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**LYDIA GWILT: WILKIE COLLINS'S SATANIC,
SIRENIC PSYCHOTIC**

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In *Armadale*, Wilkie Collins incorporates evangelical and psychological principles to develop Lydia Gwilt as his ultimate femme fatale. Of course, such an assertion opposes most evaluations of his artistry. Many critics concentrate on the Gothic antecedents for Victorian sensation novels,¹ and others emphasize Collins's streamlining the typically convoluted action.² Thus Michael Sadleir praises Collins's "faultlessly constructed plots," but criticizes his characters as mere "puppets"—an authoritative and oft repeated evaluation.³ General agreement that he influenced Dickens's later plot construction⁴ also tends to obscure Collins's emphasis upon and depth of characterization.⁵ He nevertheless subordinated the plot of *Armadale* to his characters' mental states and sandwiched the narrative between Wrentmore's and Lydia's confessions. Three episodes—Ozias Midwinter's first view of Miss Gwilt, Doctor Downward's collaboration with her, and her suicide—reveal her regression into a madness borne by religious obsession.

Although T. S. Eliot and Edward Wagenknecht consider Lydia's diary a *deus ex machina*, Collins elsewhere claimed that egotism leads intelligent criminals to produce such self-incriminating journals.⁶ The murderess herself recognizes the danger of compulsively writing her darkest thoughts: "Why do I keep a diary at all? Why did the clever thief the other day (in the English newspaper) keep the very thing to convict him in the shape of a record of everything he stole?" Ironically, she points to both realistic characterization and her own failing intellect: "Why are we not perfectly reasonable in all that we do? Why am I not always on my guard and never inconsistent with myself, like a wicked character in a novel?" (9:375-376). As her paranoia grows, she does indeed try to maintain such a constant vigilance as that foreshadowed by her self-interrogation and symbolized by her journal.

In Lydia's diary desperation eventually alters descriptions; like Poe's brilliant narrators, she becomes unreliable. Her degeneration, however, follows contemporary beliefs that hallucinations attended only the severest cases of insanity.⁷ Gillian Beer links the rise of detective novels with fear of forgetting; the need for comprehensible origins becomes the "search for parentage in Victorian fiction."⁸ Ozias uses his father's deathbed letter to formulate a familial fatalism, but Lydia

repeatedly finds herself adopted and discarded (possibly because of illegitimacy and/or hereditary insanity, her earliest memories involve an orphanage and visitations by a wealthy man).

Miss Gwilt consistently seeks guidance from her diary, which whets her appetite for violence, and from Mrs. Oldershaw, who disappears during her protégée's psychic struggle. Lydia's schemes require that she record minutiae in her diary, which becomes a detective story with a predetermined dénouement; Ozias likewise wrestles with Wrentmore's confession to disprove its conclusion. Crushing guilt, however, causes both readers' dissociation as they ignore what they must recall: Midwinter burns his father's letter, and Lydia resorts to laudanum. Self-justification eventually renders her a mad, Satanic figure, but spiritual rebirth obviates Ozias' struggle.

The Gothic convention of insanity, according to John R. Reed, was "a curse imposed by gods or devils"; in Victorian novels, madness resulted from "a sinful, ruined life" or "a passionate nature trapped in unbearable circumstances."⁹ Despite Lydia's sinful life, her insanity exceeds poetic justice; Ozias, a noble savage, verges upon similar disintegration as a familial curse seemingly dogs him. His instability eventually represents Romantic imagination dovetailing with spiritual insight. When rebirth quells his violent nature, Collins challenges assumptions that criminality is inheritable.¹⁰ *The Woman in White* (1860), *Armada* (1866), *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880), and *The Legacy of Cain* (1887) qualify G. H. Lewes's theory with the biblical principle of ungodly fathers' sins falling upon their children (Cf. Exodus 20:5, 34:5-7). Thus, if evil tendencies pass to a child, such false spirituality as Wrentmore's fatalism may energize them.

Lydia initially attempts self-regeneration through organized religion. Her music teacher, a married man with children, fell desperately in love with her and shot himself. His brain damage and commitment to an asylum foreshadow her own mad end and provide her an authoritative precedent of suicide. School administrators indirectly condemned her: "Miss Gwilt's beauty having been at the bottom of the scandal, it was...impossible—though she was proved to have been otherwise quite blameless in the matter—for her to remain" (9:316). Assumed guilt, rather than devotion, apparently prompted the girl to enter a convent. When she abandoned her novitiate, the priest who had recruited her rejected her as other authority figures had. He pronounced her "possessed by the devil" (9:318) evidently to escape blame. Implicitly, she was unnerved and suggestible; to her, his cant would explain her alienation and involvement with Ingleby's murder and the

teacher's suicide attempt. The priest's duplicity, moreover, prepares for Mrs. Oldershaw's affected piety and Lydia's own spiritual delusions.

In Thorpe Ambrose a grown Miss Gwilt poses as a martyr to slander and retreats to a partially developed neighborhood; the desolation supposedly reflects her sensibilities after Allan's romancing. Less consciously, Lydia cloisters herself in a figurative convent. This isolation also recalls the solitude Waldron, her first husband, had forced upon her. The guilt of her and Manuel's murdering him haunts her, even though physical abuse might have mitigated the crime. The martyr's retreat, therefore, helps Lydia to recreate the period before the murder, a symbolic return to relative innocence. She also unconsciously continues her prison sentence; her suicide likewise fulfills the execution she narrowly escaped.

A grievous childhood, failed novitiate, supposed demonic possession, and murder conviction apparently make Lydia amenable to Wrentmore's belief that she embodies evilness (hence her nickname for Mrs. Oldershaw is Mother Jezebel). Midwinter eventually abandons this fatalism, but it presents a self-fulfilling prophecy to Lydia. Through Ozias she hopes to find a new life and to change her essential nature; when he withdraws, Lydia suspects that an aura emanates from her and evinces her fate. Downward's abortion practice foreshadows her failed regeneration and symbolizes her confounding novelty with death. Thus his recently constructed asylum on "a new road" and in "a new neighborhood" unnerves her. She writes about "a wilderness of open ground, with half-finished villas" and "a hideous litter of boards, wheelbarrows, and building materials...scattered in every direction" (9:425). She apparently perceives the disarray as destruction rather than construction and disregards the semblance to her martyr's retreat.

Lydia describes an "overgrown dismal house, plastered with drab-colored stucco, and surrounded by a naked, unfinished garden, without shrub or flower in it, frightful to behold" (9:425). The denuding quickens her fear of revealed duplicity, diminished rational control, and spiritual subjugation. As her first reencounters with Downward and Mrs. Oldershaw illustrate, Lydia no longer trusts her judgment. Although she can readily kill Allan, Ozias' figurative murder, in her deserting and denying him, also seems to confirm her dementia—especially when she almost poisons him. She cannot ignore that Downward, a former abortionist, is a murderer by middle-class Victorian standards and that he now claims to save patients' emotional lives. Whereas killing Waldron could have been a crime of passion, Lydia leagues herself with a man who regularly killed for profit, and she evidently associates his asylum with the prison which held her. That

association, Downward's past, Waldron's death, and decimation of the Blanchards could initiate the delusion that she is a death angel of sorts.

With such supernaturalism, Collins adapts the Fatal Woman convention. Including aggressive eroticism, vampirism, sexual cannibalism, and demonism, the type influenced Coleridge's *Geraldine*, Keats's *Lamia*, Byron's *Gulnare*, Swinburne's *Mary Stuart*, and Thackeray's *Becky Sharp*.¹¹ Lilit is the princess of succubi often, like Lydia, having red hair and inhabiting lonely areas; the main charge of Lilit's servants, moreover, is to kill newborn babies.¹² As she affected the character type, seduction and murder gave way to damnation. Lydia's union with an abortionist expands Lilitian infanticide to suggest the sacrifice of children to Moloch and, therefore, to Satan. If Newgate romances domesticated the Byronic hero so that "trailing clouds of brimstone no longer oppress the atmosphere,"¹³ Collins combined elements of an attractive arch-criminal and of Lilit to reintroduce the brimstone.

Lydia exhibits none of the haggardness Victorian readers expected in such a villainess.¹⁴ With an eye toward realism, Collins creates instead a tableau to illustrate "her devilish beauty" (9:38). Ozias, a quadron, becomes darker in an ivy-enshrouded gazebo as he spies upon a brilliant woman ironically epitomizing a virginal heroine. In the garden, she is voluptuous, fair as porcelain, and instinctively graceful. Her eyes are "large, bright, and well opened" with "that purely blue color...rarely met with in the living face" (8:470). Her red hair is "superbly luxuriant" (8:470), worn "unshrinkingly in a plaited coronet" with "one vagrant love-lock" (9:62). Her skin is "so delicately bright in its rosier tints, so warmly and softly white in its gentler gradations of color on the forehead and the neck" (8:471). Fair complexion and hair suggest light, reason, and goodness; she disarmingly contrasts with Ozias' cruel mother, a beautiful mulatto. Lydia's widely opened eyes imply innocence, as opposed to his seemingly furtive glances. Her blush and lone love-lock hint at passion and aver modesty. Physiognomically, she should personify refinement, hence the plaited coronet (an ironic symbol of her megalomania); yet, she forges, blackmails, commits adultery, inadvertently causes many deaths, possibly prostitutes herself, and thrice conspires to murder.

Ozias expects to see the dowdy maid Brock mistakenly described; the correspondence would prove that she had plotted against Allan, fulfilling Wrentmore's prophecy. The beautiful creature so unnerves Midwinter that he apparently suffers a cataleptic seizure. When Lydia and Neelie notice him, his reactions evince psychological and spiritual

bondage. Despite Lydia's civilities and her charge's scorn, he remains "spellbound" in "breathless astonishment," aware of only "the astounding contradiction." He approaches them "without knowing why" and searches "like a man lost" (8:473). As Pedgift Junior had likened him to "a lost man" (8:442), the mesmerism and analogy point to the Mephistophelean woman and Ozias' potential damnation. In his perceptual limits, her seeming metamorphosis to a pleasing shape also connotes Satanic power (her beauty, however, is evanescent; cf. 9:81).

Lydia's beauty and obsessions correspond to God's indictment of Satan: "Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty; thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness" (Ezekiel 28:17). Given Miss Gwilt's similarly corrupted wisdom, her brilliance could refer to fiendish piety: "Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light," and "his ministers" pose as "ministers of righteousness" (2 Corinthians 11:14-15). The apostrophe to "Lucifer, son of the morning" (Isaiah 14:12) emphasizes his luminosity, as does his name, "light-bearer." The word "devil," moreover, denotes the alienation of man from God and of man from other men.¹⁵

Lydia's visual brightness symbolizes her unholy unction and madness. Her relentless quest for Allan's estate betrays a fiendish lust for power. Midwinter sees her in an Edenic garden where she, serpentlike, suns herself and virtually hypnotizes him. She does not separate him from God, for he already assumes a divine curse. Because she too accepts damnation, she reinforces Ozias' spiritual estrangement. She alone, however, can alienate him from Allan. Besides associating her with Lilith, Lydia's red hair links her to traditional Satanic figures such as Judas and Cain.¹⁶ Her purely blue eyes, a type "so often presented...in pictures and books" (8:470), stress the unnaturalness of her wit and power. Responsible for a drowned crew and eight other deaths, she seems to seize Satan's "power of death" (John 8:44) and to emulate him as "a murderer from the beginning" (Hebrews 2:14). Red and black, symbols of sensuality and death, therefore, eventually overshadow her brilliance and reveal her essence, as in her red hair spread over widow's weeds and her silhouette before a blood-red lake.

Devilish properties notwithstanding, Collins subdued elements of the historical source, Marie de Brinvilliers. Often with little motivation, the seventeenth-century marquise used undetectable poisons to murder almost a hundred people. Fumes killed her paramour, who mixed the poisons, and she thrice attempted suicide after capture, once by eating glass. Tortured and nearly naked, she confessed and suffered execution.¹⁷ Collins retained her research in poisons, lethal gas,

lover's ironic death, sensuality, joy in murder, and death wish; but he reduced the number of victims, lovers, and suicide attempts. In Lydia's death gas replaces the grotesquerie of swallowed glass. Public nudity, torture, and execution do not enter the fictional version, but motivation for suicide remains ambiguous. Her name reflects this softened image: Gwilt combines guilt and wilting malevolence; Lydia suggests the Christian seller of purple (Acts 16:14-15, 40). Similar ambiguity attends de Brinvilliers' seeming repentance after torture.

Ozias apparently makes his wife wonder whether a spiritual rebirth is possible; thus she struggles to penetrate Mrs. Oldershaw's spurious piety. The difficulty of such analysis marks Lydia's weakening cognition; the same deterioration moves her, as a supposed patient, to cultivate the sympathy of Downward's neighbors, though such pity in no way helps her. Implicitly, she imitates her former self. Although allegiance to Ozias stultifies her, the woodenness recalls her bouts of depression; nearly hallucinating, she had marveled at the "strange shapes" of clouds and compared herself to Lady Macbeth (9:173). Lydia, therefore, describes the asylum as a mortuary: The doorbell "pealed...like a knell," and a "pallid, withered old man-servant" answered "as if he had stepped up out of his grave" (ironically foreshadowing her self-deification). The fire is "dying in the grate" (9:425) as she, like an evil spirit, uneasily crosses the threshold.

In Downward's office, Lydia ignores the business furniture to search for symbols of her torment. She had believed that she must offer Allan as a rich victim to Manuel, or the captain would expose her. With Manuel dead, nothing adequately excuses her plot and its probable consequences. Thus she sees outside the snuggery "fields and trees, doomed but not yet destroyed by the builder." Her phrasing suggests a suspicion: Her plans, her "buildings," necessitate spoiling something good and natural. Thus "the builder" will ruin the "fields and trees" just as she will destroy her marriage, her last hope of innocence, and Ozias, the character most sensitive to natural settings. Lydia abruptly turns to the snuggery, but the decor intensifies her stress. "Horrible objects in brass and leather and glass," she writes, "twisted and turned as if they were sentient things writhing in agonies of pain" (9:426). The biological specimens horrify her because she projects repressed fears onto them; the sadomasochistic "brass and leather" convey her sense of entrapment, ultimately her damnation.

The biological display would remind Lydia that others have repeatedly rendered her a decoration. For example, the Oldershaws used her in a mountebank show, and gangsters hired her to lend their casino an air of legitimacy. Perhaps she even regards her novitiate as a

masquerade. Such depersonalization apparently attends her depression; with Downward, her silence confirms a genuine collapse.¹⁸ Like Ozias, Lydia finds that immediate objects symbolize spiritual turmoil, but her suffering alters visual perception. Downward's preserved animals evidently revive her memories of dehumanization, and the blurred identities of the specimens illustrate her disequilibrium. Such ambiguity, moreover, facilitates projection of her fears. Probably anticipating Allan's torment and her own, Lydia attributes redundant "agonies of pain" (9:426) to the objects. Though public outcry saved her, she still wonders why she escaped a long sentence or execution for murdering Waldron; her projection could thus include images of herself displayed, convulsing in a noose and facing hell.

The seemingly tortured specimens have counterparts, "shapeless dead creatures of a dull white color float[ing] in yellow liquid" (9:426). The doctor scrupulously maintains his new role and would not keep abortuses as mementos of his former practice. The specimens are inappropriate for an asylum director's office and contradict Downward's therapeutically soothing regimen; their grotesqueness would perplex or, in Lydia's case, unnerve a patient. The bizarre appearance of the objects, if not their existence, depends upon her questionable perception. Although she imagines the suffering of the contorted specimens, she does not attribute pain to the floating ones. She now identifies only herself with the writhing animals; the others represent Allan, whom she had believed to be drowned by Manuel.

Posing as a patient, Lydia submits to a final exhibition as Downward uses her to gain credibility; ironically, neighbors touring the asylum see no pretense. Instead, a "strangely pale and old" woman glides by "like a ghost" (9:501) and follows "among them, but not of them" (9:506), in unconscious parody of Ozias' sanctification. If the diabolical veil of beauty slips, madness alters her appearance, as Downward's photographs imply. She resembles the zombielike doorman, and even the doctor finds her "impenetrably and coldly composed" (9:502). With "hungry eyes" the women soon have "devoured her from head to foot" (9:505). Lydia inverts her vampirism, and the resultant unholy communion indicates self-deification and catatonia. In assumed insanity, she seems to become, like Hamlet, intermittently mad. The visitors see "something in her face, utterly unintelligible to them, which check[s] the well-meant words"; they intuit her megalomania and surmise that Downward was "delicately concealing...that his first inmate was mad" (9:508). With dramatic irony, he confides that she has "shattered nerves—domestic anxiety"

(9:505); he probably does not suspect that the murder of Waldron haunts her or that she adores Ozias.

If the doctor doubts Lydia's sanity, he still uses the tour to show her the fumigating device, the means to poison Allan. Her grip on reality becomes so weak that she blames Downward for the plot and relegates herself to an auxiliary role: "The doctor will kill him by my hands" (9:514). She seems to forget that she recruited Downward and that she alone will control the Blanchard estate. With no training he ironically proposes credible treatment for mental stress. He finds a pharmaceutical approach inadequate and augments therapy with tranquil environs. His hospital removes "the ten thousand trifles which... irritate nervous people" (9:510). Lydia's Neapolitan apartment provided a similar haven; she consequently mastered her sadomasochism for a time. Nuisances of the kind Downward cites, however, most likely prevented her recovery. She could neither exercise her formidable wit nor find any meaningful pursuit. Allan interrupted her honeymoon, resurrecting her hatred, and Ozias withdrew to write, an act she interpreted as rejection. Downward forbids his patients access to provocative material (Collins's self-parody), but Lydia pored over her diary and excited her lust for violence. Aware of this arousal, she viewed the book as a demon tempter and essentially divided her personality.

In Downward's snuggery a photographic montage suggests Lydia's plight. The asylum, fake diploma, and appearance support his role, but such items as the montage perfect the illusion.¹⁹ The garish office suits the doctor, but it also reveals Lydia's turmoil. Through photographs he implies that unrestrained neurosis can become psychosis. Like the preserved animals, the pictures engross Lydia, who writes: "The left-hand frame illustrated...nervous suffering as seen in the face; the right-hand frame exhibited the ravages of insanity"; between them was "an elegantly illuminated scroll" proclaiming "Prevention is better than Cure" (9:426-427). Lydia does not grasp that the montage is her psychological mirror. Downward's recuperative regimen impresses his neighbors, but his ostentatious oratory evinces duplicity. When he privately presents the same regimen to her, he is uncharacteristically earnest and apparently suspends role-playing.

Confusing fantasy with reality, Lydia loses the capacity to discern right from wrong. Thus she considers murderous acquisition of wealth to be self-defense and views despair as pragmatism. Nonetheless, her values barely exaggerate the middle-class cult of respectability; her withdrawal from the convent and faith in money imply a substitution of wealth for God.²⁰ The fireplace under the photographs emphasizes the

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fiendishness of such mores. After Manuel drowns, Lydia acquires a primary ingredient for poisonous gas. The yellow fluid resembles that surrounding the passive biological specimens and points to her associating them with Allan. Twice she tries to kill him—by drowning and lethal gas—exactly as she attempts suicide, and she poisons his brandy with the laudanum on which she depends (again Collins's self-parody). Instead of a repeated process, Lydia's *modus operandi* is her various means of self-torment. The ironic pattern follows her increasing inability to accept responsibility. Ozias' welcoming Allan to Naples most likely convinced her of her marital failure and irredeemability. Having wooed and discarded her, the squire also represents the Blanchards who used and then repudiated her as a child; killing him would symbolize her revenge upon all depersonalizing authority.

Thus, before Lydia entered the asylum, she was paranoid: "A horrible fancy has taken possession of me. He [Ozias] has been noble and good.... Who can tell what a gap that dreadful difference may make between us, unknown to him and unknown to me?" Her anxiety builds: "It is folly, it is madness; but, when I lie awake by him..., I ask myself whether any unconscious disclosure of the truth escapes me"; terror leads to gross uncertainty: "Is there an unutterable Something left by the horror of my past life, which clings invisibly to me still? And is *he* feeling the influence of it, sensibly, and yet incomprehensibly to himself?" Lydia's deification of romantic love exceeds metaphor and opposes Brock's belief in purification through Jesus Christ's sacrifice: "Is there no purifying power in such love as mine? Are there plague-spots of past wickedness on my heart which no after-repentance can wash out?" (9:352-353). Like Wrentmore, she idealizes affection, becomes violent, and evidently doubts her sanity—hence her "horrible fancy," "folly," "madness," and "unconscious disclosure." "Taken possession" demonizes her irrationality, and when she poisons Ozias, the gas symbolizes her fancied aura.

When Lydia meets Downward in his office, she is already self-horrified and self-damned. Her search for reflections of terror, though draining, could be an artistic exercise distancing her from guilt. Both the floating and writhing specimens remain forever in the jars, and photographs of both the neurotic and psychotic patients hang above the flames; these images of eternal torment correspond to Lydia's acceptance of the belief that she personifies malevolence (thus she enjoys playing a sonata which suggests to her "the agony of lost spirits in a place of torment" [9:360]). Through Wrentmore's fatalism she becomes as bound as the specimens, photographed patients, and the

paralytic himself. Her projections consequently connote entrapment, and her collapse paradoxically results from and breeds perceived helplessness. In over-compensation Lydia almost runs from the building to which Downward lures Allan. She grabs her cloak and blurts, "I'm not in prison" (9:522), yet she never leaves.

Lydia's despair prompts her to kill Allan: "The gulf is dug between us [Ozias and her]—the worst is done" (9:522). To her, their failed marriage is worse than murder. Her "gulf" alludes to the "great gulf" between heaven and hell (Luke 16:19-31); Dives, dressed in purple and damned, is the antithesis of Lydia, the Christian seller of purple. They correlate to Lydia Gwilt's assuming damnation despite the offer of salvation. Her passive "is dug" reveals that she again attributes her predicament to fate. When Ozias finally finds her, a "dead silence" (9:488) thrice foreshadows her denials and death. After she renounces him, he begs Bashwood's help and unwittingly points to her madness: "Am I seeing things that *you* don't see?...Am I looking or speaking like a man out of his senses?" Her three denials render Ozias a Christ-figure; murder for money, red hair, and suicide link Lydia with Judas and the spirit that temporarily led Peter: "She raised her eyes to his for the first time. Her lost spirit looked at him, steadily defiant, out of the hell of its own despair" (9:490).

Bashwood screams, "He'll kill you," but Lydia's reply is more bizarre than Ozias' fury. "With a sudden irradiation of her blank face," she murmurs, "*Let* him kill me," and musters "a frightful smile." Frail, aged Bashwood cannot stop her husband, so she either talks to herself or prays. Such manslaughter would satisfy her death wish and end her self-horror. Ozias would have to kill her barehanded as her Satanic brilliance reappears and her masochism nears an orgasmic level. Evidently, a cataleptic seizure stops him: "He dropped, as the dead drop. He lay as the dead lie" (9:491). His corpselike attitude and her response suggest that he ironically foils the plot: Lydia "rocked him on her bosom in an agony of tenderness beyond all relief in tears, in a passion of remorse beyond...words" (9:492). Soon, however, "merciless necessities" (9:493) consume her. Because Wrenmore's prophecy demonizes her, she apparently feels that Midwinter's killing her proves his righteousness and her remaining value to him.

Paradoxical characterization stems from Lydia's psychic division. The megalomania that daunts Downward's neighbors surfaces as she sends Bashwood for a doctor; her stare and voice would warn "any man living to obey her in silence" (9:491). She and Ozias believe that they are fated to play evil roles. Spiritual rebirth evidently transforms his acquiescence into trust in God's forgiveness and guidance. Lydia,

however, again fights any sense of powerlessness. When her reason collapses, suppressed emotions emerge with a suicidal vengeance. Until then, she depends upon “the fatal force of her character” (9:489). Bashwood admires her strength, yet he hopes to blackmail her with information gathered by his son. Rather than demanding money or sexual gratification, the steward assumes that he can make Lydia love and cherish him. Mutual amorality informs his intended threat—“do what she might, commit what crimes she pleased—to think twice before she deceived and deserted him again” (9:533). His plans point to her delusion of redemptive romance and subordination of murder to marital failure.

Ozias recognizes his pain multiplied in Bashwood; implicitly, Lydia senses their similarity. Her “stronger will” dominates the steward “as it had conquered him throughout” (9:550), but soon she acts as if she cannot distinguish him from Midwinter, whom she has never subjugated. As the old man intends to blackmail her, Ozias unwittingly threatens to expose the plot. She evidently assumes, however, that he will countenance the murder which would irrefutably confirm their fatalism. Lydia believes that Ozias sensed her evilness and, therefore, rejected her; yet, she gathers that he will rejoin her because she now indulges the proclivity. She cannot grasp the discrepancy, and her ravelment monomaniacally culminates in a belief that “there is no other way” (9:551) but murder. The guilt of Waldron’s death would persuade her to kill Armadale; refraining from the present murder would not, in her mind, compensate for the previous one, as Ozias’ saving Allan would not wholly atone for Ingleby’s wrongful death. Although Midwinter has no inkling of her plans, she paranoically thinks otherwise: “He will leave the words unspoken which he has come here to say—when he knows...that the words may send me to the scaffold” (9:551). She cannot concentrate or muster the frankness of her diary, and the paranoia expands from her fear of emitting a subliminally perceptible aura of evilness.

Lydia proceeds to concoct a gas in the fumatory apparatus connected to Allan’s bedroom. The process involves six stages, five minutes elapsing between each step; during the twenty-five minutes, severe mood swings initiate her delusional climax. In manic excitation “she went downstairs into the hall; she walked to and fro...She came up again; she went down again.” Apparently, catatonia, rather than caution, arrests her: She stares, “*without conscious thought of any kind*, into the black night” and hears a dog howling. Oddly detached, she finds herself “following the faint sound as it *died away* into silence *with a dull attention*” and listens for its return “*with an expectation that*

was duller still." Meanwhile, "her arms *lay like lead* on the window-sill; her forehead rested against the glass *without feeling the cold.*" After an interval, "the moon *struggled out,*" and thus "she was *startled into sudden self-remembrance*" (9:552-553, emphases added). In such debilitation Lydia cannot focus upon the murder at hand. After the third step, her energy seemingly returns as sexual arousal: "The fever-heat throbbed...in her blood, and flushed fiercely in her cheeks...again the suspense began to madden her." The area becomes "too confined for [her] illimitable restlessness," so she re-enters the hall and circles "round it like a wild creature in a cage" (9:553).

The analogy points to Lydia's fatalistic belief that she is "a wild creature in a cage," that she must play her evil role with no moral qualms. Nonetheless, unendurable guilt disproves the assumption. Her recurrent stops and starts indicate failing confidence and decay of cognition, and an otherwise trivial event marks the extent of her delusions. Another caged animal, a house cat, approaches her; Lydia identifies herself with amoral nature and caresses the animal: "Armadale hates cats...Come up and see Armadale killed!" The next moment her own frightful fancy horrified her" (9:553-554). Apart from her assertion, there is no indication of his hating cats. She fantasizes the collusion of the animal as she justifies the murder itself: She invents Allan's animosity and then defends against it. At last she seems to realize how far her mind has wandered and how tenuous her rationalizations have become, but she is unaware that Satanism tinges her fantasy, cats being traditional, demonic familiars.

Lydia immediately fears her husband's waking. Because no transition occurs, she evidently forgets amorality and associates him and the animal as innocents, in contrast with herself. Dark humor enters her supposed collusion with the cat, but the situation parallels her hope that Ozias would support murder. Furthermore, the animal's insomnia reminds her how lightly he sleeps. Alerted, she checks the hall outside his room and finds her handkerchief, proof that "the last man on earth whom she would have suspected" (9:549) had indeed deceived her. The discovery is a touchstone of her collapse. Despite Bashwood's obtuseness, she not only succumbed to his deception, but also promoted it. Diminished reason had led Lydia to horrify him when she left him on guard; thus he refuses to admit that Ozias entered the hallway. Her subsequent reactions also suggest dementia. Seeing Allan asleep in Ozias' room, she stumbles "with a frantic upward action of her hands"; "like a woman stupefied," she stares at the door and finally lurches to the fatal bedroom "before her reason recovered" (9:556).

When murder was Lydia's primary concern, her erotic carriage had impressed Bashwood—"her flowing hair, as it lay red over the black shawl"; "her supple, long-fingered hand, as it slid down the banisters"; and "the smooth, seductive grace of every movement" (9:550). The Gothic union of murder and sensuality underscores her death lust (the mirrors and cupids near Wrentmore's deathbed served a similar purpose). In saving Ozias, however, her hand twice gropes "wildly and clumsily" for the hidden lever to unlock his door: "The third time her eyes helped her hands" as her body seemingly reflects her psychic division. Either Lydia suffers a temporary blindness consistent with her symptoms of catatonia, or she averts her eyes as she had done while denying him. She eventually saves Midwinter because "her instinct rushed into action" (9:556), not because her reason returned.

Lydia drags Ozias into the hall still "without daring to look" (9:557) at evidence of her imbalance. Her reluctance lends a hallucinatory quality to the scene, as if the horrors of the snuggery culminate in this vision. Having rendered him unconscious, the gas "seized her, like the grasp of a hand at her throat, like the twisting of a wire round her head" (9:556). The imagery recalls Midwinter's aborted attack and the hanging she barely escaped, but "the twisting of a wire round her head" primarily refers to irremediable mental collapse. Thus, when Lydia reels, gas intoxicates her, and her will and guilt madden her. Ironically cradling Ozias' head, she searches for signs of life, as she had done after his last seizure. Her anxiety apparently conjures up an attractive alternative. She had monomaniacally perceived Allan's death as the only means to happiness; in a slight variation, she feels that suicide/martyrdom is her proper end. With "strange composure," therefore, she is "resigned to welcome the chance of his [Ozias'] recovery, or to accept the certainty of his death" (9:557-558).

Collins emphasizes Lydia's self-absorption by twice indicating that "not a cry or a tear escaped her"; she had virtually glowed when Ozias tried to strangle her—even though he would have assumed the guilt maddening her. She also disregards how her suicide would devastate him: "Something softly radiant in her eyes...lit her whole countenance as with an inner light, and made her womanly and lovely once more" (9:558). Despite suggested regeneration, her visage simply reflects her delusion of self-redemption. Doubly ironic, death quickens Lydia, whose humanization marks a re-entry to the role of succubus. The "inner light" and revived beauty refer to Satanic brilliance and the belief that suicide would redeem her. Craving laudanum-induced forgetfulness, she redefines martyrdom to repress fear of damnation and twice links the poisonous gas with oblivion.

As Lydia had played a martyr to slander, she supposedly sacrifices herself for love. She writes her suicide note on Brock's deathbed letter and apparently associates her demise and his, hence the religious tone: "The one atonement I can make for all the wrong I have done you is the atonement of my death." She claims her "wickedness has one merit—it has not prospered," yet she seems to forget the many deaths for which she is responsible, the only exception being Allan's survival. The final line, "I have never been a happy woman," suggests that her sorrow is compensatory. Lydia buries reference to affection in midletter and unconsciously admits dissociation: "I had some innocent moments, and then I loved you dearly." Still preoccupied with oblivion, she tells Ozias to "forget me...in the love of a better woman" (9:559), but she never considers the trauma of his waking near her warm corpse. Thus she uses the note to evoke sympathy by promoting her ostensible selflessness and by obscuring her attack on Allan.

Lydia addresses Ozias as "my angel," promising him "a happy life...if you are freed from *me*" (9:560). Her suicide, however, insures that he will remember his dubious debt to her and will never be psychologically free. She forgets her claim that traumas can warp psyches (apparently a corollary from Downward's regimen): "I might, perhaps, have been [a] better woman...if I had not lived a miserable life" (9:559). Until she prays, she makes atonement only to Ozias. Brock's letter evidently reminds her of God. Before she enters the gas-filled room, Lydia notices that "the waning moon shone in faintly at the window" and that "light...was slowly fading out of the murky sky." The pathetic fallacy and her exclamations suggest that she associates the darkness and damnation: "Oh, God, forgive me!...Oh, Christ, bear witness that I have suffered" (9:560). Rather than repenting, she emphasizes her all-atoning sorrow, and even her prayer alludes to the martyrdom informing her suicide note. The delusion simply extends her self-deification. Thus Bashwood creates a shrine to her and keeps her castoffs as holy relics, his romance being cultic and ecstatic.

Lydia's only consistent orthodoxy is a belief in damnation; she never substantiates faith in divine redemption. Without preparation, her prayer appears to be a psychological reflex, a response to suggestion. By leaving the prayer ambiguous, Collins preserves a degree of sympathy for her. Well before her suicide, though, Lydia copied Brock's letter in her diary and dismissed his evangelicalism. "A believer in the Bible" (9:298), he cites Christ's sacrificial death and condemns fatalism. The rector dwells upon forgiveness of sins through faith, imputation of righteousness, and divine guidance: "The mainspring of all the good I have ever done," such trust "comforts and

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quiets me, lying here, to live or to die, I know not which. Let it sustain, comfort, and enlighten you" (9:300). Brock claims that the coincidences joining Allan and Ozias, if seen through faith, disprove the family curse: "The Atonement...has its mortal reflections....If danger ever threatens Allan, you, whose father took his father's life—YOU, and no other, may be the man whom the providence of God has appointed to save him." Lydia had recopied the last line, adding that "the words...have shaken me to the soul" (9:301). Fear of harming Ozias moved her to aver: "I have trampled my own wickedness under foot. I am innocent" (9:302). Her self-redemption, however, directly opposes Brock's doctrine.

To render her unhappiness redemptive, Lydia must forget when murderous excitement was akin to sexual arousal. She had felt "terrible excitement" when she rode with Allan: "There I was, alone with him, talking in the most innocent, easy, familiar manner, and having it in my mind all the time to brush his life out of my way...as I might brush a stain off my gown." The desire "made my blood leap, and my cheeks flush. I caught myself laughing" and, therefore, "pull[ed] down my veil" (9:252). Her stained gown, rushing blood, flushed cheeks, shifted clothes, and stifled laughter connote eroticism (the blush and racing blood reappear as Lydia makes the lethal gas [9:553]). She links death and romance, as opposed to pursuing spiritual regeneration. Her supposed repentance lacks such authentic intensity; in profound suggestibility, she approximates Brock's deathbed message of divine grace. Thus, though she and Mrs. Oldershaw have parted, Lydia unconsciously mimics her mentor, who poses as a revivalist. Evidence of a spiritual rebirth, in Lydia's suicide note and prayer, is incomplete; her essential nature is unchanged. The death lust and latent necrophilia which had excited her with Allan also control her at death. Therefore she twice caresses her seemingly dead husband and kills herself on his bed.

In her suicide note Lydia refers to Allan's rescue as a solely human feat. She sees Brock's message again as she writes her farewell and, as if knocking on wood, she mouths a prayer. Her last words to Midwinter are more forthright: She "lingered for her last look in this world—and turned that look on *him*. 'Good-by!' she said, softly" (9:560). Lydia's "good-by," a contraction of "God be with ye," implies that He would be with Ozias but that she does not expect such divine companionship. Unlike Brock, she neither claims that faith eases death nor directs Ozias to return to Allan. Ceasing efforts to placate God, Midwinter simply accepts heavenly redemption; no longer defending Armadale, the young writer merely sleeps and thwarts the conspiracy.

Such sleep symbolizes his new-found faith and surrender to Providence (cf. Luke 8:23). When, without similar foundation, Lydia sleeps in the gas, no one saves her physically or spiritually.

Ozias' spiritual rebirth dramatically contrasts with Lydia's deluded end. Alluding to Romans 8:28, he accepts Brock's evangelicalism, renounces fatalism, and testifies to his "new mind" (9:572) and "new life" (9:573). He distrusts his perceptions and depends instead upon God's compassion and wisdom: "In that faith I can look back without murmuring...and can look on without doubting," as two archetypes confirm rebirth. Whereas Lydia had recently looked upon the pitch-black night, "the darkness had passed" when Ozias stares outside, and "the first light...rested tenderly on his face" (9:573), a wholesome luminosity which her Satanic brilliance mimicked. His salvation and Brock's tenets refute the agnosticism or atheism generally ascribed to Wilkie Collins's canon.²¹ With Ozias, the author returns the conversion convention to a spiritual application; he suggests that the literary change in character, epitomized by Lydia's romantic idealization, is pernicious and devilish.

Thus Lydia Gwilt collapses and becomes a Satanic figure, as if such despair and violence are infernal. Suppressed emotions become her nemeses as projected fears verge upon hallucinations in Downward's asylum, and her death wish and perceived powerlessness culminate in sadomasochism and necrophilia. Assuming a delusional martyrdom, she fulfills earlier hints of demonism and parrots Brock's doctrine as emotional devastation results in an absolute suggestibility. With Lydia, therefore, Collins reveals a depth of characterization and a specifically evangelical orientation.

NOTES

¹Michael Sadleir, "Melodrama in Fiction," *TLS*, 11 August 1927, p. 548; Wilbur L. Cross, *The Development of the English Novel* (1927; New York, 1964), p. 109; Merle Mowbray Bevington, *The Saturday Review, 1855-1868: Representative Educated Opinion in Victorian England* (New York, 1941), pp. 153-202; Keith Hollingsworth, *The Newgate Novel, 1830-1847: Bulwer, Ainsworth, Dickens and Thackeray* (Detroit, 1963), pp. 14-15, 33, 87-89, 98-99, 103, 105-106, 120; Frederick R. Karl, *An Age of Fiction: The Nineteenth Century British Novel* (New York, 1964), pp. 9-11; Maurice Richardson, "It's All Been Done Before," *TLS*, 8 December 1966, pp. 1144-45; Edward Wagenknecht, *Cavalcade of the English Novel* (New York, 1967), p. 234; Elaine Showalter, "Desperate Remedies: Sensation Novels of the 1860's," *VN*, 49(1976), 1-4.

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²S. M. Ellis, *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu, and Others* (1931; Freeport, N.Y., 1968), p. 14; Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame: A History of the Gothic Novel in England* (1957; New York, 1966), pp. 237-240.

³Michael Sadleir, *Excursions in Victorian Bibliography* (London, 1922), pp. 129-131, 135. See also J. W. T. Ley, "Wilkie Collins's Influence upon Dickens," *Dick.*, 20(1924), pp. 66-67; Bradford A. Booth, "Wilkie Collins and the Art of Fiction," *NCF*, 6(1951), 136; Karl, pp. 10-11, n. 1; Ernest A. Baker, *From the Brontës to Meredith: Romanticism in the English Novel* (1936; London, 1942), p. 197, 199-201, vol. 8 of *The History of the English Novel*; Walter M. Kendrick, "The Sensationalism of *The Woman in White*," *NCF*, 32(1977-1978), 21; Walter C. Phillips, *Dickens, Reade, and Collins, Sensation Novelists: A Study of the Conditions and Theories of Novel Writing in Victorian England* (1919; New York, 1962), p. 144, 186, 200-201.

⁴Cf. Lionel Stevenson, *The English Novel: A Panorama* (Boston, 1960), pp. 325, 384; Ellis 15; Wagenknecht 222, 234; T. S. Eliot, "Wilkie Collins and Dickens," *TLS*, 4 August 1927, pp. 525-526, rpt. in *Selected Essays, 1917-1932*, new ed. (New York, 1964), p. 410; Harland S. Nelson, "Dickens' Plots: 'The Ways of Providence' or the Influence of Collins?" *VN*, 1(1961), 11. George S. Fayen, Jr., "Thomas Hardy," in *Victorian Fiction: A Guide to Research*, ed. Lionel Stevenson (Cambridge, Mass., 1964), p. 374, suggests that Collins similarly influenced the plot construction of Hardy's *Desperate Remedies*.

⁵Defending Collins's capacity for characterization, S. M. Ellis, pp. 3, 20, 29, 35, and Edward Wagenknecht, pp. 235, 238-239, refer to *Armadale* in particular. In *Wilkie Collins* (New York, 1970), p. 129, William H. Marshall cites Collins's exposure to the theory of "the unconscious self." Paul Jay Delmar, "The Sensation Fiction of Wilkie Collins," diss., Univ. of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1976, pp. 24-25, 28, 48, 50, n. 5, notes Collins's exposure to contemporary psychology; Kirk H. Beetz, "Wilkie Collins and *The Leader*," *VP*, 15(1982), pp. 20-21, specifies Collins's opposition to G. H. Lewes's rationalism (this disagreement naturally colored their different views of psychological phenomena).

⁶Eliot p. 416; Wagenknecht p. 240; Wilkie Collins, *Jezebel's Daughter* (New York, 1900), pp. 411-412, vol. 27 of *The Works of Wilkie Collins*. Such diaries also facilitate the intense reliving of crimes, as with the often grotesque souvenirs kept by modern serial murderers. My study covers *Armadale: Parts One and Two*, vols. 8 and 9 of *The Works*; references appear parenthetically in the text, giving volume and page numbers.

⁷Delmar, p. 23, cites Millingen, Carpenter, and Griesinger.

⁸Gillian Beer, "Origins and Oblivion in Victorian Narrative," *Sex, Politics, and Science in the Nineteenth-Century Novel*, Selected Papers from the English Institute, 1983-1984, n. s. 10, ed. Ruth Bernard Yeazell (Baltimore, 1986), p. 76.

⁹John R. Reed, *Victorian Conventions* (Athens, Oh., 1975), pp. 198, 201.

¹⁰Cf. Delmar 28; George Henry Lewes, *The Physiology of Common Life*, (Edinburgh, 1859), 2: 385.

¹¹Varma 192; Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, trans. Angus Davidson, 2nd ed. (1951; Oxford, 1983), pp. 214-216, 223, 231, 236, 249-251, 273; Karl, p. 25.

¹²Cf. M. Rudwin, *The Devil in Legend and Literature* (Chicago, 1931), pp. 101-102; Jerome Hamilton Buckley, *The Victorian Temper: A Study in Literary Culture* (New York, 1951) 166-168; "Lilith," *An Encyclopaedia of Occultism*, 1960 ed.

¹³Phillips, pp. 163-164.

¹⁴Philip O'Neill, *Wilkie Collins: Women, Property and Propriety* (Totowa, N.J., 1988), p. 195.

¹⁵"Lucifer" and "Satan," *Smith's Bible Dictionary*, 1977 ed.

¹⁶Cf. Paull F. Baum, "Judas's Red Hair," *JEGP*, 21 (1922), 520-529; Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV, *The Gothic's Gothic: Study Aids to the Tradition of the Tales of Terror* (New York and London, 1988), pp. 383-385.

¹⁷"Marie de Brinvilliers," *Almanac of World Crime*, 1986 ed. Nuel Pharr Davis, *The Life of Wilkie Collins*, intro Gordon N. Ray (Urbana, 1956), p. 240, identifies the historical source Collins appropriated.

¹⁸Delmar, pp. 21-22, indicates that contemporary psychology regarded a dramatic change in disposition an important symptom of incipient madness.

¹⁹On Collins's fear of unregulated asylums, see Dean D. Dunham, Jr., "The Growth of Wilkie Collins' Craftsmanship: *Antonina to The Moonstone*," diss., Univ. of Nebraska, 1969, pp. 206, 297; Davis, p. 213, 242; Marshall 71. Davis, p. 245, deduces Collins plied John Forster for details of such asylums. Jenny Bourne Taylor, *In the Secret Theatre of Home: Wilkie*

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Collins, Sensation Narrative, and Nineteenth-Century Psychology (New York, 1988), pp. 171-172, finds that Downward's hospital parodies one based aspects of Conolly's *The Treatment of the Insane Without Mechanical Restraints*.

²⁰Alexander Welsh, *The City of Dickens* (Oxford, 1971), p. 223: Decreasing faith in immortality often led to an emphasis upon inheritable estates.

²¹Cf. Davis, pp. 211-212; Wagenknecht, p. 241; Reed, p. 318; Marshall, pp. 115, 124, 126, 133. Beetz, pp. 24-25, challenges their assumption. For specifics on Victorian evangelicalism, see Julia Prewitt Brown, *A Reader's Guide to the Nineteenth-Century English Novel* (New York, 1985), pp. 45-48.