

The Woman in White: Marian Halcombe, or Checkmate on Women's Empowerment

La dama de blanco: Marian Halcombe, o jaque mate al empoderamiento de la mujer

BELÉN FERNÁNDEZ CRESPO

Independent scholar. Madrid, Spain.

E-mail: nyb777@hotmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0003-0724-0915

Received: 29/10/2021. Accepted: 29/04/2022.

How to cite this article: Fernández Crespo, Belén. “*The Woman in White*: Marian Halcombe, or Checkmate on Women's Empowerment.” *ES Review: Spanish Journal of English Studies*, vol. 43, 2022, pp. 157–81.



This work is licensed under [CC-BY-NC](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.24197/ersjes.43.2022.157-181>

Abstract: Wilkie Collins's fraudulent rhetoric of protest against patriarchal Victorian oppression is manifested through his manipulation of Marian Halcombe's character: she does not represent an attainable example of women's empowerment but rather of women's subordination. Marian confronts Victorian patriarchal discourse through the doomed, symbolic games of chess she plays with Fosco and Collins, but she is inevitably disciplined, tamed, and transformed into the perfect “Angel in the House.” When the novel concludes, neither gender roles will have been changed nor equality attained, and feminine readers will have been lured into accepting that resignation, sacrifice and submission are the only alternatives.

Keywords: women's empowerment; feminism; Victorian patriarchal discourse; Wilkie Collins; *The Woman in White*.

Summary: Introduction. “This is the story of what a woman's patience can endure, and what a man's resolution can achieve.” “A woman of ten thousand.” “I can match you at chess . . . (with the inevitable female drawbacks).” “Dear and admirable woman . . . Resignation is sublime—adopt it.” Conclusion.

Resumen: La retórica fraudulenta de Wilkie Collins contra la opresión patriarcal Victoriana se manifiesta a través de la utilización que éste hace del personaje de Marian Halcombe, quien no representa un modelo alcanzable del empoderamiento femenino, sino de la subordinación de la mujer. Marian, que se enfrenta al discurso patriarcal Victoriano jugando un simbólico juego de ajedrez con Fosco y Collins, acaba siendo inevitablemente disciplinada, domada y transformada en el perfecto “Ángel de la Casa.” Al término de la novela, ni los roles de género han cambiado ni se ha alcanzado la igualdad, sino que se ha inducido a las lectoras femininas a aceptar que la resignación, el sacrificio y la sumisión son las únicas alternativas posibles.

Palabras clave: empoderamiento de la mujer; feminismo; discurso patriarcal victoriano; Wilkie Collins; *The Woman in White*.

Sumario: Introducción. “Esta es la historia de lo que puede resistir la paciencia de una mujer y de lo que puede lograr la determinación de un hombre.” “Una mujer entre diez mil.” “Puedo competir con usted al ajedrez. . . (contando con las inevitables desventajas que conlleva el ser mujer).” “Querida y admirada mujer . . . La resignación es sublime. Adóptela.” Conclusión.

INTRODUCTION

Wilkie Collins has been traditionally read as a feminist author. In 1944, Dorothy Sayers found Collins “genuinely feminist in his treatment of women” (qtd. in O’Neill 3). Phillip O’Neill himself affirms Collins is not a feminist (187), but he detects some anticipation of an early feminist consciousness in Collins’s unique presentation of women. In the 1950s, Collins’s work was considered feminist: first, for exposing the unjust restrictions imposed on women by Victorian society; second, for creating resolute heroines with a mind of their own; third, for showing sympathy for the fallen woman (Ashley 271). In the 1970s, critics still considered Collins a proto-feminist:

[I]n the last twenty-five years or so . . . Collins has been “recontextualized” as a subversive or dissident writer, whose novels offered a critique of the class and gender hierarchies of Victorian society; as a proto-feminist whose portrayal of such transgressive, independent women as Marian Halcombe . . . [was] part of a more general exposure of the social constraints on women; and as a social critic who exposed the hypocrisies involved in constructing and sustaining Victorian bourgeois respectability. (Pykett 223)

The critical opinions on the author hardly changed throughout the next few decades. In the 1990s, his novels were considered to display an attack on gender conventions, as in Pamela Perkins’s and Mary Donaghy’s *A Man’s Resolution*. The fact that Collins operated with Female Gothics—a genre depicting female victimization where “distressed female heroines are imprisoned in the domestic sphere and threatened with extortion, rape and forced marriage” (Ledoux 1)—was interpreted by feminist critics like Tamar Heller, in *The Woman in White: Portrait of the Artist as a Professional Man*, as a means to expose the victimization of women in a patriarchal society. In the 2000s, Collins was deemed to portray female resistance to prescribed gender roles (Oulton 309). His queering gender roles and cross-gendered characterizations added to the accepted feminist author theory, for all “sensation fiction exposes the nineteenth-century

navigation of shifting gender roles and identities, [since] it interrogates gender conventions and notoriously destabilizes the traditional gender binary” (Zigarovich 1). For Liddle, cross-gendered characterizations together with “a sustained engagement with women’s lives and legal rights” contributes to Collins’s work being “read into the records of feminist criticism and queer theory” (37).

The feminist-writer denomination has prevailed despite Collins’s inconsistencies in his defense of feminine vindication, which have been ascribed to inadequate categorizations of gender identities (O’Neill 64), to the Victorian man “upstaging the dissident moralist” (Meckier 104), to a narrative conservatism “that represents . . . his need to satisfy a wide array of readers” (Gaylin 325), and to the containment of the author’s subversiveness (Pykett 20–21).

As regards *The Woman in White*, it has been considered not only a denunciation of Victorian disabling discourse, a critique of class and gender hierarchies of Victorian society, but also a proto-feminist portrait of transgressive, independent women (Pykett 223). The persona of Miss Halcombe has been deemed to question gender roles, destabilize gender boundaries (Pykett 126) and break the boundaries of pliable, lovable femininity and exemplary wifehood represented by Laura. Marian is “one of nature’s heroes” (Auerbach 142) and “is described as possessing supposedly masculine qualities, such as intelligence and courage” (Oulton 312). However, though Collins appears to be setting an example of women’s attainable empowerment through Marian, being a feminist would imply “being concerned with rectifying the oppression of women in domestic life as well as with promoting equal rights between the sexes” (Colvin 9), and there is no such rectification neither in the plot of the novel nor in the persona of Miss Halcombe. What is more, “as a woman, Marian is debarred from action” (Oulton 312).

In this essay, I will give a new reading of *The Woman in White*, which proves Collins’s classification as a feminist writer wrong. I will uncover how the author constructs Marian’s uniqueness to deconstruct it; how the character of Miss Halcombe is a source of indoctrination for female readers, a deterrent against any inclinations toward any behavior outside the boundaries of Victorian feminine ideals, and an epitome of submission to patriarchy. Collins does not develop any rhetoric of protest against the submission of women or for women’s empowerment; he is not a proto-feminist, but a Victorian man who believes women should remain within the limits established for them by society. I will demonstrate how the

author annihilates Marian's feminine uniqueness by making her play a tainted game of chess—this game standing for a rebellious fight against patriarchy—with Fosco and himself; how he suffocates her proactivity and determination; how Marian's submission is procrastinated in the opening sentence of the novel. Collins checkmates and invalidates Marian as a positive paragon of attainable women's empowerment by suffocating her voice, domesticating and transforming her into a perfect “Angel in the House,” while instructing the feminine audience of the novel in the inescapability of Victorian patriarchal rules.

1. “THIS IS THE STORY OF WHAT A WOMAN’S PATIENCE CAN ENDURE, AND WHAT A MAN’S RESOLUTION CAN ACHIEVE”

The development of events in Marian's storyline is procrastinated by the opening sentence of the novel, the title of this section. Walter, the hero, narrator, and editor of the narratives told by the different witnesses, imprints the first words in his testimony with the Doctrine of Separate Spheres encapsulated in Ruskin's words: “The man... is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender . . . but the woman's power is for rule, not for battle-and her intellect is not for invention or Creation, but for Sweet ordering, arrangement and decision” (77).

Ruskin's domestic ideal is a theory of gender difference in which men and women are complementary opposites, “a moralized version of the home as a sacrosanct privatized space as opposed to the public sphere of work, economics and politics” (Pykett 47, 48). Collins validates the Victorian gender role of the virtuous woman through the “masculinized” character of Marian Halcombe, the antithesis to Laura's perfect feminine “piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (Welter 152). This concept of respectable femininity, “or the womanly woman, was used as a way of keeping women in their place” (Pykett 49). Laura does not have a voice of her own to share her reactions towards the events that she motivates: whereas even Hester Prynne, illiterate, has the opportunity to express herself through a scrivener, Laura's identity is under the absolute control of the narrative authority, for “the struggle for narrative authority thus involves both the power to control an individual's identity as well as the public account of it” (Gailyn 308). For Sercan Öztekin, in *Subversion of Gender Stereotypes*, Laura is the embodiment of a stereotype; for Shannon Branfield in *Sufficient for Herself*, she is the construct of a submissive woman unable to act on her own. For Debora Sarnelli, in

Gender Ambiguity, Domesticity, and the Public Space, she is an idealized beauty and an “Angel in the House”: the archetype popularized by Coventry Patmore’s poem of the same name, which presents the “perfect daughter, sister, wife, and mother . . . who took care of the housework and children . . . without complaining” (Querol 17). A candid, fragile woman in need of protection, unintelligent Laura needs to be guided by brilliant Marian: “Tell me, pray, tell me, what you think about it. I don’t know what to think or what to do next” (*WIW* 252).¹ Whereas Laura is an epitome of obedience and proper female behavior, rebellious Marian asserts “her personality outside of the boundaries imposed by Victorian gender roles” (Welter 152). After discovering the bruises Sir Percival inflicted on Laura’s arm, transgressive Marian defies Walter’s opening sentence when she declares “our endurance must end, and our resistance must begin today” (*WIW* 268). However, as shall be seen, resistance is futile, for “the authoritative narrator of the preamble asserts that gender roles are fixed and absolute” (Gailyn 306).

2. “A WOMAN OF TEN THOUSAND”

Marian Halcombe is an extraordinary woman. In an age in which “the stamp of masculine approval [of women] was placed upon ignorance of the world, weakness, lack of opinions, general helplessness and weakness; in short, recognition of female inferiority to the male” (Petrie 184), Marian proves otherwise. Her proactivity, resolution, and bravery demonstrate that she is not the typically Victorian frail, inferior woman. Through the eyes of Walter, the reader not only learns to appreciate her sense and courage, her force, energy and decision, but also comprehends that Marian is “a woman of ten thousand” (*WIW* 117) just as Laura is the woman whose only worth is the ten thousand pounds her husband will get in the event of her death. However, despite Walter’s apparent admiration towards Marian’s independent attitude, he will garnish her description with a detail that will prevent the feminine reader from ambicioning women’s empowerment.

¹ All references to *The Woman in White* will be made to the Penguin Popular Classics edition of 1994, abbreviated as *WIW* in bracketed references.

2.1 Marian's Moustache

When Walter first meets Miss Halcombe, he feels attracted to her graceful figure and her perfect waist. As she advances toward Walter, who is anxious to see her face, the harsh reality of her ugly masculinity is presented to us:

Never was the fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied by the face and head that crowned it. The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm, masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead. Her expression—bright, frank, and intelligent—appeared, while she was silent, to be altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability, without which the beauty of the handsomest woman alive is beauty incomplete (*WTW* 24–25).

Marian's *deficit* in gentleness and pliability—the ideal characteristics contained in Laura's perfect femininity—is physically shown in Walter's description. Walter transforms Miss Halcombe's "perfectly shaped" figure into something grotesque by garnishing it with a mustache, which causes the reader to feel repulsion. Marian's masculine mouth and jaw originate from Collins's desire to avert any inclination towards any behavior outside the boundaries established for Victorian women. According to Miller: "Marian may be taken to suggest how the novel envisions that female reader whom, though it nominally ignores, it has taken into practical account" (130). Even though the feminine reader may admire Marian's determination, she is to refrain from imitating her because of her disgusting masculine appearance²: in an age where the only target of women was to marry, emulating Marian's self-sufficient attitude and downright way would mean ending up as a repellent spinster.³

² Thackeray's Becky Sharp, the calculating social climber, is "attractive but not beautiful" (Hedgecock 141). There seems to be a prevalent "ugliness" vs. beauty theme in Victorian literature, for "once a woman comes fully under the male gaze, she begins to see herself in a negative light, evil, ugly and misshapen" (Leonard 57).

³ Lesnik-Oberstein interprets Marian's spinsterhood as a punishment for transgressing the proper limits of feminine appropriateness (27). She also refers to Susan Sontag's theory on Marian's disabling intelligence as being inscribed in her ugly appearance and preventing her from inspiring desire (28).

Much has been written about Marian's masculine appearance, especially about the relationship between Miss Halcombe and her sister Laura. Considered homoerotic (Hoffer 50; Peterson 67), Marian's aspect has been regarded as the expression of a masculine soul constrained within a female body (Miller 176). Walter's connection with them has been interpreted as generating a "queer erotic triangulation" (Peterson 67) or a bisexual marriage (Dever 114; Haefele-Thomas 32) that accommodates the sister's bond within heteronormativity (Dau and Preston 200). Some critics describe the relationship between the half-sisters as innocent (Dau and Preston 195), as a subversive sororal weapon to protect Marian and Laura from the "vices of the Victorian age and beyond the legitimate structures of authority" (May 84). Whereas Haefele-Thomas (32) develops on the theory of Marian as a new androgynous heroine—a new ideal, an alternative version of womanhood—, Pykett (126), Öztekin (37, 46) and Richard Collins (137) affirm that Marian's mustache and queerness are used for disrupting gender conventions in order to resist patriarchy and subvert Victorian notions of gender. In *The Madwoman Outside the Attic*, Ann Gaylin suggests the idea of in-betweenness and describes Marian as a liminal (transgressive) figure that can move between gender roles, between the public and the domestic space, due to her transgender characterization. In *Transing Wilkie Collins*, Jolene Zigarovich suggests that Collins exploits the growing social interest in the medical investigation of genderqueer and transgender people to attract readers to his work. However, Zigarovich remarks that the narrative forecloses Marian's trans possibilities, and she is "forced to accept the maternal feminine role demanded by the text" (9). In *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic*, Ardel Haefele-Thomas states that Marian is a Victorian queer monster, and explains that her masculinity originates from the attractiveness that Victorian readers found in those "freaks."

Marian's masculinity does not stand for her sexual orientation. In her diary—the most private type of text, for it is written only for the eyes of its creator—Marian never hints at feeling attracted to Laura, and rather she admits her darkest secret to its pages regarding her romantic feelings: "I am almost afraid to confess it, even to these secret pages. The man has interested me, has attracted me, has forced me to like him" (*WIW* 192). Marian confesses the irresistible allure she feels towards Fosco, how the glitter in his eyes "causes me sensations, when I do look, which I would rather not feel" (193), and how she is enraptured by the gentleness in his voice. Miss Halcombe tries to suppress the control the Count exerts over

her feelings, for she knows they are natural enemies, but “when I go downstairs, and get into his company again, he will blind me again, and I shall be flattered again” (197).

2.2 A Mirage of Freedom

Miss Halcombe’s character is used by Collins to enhance the purity of candid, angelic Laura—the Victorian archetype of the frail, passive, and dependent woman any man would love to marry—since Marian’s brightness, courage, and physical appearance make her a devil:

I am dark and ugly, and she is fair and pretty. Everybody thinks me crabbed and odd (with perfect justice); and everybody thinks her sweet-tempered and charming (with more justice still). In short, she is an angel and I am——— Try some of that marmalade, Mr. Hartright, and finish the sentence in the name of female property, for yourself (*WIIW* 26).

However, it is by contradicting “lovable femininity and exemplary wifehood [that] Marian reveals herself as one of nature’s heroes” (Auerbach 158). It is her rebelliousness, the aura of dignity that surrounds her, that makes her so attractive:

Her light flow of talk, and her lively familiarity of manner with a total stranger, were accompanied by an unaffected naturalness and an easy inborn confidence in herself and her position, which would have secured her the respect of the most audacious man breathing (*WIIW* 26).

Marian gives the impression of being emancipated despite the fact that the Victorian era required that middle-class women could not work and were to be dependent on men for their nourishment and care. In a situation wherein Marian and Laura had “neither father nor brother to come to the house and take our parts” (*WIIW* 275), Marian takes the role of substitute male representative of her sister Laura. Miss Halcombe lives under a mirage of freedom due to her uncle’s indolence, for Mr. Fairlie shifts all of his family responsibilities into her shoulders. Marian is used to doing business and to being in charge of the household: she shakes hands with the “strong, steady grasp of a man” (107), she summons Mr. Gilmore, leads the way into her mother’s school, and is consulted by Mr. Fairlie on the issue of Laura’s marriage, just as if she was a male familiar. As no

opposition is raised against Marian's part as head of the Fairlie family, and she performs her role with such ease, even the reader is deceived into believing that women can lead their own lives, that equality is easily attainable, that women's empowerment depends on women's will.

2.3 A Speaker for Victorian Patriarchal Discourse

Notwithstanding her unusual situation of autonomy, Marian is not an advocate for feminism. Despite her "resolute, downright way" (*WIW* 42), Marian does not consider herself a rebel, nor is she in favor of suffragism, whose ideals she rejects in the person of Madame Fosco: "As Eleanor Fairlie she was always talking pretentious nonsense . . ." (191), an "impertinent, capricious woman" (168) who "advocated the rights of women and freedom of female opinion" (207). Marian celebrates how the Countess has been subdued by her husband: "so much changed for the better—so much quieter and so much more sensible as a wife than she was as a single woman" (178). Despite the apparent social criticism, and despite Marian's apparent disobedience, there is an incongruity in Miss Halcombe, "who violates established Victorian assumptions about gender even as she continually utters them" (Gaylin 313). Collins projects the Victorian patriarchal discourse over Marian's words, suffocating her voice and presenting her as a misogynist. By complementing her asseverations with sexist stereotypes which define women as inaccurate and inattentive beings who cannot hold their tongues, even when they do not know what to say, Marian is disqualifying herself as a woman.

Over the 180 pages Marian Halcombe tells her story, we can occasionally hear her censuring her inferior situation as a woman in Victorian society: "If only I had the privileges of a man . . . being nothing but a woman, condemned to patience, property and petticoats for life . . ." (*WIW* 174); "if I had been a man, I would have knocked him down . . . but I was only a woman" (210); "the tears-miserable, weak, women's tears of vexation and rage-started to my eyes . . ." (159); "no father, no brother-no loving creature but the helpless, useless woman who writes these sad lines" (171). It is at those times that we can hear Marian's voice and feel her rage. Collins persists in forcing Marian to show her acquiescence to the prototypical social roles, and the reader has to make an exercise of strong concentration to distinguish the real Marian from the rhetoric of patriarchy inserted by the author in her words. Marian's independent behavior, which empowers femininity, heavily contrasts her words: the patriarchal

discourse that she displays helps undermine and disqualify women as inattentive and unreliable blabbers. As Miller states: “even the woman who speaks as “freely” as a man remains the prolocutor of a patriarchal discourse that keeps her in place” (24). Marian is not as emancipated as the readers may think, for her words chain her, as a woman, to sexist stereotypes that prevent her character from reaching the desirable empowerment.

3. “I CAN MATCH YOU AT CHESS . . . (WITH THE INEVITABLE FEMALE DRAWBACKS)”

Due to Marian’s miragelike position as head of Limmeridge House, she gets to believe herself on equal terms with men—and so do readers. She declares herself as intelligent as to match a man in *his* game, although the author and his patriarchal discourse highlight that it is “with the inevitable female drawbacks” (*WIW* 27). Miss Halcombe plays a mental duel of intelligence—an analogy of the chess games they played at Blackwater—with Count Fosco. Marian plays for women’s empowerment; Fosco for Victorian patriarchy. There is a collision of irreconcilable positions, despite the allure they feel. Even Fosco admits feeling attracted towards Marian, something his monetary needs force him to overlook: “I lament afresh the cruel necessity which sets our interests at variance, and opposes us to each other. Under happier circumstances how worthy I would have been of Miss Halcombe—how worthy Miss Halcombe would have been of ME” (303). Enraptured Marian states: “I certainly never saw a man, in all my experience, whom I should be so sorry to have for an enemy” (198).

Marian plays with white, the feminine color of purity and chastity worn by Laura, Anne Catherick, and herself in the “cumbersome parts of [her] underclothing” (*WIW* 287). All of her pieces are either feminine or tainted by femininity due to their sex or personality, which means that despite Miss Halcombe’s courage and “energy of character” (504), she could never win against omnipotent patriarchy. Marian, whose “courage was only a woman’s courage after all” (287), can only count on herself. She can hardly get any help from her chessmen: Frederick Fairlie, a languid, indolent, effeminate uncle reluctant to play his masculine role of guardian; Anne Catherick, a “madwoman” who cannot battle Sir Percival due to her deep mental problems; and Laura, a stereotypical frail and weak Victorian woman. Marian, whose bravery helps her move quite freely all over the chessboard, plays the part of the Queen. She attempts to defend

weak, “flimsy” (291) Laura, a King who can hardly “move” along the board due to the gender stereotypes which chain her.

Fosco plays with black pieces, symbolizing evil. His Chessmen are masculine or masculinized: violent Sir Percival; “Fosco-lobotomized” Countess Fosco—a Rook who can do formidable mischief “as a willing instrument in her husband’s hands” (*WIW* 277); cold-blooded Rubelle; unfeeling Margaret Porcher. Count Fosco plays the part of the Queen due to his effeminate traits.⁴ His cunning, falseness, and his ability for deceit help him move freely all over the chessboard. Fosco defends the interests of Sir Percival, a weak, helpless King who “lost the signature of the deed and [Laura’s] ready money” (291) and can only move one square due to his inept brutality and terrible outbreaks of temper.

3.1 Chess Game with Fosco

Marian and Fosco get entangled in a confrontation in the real world—a chess game between feminine empowerment and patriarchal domination—that goes beyond the board. Marian employs stereotypical feminine weapons such as eavesdropping, the writing of a diary, and words to confront the power Victorian patriarchy grants Sir Percival over his wife and her property.⁵ Marian will win on two occasions, just as Collins foretold: “The Count and I played at chess. For the first two games, he politely allowed me to conquer him, and then, when he saw that I had found him out, begged my pardon, and at the third game checkmated me in ten minutes” (*WIW* 203). Notice that it is Collins who masterly checkmates Marian. Fosco does not, for it is their repressed sexual attraction that prevents Fosco from eliminating her during her illness and from revealing the sisters’ hiding place in London: Marian is “the first and last weakness of Fosco’s life⁶” (556). Lesnik-Oberstein ascribes the

⁴ In contrast to Marian, Count Fosco possesses the feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability. Also, his shaven face, his sensitiveness and quietness, the fact that he dresses in a feminine way, add up to the Count’s queerness (Peterson 52). Fosco’s exaggeratedly polite and effeminate manners, his bizarre interest for birds and flowers, contrasts with the figure of a masculine gentleman (Öztekin 43).

⁵ A married woman had neither legal existence nor any right over her property, assigned to the husband at the time of their marriage (Kha 23).

⁶ Peterson (51) states that Fosco falls in love with Marian and spares her life as a result.

unresolved sexual attraction between Marian and Fosco to her lack of pliability (28): the Count could never tame her.

When Mr. Merriman, Sir Percival's solicitor, speaks to him in private, Marian listens with her ear at the keyhole. The information about Percival's financial distress allows her to make arrangements for Laura not to sign a document that would compromise the fortune of her future heirs. With the information obtained by eavesdropping, Marian writes a letter to Mr. Kyrle, Laura's lawyer. However, cunning Fosco moves the Rook—Madame Fosco—to engage Marian in a private conversation, which gives him time to read the missive. Marian sets out to get the answer from the lawyer's office before it reaches Backwater Park; Fosco tries to intercept it himself without success. Miss Halcombe obtains the information and a "reason for objecting to the signature" of the parchment (*WIW* 240), which entitles her with a way to circumvent patriarchal control of Laura's property: this is her first victory. After a private conversation with Sir Percival, Fosco informs Miss Halcombe that Glyde has altered his mind on the issue of the signature, and it will be postponed. Marian would have gone to find Laura—who is searching for her lost brooch on the plantation—but Collins makes use of weather conditions and physical illness to bend Marian's will for the first time:

There were no signs of Laura's return, and I thought of going out to look for her. But my strength was so exhausted by the trials and anxieties of the morning that the heat of the day quite overpowered me, and after an attempt to get to the door I was obliged to return to the drawing-room and lie down on the nearest sofa to recover. . . .

. . . I tried a second time to run out and find Laura, but my head was giddy and my knees trembled under me. There was no choice but to give it up again and return to the sofa, sorely against my will (*WIW* 243, 244).

When Miss Halcombe discovers the bruise Sir Percival inflicted on Laura's arm, she devises a plan to conclude the marriage,⁷ for the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857 established that women could petition to have their marriages dissolved if the husband was physically cruel (Kha 109). Marian writes letters both to Mr. Kyrle—consulting on the legal

⁷ In the 19th century, women had no choice but to consent to marriage and marital patriarchy. Heather Lea Nelson (8, 22) explains that marriage was a trade-off, and engagements legal contracts; women's inability to truly consent contributed to the perpetuation of systematic patriarchy.

proceedings for Laura's protection—and to Mr. Fairlie—asking him for a place to refuge. Miss Halcombe comprehends that Laura would lose all claim for her property if she left her husband before obtaining a divorce so, to ensure victory, she walks to the village to handle the letters for Fanny to deliver to their addressees. It is dangerous Madame Fosco—while the Count distracts Marian for more than half an hour—who obtains the information written in the missives, tampers with the letters, and counteracts Marian's secret move, thus gaining victory.

The climax of the game takes place when Marian eavesdrops on the secret conversation between Sir Percival and Count Fosco. Stripped off white and of all parts of “cumbersome”—feminine—underclothing, Marian wears black and spies from the veranda. She obtains vital information about Sir Percival's financial crisis and his desperation to track Anne Catherick: eavesdropping “furnish[es] us, not only with our justification for leaving the house, but with our weapons of defense against them as well” (*WIW* 301). Marian has obtained a legal reason to save her sister from an unhappy marriage and an abusive husband. It seems as if Marian's second victory, her masterstroke, would help her win her game of feminine empowerment. Despite all her bravery and intelligence, Marian is predestined to lose. Fosco's victory is granted to him by patriarchy, and foretold by Collins, for this is the prophesied “third game”, the game in which Marian would be checkmated (*WIW* 203). The author again employs weather conditions and severe illness to eliminate Marian as an active character just when she is about to defeat patriarchy and save Laura from her cruel destiny. Miss Halcombe, who is “drenched to the skin, cramped in every limb, cold to the bones” is turned into a “useless, helpless, panick-stricken creature” (*WIW* 301). Unable to act, “ill, at such a time as this!” (302), Marian is deprived of her weapons: language, writing, and wit, for she “can write, but the lines all run together” (302).

3.2 Chess Game with Collins

Marian plays a doomed symbolic game of chess against Collins. Like Count Fosco, who deceives Marian, for he talks to her “as seriously and sensibly as if [Marian] was a man” (*WIW* 197), the author misleads her—and the readers—into believing that she can defeat a man in the game of protecting Laura and defeating Victorian patriarchy twice (objecting to the signature of the documents and obtaining a reason for dissolving the

marriage after eavesdropping). Fosco himself acknowledges Marian's uniqueness, foresight, and resolution:

. . . With that woman for my friend, I would snap these fingers of mine at the world. With that woman for my enemy, I, with all my brains and experience,—I, Fosco, cunning as the devil himself, as you have told me a hundred times—I walk in your English phrase, upon egg-shells! And this grand creature—I drink her health in my sugar-and-water—this grand creature, who stands in the strength of her love and her courage, firm as a rock, between us two and that poor, flimsy, pretty blonde wife of yours—this magnificent woman, whom I admire with all my soul, though I oppose her in your interests and in mine, you drive to extremities as if she was no sharper and no bolder than the rest of her sex. Percival! Percival! you deserve to fail, and you *have* failed (*WIW* 291–92).

Miss Halcombe, the real heroine of the novel, is politely allowed to believe herself on equal terms with men only to be checkmated at the “third game”—and in a few minutes—by the author himself. Collins provokes a change in the weather which brings about Marian's illness, the only setback that could stop her strong nature and helps Walter exert a “usurpation of narrative control” (Branfield 18). Collins's plot move subdues Marian's experiment of female empowerment, thus proving the novel was never a proto-feminist construct, but a source for patriarchal indoctrination. After falling ill, Marian turns into the average Victorian woman under masculine control: she is used with impunity, “interned” into the Elizabethan abandoned wing of Blackwater, drugged and silenced permanently. Even though we would like to hear the story told by Miss Halcombe, a true detective, Walter takes control of the narrative and exerts not only an “oppressive silencing of the women of the text as their voices are ignored or rewritten” (Branfield 1) but also a usurpation of Marian's narrative agency (Gaylin 306–07). Walter considers that the sisters' chronicle would be “confused” (*WIW* 373), so it is he who tells the story while he “attempts to establish his own heroic stature” (Perkins 397) by restoring Laura's identity and fortune. It is “when Marian places herself under [Walter's] male authority that she becomes shadowy and less interesting” (Perkins 396). After obliterating Miss Halcombe as the real heroine and narrator of the story, we can only hear her “voice” through the reported speech of the conversations and confidences Walter decides to transcribe.

Marian is not physically interned into a mental asylum like Laura and Anne, but she is symbolically “interned”, secluded into the abandoned wing of Blackwater to keep her under control. Secluding women was a man’s prerogative and Collins’ makes use of that masculine power: “the novel situates confinement as a masculine endeavor . . . women are designated as patients and are controlled and restrained by men” (Bachman 62). When the character of Marian gets too strong, when she outgrows the boundaries established by Victorian patriarchy, Collins puts her under restraint. During the Victorian era “the predominance of women among the insane becomes a statistically verifiable phenomenon” (Showalter 159). They were hospitalized for Victorians “had a troubling tendency to confuse a rejection of social conventions with mental illness” (Fauvel 2). Marian, who continually transgresses feminine Victorian limits, is symbolically cloistered thrice. First, when Collins exercises his power of internment on Marian in the abandoned wing in Blackwater; second, after rescuing her sister Laura, Collins keeps them both “in place” by cloistering them in a popular neighborhood in London where they must live incognito—unnoticed, unseen, and silenced—with the excuse of not being found out by their enemies; third, when Collins deprives Marian of her narrative voice. As Miller states: “male security in *The Woman in White* always seems to depend on female claustration” (119). By secluding Marian, through absolute control and restraint, the author educates her and female readers on the lesson of humility and never breaking the boundaries set by patriarchy: “women should be quiet, virtuous and immobile” (Showalter 167). Collins makes clear that no one but a man could set things right and even though neither Walter’s narrative is as detailed and vivid as Marian’s and his investigation powers are deficient, he is to be the only hero and the only one to take part in the action. His leading role is granted to him by his gender, and his victory will be boasted of in the last part of the narrative when “the closing fairy-like family portrait sanctions the hero’s victory, his social and economic success, and his newly acquired role as the household master” (Sarnelli 123).

4. “DEAR AND ADMIRABLE WOMAN . . . RESIGNATION IS SUBLIME—ADOPT IT”

After the ordeal of her illness and internment, Marian’s psyche is so hurt that “big tears rise thick in her eyes, and fall slowly over her cheeks” (*WIW* 390). Marian’s tears are not mannish anymore: her crying does not come

out “with sobs that seem to tear me in pieces, and that frighten everyone about me” (144), but has transformed into a feeble crying, a sign of the weakness of her spirit. However, Miss Halcombe’s state of mind will not deter Collins from continuing with his plan of patriarchal subjugation.

4.1 Transforming the Devil into an Angel

When Walter takes control of the narration, Marian turns into an indirect speech persona, just like Laura. We will never hear her voice again, for the story of how she saves Laura from the asylum and the detection of Count Fosco is narrated by Walter. The moment when Marian is deprived of her voice, Collins starts a process during which masculine Miss Halcombe is tamed, taught how to be a submissive woman and how to fit into traditional sexual stereotypes (Gaylin 16, 17). Marian is feminized and forced to ascribe to the Victorian feminine ideal even though “the unquenchable spirit of the woman burnt bright in her even yet” (*WIW* 390), and she begs for action and to share her part in the danger. From here on, we will never read Marian described with masculine traits, as she will be systematically deprived of her uniqueness and deconstructed from a mannish woman into a feminine one. Through Collins’s astute psychological moves, Marian will be endowed with the “attributes of true womanhood . . . piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity” (Welter 152).

4.1.1 Piety

It is demanded of Miss Halcombe that she turns into a caregiver, a typical role ascribed to women at the time and even nowadays “as a cultural obligation because of their sex” (Jiménez Ruiz and Moya 434). All through the novel, it is required of Marian to serve childish Laura, who, as all women, is “nothing but [a] child grown up” (*WIW* 290); to nurse her and to spare her all knowledge of events that may put pressure on her nerves or feminine ailments. However, when Walter takes control of the situation as the man in charge, the demands made on Marian are more intense. We will not read about Marian’s brisk walks or about her leaving their apartment again. Marian is to “babysit” frail Laura, turned mentally into a child, a “burden” (432) after her experience in the asylum. Miss Halcombe’s spirit is subdued with the only excuse that would do so: protecting her dear sister. Marian takes the responsibility upon her shoulders and assumes her role willingly, as female caregivers do, for

“caregiving is established as a completely naturalized role and the moral duty of women” (Jiménez Ruiz and Moya 446).

4.1.2 Domesticity

Marian's “awkward as a man's hands” (*WIW* 204) are forced to do the housework—considered a feminine duty in Victorian times—for “in the home women . . . were supposed to keep busy at morally uplifting tasks. Fortunately, most of housework could be regarded as uplifting” (Welter 164). Through the psychological strategy of feminization Collins exerts on Marian's “unquenchable spirit”, she is deceived into believing that she is freely embracing her new obligation as if it was “her own right”: “The house-work . . . was taken on the first day, taken as her own right, by Marian Halcombe. “What a woman's hands *are* fit for, “she said,” early and late, these hands of mine shall do” (*WIW* 390). Marian is forced to stay into the realm of domesticity, either nursing her sister or doing the house chores, as all decent women were expected to. Notice that “domesticity was among the virtues most prized by the women's magazines” (Welter 162). The times when Miss Halcombe could transgress the limits of her gender and freely move within the world of men (public space) and the world of women (domestic space) are gone for good. Chained by domesticity, Marian will never trespass the boundaries of what was considered “appropriate” feminine space again.

4.1.3 Submissiveness

Miss Halcombe is transformed into a passive character. Despite her foresight and resolution, Marian must stay at home and wait for the news Walter brings. On several occasions, Miss Halcombe pleads with Walter to let her take part in the investigation, to let her have her “share in the risk and the danger too” (*WIW* 390). Even though she is much better a detective than Walter, she must remain in the sphere of domesticity and live incognito, unseen and unheard in London. Marian is forced to transform into a passive, patient woman and is isolated from action and the public space, for “her place [as a woman] was in the home . . . and emphatically not in the world of affairs” (Altick 74). During Walter's narration, Marian loses her corporality and transforms into a voice-over who waits for the hero to return home. Collins gives Marian a wifely, submissive role since

“a wife should occupy herself only with domestic affairs—wait till your husband confides to you those of a high importance—and do not give your advice until he asks for it” (Welter 161).

4.1.4 Renunciation

As part of the process of Marian’s refitting to Victorian gender standards, she is domesticated by “deferring [her] needs to those of others” (Kaplan 127). Her transgressive self will be bloated for good by depriving her of her identity, as “she, in the end, acquires that self-sacrificial spirit typical of the “Angel in the House”: she gives up the possibility to lead an independent life to support Laura in childcare and household running” (Sarnelli 122). Miss Halcombe is requested never to marry, and the scene of this petition is deliberately embellished with a melodramatic aura of bliss:

On leaving Laura once more . . . in her sister’s care, a serious consideration recurred to me, . . . —I mean the consideration of Marian’s future. Had we any right to let our selfish affection accept the devotion of all that generous life? Was it not our duty, our best expression of gratitude, to forget ourselves, and to think only of *her*? I tried to say this when we were alone for a moment, before I went away. She took my hand, and silenced me at the first words. “After all that we three have suffered together,” she said, “here can be no parting between us till the last parting of all. My heart and my happiness, Walter, are with Laura and you. . . .” (*WIW* 564)

4.1.5 Sacrifice

Sacrifice, the “self-forgetfulness of women, which yields so much and asks so little” (*WIW* 494) is considered to be ideally feminine. In the last pages of the book, the prospect of renouncing one’s self for domesticity is willingly embraced by tamed and feminized Marian, who is “sitting now, with the child industriously sucking his coral upon her lap” (569). Obedient Marian has yielded to the stereotypical role assigned to spinsters in the Victorian age—since “teaching and nursing were often seen as most appropriate for unmarried women without children” (Stone 90)—with no opposition on her part, and Walter depicts a blissful moment, the culmination to “the long, happy labor of many months” (*WIW* 569). Through his portrayal of domestic happiness, Collins is also instructing

female readers on submission and patience as the only possibility to reach a happy ending.

Finally, after the disciplining process has come to an end, Marian will have been transformed into an “Angel in the House,” a matron who lovingly looks after her nephew. She “has been domesticated” (May 99), not by coercion—which she may have resented and opposed—but by the “persuasion” exerted on her by the astute moves of the author. Marian will never be considered masculine or devilish again, for she has turned into a subservient, perfect woman: “Marian was the good angel of our lives,” says Walter. Miss Halcombe, who violated “established Victorian assumptions about gender even as she continually utter[ed] them” (Gaylin 311), finally behaves according to her role as a woman, and “tacitly surrenders to the role that spinsters like her could carry out in Victorian families” (Sarnelli 123). Marian is a dependent, weak, submissive woman who willingly discarded her uniqueness: she will never be “a woman of ten thousand” (*WIW* 117) again.

4.2 Marian's Foretold Destiny

Collins had foretold how Marian's attempt for women's empowerment was helpless through Count Fosco's words: “Dear and admirable woman . . . Resignation is sublime—adopt it. The modest repose of home is eternally fresh—enjoy it. The storms of life pass harmless over the valley of Seclusion—dwell, dear lady, in the valley” (*WIW* 404). Women must be dependent, passive, submissive, and pliant, and Collins exhorts female readers to be so. Fosco's words complement the sexist opening sentence of the book: “This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure and what a Man's resolution can achieve” (*WIW* 1). Marian's self-sufficiency was just an illusion, a source of exemplification for female readers on how not to act. The novel instructs female readers they must resort to resignation and sacrifice so that there can be a “happy” ending, depicted at the end of the novel in the scene of bliss wherein Marian “with bright tears of happiness gathering in her eyes” (569) presents Walter her nephew, the male Heir of Limmeridge. After the process of reeducation exerted by Collins on Miss Halcombe, Marian adheres to the established role society establishes for spinsters. Despite how determined and attractive Marian may have seemed to the readers' eyes—especially feminine readers—in the first part of the novel, women's empowerment is futile. Marian has not only lost the resolution and courage that made her such a strong and unique

character, but she has also turned into a helpless woman, a spinster who, in the eyes of society, is an absolute failure, “superfluous or odd” (Stone 95). According to Victorian standards, the life of unmarried Marian life makes no sense if she cannot have a family of her own, and her only possibility—no education and no way to earn her bread—is to stay at her sister’s home (Sarnelli 122) and nurse her nephew:

Single women, disappointed in their hopes of marriage—census figures showed a surplus of females in Victorian England—perforce had to settle for ‘governessing slavery,’ as Charlotte Bronte called it, if they had to earn a livelihood. Like the spinster aunts who found haven as permanent guests in many households, they were regarded and regarded themselves, as failures (Altick 76).

Despite interpretations of Marian’s choice to live with Laura and Walter as a “homoerotic marriage” to her half-sister (Dau and Preston 200; Collins 134; Haefele-Thomas 32), this choice stands for submissiveness and renunciation. The author puts Marian—a Victorian unmarried woman who does not possess an income to support herself—into the place wherein she belongs. Collins did not revert any social convention: Marian’s subversion has carefully been suffocated and transformed into submission taking the feminine reader in mind, for “the nineteenth century knew that *girls* could be ruined by a book . . . Books which attacked or seemed to attack woman’s accepted place in society were regarded as equally dangerous” (Welter 166). No gender roles have been changed and no equality achieved, for the “narrative closure involves the reestablishment of fixed social positions and absolutely gendered identities” (Gaylin 312). Woman’s empowerment is unattainable.

CONCLUSIONS

Wilkie Collins, traditionally celebrated as a proto-feminist or feminist author, is just another Victorian man whose ideas ascribe to the patriarchal discourse of his age. The unique persona of Marian Halcombe, which could have been used as a weapon of social criticism, was not built to advocate for feminism—clearly rejected by her as represented by young Madame Fosco—or for women’s empowerment. All of her charisma, resolution, and intelligence, turn out to be useless qualities, for they do not construct a consistent feminine defense of women’s rights against

oppression. Collins avails himself of Marian to exert an exemplifying moral on the feminine readers of his novel and to prove that, whereas women must be quiet, enduring, and patient, it is men who are meant to be active powerful protectors. Miss Halcombe is disciplined and tamed into submission to patriarchal rules as her outstandingly non-feminine personality is “interned” into the domesticity where all women belong.

During the first half of the novel, Collins paternally allows Marian to live under a mirage of freedom and independence which leads the reader to believe women's empowerment is possible. Despite the fact that readers get to admire Marian as a woman of ten thousand and appreciate her as the real detective and narrator of the story, her feminine destiny of patience and endurance is doomed by the opening sentence of the novel. Marian plays chess against patriarchal power as represented by Fosco and by Collins himself, whose almighty power over the plot and the events that take place in the novel suffocates Miss Halcombe's uniqueness and transforms her into an angelical Victorian woman, an epitome of feminine patriarchal perfection to be imitated by the feminine reader.

The patriarchal opening sentence of the novel will prove unbeatable: there was never any chance of rectifying the oppression of women, and Marian's uniqueness was just a narrative resource. By the end of the novel, Collins will have succeeded in instructing female readers that resignation, passivity, and seclusion is the appropriate attitude for women. By the end of the novel, no gender roles will have been changed and no equality attained. Collins's fraudulent rhetoric of protest against the oppression of women has been exposed.

REFERENCES

- Altick, Richard Daniel. *Victorian People and Ideas: A Companion for the Modern Reader of Victorian Literature*. 1st ed., Norton, 1973.
- Ashley, Robert P. “Wilkie Collins Reconsidered.” *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1950, pp. 265–73, doi:10.2307/3044407.
- Auerbach, Nina. *Woman and the Demon: The Life of a Victorian Myth*. Harvard UP, 1982.

- Bachman, Savannah J. "Shutting Her Up": *An Exploration of the Madwoman and the Madhouse in Victorian Literature*. 2017. Bard College, Senior undergraduate project. Senior Projects Spring.
- Branfield, Shannon, "Sufficient for Herself": *Women & Silence in Wilkie Collins's Novels*. 2016. Utah State University, Master of Arts Report. All Graduate Plan B and other Reports.
- Collins, Richard. "Marian's Moustache Bearded Ladies, Hermaphrodites, and Intersexual Collage in *The Woman in White*." *Reality's Dark Light: The Sensational Wilkie Collins*, edited by Maria K. Bachman and Don Richard Cox, U of Tennessee P, 2003, pp. 131–72.
- Collins, Wilkie. *The Woman in White*. Penguin Popular Classics, 1994.
- Colvin, Trey V. *Jezebel's Daughters: A Study of Wilkie Collins and his Female Villains*. 2000. University of North Texas, Doctoral dissertation.
- Dau, Duc, and Shale Preston, editors. *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature*. Routledge, 2015, doi:10.4324/9781315762067.
- Dever, Carolyn. "The Marriage Plot and Its Alternatives." *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, edited by Jenny Bourne Taylor, Cambridge UP, 2006, pp. 112–24.
- Fauvel, Aude. "Crazy Brains and the Weaker Sex: The British Case (1860–1900)." *Clio: Women, Gender, History*, vol. 37, 2014, pp. 41–64, doi:10.4000/clio.10972.
- Gaylin, Ann. "The Madwoman Outside the Attic: Eavesdropping and Narrative Agency in *The Woman in White*." *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, vol. 43, no. 3, 2001, pp. 303–33.
- Haefele-Thomas, Ardel. *Queer Others in Victorian Gothic: Transgressing Monstrosity*. U of Wales P, 2012.
- Hedgecock, Jennifer. *The Femme Fatale in Victorian Literature: The Danger and the Sexual Threat*. Cambria Press, 2008.
- Heller, Tamar. "The Woman in White: Portrait of the Artist as a Professional Man." *Dead Secrets: Willkie Collins and the Female Gothic*, Yale UP, 1992, pp. 110–41. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt5hk0xd.9/.

- Hoffer, Lauren N., and Sarah E. Kersh. "The Victorian Family in Queer Time: Secrets, Sisters, and Lovers in *The Woman in White* and *Fingersmith*." *Queer Victorian Families: Curious Relations in Literature*, edited by Duc Dau and Shale Preston, Routledge, 2015, pp. 207–22.
- Jiménez Ruiz, Ismael, and María Moya Nicolás. "The Family Caregiver: The Naturalized Sense of Obligation in Women to be Caregivers." *Enfermería Global*, vol. 17, no. 1, 2018, pp. 420–47.
- Kaplan, Laura Duhan. "Woman as Caretaker: An Archetype that Supports Patriarchal Militarism." *Hypatia*, vol. 9, no. 2, 1994, pp. 123–33. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/3810173/.
- Kha, Henry. *The Reform of English Divorce Law: 1857–1937*. 2017. University of Queensland, PhD dissertation. UQ eSpace.
- Ledoux, Ellen. "Was There Ever a 'Female Gothic'?" *Palgrave Communications*, vol. 3, 2017, doi:10.1057/palcomms.2017.42.
- Leonard, DeLisa. *Women and Bodily Separation in Literature from the Victorian Era until Today*. 2011. Eastern Michigan University, Master's Theses and Doctoral dissertation.
- Lesnik-Oberstein, Karín. *The Last Taboo: Women and Body Hair*. Manchester UP, 2011.
- Liddle, Dallas. "Wilkie Collins, *The Woman in White* (1859–60)." *Victorian Review*, vol. 35, no. 1, 2009, pp. 37–41. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/27793695/.
- May, Leila Silvana. "Sensational Sisters: Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*." *Pacific Coast Philology*, vol. 30, no. 1, 1995, pp. 82–102, doi:10.2307/1316821.
- Meckier, Jerome. "Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*: Providence against the Evils of Propriety." *Journal of British Studies*, vol. 22, no. 1, 1982, pp. 104–26. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/175659/.
- Miller, D. A. "Cage Aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*." *Representations*, vol. 14, 1986, pp. 107–36, doi:10.2307/2928437.

- Nelson, Heather Lea. *The Law and the Lady: Consent and Marriage in Nineteenth-Century British Literature*. 2015. Purdue University, Doctoral dissertation. Purdue e-Pubs.
- O'Neill, Philip. *Wilkie Collins: Women, Property, and Propriety*. Rowman & Littlefield, 1988.
- Oulton, C. "‘The Good Angel of Our Lives’: Subversive Religion and *The Woman in White*." *Dickens Studies Annual*, vol. 30, 2001, pp. 309–20. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/44372020/.
- Öztekin, Sercan. "Subversion of Gender Stereotypes in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*." *Crossroads: A Journal of English Studies*, vol. 1, no. 32, 2021, pp. 36–48, doi:10.15290/CR.2021.32.1.03.
- Perkins, Pamela, and Mary Donaghy. "A Man's Resolution: Narrative Strategies in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White*." *Studies in the Novel*, vol. 22, no. 4, 1990, pp. 392–402. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/29532745/.
- Peterson, Sabrina Elena Cascos. *Sensational Deviations: Queering Nineteenth-Century Mystery*. 2016. California State University, Master's thesis. Scholar Works.
- Petrie, Charles. "Victorian Women Expected to Be Idle and Ignorant." *Victorian England*, edited by Clarice Swisher, Greenhaven Press, 2000, pp. 178–87.
- Pykett, Lyn. *Wilkie Collins*. Authors in Context Series, Oxford UP, 2005.
- Querol Díaz, Laura. *The Ambiguous Disruption of Gender-Role Expectations in the Law and the Lady*. BS thesis. University of Lleida. Department of English and Linguistic, 2013.
- Ruskin, John. *Sesame and Lilies*, edited by Deborah Epstein Nord, Yale UP, 2002.
- Sarnelli, Debora Antonietta. "Gender Ambiguity, Domesticity and the Public Space: The Case of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*." *English Language, Literature & Culture*, vol. 5, no. 3, 2020, pp. 116–23, doi:10.11648/j.ellc.20200503.1.

Showalter, Elaine. "Victorian Women and Insanity." *Victorian Studies*, vol. 23, no. 2, 1980, pp. 157–81.

Sontag, Susan, and Annie Leibovitz. *Women*. Ballantine Books, 2000.

Stone, Pamela K., and Lise Shapiro Sanders. *Bodies and Lives in Victorian England: Science, Sexuality, and the Affliction of Being Female*. Routledge, 2020, doi:10.4324/9780429398735.

Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820–1860." *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1966, pp. 151–74.

Zigarovich, Jolene. "Transing Wilkie Collins." *The Wilkie Collins Journal*, vol. 15, 2018. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26996123/.