CHAPTER – 2

THE WOMAN IN WHITE (1860)

The publication of William Wilkie Collins’s *The Woman in White* in the year 1860, earned him widespread fame and repute. *The Woman in White* started off as a serial in Dickens’s *All The Year Round* on 26th November 1859, and created a furore from the very first chapter itself. It appeared in forty weekly instalments upto 25 August 1860.

*The Woman in White* was the precursor of what we now call the sensation genre. Collins’s *The Woman in White*, one of the best known sensation novels, was as Kathleen Tillotson says, “...a novel with a secret, or sometimes several secrets, in which new narrative strategies were developed to tantalize the reader by withholding information rather than divulging it”. The trademark of all sensation fiction, especially Collins’s *The Woman in White*, was that, however, mysterious and unreal the plotting and characterization of the novel, it was always steeped in reality. In *The Woman in White* a real life incident of 1787 was turned into very interesting reading material. It was from a volume by Maurice Mejan, *Recueil des Causes Celibres*, 2nd edn, 1808-14, and the source of *The Woman in White* in that volume was ‘Affaire de Madame de Douhalt’.

In *The Woman in White* Collins complicates the plot by taking a woman of similar appearance and substituting her for the heiress, Laura Fairlie, who ultimately dies and is buried in Laura Fairlie’s name. When Laura escapes with the help of Marian and Hartright she finds umpteen obstacles in establishing her
legal identity. She finally succeeds in doing so, thanks to the ingenuity of Walter Hartright, the young drawing master, and Marian Halcombe, a woman of great wit and genteel breeding and very much concerned about Laura. Collins uses the time-tested elements of the detective novel, namely, crime, mystery and suspense in this novel. His legal training partialised him towards an interest in crime, criminals and detection. It also inspired the ‘witness – in – the box’, narrative of his two major novels *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*.

In *The Woman in White* Collins juxtaposes the world of the upper middle class by relating the two in the search for a system that would both subvert and reveal the mysteries of the human psyche using an apparently popular form much as used in his mystery novels. Thus, form and meaning both reveal his fascination for popular narratives but often ironically subverts its own form to reveal Collins’s darker obsessions and search for criminality in human nature. Collins “…the author, openly acknowledges an anarchic and asocial counter world as a powerfully attractive alternative to the ordered, civilized world of conventional beliefs….”

In Collins’s novel, domestic violence and domestic crime predominates: poisoning by a kind and familiar hand, crimes committed in a fit of passion, and intra-familial rivalries which lead to conspiracies regarding execution of wills and the inheritance of property. The world of commoners, rampant with the violence of subversive criminal activities was familiarized and condemned to vitiate the congenial atmosphere of the Victorian household.

In *The Woman in White*, we find ‘the hot-tempered and brutal bully of an imposter and forger’ Sir Percival Glyde and ‘the truly psychopathic criminal’
Count Fosco, both engaged in a conspiracy to rob Laura Fairlie of her identity. Anne Catherick, the look alike of Laura Fairlie, is the unsuspecting victim of these two ruthless criminals. Sir Percival Glyde is moreover, guilty of the crime of being an imposter. By illegally putting his father’s and mother’s names in the marriage register of the Church in Welmingham, Percival inherits the Blackwater Park property and poses as the rightful heir to this property. It is significant, that the Count always accompanies Sir Percival Glyde. Collins had himself remarked that Fosco originated in Collins’s desire for verisimilitude as he realized that the crime to be committed would require the ingenuity of a foreigner. At the same time, Collins makes out Sir Percival to be ‘a weak shabby villain’. These two characters serve as a foil to each other. It is through both Fosco and Sir Percival, that the dual nature, the social and psychological validity of the criminal is represented, revealing Collins’s desire to explore the criminal elements in human nature. Thus, Collins here uses character to reveal the darker recesses of the criminal mind.

Sir Percival, the wicked illegitimate baronet seeks Laura’s possession and thereby her fortune; and through the development of this conventional criminal, Collins stresses the moral weakness, guilt and doubtful mannerisms of the criminal along with his uncontrollable temper and inconsiderate candour. Through Fosco, the author shows us the other side of the coin, namely the immense vanity, arrogance and self deception of the criminal, his love for histrionics and sheer involvement and excitement in the conspiracy, his intoxication with his clever ploys, and his delight at their fruition, his fatal attraction to intelligent and witty women, his easy charm, his deceitfulness and
impossibly cunning ways. Collins brings us the extreme duality in the nature of a criminal when he describes the scene where Marian overhears the midnight tête-à-tête of Fosco and Percival. Count Fosco, the truly psychopathic criminal, coolly calculates the best time and situation to annihilate Laura's identity with a living death, whereas the imposter Percival shrinks even from the thought of the deed. This complete reversal in their criminal nature shocks us – the human inhibition of Percival and the brutal ruthlessness of the Count. In creating Fosco, Collins said that the Count owed his birth to the ingenuity of the crime, which required a foreigner and that it was a general belief that fat men tend to be more ruthless. "I had begun to write my story, when it struck me that my villain would be commonplace and I made him fat in opposition to the recognized type of villain" (WW vii), so writes Collins of his villain. Fosco's belief and theories regarding the vulgar claptrap, that crimes committed by the wise are never found out, were Collins's own.

The gist of Collins's detective theory is that the wise criminal is never found out. The crimes that are found out and reported by the police are those committed by foolish criminals. Fosco remarks, that the hiding of a crime, or the detection of a crime, is nothing but a trial of skill between the police on one side, and the individual on the other. "When the criminal is a brutal, ignorant fool, the police, in nine cases out of ten, win. When the criminal is a resolute, educated, highly intelligent man, the police, in nine cases out of ten, lose...." (WW 210-12). Since the law is by preference the willing accomplice of the 'long purse', Fosco does nothing, which works outside the law. The same law he manipulates to seal Laura's inheritance and help Glyde achieve his illegal
ends, while Hartright the wronged one, has to work outside the law, is arrested and becomes an unwilling assistant at the execution of Fosco, at the hands of Pesca. Thus, Hartright, if he is to, outwit Fosco, has to learn and master Fosco’s art of cunning and perceive with Fosco’s criminal intellect. Both work with the same means toward similar ends. Thus, Fosco’s evil plot consists merely in the extension of what Hartright himself has introduced to the reader, the similar appearance of the two women. Manipulating the sin of illegitimacy, Fosco makes whiteness stand for all there is of both; from this he moves to the fatal metaphor by which Anne is made to take Laura’s place in her grave. The most sinister crime in *The Woman in White* is the realization and successful implementation of this false metaphor. Although, Fosco is very much guilty of criminal figuration, yet Hartright’s tricks ought equally to be condemned by the novel, which displays them.

There is, however, one great difference: in order to provide sensations in plenty, Hartright must do what his arch enemy does; but Hartright’s victim is only the reader, and the crime is only the reader’s desire to be duped.³

Thus, Walter is successful, both as a criminal and a detective only because, he is able to uncover and use the secrets of other criminals against them. The two archenemies of Hartright — Count Fosco and Percival Glyde, are both guilty of hidden secrets, secrets that would threaten their very existence. Count Fosco is a member of the Italian Brotherhood and Glyde is an illegitimate baronet. “The disruptive energy of Walter’s secret love for Laura is diffused by his ability to uncover other secrets, ... that are more criminal or repressed than
his own." Walter is thus, able to guard his secret love for Laura and conceal his yearning for social transgression. Walter’s crime is only that and his necessary duping of the readers to give a blow-by-blow account of the loss and eventual reinstatement of Laura’s identity.

As the novel unfolds, we find that it is the sexual indiscretion of Philip Fairlie, Laura Fairlie’s father, which starts off a whole string of criminal activities. His criminal irresponsibility leads to the illegitimate conception of Anne Catherick in August 1826, and the striking resemblance between the two half sisters, Laura and Anne, is a case of the father’s sins visiting his children. This particular male secret is responsible for all the criminal activities that follow. The birth of Anne Catherick, the mysterious woman in white, is the origin of all subsequent mysteries in the novel and the very first few pages unravel the mystery of the woman in white. “There in the middle of the broad, bright high-road ... stood the figure of a solitary woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments,” (WW 15). And that is the beginning of the process of detection in The Woman in White. Hartright and the reader, both participate in the exciting journey of detection surrendering themselves to sensation and melodrama by turns, finally culminating their journey through intellectual exercise to the enlightenment of the mystery.

Collins’s claim, in his preface of 1860, that the method of narration he uses in The Woman in White is innovative is entirely true. Of course, Collins’s novel antedate’s Browning’s use of a similar method in The Ring and the Book 1868-69 by almost a decade yet, almost a decade earlier, a similar narrative
method was also used by Emily Bronte in *Wuthering Heights* 1847. In the Preamble to *The Woman in White* Collins himself declared:

> As the Judge might once have heard it, so the Reader shall hear it now. No circumstance of importance.... Shall be related on hearsay evidence.... the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, .... To present the truth... (WW x)

Thus, was developed and perfected the split or multiple narrative. The method practised and perfected by Collins used a variety of first person narrators, none of who was in possession of the entire story. Collins developed a narrative method, which was dramatic, using 'set piece scenes' and 'dramatic tableaux'. The omniscient narrator here was the reader's guide, guardian and friend. As the narrative progressed, it was up to the reader to make abrupt adjustments with his earlier knowledge, as new facts and information unfolded themselves. We the readers of this novel of crime and deception know as much as the various characters involved in the crime themselves know. Every time a character unravels new secrets, new mysteries, we too are made all the more wise and immediately afterwards, we see events in a new light, a new perspective. The complicated developments at Blackwater Park between 20 June and 26 July involve the simultaneous activity of several characters in different places. The apparent fullness of the early narrative conceals tricks with space behind a pretence of fidelity to time. Only when Count Fosco's confession reveals where he was during the many gaps in Marian's vision of him does spatial continuity match its temporal counterpart. In the last pages of the novel, when the same time period has been narrated eight times, the reader
is at last able to construct a full narrative, from the omniscient perspective which Hartright has enjoyed since the beginning.

The first person narrative, which had promised to clarify the unfolding of the narrative, is, however, responsible for its very ambiguity. The apparent clarity actually denies spatial continuity with temporal progression. In the narrative of Marian Halcombe, the many absences of Fosco are finally explained by his confession at the end. Hartright’s position as the omniscient narrator is finally shared by the reader only after he goes through the narrative account of the same time period, which has been narrated for at least a minimum of eight times. “Only at the end of the novel does its complex mosaic of corrupted words, violated spaces, broken time, and splintered space make the coherent whole which the ‘Preamble’ promised.” The reader’s knowledge is thus confined to the experiences of the various characters involved. Thus, we find that the plot of the novel is already in its place. The various bits of knowledge and experience allow the reader to perceive the entire mystery of *The Woman in White*.

On the other hand, the other important narrative component i.e. character, in *The Woman in White*, as critics have pointed out, is assigned a place of lower importance, because the narrative function assigned to the plot structure has been given a higher interest. The “pseudospatial coherence” in the characterization of *The Woman in White* is missing, which set the trend for the sensation novel. Thus, plot, inspive of Collins’s denial here, has assumed more importance than character. The mystery in *The Woman in White*, functions like the mysteries in the later mystery novels and has no connection with anything
outside the world of the novel. Although, the world of *The Woman in White* is both violent and terrible, yet the mystery of *The Woman in White* is one that can be solved. The most important and crucial mystery is the origin of the woman in white, here Anne Catherick, and her resemblance to Laura in terms of the physical only, that is, dress, complexion and other physical features. Juxtaposed with this is Anne's claim of knowing Percival's secret. Hartright goes on to discover that Percival's secret is his illegitimacy. But the greatest discovery made by Hartright, which helps him unravel the mystery of Anne is that she actually knew no secrets. She only thought she knew something, which could ruin Percival's future. And Percival in turn was petrified, because he actually was guilty of being an imposter. All these alleged secrets alert the reader to the presence of mystery in the novel.

Hartright seeks to convey the mysteriousness of this woman in white; by attempting to overcome it by explaining her as a story that he fails to understand. He seeks to explain the shock and terror of his encounter with the woman in white by trying to find a different location and explanation for her presence. "I was far too seriously startled by the suddenness with which this extraordinary apparition stood before me" (WW 15). Walter finds himself 'quite unable to account for the woman's presence'. He tries to fathom her mysteriousness by trying to read into her body language and motives in trying to turn away from her pursuers. "'All I could discern....' 'The voice, little as I had yet heard of it, ...' '...her dress ...so far as I could guess...'' (WW 15). Her body is the clue to various mysteries that Walter seeks to explain. It is also the clue to the effect that she produces on Walter. Regarding this effect, Ann
Cvetkovich also reads sexual connotations in it. She takes into account that Walter was a man in his youth and Anne Catherick’s hand was that of a woman’s. “Remember that I was young; remember that the hand which touched me was a woman’s” (WW 17). This encounter is also decisive in the fact that it transforms Walter into a man of physical desires and emotions, away from the sheltered cottage of his boyhood, that is, his mother’s cottage.

Ann Cvetkovich, also seeks to reason out whether this encounter paved the way for Walter’s reaction to subsequent events or whether his reaction to later events was actually triggered off by this encounter. Ann Cvetkovich’s suggestion is that Walter’s is a case of ‘deferred action’. Thus, when Walter retrospect on his encounters with Anne Catherick and determines his response to her, it is to determine how she influences his subsequent response to Laura. Walter waits in suspense for his first meeting with Laura, whom he eventually meets after a series of introductions to the other members of the household. In the meantime he enlists Marian’s help to investigate and explore the woman in white’s information regarding Limmeridge House and its occupants. Walter begins “to wonder ...whether (his) introduction to Miss Fairlie would disappoint the expectations that I had been forming of her ...” (WW 40). Hartright reasons out that his love for Laura is a case of love at first sight and not as we might think, a result of his expectations and as a corollary to past events. Walter justifies his love for Laura as a direct outcome of his appreciation for Laura’s beauty. “I let the charm of her presence lure me from the recollection of myself and my position” (WW 44). Walter wants to convince both himself and the reader that he was so overcome by the sheer
beauty of Laura that in loving her, he quite forgot his humble position of an art teacher and also forgot to be ‘a harmless animal’ amidst the ladies of high society.

All this seems all the more improbable when we know that Walter has already met Anne, Laura’s look-alike. That is why upon meeting Laura and having seen her for the first time, “...was another impression.... It seemed like something wanting in her; at another, like something wanting in myself” (WW 42). That ‘something wanting’ was Walter’s recognition of the ominous likeness between the fugitive from the asylum and his lovely pupil at Limmeridge House. Early on, he reasons that if ever Laura is afflicted by sorrow, she would look exactly like Anne. And, that ‘something wanting’ fits into place, when Marian reads excerpts from her mother’s old letters. As soon as Laura comes into view, Walter is able to make and relate to her body, much as he would do to a sign. And as Ann Cvetkovich says, Walter’s suspense is alerted as soon as he makes Laura’s body a sign or text for his understanding of the mystery. Walter’s premonition and his fears are confirmed, when the resemblance proves fatal to Laura and he decides to take charge. By doing this, Walter nulls any sexual connotation in his meetings with Laura. This also helps him to take his mind off the secret of his love for Laura. In the same way, his fight against the injustice meted out to Laura preserves his secret desire for social transgression. Ann Cvetkovich sees Walter’s fascination for Laura as an act of ‘commodity fetishisation’. That is why, Laura, Anne’s superior in social hierarchy, is loved by Walter. Their difference is brought about by their different social backgrounds. And it is this difference that is made into a
mystery. Thus, in a way, fate or chance is a mask for social mobility. And social mobility is further masked as sexual desirability.

The narrative highs and lows of *The Woman in White* is dependent on the breakdown and re-formation of Laura’s identity, and at the same time is also a revelation of Hartright’s social and psychological transformation. His rise almost equals that of a transgressive anti-heroine. From the stature of a lower middle class drawing master, he rises up to father the heir of Limmeridge and thus once again, ensures the mobility and progression of the family. He is the epitome of safety in the midst of seemingly neurotic criminals. Hartright the collector and editor of “the story of what a Woman’s patience can endure, and of what a Man’s resolution can achieve” (WW 1) acts on his and Laura and Marian’s behalf to right various wrongs without the assistance of the law which is known to befriend only the ‘moneyed’ man. Laura’s problems arise even before the arrival of Hartright at Limmeridge House. On his deathbed, her father had promised her hand in marriage to Sir Percival Glyde. In honour of her father’s memory, Laura, in spite of her newfound love for Hartright, does what she considers appropriate in a dutiful daughter. Percival takes full advantage of the situation to gain full rights over her property and at her resistance enlists the help of the psychopathic criminal Fosco, initially to uproot her from her heritage and finally to rob her of her very identity.

Enmeshed in this theme of mercenary marriage, we find another story of the socially inferior hero who because of his virtuosity wins over the love and property of this innocent lady of aristocratic origins. Any doubt about his intentions is laid to rest, because he takes over her complete well being, in the
form of a selfless father and a loving brother. Only then, does he don the garb of the Victorian lover. He frees her from the prison of her loveless marriage and to do so he combines the character of a Victorian lover and the Victorian ethos of self-help. Collins sets the stage right for Laura’s acceptability into Hartright’s life, by making her his equal. To do this, Collins temporarily strips her of her property and her class pretensions:

Forlorn and disowned, ...robbed of her station in the world....

The devotion he had promised ...might be laid blamelessly, now, at these dear feet.... Mine to love and honour as father and brother both (WW 381).

With the help of his detective acumen, he sets about solving the various mysteries, at the same time taking care to leave behind no tell-tale signs. Hartright by his passivity and Marian with her resolution to fight for the re-construction of Laura’s identity show an inter-weaving of the social and psychological threads throughout the narrative. Although he is the main controller of the narrative thread at work, his whole plan is subject to the fulfilment of certain pre-conditions. As he gains in stature from a marginalized lower middle-class farmer to Laura’s lover and future husband, Hartright also begins to use ‘hearsay evidence’, whenever he perceives his inadequacy as narrator. He also manipulates the story’s beginning and end. From ‘a harmless animal’, Hartright becomes conscious and asserts his masculinity and sexuality. The other woman, Walter uses to prove his worth, is Laura’s look-alike, Anne Catherick. She puzzles Hartright no end, even after he has helped her make her escape. As Hartright muses: “There was nothing wild, nothing immodest in her
manner .... I altogether failed to guess..." (WW 15). Walter responds to this woman in white in a way that challenges his very identity. He responds in a dual manner. Initially like a chivalrous Victorian gentleman he is out to assist her, as he would any damsel in distress. Secondly, as a respectable man, whose duty should be for the good of the society, whose duty is to curb all unwanted antisocial elements, who might pose a threat to the advancement of the society, he feels guilty for aiding her in her flight from the asylum. By working out Anne's connection with Laura, Walter tries to resolve his identity crisis, by which he is fully socialized into the convention of a Victorian gentleman.

Hartright, firstly, as general editor presents the various narrative testimonies as evidence and then secondly as the specific narrator, who is on a level, supposedly, with the other specific narrators - Gilmore, Marian, Mr. Fairlie, Mrs. Michelson, Hester Pinhorn, the Doctor, Jane Gould, 'The Tombstone', and Count Fosco. Within these are embedded other narratives, in the form of letters, dreams, or reported speech. But the degree of credibility of each narrating instance, is itself partly determined by the psychological frame within which the narrators themselves are set. As the chief narrator of *The Woman in White*, Hartright, edits, selects, organises and arranges his and the narratives of the other characters also, so that everyone seems to be relating his story from his direct experience, based on a truth that is both direct and easily understood. This is ensured as each successive narrator is asked to relate and reproduce only the part he is most involved with. Jenny Bourne Taylor perceives the narrative of *The Woman in White* as a parallel process. Firstly, Hartright's role as chief narrator and secondly his understanding of himself
through this process. The first role of the narrative makes clear the second function of the narrative and although these two strains are complementary, yet at certain critical moments they blend together in reconstructing Laura’s identity and consequently Hartright’s elevated social position. Embedded in these two processes, are the other narratives taking place simultaneously. If the narrative of the plot of *The Woman in White* is compared to a chain, the narrative will be found progressing and at the same time moving inwards into the narrative process at work. All the specific narrators chosen to speak by Hartright are arranged in an orderly manner.

That, Hartright is conventional and conservative in his approach, is amply proved by his reaction to Marian and Laura. He reacts to Marian’s ugliness and Laura’s beauty according to the established conventions of feminine beauty as perceived in the Victorian Age.

The lady’s complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache.... Such a face as this set on shoulders that a sculptor would have longed to model....

the anomalies and contradictions of a dream. *(WW 166).*

The only narrative consciously offered by Anne is her dream and its accompanying foreboding. She compares this to a scene in the Bible and thereby wants others to believe her, equating it to their belief in and reverence for the Bible. The reason for the letter which follows her dream is her immense fear and hatred for Percival and love and anxiety for Laura. But then one must keep in mind that it is only a dream and that Anne is not completely sane.
Another specific narrator is of course Count Fosco. The finale of his narrative, however, becomes enmeshed in Hartright’s specific narrative. Here we find evidence and umpteen examples of Fosco’s malevolence, the working of the mind of a psychopathic criminal, yet one who is sincerely pained at the loss of a pet mouse. In his own narrative we find instances of his contempt for able-bodied men who do not make use of themselves to earn a decent living and at his magnanimity in giving the lion’s share of his tart to the monkey and last, but not the least at his morbid fear of Pesca. We must not undermine the importance assigned to Fosco’s narrative in comparison to Hartright’s. Collins makes Fosco, the spokesman for his own belief in the inadequacy of the police force in tackling crime and the criminal. Thus, all the theories that Fosco professes are his, are actually Collins’s own. Fosco is thus able to invert the moral pattern and Hartright comes out as an ineffectual moral agent. Fosco dominates with his determined narrative and clearly expresses what the narrative structure itself makes clear – that history is usually written by the winning side.

Coming to Marian’s narrative, we have her journal at our disposal. Marian’s journal was kept to record her observations and perceptions which would help her in her recollections and thereby serve as a brake, should she in any way become wayward in her ways. As such, it was not written at the instance of Hartright, unlike the other specific narrators. Her narrative is especially important in recording her feelings and observations regarding Laura – her emotional attachment to Hartright, her marriage to Percival and her almost successful annihilation at the hands of the malevolent Fosco. As already
mentioned, the part of Marian's narrative which is most interesting is that regarding Laura. If for the purpose of convenience, this journal is studied in two sections – the Limmeridge and Blackwater sections we find that the first section faithfully records Marian's growing anxiety and tension regarding the complicacy of Laura falling in love with Hartright and this feeling being reciprocated. However, she is able to nip this in the bud. The next alarming situation is Laura's impending marriage to Sir Percival Glyde and the change she perceives in Laura. "She used to be pliability itself, but she was now inflexibly passive in her resignation..." (WW 158) This change in Laura does not meet with Marian's approval.

An eminent critic, Tamar Heller has accused Marian of lesbianism. She sees her over protective tendency, her possessiveness, and her willing acquiescence as Laura's unappointed guardian as indicative of her lesbianism. Where Laura is the fair frail one, Marian is dark and manly in her appearance. Marian emphatically states "she will be his Laura instead of mine." (WW 166). But then Laura also seems to be reciprocating her feelings, and asks her to remain a spinster so that she could monopolise Marian. That might be one reason why Laura fails in her relationship with her husband. When Laura falls in love with her drawing master, Marian stands in between reminding them both of the engagement, Laura has to honour. But there were no such impediments in her relationship with her husband. Perhaps if Percival had been kinder and a little less mercenary, Laura could have made a success of her marriage. Initially, Marian tries to school herself to like Sir Percival, if not for any other reason, but because he was going to be Laura's husband. But Marian cannot help
distrusting and disliking 'Blackwater Park' and its owner too. Try as she might she cannot like and trust him and finally breaks out acknowledging 'I hate Sir Percival' (WW 172) and the same sentiment is echoed when she writes of Blackwater Park.

We find Marian gradually relying on her instinctive and unconscious understanding of symptoms instead of critically examining and analyzing her own perceptions, sensations and reactions. She seems on the one hand to be recording her first impressions and then again re-examining and re-questioning herself. In one such instance, Marian after much indecision, finally decides that, the figure they saw at the lake was not the figure of Madame Fosco, or her husband or of any one of the servants at Blackwater Park. At other times, Marian’s journal is a receptacle for her own unconscious mental processes: “My eyes closed of themselves; and I passed gradually into a strange condition... I was conscious of my own repose” (WW 248). Marian’s acute perception and sensitivity to the influences around her makes her exercise discretion and self-control until she finally breaks down understanding the psychology of the different characters, especially Count Fosco’s and Percival Glyde’s.

With Fosco’s novel way of moral management, humans and animals become direct equivalents, breaking the very boundaries that demarcates man and animals. Sir Percival, reacts to the Count ‘with the sullen submission of a tamed animal’. The violent bloodhound at Sir Percival’s is in the same manner subdued with a withering look. He has been able to reign in the formerly outspoken and obstinate Eleanor Fairlie by a combination of fear and flattery.
As Eleanor Fairlie, she was always talking.... As Madame Fosco (aged three and forty) she sits for hours together without saying a word.... with the look of mute submissive enquiry which we are all familiar with in the eyes of a faithful dog. (WW 194-95)

Fosco is powerful and doubly so by his amiability and ability to twist everyone round his fat little finger. He manipulates the narrative itself and holds up the dominant social, psychological and medical conventions to ridicule even as he makes use of them. Thus, in the First Part of the narrative Hartright, Marian and Fosco, three of the most important characters each manipulates, regulates and controls the narrative.

Time is an important aspect in the unfolding of the narrative of *The Woman in White*. Marian’s narrative gains in immediacy when both narrative time and story time come close enough to merge with each other. Their fears regarding Laura become true, when Fosco substitutes Laura for Anne by ‘stealing’ a day. This mixing up of dates is enough to send everyone haywire and the entire narrative becomes charged with mystery and suspense. Early on Marian realizes the necessity of time control and she tells Laura. “The question of time, is our question, and trust me, Laura, to take a woman’s full advantage of it” (WW 162). And this is how she is able to put up a decent fight against Fosco’s devious ways. The tension generated is a direct fall out of the narrowing of gap between narrative time and story time, and it reaches its climax when Marian’s health breaks down after her bout of fever and Fosco carries on, from where she had left off.
June 20th — Eight O’clock ...I count the hours that have passed since I escaped to the shelter of this room by my own sensations.... and those hours seem like weeks.... In that persuasion, I sign myself, Fosco (WW 305 — 9).

Thus, the second half of the narrative aims towards a resolution of the different narratives of the different specific narrators, is woven together, along with Hartright’s narrative and here, he takes over both as specific narrator and general editor. Hartright exercises greater control over the narrative and then begins the second part of the narrative, after the lapse of a week. “I open a new page, I advance my narrative by one week.... So the tangled web will be most speedily and most intelligibly unrolled” (WW 379). In spite of all the sensational events, mysteries and suspense embroiled in The Woman in White, it is still very much steeped in mid-Victorian realism. Every character is such an adjudicate mixture of the good and bad that they easily lay credence to the skillfully worked out plot of The Woman in White. The wicked plotting squire and the imposter Percival are endowed with some redeeming qualities and thus humanized. Marian and Hartright stoop to the base level of Fosco and Percival, in order to outwit them. In adopting the multiple narrative, Collins opted for the dramatic method to tell his story. He undoubtedly saw its advantages and the voice of Hartright the general editor confirms this by saying he dismisses with, ‘hearsay evidence’, for he prefers the ‘truth always in its most direct aspect’. The revelation of each successive narrator adds to the mystery and prolonging and heightening of suspense in the story. The story continues to move forward and thereby ensures the reader’s continued interest and participation.
T.S. Eliot in his *Selected Essays*, 1917–32, while admiring Collins's *The Woman in White, Armadale* and *The Moonstone*, regretted that he could not find anything akin to aesthetics in a melodrama. Although Wilkie Collins's novel closely resembles a melodrama, a struggle between good and evil, with a happy ending yet *The Woman in White* has little in common with impossible plots and extremes of characters as in most Victorian melodramas. Walter Hartright is innocence personified, Laura Fairlie, a beautiful heiress is victimized for her wealth by Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco, who aids Percival with his scheming designs on the life of Laura Fairlie. But each of these characters has a credibility of his own. They are complete personalities who have been psychologically delineated by Collins. They are all complex characters that cannot be simply categorized as 'good' or 'bad'. Collins was also criticized for what was a 'vile melodramatic title' i.e. *The Woman in White*, but Collins found a staunch supporter in his friend and contemporary Charles Dickens and went ahead with its publication, under the same. As pointed out by H.P. Sucksmith, the lighter aspects of melodrama introduced to ease the tension, was the introduction of humorous characters with the intention of lightening the intensity of the action, and aiding the movement of the plot. For instance, he describes, Mrs. Vesey, the Fairlie's housekeeper as “some of us rush through life, and some of us saunter through life. Mrs. Vesey sat through life.” (*WW* 38).

Every other character in the novel has a contrasting and corresponding counterpart. Marian and Laura, Laura and Anne, Marian and Fosco, Fosco and Pesca, Fosco and Hartright, Hartright and Percival are such pairs of characters
in the novel. This pairing of counterparts gives the book a deeply intriguing ‘double ration’ of characters and plots and continually reminds us of further unforeseen possibilities. There are two houses, two heroines, two villains, two graveyard revelations, two women who share one face. All these ‘paired’ people and events enrich the fabric of the plot and also point to the dual presence of vice and virtue in the Victorian society. Mark M. Hennelly, JR. refers to this as the ‘repetition compulsion’. “…all these secret sharers dramatise that favourite Victorian theme of the divided self.” The extreme pairings are of course, Hartright and Percival, Hartright must pursue Percival, as Percival pursues Anne, to unravel the crime of robbing Laura’s identity. Again, in Hartright and Fosco, Hartright has to outdo Fosco, at his own game, to get to the bottom of the crime—‘there was no choice but to oppose cunning by cunning’. *The Woman in White* can also be read as a social anthology. Laura and Anne resemble each other and Walter is captivated by and falls in love with Laura. Ann Cvetkovich reasons out Walter’s love as

Walter makes the mistake of reading social relations as inhering in an object when he attributes Laura’s attractiveness to her physical beauty…. only difference between her and Anne Catherick is their social class…. only explanation for why Walter loves Laura rather than Anne.12

In the case of a sensational plot, fate and chance are accomplices in ensuring a social upheaval. Hartright finds it easy to believe his love to have ensued not from a desire of social transgressiveness, but as an accident, which breaks the normally accepted social conventions. Collins is very much keen to
give a patient hearing to the antisocial rebel. Thus, what Fosco advocates that crime pays, gains further credence with the behaviour of Anne Catherick’s mother. The goal of Mrs. Catherick is respectability. So she marries Mr. Catherick and exultingly informs Hartright, “I stand high enough in this town, to be out of your reach. The clergyman bows to me” (WW 450). The same society that refuses Laura Fairlie, a lady of high birth, her social identity, acknowledges the presence of Mrs. Catherick. That is why Fosco refers to the hypocrisy of the ‘moral claptraps’ of the Victorians, as excellently accepted in England. To show his solidarity with the Count, Collins had to draw Fosco’s original from Isidor Ottavio Baldassare Fosco who is an adaptation of Count Fosco of Stendhal’s *The Charterhouse of Parma*, another nihilist, who openly defies morality drawn on conventional lines. Thus, Collins rightly understands and accepts that beneath the conventional social codes is to be found the nihilism of the amoralist.

Collins’s *The Woman in White* is a novel with two heroines and two villains, but one hero. In literature, characters usually represent one particular trait of human nature. But, in Collins’s characterization, we find the dissociation of personality, which was achieved by contrasting characteristics coming up and striking against each other and developing into a single, generalized, but complete human personality. This ensured the representation of both the social truth of his time yet restored to his work, an apparent likeness to the total psychic reality that his age denied. Thus, Laura Fairlie is most definitely a conventional beauty, but it is her very conventionality which steeps her in contemporary social realism. The shadow side of the Victorian woman is
presented in the figure of Marian Halcombe. It is only Marian’s face that is ugly, the discrepancy between her face and her beautiful figure reflects the dissociation between sexual feeling and sexual instinct, which is characteristic of the overt Victorian attitude to the sexual nature of woman. As suggested by H.P. Sucksmith13, with the two heroines in the novel against only one hero, Collins secures psychic reality by representing the Victorian romantic male’s idealized image of the fairer sex together with much that is contradictory in nature which is excluded from that ideal. He maintains this male dominance in the method of his narration too. Laura scarcely narrates in her own voice and Hartright’s view is what we are given, regarding both Laura, and Marian. Thus, in his narration he went along with the Victorian trend of superimposing the subjective view on an objective social situation. This relation between masculinity and femininity, however, seems somehow to have become imbalanced in the world of The Woman in White. But inspite of his trend towards femininity Collins, through his narrative has tried to redress this gender imbalance.

The theme of his novel about wrongful confinement is interwoven with contemporary debates about the degree of insanity, which justified confinement. And the most interesting aspect of this representation is that Collins consciously works on the inversion of this dominant code. Laura and Anne, are shown here as ‘mad’. This was perhaps a fall out of the belief that madness or insanity usually affected women and was termed a ‘female malady’. But Collins’s greatest advantage was perhaps his choice of subject. Catering to the Victorian delight in and craving for romance, sensation and violence, he draws out the
different events and characters in his novel, but the main sustenance of interest
is his choice of depicting a crime. No doubt, crimes are committed by the dozen
a day, but it is the immediacy of the incident, which appeals most to the reader.
It gains immense importance when experienced on a personal front.

Coming to the last, but not the least of all Collins's themes of
importance. *The Woman in White* was also a reflection of the contemporary
debate between legitimacy and illegitimacy. The origin of this novel lies in the
illegitimate origins of Percival Glyde and Anne Catherick. The mother of Anne
Catherick, Mrs. Catherick is the link between the different narrative strands.

Here, again, there is a hint of disruptive femininity in the novel. The resolution
of the narrative is the establishment of legitimate succession here, Laura Fairlie
and her progeny, through morally and socially recognized legitimate means.
This vicious cycle of moral and legal legitimacy and transgressive femininity is
also a major concern of Collin's next novel, *No Name*.

To sum up, Collins's *The Woman in White*, the first great 'novel of plot',
inspite of its author's denial, does fall victim to sensationalism. It has been so
inspite of a balance of both elements in the novel. Another limitation of *The
Woman in White* is that Collins does not find anything wrong in Fosco's
rationality. In this context the morality of the world of *The Woman in White* is
much removed from the morality of the real world. In this sense, *The Woman in
White* is far removed from the realistic world. A reader might question Collins's
success as a novelist. Inspite of glaring discrepancies in dates, people continued
to enjoy reading *The Woman in White*. But one does tend to be inclined to believe in the reality of the plot of *The Woman in White*.

The ambivalent rhetoric of *The Woman in White* marks a tentative breach of the mid-Victorian realist contract; and this, far more than its role as precursor of the twentieth-century detective novel, makes *The Woman in White* a significant document in the history of English fiction.¹⁴
NO NAME (1862)

No Name is a strategic inversion of the method adopted in The Woman in White. Magdalen Vanstone and her sister are stripped of their home and property, at their parents' death. Magdalen then stoops to a scheming marriage, in the hope of retrieving their lost property. The bone of contention in this novel too is the question of legitimacy and the vulnerability and exploitation of women as regards their legal status and economic dependency.

The chief crime in the novel, is committed by Magdalen, who with the aid of a rouge, Horatio Wragge, dupes Noel Vanstone into marrying her, the man who had by a twist of fate, become the master of her paternal property. When Andrew Vanstone learns of the death of his former wife, he and the mother of his daughters quickly go off to London to legitimize their union. But unfortunately, Andrew Vanstone dies in a rail accident and his wife dies in childbirth, before he can rewrite his will, thus disinheriting the daughters from their rightful inheritance. Collins uses this novel to disrupt conventional narrative discourse in the process of interrogating Victorian gender politics.

After marrying Noel, Magdalen is unmasked by her husband's housekeeper, becomes very sick after the death of Noel, and is eventually rescued by a Captain Kirke - who is a symbolic father figure. Bereft of patriarchal protection in the opening chapters, her marriage to Captain Kirke brings her back to the fold of patriarchal protection towards the end. And to complete the picture of restoration of inheritance, Norah marries the man who inherits the estate from Noel Vanstone.
... in generating suspense.... No Name illustrates.... the constraints as well as the possibilities open to sensation fiction that the excitement lies in the strategies pursued by a deviant heroine ...  

In his preface to No Name, Collins states that

... the narrative related in these pages has been constructed on a plan.... to enlarge the range of my studies in the art of writing fiction, and to vary the form in which I make my appeal to the reader...(NN vii-viii).

The Vanstone sisters and their parents were leading a peaceful life amidst natural surroundings. The reader is lulled into a false sense of security and is very much unprepared for the rude shock in store. Elements of the gothic, crime and domestic novel, help create the air of sensationalism in this novel. In No Name, Magdalen is the central transgressive female character who stops at nothing to regain her lost property. She is a natural actress and very convincing. Mr. Pendiil, the sympathetic family lawyer, Norah, and the old family housekeeper are very much alarmed by the various postures of Magdalen. The novel emphasizes the importance of social class and its recognition in the society. The plot is further complicated by the problem of gender bias. At the same time, No Name also portrays the tensions existing between families. In No Name, the intra-familial rivalry between the Vanstone brothers led to the conspiracy with the will and the ownership of the Vanstone home and property, as, social recognition was synonymous with the ownership of property, movable and immovable. Collins employs completely different devices to generate
mystery and suspense in *No Name*. The usual mysterious apparitions and foreboding dreams are done away with in *No Name*. The peaceful evocative picture of Combe Raven includes the inmates who are assuredly safe and secure at home. Realistic details suggest and emphasise the happiness of the Vanstone family. A familiar reader prepares himself for the onslaught of trouble as he instinctively knows Collins's way of springing surprises. Every trifling incident in a Collins novel has a meaning and so looks for a deeper meaning in the peaceful atmosphere of the Vanstone household.

The specialty of *No Name* is that the novel's single secret is disclosed first and then followed by the narratives of the different characters. It is a complete conversion from Collins's other novels where the narrative is made up of the different characters' attempts to follow the series of clues, which lead to a single or some mysterious events in the past. In *No Name* Collins makes a departure from all that is unrealistic. The illegitimacy of the Vanstone daughters results in their loss of social standing as a result of being disinherited. The otherwise dour lawyer, Mr. Pendril is equally distressed by the unpleasant turn of events: "I am far from defending the law of England, as it affects illegitimate offspring....it visits the sins of the parents on the children.... in the names of morality and religion"(NN ix). Collins himself later fathered three illegitimate children, who, one imagines, might well have agreed with the lawyer's outburst. This secret of illegitimacy, the only secret in *No Name* is revealed midway through the story. From this point onwards, the main events are sidelined to highlight the circumstances, which are responsible for the occurrence of the main events. The secret of Magdalen's illegitimacy, drives the narrative. Her
illegitimacy, which is unknown in the initial stages, helps in the creation of an altogether new kind of mystery, which is the threading of the missing links in the finished chain of the plot. The purposeful foreshadowing of the past events builds up the tension in the novel, which ultimately creates an atmosphere of suspense generated by the ways and means Collins adopted to link the various characters and incidents towards the culmination of the main events.

The narrative rhetoric used is shown to parody the voice of the omniscient narrator, and also carry the story farther. Collins exploits the issue of femininity both outside and inside the family, showing its bearing on the cross cultural tensions explicit in a society. Collins here shows the perverse formation of a social identity. The narrative rhetoric becomes analogous of identity and subjectivity, and the self and narrative also become equivocal as they parody the dominant voice, choosing to follow the plot construction and its diverse ways. Magdalen’s erring ways are different from other errant maidens involved in romantic entanglements. Collins sympathizes with Magdalen’s plight as he sympathizes with his other villains in his other novels. He justifies Magdalen’s cunning and devious methods, because of the strange predicament she finds herself in. Thus, Collins restores her social identity by marrying her off to Kirke and thus bringing her back into the fold of Victorian respectability. Collins’s narrative derives its strength from the excesses of Magdalen’s transgressiveness. Norah’s story being the story of a good woman, occupies only the interest of a subplot. Just as Magdalen’s transgressiveness motivates the narrative, in the same way, the curbing of her transgressiveness, sees to the culmination and eventual end of the narrative. Her adoption of different identities and loss of the
original self still leaves Magdalen in the lurch. She fails in all her daring deceptions and acceptance of the truth is her only succour. The readers almost sympathise with her plight, at the same time having reservations about her lack of morals. Collins makes us admire her beauty and brilliance, which she utilizes to get over her emotional distress. Unlike Norah, Magdalen is loathe to accept her fate as decreed by the will and she asserts herself to restore to herself and her sister what was rightfully theirs. Her fever towards the end of the novel shows her feminine sensitivity and desire to be united with Kirke, which is the epitome of all Victorian women. Collins by reverting her to her past social and psychological self and marriage to Kirke brings her back into the fold of Victorian respectable society.

Thus Magdalen’s transgressiveness finally makes way for her moral upliftment. Magdalen adopts one ‘skin’ after the other, until the reader is left wondering which is the real one. Thus, to ensure the continuity of the narrative to its completion one has to take recourse to multiplicity, which, however, has to be continually shifted and realigned within the linear narrative of the novel, which will culminate in the moral upliftment of Magdalen. This is further heightened by the complete contrasts in the characters of Norah and Magdalen. Thus, in spite of her perversity Magdalen excites the curiosity of the reader whereas; Norah’s passivity in the acceptance of her fate makes her dull and uninteresting. She is just as improbable, as the other character of fitness and male father figure, Robert Kirke. The dominant voice of the narrative undergoes a change, to show the development of the heroine from perversity to redemption and is further qualified by the delineation of characters such as Captain Wragge.
The narrative is manipulated so as to reach the desired conclusion planned by Collins, while at the same time chance and fate are evoked to add that air of sensationalism to the novel. Magdalen's adoption of different identities, goes against everything natural. The naturalness of the different poses and transformations that Magdalen undergoes is sensational. Magdalen by her transgressiveness is an anomaly when viewed in the perspective of the family. Thus, by the end of the novel, Magdalen's erring ways are curbed and both Magdalen and Norah retrieve their social positions by marrying, which once again underlines the importance of family life, in the Victorian society. Thus, the diverse and contrasting and transgressive elements are brought and moulded into the organic healthy whole of the family. Thus, the original figures of Magdalen and Norah, in spite of their contrasting natures are actually prototypical figures. Their different attitudes of confronting the same problem, Norah's morbidity and Magdalen's transgressiveness are their natural respective reactions, which drive the central narrative of the novel.

The narrative of *No Name* seems to be best divided into three parts. The first part of the narrative covers the peaceful domesticity of the Vanstone household, the disruption of that peace by the bitter and shocking truth and an inkling of what Magadalen plans to do to restore to herself and her sister what is rightfully theirs. The second part of the narrative is taken up by the character called Wragge and his experiments, with his book 'Skins to Jump Into', with Magadaln. The various transformations of Magadalen's identity are completed in this section. The third and final part of the narrative sees the purification of Magdalen, the breakdown of Magdalen's transgressive self into a new, chastised
wife of Captain Kirke. The third person narrative is used in this part of the story. Each part of the narrative is a natural outcome of the previous section, which again upsets the previous suppositions and hypotheses, so that there is a continuous realignment in the drive of the linear narrative. Each part of the narrative looks at the different identities from different angles. This constant fluctuation in meaning and perspective results in perversity of the narrative. The first part of the narrative sees Magdalen uprooted from a deceptive scene of domestic peace and happiness to being “nobody’s child”. Immersed in this sea of illegitimacy, she tries to extract herself and Norah, from this morass of despair. She degenerates into a transgressive female and slips into a predictably physiological role, which is meaningful when understood in the cultural context of feminity. The characters of Norah, Frank and Noel undergo the same kind of moral, social and cultural bearings. Thus, Collins questions,

...the moral force of character and higher intellectual capacities in parents seem often to wear out mysteriously in the course of transmission to children? ....the same rule may apply, ... to the bodily gifts as well? (NN 6).

Norah’s passivity, and inactivity along with her temerity presents her as particularly vulnerable. Norah with her “less refinement and depth of feeling” is thus, relegated to the back seat. Collins inverts the process of The Woman in White, where Laura remained passive and Marian resolute whereas in No Name, Magdalen becomes transgressive, but Norah becomes resolute in spite of her patience and passivity.
Like Norah, Frank Clare and Noel Vanstone are dim, unimpressive and indistinct copies of their parents and ancestors. Descended from a lineage they could be proud of they had nothing to their credit, to make their lineage proud of them. Frank Clare in fact closely resembles the disturbing femininity of Frederick Fairlie in *The Woman in White*. "The small regular features, which he was supposed to have inherited from his mother, ....Mr. Francis Clare had more in him of the shadow of his ancestors than of the substance." (NN 30) This is again repeated in the figure of Noel Vanstone: "His complexion was as delicate as a young girl's, his eyes were of the lightest blue, ... wicked little wrinkles." (NN 228). The characters of Frank Clare and Noel Vanstone both tether on the borders of femininity, which is symbolic of a declining trend in the organic wholeness of the family. Their inability to stand up for their own results in their becoming nervous wrecks. Noel Vanstone's misunderstanding of economic security, is further worsened by his nervousness and inability to rationalize his thoughts, where the only use of money as understood by him was to hoard it. He reflects the degeneration and the loss of values in modern life, the people of a modern urban society who are both the products and victims of their materialism.

Magdalen, is different in the sense that the narrator cannot attach any particular characteristic to her. She is distinguished from Norah, by her transgressiveness whereby she decides and acts on her own behalf. Disinherited, she turns out to be a real bastard, who actually acts and behaves like one. What is emphasized here is her self assertiveness and spirit to live with social recognition and respectability. Thus, although her wild ways are not approved
by the society, it is ultimately her wildness, which helps her survive her fate. She is an anomaly in Victorian society, yet her anomalousness as Jenny Bourne Taylor points out, is a case of survival of the fittest, propounded by Darwin’s Theory of Natural Selection. A similar caprice of nature seems to be at work in the face and features of Magdalen who resembled neither of her parents. “How had she come by her hair? ...Here, in truth, lay the mainspring of this strangely constituted organization.” (NN 8-9). What is peculiar about Magdalen’s character is her inability to fit into any of the prescribed feminine roles. Her audacity in adopting different identities refuses to make sense when compared to Norah’s passivity in accepting her fate. In the second stage of the narrative, Magdalen ill advised and ill used by Captain Wragge, adopts a new identity to ensure Noel’s presence, in her design to retrieve her lost inheritance and social standing. This part of the narrative, the Wragge-dominated part, is interesting for Wragge’s anomaly and perversity in the way he manipulates Magdalen and her resources and thereby dominates the narrative strains in the novel. Captain Wragge, in a way, like Collins, controls the narrative. He is the perfect Victorian hypocrite, his conscious self trying to come to terms with his hypocrisy.

Captain Wragge is like Fosco in that he is not ashamed of doing anything for the success of his various devious plans. From being a successful villain, the Captain manages his affairs, by managing Magdalen’s so that his present competes with his past to embrace a new future. Compared with Frank Clare who is not able to carry out his father’s wishes and has no desire to fight for himself Wragge’s is an altogether different story. His sense of respectability
is ridiculous, when we take into account his various past identities. The
narrative rhetoric here is skillfully manipulated to strike a contrast between
Frank Clare's disposition and Wragge's daring escapades, which is imperative
for an enjoyment and understanding of the plot. Wragge because of his natural
affinity for tricking mankind overthrows the narrative to suit his kind of morality.
Thus, he justifies his actions to himself, by saying that he is "a moral
agriculturalist; a man who cultivates the field of human sympathy ..." (NN
169). He is constantly trying to reign in his wife to merge harmoniously with
her external surroundings. But like one with no self control she fails to be in
'harmony with the eternal lover of symmetry and order.' Thus, she is constantly
reminded of her wifely duties, along with admonitions to tidy herself. Wragge is
often heard saying, 'Sit straight at the table. More to the left, more still — that
will do', and 'pull it up at heel, Mrs. Wragge — pull it up at heel,'(NN 158) —
 meaning her worn slippers, and so on and so forth. But he fails as, Mrs. Wragge
remains a grotesque figure of domesticity.

Along with the themes of Victorian fiction like marriage, family, money,
wills, female transgressiveness and male dominance is interrelated Collins's
indictment of patriarchal law. Thus, as Deirdre David suggests, if Captain
Horatio Wragge's behaviour is suggestive of Collins's restlessness with the set
trends of literary form, then it is his wife, Matilda Wragge, who, with her
complete unconscious negation of her husband's diktat, expresses Collins's
impatient criticism of dominant modes of gender bias in all fields, including
literature. Matilda continues to be troubled by the 'buzzing' which had afflicted
her when she was working as a waitress in Darch's Dining Rooms in London,
before she got married to Wragge. The orders barked out simultaneously so thoroughly confused poor Matilda, that she was completely disoriented by the barrage of gentlemen’s orders until she forgot her own name, and even lost her identity in the need to conform to the incessant discipline of male directions. Deirdre David has pointed out, Mrs. Wragge’s deconstruction of the omelette recipe is significant in that Mrs. Wragge’s efforts at making an omelette are not ‘nice’ in the same way that she represents women kind who do not consider obeying rude and inconsiderate orders as ‘nice’. This is an instance of gender politics in No Name.

Wragge ultimately uses Mrs. Wragge to reap rich profits from his sale of laxatives. Wragge turns to prey on public stomach, by manufacturing laxatives. Thus, he turns from moral agriculture to medical agriculture. “Don’t think me mercenary – I merely understand the age I live in.”(NN 590). He profitably uses his narratorial skills to the creation of authentic records on the commendable effects of the pill and amasses a lot of wealth. He stops shouting at her and instead advertises her to boost up the sales of his laxative, which once again confirms Wragge’s ability to mould everything for his monetary gain. Mrs. Wragge’s new respectability, thanks to the popularity of the ‘pill’ puts an end to Collins’s disruption of conventional narrative form, patriarchal law and gender politics. Bowing to the demands of his career and diktats of gender bias, the subversiveness of No Name has to be controlled to enable it to exist. Thus Deirdre David has suggested, perhaps it would be best to retain the purity of Collins’s novel by not deconstructing it to such an extent that there ceases to be
a bond between the real and the fictitious. Or else Collins’s literary practice and gender politics will have been a useless effort.

Captain Wragge’s scheming is matched by Mrs. Lecount’s intrigues, the housekeeper of Noel Vanstone. Like Count Fosco, she is a magnetic personality attracting and repelling at the same time. Like Wragge and Fosco, she too dabbles in the medical, with which she is successfully able to counteract the ravages of time on her physical self. Her choice of a pet is a tame toad, whose nature resembles her master, and thus, impels the ease with which she controls him. The most interesting part of the narrative is the contest of wills between the two formidable adversaries — Magdalen and Mrs. Lecount. Both manipulate the rhetorics of self help and moral management and the sharp rejoinders between the two are responsible for most of the tension in the novel. Their constant parrying, on the borderline of propriety, ridicules the very codes of propriety within which each adopt a different identity. While doing this the strain of the narrative is again subverted and then reasserted to the final narrative closure, which purifies Magdalen. Magdalen is swayed by the symptoms of hysteria, so that, where earlier she was the mistress of her emotions and actions, now it is her emotions and actions, which rule her. She is a victim of monomania; her perversity ensures her degrading fall, from which she finally emerges chastised and purified, by recollecting herself from her intellectual degeneration.

Narrative closure is now dependent on Magdalen’s adoption of a new identity, where her numerous ‘skins’ or masks of the past are obliterated and the narrative drive is aimed towards a completely different moral management of
the heroine. The narrative, now tries to replace Magdalen's morbidity, with a new consciousness as to the uselessness of her past misadventures. By examining, intervening, mixing and understanding the two extremes of Magdalen's condition the narrative now tries to iron out the differences. Magdalen is thus subjected to 'fever', although it is difficult to find a strain of consistency between her past and future actions. Her past transgressiveness makes it difficult for us to believe in her sudden transformation. However, her present physical state in a way, explains her declining mental resolve, to carry on with her fight for legitimacy. "Faintly and more faintly the inner voices now plead her to pause.... and carried to it with the daring of her despair – Drive me on." (NN 493). Magdalen, of No Name, is a figure who cannot be understood or explained as a single entity. Full of contrasting conceptions of ideological differences which go into the making and development of her complex character, Magdalen's character is a composite of all these differences and she experiences a constant conflict between her gender and identity as a person. The tactics she employs are unsuitable to her gender and could also eliminate the existence of any difference between the sexes.

Although, the dominant narrative strain constantly sifts and qualifies her changing identities, the novel does not examine the subjectivity of Magdalen. The ambiguity in No Name is left unattended and the emphasis is more on the comic than the uncanny. The secretive is automatically and inevitably revealed by an 'inevitable law of revelation', which sees to it that nothing in this world is effectively repressed forever. Like the Shivering Sand in The Moonstone, nature gives up all that is artificial. While this law dominates the very structure of the
story, the narrative strain of the story is based on a more ambiguous revealing process, which helps in building up the suspense in the story, and also lengthening the narrative closure. The ‘Progress Of The Story Through The Post,’ which is narrated in the third person, is a combination of letters and the chronicle maintained by Wragge. Ample use is made of chance and coincidence to reach the narrative closure. Collins then resorts to Providence, when Magdalen is desperate enough to contemplate suicide, she counts the ships passing under her window to help her come to a decision on taking the fatal step. As she sinks into the depths of despair, she becomes very obsessive in her quest for social recognition. Her obsessiveness makes her disguise herself as a servant rather than a wife, as she re-enters Noel’s house to find out the future Vanstone inheritors. This section makes use of association, keys lost and found and labyrinthine passages and the transgressive Magdalen unconsciously stumbles on to what she has been looking for. She loses all track of time and self-respect in her relentless pursuit of the inheritance. Collins also makes use of mesmerism in Magdalen’s case, when she suffers from an inherent collapse in the ‘Bygrave Plot’.

Jenny Bourne Taylor has pointed out Collins’s use of associationist psychology also. This is when Mrs. Lecount first meets Magdalen disguised as Miss Bygraves, after meeting her masquerading as Miss Garth. Before falling asleep, Lecount’s mind drifts along its own uncontrolled chain of associations. “...the chain of thought broke. Her mind took up the fragments and formed another chain.... At this point her thoughts broke off once more, ...The next instant she started up in bed.... Miss Vanstone again.”(NN 307-8). She was
very much at a loss as to the working of her rational faculty, which led to her stupendous discovery, observes Collins. Her inability to arrive at a conclusion regarding the Bygraves and her suspicions about the conspiracy against her master must have activated her grey cells and thus, this startling discovery. Magdalen’s masquerade and Mrs. Lecount’s ability to read through it are symptoms of the rampant perversity in the social psyche and its perverse influence on the individual. What Collins seeks to portray, is the general decay in the standards of morality in the society and its subsequent generations of people. Magdalen who bears no resemblance to either of her parents is also different in the way, that she can easily adopt different identities. Called in at the last minute to play two opposing roles at the amateur production of Sheridan’s *The Rivals* 1775, Magdalen glides in and out of the opposing roles of Lucy, the maidservant and Julia, who patiently tolerates the fits of Falkland. But her very success alienates her from her peers and family members.

In *Basil: A Story of Modern Life* 1852, Collins had formally declared his credo that, “the Novel and the Play are twin sisters in the family of fiction ... the one is a drama narrated, as the other is a drama acted.” In *No Name*, Collins proves this. Left with nothing but her acting abilities and instigated by Wragge, Magdalen decides to undo the wrong done to her and her sister, Norah. She assumes various theatrical roles — Miss Garth in Vauxhall Walk, Julia Bygrave in Aldborough, the parlour maid Louisa at St. Crux and thus, becomes acceptable to the society. Ironically, her adoption of the role of wife of Noel Vanstone is the most pathetic, yet secures for her social respectability. “Even the law”, she points out in a bitter letter to her ex-governess, “which is the
friend of all you respectable people, has recognized my existence, and has
become my friend too" (NN 484). Captain Wragge, the other successful
impersonator in the novel, has a book called *Skins to Jump Into*, outlining
various roles, he may adopt as and when required. He is rather proud of his
ability to trick people with his roughishness. He says, "Narrow minded
mediocrity, envious of my success in my profession, calls me a Swindler.... It
totally depends on the point of view" (NN 169). He echoes the amoral and
realistic ways of the Count in *The Woman in White* and at the same time is a
live personification of the hypocrisies associated with free enterprise system.
His books of accounts, wherein are recorded his dubious ‘transactions’ and his
Grand Financial Fact all point to the thin dividing line between respectability
and hypocrisy. As usual, Collins is sympathetic to his villain’s travails and thus,
informs the reader of Wragge’s decision to become a ‘medical agriculturist’
from a ‘moral agriculturist’.

Wragge’s most daring impersonation occurs at Aldbourough, in his duel
of wits with Mrs. Lecount. Both are aware of the hypocrisies latent in the other,
yet they talk with the familiarity of long lost friends, at Dunwich Sands. What is
peculiar to Mrs. Lecount is her ability to skilfully manage members of the
opposite sex, without their being aware of it. She is even able to distress
Magdalen from the way she conducted and carried herself. Magdalen is
surprised to note that Mrs. Lecount was “a lady of mild ingratiating manners;
....triumph of physical resistance to the deteriorating influence of time” (NN
223). Her amiable appearance is compared to her smooth hold over her master,
Noel Vanstone. Again, here Collins seems to be harping on gender politics and
the attitude of the society towards the relationship between men and women in general. Magdalen is quite out manoeuvred by the self-possessed Mrs. Lecount as is evident by her talk with Mrs. Lecount’s pet toad. “I wonder whose blood runs coldest’, ‘...Your mistress is a devil”(NN 226). But Collins doesn’t altogether hold Mrs. Lecount in contempt. She, like Wragge understands the demands of the age she lives in and is accordingly compliant. She understands too well the basic tenets of survival. Like Magdalen, she pampers and reigns in Noel Vanstone, for her share of what she considers her rightful inheritance. Collins seems to be outlining the depths a woman has to stoop to, to outdo male supremacy, be he a weakling or otherwise, to maintain her social equilibrium.

The Sensation novel relies on the manipulation of sensation at all costs. The family is no longer the sanctified haven it was projected to be and this is exactly what happens in Collins’s No Name. Magdalen and Norah are rudely uprooted from their comfortable family life in Combe-Raven and find themselves illegitimate. Magdalen and Norah realize to their dismay that the happy family life they had so far led, could not assure them security and permanency. It was only an illusion, which existed as long as their parents lived. Almost every one of Collins’s books “preached a sermon or endeavoured to found a crusade.”20 In retrospect, the Vanstone family fortunes is a case of simmering tension within the family as a caring secure institution sanctioned by law and society. But the discovery of lack of legality in the Vanstone marriage casts a shadow of doubt on the propriety and respectability of that family. What Collins seeks to highlight here is the socio-cultural anxiety about the family as a stable organic union, which also affects the economic condition of women. The
hypocrisy of the female and her unpredictability when driven by hysteria is Collins's subject of interest here. Feminity is here defined as duplicity and respectable feminity is but an impersonation or a veneer. Magdalen's acting capabilities help her don several identities, all necessary for social acceptance and respectability. She is a 'natural' in her acting capabilities and enjoys herself while doing so. "I want to go to another concert ....that puts me into a new dress, from head to foot"(NN 10).

She takes matters into her own hands to rectify the wrong done to her. Unlike Marian Halcombe of The Woman in White, Magdalen, does not only verbally react to feminine petticoat existence. She embodies the contrasting characteristics of feminine respectability personified by her sister Norah and Laura of The Woman in White. She doesn't need a man to protect and guide her, she is impulsive, determined, clever and stops at nothing to get what she wants. Even though, the narrative closure makes it necessary for Magdalen to have a father figure to look up to. Unheeding of Victorian propriety and respectability, Magdalen takes to acting as a profession. She shows how unstable is the conception of middle-class feminine respectability, which underlies the dominant code of social propriety. Magdalen only too well understands the social meaning of a respectable lady — "a lady is a woman who wears a silk gown, and has a sense of her own importance". (NN 503). In another sense she knows how and why, men and women engage to make a good marriage: "Thousands of women marry for money ... why shouldn't I"?(NN 400). And this is how she gains social respectability after her marriage to Noel. "In
Collins's representation of Magdalen, the histrionic and hysterical are closely connected: "...all women were perpetually in danger of falling."^{21}

What is unacceptable about Collins's fiction to the contemporary Victorian critic is that the erring heroes and heroines do not meet with poetic justice. By bringing Magdalen back into the fold of respectable Victorian society, Collins flouts the norms of acceptability and is thus criticized by Alexander Smith, in the *North British Review*, who remarks of *No Name* that the novel "enchains you, but you detest it while it enchains.... the repulsiveness of the matter disturbs the pleasure of the reader."^{22} Mrs. Oliphant is suitably affronted by Magdalen’s acceptance into polite society, after taking into account her past exploits — "Magdalen of *No Name*, does not go astray ... after all her endless deception and horrible marriage ..."^{23} Collins perhaps thought of counteracting these criticisms by vividly showing the inner conflict of Magdalen Vanstone. As in the morality plays, Magdalen was shown to have misgivings every time she embarked on a devious plan to retrieve her lost social position. But the narrative, of course, which is the vehicle of Collins's telling the story, is free from this conflict between good and evil. What was unconventional about Collins’s novel was that, at the centre of his novel, he not only had an anti heroine, instead of a hero, but also one who did not have any inhibitions about thinking and acting like one. Thus, inspite of the fact that Collins gives us a vivid and realistic portrayal of the socio-legal encumbrances of the Victorian society, which is responsible for Magdalen’s unconventional tactics, we might be tempted to agree with the insipid male character of Noel
Vanstone who is astonished at Magdalen’s plot for revenge: “... It’s like a scene in a novel – it’s like nothing in real life” (NN 448).

Collins, very much sensitive to the pulse of the Victorian reader perhaps intuitively guessed at the stir which No Name would generate. It is echoed in his next novel Armadale 1866, by one of the characters, Dr. Downward, in charge of the inmates of the sanatorium, who classifies suitable reading material for his inmates.

Nothing painful, ma’am. There may be plenty that is painful in real life – but for that very reason, we don’t want it in books.... occasionally to make us laugh, and invariably to make us comfortable.24

No Name remains a very disturbing work of art. Its subject, illegitimacy, and Collins’s sensitive portrayal of the crisis of identity, through his multiple narrative devices, is still able to disturb and provoke the sensitive reader. Inspite of humorous episodes, the humour itself is unable to detract from the seriousness of the subject and leaves the reader confused and unsettled.
THE MOONSTONE (1868)

Collins's *The Moonstone* like his previous novel, *Armadale* is placed in a colonial setting, amidst violence and greed. An old Indian jewel brings about the climax of an old family discord, which entails a story of crime, mystery and suspense. This particular gem in this novel was also supposed “to have been the subject of a prediction, which prophesied certain misfortune to the persons who should divert it from its ancient uses” (TMS xxxii).

With their labyrinthine narratives..., generating mystery, Collins’s novels have been read as prototypical detective fiction with *The Moonstone* installed as ‘the first and greatest of English detective novels’ and Collins as the ‘father’ of the English branch ...

In this novel, crime forms an integral pattern of the plot, although violence has almost been done away with. The only crime apart from the theft of the precious moonstone, is the murder of Godfrey Ablewhite, performed in the same manner as the murder of Count Fosco in *The Woman in White*. Both fall victims to the machinations of secret societies. A thorough perusal of *The Moonstone*, as a study in detection and crime imparts many peculiar characteristics which was to set the trend of the detective genre. In reading, *The Moonstone* the reader is spellbound, as the mystery unravels. Gabriel Betteredge remarks on the disruption of the orderly Verinder household. He is gripped by the ‘detective fever’ as are the others, Bruff supposes he knows the real culprit and Rosanna suspects Blake to be guilty of the crime. Every small incident acquires a new importance as the detective consciousness sets to work and everyone is suspected to be guilty of the crime. The science of detection like the
relations between the police and the public, the difficulties faced by the detective, the Least Likely Person solution, all these find sufficient and realistic presentation in Collins's detective novel *The Moonstone*.

The main narrative of *The Moonstone* begins with the onslaught of peace in the Verinder household. Rachel Verinder inherits an alleged heirloom, a diamond by her uncle Henncastle who perchance wanted to revenge himself on the family which had boycotted him all his life, for his unruly ways. The narrative itself deals not only with the secretive ways of the Victorian genteel family, which values its privacy very much, but also the impact of colonial domination so long perpetrated by the Britishers on the colonies. Thus, this involves a domestic, social, cultural and political burden on the sub-text of the novel. Collins's source for this novel, like his *The Woman in White* involved many contemporary details. For this story, Collins concentrated on material extracted from his readings of Indian history and jewels, and a much publicised murder case of his times. The Road Murder Case of 1860 and the Northumberland Street Incident of 1861 provided Collins with many of his sensuous details for the plot of *The Moonstone*. "His main action appears to echo the Gates of Somnauth furore of 1843, in which Lord Ellenborough had attempted to restore a Hindu sacred object, allegedly purloined by the Afghans ..." (TMS viii). But the most striking resemblance is the detective, Sergeant Cuff, who is called in to restore normalcy in the Verinder family. The one flaw in his career which ultimately ruined him was that he had the audacity to suspect the daughter of the Kent household, Miss Constance, with murder. As later incidents show, he was very much correct in his deductions. The public,
which was very much interested in the follow up of this case, could easily find similarities between the Road Case and Collins's *The Moonstone*. The dull-witted Superintendent Seagrave and the clever Scotland Yard detective officer were modelled on the local policemen, Inspector Foley and Sergeant Whicher, respectively.

Similarities also exist between Rosanna and Elizabeth Gough—both in love with their masters and unable to reach them. Both, because of their social class and gender, could not break the cultural barrier, imposed by society on their love. Rachel, however, is a more complex character perhaps having characteristics imbibed in both Constance and Elizabeth. She maintains the obstinate silence of Constance Kent and also bears Elizabeth's love for her master, as is evident from her love for Franklin Blake. What is, however, common to both Rachel and Rosanna is that they are both in love with the same man, suspect him of having committed the crime, yet try and protect him from being discovered. We find that the crux of the novel turns on the reticence and silence of these two women. Sergeant Cuff, thus, correctly suspects Rachel to be in the know of the crime, yet can not read through her upper class breeding. Thus, the preservation of these secrets aids and abets a crime and harbours a criminal. Blake is shielded from being declared a criminal and in shielding him from others, they are also shielding him from knowing the truth. Thus, the secret, religiously guarded by the honourable Rachel and love-sick Rosanna is transformed into a criminal secret. Sergeant Cuff is a versatile genius rolled into one. Faced with the threat of Cuff's professional competence and capability, the Verinders realise that family prestige and honour are more important, that they
can not very well accept the public onslaught on their privacy. Cuff, however, returns to the Verinder household to pay off, if possible Lady Verinder’s generous amount to him. Cuff has an inclination for rural leisure activities like Mr. Wemmick of *Great Expectations* and lacks the social deference, acceptability, and charisma of Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*.

Elliot pointed out the degree of fallibility the detective might be subject to, which made him humanely credible. As W.S. Gilbert’s invariably late, Gripper the detective pointed out, this fallibility was a necessity in itself. The detective’s fallibility ensured the progress of the plot. Again, their commendable competence should not outshine that of the protagonists of the novel, who, of course, were the primary characters in the plot. Cuff’s competence is hereby overshadowed by his inferior social position. In *The Moonstone*, Collins desists from making use of providence. As such, the return of the Hindu gem to its temple does not have any overtones of Christianity. The return of the moonstone to its Hindu shrine is made possible because of the religious fervour of the Hindu priests. The mystery narrative of *The Moonstone*, also throws light on the problematic relationship between the two sexes. It deals with the inability of men to understand the affective domain of femininity, of what makes women tick, of their need for privacy and reserve. Thus, indirectly, Collins is here, also dealing with the problem of men, masculinity and the family, in other words, that of gender bias and gender politics.

As Jenny Bourne Taylor points out, although it is the passion, silence and reticence which drives the mystery narrative of this novel, yet it remained the male’s prerogative to start off this mystery. Blake and Ablewhite are both
very much involved with the mystery of the moonstone. Franklin, more so because it is he who acts as the 'messenger' in bringing the moonstone to the Verinder household. And just as he is responsible for bringing it, he is also very much responsible for its disappearance. Godfrey Ablewhite, goes a step farther and where Blake makes the moonstone disappear unconsciously, Ablewhite is very much conscious and guilty of its disappearance. The reader is slowly but surely enmeshed within this mysterious narrative and with bated breath waits for the suspense to end and the generation of suspense is aimed at a pleasure that unconsciously delights and unnerves the unsuspecting reader. Coming to the narrative of *The Moonstone*, Collins again adopts the technique of multiple first person narrators. Each narrator recalls his experiences first-hand. This ensures a continuity in the flow of the narrative, making for interesting reading. It also guards against the flaw of repetition. Here Collins relies less on the testimony of the principal characters and more on the narrative experiences of the butler, the lawyer and the poor relation after establishing their professional and moral competence. For the flashback episodes, Collins makes do with an interesting detective reconstruction of past events. A significant and welcome difference here, is the absence of the villain's confession at the end. The narrative seeks to establish not only the moonstone to its place of origin, but also tries to normalise the social and sexual dysfunctions within the family circle. The narrative closure attempts to retain peace in the lives of the inmates of the Verinder household.

As is natural in the English psyche, the natives are the prime suspects, as they are also guilty of practising such occult devices as clairvoyance to find out
the diamond's whereabouts. Doubt also falls on Rosanna, although now very much penitent and even Rachel is not allowed to go scot free. But it is actually Blake, the person responsible for the presence of the moonstone in the Verinder household, who steals the diamond, albeit unknowingly. Thus, the search for the moonstone, necessarily entails a reconstruction of past events. The past is to be scrutinised from both the historical and psychological points of view, to give some meaning to the present search for the moonstone. In its construction of the social, psychic and cognitive processes at work, *The Moonstone* tries to strike a balance between the various resemblances and differences of the past and the present. Thus, the ordinary and extraordinary, homely and alien, the occult practices of the natives and English imperialism, are all juxtaposed to make an interesting whole. A direct correspondence is sought between the social understanding of the different psyches and the colonial domination practised by the English. The narrative itself is recounted by people under various social and psychic influences, who are finally merged within the central narrative. Thus, there are two strands of narratives striving for a place within the central narrative in the novel. No event is narrated serially nor does it take place in any set or fixed relations. On the one hand, we have the framework of the novel, its very structure and this is a linking of the various narratives of the individual narrators. On the other hand is the narrative, which tries to find a rationale or meaning through the different episodes by arranging them from the past to the present, that is, taking the social, psychological and historical points of view.

The novel itself is divided into Prologue, Story and Epilogue and the general English story is narrated within a very native Indian set up. The story
shows a division between the loss and restoration of the diamond. Gabriel Betteredge narrates that part of the story which concerns the loss of the moonstone. He describes the advent of the diamond into the Verinder household and consequent turmoil in its wake, the love that blooms between Rachel and Blake, Blake’s unconscious theft of the precious stone on the night of the birthday, the failure of the police and ultimately Rosanna’s suicide. Then, we have, Miss Clack and her hypocritical religiosity; Bruff, the family lawyer; Blake; Jennings; Sergeant Cuff; Dr. Candy and Gabriel Betteredge once again. This part of the narrative also goes over Rachel’s indecision regarding Blake and Ablewhite; Rosanna’s letter along with the stained nightshirt; Blake’s shocking realisation of being guilty of the theft; Jennings’s experiment on Blake; Cuff’s reappearance and finally the tracking down of the actual culprit, Ablewhite. The Epilogue has one principal narrator, Murthwaite, who has commendable knowledge of India and its ways, and he outlines the restoration of the moonstone in the Hindu temple.

Blake, somehow doubles up as the general editor and specific narrator, and where he is not directly involved, he has sought out the assistance of the other narrators. One important drawback here as pointed out by Jenny Bourne Taylor28, is that, the control of narrative is not always focussed on narrative time, because Blake reconstructs the narrative much later, after the actual events have taken place. In the same way, the conscious and unconscious narratives both give pleasure to the reader, who is trying to detect the crime. The inconsistencies and false clues further heighten the suspense in the narrative thought process, along with heightening of the ‘detective fever’ in The
Moonstone. More importantly, the subdued male voice is at times over ridden to show the simmering voice of female dissent. Once again, Collins here is dealing with gender politics.

The most interesting but ambiguous narrator is Jennings himself. Jennings conducts the experiment on Blake, which changes the very course of the narrative. His attitude to the experiment is both subjective and objective, while administering instructions to Blake, he also tries to come to terms with his failure in life. Jennings’s journal provides the clue to Blake’s unconscious theft of the moonstone and is the tensest moment in the detective process. As an epitome of an admixture of different racial and cultural backgrounds, he, however, is a point at which all these superficial differences merge. Blake, on the other hand is also attracted by this freak of nature with piebald hair. Jennings is proud of his association with Blake as they are both born of English fathers. He is not at all keen to acknowledge his mother, from whom he got his odd colouring and for which he is now mistrusted. Like Marian Halcombe, in The Woman in White, Jennings shocks the onlooker by his very physical features. Even his emotional balance is an odd mixture of feminine hysteria and manly resolution. Blake is everything that Jennings wanted to be, yet could not be, so, he resolves to do whatever he can to help Blake. Jennings had nursed Dr. Candy and had come to know of the practical joke played on Blake. Added to it, was a strange coincidence between Blake’s artificial nervousness and Jennings’s physiological one. Thus, he takes the initiative in experimenting his smattering of medical knowledge on Blake. Where Fosco, in The Woman in White uses pharmaceutical products to soothe the feverish Marian, Jennings
here uses it to stimulate Dr. Candy. Jennings then uses opium not to sedate or soothe Blake but to stir up his associative process while in delirium as a genuine doctor would do, to disentangle the web of clues hidden on the night of Rachel’s birthday.

Jennings becomes a gothic figure not only because of his unwholesome appearance, but also his subdued self and uncommunicative silence is a cause for concern. This is evident when Blake tries to peruse through his journal. When Jennings commands him to stop, all of a sudden, Blake gets a glimpse of the other Jennings who seemed to be in the grip of an inexplicable emotion, which had him under its control. Again, by becoming Blake’s ‘Friday’, as Tamar Heller suggests, he gradually merges into society, first as Collins, who inspite of writing against the idiosyncrasies of the Victorian society, is enveloped by the inherent social order, of his day. The suggestion is that, Collins, like Dickens, pointed out the discrepancies to be rectified in the Victorian family, to normalise the role of the family in the society and, to find acceptability for his written word. By obstinately refusing to tell his own story, Jennings is in some ways reflecting Collins’s predicament, where he tries to shield his private life, from the prying public eye. Tamar Heller, also points out that, Jennings made Blake promise that he would bury his journal with him, and stressing this Collins wanted to show Jennings’s yearning, like Keats’s for anonymity. As Mary Jacobus points out, this was actually the fate of Romantic literature in the Victorian times. She claims that the buried letter is actually an image to show the Victorians the “divorce of the Romantic imagination from its revolutionary impulse” Through Jennings Collins voiced his fears of being
hounded, like Keats, by the critics. He was afraid that his radicalism would not go down very well with the public. There are also other similarities pointed out by Tamar Heller. Collins and Jennings, “Both are opium addicts ... and both respond satirically to convention.... Collins claims that he overcame ‘merciless pains’ and ‘useless tears’ in order not to disappoint his good readers”(TMS xxxiii).

Then, the Indians, like the moonstone, by remaining on the periphery of the narrative, become central to the narrative. By linking the Prologue with the story, inspite of being on the parameters of the narrative, they emerge as the rightful owners of the moonstone. The association of occult and transcendence with the moonstone, brings larger issues into focus – the domination of British Imperialism pervading not only its colonies, but also signifying all other kinds of domination – the domination of the colonised by the colonisers, women by men, the domination of the lower class by the upper class, the domination of the family for the greater benefit of the society. Collins’s unconventional attitude as an English writer who upholds the cause of the Indian Brahmins and undoubted contempt for the rebel Hemcastle, is especially highlighted by critic John Reed. This is how Collins links up the Indians and Jennings. Bruff and Betteredge, inspite of being rational distrust them because of their darker colouring. By being absentees, their presence is missed, yet at the same time they cannot be merged with the central narrative. From them, Murthwaite takes over the narrative thread and brings the story of The Moonstone to its logical conclusion. He traces the history of the moonstone to its restoration in the Hindu temple. He is very authoritative and convincing as a narrator. Various
meanings have been assigned to the significance of the moonstone, yet these meanings have to be taken in their combination to understand the importance of the moonstone. "It represents 'wild' nervous energy..., conveys the diamond's influence and attraction, ... suggests links between psychic power and sexual energy ... meaning ... is continually merging with the objects and people ..."²²

This brings us to the significance of the jewel and its interconnection with another important image in the novel, the Shivering Sand. The Shivering Sand is associated with the presence and suicide of Rosanna Spearman, 'the penitent and deformed servant', which ultimately is a complex repertoire of various kinds of emotions, dominations, and revolt. The Shivering Sand is the other dominant image in this novel, attracting one by its very repulsive nature. The frightening movement of the sand is almost as terrifying as the wild energy of the moonstone. Both are forces to be reckoned with and influence the lives of several important narrators of The Moonstone. The Shivering Sand, affects Rosanna's emotions. The force within the sand is intangible, yet all pervasive in its effect on Rosanna. It threatens her peace of mind in her life-time and in her death makes her an object of pity and ridicule. Her narrative, mainly the narrative of the letter in the Shivering Sand, contains the vital clue to the eventual solution of the mystery. It helps it solving the mysterious theft of the moonstone and also solves the other deeper mystery of Rachel's and her own silence. Thus, E.R. Gruner²³ points out to Rosanna's crucial role in uniting the mystery and the marriage plots by her recognition that the paint on Franklin's nightgown is sufficient proof against him, at least of his improper visit to Rachel's room.
And this letter brings us to the ‘viscous’ Shivering Sand, the site of the buried letter. As Albert Hutter, says, the Shivering Sand, is an image for the female body, “with a ‘face’, that at the turn of the tide ‘dimple’(s) and ‘quiver’(s) like ‘some grotesque coquette’”.34 The sand in between ‘two spits of rock’ is a female sexual symbol and parodies female orgasm by its “shivering and trembling in a manner most remarkable to see”. According to Tamar Heller35, the sand which resembles a ‘broad brown face’, is actually representing the dark Indians who are actually “hundreds of suffocating people ... all struggling to get to the surface” (TMS 28). Like, Rosanna, with her deformed shoulder, one rising above the other, with her love for Blake, wanting to rise above her class, these Indians are also trying to rise above themselves. Where Limping Lucy, echoes their hopes of success, Rosanna, seems to have resigned herself to her fate, by accepting the failed revolt of the Indians as her own, against class and gender domination, because their rise only ensures that they only sink ‘lower and lower in the dreadful deeps’ (TMS 28). This is again reminiscent of the period of 1848, a time of social unrest, marked by revolt against all forms of domination. Rosanna tells Betteredge of her fatal attraction for the Shivering Sand. “Something draws me to it ... I try to keep away from it, but I cannot. Sometimes .... I think my grave is waiting for me there”. (TMS 27). This grave is not only the receptacle for Rosanna’s deformed body, it is also the repository of all her secrets and promises her obscurity. Her suicide in the sand terminates any kind of female uprising against male domination of class and gender.
The Sand also brings us round to a staunch supporter of Rosanna, Limping Lucy. Like Marian Halcombe and Laura, in *The Woman in White*, Limping Lucy is always present to vouch for Rosanna. Her erotic attraction again complicates the heterosexual plot, by its very homosexual overtones. But most of all Limping Lucy is a representative of her class, striving hard to rise above her social position. She tells Betteredge, "'Ha, Mr. Betteredge, the day is not far off when the poor will rise against the rich. I pray Heaven they may begin with him'" (TMS 207). Lucy, thus echoes the other marginal tensions in the novel, which make *The Moonstone* more complex. Concealed within her intense hatred of Blake is the secret passion for Rosanna, the penetration of female secrets by the male detectives like Cuff and Blake, the female desire to rise above male domination of any kind and finally the social uprising of 1848 against class domination by the upper classes and gentry\(^3\). The climax between this male female conflict, takes place when Blake, in possession of Rosanna's letter goes to the quicksand to retrieve from it the stained nightgown. "'In this position, my face was within a few feet of the surface of the quicksand. ... the point of the stick first entered the quicksand'" (TMS 343). Tamar Heller interprets this act of detection with erotic overtones. Blake's stick is termed as the phallic stick and the sand 'vagina dentata' and the inherent shivering as female orgasm. Once again this act underlines the use of male virility in controlling female mysteriousness. Having "'... penetrated the secret which the quicksand had kept from every other living creature,'" (TMS 345). Blake makes two erotic discoveries: the stained nightgown, which is evidence not only of his theft of the gem, but also symbolically his violation of Rachel's virginity, and
the letter, which contained the secret of Rosanna’s longing for his love. As
Heller interprets this act of Blake’s, she deduces that Blake is threatened by
Rosanna’s sexuality and it is ultimately the supervision/satisfaction/pacification
of his detective fever that frees him from this threat.

Miss Clack, like Rosanna cloaks her attraction for Godfrey Ablewhite
beneath a façade of religious piety. In her fanatical narrative, Miss Clack
transmits her religiosity into a parody, by trying to disguise her sexual obsession
for Godfrey Ablewhite. She professes, “I am indebted to my parents.... for
having had habits of order and regularity instilled into me at a very early
age.” (TMS 214). What Miss Clack, wishes for Rachel is pretty obvious.
Conscious of her poor relation status, she shows off her gratitude by praying for
the good of the family’s daughter, who has been blessed with looks and family.
But, what perhaps she is actually praying for is Rachel’s further moral
derangement, so that she could better show her piety and fellow feeling. She
wants to make herself out to be a paragon of virtue, and thereby cloak her
frustrations of a maid on the shelf.

In Rachel and Rosanna however, the differences in their situations is
eliminated by the death of Rosanna. Rosanna’s transgressiveness, arises from
her audacity to rise above her class by her improper love for Blake. Trying to
reform herself, from her past criminality, Rosanna is made all the more self
conscious of her crime and position. This reformation of the self, increased
Rosanna’s self-hatred instead of raising her self esteem, which ultimately led to
her suicide. She thus writes: “My life was not a very hard life to bear when I
was a thief. It was only when they taught me at the reformatory to feel my own
degradation that the days grew longer and weary...

Rachel, inspite of losing her diamond, doesn’t overstep the limits of propriety and very much maintains the decorum due in her social position but in doing so she becomes hysterical. She shows a similar kind of attachment with the diamond that Rosanna shared with the Shivering Sand. And that is where the comparison and contrast ends. Loving Frank as she did, she could not come to terms that her lover should stoop so low as to steal her ‘moonstone’ to pay off his debts. This was completely at par with her moral up-bringing and unable to unlove him, try as she might her conscience and passion were at loggerheads with each other, which ended in her becoming a hysterical wreck.

Luce Irigaray here makes an interesting observation. “The virginal woman ... is pure exchange value.” What she means is that a woman, when still a virgin, is simply a symbol for relationships with men. Once a woman loses her virginity, she is transformed into a mother from a mere woman, she is valued for her reproductive uses. She stops having her social exchange value and is entrapped as in the case of a private property. Thus, Elizabeth Rose Gruner, understands, there to be a significant connection between Rachel and her uncut diamond, which is, however, flawed. According to her also, the ‘flaw’ in the diamond is the flaw that women, in Victorian England, were assessed only because of their reproductive potential. Thus, the diamond, which becomes a symbol for Rachel’s virginity, is valued as a diamond only by the Indians. The others, excepting Franklin Blake, see it and Rachel, only for its exchange value. John Reed’s observations regarding the diamond also need to be noted here. He observes that the diamond is: “In itself ambiguous, .... the Moonstone becomes
the sign of England's imperial depredations — the symbol of a national rather than a personal crime."39

While the mystery of the disappearance of the diamond is intensified with the passion and love of Rachel and Rosanna, the marriage or love angle is equally mystified. Rachel rightly chooses Franklin. She transgresses Victorian convention by being unconventionally silent and is later brought into the fold of conventional domestic bliss through marriage with Franklin Blake. Franklin, inherits his father's wealth and doesn't have to depend on Rachel's inheritance when he marries her. The occult, transgressive and marginal incidents and characters, because of their excessive secrecy, make themselves prominent, which in turn overthrows the intended narrative structure. Thus, Jenny Bourne Taylor40 suggests that in *The Moonstone* the elusive narrative framework of the novel admits different hypotheses forwarded by the different narrative voices at work. The common element at work is Franklin Blake, who takes the garb of general editor and is also made a subject of psychological study.

Five narrative strains are at work, in *The Moonstone*, vastly differing from each other in their different hypotheses. There is Betteredge, Bruff, Cuff, Murthwaite and Jennings, all offering their different hypotheses and Blake trying to weave them into a cohesive whole. The result, is that the specific narrator, has to sift and assess the conflicting and differing narratives, to help the reader, understand the plot better. This does not necessarily mean, that they are all unreliable and cannot be trusted for what they are. Since all the narratives are actually retrospective accounts by the different narrators, the sequence of time is not maintained. The narratives overlap each other and at times the more
important and crucial narratives come up much later. Again, Betteredge interconnects the accounts of the different narrators and lends an air of authenticity to the novel. The various digressions and sub-plots become justified in Betteredge's narrative. Through his narrative, the retrospective accounts of incidents recollected from one's memory—long after the incidents have taken place, form a logical resolution to the final solution of the mystery plot. His role as narrator reveals his efficiency and sincerity and at the same time validates Blake's role as narrator. Both act as the conscience of the moonstone and are responsible for the narrative inversions in the novel. Blake, finally controls the narrative, through his efforts in the process of detection and goes through the psychological experiment, at Jennings's initiative who tries to help him regain his social position. Thus, through his collection and sifting of other narratives Blake finally reasserts his manliness and social position, by finally marrying Rachel. By moving through 'the slow and toilsome journey from the darkness to the light', Blake finally dissociates and frees himself from the past and remains free to grow and develop himself in the future.

In *The Moonstone*, the complicated plot was devised as a game of skill between writer and reader. The authorial narrative is solely driven by the author, who decides which clues can be given away and which cannot. Collins is an exponent of the 'fair-play' convention, where the intelligent reader, if sufficiently alert can deduce the mystery himself. Collins, sets a trend, with his democratic views in the detective novel, where each witness' testimony is given due weightage, be he the lord of the family or the family maid-servant. Collins enriched his narrative with letters, diaries and collateral narratives. This,
however, created unnecessary digressions in the plot. One plus point, however, was that these helped in revealing the psychology of the characters concerned.

Again, critics like D.A. Miller argue that the tendency of the multiple narratives in *The Moonstone*, helps Blake in unravelling the mystery of the moonstone. But narratives like those of Miss Clack, by being so distorted reveal one prominent narrator, the author, who has the last word — by correcting and clarifying the various distortions. Collins was a serious novelist. He never wrote a book without a mission, he looked down on those authors who wrote otherwise. Collins believed that it was the duty of the novelist to not only earn or entertain but also educate and reform. Collins was very much conscious of his duty towards society. So, inspite of the fact that *The Moonstone* is the least loaded with social innuendoes, certain abuses are magnified in the novel.

*The Moonstone*, very subtly probes the problems posed by imperial domination of the English over the colonies, which is reflected, back home, in the domination of women (gender bias) and domination of and indifference to servants in general (class bias). Rachel’s distinctiveness from other girls are also the signs of Eliza Lynn Linton’s ‘Girl of the Period’, that embodiment of mid-Victorian fears about the nature of modern femininity, which first appeared in the *Saturday Review* in 1868 (i.e. the same year as *The Moonstone*). Rachel’s secrecy, her self-dependence and exceptional self-control inspite of being transgressive, in a sense only heightened those virtues of self-containment, modesty and restraint which were universally recommended to respectable middle-class women, and were, indeed the defining characteristics of domestic femininity. While the male characters work to detect the theft, Rachel is
engaged in a psychic drama of detecting what she perceives as the awful truth about herself: that she, cannot ‘tear from her heart’ her love for a man she knows (on the evidence of her own eyes) to be unworthy. This guilty secret is a peculiarly feminine one: “Oh, ...! How can I make a man understand that a feeling which horrifies, can be a feeling that fascinates me ...”(TMS 205).

Some more information on the history of Rosanna and Jennings would have been welcome. But here again, we can counteract the argument by simply stating that what is revealed of Rosanna’s and Jenning’s past life is enough for the movement of the plot. Their psychological delineation would have perhaps resulted in an unnecessary digression.

Although, Collins’s *The Moonstone*, incorporated and exploited many of the features of *The Woman in White*, yet at the same time, it strikingly underplays its sensational features. Perhaps for that reason it has enjoyed an existence as permanent as the gem itself. *The Woman in White* remains very much a part and parcel of the sensation genre; *The Moonstone* inspite of its sensationalism has been referred to as one of the greatest detective novels by none other than T.S. Eliot.

Studies of the detective story felt obliged to make preliminary obeisance to *The Moonstone* and in discussions of how it anticipated or established detective features, .... a novel about an experiment with opium, written under the influence of opium, .... its representation of the primal scene ... a new career as an anti-imperialist novel(TMS viii).
So, as regards, the theme and technique, there is a continuity in these three of Collins’s main novels. He concentrates on crime, mystery and suspense and his narrative technique shows a similarity of style. Everyone of his characters narrates the part of the mystery that most concerns him or her. The only difference in this novel is that “… male characters and the male viewpoint dominate… linking The Moonstone with the later detective genre, and its predominantly male emphasis” (TMS xii-xiii).

Tamar Heller sees two narrative endings in The Moonstone, the English ending and the native ending. The English ending suppresses all that is ‘outcast and other’. Godfrey Ablewhite, ultimately killed by the Indians is finally revealed for what he is, while Blake is brought within the fold of domesticity. The Indian ending, given by Murthwaite shows the Indians restore the gem and disperse amid ‘dead silence’ once again to become outcasts. This ending prophesises a repetition of the historical cycle, where repression is followed by resistance. A certain thread of continuity exists in the above studied novels of William Wilkie Collins. The Woman in White '1860', No Name '1862' and The Moonstone '1868', have more to them, than mere sensation. Collins in The Woman in White makes use of the marriage and property laws to manipulate and strip the heroine of her paternal property, social status and even her identity. Whereas, in No Name, Collins makes the main female character use marriage as a subterfuge to reclaim her paternal property and social status. Both novels deal with the victimisation of women on the legal and economic front.
No Name charts the gradual destruction of the Vanstone family upon the deaths of the Vanstone parents, wherein their two daughters are declared illegitimate. In The Woman in White, Sir Percival Glyde's life is steeped in illegitimacy and like Magdalen resorts to marriage scheming to have social status and identity. The only difference here being, that in No Name, Magdalen fights to regain what is rightfully hers whereas, Percival in The Woman in White tries to ensnare something which can never rightfully be called his. Again, two of Collins's most hysterical heroines belong to two of his most well known novels – No Name and The Moonstone. Magdalen of No Name and Rachel of The Moonstone are both prone to hysteria and restlessness. Magdalen is transgressive and hysterical because she has been disinherited. On the other hand, Rachel is not disinherited, she does lose a precious heirloom, but does not resort to every trick in the book to retrieve her possession. Again, there is a thread of erotica in two of these three novels of Collins. The love and protection that Marian showers on Laura in The Woman in White is matched by the protective attitude that Limping Lucy adopts towards Rosanna in The Moonstone. What Marian and Limping Lucy feel for the other two respectively is an unnatural feeling of a woman towards another woman. Collins, like Dickens, uses 'colonies' in the same way that Dickens uses Australia. Both places are far removed from the actual scene or event, are annexed to England and dumping grounds for people with dubious reputations. Hartright, in The Woman in White, disappears in South America and magically learns not only tracking skills, but also manly resolve. In No Name, the place is Canada. Here
Andrew Vanstone indulges in youthful excesses, Kirke enhances his strengths and Frank Clare increases his atrophy.

Of course, Collins does not maintain a thread of uniformity in the symbolic use of all his devices, in these novels. The Sand in *The Moonstone* has the capacity of absorbing secrets and keeping them. But in *No Name*, the sand is not endowed with such powers. It has no capacity to absorb and keep secrets and lets down, whoever chooses to cross over it. In *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, Anne Catherick and Rosanna Spearman, die, preserving what they think are vital secrets. A striking feature of all Wilkie Collins's novels is the absence of what one might call a hero or a heroine. Collins very democratically distributes the interest over all the characters so that the protagonist is debarred from enjoying all the attention. In *No Name*, Magdalen in her role of a transgressive and hysterical young girl cannot be elevated to the rank of a heroine. In *The Moonstone*, Rachel and Blake do come to the foreground very often, but neither of them have been given the stature of a hero or heroine. In *No Name*, Wragge directs Magdalen in her natural histrionic abilities, his directions are suggestive of omnipotence associated with narrative omnipotence. Jennings, in *The Moonstone*, like Wragge, is seen as a literary critic of the Victorian society and its underworld, in other words, a 'parodic emblem' of Collins.

Wilkie Collins was a serious writer. He held in contempt those whom he called the 'holiday authors', who wrote only to amuse themselves or to pass their time. Collins opined that it was the duty of the novelist to not only please, but also give some food for thought to his readers. In *The Woman in White*, he pointed out the danger of lunatic asylums being in private hands and in *No
Name, the law, which did not acknowledge illegitimate children. "He regarded himself as a missioner, and in nearly every one of his books preached a sermon or endeavoured to found a crusade.... gone about looking for abuses in order to write a story about them...."

Thus, Wilkie Collins set out to explore certain dominant trends in Victorian Society — the class system, the family, crime, and the human psyche. He used the narrative of detective fiction and the elements of crime, mystery and suspense to explore these values in the Victorian ethos — that it had its dualities and ambiguities he was well aware of. He used certain clichés only to subvert them and show the mystery of self. Collins’s world was a world of crime but the fictive world he created rested on his ability to unmask the self — therefore his novels are a journey in search for a unity that would combine his fascination for mystery and crime and reveal his interest in the complex analysis of a world where the real and unreal merge and combine to mask and unmask self and desire. It was his obsession for the law, his frantic search for meaning in a world where stability was not a strong point in his own personal life. Crisis and resolution were reflected in these novels as a means of confronting a divided self. Thus, mystery and suspense were but second nature to a man who mastered this art in his novels. His novels therefore, reflect himself and this crisis in the Victorian ethos. Inner tensions were reflected in the moods and emotions of the chief characters. These were but symptoms of an age. This was also taken up by another great writer — Dickens, who is studied, in the forthcoming chapter.
Notes


6. See, Cvetkovich, Ann. 'Economy of Sensation and The Woman in White'.


17. See, David, Deirdre. ‘Rewriting the Male Plot,’ in Wilkie Collins’s *No Name*: Captain Wragge orders an Omelette and Mrs. Wragge goes into Custody from *Out of Bounds: Male Writers and Gender Criticism*, ed. Laura Claridge and Elizabeth Langland (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990).


27. See, Taylor, Jenny Bourne: *In the Secret Theatre of Home*.


35. See, Heller, Tamar. *Dead Secrets*.


38. See, Gruner Elisabeth Rose. Family Secrets.


40. See, Taylor Jenny Bourne. *In The Secret Theatre of Home*.


43. See, Heller, Tamar. Dead Secrets.

44. Melville, Lewis: Victorian Novelists, 133.