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Patrolling Boundaries in the Victorian Age:
Empowering the Ab-normal *in Wilkie Collins's* The Moonstone

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Ad Anna, a Loris

The modern novel is one of the most important moral agents of the community.

(Dinah Maria Mulock Craik, “To Novelists – and a Novelist”,

in Masson, Mowbray, Morley, Grove, 1861: 442)

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Introduction

"We have become a novel-reading people. Novels are in the hands of us all, from the Prime Minister, down to the last appointed scullery maid" observed Anthony Trollope in his 1870 "On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement" (in Pamela K. Gilbert, 2011: 1). Less than a decade before, Dinah Craik had claimed that "The essayist may write for his hundreds; the preacher preach to his thousands; but the novelist counts his audience by millions" (Masson, Mowbray, Morley, Grove, 1861: 442). Indeed, never had so many readers consumed so much fiction so affordably as in the Victorian era. By the mid-nineteenth century, crime novels in particular became a popular, commercial success, bringing together a new "mass" audience made up of all classes and both genders. Crime novels were up-to-date in their subject matters, often took up themes of recent interest in the newspapers, and dealt with scandalous affairs. As Heather Worthington maintains, these new texts "sold on their promise of sensationalism" (2010: 15). Even though the Sensation novel emerged as a peculiar literary genre around the 1860s and died out after a two-decades span of time, it has lived on in several forms, especially in its most direct offspring: modern mystery, suspense fiction, and the detective novel – the latter being particularly appreciated by Victorian readers.

The 1868 masterpiece by Wilkie Collins, *The Moonstone,* is considered the prototypical British detective novel.[1] By the time of the publication of its first edition, most of *The Moonstone* had already appeared in serial form in Britain and in America. In Britain, it was published in *All the Year Around*, the journal founded and owned by Charles Dickens, and that had serialised Collins's *The Woman in White* in 1859-1860. The first instalment of *The Moonstone* was released on the Saturday 4 January 1868 issue, while the last came out on Saturday 8 August (see David Blair's introduction to the *The Moonstone*, 1993: xii). It should be noticed that the nature of Victorian serial publication involved the novelist differently from contemporary practice of serialisation. If a book is serialised today, by the time the episodes are released, the author "can be well into his or her next book or reclining in tax exile in the Bahamas" (ibid.). On the other hand, while

[1] For instance, T. S. Eliot defines *The Moonstone* "the first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels" (T. S. Eliot, 1971, "Wilkie Collins and Dickens" in *The Victorian Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism,* quoted in Frazier, 2015: 22).

an author began their novel's serialisation in a Victorian magazine, they could still be working on it, and possibly only a few chapters ahead of the reader. This was precisely the case of *The Moonstone*: soon after publishing the first three instalments, Collins had to drop its writing because his friend Dickens had asked for his cooperation in the redaction of *No Thoroughfare,* a mystery story meant to be published in the "Christmas Number" of *All the Year Round* – a task that Collins eventually had to fulfil on his own, since Dickens left for a reading tour in the United States. Moreover, as Collins explains in his Preface to a New Edition (1871) of *The Moonstone*, his mother was taken seriously ill when the novel's serial publication had just begun. Since he spent by her bedside the two months before she passed away (on 19 February 1868), he struggled to find the time and the strength to carry on his writing. To make matters worse, after "the bitterest affliction" (5) of his life, Collins's own health broke down, making him experience "the severest illness" (5) from which he had ever suffered, and which he tried to heal with doses of opium. In that arduous period, Collins had to resort to an amanuensis, to whom he "dictated from [his] bed that portion of *The Moonstone* which has since proved most successful in amusing the public – the 'Narrative of Miss Clack'" (5). Despite all these obstacles and complications, *The Moonstone* proved to be a triumph. Its first edition was an immediate hit. In the second, revised edition of 1971, Collins himself wrote in the above-mentioned Preface:

> […] the welcome accorded to the story in England, in America and on the Continent of Europe was instantly and universally favourable. Never have I had better reason than this work has given me to feel gratefully to novel-readers of all nations. Everywhere my characters made friends, and my story roused interest. (6)

In view of his enormous success, in 1877 Collins adapted *The Moonstone* for the stage – a production, performed at the London Royal Olympic Theatre, that ran for approximately two months. The stage version of the novel, written in four acts, was not very well received by the public, possibly because of his over-simplification of the plot (which omitted Rosanna Spearman, Ezra Jennings and the Indians, and was restricted to a twenty-four-hour period at the Verinders' dwelling in Kent). Subsequently, many film, radio and television adaptations of the novel have been released. For instance, in 1909 and 1915 two silent films were produced – respectively, by William Nicholas Selig and by Frank Hall Crane. In 1934, Reginald Barker directed his critically acclaimed version

of *The Moonstone*, which starred David Manners, Phyllis Barry and Jameson Thomas, and used a contemporary 1930s setting rather than a Victorian one. In 1966, the BBC remade a television drama series of the novel, directed by Robert Bierman, and starring Greg Wise and Keeley Hawes. From 21 April to 9 May 1972, the Italian television company Rai broadcast the six-episode series entitled *La Pietra di Luna*, directed by Anton Giulio Majano, and featuring Aldo Reggiani, Enrica Bonaccorti, Valeria Ciangiottini and Mario Feliciani. In 2011, BBC Radio 4 serialised it in the *Classic Serial* slot, and in 2016 the BBC adapted it for an afternoon TV series. To this day, *The Moonstone* continues to earn its reputation as the founding text of the classic English detective story, and to receive very much critical attention, in particular as concerns its imperial implications – which will be part of the focus of my research, too.

During a course on Poetry in English that I took some years ago, praising the powerfulness of adjectives, Professor Miguel Juan Gronow Smith invited us students to perform a particular assignment. Every one of us had to pick five among all the poems, books, paintings, songs and films that had been discussed in class. The selection criterion was our own taste: we had to choose the five we appreciated the most. For each of the items selected we were then required to think of one adjective that could express a qualitative comment on its aesthetics, character, type – and that, at the same time, could convey the personal, reaction-based nature of our choice. It was anything but a simple task: coming up with such all-encompassing definitions required a huge investment of real, quality time to reflect, select, exclude. However, I found the exercise truly interesting and challenging, as well as a way of creating some sort of intimacy with the text. In fact, I have been performing this task for every text I have fallen in love with ever since. I have been thinking for a long time about "my" adjective for *The Moonstone.* In the end, I came up with *unputdownable.*

I think *The Moonstone* is unputdownable because of its intriguing plot. The novel opens with an account on "The Storming of Seringapatam (1799) extracted from a family paper" (7) that, interweaving history with fiction, leaves the reader with a paralysing sense of disconcert. Offering a brutal image of the British raids, the family paper's author introduces the despicable army officer John Herncastle who, having taken the Moonstone from its rightful place – "the forehead of the deity" (434) – brings with him to England the Oriental curse of the stolen gem. Less than ten pages ahead, the exotic setting suddenly disappears, and the reader is catapulted to 1848 Kent. Romance, death, opium addiction, a mysterious female servant, a beautiful, young heroine, three enigmatic Indians, the

disappearance of both people and objects, bungling policemen, an eccentric London detective and an inextricable net of twist and turns definitely manage to keep the audience on tenterhooks until a satisfying ending is delivered. However, *The Moonstone*'s storytelling contributes perhaps even more than its detection to making it unputdownable. Collins's virtuous and fruitful exploitation of the narrative viewpoint is truly majestic. Drawing on the tradition of epistolary fiction, Collins develops the complex plot resorting to the conservative, loquacious Gabriel Betteredge, to the intrusive, puritanical Miss Clack, to the professional solicitor Mr Bruff, to the European-educated Mr Blake, and to the English Indian-traveller Mr Murthwaite – who significantly has the last say. Such style lends the narrative an irresistible *variatio* in terms of tone and tempo. Moreover, the selection of narrators, and of the writing styles each of them adopts, is not at all arbitrary: conversely, it constitutes one of the main ways through which a thought-provoking idea of contemporary reality is conveyed. *De facto,* as Mark Mossman argues, "rather than delivering a standard mimetic representation of the real, the novel is attempting to redefine notions of what 'the real' really means" (2009: 495). One of the features I find most enthralling is precisely Collins's connotation of the characters, his way of exploring and conveying their humanity. Rosanna Spearman's tragic, prohibited and brave love; Rachel Verinder's dilemma on whether to marry the person she loves or the person she conventionally should be marrying; Ezra Jennings's heart-breaking generosity; Mr Murthwaite's unprejudiced, "silent" (67) wisdom, the Brahmins' stoicism and sacrifice: ultimately, the forensic investigation appears to be less into the loss of the Moonstone than it is into society and its diseases. I believe *The Moonstone* is unputdownable also because it is implicit in Sensation literature. The novel's thrill, the voyeuristic, guilty pleasure it offers, the moral questions and speculations it implicitly suggests: they all whet the reader's insatiable curiosity and appetite for more.

In the years in which Collins was writing his novel, his nation was undergoing a series of profound revolutions. First of all, one of the defining characteristics of nineteenth- (and also early twentieth-) century Britain was imperialism. The British Empire was truly immense: suffice it to say that by 1914 it included a quarter of the total world population, and about one fifth of the world's landmass (see Douglas M. Peers, 2004: 53-78). Moreover, in 1877 Queen Victoria (the longest reigning of any British monarch until 9 September 2015, when Queen Elizabeth II obtained that record) was proclaimed Empress of India. Another significant part in redrawing Britain's urban, economic, social and cultural map was played by industrialisation, which remodelled the

values upon which Victorian civilization rested. For the first time in Britain, whole parts of towns began to be inhabited exclusively by working men and women, *i.e.,* the new working class – whose distance from the wealthier social strata grew progressively larger. Furthermore, the great technological advancements in transport and communications allowed a faster and easier circulation of people, goods, and news. A new cultural space was relatively rapidly taking shape – a space that saw the boundary between the "elite culture" and the "common culture" increasingly blurring, in favour of a "popular culture" shared by all classes (as John Storey argues, 2009: 1-15). The emergence of such cultural arena marked a profound disequilibrium in the canonical power relationship between subordinate and ruling classes, undermining in many ways the social stability, and the political and cultural domain of the time. Meanwhile, science and the figure of the scientist started to be provided with an unprecedented potential for authority over interpretations of nature, politics, religion, culture, and the humankind as a whole. New scientific and pseudoscientific fields were being explored and discussed, among which sociology, chemistry, physiology, phrenology, anthropometry and mesmerism. In particular, social Darwinism and Lombroso's criminal anthropology significantly contributed to subvert from the root the traditional ways of understanding the human being, providing positivist foundations for the construction of a new meaning of "normalcy". Lennard Davis defines "normalcy" as the sociocultural construct responsible for the creation "of the 'problem' of the disabled person" (Davis, 2006: 3), underlining that, rather than being a degree zero of existence, it constitutes a location of "biopower". This last term drawn from Michel Foucault, on the other hand, refers to the study of all the techniques employed by the power that, acting on the human body, contribute to define the standards of the (biological) *norm.*

In 2009, Mark Mossman published his essay "Representation of the Abnormal Body in *The Moonstone*" in *Victorian Literature and Culture*. I found the reading of this essay truly illuminating, inspiring and, in some way, provocative – to such an extent that I can say it represented some sort of trigger and scaffolding for my dissertation. In that essay, Mossman delineates the factors that, in the Victorian era, contributed to the fabrication of the construct of "normalcy", and the processes through which "normalcy" and "abnormalcy" became dichotomic, producing a condition of hegemony and subalternity. Most notably, he interrelates the re-definition of new standards for interpreting the body with the synergy between the flourishing medical sciences and the rising of statistics and mathematics.

The biased Victorian dichotomy “normal”/“abnormal” appears to have raised, within some social realms, quite rigid boundaries. In my dissertation, I am interested in exploring in particular the domains of social class (which sees the high-class as opposed to the inferior working class), gender (which confirms the male sovereignty in a deeply patriarchal society), sexual orientation (in which heteronormativity appears as the only possibility) and ethnicity (which perceives foreignness as a synonym to savagery and uncivilization). The resulting idea is that the artificial boundaries between “normal” and “abnormal” were being carefully patrolled in order not to be crossed.

Analysing the specific case of *The Moonstone*, in the above-mentioned essay Mossman claims that the novel is “constructed through the repeated representation of the abnormal body”, holding that such representation in a *popular* form could “define and enforce the parameters of the statistical norm” (2009: 483). However, he interestingly suggests also another possibility, that contemplates quite the opposite thesis – which I fully endorse: he claims that the representation of the abnormal body in *The Moonstone* could as well possibly “lead to a transformative re-construction of the body, a transformation that can occur inside of representation, so that in terms of physical difference ‘disability’ may occur” (2009: 486).

Embracing Mossman’s view, and maintaining that “deviance is in the eye of the beholder, not in any particular action on the part of the person who may be labelled as deviant” (Marshall Clinard and Robert Meier, *Sociology of Deviant Behaviour*, 1957; quoted in Tomaiuolo, 2018: 7), I understand *The Moonstone*’s impaired characters as subalterns, victims of the epistemic violence hegemonically exerted on them by the bodies who are arbitrarily in possess of a supposed “normalcy”. Therefore, in this dissertation I investigate the conflicting functions and significance of the “normal” and “abnormal” bodies in Collins’s novel, as well as the problematic question of the subalterns’ representation and self-representation. My aim is to prove that, within the pages of *The Moonstone*, a de-construction (and a re-construction) of the Victorian *norm* occurrs – through the empowerment of its deviant characters.

To delve into this matter, I found it fruitful to explore Collins’s work through the lens of postcolonial discourse, in particular in relation to the ideas of the subalterns’ development of a self-consciousness, their possibility of self-representation, and the mechanisms behind the production of knowledge. In particular, I referred to the concept of “subalternity” as defined by the Italian philosopher Antonio Gramsci in his 1929-1935 *Quaderni del Carcere III (12-29)*, and later critiqued and broadened by the Indian scholar

Gayatri Spivak (in her 1988 "Can the Subaltern Speak?", and her 1999 monograph, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*), including the female subjects and the "lowest" social strata. Moreover, Spivak's reading has been illuminating with regards to the ideas of "hybridity", "epistemic violence", and the Lacanian concept of "foreclosure" which she metaphorically exploited to explain how imperialism created "a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" (1999: 127). Dealing with the issues of consciousness and self-representation, I found two more significant contributions in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) by the French West Indian psychiatrist Frantz Fanon, and in *Orientalism* (1978) by the Palestinian American writer Edward Said. As concerns Fanon, I found particularly effective the value he attributed to the dominant group's normalising gaze. Indeed, he claims that in the very moment in which that gaze judges and dismisses the different body, it articulates its power over the other. As for the analysis of *The Moonstone*'s numerous imperial hints, along with Fanon's and Spivak's, I found Said's reading equally helpful. In particular, I refer to Said's understanding of "orientalism": a totally artificial, Euro-centric and purposely biased form of knowledge and control on the "Orient" produced by the West and grounded on clichés, stereotypes and generalisations. Based on these readings, I observed that subalterns can "speak" and represent themselves resorting to *their own* tools and grammar (and not to the ones hegemonically imposed on them) – on the sole condition that they (re)gain their historical self-consciousness, as well as the awareness of the biopower exerted on them by an arbitrarily self-proclaimed "superior" group. This critical apparatus constitutes a significant background and strong support to my analysis of the subaltern characters featuring in *The Moonstone*, their psychology and their role within the plot. To carry out my research, I also took into account the novel's stylistic devices: for instance, the narrative techniques exploited to introduce and describe the characters, the use of precise lexical choices, epithets and speaking names, the value of specific metaphors and rhetoric strategies, the presence of different narrative voices, and the entanglement – and in some cases, subversion – of different literary genres' influences.

My analysis seems to confirm that the self-consciousness of *The Moonstone*'s subaltern characters is fully-fledged active; what is more, their awareness is precisely what empowers them, and what allows them to "speak" (in Spivakian terms), "stare back" (in a Fanonian way), and produce their own writings (in order to "rememory", *i.e.,* preserve their historical consciousness, and be remembered). Therefore, here I suggest that Mossman's hypothesis of a subversion and re-construction of the sociocultural

paradigm of normalcy as location of biopower is actually taking place within *The Moonstone*. However, if in his essay Mossman referred to the impaired body only as a physical body, in my dissertation I consider its value as a social, cultural and political space, too. Therefore, my claim is grounded on the study of *The Moonstone*'s "deviances" related also to gender, sexual orientation, social class, and ethnicity.

As for the organisation and contents of the thesis, it is divided into three parts. "Em-Bodying Victorian Britain", the first chapter, aims at contextualising *The Moonstone* within nineteenth-century Britain, and pinpoints some specific aspects which are useful to present my reading of Collins's novel. In particular, I evidence Britain's great transformations in terms of society, culture, economy, technology, science and lifestyle. Moreover, I include an excursus on its capital, the world's largest port, an increasingly important financial centre that attracted tourists and immigrants from all over the world. Victorian London embodied all the paradoxes and contradictions that characterised that stormy era. If the Crystal Palace constituted the symbol of the British grandiosity, the fashionable West End's dwellings – of course, with their inhabitants – represented the very peak of the nation's prestige, and "the respectable kept themselves to themselves, gloried in labor, saved, achieved" (see Eugene C. Black, 1973: 154), across the border lied the polluted slums, populated by "the great unwashed": "uncivilised" factory workers who occupied overcrowded, filthy row homes. London East End was notorious also for its extremely high crime rate that, producing a sense of anxiety and insecurity in the wealthier classes, elicited the creation of new salaried, professional, full-time police forces – which began to feature in Victorian crime novels, as in the case of *The Moonstone*. The geography of the first chapter's last section, on the other hand, shifts from East London to the East of the world – precisely to India, where the *Moonstone*'s Prologue and Epilogue are set. Here I describe some episodes in which Britain imposed its authority over Indian states, such as the violent Siege of Seringapatam, in the Kingdom of Mysore (1799), the battle of Gujrat for the annexation of Punjab (1849) – following which, Queen Victoria was presented with the Koh-i-Noor, and the series of military mutinies that, between 1857-1858, ended in a ferocious bloody uprising. If the relation between Britain and its "jewel in the crown" (see C. C. Eldridge, 1984: 82) appears in a constant tension between pride and hypocrisy, ambivalence and anxiety, so can be pictured the multifaceted domestic reception of imperialism. Indeed, although most Victorian historiography seems to reveal a nationalistic predisposition towards imperialism, legitimising its civilising mission, some anti-imperialist countertrends have

appeared, too – denouncing the dishonourable motives on which it was grounded (such as economic interest and labour exploitation). To conclude, cultural studies and post-colonial studies support the last part of this section, which covers the social and cultural practices, as well as the legacy, of the imperialistic control and exploitation of the colonised subjects and their lands.

The second chapter, entitled "Crime Fiction and Wilkie Collins", is concerned with providing *The Moonstone* a background in relation to its literary genre. As mentioned, crime fiction has always been positively welcomed by the British public, and appeared in many forms, such as Gothic novels and Newgate novels (the latter, developed from *The Newgate Calendar*) – both of which had a strong influence on Sensation literature. What mainly distinguished the Sensation novel from its Newgate progenitor, however, was that the former featured middle- and high- class characters, gaining in this way an increasing market even among the wealthier classes. The Gothic presence within Sensation, on the other hand, is detectable mostly in the presence of mystery, which marks Sensation novels' distinction from more realistic fictions and other related romantic and popular forms. At the time when new police forces were established and began to grow, the figures of detectives and police officers emerged and started developing also within Detective novels. The introduction of detection in fiction determined a new narrative strategy meant to tantalise the public by withholding information rather than divulging it – which is quite the opposite of the retrospective narrative that characterised the early crime stories. As far as *The Moonstone*, I analyse the functions of the Gothic mystery's presence within the novel (embodied by the leitmotif of the Orient), the role of Sergeant Cuff as the *professional* Detective and of Mr Blake as the *actual* chief Detective, as well as the entanglement of real historical and scientific data with fictional elements, and the subversion of the Victorian "colonial biography" through the portrait of Colonel Herncastle as an anti-hero. However, since many literary traditions can be identified within the novel, trying to confine Collins's masterpiece into a specific literary genre would be belittling: it can be argued that, relying on several literary conventions, Collins produced a definitely unconventional work. Collins's biographers often maintain that the eccentric content of his novels, as well as the uniqueness of his style, are reflected in his rather bohemian personal lifestyle (see Daniel Martin in "Wilkie Collins and Risk", 2011: 185), of which some tidbits are offered in the last section of this chapter. Describing Collins's Law studies, European trips with Dickens (of whom he was seen, for much of the twentieth century, as the lightweight protégé), interests in visual arts, position as a

clerk at the tea merchants, physical malformities, opium addiction, and nonconformist relationships with women, I attempt to set forth the biographical details which can be of some interest in relation to *The Moonstone.* Indeed, the novel is strewn with disabled characters and misfits, drug addicts and foreign people – to whom, though, a new and own voice is given, and who are often portrayed as the real heroes. Indeed, diseased bodies acquire central meaning in Collins's production, serving as a helpful engine of the plot – as the following chapter shows.

"Against Stereotypes: Dismantling the Victorian *Norm* in *The Moonstone*" is the third and last chapter, and constitutes the core of my thesis. After elucidating the nature of the dialogue that I propose between Collins's *The Moonstone* and the postcolonial discourse, my research focuses on the ways in which the Victorian *norm* appears to be undermined and subverted through the empowerment of *The Moonstone*'s subaltern characters. Specifically, I will devote the first section to illustrating the supposed "deviances" concerning gender, sexual orientation, social status, and psychophysical characteristics. In the last section, conversely, further attention will be devoted to the theme of ethnicity as a discriminating, disabling condition, as well as to a wider discussion on the imperialistic rhetoric.

In conclusion, I find that, in *The Moonstone,* the demolition of the social construct of normalcy occurs in synergy with, and thanks to, the rehabilitation of those traits considered to be deviant or abnormal, and the empowerment of the characters featuring them. Although each of the characters appears at first to be well positioned within one specific class of the rigid Victorian social taxonomy, eventually the reality that emerges from *The Moonstone*'s pages is way more liquid and fluid. *De facto,* the de-construction of such prototypical characters within a Detective plot rich in twists and turns results highly functional in dismantling those same stereotypes from within. In particular, I highlighted many cases in which established social, class, heteronormative and ethnic boundaries have been crossed – producing a hybridisation whose outcomes are not "reversion" or "regression" (as a Victorian reader would *normally* expect), but a successful, fertile merging.

Chapter One

Em-Bodying Victorian Britain

History may seem to be about the past, but it is really about the present.
(Duffin 2010: 276)

Although at first glance the Victorian era might evoke an idea of order, control and stability, this image is *de facto* misleading: in reality, it was an era of great mutations and political, economic and social revolution. At the beginning of Queen Victoria's reign (which lasted from 20 June 1837 until her death, on 22 January 1901), Britain had just emerged victorious from the Napoleonic wars, gathering positive viewpoints across the globe. The ongoing and increasing industrial development and the construction of the Stockton & Darlington (the world's very first railway, opened in 1825) brought about a wide series of effects and consequences that changed entirely the lives of many people and substantially altered those of almost all, reshaping the concepts of culture, city, time, space and society, and determining the emergence of a new social category: the working class (Black: 1973: ix). In addition to technological advancements, British imperialism was globally prevalent during all the nineteenth and the early twentieth century, and in 1877 Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli had Queen Victoria proclaimed as Empress of India.

From about 1825 London grew enormously, becoming the largest city in the world.[2] By the 1860s it was two-thirds larger than Paris and five times larger than New York City, and its population increased from 1.90 million in 1801 to 5.567 million in 1891.[3] Its kaleidoscopic heterogeneity has earned London the association to the Biblical cities of Jerusalem, Babel, Sodom and Gomorrah.[4] New pseudoscience and doctrines such as physiognomy, phrenology, psychiatry and social Darwinism began to take hold, with important cultural consequences.

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[2] Rosenberg (2020). "Largest Cities Throughout History." ThoughtCo. thoughtco.com/largest-cities-throughout-history-4068071. (Accessed: 14th December 2020).
[3] Data are taken from the Great Britain Historical GIS website. Accessed: 14th December 2020.
[4] Ascari (2007: 133) among other scholars.

It would be too difficult and ambitious a purpose to pay fair tribute to a complex, intricate and multifaceted reality such as the Victorian one; as a matter of fact, as Eugene C. Black maintains, “there is no such thing as a Victorian society or a Victorian culture. The closer one comes to the evidence, the more that specific cases resist generalization” (Black, 1973: ix). Therefore, this chapter does not aim at offering an all-encompassing prospect of that period; rather, its goal is to pinpoint some of the major changes that Victorian civilisation experimented, which will be useful to the reading of Collins’s *The Moonstone* offered in the present dissertation.

1.1 “*The Times They are a-Changin’*”: Urban Life, Leisure Time and Popular Culture

As suggested by Storey in *Cultural Theory and Popular Culture. An Introduction* (2009),[5] industrialisation was the process that mostly contributed to redraw not only an urban, but also a social and a cultural map of nineteenth century Britain, impacting and remodelling the values upon which Victorian civilization rested.

As far as urbanisation and social structure are concerned, the new Industrial Revolution that took place from the mid-eighteenth century to about 1830 led to the concentration of many factories within a town or a region, creating a high demand for labour and drawing people from the countryside to the cities where factories were established. Hence, industrialisation produced a residential separation of classes: for the first time in Britain there were whole parts of towns inhabited only by working women and men. The emergence of the working class, as well as the definitely increasing gap between employees and employers, appear therefore to be a direct consequence of industrialisation (Storey, 2009: 17-18).

As regards the cultural impact of industrialisation, Storey maintains that before the spreading of factories and mass manufacture Britain had two cultures: a “common culture” shared, more or less, by all classes, and an “elite culture” produced by and meant for the dominant classes (2009: 1-15). The physical (topographical), social and economic boundaries separating the working class from the others, as well as the government’s repressive measures aimed at defeating trade unionism – but that, in reality, fomented the

[5] Chapters 1, 2 and 6.

working class' own production beyond its control – led to the development of a totally new cultural space, which could find a fair definition in "popular culture".

The emergence of a culture created by and intended for the majority marked a profound disequilibrium in the canonical power relationship between subordinate and ruling classes, threatening in different ways the political and cultural authority, and undermining social stability. In *Culture and Anarchy* (1867-9), Matthew Arnold offers an evolutionary-hierarchical division of society (where aristocracy and middle-class are found further along the continuum than the working class); he maintains that franchise "had given power to men as yet uneducated for power", [6] and that the concentration of power in wrong (and, what is more, numerous) hands could lead to seriously menacing outcomes. In his view, only providing the working class with an "hegemonic, manipulative education" could remove the temptation of radical and subversive movements, social agitation, and cheap entertainment. In short, education would remove popular culture, which *per se* was essentially the symptom of a profound political disorder.

On the other hand, culture as "the ability of know what is best; what is best; and the mental and spiritual application of what is best" is a self-perpetuating prerogative of a privileged elite.[7] This idea of "culture" as opposed to "popular culture" seems to match the definition of "high culture" provided in *The Oxford Dictionary of Media and Communication*:

> High Culture: 'Authentic' works of art and individual creativity and the aesthetic pleasures associated with their appreciation which require the demonstration of taste, discrimination, and sophistication derived from and contributing to the cultural capital of an *elite* as distinct from the 'mere entertainment' values associated with popular (*mass*) culture, commercial commodification and uncritical consumption. A polarizing term, originating in the mid-nineteenth century, explicitly linked to *class distinctions*. ("high culture" in Chandler & Munday, 2011. My italics.)

The gap between high culture and popular culture, therefore, seems to be historically, socially, economically and politically based: in a community in which the

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[6] The context is the suffrage agitation of 1866-7. See Storey (2009: 20).

[7] Storey's definition of Arnold's concept of culture, (2009: 19).

boundaries between the *elite* and the *mass* were growing stronger, their respective cultural productions increasingly appeared as dichotomous.

Furthermore, in her 1932 *Fiction and the Reading Public,* Q. D. Leavis questions the qualitative aspect of popular culture and nostalgically looks back at Shakespeare's time as a sort of "cultural golden age":

> The spectator of Elizabethan *drama*, though he might not be able to follow the 'thought' minutely in the great *tragedies*, was getting his amusement from the mind and sensibility that produced those passages, from an *artist* and not from one of *his own class*. There was then no such *complete separation* as we have… between the life of the *cultivated* and the life of the *generality*. (Leavis, 1932, quoted in Storey, 2009: 26. My italics.)

Like Arnold, Q. D. Leavis seems to identify the *cultivated* elite as a reality completely separate from the *generality*, and positioned on a higher level of the evolution of mankind. Moreover, another point suggested in the above-mentioned quotation regards the literary genre. If tragedy has historically always been ranked among the "paradigm of main (literary) genres", popular culture – in particular popular fiction – has been strongly criticised for a number of reasons (Fowler, 1979: 103). As reported in Storey, it was said to offer the reader a drug-addiction-like form of "compensation" and "distraction" from reality, let alone romantic fiction, which could even produce a "habit of fantasying [which] will lead to maladjustment in actual life" (Leavis, 1932, quoted in Storey, 2009: 24). Many deemed it could "lessen people's capacity to experience life itself",[8] since fiction provided them with "what Freud calls 'substitute gratification'": that is to say, readers of fiction would find in this literary genre a way to satisfy urges that they are not able to fulfil in their real life.[9] It was charged with causing the loss of regional, locally-based culture, due to its way of production and distribution: popular culture was a mass-culture, based on consumption, sales and profits, engaged with meeting the market demand, and whose major concern was reaching the broader possible audience.

A large circulation of goods required them to be shipped in a more efficient way than via carriage routes, and in more reasonable times. With the recent invention of the steam locomotive, engineers proposed railways as a feasible solution. Although the first

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[8] E. van den Haag (1957) *Notes on American Popular Culture* quoted in Storey (2009: 31).

[9] Storey (2009: 31). This take is strictly linked to the way in which industrialisation changed people's work-style: if in the past they would live *in* their work, after the Industrial Revolution they started working in order to live *outside* their work, therefore seeking leisure and distraction. (Storey, 2009: 27).

"railroad generation" was frightened to get the train (fearing accidents, derailments, smoke inhalation due to the open carriages, and insanity or nerve damage provoked by its motion, noise and high speed), the railway proved to be one of the principal instruments of progress that utterly revolutionised Victorian lifestyle in many different ways, steaming through the financial, social and cultural fabric of the country.[10]

The construction of an efficient and quick rail service saw a frenzy of investment and speculation on the part of prominent engineers. To provide some data, only from 1845 to 1900, £3 billion were spent on it.[11] Railroads employed unskilled and semiskilled workers on a scale previously matched perhaps only by the military forces. The railway played a fundamental role in the unification of the nation, erasing the distance between towns and countryside, and allowing the development of urban and suburban complexes as we know them (Black, 1973: 26-30).

The railroad also provided a brand-new understanding of mobility, offering people new ways and more chances of travelling and thus supporting the spread of news, ideas, culture. Such a possibility was so extraordinary and groundbreaking that Victorian fiction began to feature trains as steady presences. For instance, famous nineteenth century writers such as Conan Doyle and Mary Elizabeth Braddon portrayed the protagonists of their novels (the detective Sherlock Holmes[12] and Lady Audley[13] respectively) sending letters or telegrams at breakfast and receiving a reply before lunch the same day. Thomas Hardy's Jude suggested Sue Bridehead that they go and sit in the Cathedral together, and was answered: "'I think I'd rather sit in the railway station,' […] 'That's the centre of the town life now. The cathedral has had its day!' 'How modern you are!'".[14] As John Mullan argues in his 2014 article "Railways in Victorian Fiction", trains in literature often represented a symbol of destiny, too: railway accidents, crimes and thefts became a plot device, as in the case of Wilkie Collins's *No Name* (1862), where Mr Vanstone (the protagonists' father) was killed in a train crash.

Furthermore, the need for a synchronisation arisen from the construction of a national railway contributed to the institution of standardized time across Britain. The first company to implement the use of "London Time" as a common measure for all

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[10] "Victorian Railways. Did they create more crime?", The National Archive (online). https://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ Accessed: 12th December 2020.
[11] Ibid.
[12] In Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902).
[13] In Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862).
[14] Part 3, Chapter 1 of Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895).

stations was the Great Western Railway, in 1840; yet, it was only in 1884, at the International Meridian Conference of Washington, D. C., that Greenwich was selected as the prime meridian for international use.[15]

Lastly, the railway had a significant social impact since it managed to trespass and, to a certain extent, break some social boundaries. Indeed, in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, public transport in London (mainly horse-drawn omnibus and tram services) was rather expensive and could only be afforded by the better off, the wealthiest of whom owned their own carriages.[16] Lower-class passengers, then, were offered very little choice. The railway, being much cheaper, soon gained popularity, also encouraged by Acts of Parliament that, especially in the late part of the century, offered rates affordable by all, ensuring that trains conformed to standards of speed and comfort. However, despite the fact that all social classes were sharing the same public space, there was still a sort of "logistical" boundary separating them, marked by their accommodation in the carriages: first and second classes were enclosed (with first class having upholstered seats), whereas third-class passengers (who travelled outside on a stage-coach) were provided with benches in open wagons.[17]

Not only does the train appear to have questioned the boundaries between the upper and lower classes, it also questioned the dichotomy man/woman. Taking into account the role of railroad (and technological advancements in general) in literature, Lee argues that sensation fiction conveys "a new kind of power relationship […] where being the master, or, as is more often the case, the mistress of a situation is based on the ability to read the seemingly chaotic and disparate signifiers of the fast-moving modern world" (2011: 135-138).

In particular, Lee understands the literary use of locomotive as a power that "symbolically constrain(s) male sovereignty" (2011: 135-136), and provides some literary examples to support her claim. For instance, Lady Audley, despite being unable to carve a pheasant, is perfectly fine in popping down to London catching the downtown train, sending telegrams and manipulating modern media. The ease with which she handles technology is more than enough to level off her male counterparts (ibid.). Another of Braddon's heroines, Aurora Floyd, and some of Collins' powerful female characters

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[15] *International conference Held at Washington for the Purpose of Fixing a Prime Meridian and a Universal Day* (1884).
[16] These data on public transport in the Victorian Age are found in the London Transport Museum website.
[17] (ibid.)

(Lydia Gwilt in *Armadale*, 1864, Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name* and Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White*, 1859) seem to greet the latest scientific and mechanical developments in Victorian Britain with vitality and dynamism, whereas the male protagonists seem to be scarcely reactive, "stripped of all agency and autonomy by the advent of industrial modernity. The ability (or not) to assimilate the changes of contemporary life is registered in gender-specific images of high speed and mobility (associated with female characters)" (ibid.). Therefore, in sensation novels[18] a subversion of the traditional gender hierarchy takes place: no longer outsiders, women become active agents in a technological world, and are interested in "high literature" which keeps them up with the changes the modern world is undergoing, as the title of the book that Alicia Audley (in *Lady Audley's Secret*) is reading, *Changes and Chances*, suggests.[19] On the other hand, men are unable to face reality and most likely prefer to run away from difficult situations. George Talboys (in *Lady Audley's Secret*) and Franklin Blake (in *The Moonstone*), who also fancy reading "effeminate" French novels, exemplify to perfection this elusive behaviour.

With the shift to industrial discipline and urban concentration, forms of leisure changed, too. Many elements of continuity with the past leisure activities still persisted (for instance, public houses and beer shops, theatres, Pantomimes and circuses), many more activities began to gather an increasingly wide participation. Technology made books and newspapers available at a cheaper price, therefore reading became a popular pastime. Sports like football, rugby, cricket and boxing were given proper rules for the first time, and began to collect an enormous number of spectators and fans, simultaneously reinforcing "the omnipresence of the community and individual anonymity" (Black, 1973: xiii). Moreover, new sports were introduced, like croquet that, together with cycling and lawn tennis, started to gather also middle-class female players. With the growth of the railways, people also began to travel more. The Grand Tour around Europe, which in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was a trip undertaken by a few young gentlemen on the occasion of their coming of age, from the nineteenth century turned into a regular feature of aristocratic education. In general, tourism became fashionable – and not only for the well-to-do families. The involvement in leisure time of

[18] Sensation novel is a literary genre very popular in Great Britain especially between the 1860s and 1870s. This topic will be further discussed in the second chapter of the present dissertation.
[19] Nicholas Daly (1999) "Railway Novels: Sensation Fiction and the Modernisation of the Senses", in *English Literary History*. Volume 66, Number 2. Quoted in Lee (2011: 141-143).

a substantial new portion of the community was quite innovative: by the end of the nineteenth century, indeed, even some working families had time off and were able to afford holiday time. In these terms, some internal tensions within Victorian society could be spotted: although the division into social strata appeared clear, as well as that between the male and female spheres of agency, the technological revolution contributed to blur these boundaries, causing anxiety and dizziness especially in the dominant powers, who began to feel threatened.

1.2 London, the Victorian Compromise and (*im*)mobility

Hell might or might not exist in the next world; it certainly did in this.
(Black, 1973: 154)

It is not by chance that both Black in *Victorian Culture and Society* (1973: 154) and Ascari in *A Counter-History of Crime Fiction: Supernatural, Gothic, Sensational* (2007: 133) use a Biblical metaphor in the intent of conveying the polyhedral character of Victorian London, emphasising on the one hand its heavenly greatness, and on the other its sinful, dark and wicked side. As argued by Ascari (2007: 133), Victorian London has often been described as embodying the contradictory terms that imbue the Western rhetoric of urban space, that is to say, marked by the coexistence of vice and civilisation, virtue and sin. Indeed, he points out that a wide range of literary works of the second half of the nineteenth century represent London's duality as two juxtaposed faces of the same coin, highlighting the contrast between the East End, an unexplored dark world of crime and degradation, and the West End, a completely separate reality constituting the beating heart of modernity.[20]

Victorian London was the capital of the largest Empire that history had ever known that far, as well as the world's largest port. Its importance as a financial centre substantially increased over the course of the nineteenth century, attracting tourists and

[20] For instance, in his *The Mysteries of London* (1844-48) Reynolds asserts that "There are but two worlds in the moral alphabet of this great city; for all virtues are summoned up in the one, and all vices in the other: and those words are WEALTH / POVERTY" (Ascari, 2007: 134). Conrad, in his preface to *The Secret Agent: Simple Tale* (1907) describes London as follows: "There was room enough there to place any story, depth enough for any passion, variety enough there for any setting, darkness enough to bury five million of lives." (Conrad, 2004: 9).

immigrants from all parts of Europe and from the colonies. Many new infrastructures (among which roads and bridges) were built, and in 1843 the Thames Tunnel (the first tunnel in the world to be successfully constructed under a navigable river) opened.[21] The development of gas lighting at the beginning of the nineteenth century provided the city with public street illumination for the first time in its history. Many of modern London's major museums were founded or constructed in the Victorian Era, among which the National Portrait Gallery (1856)[22] and the Tate Britain (opened in 1897 as the National Gallery of British Art).[23] However, the main symbol of Victorian London's splendour was the Crystal Palace, a structure made of 4,500 tons of iron framework and holding together nearly 300,000 panes of glass, originally built in Hyde Park to house the Great Exhibition of 1851, and relocated lately to Penge Common, an area of South London (Tomaiuolo, 2018: 227). In *Deviance in Neo-Victorian Culture. Canon, Transgression, Innovation,* Tomaiuolo reports the page of Queen Victoria's diary dated 1 May 1851, in which she recalls enthusiastically the inauguration day at the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of All Nations:

> This day is one of the greatest and most glorious of our lives […]. It is a day which makes my heart swell with thankfulness […]. The Green Park and Hyde Park were one mass of densely crowded human beings, in the highest good humour. I never saw Hyde Park look as it did, being filled with crowds as far as the eye could reach. A little rain fell, just as we started, but before we neared the Crystal Palace, the sun shone and gleamed upon the gigantic edifice, upon which the flags of every nation were flying. (Tomaiuolo, 2018: 225)

Commenting on the Queen's entry, Tomaiuolo underscores her use of the *plurale maiestatis* interpreting it not as a typical royal "We", but rather as a true reflection of the widespread feeling of pride shared by many British citizens on that glorious day.[24]

[21] The Brunel Museum Thames Tunnel. https://www.thebrunelmuseum.com/ Accessed: 15th December 2020.

[22] *The Dictionary of Victorian London*. http://www.victorianlondon.org/index-2012.htm. Accessed: 15th December 2020.

[23] Tate: www.tate.org.uk. Accessed: 15th December 2020.

[24] Actually, Tomaiuolo also understands the "mass of densely crowded human beings, in the highest good humour" as a society based on consumerism, with people eager to become buyers of commodities. Indeed, the Great Exhibition was halfway a market and a museum that included products coming from all over the world. It is in these terms that Richards, as well as Tomaiuolo, considers the Great Exhibition to be "a monument to consumption" that "perfectly suited to legitimise the capitalist system", nourishing the people's desire that everything could be available for them. Richards quoted in Tomaiuolo (2018: 227).

Admittedly, two observations might lead to a possible "political" implication linked to the Crystal Palace and the inauguration of the Great Exhibition: first of all, it should be noticed that approximately half of the whole space was devoted to items made in Britain, which constituted a noteworthy act of self-promotion of the nation's economical, technological and imperial achievements. Indeed, the Victorian science of racialism was closely related to an increasing British national identity and sense of superiority. A literary example of this disposition can be found for instance in Gabriel Betteredge (the Verinders' head servant in *The Moonstone*) who, carrying always with him his beloved copy of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*, embodies the sense of patriotism and imperial thoughts. Secondly, the tickets were by no means prohibitive, meaning that the Great Exhibition could be easily accessed by all.[25] Consequently, the organisation of such a giant event could be interpreted as a political strategy: a precautionary measure to fend off trade unionism, revolts or rebellions (indeed, it had not been long since the French Revolution broke out, and masses were still feeling its resonance). The working class, being offered the possibility of admiring the grandiosity of its country and enjoying the same leisure of the upper classes, could possibly feel the gap with the West End grow smaller.

"West End" is a term appeared for the first time in the early nineteenth century, used to indicate the very peak of residential prestige in Victorian London, *i.e.*, the fashionable areas to the west of Charing Cross, that cover parts of the boroughs of Westminster, Camden, Covent Garden, Soho, Chinatown, Leicester Square, Oxford Street, Regent Street, Bond Street, Trafalgar Square, the Strand and Aldwych.

Discussing the concept of "production" of social space, in his 1991 *The Production of Space*, French Marxist philosopher and sociologist Henri Lefèbvre argues that it is "both a product and a means of production", "both a weapon and a sign" in the struggle between classes and between people and nature (Lefèbvre, 1991, quoted in Atkins, 1993: 265). Applying this idea to nineteenth-century London, Atkins argues that the West End is "the concretised material spatiality of biased social relations", adding that "one convenient strategy for the ruling class to reproduce its hegemony has been to develop pseudo monopolies of key places and spaces through ownership-, transactional-

[25] Tickets cost 1 shilling from Monday to Thursday, 2 shillings and sixpence on Fridays, and 5 shillings on Saturdays (Tomaiuolo: 2018: 226).

and use-patterns" (Atkins, 1993: 265). Atkins's remark refers to physical, concrete boundaries that were separating, isolating, protecting the West End: barriers impermeable to non-residential traffic. He quotes a passage from the 1822 *British Parliamentary Papers* regarding Camden Estate, St Pancras:

> Notice is hereby given that there is no public thoroughfare through this estate. That no cattle are allowed to be driven through this estate, to or from the New Cattle Market, Islington. That no tramps, vagrants, organ grinders, bands of musicians, or disreputable characters are permitted on the estate. That no railway vans, coal waggons, beer trucks or carts, furniture vans, dung carts, or other heavy traffic, are allowed to pass through the gates of this estate, unless they have to deliver or take up goods on the estate. That no hackney coaches are allowed on the estate, except going to or returning from the residence of any inhabitant, either to take up or set down. By order of the trustees of the Marquis of Camden. (Camden Estate, St Pancras. *British Parliamentary Papers*: 1882: 369 lxi.355, quoted in Atkins, 1993: 265)

According to Atkins, the nineteenth-century West End constituted a "gilded cage of privilege" (1993: 266) whose boundaries were constructed not only in the subtle and informal manipulation of the quality of its residential area and communities, but also (and mostly) through the blockading of streets to keep out undesirables and to restrict (or even ban) access to traffic. Thanks to the turmoil, debates and struggles about the (dis)equilibrium between public and private rights in the streets, from the 1850s some barriers began to be removed and streets to be re-open to traffic. The process culminated in two conclusive Acts of Parliament (in 1890 and 1893), that can be interpreted as clear symptoms of the wide changes in society that were inexorably eroding elite power (1993: 265). But while "the respectable kept themselves to themselves, gloried in labor, saved, achieved" (Black, 1973: 154), on the other side of these metaphorical and physical boundaries lied the East End.

The East End is the area surrounding Whitechapel, St. George's-in-the-East, Mile End, Bethnal Green, The Old Nichol and Spitafields. London slums initially arose as a result of rapid population growth and industrialisation, which, from the first decades of the nineteenth century, spurred a high demand for cheap housing. In *Dirty Old London* (2014) Lee Jackson indicates that the sanitary conditions of the districts were horrible. The burning coal of the industrial factories polluted the air, coating everything in a layer

of grime.[26] Since the municipal governments did not concern themselves with cleanliness, London did not have proper waste disposal systems, and people threw sewage and trash directly into the River Thames or on the streets, which were covered in mud – or, as Jackson actually specifies, horse dung: since public transport was mostly based on horse-drawn means, there were thousands of working animals wandering around the city, with inevitable consequences (2014: 166). Most of the factory workers lived in these districts, lodged in overcrowded, filthy row homes. Often, entire families were crammed in single-room accommodations, and government reports of the time indicated people sleeping as many as six to one bed. Most struggled to wash themselves and their clothes – that is why they are also referred to as "the great unwashed" – mainly because finding water was a challenge (ibid.).[27] Their life at work was not at all less deplorable than their life at home: factories were extremely unsafe; no working-hours nor working-days regulations were established, and no work insurance existed.

Especially at the beginning of the century, most well-off Victorians were (or pretended to be) ignorant of the awful life of the people who lived in slums. Many who heard about them had the atavistic belief that lower-class people were the outcome of laziness, sin and vice, and that their primeval instincts had resurfaced over "the long march of civilisation" (Ascari, 2007: 133-135). Indeed, in numerous nineteenth-century texts, London slums were depicted as "primitive, barbaric and exotic […] revealing imperialist ideological assumptions" (ibid.), since they hosted not only an English population, but also immigrants from Ireland and central and eastern Europe (mostly Russian, Polish and German Jews), and from Africa, Arabia, China, India and Bangladesh. The hybrid population of the East End was very often described by underlining its "otherness", its unfitness, its physical and moral degradation, and the fear that its evil toxicity could be contagious. Indeed, the most frequent associations with Hindoos, Chinese, Lascars and Arabs in Victorian literature regarded prostitution, drugs consumption (especially opium), madness, filthiness, begging, perverse sexuality,

[26] The volume of smoke in the metropolis grew exponentially, in proportion to demographic increase. As noted in Jackson, "it was said of the sheep in Regent's Park that one could tell how long they had been left to graze by the blackness of their wool" (2014: 224).

[27] Jackson reports that working class women were forced to queue to fill buckets with "rather murky liquid which they would carry back home to serve as their pathetic ration for washing, cooking and laundry combined" (2014: 134). To do the laundry, very often some surrogates were used in lieu of the too expensive soap, such as stale or concentrated urine (valued for its ammonia).

indolence, theft, murder, as well as specific physical traits (e. g. protruding jaws).[28] The following are some examples:

> It is clear that we have not yet found out what to do with our criminals. We neither reform them, nor hang them, nor keep them under lock and key, nor ship them off to the Antipodes. Our moral sewage is neither deodorised nor floated out to sea, but remains in the midst of us *polluting* and *poisoning our air*. (Anonymous article from *Saturday Review,* 1862, quoted in Ascari, 2007: 142, my italics)

> There are neighbourhoods that, compared to others, may seem foreign. Whoever, for instance, travels from Haymarket to the picturesque regions of Wapping and Bethnal Green passes in certain respects *from civilisation to barbarism*. (Aglebert, *Della Polizia in Inghilterra, in Francia e in Italia,* 1868, quoted in Ascari, 2007: 135, my italics)

> [London] that great cesspool into which all the *loungers* and *idlers* of the Empire are irresistibly drained. (Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* in *Sherlock Holmes: the Complete Illustrated Novels*, 1987 – first published 1887: 4, my italics)

However, a new phenomenon emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century, called "slumming": middle and upper classes began to be attracted by the economic, social and cultural deprivation of slums - for some sort of odd amusement in certain cases, and of moral, religious or altruistic reasons in others.[29] Hence, ethnologists, writers, explorers, journalists, as well as philanthropists, religious missionaries and charity workers made frequent visits to the slums to see the living conditions of their inhabitants, collecting data on their life-style and working conditions (Ascari, 2007: 133-135). In this way, slumming contributed to raise public awareness on the issue, and motivation to provide adequate welfare programmes aimed at improving them.

The enormous population increase, together with people's dramatic quality of life, made the East End notorious also for its extremely increasing crime rate.[30] Data of trials

[28] Henry Mayhew, *London Labour and the London Poor* (1851-62) in Ascari (2007: 140).

[29] Victorian Web: http://www.victorianweb.org/history/slums.html. Accessed: 16th December 2020.

[30] Among the most prevalent crimes (leaving aside drunkenness), theft was rampant: extortion, embezzlement, shoplifting, pickpocketing, larceny, larceny, animal theft, but also robbery and mugging. Murder as well was widespread, and prostitutes were the ones who ran the hugger risks. Kidnapping, and

that took place within Victorian reign show that the majority of the offenders brought before the courts indeed belonged to the working class. Most of them were male; and when the defendants were female, especially if they were arraigned for violent offences, they tended to be treated more harshly than men: indeed, not only had they transgressed the boundary of the law, but also the boundary of womanhood, intruding in the sphere of the male jurisdiction.[31]

A high crime rate produced a sense of anxiety and insecurity in the middle and upper classes. Therefore, the already existing police forces (such as the army, the JPs, the Petty Constable, the Watchmen and the Bow Street Runners) had been implemented with some new salaried, professional, full-time ones (Emsley, 2014: 1-84). Among these, the Thames River Police, created in London in 1798, and the Metropolitan Police Service, founded by Robert Peel and headquartered at Scotland Yard, which began patrolling seventeen London's divisions (each with its own central police station) in 1829.[32] The primary role of these uniformed policemen was to maintain public order and prevent criminality, without intruding on the private life of citizens.

Investigation of crimes, on the other hand, has never prominently appeared among their functions. Only in the second half of the century were the police pressured into accepting responsibility for investigations, and created detective units (such as the Criminal Investigations Department of The London Metropolitan Police, established in 1878),[33] whose main purpose was to capture criminals and bring them to justice (Shpayer-Makov, 2011: 1). The advancements in forensic science, that allowed to find proofs and evidence and study them through rigorous scientific methods, notably reduced the value of human witness and deposition (Dauncey, 2010: 164-174). In *The Ascent of the Detective. Police Sleuths in Victorian and Edwardian England*, Shpayer-Makov calls attention to the fact that "their tasks were essential in a society whose elite was increasingly intolerant of crime and social disorder, yet also *sensitive to public opinion* and anxious to *retain the legitimacy of its political authority*" (2011: 1, my italics). An explicit example of this attitude is given by Sergeant Cuff, the detective who has been

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towards the 1880s, gun crimes, were quite frequent too. (Data are taken from BBC 2020, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/crime_01.shtml. Accessed: 16th December 2020).

[31] Data are taken from BBC: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/crime_01.shtml. Accessed: 16th December 2020.

[32] Encyclopaedia Britannica, Inc. (2020). www.britannica.com. Accessed: 17th December 2020.

[33] BBC 2020: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/crime_01.shtml (Accessed: 16th December 2020).

called to solve the mystery of the lost gem in *The Moonstone*: as soon as he appeared to cast suspicion on the young Rachel Verinder, he got dismissed by her mother, who was willing to protect her family's privacy and reputation, and to avoid a scandal.

Investigation in literature gained popularity as soon as the figure of detective became established in society, conveying to detective fiction a tinge of respectability – and simultaneously contributing to making the detective a more prestigious figure. Indeed, as Heather Worthington maintains, in this subgenre of crime fiction a shift in focus from the criminal to the detective seems to take place: the fact the latter sides with the law would make crime novels more morally acceptable and less like a frivolous "guilty pleasure" (Worthington, 2010: 13-27).

1.3 Science, Statistics and the New *Norm*

> He was scientific, and he gazed scientifically at that woman, the sister of a degenerate, a degenerate herself - of a murdering type. He gazed at her, and invoked Lombroso, as an Italian peasant recommends himself to his favourite saint. He gazed scientifically. He gazed at her cheeks, at her nose, at her eyes, at her ears… Bad!... Fatal! Mrs Verloc's pale lips parting, slightly relaxed under his passionately attentive gaze, he gazed also at her teeth… Not a doubt remained… a murdering type…
>
> (Conrad 2004 – first published 1907: 214)

From the late eighteenth century, scientific institutions, practices and ideas throughout Europe had been profoundly recast. Science itself began to arouse the interest of more and more people, and to be seen as a touchstone of modern civilisation, as well as the real bearer of utopian hopes for the future (Secord, 2014: 1-3).

Conversations about science pervaded elite society, and hundreds of thousands of women and men would pay a penny a week to gain access to scientific articles, essays and journals (ibid.). Commenting on their readership, and on the appeal that these publications had on it, Bernstein (2011: 466-480) suggests possible connections between science and sensation fiction. Firstly, she finds that many fundamental questions posed by sensation novels around identity, origins, taxonomy and transformations are pertinent to the concerns raised on Victorians by the latest scientific discoveries. Furthermore, she adds that scientific practices in vogue in that period were frequently incorporated in

sensation literature: from Count Fosco's ability to overpower Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White,* to Ezra Jennings's interest in experimental sciences and the trance he produces in Franklin Blake, to Gabriel Betteredge's suspicion of the Brahmins performing mesmerism on a boy in *The Moonstone*. As a matter of fact, Collins's interest in science has earned his novels the definition of "not so much works of art as works of science" (H. James, "Miss Braddon" in *Notes and Reviews*, 1921, quoted in Bernstein, 2011: 468). However, Bernstein argues that, to attract the public, scientific works would employ some of the strategies typically used in sensation, such as the choice of engaging titles.[34] In addition to this, most of the scientific findings of that period hinted at the fact that the whole world was undergoing a severe metamorphosis, and Victorians greeted them with thrill and excitement, but also with fear and anxiety – which are the same physical impressions traditionally associated to sensation fiction's reading.

Much nineteenth-century's research was carried out on humans. Fields such as sociology, chemistry, physiology, phrenology, anthropometry, mesmerism and clairvoyance were deeply explored and discussed. These new sciences and pseudo-sciences began to be provided with an unprecedented potential for authority over interpretations of nature, politics, religion, culture, the actual entire humankind – which was threatening, since some of them subverted from the root traditional ways of thinking and established institutions, leading to question and reinterpret not only the physical body, but also the social body and the human mind.[35]

In particular, social Darwinism and Lombroso's criminal anthropology significantly contributed to reshape Victorians' perception of the world, providing positivist foundations for the construction of a new meaning of "normality". On one hand, Darwin's theories of evolution by natural selection and the survival of the fittest have been exploited to offer a biological confirmation of progress, and applied to justify political, social and economic views, as well as imperialism, racism, eugenics and social inequality at various levels (providing an explanation, for instance, to slavery).[36] On the

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[34] Some titles' examples listed in Bernstein (2011: 466-480) are: "Inhabited Planets" (Phipson 1867), "Nitro-Glycerine and Other Explosives" (Scoffern 1868), "Is the Sun Dying?" (1868), "Are there more Worlds than One?" (1868). These journal articles were generally organised in a threatening introduction, followed by a quasi-reassuring conclusion.

[35] For instance, Secord asserts that it was feared that the study of chemistry would easily lead to materialism (according to which everything in the universe, including the human mind, is the result of matter in motion). Likewise, geology, astronomy, and other sciences could be brought to the service of atheism. (2014: 6-15)

[36] These theories were set out in C. Darwin's *On the Origin of Species by Means of Natural Selection, or the Preservation of Favoured Races in the Struggle for Life* (1859).

other hand, Lombroso, whose research focused specifically on mental illness and delinquency, came to the conclusion that there existed a link between certain biological conditions and the tendency to engage in deviant behaviours.[37] In *L'Uomo Delinquente* (1876), for instance, he offered an accurate "face" of criminality through the inclusion of photographs providing a chart of the physical signs that allowed the identification (and consequent elimination) of deviant subjects, promoting an operation of social policing (Tomaiuolo, 2018: 11). In his view, criminals were diseased organisms "in the otherwise progressive development of humanity" (Mangham, 2007: 35), and thus ranked at the bottom of the evolutionary line: he thought of them as belonging "to a subgroup – a different species almost" (ibid.), – to such an extent that the label "criminal class" was in vogue to define them from the middle of the century.[38]

Ascari points out that two pseudoscientific discourses flourished associated to Lombroso's theories, which came soon to be regarded as "all-encompassing hermeneutic paradigms to explain society" (2007: 145-155): atavism and degeneration. In particular, he suggests that Lombroso, using atavism as an interpretative category, drew a hazardous parallel between people who suffered from hysteria and epilepsy (believed to be criminals' typical traits) and uncivilised people (savages).

The widespread idea (supported by the emerging pseudo-sciences) of control over the body, *i.e.*, the presumption that the body is legible and that there is a direct correspondence between people's appearance and their inner self, is interpreted by Dauncey (2010) as a process of dehumanisation of the body and a blatant form of social control. In "Crime, Forensics and Modern Science" she documents her claim asserting that, thanks to the development of forensics, evidence became able to provide witness, and testimonies lose their value. In particular, she reports the specific case of India, where fingerprinting was introduced as a "means of controlling the 'wily' and mendacious

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[37] Lombroso's studies were mostly based on Darwinism, phrenology, physiognomy, psychiatry and anthropometry. The traits that Lombroso believed to distinguish the criminal man were, for instance, protruding jaw and cheekbones, robust canines, big upper incisors, supernumerary teeth, prominent eyebrows, an arm span whose length exceeds somebody's stature, prehensile feet, flat nose, an excessive thinness or obesity, paucity of body hair, small capacity of the skull, receding forehead, well developed breasts, darker skin, thicker and curlier hair, big ears. Moreover, according to Lombroso, the criminal man usually had a reduced sensitivity to pain, a higher sight accuracy, a great agility, a scarce propensity for affections, a precocious tendency to venereal pleasures and wine, a passion for gambling, alcohol and its surrogates, the passion for tattooing. Their temper could be affected by climatic factors, such as heatwave. (Ascari. 2007: 147).

[38] BBC 2020. http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/victorians/crime_01.shtml (Accessed: 16th December 2020).

bodies of Indians by replacing the need for reliance upon personal testimonies" (William Herschel quoted in Dauncey, 2010: 168). In other words, in a confrontation between proofs based on scientific methods and the witness of a testimony (even worse, an unreliable and cunning one like an Indian), the former would always win. However, Dauncey also specifies that in India fingerprinting was, in most cases, accompanied by witnessing. Since, as already mentioned, testimonies become needless following the application of scientific procedures "granting expressive powers to the inert body", she argues that "the rhetoric of witnessing evidence bolsters colonial authority" (2010: 168): this measure would only provide a strategic means to conceal the hegemonic process by which subalterns (the colonised subjects) are stripped of voice and agency.

In addition to that, discussing the emergence of forensic technologies, Ronald Thomas holds that it coincided with a wider cultural and political project to make and monitor the modern subject at a time when impersonal forces threatened the very notion of individuality (2006: 65-78). In short, the developments in criminology and forensic science are "inextricable from the development of nationalist discourses seeking to define 'others' who pose a threat to social order" (Dauncey, 2010: 167).

> I found three mahogany-coloured Indians […] I judged the fellows to be strolling conjurers. […] Now *I am not* a sour old man. I am generally all for amusement, *and the last person in the world to* distrust another person because he happens to be a few shades darker than myself. *But* the best of us have our weaknesses – and my weakness, when I know a family plate-basket to be out on a pantry-table, is to be instantly reminded of that basket by the sight of a strolling stranger […] (Gabriel Betteredge in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone,* 23)

In this quotation from *The Moonstone*, *praeteritio* is used in order to convey Betteredge's *real* attitude towards Indians. He is denying his being racist or having a suspicious attitude towards strangers; nevertheless, the use of the adversative conjunction "but" (*a fortiori* after a full stop and at the beginning of a sentence) seems to set limits to his declared xenophilia, opening it to some reservations. This literary example appears to prove Thomas's aforementioned observation and demonstrate how some sciences emerged during the nineteenth century had led to the interpretation of the body as a signifier of moral, cognitive, political and racial values, providing also the instruments and criteria to judge it.

In "Representation of the Abnormal Body in *The Moonstone*" (2009), Mossman delineates the nineteenth-century processes through which "normalcy" and disability became dichotomic, as well as the factors that contributed to the construction of normalcy. He explains that a rising interest in statistics was spread in England since the 1830s: quoting L. J. Davis, he records that in 1832 a statistical office was set up as the Board of Trade, and in 1837 the General Register Office was created to collect vital statistics,[39] adding that "the country was being monitored and the poor were being surveiled" (L. J. Davis, 1997, *The Body and Physical Difference: Discourses of Disability*, quoted by Mossman, 2009: 485). This rise of statistics, together with mathematics and the flourishing of the medical sciences, appear to have triggered a more or less spontaneous mechanism of re-definition of new standards for interpreting the body, based on the "average", and resulting in the conceptual creation and constant construction and re-construction of a "normal status". In this cultural formation, Mossman argues, the modern body is made "through statistical formulas, and normalized through the mathematics" (2009: 485).

Lexicographical studies over the first decade of Queen Victoria's reign show that it is possible to date "the coming into consciousness in English of an idea of 'the norm'" already in the period 1840-1860 (Davis citing the *Oxford English Dictionary* in Mossman, 2009: 484). More specifically, as Foucault's research demonstrates, an entirely new terminology and definition of cognitive, physical and sexual *difference* was being organised and implemented in that period, across Western Europe and North America.[40] This increasingly spreading lexicon signals that a new set of categories was emerging, with reference to people's mental and physical disorders – *i.e.*, deviances from the norm. Furthermore, Mossman stresses that with the passing of time these categories of psychosomatic identification appeared to represent not only a difference (let alone an alternative) to the norm, but its actual binary opposition, bearing a negative value judgement. If its etymology is taken into account, it is interesting to notice that the word "deviant" derives from the Latin verb *deviare*, which means "to turn out of the way": according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it refers to someone who departs from "what

[39] L. J. Davis, (1997). "Constructing Normalcy: The Bell Curve, The Novel, and the Invention of the Disabled Body in the Nineteenth Century" in *Enforcing Normalcy.* Pp. 23-72. Quoted in Mossman (2009: 484-485). Davis argues that "all this interest in numbers concerning the state was a consequence of the Reform Act of 1832, the Factory Act of 1833, and the Poor Law of 1834."

[40] M. Foucault's *The History of Sexuality* quoted in Mossman (2009: 485).

most people consider to be *normal* or *acceptable*”[41]. Disability in the nineteenth century, then, became at the same time a synonym for “impairment” and an antonym of “normalcy”; something “constructed on top of impairment, […] not so much the lack of a sense or the presence of a physical or mental impairment as it is the reception and construction of that difference” (Mossman, 2009: 484). Normalcy, on the other hand, became a social construct based on the application of prescriptive judgements to human bodies and behaviours, a state of being that people could actually *possess.* The rigidity with which the abnormal body was distanced, stigmatised and marked as a complete “other” with respect to a supposedly “normal” one, and the will to create and maintain strict boundaries between the two are emblematic of larger social issues and of the anxieties felt towards disabled subjects by those believed to be in “possess of normalcy”.

Indeed, it should be noticed that it is the body said to “possess normalcy” who defines, catalogues, and exclude the impaired or different body – thus, imposing its authority and determining a condition of subalternity. For this reason, Davis suggests that “Normalcy, rather than being a degree zero of existence, is more accurately a location of biopower” (Davis, 1997, quoted by Mossman, 2009: 487). In *Sociology of Deviant Behaviour* (1957), M. B. Clinard and R. F. Meier point out that, according to a relativist definition, it would not exist such thing as an absolute “deviance”, but that this idea is instead constructed according to specific sociocultural norms that exercise a form of control and, indirectly, of power:

> Deviance is in the eye of the beholder, not in any particular action on the part of the person who may be labelled as deviant […]. A Normative definition describes deviance as a violation of a norm. A norm is a standard […]. Violations of norms often draw reactions or sanctions from their social audiences. (Clinard and Meier, 1957, quoted in Tomaiuolo, 2018: 7)

A contemporary sociological approach to “deviance” owes in particular to the French philosopher Émile Durkheim, who is said to be the father of sociology. Durkheim labels “deviance” as an “integral part of the social system, since it helps affirming stable, and shared, cultural values and norms (defining boundaries of behaviour and practice)”.[42]

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[41] “Deviance” in OED Online. December 2020. Oxford University Press. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/english/deviance?q=deviance (Accessed 7th January 2021), my italics.

[42] E. Durkheim, “On the Normality of Crime”, in *The Rules of Sociological Method* (1985), in Tomaiuolo (2018: 6-7).

Taking into account the definitions of "normalcy" and "deviance" provided, it can be argued that the construction of the meaning of normalcy and abnormalcy happened simultaneously, and it was mutual and symbiotic.

Thus far, I have offered a few examples of marginalisation and segregation, which were meant to identify certain categories and mark strict boundaries to separate them from their supposed counterparts. For instance, I discussed how wealth appeared to have determined impairment, raising insurmountable metaphorical and literal boundaries between people belonging to different social strata.

As Andrew Mangham stresses, following Darwin's *Origin of Species* (1859), ideas on breeds and biological conditioning became a source of speculation, laying the groundwork for biological determinism (2007: 34-38). Ten years later, in *Hereditary Genius*, Francis Galton indeed suggested that individuals from different social classes were incompatible, and that cross-class reproduction would give life to monsters or imbeciles. Moreover, I gave some examples of how physical appearance constituted another prejudicial factor, signalling how a disability or a health condition could define someone as invalid, as well as a particular trait could indicate poor moral values or mental illness (as I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, criminality and insanity were often diagnosed on the basis of particular physical characteristics).

Geographical origin also proved crucial to the classification of people: a biased application of evolutionary theories to society contributed to the creation of the concept of "race" and to reinforce the idea that some races were biologically inferior to others. Two more dichotomies bearer of a deep discriminatory meaning were related to gender and sexual orientation.

With regards to the categorisation concerning gender, the discrepancy between the two sexes was considered blatant, and felt as a real social issue throughout the entire Victorian age. It was 1869 when, in *The Subjection of Women*, John Stuart Mill indicated the relation of subalternity suffered by women as a disabling, invalidating condition:

> …the principle which regulates the existing social relations between the two sexes – the legal subordination of one sex to the other – is wrong in itself, and now one of the chief hindrances to human improvement; and […] it ought to be replaced by a principle of perfect equality, admitting no power of privilege on the one side, nor *disability* on the other. (Mill, 1869 quoted in Guy, 1998: 520, my italics)

In *Health, Medicine, and Society in Victorian England* Carpenter reports a quotation by Margaret Oliphant, who in 1858 (only eleven years before Mill's) wrote as follows:

> …writers on the subject invariably treat this half of humankind as a *distinct* creation rather than as a portion of a general *race*—not as human creatures primarily, and women in the second place, but as women, and nothing but women – a *distinct* sphere of being, a *separate* globe of existence, to which *different* rules, *different* motives, an altogether *distinct* economy, belong. (Oliphant, "The Condition of Women", 1858. *Blackwood's Magazine*, Vol. 83, quoted in Carpenter, 2009: 149. My italics)

The fact that Oliphant could so clearly and unhesitatingly state that women were thought of as belonging to a race different from men is an indication of how recognised and accepted this notion had dangerously become in the British patriarchal society, already by the middle of the century. Furthermore, the adjectives in the quotation above belong to the semantic field of estrangement and alienation, in a choice that speaks for itself and confirms the insurmountable distance between the two "spheres of being". Studying the rise of gynaecology in the nineteenth century, the scholar Ornella Moscucci comments on Oliphant's insight stating that women were regarded as a "special case, a *deviation* from the norm represented by the male"[43] (my italics) also due to their role in reproduction. The medical dogmatism on the biological difference between women and men was truly vehement in the nineteenth century, underlining once again the Victorian eagerness to find moral significance in natural patterns. In *Violent Women and Sensation Fiction*, Mangham describes how all women, regardless of their age and biological and social statuses, were considered as some sort of dangerous "ticking bombs" ready to explode at the most unexpected time, having the smouldering fires of insanity within them (2007: 7-48). Since the establishment of the practice of having expert medical witnesses

[43] O. Moscucci, (1990). *The Science of Woman: Gynaecology and Gender in England, 1800–1929*. Quoted in Carpenter (2009). In Carpenter's view, besides identifying women as a group apart, gynaecological studies of the nineteenth century supported the idea that women, because of their biology, were unfit to become medical practitioners as well as to undertake any kind of rigorous intellectual study (believed to undermine the health of their reproductive organs). On the other hand, they affirmed that *only* women could become nurses. Indeed, as Carpenter (2009: 150) reports, "An 1878 editorial in the Lancet declared that 'in the economy of nature… the ministry of woman is one of help and sympathy'. 'Complete surrender' of judgment and 'implicit obedience in spirit, as well as letter […] are the first essentials of a good nurse' were natural to women, but not to men. For women to aspire to become doctors, leaders in the medical realm, was a 'revolt against the reign of natural law'."

in criminal and civil trials, lawyers, doctors and journalists started to repeatedly argue over what constituted diminished responsibility: according to the 1843 “McNaughten Rules”, it was stipulated that the defendant would be held responsible only if their mental state “did not interfere with their sense of right and wrong” (2007: 12).[44] In many cases, Mangham argues that even if women were declared aware of the difference between right and wrong, they were often considered unable to resist the urge to commit crime because of their bodily processes. Pregnancy, puerperal mania, breast feeding, menstruation, puberty, menopause: they could all weaken women’s bodies and minds, driving them to madness or to violent outburst (Mangham suggests, in a kind of macabre pun, how “in the nineteenth century, a fine line was considered to exist – in some cases – between mothering and murdering”, 2007: 25). In addition to that, it should be specified that insanity as well as delinquency, considered both as biologically rooted, were believed to be hereditary – however, “the hereditary influence of the father is slightly less than that of the mother”[45] (or, as the French psychiatrist Jean-Étienne Dominique Esquirol put it, “insanity is rather transmissible by mothers, than fathers”)[46] and “women have a greater tendency to be affected with hereditary insanity than men” (W. Jung, cit., in Mangham, 2007: 35). Broadly speaking, all the behaviours that did not fit with the prescribed model of Victorian womanhood were diagnosed with a “catch-all classification”: hysteria, or “the nerves” (J. Oppenheim, *“Shattered Nerves”: Doctors, Patients, and Depression in Victorian England*, 1991, quoted in Mangham, 2007: 18).[47]

In the work I mentioned earlier, Mangham also highlights how Victorian medical theories and treatises have found their parallels in many of the nineteenth-century novels’ scenarios, which often feature insane, violent women indulging in sudden and unpredictable burst of madness and rage, killing their family’s members, feeling cannibalish longing for the flesh of their husbands, and committing in general any sort of

[44] “McNaughten Rules” are a set of rules, established in English law in 1843 and followed in many jurisdictions throughout the world, according to which legal proof of insanity, and thus lack of criminal responsibility, requires evidence that the accused either did not know what he or she was doing or was incapable of understanding that what he or she was doing was wrong.

[45] W. Jung, “Hereditary Tendency in Insanity”, *Journal of Mental Science* (1867) quoted in Mangham (2007: 35).

[46] J. E. D. Esquirol, *Mental Maladies* (1838) quoted in Mangham (2007: 35).

[47] In *Ideals of Womanhood in Victorian Britain* (2001) Lynn Abrams asserts that during the reign of Queen Victoria, a woman's place was in the home, as domesticity and motherhood were considered by society at large to be a sufficient emotional fulfilment for females. Women had to be devoted wives to their husbands and loving mothers to their numerous children, pleasing their men and promoting the wellbeing of the family.

crime. Lady Audley, Blanche D'Alberville, Bertha Rochester, but also Mrs Verloc and, like them, countless other female characters are notorious examples to illustrate Mangham's claim. It should be noticed, however, that some of these anti-heroines come from the middle- and upper-classes, and assault on the Victorian sanctity of the home and family: this seems to underpin that "women, and the homes they are central to, needed careful and sustained surveillance if established hierarchies were to be maintained" (2007: 18).

It is worth noticing that another invalidating subcategory of the female sex existed, that of the "fallen woman", which included a combination of low-class status, sexual impurity and ineradicable guilt – to which more peripheral vices could be added, such as "degraded and vulgar tastes, alcoholism, impaired capacity for mothering, selfishness and unruly temper" (Ingham, 2003:177).

If a dishonourable sub-group existed for women, it did also for men. As argued in Mallett's *The Victorian Novel and Masculinity*, fears of "degeneration" among working-class males fostered an anxious effort to police the borders of what constituted "standard" masculine character and behaviour, resulting in a process of normalisation of the figure of man. The discourses of law, medicine, religion and politics helped construct and maintain dominant forms of masculinity by defining and stigmatizing negative or deviant versions of male identity – in particular with reference to their sexual orientation.[48] Therefore, new categories of defective masculinity were diagnosed, to contribute to the definition of heterosexual normativity, such as transvestites, exhibitionists, sadists, and homosexuals.[49]

As a matter of fact, another binary opposition which bore discriminatory implications regarded heterosexuality and homosexuality. Sodomy was punished with death penalty during the entire century. To provide some data, in the triennium 1856-59 alone, fifty-four men were sentenced to death for it (Bachman and Cox, 2012: 322). As Bachman and Cox maintain, "the fact that sodomy was still prosecuted as a capital crime indicates the level of anxiety mid-Victorian society experienced towards those

[48] An interesting point on the normalised body is offered in *Muscular Christianity. Embodying the Victorian Age* (1994: 3-24), in which Hall argues that throughout works written by the muscular Christians (like J. M. Ludlow and F. D. Maurice) the male, white, wealthy and healthy body appears as the bearer of a hegemonic social, national, intellectual and religious power.

[49] As argued in Mallett (2015: xi). However, it should be pointed out that for most of the nineteenth century homosexuality was literally and figuratively "unspeakable": the word "homosexual" was not introduced into the English vocabulary until the 1890s, with the translation of Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), as claimed in Bachman and Cox (2012: 322).

phenomena which were ‘against the norm’” (ibid.). Indeed, in *History of Sexuality*, Michel Foucault claims that the persecution of homosexuals during that period is the result of the identification of homosexuality as a perversion and a type, stating that “as defined by the ancient civil or canonical codes, sodomy was a category of forbidden acts; their perpetrator was nothing more than the juridical subject of them. The nineteenth-century homosexual became a personage, a past, a case history”.[50] Furthermore, Bachman and Cox report Professor James Eli Adams’s point according to which a shift in the perception of homosexuals seems to have taken place in Victorian times: although same-sex relations had been around from time immemorial, from that period on “men who enjoyed such activity […] thought of themselves as different in *kind* from the other men”,[51] as if, indulging in behaviours considered unnatural and thus against *norm*, they belonged to another species. Indeed, homosexuals were identified as deviants by the Labouchère amendment to the *Criminal Law Act* of 1885 (section 11), according to which acts of “gross indecency” between men were classed as “misdemeanours” and punishable by up to two years’ hard labour (Mallett, 2015: xi), and that made possible to prosecute homosexuals even when buggery could not be proved (Cook, 2007: 145).

It is interesting to notice how, debating the representation of genders in literature from a semantic point of view, and noticing an uncertainty over the representation of masculinity, Patricia Ingham links the legal definition of homosexuals as deviants to “the fear of a third or intermediate sex” (2003: 160-161). Once again, in a society undergoing rapid and groundbreaking changes, the urgency of setting categories, establishing a hierarchy and uncrossed boundaries was impelling and felt as an absolute necessity.[52]

[50] M. Foucault, *The History of Sexuality* (1976), quoted in Bachman and Cox (2012: 322).

[51] J. E. Adams, “Victorian Sexualities” in *A Companion to Victorian Literature and Culture* (1999) quoted in Bachman and Cox (2012: 322).

[52] During the Victorian age, not much attention was paid to female homosexuals. In reading one of the most famous works on sexuality and sexual orientation, Henry Havelock Ellis’s *Sexual Inversion* (1900), Robinsons argues that “women were confined to a single chapter, and although Ellis stated that homosexuality was just as common among women as men, he presented only six case histories. Even more bothersome than this disparity in the extent of his treatment was his apparent lack of interest in reconstructing the popular image of lesbianism. He was, for example, as emphatic in asserting the manishness of the typical female invert [what today is called “transgender”] as he had been reserved about the effeminacy of the male invert”. (1973: 36).

1.4 Around the Empire

O my body, make of me always a man who questions!
(Fanon, 1986: 232)

At Queen Victoria's death, Prime Minister Lord Salisbury celebrated her past sixty-three years-long reign praising its rising wealth, civil order, and the enormous growth that the Empire had experienced (Peers, 2004: 53-78). Indeed, the Empire was one of the defining characteristics of nineteenth-century Britain: it was truly immense. As Peers highlights, by 1914 it included 88 million people (a quarter of the total world population) and about one fifth of the world's landmass (ibid.).

The last decade of the eighteenth century and the first decades of the nineteenth, in particular, represented a crucial period that would bring the Empire to a deep transformation. Despite having lost the Thirteen Colonies, after the Napoleonic Wars Britain established itself as the first global superpower, boasting a great economic power, a strong naval force and new strategic annexations. A collective feeling of nationalism and patriotism was growing stronger, encouraged even more by new possessions: besides conquering additional territories in Africa (Cape Town, Sierra Leone, Tasmania) and in the Caribbean Islands (Trinidad and Tobago), Britain engaged in the so-called "Swing-to-East" move, extending its authority over a large number of Indian states and becoming the dominant power in the subcontinent (ibid.). Particularly notorious was the violent Siege of Seringapatam, that took place in 1799 in the Kingdom of Mysore, during which the British East India Company's army, guided by Governor General Wellesley, breached the wall of the city fortress and stormed the citadel. According to Roy (1993: 679), this assault resulted in the annals of British-Indian relations as one of the largest hauls of treasure, arms, and other plunder to return to England. Another central annexation was that of Punjab (1849), in which the East India Company defeated the Sikh Empire at the battle of Gujrat. Following this conquest, and on the occasion of the Company's 250th anniversary, the Koh-i-Noor, one of the largest cut diamonds in the world, of Indian

origins and that had changed many hands between south and west Asia,[53] was presented to Queen Victoria, as established in the "Last Treaty of Lahore".[54]

The years 1857-1858 also marked a major watershed not only for the history of British India, but for British Imperialism as a whole: a series of rebellions clashed as military mutinies and ended in a major bloody uprising, involving innumerable civilians. Apparently, these revolts had threatened Britain's hold on India so much that British rule appeared vulnerable to Russia's advance intro central Asia. According to Robert Blake's biography of Benjamin Disraeli (1967), this partially contributed to motivate the Queen to take (like the Tsar) the title of Empress – which she did in 1877 (even though Parliament voted in 1876).[55] The mutiny is known with different names: the Sepoy Mutiny, the Indian Mutiny, the Great Rebellion, the Revolt of 1857, the Indian Insurrection, and the First War of Independence. As Peers (ibid.) argues, the same debate over its nomenclature shows how contested and complex imperial history is.[56]

As a matter of fact, a reflection should be made with regards to the multifaceted "domestic" reception of Imperialism. Overall, most Victorian historiography seems to reveal a nationalistic predisposition towards Imperialism. With his *Greater Britain* (1868), Sir Charles Dilke constitutes an apt example of this claim (Peers, 2004: 66). Treating the subject of the white settler Empire, Dilke drew an ethnocentric picture of Imperialism, describing in racial terms dramatic events such as the frontier wars in South Africa, the conflicts with the Maori in New Zealand, and the Sepoy Mutiny.[57] As well as Dilke, many other historians (among whom Thomas Babington Macaulay and John Robert Seeley) celebrated the glory of the British Empire, supporting the idea of its very

[53] Encyclopaedia Britannica. www.britannica.com. Accessed: 17th December 2020.
[54] The third point of the Treaty says: "The gem called the Koh-i-noor, which was taken from Shah Sooja-col-moolk by Maharajah Runjeet Singh, shall be surrendered by the Maharajah of Lahore to the Queen of England." (Login, 1890: 127).
[55] In Blake (1967: 562) it is claimed that "proposals to adopt the imperial title for India had been in the air ever since the mutiny".
[56] The result of these revolts was the Parliament's decision to transfer the rule of the subcontinent from the hands of The British East India Company to the Crown, via the creation of an elaborate bureaucracy, the British Raj. (Darnton, "Literary surveillance in the British Raj: The Contradictions of Liberal Imperialism". 2001: 133-176).
[57] In particular, the causes of the mutiny have been explained in terms of Indian society not being ready to accept rapid reform – therefore, a solution was identified in proceeding at a slower pace operating through native princes and landlords instead of the "Westernizing classes" that had been installed prior to 1857 (Peers, 2004: 63).

inevitability.[58] Peers (ibid.) suggests that the positive interest that British had towards Imperialism – especially in the last three decades of the nineteenth century – was mainly attributable to two reasons: on one hand, the further enlargement of the Empire (which after 1870 expanded faster than it had in the past, quadrupling in size); on the other hand, the appeal that colonial products (tea, opium, textiles and jewellery, to name but a few) had on the British people. It is undeniable that the Empire captured the public imagination, as the Victorian press and literature prove. Readers of newspapers, magazines, novels and biographies craved for news about the British military campaigns in distant exotic lands (such as the defeat of Tipu Sultan, the "Tiger of Mysore" who was killed during the Siege of Seringapatam, or the campaigns of the Great Rebellion), but also about the lives of colonial officials and military officers. These readings, together with fictional colonial adventures, Peers claims, were instrumental in investing imperialism with a higher purpose and instilling in the people a sense of national pride (ibid.).[59]

And yet some anti-imperialist countertrends appeared to point out, for instance, how Britain drove India's manufacturing capacity to collapse by forcing it to accept its own manufactured textiles,[60] or denouncing the dishonourable motives on which imperialism was grounded, such as economic interest and labour exploitation.[61] Ethnicity and morality had actually already entered colonial debates in the past: Peers (ibid.) reminds the intense campaign mobilised against the Atlantic slave trade, but also the Morant Bay uprising of 1865, which saw the imposition of martial law in Jamaica embraced by some influential Victorians (like Carlyle and Dickens) and strongly criticised by many others (like Mill and Darwin).

[58] As Peers (2004: 66) specifies, although both Macauley and Seeley denounced the brutality of some colonial ruling practices, they looked upon the introduction of British institutions, ideologies and values, believing them to be ultimately beneficial to their subjects.

[59] In these terms, imperialism, as suggested in Peers (2004: 67), contributed also to strengthen the notion of Britishness helping to transcending some tensions between English, Scottish and Welsh.

[60] Peers (2004: 68) indicates that the empire was a crucial market for British textiles: in 1870 India took in one-fifth of British textile exports.

[61] According to Romesh Dutt's *The Economic History of India* (1904), the average wages of an able-bodied agricultural Indian labourer during the last decade of Victoria's reign ranged from 4s. 8d. to 6s. 8d. a month, meaning that he did not get even 3d. a day – his average earnings scarcely coming to 2½d. per day (1904: 605). In the same period, an English field labourer earnings were on an average not less than £28 a year, including his extra gains in harvest time. Therefore, it appears that the real wages of a field labourer in regular employ were in India little more than a third of what they were in England (1904: 73). Millions of agriculturists and labourers in India were forced to be indebted to money-lenders (1904: 589).

Nevertheless, what should be pointed out is that nineteenth-century British imperialism was legitimated in public opinion by the synergy of Victorian morality and social Darwinism (with the concern about racial boundaries it carried). In particular, one finds it easy to detect a (hypocritical) and generalised belief that the Empire had the responsibility of bringing moral, economic and social improvement to subject peoples, accomplishing a mission of civilisation among primitive savages. But, as the British Indian post-colonial writer Salman Rushdie laments in *The Satanic Verses*, "the trouble with the English is that their history happened overseas, so they don't know what it means" (S. Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses,* 1988, quoted in Peers, 2004: 55). The Empire was literally and also metaphorically distant from the lives of many in Britain, and imperialism was most often regarded as a matter confined to a political and economic elite.

It appears clear that imperialism was imbued with many paradoxes, in a constant tension between pride and anxiety, hypocrisy and ambivalence. As mentioned, Britain made constant appeals to ideals of liberty – yet its imperialism depended on coercion. In 1872, Disraeli spoke of India as a "jewel in the crown of England" (as mentioned in Eldridge, 1984: 82), because it played a vital role in supporting the British trade oversea (since Indian opium funded the lucrative tea trade with China), providing military force and employment opportunities to the motherland; nevertheless, the 1867 Reform Bill extended the franchise in some places (such as Britain, Canada, Australia) whereas nothing remotely equivalent was allowed to India (Peers, 2004: 62).

The legacy of imperialism is the object of cultural studies and post-colonial studies, which since the middle of the twentieth century are focusing their attention on the wide range of social, cultural, economic and political consequences of the control and exploitation of colonised people and their lands. In particular, from the 1980s a crucial development in cultural history came with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) – although his theories have not met universal acceptance. Said suggests a reading of the imperial experience in which violence and political power constitute but one part of the motherland's means of exercising control on its colonies: a substantial, essential role is covered by orientalism, *i.e.*, the artificial form of knowledge on the "Orient" historically produced by the Occident. Said maintains that the word "Orient" does not refer to a specific, clearly identifiable geographic or cultural entity. It is an artificial, Euro-centric and purposely biased discourse shaped around "Eastern-ish" clichés, meant to generate a collective representation of the East through the use of codified set of images,

grammar, syntax and vocabulary. The result conveys the idea of a stable, immutable system in which every form of specificity and individualism is annihilated – a system that exists by natural law. The East, therefore, appears as a vast, stereotyped and timeless essence, an-other reality in definite opposition to the West. This juxtaposition (which is, of course, classifying in a discriminatory way) is what allows the West to construct its own identity, by means of logical opposition and semantic exclusion.

Another fundamental contribution to the understanding of the human costs of imperialism is given by Frantz Fanon who, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), refers back to the autobiographical effects of the "generalisations" so strongly criticised by Said. In particular, he describes experiencing his dark skin as an attribute linking him to a universal, totalising idea of "blackness" – a discriminating blackness that includes all his black ancestors, all the living black people, and all the existing shades of darkness, without distinction, and with no individuality allowed. He feels that his body – the vehicle that relates him to the world and to other people – bears meanings that lie outside himself as a unique individual, but refer to a global, subaltern "other" and that he does not recognise. To this respect, it is quite telling that the intended original title for his work should have been *Dis-alienation*: "alienation" comes from the Latin adjective "alienus", which in turn derives from the indefinite pronoun "alius", that means "other".

Racism, Fanon explains, generates some psychological constructs that reinforce power through the naturalisation of dichotomies (such as the black/white) which *de facto* are not natural at all. In the fifth chapter of his above-mentioned work, he recounts his feeling of "otherness" caused by the white man's gaze, whose eye is arbitrarily entitled of the power of judgment.

> As long as the white man is among his own, he will have no occasion, except in minor internal conflicts, to experience his being through others. […] For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man. […] Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself. His metaphysics, or less pretentiously, his customs and the sources on which they were based, were wiped out because they were in conflict with a civilization that he did not know and that *imposed* itself on him. […] And then… And then the occasion arose when I had to meet the white man's *eyes*. An unfamiliar weight burdened me. […] In the white world the man of color encounters difficulties in the development of his bodily schema. (Fanon, 1986: 109-110. My italics)

When the black man is stripped off his “frame of reference”, and is hegemonically forced into a different one – presented as the *only* possible one by natural law – an epistemicide seems to be taking place, along with an unconscious process of acceptation and paradoxical sharing of the new paradigm. In this way, the black man interprets reality (including his human status) using the same instruments that the white man has built for him. It could be said, using Fanon’s semantic field of sight, that the self-image of the black man is not reflected in a mirror, but in the white man’s eye. In this way, the subaltern becomes at the same time victim and accomplice of what Gayatri Spivak defines “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 2013: 66-104).

Investigating the subject of representation and self-representation, in “Can the Subaltern Speak?” Spivak emphasises the fact that both these tasks require a speech act in which two parties are involved and cooperate. She claims that this pattern cannot be applied to the case of imperial India, where self-representation has been denied to the colonised subjects, who have only been allowed to be represented – of course, from the perspective of the dominant class. Furthermore, Spivak calls the attention on the gender discourse, underlining how, in a context of colonial historiography, the female subaltern has been doubly silenced (2013: 84).

She investigates whether or not “the subaltern can speak”, that is, if they have agency outside the hegemonic conditioning of the elite, if they can look back and make their voice heard.

Chapter Two

Crime Fiction and Wilkie Collins

2.1 From the *Newgate Calendar* to Crime Fiction

In the United Kingdom, towards the mid- and end of the eighteenth century, novel saw a relatively rapid rise as a popular literary formula, a rise which has long elicited interest from literary critics. Its development as a modern literary form occurred in the short timeframe of barely two generations – that is, the years between 1720 and 1780, thus indicating that many changes in society were taking place. Among them, the middle-class's increasing disposable income to spend on books can be mentioned, as well as the rising educational standards during that period – the latter confirmed also by the fact that many of those who consumed novels were women (Gilbert, 2011: 1-12).[62] If compared to the devotional works which had been popular in the previous centuries, eighteenth-century novels appear to be forms of entertainment undoubtedly secular. However, it should be pointed out that despite their "materialistic", worldly or sometimes frivolous outlook, they still conveyed moral or religious meanings: eighteenth-century Britain was indeed a country still very much shaped by Puritanism. In fact, the subjugated women, libertine men and captivating crimes featured in the literary works of that period often tickled traditional values in order to reinforce them.

An example of texts in which crime was exhibited with moralising and deterrent purposes is offered by *The Newgate Calendar,* an eighteenth- and nineteenth-century collection of criminal biographies, which can be considered to have laid ground for the development of crime novels. Its name derives from London's Newgate Prison, which hosted criminals before their trials and (often) execution. As explained by Heather Worthington in "From The Newgate Calendar to Sherlock Holmes", these texts were written by the Chaplains (or "Ordinaries") of the prison, who produced so-called

[62] In "'Literature of the Kitchen': Cheap Serial Fiction of the 1840s and 1850s", Andrew King indicates that as the poorer classes became more and more literate over the nineteenth century, the market for cheap reading grew exponentially. Already in 1800, around 60 percent of males and 45 percent of females could read; by 1871 the figure had risen to 81 percent and 73 percent respectively (2011: 40).

"*Accounts*" of the story, crimes, confessions and, sometimes, execution of the prisoners, and published them as cheap pamphlets (2010: 13-14). The publication of such reports found a growing market among the lower classes – confirming the great appeal that crime had on people, and their thrilling appetite for danger and prohibited matters. Soon, major anthologies began to be published of the existing *Accounts*, meant also to a wealthier public.[63] One precise feature intended to attract middle-class public, Worthington describes, is the translation of the criminals' language, or "cant", for the benefit of the reader (ibid.). The heavily moralistic intentions of the pamphlets and of *The Newgate Calendar* are clear from their fairly constant narrative structure, consisting in a religious frame narrative (which acquired more legalistic shades in the later versions of the 1820s) that encloses the criminal's own confession and repentance. The confession, in particular, not only did serve to validate the death sentence and to deter the potential criminal with the certainty of punishment, but first and foremost to demonstrate the efficiency of the penal system, reassuring the wide audience that crime could and would be contained. Indeed, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, crime started to become rather widespread – especially in the nineteenth century – and became a primary concern for society, not only in London, but in most British big cities and in European capitals in general.

However, it was not so much the moralising sense of these sorts of biographies that took hold on the public. What mostly attracted readership was the entertaining factor, the voyeuristic pleasure of reading about criminals' exciting lives, their sly, Machiavellian crimes and their atrocious punishments: "the texts sold on their promise of *sensationalism*" (2010: 15, my italic). People's engagement with this kind of "sensationalism" is visible also in the increasing success of ballad sheets (which used to be very cheap, printed on a single sheet and often illustrated, and had been in vogue since the sixteenth century) and execution broadsides (which conversely were in prose). Paying little to no attention to the moral and religious implications of criminality, ballad sheets and broadsides became in fact an irreverent commodification of crime that exploited it to make maximum profits (ibid.).

[63] Worthington indicates that "there was a medium one in 1728, another small one in 1748, then a large and purposefully collected five-volume version in 1773". However, various editions continued to appear into the nineteenth century, under various names. For instance, he cites *The Malefactor's Register or the Newgate and Tyburn Calendar* (1779) and *New and Complete Calendar*, published in 1795, revised and re-published in 1809 and in 1826 as *The Newgate Calendar* (2010: 14).

The growing market of crime fiction, with its emphasis on entertainment, was truly prolific. When no new murders, thefts or other crimes were committed, to match the public demand of new stories and biographies it was often necessary to resort to revisitations of past ones: old delinquencies, hence, were set up to look like factual narratives. In this way, the distinction between real facts and fiction in crime narratives became increasingly blurred and unclear. An example of this can be offered by Daniel Defoe's *The True and Genuine Account of the Life and Actions of the Late Jonathan Wild* (1725). Discussing the inextricable link between the development of crime fiction and the rise of the novel, Worthington explains that Defoe, who was a journalist, a writer and a spy, spent some time in Newgate Prison for political offences. There, he could gather information on famous criminals, of whom he wrote numerous biographies – one of them, that of Jonatan Wild. Although the narrative is certainly factual, Worthington argues that its novelistic style and structure, as well as the recount of entertaining aspects of Jonathan Wild's life, locate the text as a prototype of crime fiction (2010: 16).

In general, these early crime narratives had as their central focus the criminal, their lives and their adventures; in most cases, criminals belonged to the lower classes. The accounts of the crimes were retrospective: both crimes and their culprits were well known to the readers. In addition to that, attention needs to be paid to the fact that neither police nor official detectives featured in these early crime novels – as they did not exist with the role of investigating crimes before the nineteenth century (as explained in the previous chapter).

In the early part of the nineteenth century, "Newgate novels" developed from the fashion of *The Newgate Calendar*.[64] Although Newgate novels can be considered a fad in the literary world, lasting only a few years from the 1830s until the late 1840s, they had a huge success among the public, especially the lower-classes.[65] Like *The Newgate*

[64] Another descendant of *The Newgate Calendar* is identifiable in the "penny dreadful". It consisted in stories in which the criminal was glorified, and relied on purely fictional criminality. It appealed specifically to a juvenile audience, in fact the readership of such texts was confined to the working class, usually young men. Although these narratives were not always and exclusively concerned with crime. As in the case of Newgate novels and Sensation novels (which will be analysed later in this chapter), there was a perceived danger that reading "dreadfuls" would encourage criminality among the young, since they were said to have a disproportionately large influence on the reader. As a matter of fact, in criminal cases where juvenile offenders were involved, they had been found to have been reading such literature. In his essay "From Sensation to the *Strand*", Christopher Pittard mentions the example of Alfred Saunders who, in 1876, was charged with stealing from his father – and was believed to be passionate of such tales (2010: 105-116).

[65] Among the Newgate novels' authors, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, William Harrison Ainsworth, and Charles Dickens should be remembered.

Calendar, Newgate novels included the description of crimes and of their perpetrators' lives but, contrary to *The Newgate Calendar*, they romanticised the stories and actions of the offenders. Moreover, a definite controversial aspect of their reception should certainly be signalled. Indeed, similarly to the *Accounts* written by the prison's Chaplains, the aim of the Newgate novels appeared initially to be that of being morally active, in that they seemed to warn their readers of the consequences of crime, and to show the efficiency of the English law and justice. At the same time, though, the genre was subjected to a harsh criticism by some reviewers of the time, who accused it of glamorising the lives of criminals, glorifying criminality and making it fascinating and attractive, and offering a distorted, unfavourable picture of society (Gilbert, 2011: 26-37).[66] Especially because this genre mainly appealed to a young audience, moreover, Newgate novels were believed to encourage crime. Furthermore, a complex mechanism of Newgate novels' interpretation should be indicated, according to which they seemed to reflect the guilt back to society, which was blamed not only for being unable to prevent criminals from indulging in delinquency, but also for failing to save the offenders' soul before it was too late. Creating an aura of fascination and heroism around the criminal, it appeared as if it was not the criminal's fault if they committed a crime, but it was their social conditions that left them with no choice but criminality (Jacobs and Mourão, 2011: 26-37). In this way, criminals were almost portrayed as the real victims. By insinuating this kind of message, Newgate novels seemed to hint at the actual difficulty of indicting criminals, because in some ways each end every one of us could be held responsible for being part of an unfair and corrupt society.[67] In addition to that, another feature of Newgate novels needs to be pointed out: contrary to *The Newgate Calendar*, which portrayed lower-class criminality, Newgate novels tended to feature also middle-class characters. The change of attention in the social class of the people described contributed to determining a larger readership, beginning to appeal not only to "little people" who enjoyed reading about "great people", but also to "great people" who delighted in hearing and reading about themselves (Casey, 2011: 13-25). However, a fundamental part in broadening the number and the social status of

[66] As Geraldine Jewsbury (1865) sates, "If, in after times, the manners and customs of English life in 1864 were to be judged by the novels of the day, it would naturally be believed that people, in the best regulated families, were in the habit of marrying two wives, or two husbands… and of suppressing the one that proved inconvenient, by 'painless extinction' or by more forcible methods." (Geraldine Jewsbury, 1865, "New Novels" in *Athenaeum*, quoted in M. C. Fryckstedt "Geraldine Jewsbury's '*Athenaeum*' Reviews: A Mirror of Mid-Victorian Attitudes to Fiction" in *Victorian Periodicals Review,* 1990: 13-25).

[67] A similar feeling will be the one arisen by the reading of Collins's *The Moonstone*, especially in relation to the concept of "colonial guilt", which will be discussed in the next chapter of the present dissertation.

novels' consumers was played also by the easier access to education, and the developments in the printing and publishing industry. In this respect, it has to be reminded that the dissemination of criminal fictions to a cross-class audience was fostered also by the trend (which Worthington indicates as initiated by *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* in 1817) of including fictions and serialising novels in periodicals (see Worthington, 2010: 19).

To conclude, in the development of crime fiction the Newgate novels have proved particularly significant in that they "represent an increasing interest in the construction and motivation of the criminal", they started to include an element of detection or to feature a detective figure, and "they bring crime firmly into mainstream fiction and so make possible the later genre of sensation fiction" (ibid.).

2.2 Sensation Fiction and Detective Novels

When the Sensation novel began to appear in the Victorian literary marketplace, England was in the midst of profound economic changes that would impact the nature of book and periodical publishing. As seen in the previous chapter, particularly significant amongst these changes in everyday life were the expansion and refinement of the railway, telegraph, and postal networks. Places seemed closer, travels were democratized and more comfortable, communications between England, the Continent, and, eventually, the Americas improved, and tourism became a vital industry of modern life. This "new world" contributed to the creation of a new ground for emergent identities, criminal activity, foreign secrets, conspiracies, rumours, and scandals – some of Sensation fiction's main ingredients.

As Pamela K. Gilbert explains in her introduction to *A Companion to Sensation Fiction,* this genre emerged as a literary form around the 1860s – though the term identifying it had been in use to describe exciting and eventful stories in the US a few years prior (2011: 1-10). The sensation novel is considered to be a relatively minor subgenre of British fiction, that died out in a two-decades time; nevertheless, it has lived on in several forms of popular culture, especially – obviously – in their most direct offspring, *i.e.*, modern mystery, detective, and suspense fiction (see Brantlinger, 1982: 1-28).

Alongside with the Newgate novel, Sensation fiction shares some elements also with the Gothic romance. Actually, it can be said that in Sensation, the Gothic is brought up to date and mixed with the conventions of realism as to make events seem possible. In "What is 'Sensational' about the 'Sensation Novel'?", Patrick Brantlinger argues that the best Sensation novels are "novels with a secret" or, sometimes, several secrets, in which new narrative strategies were developed to tantalise the public by withholding information rather than divulging it – which is quite the opposite of the retrospective narrative that characterised the early crime stories, as seen in the previous section (ibid.). In particular, the trigger that determined this upturning in the narrative mode is identified in the emergence of the protagonist as detective or of the detective as an aid to the protagonist, as well as in the refusal of a strictly realistic path in favour of Gothic and mysterious contaminations. Indeed, precisely the presence of mystery is what seems to be Sensation fiction's peculiarity which marks its distinction from more realistic fictions and other related romantic and popular forms. Stating that the Gothic romance managed to make secular Gothic mysteries look like religious mysteries, Brantlinger spots in many Sensation fictions (and later Detective novels) a Gothic, quasi-religious content, as well as other Gothic elements such as the presence of supernatural forces and the inescapable power of fate (ibid). He mentions the example of Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), in which a gloomy aura of mystery lingers around the figure of Lady Audley, and many places are evoked through definitely spine-chilling images: the Castle Inn (the tavern run by Phoebe and Luke Marks), but also Audleys' castle. With its door, windows, bewildering clock and old well, the description of the castle is indeed eerie:

> The principal door was squeezed into a corner of a turret at one angle of the building, as if it was in *hiding from dangerous visitors*, and wished to keep itself a *secret* – a *noble* door for all that – old oak, […] A *noble* place; inside as well as out, a *noble* place – a house in which *you incontinently lost yourself* if ever you were so rash as to go about it *alone*; a house in which no one room had *any sympathy* with another, every chamber running off at a tangent into an inner chamber, and through that down some *narrow staircase* leading to a door which, in its turn, led back into that very part of the house from which you thought yourself the farthest; a house that could never have been planned *by any mortal architect*, but must have been the handiwork of that good old builder – *Time*. (Braddon, 2003 – first published 1862: 44. My italics)

Another example displaying the influence and actual presence of Gothicism in Sensation fiction is *The Moonstone* (which, in reality, can be positioned in between Sensation fiction and Detective novel, containing elements pertaining to both genres – as we will see later in this chapter). Indeed, many occurrences in this masterpiece by Collins can be interpreted as the fulfilment of the curse that follows the diamond – a curse of spiritual, religious nature. Furthermore, many events of the plot are presented as inexplicable – because of their (apparently) supernatural origin: mesmerism, hallucinations and scientific experiments, to name but a few. Moreover, also in this case, a few places and circumstances are described as creepy and truly terrifying – the Shivering Sands being a perfect example for it.

Using the definition Miller Casey offers in "The Silver Fork Novel", another "progenitor" of the Sensation novel can be found in the "silver fork" or "fashionable" novels, whose peak of success was between the mid-1820s to the mid-1840s, and that survived till the 1850s (2011: 13-25). These novels, the first bestsellers, depicted in detail and with a certain degree of realism the social lives of the aristocracy. The typical plots of the "silver fork" novel saw intellectual and often self-educated young men searching for an appropriate way to distinguish themselves and settle on politics, while beautiful and wealthy young women, devoted to the hunt for an appropriate husband, were pressured by family and friends into inappropriate matches. These tales were usually set against vivid descriptions of balls, dinner parties, teas, clothes, food, and shopping. However, late Victorian reviewers were quite sharp in their critiques of this genre: although they saw them as an interesting popular phenomenon, they blamed "silver fork" novels for being stereotypical, predictable, sometimes immoral, and often bearer of little intrinsic value. One of the most significant Victorian critics of the "fashionable" novels was William Hazlitt, who coined the term "silver fork". Indeed, in his 1827 article for *The Examiner*, he claims that the only concern of the fashionable novelist Theodore Hook[68] is "the admiration of the folly, caprice, insolence, and affectation of a certain class", and that providing "a few select persons eat fish with silver-forks, he considers it a circumstance of no consequence if a whole country starves" (Hazlitt, "The Dandy School". *The Examiner.* In A. R. Waller and A. Glover, 1904. *The Collected Works of William Hazlitt,* quoted in Casey, 2011: 14). Confirming its trivial reception among the public, the silver fork phenomenon quite soon provoked the rise of a number of parodies,

[68] The author of *Sayings and Doings*, 1834.

notably by Thomas Carlyle, Charles Dickens, and William Makepeace Thackeray (ibid.).[69] The "fashionable" novels' legacy is detectable in Sensation fiction mainly in the presence of aristocratic characters, and in its location in metropolitan London. Indeed, in the 1820s the novel experimented a shift from the country to the city; and while other bestsellers of that period, like the above-mentioned Newgate novels, were mainly set in the East End, the "silver fork" novels were set in the West End and, in particular, west of Regent Street and south of Oxford Street (ibid.).

As a literary genre, the Sensation novel was distinctive in many ways. It was incredibly popular: a proper cultural and commercial success, a product to be written and read quickly, without too much discernment, which created a new "mass" audience made up of all classes and both genders. In particular, the spread of periodicals' serial publication was widely condemned as being responsible for the growing taste for extravagant and sensational plots. Moreover, the Sensation novel was up-to-date in its subject matter, often taking up themes of recent interest in the newspapers: indeed, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, the characters of Sensation novels were frequently portrayed handling modern commodities and technologies (such as telegraphs and trains) and dialoguing or reading about the latest scientific findings. Moreover, sensation fiction was considered transgressive for a number of reasons: as we will see further in detail in the next paragraphs, it broadened its readership with an increased female audience and the involvement of the newly literate servant classes, too; it appealed directly to the "nerves", eliciting physical reactions; it dealt with scandalous matters, with a questionable morality and sometimes inadequate or inappropriate style – often receiving rigidly unfavourable reviews.

Sensation novels tended to be associated in particular with a female readership. In his essay "Melodrama" (in *A Companion to Sensation Fiction*, 2011), explaining the extent of this association, Rohan McWilliam mentions the first time Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret* was presented at the St. James' Theatre in London, within a year of the novel appearing in book form (in 1862). On that occasion, women in the audience were seen explaining the plot to the men who accompanied them – a confirmation of the way

[69] For example, Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* (1833-1834), Thackeray's *Vanity Fair. Pen and Pencil Sketches of English Society* (1848) and Dickens's *Bleak House* (1852) had a great success among the Victorian public.

the sensation novel was a distinctly female form (2011: 62).[70] Besides being associated to a female readership, often, though not always, Sensation novels were also associated with women writers. Among them, Mary Elizabeth Braddon might be indicated as the most famous – and condemned one. Suffice it to mention how, in the Afterword to Frederick Paget's parody *Lucretia: The Heroine of the Nineteenth Century* (1868), Paget expresses his abhorrence of female authors:

> [T]he writers of these books, ay, the very foulest of them, - authors who have put forth confessions of the darkest profligacy that an utter reprobate could make, and who have degraded woman's love into an animal propensity so rabid and so exacting, as to profess an opinion that its gratification would be cheaply purchased *at the const of an eternity in hell,* - these writers are, some by their own admission, some by internal evidence (where the publication is anonymous,) *women*; and the worst of them, UNMARRIED WOMEN! (Paget, 1868, quoted in Steere, 2013: 18. Emphasis in the original.)

This trenchant remark was very possibly referred to Braddon, whose liaison with John Maxwell was notorious. Maxwell, with whom she shared also her professional life, was the proprietor of the magazine *The Welcome Guest*, and was already married to another woman and father of six children (Pykett, 2011: 125). The treatment that Braddon received at the hands of her critics provides a good example of the classist and gendered terms used to attack female authors of the genre in general. Indeed, since proper Victorian women were supposed to tend the home fires in chaste humility and Christian morality, the fact that they knew of criminal life and wrote highly seasoned popular novels about bigamists and murderesses for a mass audience and for profit was judged as tremendously inappropriate. As Andrew King (2011) asserts, one of the most memorable condemnations of Sensation fiction in the Victorian periodical press occurred in an 1865 *North British Review* article by the critic William Fraser Rae. Indeed, Rae derided the genre as literature fit only for maids and for cooks. He (again) denounced Mary Elizabeth Braddon for being able to "boast of having temporarily succeeded in making the *literature*

[70] The Sensation novel of the 1860s was a reflection, as well as – according to some critics – a direct cause, of the women's rebellions and self-assertion which were taking place during that period. Therefore, the female characters were represented taking matters into their own hands, reflecting the ongoing rebellions of women against their prescribed social roles. These strong, assertive female characters who were seeking a life of individuality, power and gender equality not only evoked in the female readership the desire of leaving a similar life, but sprung from the pen of confident, bold women. Sensation fictions' female writers menaced to undermine established values such as those of family and the women's role within the family.

of the Kitchen the favourite reading of the Drawing room". Even more specifically, the critic claimed that the "literature of the Kitchen" was welcomed by "the lowest in the social scale, as well as in mental capacity", though recognising that it was beginning to be read also by the mistresses of the house, which he interpreted as a "devolution" in their literary taste (2011: 38-53).[71] A substantial part of Victorian critical objections to Sensation fiction focused on gender mainly for two reasons: on one hand, because it typically features female protagonists who challenge traditional expectations of Victorian femininity, turning out to be implicated in shocking crimes;[72] on the other hand, because women were often the authors of these novels, too. For example, Rae identified some sort of danger in these texts, since they potentially exerted a malign influence on their female readership, poisoning it by teaching sinful behaviour and instilling bad morals. He feared that rather than teaching women how to cook, pray, and marry, Sensation novels were a source of information on crimes such as bigamy, adultery, and murder (Pykett, 2011: 130).[73]

However, in *The Female Servant and Sensation Fiction: 'Kitchen Literature'* (2013), Elizabeth Steere specifies that the popularity of the genre extended well beyond the house servants and ladies, transcending the boundaries of class, education and gender. For instance, she refers that Prime Minister William Gladstone was said to be so engrossed in Collins's *The Woman in White* that he cancelled a theatre engagement to finish it in a day, and that King Edward II was such a fan of Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861) that he persuaded the Dean of Westminster, Arthur Stanley, to read it as well (see Steere, 2013: 1-89). Steere takes up a class-oriented understanding of the Sensation novel through a gender-specific lens, focusing on the female servants: one of the genre's most enigmatic recurring figures. Indeed, women in service abound in Sensation: from Phoebe Marks in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, to Lydia Gwilt in Collins's *Armadale* and Rosanna Spearman in the same author's *The Moonstone.* Steere argues that among the characters Sensation novels presented, female servants (unlike their male counterparts)

[71] W. F. Rae (1865). "Sensation Novelists: Miss Braddon", *North British Review 43*, quoted in A. King "'Literature of the Kitchen': Cheap Serial Fiction of the 1840s and 1850s", in Gilbert, P. K. (ed.). (2011), my italics. According to Rae's statement, Sensation novels were mostly consumed by socially and mentally *deviant* categories – in this case, cooks and maids.

[72] Like Marian Holcombe in Wilkie Collins' *The Woman in White* or, worse, like Lady Audley in Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret.*

[73] By contrast, the protagonists of Newgate novels were almost exclusively male, as well as their authors. Because of this, and the fact that most Newgate novels' characters belong to the lower-class, the criticism of these fictions did not regard gender.

are the most able to cross and actually subvert Victorian social, familial, and class boundaries, proving themselves to be key figures in the genre. Examining texts from authors such as Wilkie Collins, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Elizabeth Gaskell, Steere explores the recurring tropes of the servant as a victim, criminal, actress, and spouse or lover. In particular, as far as the specific case of Collins' *The Moonstone* is concerned, Steere underlines how Gabriel Betteredge might be considered a memorable, opinionated narrator, but it is in fact Rosanna Spearman who propels the plot with her cross-class infatuation. Moreover, more in general, Steere claims that in Sensation novels the dichotomies master/servant and upper- (or middle-) class/servant-class are quite malleable and situation-specific, and they rely on class identities being confused. Indeed, many of their plots imply that class identity in Victorian Britain is fluid and unstable, rather than secure – and thus potentially subject to manipulation and misinterpretation (ibid.).

As I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, Sensation fiction developed predominately representing the middle- and upper-class, and consigning into oblivion the lower class and lower class's criminality. Therefore, the typical subjects that featured in these texts were ordinary wealthy families in their domestic settings, experiencing startling emotions and occurrences. Moving crime from the dark, polluted and savage London slums into the aristocratic or the middle-class dwellings and the domestic sphere, meant to trespass the sacred boundary between public and private – and this was indeed a nineteenth-century British major fear and concern. The idea of entering the privacy and sanctity of the Victorian "home" fomented a remarkable interest in crime narratives, perhaps even more than it had with Newgate novels because, in this instance, crime was not that far from the audience's understanding and experience. An additional thrill, furthermore, was given by the fact that not only could the criminal be a gentleman but, shockingly, also a gentlewoman. The possibility that a deceitful, artful crime could be committed by an aristocratic, educated lady was even more frightening.

Sensation novels usually included exciting, provocative and sometimes even outrageous topics, among which bigamy, adultery, abduction, fraud, seduction, blackmail, madness, kidnapping, and murder. As its very name suggests, Sensation fiction was meant to create sensationalism, disarray, surprise, thrill, astonishment, shock, scandal. It was not only entertaining because it provoked a voyeuristic interest in the secret lives of the upper- and middle-class, but also because it provoked in its audience empathy and even a physical response to the story. In "Sensation and Science" (2011),

Susan D. Bernstein explores the Victorian critical attention to theorising the experience of reading as an embodied act. The physical impressions usually associated with Sensation fiction's reading, she argues, were compared with feelings generated by heat, electricity and galvanism (2011: 466-480). In her essay, she reports the worries that some Victorian reviewers had about Sensation novels "electrifying the nerves of the readers" (as H. L. Mansel maintained in his 1863 article for *Quarterly Review*)[74]. Bypassing intellectual faculties or moral consciousness, in this type of texts the connection between page and nerve was said to be direct. Reporting Alison Winter's record in 1998 *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain*, Bernstein explains that during the 1860s readers very frequently gave accounts of "involuntary reactions and excited states of mind"[75] derived from Sensation fiction's reading. In particular, Bernstein tells of one Victorian reader who attributed a magnetic force to Collins's *The Woman in White* (1859): when illness interrupted his reading, he claimed that he felt a sort of electric energy coming from the cupboard where he had previously stored the volume (ibid.). In an 1864 letter to his mother, Collins says of *Armadale*, "I am making my own flesh creep with what I am writing just now… Whether the public flesh will follow my example remains to be seen" (Collins's "Letter to Mrs. Harriet Collins, 9 September 1864").[76]

As a matter of fact, although sensation and science might seem completely disconnected, by the end of the nineteenth century the associations made between the two were numerous – both in terms of scientific discourses featuring in novels, and of the physical effects that novels were said to cause on the public. Both Bernstein and Meegan Kennedy (2011) argue that Sensation fiction is very much fascinated especially with medicine. In particular, Kennedy holds that "Victorian medicine was as much art as science", meaning that, with its tension between romance and realism, medicine was ideally positioned to provide a tool for Sensation works (2011: 481-492). Moreover, the scholar argues that if the pattern of illness in the Victorian novel as a whole was pretty much focused on the culture of sickroom, the invalid, the nurse, and the scientific discourse in general, Sensation fiction added to it a peculiar attention to the body and its responses (ibid).

[74] H. L. Mansel (1863). "Sensation Novels" in *Quarterly Review.*

[75] A. Winter (1988). *Mesmerized: Powers of Mind in Victorian Britain* quoted in Bernstein (2011: 467).

[76] The letter, in W. Baker and W. M. Clarke (eds). *Letters of Wilkie Collins, vol. 1: 1838-1865* (1999b) is quoted in Kennedy (2011: 486).

Indeed, one of the issues which were most extensively discussed and that overstuffed Victorian journals and magazines concerned the matters of brain and behaviours. Specifically, an integral part of the contemporary intellectual culture was constituted by theories on mind shock and sense transmission (including nerves, electricity, emotion), memory, consciousness and unconsciousness, dreams, somnambulism, delirium, hallucinations, visions and supernatural visitations, mesmerism, phrenology, physiognomy and physiology. A particularly influential publication was *Elemente der Psychophysik* (1860), a monumental book in which the German experimental psychologist Gustav Theodor Fechner argued that scientists could move beyond the mind/body distinction by means of the sensory experience, which involves the physical stimulation of nerves and the mental recognition of the feeling produced by that stimulation. Indeed, he did not accept that an insuperable barrier existed separating what is mental, psychological from what is corporeal, material, and sought to study humans from a "single point of view". Having coined the term "psychophysik" (translated into English as "psychophysics"), Fechner claimed to have proved the existence of a mathematical relationship between physical stimulation and psychological experience of a sensation (Karpenko and Claggett, 2017: 105-124).[77] Indeed, in the nineteenth century, the connection between body and mind was believed to be very strong – to such an extent that all living beings were thought to own an invisible, natural force able to physically affect other beings without actual bodily contact. This theory, known as "mesmerism" (called after the German doctor Franz Mesmer), was in vogue particularly during the 1840s and 1850s – the decades in which a "mesmeric mania" was said to have gripped the public imagination. In "So Extraordinary a Bond: Mesmerism and Sympathetic Identification in Charles Adams's *Notting Hill Mystery*", Lara Karpenko describes the structure of the mesmeric séance as generally featuring a male mesmerist and a female subject. To exemplify the dynamic between mesmerist and mesmerized, she turns to a report from the *Lancet*, in which the most famous mesmeric demonstrations of the era is narrated: the one between Dr John Elliotson (who, as we will see later in this chapter, will feature in *The Moonstone*) and Elizabeth O'Key (2016: 145-150). The experiment is described as follows:

[77] Psychophysics found a great supporter in the scientist Francis Galton, who applied Fechner's theories on anthropometry, holding that it was possible to take exact measurements of a person's mental qualities, and to compare the mental faculties of different people. As I mentioned in the first chapter, Francis Galton used psychophysics in particular to statistically justify his theory of eugenics.

> She was here put to *sleep* (this was always done *by a pass of the hand*)… the Doctor drew his hand, pointed towards hers, upwards and outwards in the air. In a few seconds her hand and arm began to move up in the same direction. While ceasing, for a short time, in order to talk to someone near, he produced a motion with his fingers, which those of the girl immediately imitated. "See," said the Doctor, "my fingers were moved involuntarily; *I did not mean to* influences hers." ("University College Hospital: Animal Magnetism" in *Lancet 2*, 1837-1838, quoted in Karpenko, 2016: 149. My italics.)

This "pass of the hand", a pass that does not involve bodily contact, became the hallmark of mesmerism. This simple "pass of the hand" is a gesture indicating that bodily boundaries are permeable, and that the doctor is in control of the patient.

Another concept that by the 1850s had become entangled with mesmerism is sympathetic identification: a form of "thinking geared towards others", as Karpenko explains, which does not necessarily involve emotional feeling, but is more related to physical feeling. Not only did Sensation fiction exploit mesmerism and sympathetic identification, but it was also naturally permeated with them. Sensation novelists were born in the midst of this "strange" scientific tornado, and wholeheartedly took it up becoming a sort of "textual mesmerists", binding readers to their characters, but also binding readers to one another. Indeed, as I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, one of the reasons why Sensation fiction was so harshly criticised was its potential for the public's *identification* with criminal heroes (Margaret Oliphant would warn against "a kind of literature which must… more or less, make the criminal its hero").[78] At the same time, this literature seems to also allow a different kind of sympathetic identification, in that its community of readers fuse and blend into one another, feeling one another's sensations, and speaking, as Oliphant does, for one another's reading experiences (ibid.).

Not only were physiological theories of reading mentioned within critics' reviews, they also – directly or implicitly– entered in the content of Sensation fiction: indeed, many Sensation characters seem to harness unusual powers of reading that resemble animal magnetism or clairvoyance. A literary example of this is offered in *The Moonstone*, where Collins draws on two sciences in particular, chemistry and medicine (the latter divided into physiology and psychology), and on mesmerism. In *The Moonstone*'s first Preface

[78] Margaret Oliphant, *Oliphant, Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine 102* (1867: 568-572) quoted in Karpenko (2016: 152-153).

(written at Gloucester Place, Portman Square the 30th of June 1868), Collins specifies that any scientific allusion is based on facts:

> In the case of the physiological experiment which occupies a prominent place in the closing scene of *The Moonstone* […] Having first ascertained, not only from books, but from living authorities as well, what the result of that experiment would really have been, I have declined to avail myself of the novelist's privilege of supposing something which might have happened, and have so shaped the story as to make it grow out of what actually would have happened – which, I beg to inform my readers, is also what does happen in these pages. (3)

As a matter of fact, it is quite typical of Collins to declare his accuracy regarding medical and legal matters. In *Heart and Science* (in April 1883), in a section called "To Readers in Particular" Collins writes as follows:

> In the following pages, there are allusions to medical practice at the bedside; leading in due course to physiological questions which connect themselves with the main interest of the novel. In traversing this delicate ground, you have not been forgotten. Before the manuscript went to the printer, it was submitted for correction to an eminent London surgeon, whose experience extends over a period of forty years.
>
> Again: a supposed discovery in connection with brain disease, which occupies a place of importance, is not (as you may suspect) the fantastic product of the author's imagination. […]
>
> On becoming acquainted with "Mrs. Gallilee," you will find her talking – and you will sometimes even find the author talking – of scientific subjects in general. You will naturally conclude that it is "all gross caricature." No; it is all promiscuous reading. Let me spare you a long list of books consulted, and of newspapers and magazines mutilated for "cuttings" – and appeal to examples once more, and for the last time. (Collins, 1997 – first published 1883: 39-40).

In "Science and '*The Moonstone*'", Ira Bruce Nadel finds in the characters of Betteredge and Mrs Merridew (Rachel Verinder's old conservative aunt, who looks down on Ezra Jennings's experiment) the confirmation of Collins's faith in new sciences (1983: 239-259). This is clearly visible also in the above-mentioned Prefaces, where he insists on having mixed fictional tales with *real* scientific data. However, two conflicting views

of mesmerism, as well as nineteenth-century sciences, appear in *The Moonstone*. The first view is embodied by Betteredge and Mrs Merridew, who are bearers of the eighteenth-century view of science as metaphysics (rather than the nineteenth-century interpretation of science as experimentation). Indeed, Betteredge considers Ezra's opium experiment a "conjuring trick" (370) and a "hocus pocus" (375), just like he had judged an "hocus pocus" (25) the mesmeric state induced on the young boy by the Indian jugglers earlier in the novel. Mrs Merridew, for her part, hopelessly links experiments with a romantic idea of chemical explosions, adding a comic tint to the event. On the opposite side, Ezra represents an unusual combination of the spiritualism that characterises the Oriental medical discourse and the precision of Western sciences. He is the scientist par excellence – a figure that was new to the nineteenth century, and whose prestige was growing exactly at the time in which Collins was writing. With a deep knowledge in physiology, psychology and pharmacology, Ezra grounds his method on hypothesis, observation, experimentation, and always takes notes and keeps records of his studies. As well as Collins did in his Preface with his readers, Ezra proves keen in offering reliable, accredited references to his claims:

> Observe, Mr Blake before you begin, that I am now referring you to one of the greatest of English physiologists. The book in your hand is Doctor Elliston's *Human Physiology*, and the case which the doctor cites rests on the well-known authority of Mr Combe. (359)

Collins knew and had himself been treated by John Elliotson who combined, in his *Human Physiology* (1840), conventional medical methods with mesmerism and clairvoyance. Ezra provides Blake with a second source, too:

> 'There,' he said, 'are the far-famed C*onfessions of an English Opium-Eater.* […] At the passage which I have marked, you will find that when De Quincey had committed what he calls 'a debauch of opium', he either went to the gallery at the Opera to enjoy the music, or he wandered about the London markets on Saturday night, and interested himself in observing all the little shifts and bargainings of the poor in providing their Sunday's dinner. […]' (360)

First appeared in 1821 and later revised and expanded for a new edition in 1856, the book mentioned by Ezra was written by Thomas De Quincey who, like Ezra and Collins himself,[79] became addicted to opium after starting to use it for medicinal purposes.

Science proves undoubtedly decisive to the development and final disentanglement of the book's narrative threads. The sort of mesmerism which Ezra performs on Franklin Blake succeeds thanks to its total reliance on forensic and a "science that focuses on the body of the suspect as a text to be read" (Thomas, 2006: 67). Indeed, Ezra must render intelligible Mr Candy's seemingly incoherent ramblings through piecing together, interpreting and making sense of them. At the same time, he has to foresee Blake's unconscious intention, in order to help his body tell the story that Blake has *repressed*. With respect to Blake's mesmeric experience, a consideration should be made on the result of the experiment, since it is really controversial. If on one hand Blake is found responsible for having stolen the Moonstone, on the other hand his hallucination caused by an opium overdose certainly contributes to lighten his guilt. Indeed, mesmerism and drug addiction as a means of leaving the criminal unpunished were frequently exploited in Sensation novels. For instance, commenting on Charles Adams's *Notting Hill Mystery* (1862-1863) Karpenko describes how in that novel the convict manages to get away, leaving the readers – who had sympathetically identified with him – with the ambivalent feeling that justice has not been done, but that the convict cannot be considered totally guilty either (2016: 145-163).

As Worthington maintains, "despite, or perhaps because of its popularity, Newgate fiction contributed to nineteenth-century society's anxieties about crime in reality, anxieties that the government sought to assuage with the inauguration of the New Metropolitan Police in 1829" (2010: 20). The figures of detectives and police officers in Detective novels emerged and started developing in a symbiotic relation with the rise and growth of the police forces. Before that, the patrolmen that appeared within narratives concerned with crime rarely took the central stage, possibly because their coming from the lower-classes made them unsuitable heroes for policing crimes, which were also associated with poverty.[80] However, by the early 1840s the police presence in London had become acceptable and widespread enough to allow for the creation of plain-clothes detective police forces, which marked also their gradual appearance within fiction, so that

[79] As I will explain in the next section of the present dissertation.

[80] For instance, the Bow Street Runners, a small quasi-police force instituted in 1749.

detection was finally associated with crime. Indeed, contrary to the Newgate novel, which only showed signs of detection, and contrary to Sensation fiction that featured detection with no involvement of police officers, the detective fiction added the professional detective as a new feature of crime fiction.

Detection was particularly appealing to Victorian readers, as they felt invited to participate in the investigation, exercising their retrospective imagination. However, the introduction of mystery and detection in nineteenth-century fiction – which involves the self-conscious withholding of specific information from the reader – determined a complication in the role of the omniscient narrator. Indeed, the latter stands on a difficult position: on one side, they seem to be conniving with the criminal (implying the sacrifice of moral legitimacy), on the other hand, they look as if they are suffering a structural amnesia, which will only be recovered at the end, when all the threads of the novel are pieced together, and the author offers a recapitulation of the story. Therefore, the figure of the detective appears to compensate for the narrator's lack of authority, in that the information provided to the readers is reduced to that in possession of the detective. The plot, hence, is slowly built through the discovery – or, better, recovery – of knowledge, until, as Brantlinger explains, "at the end what detective and reader know coincides with what the secretive […] narrator-author has presumably known all along" (1982: 19). Therefore, the detective can be seen as one of the narrator's personifications in the text, presiding over the plot and leading the reader down many "false paths" before disclosing the true one. An example of a fictional detective can be seen in the character of Sergeant Cuff, in *The Moonstone*: he solves only parts of the mysteries, setting up misleading leads. He surely offers useful details and insights – nevertheless his knowledge is incomplete, and he proves no more successful at providing information than the missing third-person narrator. However, it should be added that this narrative technique does not invalidate the reliability, authority and reputation of the role of the detective within Detective novels. In the case of Mr Cuff, for example, all his prophecies will be fulfilled, and the convict will turn out to be the one he had previously indicated. Another narrative technique exploited in *The Moonstone* to withhold information, simultaneously involving the readers in a real-like investigation, is switching narrators throughout the novels.[81] Indeed, each narrator speaks of only what they could have known at the time; although they know

[81] Some scholars (such as Charles J. Rzepka and Patrick Brantlinger) argue that what persuaded Collins to use the strategy of switching narrators was due to his Law studies.

the ultimate truth as they narrate the story, they are honour-bound not to reveal the conclusion until the very end.

However, Mr Cuff is not the chief detective in *The Moonstone*. That role is actually embodied by a gentleman, Franklin Blake – who, as I previously anticipated, is also the one who did steal the diamond, setting the stage for a "search-for-the-self" motif. Brantlinger argues that the more profound essence of the "search for the self" will be the focus of later mystery novels, and that in *The Moonstone* the *Bildungsroman* is short-circuited (1982: 22). However, I think that a psychoanalyzed reading of Collins's novel actually points at the crucial importance of the process of (re)acquiring self-consciousness. The way itself in which the Moonstone was stolen (in a moment of mental narcolepsy, followed by amnesia) indicates the urge of awakening a process of self-discovery and self-awareness, to avoid that "The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters" (quoting the aquatint by the Spanish painter Francisco Goya, 1797-1799). The reason behind the introduction of an "unofficial" investigator like Blake is brilliantly explained by Heather Milton in "Sensation and Detection". Despite the fact that Mr Cuff is provided with great skills and mental acuity, his role as police detective inspecting a nineteenth-century bourgeois family conveys a feeling of uneasiness. (2011: 519-522). Milton argues that Sensation novels were not only a response to a perception of an increase in crime, but mostly a response to anxiety about the middle-class family corruption from within. As I mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the high- and mid- class domesticity was a safe haven, a shelter, and the aristocratic Victorian family an institution. The intrusion of a police detective would mean a series of sacred boundaries being trespassed and violated: social class, privacy, and gender (when high-born women were involved). As paradoxical as it might seem to us at first, police detectives threatened the very boundaries they attempted to fix, being "profoundly ambivalent and disturbing characters, all the more disturbing because of their pronounced ability to uncover secrets" (ibid.). The detection of crimes within the wall of an apparently respectable Victorian family would certainly threaten its façade, and jeopardise and pillory its name. From this point of view, hence, it appears that what was thrilling in Detective fiction was the concept of surveillance itself, the idea that, at least potentially, everybody could be kept under strict observation. Therefore, it emerges that these novels are as much about concealing secrets as revealing them: what drives them is the desire to cover up the truth, rather than finding it. This take helps explaining also the success of an amateur detective like Blake in *The Moonstone*:

usurping lower-class police detective, he expels the risk of an infiltration and the exposure of the middle- and upper-class home.

In "Canonisation, Modern Literature and the Detective Story", John G. Cawelti asserts that crime, as a distinctive problem of bourgeois, individualistic, and quasi-democratic societies, is handled without upsetting society's fundamental institutions, nor its worldview. He argues that, at the end of the novel, the detective reaffirms the fundamental soundness of the social order by revealing how the crime has resulted from particular motives of certain individuals, and offers a view of the crime as a possibility, and not as an endemic feature of society. The message conveyed, thus, is that "however corrupt or unjust society may be in some of its particulars, it yet contains the intelligence and the means to define and exorcise these evils as particular problems" (1997: 5-18). In reality, I believe that Cawelti's assumption does not fully apply to *The Moonstone*, since a just, fair social order seems not to be eventually restored (if ever there was some kind of social justice at the beginning of the novel, which can also be questioned). Indeed, the themes of guilt and individual/collective responsibility in *The Moonstone* leads to a complex debate – which will be deepened in the next chapter. Indeed, even though it is undeniable that Godfrey Ablewhite is to be identified as (one of) the culprit(s), he will never release a confession nor feel repentance. In addition to it, the position of Blake is even more problematic, because he can be neither totally absolved nor condemned. Thus, the impression I have is that some of the mystery and crime threads forwarded in the novel do not find definite solutions, and leave the readers with a feeling of anxiety and suspense. It is not by chance that the novel ends with a question mark: "So the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time. What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone? Who can tell?" (434).

As far as its literary genre, T. S. Eliot claims that *The Moonstone* was "the first, the longest and the best of modern English detective novels", acknowledging mainly Collins's creation of Sergeant Cuff (Eliot, 1971, "Wilkie Collins and Dickens" in *The Victorian Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism,* quoted in Frazier, 2015: 22). In her essay "Parody and Detective Fiction", Janice MacDonald recognises Collins the paternity of the Detective novel, asserting that his best-known works, *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*, are the prototypes for the mystery thriller and the Detective novel, respectively (1997: 61-72). However, Melissa Frazier argues that most scholars push

Collins to the margins of the genre.[82] Indeed, trying to confine Collins's masterpiece within a specific literary genre would be belittling. Many of Sensation fiction's typical features are detectable, although in the novel's opening pages – set in India – readers feel like inhabiting a different realm, at a remove from a middle-class dwelling, a Victorian lady's boudoir, or anything close to London West End. They will recognise the Sensation genre again once they will be suddenly catapulted into the Verinders' mansion in the first chapter. Furthermore, alongside a fictional plot, the novel includes a series of *real* data: historical (like the Siege of Seringapatam, or the allusion to the Koh-i-Noor made explicit in the Preface), and scientific (as mentioned in the paragraphs above). Overall, it can be argued that, relying on several literary conventions, Collins produced a definitely unconventional work. As argued by Daniel Martin in "Wilkie Collins and risk", Collins's biographers often maintain that the sensationalist content of his novels, as well as the uniqueness of his style, are reflected in his rather bohemian personal lifestyle (2011: 185). And as Tim Dolin affirms, "Collins was an unconventional person who lived unconventionally" (2006: 18).

2.3 Wilkie Collins, story of an unconventional life

Wilkie Collins was a multifaceted artist whose literary production still provokes debates and whose points of view are still very discussed and ambiguous. He is considered to be a great storyteller, "a master of suspense" – as Jenny B. Taylor would define him in her introduction to *The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins*, and a key player in the shaping and development of both sensation and detective fiction (2006: 1-6). He was a prolific and hard-working professional writer who managed to accommodate journalistic production – closely collaborating with his friend Charles Dickens – and original narratives, imbued with new inventions and commodities, quickly adapting his work to the changing literary marketplace. He achieved great success while he was still alive and was considered a celebrity for many decades of the twentieth century, endlessly praised

[82] For example, Jacques Barzun expresses his dissensus stating: "*Pace* T. S. Eliot, this marvellous book is not 'the greatest English detective story.' It is a good mystery with unforgettable characters and fine melodrama, but Sergeant Cuff […] is not conspicuously a detective, and the clues, though fairly laid out from the beginning, satisfy only an antiquarian interest in ratiocination...". (J. Barzun and W. H. Taylor. *A Catalogue of Crime.* 1971, quoted in Frazier, 2015: 22).

for his intellectual complexity. However, although seen as an interesting figure in the growth of the genre fiction, for much of the twentieth century he was seen as Dickens's rather lightweight protégé, but not really worth sustained academic study (ibid.). However, during the last thirty years there has been a real explosion of interest towards the sophistication of his novels and his exploration of social identities and social boundaries, which has gained the interest of critics, opening an on-going debate on Collins's actual point of view and on his literary intent.

William Wilkie Collins was born in St Marylebone, London, on 8 January 1824 and named after his father, William Collins, and his godfather David Wilkie (2006: xiii-xix). His family gave him a rather wealthy and happy childhood and he developed a particularly strong bond with his mother Harriet Collins (née Geddes), with whom he would keep in contact throughout his whole life and to whom he constantly wrote seeking for advice and comfort (2006: 7-22). When he was still a young boy, his family visited France and Italy, where he will return other times during his tours with or without Dickens, and which gave him the opportunity to start learning foreign languages.

Between 1838 and 1840 he attended Mr Cole's private boarding school in Highbury and the following year he started working as an apprentice at Antrobus & Co., a tea importer company located in the Strand. Tea, a colonial product, was already a national icon at the time. Reading from this experience, it is possible to affirm that he was put in contact with the Empire, ever-present in the everyday British lifestyle (as well as in part of Collins's literary production), from a very early age.

During his free time, but also during working hours, Wilkie Collins released his urge to write, and in August 1843 (when he was only nineteen) his first story "The Last Stage Coachman" was published in the *Illuminated Magazine*. The short story, as the title suggests, features trains and railways, showing from the very beginning Collins's interest in new technologies and in modern commodities and culture. However, critics claim that it is quite clear that his first texts owed a lot to Dickens (2006: 43). In 1844, during a trip to Paris he wrote his first novel *Iolàni, or Tahiti as it was*, an exotic romance that went the rounds of the London publishers in 1845, but never saw the light of day (2006: 98).

In 1846, Collins entered Lincoln's Inn to study law in order to become a solicitor (2006: 13). Even though he never practiced, his knowledge of the law became very useful when writing his novels and narrating about crimes and want-to-be detectives. When in 1847 his father William died, Collins started writing his biography, which he titled *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., RA*, which was published the following year.

This work was finally successful and gained him fame as a writer. It was at this moment he decided to be published by the name of Wilkie Collins, so as not to be confused with his acclaimed painter father (ibid.)

In part following his father's steps, Wilkie Collins dedicated himself to visual art, too. In fact, in 1849 he exhibited a painting, *The Smugglers' Retreat*, at the Royal Academy Summer Exhibition, showing his many-sided nature as an artist (2006: 19). This artistic side of him was also present in his writing style, shown particularly in the way he thoroughly described characters and events in his novels. In "Collins's Career and the Visual Arts", Tim Dolin reports that Collins had, in fact, inherited "a painter's eye for description" from his father and from his artistic upbringings (2006: 8). His godfather, Sir David Wilkie, was also a painter. The fact that Collins grew up surrounded by art surely had some influence on his career as a writer; as the *Westminster Review* stated in 1853, talking about Collins's literary production, "it matters not whether the artist hold the pencil or the pen": he, being the son of a renowned painter, knew that Art's purpose was that of elevating things and pleasing the reader, no matter through which means it was done (ibid.).[83] As an additional proof of his versatility, it must be remembered that Wilkie Collins was also a very enthusiastic actor, playwriter and theatregoer. The passion for theatre was shared also by Charles Dickens, with whom Collins created an indissoluble bond and a very solid friendship. The two acted together at a charity event performing even in front of Queen Victoria and her consort Prince Albert (2006: 104).[84] Apart from writing a few plays, Wilkie Collins also adapted for the stage some of his most famous novels, such as *The Woman in White*. *The Woman in White* was not his first novel, but it is ranked among his most successful ones, together with *The Moonstone*. By the time *The Woman in White* was serialised and published (in 1860), he had already written many other novels and plays, such as *Basil: A Story of Modern Life* (1852), which is considered to be the most significant precursors of sensation fiction; *Hide and Seek* (1854), that features for the first time Collins's interest in the impaired and crippled characters – interest that will be further and more deeply developed in his later works, in *The Moonstone*, in particular; and *The Lighthouse* (1855), which was Collins's first play, performed by Dickens's theatrical company (2006: 7-22). From November 1859 until

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[83] *Athenaeum*, 4 December 1852: 47, quoted in Dolin, 2006: 8.

[84] The play, *The Frozen Deep*, was written by Collins in 1856 and revised by Dickens. On 4 July 1857 it was performed at the Royal Gallery of Illustration for Queen Victoria, Prince Albert and their family. Victoria praised the performance (especially Dickens's acting) in her diary.

august 1860, as I had just mentioned, *The Woman in White* was serialised in the journal *All the Year Round*, affirming Collins as one of the most important contributors to Sensation fiction. The novel was then published as a volume and adapted for the theatre, earning a huge success, mainly due to the controversial and modern topics it deals with and the characters it represents.

Wilkie Collins cannot be precisely included within the category of the *standard* "strong and independent Victorian bourgeois men",[85] and the controversies found in his conditions and lifestyle are mirrored also in his novels. Possibly because of a difficult birth, Collins came to life with a malformed body which gave him an unusual look. He was very short, clumsy, with small hands and feet, and a noticeable disproportion in his upper body: his head was large and triangular with a bulge on his forehead above his right eye. In addition to that, before the age of forty he started suffering from a serious form of rheumatic gout, which caused him severe pain and led him to find relief in the use of opium and derivatives (ibid.). His atypical appearance and his unconventionality probably helped Collins understand, and most of all, identify with disabled and social outcasts. Indeed, his work is strewn with disabled characters and misfits, mad women, drug addicts and foreign people – to whom, though, a new and own voice is given, and who are often portrayed as the heroes of the stories. Indeed, the physically and mentally diseased (hence, presumably, *abnormal*) body acquires central meaning in Collins's production, serving as a helpful engine of the plot.[86]

His interest in eccentric characters and cripples is certainly linked to his personal life experience, as it is his attention to nonconformist relationships with women. In fact, Collins lived with his mother until he was thirty-two years old and did not even own a bank account until 1860, when *The Woman in White* was finally a triumph (ibid.). In 1859 he moved in together with Caroline Graves and her daughter, but will never agree to marry her. In 1868 Caroline got married to a young man named Joseph Charles Clow, which event Collins attended (2006: xvi). Before that, the writer had already started another affair with another woman, Martha Rudd, who was 15 years younger and belonging to the lower class. When eventually Collins's *The Moonstone* was published

[85] The stereotypical features characterising the "strong and independent Victorian bourgeois man", as described in the previous chapter, were those constructing the artificial concept of "normalcy", hence based on patriarchy, heteronormativity, the absence of physical disabilities, and the belonging to the highest step of the social hierarchy – according to an evolutionistic perspective, that moreover excluded "exotic" origins.
[86] Some of these disabilities which actually do *categorise* and *define* some characters in *The Moonstone* will be deeply discussed in the next chapter of the present dissertation.

and reached the peak of success, Caroline Graves left her husband and returned living with Collins. Until the death of both Martha and Caroline, Wilkie Collins maintained both the relationships in two different homes without ever marrying either woman, but providing for them both and the children Martha borne.

Using the words of Tim Dolin, Collins could be described as embodying a "bohemian personality" because, together with Charles Dickens, he was in the habit of visiting music halls and bordellos in their European tours and exploring squalid parts of London (2006: 12). This reputation of his, though, hid a quite literal painful truth that saw Collins subjugating himself to the effects and reliefs of laudanum. In short, he was forced to become a drug addict if he wanted to soothe the unbearable pain of ocular gout and rheumatic illness he suffered from, and even though he tried more than once to cure his addiction (resorting on one occasion to morphine) he was never successful (ibid.).

Although Wilkie Collins was considered to be truly unconventional for his times and very far from embodying the mid-Victorian middle-class man, he nonetheless was very fond of his career, and his work ethic reflected the pattern presented by the standard bourgeois man. His friend Edmund Yates wrote about this matter that "No barrister or physician ever worked harder at his profession […] [nor] devoted more time, or thought, or trouble to it, was prouder of it, or pursued it with more zeal or earnestness than Mr Collins has done with regard to literature", confirming how big an impact this Art had on his life, and his devotion to literary production (2006: 13).[87]

[87] E. Yates, June 1857. "Men of Mark: No 2 - W. Wilkie Collins", *The Train*, quoted in Dolin, 2006: 13.

Chapter Three

Against Stereotypes: Dismantling the Victorian Norm *in* The Moonstone

> 'La vostra protezione!' esclamò egli, dando indietro due passi, appoggiandosi fieramente sul piede destro, mettendo la destra sull'anca, levando la sinistra coll'indice teso verso don Rodrigo, e *piantandogli in faccia due occhi infiammati*: '[…] Avete colma la misura; e non vi temo più. […] *ve lo dico io povero frate*; e quanto a voi, sentite bene quello che io *vi prometto. Verrà un giorno*...'
>
> (Manzoni, 2010 - first published 1827: 89. My italics)

In the present chapter I explore, through a postcolonial lens, *The Moonstone*'s characters that I identify as subalterns, their role within the plot, and the narrative techniques employed to introduce them. My aim is to demonstrate how a subversion of the Victorian sociocultural construct of normalcy as location of biopower is taking place within the novel – precisely through the empowerment of the subaltern characters. To this purpose, I will examine the concept of "subaltern" as defined by Antonio Gramsci and later reinterpreted by Gayatri Spivak, as well as the mechanism operating behind the subalterns' self-consciousness as described by Frantz Fanon, and the Lacanian notion of "foreclosure" exploited by Spivak to explain the imperialistic agenda. As I will show in the next paragraphs, what emerges is that subalterns are allowed to form their identity and represent themselves resorting to their own tools and grammar only if they become aware of their subjection to the hegemonic power perpetrated by a dominant class and gender.

In addition to that, I will highlight Spivak's understanding of nineteenth-century British literature as a political tool to denote the superiority of British culture and as a means to convey ethnocentric prejudice. Since the dialogue between Victorian literature and postcolonial discourse does not meet universal acceptance and has been questioned by some scholars (among whom, Erin O'Connor), I will offer Deirdre David's favourable position on such encounter, in order to justify and support my reading of *The Moonstone*, and to prove that a postcolonial reading of the novel is in line also with its numerous

references to British imperialism. Indeed, as I will illustrate, Collins's text appears imbued with anti-imperialistic hints.

I will therefore refer to Mark Mossman's 2009 essay "Representation of the Abnormal Body in *The Moonstone*", in which he advances the hypothesis (which I embrace) that the repeated representation of the abnormal body in the novel serves not so much as a definition and reinforcement of the norm, but as its de-construction and re-construction. However, whereas in his work Mossman only focuses on the impaired characters' *physical* disabilities, in my analysis I will consider their deviances also as regards gender, sexual orientation, social status and ethnicity. Moreover, I will explain that the subaltern characters' empowerment is triggered precisely by their consciousness of their ab-normality being not a natural, intrinsic, problematic condition, but the biased consequence of a mere social construct.

Gayatri Spivak uses the concept of "deconstruction" elaborated by the French philosopher Jacques Derrida as an important theoretical tool to investigate the ethical and practical approach to the discourse of subalternity, since deconstruction "is constantly and persistently looking into how *truths* are produced" (Landry and MacLean, 1996: 9).[88] Spivak's persistence on "looking into", eviscerating and turning inside out the key concepts of colonialism, postcolonialism, feminism and Marxism in order to deeply explore the question of subalternity is inevitably accompanied by a complex writing style – which, admittedly, sometimes might give the reader quite a hard time.[89] However, some scholars have pointed out that the proverbial difficulty of her texts is a rhetorical strategy purposely employed to avoid too superficial or simplistic conclusions to be drawn, as well as to demonstrate that coherent and systematic reasonings often ought to be distrusted – or, at least, looked at with suspicion.[90] Within Spivak's postcolonial discourse, deconstructing and delving into the ways in which *truths* are created, means to reach a deep understanding of the impact that Western texts had on the *other* cultures, as well as

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[88] The term "deconstruction" refers to a method for philosophical and literary analysis – which, according to Derrida, constitutes also a mode of political action – that questions the fundamental conceptual distinctions, or "oppositions", in Western philosophy through a close examination of the language and logic of philosophical and literary texts. The concept has derived mainly from the work begun by Derrida in the 1960s.

[89] Actually, some literary theorists and critics, among whom Terry Eagleton in "In the Gaudy Supermarket", *London Review of Books* (1999), have even accused Spivak of obscurantism and narcissism.

[90] Among these scholars, R. Young in *White Mythologies. Writing History and the West* (1990), and S. Morton in *Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak* (2002).

to comprehend how the representation of the subject is constructed and how the figure of the *other* is positioned within definite epistemological boundaries.

It was 1988 when Spivak answered negatively the question posed in the very title of her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?", stating with no hesitation that "the subaltern cannot speak" (2013: 104). Spivak sourced the term "subaltern" from Antonio Gramsci's *Quaderni del Carcere (12-29)*, written between 1929 and 1935. In his writings, the Italian philosopher and politician did not offer a proper definition, as it were, of "subalternity". However, since the contexts in which this word is used are quite indicative of its meaning, I will report below some significant passages to illustrate this concept:

> Si sente dire spesso che una certa abitudine è diventata una "seconda natura"; ma la "prima natura" sarà stata proprio la "prima"? In questo modo di esprimersi del senso comune non è implicito l'accenno alla storicità della "natura umana"? […] Nei gruppi subalterni, per l'assenza di autonomia nell'iniziativa storica, […] [è] più forte la lotta per liberarsi dai *principii imposti e non proposti nel conseguimento di una coscienza storica autonoma*: i punti di riferimento in tale lotta sono disparati e uno di essi, quello appunto che consiste nella "*naturalità*" […] ottiene molta fortuna perché pare ovvio e semplice. Come invece dovrebbe formarsi questa coscienza storica proposta autonomamente? Come ognuno dovrebbe scegliere e combinare gli elementi per la costituzione di una tale *coscienza autonoma*? Ogni elemento "imposto" […] sarà da ripudiare come imposto, ma non in se stesso, cioè occorrerà dargli una nuova forma che sia *propria del gruppo dato*. (Gramsci, 1975: 1875. My italics.)

I would like to signal, in particular, that the principles subalterns have at their disposal to form their autonomous (historical) consciousness are alien, and have been imposed on them, while also being dangerously presented as natural.

> Come, in un certo senso, in uno Stato, la storia è storia delle classi dirigenti, così, nel mondo, la storia è storia degli Stati egemoni. La storia degli Stati subalterni si spiega con la storia degli Stati egemoni. (Gramsci, 1975: 1759.)

As it appears from the quotations above, the identity and history of subalterns are totally subjected to the domination of cultural hegemony. With regards to the identification of subaltern groups, on the other hand, Gramsci states that "Spesso i gruppi subalterni sono

originariamente di *altra razza* (altra cultura e altra religione) di quelli dominanti e spesso sono un *miscuglio di razze diverse*." (Gramsci, 1975: 2286. My italics.)

Reinterpreted by the Subaltern Studies Collective within the "history from below" narrative, the term "subaltern" is used in Spivak's essay with reference to "the margins" or "the silent, silenced center of the circuit marked by […] *epistemic violence*, men and women among the illiterate peasantry, the tribals, the lowest strata of the urban subproletariat" (2013: 78; my italics), of whom Spivak asserts that no voice-consciousness is allowed. Moreover, the scholar finds that

> within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. […] both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow. (Spivak, 2013: 82-83)

As it appears from the quotation above, Spivak is denying the "poor, black and female" subjects' agency, their hegemony not exclusively in terms of power, but more specifically within the discourse of self-representation, holding that history of women has always been told and written by Others, be them the local patriarchy or the British imperialism (2013: 90). She introduces the case of the suttee (in Sanskrit, "sati"), the Indian custom of a wife immolating herself, either on the funeral pyre of her dead husband or in some other fashions, soon after his death. Through the example of the suttee, Spivak denounces the fossilised positivism of the Collective's archival research as well as the Western "benevolent" and moralising point of view through which this practise is interpreted: she claims that the native woman cannot speak nor be listened to, since there is always another entity who does so in her stead. Indeed, when British abolished the practice of suttee (1827), they undertook the task of speaking in place of the oppressed Indian woman. In this way, not only they legitimised imperialism as a civilising mission and themselves as liberators, but they also attributed the subaltern woman a voice that seemed to be asking for the white man's help. On the other hand, and speaking against the British representation of suttee, the local patriarchy (*i.e.,* the native men) insisted that any widow was honoured and willing to join the dead husband on the pyre. Spivak argues that none of these versions truly represents the *real* position of the subaltern: her voice ventriloquised "between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-

formation, the figure of the woman simply disappears", deprived of her existence and of her presence within the public space (2013: 102). The subaltern woman is so invisible that every attempt of giving her a voice results in an artificial façade, a manipulation, a fabrication of an entity that *de facto* does not exist. Therefore, it can be noticed that Spivak broadens Gramsci's circle of subalternity, including also the lower social strata and the female subjects – regardless of their ethnicity, culture or religion. This reinterpreted definition of "social subaltern" is the one I refer to in defining some of *The Moonstone*'s characters as subalterns.

As concerns the self-consciousness and identity of the subalterns, another important contribution comes from the French West Indian psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. As I mentioned in the first chapter, in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) Fanon movingly describes the devastating effects that (using Gramsci's words) the *imposition of principles*, presented as the only possible ones by natural law, has caused on the construction of the identity of the subalterns. In particular, he relates his feeling of a faulty, impaired otherness to "the white man's eyes", underlining the arbitrariness of his power of judgement (1986: 109-110). Fanon remarks that the white man's supposed "normalcy" – which translates to "superiority" – is only a discriminatory (and terribly dangerous) construct believed to be intrinsic to human nature, but that in reality is not natural at all. Therefore, he asserts that subalterns are unconscious victims of epistemicide, since the only way they are allowed to build their identity is by looking at themselves not in a mirror, but in the dominants' eyes.

On the basis of these observations, it appears that the only way of subverting the condition of the subalterns would involve a process in which they gain awareness of the mechanisms operating behind the economic, political and cultural history of imperialism and colonialism, the unbalanced power relation between coloniser and colonised, the biased international division of labour and, most of all, the coming to full consciousness of their silencing and invisibility. Only the *awareness* of their *real* subjectivity – thus, untied from the representation that had been imposed on them – would allow subalterns to re-conquer their voice. As I will point out later in this chapter, this awareness will be the trigger allowing *The Moonstone*'s subaltern characters to emancipate, and to fruitfully travers seemingly uncrossable social boundaries.

In Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999) the psychological domain within which the epistemic violence is exerted on subalterns is further investigated. As the title itself suggests, a clear reference to Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*

(1781) is present – in particular in relation to his notion of "critique" intended as "critique of prejudice and established authority, and hence […] intimately tied to a conception of the human being as *capable of self-thinking*, hence autonomous, and free from religious and political authorities" (Gasché, 2006: 13, my italics).[91] Most notably, in her *Critique* Spivak is interested in pinpointing how Kant's critique appears to be centred on categories, concepts, values and foundations ascribable exclusively to, and grounded solely on, Europe. Moreover, she underlines how, in general, nineteenth-century social and ethnographic studies labelled the "Other" as "native". The identity of natives, she argues, has been constructed in a dichotomic opposition to non-European natives. Natives have been denied any possibility to "inform" about themselves – except through the introjection and use of the dominant (*i.e.,* Western) interpretative tools of reality. To explore the roots and the extent of the unconscious yet tremendously devastating process operating on subalterns, Spivak resorts to the concept of "foreclosure", drawing it from the Lacanian translation of Sigmund Freud's *Verwerfung*. In *Écrits: a Selection* (1977), the French psychiatrist Jacques Lacan postulates that psychosis could find its origins in a fundamental signifier, the so-called "Name-of-the-Father", being rejected outside the symbolic order just as if it had never existed (the symbolic order being, in Lacanian psychoanalysis, one of the three orders that structure human existence, together with the imaginary and the real). When the Name-of-the-Father is foreclosed for a subject, Lacan hypothesises, it leaves a hole in the symbolic order – a hole that would never be filled. Indeed, at a time when the foreclosed Name-of-the-Father reappears in the real order, the subject is unable to assimilate it: the collision with the unassimilable signifier is said to cause the onset of hallucinations and (or) delusions, conferring the subject a psychotic structure, although she or he might show no sign of psychosis. Foreclosure differs from other psychological mechanisms (such as repression, negation and projection) in that the foreclosed element is not *buried* in the unconscious, but *expelled* from the unconscious (1977: 217-321). The psychoanalytic speculation on this definitive, permanent cancellation of an event that would never be able to be restored in the human consciousness and memory finds its parallel, in Spivak, in the imperialistic moral

[91] In *The Honor of Thinking* (2006) distinguished Professor at the University at Buffalo Rodolphe Gasché argues that today's use of the word "critique" remains largely indebted to Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*. However, also Marx can be found as a source for Spivak's *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, in particular with reference to his critique of political economy intended as action and philosophical commitment to change the world.

commitment: the expulsion or rejection of the native informant from the "*name of Man* [...] served and serves as the energetic and successful defence of the civilizing mission" (Spivak, 1999: 5). As the Indian scholar argues,

> I read psychoanalysis as a technique for reading the pre-emergence [...] of narrative as ethical instantiation. [...] The idea of the rejection of an affect can direct us into the dis-locating of psychoanalytic speculation from practical science (for which specialized training is recommended) to ethical responsibility (a burden of being human). [...] I think of the 'native informant' as a name for that mark of expulsion from the name of Man – a mark crossing out *the impossibility of the ethical relation*. (1999: 4-6. My italics)

Within Spivak's postcolonial discourse, foreclosure can then be interpreted as the instrument that imperialism employed to exercise epistemic violence, operating not "simply" through an evident, cynical act of exclusion, but constructing "a self-immolating colonial subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer" (1999: 127).

One stage of Spivak's speculation on foreclosure linked to subalternity (and female subalternity in particular) coincides with her interest in nineteenth-century British literature. The Indian scholar and, prior to her, Said, read that literature as a political tool to signify the superiority of British culture above all cultures, conveying powerful messages of ethnocentric prejudice. For instance, in "Three Women's Texts and a Critique of Imperialism" (1985), Spivak explains how Jane Eyre (the feminist heroine in the homonym 1847 Brontë's work) embodies the model of Western feminism especially through the cancellation of Bertha Mason, Rochester's first wife – or, as Spivak calls her, the "woman from the colonies" (1985: 251). Spivak maintains that nineteenth-century British feminism is unable to comprehend the colonial female subject also for being so strongly bewitched and charmed by texts such as *Jane Eyre.* Altogether, it can be said that the Indian scholar's project consists in a mission of (and in an invitation to) constant vigilance over supposedly and apparently neutral Western texts.

However, the dialogue between nineteenth-century British literature and postcolonial discourse is not universally welcomed, and some critics argue that in certain cases it appears forced. For instance, in "Preface for a Post-Postcolonial Criticism" (2003), Erin O'Connor calls for a reassessment of the "project of postcolonial criticism as it has been practiced over the last two decades" and depicts Spivak as "'She Who Must Be Obeyed', a demonic force to whom all pay obeisance on the pain of publishing death

if they don't, an exotic female theorist who seems to rule her enslaved acolytes" who are fearful of being labelled racist (David, 2003: 107). In "She Who Must Be Obeyed: A Response to Erin O'Connor" (2003), Deirdre David attempts to mediate Spivak and O'Connor's positions on this matter. Despite her disappointment with O'Connor's reassessment, David admits that some Victorian studies' scholars, and in particular those interested in the relationship between history and literature (herself being one of them), "are quick to read small textual detail as suggestive of the large social and political forces" (ibid.); hence, she declares herself keen on taking up O'Connor's "challenge" to question their position. In reality, quite provocatively (to put it mildly) David ponders whether, for instance, it is reasonable to claim that the devastating circulation of the Moonstone in Collins' novel suggests imperialistic greed – and not simply "dirty doings in an English country house", or if scholars are violating Brontë's *Jane Eyre* by enlarging the historical context of what she "so vividly puts before us: a crazed woman from the West Indies, […] a fanatical clergyman who wants to civilize the Indians" (ibid.). David strongly believes that Spivak and Said's contributions have allowed a fuller reading of Victorian fiction and an enlarged understanding of the complex and inseparable link "between a spirited governess and a political world elsewhere" (2003: 108). Moreover, David states that Victorian fiction welcomes many paradigms of interpretation, and can be explored from different perspectives: "formal, Freudian, Marxian, feminist, and, yes, postcolonial" (ibid.). David's claims receive my complete endorsement, since I found in the postcolonial discourse a useful and fruitful means to support my analysis of *The Moonstone.* As a final note on this essay, I would like to stress the fact that David does not provide an answer to the above-mentioned rhetoric questions she had submitted (if in *The Moonstone* and *Jane Eyre* there are no implications of imperialistic greed). Besides declaring that "Charlotte Brontë […] was, as we all know, a kind of collaborator with the Foreign Office in the propagation of imperialist ideology" (2003: 107), David does not tackle again the subjects of *Jane Eyre* nor of *The Moonstone*: I find the lack of answer to O'Connor's provocation about the imperialistic hints in these novels quite telling.

Indeed, many are the scholars who have spotted indisputable allusions to a dark, negative shadow lingering over British imperialism in *The Moonstone* – fact that further legitimates the novel's analysis from a postcolonial perspective.[92] In "'Dirty Linen':

[92] Among them: Sharleen Mondal (2009) "Racing Desire and the New Man of the House in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*"; Ashish Roy (1993) "The Fabolous Imperialistic Semiotic of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*"; John Glendening (2008) "War of the Roses: Hybridity in *The Moonstone*"; Sean C. Grass

Legacies of Empire in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*", Melissa Free maintains that imperialism is depicted with such a disapproving, rebuking tone that she devotes many paragraphs of her essay trying to figure out why *The Moonstone* was not submitted to censorship. "While Collins's critique of Empire may be anachronistic," she argues, "*The Moonstone* is no anomaly in the Collins canon. His views on the Mutiny, Indians and India generally, as revealed through his writing, contrast starkly with those of Charles Dickens, long-time friend, relative-by-marriage, and sometime collaborator" (2006: 348-349).[93] In fact, Dickens, who serialised many of Collins's works in his weekly journals, had to censor his friend's writings on a number of occasions. In accounting for Collins's subversion, Free notices the abundance of "buried writings" in his text (such as Rosanna Spearman's letter), and argues that their presence seems to mirror Collins's own buried writing. Furthermore, Free offers Lilian Nayder's interpretation of these "buried writings" as a sort of Collins's self-censorship, a "self-conscious commentary on the means he must employ to evade the censorship of Dickens and of others" (Nayder, 1997. *Wilkie Collins*. Quoted in Free, 2006: 349). In the specific case of *The Moonstone,* Free maintains that Collins's "pretended self-censorship" would coincide with an invitation to the reader to pay close textual attention to the archive, "one in which national/imperial and familial histories are co-interred" (2006: 349).

Indeed, Collins's rendition of events at Seringapatam in *The Moonstone* seems to evoke the brutality of the British response to the Mutiny. In the Prologue, the events are described as follows:

> The camp-followers committed deplorable excesses; and, worse still, the soldiers found their way, by an unguarded door, into the treasury of the Palace, and loaded themselves with gold and jewels. […] The men (if I may use such an expression) disgraced themselves good-humouredly. (9-10)

I also read anti-imperialistic hints in the way in which Colonel John Herncastle is introduced in the novel. As I mentioned in chapter 1.4 of this dissertation, British military campaigns, as well as colonial officials and military officers' lives, were often celebrated in Victorian texts, which invested imperialism with a high purpose and instilled in the

(2006) "*The Moonstone*, Narrative Failure and the Pathology of the State"; Melissa Free (2006) "'Dirty Linen': Legacies of Empire in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*".

[93] Dickens often sided with British imperialism. For instance, as mentioned in paragraph 1.4 of this dissertation, he was among the influential Victorians who embraced the imposition of martial law in Jamaica following the Morant Bay uprising of 1865.

people a sense of national pride. However, in *The Moonstone*'s Prologue, Herncastle is presented by his cousin as follows:

> Herncastle's unlucky temper got the better of him. He declared, in his *boastful* way, that we should see the Diamond on his finger, if the English army took Seringapatam. […] Herncastle's fiery temper had been, as I could plainly see, exasperated to a kind of frenzy by the terrible slaughter through which he had passed. *He was very unfit*, in my opinion, *to perform the duty that had been entrusted to him*. […] I saw John Herncastle, with a torch in one hand, and a dagger dripping with blood in the other. A stone, set like a pommel, in the end of the dagger's handle, flashed in the torchlight, as he turned on me, like a gleam of fire. […] My cousin rushed to meet him, like a *madman*. (9-10. My italics.)

In the Preface readers learn that Herncastle had stolen the Moonstone and apparently (most likely) had killed the three "officers of the palace" who were surveilling it (10). In the following chapters of the book, readers discover that the gem, which "the wicked Colonel" has taken back to England, seems to have cursed him for the rest of his life (34). His family and friends shun him: "There was more than one slur on the Colonel that made people shy of him", Betteredge will say, and "When he came back to England […] [he] found himself avoided by everybody" (36). He is described as "one of the greatest blackguards that ever lived" (34), who ends up leading "a solitary, vicious, underground life" (36). Eventually, he leaves the diamond to Rachel, his niece, engaging in what is undoubtedly a malicious attempt to infect Lady Verinder with its ill luck. The "Honourable John" (35) cannot be compared to the famous colonial officers featuring in the above-mentioned Victorian texts, in which their bravery and temper are praised: actually, there is nothing *honourable* emerging from Herncastle's portrait. Thus, I argue that Collins subverted the genre of the Victorian "colonial biography" by presenting the figure of a colonial Colonel like a total anti-hero, with the purpose of disclosing the systematic bloodthirstiness, immorality, and greed of the British Empire.

Returning to the subject of "buried writings", the importance of "hidden" or peripheral texts as bearer of intrinsic meanings is confirmed also by Anne Schwann in *Convict Voices: Women, Class, and Writing About Prison in Nineteenth-Century England* (2015). In the Preface to the first edition of *The Moonstone*, Collins writes:

> In some of my former novels, the object proposed has been to trace the influence of circumstances upon character. In the present story I have *reversed* the process. The attempt made here is to trace *the influence of character on circumstances*. The conduct pursued, under a sudden emergency, by *a young girl*, supplies the foundation on which I have built this book. (3. My italics.)

Schwann argues that in *The Moonstone* marginal (deviant, subaltern) characters and (seemingly) negligible texts prove to have a crucial role within the narrative. As we will see further in this chapter, it is the case of Rosanna Spearman, Limping Lucy, Ezra Jennings and the writings they produce. Schwann maintains that within *The Moonstone* agenda "the more embedded and qualified a testimony, the stronger its significance becomes", suggesting that, in this way, Collins "provokes a reversal of narrative authority" (2015: 88-89). This can hold true also for the Preface: when thinking of the "young girl" providing motive for the novel, at first we might be led to assume that she is Rachel Verinder. But, within the above-mentioned rhetoric of the novel, another possibility worth considering is that the "young girl" could as well be Rosanna Spearman. In this case, it appears as if Collins were warning the reader that the "circumstances" (Rosanna's prior accusation for theft) must not lead the reader to a prejudice towards the servant who, in fact, will show immense loyalty. However, Collins suggests it sotto voce – as well as sotto voce advocating the importance that responsibility for one's own action must be taken (that "influence of characters on circumstances").

The Moonstone's readers are hence called to take on a participative and analytical role, which involves reading the text (and the texts within the text) carefully, interpreting and questioning them – "constantly and persistently looking into how *truths"* (and proofs, I would add) "are produced" (recalling Landry and MacLean's quote which I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter). Collins's invitation appears clear also in the narrative structure he adopts: the story is written (sometimes even in the form of diary's entries and letters) by more than one pen, just like the account of an offence against the law would be told in Court by more than one witness. From this perspective, each and every reader is thus entitled to judge "the case", having at their disposal the faculty and all the material to evaluate it.

So far, I have mentioned how Antonio Gramsci understands subalterns as having built their historical self-consciousness on the basis of principles imposed on them as natural. I stressed that Gramsci links the concept of subalternity to a race different from the dominant one, and to hybridisation. Subsequently, I analysed how in "Can the

Subaltern Speak?" Spivak has broadened Gramsci's concept of subalternity to anyone marked by "epistemic violence", thus including the female subjects and the lowest social classes. Dealing with the issues of consciousness and self-representation, I presented Spivak's theory according to which the construction of the subalterns' identity takes place by means of the dichotomic opposition to, and the exclusion from, the dominant class. Another perspective on subalterns' self-consciousness and identity that I have offered is that of Frantz Fanon. Specifically, I pointed out his explanation of "otherness" as "deviance from the norm" in terms of naturalisation of a deceitful construct of "normalcy". I explained how Fanon sees the imposition of that supposed normalcy as the only existing paradigm, and its consequent use from the part of subalterns as a contribution to reinforce the norm. Then, I focused in particular on the importance that Fanon attributes to the gaze, underlining that the gaze constitutes the very moment in which the power over another is articulated – that is, when a body in possess of a supposed normalcy is able to judge and dismiss the body seen as different or impaired. Briefly introducing the Lacanian concept of foreclosure, I described how Spivak interprets it within postcolonial discourse to signify the means through which imperialism has justified its moral mission, constructing "self-immolating colonial subject[s]" (1999: 127). In light of all these remarks, I observed that the only possible way for the subaltern to "speak" and "look back" would imply a prior process of awareness of his/her position as victim of epistemic violence, and of their hegemonic relations with the dominant class. Once this consciousness is gained, they are enabled to build their own identity and represent themselves, resorting to their own tools and their own grammar. Proposing the idea of a dialogue between postcolonial discourse and Victorian literature – a dialogue which has been questioned by some scholars – I offered Deirdre David's position which considers Spivak and Said's contributions definitely enriching: by framing Victorian fiction within its historical, cultural and political context, David argues that they have provided it with a fuller reading. Moreover, I attempted to prove how *The Moonstone* conveys a criticism of British imperial greed, and to acknowledge the presence in the novel of "deviant" characters representing different categories of subalterns. Therefore, I suggested that some precise narrative choices can be read as an invitation for the reader to an attentive and critical reading of the text.

In chapter 1.3, I drew attention to the fundamental role played by social Darwinism and Lombroso's criminal anthropology in reshaping Victorian's perception of the body. I also explained that the rise of statistics and mathematics, together with the

flourishing of medical sciences, contributed to shaping a new meaning of the construct of "normalcy". Hence, I suggested how the widespread presumption that the body was legible, and the supposed direct correspondence between a person's appearance and their inner self, began to be a form of social control. Additionally, I pointed out that, in the Victorian age, normalcy became a location of biopower, and abnormalcy a construct based on deviance and impairment.

In "Representation of the Abnormal Body in *The Moonstone*", Mark Mossman claims that "Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* is a novel constructed through the repeated representation of the abnormal body" (2009: 483). Grounding his analysis of the novel on contemporary disability studies, hence with a "biocultural" approach, he maintains that

> Collins's writing of physical difference in this 1868 narrative, his consistent placement of images of the *abnormal* body (usually *female*, *impoverished*, and *impaired*) against images of the *normal* body (usually *male*, *privileged*, and *able*), constitutes an early comment on and a potentially transformative critique of those modern practices (and resulting cultural forms) which in their origin intended to define, designate, medicalize, control, and *exclude* the body that is physically and cognitively *different*. (2009: 483-484. My italics.)

I opened this dissertation quoting a statement by Dinah Maria Mulock Craik: "The modern novel is one of the most important moral agents of the community". Her claim is motivated by the wideness of the novel's readership. Indeed, she continues: "The essayist may write for his hundreds; the preacher preach to his thousands; but the novelist counts his audience by millions" ("To Novelists-and a Novelist" *Macmillan's Magazine 3*. 1861: 441-442). Sharing Craik's view, Mossman adds that in the same way that "representations of the abnormal in a *popular* form like the sensation or the detective novel define and enforce the parameters of the statistical norm", in theory those representations could also "lead to a transformative re-construction of the body, a transformation that can occur inside of representation, so that in terms of physical difference 'disability' may occur" (2009: 486. My italics). Indeed, in Mossman's view, Collins has pushed beyond the binary of the normal and the abnormal bodies, presenting them not as a rigid dichotomy, but as parts of a multifaceted, liquid reality in which bodily differences do not bear a value judgement. In this way, the very concept of "normalcy" is undermined. Therefore,

rather than delivering a standard mimetic image of the real, the novel appears to redefine the notion of what the real really means.

I fully embrace Mossman's thesis on the conflicting functions and significance of the normal and abnormal bodies within Collins's novel. Actually, together with the observations that I have offered by way of summary in the previous paragraphs, his hypothesis constitutes the ground for my analysis of *The Moonstone*'s subaltern characters. However, if in his essay Mossman referred to the impaired body only as a physical body, in my research I intend to consider its value also as a social, cultural and political locus. Therefore, my study is based on the study of *The Moonstone*'s "deviances" related also to gender, sexual orientation, social class, and ethnicity.

As I stated at the beginning of this chapter, I aim at demonstrating how, within the novel, a subversion of the Victorian sociocultural construct of normalcy as location of biopower is taking place, through the empowerment of its subaltern characters. As previously explained, the sole condition for this empowerment to occur (allowing subalterns to "speak" in Spivakian terms, and to "gaze back" in a Fanonian way) is that they gain awareness of their hegemonic silencing and invisibility, hence re-acquiring their "autonomous consciousness" (as Gramsci calls it, 1975: 1875). Therefore, I investigated whether the subaltern characters featuring in *The Moonstone* are (or not) aware of the hegemonic biopower exerted on them by a dominant class in possess of a supposed normalcy, finding that their consciousness is in fact fully-fledged active. What is more, I think that it is precisely their consciousness what empowers them, triggering a process of de-construction (and subsequent re-construction) of the Victorian *norm*. To confirm that they know they are seen as "ab-normal", "deviant", "other", I suggest considering how they deal with their supposed disabilities. As I will show in detail in this chapter, Rosanna will hide her deformed shoulder because she recognises that it *is seen* as a disability at which everybody – including her beloved Blake – *stares*. Ezra will refer to himself as a "*victim*", "a man whose life is a wreck"; and when in the sole company of Blake, he will tell the young gentleman: "a horrible accusation has rested on me for years. […] I cannot bring myself to acknowledge what the accusation is. And I am incapable, perfectly incapable, of proving my *innocence*. *I can* only *assert* my innocence." (348. My italics). Ezra is aware that his feeling of wrongfulness is not intrinsic in his nature, but that it depends on something/someone else. "Always weak and weary" and constantly "resting on her bed upstairs" (120), Limping Lucy is aware she is discriminated because of her leanness and lame foot; nevertheless, she overtly declares her self-worth: "*I* had a plan

[…] *I* had saved up a little money. *I* had settled things […]. *I* meant to take her […] *I* have a good education, and *I* write a good hand." (173. My italics.). What I claim here is that, in *The Moonstone,* subalterns' self-consciousness provides them not only with the possibility of self-representation, but also with *agency* – which is confirmed by their essential role within the plot. Collins allows these characters to speak, and to return the gaze to their oppressors. What is more, not only are *The Moonstone*'s subalterns entitled to have a voice: even more importantly, they have pens. Rosanna Spearman writes a letter which occupies fifteen pages in the 1993 Wordsworth edition. The Fourth Narrative of the Second Period consists in entries extracted from Ezra Jennings' own Journal. Although they might seem peripheral texts, they function as "buried writings", hence bearing intrinsic meanings. Ink leaves permanent marks – and written testimonies have an inestimable value: written texts are what allow history not to be cancelled, they serve to inform people of facts; they can work as some sort of shelter for the future generations. But they can also help their own authors not to forget their past – and within the rhetoric of "postcolonial foreclosure" this last detail is crucial.

In the next sections, I will offer some examples illustrating the ways in which the Victorian *norm* appears to be undermined and subverted through the empowerment of *The Moonstone*'s subaltern characters. "Deviances" concerning gender, sexual orientation, social status, and psychophysical characteristics will be the main focus of the first section. In the last section, further attention will be devoted to the theme of ethnicity as a discriminating, disabling condition.

3.1 Crossing Boundaries: When the Subaltern Speaks (and Stares)

Godfrey Ablewhite is the character in *The Moonstone* that embodies the emerging Victorian idea of "normalcy" as a location of biopower. This is how he is introduced in the novel, through the words of Betteredge:

> With all his brightness and cleverness and general good qualities, Mr. Franklin's chance of topping Mr. Godfrey in our young lady's estimation was, in my opinion, a very poor chance indeed. In the first place, Mr. Godfrey was, in point of *size*, the finest man by far of the two. He stood over *six feet high*; he had a *beautiful* red and *white* colour; a smooth round face, shaved as bare

> as your hand; and a head of *lovely long flaxen hair*, falling negligently over the poll of his neck. *But why do I try to give you this personal description of him?* […] He was a *barrister* by profession; a *ladies' man* by temperament; and a good *Samaritan* by choice. […] he was *vice-president*, *manager*, *referee* […] the most accomplished *philanthropist* […] that England ever produced. […] *the sweetest tempered person* […] the simplest and pleasantest and easiest to please – you ever met with. He loved everybody. And everybody loved him. (57-58. My italics.)

First of all, Godfrey Ablewhite is a man, and he is English (unlike Blake, who has a European education – but is English indeed). Moreover, he is described by means of his physical aspect (he is "beautiful", "six feet high"), which – of course – implies honourable moral values (he is a "Samaritan", a "philanthropist" and "the sweetest tempered person"). In this correspondence between Godfrey's attractive look and his immaculate morality lies the answer to the rhetorical question Betteredge asks himself as to why he is offering Godfrey's description. Godfrey is heterosexual ("a ladies' man"), and well-off ("a barrister by profession"). Furthermore, if his name is taken into account, we find a blatant case of *nomen omen: God*frey *Able-white* is obviously Christian, able, and white. All in all, Godfrey's character is presented to the reader as the perfect role model.

However, at the end of the novel any expectation about him is disattended, and he turns out to be a burglar who had been living a double life. The stereotype of the perfect Englishman crumbling before their eyes, the astonished readers cannot help but perceiving normalcy as a failing construct. What is more, Godfrey will not be punished for his actions by the English law: his "beautiful red and white" face painted in brown (57), he will die at the hands of the three Indians – a conclusion which suggests a subversion of the colonial discourse.

The demolition of the social construct of normalcy occurs in synergy with the rehabilitation of those traits considered to be deviant or abnormal, and the empowerment of the characters featuring them. The main way in which the Victorian norm is undermined is specifically through these characters' *conscious* breakage of the social taxonomy. In the next paragraphs, I will illustrate how the fixed paradigms of social status, body representation, gender roles and sexual orientation are not only questioned, but subverted in their hierarchy, and ultimately dismantled.

As concerns social status, the most representative characters are undoubtedly Rosanna Spearman and Limping Lucy. Although supposedly reformed, Rosanna

Spearman belongs to the urban criminal class. Her description occupies six pages in the 1993 Wordsworth edition of *The Moonstone* – in the first twenty-seven lines of which, the words "reformatory" and "prison" are repeated twice, the word "sands" three times, and the act of stealing appears in the form of "rob", "robbing" and "thief" (27). She is well aware that criminality is something that would never part from her. The day after she had a spot removed from Betteredge's coat, seeing how a ring was still visible, she confesses that "The stain is taken off […] but the place shows, Mr Betteredge – the place shows!" (30). Moreover, as Anne Schwan notes, the fact that Rosanna elects such "a lonesome and a horrid retreat" as the Shivering Sands as her "favourite walk" (29) and "grave" (31) evokes the limitations of a reformatory system that does not go hand in hand with larger social transformations and fails to offer a decent future to former prisoners like Rosanna (2014: 88). The young servant offers an anthropomorphic representation of the quicksand ("It looks as if it had hundreds of suffocating people under it – all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and lower in the dreadful deeps!", 31), which many scholars read as a metaphor for the Empire.[94] However, I share Schwan's take according to which it functions as a metaphor for the servant's class attempting a futile social ascent. Rosanna's past persecutes her, and keeps coming back also in the form of the severe, unfriendly gaze of the other housemaids, whom "she failed to make friends" with, even though "not a soul was told the girl's story" (28). Thus, it is not surprising that after the Moonstone's disappearance, she is the first person to be suspected.

Rosanna is a fallen woman, a servant from a poor background, and she has no right to mix with the upper class; nevertheless, she "had been mad enough to set her heart on Mr Franklin Blake" (as Betteredge explains to Sergeant Cuff, 110). Since the first time she saw Blake, Rosanna has started indulging in behaviours which Betteredge, Penelope and Blake himself consider weird, even inappropriate in a servant. For instance, Betteredge states that "she was flighty and excited, had what they call a hysterical attack" (92); "she stood opposite to me at the table, looking at me in the oddest manner" (90), and showing a "strange language and behaviour" (91). One day, Penelope "caught Rosanna at Mr Franklin's dressing table, secretly removing a rose which Miss Rachel had given him to wear in his button-hole, and putting another rose like it, of her picking, in its place" (60). When she advances the hypothesis that Rosanna might have fallen in love

[94] Among the scholars who understand the Shivering Sand as a metaphor for the Empire, Melissa Free in "'Dirty Linen': Legacies of Empire in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*" (2006) and Sharleen Mondal in "Racing Desire and the New Man of the House in Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*" (2009).

with Blake, Betteredge considers it "just as absurd as ever" (59). Blake too reports that "She has just passed me […] in a very odd manner" (131) and talking "very strangely" (90). For her part, Rosanna perfectly knows that a relationship between her and Franklin would be impossible. Actually, "she had been angry with Penelope for presuming to suppose that a strange gentleman could possess interest for her" (49). Despite the fact that Rosanna's feeling for Blake goes unrequited and that she hears him declaring: "I take no interest whatever in Rosanna Spearman" (136), she cannot help indulging in this impossible love. However, the missive she writes to Blake looks not so much like a love letter, but rather like the explanation of the *circumstances* surrounding her love. It constitutes an assertion of her *self-worth*. Through her indelible words, Rosanna manages to gain Blake's respect and gratitude, and to conquer the dignity she was not devoted while alive.

Moreover, it should be pointed out that Rosanna's love for Blake appears even more solid and unconditional if compared to Rachel's. Both girls know that Blake has taken the Moonstone; yet, the Rosanna does anything in her power to protect him, even risking her own life, whereas Rachel puts up a wall between her and Blake. The comparison between the well-off Rachel and the poor Rosanna emerges also in Rosanna's replacement of Rachel's roses with the ones she has picked herself – without Blake noticing it. I read the fact that Blake does not realise that the gifts he receives come from different people as a symbol that love goes far beyond the social status. In addition to that, Rosanna herself challenges the ideology of inherent class difference by suggesting that the differences between her and Rachel are relative and contingent. Indeed, in her letter to Blake she claims:

> Suppose you put Miss Rachel into a servant's dress, and took her ornaments off -? […] It can't be denied that she had a bad figure; she was too thin. But who can tell what men like? […] But it does stir one up to hear Miss Rachel called pretty, when one knows all the time that it's her dress does it, and her *confidence* in herself. (292. My italics.)

This provocation, as well as Betteredge's comment that "there was just a dash of something that wasn't like a housemaid, and that was like a lady, about her" (28) and the quality of the letter (containing Latin words in it), seem to support Rosanna's unsettling of classist assumptions.

As for Lucy, the wealthy Blake refers to her as "the fisherman's daughter" (281), clearly establishes a social hierarchy. Nevertheless, when the two meet – in the presence of Betteredge – the latter attempts to impress proper class attitude to the encounter by introducing Blake as follows: "'This gentleman's name", [...] (with a strong emphasis on *gentleman*), 'is Mr Franklin Blake'" (282). Disregarding any etiquette, the first word Lucy addresses to Blake is an imperative: " '*Stand* there, [...] I want to *look* at you'" (283. My italics). The imperative form is used again when Lucy forces Blake to repeat what he had just said – to which he comments: "I repeated the words, *like a good child learning its lesson*" (283. My italic). I suggest that here we are witnessing a female subaltern who dares not only to speak to a supposedly superior entity, but to issue orders, and to set the gaze upon him. What is more, Blake's submissive attitude demonstrates that who "learns its lesson" is not the uncivilised, savage subject, but the dominant power. By treating a gentleman with scorn and disdain, Lucy expresses her independence, her wilfulness, and her self-*confidence* (that confidence that characterises Rachel, and of which Rosanna regrets to be lacking). Blake cannot avoid receiving her hatred with shock and disconcert:

> There was no mistaking the expression on her face. I inspired her with the strongest emotions of abhorrence and disgust. Let me not be vain enough to say that *no woman had ever looked at me* in this manner before. (283. My italics.)

Moreover, moved by her friendship with her peer Rosanna, Lucy prophesises that "the day is not far off when the poor will rise against the rich. I pray Heaven they may begin with *him* [Blake]. I pray Heaven they might begin with *him*" (174). Her protest against social justice encompasses all its victims – just like Ezra's subalternity symbolises all colonial subjects (as we will see later in this chapter). As Glendening points out, her revolutionary sentiments seem all the more subversive because her prayer appeals to divine justice, implying an "apocalyptic social revolution sanctioned by the Christian God" (2008: 291).

With regards to physical dis-ability, the importance of the gaze acquires an even deeper significance. As Mark Mossman states, "Disability [...] is a disruption in the visual, auditory, or perceptual field as it relates to the power of the gaze… The visual field becomes problematic, dangerous, treacherous" (2009: 487). In particular, having highlighted the direct relation between physical characteristics and inner qualities promoted by sciences such as anthropometry, phrenology and physiognomy, we can see

how *staring* becomes a synonym for *knowing*. It does not sound surprising that Rosanna's love for Blake is thus a love at first *sight*, and that Blake comments: "The poor girl can't help being ugly" (132). In the narrative, subaltern bodies appear controlled by their constant constructions and deconstructions through descriptions underlining their deficiencies. Rosanna's portrait, which in the novel is entrusted to Betteredge, counts a remarkable number of words semantically linked to impairment: "poor", "far from strong", "troubled", "she failed", "no beauty"; "plainest", "plain" (repeated twice), "additional misfortune", "one shoulder bigger than the other", "silent tongue", "solitary ways", "distance". Rosanna's faulty, unfortunate body is pitied by Betteredge, who feels like sympathising with her because of her handicap. But her impaired position is not determined by her intrinsic characteristics - which, *de facto*, are nothing more than just mere characteristics: it is the privileged gaze of which Betteredge deliberately entitles himself what sets Rosanna on a lower level. Penelope reports that "[Rosanna] had been surprised, smiling, and scribbling Mr Franklin's name inside her work-box. She had been surprised again crying and looking at her deformed shoulder in the glass" (49). Rosanna's misshapen shoulder does not constitute a problem *per se*, it becomes a site of impairment when submitted to Blake's normalised gaze.

Lucy's description is also based on the same normalising rhetoric. Again, the most frequent keywords that Betteredge uses to picture her are: "lame foot", "leanness", "horrid drawback", "crutch" (repeated twice), "misfortunes", and "defects" (172). Some of these keywords are the same used by Blake to portray the girl, even though he insists more on the auditory field:

> An apparition advanced towards me, out of a dark corner of the kitchen. A wan, wild, haggard girl […] came limping up on a *crutch*. […] My attention was absorbed in following the sound of the girl's *crutch*. *Thump-thump*, up the wooden stairs; *thump-thump* across the room above our heads; *thump-thump* down the stairs again – and there stood the apparition at the open door, with a letter in *its* hands. (282. My italics.)

Not only does Blake's normalised gaze catalogue Lucy's body as dis-abled: what is worse, it dehumanises the girl by referring to her hands using the adjective "its". This moment constitutes an act of subordination, an act in which "impairment translates irretrievably through disability into negative abnormalcy, […] [and] a wild, undisciplined, incoherent, and irrational body is trapped, mediated, defined, administered

and controlled" (as Mossman asserts, 2009: 488). Moreover, it should be underlined that Lucy has been assigned an epithet: she is not simply Lucy, she appears in the novel as *Limping* Lucy. This detail is highly significant: the epithet marks the identification of Lucy with her disability, denying her existence outside her deformity.

The same applies to Mr Bruff's young assistant: his real name is not even mentioned in the novel. In a dialogue between Blake and Mr Bruff, the former asks:

> [Mr Bruff] "Did you notice my boy – on the box, there?"
> [Blake] "*I noticed his eyes*."
> Mr Bruff laughed. "They call the poor little wretch "Goosberry" at the office, […] Goosberry is one of the sharpest boys in London, Mr Blake, *in spite of his eyes*". (399. My italics.)

Apropos of "speaking names", it is quite significant that one of the meanings of the word "gooseberry" describes an *unwanted* extra person. Despite his deformity, and unlike Franklin and Mr Bruff, it is precisely Gooseberry who manages to identify the right criminal in the bank, and to covertly follow him all the way to the public house.

Another physically impaired male body is that of Ezra Jennings, whose "appearance is against him", as Betteredge states (300). Ezra is introduced in the novel through the same hegemonic rhetoric of the gaze set upon Rosanna, Lucy and Gooseberry.[95] However, within the normative male economy that governs the narrative, it can be argued that portraying disability also on men could be a way of rendering it more "acceptable".

In their encounters with Rosanna, Lucy, Gooseberry and Ezra – Franklin, Betteredge and Mr Bruff are possessors of the normalised gaze, and in that possess they embody the power of a normative centre. However, subaltern characters are not denied agency within the novel – on the contrary, their roles are crucial to the development of the plot and to the solution of the mystery: they become central by remaining only *seemingly* peripheral.

As far as gender hierarchy is concerned, *The Moonstone* conveys the idea of a society based on patriarchal dominance. The fact that Rosanna and Rachel are the first people suspected of stealing the gem, for instance, confirms the *topos* of relating crime to female biology. The cutting remark that Mr Bruff addresses to Miss Clak ("You would have done great things in my profession, m'am, if you had happened to be a man", 207)

[95] The character of Ezra Jennings will be further discussed in the next section of this chapter.

confirms that it was conceived as normal for women not to have full access to employment. Moreover, Godfrey Ablewhite appears to dominate all the women of his community, keeping the relation of authoriser over them: the fact that they idolise him as the most benevolent, charming man – without realising his *real* personality – further confirms their condition of foreclosed subalternity.

However, many are the occasions on which patriarchy is seriously destabilised, and chauvinism subtly criticised. Always mistrusted by the smart Penelope, Godfrey will turn out to be (one of) the culprit(s). Female characters, for their part, lose some of their stereotypical womanly traits and codes in favour of supposedly masculine ones. By pursuing a man, for example, Rosanna violates gender conventions. Moreover, her last name (Spear-man) is another "speaking name" suggesting a masculine aggression which, as John Glendening claims, "captures her transgression of both sexual and class boundaries, an attempt by an inferior to force herself where she does not belong" (2008: 290). For her part, Lucy concentrates her anger over social injustice upon Blake, whom she accuses of being responsible for ruining her dream of moving to London with Rosanna. In particular, what emerges from their plan is their will of economic independence, and the lack of men providing financial support. Female, physically deformed and socially unprivileged, Rosanna and Lucy claim (timidly in one case, and more blatantly in the other) the right to confront their superior on the basis of equality; and I think that their importance within the novel provides for their claim.

Furthermore, male sovereignty is undermined also from within, by offering the image of mentally and physically weak men who indulge in activities considered mainly feminine. As Mondal observes, "sensation novels evoked questions of gender identity and gender stereotypes, including the feminized male who lacks a clear role" (2009: 2). For instance, Blake "wasn't by an inch or two up to the middle height" (33), had a "nice sweet-tempered" manner (47), and "had come back [from his foreign training] with so many different sides to his character, […] that he seemed to pass his life in a state of *perpetual contradiction with himself*" (47. My italics). He takes delight in "decorative painting" (54), "he wrote a little; he painted a little; he sang and played and composed a little" (22), always as a non-professional, not mastering any of these activities, as true gentlemen must do. When Rachel moves to London and refuses to have any contact with him, Blake confesses to feel "dreadfully distressed about it" (175): the heartache is so hard to him to endure, that he has to leave "wherever the railway chooses to take" him (175). Hence, he spends the whole spring of 1849 "wandering in the East" (271).

Moreover, a subversion of the Victorian gender hierarchy is detectable also in the mesmeric experiment carried out by Ezra Jennings. As I explained in the second chapter, mesmeric demonstrations were usually performed on female patients. In Collins's novel, though, it is a man who is exhibited in front of a considerable number of spectators.

As far as the subversion of heteronormativity in *The Moonstone* is concerned, much critical attention has been given to the quasi-homoerotic relation between Ezra and Blake. Like Blake, Ezra also shows feminised traits. *De facto*, he overtly confesses to Blake that "physiology says, and says truly, that some men are born with female constitutions – and I am one of them" (343), even asserting that "it is useless to appeal to my honour as a man" (348). Ezra and Franklin seem to share a mutual attraction, a curiosity merrily reciprocated. The first time Blake sees Ezra, he describes him as "the most remarkable-looking man that I had ever seen", with eyes "of the softest brown" (299). He also admits: "I looked at the man with a curiosity which, I am ashamed to say, I found quite impossible to control" (299). Since their first encounter, Ezra began to pop up in Blake's mind at many, unexpected times. Just like Rosanna found herself "scribbling Mr Franklin's name inside her work-box" (49), Blake confesses:

> I sat idly drawing likenesses from memory of Mr Candy's remarkable-looking assistant on the sheet of paper which I had vowed to dedicate to Betteredge – until it suddenly occurred to me that here was the irrepressible Ezra Jennings getting in my way! I threw a dozen portraits, at least, of the man with the piebald hair (the hair in every case, remarkably like), into the waste-paper basket – and then and there, wrote my answer to Betteredge. (332)

Ezra himself declares that Blake arouses his curiosity:

> There is no disguising, Mr Blake, that you interest me. I have attempted to make my poor friend's loss of memory the means of bettering my acquaintance with you. […] Is there no excuse for my intruding myself on you? Perhaps there is some excuse. […] You […] show me the sunny side of human life, and reconcile me with the world that I am leaving, before I go. (350)

As Ezra begins to meet regularly with Blake to prepare the experiment, he notes on his diary that even the simplest conversation with his new friend makes him feel "the better and the happier" (366) and that Blake has given him "a new interest in life. Let that be enough, without seeking to know what the new interest is" (366). I believe that their

attraction can be explained in terms of a certain "likeness". As a matter of fact, the two have in common hybridity (Blake because of his cosmopolitan education, whereas Ezra in genetic terms), and both are in need of emotional help. Blake has been rejected from Rachel, has found out that Rosanna took her life because of her unrequited love, and has discovered to be the Moonstone's thief. On the other hand, Ezra has no friends, is about to die, and has been involved in the Moonstone's mystery through deciphering Dr Candy's incoherent ramblings. I am led to think that this rhetoric of the uncanny is purposely employed to overcome a series of social and cultural paradigms seen as dichotomic. Indeed, Blake and Ezra's union would break not only rigid heteronormative boundaries, but even racial and class boundaries, constituting a scandalous example of progressive cross-gender, cross-breed and cross-class relationship. However, I believe that the success of the mesmeric experiment demonstrates that a hybrid union (grounded on collaboration, sympathy, trust and equality) would not result in a "reversion" or "regression"; on the contrary, it would lead instead to favourable outcomes.

3.2 Detecting Colonial Matters in *The Moonstone*

> In the pages of Ezra Jennings nothing is concealed, and nothing is forgotten.
> Let Ezra Jennings tell how the venture with the opium was tried, and how it ended.
> (Collins, 1997: 364)

The Moonstone opens with a letter written in India, which narrates "the storming of Seringapatam, under General Baird, on the 4th of May, 1799" (7). The text informs that during the siege three Brahmins have died (most likely) at the hands of Colonel John Herncastle, promising punishment and revenge for the diamond he had stolen. The diamond and its Oriental curse, hence, become the leitmotif of the novel, constituting the source of the plot evolvement. After being stolen, indeed, the diamond arrives to England, where it ruins Herncastle's life, disturbs the otherwise tranquil life of the Verinders, exposes the family to the risk of a public scandal, and provokes the death of Rosanna Spearman. If the diamond is read as an allegory for India, it can be said that the novel portrays the "foreign" while violently trespassing the "domestic" boundaries, corrupting the peace of the English house and the sanctity of the English family. An inferior,

uncivilised culture is therefore shown not only permeating and infecting the Victorian well-off class but, what is worse, unmasking and exposing publicly the rottenness behind its fair façade.

The uncomfortable presence of India within British society is embodied also by the three Indian jugglers, who in reality are "undercover" Brahmins. As mentioned in the previous sections, the spread of social Darwinism reinforced the Victorian perception of colonial subjects as primitive and savage beings – and in Collins's novel, this stereotypical view is in some ways met. Though they wear "white linen frocks and trousers", the skin of the "three mahogany-coloured Indians" shows – to a Victorian standard gazer – that they belong to a race that seems worth less than the British one (23). Their incomprehensible "hocus pocus" (25) makes them truly unfathomable, suspicious characters, and their feared presence around the Verinders' house motivates Franklin to unconsciously remove the Diamond from Rachel's box. Despite Mr Murthwaite's reassurance that they would not attempt to access the Verinders' mansion on the night of Rachel's birthday, Betteredge decides to leave the dogs loose in the yard as a preventive measure against that "set of murdering thieves" (74). When Penelope announces that "*The Diamond is gone!*" (79), Blake unhesitatingly accuses "the Indian jugglers who performed here last night. […] I can't stop to explain myself now, […] I can only tell you that the Indians have certainly stolen the Diamond." (80). However, a lone voice with a different perspective on the Indians is offered, too. This voice belongs to

> the celebrated Indian traveller, Mr Murthwaite, who, at risk of his life, had penetrated in disguise where no European had ever set foot before. It was rumoured that he was tired of the humdrum life among the people in our parts, and longing to go back and wander off on the tramp again in the wild places of the East. (67)

Even though Mr Murthwaite is an Englishman, Betteredge introduces him as "a long, lean, wiry, brown, silent man" (67), thus highlighting his "Oriental-ish" traits: his travels to "the East" have gained Murthwaite a strong bond with India. His acquaintance allows him to have a more neutral attitude towards the Orient, and his insightful comments on the Hindoo culture and religion offer a valid counterbalance to Betteredge's racism, as well as a comparison between the British and Indian morality. Noticing that the Indians jugglers were in reality Brahmins in disguise, and knowing that such a behaviour would

entail "a tremendous sacrifice" in their land, Murthwaite considers them "wonderful people" because they devote their lives for *noble* causes (74).

Although the three Brahmins' position is totally clarified only at the very end of the novel, the nearer the reader gets to the truth, the better they understand, if not the Indians' innocence, at least their rationale. By stating this, I mean that the murder committed by the Indians cannot be neglected; however, it appears to be "minor" and somehow "justifiable", due mainly to two factors.

The first factor has to do with the literary genre and intended readership of *The Moonstone*. As it is often the case in Sensation novels, readers are led to sympathise with the culprits and sometimes to justify their actions because they understand their motives. As I have just mentioned, the honourable, spiritual intentions guiding the Brahmins' actions are proved along the novel. Mr Murthwaite, for example, is very clear when he explains that, "in the country where those men came from, they care just as much about killing a man, as you care about emptying the ashes out of your pipe" (74), but only if they have "some *very serious* motive" (72. My italics).

The second factor has to do with the identity of the person who has been killed. Finding Godfrey Ablewhite's assassinated body at the end of the novel does not cause such an emotional shock in the reader, because Godfrey is portrayed as a deplorable, unscrupulous and mean man, whose only interest lies in money. He is a man who cancels his engagement to a woman because he finds out he will not get immediate access to her inheritance. He is a man who misappropriates his own charity funds. He is the man who consciously and willingly steals the diamond. And his immorality results even more sinful if compared to the patience, perseverance and dignity of the Indians. This offers a ethically-plausible reason for the homicide committed by the Indians to be, if not legitimated, at least, comprehended. The novel's conclusion, therefore, makes the reader realise how unfair accusations have been set on the Brahmins, and that pointing the finger at foreigners is a stereotypical habit with no actual foundation. In fact, although the three Brahmins ultimately succeed in reclaiming the diamond, the real thieves are revealed to be three Englishmen, as if they were the three Indians' uncanny doppelgängers: Herncastle, Blake and Ablewhite.

Drawing a parallel between the fictional murder accomplished by the Indians in the novel and the violence of the historical rebellions that had taken place in India a

decade before the publication of *The Moonstone*, I argue that a different perspective of the historical colonial events is offered in the novel.[96]

As appears from these observations, the analysis of the characters' psychology, as well as the description of events from different angles, allows a less stereotyped vision and a better understanding of the Orient. Another example of it is offered again by Godfrey Ablewhite. As Sergeant Cuff claims, Godfrey is a man whose life

> had two sides to it. The side turned up to the *public* view, presented the spectacle of a *gentleman*, […]. The side kept *hidden* from the *general notice*, exhibited this same gentleman in the totally different character of a man of pleasure, with a villa in the suburbs which was not taken in his own name, and with a lady in the villa, who was not taken in his own name, either. (417. My italics.)

His attitude of concealing uncomfortable truths emerges also when, recounting how Godfrey tried to sell the Diamond to the moneylender and gem dealer Mr Luker, Sergeant Cuff states as follows:

> Mr Luker opened his lips, and put a question: "How did you come by this?" […] Mr Godfrey Ablewhite began *a story*. Mr Luker opened his lips again, and only said three words, this time: "That won't do!" Mr Godfrey Ablewhite began *another story*. Mr Luker wasted no more words on him. He got up, and rang the bell for the servant to show the gentleman out. Upon this compulsion, Mr Godfrey made an effort, and came out with *a new and amended version* of the affair. (419-420. My italics)

As mentioned in the previous section of this chapter, Godfrey Able*white* embodies the Victorian concept of normalcy, which includes "whiteness". For this reason, Godfrey can be considered also an allegorical character for the white colonial man. With this in mind, I believe that Godfrey's will of hiding disturbing secrets by offering "*amended versions*" of the story finds a parallel in the Victorian explanation of imperialism in terms of a moral and civilising mission. This take is further reinforced if we consider that Godfrey, who pretends to be a philanthropist, is in fact embezzling the charity's money. In a similar way, in the imperial "moral and civilising" mission, the soldiers "loaded themselves with gold and jewels" (10), and John Herncastle stole the Moonstone. Bearing in mind that in

[96] The rebellions that took place in the years 1857-1858 are described in paragraph 1.4 of this dissertation.

the First Preface Collins relates the Moonstone to the real Koh-i-Noor, this breakage of the boundary between fiction and reality acquires here an even deeper meaning.

From the analysis of the behaviours of the Eastern characters (the three Brahmins) and the Western ones (Herncastle and Godfrey in particular), I argue that the colonial subaltern is empowered through questioning the morality of the "domestic" and the "foreign". A full, detailed and seemingly impartial recount of the actions (including crimes) performed by both parts and told by different narrators allows the reader to judge such representations with less preconceived ideas.

In the second chapter of this dissertation, I explained how Sensation fiction shares some of the typical features of the Gothic romance, in particular – mystery. The sense of mystery in *The Moonstone* is mainly conveyed by the leitmotif of the Orient. As seen in the previous paragraphs, the "loss" of Moonstone and the role of the three Indians remain inscrutable along the whole narrative, therefore the "gothic plot" grounded on the mysteries of the East holds until the end of the novel. In the novel's last pages, however, the apparently incomprehensible behaviour of the three Indians finds a full and convincing explanation. They demonstrate they know their way around British law and loan regulation, managing to pursue their aim in a way understood as logical and coherent within the Western code. Moreover, the last image of the novel is "the grandest spectacle of Nature and Man, in combination, that I have ever seen" (432): these are the words used by Murthwaite to describe the Indian ceremony he attends with his "Hindoo *friends*", feeling like one of them (432. My italic). During this ceremony, the reader understands that the Indians have managed to take the Moonstone back to where it really belongs: "in the forehead of the deity, gleamed the yellow *Diamond*, whose splendour had last shone on me [Murthwaite] in England, from the bosom of a woman's dress!" (434). The solution of the mystery conveys an idea of India quite opposite to the one promoted by British imperialism and shared by many Victorian people. In this way, not only has the gloom lingering over the Orient been dissolved, but also exorcised. Reducing the Gothic plot to cultural and rational terms implies a subversion of the literary genre itself. Therefore, I argue that Collins has exploited the Gothic component of the novel (the one appealing to readers' longing for thrill, and based on readers' fears) in order to dismantle it, proving that the readers' fears towards the exotic are wrong, unfounded, and based on mere stereotypes. More in general, I believe that in *The Moonstone* the reader is offered the possibility of questioning the representation of the Orient as "other", understanding it as a discriminatory Western fabrication.

Another site of cultural comparison between India and Britain is offered by the religious discourse, which sees the Brahmins' spirituality opposed to the British materiality. This conflict is elaborated throughout the novel in different ways. An occasion is provided by Betteredge, and his quasi-obsession for *Robinson Crusoe.* Betteredge resorts to *Robinson Crusoe* whenever he is in need of help, and claims that the novel always, infallibly provides him with the right answers and the spiritual support he seeks. It can be argued that Defoe's book is like a Bible to Betteredge, bearing a sacred value. Much has been written about Defoe's 1719 work as the pioneer of the eighteenth-century colonial novel: for instance, in his book *Dreams of Adventure, Deeds of Empire,* Martin Green calls *Robinson Crusoe* "the prototype of literary imperialism" (1979: 5); and in *Culture and Imperialism* Edward Said alludes to it as "a work whose protagonist is the founder of a new world, which he rules and reclaims for Christianity and England" (1993: 70). Indeed, the novel has received great attention in postcolonial theoretical discourse, in particular with regards to the Crusoe-Friday relationship and the reception of the "other" as an alien entity in need to be civilised, the description of the vastness of the globe encouraging a colonial enlargement, and the promotion of the expansion of trade. In *The Moonstone*, Betteredge states:

> I express my opinion that such a book as *Robinson Crusoe* never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years – generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco – and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad – *Robinson Crusoe*. When I want advice – *Robinson Crusoe*. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much – *Robinson Crusoe*. I have worn out six stout *Robinson Crusoe* with hard work in my service. On my lady's last birthday she gave me a seventh. I took a drop too much on the strength of it; and *Robinson Crusoe* put me right again. *Price four shillings and sixpence*, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain. (16. My italics.)

Betteredge's faith in *Robinson Crusoe* represents his belief in the Empire. However, as Katie Lanning argues, "though he places immense sentimental value on his favourite book, he cannot detach that value from the book's value as a physical market object" (2012: 2). When inviting the readers to buy the book, Betteredge treats it like a commodity – which it is, indeed. Since *Robinson Crusoe* embodies a sort of religious guide for Betteredge, his insistence on its commercial value seems to diminish, at the same time,

its spiritual worth, hence hinting at the materialism of Christianity. Similarly, a very religious person like Miss Clack is portrayed as more corrupted than other characters. These representations clash with the Indians' spirituality, and the value they give to the Moonstone. In the Prologue, the diamond is described as follows:

> The deity breathed the breath of his divinity on the Diamond in the forehead of the god. […] The deity commanded that the Moonstone should be watched, from that time forth, by three priests in turn, night and day, to the end of the generations of men. […] One age followed another – and still, generation after generation, the successors of the three Brahmins watched their *priceless Moonstone,* night and day. (8. My italics.)

For Indians, the Moonstone is a pillar of their Hindoo religion: its value is spiritual and priceless.

Moreover, a further way of enhancing the materialism of British religiousness is offered by the reception of the Moonstone from the part of the English. Betteredge refers to the gem personifying it as "a devilish Indian Diamond" invading "our quiet English house" (38), while Godfrey Ablewhite calls it even "Carbon! […] mere carbon, my good friend, after all!" (64). Suggesting that it should be included in Herncastle's will "in Rachel's interest, [since] the Diamond might be worth something, after all" (41), Mr Bruff states that "after the Colonel's death […] it was formally necessary to have the Diamond *valued*" (42. My italic). Eventually, "the lowest of the various estimates given was twenty thousand pounds" (42). The misunderstanding of the value attributed to the gem by the Brahmins is what makes the English superciliously consider the curse associated to it as "some Hindoo superstition". As Betteredge claims,

> Who ever heard the like of it – in the nineteenth century, mind; in an age of progress, and in a country which rejoices in the blessings of the British constitution? Nobody ever heard the like of it, and, consequently, nobody can be expected to believe it. (38-39)

One more curse brought by the Diamond is identified by Amna Matar Al-Neyadi in opium, another colonial product. In her essay "Depicting the Orient in Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*", she explains that before the eighteenth century, opium and laudanum (a solution of opium and alcohol) were used in Britain as painkillers (such as Collins himself did for his rheumatic gout). However, in the early nineteenth century opium became popular among the different classes of British society – to such an extent that, towards

the end of the same century, "the image of opium was very much entangled with concepts of the Orient, of deviance, and sexual licentiousness in an Eastern context" (2015: 181-189). Indeed, in *The Moonstone*, Herncastle's addiction to opium turns him into an outcast rejected by people. Understanding it as a colonial product from which the British often developed addiction, it could be argued that opium symbolises British dependence on colonial resources and labour. Moreover, Al-Neyadi suggests that Herncastle's addiction is the curse of India on him, for having stolen the gem. In the above paragraphs I explained how, removed from its original context, the Moonstone loses its meaning, its value being misinterpreted; likewise, I believe that the presence of opium in the novel could indicate both the Western illicit appropriation of Indian products, and a biased interpretation of the Indian culture and traditions. Indeed, the British characters who use opium in the novel are two: Herncastle, who is seen "smoking opium […] amongst the lowest people in the lowest slums of London" (36), and Blake, who, high on opium, steals the Moonstone and loses his memory. On the contrary, Ezra Jennings uses opium on a regular basis, but only in order to heal his physical pain. Furthermore, I suggest that, in a place where he constantly feels like a marginalised stranger, Ezra Jennings's use of opium might also constitute an emotional link with his homeland.

> [Betteredge] "Nobody likes him, sir."
> [Franklin] "Why is he so unpopular?"
> [Betteredge] "Well, Mr Franklin, his *appearance* is against him, to begin with. […] *Nobody knows who he is* – and he hasn't a friend in the place. How can you expect one to like him, after that?" […]
> [Franklin] "What is his name?" […]
> [Betteredge] "As ugly a name as need be," Betteredge answered gruffly. "Ezra Jennings". (300. My italics.)

In the novel, Ezra embodies the colonial subaltern par excellence. It can be noticed that, whereas "everybody loved" Godfrey Ablewhite (58), "nobody likes" Ezra Jennings. Like in the cases of Rosanna Spearman, Limping Lucy and Gooseberry, also Ezra Jennings is judged by the hegemonic biopower of the normalised gaze.

About his origins, Ezra states: "I was born, and partly brought up, in one of our colonies" (341), leaving his actual place of birth untold. I believe that, within colonial/istic discourse, this detail is significant. Indeed, I find his being elusive on his origins a way of stating that his condition could be that of any colonial subject. Thus, he

represents a wider group of subalterns, all enduring the discriminations that he suffers. As I mentioned, Frantz Fanon describes feeling his "blackness" as an invalidating feature that, depriving him of individuality, inexorably relates him to a collective, subaltern "other". To this respect, it is significant to recall the letter written by Mr Candy, in the Seventh Narrative of the Second Period, in which he reports Ezra's last will.

> And then he said – not bitterly – that he would die as *he had lived, forgotten* and *unknown*. He maintained that resolution to the last. There is no hope now of making any discoveries concerning him. *His story is a blank*. (425. My italics.)

However, I would like to signal back to the powerful quotation with which I opened this section:

> The events of the next ten days […] are all placed on record, exactly as they happened, in the *Journal* habitually kept by Mr Candy's assistant. In the pages of Ezra Jennings nothing is *concealed*, and nothing is *forgotten*. *Let Ezra Jennings tell* how the venture with the opium was tried, and how it ended. (364. My italics.)

With these words, after accepting Ezra's "little service" (364), Blakes discharges himself as a narrator and passes the baton to Ezra, whose records remain indelible in *The Moonstone*. As a matter of fact, Ezra's name will be remembered, and (at least, parts of) the texts he produced remain.

When introducing himself to Blake, Ezra claims he has been brought up "in one of *our* colonies. My father was an *Englishman*, *but my mother* – we are starring away from our subject, Mr Blake" (341. My italics). Ezra's keenness to stress his Englishness, marked by his use of the possessive adjective "our", can be read as his search both for Blake's complicity and for a sense of respectable belonging. His leaving his mother's identity unspoken, though, has aroused speculation on his ethnicity: Vicky C. Willey describes him as "biracial" (2006: 229), Jaya Metha as "Eurasian" and "a racial 'half-cast'" (1995: 628, 630), Ronald Thomas as "an exile from India" and "the bastard child of the Empire" (1991: 241-242). Regardless of his mother's place of birth and skin colour, Ezra's hybridity is a fact. As already stated, the decade of the 1860s witnessed the proliferation of theories about racial mixing. Within the racial typology discourse, the union between a colonial woman and an Englishman could only result in a "regression"

(or “reversion”) – *i.e.,* the inclination to regress to the race believed inferior. The child born from a mix-raced coupling would therefore show “savage” qualities and be associated to latent criminality, according to the emerging pseudo-sciences such as criminal anthropology and phrenology. Such is the way people from Yorkshire see Ezra: with profound distrust and distaste. As a matter of fact, their antipathy is generated by signs of extreme foreignness:

> His complexion was of a *gipsy darkness*; his fleshless cheeks had fallen into deep hollows, over which the bone projected like a pent-house. His nose presented the fine shape and modelling so often found among the ancient people of the *East*, so seldom visible among the newer races of the *West*. […] From this *strange* face, eyes, *stranger* still, of the softest brown […]. Add to this a quantity of thick closely-curling hair, which, by *some freak of Nature*, had lost its colour in the most startlingly partial and capricious manner. Over the top of his head it was still of the *deep black* which was its natural colour. Round the sides of his head – without the slightest gradation of grey to break the force of the extraordinary contrast – it had turned *completely white*. The line between the two colours preserved *no sort of regularity*. At one place, the white hair ran up into the black; at another, the black hair ran down into the white. (299. My italics)

Ezra’s description is carried out by means of strong oppositions: the East and the West, deep black and complete white – which could result in nothing but “some freak of Nature” (299). John Glendening underlines how his appearance might have seemed hostile enough had it merged black and white, but Ezra’s hair holds the two aspects apart, thereby “emphasising a separateness so great that their conjoining appears unnatural in the extreme” (2008: 295-296). If we read the two hair colours as metaphors for different races, also the line separating white hair from black acquires an interesting meaning. Its being irregular suggests that blackness and whiteness are not so clearly divided, but they sort of interpenetrate each other, indicating that the boundary between them has been violated. This crossing embodies the Victorians’ fear of cultural and racial mixing in a society that, by acquiring an Empire, had opened itself to unwelcomed influences.

Ezra is introduced in the novel by means of another opposition, too: “Judging him by his figure and his movements, he was still young. Judging him by his face, and comparing him with Betteredge, he looked the elder of the two” (299). The comparison with Betteredge, who embodies the British Victorian norm, emphasises Ezra’s deviance

from the norm. Furthermore, it reveals once more the mechanism underlying the construction of the identity of the impaired "other" as opposed to the normalised Western identity.

However, as I argued at the beginning of this chapter, Ezra seems aware not only of been seen as disabled, but also (and most importantly) of the fact that his subalternity is groundless. In one of his conversations with Blake, he

> stopped for a moment, and picked some *wild flowers* from the *hedge* by the *roadside*. 'How beautiful they are! […] And how few people in England seem to *admire* them as they deserve! […] The truth is, I have associations with these *modest little hedge-side flowers* – It doesn't matter; we were speaking of Mr Candy. (341)

In his essay "War of the Roses: Hybridity in *The Moonstone*", Glendening underlines that in the novel flowers bear specific meanings. In particular, he explains that the many references to roses are linked to the concept of hybridity in regard to the imperialistic subjection, but also to other cultural arenas (construction of race, ethnicity, gender, and class) in which "imbalances of power create confusion about the combination of things generally believed fundamentally distinct and naturally incompatible" (2008: 284).[97] On the basis of Glendening's claim, I understand the flowers growing by "the roadside" as a metaphor for colonial subjects. Indeed, a few minutes after Ezra expresses that comment on those flowers, Blake states: "We sat down in silence. […] He tossed his little nosegay of wild flowers away from him, as if the remembrances which it recalled were remembrances which hurt him now" (348). I find my claim reinforced by the fact that Ezra, a *savage* man from the *margins* of the Empire ("partly brought up in one of our *colonies*", 341) likens himself to the "*wild*", "modest little *hedge-side* flowers". However, it should be noticed that Ezra acknowledges the hegemonic power that the British gaze exerts on him and on all colonial subjects, nevertheless he lays claim to his and their worth: he *knows*, *sees*, and *states* that they all deserve *admiration*.[98]

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[97] The relation between roses and hybridity is found in the gardener and Sergeant Cuff's quarrel on how to grow specific types of roses; more specifically, "whether the white moss rose did, or did not, require to be budded on the dog-rose to make it grow well" (130). Cuff claims that the non-native moss rose can be bred on its own, while the gardener contends that it requires being budded onto the indigenous dog rose for its cultivation. Glendening argues that this controversy starts the novel's investigation of various forms of hybridity (2008: 2).

[98] I regret that in the Italian translation of *The Moonstone* by Piero Jahier and Maj-Lis Rissler Stoneman this meaning is lost. Indeed, this passage is translated as follows: "Ezra Jennings si fermò per un istante,

By solving the mystery of the Moonstone's disappearance, by allowing Blake to recover her approval, by saving Mr Candy's life, and by obtaining the Verinders' approval, Ezra manages to make a strong argument against prejudice. What is more, Glendening claims that Ezra "counteracts the projection of criminal instincts and savage impulses onto racial others by guiding Blake toward a degree of self-knowledge" (2008: 298). I totally share Glendening's take on this subject. On the one hand, I find here an example of how deconstruction has been applied in a fruitful way to the mechanisms of the identity's formation. As a matter of fact, this process proves to be revealing both for Ezra and for Blake, who manage to know each other's identities – and their own identity, at the same time. On the other hand, as I stated in the previous chapter, I believe that *The Moonstone* gives considerable room to the *Bildungsroman*, focusing on the importance of (re)acquiring self-consciousness.

Ezra's subaltern condition is not only redeemed and rehabilitated, but even empowered and subverted, also thanks to his role as "the New Man of the House", as Sharleen Mondal defines him. Indeed, Ezra's preparation and performance of the experiment establishes a new hierarchy of authority in the Verinders' villa. In the correspondence between Ezra and Rachel, the latter seems to withdraw from her position of mistress of the house, entitling Ezra of that qualification. Ezra reports that

> Miss Verinder willingly consents to place her house at our disposal […] Not content with having written to Mr Betteredge, instructing him to carry out whatever directions I may have to give, Miss Verinder asks leave to assist me, […] She only waits a word of reply from me to make the journey to Yorkshire. (367)

Rachel places Ezra in command of the household, and asks everybody to obey him – herself included. Ezra's position as the new master is recognised also by Betteredge, who in the novel has always been very concerned with maintaining stability and standards within that ideal "quiet English home" (38). Though irritated, the steward has no choice but to follow his orders:

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colse alcuni fiori selvatici della siepe *lungo la strada*. 'Come sono belli […] e quanta poca gente in Inghilterra li ammira come meritano! […] La verità è che io sono imparentato con questi modesti fiorellini *di siepe*." (*La Pietra di Luna,* 2002: 417). I think that this translation does not express the crucial sense of marginality which, conversely, is so powerfully conveyed in the original.

> Speaking as a servant, I am deeply indebted to you. Speaking as a man, I consider you to be a person whose head is full of maggots, and I take up my testimony against your experiment as a delusion and a snare. Don't be afraid, on that account, of my feelings as a man getting in the way of my duty as a servant! You shall be obeyed. The maggots notwithstanding, sir, you shall be obeyed. (373)

Reading Ezra as the "victim" (according to his own definition, 348) and Betteredge as the spirit of British imperialism, the passage below indicates how an obvious subversion of the imperialistic agenda has finally taken place in *The Moonstone*'s pages:

> [Mr Betteredge] 'Give me your orders, Mr Jennings. I'll have them in writing, sir.' […]
> [Ezra Jennings] 'I am very sorry,' I began, 'that you and I don't agree – '
> [Mr Betteredge] '[…] *This is not a matter of agreement*, it's a matter of obedience. Issue your directions, sir – issue your directions!' (371. My italics)

Moreover, another subversion of the imperial "civilising" mission is detectable in the fact that it is the colonial subject who educates the white man. Indeed, as mentioned in the previous chapter, Ezra invites Blake to consult with him some books and even his manuscript – thanks to which he has managed to save Dr Candy's life, as well as Blake's reputation and relation with Rachel.

One last observation regards Ezra's mesmeric experiment. Firstly, it must be noticed that the person leading the experiment is a hybrid, colonial subject who is in control of an Englishman – which indicates how in *The Moonstone* subalternity is dismantled and traditional ethnic hierarchies subverted. Secondly, the outcome of the experiment seems to exculpate Blake: it demonstrated that, although he had violated the Indian box and removed the gem, he did it *unconsciously* (and for good purposes). Nevertheless, when Blake recovers the box Rosanna had hidden in the Shivering Sands, he discovers that his search for the thief has been self-referential: as Mangham says, "a search for his *own* responsibility" (2010: 388). Blake does not intentionally steal the Moonstone; yet, the fact remains that the diamond had disappeared. Therefore, whether Blake should be considered partially guilty, or completely innocent, is left unclear. Extending the metaphor to imperial discourse, the novel seems to pose a larger issue linked to historical responsibility, confronting the British in their relation to imperialism.

Although a British citizen might not have been *directly* involved in the imperial mission, she or he was part of a country that did so. In a conversation with Betteredge, Blake says: "What was there against the Colonel? He belonged to your time, not to mine" (35). Therefore, another boundary is being obviously tackled and somehow crossed: that between individual and collective responsibility. Collins leaves this matter open, and again it is the reader's task to speculate on the possible answer to the question with which he ends his novel: "What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone? Who can tell?" (434).

Summary in Italian

Nel saggio "On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement" (1870) Anthony Trollope osservò: "Siamo diventati un popolo di divoratori di romanzi. I romanzi sono ormai nelle mani di tutti, dal Primo Ministro all'ultima delle sguattere" (Pamela K. Gilbert, 2011: 1). Poco meno di dieci anni prima, Dinah Craik aveva dichiarato: "Il saggista può raggiungere un centinaio di persone, il predicatore un migliaio, ma uno scrittore di romanzi conta i suoi lettori a milioni" ("To Novelists-and a Novelist", in *Macmillan's Magazine. Volume 3*. 1861: 442). In effetti, l'età vittoriana fu in assoluto il periodo di maggior fortuna per questo genere letterario, che mai fino ad allora aveva riscosso un successo così eclatante tra un pubblico così ampio. Dalla metà del diciannovesimo secolo, il romanzo giallo, in particolare, si convertì in un prodotto commerciale "di massa", in grado di raccogliere lettori di qualsiasi estrazione sociale e di ambo i sessi. I gialli solitamente trattavano argomenti di attualità, spesso traevano ispirazione dalle notizie di cronaca ritagliate dai giornali ed includevano contenuti scandalistici. Non a caso, la loro fortuna era basata proprio sul "sensazionalismo". Nonostante il "Sensation Novel" avesse rappresentato una breve parabola nel panorama letterario inglese, raggiungendo il suo picco negli anni '60 del diciannovesimo secolo per scomparire meno di due decadi più tardi, questo particolare sottogenere del giallo lasciò un'eredità importante nel romanzo poliziesco che, già dai suoi esordi, risultò graditissimo al pubblico Vittoriano.

The Moonstone, una delle opere più famose e riuscite dello scrittore inglese Wilkie Collins, è considerata da molti critici letterari il primo poliziesco della storia, e, secondo Thomas Stearns Eliot, anche il migliore (T. S. Eliot, 1971, "Wilkie Collins and Dickens" in *The Victorian Novel: Modern Essays in Criticism*, citato da Frazier, 2015: 22). Come la maggior parte dei romanzi Vittoriani, anche *The Mooonstone* fu pubblicato a puntate – e non solo nel Regno Unito, ma anche in America. Nel Regno Unito, gli episodi uscirono nel periodico londinese *All the Year Round,* diretto da Charles Dickens, tra il 4 gennaio e l'8 agosto 1868. Nel frattempo, il romanzo venne stampato anche come unico volume, in due edizioni: la prima nel 1868, e la seconda nel 1871, riscuotendo un enorme successo.

In quegli anni, il Regno Unito attraversava un periodo di profondi cambiamenti. Il proprio impero, già di vaste dimensioni, era in continua espansione e, nel 1877, la Regina Vittoria veniva proclamata Imperatrice d'India. La crescente industrializzazione contribuiva notevolmente a rimodellare il tessuto urbanistico, economico, sociale e culturale della nazione, mettendo in discussione i valori fondanti della società Vittoriana. Per la prima volta nella storia inglese, intere aree delle città iniziavano ad essere popolate da una nuova classe sociale: il ceto operaio. Il divario con le classi più abbienti risultava via via più evidente. I progressi negli ambiti dei trasporti e della comunicazione permettevano una circolazione di persone, merci e notizie in maniera più semplice, rapida e dinamica. Al contempo, prendeva forma un nuovo spazio culturale che, nel lenire la dicotomia tra una cultura elitaria ed una popolare, favoriva la nascita di una cultura "di massa", condivisa da tutte le classi sociali. L'emergenza di questo nuovo tipo di arena culturale determinava un profondo disequilibrio nella canonica relazione di potere tra le classi dominanti e quelle subordinate, minando in diversi modi la stabilità sociale, politica e culturale. Parallelamente, nuovi ambiti scientifici e pseudoscientifici venivano investigati, tra cui sociologia, chimica, fisiologia, frenologia e antropometria. Alla figura dello scienziato, che assumeva un ruolo di rilievo senza precedenti all'interno della società, era conferita l'autorità non solo di interpretare, ma anche di intervenire nelle realtà sociali, politiche, religiose e culturali. In particolar modo, l'essere umano e l'umanità intera venivano radicalmente reinterpretati e classificati sulla base del darwinismo sociale e delle teorie di antropologia criminale avanzate dal medico italiano Cesare Lombroso, modellando e ricostruendo un nuovo significato di "normalità".

Mark Mossman, professore alla Western Illinois University, in un saggio intitolato "Representation of the Abnormal Body in *The Moonstone*" (2009), illustra i fattori che in epoca Vittoriana contribuirono alla fabbricazione del costrutto di "normalità", affermando che, nella dicotomia "normalità" e "anormalità", la seconda assunse un valore negativo, originando una condizione di egemonia e di subalternità. Nello specifico, Mossman riconduce la ri-definizione di nuovi paradigmi di interpretazione del corpo alla sinergia che si era creata tra medicina e statistica, spiegando anche come la dicotomia "normale/anormale" avesse rafforzato ulteriormente le rigide barriere presenti all'interno di varie sfere del tessuto sociale. In particolare, Mossman evidenzia come, il corpo (quale "entità fisica") deviante dalla norma venisse classificato come dis-abile, e pertanto sbagliato, inferiore. Anche le ricerche del filosofo francese Michael Foucault raccolte in *The History of Sexuality* (1976) hanno confermato che, in tale periodo, un lessico

interamente nuovo riferito alla definizione di devianze cognitive, fisiche e sessuali, si era formato e diffuso tra l'Europa occidentale e gli Stati Uniti. Analizzando il caso specifico di *The Moonstone*, Mossman sostiene che il romanzo sia "costruito attraverso la reiterata rappresentazione ed esposizione del corpo 'anormale'", e che tale ripetizione all'interno di un genere letterario così *popolare* contribuisca a "definire e rafforzare i parametri statistici della 'norma'" (2009: 483). Tuttavia, suggerisce l'ulteriore ipotesi contrapposta, da me pienamente condivisa, secondo cui le rappresentazioni del corpo "anormale" all'interno del romanzo non costituirebbero una disabilità o una devianza dalla norma, bensì varie possibilità di espressione del corpo umano.

Assumendo tale teoria ed il concetto che "la devianza sta nell'occhio di chi osserva, e non è intrinseca della persona etichettata come deviante" (Marshall Clinard e Robert Meier, *Sociology of Deviant Behaviour*, 1957; in Tomaiuolo, 2018: 7), nel mio elaborato propongo una lettura dei personaggi "anormali" presenti in *The Moonstone* come subalterni, vittime della violenza epistemica esercitata dai corpi che arbitrariamente si auto-definiscono "normali". Per sostenere tale assunto, studio sia le funzioni ed i significati attribuiti ai corpi "normali" e "anormali" all'interno del romanzo di Collins, sia la problematica questione della loro rappresentazione e auto-rappresentazione, con l'obiettivo di dimostrare come, in *The Moonstone,* avvenga un processo di de-costruzione e di ri-costruzione del concetto Vittoriano di "normalità" attraverso l'emancipazione dei personaggi subalterni.

Nella fase di analisi è stata di fondamentale utilità l'esplorazione del romanzo attraverso la lente degli studi postcoloniali, in merito allo sviluppo della coscienza storica dei subalterni, alla questione della loro auto-rappresentazione e ai meccanismi di produzione della conoscenza. Ho fatto ricorso al significato di "subalterno" elaborato dal filosofo italiano Antonio Gramsci nei *Quaderni del Carcere III (12 - 29)* (1929-1935), e ripreso dalla filosofa statunitense di origine bengalese Gayatri Spivak in "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (1988) e in *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason* (1999). In queste ultime letture, ho focalizzato l'attenzione sui concetti di "ibridità", di "violenza epistemica" e sulla nozione Lacaniana di "forclusione", utilizzata metaforicamente dalla filosofa per spiegare come l'imperialismo abbia prodotto "soggetti coloniali che si auto-immolano per la glorificazione della missione sociale del colonizzatore" (1999: 127). Per quanto riguarda l'idea di coscienza storica e auto-rappresentazione, preziosi sono stati i contributi offerti dallo psichiatra francese-martinicano Frantz Fanon in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952), e dallo scrittore statunitense di origini palestinesi Edward Said in *Orientalism*

(1978). Nel caso di Fanon, è stato di particolare interesse il valore attribuito allo sguardo "normalizzante" del gruppo dominante. Egli sostiene infatti che tale sguardo, nel momento in cui attribuisce un giudizio di valore negativo al corpo che percepisce come diverso, auto-legittima il proprio esercizio di potere, stabilendo così una gerarchia di fatto arbitraria e artificiale. Nello studio della questione dell'imperialismo all'interno di *The Moonstone*, ho trovato d'aiuto anche il concetto di "orientalismo" proposto da Said, inteso come forma di conoscenza eurocentrica, generalizzante e capziosa prodotta dall'occidente sull'oriente, ed impiegato come mezzo subdolo per esercitare il controllo sulle colonie.

Dalla lettura di questo apparato critico, emerge che i subalterni potrebbero auto-rappresentarsi ricorrendo alla propria grammatica (e non ad una imposta egemonicamente) a condizione che si ri-approprino della coscienza storica depredata, e che assumano consapevolezza del biopotere esercitato su di loro da un gruppo dominante arbitrariamente autoproclamato "superiore". Tale premessa, assieme allo studio degli espedienti retorici, delle tecniche narrative e della commistione di generi letterari presenti in *The Moonstone*, costituisce uno sfondo significativo ed un supporto consistente alla mia disamina dei personaggi subalterni del romanzo, con particolare riferimento al loro quadro psicologico ed al ruolo che rivestono all'interno del romanzo. La mia analisi sembra confermare che la loro coscienza storica sia in effetti attiva, e che sia precisamente il vettore che li conduce all'emancipazione. Nel mio elaborato, pertanto, avvallo l'ipotesi di Mossman secondo cui in *The Moonstone* vi sono un sovvertimento ed una ricostruzione del paradigma socioculturale della "normalità" Vittoriana quale sito di biopotere. Tuttavia, se nel proprio saggio Mossman fa riferimento alla disabilità quale caratteristica del corpo fisico, io considero il corpo anche come terreno sociale, culturale e politico, ed esploro dunque gli ambiti relativi alla stratificazione sociale, al genere, all'orientamento sessuale e all'appartenenza etnica, evidenziando la profonda disparità tra le classi, la subordinazione della figura femminile in una società profondamente patriarcale, l'eteronormatività e la discriminazione razziale.

Per quanto concerne l'organizzazione dei contenuti, la mia tesi si compone di tre capitoli. Nel primo capitolo ho contestualizzato storicamente l'opera di Collins, offrendo un excursus sul Regno Unito, sulla propria capitale, e sul rapporto con l'India. Nel secondo capitolo ho ambientato *The Moonstone* all'interno del panorama letterario dell'epoca Vittoriana. Nel terzo ed ultimo capitolo ho dimostrato come, in *The Moonstone,* il costrutto sociale Vittoriano di "normalità" sia stato messo fortemente in

discussione e, di fatto, rovesciato, grazie all’emancipazione dei personaggi ritenuti devianti. Nello specifico, la prima parte di quest’ultimo capitolo illustra, tramite puntuali esempi letterari, le “devianze” dalla norma riguardanti la stratificazione sociale, il genere e l’orientamento sessuale, mentre la seconda parte è incentrata sui temi della discriminazione razziale, dell’“ibridità” e dell’imperialismo.

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