3.3.1.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid., 2.1.11.

<sup>244</sup> Pinch, 33.

feeling would not be communicated between bodies without the crucial mediation of the expressions or external signs that make them visible, legible, and readable.<sup>245</sup>

I will suggest, however, that the treatment of the mediated immediacy and embodied representation that takes place within the scene of sympathy most relevant to sensation genres emerges in Alexander Bain's discussion of sympathy in *The Emotions and the Will*. In his account, feeling can spread like fire both between people in real life and between a scene of representation and those interacting with it: turning to acting as an example, he notes, people's emotional expression can "kindle a corresponding flame in those about them."<sup>246</sup> This kindling of the sympathetic process, however, actually consists of two interrelated stages whereby physical responses travel across bodies and diffuse into mental states. The first step, as Bain writes: "is a tendency to assume a state, attitude, or movement, that we see enacted by another person...rendering the sensation a power to stimulate the act."<sup>247</sup> The second step is in turn to have "the assumption of a mental state or consciousness, through the occurrence of bodily accompaniment"(212-213). In other words, seeing the outward expression of an emotion in one person causes corresponding bodily accompaniments and play of nerves in another that then diffuses into a mental state, or as Bain captures the arc of this movement:

I proceed on the supposition that if the entire physical condition accompanying any feeling can be aroused from whatever cause, the feeling itself will necessarily co-exist. Could we reinstate all the outward gesticulation, the play of feature, the vocal tones, the altered secretions, the nerve-currents instigated in a burst of grief, we should have the very emotion itself enacted in our mental experience. Hence, if by witnessing the manifested expression of a sufferer, we could be lead to assume to the inmost depths the same diffusion, it would follow that we should ourselves suffer in the like manner (215).

---

<sup>245</sup> My emphasis on the external signs somewhat departs from Pinch's argument inasmuch as she argues that for Hume, feelings are "neither mimetic nor semiotic" because they rely on force (33).

<sup>246</sup> Bain, 213. All citations are from Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: John. W. Parker and Son, 1859). Surprisingly little has been written on Bainian sympathy. Notable exceptions include: Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) and Susan Lanzoni, "Sympathy in *Mind* (1876-1900)," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70.2 (April 2009): 265-287.

<sup>247</sup> Bain argues this process is the result of "an association between the actual movements in ourselves, and the appearance they give to the eye as seen in operation"(212).

Bain establishes that the entwined relationship of the physical and mental in intrapersonal feeling logically extends to the status of the physical and mental in transpersonal communication of feeling. Here diffusion and its expression in one body can lead to different body becoming primed for diffusion. However, Bain also articulates some doubts about how this process works. What if, he wonders—citing an actor not feeling inwardly what he is outwardly declaiming (215)—the outward signs of the feeling result in a mere “mechanical echo” of feeling in the spectators instead of the full diffusion of the emotional wave? While he allows for gradations and susceptibilities that complicate this process, he nonetheless concludes,

Still it is to be reckoned a general tendency of our constitution, that when the outward signs of emotion are in any way prompted, the wave, passing into the interior, inflames all the circles concerned in the embodiment of the feeling, and gives birth more or less powerfully to the conscious state. The possibility of sympathizing fully with other minds depends on this fact (216).

In this equation, the sympathetic response relies on embodied feeling and sensation converting into, or diffusing into a mental state, or a condition of mind: sensational feeling manifests itself in one person, is made legible through expression, these expressions in turn strum the strings of the nerves and bodily expression diffusing into a mental state in another. It is again worth highlighting that what at first seems like an almost bodily contagion—or “infection” as he calls it, in which we “fall in with”(210) other’s emotional states—is still contingent upon mediation, or the outward external signs representing and enacting inward movements.

While Bain’s account stresses the transmission of affect between people (whether in real life or a fictional scene of representation), it also accommodates the movement between form and the physical bodies processing it. Drawing upon a discussion of systems obtaining harmony with one another from *The Senses and the Intellect*, where, for instance, “there is something in the *pace* of movement of one person that induces a corresponding pace in the movements of the beholder or listener,” Bain slightly reorients this process of synchronicity or arriving at the same frequency. As he says, “rapid movements of the eye from exciting spectacles make all the other movements

rapid...the violent expression of extreme joy, rage, or astonishment, will induce a disposition to active excitement in the spectator, which needs only to be guided into the channel specific to the passion.”<sup>248</sup> Or, in other words, form (in this case “exciting spectacle”) produces specific physical responses that then diffuse throughout the bodily system and can channel into specific passions.

This Bainian account of sympathy renders visible why sensation scenes were indispensable not only to the narrative logic of play, but to its affective aims. While the sensation drama consolidated some of the tonal shifts of earlier melodrama (from comic to tragic, etc.) it amplified its rhythmic shifts: moments of exciting spectacle depicted with particularly vivid realism critically facilitated the transmission, or diffusion of affect from the fictional representation into real bodies that could in turn become mental states, or, to return to Boucicault’s formulation, conditions of mind. This exchange effectively relies on two senses of sympathy: sympathy in the sense of a specific moral affect (compassion for suffering) cannot emerge without the structural mechanism of sympathetic response or communication that embodies the feeling of that suffering (characterized by excitement leading to diffusion of bodily sensations or feeling). The form here “disposes” the spectator to an “active excitement” which is soon “channel[ed]” into a specific passion. The contours of this “disposition” are further clarified in a passage from a later work by Bain, *Mental and Moral Science*, that I first discussed in the introduction. As we have seen, Bain seems to indicate that in this scene of transmission, we actually imitate or assume “the displays of feeling enacted in our presence”; however, he clarifies, “even when we do not repeat the displays of feeling to the full, we have the idea of them, that is, their embodiment in nervous currents, to which attaches the

---

<sup>248</sup> Bain, 211. This extends to other media of representation as well; as he writes, “The emotions of action and pursuit...are inspired not solely by actual display...the printed page is able to kindle them to a high pitch”(216). On rhythm, physiology, affect, and literary forms, see Nicholas Dames, “Wave-Theories and Affective Physiologies: the Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories,” *Victorian Studies* 46.2 (Winter 2004): 206-216.

corresponding state of mind. We come under the influence of every pronounced expression of feeling, and if the circumstances be favourable, reproduce it in ourselves...”<sup>249</sup>

While the entire process of sympathy emerges first from a tuning or pitching of our nervous currents in response to something we are viewing, the process of sympathy inexorably links with the processes of imitation, or representation—it isn’t just that one walks into a room, or a theatre, say, and catches sympathy like a germ just because someone is inwardly feeling something; instead, it can only take place because feelings become represented in expression or form (the inner feeling only diffuses into another’s inner feeling through the external sign or representation or “display” of the feeling). This relationship between sympathy and the scene of mimetic representation is emphasized in the structural logic of *The Emotions and the Will*. Bain places sympathy and imitation in the same chapter, arguing that they owe to the same process:

Sympathy and imitation both mean the tendency of one individual to fall in with the emotional or active states of others, these states being made known through a certain medium of expression...the foundation of sympathy and imitation is the same; but the one applies itself more to our feelings, the other to our actions. We sympathize with grief, anger, or astonishment; we imitate the handicraft or the behavior, the elocution, or the language, of one that we consider a model (210).

While Bain discusses imitation at some length between people in real life, he also makes clear that the connection between sympathy and imitation extends into the domain of the imitative arts (226)—all are contingent upon “a medium of expression.”<sup>250</sup>

I would suggest that this emphasis on the interrelation of sympathy and imitation—or rather, their structural affinities and reliance on medium—returns us directly to *The Streets of London*. The play itself seems curiously reflexive about how scenes of imitation act to forge both feeling and action. Here, my interest is less to suggest that the play is in some broad way meta-theatrical; my

---

<sup>249</sup> Alexander Bain, *Mental and Moral Science: A Compendium of Psychology and Ethics* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868), 277-78.

<sup>250</sup> And, as he allows, imitative fidelity might only heighten the sense of aesthetic pleasure: we both appreciate seeing things represented that “we have felt without expressing to ourselves” and at the same time, we learn through the represented details that we hadn’t seen before (227).

interest instead lies in how it explicitly stages the movement between its own forms of imitation and their production of affect, and how it in turn expects the condition of mind cultivated will operate in the real world outside of the theatre. In this reading, it matters, for instance, that the play's first sensation scene—the life and action of Trafalgar Square—immediately shifts to a scene outside Covent Garden Theatre. With a play just ending, the ladies and gentleman stream out of theater, ignoring the poor on the streets outside, thus explicitly staging the moment that will soon occur when the ladies and gentlemen of the audience will soon stream out of the Princess's Theatre into the real London streets. Here the imitative action on stage seems to advance the question: will the audience imitate the action they have just witnessed in this scene, with Alida disgusted by “the ragged wretch” and telling her father to just “give the fellow sixpence and send him away”—that is, mechanically act without any emotional structure supporting it—or will there be another alternative that the audience will adopt (a condition of mind that creates sympathy with suffering)?

The fire scene arguably functions as the main transmission site that supports or facilitates this alternative: the scene can be read as almost uncannily rendering the physiologically inflected communication of feeling Bain describes in the sympathetic exchange. The scene at once renders a play between the interior and exterior—it begins with all of the shutters of the building closed as the audience sees a flame arise through a hole in a shutter, and watches it diffuse through the system of the house, “spread[ing] from room to room” until the exterior finally bears the signs of interior damage, the “shutters of the windows fall way and the inside of the house is seen gutted by the fire”(33). With the fire now externally visible, “a cry of horror is uttered” by the crowd on stage. If the wave has passed through the interior of the house penetrating the exterior, this wave in turn, to return to Bain's language, is seen to “kindle a corresponding flame in those about them” “inflam[ing] the circles concerned in the embodiment of feeling.” This is a sensation scene in a dual sense of the term: not only is it designed to thrill the spectators in the theatre's audience, it actually



stages the transmission of sensation on stage to the surrogate audience of the crowd. It is not simply a sensation scene, but a scene of the transmission of sensation. The “exciting spectacle” facilitates and amplifies the diffusion of sensation from the scene on stage to the audience witnessing it; it traces cause (the kindled flame) outwards to effects (the cry amongst the crowd and assumed audience).

Building upon the sensation scene and the reduplication of sensation currents the play has depicted through its network of images, *The Streets of London*'s final scene suggests the appropriate way to channel the feelings wrought by what the audience has seen. The play's final scene stages an exchange precisely between sympathy and imitation, between external signs and interior diffusion, with the characters on stage breaking the fourth wall and directly appealing to the audience:

Badger: You have seen the dark side of life; you can appreciate your fortune, for you have learned the value of wealth.

Paul: No! We have learned the value of poverty. (*Gives his hand to Puff*) It opens the heart.

Lucy: (*To the public*) Is this true? Have the sufferings we have depicted in this mimic scene touched your hearts, and caused a tear of sympathy to fill your eyes? If so, extend to us your hands—no, not to us—but when you leave this place, as you return to your homes, should you see some poor creatures by the wayside, extend your hands to them, and the blessings that will follow you on your way will be the most grateful tribute you can pay to the Poor of London (37).

This scene explicitly renders the movement between “the mimic scene” and its called for affects and effects on the audience. Just as the on-stage act of the actor extending his hand to Puffy leads to “an opening of the heart,” the entire “mimic scene” of the play is envisioned to open and “touc[h]” the hearts of the audience. In turn, the audience—with their emotional channels now touched and opened—are expected not to “extend their hands” to the actors, but to walk home and see the poor differently and “extend [their] hands to them.” That is, the play directly links “emotional” and “active” or imitative states: the mimetic action in the fictional representation produces a set of emotional conditions of mind in real bodies that are then called upon to mimic the actions represented within the fictional world within the real one. In this dense relay between fictional feeling and action and real feeling and action, the body of the spectator forms the mediating role

that diffuses (represented) gestures into feeling, feeling into mental states, and mental states back into physical actions. Witnessing suffering in represented form leads to an embodied experience that internalizes this suffering which in turn creates a “condition of mind” assumed to lead to imitative actions outside of the theatre. But without the impressive forces of sensation that have taken place within the play, the audience would not have been properly pitched to channel sensation into feeling and into cognitive acts. Sympathy first had to be activated and excited by the force of sensation in order to convert fictional feeling into real feeling and fictional actions into real actions.

\* \* \*

In my account of Boucicault’s *The Streets of London* thus far I’ve traced its network of sensation effects, the purported aims of these effects, and how the play’s formal and physiological movement conditioned the bodies and thus conditions of mind of the audience, conducing towards the aim of sympathy with suffering through the pathways of expression impacting the nerves. Here, it has emerged that the theatrical illusion in question is not simply how the representation conveys reality and (re)produces an effect of reality through moments that initially seem extraneous to narrative development, but instead how these moments help contribute to the conversion from fictional to real feeling—to an embodied response soon channeled in the appropriate direction.

More, however, remains to be said about the status of these imitative actions envisioned to transpire beyond the walls of the theatre, or to what end, and action, these feelings are supposed to be channeled. On the one hand, the play’s modeling of an ethical behavior—its direct appeal to the audience to channel their “touched hearts” and “tears of sympathy” to extending their hand to the poor on the streets—seems very familiar to readers of Victorian fiction, where (with some exceptions), the depiction of the real never quite amounted to the “death of the ideal,” but instead

actively sought to, as Suzanne Keen captures it, “cultivate the reader’s sympathetic imagination.”<sup>251</sup> Of course, the term imagination highlights a crucial distinction—if, say, Eliot’s fiction aimed to extend her reader’s sympathies and moral capacities through their imagination—a sensation drama like *The Streets of London* presents a different model, where perhaps the imagination comes into play to convert the sympathetic feelings into real actions drawn from the mimic scene, or as Bain captures the direction of the imagination: “the Imagination is determined by the Feelings, and not the Feelings by the Imagination. Intensity of feeling, emotion, or passion, is the earlier fact.”<sup>252</sup> Once the play has stoked the appropriate “intensity of feeling,” imagination is then required on the streets themselves to redirect this feeling into a relationship with actual people on the streets. Nonetheless, even if it is working quite differently, it still may share more in common with Thomas Laqueur’s vision of the “humanitarian narrative,” than it would appear for something that is “all sensation and no substance.” As Laqueur writes,

The humanitarian narrative exposes the lineaments of causality and of human agency: ameliorative action is represented as possible, effective, and therefore, morally imperative. Someone or something did something that caused pain, suffering, or death and that could, under certain circumstances, have been avoided or mitigated... In sharp contrast to tragedy, in which we feel for the suffering of the protagonist precisely because it is universal and beyond help... the humanitarian narrative describes particular suffering and offers a model for precise social action.<sup>253</sup>

After tracing a generative action that caused suffering, the end of *The Streets of London* exactly “offers a model for precise social action.”

This model for social action, however, offers its own set of problems. While it might become tempting to view the play as a kind of “drama of purpose,” and wonder how its modeling of ethical behavior intersects and diverges with other models offered, for instance, by the Victorian social problem novel and novel of purpose, this stance is somewhat undermined, not least by

---

<sup>251</sup> Keen, 38. On idealism and Victorian realism, see also Sharon Marcus, “Comparative Sapphism,” in *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel* ed. Carolyn Dever and Margaret Cohen (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 268-271 and Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 40-41.

<sup>252</sup> Alexander Bain, “Common Errors on Mind,” *Fortnightly Review* (August 1868): 166.

<sup>253</sup> Thomas Laqueur, “Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative,” *The New Cultural History*, ed. Lynn Hunt (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989): 179.

contemporary scholarship's reminders of compassion, sentiment, and sympathy's lack of political efficacy.<sup>254</sup> Instead, it might not feel right to conceive of the play—or Boucicault—as working within a register of social reform because it appears to lack the institutional critique often associated with literatures of reform—critiques, that, interestingly, are more explicitly present in the Boucicault's earlier American adaptation, *The Poor of New York*. In the American version of the play, the critiques of the financial industry are much more incisive: while *The Streets of London* personalizes Crawley's crime, making it clear he did it in the name of protecting his daughter Alida, in *The Poor of New York*, Bloodgood is more explicitly villainous, standing in as a representative of a finance world that capitalizes visibly on the plight of others (“if this panic do but last, I shall double my fortune!”[44]). The British version, on the other hand, jettisons some of the more explicit language about finance as an industry, instead expanding the scenes like the one in Trafalgar Square to focus on creating sympathetic connection with and compassion for the poor on the streets through the strategies I've already explored. Of course this sympathy is never quite sympathy for difference: the play never quite invokes a poor born into poverty, but instead promotes identification through the higher class audiences known to frequent the Princess's Theatre. The play effectively asks the audience to care about middle to upper class people who have fallen from their status into poverty, and thus the audience's compassion for the “poor creatures” draws upon their own fear of a similar fall.

Furthermore, the action called for, is of course, not an appeal to reform the finance and banking industry, but an appeal to the Brownlow version of individual benevolence. As Amanda Claybaugh captures the distinction between charity and reform in *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World*:

---

<sup>254</sup> See especially, Lauren Berlant, “Introduction Compassion (and Withholding),” in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 15-29 and Keen, *Empathy and Narrative*.

Where charity expects that we will feel compassion for the single ‘wretched woman’ standing before us, reform calls upon us to encompass in our minds all ‘miserable creatures,’ whether we ever see them or not. In this way, reform brings each of us in turn into an imagined relation with all of the urban poor.<sup>255</sup>

In this respect, *The Streets of London* would appear to be firmly on the side of charity: the play asks its audience to extend their hands to the single individuals they see standing on the streets before them, even if its very final line, to give a tribute to the collective “poor of London” somewhat abstracts this set of individuals. This abstraction is further heightened by the fact that this line was substituted for any play in which the city was performed, thus forming an unwritten “imagined relation” between the poor of the cities across England and between urban environments in England and those on the other side of the Atlantic. And yet, *Streets* still subtly suggests that this problem of poverty can neither be met at the level of the individual nor should be conceived at the level of the transnational: as Mark Livingstone says after hearing of Paul and Lucy’s fall into “destitution and hunger,” “Hunger! I thought that hunger in wealthy England was impossible”(7). Instead, as the play makes clear, the problem rests in the condition of England and the level of the nation as well.

The question of how sensation and sympathy fused to aesthetic form and lead to effects in the real world was not only posed by *The Streets of London* but tended to weave their way through critical reactions to the sensation drama more broadly. For instance, in Boucicault’s play of slave life in Louisiana, *The Octoroon* (Adelphi Theatre, November 1861) a critical debate erupted over the controversial ending that had appeared first in America and subsequently debuted in London—the tragic suicide of the octoroon, Zoe. While famously, Boucicault, responding to reactions from its British press and audience, was forced to rewrite the ending for the British production so Zoe would live, a lively debate played out in the press that hinged upon whether or not the ending represented an aesthetic and generic failure, or whether, as Boucicault suggested, it represented a larger shift of mind in attitudes towards slavery: “had this girl been saved, and the drama brought to a happy end,

---

<sup>255</sup> Amanda Claybaugh, *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World*, 57-58.

the horrors of her position, irremediable from the very nature of the institution of slavery, would subside into the condition of a temporary annoyance.”<sup>256</sup> At stake was the question of sympathy: how could the aesthetic form and its development maximize sympathy for the position of the slave, or how did the end of the play inculcate the correct “condition of mind” in the audience?<sup>257</sup>

In Charles Reade’s stage adaptation of his novel, *It’s Never too Late to Mend* (Princess’s Theatre, October 1865) the debate was even more acute and scandalous. Critics treated his play as a sensation drama, with outrage developing over what was viewed as its sensation scene, a graphic depiction of prison conditions, complete with the treadmill torture system, deemed to be “one of the most painful and disgusting scenes we ever witnessed in a theatre.”<sup>258</sup> Critics registered shock that “our treatment of criminals being made the theme of a sensation drama,” arguing that this sensation scene simply went too far in its graphic realism and its effects on the audience:

Much that the eye can read with patience, the eye cannot see without repulsion. We may read of men on the treadmill, or fainting at the crank, and feel our indignation roused; but to have the curtain rise upon that harrowing scene—to see a close reproduction of this ignoble spectacle of humanity degraded—is what cannot be tolerated on stage.<sup>259</sup>

The sensation drama left open the possibility that the audience would be “assaulted” by “dissecting rooms and hospitals put on stage next.”<sup>260</sup> If part of the suggestion here is that the effects of the scene so assaulted the audience that it didn’t allow the proper impression and sympathy to fully form, the reviews also tied this misfiring affective response to the question of ameliorative action. As critics advanced, this particular prison system had already ceased, and while its representation could have been necessary if it could lead to some form of action; instead, for the audience, an “unnecessary shock was given to their feelings by forcing upon their notice the sight of brutalities

---

<sup>256</sup> Dion Boucicault, “The Octoroon,” *The Times* (20 November 1861): 5.

<sup>257</sup> See above, plus: “The Author, not Public Feeling, at Fault” *Examiner* (23 November 1861); “The Drama,” *London Review* (23 November 1861).

<sup>258</sup> *Morning Advertiser* (5 October 1865): 6 quoted in Daniel Barrett, “*It is Never Too Late to Mend* (1865) and Prison Conditions in Nineteenth-Century England,” *Theatre Research International* 18.1 (March 1993): 4-15.

<sup>259</sup> “It’s Never Too Late To Mend,” *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 October 1865): 10-11.

<sup>260</sup> *Ibid.*

which made the heart sicken and the mind shudder to contemplate” since their feeling could not be channeled into the appropriate direction and action.<sup>261</sup>

As these examples and *The Streets of London* suggest, far from being a matter of “pure spectacle,” the sensation drama was often seen to raise questions about how sensational effects embedded in form and lead to affective responses and reflective ameliorative actions. The sensation drama—thus, perhaps surprisingly—becomes a locus for thinking through the process of illusion in which fictional feelings convert into real feelings, and causes generate affects and effects within those consuming it.

---

<sup>261</sup> “It’s Never Too Late To Mend,” *Era* (8 October 1865): 11.



Figure 2: Playbill, *The Streets of London*, August 1864, Boucicault Collection, University of Kent, UKC-POS-BOUC-THEPRS.0648154.





Figure 3: Advertising Card, *The Streets of London*, 1864, V&A Museum n. S.2520-1986, [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk).

**Chapter Three:**  
**“Catching Fire of the Witness”:**  
**The Melodrama of Emotional Transmission in**  
**Collins’ *The Red Vial*, *The Woman in White*, and *No Name***

In Wilkie Collins’ collection of short stories, *The Queen of Hearts* (1859), a young woman visits the home of her elderly legal guardian and his brothers. The guardian receives a surprising letter from his son—he is finally on his way home from Crimea, and asks the brothers to devise a way to delay the departure of their young guest, as he wants to propose to her. The brothers consider how best to fulfill this mission since their guest seems restless and ready to depart. As they wonder, “the piano and the novels had both failed to attract her. What other amusement was there to offer?”<sup>262</sup> One of the brothers returns to the question of novels, asking her why she has grown bored with them. As she responds,

...I’m sick to death of novels with an earnest purpose. I’m sick to death of outbursts of eloquence and large-minded philanthropy, and graphic descriptions, and unsparing anatomy of the human heart, and all that sort of thing... Isn’t it the original intention or purpose, or whatever you call it, of a work of fiction, to set out distinctly by telling a story? And how many of these books, I should like to know, do that? Why, so far as telling a story is concerned, the great part of them might as well be sermons as novels... What I want is something that seizes hold of my interest, and makes me forget when it is time to dress for dinner; something that keeps me reading, reading, reading, in a breathless state to find out the end.<sup>263</sup>

Upon hearing this, the brothers arrive at a plan: to “lure” her into prolonging her stay, they will tell her mysterious tales drawn from their life experiences as “plainly and unpretendingly” as possible, in order to “pique the curiosity and impress the imagination of our young guest.”<sup>264</sup> Or, as one brother summarizes the task of storytelling, “I’m to make her flesh creep and to frighten her out of her wits. I’ll do it with a vengeance.”<sup>265</sup>

It is tempting to read this reorientation of the novel around the concept of storytelling as a summation of Collins’ own point of view. While at once this frame for his collection of short stories rings hollow—the motivation of entertaining the young guest with different tales to keep her there

---

<sup>262</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Queen of Hearts*, vol. I (London: Hurst and Blackett, 1859), 91.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 95-97.

<sup>264</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

until another character returns is also Collins providing an excuse to repackage already published short stories in one “new” collection—it still, nonetheless, captures an insight into Collins’ perspective on his work. After all, upon his death, he was referred to as “A Living Story-Teller”; as one reviewer described, his contribution was “tale-telling,” and “to have something worth the telling, and to say it in the clearest and most vivid manner, and to say it in such a way as to excite the reader’s suspense, stir his emotions...—this is to be a story-teller indeed.”<sup>266</sup>

In his own work, Collins’ short stories and prefaces to novels continually return to the aim of telling a story in order to produce a specific affective state of interest and excitement. For instance, in another short story collection, *After Dark* (1856), a character prepares to recount a story once told to him: “The story interested and impressed me in no ordinary degree; and I now purpose putting the events of it together as skillfully and strikingly as I can, in the hope that this written version of the narrative may appeal as strongly to the reader’s sympathies as the spoken version did to mine.”<sup>267</sup> Or, as Collins writes in the 1861 preface to *The Woman in White*, “I have always held the old-fashioned opinion that the primary object of a work of fiction should be to tell a story” one that “can hope to lay a strong hold on the attention of readers.”<sup>268</sup> The desire to tell a story that aims to capture readers’ attention and interest also helps clarify and account for Collins’ fluidity across media—both the extent to which he wrote novels and plays, but, perhaps more importantly, the extent to which his novels are structured and saturated in melodrama and conditions of embodied performance. As he famously wrote of the novel and theater in the preface to *Basil*,

Believing that the Novel and the Play are twin-sisters in the family of Fiction; that one is a drama narrated, as the other is a drama acted; and that all the strong and deep emotions which the Play-writer is privileged to excite, the Novel-writer is privileged to excite also...<sup>269</sup>

---

<sup>266</sup> Harry Quilter, “A Living Story-Teller,” *The Contemporary Review* 53 (April 1888): 576.

<sup>267</sup> Wilkie Collins, *After Dark*, vol. II (London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1856), 58.

<sup>268</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* ed. Matthew Sweet (London: Penguin Books, 1999/1859-60), 7.

<sup>269</sup> Wilkie Collins, *Basil* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 4.

Collins, essentially, refuses a strict distinction between media; instead, he emphasizes that storytelling or fiction across media is dramatic and abides by a specific aim or goal: to “excite” “strong and deep emotions.”

It is debatable whether or not this affective aim ever really remained as free from “earnest purpose” as *The Queen of Hearts* ostensibly suggests; Collins work often engaged directly in the social and legal currents of his time. While his later “didactic” period of novel writing was memorably dismissed by Swinburne—“What brought good Wilkie’s genius nigh perdition?/ Some demon whispered, ‘Wilkie! Have a mission’”<sup>270</sup>—as Victorian critics acknowledged, even an early novel like *No Name*, as Mansel observed, served as “principally a protest against the law which determines the social position of illegitimate children.”<sup>271</sup> And, as contemporary critics have noted, *The Woman in White* offers a critique of women’s status in marriage and the erasure of identity posed by coverture, and, as I will argue, its affective aims seem to amplify its exposure of the law by making it felt, by giving it bodily sensation. Therefore, this chapter will also further pursue a question developed in chapter two, around the sensation *drama*, this time asking what kind of labor the affective work of the sensation *novel* considered itself to perform, or what kind of interrelation was imagined between its affects and effects.

However, at its core, the chapter is animated by another more basic question: if, for Collins, fiction was imagined to “excite” “attention,” “interest” and “strong and deep emotions,” what were its strategies for doing so? How was medium and form envisioned to carry and shape feeling? What kinds of attention did these works focus on this process? This chapter turns to the first and formative sensation novel—*The Woman in White*—in order to consider how it, and therefore the sensation novel more broadly, conceived of the scene of the transmission of emotion—both within the scene of the novel, between characters, or between characters and text, and from its fictional

---

<sup>270</sup> Algernon Swinburne, “Wilkie Collins,” *Fortnightly Review* (November 1889): 598.

<sup>271</sup> Henry Mansel, “Sensation Novels,” *Quarterly Review* (April 1863): 495.

scenes into its real readership. I argue that Collins thematized the transmission of feeling in his work and that *The Woman in White* constitutes the height of what I call the “melodrama of transmission,” an embodied mode of witnessing. I suggest that the affective labor in *The Woman in White* becomes clearer and more specific when we constellate it with Collins’ other work in this period: his spectacular failure that appeared before it, the melodrama, *The Red Vial* (1858) and the novel written after the success of *The Woman in White* (1859-60), *No Name* (1862-63).

This triptych, I argue, unfolds a movement that fleshes out the scene of emotional and sensational transfer envisioned by the sensation novel. First, I turn to Wilkie Collins’ ignored melodrama, *The Red Vial*, written in the year before *The Woman in White*, arguing that it constitutes an experiment in achieving a “design on th[e] nerves” of the audience that was thought to be a failure—a work that missed the mark and misfired its affects/effects. I then turn to *The Woman in White* to argue that one of the reasons it is *the* paradigmatic sensation novel is that it continually stages scenes of the transmission of sensation and feeling—the novel elaborates a “melodrama of transmission,” that corporealizes print and develops a structure of emotional transfer in which the reader can “catch fire of the witness.” Finally, I turn to the work that follows *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, considering how it advances and explores the limits of sensational exchange—the traumatic shocks or stimuli that rupture and risk breaking down, the entire nervous system. This fuller arc—from misfiring sensation, to the staging of emotional transmission, to the traumatic rupture caused by shocks too overwhelming to assimilate and absorb—not only complicates a reading of “sensation” in *The Woman in White*, but also underscores the sensation novel’s connection to structures of feeling like anxiety and trauma, while letting us think through the affective work these novels perform in relation to other configurations of melodrama and realism.

*Section 1: The “Design on the Nerves” Misfiring: Wilkie Collins’ The Red Vial*

Premiering October 11, 1858 at the Olympic Theatre, Wilkie Collins’ *The Red Vial* drew a large audience that had been eagerly awaiting its arrival. With success across a range of media and genres—from novels like *Basil* to short stories in periodicals and collections like *After Dark*, to a public stage production of *The Lighthouse* (Olympic, August 1857), and private stage productions of *The Frozen Deep* (Gallery of Illustrations, August 1857)<sup>272</sup>—it is not surprising that Collins’ new production would attract considerable interest. As one reviewer wrote of its opening night, “An audience distinguished, not only in numbers, but in character, including as it did very many of the literary and artistic celebrities of the day, assembled last night at this theatre, to witness the production of a new drama which has lately been a frequent topic of speculative conversation in theatrical circles.”<sup>273</sup>

As excited as audiences may have been before the show, as the night unfolded, anticipation turned to discontent, and discontent into remonstrations, with audiences loudly booing the show by the curtains’ fall, and critics eviscerating it in papers over the next few weeks.<sup>274</sup> As one critic wrote, the audience was “doomed to the severest disappointment. The whole thing was a complete failure. The naked horror of the piece, with its poisoning and dead-house and resuscitated corpse, disgusted the whole audience, as it might well do, for the treatment was in defiance of all sound rules of art and taste.”<sup>275</sup> *The Red Vial* was, as another critic captured it, “summarily damned on the first night of its production.”<sup>276</sup> As yet another observed of the parameters of the play’s failure, “the effect on the

---

<sup>272</sup> For glowing reviews of the public performance of *The Lighthouse*, see for instance, “The Arts,” *The Leader* (August 15, 1857); Morley, “The Theatrical Examiner,” *The Examiner* (August 15, 1857). For effusive reviews of *The Frozen Deep*, see for instance, “The Theatricals at the Gallery of Illustration,” *The Saturday Review* (August 1, 1857).

<sup>273</sup> “Drama” *Daily News* (October 12, 1858). See also, “The Theatrical Lounger,” *Illustrated Times* (October 9, 1858).

<sup>274</sup> “Olympic Theatre,” *The Times* (October 12, 1858):10; “Drama” *Daily News* (October 12, 1858).

<sup>275</sup> “From Our London Correspondent,” *Manchester Times* (October 16, 1858).

<sup>276</sup> “The Drama, Music, ETC.,” *Reynolds Newspaper* (October 17, 1858).

audience is not that which an author contemplates, nor an actor aims at—an immediate desire to get up and leave the theatre.”<sup>277</sup>

While Wilkie Collins would revise some of the more objectionable aspects of the play to make it more palatable to audiences and the play lasted on stage for a month, critics welcomed its inevitable demise, suggesting that the plays that replaced it at the Olympic Theatre offered a necessary form of cleansing: “an event much to be desired as the poisonous vapour which had evaporated from *The Red Vial* had permeated the theatre and associated it with a noxious species of drama, which had it succeeded, would have infected the town universally. The new production is of so healthful a kind...that it has completely purified the place...”<sup>278</sup>

As Wilkie Collins, in a rare comment about the play’s failure, would reflect upon it a few years later in 1862,

*The Red Vial* was performed at the Olympic Theatre...I have written no other Drama since, and my literary success has been entirely as a novelist. If I had been a Frenchman—with such a public to write for, such rewards to win, and such actors to interpret me, as the French stage presents—all the stories I have written from ‘Antonia’ to ‘The Woman in White’ would have been told in dramatic form. Whether their successes as plays would have been equal to their successes as novels is not for me to decide; but if I know anything of my own faculty, it is a dramatic one.<sup>279</sup>

His slightly wistful tone notwithstanding, the story of *The Red Vial*—which is really the story of audiences and critics’ reaction to *The Red Vial*—does not merely adhere to a narrative of theatrical failure reinvigorating novelistic production, or even one of the private spaces of the novel melancholically longing for the public spaces of the theatre.<sup>280</sup> After all, as I have explored, the novelistic and dramatic were always too fluid for Collins to be so rigidly demarcated; over the next two decades, Collins would continue writing novels, stage adaptations of his novels, novels that took

---

<sup>277</sup> “Dramatic Intelligence,” *The Musical World* (October 16, 1858): 668.

<sup>278</sup> On the revisions: “Musical and Dramatic Gossip,” *The Athenaeum* (October 23, 1858). On purification: “The Theatres,” *The Critic* (December 4, 1858): 862.

<sup>279</sup> Wilkie Collins, “Letter to an Unknown Recipient, 21 March 1862,” in *The Letters of Wilkie Collins* Vol. 1, ed. William Baker and William M. Clarke, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), 208.

<sup>280</sup> See David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) and Emily Allen, *Theater Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003).

the form of plays (*New Magdalen*, 1873) novelistic adaptations of plays (his 1880 *Jezebel's Daughter* was based on *The Red Vial*), as well as sensation novels that incorporated melodramatic elements in its plotting and form, and plays that often relied on narration. What mattered was storytelling, and in particular, how stories could be told in a way that physically affected and stirred an audience (“to excite the suspense or pity of the reader”),<sup>281</sup> and how stories told in different media worked to transmit affect and feeling to an audience. Inasmuch as *The Red Vial* marked a spectacular misfiring of sensation—a form that failed to achieve the affect and effect it sought to induce in spectators, it remains relevant to the work that would emerge on the pages of *All the Year Round* a year later, the advent of a new genre that would soon be called the sensation novel, *The Woman in White*.<sup>282</sup>

*The Red Vial* constitutes an earlier, failed experiment in elements of sensation—or more specifically, in inducing sensation—an experiment that would be refined, recalibrated, and achieve success in *The Woman in White*, a novel that largely thematizes how sensation is induced and transferred. The aesthetic failure of *The Red Vial* helps highlight and inform a reading of the novel’s obsession with the transmission of sensation, and how feeling is understood to be transmitted between fictional characters, and between the page and the imagined real life bodies reading it. As we will see, the critical debates that emerged around *The Red Vial* resonate strongly with critiques that would be leveled at the sensation novel in the years to come: critics condemned the play’s vulgar realism, its reliance on sordid incident, its misdirecting of sympathies around villains, and most importantly for our purposes, for the ways its form impacted the bodies of its spectators and played on their nerves.

---

<sup>281</sup> Collins, *Basil*, 4.

<sup>282</sup> While some critics have mentioned *The Red Vial* in passing, there has not been an analysis of Victorian critics’ reaction to it, or a discussion of the play itself. For those who reference it the most thoroughly, see: Graham Law and Andrew Maunder, *Wilkie Collins: A Literary Life* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008). For a reading of the novel based on *The Red Vial, Jezebel's Daughter*, see: Laurence Talairach-Vielmas, *Wilkie Collins, Medicine, and the Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009).



Set in Frankfurt, Germany in the early nineteenth century, the basic plot of *The Red Vial* follows a series of crimes that take place in the merchant business of Isaac Rodenberg and his partner Max Keller. Rodenberg's housekeeper, the Widow Bergmann, has a daughter, Minna, set to marry Keller's son, Karl in a few months time. However, as Rodenberg will soon discover, the Widow Bergmann has been hiding a secret in order to allow her daughter's nuptials to proceed: she is in debt, and has been stealing from the House of Rodenberg/Keller. Rodenberg decides not to tell her secret as long as she repays the money just after her daughter has married. However, the marriage date is pushed back, the deadline arrives, and the Widow Bergmann is unable to repay the money. Cast aside by her own relatives and attempting to keep her secret safe and ensure the happiness of her daughter, she decides her only available option is to poison Rodenberg with THE RED VIAL, one of the compounds left to her by her chemist husband. However, Hans, the faithful servant that Rodenberg has rescued from an insane asylum, overhears her plans and replaces the poison with an antidote. When attempts to rouse Rodenberg are unsuccessful, the Widow believes she successfully carried out her crime. The final act of the play takes place in a deadhouse in Frankfurt where the dead are taken and their arms tied to a bell to make sure that they are not buried alive. While Hans carouses with the watchman, suddenly a bell rings, Rodenberg's naked arm appears from behind the door—he is alive! He was merely in a state of suspended life from the narcotics in the antidote. The Widow Bergmann sees he's alive and poisons herself—and just before she dies, finds out, her relatives had decided to pay off her debt after all.

Set at a remove from contemporary London life, *The Red Vial's* plot, at first blush, bears more of an affinity to earlier stage melodramas indebted to the Gothic than the kind of plots of precarious identity and “mysteries that are at our own doors” that emerge on the pages of the sensation novel in the years that would follow. Critics clearly identified its allegiance to earlier melodramas, deriding it as an “old-fashioned” or “vulgar” melodrama that could have been seen in

the transpontine playhouses and had merely been dressed up in the style of the literary, when it was little else than “a silk purse made of a sow’s ear.”<sup>283</sup> Of course, as we have seen in chapter one, this line of attack often made its way into latter critiques of the sensation novel, which was similarly criticized for its affinities to a “trans-Thamesic” illegitimate style of representation.<sup>284</sup> Critics also attacked all levels of its subject matter, advancing that it suffered from a dubious morality, as the audience was “asked for some sort of sympathy with [a] mother’s love that begets robbery and murder,”<sup>285</sup> highlighting the discomfort around not only having the female lead be a criminal, but also in the play’s positioning of that female criminal as a heroine. All agreed that the subject matter was vile, repulsive, and morbid, and contained an overabundance of incident. As one critic encompassed his critique in a diatribe that could have been, and indeed would eventually be written, of sensation novels in the years to come:

We imagine the recipe for composing such a play to be something of the following nature. Take lunacy, felony, and murder, beat them well up together—cram in incident as thick as possible—sprinkle in some touching family affections—spice with love, lawful or unlawful, according to demand—sweeten with some lack-a-daisical morality...pour in horror abundantly—then churn the whole well up together till you can get each particular hair on your own head to stand on end...Language and character are of no importance in a drama of this kind—for the first, take whatever comes to hand, and for the second purpose, the characters may be divided into villains and honest men, the tender and the savage, the sane and the idiotic; intermediate shades not required.<sup>286</sup>

In this “recipe,” it is not just the subject matter that is critiqued, but aspects of form and aim. And indeed the most interesting and most pervasive critique of *The Red Vial* centered on issues of its form, at once, its flawed formal innovation and how this innovation impacted the bodies of the audience, and missed its intended mark.

One of the most universal critiques focused on the pacing and rhythm of its action. At issue was not only that *The Red Vial* depicted horrors, but that “the horrors are too closely piled

---

<sup>283</sup> See “The Drama and Music,” *The Literary Gazette* (October 16, 1858): 508; “Olympic Theatre,” *The Times* (October 12, 1858).

<sup>284</sup> “Philosophy of Sensation,” *St. James’ Magazine* (October 1862): 340.

<sup>285</sup> Henry Morley, “The Theatrical and Musical Examiner,” *The Examiner* (October 16, 1858), 661.

<sup>286</sup> “Plays and Players,” *New Quarterly Review* (November 1858): 311.

together.”<sup>287</sup> Critics recognized this was in fact one of the distinguishing features of the piece, that in the play, “Mr. Wilkie Collins has experimented in a drama without one break in the chain of crime and terror...”<sup>288</sup> They lamented that the play featured neither the comic interludes of melodrama to vary the tone, nor the “fine gleams of poetry” of tragedy to “relieve and turn the mind from the intervening horrors. Mr. Collins disdains relief of this kind, and has given us a demonic interchange of plotting between a she-poisoner and half-witted lunatic; and we have thus a hazy and devilish dance of murder, idiocy, and drunkenness.”<sup>289</sup> The argument that audiences required relief from the relentless pace of the play finds a sound basis in mid-nineteenth century physiological thought about cognitive processes found in writers like Alexander Bain. As Nicholas Dames has noted in relation to rhythm and attention in reading, Bain offered a “wave theory” of affect and attention: effectively, periods of concentration required periods of intermission and relaxation in order for feelings to be properly diffused and cognitive engagement to fully occur.<sup>290</sup> However, with the play’s “piling of agonies” without any “relief,” as a critic observed, “the audience therefore makes breaks for itself at very inconvenient places.”<sup>291</sup> As reviewers emphasized, the form itself creates the conditions and feelings of reception, and with this play, the audience was unable to fall in sync with its form.

This line of critique also extended in the interrelated direction of the play’s realism, its problem with present bodies, and its medium of representation and form. By piling on “horror after horror” without any breaks or buffering, as one critic had it, “the facts are left to their own naked repulsiveness.”<sup>292</sup> The use of the term “naked” highlights several enmeshed complaints raised about the play: at once, critics reserved some of their most incisive criticism for the depiction of bodies in the dead-house in the play’s final act. As a critic observed, “the appearance of the revived

---

<sup>287</sup> “Drama,” *Daily News* (October 12, 1858).

<sup>288</sup> Morley, *The Examiner*, 661.

<sup>289</sup> “The Theatres,” *The Critic* (October 16, 1858): 693.

<sup>290</sup> See Nicholas Dames, “Wave Theories and Affective Physiologies: The Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories,” *Victorian Studies* 46.2 (Winter 2004): 214.

<sup>291</sup> Henry Morley, *The Journal of a London Playgoer*, ed. Michael Booth (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974), 190.

<sup>292</sup> “Dramatic Intelligence,” *The Musical World* (October 16, 1858): 667.

Rodenberg's bare arm, as it was obtrusively thrust forward through an opening door, was in particular, revolting"<sup>293</sup> and indeed, the reanimated, "naked" arm was so thoroughly condemned that Collins was forced to rewrite and excise this moment.<sup>294</sup> If the naked arm at once represented to critics a "repulsive" realism on stage, their unease gestured towards a broader discomfort with embodiment and presence unique to the medium of theatre. As a critic wrote, "images of crime, and poison, and death are made visible to the audiences from first to last, and during the last two acts the spectator is to feel that he is breathing alternately the atmosphere of the sick-room and the charnel house..."<sup>295</sup> In this account, seeing actual bodily forms participating in representations of crime and death overwhelmed the feelings of the audience witnessing them. The act of viewing the embodied scenes was equated with a contagion in which the spectating body viewing the acts risked dangerously consuming, feeling, and breathing in the "poisonous vapours" before them.

While critics maintained that the problem with *The Red Vial* stemmed from the way the story appeared in "flesh and blood," "offered bodily to our senses for two hours study," they concluded the story would have been perfectly acceptable if it had appeared in a different medium: "If told on paper, as none would know better than Mr. Wilkie Collins how to tell it, everything in it would pass muster; the reader would be in the story-teller's power..."<sup>296</sup> The concern again pivots on reception and how the form and medium would affect the person consuming it. As an audience member writing to *The Daily News* observed, "had it come before us in the pages of *Household Words*, simply written...it would doubtless have impressed its readers with precisely the feelings which he would have desired, although when brought visibly before us, much of it repelled and disgusted."<sup>297</sup> In

---

<sup>293</sup> "Music and the Drama," *The Athenaeum* (October 16, 1858): 496.

<sup>294</sup> For more on the rewrite see, for instance: "Theatres and Public Entertainments," *The Leader* (October 16, 1858); "The Drama and Music," *The Literary Gazette* (October 16, 1858).

<sup>295</sup> "Theatres, &c.," *The Era* (October 17, 1858).

<sup>296</sup> Morley, *The Examiner*, 661.

<sup>297</sup> "The Red Vial. To the Editor of *The Daily News*," *The Daily News* (October 14, 1858).

these accounts of audience members and critics, the visibility and embodiment of the story on stage seemed to explain its failure to induce the “correct” impression.

Its faults in form, however, were also blamed. As the audience member noted, basic elements of its representation failed; for instance, in the last scene, the bell that signals that a dead body is in fact alive should have “forcibly impressed us” instead,

In spite of our knowledge that the scene before us is but illusory, we are held in breathless suspense; suddenly the hand of the dial moves...we await in eager impatience that awful sound...What follows? —a sound that would not disturb the repose of a sleeping infant; a sound that produces no result whatever, failing apparently to reach the ears of any persons whose attention it was intended to draw. Not thus would our imaginations have filled up the details of this fearful picture had the author placed it before us in the pages of a romance...

298

While the audience member effectively describes an experience of “breathless suspense,” as a kind of hyper-presence to the illusory scene set before them in a way that is useful for thinking about the accounts of “breathless suspense” that would occur to readers of the sensation novel, of course, the point is that the “eager impatience” was disrupted by an instance of bad form—a bell that was too soft to induce its proper effects on the audience. Yet, even this instance of critiquing “bad form” again turns into a broader comment on medium—the audience member does not simply say that the production should have used a louder bell, but that it should have forgone visual, theatrical representation altogether and have been left to the mind’s eye of a reader.

Whatever faults of medium and form *The Red Vial* was perceived to suffer from, critics agreed the real problem was the outcome these faults created: “the impression upon the audience is not that which the author intended.”<sup>299</sup> Furthermore, they often depicted this misfiring form creating a misfired impression in explicitly physiological based terms. The play failed to impress the audience with the desired effect because it did not properly play on the audience’s nerves. As critics described, the piece was “exceedingly repugnant to the nerves of modern audiences”<sup>300</sup> and its “contents [we]re

---

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> “Theatres, &c.,” *The Era* (October 17, 1858).

<sup>300</sup> “Olympic Theatre,” *The Times* (October 12, 1858): 10.

a little too strong for Olympic nerves.”<sup>301</sup> Rather than affecting the nerves in the way intended, “the design on their nerves exhibited in the gloomy third act failed of its object and only excited disgust in some and amusement in others.”<sup>302</sup> In this account, while a “design on their nerves” exists to yield a particular affective outcome, instead, the work excited the wrong feeling.

## *Section 2: The Melodrama of Transmission*

Inasmuch as the play aimed to excite the audience’s nerves (and therefore feelings) in a certain direction and yet failed to do so, its misfiring raises questions highly relevant to the sensation debate. First and foremost, how was medium and form envisioned to carry, direct, transmit, communicate, and shape feeling? As I explored in chapter two, Bain’s discussion of sympathy helps us consider this idea of transmission; for Bain, “sympathy” is not the moral emotion of sympathy (although the moral emotion sympathy can emerge through the sympathetic process), but instead stands for the broader process of emotional transmission or communication of feeling that can take place both between people, and more importantly for our purposes, between a work of art and those encountering it through any medium. As he writes, sympathy is “the tendency of one individual to fall in with the emotional or active states of others, these states being made known through a certain medium of expression.”<sup>303</sup> The “certain medium of expression” acts as the crucial facilitator of this exchange. The sympathetic process or communication of feeling happens when we witness subtle or obvious manifestations of feeling registered on the body (itself arising from diffused nervous currents) ranging from facial expression, to gesture, to vocal tone, to subtle movements of the eye or breathing, and, importantly, to the pace, rhythm, and changes to all of these forms of expression.<sup>304</sup>

---

<sup>301</sup> “Untitled Item,” *The Musical World* (November 6, 1858): 713.

<sup>302</sup> “The Drama and Music,” *The Literary Gazette* (October 16, 1858): 508.

<sup>303</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: John. W. Parker and Son, 1859), 210.

<sup>304</sup> Bain, *EW*, 211, 215.

As I noted in chapter two, in Bain, theatre becomes an important focal point in his discussion of how the sympathetic process works: since it relies on bodily presence manifesting feelings witnessed by an audience, he calls on theatre at once to describe how the sympathetic process works between bodies in real life, as well as how it works between bodies in a fictional scene of representation and the spectating body witnessing it. That is, he uses stage performance as a basis for explaining how feeling spreads and the extent to which this process depends upon “witnessing” form. As he writes, “the character of the expression that we witness” matters as there can be a

...disparity in the power of manifesting emotion strongly, clearly, and characteristically, so as to render it infectious to all beholders...It is a common remark that if a man himself feels, he can make others feel; but this takes for granted that he has an adequate power of outward manifestation...It is true that Kean, Kemble, or Macready, when affected by strong emotion, could so express themselves as to kindle a corresponding flame in those about them; but it is not true that any Dorsetshire ploughman could stir the fervours of an assemblage of people merely because his own emotion was strong and genuine...It is proper, however, to remark that the Dorsetshire ploughman, if his strong feeling shows itself unmistakably in any form, will call forth a certain amount of sympathy...<sup>305</sup>

In this account, it is not enough to simply have feeling; feeling has to manifest itself in form and medium in order to be communicated—or “rendered infectious”—to those witnessing it. At the core of the exchange of feeling in Bain’s account, lies form and a kind of spectatorship or witnessing of form; as he observes, “if by witnessing the manifested expression of a sufferer, we could be lead to assume to the inmost depths the same diffusion, it would follow that we should ourselves suffer in the like manner.”<sup>306</sup> Feeling must “show itself unmistakably” in “form” and this form must be “witnessed.”

Inasmuch as this account of the transmission of feeling assumes a bodily and visual presence—an act of witnessing forms of feeling legible in bodily signs—it also raises with it a question directly relevant to the project of *The Woman in White*, a novel that follows a spectacular failure of the design on the nerves in *The Red Vial*: how does this question of transmission extend to other media? That is, how is the medium of print thought to transmit nervous currents and bodily

---

<sup>305</sup> Bain, *EW*, 213.

<sup>306</sup> Bain, *EW*, 215.

feeling and presence both within its fictional worlds and in a way that aims or shapes the nervous currents and bodily feeling of readers? Of course the question is not whether or not print can register “outward gesticulation, the play of feature, the vocal tones, the altered secretions, the nerve currents” because it has numerous strategies and forms for doing so and embodiment does not necessarily rely on present bodies. But how might those strategies work between real bodies of the readers and the imagined bodies in printed fiction, when the body as text becomes the body in text? In light of the recent failure of the “design on the nerves” in *The Red Vial* about a year before the appearance of *The Woman in White*, I would suggest these questions about how print mediates and embodies sensation and how print is imagined to transmit affect and emotion and facilitate the sympathetic process of reading bodily signs and form and “fall[ing] in with emotional or active states of others” become important to a reading of the novel.

As Victorian critics like Margaret Oliphant noted, with *The Woman in White*, this “falling in” through the nerves was not a slow process, but instead registered as a particularly acute one, a “sensation...distinct and indisputable” a “shock...as sudden, as startling, as unexpected and incomprehensible to us as it is to the hero.”<sup>307</sup> Drawing upon Oliphant’s insight that when reading *The Woman in White*, “the reader’s nerves are affected like the hero’s,”<sup>308</sup> contemporary scholars have identified the novel’s defining, distinguishing element as a physiological one, namely, that it was considered to produce a specific set of sensation and nerve-based responses in the bodies of its readers. With the novel, as Alison Winter has observed, “the route from page to nerve was direct.”<sup>309</sup>

Why, however? D.A. Miller has offered perhaps the most interesting insight into the question of why readers were understood to have a specific set of reactions to the text of *The Woman*

---

<sup>307</sup> Margaret Oliphant, “Sensation Novels,” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (May 1862): 571.

<sup>308</sup> Oliphant, 572.

<sup>309</sup> Allison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 324. See also Nicholas Dames, “1825-1880: The Network of Nerves.” *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*, ed. David Herman (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2011).



in *White*, “in order to make us nervous, nervousness must first be represented.”<sup>310</sup> We become nervous if the text we are reading is nervous, or represents nervousness. And yet Miller is largely reading “nervousness” in a pathologized sense—“nervous” is not just of the nerves, but for him, a phantasmatic, “hysterical” contagion in which we “‘catch’ sensation from the neuropathic body of the woman [in white].”<sup>311</sup> While I will later complicate Miller’s pathologized reading of nervousness, I aim now to simply explore why is it that reading nervousness is necessarily thought to translate and transmit into bodily nervousness. In her article, “Some Body’s Story: The Novel as Instrument,” Meegan Kennedy examines how *The Woman in White* functions almost like a sphygmograph, an instrument that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century that “reads and records what is hidden in the body,” namely the pulse, and similarly, the sensation novel renders and “record[s]...the surging blood and quivering nerves of these bodies...reincorporating the body through its trace.”<sup>312</sup>

While this observation about “reincorporating the body” also speaks to the question I earlier posed about how the medium of print re-embodies and re-corporealizes the body, a question remains: how does “recording” a fictional character’s bodily sensation produce a sensation in the body of a reader? Does the mere fact of bringing awareness to a character’s embodiment necessarily bring awareness and attention to our own embodiment? After all, as Lauren Berlant has asked of theorizations of the transmission of affect, in her essay, “Thinking about Feeling Historical,” what if, “our view of the communication of affect and emotion is too often simply mimetic and literalizing...If one determines that an event or relation is traumatic—that is, endowed with the capacity to produce trauma—does it follow that it communicates trauma to anyone who encounters it?”<sup>313</sup> Interestingly, she associates this more overtly mimetic view of the communication of affect

---

<sup>310</sup> D.A. Miller, *The Novel and the Police* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), 148.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>312</sup> Meegan Kennedy, “Some Body’s Story: The Novel as Instrument,” *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 42.1/2 (Winter 2009): 455.

<sup>313</sup> Lauren Berlant, “Thinking about Feeling Historical,” *Emotion, Space, and Society* (August 2008): 4.

with one particular genre: melodrama. In the contemporary affects she describes, the communication may be altered in two directions: the event itself that serves as the trigger, “begins not with drama but its absence”<sup>(7)</sup> and the feelings that get communicated tend to drift and flatten into other amorphous states. As Berlant notes, this contemporary drifting does not represent “‘the waning of affect’ but the waning of genre. Life can no longer be lived even phantasmatically as melodrama, as Aristotelian tragedy...as a predictable arc that is shaped by acts, facts, or fates.”<sup>314</sup>

Yet, with the mid-nineteenth century moment of *The Woman in White*, we are precisely in the heart of a melodrama of transmission in several senses. First, the transmission of feeling often relies on a sense of mimetic contagion (as I noted in chapter two, it matters that Bain places Sympathy and Imitation in the same chapter, as part of the same process). Second, the transmission of feeling abides by a vocabulary of bodily signs (gesture, expression, but also the pulse, muscle contractions and movements, sudden shocks registered on the body). Bodily presence is one of its constitutive features. As a critic wrote of Collins’ work, his fiction is dramatic in the way that if the “most perfect presentment of a human being is...the embodiment of himself,” Collins’ work “presents him, so to speak, on the stage of [the] book, letting him act there as he would do ‘on the boards,’ or as he would in that life of which his action ‘on the boards’ is an imitation.”<sup>315</sup> That is, his work retains a kind of bodily presence often found in the conditions of theater. Third, it often traffics in particularly heightened emotion in which, concomitantly, the ordinary assumes aspects of the extraordinary (so a chance encounter with a woman walking down the road opens a mystery), and the extraordinary assumes aspects of the ordinary (or, as Henry James observed, instead of exploring the far away terrors of the Apennines, the sensation novel focused on the “terrors of the cheerful country house and the busy London lodgings”).<sup>316</sup> The sensation novel becomes a melodrama of the

---

<sup>314</sup> Berlant, 7.

<sup>315</sup> Quilter, “A Living Story-Teller,” 577.

<sup>316</sup> Henry James “Miss Braddon,” *The Nation* (November 1865), 593.

domestic, the bodily, and the status of identity and *The Woman in White* stands as one of the chief texts of a melodrama of the transmission of feeling. Not only does the novel deploy numerous strategies to transmit feeling and maximize print's ability to record and transmit embodied feeling, but the sympathetic process becomes thematized in the novel in the form of scenes that examine the operation of transmission and highlight the workings of this process.

Before turning to the melodrama of transmission at work in the novel itself, it is worth considering how physiologists like Bain discussed how transmission and embodiment worked across media, including in literature. In a section of *The Emotions and the Will* entitled "The Literature of Plot Interest," Bain elaborates an embodied dramatics to the process of reading by sedimenting layers of presence and physicality that are involved in the narrative act of witnessing. He begins his account by focusing on a participant's highly physicalized engrossment and attention within a scene—that of an animal in the process of hunting:

An animal sees in the distance what it knows by experience to be something to eat...and the chase is begun. The double predicament of looking a-head and moving forward engrosses the entire mental and bodily system; while by coming nearer the tension of both efforts is heightened...it becomes more and more difficult to divert the creature into a new channel, or to occupy its attention with a new object ...the state of engrossed attention and vehement exercise rises to a climax...those two stimulants of the volition—difficulty and uncertainty—make the whole situation additionally intense.<sup>317</sup>

As Bain discusses, this feeling of embodied intensity, concentration, and narrative drive extends into a variety of human domains, from a participant engaged in sports, hunting, games, contests, and exercise, as well as intellectual pursuits that engage "rapt attention" like research and discovery. After discussing how interest derived from the pursuit of "beginning, middle and end" is experienced by the participant/actor, he then shifts one remove away, to the position of the spectator consuming a real-life chase or contest before them, explaining how the spectator relates to the bodies he or she is watching:

---

<sup>317</sup> Bain, *EW*, 188.

We pass now to the position of the Spectator of a chase...We are capable of entering into the situation of the actors, and becoming invested for the time with their mode of excitement...The case follows the usual laws of sympathy...<sup>318</sup>

Through sympathy, or “the tendency of one individual to fall in with the emotional or active states of others, these states being made known through a certain medium of expression,”<sup>319</sup> the spectator is able to enter into to, or assume the position of, the actor/participant in the chase and this shared, almost proprioceptive embodiment creates and intensifies the spectator’s “breathless suspense.”<sup>320</sup> The spectatorial role is a particularly embodied one, in which the observer “is capable of entering into” the role of the actors in the scene.

Moving from the situation of the spectator watching an actual event with actual bodies before him or her, Bain again steps back one remove from this live scene: what happens when a spectator isn’t seeing the bodies and events before him, but the “moving events” are narrated by language—in this case, not yet narrated fiction, but narrated real events. As he posits, since,

Language...brings before his mind scenes witnessed by other men...in so far as he is able to conceive what is thus related, he catches fire of the actual witness...The narrative of a chase, a battle, an adventure, places the hearer under the dominion of the emotion before us. The interesting stake, at first remote and uncertain, but gradually brought nearer as the successive incidents are recounted, keeps up that animated suspense, felt alike by the actor, the looker-on, and the hearer or reader...<sup>321</sup>

Once the events are no longer before the spectator, but are instead narrated, the emphasis on embodiment remains—the hearer/reader is able to “catch to the fire of the actual witness”—or to experience the feeling that the witness relays. The way reading enters towards the end of this relay suggests that reading shares a space with orality. Bain makes little difference in this passage between the hearer and the reader; both the spoken word and written word allow for a kind of double witnessing, first that of the narrator witnessing the scene and then that of the person hearing or reading, or witnessing through that narration and thus becoming more proximate to it. Another way of looking at it is a hearer/reader retains or assumes—even at the remove of narration, or rather

---

<sup>318</sup> Bain, *EW*, 194.

<sup>319</sup> Bain, *EW*, 210.

<sup>320</sup> Bain, *EW*, 195.

<sup>321</sup> Bain, *EW*, 196.

through the narration—the embodied position of a spectator witnessing an event or scene before them.

After turning more explicitly to the written word in the form of an historian writing history, Bain then moves one remove further (from the embodied presence of the participant/actor in the scene) into the realm of fiction:

While the historian is bound by fact and reality, the poet or romancer is able to accommodate his narrative so as to satisfy the exigencies of plot-interest by devices suited thereto. Calculating how much suspense the mind of a reader can easily bear; how this can be artificially sustained and prolonged; casting about also for the class of events best able to awaken agreeable emotions in a story...The novel, which is the greatest elaboration of the pleasures of ideal pursuit, is also the occasion for the greatest excesses in this mode of excitement...<sup>322</sup>

Fiction, for Bain, becomes essentially defined by the way the writer deploys strategies to induce specific responses in the reader—plot and structure seek to produce excitement, interest, and “awaken...emotion.” The novel, for Bain, offers a borderline excessive elaboration of the process of fulfilling this strategy of inducing feeling and excitement.

### *Section 3: Witnessing the Body, the Body Witnessing: The Transmission of Feeling in The Woman in White*

Bain, in other words, advances a continuum in which a reader/hearer cannot be separated from the other positions: from that of an embodied participant in a present scene, to a spectator watching embodied participants, to a narrator relaying and conjuring the embodied scene he or she witnessed, to a narrator unfolding a fictional scene of fictional bodies, to a hearer and reader “catching fire of the witness” and in effect entering into an embodied and proximate position in the scene. This process of embodied reading has relevance to *The Woman in White*, a novel that exhibits interest in the somatic position of the reader and the strategies of narrating and reading that impact and align the reader’s body with fictional, invisible bodies in order to allow the reader to witness, share, or “enter into the dominion” of their feeling.

---

<sup>322</sup> Bain, *EW*, 197.

From its outset, the novel explores the status of bodies in the scene of reading by envisioning a “liveness” and embodied presence to the act of reading. Laying out his novel’s narrative technique, Collins writes,

As the Judge might once have heard it, so the Reader shall **hear it now**. No circumstance of importance shall be related on hearsay... Thus, the story here presented will be **told** by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws **is told** in Court by more than one **witness**—the same object, in both cases, to present the truth always in its **most direct** and most intelligible aspect, and to trace the course of complete series of events, by making two persons who have been most **closely connected** with them, at each successive stage, **relate their own experience**, word for word.

Let Walter Hartright, teacher of drawing, aged twenty-eight years, be **heard** first.<sup>323</sup>

This passage has often been discussed in terms of its epistemological claim on a truth derived through the evidence of testimony. As Jan-Melissa Schramm has described this process in *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology*, “seen as evidence, testimony serves as a vehicle for the attestation of the ‘real’”; the “eye-witness” lays claim to “the proof of ‘fact’.”<sup>324</sup> My interest in this passage lies instead in how ‘the real’ is not merely harnessed through a claim to truth and evidence, but through an embodied strategy of positioning the reader as an audience in a courtroom watching and hearing witnesses. The passage does not only offer a way of knowing presented by the text, but a way of reading and consuming the text for the reader. While many have noted that Collins rather naively offers his narrative technique as something new, when for instance, the

---

<sup>323</sup> Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* ed. Matthew Sweet (London: Penguin, 1999/1859-60), 9-10; my emphasis.

<sup>324</sup> Jan-Melissa Schramm, *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 5. There is an extensive amount of scholarly criticism written on *The Woman in White*. For instance, on the gothic, see: Stephen Bernstein, "Reading Blackwater Park: Gothicism, Narrative, and Ideology in *The Woman in White*" *Studies in the Novel* 25.3 (Fall 1993): 291-305. On sensation: Rachel Ablow, "Good Vibrations: The Sensationalization of Masculinity in *The Woman in White*," *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 37.1/2 (2004): 158-80; Ann Cvetkovich, "Ghostlier Determinations: The Economy of Sensation and *The Woman in White*," *Novel* 23.1 (Fall 1989); Walter Kendrick, "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 32 (1977). On physiology: Miller, *Novel and the Police*; Dames, "1825-1880: The Network of Nerves,"; Winter, *Mesmorized*; Kennedy, "Some Body's Story." On memory and traumatic memory: Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia, Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001); Natalie Huffels, "Tracing Traumatic Memory in *The Woman in White*: Psychic Shock, Victorian Science, and the Narrative Strategy of the Shadow-Bildungsroman," *Victorian Review* 37.1 (Spring 2011). On psychology: Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of the Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology* (London: Routledge, 1988); Lynn Pykett, *Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel* (Tavistock: British Council, 2011). On textuality: Roland Thomas, *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

epistolary form would also seem similar to his technique, the original *Times* review of *The Women in White* described what it saw as their difference:

The story is told by a number of persons, all of whom...are eyewitnesses and earwitnesses of what they report. Practically there might not be much difference between this mode of relating a history and that which was once so common—the epistolary method...but it had the disadvantage of leading to many digressions and endless repetitions...In the method of story telling devised by Wilkie Collins, the narrators are like the witnesses at a trial. Each one speaks according to his or her knowledge, the succeeding witness adds a few touches to the evidence of the previous one...The advantage of this new method is, that the story moves forward without interruption, and that the reader's curiosity is continually teased...<sup>325</sup>

The reviewer places the emphasis on the impact this technique achieves on the reader—instead of creating diversions, each witness account extends the story in a way that activates, teases, and piques the reader's curiosity and attention. That the narrators are like witnesses at a trial that “speak” while the reader hears, imbues the scene of reading and the print itself with particular sense of embodied presence.

In this account, offered both by the novel's opening and reviewers' discussion of its narrative strategy, bodily presence structures the text. The exchange relies on the multimodal or sensorial proximity the narrator—and by default the reader—has to the story being told. As a reviewer for *The Examiner* captured it, “everything is told as a distinct memory of something present to the eye.”<sup>326</sup> Presence to the eye matters; as witnesses, each narrator is said to have “direct” access and proximity to the events being told, such that they “relate their own experience word for word.” As I have advanced, this offers not only an epistemological weight to the testimony, but also describes or unfolds a physiological condition to the text and its mode of narration that almost directly inscribes Bain's physiology of reading—one that maximizes a reader's somatic engagement with the text. In Bain's description, through language, the narrator is able to offer his or her testimony as a direct witness. Through this narration of the witness, the reader/hearer is able to “bring before his mind scenes witnessed by other men” and “in so far as he is able to conceive of

---

<sup>325</sup> “The Woman in White,” *The Times* (October 30, 1860): 6.

<sup>326</sup> “The Woman in White,” *The Examiner* (September 1, 1860): 549.

what is thus related, he catches fire of the actual witness...the narrative...places the hearer under the dominion of the emotion before us.” Inasmuch as the novel emphasizes the directness of the witness relating his or her experience as an observer and participant in the scene, and envisions the reader as a body listening to that witness, the kind of proximity reviewers like Oliphant found between the narrator/participant and the reader can be understood to arise from the physiological condition or way of reading that the text offers: by listening or reading, the reader “catches fire of the witness” and enters into a proximate position of witnessing that allows him or her to fall “under the dominion of the emotion before us.” This narrative technique constitutes one of *The Woman in White*’s strategies for transmitting feeling and is part of a renewed effort at the precision of affecting the audiences’ sensation.

“Before us” and “hearer” therefore become crucial terms to the somatic act of reading: as the opening to *The Woman in White* suggests, reading the text presumes and requires that a kind of “liveness” animates and reanimates the printed word. In reading the text, we are supposed to hear voices, see bodies, and exist in our bodies in a shared space and temporality, even if the narrator is narrating past events. As Philip Auslander discusses testimony in *Liveness* “to give testimony is to perform recollection, the retrieval of memory, in the present moment of the trial...the essence of testimony is not the information being recalled, but the performance of recalling...”<sup>327</sup> By “lett[ing]” Walter Hartright be heard first,” the novel envisions print as a potential collective space in which we can hear and see the witness before us, and potentially enter into what they have witnessed. From its first page, the novel is preoccupied with a melodrama of transmission—with the very processes of immediacy, presence, embodiment, and sensation that can affix to reading audiences, and as we will see, to audiences more broadly. From its first page, then, we are not just given an insight into what we will read, but how we will be reading it.

---

<sup>327</sup> Philip Auslander, *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*, (New York: Routledge, 1999), 145.



The melodrama of transmission emerges as a preoccupation of the novel appearing in many different forms, from scenes of characters/witnesses “falling in” with “emotional dominions” or catching fire from the scenes they are both participating in and retrospectively observing, to scenes that gesture towards how the reader/audience enters into the scene of the text also catching fire of it, or falling under its emotional dominion. While so much of the contemporary criticism of *The Woman in White* focuses on the scene of Anne Catherick touching Walter’s shoulder on the road and the condition Oliphant writes about that when “the silent woman lays her hand upon our shoulder as well as upon that of Mr. Walter Hartright,”<sup>328</sup> the strategies leading up to and surrounding this scene are just as important to understanding the intense proximity and feeling of entering into the scene that critics like Oliphant described.

Not only does the novel open by establishing an embodied sense of proximity for the narrators/witnesses and by extension the readers “hearing” them, but Walter Hartright’s opening narrative or testimony reinforces the kind of available presence and embodiment the novel will demand of its reader as well. As Walter recounts the atmospherics of the evening, the novel again depicts a scene of transmission:

The evening, I remember, was still and cloudy; the London air was at its heaviest; the distant hum of the street-traffic was at its faintest, the small pulse of life within me and the great heart of the city around me seemed to be sinking in unison, languidly and more languidly, with the sinking sun. I roused myself from the book which I was dreaming over rather than reading, and left my chambers to meet the cool night air in the suburbs (10).

The novel draws attention to a moment of syncing, or a kind of sympathy—in the Bainian sense of transmitted fellow feeling—between two entities. Walter realizes the “small pulse of life” within him is falling into the same rhythm as “the great heart of the city” such that they seem “to be sinking in unison.” Not only does the scene underscore the physiology of the participant, it also imbues the page with a kind of heart beating in the background, making it a peculiarly embodied text, one that beats with a pulse that the reader might sink into unison with as well. What’s additionally interesting

---

<sup>328</sup> Oliphant, 571.

about this opening is that it immediately places this physiological fellow feeling or shared sensation within the context of reading, and yet in an unexpected way. For Walter, the act of reading his book is not one of active concentration and active pursuit, but of dreaming and reverie—he must rouse himself from the pages instead of being roused by them. And yet by presenting this vision of drowsy reading, it is as if the novel rejects this experience of reading and warns the reader that this is not what our experience will be. Instead of reading languidly, we will be following Walter outside to the road in sync with his witnessing of his surroundings and the “real” story about to unfold.

By the time Walter Hartright and, by extension, the reader arrives on the road and “in one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me”(23) a crucial act of witnessing—and reading—commences. The scene in some ways exemplifies the Bainian scene of transmission of feeling in which through the “medium of expression” of the woman in white, Walter catches fire of her feeling, and then the reader too “catches fire” through Walter’s witnessing. The interest of the scene, for my purposes, lies in the way the novel tries to capture the embodied state of the witness, and the embodied presence of the woman in white. The encounter is mediated first, not by spoken language or the gaze, but by one body reaching out and touching another, causing an immediate physiological response, and therefore creating a multi-faceted sense of embodied presence in the scene. Her hand reaching out accomplishes what the naked arm of *The Red Vial* failed to do—it induces a response, and reaches out and literally and figuratively touches the witness. As Oliphant recognized of this moment, “the momentary thrill of that touch has an effect as powerful as the most startling event. It is, in fact, in its perfect simplicity, a sensation-scene of the most delicate and skillful kind.”<sup>329</sup> Before Walter turns and sees that “There, in the middle of the broad, bright, high-road...the figure of a solitary woman,”(23-4) thus becoming “eyewitness” and “earwitness” to her, he first becomes a kind

---

<sup>329</sup> Oliphant, 571.

of “touchwitness”—that is the act of witnessing is always situated as first and foremost a bodily act requiring the work of multiple senses and activation of multiple sensations that asks the reader to enter into the scene. The touch poses a question that needs answering and arouses narrative curiosity—it is the medium of expression that effectively begins the story. The woman then speaks and asks a question and Walter proceeds to look at her and silently witness and read her bodily signs, from the color of her face, to her expression in her eyes, to the tone and even speed of her voice “the utterance was remarkably rapid”(24). In reading her bodily signs and medium of expression, as I explored in chapter one, the woman’s literal touch extends into an exchange of fellow feeling and sympathy in which “the loneliness and helplessness of the woman touched me”(25).

In rendering how the bodily medium of expression facilitates the transmission of feeling, the novel confers bodily presence to the act of reading and writing, drawing attention to how Walter is recording—and performing—his recollection for us. When the woman in white asks Walter for a promise that he will not interfere with her getting to London, he recounts how she again extends her hand:

She came close to me, and laid her hand, with a sudden gentle stealthiness, on my bosom—a thin hand; a cold hand (when I removed it with mine)...  
‘Will you promise?’  
‘Yes’(26).

This memory—with its proximate intermingling of the body and the gesture with the word and the utterance—is immediately tied to the act of writing, with Walter framing the utterance of the word, and the recollection of it as an embodied act of sensation: “One word! The little familiar word that is on everybody’s lips, every hour in the day. Oh me! I tremble, now, when I write it”(26). Here, the novel again situates the “medium of expression” through which words, ideas, and feelings are transmitted, as one that is always corporeal—the lips draw attention to the corporeal act of speaking, as the trembling draws attention to the corporeal act of writing (and as the novel will more explicitly explore—the act of reading). In this melodrama of transmission, the body in the text is always the

body as text and vice versa—drawing particular attention to the reading of corporeal signs in the written word is one of the novels' ways of reanimating, or re-presenting the page, and transmitting feeling between fictional printed bodies and the real ones reading and witnessing them.

The novel's attention to (re)corporealizing the written word's transmission of feeling further extends into the scene Margaret Oliphant recognizes as its double and a "second shock of surprise and alarm"—when, on the moonlit terrace, Walter Hartright is struck by Laura Fairlie's resemblance to the woman in white. Even more than the scene on the road, this second "sensation scene" links corporealized transmission and witnessing to the act of reading and the written word. It should perhaps be noted, that after Walter's encounter with the woman in white and his entrance into Limmeridge House, he is described as in a particularly receptive state—he is full of "confused sensations,"(33) he is able to "catch the infection of [Marian's] own bright gaiety of spirits"(36)—however, he is still not like Mr. Fairlie, whose nerves are self-proclaimed to be so "wretched" and "delicate"(45) that he tries to withdraw from all sensory stimulation. Walter, like the reader, is always situated as someone ready to receive all sensations. As Margaret Oliphant writes of the novel's second "sensation scene"

The scene itself is as tranquil as can be conceived—two young people indoors in a lighted room, with a pretty girl outside passing and re-passing the uncovered window—yet the sensation is again indisputable. The reader's nerves are affected like the hero's. He feels the thrill of the untoward resemblance, an ominous painful mystery. He, too, is chilled by a confused and unexplainable alarm.<sup>330</sup>

As Oliphant advances, Walter's sensations are thrilled and diffused into emotions like alarm and confusion, and the reader's nerves are similarly affected. Interestingly, the novel stages Walter's sensations and feelings as triggered not only by his reading of Laura, but by Marian's reading of the letter. In this exchange, the distance between the body and the word collapses. As Laura walks in and out of his view, Marian reads the letter speaking of the young Anne Catherick dressed in white and they note that the woman on the road was wearing white. Suddenly, Walter's attention is drawn

---

<sup>330</sup> Oliphant, 572.

to the white gown Laura is wearing and “a sensation, for which I can find no name—a sensation that quickened my pulse, and raised a fluttering at my heart—began to steal over me”(61). While the sensation is at first vague, as Marian reads more, the sensation heightens and becomes more distinct:

*‘...Anne Catberick...although she is not half so pretty, she is, nevertheless, by one of those extraordinary caprices of accidental resemblance which one sometimes sees, the living likeness in her hair, her complexion, the colour of her eyes, and the shape of her face—’*

I started up from the ottoman, before Miss Halcombe could present the next words. A thrill of the same feeling which ran through me when the touch was laid upon my shoulder on the lonely high-road chilled me again.

There stood Miss Fairlie, a white figure, alone in the moonlight, in her attitude, in the turn of her head, in her complexion, in the shape of her face, the living image...of the woman in white (62).

Here, the sensation of touch becomes in effect mediated and triggered by the page—instead of the hand on his shoulder, the words Marian reads triggers that exact “thrill of the same feeling” that he had first felt on the road. The transmission of feeling here, is less from person to person as it is between Walter Hartright and the written, narrated word—Walter is, to return to the Bainian phraseology, able to “catch fire of the witness” through the letter which is capable of producing as much physical presence and feeling as the touch of a hand. Additionally, the written word is given a curiously animated and corporeal power—through it, the “living likeness” on the page becomes embodied in the “living image” of the figure in front of him. That is, the “living likeness” captured in the words morphs into or becomes reanimated as the “living image” of a body in front of him in his present space. One, then, wonders, if the “reader’s nerves are affected like the hero’s” if this in part emerges either because of how the novel insists on the corporeal dimension to the transmission of feeling, or whether it also emerges because it’s invested in how the print “lives” and becomes reanimated to produce “living images” that can have real effects on the readers’ bodies. Or we have to wonder if perhaps the reader’s nerves are not affected like the hero’s, but the novel is an investigation of the transmission of feelings between characters and fictional bodies to real bodies. That is, if, as one scholar notes, the sensation novels “accomplish the feat of producing sensation,

they communicate it through their meticulous, unremitting record of sensation,”<sup>331</sup> in the case of *The Woman in White*, the novel is not just invested in recording sensation but depicting and investigating the transmission of sensation and feeling, particularly as it is triangulated between the fictional bodies, text, and real life bodies reading the text. Sensation is not depicted outside of the loop of mediation and textuality—the transmission of sensation in the novel is always mediated, always requires reading, in order to be “caught.”

*The Woman in White* places what I have been calling the melodrama of transmission—or the embodied presence of witnessing that facilitates the transfer of sensation and emotion both between fictional characters in a work and between the fictional work itself and the reader encountering it—not only in relation to individual bodies “catching fire” through their act of witnessing, but especially towards the end of the novel, it shifts to larger crowds or audiences encountering and responding to real and fictional scenes before them. For instance, in the most obviously “theatrical” sensation scene of the rectory catching fire, the novel again draws attention to spectator responses to those watching and encountering the flames, moving into the present tense. After rushing at the door to break it open, it finally gives way: “The door falls in with a crash. A great hush of awe, a stillness of breathless expectation, possesses every living soul of us. We look for the body. The scorching heat on our faces drives us back...we see nothing but a sheet of living fire”(518). While the fire scene is in a way an important plot point the novel builds towards—after all, it marks the death of the villain, Sir Percival Glyde—unlike a sensation scene in *The Streets of London* which fully builds to the conflagration, in *The Woman in White* it is merely one of many different kinds of “sensation scenes.” Towards the end of the novel, scenes like this focus more on crowds responding to what they are seeing as if they are in the present space looking at it in front of them. The turn to the present tense with the “stillness of breathless expectation” that “possesses every living soul of us” seems to at

---

<sup>331</sup> Kennedy, 452.

once include the readership in the scene. “We,” the reader, are also brought into the scene as witness. It is the melodrama of transmission in its emphasis on the present body becoming induced or triggered into sensational feeling through an encounter with a sensational extreme.

The novel’s attention to crowds of spectators—as opposed to just individual bodies—reacting and responding to something before them also appears in the Paris morgue scene towards the novel’s end. At first, Walter Hartright realizes a crowd is growing at the dead-house and there was “evidently something inside which excited the popular curiosity, and fed the popular appetite for horror”(623), and he soon realizes it is the (naked) corpse of Fosco drawing the attention of the crowd,

Slowly, inch by inch, I pressed in with the crowd, moving nearer and nearer to the great glass screen that parts the dead from the living at the Morgue—nearer and nearer, till I was close behind the front row of spectators, and could look in.

There he lay, unowned, unknown; exposed to the flippant curiosity of a French mob...the chattering Frenchwomen about me lifted their hands in admiration, and cried in shrill chorus, ‘Ah, what a handsome man!’ The wound that killed him had been struck with a knife or dagger exactly over his heart. No other traces of violence appeared about the body, except on the left arm; and there...were two deep cuts in the shape of the letter T, which entirely obliterated the mark of the Brotherhood (623).

While Nicholas Daly in his book *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* has placed this scene in relation to the crowd and modernity, and how the gawking crowd stands in for Collins’ readership,<sup>332</sup> I would also note the affinity it bears with the scene that was so condemned for its “nakedness” in *The Red Vial*. Once again, we return to the morgue and witness a naked body in front of us, but Collins rewrites the scene in a novel to include the scene of a body being “read” and group of spectators, some of whom are reading it correctly, and some of whom are looking at it without fully understanding the bodily signs in front of them. Again, the novel stages a scene of bodies witnessing bodies and catching sensational meanings from them. The morgue scene becomes a particularly theatrical form of spectatorship not only because of the crowd, the historical relationship of melodrama to the “French mob,” the importance of bodily traces and signs, but also because the last

---

<sup>332</sup> Nicholas Daly, *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 44-45.

time we saw Fosco alive was actually in the theatre, in a scene towards the end of the novel, in which he was busy directing audiences responses to an opera, by encouraging them when to applaud:

At the more refined passages of the singing...which passed unapplauded by others, his fat hands adorned with perfectly-fitting black kid gloves, softly patted each other. At such times, his oily murmur of approval, 'Bravo! Bra-a-a!' hummed through the silence...His immediate neighbours on either side...seeing and hearing him, began to follow his lead. Many a burst of applause from the pit, that night, started from the soft comfortable patting of his black gloves (569).

The scene in which Fosco eventually sees a member of the brotherhood, realizes his life is at stake, and flees the theatre, is yet another that involves an explicit staging of audience and spectatorial response. While the audience witnesses the play and Fosco's response to it, we witness Fosco and observe him in a private-in-public moment of transmission of affect. He sees the member of the brotherhood and turns

the leaden hue that altered his yellow complexion in a moment, the sudden rigidity of all of his features, the furtive scrutiny of his cold grey eyes, the motionless stillness of him from head to foot, told their own tale. A mortal dread had mastered him, body and soul (571).

The body telling its "own tale" perhaps encapsulates the melodrama of transmission in *The Woman in White*: witnessing a body catch feeling from another and tracing individual and group scenes of transmission of affect and sensation, is in some respects the object of the novel.

#### *Section 4: "She made me feel almost...as she felt herself"—Witnessing and Catching Anxiety*

While I have thus far examined the structure of the transmission of feeling, elaborating a melodrama of transmission at work in the novel that relies on the intermixing of bodily signs and written words, and the liveness and embodiment of print allowing the reader to "catch fire of the witness," more remains to be said about the content of this exchange, that is, the actual kinds of feelings and sensations that novel envisions transmitting. Is there a primary sensation or emotion the characters and readers are often called upon to witness and catch fire from? As D.A. Miller has advanced, the predominant feeling in the novel is that of "nervousness"—nervousness circulates between the page and the reader. However, I would argue that the novel uses a much more specific word for this



nervousness: anxiety. In the melodrama of transmission that appears in *The Woman in White*, the term “anxiety” recurs throughout the novel, accelerating and accruing around different moments that also advance readerly suspense.

Before I turn to anxiety at work in the novel itself, Bain’s understanding of anxiety provides context for the circulation and contagion of anxiety imagined in the novel. For Bain, anxiety is a species and more “diffused” form of the emotion of terror, which he defines as “a tremulous excitement originating in pain, apprehension, uncertainty, or strangeness...”<sup>333</sup> One of the metaphors he chooses to describe the feeling of uncertainty that can structure anxiety seems particularly apt to a discussion of *The Woman in White*:

A man walking on a road he knows to a goal that is familiar to him, has this serene and comfortable feeling. So it is when we see distinctly what we are aiming at in any active enterprise...Any breach of expectation is eminently discomposing...there is a violent unhingement caused by the occurrence of something totally different. The same happens when we are suddenly struck or seized without warning or preparation.<sup>334</sup>

Much like Walter walking down the road in the beginning of the novel, his journey is marked by both a sense of serenity and sense of looking forward. As Bain describes, while there might be uncertainty, there is a sense of pursuit, “expectation,” and “anticipation.”<sup>335</sup> Of course, the “breach of expectation” of the woman in white’s hand suddenly reaching out and touching his shoulder discomposes Walter Hartright and causes an immediate shock to his system.<sup>336</sup> Some attributes of its physical embodiment include marks of tension like “stare of the eyes...the hair standing on end...the contraction or creeping of the skin...breathing [that] is short and rapid”<sup>337</sup>—in other words, physical markers that both occur to Walter Hartright on the dark road as well as within Victorian critics describing the physical effects sensation fiction leaves on the body of the reader.

---

<sup>333</sup> Bain, *EW*, 73.

<sup>334</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>335</sup> *Ibid.*, 74-75.

<sup>336</sup> *Ibid.*, 79 By “violent unhingement,” Bain means a variation of “shock” or “stimulus” to the system. He again returns to something startling happening along a road to discuss this sudden shock, “A single object occurring to cause dread—as a sinister face in a lonely lane—will make a strong impression.”

<sup>337</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

That is, the process of shock and sensation in the specific activation of the emotions of terror and anxiety stand in for, or are closely related to, the broader process of sensation itself.

If, as Oliphant notes, “our nerves are affected like the hero’s”—it is not just that sensation and nerve feeling is broadly communicated, but that a specific feeling is communicated and transmitted. In fact, anxiety might in some ways be fundamental to the processes of sensation in *The Woman in White* because the feeling of “uncertainty [and] strangeness” embedded in anxiety mirrors or relies upon the uncertainty and suspense embedded in a novel of “plot interest” and narrative drive. The OED defines the state of being anxious as “troubled or uneasy in mind about some uncertain event; being in painful or disturbing suspense; concerned, solicitious” and offers one definition of anxiety as “strained or solicitious desire.”<sup>338</sup> In that sense, the sensation of “suspense” and uncertainty in the emotions of terror and anxiety create and sustain desire and narrative drive. As Bain explains, the “emotions of terror” of which anxiety is one variant, abides in “apprehension” (the “prospect of a coming evil”) and “uncertainty” (built on “anticipation” and “expectation”)<sup>339</sup> qualities that themselves, I would suggest, have a forward-oriented dimension of the what-comes-next movement also found in readerly suspense. Bain mentions that actual condition of anxiety can either have a stimulating or a paralyzing affect, and when experienced through art, it can produce a “wave of agreeable emotion.”<sup>340</sup> However, as he notes, while “some minds can endure a large amount of this element...for others the misery causing element would predominate.”<sup>341</sup>

In its condition as “a sort of diffused terror,” anxiety is hardly unique to the sensation novel; the feeling of dread and “emotions of terror” belong perhaps more fully to the domain of the gothic novel. Yet, *The Woman in White* treats anxiety quite differently than a representative gothic

---

<sup>338</sup> "Anxious, adj.," OED Online, accessed January 04, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/8970>; "Anxiety, n.," OED Online, accessed January 04, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/8968>.

<sup>339</sup> Bain, *EW*, 73-75.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid.*

novel like *The Mysteries of Udolpho*. While in both novels, anxiety is critical to readerly suspense, in *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, anxiety is often used to describe a self-contained mood, particularly that of the protagonist, Emily: “Emily, smiled faintly, anxious to say something...”; “At length, worn out with anxiety, she determined to call loudly for assistance”; “in the hall, confusion and tumult still reigned. Emily, as she listened anxiously to the murmur...sometimes fancied she heard the clashing of swords.”<sup>342</sup> Anguish, dread, anxiety, tumult, and terror form the basis for *Udolpho*’s landscape of feeling and atmospherics—particularly as the novel arrives at frightening confines of Montani’s remote castle in the Italian Apennines, Udolpho.

*The Woman in White* also appears to similarly traffic in a Gothic depiction of anxiety and confinement, especially in the most “gothic” heart of the novel, when Laura Fairlie marries Sir Percival Glyde and Laura and Marion move into his residence at Blackwater Park. The location is discussed in gothic terms of enclosure and peril—“the house is situated on a dead flat, and seems to be almost suffocated...by trees”(197). Blackwater is an ominous place in which Laura and Marion feeling increasingly “stifled,”(204) and claustrophobic the more they learn about the danger Sir Percival poses and the more Fosco and Sir Percival’s surveillance of them increases.

As the surveillance and impending danger increases, so do descriptions and recordings of characters’ anxiety. Marion initially records in her diary—a narration that draws attention to words mediating and representing bodily feeling—that “my nerves are not easily shaken...”(205). However, over the course of her observation of Sir Percival and Fosco’s behavior, in particular Sir Percival’s lies and mistreatment of Laura, she transcribes her growing concern and anxiety, “a strange responsive creeping in my own nerves”(230). As Marion writes upon hearing Sir Percival and Fosco speak of Laura, “I felt heart-sick and faint with anxiety...my strength was so exhausted by the trails and anxieties of the morning...I was obliged...to lie down...”(272). Her heart beats

---

<sup>342</sup> Ann Radcliffe, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ed. Bonamy Dobrée (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 101, 283, 297.

violently, she trembles, her “anxiety to know”(288) what Sir Percival and Fosco are precisely doing becomes in “overpowering anxiety”(295). Her anxiety over what she bears witness to ultimately leads to her own physical illness, which she again faithfully communicates, until her writing becomes fevered “faster and faster and hotter and hotter”(335), and she can communicate her feelings no longer. Marion’s diary becomes one knot in the communication of affect—a transcription and record of the anxiety she begins to feel as she learns more facts of Sir Percival’s deception and the extent of the danger Laura is in.

However, *The Woman in White*’s focus on anxiety often pushes beyond that of describing a character’s self-contained state of mind—unlike *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, *The Woman in White* becomes explicitly concerned with the communication and transmission of anxiety—with how it moves from person to person. This focus on anxiety as something caught becomes particularly evident once the narration shifts to the housekeeper, Eliza Michelson’s account of the last days before Laura’s disappearance. First, the narrative focuses on witnessing Laura’s increasing anxiety over Marion’s illness: “Lady Glyde’s nerves were so completely broken down that she seemed quite frightened. . . . She trembled from head to foot”(366), she becomes “in no state to bear any fresh anxieties”(373). Laura’s nervousness in turn spreads to the household and narrator, “days pass anxiously,” and while the doctor’s news appears to temporarily relieve the “household from all further anxiety and alarm”(372), the alarm only grows in strength once Percival tells Laura that Marion has left for London and Limmeridge House, which Laura knows cannot be true. While Laura was “anxious that morning about Miss Halcombe,”(379), once she concludes that “something has happened to my sister” (382), she grows “panic stricken” and Eliza recounts how “Lady Glyde’s hand began to tremble violently round my arm”(383). She records how Laura grows increasingly “agitated and alarmed”(385) aware that something is dangerously wrong. As Laura prepares to leave for London, Eliza worries that Laura’s “mind had been a little affected by recent anxiety and

suffering”(386). Here, in other words, the novel focuses on recording and witnessing someone’s anxiety.

It also, however, extends and aligns the act of witnessing with the structure of catching or transmitting feeling. As witness, Eliza records seeing Laura off at the train station, a distressing and important moment in the novel. As Laura boards a train for London, uncertain of her sister’s safety, and indeed, of her own, she tells Eliza that she “will go anywhere...to end the dreadful suspense that I am suffering at the moment”(388) over her sister’s fate. In turn, Eliza records that she herself catches Laura’s anxiety: “She had made me feel almost as anxious and as uncertain about Miss Halcombe as she felt herself”(388). Later, back at Blackwater Eliza’s anxiety continues to grow: as she tries to read a book of sermons to compose herself, she cannot pay attention, “concluding that Lady Glyde’s departure must have disturbed me far more seriously than I had myself supposed”(389). She takes a turn in the garden, and the extent of her anxiety even further takes hold when she sees a stranger in the garden and realizes it’s Mrs. Rubelle, the nurse who had been taking care of Marion, and that Marion is in fact still at Blackwater Park. The realization of the danger that Laura is now in—that she was forced to leave the house under false pretenses—makes Eliza’s “blood curdl[e] in her veins”(390). As she records, “I trembled for the time when the shock of the discovery that I had made would fall on [Laura]...my fears for the poor ladies silenced me”(390), and she looks in “anxiously” at Miss Halcombe aware of the “the whole cruelty of Sir Percival’s deception”(395).

In this knot of affective exchange, a series of witnesses watch over and catch anxiety from one another. Just as Laura’s “dreadful suspense” transforms and transfers into Eliza’s suspense and anxiety (“she made me feel almost as anxious...as she felt herself”), so to does Eliza’s shock over seeing Mrs. Rubelle transfer into a fear about how Laura will feel when she discovers that she has been tricked and is in danger. This shared somatics also implicitly includes the reader—by drawing

attention to the way character's witness and catch fire of sensation, the novel also places the reader in that relay, suggesting that they too will feel "almost" as they felt. After all, for the sensation novel's suspense to work, Laura's "dreadful suspense" becomes the reader's "dreadful suspense": the reader as witness is able, to return to Bain's phrasing, to "catch fire" and "enter into the dominion of the emotion before us" and feel "as she felt." Just as Marion witnesses and records her own increasing anxiety and fear for her sister, and in turn Eliza records Laura becoming increasingly anxious over her sister's fate and in turn becomes anxious herself, the novel both highlights and imagines the transfer of affect within its pages from its pages to the reader—the narrative's ultimate witness.

### *Section 5: The Ethics of Witnessing the Sensation of Anxiety*

Yet, a question remains about what the novel envisions as the effects and stakes of bearing witness to this anxiety, and I would suggest, that question is closely related to another—does the novel pathologize anxiety? Later in the novel, one of the key features of Laura's trauma after being locked in a mental institution under false pretenses involves, as Nick Dames has noted, memory becoming pathologized by turning into amnesia. This amnesia, as Dames explores, appears to be a defining feature of the sensation novel itself: not only does Laura experience a trauma that results in forgetting, not only do other characters forget key dates of events, but the reader can experience a kind of amnesia of the novel after completing it, in which they essentially "read, become nervous, forget."<sup>343</sup> While memory in the novel becomes pathologized and while it offers early insight into what will later be called trauma, D.A. Miller and others have suggested that the nervousness itself in the novel is pathologized—that it bears affinities with hysteria. As Miller writes, "nervousness is always gendered in the novel as...an essentially feminine malady" and in the scene of Walter meeting

---

<sup>343</sup> Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves*, 178.

Anne Catherick on the road, “fantasmatically, we ‘catch’ sensation from the neuropathic body of the Woman who, no longer confined or controlled in an asylum, is free to make our bodies resonate with—like—hers.”<sup>344</sup>

I would suggest, however, this view of Miller’s oddly reinscribes and accepts the idea that Anne Catherick is, in fact, a woman with a “malady” who belonged in an asylum, an idea that the novel, on the whole, rejects. After all, the point is, Anne was *wrongfully* imprisoned in an asylum, and although she suffers trauma after her ordeal, and although the novel invokes the idea of “the Madwoman” or “hysteric” most clearly through her, the novel also establishes that her anxieties are based on very real fears—after her own trauma, her motivating desire is to warn other women about Sir Percival Glyde so that they can avoid the danger he poses, and she believes she has failed in that duty. As Anne Catherick laments in the Blackwater section, shortly before she dies and is cruelly exploited and disposed of by Sir Percival and Fosco, “Why did I ever let you marry him?...I ought to have warned you and saved you before it was too late. Why did I only have the courage to write you a letter?”(279). Her concerns here are not “hysterical”; they are grounded in the belief that she wishes to have done more to protect Laura from the danger that she is in.

That is, if the concept of “hysteria” and “the hysteric” evokes the idea of sensation misfiring, or of incorrect or extreme modulations of sensational response and sensitivity, *The Woman in White*, does not pose the “anxiety” and “nervousness” of Anne, Eliza Michelson, and especially Laura and Marian, as “hysterical” “incorrect” responses.<sup>345</sup> While the novel invokes “madness”—as Marion records, “I felt heart sick and faint with anxiety...till the oppression of my suspense half maddened me”(272)—the novel firmly ties this anxiety to *warranted* fears about the terrors and cruelty of the domestic space, and by extension, women’s unequal status before the law, the precariousness and

---

<sup>344</sup> Miller, *Novel and the Police*, 151, 153.

<sup>345</sup> In the understanding of “hysteria” as “a...disturbance of the nervous system”; “morbidly excited condition; unhealthy emotion or excitement” “Hysteria, n.,” OED Online, accessed June 01, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90638>.

erasure of female identity under that law, and that what can be done to a woman takes place (legally) “without her consent,” leading to bodily domestic violence and cruelty. The Blackwater section poses the anxiety as a necessary, proper response to an imminent threat, not an example of sensation misfiring. The characters’ “contagious” “communicated” shared somatics of anxiety emerges from the threat on Laura’s life within her marriage, and the real conditions of imminent marital violence in which she finds herself—from the bruises Marian finds on Laura’s arm (299), to Sir Percival banging on Laura’s door warning her, “I’ll wring it out of you...I’ll crush your obstinacy—mind that!—I’ll wring it out of you”(311), to Marian overhearing Sir Percival and Fosco’s plan to murder Laura and take her money.

Inasmuch as their anxiety is created by grounded, “real” conditions, anxiety in the novel, and the communication of anxious sensation, thus carries with it the charge that anxiety, and by association sensation more broadly, might carry productive uses and even ethical stakes. After all, by inhabiting Laura’s “dreadful suspense” and through the shared process of catching fire as witness until we feel (almost) “as she felt” the novel creates not just sensational feeling, but potentially political feeling—feelings about the political and the legal that the language of the law itself might not stir. As critics like Marlene Tromp have suggested in *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain*, by focusing on the abuse of a wife in an upper-class home, the novel—even though it is set in 1849-50—invokes and participates in “the tensions represented in the Divorce Act of 1857...[and] re-marks the language of violence in the domestic space, anticipating and casting the frame of later debates, particularly the Married Women’s Property Act (1870).”<sup>346</sup> And, as Lisa Surridge has noted in *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction*, the novel should be placed within the context of newspaper coverage of the divorce proceedings in the newly established Court of Divorce and Matrimonial Causes, particularly the marked increase in

---

<sup>346</sup> Marlene Tromp, *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000), 71.



those that cited “cruelty” and gave increased visibility to the subject of martial abuse.<sup>347</sup> With the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, a civil Divorce court was created, and though women’s access to divorce was much more limited than men’s access, a woman was allowed to pursue separation on the grounds of “cruelty” (physical abuse, violence), and of “the divorce and separation cases filed by women between 1858 and 1866, cruelty appeared to be the most common offense.”<sup>348</sup> These cases were often covered in newspapers, often including coverage that depicted or transcribed the full witness testimony. As Surridge argues, *The Woman in White*, with its structure of witnesses providing testimony, “resembles a divorce court trial in content as well as form.”<sup>349</sup>

I would argue, however, that while the novel might resemble divorce court trial coverage in form, with its “transcription” of witness testimony, it differs from newspaper accounts in its *affective form*, or its formal structures and strategies for conveying sensation and emotion. While accounts like those included in *The Times* or *The Standard* came under criticism for “corrupt[ing] public morals”<sup>350</sup> by printing the details of private, intimate life, the divorce court coverage, on the whole was quite matter-of-fact in its narration of the proceedings: it either provided short summaries of the proceedings, or transcribed the witness testimony in full. In narrating the case, *The Times* stuck to legal facts and summarized the charges, reporting facts that were disturbing and harrowing in their detail, but rendered in stark, unemotional language:

The Acts of cruelty charged extended over several years, beginning in 1839...The principal charges were, that in 1839 Mr. Bostock broke open his wife’s bedroom, and held a pistol to her head; that in 1840, he made use of threats that his wife and children should not die a natural death; that in 1841, he struck his wife a blow on the head and threatened her with a knife...<sup>351</sup>

---

<sup>347</sup> Lisa Surridge, *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction* (Athens, Ohio: Ohio State Press, 2005), 134.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, 152.

<sup>350</sup> “The Purity of the Press,” *Saturday Review* (June 26, 1858): 657.

<sup>351</sup> “Court For Divorce And Matrimonial Causes, May 25.” *Times* (May 26, 1858). For another representative example, see: “Court Of Probate And Divorce, Feb. 18,” *Times* (Feb 19, 1859).

However, it was less these summaries that drew the condemnation of critics, but rather the practice of newspapers reporting “*de die in diem*, expanded over column upon column”<sup>352</sup> the testimony of witnesses that caused the most consternation. And yet, even these instances of witness testimony tended towards detailed precision and the presentation of facts, as opposed to the recounting of a survivor’s feeling. For instance, in a divorce case based on cruelty, *Marchmont v. Marchmont* that was transcribed in newspapers for over a week, when the petitioner, Mrs. Marchmont, spoke of the facts of her abuse, her claim was less emotional than evidentiary:

We went out for a walk in the afternoon, and one of the children took his arm. I said it would be better if they did not take his arm. He said they should, got very violent, threatened to knock me down, or to give me in charge to a policeman, and called me ‘a beast and a cat.’ I struggled and run away. I got into an omnibus and went to Deal, and the next day went to my sister, Mrs. Davis, at Blackheath.<sup>353</sup>

In other words, when examining the language of testimony that appeared in divorce cases based on cruelty reported and transcribed in newspapers between 1858 and 1860, the language was hardly the affective “melodramatic tactics” of Caroline Norton<sup>354</sup> describing her plight and advocating for changes to divorce and marriage property laws through overt emotional appeals that focused on narrating the witnesses own feelings or appealing to the emotions of those listening (and reading).

While *The Woman in White* shares an affinity with these newspapers accounts of testimonials of cruelty in marriage, it differs from them significantly in the affective form of its fictional testimony: the novel depicts a case of cruelty and the violence of the erasure of identity that happens through coverture by heightening and drawing attention to the circuitry of feeling and sensation that the women circumscribed by it feel. This is not necessarily to say the novel “sensationalizes” a case of cruelty in marriage—we do not see Sir Percival grab Laura’s arm leaving bruises on it, nor does the novel directly depict him threatening to break down her door. Instead, we read Laura narrate

---

<sup>352</sup> “Cheap and Nasty,” *Saturday Review* (December 31, 1859): 801.

<sup>353</sup> “Court Of Probate And Divorce, Nov. 20.” *Times* (Nov. 22, 1858).

<sup>354</sup> On Caroline Norton’s tracts and melodrama, see: Elaine Hadley, *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 135; and Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 66-70.

these events to Marian and Marian transcribes Laura's experience. And while Laura never becomes one of the main narrators of the novel—an omission that perhaps signifies or at least parallels the erasure of Laura's identity in the eyes of the law—the novel specifically focuses on how Laura's pain and anxiety is witnessed, shared, and circulated by Marian, Anne, Eliza, and by extension, the reader.

In doing so, the novel's attention to the “melodrama of transmission” or the focus on the communication and circulation of feeling and sensation between characters, and the circuitry of how words represent and produce embodied feeling, carries with it, I would suggest, a legal or political valence. The attention to anxiety and its communication or transmission draws attention to the affective circumstances of divorce law, cruelty cases, and the felt experience of coverture. It makes law into a matter of sensation and affect, and makes sensation and affect into something with legal stakes. While we sometimes ignore or diminish it, the novel, at its core, is depicting a case of cruelty in marriage and exposing the emotional reality and violence underwriting the law of coverture.

Under the law of coverture, as Rachel Ablow writes, “the wife's legal identity was effectively absorbed into her husband's. All her personal property was transferred to her husband at the time of marriage.”<sup>355</sup> The qualification was usually reserved for very wealthy women, whose fathers or male relatives would form a trust, or marriage settlement that kept her finances largely separate from her husband's.<sup>356</sup> However, as Lisa Surridge notes, one of the interesting legal dimensions of *The Woman in White*, is that while Laura Fairlie is precisely the sort of wealthy woman who could have a settlement or trust that somewhat shields her from the full extent of coverture, instead, Collins “exposes Laura to the full injustice of married women's property law as it existed prior to the Married Women's Property Act of 1870” and she becomes “subject to the full inequity of married

---

<sup>355</sup> Rachel Ablow, *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 10.

<sup>356</sup> Poovey, 71.

women's property law as it operated for those who could not afford lawyers and marriage settlements."<sup>357</sup>

Of course, the decision to give Laura a terrible settlement that her family's lawyer entirely objects to because of how negligent it is and for the danger it places her in—that the full *principal* as opposed to income goes to Sir Percival upon her death—is necessary to Collins' plot as it creates the condition that Sir Percival would need to murder Laura (or, as he does, stage Laura's death by burying Anne as Laura, and placing Laura in an insane asylum as Anne), to get her money. In other words, Collins dramatizes the law of coverture by exposing and amplifying the stakes of its violence, harm, and erasure. Coverture, in the hands of the Victorian era's most important sensation novel, is depicted as itself cruel and abusive and the novel is interested, importantly, in tracing the emotional affects and effects of its violence. It matters, therefore, that the novel focuses on tracing the affective responses to this law: Laura's anxiety being witnessed by Marion, Anne, and Eliza, and her anxiety becoming their own shared anxiety, reinforces how the violence of the law affects women of all classes.<sup>358</sup> Feeling almost "as she felt" carries with it an important ethical charge.

In the context of the decade bookended by, on the one hand, the Divorce [Matrimonial Causes] Act of 1857 and, on the other, by the Marriage Property Act of 1870 that rewrites and changes the laws of coverture, the novel's focus on the transmission of sensation, the act of witnessing, and the shared somatics of anxiety, cannot be disconnected from its legal context as a case of cruelty, and the cruelty inbuilt to the law of coverture. It is perhaps curious, then, that the

---

<sup>357</sup> SurrIDGE, 155, 157. It is not, as SurrIDGE writes, that Percival "has not married a woman with a marriage settlement"(156). Laura has a settlement, but a terrible one that leaves her entirely vulnerable, as it allows the entire principal of her income to fall to Percival upon her death. On the argument over the settlement see Collins, *The Woman in White*, 151, 159.

<sup>358</sup> SurrIDGE also makes a point about class, that "the lack of marriage settlement flattens the class distinctions between Lady Glyde and a working-class woman"(157), however, as I've said in the above note, this doesn't correctly describe the settlement. My point about how Laura's predicament is felt across classes is that the shared somatics, affective form of the text, and its acts of witnessing structure and facilitate it.

novel's most direct articulation of the uses of its sensation transpires in a scene between the two murderers, Sir Percival and Fosco. As Marian overhears them say:

Sir Percival: Don't look at me in that way! I won't have it! What with your looks and your questions, upon my soul, you make my flesh creep!

Fosco: Your flesh? Does flesh mean conscience in English? I speak of your wife's death, as I speak of a possibility. Why not? The respectable lawyers who scribble-scrabble your deeds and your wills, look the deaths of living people in the face. Do lawyers make your flesh creep? Why should I? It is my business to-night, to clear up your position beyond the possibility of mistake—and I have now done it. Here is your position. If your wife lives, you pay those bills with her signature to the parchment. If your wife dies, you pay them with her death (327).

In this account, Fosco argues that what he's saying should not make the flesh creep or stir sensation. He advances that his discourse on the potential murder of Laura should be taken as legal discourse is—as coldly and clinically as lawyers drawing up wills and deeds. In doing so, as Jan-Melissa Schramm observes in *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology*, a critique is offered about legal discourse itself, that “to adopt the terminology of the law is to quash the emotional and the sensate, to normalize murder.”<sup>359</sup> The novel arguably counters this idea by amplifying and tracing the circulation of the sensate and emotional, and resensitizing the emotional stakes of the law, while repoliticizing the stakes of sensation. After all, it offers the idea that having the “flesh creep” is a necessary and productive reaction in the face of violence and erasure the book witnesses. The flesh creeping—so often signaled by Victorian critics as the defining superficial mark of sensation fiction—is here imagined as a productive channel for “conscience” and by extension for sympathy (that Common Law was itself not providing). Here, feeling almost “as she felt” and having “the flesh creep” is advanced as a necessary feeling, something that *should be felt*.

### ***Section 6: The Shock that Overwhelms: Sensation and Trauma***

If, as we have seen, *The Red Vial* represents a misfiring of sensation and stirring the audiences responses, and *The Woman in White* attends to how sensation and affect work on audiences, how

---

<sup>359</sup> Schramm, 16.

print mediates bodily feeling, how feeling is witnessed and caught between characters and from page to reader, and how the melodrama of transmission carries with it ethical stakes, the Collins novel that follows *The Woman in White*—*No Name*—participates in and complicates the scene of the transmission of sensation and emotion. *No Name* draws upon *The Woman in White*'s attention to the transmission of sensation and redirects it to a specific area. The novel becomes a meditation on the problems and dangers of sensation: what happens when sensation is not experienced fully or is experienced too much, and particularly, what happens when a shock or stimulus is so strong that it overwhelms those interacting with it.

*No Name*, first and foremost is, I would argue, a novel about trauma, or—to use the term in circulation before the word trauma would emerge the late 1890s—shock. It centers on those “events and experiences” as Jill Matus explicates shock in the Victorian period, “that ‘went beyond the range of the normal’—events so overwhelming and inassimilable that the ordinary processes of registration and representation were suspended or superseded.”<sup>360</sup> If Laura Fairlie’s traumatic ordeal in *The Woman in White* exposes her to the fall out and recovery from the stripping away of her identity, the cruelty and abuse in her marriage, and her false imprisonment, *No Name* more thoroughly orients itself around and elaborates the after effects and absorption of tremendous shocks to the system. It extends and builds upon *The Woman in White*'s interest in the transmission of sensation and emotion. Instead of depicting “on stage” sensation scenes, it is concerned with the reverberating affects and effects of shocking, catastrophic events on bodily and mental systems.

From its outset, the novel is preoccupied with the transmission and spread of bodily feeling. As characters descend the stairs of their home, Combe-Raven, one morning after a long night of amusements, Collins depicts the elder sister Norah Vanstone’s expression of “quiet reserve, from

---

<sup>360</sup> Jill Matus, “Emergent Theories of Victorian Mind Shock: From War and Railway Accident to Nerves, Electricity, and Emotion,” in *Neurology and Literature, 1860-1920* ed. Anne Stiles (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 163-64. See also, Jill Matus, *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

which her mother was free” to ask that while we sometimes wonder whether “moral force” and “intellectual capacities” “seem to wear out mysteriously in the course of transmission to children...In these days of insidious nervous exhaustion and subtly-spreading nervous malady, is it not possible that same rule may apply...to bodily gifts as well?”<sup>361</sup> The novel, in other words, almost immediately raises the issue of “transmission” between generations and reorients it within the context of a larger social body suffering from “nervous exhaustion” and “subtly spreading” affect that produces bodily effects—the interest here is in transmission that affects the body, nerves, expression, and emotion.

This focus on the “transmission” and “subt[le] spreading” that affects the nerves of the body becomes even more specific: the novel highlights characters’ nerve-based bodily responses to consuming a night of public amusements or entertainment. While Mrs. Vanstone has to skip the concert altogether as the amusements might have been “too much” for her delicate health, as the governess Miss Garth observes, Mrs. Vanstone’s daughter, Norah, looks “a perfect wreck...The vile gas, the foul air, the late hours—what can you expect? She’s not made of iron, and she suffers accordingly”(7). If Norah registers the systemic bodily affects and effects of consuming sensations, her younger sister Magdalen, has a very different response, or lack thereof:

...what has the concert done for *you*? What form of suffering has dissipation inflicted on *your* system this morning?  
‘Suffering?’ repeated Magdalen... ‘I don’t know the meaning of the word: if there’s anything the matter with me, I’m too well. Suffering! I’m ready for another concert to-night, and a ball to-morrow, and a play the day after’(10).

The novel again raises the idea of systemic response—in this case of the individual bodies that formed the audience. While Magdalen’s lack of “suffering” both provides a contrast with the sorrows and suffering about to arrive, it also hints at the idea that her lack of response—being “too well”—is not, to put it in Bainian terms, a fully diffusing relay of sensational and emotional response. The novel’s interest in how sensations and emotions are registered recurs as a topic of

---

<sup>361</sup> Wilkie Collins, *No Name* ed. Mark Ford (London: Penguin Books, 2004/1862-63), 6.

conversation between characters. Before sharing news with Mr. Vanstone, the neighbor Mr. Clare, “abruptly opened the conversation by asking if [Mr. Vanstone’s] nerves were in good order, and if he felt himself strong enough for the shock of an overwhelming surprise”(55). As Mr Vanstone responds, “‘Nerves?’[...] ‘Thank God, I know nothing about my nerves. If you have got anything to tell me, shock or no shock, out with it right on the spot’”(55).

The novel, however, precisely wants to know something about nerves and their response to shocks; the question of how the nervous system absorbs shocks and surprise essentially animates the novel. In doing so, it also has broader resonances for sensation culture. That Collins follows *The Woman in White*, the ur-sensation novel, with a novel that explores the problematics of sensation—that is, with shocks that instead of providing stimulation and pleasure, risk overwhelming the bodily-mental system—complicates discussions of the sensation novel and sensation culture by underscoring how writers like Collins reflected on the underside of sensation and its ability to cause ruptures, misfirings, breaks. The sensation novel’s—and sensation drama’s and melodrama’s more broadly—focus on violent ruptures in the midst of everyday life draw attention to how the body and its affects and emotions function or fall apart in the midst of intensities and violent changes. It also highlights the extent to which the genre’s importance to a figuration of trauma is taken for granted.

In the case of *No Name*, “it was a quiet, cloudless summer day,” when the first of a quick series of traumatic events arrives, piercing through the quiet of the everyday: the Vanstone family learns that their father, who had been on his way to conduct some business in Grailsea, has been killed in a railroad accident. Having a railway accident function as the initial shock in the novel is an important choice. It not only exemplifies the way the sensation novel and sensation drama becomes enmeshed with railway travel in this period,<sup>362</sup> but, more importantly, it places the novel within an

---

<sup>362</sup> On the railway and sensation culture, see, for instance, Nicholas Daly “Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses,” *ELH* 66.2 (Summer 1999): 461-480 and Nicholas Daly, *Literature, Technology, Modernity*,



historical context that becomes crucial for understanding of theories of shock, namely, the medico-legal debate around railway accidents in the 1860s found in the form of the railway compensation trials and medical discourses that would emerge from it. As Ralph Harrington explores in “The Railway Accident: Trains, Trauma, and Technological Crises in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” in these trials, “establishing the reality and the precise nature of the injuries that the victim claimed to have suffered in an accident” ultimately lead to a burgeoning medical discourse that examined the physical and mental effects experienced by victims in railway accidents.<sup>363</sup> Across the mid-to-late half of the nineteenth century, these attempts to understand mental and physical ailments emerging from the shock and injuries of the accident often retained complex and sometimes contradictory ideas about whether or not the ensuing disorders were the result of “an organic lesion” (“railway spine”), or if a mental, nervous shock was enough to lead to an onset of symptoms. By the 1880s, however, the discourse would become increasingly clear: “the emotion of fear alone was sufficient to inflict severe shock on the nervous system...the psychological effects of involvement in a railway accident as quite capable of inducing nervous illness and collapse.”<sup>364</sup>

That is, the discourse on the physical and mental dimensions of railway accidents on their victims in the 1860s, would become crucial and foundational to the development and understanding of traumatic neurosis and trauma as it would be developed in the twentieth century. As Freud would write in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, “a condition has long been known and described which occurs after severe mechanical concussions, railway disasters, and other accidents involving a risk to life; it

---

1860-2000 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). Daly argues that the sensation novel is an attempt to acclimate to modernity and the railway age (“Railway Novels,” 464).

<sup>363</sup> Ralph Harrington, “The Railway Accident: Trains, Trauma, and Technological Crises in Nineteenth-Century Britain,” in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930* eds. Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 37.

<sup>364</sup> Harrington, “The Railway Accident,” 50. For accounts of “railway spine” and the nineteenth-century emergence of the term, “trauma,” see especially: Harrington, “The Railway Accident,”; Harrington, “On the Tracks of Trauma: Railway Spine Reconsidered,” *Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine* 16.2 (2003): 209-223; Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986); Matus, *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*; Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 3.

has been given the name of ‘traumatic neurosis.’”<sup>365</sup> If Freud at once acknowledged trauma’s relationship to theories of shock—that if we “regard the common traumatic neurosis as a consequence of an extensive breach being made in the protective shield against stimuli [...] This would seem to reinstate the old, naïve theory of shock”<sup>366</sup>—in doing so, he also sought to provide distance between “shock” and “trauma.” However, as critics like Mark Seltzer have noted, the lines between shock and trauma, the physical and psychological could not be so easily demarcated: a “modernist culture of shock and a postmodern culture of trauma...tend to understate...how, on the Freudian account, trauma remains a borderland concept between the physical and the psychical.”<sup>367</sup> At the same time some scholars within Victorian Studies have attempted to complicate divisions between nineteenth-century ideas on shock and twentieth-century ideas on trauma by noting, as Jill Matus does in *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, that “To see trauma rather than shock as a ‘sort of switch point between bodily and psychic orders’ is to discount (if not ignore) the rich variety of Victorian thinking about the relationship between somatic and psychic registrations of shock,”<sup>368</sup> or as Ralph Harrington summarizes it in “On the Tracks of Trauma: Railway Spine Reconsidered,” “the interaction of the emotional and physical was being approached in a much more complex way.”<sup>369</sup>

The complex interplay between the physical and emotional—or the physical and bodily as emotional and mental; the emotional and mental as physical and bodily—of course, returns us to Alexander Bain. As Jill Matus notes, for Bain, low-level shock is the very foundation of consciousness, and I would note, as I did in chapter one, sensation:

---

<sup>365</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* ed. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961/1920), 10.

<sup>366</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>367</sup> Mark Seltzer, “Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere,” *October* 80 (Spring 1997): 5. For more on “shock” with/against “trauma” see also Tim Armstrong, “Two Types of Shock in Modernity,” *Critical Quarterly* 42.1 (2000): 60-73; Matus, *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, 4.

<sup>368</sup> Matus, *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, 5.

<sup>369</sup> Harrington “*On the Tracks of Trauma: Railway Spine Reconsidered*,” 217.

The simplest term we can employ for a mental state is a shock; a word equally applicable to the bodily side and to the mental side. A sudden stimulation of the eye, the ear, the skin, the nose is called a shock, from its more outward or physical aspect; it is also called a shock mentally...because there is a rapid transition from quiescence to excitement<sup>370</sup>

If low-level, non-intense shock is the electric undercurrent of sensation, feeling, and consciousness, the kind of overwhelming shock that constitutes a traumatic event is defined by the violence of its intensity. As Bain writes in *Mind and Body* “There have occurred many instances of death, or mental derangement, from a shock of grief, pain, or calamity...extreme intensity of shock, whatever be its character, is unhinging”<sup>371</sup> or as he writes in *The Senses and the Intellect*:

...a strong sensation, something that takes the mind by storm, and excludes for the time all other objects of attention. The stronger kinds are those that produce some startling change in the still routine of things. The firing of a canon in the quiet of the night; the shattering of a window; the upsetting of a table covered with crockery; the kindling of a conflagration; the taking away of a life—are all intensely exciting to the nervous system; and the excitement takes the particular form of engrossing the entire action of the mind for a length of time. It becomes difficult to form any other adhesions at such a moment...<sup>372</sup>

This focus on the strength of the sensation and how the body and mind absorb its disruptive intensity bears some affinities with the definition of a traumatic event that Freud would later offer in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*—

We describe as ‘traumatic’ any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield...the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism’s energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure...There is no longer any possibility of preventing the mental apparatus from being flooded with large amounts of stimulus.<sup>373</sup>

---

<sup>370</sup> Alexander Bain, *Mind and Body: The Theories of Their Relation* (London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873), 40, as quoted in Matus, *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*, 55. In her book, Matus brackets any discussion of the sensation novel in her exploration of shock. As she writes, “I particularly want to avoid the association of a discourse of psychic shock with any specific subgenre of fiction...To claim that this subgenre has greater purchase on ideas about emotion, shock, and the unconscious, however, would limit the more generalized and diverse interest in mind...” (15). I’m not entirely sure why this bracketing is necessary—after all, to promote “diverse interest” in mind, it makes sense to read the popular along with “high” forms of realism. I understand, however, that it is important to see these trends in sensation novels as trends at work within in realist fiction more broadly. However, in this chapter, I’ve attempted to question the obviousness with which we associate sensation novels with provoking feeling and shock to see how this often worked—how did the sensation novel actually attempt to accomplish this provocation? How did it thematize these very subjects? In what ways did it depict shock? This doesn’t mean that this subgenre has “greater purchase” on these ideas, just that the subgenre offers more complicated permutations of theories of emotion, shock, and sensation than we often acknowledge.

<sup>371</sup> Bain, *Mind and Body*, 64.

<sup>372</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1855), 422.

<sup>373</sup> Freud, 33.

Freud defines trauma or a traumatic event as essentially a disorder of the intake and processing of sensation and stimuli—a condition in which the protective barrier of ego is breached by an intensity and then, as a result of that breach, becomes overwhelmed by a continuous stream of stimuli. For Walter Benjamin, of course, this sensory bombardment would become a constitutive, defining feature of modernity.<sup>374</sup>

While the railway scene and railway accident serves at once as a privileged marker of modernity, it also figures as a kind of primal scene in the theorization of trauma, and in this latter respect, Collins' treatment of the railway accident in *No Name* is important, first, to a discussion of the status of sensation in the sensation novel as a whole, and second, to a discussion of the nineteenth-century theories of shock that lead to the development of theories of trauma. As I have already suggested, *No Name* expands upon the exemplary sensation novel *The Woman in White*, by intensifying its gaze upon the overwhelming, disruptive affects and effects of sensation—in other words, it focuses upon a very specific variant of the transmission of affect, the kind of affect that overwhelms, disrupts, shatters. *No Name* effectively explores the proximity and affinity between the ordinary streams of shock or stimuli that produce sensation (e.g. entertainment) and the startling shocks and stimuli that subsume and risk destroying not only just the structures of identity, but the entire bodily-mental system. Even further, as Collins preface announces, the train serves as an image for the project of the novel itself; as he writes, “my present design” is “to rouse the reader’s interest in following the train of circumstances by which these foreseen events are brought about”(xxviii). Everything moves outwards and forwards from the traumatic event with the train.

---

<sup>374</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Some Motifs in Baudelaire,” *Illuminations* ed. Hannah Arendt (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968/1940). For more on Benjamin, shock, and sensation culture see Daly, “The Railway Novel,” 465.

Unlike a sensation novel like *East Lynne*, or sensation dramas that staged railway accidents on stage as a sensation scene,<sup>375</sup> in *No Name* the sensation scene happens “off-stage”: we hear about the accident as his family—sitting at home eagerly awaiting his return—are visited by a railway employee charged with the task of telling them their father is dead. This, in turn, produces a core effect: the trauma at hand is immediately established as one of mental shock one step removed from the accident itself—the exposure to the traumatic event is, as the current *DSM* would define it, to one who “learns that the traumatic event occurred to a close family member or friend (with the actual or threatened death being either violent or accidental).”<sup>376</sup> The novel focuses on the ripples and reverberations caused by the shock and suddenness of losing a loved one.

And, as it traces, these ripples begin to move out and diffuse quite quickly. While at first the servants try to maintain order in the house (“the pitiless routine of the house went horribly on its daily way”), soon the shock is fully absorbed:

at five, that evening, the shock of the calamity had struck its blow...the disclosure of the husband’s sudden death was followed by the suspense of the wife’s mortal peril. She lay helpless on her widowed bed; her own life, and the life of her unborn child, trembling in the balance (82-83).

As the text emphasizes, in this scene of overwhelming, rupturing transmission of affect, the intense shock of sudden loss causes an immediate mental impact that takes physiological, bodily form: within twenty-four hours of their father’s death, their pregnant mother, and her just-born infant dies, and with that, “The Angel of Death had done his awful bidding; and the two sisters were left

---

<sup>375</sup> See, for instance, Nicholas Daly, “Blood on the Tracks: Sensation Drama, the Railway, and the Dark Face of Modernity,” *Victorian Studies* 42.1 (Autumn 1998-99): 47-76; Matthew Wilson Smith, “Victorian Railway Accident and the Melodramatic Imagination,” *Modern Drama* 55.4 (Winter 2012): 497-522. Both discuss explicit stagings of railway accidents.

<sup>376</sup> Donald Black and Jon E. Grant, “Diagnostic Criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder,” *DSM-5 Guidebook: The Essential Companion to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2014), 178. The categories I trace here uncannily align with the diagnostic criteria in the DSM, from exposure to the traumatic event through intrusion, avoidance, reactivity, a kind of depersonalization, fixation, etc. (178-180). While this would appear to “read symptomatically,” my point is Magdalen’s trauma is depicted as “present,” “manifest,” and on the “surface”—it’s highly visible and identifiable as what we would understand as “Posttraumatic Stress Disorder”—which makes the fact that *No Name* hasn’t been read as a narrative of trauma all the more peculiar. On symptomatic vs. surface reading, see Stephen Best and Sharon Marcus, “Surface Reading: An Introduction,” *Representations* 108.1 (Fall 2009): 1-21.

alone in the world”(90). The shock essentially migrates between bodies. After losing their mother and father, the reverberations of the traumatic event(s) continue to ripple outward: since their parents were not married for a time, the will is invalid, the two sisters, Norah and Magdalen lose their inheritance (it instead falls to an uncle who did not get along with their father), their home, and their status: “Mr. Vanstone’s daughters are Nobody’s Children and the law leaves them helpless...”(109). As with *The Woman in White*, the law again becomes registered as a sensational shock and sensational shock emerges from a collision with the law.

Within this context of a series of nested traumas, Magdalen emerges as the person most thoroughly “shaken by catastrophe”(86); in fact, the extent to which she tracks with many of the markers of a contemporary clinical picture of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder is remarkable. At first, her emotional reaction is delayed and deferred, she sits “tearless and speechless...nothing roused, nothing melted her”(83). While it is clear that she is in the midst of “suffer[ing] severely”(87), with every revelation and new layer of trauma, Norah and Miss Garth anxiously await the appropriate visible signs of her grief: for instance, after learning about their legal situation, they are relieved to find a letter with “the traces of heavy tear-drops lay thick over the last lines of the dead man’s writing” as her tears signal “the mute revelation of Magdalen’s return to her better self”(117). Yet, that relief is short lived.

The novel depicts Magdalen’s grief, or her systemic absorption of the shock, as particularly acute and shattering, and it offers several reasons why. First, her grief is turned inward: Magdalen blames herself for the traumatic event of her father’s sudden death as the trip to Grailsea involved business for her impending engagement, as Magdalen says: “He was not serving Norah’s interests when he went to his death: he was serving mine”(86). Secondly, inasmuch as the novel aligns the stripping of Magdalen’s identity and status with her grief, loss, and trauma, it imbricates the experience of trauma with the experience of legal injustice. Losing the “protective shield” of the law

registers as a loss of the “protective shield” that protects her from shocks and stimuli, and that shock produces “a change in her”(124). As the novel makes clear, the law rendered the sisters position vulnerable and defenseless and while their uncle Michael Vanstone, who receives their father’s inheritance, could have made amends by allowing some provision for the sisters, he instead follows the letter of the law, agreeing that they are “two illegitimate children” and therefore dismissing any thought of them otherwise as “questions of mere sentiment”(123). The novel identifies Magdalen as the figure who most thoroughly absorbs the full shock of law and its cruelty as she recognizes and makes visible his—and the law’s—underlying logic: “He has deliberately robbed Norah, and robbed me”(122). Furthermore, the law’s cruelty in denying her rightful financial standing in turn effects her engagement: her fiancé, Frank, will now have to leave for China, leaving her alone. The novel situates this loss as a repetition of the loss of her parents: “Never had she so tenderly associated Frank with the memory of her lost parents”(131). Her traumas become particularly compounded, repeating and accruing in different variations of loss.

The novel further elaborates Magdalen’s condition as one we would recognize as trauma. In fact, both sisters struggle with the memory of the original traumatic event of their father’s sudden death—as Norah writes in a letter to the lawyer of the day they left their home for good and went aboard the train,

The rain came on again as we took our seats in the train. What we felt at the sight of the railway; what horrible remembrances it forced on our minds of the calamity which has made us fatherless—I cannot, and darenot, tell you (141).

The trauma leaves a pause—or a break that cannot be fully assimilated and conveyed. However, as Norah records of Magdalen, the grief has “fall[en] so much more heavily on her than on me” the events “have quite unhinged her, and worn her out”(137). Even further, Magdalen’s grief and trauma begins to register as a persistent, and uneven negative emotional state full of emotional volatility and hyper and/or overly dulled reactivity: she is described by Norah as on the one hand,

“pale, exhausted and oppressed”(140) and on the other “frenzied” with “a fearful wildness in her eyes”(141). While these markers might be identified with hysteria, the book carefully registers them as connected to Magdalen’s grief and mourning: “how terribly she suffers, how wildly and strangely she acts under violent agitation”(141)—the novel never loses sight, to put it in Bainian terms, that the stimuli from the event is still diffusing throughout her system.

As the novel registers, Magdalen becomes transfixed by the loss: she has to be “tak[en] from the last resting-place of our father and mother, almost by force”(140), and she develops a singular focus on one thought, the recovery of their rightful inheritance. While *No Name* will spend the rest of its plot following Magdalen in what it treats as her (self) destructive quest—one that reviewers of the novel would treat as so improper as to be outright villainous—the novel carefully marks her idea as arising from her grief over the traumatic event:

...nothing has roused, nothing has interested her. She has given herself up, more and more hopelessly, to her own brooding thoughts...She has formed some desperate project of contesting the possession of her father’s fortune with Michael Vanstone; and the stage career which she has gone away to try, is nothing more than a means of freeing herself from all home dependence, and of enabling her to run what mad risks she pleases (143).

This idea not only structures the rest of the plot as Magdalen assumes various identities to try to enter into the life of Noel Vanstone, Michael’s son, who has become heir to her father’s fortune. It also becomes legible specifically as a fixation—as the novel describes it, she is “haunted day and night by the one dominant idea that possessed her”(544) and as it makes clear, this fixation is inseparable from the traumatic memory of loss: “the extracts from the will and the letter—those last memorials of her father, now so closely associated with the purpose which has possession of her mind”(177). Furthermore, running away from home is circulated as a structure of avoidance, a way, of as Norah, says, “freeing herself” from “dependence,” but possibly also from memory and the daily reminders of her previous life.

That Magdalen leaves to take up a “stage career” becomes a particularly dense knot in the logic of the novel and its figuration of traumatic memory. Her turn to the stage is largely used to



foreground her deft skill at imitating and assuming identities—the kind of ability at performance that she will eventually use off stage to try to reclaim and recover what is rightfully hers by assuming different identities. While the way the novel flags her dexterity with mimicry as problematic would suggest a strain of antitheatricity at work within the novel, contemporary critics have also read Magdalen’s acting as suggestive of the performativity of identity, and as undermining and reworking of patriarchal Law.<sup>377</sup> While I would suggest both readings should be preserved, I would also argue that the novel associates Magdalen’s stage performances with her shock and loss. The text links her stage performances to an emotional schism or break that borders on dissociation. As she rehearses in front of her would-be manager, Captain Wragge, her performance becomes intertwined with her grief and the intrusion of memory:

She tried hard to control herself; she forced back the sorrow—the innocent, natural, human sorrow for the absent and the dead—pleading hard with her for the tears that she refused...At first familiar words passed her lips, Frank came back to her from the sea; and the face of her dead father looked at her with the smile of happy old times. The voices of her mother and her sister talked gently in the fragrant country stillness; and the garden walks at Combe-Raven opened once more on her view. With a faint wailing cry, she dropped into a chair; her head fell forward on the table, and she burst passionately into tears (183).

While her grief and memories disrupt her performance, she adjusts by trying to “harden [her]self”(183) from feeling; however, in her first on-stage performance, narrated in a letter by Wragge, the novel even more thoroughly connects the act of mimicry to her grief and trauma:

She was in full possession of herself, until she got the first dress on, and heard the bell ring for the music. At that critical moment, she suddenly broke down. I found her alone in the waiting room sobbing, and talking like a child. ‘Oh, poor papa! Poor papa! Oh my god, if he saw me now!’...We strung her up, in no time, to concert pitch; set her eyes in a blaze; and made her out-blush her own rouge. The curtain rose when we had got her at a red heat. She dashed at it...She rushed full gallop through her changes of character, her songs and her dialogue; making mistakes by the dozen, and never stopping to set them right; carrying the people along with her in a perfect whirlwind, and never waiting for the applause....She carried it through to the end; and fainted on the waiting-room sofa, a minute after the curtain was down (194-95).

---

<sup>377</sup> Secondary criticism on *No Name* includes: Anna Jones, “A Victim in Search of a Torturer: Reading Masochism in Wilkie Collins’ *No Name*,” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 33.2 (Spring 2000): 196-211; Deirdre David, “Rewriting the Male Plot in Wilkie Collins’ *No Name*: Captain Wragge Orders an Omelette and Mrs. Wragge Goes into Custody,” *The New Nineteenth Century: Feminist Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction* (London: Garland, 1996); Vicky Simpson, “Selective Affinities: Non-Normative Families in Wilkie Collins’ *No Name*,” *Victorian Review* 39.2 (Fall 2013): 115-128; Kylee-Anne Hingston, “‘Skins to Jump Into’: The Slipperiness of Identity and the Body in Wilkie Collins’ *No Name*,” *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40 (2012): 117-135; Lynn Pykett, “Collins and the Sensation Novel,” *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Patricia Zakreski, *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848-1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2006).

The novel explicitly associates her performance with her losing “full possession of herself” and instead “br[eaking] down.” She “is talking like a child,” she travels so far away that she seems to lose full control and is then disturbingly manhandled like a puppet who is “strung up” to the right pitch, “set” and “made” appropriate, and then thrust before the curtain. Or, perhaps more aptly, she becomes a kind of hypnotized subject, who acts in a haze without the full recognition of herself and her surroundings, who after “dash[ing] at it” then quickly “faint[s] on the sofa, a minute after the curtain was down.” The novel, in other words, casts this breakdown in terms that almost uncannily anticipate the scene of dissociative break that haunts psychology’s early figurations of trauma. As Ruth Leys explores, in *Trauma: A Genealogy*, since trauma’s “invention” in the late nineteenth century, it maintained a complicated relationship with a kind of theatrical mode of imitation, or mimesis. In what Leys terms the mimetic theory of trauma, the “victim is hypnotically immersed in the scene of trauma” in a way that relied on a “dissociation or ‘absence’ from the self” that “precluded specular distance necessary for cognitive knowledge” and recollection.<sup>378</sup> As Leys explicates, this figuration of trauma oscillated with another, an “antimimetic” theory that “also ma[de] imitation basic to the traumatic experience, but it understands imitation differently” holding that “in hypnotic imitation the subject...remains a spectator of the traumatic scene” and remains “a purely external event that befalls a fully constituted subject.”<sup>379</sup>

In the novel, Magdalen often oscillates between retaining a fully remembered experience of the traumatic event and a dissociative “absence” of self, marked by an absence of sensation and feeling. As she presses on with her plan to reclaim her rightful inheritance, *No Name* continues to mark her psychological struggle and repetition of traumatic breaks. Once she learns that her fiancé, Frank, has officially broken off their engagement, she’s depicted as almost catatonic and void of consciousness and sensation: “She had a dreadful letter...I found her dead and if the doctor had not

---

<sup>378</sup> Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy*, 299, 8-9.

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

been two doors off, nobody else could have brought her to life again”(256). Or, as the doctor summarizes her state: “She sits, as I am informed, perfectly silent, and perfectly unconscious of what goes on about her, for hours together...”(257). If the novel depicts her as still able to represent herself, for instance, writing to her sister Norah as she goes through with her plan to marry Noel Vanstone under an assumed identity, “The shock I have suffered has left a strange quietness in me. I feel as if I had parted from my former self...”(258), it again returns to the idea that the shocks absorbed by her system have rendered her absent or unconscious: “After sitting by the window for nearly an hour—her eyes looking mechanically at the view; her mind empty of all impressions, and conscious of no thoughts—she shook off the strange waking stupor that possessed her...”(290). As soon as she is out of her “waking stupor”—a kind of hypnotized state—the novel again describes her in terms of a deadening that is void of sensation and feeling. The prospect of her impending marriage “petrified all the feeling in her, and annihilated all thought”(393).

The dissociative absence marked by a lack of sensation, emotion, and thought eventually leads to an (eventually aborted) attempt to kill herself—to end all sensation. The novel carefully marks that her desire to kill herself is the consequence of the original traumatic event, the continued reverberation of the shock to her system: “Death the tempter, pointed homeward, to the grave of her dead parents in the Combe-Raven churchyard”(397). As she struggles against her suicidal impulse, the novel once again aligns Magdalen’s state with an absence characterized by lack of feeling and consciousness: “She never moved; she never spoke. The death of thought, the death of feeling, seemed to have come to her already”(409). The novel, in other words, depicts the absorption of a rupturing shock, or trauma, as the death of sensation, feeling, and thought.

Importantly, it also renders the ultimate consequence of absorbing traumatic shocks in explicitly physiological terms; the psychical break is always also a bodily, nervous system break. Left alone and destitute towards the end of the novel, living in “the squalid by-ways of London”(578),

her trauma leads to its logical endpoint: a bodily illness that the novel describes as a complete breakdown of her nervous system. Recognized wandering among the docklands by a friend, Captain Kirke, who had met her earlier in the novel, she is taken back to her quarters, where she becomes afflicted “by an illness which had struck her prostrate, mind and body alike”(578). The novel again clearly links the bodily illness to the original traumatic event: while she had wandered outside “her mind had wandered back to old days at home; and her few broken words showed that she fancied herself a child again in her father’s arms. ‘Poor Papa!’ she said softly. ‘Why do you look so sorry? Poor Papa!’”(576). The trauma, or shock, culminates in a breakdown of the full system that had to absorb it. As the doctor says, “‘Her whole nervous system has given way; all the ordinary functions of her brain are in a state of collapse’”(580). The intake of so intense a shock leads to the collapse of the system that absorbed it, and as the doctor warns she must be kept shielded from an intruding stimuli, as “the least excitement or alarm would be fatal to her”(581).

If trauma or shock in the novel, ultimately results in a breakdown and collapse of the mind/body network the nervous system sustains, leading Magdalen to “lie in bed for weeks to come, passing alternately, without a gleam of consciousness, from a state of delirium to a state of repose”(581), the novel also outlines a recovery from trauma as a slow reorientation, realignment, and reawakening of sensation. As Magdalen passes in and out of consciousness, she begins to take in sensations again: “the sights were clearer, the sounds were louder”(583). In a reorienting of the image of the hand reaching out—first from the door of morgue in *The Red Vial*, then tapping on a shoulder on a dark road in *The Woman in White*—the gesture of the hand of her frequent visitor (and love interest) Captain Kirke touching Magdalen becomes another “sensation scene,” this time one of re-sensitizing and harmonizing the nervous system: “Every nerve in her body felt that momentary pressure of his hand with the exquisite susceptibility, which accompanies the first faltering advance on the way back to health”(592).

The novel traces not only the affects of breakdown of the mental bodily system, but it also ties the recovery from traumatic shock with the experience of narrative and making narrative memory. Magdalen's healing becomes associated with the act of storytelling. First, she becomes a consumer or audience of Captain Kirke's tales from his voyages—and while she listens to his stories of the “pleasures of his life” Magdalen exhibits sustained interest in hearing about “its perils”:

Times innumerable, he and all with him had been threatened with death, and had escaped their doom by the narrowness of a hair's breadth. He was always unwilling at the outset to speak of this dark and dreadful side of his life; it was only by adroitly tempting him...that she lured him into telling her of the terrors of the great deep. She sat listening to him with a breathless interest, looking at him with a breathless wonder, as those fearful stories—made doubly vivid by the simple language in which he told them—fell, one by one, from his lips...(593).

In prying out his stories of the “dark and dreadful” and near death experiences, Magdalen essentially seeks out his own potential traumatic memories: trauma must become narrative, and turning trauma into narrative constitutes a stage in the process of healing in which she becomes “sensitively open to impression in the first freshness of its recovered sense”(594). The stories essentially help resensitize her, or rather, retrain the nervous system and body to again “freshly” process sensation. In turn, after listening to these stories, Magdalen ultimately writes her own story to Kirke, both as a kind of confession, but as a kind of healing from her trauma: “her heart beat as if it would suffocate her...The whole story of her life, from the time of her home-wreck at Combe-Raven...had been all laid before him”(609). Inasmuch as contemporary theories of trauma recognize, as Cathy Caruth captures it in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, that “the trauma thus requires integration, both for the sake of testimony and for the sake of cure”<sup>380</sup> from the original train-wreck, to his ship-wreck, to her “home-wreck” the memories must be transformed into a narrative.

---

<sup>380</sup> Cathy Caruth, “Recapturing the Past. Introduction,” *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 153.

\* \* \*

While the above passage at once invokes the importance of narrative to trauma, it also raises a question about the sensation novel itself. The passage, in a sense, figures Magdalen as a sensation novel reader: a consumer listening with “breathless interest” to narratives of peril and shocks rendered in their “simple” prose. It becomes tempting, then, to ask—does the novel ostensibly advance the idea that telling stories of the “dark and dreadful [...] side of life” in a way that elicits and induces a bodily, physiological response in the person consuming it has a power of re-sensating, or re-conditioning a person’s networks of feeling and sensation? Or does it become another staging and permutation of the necessity of sympathy—that transmission of sensation and feeling involves a kind of re-sensitizing? Or does the sensation novel’s constant rendering of shock speak to audience’s own, real life experiences of shocks, trauma, and anxiety?

We would be right to question the idea of the restorative, re-sensating powers of the sensation novel. After all, to stage the transmission of affect, emotion, and sensation is not necessarily to impart a social function to this transmission, even though the sensation novel in the hands of Collins often seems to offer precisely that even if he at other times denies it. Furthermore, since the novel’s focus is on the transmission of traumatic shocks and their resulting, disrupting effects, it would not seem that the novel is aiming precisely to “transmit” or induce traumatic feeling in the reader. As a reviewer for *The London Review* would capture it, however, it was hard for “ordinarily sensitive readers to peruse his volumes with unshaken nerves” as “we are for ever on the verge of a crash”<sup>381</sup>—the novel left its readers in a suspended state of anxiety. Continuing the train metaphor, the reviewer explained:

We arrive at the close of the third volume almost as exhausted as at the end of a difficult cross-road railway journey; there have been half-a-dozen different trains, any mistake in any one of which would have marred our travelling for the day; the carriage which took us to the station was within a second of being too late; we have been within a few yards of a collision; in each train we have unexpectedly met an old acquaintance; we have

---

<sup>381</sup> “No Name,” *The London Review* (January 10, 1863), 46.

several times lost our luggage, and recovered it again by miracle. All is over now; but one's nerves are shaken, the mind still continues to hope, calculate, prepare for disaster, or devise expedients for success; our host mercifully dismisses us to bed, and our troubles haunt us in our dreams. The thousands who have devoured "No Name," as it appeared, have probably experienced the same sort of fluttering spirits, nervous anxiety, and weary restlessness.<sup>382</sup>

In this refiguration of the novel's scene of trauma that sets the story in motion, the reader too is in a constant state of anxiety, "prepar[ing] for disaster" and left "haunt[ed]" and in a state of "nervous anxiety" by taking the stimulus in.

Yet it becomes tempting to read *No Name's* attribution of the restorative—or at least feeling-inducing—power of listening to stories with breathless interest as directed at the readership, with Magdalen standing in as a surrogate reader, because the novel, in its closing pages, also explicitly invokes the idea of sympathy not just in relation to the single reader, but the collective "unknown" public. It offers two very different visions of sympathy and its circulation among broader audiences. The first comes through the scoundrel/entrepreneur Wragge, who by the novel's end, has become very successful peddling a cure-all pill to a naïve public, and its success owes to its saturation in commercial advertisement: "Hire the last new novel—there I am, inside the boards of the book. Send for the last new Song—the instance you open the leaves, I drop out of it... Show yourself at the theater—I flutter down on you in yellow"(586). This commerce strategy is invoked as a particular species of consumption. As he speaks of his dubious enterprise:

I have shifted from Moral Agriculture to Medical Agriculture. Formerly, I preyed on the public sympathy; now I prey upon the public stomach. Stomach and sympathy, sympathy and stomach—look at them both fairly in the face...and you will agree with me that they come to much the same thing (583).

Here sympathy becomes a sham much like the pill, even further, the act of taking in feeling is described in commercial terms specifically as an act of vacuous consumption, a charge that anticipates a critique that would be leveled at the sensation novel by the Victorian periodical press over the next few years: that it merely indulged a "public appetite...descend[ing] from trash to

---

<sup>382</sup> Ibid., 47.

garbage” or it served as an instance of public taste and the palate abiding only by “the market-law of demand and supply.”<sup>383</sup>

If, on the one hand, the novel offers a vision of the act of sympathy—or the transmission of feeling—as inherently transactional, commercial, and perhaps, a sham, it also offers a contrasting vision of sympathy at the novel’s end. After writing down her story, and renouncing her desire to get the inheritance, Magdalen is given a happy ending, one that Collins knows will be problematic to a readership that found her conduct to be “indefensible,”<sup>384</sup> or, as Margaret Oliphant would describe the depiction of Magdalen, Collins placed her

...into a career of vulgar trickery and wickedness, with which it is impossible to have a shadow of sympathy, but from all the pollutions of which he intends us to believe that she emerges, at the cheap cost of a fever, as pure, as high-minded, and as the most dazzling white of heroines.<sup>385</sup>

Anticipating this kind of critique, while Magdalen speaks to Kirke on the last page of the novel,

Collins implicitly addresses the reader:

‘Do I deserve my happiness?...Oh, I know how the poor narrow people who have never felt and never suffered, would answer me, if I asked them what I ask you. If they knew my story, they would forget all the provocation, and only remember the offence—they would fasten on my sin, and pass all my suffering by. But are you not one of them?’(610).

Collins dismisses those who do not sympathize with Magdalen as “poor narrow people” because they do not focus on the cause or “provocation”—that is, the traumatic event and the experience of the law as trauma—and the suffering that the event causes, which again emphasizes the extent to which the novel was designed to trace trauma and its rippling affects/effects. However, the passage also offers a complex account of sympathy: “people who have never felt and never suffered” at once implies people who “never felt” because they were essentially bad readers and didn’t feel her story along with her, as well as people who didn’t have a personal reference point in their own lives for feeling and suffering. The novel, on its last page, essentially confronts the reader with the necessity

---

<sup>383</sup> Henry Mansel, “Sensation Novels,” *The Quarterly Review* (April 1863): 486, 483.

<sup>384</sup> “New Novels” *The Times* (January 22, 1863): 7.

<sup>385</sup> Margaret Oliphant, “Novels” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (August 1863): 170.



of their feeling—asking if we are the “poor narrow people” or are “not one of them.” Essentially, it provides a different variation of the melodrama of transmission—it makes an explicit claim, much as the ending of *The Streets of London* did, to the feeling derived from the audience’s act of “witnessing.” In order to be a good reader, we are asked to have felt and suffered.

*No Name*, then, offers a vision of why melodramatic perils and shocks often found within sensation fiction highlight a broader question about how (fictional, real) bodies absorb shocks and stimuli. If *The Red Vial* offered an example of sensation missing its mark—feeling failing to transmit—the Collins novels that followed focused on the broader conditions that allow feeling to be transmitted and induced, often explicitly staging moments of the transmission of emotion, as in *The Woman in White*, or ultimately following sensation to its endpoint in the disruption of the entire nervous system, as in *No Name*. While reviewers criticized Collins for “the too profuse employment of the Destroyer”<sup>386</sup> or for creating fiction in which “the reader is continually as if treading on bomb-shells, which may explode at any moment,”<sup>387</sup> depicting melodramatic extremes and physical, psychological embodied violences and ruptures was not an uncomplicated, bracketable act. The embodied presence that structures the sensation novel facilitates its interest in tracing the movement and transmission of feeling. In doing so, the sensation novel considers how shocks are absorbed, how sensation relates to anxiety and the upside down of trauma, and ultimately, how a “medium of expression” mediates and circulates feeling.

---

<sup>386</sup> “No Name,” *The Athenaeum* (January 3, 1863): 11.

<sup>387</sup> “Novel and Novelists of the Day,” *North British Review* (February 1863): 184.

**Chapter 4:**  
**“We watch the audience as well as the actors”:**  
Mimetic Circuits in *The Bells* and *Daniel Deronda*

In a brief moment in George Eliot’s *Middlemarch*, the recounting of Lydgate’s galvanic experiments in Paris joins with a shock of a more theatrical kind. Lydgate, drawn to see one particular French melodrama multiple times due to his love of the actress, returns once more to the playhouse. The actress, Madame Laure, is playing a part across from her real-life husband, who plays the role of her lover, and the part requires her to “stab her lover, mistaking him for the evil-designing duke of the piece.”<sup>388</sup> Yet this night, something rather goes amiss:

The old drama had a new catastrophe...when the heroine was to act the stabbing of her lover...the wife veritably stabbed her husband, who fell as death willed. A wild shriek pierced the house and Provencale fell swooning: a shriek and swoon were demanded by the play, but the swooning too was real this time (151).

In this scene of mimetic disruption, the actress turns criminal. As Lydgate later learns, much to his dismay: this was no accidental stabbing, she “meant to do it”(153). And, yet, of interest for this chapter’s purposes, is the way Eliot turns to theater to record a moment in which imitation crosses wires so much with reality that either reality breaks through the scene of representation to the point that it overtakes it, or the scene of representation effectively becomes real and embodied outside of its representational frames. This chapter turns to two works in the 1870s, Leopold Lewis’s melodrama *The Bells* (1871) and George Eliot’s *Daniel Deronda* (1876), to trace their circuits of imitation, examining how both rework elements of sensation genres, and turn to a variety of genres and media to examine, nest, and breakdown the scene of representation. Both works’ interests in and reflexivity about their own mimetic processes involve attending to the space of performance between actor and audience, and the possibility of words and actions coming to life.

---

<sup>388</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (London: Penguin, 1871-72/2003), 153.

Leopold Lewis's *The Bells* is something of a curiosity within Victorian Studies and Theatre Studies—it is cited for standing out among the sea of Victorian melodrama, and yet, little sustained secondary criticism has been written about it. It is held as both representative of Victorian melodrama and gothic drama, while also existing as a sign that points the way towards, without fully inhabiting, an increased depiction of interiority on stage, that would arrive in different form near the late decades of the century. Above all, perhaps, it is known for the performance of its star, actor-manager Henry Irving, which, as Edward Gordon Craig described it, stood to those who witnessed it as, “the finest point that the craft of acting could reach.”<sup>389</sup> Something of a surprise success, *The Bells*, adapted from the Erkmann-Chatrion play and story, *Le Juif Polonais*, which had appeared in Paris at the Theatre Cluny in 1869, made its London debut at the Lyceum November 25, 1871. It ran 151 nights, was revived frequently even into the twentieth century, toured Britain and America, and remained in Irving's repertoire until the very end of his life.<sup>390</sup> A play that *The Times* described as having “an interest of a purely psychological kind”<sup>391</sup> it was recognized by critics as “a production of an exceptional kind, which sets at defiance the ordinary prescription for theatre.”<sup>392</sup> As a later Victorian critic would write, in 1896, “*The Bells* marked a turning point in the career of a brilliant actor and may be said to have opened an important chapter in the history of the English stage itself.”<sup>393</sup>

But what interest led it to stand out as important? In contemporary criticism, the little that has been written has been very productive: David Mayer has explored how *The Bells* relies on a

---

<sup>389</sup> Edward Gordon Craig, “Irving's Masterpiece—“The Bells”” in *Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century*, ed. Robert Corrigan (New York: Dell Publishing Co. 1967), 121.

<sup>390</sup> Jeffrey Richards, *Sir Henry Irving: A Victorian Actor and his World* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005), 402; Henry Irving and *The Bells: Irving's Personal Script of the Play*, ed. David Mayer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980), 1.

<sup>391</sup> “Lyceum,” *The Times* (November 28, 1871): 4.

<sup>392</sup> “The Bells,” *Pall Mall Gazette* (November 28, 1871).

<sup>393</sup> Frederick Hawkins, “The First Production of the Bells,” *The Theatre* (December 1, 1896), 304.

“double self” that one can see in other works like *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.<sup>394</sup> Carolyn Williams’s reading of melodramatic tableaux in *Daniel Deronda* turns to how tableau in *The Bells* externalizes and realizes the protagonist’s interior state, or how “invisible interiority can take empirical form”<sup>395</sup> helpfully complicating readings of realism and melodrama and the novel and drama.

While this chapter looks at both *The Bells* and *Daniel Deronda*, it does so with a very different aim of placing each work in a continuum with the materials I have explored thus far by viewing them as two different works both responding to sensation culture, and offering complications of the scene of the transmission of feeling. As a critic recorded of the experience of seeing *The Bells*, the play and performance of Irving served as a reworking of sensation culture and the “sensational”:

The only question that arises on seeing the play for a second time is, whether an audience in 1872, particularly a stall audience, is capable of realizing the talent which the actor displays. Have not the public lately subsided to milk-and-watery tastes, to appreciate anything that requires a concentration of attention? There has been a great and senseless outcry against ‘sensation’ and here we actually have a sensational performance of the strongest kind. The sensation, though, does not arise out of a preposterous jump, or an utterly unlikely fire, or a wildly-ridiculous penny-steamboat accident, but a death-scene wrought out with terrible truthfulness in its details—sudden, unexpected, and startlingly impressive; and the curtain falls mid a silence which shows that the audience has been completely carried away by the scene they have just witnessed.<sup>396</sup>

The critic places *The Bells* on a continuum with sensation drama, viewing Irving’s performance as “a sensational performance of the strongest kind” and situating the play as a different kind of sensation drama. Instead of staging sensation through a “preposterous jump, utterly unlikely fire...”, the play is “actually” sensational because of the performance and the “terrible truthfulness in its details” of the death scene that is “sudden, unexpected, and startlingly impressive.” But what does it mean to be “actually sensational”? As I will explore, this question ties to another one about the play’s proliferation of layers of imitation. If *The Bells* is a play that stages and is invested in questions about the circulation and transmission of feeling, it continually ties the circulation of feeling and the

---

<sup>394</sup> David Mayer, “The Bells: a Case Study A ‘Bare-Ribbed Skeleton’ in a Chest” in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*, ed. Joseph Donohue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 398.

<sup>395</sup> Carolyn Williams, “Moving Pictures: George Eliot and Melodrama,” in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion* ed. Lauren Berlant (New York: Routledge, 2004), 108-109.

<sup>396</sup> The OJ, “Henry Irving,” *Judy: or the London Serio-Comic Journal* (January 24, 1872): 128.

“actually sensational” to the boundaries between the fictional and real, offering something disruptive within the scene of mimesis itself. In exploring the play’s sense of mimetic disruptions, I seek to reclaim the sheer complexity, and indeed, strangeness, of *The Bells*. Offering a complex nexus of mesmerism, memory, and mimesis, the play becomes a site that questions not only how forms of imitation transfer feelings, but also how embedded in the scene of imitation is a sense of its unsettled potentials—including the potential that the scene of representation could become, as one critic described it, “too real.”

*The Bells* is set one snowy, blustery Christmas eve, in a remote village in Alsace. With his daughter Annette’s wedding about to take place, Mathias, the successful innkeeper and burgomaster of the village, harbours a terrible secret that he fears will be exposed. Fifteen years ago, the last time the village had such a cold winter, a man whom the play refers to throughout as “the Polish Jew” (we learn, in the final act, that his name is Koveski) had arrived in the town seeking shelter, and disappeared without a trace, the mystery of the crime still lingering. Mathias is the only one who knows what happened to the visitor: in need of money, he murdered Koveski, burnt his body in a lime kiln, and stole his money using it to establish his comfortable, bourgeois life. Over the course of the play, the burgomaster becomes increasingly haunted by the memories of his crime, fearing the exposure that his respectability, money, and power were all based on a brutal murder. Increasingly struggling to maintain his façade, he goes to sleep the night of his daughter’s wedding, and dreams a dream so real, that it *becomes* real. In his dream, he’s put on trial and a mesmerist is summoned to extract the truth of Mathias’s guilt. After reenacting his crime in a mesmeric trance, he’s sentenced to the gallows, and as the noose is placed around his neck, he awakens from the dream still choking from the rope’s grip, and dies as his family (and the audience) looks on in horror.

Similarly to the sensation of *The Streets of London*, *The Bells* realism relies on creating a multi-sensory world on stage, that produces a sensational priming, or tuning of the audience. The initial

stage picture of *The Bells* creates a pictorial realism that relies on juxtaposition of interior and exterior. The set “depicts the shadowy, candle-lit interior of an Alsatian inn. The walls are paneled in dark oak and adorned on each side with three stags’ heads” with a furniture, a lamp or candle burning, and a stove, warming the room. At the back wall was a door that lead outside, and “a large window” through which the audience could see the “country covered with snow” with “the snow falling.” As one critic described it, the play was exceptionally mounted, “the interior of the inn in the first act, with its quaint furniture, its shelves of queer crockery, and its thoroughness from end to end is a picture well worth study.”<sup>397</sup> If much of the emphasis on Victorian melodrama’s realism has focused on its spectacle—and as we’ve seen a lot of early concerns focused on melodrama appealing to the eye and not the ear—its realism and sympathetic channels emerged through much more subtle invocations of an array of sensory details. As characters enter the inn, cold and covered in snow, drinks are given to warm people, a character “sits by the stove to warm his hands”<sup>398</sup> And across the opening scene, characters draw attention to the sound of the wind, heard via off-stage effects.

All of these multi-sensory details—the sight of the comfortable interior and gusty winter snow outside, the sound of the wind, the touch of the cold and warmth of the fire—function within an associative chain of memory that becomes crucial to the narrative, as these impressions serve within the play as a crucial link to the past. As friends of Mathias observe when Annette’s fiancé, Christian, notes how severe the winter in the village must be every year,

Walter: Oh, not every year...For fifteen years we have not had a winter so severe as this.  
Hans: No—I do not remember to have seen so much snow since what is called “The Polish Jew’s Winter.” In that year the Schnieberg was covered in the first days of November, and the frost lasted till the end of March.  
Christian: And for that reason it is called “The Polish Jew’s Winter”?  
Walter: No—it is for another and terrible reason, which none of us will ever forget...(127)

---

<sup>397</sup> “Lyceum,” *Daily Telegraph* (November 27, 1871): 2.

<sup>398</sup> Leopold Lewis, “The Bells” in *Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century*, ed Robert Corrigan (New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1967),126. The stove was in fact one of the first electric lights used on stage in London—see Mayer, “The Bells: A Case Study,” 403.

Here sensory details serve as a sense memory that triggers recollection of the mysterious event that took place fifteen years ago. Or, to put in the terms of Victorian theories of mind and memory, mental links form through either the law of contiguity, that is, sensations, impressions, ideas “presented to the mind at the same time”<sup>399</sup> or through the law of similarity in which, as Bain describes, “present actions, sensations, thoughts, or emotions tend to revive their like among previous impressions or states” or the “tendency to be reminded of past occurrences and thoughts of every kind, through their resemblance to something present.”<sup>400</sup> The opening act of *The Bells* operates through identifications and links forged by both, however, it heavily relies on the latter—it invests present impressions and sensations with the power of summoning past impressions, sensations and memories.

*The Bells* has a complex structure for unfolding and revealing the past event that lies buried at its center—the story of the disappearance of the “Polish Jew” Koveski, who had visited the town fifteen years ago, in another brutal winter. As I will explore, the play returns to this “primal” scene from the past three different times, deploying three different modes and strategies for re-presenting it. In doing so, *The Bells* should be recognized as a work that thematizes strategies of re-presentation and the circulation of affect that appears in different registers of narration and enactment. If the sensory cues act as the conditioning trigger that begin to pull the play into the past, or bring the past alive in the present—and as we will soon see—in no form is this more fully realized than the sounds of the sleigh bells that will ring offstage and come to haunt Mathias, and give the play its name.

However, the sound of the bells is merely one link in a larger conjuring of the events that happened

---

<sup>399</sup> On associationism and memory see: Nicholas Dames, *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia and Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 217-232; also Alexander Bain, *The Senses and the Intellect* (London: John W. Parker and Son, 1855), 451.

<sup>400</sup> Bain, *SI*, 451. Interestingly, when Bain describes this process of association through the law of similarity, he turns to theatre: “But in addition to [contiguity] we find that one thing will, by virtue of similarity, recall another separated from it in time; thus, if I see Lear acted to-day, I am put in mind of a former occasion, when I have seen the same play acted.”

fifteen years ago. The first insight the play provides into what happened occurs before the sound of the bells are even heard and emerges through the mode of a character narrating part of the event from their perspective:

Walter: ...It was this very day, just fifteen years ago, that I was seated at this very table...we were just beginning a game of cards, when, just as the old clock struck ten, the sound of horse bells was heard; a sledge stopped before the door, and almost immediately afterwards, a Polish Jew entered...I fancy I can see him even now entering at that door with his green cloak and his fur cap...[he] unbuckled a girdle which he wore round his waist. This he threw on the table, and we all heard the ringing sound of the gold it contained. Then he said, 'the snow is deep; the road difficult; put my horse in the stable. In one hour I shall continue my journey...At eleven o'clock the night-watchman came in. Everyone went his way and the Jew was left alone.

[Chord of Music—loud gust of wind—crash of glass off—hurry. All start to their feet. Music continued] ...The next morning they found the Jew's horse dead under the bridge of Vechem, and a hundred yards further on, the green cloak and the fur cap, deeply stained with blood. As to what became of the Jew himself has never to this day been discovered [Music Ceases] (127-128).

This telling of the story raises with it the question, why does the audience need to hear this story first before it sees it represented, or why does the play first turn to this strategy of representation? In turning to this narrational mode first, *The Bells* seemingly pushes beyond just using it for the sake of exposition—the play builds suspense by offering a mystery that will be revealed and heightens the anticipation around it, as the crucial details of what happened to the visitor remain hidden from view. The narration itself also abides by the kind of Bainian logic of highly present narration that I discussed in chapter three in which the narrator's language has an ability to conjure the scene before the eye of the listener:

Language...brings before his mind scenes witnessed by other men...in so far as he is able to conceive what is thus related, he catches fire of the actual witness...The narrative of a chase, a battle, an adventure, places the hearer under the dominion of the emotion before us. The interesting stake, at first remote and uncertain, but gradually brought nearer as the successive incidents are recounted, keeps up that animated suspense, felt alike by the actor, the looker-on, and the hearer or reader...<sup>401</sup>

For Bain, language is able to bring before an audience, hearer, or reader, a scene that becomes proximate, allowing them to enter the scene, and “catch fire of the actual witness.” In the case of *The Bells*, Mathias's friend Walter's language conjures the detailed scene of the memory through multi sensory channels: the sound of the clock and the sleigh bells, the coins, the descriptions of the

---

<sup>401</sup> Alexander Bain, *The Emotions and the Will* (London: John. W. Parker and Son, 1859), 196.



snow, the blood-stained cap. The play places him in the role of witness watching the present event before him again, or as he says “I fancy I can see it all still before me,” a sense further extended with the gust of wind crashing the glass, disrupting the narration, but bringing the “animated suspense” and sense of foreboding further into the present scene. The play attempts for the first time to give life to and embody the past.

While the play stages the associative memory that relies on present sensations and impressions triggering and conjuring memories of the past (after all Walter’s recollection was triggered by the sound of the wind, the cold, the realization that it was the same day), the play does not solely locate this process in the individual and their memory. As Walter’s above recollection suggests, this strategy of narration is immediately invested in the question not just of processes of personal recall, but in the reception and communication of feeling that the story induces. Not only does the narration draw in the other characters listening on stage, and by extension the audience listening, but it also stages characters’ responses. As Christian observes, “What you have told me greatly astonishes me”(129). If melodrama abides by an “aesthetics of astonishment”<sup>402</sup> it has many ways for conveying that astonishment, through different representational strategies, and yet, at this particular moment the play still relies on speaking or narrating exactly what these emotional reactions are.

Christian’s astonishment upon hearing the story is soon reinforced by another moment of a character recording his own astonishment. Once Mathias the burgomaster finally enters the scene, we find out he had been delayed because his cousin had made him stay to watch a performance of a mesmerist in Ribeauville, and it is clear that this mesmerist with his ability to make people in the audience “tell him everything that weighs upon their consciences” has shaken Mathias to his core, and also left him astonished: “He simply looked at them and made signs and they went fast asleep.

---

<sup>402</sup> Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976).

It certainly was an astonishing performance. If I had not myself seen it, I should never have believed it”(131). The play again gestures towards an audience’s reaction to something they are seeing or hearing. From its outset, *The Bells* stages a multi-layered representational strategy for encountering its shocking core, and each time it stages it, it appears concerned with tracing how the representational strategy affects the audience consuming it.

If the play begins by approaching feelings being induced by performance and narration, and has endowed multiple registers and media as capable of producing sympathetic responses from a distance—hearing a story about a night long ago, hearing an account of someone’s reaction to a performance without seeing the performance itself—over the course of the play the memory of what happened fifteen years ago becomes more present and proximate within the scene of representation, until it is directly embodied on stage. This occurs over the course of two ‘dream sequences’ that both constitute and rework elements of the tableau and the sensation scene. The first of these occurs at the end of act one, occupying the role of a melodramatic tableau. If, however, in tableau, as Peter Brooks defines it, “the characters’ attitudes and gestures, compositionally arranged and frozen for a moment, give, like an illustrative painting, a visual summary of the emotional situation,”<sup>403</sup> *The Bells*, I would suggest, fuses elements of tableau and the sensation scene (itself a reworking or extension of tableau). Instead of just offering a “visual summary of an emotional situation” it tunes the audience for the appropriate flow of feeling and sensational response while also staging a scene of the transmission of feeling.

Agitated from his fears of the mesmerist and rattled by the mention of the mystery of the man’s disappearance fifteen years ago, Mathias begins to hear—only to himself—the sound of sleigh bells. Left alone downstairs in the inn, he sinks into a chair, but his fears and agitations crescendo behind him into a stunning scene. The scenery rises and through the gauze the scene from the night

---

<sup>403</sup> Brooks, 48.

exactly fifteen years ago appears: the frozen country-side is revealed with the snow falling heavily and the picture freezes on the crucial moment of potential, if not yet kinetic, energy. As the visitor sits bundled in his sleigh, “a man,” Young Mathias, appears “*carrying an axe; stands in an attitude of following the sledge*” (133). If the first approach to the story of what happened fifteen years ago relied on a character telling a story that leaves out the unknown part, in this tableau, *The Bells* supplies the missing scene: a “vision” that reveals that it was young Mathias who indeed murdered the traveller seeking shelter. While older Mathias, at first, does not see the tableau as his back is initially to the scene, he soon turns around and is horrified as he is confronted by the image of his past crime. The tableau thus complexly mediates Mathias’s psychology, as the few contemporary scholars who have written about *The Bells* have noted. As Carolyn Williams argues, in this tableau, Mathias’ “interiority is forcibly externalized” and he becomes “divided against himself as he ‘realizes’—and as the scene ‘realizes’—what he has done.”<sup>404</sup> And as David Meyer argues, the play as a whole, and the scene in particular, involves Mathias becoming increasingly unstable due to the duality and “double selves” in his life, a duality that becomes fully realized in the tableau.<sup>405</sup>

I would suggest, however, that this sense of duality, and the dimensions of the scene itself only obtain further complexity when read in light of the Victorian reviews of the play. In many of the reviews, Victorian critics drew attention to this scene for departing from the original French version. In Erckmann-Chatrain’s *Le Juif Polonais*, there is no tableau, instead, a second “Polish Jewish” man arrives at the inn fifteen years later, and when Mathias sees the visitor, he lets out a cry and suddenly collapses.<sup>406</sup> While a few reviewers maintained that the change in the British production to

---

<sup>404</sup> Williams, 108, 107.

<sup>405</sup> Mayer, “The Bells: A Case Study,” 401.

<sup>406</sup> Erckmann-Chatrain, *Le Juif Polonais*, (Paris: J. Hetzel, 1869), 30-31.

a highly crafted tableau amounted to the playwright “introduc[ing] a very effective scene,”<sup>407</sup> others criticized the decision:

...Mr. Lewis has, for the sake of a beautiful stage picture, sacrificed the most important dramatic point in the tale. We take it the intention of the authors was to represent the outward and inner life of a man whose conscience is burdened with the hideous weight of a murder committed fifteen years ago...The fact of the murder having been committed by Mathis the respected burgomaster is only to be suggested to the audience by his uneasiness and trouble when alone...Mr. Leopold Lewis has dismissed the second Jew; he has omitted the original termination of the act...he instead supplies...a picture of the actual murder supposed to be seen by Mathis during his delirium. The picture is admirably contrived, and most effective. It called down shouts of applause from the audience; but it has just this ill effect—it tells the audience unhesitatingly that Mathis is a murderer...<sup>408</sup>

The primary criticism was that while the French version withheld until the end of the play that Mathias was definitely the murderer, here the British version unambiguously revealed Mathias’s crime to the audience by the end of act one, instead of only “suggest[ing]” it.

The critique that the change revealed too much or that it created “repetition”<sup>409</sup> with the final scene of the play carries with it a judgment about the play’s modes of representation and the audience’s reaction to it: the critiques essentially argue that the move was merely for “the sake of a beautiful stage picture” one that was “admirably contrived” and drew applause, but left little to the imagination. In that assessment, the review echoes criticisms of melodrama and sensation genres that we’ve encountered in previous chapters: that their forms of spectacle were vacuous. A favorable review of the original French play, *Le Juif Polonais*, that highlights its deft handling of incidents, illuminates the basis for the later criticism of the English adaptation:

Lessing speaking of the Laocoon, shows how the sculptor has moderated the agony of the figures, that the spectator may have a margin in which to exercise his imagination. The work of art which tells its story at once is a work of mediocrity...We are yet much afflicted (though the affliction is rapidly decreasing) with novels in which incidents only fit for transpontine theatres are presented to us with a detail which might instruct a scene-painter, but which must disgust any reader acquainted with the best examples of fiction. This vice, too, is one which is peculiarly English, and it has become English only with in the past few years. It never cropped up in the literature of France or Germany. We do not, therefore, express any surprise over the fact that “Le Juif Polonais,” while dealing with powerful and gloomy incidents, should avoid the coarse and vulgar manipulation of our second and third-rate playwrights and novelists...<sup>410</sup>

---

<sup>407</sup> “Drama” *Daily News* (November 27, 1871); see also “Scene from ‘The Bells,’” *Illustrated London News* (December 23, 1871): 619.

<sup>408</sup> “Lyceum” *Daily Telegraph* (November 27, 1871): 2; see also “Drama” *Athenaeum* (December 2, 1871): 728.

<sup>409</sup> “Drama,” *Athenaeum*.

<sup>410</sup> “Le Juif Polonais,” *Examiner* (Aug 21, 1869): 533.

Not only does the reviewer re-inscribe a familiar tension between sensation and imagination, associating the former with emotional extremes, and the latter with a moderating of appropriate depiction and reaction, but he also nationalizes these binaries, setting the French play against tendencies that critic locates in the English “transpontine theatres” and novels “with incidents only fit for transpontine theatres...presented to us with a detail which might instruct a scene-painter.” In doing so, the critic clearly invokes melodrama, the sensation drama, and the sensation novel along the lines we saw in chapter one: that the tendency toward the visual and spectacular erased the use of the “higher faculties” of imagination, that “scene-painting” represented a lesser, more mediocre form of representation. The same tensions are alive in the review above of *The Bells*: the problem for the critic hinges on what happens when instead of something being suggested, we instead see “a picture of the actual murder.” The word “actual” stands out; after all, the play, of course, isn’t staging a picture of an *actual* murder. Yet, seeing something “actualized” and “realized” seems to be continually posed as a problem for representation and realism: what happens if the scene becomes too actual, too real?

This question becomes crucial to *The Bells* in particular in its final act, and I would suggest that the significance of the addition of a sensation tableau in the English version rests in how the tableau sets the stage for the final act of *The Bells*. As Victorian critics recognized, this shift towards tableau strongly interlinked with the larger dream sequence at the end of the play: as one reviewer noted, the scene was “anticipating the final effect of the piece, which is also a vision representing a dream”<sup>411</sup> And, as another critic recognized, “In place of the visit of the Jew we have in the adaptation a dream preliminary to that which follows, and like it, presented visibly to the audience. In this the scene of the murder is repeated before the eyes of the awe-struck assassin.”<sup>412</sup> The

---

<sup>411</sup> “Drama,” *Daily News*.

<sup>412</sup> “Drama,” *Athenaeum*.

addition of the scene gives the play two inter-related “dream” sequences, “presented visibly” to the audience.

The effect this shift has, or the way the dramatic tableau in act one anticipates the final act, has a crucial effect: it places the focus on representation itself, and the spectator’s emotional engagement within the field of representation. To see how, we have to return to the inserted tableau. Not only does the play again turn to this scene in multiple registers—first the event leading up to the disappearance is narrated, then the moment right before the crime is visually depicted—but the tableau heightens and transforms the scene into one of spectatorship and witnessing representation:

*[Sinks on chair; the Bells come closer; then the back of the Scene rises and sinks, disclosing the Bridge of Vechem, with the snow-covered country and frozen rivulet; lime-kiln burning in the distance. The Jew is discovered seated in a sledge dressed as described in the speech in Act I; the horse carrying the Bells; the Jew’s face is turned away. The snow is falling fast; the scene is seen through a gauze; limelight. Vision of a man dressed in a brown blouse and hood over his head, carrying an axe; stands in an attitude of following the sledge. When the picture is fully disclosed, the Bells cease]*  
Mathias [his back to the scene] Oh, it is nothing. It is the wine and cold that have overcome me! *[He rises and turns; goes up stage; starts violently upon seeing the vision before him. At the same time the Jew in the sledge suddenly turns his face, which is ashy pale, and fixes his eyes sternly upon him. Mathias utters a prolonged cry of terror, and falls senseless. Hurried Music]* (133-134).

The play stages multiple frames of representation—the temporal and spatial past of the snowy country-side exposed in the background, the temporal and spatial present of the interior of the inn with its inhabitant watching the other frame—and then it disrupts the boundaries between each. What starts as a still picture assumes an animate force: just as Mathias “starts violently upon seeing the vision before him” and “at the same time, the Jew in the sledge suddenly turns his head...and fixes his eyes sternly upon him.” The tableau becomes a dense knot of affect, imitations, and spectatorship in which Mathias’ gaze essentially brings the tableau to life, while concomitantly the tableau is granted the capacity to disrupt his sense of space and interiority by looking back. This reciprocal bond between spectator and representation crucially registers as a scene of the transmission of feeling: the tableau looking back at him, leads to Mathias “utter[...] a prolonged cry of terror, and fall[...] senseless.” The scene stages a moment of both the disruptive powers of mimesis and the complex circuitry of emotional and sensational exchange that inheres in the

movement between performance and spectatorship, a knot made only more complex by the fact that there is a real audience sitting in the auditorium watching the representation. If I have already argued that sensation scenes were often sensational for how they might “prime” the audience for sympathetic responses, or often themselves staged moments of the transmission of emotion, *The Bells* formally reflects upon how the scene of representation itself might convey and disrupt the bounds not only between the scene represented and the audience, but within its own layers of representation. Instead of a character merely seeing another character and reacting to him, the change in the British version amplifies and strengthens the play’s interest in how theatrical representation utilizes multiple strategies of imitation that propel spectatorial response.

It is not until the third act, however, that the sheer number of layers of representation rapidly accrue, intertwine, and unravel. After seeing the tableau vision of the moment before his crime re-presented before him, Mathias continues to be haunted, as if he had seen a ghost. As a doctor says, “his nerves are still very much shaken,”(136) although none of the characters know the true reason why. Mathias, once alone, admits, the mesmerist he saw in performance has left him unsettled and “nervous.” In his state of agitation he rushes to get the marriage contracts signed between his daughter and her fiancé, a gendarme in the town, before any of his secret is revealed. He then settles down into what he believes will be his first peaceful night sleep.

Instead, the play enacts its most complex nesting doll of layered registers of representation: the scene of Mathias in his bedroom dissolves into a dream, that will soon involve a trance within a dream, one that disrupts the borders of its own imitation so much that it threatens to become “real.” As the gauze rises to reveal “an extensive set of a court of justice, arched, brilliantly lighted”(147) with judges on the bench, barristers, a crowd in the courtroom of “the public,” and Mathias seated before them, on trial for Koveski’s murder, Mathias questions what constitutes the “proof” that he committed the murder. The opening of the dream sequence enumerates different forms of proof,

forms that also constitute the play's strategies for representing: is proof verified through witnesses, Mathias asks, as there were none to the crime (even though within the play's logic, the audience members have all become witnesses), or is it in the sound of the bells that Mathias hears that prove his crime as they signify "the remembrance of what is past," or is memory itself proof, as Mathias lies, "I have no memories"(149). Mathias continually draws attention to the representation itself as not forming reality: "all this is but a dream—I am in a dream"(149), in a way that affirms the fictionality of the representation itself. Further, the presence of an on-stage crowd only heightens the self-referentiality of the scene, with Mathias sometimes asking it questions, and as I will explore, the crowd throughout registering their emotional reactions to what they see unfolding in the courtroom before them.

Within the dream, the play then adds another layer to its dense mimetic overlay: exhibiting unconsciously the anxiety Mathias has harbored towards mesmerism since witnessing the performance in Ribeauville and the concern that he might "relate certain incidents in your past life"(138) if brought before one, the court calls upon a mesmerist to "read the inmost secrets" of Mathias's heart (150). Mathias attempts to dismiss mesmerists as performers that "deceive the public for the purpose of gaining money; [and] merely perform the tricks of conjurers"(150) to negate their interrogation of him as any form of proof. The play's use of mesmerism, however, reflexively interrogates the space of performance and imitation more broadly, probing what constitutes the "reality" of performance, and the communication between minds that takes place in the scene of representation.

Of course, mesmerism in Victorian culture had long raised questions about the dynamics not only of consciousness and unconsciousness, agency and control, but also influence and the communication of transmissibility of feelings and ideas not only between mesmerist and subject, but the audience watching the performance, as well. As Alison Winter raises in *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind*



in *Victorian Britain*, mesmerists at times took the “transmission of sympathetic feelings”<sup>413</sup> as their objects, and mesmerism is rife with the tensions over the plausibility that “one person’s body could exert a powerful influence” that “dissolv[ed] certain cognitive boundaries between”<sup>414</sup> the bodies and minds of individuals.

This movement of feeling and bodily effects that dissolved boundaries, exerting influence between them, was not solely present between those involved directly in the scene of mesmerism, but rather amorphously triangulated between mesmerist, subject, and audience. As Winter argues,

Animal magnetism drew its power, in part, from the unexpectedness of bodily effects: experimenters anticipated that they would elicit unusual effects, but they were often surprised by the proceedings, and audiences were regularly shocked out of skepticism by the phenomena they saw...mesmeric influence was not contained in the relations or space between the two main parties, but spread to onlookers as well. In the process of closely scrutinizing the complex relations of mesmerist and subject, other people could find themselves falling under the influence. Mesmerism’s infectiousness gave even more plausibility to its effects.<sup>415</sup>

Mesmerism, I would argue, condenses some of the dynamics we have therefore already encountered in other chapters, especially within the scene of Bainian sympathy—that feeling is communicated in a way that spreads, catches fire, and becomes infectious to those consuming it. Mesmerism’s concerns also share significant space with concerns at work in sensation culture. As Winter argues, sensation novelists experimented in “mental influence and nervous stimulus,” and writers like Oliphant, in describing her rapt attention to the page, or a “book’s ‘hold’ on mind”<sup>416</sup> constellate entirely with mesmerism.

If mesmerism’s influence holds importance for the sensation novel, I would suggest it also warrants a place within a discussion of sensation drama and melodrama for several reasons. Not only, as I have explored, does the transmission of feeling and sensation, the circulation of emotions of shock and astonishment, and the rehearsal or staging of an embodied mode of consumption that

---

<sup>413</sup> Alison Winter, *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 114-115. It is highly surprising books on mesmerism do not devote more attention to *The Bells*.

<sup>414</sup> Winter, 236.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid.*, 102-103.

<sup>416</sup> *Ibid.*, 327, 328. There are, of course, in sensation novels also plots that directly use mesmerism.

appear in sensation drama share concerns with mesmerism, but mesmerism itself appears to circulate overdetermined ideas about imitation, mimesis, and performance. To take a famous British example—Dr. Elliotson’s experiment and performances with his patient Elizabeth O’Key in the 1840s—in the scene of interaction between the mesmerist and subject, the mesmeric subject might echo movements ostensibly out of their field of vision, or might start performing songs, dancing, reciting.<sup>417</sup> As discussions of O’Key noted, the trance state was akin to watching someone assume a different character—if out of the trance state she was a “shy servant girl,” in it, she transformed into someone outgoing and playful, as if performing a part.<sup>418</sup>

In addition to the theatricality of self that laced its way through discussions of mesmerism, at the heart of the scene of mesmeric performance was a crucial question: was the performance the audience was seeing fraudulent or real? The discourse used to describe this question often borrowed specifically from the language of theatre. In the case of O’Key, for instance, reporters writing about her performances wondered if she was truly under trance or was acting it: “The question of deception was at once met by a conviction, derived from appearances, that the most accomplished actor that ever trod the stage could not have presented the change with a truer show of reality.”<sup>419</sup> Not only does mesmerism therefore raise with it the idea that the subject might be like an actor, but sometimes actors could be viewed as both themselves mesmerists and entranced subjects. Kemble and Bernhardt, for instance, sometimes were described, or described their own practices, as “mesmerizing” an audience while simultaneously being “mesmerized” themselves.<sup>420</sup> And, yet, as the above quote suggests, these questions about acting and performance in mesmerism tied often into questions about the reality of what was taking place and if real effects were being produced. In the

---

<sup>417</sup> Winter 74, 87-88 and Amy Lehman, *Victorian Women and the Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists, and Mesmerists in Performance* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009).

<sup>418</sup> Winter, 76.

<sup>419</sup> “University College Hospital: Animal Magnetism,” *The Lancet* (May 26, 1838), 284 quoted in Lehman, 44.

<sup>420</sup> Lehman, 20.

scene of mesmerism, questions hovered around what effects were happening on the body, and as Winter describes of one mesmeric encounter, how one could “tell if such an affect had been produced [...] and what significance would the phenomena have if one could agree that they were real.”<sup>421</sup> The phrase in the above quote—that the performance presented “a truer show of reality”—only highlights how imitation, performance, representation, and reality effects entangled in the mesmeric scene.

This complex collision of forces—of influence, spectatorship, communication, witnessing, imitation, acting, and the status of the “real”—shapes the final dream sequence of *The Bells* once the mesmerist enters into the scene. If *The Bells* had already advanced, after Mathias returned from witnessing the mesmeric performance, that watching the signs unfold constituted an “astonishing performance,” it does so through emphasis on the status of spectatorship. As Mathias recounts, “If I had not myself seen it, I should never have believed it”(131). Seeing is believing—or belief spreading through spectatorship and witnessing—is present in the way the play unveils the scene of the murder.

As I have traced, the play approaches the mystery at its center through a variety of strategies: first the play narrates the moment leading into the murder as if it was before us, next, it stages the moment *right before* the murder in the form of a tableau, and finally, it complexly switches modes into a trance-within-a-dream sequence to unveil the moment of the murder itself. Once the mesmerist in the dream puts Mathias into a trance, he tells him “you are at the night of the 24<sup>th</sup> of December 1818” and Mathias reenters that night, fifteen years ago, bringing it to life. In the first layer of the telling of the event, Mathias speaks “as if he were describing a vision presented to his sight”(151), using the present tense: “the people are leaving the inn...” and narrating his thoughts as he thought them that night, “I am thinking that I must have money...” This register of narrating as if the vision

---

<sup>421</sup> Winter, 129.

was before him and he is inside it, bears affinities with the Bainian scene of witnessing and embodied viewing I have already discussed. However, the play presses further into yet another register for telling the story. Slowly, Mathias slips into *acting* out what he had previously only been narrating:

*[He raises his hands as if feeling for something.]*

Mesmerist. What are you doing?

Mathias. I am feeling in the sledge—should he carry pistols!...

This process further intensifies and he begins to more fully enact the scene, playing out Koveski's dialogue briefly, as well as his own thoughts:

Mathias. He asks me how far it is to Mutzig? Four leagues. I wish him well on his journey! He answers "God Bless You!" He goes out—he is gone! *[Mathias, with body bent, takes several steps forward as if following and watching his victim; he extends his hands]* The axe! Where is the axe? Ah here behind the door...

Mesmerist. You follow him?

Mathias. Yes, Yes, I have crossed the fields! *[Pointing.]* Here is the old bridge, and there below, the frozen rivulet! How the dogs howl at Daniel's farm—how they howl! And old Finck's forge, how brightly it glows upon the hillock *[Low, as if speaking to himself]* Kill a man! Kill a man! You will not do that, Mathias—you will not do that. Heaven forbids it. *[Proceeding to walk with measured steps and bent body]*...

The play not only stages his split self and dialogue of his guilty conscience, but it seemingly becomes reflexive about representation itself, transforming a question about believability into one about what it means to see something before you and the stakes of what can be shown, told, and enacted. These questions only further deepen as the play depicts what it has teased as the unrepresentable, repressed mystery at its core: the actual murder, which Mathias does not only tell, but also reenacts:

*[The noise of the bells increases—the Crowd express alarm simultaneously—all at once Mathias springs forward, and with a species of savage roar, strikes a terrible blow with his right hand.]* Ah! Ah! I have you now, Jew! *[He strikes again—the crowd simultaneously express horror. Mathias leans forward and gazes anxiously on the ground—he extends his hand as if to touch something, but draws it back in horror.]* He does not move!...*[He bends low down and appears to life the body upon his back; then he walks across stage, his body bent, his steps slow, as a man who carries a heavy load]*...To the lime kiln, I am there *[He appears to throw the body upon the kiln]* How heavy he was! *[He breathes with force...He appears to push the body with the pole, using his whole force; suddenly he utters a cry of horror and staggers away, his face covered with his hands]* Those eyes, oh, those eyes! How he glares at me. *[He sinks on to stool, and takes the same attitude as when first thrown into sleep.]*(153).

The scene's violence and horror—a scene whose politics is that Mathias's comfortable bourgeois life relies upon dehumanizing and taking the life away from a created "other" who was seeking refuge and shelter—is captured not through tableau, and not as a direct depiction with Koveski present.

Instead, *The Bells'* trance-within-a-dream-within-a-play draws attention to its modes of enactment and the layers of imitation and their construction: Mathias embodies his past action (his movement and gesture), and enters into the scene as an actor assumes a role, while narrating his actions. The dense overlay of mimetic modes (narration, direct dialogue, his inner thoughts, direct bodily enactment) also continually draw attention to the transmission of feeling and emotion induced: the surrogate crowd on stage watches on with increasing “alarm” and “horror” at what appears before them. And Mathias’s own horror mirrors not only that of the spectator, as he both inhabits and spectates it. For instance, he both walks and observes and points towards and describes the scenery of the bridge. However, the eyes staring back at him also recall the boundaries blurring in act one’s tableau in which the eyes “look back.”

This blurring of boundaries yet again pushes a step further, as the dream does not end with the reenactment of the murder. Awoken out of the mesmeric trance, but still asleep in the dream, the court condemns Mathias to be hanged for his crime. As the rope slips around his neck and the death bell tolls, in the dream, the play features “joy bells” playing in the present non-dream state for his daughters wedding day. The dream scene fades away, the play returns to the bedroom, and Mathias stumbles towards his family and the wedding party who has knocked at his door, he says to Christian, “*in a voice of strangulation*” “The rope! The rope! Cut the rope!” as “*his hands clutch at his throat as if to remove something that strangles him*” (155), and he dies—his hanging in the dream effectively becomes real, or rather the boundaries between the dream space and the “real” of the present representation blur and cross one another.

If the character Mathias is both within the dream and no longer in it, if the representation produces real effects that manifest in the play’s other frame of representation, the British version of the play much more explicitly than the French version thematizes this crossing and blurring of mimetic lines as emphatically one of spectatorship, witnessing, and the transmission of sensation and

feeling. While the French version includes spectators on stage in the courtroom, watching what takes place, it does not use them as extensively as the British version. In the French, for instance, we see the individual responses of spectators—in one case “*un spectateur*” says in a low voice aside, “*C’est terrible*”<sup>422</sup> or the script registers movements among the spectators in response to what they hear, “*une jeune femme se couvre la figure de son tablier, d’autres détournent la tête*”<sup>423</sup> and “*une femme*” in the courtroom says “*Ah!*” in response to what she sees.

In Lewis’ *The Bells*, however, the crowd assumes the role of a collective body, or mass audience, registering emotion. As I have noted in passing, the on-stage “crowd” in the courtroom throughout the scene registers their shock and collective feeling: as Mathias prepares to murder Koveski, the stage directions note that “the Crowd express alarm simultaneously.” As he re-enacts the murder, striking Koveski with a blow of an imaginary axe, “the Crowd simultaneously express horror”(153). The play clearly highlights “the Crowd” on stage as a collective body with simultaneous responses in ways that productively constellate with “the crowd” not so much of the revolutionary mob, but with that late nineteenth-century crowd of modernity, and the contagion theorized by Le Bon and Tarde. The insight a reading of *The Bells* brings to crowd theory and other nineteenth century works that draw attention to surrogate crowds is the particular liminality of the crowd in the play. Not only does the play’s use of the on-stage crowd highlight the transfer and emotion and feeling—that the play stages again not just the scene itself, but the affective response of spectators watching the scene before them—but it also circulates the idea of emotional contagion in multiple ways. In *The Bells*, the on-stage crowd within the dream quickly morphs with and blurs into the onstage crowd outside of the dream—the wedding party trying to wake up Mathias:

President...the court condemns the said Mathias to be hanged by the neck until he is dead!

---

<sup>422</sup> Erckmann-Chatrain, 75.

<sup>423</sup> Ibid., 80.

[*Mathias staggers and falls on his knees. The crowd makes a movement of terror—the death-bell tolls—lights lowered gradually—then curtain at back of gauze descends, disclosing the Scene as at commencement—lights up. Music—a peal of joy bells heard ringing*]

Crowd [*without*] Annette! Annette! The bride!...

Catherine [*without*] Mathias! Mathias! Get up at once. It is late in the morning and all your guests are below [*More knocking*](154, my emphasis)

Here the crowd within the courtroom transforms into the crowd of eager guests anticipating the wedding. That is, the crowd itself begins to blur the lines of reality in ways that only further imply the real crowd in question is the one out there watching—the crowd in the theatre’s auditorium. As Mathias dies, “the crowd fall[s] back with horror, and form groups of consternation, with a general exclamation of terror”(155), much like the dream crowd had been before. The play then ends with one final tableau that again relies on the crowd, upon his wife and daughters grief over Mathias death, “the women in the crowd kneel[...].” and the “men remove their hats and bend their heads upon their knees (155). *The Bells* maintains its referentiality, and its concern with the travel of emotion to spectators, by concluding its final tableau with a staging of the emotion of the on-stage crowd.

Inasmuch as *The Bells* rehearses the emotions of the crowd, the responses registered by the crowd watching it—the audience—prove to be of particular interest. In the reviews of the play, critics continually return to the subject of the audience response to it, singling out two primary ones. If the play essentially advances a nested mimesis in which one event that happens within a dream state (getting condemned to hanging) becomes “real” in the present non-dream state of the play, and the crowd’s reaction to what they are witnessing blurs together and the dream state crowd becomes the “real” crowd of the wedding party, it is notable that reviews continually returned to the question of the play’s realism. As critics maintained, the realism of the courtroom scene and watching the murder become re-enacted was so strong it was “unsuitable for spectators of weak nerves”; or as another characterized it, it constituted an effect that “was decidedly painful” as it was “terribly

real.”<sup>424</sup> As yet another critic noted of the final scene of a slightly later Irving version, “there is perhaps a measure of over-realism and method of producing effect that seems almost too strong.”<sup>425</sup> This kind of painful realism seems to continually link to the effect/affect it produces on the spectators.

As a critic of the 1871 production argues, the “agonies” of the trance/trial dream and watching Mathias “strike the blow” and “stagger under the weight of the body to the lime kiln” all “caused a somewhat painful feeling to the audience owing to the great power with which Mr. Henry Irving delineated them.”<sup>426</sup> If the effect was so strong as to cause a painful feeling, the language used to describe the audience’s response at times mirrored the response of the on-stage crowd, “it was a terrible realism of a kind such as we have rarely witnessed, and, for its awful truth was therefore painful. It is a scene that one watches and listens to with breathless horror.”<sup>427</sup> In a sense, the on-stage audience morphed into the real one.

Yet, there is another fundamental way the borders between the represented and those watching the representation become amorphous and permeable. The reviews of *The Bells* continually refer to one other effect the play had upon the audience—that it mesmerized them, as Irving’s performance was “in every gesture, every move, in the play of his shoulders, legs, head, and arms, mesmeric in the highest degree.”<sup>428</sup> As accounts described, as the curtain fell it took the audience time to “recover their self-possession.”<sup>429</sup> Or as another critic maintained any flaws the production might have were quickly forgotten as “so great...is the hold it takes upon the audience, and so powerful the spell exercised over the feelings.”<sup>430</sup> The reviews continually describe the play and its

---

<sup>424</sup> “Drama,” *Athenaeum*, 728; “Drama,” *Daily News*. See also a critic in “Mr. Irving as Mathias,” *Once a Week* (January 13, 1872): “the acting in the dream scene can only be charged with one fault. It is too real: too terrible.”

<sup>425</sup> “Lyceum Theatre,” *Sunday Times* (May 3, 1874), 4.

<sup>426</sup> “Lyceum Theatre,” *Era* (December 3, 1871).

<sup>427</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>428</sup> Edward Gordon Craig, “Irving’s Masterpiece—‘The Bells’” in *Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century*, 119.

<sup>429</sup> Hawkins, “The First Performance of *The Bells*.”

<sup>430</sup> “Lyceum Theatre,” *Morning Post* (November 27, 1871).



performance as having a mesmeric effect on the audience itself. Perhaps the ultimate form of the play's blurring of boundaries is how the staged scene of mesmerism contagiously spread a kind of mesmeric effect amongst the theater audience, leaving behind its traces as affective experience. As George Sims encapsulated it,

The play left the first-nighters a little dazed. Old-fashioned playgoers did not know what to make of it as a form of entertainment. But when the final curtain fell, the audience, after a gasp or two, realized that they had witnessed the most masterly piece of tragic acting that the British stage had seen for many a long day, and there was a storm of cheers. Then, still pale, still haggard, still haunted, as it were, by the terror he had so perfectly counterfeited, the actor came forward with the sort of smile that did not destroy the character of the Burgomaster or dispel the illusion of the stage.<sup>431</sup>

If the audience remains entranced by the performance they have just witnessed, the illusion extends beyond the frame of representation in yet another way as well: the actor, essentially, appears to retain elements of his character and the labor of performance, seeming haunted by what he has just enacted. Here, the overloaded lines of imitation become alive, or produce real effects beyond the performance itself.

While *The Bells* reveals a work in the 1870s still contending with the legacy of the sensation drama and sensation culture as a whole by re-writing what constitutes a sensation scene, by using strategies of externalizing interiority, and by turning to other modes of performance to reflect on the scene of mimesis, George Eliot's 1876 work of high realism, *Daniel Deronda*, offers a very different example of a work still contending with the legacy of sensation culture. As critics like Anne Cvetkovich have noted, Gwendolen in particular, "resembles both the transgressive and the suffering heroines of the sensation genre" or as Athena Vrettos argues, "Eliot's use of sensation fiction paradigms to portray the workings of nervous disease is made clear in the barely disguised

---

<sup>431</sup> George Sims, *Glances Back* (London: Jarrolds, 1917) 53-58 in *Henry Irving and The Bells: Irving's Personal Script of the Play*, ed. David Mayer, 6. The book includes some full-length reviews, the column was originally published in *The Evening News*.

violence and murderous fantasies of her nervous heroine.”<sup>432</sup> Additionally, a lot of secondary criticism, by Litvak, Marshall, Voskuil, and others has examined the novel’s theatricality and uses of theater: as Marshall advances, “*Daniel Deronda*, a book which seems to have been planned in its first stages as both ‘a novel and play,’ in many senses belongs to theater and has everything to do with the theater.”<sup>433</sup> While many critics most thoroughly link the novel’s theatricality to Gwendolen as a heroine, and Mirah as an “anti-theatrical” contrast, others also view the novel’s exploration of Jewish nationalism, and nation forming itself, as highly theatricalized.<sup>434</sup> And finally, Carolyn Williams has examined how melodramatic form appears in the novel, exploring how scenes in *Daniel Deronda* draw upon the language of melodramatic tableau exemplified in *The Bells*, in which interior feelings and states become exteriorized in stage pictures.<sup>435</sup> My interest lies in seeing how its traffic in sensation, theater, and melodrama interconnect. *Daniel Deronda*’s “theatricality” in fact maintains careful distinctions between modes and genres of theatrical performance—and, in crucial moments, ties this generic difference between something that almost looks like the old distinction between legitimate and illegitimate theatre discussed in chapter one, into accounts of feeling and the performative work of mimesis.

But, first, it is worth exploring the extent to which Eliot’s previous works and correspondences conceive of different forms of theatre and “theatricality.” I would argue Eliot’s relationship to theater is defined by an ambivalence, one that also extends to and interlinks with the

---

<sup>432</sup> Ann Cvetkovich, *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992): 129; Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 59-60. On connections of *Deronda* to the sensation novel, see also: Marlene Tromp, *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law In Victorian Britain* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2000)

<sup>433</sup> David Marshall, *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 196. On the novel and theater, also see: Joseph Litvak, *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992); Lynn Voskuil, *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004); Gail Marshall, *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Kimberly Snyder Manganelli, *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

<sup>434</sup> See Marshall, 202 and on nationalism and theatricality, Voskuil, 96.

<sup>435</sup> Williams, 106.

categories of the popular and conceptions of the audience and crowd.<sup>436</sup> On the one hand, Eliot's works—no more so than *Daniel Deronda*—reveal an interest in theater and performance. From the Madame Laure interlude in *Middlemarch*, to the original conception of “The Spanish Gypsy” as a drama,<sup>437</sup> to her position in the Victorian reception of Wagner,<sup>438</sup> to her prolific consumption of theater, along with G.H. Lewes, as evidenced in her letters—Eliot's connections to theater and forms of performance subtly abound, and her viewership of theater and performance ran the gamut of genre and form. As she wrote in a letter of travels in Barcelona in 1867, “this evening we are going to hear the Faust at the great opera house, to say nothing of our being now in a hurry to be ready for a popular drama...you can imagine everything of this sort is interesting to us. We watch the audience as well as the actors.”<sup>439</sup>

This interest in “watch[ing] the audience as well as the actors” highlights another strand at work in Eliot's fiction—her interest in watching audiences watch, and attention to the flow of feeling between characters. In *Adam Bede*, for instance, Eliot's staging of Dinah preaching through the eyes of a stranger watching her, attends precisely at once to the performer/preacher and the audience “she had thoroughly arrested.”<sup>440</sup> Eliot traces how as Dinah flows through different “current[s] of feeling,” her voice attempts to affect the feelings of the crowd: the hearer wonders if though Dinah can “fix the attention of her rougher hearers” whether or not she “could have the power of rousing their more violent emotions as well.” As the narrator's and readers gaze follows Dinah's vocal modulations, and her skin become paler from emotion, the gaze shifts to the

---

<sup>436</sup> A more biographical approach to Eliot might, as Rosemarie Bodenheimer does, relate this ambivalence to Eliot's own ambivalence about artistic ambition and her status as a public figure within her own career as a writer. See, Rosemarie Bodenheimer, “Ambition and Its Audiences: George Eliot's Performing Figures” *Victorian Studies* 34.1 (Autumn 1990): 7-33

<sup>437</sup> On “The Spanish Gypsy,” see, for instance: David Kurnick, *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

<sup>438</sup> See Nick Dames, *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

<sup>439</sup> George Eliot, “Letter to Mrs. Frederick Lehmann, February 3, 1867” in Gordon Haight, ed., *The George Eliot Letters 9 vols* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-1978), 4: 341-342.

<sup>440</sup> George Eliot, *Adam Bede* (London: Penguin, 1859/2008), 32.

audience, noting their “responsive sigh[s] and groan[s]” but also noting the failure of the transmission of emotion as “the village mind does not easily take fire”(33). If these are Bainian and Lewesian understandings of the physiology of emotion—currents, feelings that catch fire—Eliot links this scene of an attempt at the circulation of feeling more explicitly to the theatre: “the stranger, who had been interested in the course of her sermon, as if it had been the development of a drama—for there is this source of fascination in all sincere unpremeditated eloquence, which opens one to the inward drama of the speaker’s emotions...”(37). Watching the movement, or attempted movement between speaker and audience is likened to seeing a drama, and something about the dramatic itself seems to exist in the interplay between the “inward drama” opening up the members of the audience.

In “The Spanish Gypsy,” Eliot would again return to the subject of watching the transfer of emotion between a performer and the audience, in this case a crowd in an outdoor Spanish-town square seeing a performance of juggling, magic tricks, song, and dance. Eliot attends to the emotions of the crowd, watching how “the crowd is fired,”<sup>441</sup> and the performance “exalt[s] the thick-pressed crowd/with a new pulse in common, blending all/the gazing life into one larger soul...”(56). But, as we saw in *The Bells*, the gaze of the poem seems invested in how the performers and crowd reciprocally shape one another. At once the performers affect the crowd, and as Fedalma begins to dance: “at first a reverential silence guards/the eager senses of the gazing crowd:/they hold their breath, and live by seeing her/But soon the admiring tension finds relief--/sighs of delight, applausive murmurs low...”(61). And, concomitantly, the emotions of the crowd also affect the performer: “the exquisite hour, the ardor of the crowd,/the strains more plenteous, and the gathering might/..all gathering influences culminate/and urge Fedalma...”(64). In both *Adam Bede* and “The Spanish Gypsy,” drama and performance serve as a site to consider how “inward

---

<sup>441</sup> George Eliot, “The Spanish Gypsy: A Poem,” Second Edition, (London: Blackwood, 1868), 55

emotions” open up members of the public, in ways that seem reflexive about her own practice as an artist writing with a public reading it, and the purpose of art more broadly.

After all, if Eliot’s view of the purpose of art, as articulated in “The Natural History of German Life,” “is the extension of our sympathies” and the “mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot,”<sup>442</sup> one might wonder how small scenes like those above that link the dramatic with a scene of emotional transfer, and describe a potential mechanism for how sympathy might fail to flow (as in *Bede*) or might produce influence (as in “The Spanish Gypsy”), relate to other more paradigmatic and political moments in Eliot of the awakening and tuning of self to that which is outside it. One of the most full articulations of this moment of sympathy in the process of expanding occurs, of course, in *Middlemarch*, after Dorothea struggles through a night of pain after seeing Will and Rosamund together. Trapped in her own grief and perspective, with the morning, she “wake[s] to a new condition”<sup>443</sup> one that allows her to see past her own point of view, and to have renewed sympathy with those beyond herself. Dorothea’s act of moving “beyond the bounds of our personal lot” maintains a kind of theatrical spectatorship, or presence in which one is watching oneself and the audience, and oneself as the audience. She turns over, and “forces herself to dwell on every detail...Was she alone in that scene? Was it her event only?”(787), forcing herself to reexamine her own “narrow” spectatorship to instead see the potential dramas and crises at work not just in herself, but in the other players, who each have their own backstory. This reappraisal of her spectatorship with the scene of the drama in turn extends even further outward to the world around her:

She opened her curtains, and looked out towards the bit of road that lay in view, with fields beyond, outside the entrance-gates. On the road there was a man with a bundle on his back and a woman carrying her baby; in the field she could see figures moving—perhaps the shepherd with his dog. Far off in the bending sky was the

---

<sup>442</sup> George Eliot, “The Natural History of German Life,” *Westminster Review* (July 1856): 54.

<sup>443</sup> George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, 787.

pearly light; and she felt the largeness of the world and the manifold wakings of men to labour and endurance. She was a part of that involuntary, palpatating life, and could neither look out on it from her luxurious shelter as a mere spectator, nor hide her eyes in selfish complaining (788).

Dorothea's (theatrical) spectatorship of the scene before her, her awareness of the largeness of the world and its struggles, will form a contrast with Gwendolen in *Daniel Deronda*, one that relies upon a kind of theatrical framing in which Dorothea takes in the scene outside and its actors, and realizes she can no longer be sheltered as a "mere spectator." The narration, much like Eliot in the theatre watching the audience and actor, carefully attends to the audience and actor, staging the emergence of what Eliot describes as the fullest capacity for art—to expand circles of sympathy—for Dorothea and perhaps by extension, for the crowd of readers consuming it. Subtly theatrically framed moments like this will only become more explicitly theatrical in *Daniel Deronda*, a novel that in many ways problematizes and explicitly theatricalizes both arts' role in expanding sympathies, as well as offering insight into qualities of art that accomplish this aim.

While Eliot's fluency in theater migrates into aspects of her work and can be found in her letters and diaries, she also retained a complex relationship to theatre, often criticizing it. As she observed in an 1852 letter, "I confess, the theatre is generally a very dreary amusement for me...I mentally resolved last night that it should be a long while before I wasted another evening there."<sup>444</sup> When speaking in 1879 of the possibility of a theatrical adaptation of *Romola*, she weighed in on the current theatrical scene: "the state of our stage would make me shudder at the prospect of its characters' being represented there."<sup>445</sup> Although it might be tempting to sort Eliot's attitudes to theater purely by genre, her attitudes towards different genres appear more complex. At once, tragedy holds a particular interest: her "Notes on 'The Spanish Gypsy'", for instance, elaborate her theory of tragedy as "some grand collision in the human lot...an irreparable collision between the

---

<sup>444</sup> Eliot, "Letter to Charlie Bray, December 9 1853), Haight, ed., 2: 131.

<sup>445</sup> Eliot, "Letter to Mme Eugene Bodichon, October 4, 1879," Haight, ed., 9:275.

individual and general,”<sup>446</sup> and elsewhere she writes how “it is my way (rather too much so perhaps) to [sic] urge the human sanctities through tragedy—through pity and terror as well as admiration and delights,”<sup>447</sup> and she reserves particular concern for when tragedy misses its mark, describing a play as utterly “demoralizing” as “indeed all tragedy must be when it fails to move pity and terror.”<sup>448</sup> If her respect for tragedy becomes apparent, discussions of other genres yield more mixed results: a trip to the pantomime left her feeling “rather poisoned all evening by the theatre air” and yet also delighted to have seen a “theatre full of children.”<sup>449</sup> Seeing an adaptation of a melodramatic French play lead to a critique of qualities that would be perfected in the sensation drama a decade later: “No sparkle, but a sort of Dickens-like sentimentality all through...As a series of tableaux I never saw anything equal to it. But to my mind it is execrable moral taste to have a storm and shipwreck with all its horrors on the stage. I could only scream and cover my eyes. It was revolting to hear the cheers and clapping of the audience.”<sup>450</sup> In a critique that aligns with some of the criticism of the visual elements of melodrama that we saw in chapter one, Eliot focuses on the play’s spectacle, critiquing both the “moral taste” of depicting “horrors on the stage” while also lamenting the rousing response it received from the audience.

Eliot’s assessments of the theater also appear to fold into a more capacious argument about the divisions between good and bad art. Upon seeing a strong performance of Salvini in *Othello*, Eliot noted that, “great art, in any kind, inspirits me and makes me feel the worth of devoted effort, but from bad pictures, bad books, and vulgar music, I come away with a paralyzing depression.”<sup>451</sup> While this might appear to be a simple analysis of a great performance, it still leaves questions

---

<sup>446</sup> George Eliot, “Notes on ‘The Spanish Gypsy,’” *George Eliot’s Life as Related in her Letters and Journals, Vol. III*, J.W. Cross, ed., (London: Blackwood, 1885, 44.

<sup>447</sup> Eliot, “Letter to Frederic Harrison, August 15, 1866,” Haight, ed., 4:301.

<sup>448</sup> Eliot “Letter to Sara Sophia Hennell London, November 22, 1861,” Haight, ed., 3:467. The letter refers to Fetcher’s *Othello*. For her theory of tragedy, see above, “Notes on ‘The Spanish Gypsy.’”

<sup>449</sup> Eliot, “Letter to Sara Sophia Hennell, February 2, 1862,” Haight, ed., 4:10.

<sup>450</sup> Eliot, “Letter to Charles Bray, April 17, 1852,” Haight, ed., 2:18.

<sup>451</sup> Eliot, “Letter to Alexander Main, May 26, 1875,” Haight, ed., 6: 146.

around what would count as and be defined as “bad” and “vulgar” art forms. Returning to “The Natural History of German Life,” it would appear to be great art is that which expands sympathies, and that responds to the desire that “we want to be taught to feel” not for a misrepresentation of the real, but for its true “picture of human life.”<sup>452</sup>

While this feeling might not only be associated solely with one genre in Eliot—even though her return to tragedy stands out—present in some of Eliot’s letters and works is a tendency to divide or break down good performance from bad performance by tracing its fall into other, more popular genres. After seeing the Italian tragedienne Ristori, Eliot lamented how the quality of the tragedy was lowered through a “cheap company that turns the ensemble into a farce or burlesque.”<sup>453</sup> Here popular forms—farce, burlesque—are invoked to describe the art’s failure, its movement from a “high” form of art to a “lower” one.

A similar treatment and disaggregation of theatrical forms by genre also appears in Eliot’s 1870 dramatic poem, “Armgarth,” the story of a singer who, over the course of the poem, loses her voice and ability to perform. In examining ambition, artistic success and failure, and relationship between an artist and her audience, the poem ruminates on aspects of the female performer and art in general in ways that productively constellate with *Daniel Deronda*. Arriving home after her performance in Gluck’s *Orpheus*, Armgarth speaks of the rush of performance (in the third person): “She has found/this night the region where her rapture breathes—pouring her passion on the air made live with human heart-throbs.”<sup>454</sup> Here the act of performance focuses on this scene of emotional transfer and kinetic sensation that exists between the performer and audience—the air itself, the space between performer and audience—becomes charged and alive. Her teacher, Leo,

---

<sup>452</sup> Eliot, “The Natural History of German Life,” 54.

<sup>453</sup> Eliot, “Letter to John Blackwood, April 6, 1869,” Haight, ed., 5:23.

<sup>454</sup> George Eliot, “Armgarth” in *The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems* (Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1870/1874): 81. On “Armgarth” see especially: Bodenheimer, “Ambition and Its Audiences: George Eliot’s Performing Figures”; Alysia Kolentis “Tragedy and Compromise in George Eliot’s Armgarth and Middlemarch” *Genre* 49.3 (December 2016): 303-329.



maintains one crucial criticism of it: that she “trilled” her voice in one moment in a way that was not a part of the opera. This evaluation in turns leads to a longer discussion on the relationship between artist and audience that uses genre as an important distinction:

Armgar: You were wrong—  
Dear Leo, you were wrong [about the trill]; the house was held  
As if a storm were listening with delight  
And hushed its thunder.  
Leo: Will you ask the house  
To teach you singing? Quit your Orpheus, then,  
And sing in farces grown to operas,  
Where all the prurience of the full-fed mob  
Is tickled with melodic impudence;  
Jerk forth burlesque bravuras, square your arms  
Akimbo with a tavern wench’s grace,  
And set the splendid compass of your voice  
To lyric jigs. Go to! I thought you meant  
To be an artist—lift your audience  
To see your vision, not trick forth a show  
To please the grossest taste of grossest numbers.<sup>455</sup>

As we will soon see with Klesmer in *Daniel Deronda*, here Eliot makes distinctions between art that rely on genre and the role of the audience. Adding a vocal flourish risks taking opera into the realm of farce, burlesque, and something fit for a tavern. The audience becomes a mob, the grossest numbers, hungry to see an artist “trick forth a show.” Caring for the audience’s response as Armgar does at this moment of the poem, is revealed not only as vanity, but as a kind of artistic failure—albeit one that the audience loves. And the poem seems to mark this transgression—the departure from Gluck that feeds the crowd—as a movement between genres, in which Orpheus risks becoming burlesque.

The kind of ambivalence—a preoccupation with and investment in theater along with a simultaneous concern and critique of it, as well as a tension posited between popular and non-popular generic forms, and a distinction drawn between genres within the context of art and even imitation itself—perhaps is no more fully explored than in Eliot’s 1876 novel, *Daniel Deronda*. While the novel is often discussed in terms of its theatricality and anti-theatricality, I suggest that its

---

<sup>455</sup> Ibid., “Armgar,” 82-83.

attention to theatrical genres and forms deserves more attention, as the novel often harnesses the friction between performance genres in broader discussions of art, nationalism, spectatorship, identity, and the transfer of emotion. On the one hand, the novel seems to establish a binary along the lines of theatrical genres—between popular forms of performance and Tragedy—tying these genres to specific characters, especially Gwendolen and Mirah, and in moments seeming to point to a clear favoring of one genre over the other. On the other hand, whatever seeming binaries the novel elaborates, ultimately become far more complicated. Characters like Daniel become sites of generic conflict, and scenes across a variety of genres seem to instead use the collision between and intermingling of genres to make more intricate explorations of the workings of emotion and its transfer in the scene of imitation, and between performer and audiences.

From the outset of the novel—a famously “theatrical” *in medias res* opening in a gambling resort in Leubronn that structures itself on spectatorship and absorption—the novel’s attention to theatrical genres first, albeit subtly, appears. As we watch the players watch each other, and watch Gwendolen in particular, she becomes acutely aware of the piercing gaze upon her. The novel identifies this spectatorship as explicitly dramatic:

many were now watching her, but the sole observation she was conscious of was Deronda’s, who though she never looked towards him, she was sure had not moved away. Such a drama takes no long while to play out: development and catastrophe can often be measured by nothing clumsier than the moment-hand.<sup>456</sup>

If spectatorship becomes likened to drama, the physical environment the novel opens in, with its “gas-poisoned”(9) air akin to how Eliot described the theater air in her letter, and the room’s “heavy cost of gilt mouldings [and] dark-toned colour”(7) bear a striking affinity to a theater playhouse.<sup>457</sup> In the beginning of what will become a trend in the novel, a scene that becomes heavily associated with Gwendolen here begins to link or associate her with forms of popular entertainment. She becomes the “problematic sylph”(10) of the ballet, and the environment is linked with sounds expected to

---

<sup>456</sup> George Eliot, *Daniel Deronda* (London: Penguin, 1876/1995), 11.

<sup>457</sup> On this point, see also: Gail Marshall, 74.

emanate from “an ingeniously constructed automaton” and a “bedizened child stationed as a masquerading advertisement on the platform of an itinerant show”(8). Eliot’s positioning and use of theatre is not just broadly “theatrical” but from the beginning distinguishes between different genres of theatricality.

The link that the first chapter only gestures towards between Gwendolen and forms of popular entertainment soon becomes much more explicit. When the music teacher Klesmer first evaluates her singing, the first in a series of cutting assessments of her he delivers focuses on the kind of music she chooses. As he advances, the “music which you sing is beneath you. It is a form of melody which expresses a puerile state of culture—a dandling, canting, see-saw kind of stuff—the passion and thought of people without any breadth of horizon”(49). Gwendolen is stung to learn “how bad my taste is”(50), and the novel does not just confine this critique to popular music, but extends it into the performance of popular dramatic forms and the motives for performing. With her family in financial ruin, Gwendolen believes she can make a living on the stage, and seeks Klesmer’s advice and input. In a scene that delivers a broader critique of what a “real artist” is, Klesmer attempts to demystify what he sees as her incorrect understanding of art. As he argues, she would have to truly commit to acting with a passion and would have to fully train, “for you must not be thinking of celebrity—put that candle out of your eyes—and look only at excellence”(256). While the distinction between “celebrity” and “genius”(257), or between “mediocrity” and being a “real artist”(259) might just seem to involve motive, and the process of pursuing the arts, the novel in this section, also forms a link between Gwendolen and specific genres and forms. As Klesmer maintains, her idea that she could find work in the theatre and train at the same time has “no more resemblance to reality than a pantomime”(258). If her ideas are analogized with pantomime, he also associates her potential future with yet another popular form:

A manager would rather require you to pay as an amateur for being allowed to perform, or he would tell you to go and be taught—trained to bear yourself on the stage, as a horse, however beautiful, must be trained for the circus (258).

Klesmer's seemingly casual, but continual association of Gwendolen with popular genres fairly quickly begins to infiltrate her own point of view. With her dreams dashed, the novel conveys her misery in terms of theatrical genres. For Gwendolen, "all memories, all objects, the pieces of music displayed, the open piano—the very reflection of herself in the glass—seemed no better than the packed-up shows of a departing fair"(262). In a line that echoes a description in chapter one, the novel describes Gwendolen's memory and identity as a "packed-up" itinerant show at a fair and the pantomime and itinerant show seemingly serve to reinforce a flimsy version of reality, and an illusion that might appear to be real, but instead quickly disappears.

The association that the novel posits between Gwendolen and popular forms, and the illusion it portrays her as possessing not only consists in linking her with these forms, but in suggesting that she in some way fails to understand what the novel ostensibly positions as their opposite. After Klesmer eviscerates her idea that acting will be an easy career to pursue, the novel further elaborates exactly what her dream consisted of: "it seemed to her but the affair of a year or so for her to become the most approved Juliet of the time, or, if Klesmer encouraged her idea of being a singer, to proceed by more gradual steps to her place in the opera, while she won money and applause by occasional performances"(262-263). Here the novel suggests that Gwendolen's "highbrow" aspirations—that she can perform tragedy or sing in the opera—are misplaced, because she seems to have severed the forms from intrinsic artistry, and thinks of them instead in terms of extrinsics, like approval, money, and applause.

This nexus of the motives for pursuing art, popular and "legitimate" forms of art, and the distinction the novel offers between real artistry and art for the applause, also shapes the novel's early allusion to Rachel Felix, the great Jewish-French tragedienne, whose fame and celebrity status

emerged from her depiction in particular of French tragedy (Racine, Corneille).<sup>458</sup> Recognized as one of the greatest actresses of her day, both Eliot and Lewes had mixed reviews of her work. While Lewes portrayed her later work as “careless,” he highlighted her performance in *Phèdre* as “charged with pathos” and “transcendent,” singling out a scene as “an ideal representation of real emotion, it belonged to the highest art.”<sup>459</sup> George Eliot’s view of tragedy as we have seen from her letters, also shares an understanding of it based on its emotional core—she criticized a performance for the actor not having “the weight and passion enough for deep tragedy,”<sup>460</sup> although of a performance of Rachel, she signaled she was not entirely captivated by it, “I have not yet seen the ‘Vashti’ of Currer Bell in Rachel, though there was some approach to it in *Adrienne Lecouvreur*.”<sup>461</sup> And, yet, Eliot positioned Rachel in the novel in a way that clearly critiques Gwendolen’s (mis)understanding of tragic acting, and her naïve understanding of her own abilities:

She had never acted—only made a figure in *tableaux vivants* at school; but she felt assured that she could act well, and having been once or twice to the Théâtre Français, and also heard her mamma speak of Rachel, her waking dreams and cogitations as to how she would manage her destiny sometimes turned on the question whether she would become an actress like Rachel, since she was more beautiful than the Jewess... ‘Do I look as well as Rachel, mamma?’ said Gwendolen, on day when she had been showing herself in her Greek dress to Anna, and going through scraps of scenes with much tragic intention. ‘You have better arms than Rachel,’ said Mrs Davilow... ‘But your voice is not so tragic as hers; it is not so deep.’ ‘I can make it deeper, if I like,’ said Gwendolen... ‘I think a higher voice is more tragic: it is more feminine; and the more feminine a woman is, the more tragic it seems when she does desperate actions’... (54).

Gwendolen’s misguided view of artistry presented here is similar to the attitude Klesmer later derides: she fancies herself a great tragic actor because she has attended the theatre once or twice, and instead of connecting tragedy to any core pathos, she believes being Rachel, or surpassing her, is a matter, largely, of cultivating a look. Ignoring any of the inner passion and real emotion of a tragic actress, Gwendolen believes that if she looks as well as her, or puts on a costume, or lowers her

---

<sup>458</sup> On Rachel, see: John Stokes, “‘Terrible Beauty’: An Actress Among the Novelists,” *ELH* 51.4 (Winter 1984): 771-793 and Manganelli, *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse*.

<sup>459</sup> George Henry Lewes, “Rachel” in *On Actors and The Art of Acting*, Second Edition (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1875), 26. Lewes would also participate in a tendency otherize and exoticize her Jewish identity, depicting her as “the panther of the stage; with a panther’s terrible beauty...there always seemed something not human about her”(23).

<sup>460</sup> Eliot, “Letter to Sara Sophia Hennell, November 22, 1861,” Haight, ed., 3:467.

<sup>461</sup> Eliot, “Letter to Caroline Hennell Bray and Sara Sophia Hennell, June 17, 1853,” Haidt, ed., 2: 103. Of course an allusion to Bronte’s entrancing performer based on Rachel in *Villette*.

voice, than she *is* Rachel. And, yet, before turning into a more developed conversation about women and crime just after this passage, which foreshadows Gwendolen's plotline, the passage implicitly raises a question around what genre Gwendolen will be depicted in when she is driven to desperate thoughts and desperate actions within her marriage to Grandcourt.

Yet this link formed with Gwendolen to popular genres against misunderstandings of tragedy, and figures that stride artistry and celebrity also occurs in another allusion to a famous nineteenth-century artist—the singer Jenny Lind. As is observed of Gwendolen before singing for Klesmer—“Her voice was a moderately powerful soprano (someone had told her it was like Jenny Lind's”(48). Jenny Lind stands as a liminal figure that highlights some of the novel's interest in the tension between the “lowbrow” and “highbrow” and aspects of celebrity and artistry. Known as the “Swedish nightingale” famous for her operatic performances, Lind's abilities also transformed into “Lind Mania,” attracting huge crowds and leading to everything from “a ‘Jenny Lind’ steam engine of the London Brighton Railway, ‘Jenny Lind’ gloves, statuettes...”<sup>462</sup> In an article in *The Leader* that some attribute to Eliot, a critique around Lind appears not around her talent, but in how her celebrity status works in tension with her artistry and her motives for performing.<sup>463</sup> Aligning Gwendolen with Jenny Lind appears to both show how Gwendolen overestimates her talents (she is no Jenny Lind), while also again identifying Gwendolen with the sway of the popular, the applause, the crowd.

---

<sup>462</sup> George Biddlecombe, “The Construction of a Cultural Icon: The Case of Jenny Lind,” in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies Volume 3*, Peter Horton and Bennett Zon, eds. (London: Routledge, 2003).

<sup>463</sup> William Sullivan, “The Allusion to Jenny Lind in Daniel Deronda,” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 29. 2 (September 1974): 212. Emily Dickinson would also criticize Lind upon seeing a performance of hers in America along the same lines that Eliot discussed in Armgart. Dickinson maintained her performance would be strong if she removed “some of her curious trills.” See: Rebeccah Bechtold, “‘She Sings a stamp of Originality’: Sentimental Mimicry in Jenny Lind's American Tour,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 58.4 (2012): 494. The state of the commercial receives a different kind of treatment in Catherine Gallagher's essay, “George Eliot and Daniel Deronda: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question,” in *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel* Ed. Ruth Yeazell (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), which looks briefly at the question of commercialism in relation to exchange and prostitution.

While early on, the novel offers a clear alignment of Gwendolen with different popular performance forms (from pantomime to itinerant shows), aligns her with figures of celebrity, shows her with aspirations towards the tragic that miss the concept of tragedy based on deep feeling, the novel also situates her in an even more complex position with popular forms once she enters into marriage with the abusive Grandcourt, and feels confined by, with increasing anxiety and terror, his “empire of fear”(425). Here, the genres the novel associates Gwendolen with shift more thoroughly into melodrama, sensation genres, and even briefly, the gothic—and as I will extensively argue later through Gwendolen’s “melodrama of consciousness,”<sup>464</sup>—the novel’s turn towards melodrama, sensation, and the gothic is very complex, and not derided in the same way that the “puppet show” is. Melodrama and sensation genres occupy a space in the novel upon which a lot of its investigation of the transmission of feeling is explored. From the outset, Gwendolen and Grandcourt’s relationship is described in terms of performance and their courtship scenes play out as acted dramas:

The scene was pleasant on both sides. A cruder lover would have lost the view of her pretty ways and attitudes and spoiled all by stupid attempts at caresses, utterly destructive of drama. Grandcourt preferred the drama; and Gwendolen, left at ease, found her spirits rising continually as she played at reigning. Perhaps if Klesmer had seen more of her in this unconscious kind of acting, instead of when she was trying to be theatrical, he might have rated her chance higher (316).

If at first the relationship is characterized with the air of a comedy of manners, with Gwendolen and Grandcourt taking the roles of flirtatious lovers,<sup>465</sup> the entire plotline becomes structured by conventions of melodrama and sensation.

The association of Gwendolen with melodrama, sensation, and the gothic appears in many forms. The Grandcourt-Lydia Glasher plotline—the reveal that Lydia was Grandcourt’s secret mistress and the secret of his illegitimate child—form one such knot of melodrama and sensation.

---

<sup>464</sup> Brooks, 157.

<sup>465</sup> Grandcourt is also described as an actress “his complexion had a faded fairness resembling that of an actress when bare of the artificial white and red”(111), and his right-hand man Mr. Lush is described by Klesmer as “too fond of Meyerbeer and Scribe—too fond of the mechanical”(119).

The Grandcourt/Glasher plotline's melodrama contagiously spreads to Gwendolen, once she is in possession of the secret and still marries Grandcourt. In a scene right out of a gothic novel or sensation novel, Lydia sends her the gems as Grandcourt ordered, telling her she is now cursed. As the novel suggests, with the stage prop of these "poisoned gems," "the poison had entered into this poor young creature"(359), Gwendolen's eyes become "spell-bound" and she enters into a "spasm of terror"(359), and seeing Grandcourt precipitates "a new nervous shock, and Gwendolen screamed again and again with hysterical violence...He saw her pallid, shrieking as it seemed with terror, the jewels scattered around her on the floor. Was it a fit of madness? In some form or other the Furies had crossed his threshold"(359). While the Furies of course conjure Greek Tragedy, the rest of the passage, with its melodramatic staging of cursed jewels, its attention to Gwendolen's nerve-based affect, its depiction of her growing terror and dread, and its linking of her state to hysteria and madness, circulate and proliferate the popular forms of the gothic, melodrama, and sensation.

Furthermore, the attention to these is only amplified across the novel. If from the outset, the novel depicts Gwendolen as having a "susceptibility to terror"(63), under the increasing specter of control and violence that haunts the marriage, the novel, much like a sensation novel, only further attends to Gwendolen's nervous responses—"the texture of her nerves and the palpitation of her heart"(447). It also more explicitly links hysteria, shock, and nerves with popular genres—Grandcourt, after seeing her speaking with Daniel, commands Gwendolen to "Oblige me by not showing whims like a mad woman in a play"(446). Grandcourt effectively enjoys casting her in a melodrama of his (and she wonders, her) own making.

Eliot uses sensational and melodramatic forms in ways that highlight how the forms of spectatorship Gwendolen experiences across the novel register as increasingly cruel. Not only are her own visions becoming more occupied by thoughts of his death, but thoughts of her own death



as well: “the thought of him dying would not subsist: it turned as with a dream-change into the terror that she should die with his throttling fingers on her neck avenging that thought. Fantasies moved within her like ghosts...”(606). If in the previous chapter I explored how *The Woman in White* traced the somatics and sensation of anxiety to embody a woman’s fear and experience of domestic violence, *Daniel Deronda’s* attention to Gwendolen’s embodied fear bears much in common with the charged embodiment of sensation novels. Eliot carefully traces how Gwendolen is watched and the feeling she has from being watched. The first chapter of the novel presents the gaze on Gwendolen as not just something she enjoys, but something that “begins to be torturing”(11), and across the novel, the cruelty of spectatorship becomes amplified under “Grandcourt’s presence and surveillance”(587), until her role as wife becomes her most complete, exhausting performance: “constantly she had to be on the scene as Mrs. Grandcourt, and to feel herself watched in that part by the exacting eyes of a husband”(548).

And, yet, this spectatorship exerted on Gwendolen does not just appear from sadistic Grandcourt, or from the public, it also issues from her ever-sympathetic confidante, Daniel Deronda himself. In another moment that I would argue links Gwendolen to popular performance forms, especially melodrama, Daniel describes the feeling of watching Gwendolen as she sinks into despair over Grandcourt—a misery the novel describes Gwendolen as “trying to make present to [him]”(609): “words seemed to have no more rescue in them than if he had been beholding a vessel in peril of wreck—the poor ship with its many-lived anguish beaten by the inescapable storm”(610).<sup>466</sup> Gwendolen in effect is rendered as a sensation scene or moment of spectacle, thus reinforcing another way the novel ties her to the pictorial and spectacular in ways that evoke popular forms.

---

<sup>466</sup> Marshall, 208 also raises the shipwreck imagery, however, he doesn’t relate it to popular forms.

With Gwendolen as the figure of the novel most associated with popular forms—from pantomime to itinerant shows to melodrama and the sensation novel—it is curious that perhaps the character who offers a different vision of her is Mirah. When Mirah meets Gwendolen after singing in a private concert, it is described as “a new kind of stage-experience to her to be close to genuine grand ladies with genuine brilliants and complexions, and they impressed her vaguely as coming out of some unknown drama, in which their parts perhaps got more tragic as they went along”(560). Mirah’s insight and recognition of a tragedy developing around Gwendolen might in part owe to her own understanding and alignment across the novel with that genre.

While accounts of *Daniel Deronda* often label Mirah as “anti-theatrical” or place her “authenticity” and “natural acting” against Gwendolen’s artificial, contrived theatricality,<sup>467</sup> I would suggest that again theatrical genres—Mirah’s association with “highbrow” forms in musical choices and her association with tragedy—constitutes a more specific distinction the novel advances. When we first meet Mirah, the scene is framed by a double performance—as Daniel rows down the Thames near Kew bridge, singing the gondolier’s song of Dante’s words set to music in Rossini’s *Otello*, he moves from performer to spectator, with his gaze becoming “arrested” by a girl along the riverside, and her “statue-like despair”(187) as she prepares to drown herself. Although some critics have highlighted the scenes affinity with melodrama and melodramatic tableau,<sup>468</sup> the novel continually associates Mirah’s despair with another genre. As Daniel watches Mirah, he observes:

He fell again and again to speculating on the probable romance that lay behind that loneliness and look of desolation...then to justify himself for feeling that sorrow was the more *tragic* when it befell delicate, childlike beauty...‘I should not have forgotten the look of misery if she had been ugly and vulgar,’ he said to himself. But there was no denying that the attractiveness of the image made it likelier to last...His mind glanced over the *girl-tragedies* that are going on in the world, hidden, unheeded, as if they were but *tragedies* of the copse or hedgegrow (188, my emphasis).

While Daniel tends to romanticize female suffering throughout the novel, the repetition of “tragedies” and the “tragic” within this scene is still striking. Aligned from the outset with tragedy,

---

<sup>467</sup> See, for instance, Voksuil, 119.

<sup>468</sup> Williams, 124. See also Voksuil, 116.

Mirah and Daniel across the novel even seem to share it as a common language between them: as Mirah says later in the novel, after paraphrasing a quote, “I remember a play I read in German...where the heroine says something like that” he quickly fills in the gap of memory with the correct Greek tragedy, “‘Antigone,’ said Deronda”(371).

Mirah’s connection with the tragic emerges from her ability to truly embody and understand an emotional depth that, as we have seen in her letters, Eliot associates with tragedy. When Mirah sings, for instance, it is with “a searching pathos which had that essential of perfect singing, the making one oblivious of art or manner, and only possessing one with the song”(372).

Her deep, yet real pathos that can “possess” her audience with song alone does not present solely through Daniel’s perspective. The clear contrast the novel asserts between Gwendolen and Mirah appears in the vastly different estimations Klesmer has of them as artists. After hearing Mirah sing, Klesmer recognizes her gifts, “let us shake hands: you are a musician”(484). Because the novel confines her to only private performances, it depicts her as a pure, “real” artist—perhaps precisely because it wants to shield and separate her art from commercial pressures.

While this seeming rejection of a more public, commercial theatricality—that Mirah, in Klesmer’s view, should not “further [her] singing in in any larger space than a private drawing-room”(485) stands as one of the novel’s ostensibly anti-theatrical threads, and is an idea that Mirah herself believes in deeply—it becomes clear her dislike of acting is more complicated than just anti-theatricality. In an extensive narrative or monologue in which Mirah tells the story of her life as a Jew in exile, her experiences in the theater, and the search for some of her family, the novel positions Mirah as not liking acting, however, in specific ways. As she advances, “the clapping and all the sounds of the theatre were hateful to me; and I never liked the praise I had...”(213). Mirah posits a position that expresses a deep skepticism of certain motives for performance, and a discomfort with the audience and the idea of performing *for them*. As Mirah argues, it is “the glare

and the faces, and my having to go on and act and sing what I hated, and then see people who came to stare at me behind the scenes”(217). Mirah’s anxiety registers as Eliot’s skepticism of celebrity culture and reads in a contemporary lens almost as an artist’s fear of “selling out.” In contrast with Gwendolen’s fantasy of performance that attends to the accolades and applause, Mirah dreads accolades and applause, thus returning *Daniel Deronda* into the circulation of ideas present in “Armgarth”—that there is a distinction between singing the song itself, versus, adding a “trill” because the audience likes it. For Mirah, her understanding of acting—and her feeling that she wasn’t actually very good at it—arises from not wanting to perform *for*, but to instead be comfortable in a part that she “could be myself in, and some feeling within me carried me along”(217). That is, she wants to be able to have pure, real feeling.

Within the novel, importantly, Mirah’s desire to act in ways that allow her to access the feeling inside her, and endow a “searching pathos” to her art, becomes entirely connected with theatrical genres. While moments of Mirah’s narrative strongly bear an affinity with melodrama—the count’s “offer,” her plan to run away from her father, her description of herself wandering around London “look[ing] like a street beggar” as she tried to find her family (221)—and as some have argued, her narrative invokes sensation genres<sup>469</sup>, it also makes claims against popular forms. As she narrates her story with her “low-toned fervor”—an image that contrasts with Gwendolen, and aligns her with the deep voice of the tragedienne, Rachel—Mirah speaks of trying to learn more about her identity as a Jew and her father’s tendency to “ridicule our own people” and mimic them.

Interestingly, her revulsion with his promulgation of anti-semitism arrives in the form of a critique that pits theatrical genres against one another:

Is this world and all the life upon it only like a farce or vaudeville, where you find no great meanings? Why then are there tragedies and grand operas, where men do difficult things and choose to suffer? I think it is silly to speak of all things as a joke. And I saw that his wishing me to sing the greatest music, and parts in grand operas, was only wishing for what would fetch the greatest price (216-217).

---

<sup>469</sup> Manganelli, 123.

Here farce and vaudeville are contrasted with tragedies and grand opera in crucial way—the novel seemingly offers if not an anti-theatrical vision, a vision that criticizes popular forms by seemingly positing that the latter connects with great meaning, difficult things, and suffering, while the former does not. The monologue’s association of Mirah’s father with the Coburg Theatre (the South Bank theatre dubbed the “Blood Tub,” for its “lurid” melodramas<sup>470</sup>), reinforces how the novel can in moments appear to offer critiques of popular forms of theatre, while at the same time using those same forms. The novel’s complex treatment of theatrical genres—the clear binaries it sets and at the same time deconstructs—also emerges by advancing here that following a “highbrow” form (grand opera) for the wrong reasons (to fetch the greatest price), is just as dangerous and problematic. That is, Eliot’s vision here of “real” art involves both a relationship to genre and to the motive for art.

Importantly, placing this generic division within the context of a discussion of Jewish identity raises with it the “difficult thing” “suffering” and “great meaning” that the novel explores: Jewish exile and search for a home and nation. And this plotline—the novel’s treatment of Jewish history and orientation towards Zionism—adheres to a generic marker and distinction. As the visionary Ezra Mordecai Cohen speaks to his audience, making his case for a Jewish homeland, “his whole personality and speech had on them the effect of a dramatic representation...”, Daniel thinks of the “tragic pressures” that must be placed on Mordecai (529). Even more notably, the novel turns to a passage by the Jewish historian Leopold Zunz that frames history itself through the lens of a performance genre:

If there are ranks in suffering, Israel takes precedence of all the nations—if the duration of sorrows and the patience with which they are borne ennoble, the Jews are among the aristocracy of every land—if a literature is called rich in the possession of a few classic tragedies, what shall we say to a National Tragedy lasting for fifteen hundred years, in which the poets and actors, were also the heroes? (517).

---

<sup>470</sup> Jane Moody, “The Theatrical Revolution, 1776-1843,” in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Volume 2* ed. Joseph Donohue (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 205.

Even if the novel wonders if Mordecai fits the part of the “aristocratic” tragic hero though it clearly aligns him with “greatness”(544) and “heroism”(545), by framing the novel’s most significant discussion of the Jewish homeland around this quote—placing it both in the chapter epigraph, placing its translation as the chapter’s opening paragraph, and adding the word National in front of Tragedy<sup>471</sup>—the novel positions the suffering of exile as a *National Tragedy*, and while the novel of course gestures to other strands of the global tragic, most notably, slavery in America, it’s *the* National Tragedy of global significance that the novel explores and views Mordecai and Daniel as remedying and addressing by establishing a homeland in Palestine.

The novel’s split between the Gwendolen sections and Mirah/Mordecai sections seem to in effect become tethered to a distinction between theatrical genres. Amidst the conflicts and collisions of the popular forms and tragedies of global significance, Daniel occupies the space of generic conflict. Torn between the personal drama and his great calling, between sensational melodrama and Tragedy with heroic figures, and between Gwendolen and Mirah themselves, Daniel at once appears to reaffirm Eliot’s binary between the popular and the tragic—as he will have to choose between the two—while simultaneously complicating any notion that such a binary can exist.

When it comes to performance, and performance genres, the novel offers Daniel as a knot of contradictions. On the one hand, he is arguably the novel’s most clearly professed anti-theatrical character: in his youth, he had a great singing gift that could have lead him to be trained as a performer, however “he set himself bitterly against he notion of being dressed up to sing before all those fine people who would not care about him except as a wonderful toy”(170), and he largely rejects public performance save for a very few, arguing to Gwendolen that, “most of us ought to practice art only in the light of private study”(436), thus clearly aligning with Mirah’s ideas as well.

---

<sup>471</sup> See the footnote on this addition in the Penguin edition to *Deronda*, 835.

On the other hand, Daniel stands as one of the most theatrical characters in the novel, the person through whom dramatic, and highly melodramatic, revelations flow. While he associates Mirah and her brother Ezra Mordecai with the classical drama of heroes: “in the heroic drama, great recognitions are not encumbered with these details; and certainly Deronda had as reverential an interest in Mordecai and Mirah as he could have had in the offspring of Agammenon,” he realizes that staging the revelation and reunion of Mirah and Ezra Mordecai involves attending to material conditions. After all, “he was caring for destinies still moving in the dim streets of our earthly life” (544), and therefore will have to attend much like a stage director to details like the appropriate place and time for the reunion (546), and even costumes for the ‘actors’ to wear (581). Then there is, of course, the sheer theatricality and melodrama of another scene of revelation that crosses through Daniel: the “secret of his own birth”(167), a secret finally, dramatically revealed when his mother, the performer Alcharisi, unveils that he is in fact Jewish, and rather akin to melodrama, the proofs of his identity come in the form of papers in his grandfather’s chest (637), documents that will give proof of his identity. And perhaps above all, Daniel is associated with theatricality in his penchant for taking on the role of a spectator of the theater of others’ pain. As critics have argued, focusing specifically on Gwendolen, Daniel has something of an “attraction to scenes of suffering”<sup>472</sup>— although of course, this applies not only to Gwendolen, but to Mirah and Mordecai as well. Sir Hugo’s observation that Daniel has, “a passion for people who are pelted”(719) often takes the form of Daniel becoming a sympathetic spectator to suffering, particularly women’s suffering. This appears both in the form that Sir Hugo believes is folly when applied to Moredecai and Alcharisi, as well as in his vague romanticizing of Mirah in the near drowning scene, and his tendency to view

---

<sup>472</sup> Audrey Jaffe, *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 149.

Gwendolen as an absorbing “spectacle of suffering”<sup>473</sup> that continually draws his gaze and sympathy, but that he must ultimately break away from.

While Daniel’s sympathetic spectatorship might extend his gaze in all directions, the novel ultimately seems to stage a choice that he must make, and that choice highlights the complicated ethical stakes embedded within the novel’s use of different performance genres. When Daniel sees Mirah along the riverside, the novel doesn’t just associate her with tragedy without further context or consequence; it places her within a more global, expansive story of “girl-tragedies that are going on in the world, hidden, unheeded”(188). And indeed this division between the popular and the tragic seems to align in the novel with a sense of the personal and a more national and global political. In Klesmer’s original evisceration of Gwendolen’s popular music choices is in fact a more trenchant critique: the melody that “expresses a puerile culture” fails as art, in Klesmer’s, and we may wonder here, Eliot’s, view, because it offers “no cries of deep, mysterious passion—no conflict—no sense of the universal. It makes men small as they listen to it. Sing now something larger”(49). In Klesmer’s argument, the lack of deep passion or emotion prevents it from tapping into something larger and more cosmopolitan—audiences instead become “small” as they listen to it. This view manifests itself in Mirah’s distinction between farce and tragedy in her long monologue—that, as the novel offers, popular forms of farce and burlesque miss “great meanings,” while tragedy and grand opera confront “difficult things.” And this critique of Gwendolen—her alignment with popular forms, her disconnect from “real” pathos—would seem to align with Eliot’s view of art’s purpose as articulated within “The Natural History of German Life” that the aim of art is “is the extension of our sympathies” and the “mode of amplifying experience and extending our contact with our fellow-men beyond the bounds of our personal lot.”<sup>474</sup>

---

<sup>473</sup> Marshall, 208.

<sup>474</sup> Eliot, “The Natural History of German Life,” 54.



In *Daniel Deronda*, Eliot appears to locate this expansion within certain genres above others—or, rather, she uses the friction between genres to harness and contrast the small and expansive, the personal and the world beyond—in a way that while not exactly anti-theatrical, at times veers into sounding very much anti-popular forms (even while using those forms). Moments of the novel make this use of genre more explicit: Gwendolen is trapped essentially “in a small social drama almost as little penetrated by a feeling of wider relations as if it had been a puppet-show”(149). Once again, the novel alludes to a popular form—a puppet show—to signify a small drama cut off from the “feeling of wider relations.” Or, as another moment explains it, Gwendolen and other girls are trapped—not solely of their own making—in:

the *narrow theatre* which life offers to a girl of twenty, who cannot conceive herself as anything else than a lady...She has no permanent consciousness of other fetters...it had raised no other emotion in her, no alarm, no longing, so that the question whether she believed it had not occurred to her, any more than it had occurred to her to inquire into the conditions of colonial property and banking, on which, as she had had many opportunities of knowing, the family fortune was dependent (63, my emphasis).

Living within, being forced to live within, and choosing to live within the circumscribed “narrow theater” of the personal and social drama allows her to have no emotional connection to, or inquisitive spirit about a wider sphere of concerns. In a novel written in 1876, but set during the 1860s and the American Civil War, the allusion here to fetters and colonial property conjures the ultimate horror: that of the enslavement of fellow human beings in America. As the novel makes clear there is a “narrow theater” of social drama but then also, within, the politics of the world, a “mighty drama”(124). And the novel seems to argue that certain forms of art do not prepare people fully for either the personal or sphere of wider relations. After Gwendolen comes back from meeting Lydia Glasher, a passage again reinforces a seeming critique along generic lines:

Gwendolen’s uncontrolled reading, though consisting chiefly in what are called the pictures of life, had somehow not prepared her for this encounter with reality. Is that surprising? It is to be believed that attendance at the opera bouffe in the present day would not leave men’s minds entirely without shock, if the manners observed there with some applause were suddenly to start up in their own families. Perspective, as its inventor remarked, is a beautiful thing. What horrors of damp huts, where human beings languish, may not become picturesque through aerial distance! What hymning of cancerous vices may we not languish over as sublimest art in the safe remoteness of a strange language and artificial phrase? (155).

Neither Gwendolen's reading nor the opera bouffe fully prepare for the harsh realities in the personal or the global. Eliot's critique aims at genres that make "picturesque" and render via artificial phrase a "safe remoteness" to, to return to Mirah's phrasing, "difficult things."

The novel frames Daniel as poised between the popular and personal (Gwendolen, England), and pursuing his calling to remedy that "higher" National Tragedy imbued with global significance and expansively cosmopolitan meaning (Mirah, Israel). It is a choice the novel also situates as between the ideal and material, a concept the generic performance distinctions helps reinforce. With Daniel,

There was a foreshadowing of some painful collision: on the one side the grasp of Mordecai's dying hand on him, with all the ideals and prospects it aroused; on the other this fair creature in silk and gems, with her hidden wound and self-dread... It was as if he had a vision of himself besought with outstretched arms and cries, while he was caught by the waves and compelled to mount the vessel bound for a far-off coast (564).

Ultimately the novel will have Daniel choose to "mount the vessel" bound to take him away to the wider spheres of National and International concern—if Daniel reminds Gwendolen that she must have "an interest in the world beyond the small drama of personal desires"(451), there's a way in which the novel is also framing that as a choice Daniel must make as well. His sympathy, ultimately, must be channeled to another purpose—but Eliot uses an aesthetic distinction among the arts to reinforce this choice.

Yet, for all I have described of a binary that appears to be in place in the novel that uses a distinction between popular forms (farce, burlesque) against the "tragic" aligning this with a set of emotions that stays small against an art form that opens up emotions to the wider spheres of concerns, I have effectively been describing what I would see not as an anti-theatrical strand to the novel, but a strand that appears to be deeply skeptical of some popular forms (melodrama itself in fact occupies a more complex place in the spectrum between puppet show and tragedy, in the novel's lexicon)—or that at least uses popular forms to contrast the "narrow theatre" with the

“mighty drama.” However, what becomes more clear is the novel ultimately does not use genres merely to reject some and give them less value. Rather, it productively harnesses the friction between genres because it sees them as entirely necessary to telling this story and seemingly situates them as crucial to considering realism as a genre, its own work and performance of mimesis, the way it stages the flow of emotion between characters, and the flow of emotion between fictive worlds and the audiences consuming them. After all, the binary between the “narrow theatre” of social drama that Eliot likens to a “puppet show” and the “mighty drama” that is likened to the tragic, are of course as inseparable as the plotlines of the novel itself—Daniel and Mirah’s plotlines also abide by a melodramatics of feeling, while Gwendolen’s “narrow theatre” turns into a domestic hell analogized as a kind of imperial domination.<sup>475</sup>

Ultimately, I would argue, this friction between genres serves another function in the novel, one that is related to how it envisions its ethical stakes. While as I have explored by briefly looking at other uses of performance in Eliot’s other work, Eliot has long showed an interest in the movement of emotion in the scene of representation, in *Daniel Deronda* this takes a particularly theatrical form—the novel uses the collision of multiple theatrical genres, and media, to highlight how emotion becomes real and embodied, and how the scene of imitation generates real effects. As we saw in *The Bells*, the play turned to layers of performances and registers of mimesis to trace the transfer of emotion, and stage the presence of the audience, in *Daniel Deronda*, theatrical genres are used not solely to demarcate distinction, but are used to form a layered, nested mimesis that uses the intersection of genre and performance to consider the work of realism, and what it means for an emotion to come to life and become real. Most of the most highly theatrical scenes in the novel share this layering in common, across all genres—to the extent that the novel seems to understand

---

<sup>475</sup> On imperial domination see, for instance, Eliot, *Deronda*, 425-427.

the transfer of emotion as the connective tissue that binds together its characters, its plotlines, its realism.

The novel has an entire strand of watching ideas and emotions become embodied and actualized—or become real—in characters, and this happens across genres to the extent that cross genre and cross media moments occupy an important space within the novel. Let's return to the riverside: Mirah's association with "girl-tragedies" that go unnoticed does not form the only interest of the scene; instead, of interest as well is the complex layering of imitation and embodiment that occurs across it. It consists in a dual performance: Daniel is first a performer, before he becomes a spectator. As Daniel sings the gondoliers song from *Otello*—a haunting, short song in the opera that Desdemona overhears that uses Dante's words to express how sadness intensifies by remembering happier times<sup>476</sup>—the song becomes actualized outside of him: "a few yards' distance from him a figure which might have been an impersonation of the misery he was unconsciously giving voice to..."(187). That is, Mirah embodies—or becomes "a figure which might have been an impersonation of the misery" of—what he was singing about (187). If his performance becomes "real" outside of himself, reciprocally, his performance also affects her and crosses her bounds: "This strong arrest of his attention made him cease singing: apparently his voice had entered her inner world without her having taken any note of whence it came, for when it suddenly ceased, she changed her attitude slightly"(187). As his song becomes externalized, she also internalizes the song, and registers it externally, as well.

In this reciprocal movement between them, the words he was singing assume a force and become animated within the scene. As Mirah observes, after Daniel has saved her from killing herself, "I cannot see how I shall be glad to live. The *maggior dolore* and the *miseria* have lasted longer than the *tempo felice*' She paused and then went on dreamily,—'*Dolore—miseria—*' I think those words

---

<sup>476</sup> On the song's position in *Otello*, see: Delia da Sousa Correa, *George Eliot, Music, and Victorian Culture* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 183.

are alive”(192). The ways in which those “words are alive” are manifold: they are alive and come to life in the sense that a character embodies the pain of a song being sung, they are alive through the shared recognition of the song and its haunting, mournful tone and words transmitting between performer and spectator, and they are alive, or, as one critic notes, hold significance, as they speak to Mirah’s “personal and racial history.”<sup>477</sup> For, the sadness and memory of happier times recalls both Mirah’s specific personal history with her family and her search for her mother and brother, while also raising the broader history of the Jewish diaspora’s wondering without a homeland, thereby bringing all of these alive within the scene. Yet, I would also suggest, inasmuch as the novel itself is an “impersonation of a misery” in this moment, staging a scene that draws attention to emotional transfer, raises a more formal, reflexive question about how its own “words are alive” and how they come to life between page and reader. And here Eliot calls upon performance seemingly to explore and apply pressure to the permeability of emotion in ways that raise questions of the novel’s own circulation of affect and mechanics of emotional transfer between page and reader.

This question of emotional transfer and the novel’s turn to multiple genres and media again appears within Mordecai’s visions of a future leader to carry out his dreams of a homeland. Mordecai searches among the images at the National Gallery for the type he believes can carry out the mission, but it is not until he meets Daniel that his dream and vision becomes embodied and externalized in his form: “he was struck by the appearance of Deronda...he saw a face and frame which seemed to him to realize the long-conceived type”(479). Daniel’s realization of Mordecai’s vision is further reinforced by their meeting on Blackfriars Bridge—if Mordecai had previously imagined the figure advancing, in Deronda it becomes “discernable”(474), and Mordecai realizes that “his inward prophecy was fulfilled”(493).

---

<sup>477</sup> Ibid.

If Daniel embodies the vision, however, the novel suggests that is not enough, as Mordecai not only needs to find the right person, but needs to transmit his vision to him: he “yearn[s] for some young ear into which he could pour his mind as testament” and his hope to have his vision embodied and fulfilled “carried into the current of this yearning for transmission”(472). Mordecai becomes one of the “transmitters” passing Jewish culture and a vision for the future forward. And the novel’s staging of the transmission of emotion and idea that allows Mordecai’s vision to become real and actualized in the form of Daniel, relies on a turn to the theatrical. The “philosopher’s club” scene not only situates the matter at hand as one of National Tragedy and global significance, but it carefully traces Mordecai’s attempts to bring the visions to life—or make words alive—for Daniel. As the novel advances, Mordecai’s “extraordinary excitement” in the scene “was certainly due to Deronda’s presence: it was to Deronda that he was speaking, and the moment had a testamentary solemnity for him which rallied all his powers”(533). And, for Daniel, Mordecai’s “performance” works, as the vision and Mordecai’s hope, become more real to him: “Again the former words came back to Deronda’s mind—‘You must hope my hopes—see the vision I point to—behold a glory where I behold it.’ They came now with gathered pathos. Before him stood as a living, suffering reality, what hitherto he had only seen as an effort of imagination...”(533). In a crucial moment of emotional transmission, the novel calls upon a highly theatricalized scene to explore the process of the vision becoming more real and transferable. That is, in yet another scene, the novel attends to this process of words, visions or ideals, becoming more “real” and material.

Perhaps no more do we see this process of and concern with something becoming real, embodied, and externalized, then in several scenes with Gwendolen, who ultimately is placed at the nexus of the novel’s most complex mimetic knots and mimetic disruptions. It is important to remember that for however the novel seemingly aligns her with popular forms as a critique of her lack of understanding of true art, the novel also revels in its star—and it takes Gwendolen’s pain

seriously, and is still highly invested in her forms of theatricality, even as it also critiques elements of them.

If the scenes I have just discussed highlight the novel's concern with how words are alive, and ideals become material and real, perhaps the most complex, layered scenes of the novel—the *tableau vivant* scene—focuses on emotion and proliferates layers of imitation to uncover its potentially disruptive powers. The scene occurs early in the novel—Gwendolen wishes to stage some amateur theatricals, but Mr. Gascoigne has “prohibited the acting of scenes from plays” (59), so they choose Hermione's statue “awaking” from *The Winter's Tale* to perform as a *tableau vivant*. The form of the *tableau vivant* already itself occupies a complex space between the private and public, the elite and the popular, as it is a genre found both in the drawing rooms of the estates and the popular stages of music halls.<sup>478</sup> The scene in *The Winter's Tale* itself incorporates elements of the supernatural and realistic: while it may appear Hermione has been kept as a statue that magically comes back to life, the scene has a more realistic explanation—Paulina has hidden Hermione away to protect her, and the scene itself is therefore a *tableau vivant* in which the concealed and very not dead Hermione plays the role of a statue coming to life. And then, on top of this already complicated staging, as Hugh Witemeyer has noted in *George Eliot and the Visual Arts*, Gwendolen's pose might also invoke pictures that specific actresses assumed when playing Hermione: as he argues, “Gwendolen, then, is imitating pictures of Mrs. Siddons as Hermione,”<sup>479</sup> adding yet another layer of re-presentation and imitation into the scene.

Perhaps, above all, the scene draws attention to its means and mediums of re-presentation and imitation, and is interested in the space between enacting a *tableau vivant* as opposed to actually

---

<sup>478</sup> On *tableaux vivants* see, for instance: Nicole Anae, “Poses Plastiques: The Art and Style of ‘Statuary’ in Victorian Visual Theatre,” *Australasian Drama Studies* 52 (April 2008): 112-130; Barry Faulk, *Music Hall & Modernity: The Late-Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004); Mary Chapman, “‘Living Pictures’: Women and *Tableaux Vivants* in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture *Wide Angle* 18.3 (1996): 22-52

<sup>479</sup> Hugh Witemeyer, *George Eliot and the Visual Arts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 94.

acting the scene. Gwendolen, for instance, pushes for the scene to include more of the play: she “urged that instead of the mere *tableau* there should be just enough acting of the scene to introduce the striking up of the music as a signal for her to step down and advance; when Leontes, instead of embracing her, was to kneel and kiss the hem of her garment”(61-62). Poised, thus, between a *tableau vivant* and the scene itself, the novel positions the entertainment as at one step remove from acting, but instead “an imitation of acting” that therefore, “was likely to be successful, since we know from ancient fable that an imitation may have more chance of success than the original”(60). In a way that echoes the last scene of *The Bells* with its enactment within a scene of hypnosis within a dream that comes to life or becomes real in the scene in the play (as Mathias dies in the dream, he dies outside of the dream), the *tableau vivant* scene stands as an almost *mise-en-abyme* of imitations, with Gwendolen imitating possibly an actress imitating Hermione who is herself imitating a statue coming to life—or rather, at the formal level, the novel imitates a *tableau vivant* that imitates a scene from a play of a character imitating a statue coming to life.

Within this overloaded circuitry of imitations and re-presentations, the novel seemingly raises a question—will this imitation be a success? Will it be charged with real feeling? The result seems decidedly mixed on all questions—real feeling with all of its force does pierce through the scene, but not in the way intended. Just as the music strikes in the play and Hermione is supposed to “awake” and come to life, as the music strikes in the *tableau vivant*, panels are thrown open that reveal the painting that Gwendolen had previously hidden away—the dead face that prefigures Grandcourt’s death—and suddenly instead of the statue coming to human life as the *tableau* intended, the human life becomes “a statue into which a soul of Fear had entered”(61). If Gwendolen appears as if a statue or in a trance, her mother’s arm touching her effectively awakes her by sending an “electric charge” that makes Gwendolen fall to her knees, while trying to contain



her still showing “signs of terror”(61), as she has been “mortif[ied]”(62) not just literally but figuratively by her “susceptibility to terror”(63) revealing itself before an audience.

While the scene does not precisely show a moment of emotional transfer, it seems to instead rehearse a dynamic that inheres in imitation—Eliot, ever shifting her gaze between the actor and the audience, depicts the audience’s confusion with what they are watching: “was it part of the play?” a guest asks (61). That is, a kind of mimetic havoc enters into the scene in which through the layers of representation—or rather, *because of* the friction between the layers of representation—emotion shatters through the scene to become too real, and the audience cannot tell what is acting and what is not. While Gwendolen’s “real” feelings bursting through the scene would appear to render the tableau a failure: there is some sense in which although Gwendolen does not capture the affect of Hermione in this moment of the play, her terror does bizarrely capture Hermione’s treatment across the play, as a woman whose life was placed in danger by the toxic mixture of her husband’s power, control, and jealousy.<sup>480</sup>

And it is of course that this scene with its terror piercing through the placidity that ultimately does become “real” and embodied towards the end of the novel in the scene of Grandcourt’s death. If I have already suggested that the novel’s treatment of melodrama is quite different than what at times sounds like derision of puppet shows, farces, and burlesques, that is due to the way that the novel uses melodrama and sensation as it becomes acutely absorbed in tracking Gwendolen’s interior life and ever growing inner torment, from her first “susceptibility to terror”(63) to her increasing dread once she enters into marriage with Grandcourt. As Jill Matus argues, Eliot’s exploration of Gwendolen veers into clear narratives of the precursor to trauma, shock, and the novel describes her in terms of “psychic pain” and even “a hidden wound.”<sup>481</sup> And, as Athena

---

<sup>480</sup> William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale*, The Arden Shakespeare, J.H.P Pafford, ed., (London: Thomson Learning, 2002).

<sup>481</sup> Jill Matus, *Shock, Memory and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 153.

Verettos has argued, Gwendolen's heightened sensibility links her with the other characters: her "hysterical visions constitute a challenge to the privileged spiritual discourse of Mordecai, Mirah, and Deronda."<sup>482</sup> She starts having her own visions—not of a mystical creation of a future country, but in the form of a death—a death, that she guiltily understands, would both give her freedom and take it away from her in the same moment.

In ways that evoke mimetic havoc of the *tableau vivant* scene and are reminiscent of the last act of *The Bells*, Gwendolen's fantasies of Grandcourt's death assume the form of dissolving lines between dream and reality:

Her vision of what she had to dread took more decidedly than ever the form of some fiercely impulsive deed, committed as in a dream that she would instantaneously wake from to find the effects real though the images had been false: to find death under her hands, but instead of darkness, daylight; instead of satisfied hatred, the dismay of guilt; instead of freedom, the palsy of a new terror—a white dead face from which she was for ever trying to flee and for ever held back (674).

Here, the lines between what is a dream and what is real give way, and she struggles with the idea that there will be no release, but only "a white dead face"—that is, that the painting from the beginning of the novel will become real and embodied.

Gwendolen's mental anguish and the prefiguring of Grandcourt's death across the novel stands as one of its most complex uses of melodrama, and the melodrama becomes both internalized and externalized. Early in the novel, Gwendolen is described as having "contrary tendencies" and a state of feeling characterized by having "many opposite things in the same moment"(42), and this contrast clearly foreshadows the end of the novel: "we cannot speak a loyal word and be manly silent, we cannot kill and not kill in the same moment; but a moment is room wide enough for the loyal and mean desire, for the outlash of a murderous thought and the sharp backward stroke of repentance"(42). If here, the contrasting tendency relates only to her inner thoughts and feelings, as opposed to her outer actions, this contrasting set of feelings across the novel, will only become more intense and more dramatic. As Gwendolen longs for release through

---

<sup>482</sup> Athena Vrettos, *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 69.

Grandcourt's death, "In Gwendolen's consciousness Temptation and Dread met and stared like two pale phantoms, each seeing itself in the other..."(674)—the dramatization of her thoughts becomes an almost paradigmatic scene of "the melodrama of consciousness" as Peter Brooks describes it in the context of Henry James, as "the intensification of oppositions...oppositions that are intensified for the sake of the choice between them."<sup>483</sup>

And, yet, for Gwendolen, these intensified polarizations within her consciousness, in which her feelings meet and clash as if they were characters in a play, register not as the kind of conflict that weighs on Daniel, who is allowed to choose freely between watching the spectacular shipwreck that is Gwendolen, or sailing off on a ship to a far away place. Instead for Gwendolen, the opposition and conflict appears to play out around her interiority becoming revealed and externalized outside of herself, as it was in the *tableau vivant* scene, without her permission or control. She is scared her feelings will inevitably become embodied, externalized, and made real, and she will be to blame, a fear that is amplified by what she knows was also a choice to marry Grandcourt in the first place. And the sequence of the novel leading into the boat scene only finds the lines between the internal and external, the dream and the reality, shifting even more not only around Grandcourt, but with others as well: Daniel at once becomes in her own mind, her Smithian impartial spectator that she internalizes as effectively an imaginary audience watching over her actions,<sup>484</sup> while at the same time she has "strangely-mixed dreams" that become real—for instance, when she dreams of Daniel, and then he materializes in the lobby of her Genoa hotel (676).

Suspended in a collision between dream and reality, between internal feelings, and external actions, Gwendolen's "melodrama of consciousness" achieves ultimate form in one of the most 'sensational' scenes of the novel, a scene that is once again framed by theater. As Gwendolen and Grandcourt set out from the hotel to board their boat, it is observed that "the scene was a good as a

---

<sup>483</sup> Brooks, 157.

<sup>484</sup> Marshall, 210.

theatrical representation,” and more ominously that they look like “they were fulfilling a supernatural destiny” and “the wife was declared to be like a statue”(681), thus raising the imagery of the *tableau vivant* scene once again. The supernatural destiny’s theatrical dimension is again reinforced by Gwendolen as they enter the boat, “I think we shall go on always, like the Flying Dutchman’ said Gwendolen, wildly”(682)—the Flying Dutchman, the cursed fantasmatic ship, recalls at once Wagner’s opera, as well as the whole history of English nautical melodrama and popular entertainment based on it, thus perfectly blurring generic lines.<sup>485</sup>

Within this theatrical framing, Gwendolen’s vision becomes fully ‘realized’ and actualized before her. If the “melodrama of consciousness,” as Brooks describes it, works internally, it can also intensify the external drama as well, as “the greater inwardness of the drama will be matched on the plane of external action.”<sup>486</sup> If Brooks argues this happens in part to increase the ethical stakes, I would suggest that the kind of friction between genres, media, the internal and external, and layers of representation all increase the ethical stakes not only of the plotline, but of form. As Gwendolen becomes both audience and actor, thinking herself to be a murderess when her “criminal desire”(696) becomes “real” and externalized, such that, as she recounts, “I saw my wish outside me”(696), the novel would appear to stage reflexive questions: how is the internal made manifest? What if a thought becomes real, or words, as Mirah says, “are alive”?

The novel ultimately stages a scene with echoes of Mirah’s drowning, echoes, of Mordecai’s visions, echoes of the mimetic disruption of the *tableau vivant*, that considers how re-presentation—a painting of a dead face, and the emotional responses it provokes and captures—has enough force that it can become real, and embodied—“a dead face I shall never get away from...”(689). Or how a vision, like that of Mordecai’s, assumes an embodied, material form. *Daniel Deronda*, therefore, much

---

<sup>485</sup> On the Flying Dutchman on stage see: Gabriela Cruz, “The Flying Dutchman, English Spectacle, and the Remediation of Grand Opera,” *Cambridge Opera Journal* 29.1 (2017): 5-32

<sup>486</sup> Brooks, 158.

like the play, *The Bells*, seems invested in how thoughts and words slip out of their mimetic frames and assume the force of life. Crucial to this process is a staging of the collision between layers of imitation and genre that carefully allows one to watch the space between “the actor and the audience.”

## Bibliography

### Primary

- “Adelphi.” *The Athenaeum* (23 November 1861).
- “The Adelphi in Chancery.” *Saturday Review* (21 June 1862).
- “Advertisements and Notices.” *The Era* (20 March 1865).
- “Advertisements and Notices.” *The Era* (23 December 1860).
- “Advertisements.” *The London Review* (22 December 1860).
- “Aeschylus, Shakespeare, and Schiller.” *Blackwood’s Edinburgh Magazine* (June 1851).
- “Amusements.” *New York Times* (2 February 1858).
- “Amusements.” *New York Times* (31 March 1861).
- “The Amusements of Whitsuntide.” *The Era* (26 May 1861).
- Aristotle, *Poetics*. Edited by Francis Fergusson. New York: Hill and Wang, 1961.
- “Art and Literary Gossip.” *Manchester Times* (13 August 1864).
- “The Arts.” *The Leader* (August 15, 1857).
- “Aurora Floyd.” *The Spectator* (31 July 1863).
- “The Author, not Public Feeling, at Fault.” *Examiner* (23 November 1861).
- “Awful Apparition!” *Punch* (April 6, 1861).
- Bagehot, Walter. *English Constitution*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- Bain, Alexander. “Common Errors on Mind.” *Fortnightly Review* (August 1868).
- . *The Emotions and the Will*. London: John. W. Parker and Son, 1859.
- . *Mental and Moral Science: A Compendium of Psychology and Ethics*. London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1868.
- . *Mind and Body: The Theories of Their Relation*. London: Henry S. King & Co., 1873.
- . *The Senses and the Intellect*. London: John W. Parker and Son, 1855.
- “Bank Defalcations.” *New York Times* (17 March 1858).

- “The Bells.” *Pall Mall Gazette* (November 28, 1871).
- “Book Review.” *The Literary Gazette* (19 January 1861).
- Boucicault, Dion. “The Art of Dramatic Composition: Part I.” *The North American Review* (January/February 1878).
- Dion Boucicault Collections, University of Kent and V&A Theatre and Performance Archives.
- . “The Decline of Drama: (An Epistle to C\*\*\*\*\* R\*\*\*\* From Dion Boucicault.” *The North American Review* (September/October 1877).
- . “Leaves from a Dramatist’s Diary.” *The North American Review* (August 1889).
- . “The Octoroon.” *The Times* (20 November 1861).
- . *Plays by Dion Boucicault*. Edited by Peter Thomson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.
- . “The Poor of ----.” British Library. Add. MS 53029.O (Jan/Feb 1864).
- . “The Poor of New York.” *American Melodrama*. Edited by Daniel Gerould. New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1983.
- Plays Boucicault Prompt, V&A Theatre and Performance Archive, Blythe House.
- Braddon, Mary Elizabeth. *The Doctor’s Wife*. Oxford: Oxford World’s Classics, 2008/1864.
- Bronte, Charlotte. *Villette*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008/1853.
- Brisbarre, Édouard and Eugène Nus. *Pauvres de Paris*. Paris: Michel Levy Frères, 1856.
- Burke, Edmund. *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Edited by L.G. Mitchell. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- Carpenter, William. *Principles of Human Physiology*. 5<sup>th</sup> Edition. London: John Churchill, 1855.
- “Cheap and Nasty.” *Saturday Review* (December 31, 1859).
- “The Colleen Bawn.” *The London Review* (15 September 1860).
- Collins, Wilkie. *After Dark*, vol. II. London: Smith, Elder, and Co., 1856.
- . *Basil*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990.
- . “Letter to an Unknown Recipient, 21 March 1862.” *The Letters of Wilkie Collins* Vol. 1. Edited by William Baker and William M. Clarke. New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999.

----. *No Name* ed. Mark Ford. London: Penguin Books, 2004/1862-63.

----. *The Queen of Hearts*, vol. I. London: Hurst and Blackett, 1859.

----. "The Unknown Public." *Household Words* (21 August 1858).

----. *The Woman in White* ed. Matthew Sweet. London: Penguin, 1999/1859-60.

"Court For Divorce And Matrimonial Causes, May 25." *Times* (May 26, 1858).

"Court Of Probate And Divorce, Feb. 18." *Times* (Feb 19, 1859).

"Court Of Probate And Divorce, Nov. 20." *Times* (Nov. 22, 1858).

Craig, Edward Gordon. "Irving's Masterpiece—"The Bells." *Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century*. Edited by Robert Corrigan. New York: Dell Publishing Co.

Darwin, Charles. *The Descent of Man*. London: John Murray, 1871.

[DDG]. "State of the Drama." *Drama* (25 September 1825).

[DM]. "Bain on the Senses and the Intellect." *Fraser's Magazine* (February 1856).

"Drama." *Athenaeum* (December 2, 1871).

"Drama." *Daily News* (2 August 1864).

"Drama." *Daily News* (November 27, 1871).

"Drama." *Daily News* (October 12, 1858).

"Dramatic Intelligence." *The Musical World* (October 16, 1858).

"The Drama and Music." *The Literary Gazette* (October 16, 1858).

"The Drama, Music, &c." *Sporting Gazette* (6 August 1864).

"The Drama, Music, ETC." *Reynolds Newspaper* (October 17, 1858).

"The Drama: Mr. Dion Boucicault's *The Streets of London*." *The Reader* (6 August 1864).

"The Drama." *London Review* (23 November 1861).

"The Drama." *The Literary Gazette* (15 September 1860).

[EH]. "On Melo-Drama." *Theatrical Inquisitor, and monthly mirror* (March 1818).

Eliot, George. *Adam Bede*. London: Penguin, 1859/2008.



- . "Armgarth" in *The Legend of Jubal and Other Poems*. Edinburgh and London: Blackwood, 1870/1874.
- . *Daniel Deronda* (London: Penguin, 1876/1995).
- . *The George Eliot Letters 9 vols.* Edited by Gordon Haight. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954-1978.
- . *Middlemarch*. London: Penguin, 1871-72/2003.
- . "The Natural History of German Life." *Westminster Review* (July 1856).
- . "Notes on 'The Spanish Gypsy.'" *George Eliot's Life as Related in her Letters and Journals, Vol. III*. Edited by J.W. Cross. London: Blackwood, 1885.
- . "The Spanish Gypsy: A Poem." Second Edition. London: Blackwood, 1868.
- "The Enigma Novel." *The Spectator* (28 December 1861).
- Erckmann-Chatrion, *Le Juif Polonais*. Paris: J. Hetzel, 1869.
- Evans, David. *The City; Or, The Physiology of London Business*. London: Bailey Brothers, 1845.
- "A Feuille Volonte: Apropos of Some Tastes of the Day." *Bentley's Miscellany* 50 (October 1861).
- "From Our London Correspondent." *Manchester Times* (October 16, 1858).
- "Half Hours with New Books." *Twice a Week* (25 October 1862).
- Hawkins, Frederick. "The First Production of the Bells." *The Theatre* (December 1, 1896).
- Hume, David. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Edited by David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- "It's Never Too Late To Mend." *Era* (8 October 1865).
- "It's Never Too Late To Mend." *Pall Mall Gazette* (6 October 1865).
- Jacobs-Jenkins, Branden. *An Octoroon*. New York: On Stage Press, 2014.
- James, Henry. "Miss Braddon." *The Nation* (November 1865).
- [Jewsbury, Geraldine] "Miss Jane, The Bishop's Daughter." *The Athenaeum* (1 June 1867).
- "Le Juif Polonais." *Examiner* (Aug 21, 1869).

- “‘Lady Audley’ On the Stage.” *The London Review* (7 March 1863).
- “Lady Audley’s Secret.” *The Critic* (December 1862).
- Lewes, George Henry. “Critical Notices.” *Fortnightly Review* (1 May 1866).
- . “Dickens in Relation to Criticism.” *Fortnightly Review* (February 1872).
- . *Physiology of Common Life*. London and Edinburgh: William Blackwood and Sons, 1859.
- . “Rachel.” *On Actors and The Art of Acting*. Second Edition. London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1875.
- . “What is Sensation?” *Mind* (April 1876).
- Lewis, Leopold. “The Bells.” *Laurel British Drama: The Nineteenth Century*. Edited by Robert Corrigan. New York: Dell Publishing Co., 1967.
- “Literature and Art.” *Illustrated London News* (8 June 1861).
- “The London Theatres.” *The London Review* (6 August 1864)
- “Lyceum.” *Daily Telegraph* (November 27, 1871).
- “Lyceum.” *The Times* (November 28, 1871).
- “The Lyceum—Peep O’Day.” *The London Review* (16 November 1861).
- “Lyceum Theatre.” *Era* (December 3, 1871).
- “Lyceum Theatre.” *Morning Post* (November 27, 1871).
- “Lyceum Theatre.” *Sunday Times* (May 3, 1874).
- “Lyceum Theatre.” *The Times* (12 March 1862).
- Mansel, Henry. “Sensation Novels.” *The Quarterly Review* (April 1863).
- “Metropolis.” *The Ecclesiastical Gazette* (10 December 1861).
- Mill, John Stuart. “The Senses and the Intellect.” *Edinburgh Review* (Oct 1859).
- “Modern Novel and Romance.” *Dublin University Magazine* (April 1863).
- “The Monster Melo-Drame.” *The Satirist* (January 1808).
- Morley, Henry. “The Theatrical Examiner.” *The Examiner* (August 15, 1857).
- . “The Theatrical and Musical Examiner.” *The Examiner* (October 16, 1858).

----. *The Journal of a London Playgoer*, ed. Michael Booth. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1974.

*Morning Advertiser* (5 October 1865).

“Mr. Irving as Mathias.” *Once a Week* (January 13, 1872).

Murray, James, ed. *New English Dictionary on Historical Principles* vol. 8 part 2. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909.

“Music and Drama.” *The Athenaeum* (1 February 1862).

“Music and the Drama.” *The Athenaeum* (15 September 1860).

“Music and the Drama.” *The Athenaeum* (23 November 1861).

“Music and the Drama.” *The Athenaeum* (October 16, 1858).

“Music and the Drama.” *The Athenaeum* (March 25, 1865).

“Music and Drama.” *Bell's Life in London* (6 August 1864).

“Music and the Drama.” *Evening Post* (20 June 1859).

“Music and Drama.” *The Literary Gazette* (6 April 1861).

“Musical and Dramatic Gossip.” *The Antheneum* (October 23, 1858).

“New Books.” *New York Times* (14 May 1859).

“New Novels.” *The Times* (January 22, 1863).

“No Name.” *The Athenaeum* (January 3, 1863).

“No Name.” *The London Review* (January 10, 1863).

“The New Sensation Drama.” *The Spectator* (23 November 1861).

“Not a New ‘Sensation.’” *All the Year Round* (25 July 1863).

“Novel and Novelists of the Day.” *North British Review* (February 1863).

The OJ. “Henry Irving.” *Judy: or the London Serio-Comic Journal* (January 24, 1872).

“An Old Sensation Drama.” *London Review* (10 January 1863).

Oliphant, Margaret. “Modern Novelists—Great and Small,” *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 77 (May 1855).

- . "Novels." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (August 1863).
- . "Sensation Novels." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (May 1862).
- "Olympic Theatre." *The Times* (October 12, 1858).
- "Our Dramatic Correspondent." *Punch* (4 May 1861).
- "Our Female Sensation Novelists." *Christian Remembrancer* (July 1864).
- "Philosophy of 'Sensation.'" *St. James Magazine* 5 (October 1862).
- "Plays and Players." *New Quarterly Review* (November 1858).
- Philips, Watts. *The Woman in Mauve*. London: Lacy Acting Edition, no. 76.
- "Princess's Theatre." *The Times* (3 August 1864).
- "Princess's." *The Athenaeum* (6 August 1864).
- "Prospectus of a New Journal." *Punch* (9 May 1863).
- "Public Amusements: Princess's Theatre." *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (7 August 1864).
- "Public Amusements: The Streets of London at the Princess's Theatre." *Reynold's Newspaper* (7 August 1864).
- "Public Entertainments." *The London Review* (22 February 1862).
- "The Purity of the Press." *Saturday Review* (June 26, 1858).
- "Queens Theatre." *The Caledonian Mercury* (28 July 1861).
- Quilter, Harry. "A Living Story-Teller." *The Contemporary Review* 53 (April 1888).
- Radcliffe, Ann. *The Mysteries of Udolpho* ed. Bonamy Dobrée. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- "Rambles at Random Southern States." *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* (January 1860).
- "The Red Vial. To the Editor of *The Daily News*." *The Daily News* (October 14, 1858).
- "Report from the Select Committee on Dramatic Literature." (29 June 1832) 2843-44. *Parliamentary Papers*.
- "Report from the Select Committee on Theatrical Licenses and Regulations." (27 April 1866) 3326. *Parliamentary Papers*.

- Sala, George Augustus. "On the 'Sensational' in Literature and Art," *Belgravia* (February 1868).
- . *Twice Around the Clock; Or, The Hours of the Days and Night in London*. London: Robson and Sons, 1859.
- "Scene from 'The Bells.'" *Illustrated London News* (December 23, 1871).
- "Sensation Dramas." *The Times* (14 March 1862).
- "A Sensation Song." *Fun* (23 November 1861).
- "The Sensational in Art." *The Orchestra* (29 Feb 1868).
- "Sensational Literature." *The Rose, The Shamrock, and the Thistle* (August 1864).
- "Sensational Novels." *The Spectator* (8 August 1868).
- "The Sensational Williams." *All the Year Round* (13 February 1864).
- "Sense v. Sensation." *Punch* (July 1861).
- Shakespeare, William. *The Winter's Tale*, *The Arden Shakespeare*. Edited by J.H.P Pafford. London: Thomson Learning, 2002.
- "Shakespeare and his Latest Stage Interpreters." *Frasers Magazine for Town and Country* (December 1861)
- Sims, George. *Glances Back*. London: Jarrolds, 1917.
- "Small Beer Chronicles." *All the Year Round* (29 November 1862).
- Smith, Adam. *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. New York: Penguin Classics, 2009.
- "The Streets of London." *The Saturday Review* (27 August 1864).
- Stoker, Bram. "The Streets of London." *Dublin Evening Mail* (2 April 1872) in Catherine Wynne, ed. *Bram Stoker and the Stage: Reviews, Reminiscences, Essays, and Fictions*. Vol. I. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2012.
- Swinburne, Algernon. "Wilkie Collins." *Fortnightly Review* (November 1889).
- Thackeray, William. "On Two Roundabout Papers Which I Intend to Write." *The Cornhill Magazine* (September 1861).
- "A Theatre For Brompton." *Punch* (24 January 1863).
- "The Theatres." *The Critic* (December 4, 1858).

- “The Theatres.” *The Critic* (October 16, 1858).
- “The Theatres.” *The Era* (6 October 1861).
- “The Theatres, &c.” *The Era* (7 August 1864).
- “Theatres, &c..” *The Era* (October 17, 1858).
- “Theatres&c.” *The Era* (1 October 1860).
- “The Theatres.” *Illustrated London News* (8 June 1861).
- “The Theatres.” *The Saturday Review* (23 November 1861).
- “Theatres and Public Entertainments.” *The Leader* (October 16, 1858).
- “Theatric Realism.” *The Spectator* (15 October 1864).
- “Theatrical Lounger.” *Illustrated Times* (6 August 1864).
- “The Theatrical Lounger.” *Illustrated Times* (October 9, 1858).
- “The Theatricals at the Gallery of Illustration.” *The Saturday Review* (August 1, 1857).
- “Untitled Item.” *The Musical World* (November 6, 1858).
- Wheatley, Henry Benjamin. *London, Past and Present*. Volume 3. London: Murray, 1891.
- “The Woman in White.” *New Quarterly Review* (September 1860).
- “The Woman in White.” *The Examiner* (September 1, 1860).
- “The Woman in White.” *The Times* (October 30, 1860).
- Wordsworth, William. “Preface to Lyrical Ballads.” *Lyrical Ballads*. London: T.N. Longman and O. Rees, 1800.
- Wood, Ellen. *East Lynne*. Oxford: Oxford World Classics, 1860-61/2008.

### Secondary

- Ablow, Rachel, ed. *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- . “Good Vibrations: The Sensationalization of Masculinity in *The Woman in White*.” *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 37.1/2 (2004): 158-80.

- . *The Marriage of Minds: Reading Sympathy in the Victorian Marriage Plot*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- . "Victorian Feelings." *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Ed. Deirdre David. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- . "Victorian Feeling and the Victorian Novel." *Literature Compass* 4.1 (2007).
- Alborn, Timothy. "The Moral of the Failed Bank: Professional Plots in the Victorian Money Market." *Victorian Studies* 38.2 (Winter 1995).
- Allen, Emily. *Theater Figures: The Production of the Nineteenth-Century British Novel*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2003.
- Altick, Richard *Deadly Encounters: Two Victorian Sensations*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986.
- . *Victorian Studies in Scarlet*. New York: Norton, 1970.
- Anae, Nicole. "Poses Plastiques: The Art and Style of 'Statuary' in Victorian Visual Theatre." *Australasian Drama Studies* 52 (April 2008): 112-130.
- "Anxiety, n." *OED Online*. Accessed January 04, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/8968>.
- "Anxious, adj." *OED Online*. Accessed January 04, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/8970>
- Armstrong, Tim. "Two Types of Shock in Modernity." *Critical Quarterly* 42.1 (2000): 60-73.
- Auslander, Philip. *Liveness: Performance in a Mediatized Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1999.
- Barrett, Daniel. "It is Never Too Late to Mend (1865) and Prison Conditions in Nineteenth-Century England." *Theatre Research International* 18.1 (March 1993).
- Barthes, Roland. "The Reality Effect." *The Rustle of Language*. Translated by Richard Howard. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968/1986.
- Basta, Samira. "The French Influence on Dion Boucicault's Sensation Dramas." *Literary Interrelations*. Edited by Wolfgang Zach and Heinz Kosok. Tübingen: G. Narr Verlag, 1987.
- Bechtold, Rebecca. "'She Sings a stamp of Originality': Sentimental Mimicry in Jenny Lind's American Tour." *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 58.4 (2012): 493-528.
- Benjamin, Walter. "Some Motifs in Baudelaire." *Illuminations*. Edited by Hannah Arendt. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1968/1940.
- Berlant, Lauren. "Introduction Compassion (and Withholding)," in *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

- . "Thinking about Feeling Historical." *Emotion, Space, and Society* (August 2008).
- Bernstein, Stephen. "Reading Blackwater Park: Gothicism, Narrative, and Ideology in The Woman in White." *Studies in the Novel* 25.3 (Fall 1993): 291-305.
- Best, Stephen and Sharon Marcus. "Surface Reading: An Introduction." *Representations* 108.1 (Fall 2009): 1-21.
- Biddlecombe, George. "The Construction of a Cultural Icon: The Case of Jenny Lind," in *Nineteenth-Century British Music Studies Volume 3*. Edited by Peter Horton and Bennett Zon. London: Routledge, 2003.
- Black, Donald and Jon E. Grant. "Diagnostic Criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder." *DSM-5 Guidebook: The Essential Companion to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition*. Washington D.C.: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2014.
- Blum, Justin A. "Adaptation, Copyright, and the Case of Dion Boucicault's 'The Poor of.'" *Performing Arts Resources* Vol. 28 (2011): 127-34.
- Bodenheimer, Rosemarie. "Ambition and Its Audiences: George Eliot's Performing Figures." *Victorian Studies* 34.1 (Autumn 1990): 7-33.
- Booth, Michael. *Hiss the Villain: Six English and American Melodramas*. London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1964.
- . *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850-1910*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981.
- Borch, Christian. *The Politics of Crowds: An Alternative History of Sociology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Bourne Taylor, Jenny. *In the Secret Theatre of the Home: Wilkie Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology*. London: Routledge, 1988.
- Brantlinger, Patrick. *The Reading Lesson: The Threat of Mass Literacy in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998.
- . "What is Sensational about the Sensation Novel," *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 37, no. 1 (June 1982): 1-28.
- Bratton, J.S. ed. *Acts of Supremacy: The British Empire and the Stage, 1790-1930*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991.
- Brooks, Peter. *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975.
- Burdett, Carolyn. "Is Empathy the End of Sentimentality?" *Journal of Victorian Culture* 16.2 (August 2011).



- Burgess, Miranda. "On Being Moved: Sympathy, Mobility, and Narrative Form." *Poetics Today* 32.2 (Summer 2011): 289-321.
- Caruth, Cathy. "Recapturing the Past. Introduction." *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Edited by Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995.
- Chapman, Mary. "'Living Pictures': Women and *Tableaux Vivants* in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction and Culture." *Wide Angle* 18.3 (1996): 22-52.
- Clarke, Edwin and Jacyna, L.S. *Nineteenth-Century Origins of Neuroscientific Concepts*. Berkeley: University of California, 1987.
- Claybaugh, Amanda. *The Novel of Purpose: Literature and Social Reform in the Anglo-American World*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.
- Cruz, Gabriela. "The Flying Dutchman, English Spectacle, and the Remediation of Grand Opera." *Cambridge Opera Journal* 29.1 (2017): 5-32.
- Csengei, Ildiko. *Sympathy, Sensibility, and the Literature of Feeling in the Eighteenth Century*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- Cvetkovich, Ann. "Ghostlier Determinations: The Economy of Sensation and *The Woman in White*." *Novel* 23.1 (Fall 1989).
- . *Mixed Feelings: Feminism, Mass Culture, and Victorian Sensationalism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1992.
- Daly, Nicholas. "Blood on the Tracks: Sensation Drama, the Railway, and the Dark Face of Modernity." *Victorian Studies* 42.1 (Autumn 1998-99): 47-76.
- . *Literature, Technology, and Modernity 1860-2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- . "Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernization of the Senses." *ELH* 66.2 (Summer 1999): 461-480.
- . *Sensation and Modernity in the 1860s*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Dames, Nicholas. "1825-1880: The Network of Nerves." *The Emergence of Mind: Representations of Consciousness in Narrative Discourse in English*. Ed. David Herman. Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 2011.
- . *Amnesiac Selves: Nostalgia and Forgetting, and British Fiction, 1810-1870*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.
- . *The Physiology of the Novel: Reading, Neural Science, and the Form of Victorian Fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

- . "Wave Theories and Affective Physiologies: The Cognitive Strain in Victorian Novel Theories." *Victorian Studies* 46, no. 2 (Winter 2004): 206-16.
- . "The withering of the individual: Psychology in the Victorian Novel." *A Concise Companion to the Victorian Novel*. Ed. Francis O'Gorman. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005.
- David, Deirdre. "Rewriting the Male Plot in Wilkie Collins' *No Name*: Captain Wragge Orders an Omelette and Mrs. Wragge Goes into Custody." *The New Nineteenth Century: Feminist Readings of Underread Victorian Fiction*. London: Garland, 1996.
- Denison, Patricia. "Victorian and Modern Drama: Social Convention and Theatrical Invention in T.W. Robertson's Plays." *Modern Drama* 37.3 (Fall 1994): 401-420.
- Denning, Michael. *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working-Class Culture in America*. London: Verso, 1987.
- Diamond, Michael. *Victorian Sensation, or the Spectacular, the Shocking, and the Scandalous in Nineteenth-Century Britain*. London: Anthem Press, 2003.
- Dixon, Thomas. *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.
- Faulk, Barry. *Music Hall & Modernity: The Late-Victorian Discovery of Popular Culture*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2004.
- Fawkes, Richard. *Dion Boucicault: A Biography*. London: Quartet Books, 1979.
- Fischler, Alan. "Guano and Poetry: Payment for Playwriting in Victorian England." *MLQ: Modern Language Quarterly* 62.1 (March 2001): 43-52.
- Fisher, Judith L. "The 'Sensation Scene' in Charles Dickens and Dion Boucicault." in *Dramatic Dickens* Edited by Carol MacKay. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Edited by James Strachey. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1961/1920.
- Gallagher, Catherine. *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994.
- . "George Eliot and Daniel Deronda: The Prostitute and the Jewish Question." *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*. Edited by Ruth Yeazell. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.
- Garratt, Peter. *Victorian Empiricism: Self, Knowledge, and Reality in Ruskin, Bain, Lewes, Spencer, and George Eliot*. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2010.
- Garrison, Laurie. *Science, Sexuality, and the Sensation Novel: Pleasure of the Senses*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.

- Gilbert, Pamela, ed. *Companion to Sensation Fiction*. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2011.
- . *Disease, Desire, and The Body in Victorian Women's Popular Novel*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Greiner, Rae. "Sympathy," *The Encyclopedia of Victorian Literature* First Edition. Hoboken: John Wiley and Sons, 2015.
- . *Sympathetic Realism in Nineteenth-Century British Fiction*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.
- . "Sympathy Time: Adam Smith, George Eliot, and the Realist Novel." *Narrative* 17.3 (Oct 2009): 291-311.
- Gunning, Tom. "The Horror of Opacity: The Melodrama of Sensation in the Plays of Andre de Lorde." *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen*. London: British Film Institute, 1994.
- Hadley, Elaine. *Melodramatic Tactics: Theatricalized Dissent in the English Marketplace, 1800-1885*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Harrington, Ralph. "On the Tracks of Trauma: Railway Spine Reconsidered." *Journal of the Society for the Social History of Medicine* 16.2 (2003): 209-223.
- . "The Railway Accident: Trains, Trauma, and Technological Crises in Nineteenth-Century Britain." in *Traumatic Pasts: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma in the Modern Age, 1870-1930*. Edited by Mark S. Micale and Paul Lerner. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.
- Harrison, A. Cleveland. "Boucicault's Formula: Illusion Equals Pleasure." *Educational Theatre Journal* 21.3 (October 1969).
- Harrison, Mary-Catherine. "How Narrative Relationships Overcome Empathic Bias: Elizabeth Gaskell's Empathy Across Social Difference." *Poetics Today* 32.2 (Summer 2011): 255-288.
- Herbert, Christopher. *War of No Pity: The Indian Mutiny and Victorian Trauma*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.
- Hibbet, Christopher et al. *The London Encyclopedia*. Third Edition. London: Macmillan, 2010.
- Hingston, Kylee-Anne. "'Skins to Jump Into': The Slipperiness of Identity and the Body in Wilkie Collins' *No Name*." *Victorian Literature and Culture* 40 (2012).
- Huffels, Natalie. "Tracing Traumatic Memory in *The Woman in White*: Psychic Shock, Victorian Science, and the Narrative Strategy of the Shadow-Bildungsroman." *Victorian Review* 37.1 (Spring 2011).
- "Hysteria, n." *OED Online*. Accessed June 01, 2016, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90638>.

- Jackson, Noel. *Science and Sensation in Romantic Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.
- Jaffe, Audrey. *Scenes of Sympathy: Identity and Representation in Victorian Fiction*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000.
- Jameson, Frederic. *The Antinomies of Realism*. London: Verso, 2013.
- Jenkins, Anthony. *The Making of Victorian Drama*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
- Jones, Anna. "A Victim in Search of a Torturer: Reading Masochism in Wilkie Collins' *No Name*." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 33.2 (Spring 2000): 196-211.
- Keen, Suzanne. *Empathy and the Novel*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.
- Kendrick, Walter. "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 32 (1977).
- Kennedy, Meegan. "Some Body's Story: The Novel as Instrument." *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 42.1/2 (Winter 2009).
- Kindleberger, Charles and Robert Aliber. *Manias, Panics, and Crashes: A History of Financial Crises*. Sixth Edition. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Kolentsis, Alysia. "Tragedy and Compromise in George Eliot's *Armstrong* and *Middlemarch*." *Genre* 49.3 (December 2016): 303-329.
- Kurnick, David. *Empty Houses: Theatrical Failure and the Novel*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012.
- Lanzoni, Susan. "Sympathy in *Mind* (1876-1900)." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 70.2 (April 2009): 265-287.
- Laqueur, Thomas. "Bodies, Details, and the Humanitarian Narrative." *The New Cultural History*. Edited by Lynn Hunt. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.
- Law, Graham and Andrew Maunder. *Wilkie Collins: A Literary Life*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Lehman, Amy. *Victorian Women and the Theatre of Trance: Mediums, Spiritualists, and Mesmerists in Performance*. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2009.
- Leys, Ruth. *Trauma: A Genealogy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.
- Litvak, Joseph. *Caught in the Act: Theatricality in the Nineteenth-Century English Novel*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.
- Lowe, Brigid. *Victorian Fiction and the Insights of Sympathy*. London: Anthem, 2007.

- Manganelli, Kimberly Snyder. *Transatlantic Spectacles of Race: The Tragic Mulatta and the Tragic Muse*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2012.
- Mangham, Andrew. "Life after Death: Apoplexy, Medical Ethics, and the Female Undead." *Women's Writing* 15, no.3 (2008): 282-299.
- Marcus, Sharon. "The Theater of Comparative Literature" *Companion to Comparative Literature*. Edited by Ali Behdad and Dominic Thomas. Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2011.
- . "Comparative Sapphism." *The Literary Channel: The Inter-National Invention of the Novel*. Edited by Carolyn Dever and Margaret Cohen. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.
- Marshall, David. *The Figure of Theater: Shaftesbury, Defoe, Adam Smith, and George Eliot*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986.
- . *The Surprising Effects of Sympathy: Marivaux, Diderot, Rousseau and Mary Shelley*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Marshall, Gail. *Actresses on the Victorian Stage: Feminine Performance and the Galatea Myth*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.
- Massumi, Brian. "The Autonomy of Affect." *Cultural Critique* 31 (Autumn 1995).
- Matus, Jill. "Emergent Theories of Victorian Mind Shock: From War and Railway Accident to Nerves, Electricity, and Emotion." *Neurology and Literature, 1860-1920*. Edited by Anne Stiles. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- . *Shock, Memory, and the Unconscious in Victorian Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Maunder, Andrew ed., *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction: 1855-1890*. London: Pickering & Chatto, 2004.
- . "Mapping the Victorian Sensation Novel: Some Recent and Future Trends," *Literature Compass* 2 (2005).
- Mayer, David. "The Bells: a Case Study A 'Bare-Ribbed Skeleton' in a Chest" in *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*. Edited by Joseph Donohue. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- , ed. *Henry Irving and The Bells: Irving's Personal Script of the Play*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1980.
- McFeely, Deirdre. *Dion Boucicault: Irish Identity on Stage*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

- Meer, Sarah. "Boucicault's Misdirections: Race, Transatlantic Theatre and Social Position in *The Octoroon*." *Atlantic Studies* 6.1 (May 2009).
- Meisel, Martin. "Dion Boucicault," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of British Literature*. Edited by David Scott Kastan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- . *Realizations: Narrative, Pictorial, and Theatrical Arts in Nineteenth-Century England*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983.
- Miller, D.A. *The Novel and the Police*. Berkeley: University of California, 1988.
- Moody, Jane. "The Drama of Capital: Risk, Belief, and Liability on the Victorian Stage." *Victorian Literature and Finance*. Edited by Francis O'Gorman. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.
- . *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770-1840*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- . "The Theatrical Revolution, 1776-1843." *The Cambridge History of British Theatre Volume 2*. Edited by Joseph Donohue. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Nandrea, Lorri G. "Desiring Difference: Sympathy and Sensibility in *Jane Eyre*," *Novel* (Fall 2003/Spring 2004): 112-134.
- Nead, Lynda. *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth-Century London*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.
- Nixon, Cheryl, ed. *Novel Definitions: An Anthology of Commentary on the Novel, 1688-1815*. Toronto: Broadview Press, 2009.
- Phegley, Jennifer, John Cyril Barton and Kristin N. Huston, eds. *Transatlantic Sensations*. Burlington, VT, 2012.
- Pinch, Adela. *Strange Fits of Passion: Epistemologies of Emotion, Hume to Austen*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.
- Pocock, Stephanie. "The Judicial and the Melodramatic Stage: Trial Scenes in Boucicault's *Arrah-na-Pogue* and *The Octoroon*." *Theatre Journal* 60.4 (2008 Dec): 545-561.
- Poovey, Mary. *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988.
- Pykett, Lynn. "Collins and the Sensation Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- . *Nineteenth-Century Sensation Novel*. Tavistock: British Council, 2011.
- Radford, Andrew. *Victorian Sensation Fiction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

- Reed, Edward. *From Soul to Mind: The Emergence of Psychology from Erasmus Darwin to William James*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.
- Richards, Jeffrey. *Sir Henry Irving: A Victorian Actor and his World*. London: Hambledon and London, 2005.
- Roach, Joseph. *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1996.
- Ryan, Vanessa. *Thinking without Thinking in the Victorian Novel*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012.
- Rylance, Rick. *Victorian Psychology and British Culture, 1850-1880*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.
- Scarry, Elaine. *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987.
- Schivelbusch, Wolfgang. *The Railway Journey: The Industrialization of Time and Space in the Nineteenth Century*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986.
- Schoch, Richard. "Theatre and Mid-Victorian Society, 1851-1870." *The Cambridge History of British Theatre*. Vol 2. Edited by Joseph Donohue. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Schramm, Jan-Melissa. *Testimony and Advocacy in Victorian Law, Literature, and Theology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2003.
- Seltzer, Mark. "Wound Culture: Trauma in the Pathological Public Sphere." *October* 80 (Spring 1997).
- Sennett, Richard. *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*. New York: W.W. Norton Company, 1994.
- Simpson, Vicky. "Selective Affinities: Non-Normative Families in Wilkie Collins' *No Name*," *Victorian Review* 39.2 (Fall 2013).
- Singer, Ben. *Melodrama and Modernity: Early Sensational Cinema and Its Contexts*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2001.
- Smith, Matthew Wilson. "Victorian Railway Accident and the Melodramatic Imagination." *Modern Drama* 55.4 (Winter 2012): 497-522.
- Sousa Correa, Delia da. *George Eliot, Music, and Victorian Culture*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

- Steadman, Gesa. *Stemming the Torrent: Expression and Control in the Victorian Discourses on Emotions, 1830-1872*. UK: Ashgate, 2002.
- Steele, William. *The Character of Melodrama*. Maine: University of Maine, 1968.
- Stokes, John. "‘Terrible Beauty’: An Actress Among the Novelists." *ELH* 51.4 (Winter 1984): 771-793.
- Streeby, Sally. *American Sensations: Class, Empire, and the Production of Popular Culture*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002.
- Sullivan, William. "The Allusion to Jenny Lind in Daniel Deronda." *Nineteenth-Century Fiction* 29. 2 (September 1974): 211-214.
- Surridge, Lisa. *Bleak Houses: Marital Violence in Victorian Fiction*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio State Press, 2005.
- Talairach-Vielmas, Laurence. *Wilkie Collins, Medicine, and the Gothic*. Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2009.
- Taylor, Daphne. *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performances of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
- Thomas, Roland. *Detective Fiction and the Rise of Forensic Science*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Todd, Janet. *Sensibility: An Introduction*. London: Methuen, 1986.
- Tromp, Marlene. *The Private Rod: Marital Violence, Sensation, and the Law in Victorian Britain*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000.
- Trotter, Mary. *Ireland's National Theaters: Political Performance and the Origins of the Irish Dramatic Movement*. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2001.
- Viktor Shklovsky, "Art as Device." *Theory of Prose*. Translated by Benjamin Sher. Illinois State University: Dalkey Archive Press, 1991.
- Voskuil, Lynn. *Acting Naturally: Victorian Theatricality and Authenticity*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004.
- Vrettos, Athena. *Somatic Fictions: Imagining Illness in Victorian Culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
- Walsh, Townsend. *The Career of Dion Boucicault*. New York: The Dunlap Society, 1915.
- Watt Smith, Tiffany. *On flinching: Theatricality and Scientific Looking from Darwin to Shell Shock*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012.



- Williams, Carolyn. "Moving Pictures: George Eliot and Melodrama." *Compassion: The Culture and Politics of an Emotion*. Edited by Lauren Berlant. New York: Routledge, 2004.
- . "Melodrama and the Realist Novel." in *The Cambridge Companion to English Melodrama* Edited by Carolyn Williams. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Williams, Raymond. *Marxism and Literature*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977.
- Williams, Tony. *The Representation of London in Regency and Victorian Drama 1821-1881*. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellon Press, 2000.
- Winter, Alison. *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.
- Witemeyer, Hugh. *George Eliot and the Visual Arts*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979.
- Zakreski, Patricia. *Representing Female Artistic Labour, 1848-1890: Refining Work for the Middle-Class Woman*. Burlington: Ashgate, 2006.