Sensational Bodies: Semiotics and Embodiment in the Work of Wilkie Collins

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Abstract

This project uses the semiotic theories of nineteenth-century philosopher Charles S. Peirce to read embodiment in the sensation fiction works of Wilkie Collins. I argue that a Peircean semiotic reading offers critics a unique advantage to read and discuss how embodiment and environment affect both characters within the novel and the readers outside the novel. Using *The Woman in White*, my thesis explores how embodiment shapes the plot of the novel, and imbues characters with detective skills. I also discuss the fraught serialization of *Armadale* in Britain and America, and I examine how alterations in the illustrations reshape the readers' sense of embodiment in terms of race and gender. My project then turns toward a discussion of how a semiotic analysis of sensation fiction can create new ways of reading and valuing popular fiction and affective genres.

Keywords: Wilkie Collins, embodiment, illustrations, semiotics, sensation fiction, nineteenth-century

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1 Introduction

"The entire universe is perfused in signs, if it is not composed exclusively of signs."

-Charles S. Peirce (Volume 2, 394).

The field of semiotics is devoted to the study of signs, sign relations, and how organisms interpret signs in the world. Our everyday lives are filled to brim with signs that require our attention and interpretation, such as linguistic cues, environmental signals, emotional feedback, and physical stimuli. Occasionally we face obstacles to semiosis, or our ability to read signs, leading to confusion, anxiety, or inaction. "Semiosis is the most fundamental indicator of life," writes Wendy Wheeler (*The Whole Creature* 109). Understanding semiosis, then, is crucial to understanding how we live. At the heart of literary studies, too, is an innate desire to understand how and why we lead the lives we do. It is no surprise then, that literary scholars and theorists have been attracted to semiotic theories to help explain texts.

However, the types of texts that have been subject to literary analysis, semiotic or otherwise, are generally canonical texts. In contemporary scholarship, there has been a renewed focus on popular and genre fiction, particularly in historical contexts. Popular fiction and genre fiction, such as sentimental literature, sensation fiction, gothic novels, and romance novels, have been often sidelined by critics, dismissing the forms as too emotional, too feminine, and too focused on achieving cheap thrills from their audiences. Current scholarship and pedagogy have been increasingly devoted to popular and genre fiction in the nineteenth century, including sensation fiction, penny blood periodicals, and new woman fiction. These genres have gained more critical attention as the field has begun to shift towards accurately representing,

understanding, and teaching the tastes of Victorian readers. In particular, my work is interested in a genre popular with Victorian readers in the 1860s and 1870s: sensation fiction. As a genre, sensation fiction reveals the evils and disasters lurking around the corners of daily life, relying on thrilling crimes and their detection to drive the novels' plots. Many modern scholars, including Lyn Pykett, Andrew Mangham, Kimberly Harrison, and Richard Fantina, have discussed how sensation fiction unraveled the mythology of the domestic home and exposed new fears and anxieties about marriage, divorce, family life, technology, and identity. To fully understand and appreciate the impact of historical and cultural studies approaches, popular fiction ought to be paired with a theoretical methodology that delves into the core of the work: its semiotic processes. I believe that combining sensation novels with the semiotic theories of philosopher Charles S. Peirce can bring forth the hidden value in this marginalized and maligned genre, making room for further theoretical inquiry into popular fiction genres. Furthermore, relying on Peirce's semiotic theories also allows for an engagement with philosophical thought that was emerging during roughly the same time period as Collins's work, thus allowing modern readers to consider the texts through a contemporary lens of thought and interpretation.

My project will focus on the semiosis in two of sensation fiction works of Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* and *Armadale*. My chapter on *The Woman in White* discusses how semiosis functions *within* the novels, shaping the characters' minds and bodies, and altering their relationships to the surrounding environment. In particular, I argue that Collins's characters with nonstandard bodies are able to perceive their environments differently, leading to alternative semiotic processes, and thus, new forms of detection. My chapter on *Armadale* demonstrates how semiotics functions *outside* of the novel, analyzing how alterations in the illustrations that accompanied the serialized text of the novel affect reader responses by creating varying semiotic

processes. My work here is particularly concerned with changes in the illustrations that affected how readers would experience the bodies of racialized and gendered characters. At the heart of my project lies a concern for bodies, embodiment, and how these two elements alter perceptions of the world. Sensation fiction, as I will show in chapter one, is a genre preoccupied with bodies, embodiment, and bodily response, making it a perfect partner to my theoretical goals.

However, before delving into Wilkie Collins's novels, some clarification is needed on Peircean semiotics, which differs from the better-known model by Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure's semiotic model is highly focused on linguistic signs, and it is a dyadic model consisting of signified and signifier (Chandler 14). For Saussure's model, the emphasis lies in the relationship between the signifier and signified with the recipient or interpretation of the semiotic process playing little to no role (Chandler 18-22). In contrast, the Peircean model is a triadic[1] model of sign relation, which asserts, "the sign is a unity of what is represented (the object), how it is represented (the representamen), and how it is interpreted (the interpretant)" (Chandler 29). Peirce's triadic model not only allows for a discussion of how signs can be read, but also invites other forms of sign-making and sign-interpretation, not merely linguistics.

Instead of linguistic utterances, Peirce argues that signs are stimulus patterns that produce a response from the organism in reaction to the sign. This stimulus pattern can roughly be broken down into the experience of the sign, the types of sign registers, and the types of inquiry. A visualization of these areas can be seen in Table 1. Peirce's foundational work argues that the stimulus pattern takes on distinct qualities in Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness that affect the different areas of the sign.

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[1] Peirce was obsessed with the number three, so many of his formulations (as you will see) take a triadic form.

	1	2	3
Experience of the sign	Firstness: Quality of Feeling, Sensation	Secondness: Connection, Causation, Relation	Thirdness: Response in Language and/or Action
Sign registers	Icon: resembles object	Index: points to relationship with object	Symbol: adheres to conventions or set meaning(s)
Types of inquiry	Abduction: hunch or educated guess; hypothesis	Deduction: hypothesis testing	Induction: verified conclusion to hypothesis

Table 1: Peirce's Sign System (created by Scupham, adapted from De Waal)

Peirce writes that the experience of a sign occurs through what he labels Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, which all occur simultaneously when experiencing a stimulus. Peirce describes, "The First is that whose being is simply in itself, not referring to anything nor lying behind anything. The Second is that which is what it is by force of something to which it is second. The Third is that which is what it is owing to things between which it mediates and which it brings into relation to each other" (Volume 1, 248). Peirce describes Firstness as "fresh, new, initiative, original, spontaneous, free, vivid, conscious" and "it cannot be articulately thought, assert it, and it has already lost its characteristic innocence…stop to think of it, and it has flown!" (Volume 1, 248). At its core, Firstness defies language and exists only the immediacy of a quality of feeling or sensation. In contrast, Secondness is defined by "that which cannot be without the first," and "limitation, conflict, constraint" (Volume 1, 248-9). Finally, Thirdness is "that which bridges over the chasm between the absolute first and last, and brings them into relationship" (Volume 1, 249). To grossly oversimplify, we can think of Firstness as the quality of a feeling, Secondness

as that which puts Firstness into relationship (connection, causation, etc.), and Thirdness is the result through action or language. In general, it can be said that signs derive from sudden sensations or feelings, are interpreted through relations and boundaries, and then result in a response. An example might be helpful here: the experience of being stung by a bee is a (painful) semiotic process. Firstness is the immediate feeling of pain unrelated to its source; Secondness is the realization of where the pain is located and that is has come from outside one's body; and finally, Thirdness is the resulting action, in this case possibly physical reaction such as a clutching or investigation of the stung location, and possibly a linguistic response (if swear words are involved), coming from logical realization or prior experience(s) that it must have been a bee sting. It is important to note that language is the end point, not the beginning, of semiosis for Peirce.

This movement (although it occurs simultaneously) from sensation to relation to response helps us not only understand how we respond to stimuli (such as an itch or a car backfiring), but also gives us a language to understand the different registers at which signs operate upon organisms. Looking again to Table 1, the categories of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness take on new qualities when applied to describing the sign itself. A sign can be read as an icon, an index, or a symbol. These different sign registers are most apparent when examining a piece of visual art. An iconic sign, as a function of Firstness, takes on the form of resemblance to the object it represents, such as photograph, which resembles the real object in photographic form, or metaphor, which resembles the object through linguistic image (Chandler 36-7). An indexical sign, as a function of Secondness, is not arbitrary and yet directly connected through observation or inference, such as smoke indicating or pointing to a fire (Chandler 36-7). A symbolic sign is arbitrary and conventional, with meanings that must be learned and agreed upon (Chandler 36).

Language and numbers function as a symbolic signs. Icons, indexes, and symbols can help in the examination of visual art in particular, determining how a work can convey a variety of layered, even conflicting, meanings simultaneously. Again, it is important to note that the understanding of a sign develops from a quality of feeling that then takes on conventional meanings. However, these different registers do not require the quality of feeling, the causality, and the conventional meaning to be unified, leading to new interpretations of the signs, as the differing receptions to illustrations from *Armadale* will demonstrate.

Finally, the last component of Peirce's theories discussed is his conception of the path of inquiry, which proceeds similarly to how Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness functions. Peirce theorized that the process of inquiry also had three distinct stages, which roughly map onto his ideas of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness: abduction, deduction, and induction. Like Firstness, abduction arises from an initial sensation: "For Peirce, abduction had its proper place in the context of discovery, the stage of inquiry in which we try to generate theories which may then later be assessed" (Douven). Deduction "helps to derive testable consequences from the explanatory hypotheses" and induction "finally helps us to reach a verdict on the hypotheses," thus mapping onto the relational quality of Secondness and the action of Thirdness, respectively (Douven). It is important to note that processes of inquiry are not generated through abstract thoughts, but rather through hunches or educated guesses that arise from sensations. Again, Peirce's theories redirect the understanding of sign relationships to the interaction with the environment and the body.

Overall, Peirce's theories of semiotic offers several advantages to discussing literary texts by grounding the experience of sign reading – whether that is a description of a character making sense of their environment, or whether that is a reader making sense of the novel and its paratexts

– through physical response, conceptualization of relationships and boundaries, and through language. By using semiotics, critics can approach a text through one unified approach that values embodiment, environment, and linguistic structures. Peircean semiotics offers a unique vantage point from which to unite various theoretical and methodological persuasions into an interdisciplinary approach that places the experience of living and existing at the fore.

2 Sensational Umwelten: *The Woman in White* & Semiotics

2.1 Sensation Fiction as a Semiotic Genre

In her 1862 review of *The Woman in White*, Margaret Oliphant begrudgingly extends praise to Wilkie Collins's latest novel, noting that his novel has achieved successfully "deprived his readers of their lawful rest," and that he had done so without "the wild devices" of supernatural or occult elements (565). Collins's skill at writing sensation fiction, Oliphant argues, deserves praise, yet she anxiously looks to a future of new sensation novels: "No successful work can apparently exist in this imitative age without creating a shoal of copyists; and with every fresh imitation the picture will take more and more objectionable shades" (568). These objectionable shades - which one *Punch* satirist describes as "harrowing the mind, making the flesh creep, causing the hair to stand on end, giving shocks to the nervous system, destroying conventional morality, and generally unfitting the public for the prosaic avocations of life" - would come to define the sensation fiction genre of the 1860s and 1870s (Sweet). The lurid and titillating temptations of sensation fiction dominated the public consciousness, and cultural critics, like Oliphant, who saw these salacious plotlines (featuring bigamy, murder, mistaken identities, and fraud) as inherent threats to the middle-class readership and their morality, often singled out the genre for harsh critique.

Morally minded Victorians were urged through literature, journals, and pamphlets to individually regulate their physical responses and emotions in order to maintain their sense of propriety, morality, and, even their sanity. One key component to this moral regulation of one's senses was abstaining from behaviors that might overtax the senses or excite the emotions, and thus, lead to immorality or insanity. As scholar Barbara Fass Leavy notes, "What psychological theory existed at the time made a close connection between physical and mental illness…prompt detection and treatment were necessary to save the patient" (Leavy 103-4). By minding one's emotional reactions, one could prevent immorality or insanity as one would a cold. Although both men and women were warned of the dangers of excessive sensation, advocates for moral self-regulation argued that women and girls were particularly in danger because they were "too effectively stimulated, too seduced by the suggestive pleasure of 'unwholesome' excitement" (Garrison 3). Yet despite the public concern about unregulated bodies and emotions, the sensation fiction genre held and still holds power and popularity over its readers, perhaps because of the unwholesome excitement these novels continue to elicit.

In subject matter and narrative style, sensation novels fixate on the physical and physiological responses of their characters and readers, the lurking threat of deviance, and the desire for detection and unmasking. Although the stigma of the label of popular fiction still clings to sensation novels, scholarship on the genre has become a flourishing subfield. Many scholars of sensation fiction, such as Lyn Pykett, Andrew Mangham, Kimberly Harrison, and Richard Fantina (just to name a few), discuss how these novels feature detection, surveillance, and social control, or how these novels grapple with the anxieties of physical sensation and its gendered elements. Scholars like Laurie Garrison, Sally Shuttleworth, and Jenny Bourne Taylor have also discussed the psychological and scientific elements of the genre. In particular, Wilkie

Collins' most famous sensation novel, *The Woman in White*, has garnered much critical attention for these elements of deviance, mental illness, surveillance, gender, and psychology.

Told in an epistolary format of journal entries and signed affidavits from various narrators, *The Woman in White* tells the story of Walter Hartright, a drawing teacher, who is engaged to teach a young heiress, Laura Fairlie, and her half-sister, Marian Halcombe. As Walter heads to meet his new pupils at Limmeridge House, he encounters the eponymous woman in white, Anne Catherick, who has escaped the local asylum and bears a striking resemblance to Laura Fairlie. Although Walter falls for Laura, she is engaged to marry the seemingly charming Sir Percival Glyde, whom Walter suspects placed Anne in the asylum. Despite some disputes over the marriage settlement (which stipulates that upon Laura's death without heirs, Percival will receive the full amount of her inheritance), an anonymous warning letter (eventually revealed to be from Anne), and Laura's confession that she loves Walter, Laura and Sir Percival marry. However, not long after the wedding, Marian and Laura each come to suspect (and later confirm) that Sir Percival and his companion, Count Fosco, are plotting to force Laura to sign a document that would immediately place her inheritance into Percival's hands. Meanwhile, Marian enlists Anne's help in uncovering Sir Percival's secret, hoping to free her sister from her unhappy marriage. When Marian falls ill, Count Fosco and Sir Percival put their plan into motion, using Anne and Laura's matching appearances to swap Anne for Laura, which allows a dying Anne to be buried as Laura and for Laura to be placed into the asylum as Anne, thus ensuring all of Laura's inheritance goes to Sir Percival. Marian rescues her sister from the asylum, and she and Walter work together to regain Laura's identity and fortune while simultaneously uncovering Sir Percival's dark secret. The novel ends with Laura's identity and rank restored, and married to Walter, following the deaths of both Sir Percival and Count Fosco.

Collins' novel, besides its compelling and complicated plot, which I have only summarized briefly, features plot structures, including suspense and gothic horror, designed to produce physical responses in the reader. For example, scholar Ann Cvetkovich's work analyzes Collins' narrative techniques in *The Woman in White* to demonstrate how other sensational plotlines unfold in conjunction to the main plotline. Specifically, Cvetkovich argues that Collins's sensational narrative structures, including the use of character foils and doppelgängers as well as descriptions of increasingly confused or unsure mental states, allow the novel to create physical responses in the reader. In particular, the sections of Walter's narrative use these plot devices to mask Walter's potentially material motivations for marrying Laura, offering an alternative reading of his character that troubles his image as the heroic detective. Cvetkovich argues that Walter's bodily experiences of nervousness and hysteria throughout the novel garner the readers' physical and emotional responses, thus making the lurking financial motivation in Walter's romantic plotline. She writes, "Walter's incapacity to control his own body, even as it renders him anxious, permits him to rise to power without appearing to aspire to it" (Cvetkovich 26-27). Walter's desire to solve the mystery of the woman in white is a subconscious smokescreen that "sensationalizes and masks" his social climbing (Cvetkovich 28). However, this narrative technique expands to do more than excuse Walter's fortune hunting: sensationalism creates the need for detection and sign-reading. Cvetkovich writes, "Physical sensations that threaten to overwhelm the perceiver must be transformed into mysteries to be explained" (32). However, these overwhelming sensations also engulf the reader as well, creating a need for the reader to solve the mystery along with the detectives. For example, the frightening and sudden appearance of Anne Catherick on the country road at night, which puts Walter *and the reader* into physical terror, prompts the foundation of the mystery of the novel.

Although Cvetkovich concludes that this technique functions to woo the reader into further sensation reading by "fulfilling the desire to make what the body fears meaningful," I would argue that, financial incentives for authors aside, Collins deploys a carefully crafted narrative technique that not only encourages, but *requires* readers to approach his text as detectives, carefully reading both the multiple layers of signs available in the text as well as our bodily responses to the text, such as nervousness, anxiety, or terror (42). Although many critics have adopted various methods[2] to untangle Collins' novel and its mysteries, the unifying feature that lies at the heart of *The Woman and White* and other examples of the sensation genre is the *uncertainty of meaning* - who is truly (in)sane or criminal? - and the necessity for both characters and audiences to *read signs* well, whether those are physical markers of instability and deviance or clues to a crime.

In fact what makes *The Woman in White* so compelling, I argue, is that Collins's nonstandard characters are his best detectives in the novel[3]. Socially nonstandard characters like Walter (whose position as an employee in the home exposes a threatening potential as a fortune hunter) and Marian (whose masculine/queer appearance and bold bravery set her apart from the traditional mold of female behavior and embodiment), possess a unusual ability to read and interact with their *Umwelten* (environments) in nonstandard ways, making them uniquely skilled to expose and see through the facades of society and its crimes. Collins imbues various locations

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[2] For example: Stephen Bernstein's ecocritical reading, D.A. Miller's gendered approach, Barbara Fass Leavy's historicist and structural analysis, and Laurie Garrison's historical and medical examination of the genre.

[3] I am building off of D.A. Miller's 1986 reading wherein he identifies Walter and Marian as figures who are particularly "nerve-wracked" and still enable the detective plot to move forward (151). Since this publication, there has been more work done identifying how both Walter and Marian deviate (physically and mentally) from other characters and Victorian society, so I find the term "nonstandard" more useful and encompassing than the label of nervous or anxious.

in the novel, such as the London cityscape and Blackwater Park, with hidden signs that only particular characters can read and respond to, which in turn, forces readers to join the nonstandard characters in their semiotic processes. Furthermore, by demonstrating how natural environments impact bodies and how bodies simultaneously respond to these environments in unique ways, *The Woman in White* offers new possibilities to read sensation fiction beyond merely a genre of cheap thrills, but as a genre that privileges bodily experiences as the foundation for inquiry.

2.2 The Body, Semiotics, and Umwelt(en)

Ann Cvetkovich writes of *The Woman in White*: "It is difficult to say whether Anne and Laura are fascinating *because they are bodies* or *because they are signs*" (41, emphasis mine). My intent here is to think not only about how bodies signify, but also how bodies become the means of interpreting signs in the world, inscribed on other bodies or the natural world. Collins's characters are neither *just* bodies nor *just* signs – they act as both in the fictional world of the novel as well as for their readers.

It is important, then, that we rely on a system of semiotics to help us analyze not only how meaning is transmitted but also how it is interpreted. Feminist critic Marcia K. Moen has argued for using Charles S. Peirce's semiotic theories as the means by which critics can approach semiosis, embodiment, and the environment through one unified approach. She writes, "Under a Peircean semiotic the body's materiality connects us with a universe of meaningful events and beings which exceed the social, indeed exceed the human" (439). In order to discuss how bodies interact with the environment, I will be relying on the key term *Umwelt*, or environment, drawn from the work of biosemiotician Jakob von Uexküll. However, *Umwelt* is more than simply the

outer world surrounding an organism – it is the organism's subjective perception of the world around it (*The Whole Creature* 103). For example, even though we may inhabit the same space, the *Umwelten* a bumblebee, my dog, and I experience at the same moment in time and space are vastly different. I may have the superiority of color vision, but my dog has a far better sense of hearing and smell, and the bee of pheromones and chemical trails. Even between humans, both physiological (dis/abilities or mental states) and socially constructed (race, gender, class) perceptions of the same *Umwelt* will vary. As Wendy Wheeler writes, "An organism's *Umwelt* is, therefore, what *signifies* for it; and through it it perceives stimuli and responds to them. An *Umwelt*, in other words, is a space of semiosis" (*The Whole Creature* 103).

How then does semiosis happen? Peirce's theories of semiosis are notable for their triadic models, which categorize the process of how an organism experiences a stimulus. Peirce writes that the experience of a sign occurs through what he labels Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness, which I have already discussed in my introduction. Peirce theorizes that continued subject exposure to the various stimuli in our *Umwelten* comes to shape our habits, allowing for fairly predictable responses or interpretations to particular signs (264-266). These habits of body-mind allow us to interact with our *Umwelten* in more effective, pragmatic ways – one's body can filter and prioritize which stimuli demand more urgent attention. Both the habits and the semiotic functions, Peirce argues, allow organisms to explore, formulate, and test hypotheses about their *Umwelten* (Douven). Peirce theorized that the process of inquiry also had three distinct stages, which roughly map onto his ideas of Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness: abduction, deduction, and induction. Like Firstness, abduction arises from initial sensation that in turn prompts inquiry: "For Peirce, abduction had its proper place in the context of discovery, the stage of inquiry in which we try to generate theories which may then later be assessed" (Douven). Deduction "helps

to derive testable consequences from the explanatory hypotheses" and induction "finally helps us to reach a verdict on the hypotheses," thus mapping onto the relational quality of Secondness and the action of Thirdness, respectively (Douven). However, by examining and considering how different experiences of *Umwelten* shape understanding, we can account for how different bodies react in unusual ways, using abduction differently in new *Umwelten*. For my work, I am concerned with how abduction functions as a form of Firstness – using physical or emotional sensation to guide the individual to a line of inquiry. Returning to the world of Wilkie Collins, I want to examine how *Umwelten* in the novel create particular physical sensations that lead our proto-detectives characters on the path of inquiry, which is otherwise blocked to other characters who cleave to traditional societal roles.

2.3 Walter Hartright: Pastoral Semiotics & Class-Crossing Fantasies

When the reader first encounters Walter Hartright in the opening pages of *The Woman in White*, he is hardly the ideal hero, described as "out of health, out of spirits, and out of money," biding his time in his apartment in London and his mother's cottage in Hampstead (Collins 10). Despite Walter's artistic profession, Collins immediately aligns him with his position in the urban setting, noting "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" (10). Here, Walter's emotions and the working center of London are one, united in their sense of time and despairing the end of another day. The opening pages are relatively devoid of references to the natural world, and Walter's life is seemingly consumed with his family, friends, worries about finances, and his future working for the Fairlies (Collins 10-22). Walter's present life is one of habit, as well as everyday worries.

Yet after making the fateful decision to work at Limmeridge House, Walter's relationship to his *Umwelt* drastically shifts, and creates the far more suspenseful (and memorable) early scene in the novel, when Walter encounters the woman in white. Collins describes the scene in meticulous detail:

> The moon was full and broad in the dark blue starless sky; and the broken ground of the heath looked wild enough in the mysterious light, to be hundreds of miles away from the great city that lay beneath it. The idea of descending any sooner than I could help into the heat and gloom of London repelled me. The prospect of going to bed in my airless chambers, and the prospect of gradual suffocation, seemed, in my present restless frame of mind and body, to be one and the same thing. I determined to stroll home in the purer air…So long as I was proceeding through this first and prettiest part of my night-walk, my 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…I had mechanically turned in this latter direction [to London], and was strolling along the lonely high-road – idly wondering, I remember, what the Cumberland young ladies would look like – 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 finger 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 out

> of the earth or dropped from the heaven – stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments" (22-24).

In an attempt to avoid his habitual experiences, which he describes as the acute physical suffering of crowded and "airless" urban life, Walter takes an unexpected route home. This choice, which opens Walter up to new *Umwelten* and semiotic experiences, also produces new patterns of thought. Walter dreamily meditates on the young women he has been hired to teach (despite claiming previously, "I can hardly say that I thought at all"), and Collins is perhaps deliberately vague on Walter's true thoughts about these upper class and wealthy ladies (Collins 23). Walter's reverie is broken by a new stimulus, the touch of the hand of an unknown woman, and his thoughts, whether they tended toward the benign or more toward the financial prospects for the Limmeridge House women, are disrupted. Collins writes that Walter is too overwhelmed by the appearance of Anne Catherick to even think or speak, describing their later conversation as "a fathomless mystery, a dream" (24-7). Following her appearance, Walter observes "I hardly knew where I was going, or what I meant to do next; I was conscious of nothing but the confusion of my own thoughts" (Collins 30). Even upon learning that the woman has escaped an asylum, Walter's thought process is confused, even contradictory, and only the prospect of leaving London and following a normal routine of work alleviates his mental turmoil (Collins 31-32). Yet this encounter with Anne marks the beginning of not only the mystery of the novel, but also of Walter's more engaged interactions with the natural *Umwelten* at Limmeridge House and the development of more clearly defined romantic and class-crossing fantasies.

The new *Umwelt* at Limmeridge house offers Walter a respite from his urban life and *Umwelt*. Walter, drawing on his artistic linguistic habits, describes his first morning in Cumberland as a beautiful landscape painting:

> When I rose the next morning and drew up my blind, the sea opened before me joyously under the broad August sunlight, and the distant coast of Scotland fringed the horizon with its line of melting blue. The view was such a surprise, and such a change to me, after my weary London experience of brick and mortar landscape, that I seemed to burst into a new life and a new set of thoughts the moment I looked at it. A confused sensation of having suddenly lost my familiarity with the past, without acquiring any additional clearness of idea in reference to the present or the future, took possession of my mind" (Collins 33).

The scene of sea, sky, and coast are described in terms of brushstrokes painting a new view. With his painterly sensibilities newly inspired, Walter's physical delight and surprise at the beauty of the natural world around him prompt fresh ideas and a new view on life. More importantly, Walter's past life, his urban life is scrubbed out, leaving him open to explore new potentials for his present and future at Limmeridge, which, despite his current role as drawing-master, takes on the role of romantic suitor, and eventual possessor of Laura Fairlie and Limmeridge.

These new potentials are laid out when Walter attempts to describe Laura and her appearance at the time of their first encounter. It escapes him: "How can I describe her? How can I separate her from my own sensations, and from all that has happened in the later time? How can I see her again as she looked when my eyes first rested on her – as she should look, now, to the eyes that are about to see her in these pages?" (Collins 50-51). Laura's physicality and presence is totally subsumed by Walter's past and present emotional responses to her, a distinction that Walter neatly disguises. Thus, Laura takes on her role as cipher for the rest of the novel, represented as perpetually in relation to either Walter, Marian, or Sir Percival, and making

her the double (and iconic sign) to the equally mysterious Anne. Without inherent qualities of her own represented in the novel, Laura's body is a sign, which Walter reads as his artistic muse and romantic object. Walter writes of Laura, in an adoring and romantic tone, "The woman who first gives life, light, and form to our shadowy conceptions of beauty, fills a void in our spiritual nature that has remained unknown to us till she appeared" (Collins 52). Despite the gushing praise of Laura's beauty, Walter can only attest that her appearance is a void, open for his own idealized conceptions of aesthetics, beauty, femininity, and fantasies about his future. Just as a painter with his brush, Walter bends his perception (rooted in his physical attraction) of Laura to his will.

As he teaches Laura to draw and paint, Walter meditates (or perhaps even lectures Laura) on Art and Nature, and his thoughts, inspired by the restful and scenic views, seemingly push for a marriage of like-minded lovers of aesthetics, despite social differences. Walter argues that the true admiration of Nature must be taught, because "as children, we none of us possess it," which conveniently justifies his role as teacher to Laura, while simultaneously marking Walter as a uniquely sensitive and educated mind, equal to a sensitive and educated women like Laura (Collins 55). Art, meanwhile, Walter writes, can only be best practiced "when our minds are most indolent and most unoccupied" (Collins 55). At first, this seems a Romantic prospect, a carefree painter creating perfect art, but undergirding this fantasy is the aspiration for financial security and independence that will allow Walter to paint when and how he chooses.

Walter eventually comes to imagine himself as one with the residents of the landscape around Limmeridge House. Even when hearing the news that Laura is engaged to be married to someone else, Walter's body and the *Umwelt* at Limmeridge House respond with him. Collins describes Walter's physical reaction and the *Umwelt* around him, writing, "My arm lost all

sensation of the [Marian's] hand that grasped it. I never moved and never spoke. The sharp autumn breeze that scattered the dead leaves at our feet, came as cold to me, on a sudden, as if my own mad hopes were dead leaves, too, whirled away by the wind like the rest" (72). Like the opening, the *Umwelt* mirrors Walter's feelings, but unlike the urban scene, Limmeridge's pastoral scene seemingly mourns with Walter at the devastating news. A similar scene occurs again when Walter prepares to leaves Laura and his post, and as he studies the "barren, decaying, and groaning" scene, Walter describes that he feels "lost…as if I stood already on a foreign shore" (116-7). These scenes read as a Romantic farewell between Walter and his lover, but another, more cynical view prompts readers to consider if Walter is not also mourning for the loss of the pastoral estate that accompanies Limmeridge. Indeed, these scenes of mourning and natural decay also demonstrate that Walter's dreams of achieving a cross-class marriage through Romantic ideals of egalitarianism have rotted away in the face of the wealth and privilege that Sir Percival Glyde embodies. Although his pastoral perspective allowed Walter to experience his fantasies, they cannot secure it in reality, and heeding Marian's advice to leave, Walter heads out into the world, away from England, to seek new perspectives.

After Walter returns from Honduras and discovers that Laura is alive, his fantasies of his marriage are more within reach – if he can restore Laura's identity, that is. However, Walter's method is less focused on restoring Laura's good name, than it is on destroying Sir Percival Glyde through the secret that threatens his societal position. During Walter's quest to find out Sir Percival's secret, Walter's Romantic approach to *Umwelten* alters dramatically, taking on capitalist, imperialistic tones. The reason for this change is vague, although Walter does note that during his time abroad in Honduras, he shed much of his old self. Walter writes, "In the stern school of extremity and danger my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind

to rely on itself" (Collins 406). During his imperialist venture, Walter leaves behind his more Romantic sentiments and fully engages in the capitalist ideology of the mid Victorians, praising himself for his strength and self-reliance.

This shift in identity becomes more apparent when Walter returns to the *Umwelt* of rural England to uncover Sir Percival's secret. The environment that once inspired Walter's cross-class fantasies, no longer thrills. Walter describes Anne's small hometown village:

> Is there any wilderness of sand in the deserts of Arabia, is there any prospect of desolation among the ruins of Palestine, which can rival the repelling effect on the eye, and the depressing influence on the mind, of an English country town, in the first stage of its existence, and in the transition state of its prosperity? I asked myself that question, as I passed through the clean desolation, the neat ugliness, the prim torpor of the streets of Welmingham…Every object that I passed – seemed to answer with one accord: The deserts of Arabia are innocent of our civilized desolation; the ruins of Palestine are incapable of our modern gloom!" (Collins 482-3).

Instead of romanticism that once would have infused his worldview in a new town, Walter's new sense of embodiment, constructed through imperialism, produces a new semiotic effect. Welmingham is now aligned with decaying civilizations of old, lands deemed inferior and subject to British evaluation. The landscape that once inspired Romantic art is no longer deemed sufficient for Walter's new semiotic processes; it is desolated, ruined, and, worse, ugly. The change that time abroad wrought on Walter's mind and body becomes clear, and he seemingly unconsciously abandons his old, Romantic way of seeing signs for a more socially standard process that adopts capitalist and imperialist values.

In an ironic twist, Walter, like Sir Percival, recreates a new self and abandons his shameful secret in a forgotten place; however, unlike Sir Percival, who makes the fatal mistake of attempting to fake a claim to a legitimate title, Walter supplants this feudal model for a modern, imperialist one, which goes unquestioned and accepted by the novel's end. As Sally Shuttleworth has noted, "The final disclosure [of sensation novels] can raise more questions than it answers while the male detective himself is usually tainted by his quest" (Shuttleworth 196-7). Although Walter returns to England and is able to fulfill his dreams of cross-class marriage, in doing so, he must abandon his older sense of *Umwelt* and semiosis to become a modern man in society.

2.4 Marian Halcombe: Semiotic Detective & the Gothic Horror of Blackwater Park

In contrast to Walter's transformation, Marian Halcombe remains a nonstandard and unresolved figure through all of *The Woman in White*, and her sense of *Umwelt* and her experience of semiosis are the vital component to uncovering the novel's mystery. Walter's semiotic processes act as a feedback loop to confirm his own personal desires, while Marian's allow her to become the novel's keenest detective. It is also important to note that while Walter's sense of semiotic reading comes from his class status, profession, and experience in Honduras, Marian's semiotic processes are inherently tied to her nonstandard body and remain consistent through the novel. Walter's semiotic experiences result in the creation of new habits that produce more conventional, and socially accepted outcomes, whereas Marian's semiotic processes continue to function uniquely throughout the novel.

Walter describes Marian's first appearance in great detail, and the shock of her physical appearance echoes throughout the book. Marian has a graceful, feminine body and a masculine

face with a "swarthy complexion; large, firm, masculine, mouth and jaw; piercing eyes" and, perhaps most masculine of all, a moustache (Collins 34-5). Walter writes: "To see such a face as this set on shoulders that a sculptor would have longed to model…was to feel a sensation oddly akin to the helpless discomfort familiar to us all in sleep, when we recognize and yet cannot reconcile the anomalies and contradictions of a dream" (Collins 34-5). Marian's appearance takes on distinct queer connotations, as well as the embodiment of the uncanny. The fact of her nonstandard appearance is heightened when juxtaposed with her extremely feminine and weak half-sister, Laura, the stereotypically beautiful English heroine. Yet Marian and her body become the novel's greatest method of detection and revelation. Her mixture of nervous sensibility, coded as feminine in the novel, and her, as Count Fosco says, "foresight and resolution of a man" make Marian a brave and resourceful detective (Collins 324). This idea of an unknowable body as the purveyor of truth aligns with D.A. Miller's work, which places "a body, whose fear and desire of violation" as the center of the sensation genre as a whole (163). Miller further argues that "in *The Woman in White* this body is gendered: not only has its gender been *decided*, but also its gender identification is an active and determining *question,*" (163, emphasis original). As we have seen in the discussion of Walter, limitations on the type of masculinity that can aspire to cross-class marriage forces Walter to create a new semiotic system, one not aligned with Romantic, pastoral masculinity. However, Marian's body, which embodies the struggle between masculine and feminine, does not have to reconcile itself to societal standards, and thus, is open to nonstandard ways of seeing the world. Marian's processes of semiotic inquiry, in particular, her abductive (an educated guess based on physical sensations) and inductive (partial knowledge that hints at larger truth) reasoning plays a vital part in her role as detective in the novel. I am particularly interested in how Marian's semiosis allows her to detect the true horrors of

Blackwater Park, Sir Percival's estate, before his devious plan for Laura unfolds. In these passages, Collins weaves gothic tropes with sensational description, producing a unique form of semiotic suspense that guides both Marian and her readers.

From its first appearance in the novel, Blackwater Park seems more suited to an Ann Radcliffe novel than a sensation novel. Arriving alone to Blackwater Park, Marian writes in her diary:

> Judging by my vague impressions of the place, thus far, it is the exact opposite of Limmeridge. The house is situated on a dead flat, and seems to be shut in – almost suffocated, to my north-country notions, by trees. I have seen nobody, but the man-servant who opened the door to me, and the housekeeper…I have not seen one of them [the servants] yet…Daylight confirmed the impression which I had felt the night before, of there being too many trees at Blackwater. The house is stifled by them. They are, for the most part, young, and planted far too thickly. I suspect there must have been a ruinous cutting down of timber, all over the estate, before Sir Percival's time, and an angry anxiety, on the part of the next possessor, to fill up all the gaps as thickly and rapidly as possible" (Collins 197-204).

From the initial impressions of Blackwater, in night and day, Marian notes her physical response to the relationship between the house and the estate. Despite being a large property, Blackwater inspires feeling of entrapment, loneliness, and suffocation. Frighteningly, the view is not improved in daylight; in fact its hidden nature from the outside world is exacerbated. Marian, examining the *Umwelt,* abducts the relationship between the tree growth and the residents of Blackwater, and she finds herself drawn to imagine the types of owners – ruinous, angry, anxious – who created such a similarly feeling landscape. Also, Blackwater Park's *Umwelt* suffers in

comparison to Limmeridge House; Limmeridge is a pastoral, flourishing, and healthy *Umwelt*, whereas Blackwater Park, with its ill planted trees, is seen as over cultivated and unhealthy. Furthermore, this opening description of Blackwater Park, scholar Stephen Bernstein argues, creates from the outset a sense of gothic horror[4]. He writes, "Collins is able to put Blackwater Park firmly in line with his gothic precursors by sharing the earlier settings' accent on darkness and the problematics of vision" (Bernstein 293). The oppressively and unhealthily spaced trees create dark spaces ripe for terror, and Marian immediately notes how her lack of vision distorts her sense of *Umwelt*. Bernstein also notes how Collins draws on the generic tropes of the gothic by using Marian's diary as the mode of narration through the Blackwater plot. He writes that "The genre thus becomes one poised between public and private, a novel which works to model the psyche towards the ends of self-analysis and a public role both" (Bernstein 293). Just as Marian's writing reveals her own psyche, readers also experience how Marian ties her personal sensations to a larger understanding of the danger and mysteries at Blackwater. This slippage between the interior of Marian's mind and the exterior of the events at Blackwater allows for uncertainty to increase, and thus creating a pattern of suspense through this plotline.

However, Bernstein also writes that despite the gothic tropes that surround Blackwater Park, "Marian is unable to comprehend this text [the symbolically sinister grounds of Blackwater Park]" (299). But this is not true – Marian *is* able to read the text of the landscape before her, and she clearly reasons, through her physical responses to the *Umwelt*, that something is horribly

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[4] Gothic novels, which emphasize physical reaction to horror, suspense, and dread, also seem to be a genre ripe for further Peircean semiotic analysis.

awry at her half-sister's new home. The clearest example comes when Marian visits Blackwater Lake for the first time, and this passage is worth quoting at length:

> The lake itself had evidently once flowed to the spot on which I stood, and had been gradually wasted and dried up to less than a third of its former size. I saw its still, stagnant waters, a quarter of a mile away from me in the hollow, separated into pools and ponds, by twining reeds and rushes, and little knolls of earth. On the farther bank from me trees rose thickly again, and shut out the view, and cast their black shadows on the sluggish, shallow water. As I walked down to the lake, I saw that the ground on its farther side was damp and marshy, overgrown with rank grass and dismal willows. The water, which was clear enough on the open sandy side, where the sun shone, looked black and poisonous opposite to me, where it lay deeper under the shade of the spongy banks, and the rank overhanging thickets and tangled trees. The frogs were croaking, and the rats were slipping in and out of the shadowy water, like live shadows themselves…I saw here, lying half in and half out of the water, the rotten wreck of an old overturned boat, with a sickly spot of sunlight glimmering through a gap in the trees on its dry surface, and a snake basking in the midst of the spot, fantastically coiled, and treacherously still. Far and near, the view suggested the same dreary impressions of solitude and decay; and the glorious brightness of the summer sky overhead, seemed only to deepen and harden the gloom and barrenness of the wilderness on which it shone (Collins 204-5).

Blackwater Lake takes the shadows that fringe the house and transforms them into a site of grotesque decay and ruin. Marian notes that here again, the trees are oppressive and distort how

the viewer can see beyond the lake. This frightening lack of sight is heightened when Marian and Laura meet at the lake to discuss her marriage, and the tree line prevents them from discovering the identity of the figure lurking and eavesdropping in the wood at the lake's edge (Collins 262-4). Although there is life in and around the lake, Marian's visceral physical response is placed into her description that breathes contempt and disgust. The water and earth are repellent to her, and pose a threat to her body through contamination, disease, and poison. The wildlife too presents a lurking and terrifying potential for injury or physical danger. The view is capped by the image of the upturned and rotting boat, a reminder of the cruel progression of time and decay, and furthermore, the wastefulness of the Glydes, who have allowed the lake and their property to rot. Different than the highly structured, obviously cultivated, and unhealthy environment of the manor, which places "A pretty, winding path, *artificially made*" to the lake, the lake itself is untamed, deviant, and disturbing (Collins 204, emphasis mine). The distinction between poorly cultivated appearances and natural rot will be one that lingers in Marian's mind throughout this section of her narrative. In general, the description of the decaying horror of Blackwater Lake, which itself is infused with adjectives chosen because of Marian's bodily response to the scenery. This violent physical reaction plants the seeds of inquiry to take place, allowing creative hypotheses to be formed, tested, and confirmed about Laura's new husband and the secrets in the house. Furthermore, by imbuing the supposedly realistic description of the scene with Marian's emotional perceptions, her physical sensations are made manifest in language, Collins primes the reader for increasing suspense surrounding this stereotypically gothic site.

The suspense, at first, seems to find an outlet in the action immediately after Marian moves to sit in the boathouse to "get her breath again" after taking in the disturbing scenery

(Collins 205). But there is no relief in the boathouse, when Marian discovers to her horror the sound of another breathing thing in the shed, which forces her to jump to her feet, and on further inspection discover the suffering body of a small dog, fatally wounded (Collins 205). Although Marian rushes back to the house to care for the sad creature, she only finds two figures: a housemaid who laughs at the dying dog and the gossiping housekeeper, who reveals the dog belonged to Mrs. Catherick, Anne's mother (Collins 205-9). The connection between the dying dog, the tainted lake, and the woman in white, sparks Marian's detective instincts and her sense of distrust surrounding Sir Percival. Like Walter, who immediately notices the physical similarity between Laura and Anne, Marian's diary reveals that her sign-reading has morphed from abduction (an educated guess) to induction (partial knowledge of a larger truth) when she links the events of the day with her hopes to see Laura. She writes, "How still and lonely the house is in the drowsy evening quiet! Oh, me! How many minutes more before I hear the carriage wheels and run down stairs to find myself in Laura's arms? The poor little dog! I wish that my first day at Blackwater Park had not been associated with death – though it is only the death of a stray animal" (Collins 209). The diary gives readers access to Marian's thoughts which link Laura and the dead dog within the span of a sentence. Marian's overloaded semiotic processes create new linkages, new mysterious and suspenseful connections that she probes after the Glydes and Foscos arrive at Blackwater.

Marian's fear of lurking fatal danger, illuminated by her physical experience at the lake, guides her to uncover what Sir Percival and Count Fosco have truly planned for Laura. Although Marian writes in her dairy that she wants to "abstain from forming a decisive opinion of his manners, language, and conduct in his house," her writing reveals abduction slowly taking place, putting together her experiences with the *Umwelt* to craft a tentative idea of the possible

truth of the situation. At one point, Marian notes, “Most men show something of their dispositions in their own houses, which they have concealed elsewhere” (Collins 214). Yet as Marian has already discovered, Sir Percival’s home *does* indeed mask a hidden truth, and in fact, his poorly executed management of the property, through the heavy planting of trees, attempts to hide the putrid lake from visitors. The estate initially seems to be emblematic of an old titled family, but on closer inspection, the home is ill-run with few and mostly inept servants. The estate was ruthlessly logged, presumably for profit, and trees were hastily planted without care or concern to preserve the home’s appearance. Like Sir Percival himself, Blackwater Park twists the field of vision of the onlooker to accept an artificial image cultivated to maintain the façade of a pastoral estate while the truth lies moldering beyond the field of vision.

But the natural world rebels against Sir Percival and Marian quickly comes to realize that the lake is more than just a blight on the property, but that it is in fact revelatory of the truth of who Sir Percival is: dangerous, cruel, and tainted. Marian notes in her diary: “The few days we all had passed together at Blackwater Park, had been many enough to show me – to show anyone – what her husband had married her for” (Collins 258). In phrases like this and others, Marian does not even complete her thought for the reader, instead inviting them to complete the semiotic process with her. This semiosis drives the process of inquiry that leads Marian to conclude that Sir Percival’s intents for Laura are dangerous, possibly lethal, and financially motivated, and allows her to begin the treacherous detective work to uncover the secret of Blackwater Park to save Laura from harm. Although Collins manipulates gothic tropes to create the otherworldly sense of the lurking danger throughout the novel, Marian’s section, which uncovers her thought process while it also claims to be her impartial description of the events, crafts the true suspense of the middle of the novel. Marian’s unique embodiment allows for a new chain of semiosis and

new strains of inquiry founded in physical sensations, which allows her to become the bold heroine of the novel.

2.5 Reading Semiotically and Sensationally

Scholar Laurie Garrison, in her work on sensation fiction, points out that critics of sensation novels often posited the habit of reading as a danger. In particular, critics were anxious that young women readers would experience the illicit criminal and/or sexual behaviors in the novel, and thus become morally depraved themselves, continually craving new thrills until they needed to fulfill them outside of the pages of a novel (Garrison 6). Garrison's assertion, confirmed by Victorian moral critics like Margaret Olphiant and Reverend Henry Mansel, is clearly the primary reason for the overwhelming anxiety surrounding the sensation fiction. However, I would like to offer a secondary cause that may have alarmed critics. As we have seen in *The Woman in White*, nonstandard bodies are in control: they make the best use of semiotic processes, they manipulate sign-making to achieve their fantasies, as Walter does by rebranding himself from painter to capitalist hero, and they expose socially constructed facades for what they really are, poor attempts at control, as Marian does by rescuing Laura.

Perhaps even more disturbingly, readers are trained by the novels to read semiotically, learning to respond physically to the appropriate clues and plot twists, in other words, treating the text as *Umwelt*, which enables them to solve the mysteries along with the hero or heroine. As D.A. Miller argues, "we 'catch' sensation from the Woman [in White] who, no longer confined or controlled in an asylum, is free to make our bodies resonate with – like – hers" (Miller 153). Sensation novels, because of their content require both the characters and the readers to engage with the world of the novel semiotically, both linguistically and physically. In turn, readers are

more easily prepared to accept and agree with the sensation novel's political or social reform goals. How this physical embodiment affects reader response, I will discuss further my second chapter.

3 *Armadale* in America: Illustration, Embodiment, and Reader Semiosis

3.1 Armadale's Publication & Paratexts

In July of 1861,Wilkie Collins gleefully wrote that he had been offered £5,000 for a new serial by George Smith, the editor of *Cornhill Magazine*, and Collins took care to note that "nobody but Dickens has made as much" (Sutherland x). Of course, this wasn't *quite* true – Smith offered George Eliot £10,000 at the same time - but certainly no editor thus far had paid that much money for any sensation novel. And what a sensation novel it would be - when *Armadale* appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine* from November 1864 to June 1866, it provoked its fair share of scandalous reviews in the British press. One reviewer, H.F. Chorely, declared the novel "a sensational novel with a vengeance" and pointed to the novel as a prime example that Victorian writers were in "a period of diseased [literary] invention" (Wynne 148). The critic of the *Saturday Review* was even less kind, calling *Armadale*, "a literary nightmare" which made readers "uncomfortable without letting them know why" (Wynne 148).

Perhaps part of the reviewers' discomfort stemmed from the novel's excessively complicated plot. The novel is sprawling and complicated, and the plot (heavily simplified) runs thus: at the beginning of the novel, there are five men all named Allan Armadale. The first is the grandfather, who disowns his degenerate son Allan Armadale, and takes on another young man, Matthew Wrentmore, as his heir, whom Allan Sr. forces to take on the name Allan Armadale as a

requirement to inherit. In an act of vengeance, the disowned Allan Jr. steals both Wrentmore's fiancé and fortune through seduction and fraud, respectively, which results in Wrentmore murdering the disowned Armadale. Wrentmore flees to Barbados and marries a mixed race society woman there while Armadale's wife flees to Scotland. Both men have sons they name Allan Armadale, although only one of them is legally entitled to the family fortune. Upon learning the truth about his father murdering his step-brother, the mixed race Allan Armadale (who is the legal heir to the fortune) renames himself Ozias Midwinter and befriends Allan, his step-cousin, without revealing their familial connection. At the same time, the scheming bigamist and poisoner Lydia Gwilt, who as a child had helped Allan Armadale Jr. defraud Wrentmore, is installed as governess to the neighboring family. She tries to ensnare Armadale for his fortune, but upon learning Midwinter's secret, marries him instead, hoping to defraud Armadale of his fortune and murder him. However, her plan backfire, and believing that she is killing her husband, Lydia Gwilt has a change of heart and instead takes his place, essentially committing suicide. Armadale regains his position as a county squire and marries, while Midwinter becomes an author.

Despite its many sensational plot twists, *Armadale* was a flop in the British literary market. During its circulation in *Cornhill* from November 1864 to June 1866, the magazine lost between 3,000 and 5,000 subscribers, and reviewers universally panned the novel, citing the lurid immorality of villainess Lydia Gwilt as the primary source of disgust (Sutherland xix). But what is more interesting is not the failure of *Armadale* in England, but its unexpected success in America. Both despite and because of the Civil War, American readers ravenously enjoyed sensation fiction. The American love of sensational, even graphic and lurid, literature was the subject of national discussion. For example, a cartoon entitled "What Sensation Has Come To At

Last," featured in *Harper's Weekly* on July 22, 1865, shows a young daughter asking her well dressed, bourgeois mother to tell her a story: "About a nice 'ittle girl who has murdered her Papa and Mamma, and all her 'ittle Brothers and Sisters!" (See Appendix, fig.1). In her book, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North and South*, Alice Fahs notes that sensational literature reached a heightened pitch among Northern publishers by the end of the war (226). In fact, the war itself may have helped to drive the desire for cheap literature, appealing to both soldiers and their families at home (Fahs 226-8). Perhaps even more than their counterparts across the Atlantic, American readers demonstrated delight at reading stories that prior to the war would have shocked genteel sensibilities. Sensational stories of excitement, deception, romance, and especially warfare, developed into its own widely read niche during the Civil War and postbellum years, and publishers were happy to cash in on the trend with pirated and uncredited copies of Northern stories appearing in Southern magazines (Fahs 249-251).

Eager to prevent publishing pirating of *Armadale*, Collins arranged for the American edition, published in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine,* to be published a month behind the English run in *The Cornhill.* Considering that an average mail ship could make an westbound journey in about 21-30 days, Collins and *Harper's* were on the offensive to prevent any pirated copies from making its way to America before the official one (Durkee). For the most part, they were effective. Scholar Norman Page has noted that *Armadale*'s serialization alongside the serialization of Dicken's *Our Mutual Friend*, helped revive the flagging sales of *Harper's*, making it the top selling monthly serial in the Union, a sharp difference from the commercial failure the novel was in England. American reviewers at the time, even if they were harshly critical of the novel, could not help noticing that "*Armadale* is one of the most popular novels of

the season…it has already numbered its readers by scores of thousands" ("Books of the Month" 388).

Although the printed texts of the English and American serial run are the same, the accompanying illustrations to the novel, drawn by George H. Thomas, suffered in their transatlantic crossing. In the serialized *Harper's* edition, the accompanying illustrations are generally displaced by one month from the text they were originally paired with in *The Cornhill*, if they are there at all. Furthermore, when *Armadale* was republished as two-volume book set, the number of illustrations dropped from twenty in the British edition to a mere thirteen in its American counterpart. This strange discrepancy in number of illustrations, which resulted in the displacement and removal of illustrations from the original text, creates a unique American edition of the novel that I believe contributed to its commercial success in America. The exclusion and displacement of particular illustrations transformed the American edition, erasing vital aspects of Collins' more controversial characters, the alluring villainess Lydia Gwilt and the mixed-race hero Ozias Midwinter. The deletion of the visual cues to these characters' bodies creates a markedly different reading of the novel and its political message, and therefore, influenced reader reception and commercial success of the novel in America.

3.2 Visual Art & Peircean Semiotics

But why focus on illustrations in *Armadale*, or indeed, on the illustrations of any sensation novel at all? Critics of sensation novels have focused on the transgressive textual elements of the genre, bringing to light the plot elements (like bigamy, adultery, murder, crime, identity theft, fraud, female criminality, homoeroticism, etc.) and historical influences (from the birth of crime reporting, the development of police forces and private investigators, the expansion of

technology, the alteration of marriage laws, etc.) that make the genre so rich and compelling. But as critics Mary Elizabeth Leighton and Lisa Surridge have noted, little work has been done concerning the illustrations of sensation novels, and this oversight is a shocking one ("Illustrating…" 35). Based on studies in reader reception of Victorian serials, they argue that illustrations and images were "an essential part of the Victorian reading experience" (Leighton and Surridge 36). Illustrations (or any paratext for that matter) force the reader to recreate both the accompanying image and the alphabetic text into a new form, thus creating a new whole text with new interpretations (Skilton 303). Wendy Wheeler, a cultural biosemiotician, has written on the creative process and noted how readers can think of "the work of art [as] characterized by relationships internal and external. We know *through* the work of art" (emphasis original, 178). Thinking in this way, not only does the reader reshape the illustration and text relationship, but also the illustration is able to reshape the reader and his/her thought process simultaneously, both in concert with and independent from the alphabetic text. From this perspective, the paratexts of sensation novels, not simply the alphabetic text alone, offer readers new methods and means by which to interpret the mysteries and thrills of the genre.

Indeed, there is good evidence to support that the illustrations that accompanied sensation fiction novels contributed to the overall effect to shock and excite the nerves of readers, which of course, was the desired outcome (Leighton and Surridge 37). Many of the scenes that were illustrated in sensation novels were those "representing atmospheric disturbance, streaming garments, women's unchaperoned nocturnal activity and figures starkly highlighted in white space against a dark background" (Leighton and Surridge 37). One set of illustrations from *Lady Audley's Secret* goes so far as to show the crime in action, depicting Lady Audley's attempt to murder her first husband by shoving him into a well. Generally, the illustrations "highlighted

atmospheric and, by implication, social disturbances" as we will see in the *Armadale* illustrations (Leighton and Surridge 41). However, the images "also suggested the genre's propensity for blurring social boundaries such as those of nation, class, gender, and race; life vs. death; and human vs. non-human" (Leighton and Surridge 41). In *Armadale*, the body is a place of conflicting and complex identities constantly in flux; its illustrations solidify elements of the character's bodies and identities for the readers through visualization. This slippage between boundaries that the illustrations bring to the fore in readers' minds is precisely what made George H. Thomas's illustrations so impactful on *Armadale*'s reception in Britain and America.

Before examining these illustrations, it is necessary to recall the theoretical framework, which stems from Peircean semiotics. Although I have already demonstrated in my first chapter how Peirce's theories are suited to discussing how bodies and *Umwelten* are related, it is perhaps less clear why Peircean semiotics might provide a useful framework for analyzing visual art. It is true that Peirce personally felt unequipped to evaluate or theorize about art, but his semiotic theories do offer a language to discuss the distinct and different registers of a reader's experience with a sign as one reads. By examining how these different registers of sign reading function, it is possible to understand how missing or displaced illustrations could result in new reading processes, and thus, create overall "different" editions of the novels for its readers and provoke alternative, even unintended, reader responses.

As I mentioned in my introduction, Peirce provides a useful vocabulary system to discuss non-linguistic signs and non-linguistic semiotic process, in a way that traditional French, linguistic-focused semiotics cannot. Instead of conceiving of a sign as an utterance, Peirce argues that signs could be imagined more broadly, including but not limited to language. In particular, Peirce argued that a sign is a stimulus pattern that produces meaning, and that signs take on three

determining "registers": icon, index, or symbol, which organisms perceive and interpret. Although Peirce believes that the "registers" occur simultaneously as one experiences them, it is perhaps useful to examine each component. An iconic sign is fairly simple: the sign physically is what it represents, such as a photograph, which is an icon of the object or person that it intends to represent. An indexical sign is more abstracted – it is a sign that points to the object through correlation with a feature. For example, dark clouds on the horizon indicate, but are not exactly, rain. Finally, the most abstracted is the symbolic sign that represents the object through mental associations but without a physical connection. We might think of how a child builds up known concepts like "fire" and "flying" and "scales" around an unknown or unknowable object like "dragon" to understand it.

Another way to think of these different registers is that iconicity is "resemblance" or quality of feeling, indexicality is "causality" or connection, and symbolicity is "convention" (De Waal 88). Similar to the earlier discussion in chapter one, sign-making begins with experiential sensation and through the identification of boundaries and connection, the sign emerges into thought and action. Peirce's conception of semiosis, or sign-reading, becomes a process that breaks and reshapes boundaries of understanding, which is why Peirce's terminology is so useful to this project. Illustrations in serialized sensation fiction texts functioned as markers of the genre's boundaries and conventions. Serial fiction illustrations attempt to appear to the Victorian readership as fulfilling a relatively conventional and tame purpose: visualizing characters and plot action moments for the readers in ways that were inoffensive to the readers of family magazines, like *The Cornhill*. However, because sensation fiction is a genre rife with transgressions, the images needed to contain those memorable and titillating aspects as well. Although the symbolic signs that George H. Thomas uses in his illustrations in *Armadale* are

fairly conventional and generic, the iconic and indexical registers of the signs disrupt the reader experience, and therefore, create new ways of reading the images and the text together. By examining Thomas' illustrations of the two most controversial figures in *Armadale*, we can see how the differing sign registers disrupted and transformed the reading experience for British and American readers.

3.3 Ozias Midwinter & The Racialized Body

Although critics often point to *The Moonstone* as Wilkie Collins's novel about empire and race, *Armadale,* through the character of Allan Armadale aka Ozias Midwinter, offers its own compelling discussion of race and imperialism, which has not yet been adequately studied. Throughout the novel, Midwinter takes on many contradictory roles: protector of Allan, but victim of Lydia; bold hero, yet unwitting accomplice; prophetic dreamer and duped lover; and, most interestingly, a mixture of activity and passivity. When the adult Midwinter makes his appearance into the novel, staggering half-dead from the moors into Allan Armadale's life, he provides a shocking contrast to his well-cared for English cousin. Collins describes Midwinter's "tawny, haggard cheeks; his bright brown eyes, preternaturally large and wild; his tangled black beard; his long, supple sinewy fingers, wasted by suffering, till they looked like claws" (64). The sight of this monstrous and wild boy makes "healthy Anglo-Saxon flesh creep" (Collins 64). From his first appearance, Midwinter is othered and distinctly labeled as non-white, and therefore, also non-English. In fact, his non-Englishness is precisely what draws Armadale to him as a friend, because Midwinter was "not cut out on the regular local pattern" of English men (66-67).

But despite the clear textual indications of Midwinter's racialized body within the novel, scholars have often simply labeled Midwinter as "mixed-race" or "racially ambiguous" and pushed concerns about race aside for alternative discussions of othering in the novel. In fact, Midwinter's character has often been studied as a psychological portrait of a hysterical melancholic figure, in particular his obsessive fascination with dreams and premonitions. Jenny Bourne Taylor argues, "Midwinter's sensitive subjectivity is put forward in gender terms rather than class ones" (163). Similarly, Lyn Pykett also reads Midwinter's "hypersensitivity, his susceptibility to non-rational modes of interpretation, and his emotional self-policing" as in line with feminine characters (30). Both Pykett and Taylor recognize in their work how Midwinter deviates from the traditional English hero, but instead both focus on how Midwinter is othered in terms of gender and not race. Another common scholarly approach is to view Midwinter and Allan, as undoubtedly Collins intended, as doubles of or foils to one another. Collins effectively uses doubling in many of his novels, such as with cousins Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White* and sisters Norah and Madgalen Vanstone in *No Name.* Scholar Carolyn Dever writes, "These Allan Armadales offer Collins a medium for the contemplation of abstract ideas of sameness and difference…Armadale is fair, flighty and bourgeois; Midwinter, his would-be-protector, a man of mixed race, swarthy skin and uncertain background" (115). Denver argues that Collins's play with the men as foils helps to solidify the homosociality between the cousins in the novel (119). Scholars Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox also discuss the duality between Midwinter and Armadale and argue for a queer reading of their passionate affection for one another (332). Here again, the concern with same-sex doubling of the characters allows for transgression and othering; but, yet again, the issue of race and racial difference is underdeveloped. However, by examining the differing sign registers found in the illustrations of

Armadale, Midwinter's character is recentered racially in the novel, revealing how race and racial perceptions influenced the novel's reception in England and America.

Like their British counterparts, American sensation novels were also fixated on characters that transgressed social conventions and limitations, especially in terms of deception and concealment. Alison Fahs notes that "[American] sensational literature often emphasized the need for concealment of true or genuine identity – an emphasis that had everything to do with the perceived limitations imposed by class, gender, and race in structuring individual identity" (239-240). In *Armadale,* Ozias Midwinter struggles with the conflicting interests of his personal sense of duty to his cousin and his desire to keep his identity and heritage a secret. Yet the secret of Midwinter is constantly bubbling to the surface, and it appears in the illustrations as well. One of the most noticeable displaced illustrations in the novel, "The Major's Clock" (see appendix, fig. 2) was originally paired with the chapter, "Midwinter in Disguise" in the British edition. In this chapter, Armadale and Midwinter, now fast friends (although only Midwinter knows the secret of their true relationship to one another), pay a visit to Major Milroy and his beautiful daughter with whom Armadale is in love. Armadale does not suspect the anxiety and turmoil within his friend, who is consumed with fear of his father's prophecy and a prophetic dream that Midwinter believes foretells Armadale's death by his hand. Collins depicts Midwinter's psychological state with keen detail, writing:

> With his whole mind still possessed by the firm belief that the Fatality had taken one great step nearer to Allan and himself…with his face still betraying what he had suffered, under the renewed conviction that his father's death-bed warning was now, in event after event, asserting its terrible claim to part him, at any sacrifice, from the one human creature whom he loved – with the fear still busy at his heart that the first mysterious

> Vision of Allan's Dream might be a Vision realized…he mercilessly spurred his resolution to desperate effort of rivaling, in Allan's presence the gaiety and good spirits of Allan himself (Collins 221)

In an attempt to mask his fear and prevent Armadale from learning the truth, Midwinter adopts unnatural mannerisms and behaviors, and the resulting visit to the Milroys is a social disaster.

Collins writes that "Midwinter's natural manner disguised in a coarse masquerade of boldness – the outrageous, the unendurable boldness of a shy man" ruins the visit, provoking Miss Milroy to outright tell Armadale that she does not like his friend (221-223). However, the most uncomfortable moment arises after Major Milroy demonstrates the working of his cuckoo clock, which features a puppet display that goes humorously awry. The entire party enjoys a hearty laugh, but Midwinter is seized with "sheer delirium" and "paroxysms of laughter [that] followed each other with…convulsive violence" (Collins 225). Midwinter's behavior is so frightening that "Miss Milroy started back from him in alarm and even the patient major turned on him with a look which said plainly, Leave the room! Allan…seized Midwinter by the arm and dragged him out by main force into the garden" (Collins 225). Although perhaps not an incredibly pivotal scene in terms of the plot, this scene does reveal Midwinter's troubled psyche and the effects it has upon his body and his relations to others, rendering him unable to function in polite society.

It is strange then, given this, that this was the scene illustrated for this serialized section, and the resulting illustration has disturbing racial resonances for the rest of the novel. For readers, this would be the first image of adult Midwinter that they would see. The previous two illustrations, which feature young Midwinter are both sympathetic scenes: one at his dying father's bedside as a child, and the other, an orphaned and abused boy sleeping with his

"brothers" the dogs. In both the earlier images, young Midwinter appears as white, English boy. With the exception of a passing reference to Midwinter being "slim, dark, and undersized" at the beginning of the chapter, Collins makes no reference to Midwinter's mixed-race body in this section of text that was serialized (219).

However, in the illustration that accompanies this chapter, Thomas' artistic work reinserts Midwinter's racial status into the novel in a jarring way. In the illustration, Midwinter's features, especially his face and hands, are grotesquely distorted, almost inhuman. Thomas's illustration depicts Midwinter with claw-like, animalistic hands and overdrawn and overly detailed facial features, in particular his lips. The pitch-blackness of Midwinter's whole appearance in the illustration compared to the inanimate and pale white characters is startling. Although often portrayed in darker clothes to contrast with Armadale, Midwinter's face and hands are noticeably shaded darker than his white English counterparts. Some of the grotesqueness of this illustration (and the others I will examine later) might be chalked up to poor illustration; in fact, the quality and detailing of the illustration varies wildly throughout publication.[5]

Quality and intent aside, this image reads as a racially charged scene, which throws Midwinter in contrast to his white counterparts. Midwinter's appearance in this illustration nevertheless serves as an indexical sign to remind English readers of Midwinter's mixed-race background, and considering how few illustrations feature Midwinter, this image takes on iconic value for Collins's English audience, provoking a visceral, physical response to his appearance.

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[5] In fact, Collins was upset that his editor picked Thomas as the artist for his novel; he wanted someone else but George Smith, the editor of *The Cornhill,* could not afford to hand out large sums for both the writer and an illustrator.

In other words, Midwinter's blackness, given a body and visual cues, *becomes* the entirety of Midwinter's character to English readers. Building off the iconic and indexical sign registers, Midwinter's blackness also becomes symbolic, absorbing the racialized and racist stereotypes that permeated the contemporary reader's culture. Midwinter's black body speaks symbolically to his white, English audience, and thus, the complexity of his characterization is drowned out. Collins was deeply aware of this fact, and anxious to prevent another financial flop, in the stage play adaptation of his novel, he removed all traces of Midwinter's mixed race heritage to avoid public outcry (Sutherland xxi).

In contrast, in the American serial run, this image is displaced from its paired text that ran the month before, creating a wider mental distance between the text, the image, and the reader. In this regard, American readers are not given the full effect to pair text and image together to make an iconic sign that would cast Midwinter in the readers mind as Thomas' image. In other words, having the image displaced from the text, lessened the initial emotional response to the image. Instead, the image of Midwinter's racialized body is one of many signs by which readers come to understand his character, including Collins's writing, which sympathetically allows readers access to Midwinter's thoughts and feelings. Instead of relying on the image to create an iconic sign of Midwinter's character through the image of his body, American readers developed a more multifaceted and complex way of reading Midwinter. Furthermore, the scandalous nature of a mixed-race man in the home of middle-class white characters is further lessened by the content of the chapters which ran with the displaced illustration – readers undoubtedly instead focused on the more salacious Lydia Gwilt, who had just made her first appearance in the text than on the image of Midwinter which was placed as the frontispiece. This is especially the case in the American bound volume set, which removed the image entirely, leaving readers to

imagine a view of Midwinter in their own minds. American readers received a very different Midwinter than their English counterparts, and the displacement of this image would help solidify the final message of the novel in a more palatable way by diminishing Collins's message about race.

Although critics have posited that *Armadale*'s final scenes and illustration, entitled "One Too Many" (see fig.3) which features Allan Armadale and Ozias Midwinter reuniting and embracing, would have presented an appealing metaphoric white and black embrace for Union readers at the end of the Civil War, it is clearly more complicated. Scholar Caroline Reitz, reading the novel from a postcolonial perspective, has noted that the reunion of the Armadales represents a necessary "national resolution" between the British and their colonial subjects, which continues to place the colonized under British control (99). But the American readership would not have been considering the novel as one, as Reitz argues, concerned with a struggle for British identity, but surely *Armadale* would have been refracting through the lens of the Civil War, and thus fixated on American identity.

Looking closely at the illustration "One Too Many," viewers can clearly see that although the contrast between light and dark clothing persists (as it does throughout the novel to help readers tell Midwinter and Armadale apart), Midwinter's appearance here is refigured as English and white. Collins's text here is also devoid of racialized terms; in fact, it is Armadale, not Midwinter, who emerges from the darkness of the train station "into the full light of the station-lamp" (647). Because of the removal of the images and text that present Midwinter's blackness, the novel for American readers instead takes on the complexities of a Cain-Abel reunion, reframing the story not strictly in terms of race, but rather as sons of murdered/murdering men who work together for justice and harmony. Considering that *Armadale*'s serial run came to an

end one year after the end of the Civil War, an image of two family members – who throughout the novel have been struggling with the question of who is the true Armadale, both legally and morally - reuniting happily after cataclysmic and violent events, would have been a welcome metaphoric sight. Viewed in this light, perhaps it is no wonder that *Armadale* found more success in Union households at the end of the Civil War than English ones.

3.4 Lydia Gwilt's Villainous Body

However, Midwinter was not the only character to undergo a radical transformation on his transatlantic voyage. As we will see, *Armadale'*s notorious villainess, Lydia Gwilt, also found herself taking on new forms for her American audience. In sharp contrast to the scant attention Ozias Midwinter's politicized appearance received in America, Collins's anti-heroine, Lydia Gwilt was subject to harsh criticism by both British and American readers. Most of the reviews of the novel fixate on Lydia's character as the determining factor of the book's overall morality or immorality, although most reviewers begrudgingly admit that Lydia is Collins's most captivating character in the novel.[6] The reviewer for the *Altantic Monthly* concedes that Lydia Gwilt's character, despite her villainy, is too clever to have been outwitted by "a blockhead like Armadale" and that the novel falters once "she loses all freedom of action" (381). In a review essay entitled "The Murderous Novel," the reviewer writes that Lydia Gwilt "dabbles in crime

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[6] Collins was keenly aware of the criticism and allure of Lydia's character. His stage adaption, entitled *Miss Gwilt*, not only shifted the focus of the story onto Gwilt's character, but also attempted to make her a more sympathetic character while also retaining her villainous actions (Davis 176).

through a long lifetime with a relish that is simply disgusting" but immediately follows up that statement, writing how "beautiful and winning in her ways" the character is despite being so "heartless" (60). In another review, the author writes: "As to Miss Gwilt, the terrible heroine, she is too monstrous a character for us to trifle with, even in criticism. Her suicidal shade might arise with the 'purple flask' in its grasp, and seek its revenge upon *us*" ("Current Notes" 180). For her American reviews, Lydia Gwilt is simultaneously fascinating and horrific, and perhaps most disturbing, seemingly too realistic and *alive*.

Throughout the novel, Lydia Gwilt commits a slew of crimes, including fraud, bigamy, and murder. Compared to Braddon's equally criminal Lady Audley, Lydia is allowed some vindication, with part of the novel's plot unfolding through her diary entries, allowing for a greater interiority than other sensation novels might allow. Lydia's body has been the foundation for many critics' work on *Armadale*, and the debate surrounding her character is deeply concerned about the motivations or justifications for her crimes throughout the novel and her final act of suicide. Like the contemporary critics of the novel, modern critics are unable to escape the fascination with Lydia's criminality.

One of the more commonly discussed rationales for Lydia's crimes examines Lydia as the nexus for the homosocial and, as Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox argue, possible homosexual relationship between Midwinter and Armadale. In Bachman and Cox's formulation, Lydia's criminality and her role in the triad of Midwinter-Gwilt-Armadale are one in the same crime (323). Reduced to merely the opposition and object of the struggle between two men, per Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick and René Girard's formulations, Lydia's entire characterization and motivations represent "an unspeakable pathology of male homosexual desire" (Bachman and Cox 232). Her presence and actions in the novel are chalked up to "the repressed legacy of a

shameful past returned to incriminate the heirs," which the authors argue stems from the quasi-incestuous homosexual relationship between the fathers of Midwinter and Armadale (Bachman and Cox 329). Bachman and Cox conclude that Lydia's suicide is an admission of the realization that she cannot stand in between the relationship between Midwinter and Armadale. Although this reading of Armadale and Midwinter's relationship is compelling, Bachman and Cox's analysis completely discounts Lydia's deft scheming and ferocious rage that drives the majority of the novel's plot. By reading Lydia as the unwanted obstacle in a triangular relationship, her criminal transgressions are made redundant and futile, which both the novel's plot and contemporary reader responses reject. Indeed, the contemporary public outcry against Lydia's character and the compelling visuals of her body that Thomas' illustrations provide prove that Lydia is not, as Bachman and Cox claim, merely a wrench in a more transgressive plot. Her embodiment and actions are the scandalous heart of the novel.

In an attempt to read Lydia's criminal behavior more critically, Caroline Reitz, like other scholars, has used Lydia Gwilt's surname to formulate a discussion about postcolonial gwilt/guilt in the novel. Reitz theorizes that Gwilt should be read as the "embodiment of guilt in the context of necessity" which can be applied more generally to an overall reading of the shifting national feeling about the imperial project (94). Lydia's crimes, especially the fatal poisoning of her abusive first husband, are made more sympathetic in this framework when readers view Lydia as symbolic of the oppressed and colonized. Yet Reitz's article quickly dismisses Lydia's relevance to the novel in favor of a broader discussion of Midwinter and Armadale. However, in doing away with Lydia, Reitz reveals her unease that Lydia is perhaps not the ideal character through which to refract a larger discussion about the sins of Britain's imperial project. In fact, by

examining the semiotic registers of the illustrations, it is Midwinter's body that troubles the British perception of race and colonization.

Similarly, scholar Piya Pal-Lapinski attempts to use Lydia's body and her crimes as a site for postcolonial criticism. She begins this work by examining the connections between Victorian perceptions of poison as a weapon and Orientalism, writing that "Poison, in fact, became a social obsession and an art; as a cultural trope, it signified various kinds of border crossings – especially radical 'otherness.' With its deviousness, 'femininity', and tropical contagions, the Orient – or even locations that made up the 'near exotic' such as Italy – was the ultimate source of the most beguiling and deadly poisons" (Pal-Lapinski 95). The boundaries that poisons and poisoners created, Pal-Lapinski argues, resulted in an uneasy hybridity between life and death, beauty and decay, Britain and the exotic other (96). From this perspective, Pal-Lapinski reads Lydia's body as "racially hybrid one, which, through its use of poison and its existence on the margins of Victorian society, is driven to a radical dislocation of imperial and domestic authority" (105). Instead of reading Lydia's criminal actions as those of necessity, Pal-Lapinski reads them as resistant to the imperial hegemony that Allan Armadale represents, and she further reads Lydia's marriage to Midwinter as her attempt to decolonize and free him from British control, symbolized by Armadale (114-5). Her suicide, then, is neither a confession of guilt nor a submission to Englishness as some scholars have posited, but rather "a frantic, tragic gesture of defiance – she evades criminal trial, her body resisting reappropriation and reinscription by the legal system" (Pal-Lapinski 118).

The most current criticism on Lydia Gwilt's character directly picks up on the Pal-Lapinski's discussion of the body as site of resistance, as Lisa Niles attempts to discuss how Lydia's body transgresses and reinforces the capitalist values of cosmetics and feminine beauty.

Although Niles does not read Lydia's body as a racially coded one, she does approach the novel as a discussion about cultural anxieties regarding women, identity, and the fear of fraud. In particular, Niles focuses on the novel and reviewers fascination with Lydia's true age and her deception through the use of cosmetics to ensnare the young men of the novel. Niles points out that "the resentment that the reviewers express about Lydia's appearance points to the public's desire for detection; according to Victorian social mores, if Lydia Gwilt is, indeed, a villainess with a degraded character, then her moral corruption should be visible" (67). Instead of legible signs of deviance, like the ones that Pal-Lapinski's argues for in her novel, Niles focuses on how Lydia's deviance is masked throughout the novel by her alluring physical appearance enhanced through makeup. Thus, Lydia's body, by not reflecting her true age and appearance, also becomes just as criminally suspect as her actual crimes (Niles 68). Niles points to this shift as "criminal disembodiment; her age is no longer tied to the body but to a free-floating signifier of an appearance intended to produce the desired effect" (91). Lydia's criminality transcends her body to accuse society of creating a marketplace in which such deviant behavior – masking one's true age through the magic of cosmetics – is unjustly rewarded.

It is clear that critics are still hotly embedded in determining whether Lydia's criminality exists in her actions, her motivations, or in/on her body. However, I want to suggest another way of viewing the anxiety that Lydia's criminality poses to readers of *Armadale*, specifically through the sexual threat her body poses in the illustrations that accompanied the novel in England and America. Due to the removal and displacement of images of Lydia Gwilt, contemporary American readers only saw imagery of Gwilt as sexually alluring and deceptively threatening. One missing illustration, entitled "Force and Cunning" (see fig. 6) which reveals Lydia's true character by visualizing both her true age and her wrath was entirely cut from all

American editions, leaving only the images of a young and seductive Lydia Gwilt for readers. Paired with the text, these images heightened for readers the terrifying danger of the novel: that evil could lurk in the hearts of the beautiful domestic woman. Thus, when the provocative Lydia was paired with the attractive message gleaned from the Midwinter-Armadale relationship, it is no wonder that *Armadale* succeeded in America.

In all of George H. Thomas' illustrations that feature Lydia Gwilt, her body is prominently on display for readers. For readers, the revelation of Lydia's appearance would have been an exciting one. Although Collins references Lydia earlier in the novel, he is deliberately vague when she first appears, writing "She was neatly dressed in black silk, with a red Paisley shawl over her shoulders, and she kept her face hidden behind a thick veil" (76). Collins keeps his readers in suspense about the identity and appearance of the veiled woman for nearly two hundred pages. Midwinter receives a note from Mr. Brock to beware a woman who "looks the full age (five-and-thirty)…and she is by no means a handsome woman" (Collins 238). All of this makes her first true appearance shocking; she emerges as a lone figure from a patch of trees and "the sudden revelation of her beauty as she smiled and looked at him inquiringly, suspended the movement in his [Armadale's] limbs and the words on his lips" (Collins 266). For American readers, this passage would conclude the July 1865 issue of *Harper's* and it would not be until September that they would receive Thomas' illustration of Lydia, entitled "Miss Gwilt".

This illustration (see fig. 4) features a full body view of Lydia as the center of the image, her dark dress standing in sharp relief to the light background and Miss Milroy's light, patterned gown. Midwinter lurks in the shadow of the trellis, voyeuristically gazing, along with the reader, upon Lydia's form. Collins's description of Lydia performs the same work for the reader in the text, and the narrator lingers at length over Lydia, describing her various features as "luxuriant,

rich, sensual, and fair" (277). Midwinter later ponders, awe struck, that "the one clear impression she had produced on him thus far, began and ended with his discovery of the astounding contradiction that her face offered, in one feature after another, to the description in Mr. Brock's letter" (Collins 278). Similarly, Thomas's illustration, other than perhaps enhancing Lydia's haughty gaze, seemingly depicts a "tall, elegant woman" who appears relatively benign (Collins 278). In fact, Thomas's illustration makes little attempt other than by dress and the caption to distinguish Lydia from Miss Milroy. Unlike the illustrations featuring Midwinter and Armadale, which use the contrasting dark and light color schemes to help reader visualize the difference between the two cousins, Lydia's figure is indistinguishable from any other gentlewoman's in the novel. In a subversion of expectations, readers did not receive the image of villainous womanhood they craved and instead received a harmless, inoffensive image of a young woman and her proper governess. If anything, the "Miss Gwilt" illustration draws attention to Midwinter lurking in the shadows rather than the novel's villainess.

This image of youth, beauty, and domestic innocence is again reiterated in Thomas's illustration "The End of the Elopement" which was originally meant to be paired with the chapter "Miss Gwilt's Diary" but instead appears alongside the chapter "The Wedding Day" in the American serialization. This displacement produces a startling contrast between the textual content of "The Wedding Day" chapter and Thomas's illustration. In the illustration, a sympathetic Lydia and Midwinter, now engaged, console a heartbroken Armadale, who has been forced to break off his engagement with Miss Milroy. Armadale is sprawled unhappily in his chair, with Lydia and Midwinter both gazing at him concernedly. Lydia looks demure, her intimidating height diminished by her soft bending towards Armadale, and her hands are gently clasped in an expression of concern. A single curl escapes over her shoulder, a dual reminder of

her sensuality and femininity. Here again, Lydia appears to readers to be an ideal domestic woman, obliging and gentle.

Yet when paired with the text from “The Wedding Day,” the image takes on a more sinister aspect. In this chapter, readers finally learn the whole truth about Lydia Gwilt’s villainous past, as Mr. Bashwood tells the story of his investigation in Lydia’s past, eager to prevent her marriage taking place that day. Readers learn Lydia’s key role in the Armadale family murder, how she almost drove a music teacher to suicide, and how she escaped capital punishment for the poisoning of her first husband who abused her (Collins 521-529). Collins writes: “She was sentenced to death in such a scene as had never been previously witnessed in an English Court of Justice. And she is alive and hearty at the present moment; free to do any mischief she pleases, and to poison at her own entire convenience, any man, woman, or child that happens to stand in her way” (529-30). Lydia’s cruel and callous disregard for human life that Bashwood reports is at odds with the illustration of gentle domesticity that American readers saw paired with the text. This dissonance between text and image is what I believe made Lydia such a scandalous character for Victorian readers. In the same way that the difference between the text and illustrations helped create a new version of Midwinter for American audiences, the dissonance between Thomas’s depiction of an elegant domestic woman and Collins’s vicious murderess helped create a new version of Lydia Gwilt for American audiences.

What this new American version looked like is apparent once realizing that the final illustration of Lydia was cut from all American editions, both serialized and volume editions. The final illustration of Lydia, entitled “Force and Cunning”, reveals some of Lydia’s true identity as a violent criminal, and unmasks both the fraud about her age and the lie about her gentle domesticity for the reader. The illustration features Lydia in profile, dressed in a black

widow's gown and veil, as the focal point, with her mouth pinched. Her hands are noticeably clenched in anger as she glares at the doctor whom she enlists in her scheme of murder and fraud. Compared to the previous illustrations, which emphasize her luxurious hair and elegant mannerisms, this image is a marked deviation. Here she looks her true age and, for the first and only time in the illustrations, we see her rage. Scholar Lisa Niles has argued that part of the terror that Lydia Gwilt inspired for readers was that she embodied the fear of the aging female body masked in deceptive youth and cosmetics. The fact that "Force and Cunning" chooses to lift this mask, and depict a haggard looking Lydia strengthens Niles' claim. But I would also argue that the illustration also removes the mask of calm female submission, and visualizes Lydia's aggressive, violent rage. For British readers, this final illustration of Lydia would solidify their perceptions of her as a vengeful criminal with the text and image finally achieving symbolic unity that would cast Lydia as a stereotypical sensational villainess.

However, for American readers, who never saw this image, Lydia remains more complicated. There is no iconic image of Lydia as a villainess for them to rely on when imagining her; instead, American readers only had images of the young, seductive Lydia to pair with the immoral actions within the text. The dissonance between the seductive and submissive iconic signs within the image and the text prevents the ability for readers to see Lydia in conventional and symbolic terms. British readers may have been horrified to see a depiction of her as her true self, unmasked, but Americans instead experienced the horror of evil lurking behind a mask that would never falter in visual depiction. In this sense, the American vision of Lydia was far more thrilling and terrifying for readers. For a readership reliant on pseudoscientific methods, such as physiognomy, to reveal the truth of a person's moral character by external appearances, Lydia's continued success to appear morally good must have been deeply disturbing and provocative.

As we have seen through both the illustrations of Lydia and Midwinter, the displacement and/or removal of the images from the serialized text disrupted the semiotic processes, and thus, for American readers, prevented the image from taking on particular symbolic meanings. Instead, American and British readers engaged in different sign reading processes, and therefore, developed different responses to *Armadale* – both text and image - as a whole. Interestingly, the illustrations, which as a genre sought to distill and unify reader response through visual image, become a site of fracture and transgression by allowing new readings and understandings of Collins's characters and plot to flourish. Although the images may not be shocking or titillating in terms of graphic content, examining the illustrations semiotically reveals how this paratext enables the novel to take on truly sensational responses.

4 Conclusions: Looking to the future of semiotic literary analysis

My work thus far has attempted to demonstrate how Peircean semiotics can be applied in conjunction with a variety of literary theories and methodologies to a semiotic genre like sensation fiction. The first chapter demonstrated the ability for semiotic readings to function within the novel, examining how sensation fiction features plot lines and characters reliant on sign reading processes, and how nonstandard characters like Walter and Marian use their unique relationships to their *Umwelten* to define themselves, others, and the action of the novel. In turn, the readers of sensation novels, through the act of reading, are trained to practice semiosis and engage in their *Umwelten* in nonstandard ways. In the second chapter, historical reader response was examined semiotically, revealing how changes to illustrations were able to alter meaning

and influence reader responses in Britain and America. The alteration of illustrations helped to craft more complex and contradictory messages about gender and race in the American edition. Taken together, using Peircean semiotics allows scholars to approach sensation fiction as the affective, popular genre it was for its contemporary readers.

It is my hope that this type of semiotic reading can foster a wider discussion of other marginalized genres and affective literary works, such as sentimental, gothic, detective/mystery, horror, romance, and erotic texts. By examining literature, such as popular literature or generic literature, that manipulates affect, through Pericean semiotics, scholars can be allowed greater access to the bodies and environments of the characters and their readers by allowing theoretical claims about embodiment and environment to be fully grounded in the text itself. Through semiotics, affective texts can be examined and valued for the very quality that previously led scholars to ignore and devalue them.

5 Appendix: Illustrations

Figure 1: Cartoon from Harper's Weekly, 22 July 1865

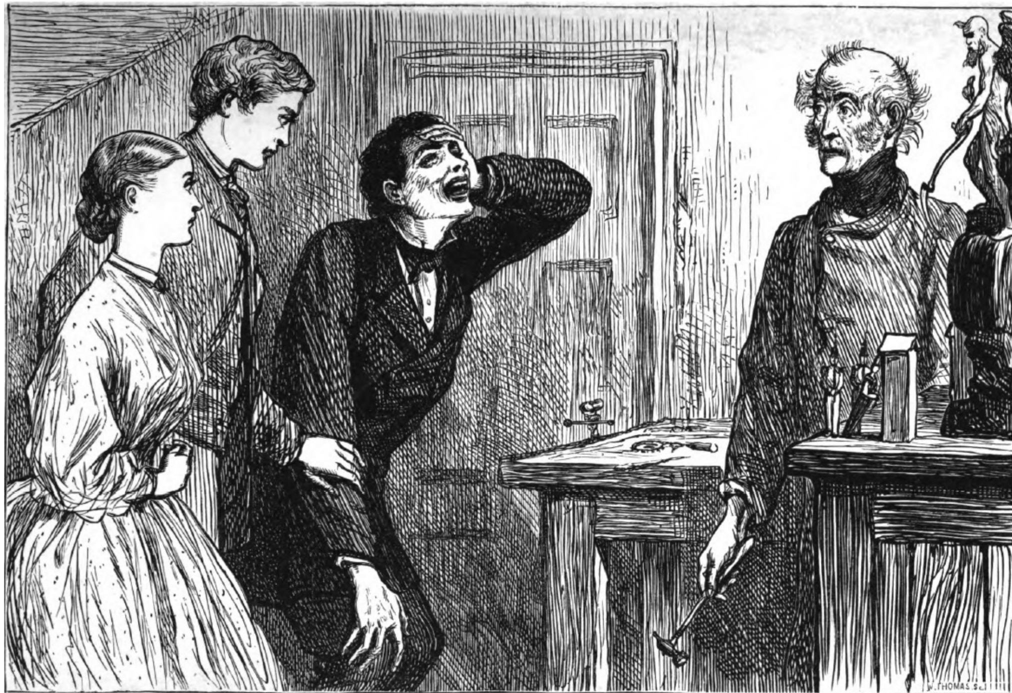


Figure 2: The Major's Clock

ONE TOO MANY.

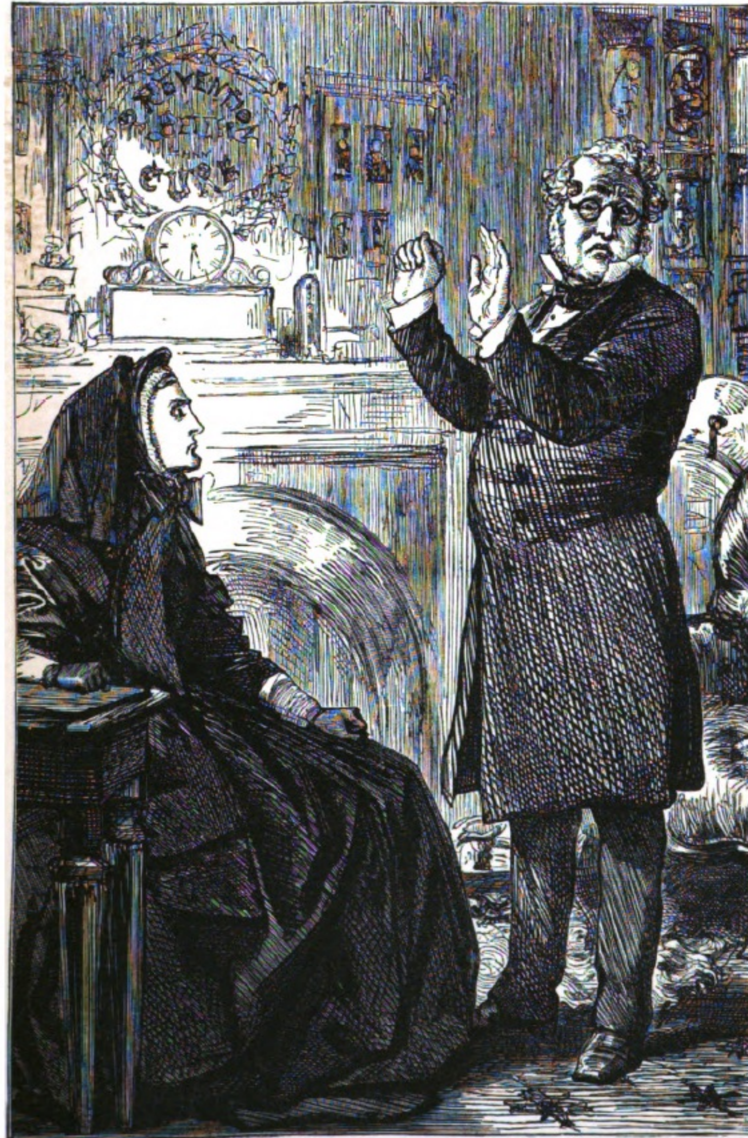
Figure 3: One Too Many

Miss Gwilt.

Figure 4: Miss Gwilt

THE END OF THE ELOPEMENT.

Figure 5: The End of the Elopement



FORCE AND CUNNING.

Figure 6: Force and Cunning

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