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The Detective Turned Freudian Psychoanalyst: “Detective Fever” and Confession in Wilkie Collins’ *The Moonstone*

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*The Detective Turned Freudian Psychoanalyst: "Detective Fever" and Confession in*

*Wilkie Collins' The Moonstone*

***Abstract***

Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868) is frequently credited as the first English detective novel. The novel grips the reader into the mystery by infecting them with what is described as a "*detective fever*." That is, readerly pleasure is contingent on uncovering the mystery. The pathology of "*detective fever*" is thus central to understanding the novel's affective sensationalism. This paper situates Collins' work in a Freudian and Foucauldian model and argues that the desire to unveil feminine privacy underlies the detective aim. Thus, the gendered valence of detection is the primary characteristic of "*detective fever*." The detective's aim, then, closely aligns with what Foucault describes as the Victorian "incitement to discourse" of private sexual desire. The importance of confession to the novel's conception of detection produces a cursory model for the Freudian psychoanalyst. Ultimately, the gendered anxiety underlying Collins' detective novel problematizes the genre's conceit that detection is governed by an agnostic and objective desire for truth.

## 1. Introduction

Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone* (1868) is frequently credited as the first English detective novel.<sup>1</sup> Told as a series of testimonies that each reveal a piece of the mystery, the novel functions as a fomite for *detective fever*. The assumed aim of detection is to uncover the truth behind the Moonstone's disappearance. The reader is accordingly cajoled into defining comedic resolution as detective unveiling. Counterintuitively, marriage between the novel's two protagonists—the victim and perpetrator of the theft—occurs before the Moonstone is recovered. Comedic resolution is thus achieved without resolution of the novel's detective mystery. The Moonstone is finally tracked down in Murthwaite's cursory Epilogue, yet even then, the Moonstone retains an air of mystery with Murthwaite noting in the final lines of the novel, "you have lost sight of [the Moonstone] in England, and [...] you have lost sight of it forever... What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone?" (462). In effect, the momentum of *detective fever* is dispelled prior to the discovery of the object of detection. This discrepancy between aim and satisfaction is characteristic of *The Moonstone's* tendency, as separately noted by Sue Lonoff and Lewis Roberts,<sup>2,3</sup> to destabilize and warp posited assumptions through the intersecting of conflicting and biased narratives. Lonoff and Roberts' skepticism with Collins' construction of objective truth sponsors a suspicious reading of the assumed pathology of *detective fever*: that the unitary concern of the detective is the identity of the thief and recovery of the Moonstone. Concomitant to the climactic moments of detective discovery is the scrutiny and revelation of female interiority. Confession of erotic desire is wrangled from Rosanna and

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<sup>1</sup> See Deidre, *The Cambridge Companion to the Victorian Novel*, esp. pp. 179.

<sup>2</sup> See Lonoff, "*Multiple Narratives & Relative Truths: A Study of The Ring and the Book, The Woman in White, and The Moonstone.*"

<sup>3</sup> See Roberts, "The 'Shivering Sands' of Reality: Narration and Knowledge in Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone.*"

Rachel, and any involving breach of privacy is swept under the alter of detection. The novel's obsession with suppressed female desire captures Foucault's observation of the Victorian "incitement to discourse,"<sup>4</sup> with subsequent confession modeling the clinical schema of the Freudian psychoanalyst. The pathological *raison d'être* of *detective fever* is to uncover cells of feminine privacy, making the erotic, public, by obsessive discourse.

## 2. *The Reader's Detective Fever*

The novel's primary mode is characterized by *detective fever*—the readerly desire to dissect and uncover. "Detective" comes from the Latin *detegere* meaning to uncover or expose. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) provides a valence of "fever" as: "an intense enthusiasm for or interest in a person" ("fever," def. n.1). The affective intensity of "fever" along with the term's medical connotation invite a mode of readership characterized by an anxious scrutiny of the text.<sup>5</sup> Even though detective fever is first coined by Betteridge in chapter fifteen, a sensationalized and anxious form of readership is encouraged from the novel's beginning. *The Moonstone* opens with an *ex post facto* account of the storming of Seringapatam. Even as the speaker promises an agnostic legal testimony—initially remarking, "I declare, on my word of honour, that what I am now about to write is, strictly and literally, the truth"—his recount of the event revels in affective sensationalism (12). The narrator, John Herncastle's cousin, reproduces the initial theft of the Moonstone, writing,

A third Indian, mortally wounded, was sinking at the feet of a man whose back was towards me. The man turned at the instant when I came in, and I saw John Herncastle,

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<sup>4</sup> See Foucault, *History of Sexuality* Volume 1: Introduction, esp. Part II.

<sup>5</sup> This argument situates readership within a "hermeneutics of suspicion." For more, see Felski's "Suspicious Minds."

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. (16)

Despite the retrospective narration, the narrator withholds the identity of the subject "man." The delay in the subject identification of "man" with "John Herncastle" amplifies readerly curiosity and excitement. The narrative further heightens readerly anticipation through the phrase "with a torch in one hand" which serves as a brief clausal filler before the detail of legal interest—the "dagger dripping with blood"—is revealed. These ambiguous and erroneous phrases embellish the cousin's testimony, obscuring a narrative supposedly governed by "strictly, and literally, the truth." Moreover, the poetic account of the Moonstone, "flash[ing] in the torchlight [...] like a gleam of fire," conveys dramatic effect over precision with the Moonstone referenced indirectly. The sensationalized details simultaneously obscure the objective facts of the event and heighten the readerly desire to know those facts. This contradiction associates readerly pleasure with a fantasy of total self-evidence and legibility of the novel's events. Such anxious desire for transparency—call it, *detective fever*—serves as a touchstone for the novel's sensationalism.

Sensationalized detection in the Prologue is generalized by Betteridge's account of *detective fever*. Betteridge first describes *detective fever* when Sergeant Cuff suggests that they follow Rosanna's footprints to Cobb's Hole, commenting, "if there is such a thing known at the doctor's shop as a *detective-fever*, that disease had now got fast hold of your humble servant. [...] I followed [Sergeant Cuff] (with my heart in my mouth); and waited at a little distance for what was to happen next" (130). The medical metaphor, in addition to the characterization of the passion as uncontrollable through the description, "that disease had now got fast hold of

your humble servant,” distinguishes *detective-fever* from the expected professional and controlled approach of the police detective.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the first person narration and the question of “what [] happen[s] next” invite the reader to join Betteridge’s amateur detective endeavor. The desire to become the amateur detective transforms detection from a professional venture into a sensationalized activity where the desire to uncover transcends legal objectivity.

The infection of Betteridge with *detective fever* exhibits the mode’s disregard for the logical disposition of its host. The steward’s introductory citations of *Robinson Crusoe* develop him as a composed and calculated witness. Betteridge prefaces the testimony by adopting a moral maxim from Defoe, quoting, “Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost, and before we judge rightly of our own Strength to go through with it” (20). This stratagem for project planning staunchly contrasts the affective whims of *detective fever*—here, Betteridge views “beginning a Work” as a reactionary “folly”, where the instinctual drive for immediate fulfillment should be controlled by logic—that is, by “count[ing] the Cost” and “judg[ing] rightly.” The precision of his citations, “at page one hundred and twenty-nine” in the previous quotation, and his attention to the exactness of dates, reading the passage “only this morning (May twenty-first, eighteen hundred and fifty),” further coerce the reader into trusting Betteridge as a precise and objective witness/detective (20). Nevertheless, Betteridge succumbs to sensational bias over detective precision as “(with [his] heart in [his] mouth) [...] [he] waited at a little distance for what was to happen next.” The parenthetical positions narration, the

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<sup>6</sup> The professionalization of the English police force can be credited to the Metropolitan Police Act of 1829. The formal enterprise of policing necessarily unified and standardized the class of activities falling under “investigation” and “detection”. With the Metropolitan Police force established only some 40 years before the publication of *The Moonstone*, contemporary wariness of a police-spy system historically foregrounds this paper’s scrutiny of the detective method. See Lyman, “The Metropolitan Police Act of 1829: An Analysis of Certain Events Influencing the Passage and Character of the Metropolitan Police Act in England.”

“mouth,” as an operation of sensation, the “heart.” Betteridge’s “distanc[ing]” from the event of detective interest reduces confidence in the accuracy of his testimony. Moreover, the idiom’s depiction of a lack of bodily control and the passivity of the verbs “follow” and “wait” depict Betteridge as unmasculine and cowardly.<sup>7</sup> This shift, from description through rigorous citation to description through sensational bias and error-prone observation, confers a detective anxiety to the reader. That is the reader’s diminished confidence in Betteridge’s ability to satisfy the desire for detection results in the reader’s heightened anxiety for detection. Accordingly, as in the Prologue, the reader is implicated in the narrator’s psychoneurotic *detective fever*.

### 3. *The Reader’s Anxiety*

The characterization of *detective fever* as a form of neurosis gestures to the trope’s similarity with the psychoanalytic model of the medical condition. Substantial scholarship has attended to psychoanalytic considerations of *The Moonstone* (e.g., Allan, 1996; Lawson, 1963; Nadel, 1983). Applications consider desire as an operation on character<sup>8</sup> or on Wilkie Collins himself.<sup>9</sup> Little attention, however, is given to the psychoanalytic schema of readerly engagement with the text even as *sensation fiction* as a genre centralizes the reader’s affective experience. Kate Flint’s discussion of Victorian readership in “The Victorian Novel and its Readers” (2010), notes that “reading provoked a good deal of anxiety during the Victorian period [...] fiction was regarded as particularly suspect: likely to [...] *stimulate* [] *desires*”

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<sup>7</sup> The “unmasculine” characterization follows from Betteridge’s lack of bodily control. This implication views “bodily control” as control of the symbolic phallus. See Lacan’s “The Signification of the Phallus.”

<sup>8</sup> Nadel’s “Science and *The Moonstone*,” argues that Ezra Jennings’ linguistic analysis of Mr. Candy’s ravings mimics the Freudian therapist.

<sup>9</sup> Larson’s “Wilkie Collins and *The Moonstone*,” treats the novel as Collins’ dreamscape. The Oedipal trifacta is subsequently cast—Collins as son, Godfrey Ablewhite as father image, and Rachel as mother image. Larson goes on to use this Oedipal framing to examine Collins’ private life.

(emphasis mine, Flint 17). The moralistic critique of the *Christian Remembrancer* (1863), contemporaneous to Collins, highlights *sensation fiction's* affective primacy; the journal bemoans the genre's desire to "open out a picture of life free from all the perhaps irksome checks that confine [women's] own existence" (Flint, 27). Similarly, John Ruskin further cautions against sensationalizing desire, warning in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865) that the romance (and by affective similarity, the sensation novel)<sup>10</sup>, "becomes dangerous, if, by excitement, it renders the ordinary course of life uninteresting, and increases the morbid thirst for useless acquaintance with scenes in which we shall never be called upon to act" (Flint, 26). In all these accounts, the production of desire unites the genre of *sensation fiction*. The sensation novel's capacity to formulate, amplify, frustrate, and redirect desire justifies treatment of the reader's anxiety ridden desire for detection, that is, *detective fever*, as a psychoanalytic neurosis.

We now turn to how *detective fever* in the *Moonstone* magnifies from a subtle readerly desire for legibility to a neurotic obsession with uncovering. The pivotal detective climax of the First Period occurs when Sergeant Cuff reveals to Betteridge his opinion of the case; Betteridge narrates:

"Tell me the truth, Sergeant," I said. "What do you suspect? It's no kindness to hide it from me now."

"I don't suspect," said Sergeant Cuff. "I know."

My unlucky temper began to get the better of me again.

"Do you mean to tell me, in plain English," I said, "that Miss Rachel has stolen her own Diamond?"

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<sup>10</sup> The "sensation novel" is used as an instance of the *sensation fiction* genre.



“Yes,” says the Sergeant; “that is what I mean to tell you, in so many words.

(Moonstone, 141)

The surety of the accusation, underscored by the dialog, “tell me the truth,” “I don’t suspect [...] I know,” and “this *is* what I mean,” (emphasis mine) implies a closing of the case. Cuff promises satisfaction of the anxiety of *not* discovering the mystery. In doing so, Cuff seems to confirm Blake’s introductory applause where the latter commends, “we are seeing the *end of our anxieties* already [...] when it comes to unraveling a mystery, there isn’t the equal in England of Sergeant Cuff!” (emphasis mine, 104). Despite Cuff’s phrasing of surety in no uncertain terms, the metatextual fact that some three hundred pages of the novel remain, in addition to the bar on confessional resolution instated by Rachel’s flight from the estate, preserves some symptomatic fraction of the reader’s *detective fever*. The reader’s *detective fever* is further intensified as Betteridge criminalizes the case of the missing diamond, remarking, “Miss Rachel has *stolen* her own Diamond” (emphasis mine). So, even as the reader is coerced into having faith in Sergeant Cuff’s detective aptitude, the revelations he provides leave more anxieties than they resolves.

The establishment of a criminal case exactly as Sergeant Cuff quits the Verinder Estate pushes the reader’s *detective fever* to a symptomatic obsession with total transparency. The OED defines “to steal” as “to take away dishonestly [...] *esp.* to do this secretly or unobserved by the owner” (“steal” def. v.1). The self reflexive application of “steal” destabilizes the notions of “dishonesty” and “secrecy,” resulting in the positive formation of readerly anxiety rather than its negation. In effect, Cuff’s inability to resolve all questions about the case, to unequivocally “end [...] our anxieties,” betrays the initial readerly investment in the mystery. Readerly excitement develops in expectation for the complete unveiling promised through Cuff. The reader is goaded

into investing in the missing diamond as an object of desire since the presence of the detective police ostensibly promises fulfillment of that invested desire. While the reader waits for the detective unveiling, the distance between desire and its fulfillment manifests as anxiety. When the reader realizes that Sergeant Cuff cannot fulfill the fantasy of a complete revelation of the case, the reader's remaining desire exists without a promise for its fulfillment. Subsequently, readerly anxiety subsists without any path to its resolution. Cuff's inability to fulfill the reader's detective fantasy provokes the reader to anxiously search for any other means of fulfilling the desire to gain complete knowledge of the theft.

The neurotic manifestation of *detective fever* resulting from Cuff's incomplete satisfaction of detective desire parallels the Freudian model of symptom formation. In "The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms," Freud notes that the frustrated neurotic-to-be fixates in a cathectic direction opposed by the ego.<sup>11,12</sup> Treating readerly investment in the novel as a libidinal allocation to the discovery of the secret,<sup>13</sup> Cuff's revelation makes the mystery porous, forcing libidinal allocation to latch to the now-available secret of Rachel's criminal guilt. Nevertheless, the novel's continual moral defense of Rachel pressures the ego to form an injunction on a readerly cathexis to Rachel's criminal guilt. For example, in response to Cuff's accusation of Rachel, Betteridge writes, "If Sergeant Cuff had been Solomon in all his glory, and had told me that my young lady had mixed herself up in a mean and guilty plot, I should have

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<sup>11</sup> James Strachey, in his translation of Sigmund Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*, defines cathexis as "the analogy of an electric charge, and [] the concentration or accumulation of mental energy in some particular channel. [] When we speak of the existence in someone of a libidinal cathexis of an object [i.e. an object cathexis] [...] we mean that his libidinal energy is directed towards, or rather infused into, the idea [] of some object in the outer world" (*Group Psychology* 48). As such, cathexis can be thought of as the allocation of libido, and subsequently concerns the expression of libido.

<sup>12</sup> See Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, esp. "The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms."

<sup>13</sup> Meant in the broadest of terms to characterize the reader's reasons for reading on even after Cuff makes his definitive opinion of the case.

had but one answer for Solomon, wise as he was, ‘You don’t know her; and I do’” (142). This moral defense is reiterated by Rachel’s response to her mother’s cross-examination of her: “I have done much to make my mother pity me—nothing to make my mother blush for me” (181). Betteridge’s biblical defiance, especially in the context of his textual allegiance to the lesser *Robinson Crusoe*, sponsors reverence for his sublime commitment to Rachel. Rachel’s comment further invokes maternal sympathy and feminine piety. Rachel’s image as a sympathetic and morally grounded individual contradicts Cuff’s criminal accusation. Given the baseline expectation for the only daughter of Betteridge’s “good mistress” to align with the sympathetic characterization, the ego necessarily opposes acknowledgment of, and even more so, cathexis to, the villainization (24). Characterizing the symptomatic anxiety of the reader’s *detective fever* as a fixation on a cathected direction opposed by the ego evidences Freud’s insistence that the ego is the primary site of anxiety.<sup>14</sup> Accordingly, at least until Rachel confesses her secret, readerly anxiety underlies the text. With the sensationalism experienced by the reader characterized by an anxious experience of *detective fever*, we now turn attention to its virulent course.

#### **4. *Detection as a Gendered Act***

While the novel’s detective claim is to equally scrutinize every facet of the Verinder estate, suspicion condenses around a female thief. Superintendent Seegrave’s methods are initially non-gendered; one of his first actions upon arriving at the estate is to equally “examine the servants [.]” (94). However, immediately after Seegrave’s cursory methods are described, Betteridge narrates, “the weaker half of the human family went distracted on the

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<sup>14</sup> See Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, esp. “The Paths to the Formation of Symptoms.”

spot. They bounced out of their corners, whisked upstairs in a body to Miss Rachel's room [...] burst in on Superintendent Seegrave, and, all looking equally guilty, summoned him to say which of them he suspected, at once" (94). Betteridge's comment connects "the weaker half of the human family" with "all looking equally guilty". Accordingly, suspicion is narrowed from all the servants to only the female ones. Betteridge emphasizes female incompetence through his misogynistic epithet of the female servants and the anxiety-ridden subtext of "distracted," "bounced," "whisked," and "burst." The description of the female servants as emotionally volatile implicates them as potential suspects. The contrasting account of Betteridge from earlier as the embodiment of composed propriety epitomized by his precise citations of *Robinson Crusoe*, and Superintendent Seegrave's lofty introduction as "the most comforting officer you could wish to see [...] [with] a fine commanding voice, and a mighty resolute eye [...] 'I'm the man you want!' was written all over his face," drives the reader to heedlessly follow the narrowing of scrutiny to the female residents of the estate (94). Even before the case is formally opened—marked by Cuff's arrival on the estate—the reader is encouraged to suspect and scrutinize femininity.

Sergeant Cuff similarly confirms the gender bias of detection. After defeating Seegrave's explanation that a female servant's "petticoat[] had done the mischief" of smearing Rachel's painting, effectively gender-anonymizing the perpetrator, Cuff reverts back to suspicion of the female servants in dialog with Betteridge: "'The women will think themselves suspected directly,' I [Betteridge] said, interrupting him [Cuff]. 'The women won't, Mr. Betteridge,' answered the Sergeant, 'if I can tell them I am going to examine the wardrobes of *everybody*' (115). Cuff's exclusive concern with the women's wardrobes as a subset of the "wardrobes of

*everybody*” reveals the gender of the suspected thief despite Cuff’s claim to, “keep to [him]self for the present” about his “opinion on the case” (114). If Cuff’s claim of reservation is taken at face value, then the detail of the thief’s gender is posited as trivial. As such, even before Rachel and Rosanna are placed under direct suspicion, detection is an act characterized by female suspicion.

Beyond the gendering of the crime, detective action confines itself to gendered space.<sup>15</sup> Within the Verinder estate, the two primary rooms of detective interest are Rachel and Rosanna’s bedrooms. The mystery of the Moonstone becomes synonymous to the mystery of the women’s rooms. Throughout the detective work of both Seegrave and Cuff, narration draws attention to the fact that Rachel’s room is closed. While Seegrave is “poking about among the chairs and tables, *the door of the bedroom was suddenly opened*. After having denied herself to everybody, Miss Rachel, to our astonishment, walked into the midst of us”; again, while Cuff is discussing the paint smear with Franklin, Betteridge narrates, “as the words passed his lips, *the bedroom door opened*, and Miss Rachel came out among us suddenly” (emphasis mine, 96). As Rachel concludes her first interview with Cuff, Betteridge details: “with that answer, she turned away, and *shut herself up again in her bedroom*” (emphasis mine, 110). Once again, after Cuff finishes his primary examination and returns to Rachel’s boudoir, “the Sergeant walked into the middle of the room, and stopped there, deep in thought, with his *eyes on Miss Rachel’s bedroom door*” (emphasis mine, 113). The above emphases keep the mystery of Rachel’s room in focus, even before Rachel herself comes under scrutiny. Similarly, Rosanna’s room is portrayed as a piece of the mystery when during Cuff’s cross examination, Betteridge discovers that the two

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<sup>15</sup> This essay thinks of the gendering of space into feminine (private) and masculine (public) spheres in line with the distinction set forth by Jürgen Habermas and Simone de Beauvoir. For more, see Habermas’ *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1989) and Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* (1949).

housemaids “had stolen upstairs [...] had tried Rosanna’s door, *and found it locked*; had knocked, and not been answered [...] when the girl had come down to tea [...] the two devils aforesaid had tried her door once more, *and found it locked*” (emphasis mine, 124). The central point of suspicion is not what is materially known to be in the rooms, but the fact that the locked doors prohibit free access; only after the reader becomes suspicious of Rosanna’s locked room is the more tangible point made of witnessing the “crackling of a fire [...] at four in the morning” in Rosanna’s room (124). Female privacy invites suspicion, even when delimiting access is expected as in the case of a lady’s bedroom. Even though the reader is not given any thoroughly substantiated reason to suspect the two women, the repetition of “door” and “locked” tangent to the unveiling of factually relevant details like the smeared paint in Rachel’s boudoir and the unusual activity of Rosanna make the reader suspicious of the otherwise permissible privacy maintained by Rachel and her maid.

Simultaneous to the scrutiny of feminine space, the novel removes suspicion from masculine space. Betteridge concludes his narrative with Cuff confident that the diamond rests in Mr. Luker’s vault. Cuff proposes “to send one of my brother-officers to make an arrangement with that money-lender in London” (175). Cuff emphasizes that “the result [of the plan] is certain”. Nevertheless, Lady Verinder rejects the proposal, minimally replying, “Consider your proposal declined, in every particular” (175). Lady Verinder’s rejection of the proposal, for which she provides no substantial rationale, is quickly glossed over. Betteridge guesses that, “to hear her own daughter made the subject of such a proposal as this, stung my mistress” (175). Yet, Lady Verinder’s defense of Rachel’s privacy seems counterintuitive given that she already consented to have two separate detectives examine every corner of Rachel’s bedroom.

Moreover, the adopted alternative, “to give [Rachel] a great shock suddenly, under circumstances that will touch her to the quick,” subjects Rachel to unusual cruelty and phrases emotional violence as a detective enterprise (175). Lady Verinder’s rejection of Sergeant Cuff’s proposal demonstrates the novel’s hesitance to infringe upon the privacy of the masculine space of “money-lending”—that is, of the space of business—otherwise necessitated by an investigation into Mr. Luker. Barring investigation, inquiry into Mr. Luker’s vault is plausibly routine for a “Sergeant in the Detective Force” at Scotland Yard, yet no such direct inquiry is made (450). Similarly, when the family lawyer, Mr. Bruff, discovers the location of the Moonstone after conversing with Murthwaite, the lawyer fails to use any legal mechanism of inquiry into Mr. Luker for the Verinders’ advantage. The novel’s hesitance to closely examine Mr. Luker delineates his privacy.

Beyond the novel’s tactful negotiations for masculinized privacy, the three Indians serve to morally dissuade infringement upon masculine space. The only time that Mr. Luker is non-hypothetically investigated before the Moonstone is withdrawn from his vault is when he is abducted by the three Indians. Miss Clack describes the confrontation, retelling Mr. Luker being “aroused from his studies by a tawny naked arm round his throat, by a bandage over his eyes, and by a gag in his mouth. He [] was thrown prostrate and searched to the skin” (205). As noted by Ian Duncan in his essay, “*The Moonstone*, the Victorian Novel, and Imperialist Panic” (1994), the Moonstone presents a racial binary where “English failure to recover the Moonstone mirrors an Indian success” (Duncan 301). Even though the reader’s *detective fever* desires an inquiry into Mr. Luker, investigation by the three Indians intrinsically involves a transgression of Englishness. The reader’s desire for the resolution of the theft is placed at odds with the larger

societal desire to uphold English moral superiority. Such social pressures infiltrate the logic of the book, with the three Indians depicted in foreign and repulsive detail. The skin of the Indians is described through a “tawny naked arm” and their smell is narrated as “a faint odour of musk and camphor” (Moonstone, 204). Their detective endeavor, while emblematic of English glory for the Scotland Yard detective, is villainized for the three Indians, with their detective search conducted “without ceremony, through and through, to his skin [...] [and] hardly within the proper limits of female discussion” (204). The grotesque detailing of the abductions by the three Indians highlights a distinction between English and Indian morality, recapitulating Murthwaite’s earlier remark that, “if a thousand lives stood between them and the getting back of their Diamond—and if they thought they could destroy those lives without discovery—they would take them all” (83-84). As the novel distinguishes between Indian and English detectives with the former characterized as morally repulsive, race is necessarily vilified to allow the English detective to retain an image of prestige and respectability. The novel’s condemnation of the Indian detectives, without compromising the detective profession as a whole, thus functions to dissuade the reader from scrutinizing male privacy. *The Moonstone* is obsessively anxious with transgression of masculine privacy, even as the masculine sphere is criminally implicated.

### **5. *Detection and Confession***

The Prologue incubates readerly desire for, beyond detection, confession. The incident that “induce[s] [Herncastle’s cousin] to refuse the right hand of friendship to [] John Herncastle” is not the murder of the Indians nor the theft of the Moonstone, but Herncastle’s refusal to confess to his crimes (12). Approaching Herncastle the day after the storming of



Seringapatam, his cousin narrates the exchange:

“Tell me first,” I said, “how the Indian in the armoury met his death, and what those last words meant, when he pointed to the dagger in your hand.”

“The Indian met his death, as I suppose, by a mortal wound,” said Herncastle. “What his last words meant I know no more than you do.”

I looked at him narrowly. His frenzy of the previous day had all calmed down. I determined to give him another chance.

“Is that all you have to tell me?” I asked.

He answered, “That is all.”

I turned my back on him; and we have not spoken since. (16)

Herncastle’s verbal confirmation serves no factual or juridical function. Recall that little room for criminal ambiguity was left when the narrator witnessed Herncastle standing above the dying Indian, “dagger dripping with blood” in hand. Even in the following chapter where Herncastle’s cousin admits he has “no evidence but moral evidence [...] [and] no proof that [Herncastle] killed” the three Indians, the narrator still possesses unequivocal evidence for the theft of the Moonstone, and at least circumstantial evidence for the murder of the three Indians (17). Nevertheless, after Herncastle sidesteps his cousin’s question, the cousin resolves to “give him another chance”. Prior to the exchange, General Baird announced that “any thief detected in the fact, be he whom he might, should be hung” (16). The “chance” given either references a chance for Herncastle to legally exculpate himself, or a chance to confess—where confession is privileged beyond its function as a juridical method. The narrator does not report Herncastle to the General even after Herncastle refuses confession. As a result, Herncastle’s “chance” to

confess retains a uniquely non-juridical value. It is only after Herncastle refuses confession that the cousin “turn[s] his back on Herncastle”. The remaining tension manifested by the familial severing—even after the factual detective work associated with the theft of the Moonstone is concluded—identifies confession as a latent desire behind detection.

Characterizing confession as desire phrases the act in Foucauldian terms. Confession is central to Foucault’s theory of power. In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, Foucault notes that “Western societies have established the confession as one of the main rituals we rely on for the production of truth” (Foucault 58). The Foucauldian resonance of confession—it’s “central role in the order of civil [] power”—is signposted to stabilize concurrent discussion of detection and confession (Foucault 58). Sections 2 and 4 demonstrate the reader’s infection with *detective fever* and its pathological focus on the feminine. The Latin resonance of detective—to uncover or reveal, prescribes no formal method for obtaining the desired result. Nevertheless, beyond being a latent desire of detection, confession is the primary object of detection’s gendered direction. We now turn to the novel’s obsession with Rachel’s secret.

The readerly contraction of *detective fever* concomitantly targets the mystery of the lost diamond and the mystery of Rachel’s secret. The cursory search around the Verinder estate following the loss of the Moonstone occupies a single page, after which, Rachel remarks, “I suppose I have no alternative but to send for the police” (91). In the single page before Rachel’s insinuation of criminality, the novel presents two mysteries through the voice of Penelope: (1) “*The Diamond is gone!*” and (2) “She [Rachel] shrinks, in the strangest manner, from speaking of it, even to *me* (Penelope)” (89, 90). Rachel’s unexpected behavior occupies a

uniquely verbal register. Rachel can resolve suspicion by speaking to Penelope—her refusal to speak invites suspicion. Like in the Prologue, *detective fever* around the theft from Rachel has a latent desire of confession that is not explicitly tied to the objective goal of determining who stole the Moonstone. Desire for confession from Rachel builds as the mystery of the lost diamond is fleshed out. After Rachel refuses to address the introductory questions asked of her by Sergeant Cuff, he remarks, “A young lady’s tongue is a privileged member” (110). Rachel’s private desire to remain silent, the privileging of her “tongue,” metonymizes her suspicious character. Furthermore, Rachel’s desire for domestic privacy is similarly placed under suspicion as Betteridge narrates, “Miss Rachel flatly refused to have her wardrobe examined. Asked for her reasons, she burst out crying. Asked again, she said: “I won’t, because I won’t. I must yield to force if you use it, but I will yield to nothing else” (118). Rachel’s outbreak that prevents her from giving “her reasons” is recapitulated by her comment, “I won’t, because I won’t.” The dramatic staging of the event is not her flat refusal “to have her wardrobe examined,” but rather her refusal to confess a reason. Finally, upon her departure from the estate, Betteridge observes, “Not a word did she say, either to the Sergeant or to me. With her lips closed, and her arms folded” (156). The narration of “with her lips closed” is redundant to the previous sentence. The repetitive detailing of Rachel’s silence again symbolizes her guilt. *Detective fever* maintains an equal concern with Rachel’s silence (subsequently, desiring its confession) as with the objective facts of the Moonstone’s theft.

Parallel to interest with Rachel, the confessional desire of *detective fever* condenses around Rosanna Spearman. Contrasting the chatty tone of the other servants after their interviews with Sergeant Cuff, Rosanna, “remained longer than any of them.

No report on coming out—dead silence, and lips as pale as ashes” (123). The discussion’s abnormally long length prompts readerly curiosity in the contents of the conversations. The main barrier to answering such curiosity is Rosanna’s “dead silence.” Further on, narration teases a complete detective unveiling of the Moonstone’s mystery after Rosanna’s conversation with Franklin at the billiard-table:

Rosanna Spearman ran by me, with a miserable look of pain in her face, and one of her hands pressed hard over her heart, as if the pang was in that quarter. “What’s the matter, my girl?” I asked, stopping her. “Are you ill?” “For God’s sake, don’t speak to me,” she answered, and twisted herself out of my hands. [...]

I can’t explain it,” says Mr. Franklin; “but, if the girl *is* concerned in the loss of the Diamond, I do really believe she was on the point of confessing everything—to me [...] Rosanna had retired to her own room. She had declined all offers of assistance with thanks and had only asked to be left to rest in quiet. Here, therefore, was an end of any confession on her part. (144-146)

The passage’s violent subtext draws attention to the body through the phrases, “hands pressed hard over her heart” and “twisted herself out of my hands.” Nevertheless, bodily pain is overshadowed by Rosanna’s refusal to speak. Betteredge’s initial concern with Rosanna’s health, asking, “Are you ill?” never receives a reply, nor does the relevance of the question persist after Rosanna’s intended confession is tied to the “loss of the diamond.” The lacuna of the detective mystery is Rosanna’s silence, and as such, *detective fever*’s desire to reveal diverts entirely to desire for Rosanna’s confession. Readerly affective attention that would otherwise be deployed as sympathy for Rosanna instead succumbs to *detective fever*. Eric Levy’s “Wilkie Collins’ *The*

*Moonstone* and the Problem of Pain in Life” (2002) notes, “Franklin Blake, on whose actions the entire plot hangs, is exempt from responsibility for the vulnerability to suffering caused by his actions [...] Franklin Blake as a character represents the literary attempt to deconstruct the tragic link between character and fate” (Levy 76-77). In this context, the reader is exempted from the guilt of deferring sympathy to Rosanna because of the joint preeminent commitment with Franklin to the mystery of the Moonstone. Prioritizing feminine confession is thus central to the novel’s literary project.

Limping Lucy and Miss Clack are treated with similar confessional scrutiny. After Lucy refuses to give Betteridge Rosanna’s note to Franklin, suppressing Rosanna’s speech postmortem, Betteridge narrates in dismay, “Was the darkness going to lift? Were all the discoveries that I was dying to make, coming and offering themselves to me of their own accord? I was obliged to wait a moment [...] The detective-fever burnt up all my dignity on the spot. I followed her, and tried to make her talk. All in vain. It was my misfortune to be a man—and Limping Lucy enjoyed disappointing me” (190). The initial rhetorical questions voice the reader’s own anxious desire to know the mystery and the proceeding sentence, “I was obliged to wait a moment,” sponsors frustration. When Betteridge does finally approach Limping Lucy, the object of his inquiry is to “make her talk.” Lucy’s silence is vilified by Betteridge’s sadomasochistic framing of her, that she “enjoyed disappointing me.” Concurrently, hostility against Lucy’s silence is gendered by Betteridge’s lament of his “misfortune to be a man.” The provocation of readerly anxiety for detection at the beginning of the passage is directed at Lucy’s silence, antagonizing her privacy. Miss Clack’s narrative similarly structures female speech as that which must be wrangled out, pried from, and ultimately, confessed. The

spinster's narrative is the only one that requires explicit coercion and negotiation to obtain. Miss Clack comments at the beginning of her narrative, "I am to re-open wounds that Time has barely closed; I am to recall the most intensely painful remembrances—and this done, I am to feel myself compensated by a new laceration, in the shape of Mr. Blake's cheque" (199). Again in view of Levy, rather than his notion that "solving the mystery of the theft of the Moonstone entails confronting the problem of pain in life," acquiring Miss Clack's account entails overcoming traumatic hesitance to narrate through monetary power. Female ailment—Rosanna's implied by Betteridge's comment, "'Are you ill?'" and Miss Clack's psychological trauma—are deprioritized by the novel's overwhelming attention to *detective fever*.

The exclusively feminine confessional desire of *detective fever* is made rigorous by the preservation of Sergeant Cuff's verbal autonomy. After preventing a supposed rendezvous between Rosanna and Rachel, Cuff goads, "your young friend, Rosanna, won't slip through my fingers so easy as you think. As long as I know where Miss Verinder is, I have the means at my disposal of tracing Miss Verinder's accomplice [...] In the meantime, I'm afraid I must trouble you to call the servants together again" (158). The patronizing tone of "your young friend" and the ambiguous implication of Cuff's "means at [his] disposal" position Cuff's knowledge of the case just out of reach of the narrator and reader. The final comment closing Cuff's remarks, "I must trouble you to call the servants together again," places narration back in an active role yet remains detached from the core knowledge Cuff maintains. The Sergeant humorously plays with his prerogative to "keep to [him]self for the present" about his "opinion on the case" despite intensifying *detective fever's* desire for revelation. In turn, Betteridge responds, "it is very disgraceful, but it is not the less true, that I had another attack of the detective-fever, when he

said those last words. I forgot that I hated Sergeant Cuff. I seized him confidentially by the arm. I said, 'For goodness' sake, tell us what you are going to do with the servants now?' The great Cuff stood stock-still, and addressed himself in a kind of melancholy rapture to the empty air" (158). Rather than Franklin's use of monetary force to extract narrative from Miss Clack, or the narrative's general refusal to respect female verbal autonomy, the desired confession from Cuff is approached non-antagonistically: Betteridge emphasizes, "I forgot that I hated Sergeant Cuff," before pleading for his information. Even during Betteridge's explicit moments of *detective fever*, Cuff is granted autonomy over what details of the case he chooses to reveal. Cuff's confession must be pleaded for rather than unsympathetically extracted. After the confessional desire is verbalized, narration again decenters hostility towards Cuff with the reverential proceeding line: "the great Cuff stood stock-still, and addressed himself in a kind of melancholy rapture to the empty air". Confession as a latent desire of *detective fever* uniquely obsesses over female interiority.

## **6. Confession and the Female Erotic**

Rosanna and Rachel's confessions to Franklin are fundamentally confessions of erotic desire. At the heart of Rosanna's suicide letter is a "confession [] made in three words. I love you" (312). In a similarly amorous tone, Rachel's confession when Franklin confronts her in the conservatory is, "My hero whom I love and honour, you have crept into my room under cover of the night, and stolen my Diamond!" (348). The love disclosed in Rosanna's letter is explicitly erotic, as captured by her writing, Rachel "used to give you roses to wear in your button-hole. Ah, Mr. Franklin, you wore *my* roses oftener than either you or she thought!" (314). Lewis

Lawson's essay, "Wilkie Collins and *The Moonstone*," explicates the sexual imagery of the rose, citing from Barbara Seward's *The Symbolic Rose*, that "in Freudian belief the explanation is sexual. Blossoms and flowers in general are said to represent the female sexual organs, while the particular shape of the rose associates it most directly with the shape of the vulva" (Lawson 65). The phallic flower stem penetrating the yonic buttonhole further elaborates the erotic image. The sensational aspect of Rosanna's confession is not her love for Franklin—to which Cuff has the observation: "the falling in love with a gentleman of Mr. Franklin Blake's manners and appearance doesn't seem to *me* to be the maddest part of [Rosanna's] conduct by any means," "Hadn't you better say she's mad enough to be an ugly girl and only a servant?"—rather, the sensation aspect of Rosanna's confession is her disclosure of erotic desire for Franklin (122). Similarly infusing narrative with the erotic, Rachel retells witnessing Franklin steal her diamond, describing, "I saw your hand go into the drawer. And I saw the gleam of the stone between your finger and thumb, when you took your hand out" (346). The penetrative act construed by seeing Franklin's "hand go into the drawer" and the vaginal image formed by "the stone between your finger and thumb" reveal the erotic subtext of Rachel's confession. Unlike for Rosanna, however, the erotic act between Rachel and Franklin constitutes transgression. Nevertheless, latent desire resurfaces when Rachel prevents Franklin from ending his meeting with her, the later narrating, "with the frantic perversity of a roused woman—she caught me by the arm, and barred my way out" (351). The erotic insinuation of "perversity" and "roused" reveal Rachel's confession of erotic desire.

After Rosanna and Rachel make their erotic confessions, the anxieties of *detective fever* are dispelled. If desire for erotic confession underpins the readerly anxiety of *detective fever*,



we expect the symptom's resolution following the two confessionals. Ezra Jennings' laudanum experiment on Franklin is the next step in detection following Rosanna and Rachel's confession. Sufficient scholarship has attended to the (attempted) verisimilitude of Jennings' experiment<sup>16</sup>. Collins' scientific framework, exemplified by Jennings' pronouncement that "science sanctions [his] proposal," cools *detective fever's* anxious desire for unveiling. Having disenchanted the reader with narrated promises for detective discovery through the inadequacies of Superintendent Seagrave and Sergeant Cuff, Collins builds quantitative certainty for Jennings' methods by directly quoting William Carpenter's *Principles of Human Physiology* and John Elliotson's *Human Physiology*<sup>17</sup>. Jennings' inclusion of the doctoral titles of Carpenter and Elliotson emphasizes the appeal to academic authority. As examined in Sections 2 and 3, readerly anxiety arises from *detective fever* following the reader's investment in mystery and subsequent betrayal by Seagrave and Cuff's promises for total discovery. Circumventing the reader's skepticism with narrated "truth," Collins' quotation of external academic text allows the establishment of an *absolute* truth, independent from narrative bias. Unlike Sergeant's Cuff desire to "keep to [him]self" about his "opinion on the case," from the beginning of Jennings' engagement with Franklin, Jennings makes clear his hypothesis and methods: at the start of their scientific engagement, Jennings posits to Franklin, "you entered Miss Verinder's sitting-room and took the Diamond, in a state of trance, produced by opium" and proceeds to propose the "bold experiment" to prove his claim (379, 382). With a complete forthtelling of the eventual resolution of Franklin's guilt, curiosity prevails through the experiment, but anxious suspense does not. The scientific method thus transforms detection

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<sup>16</sup> See Nadel, "Science and *The Moonstone*" and Thomas, "*The Moonstone*, detective fiction and forensic science."

<sup>17</sup> See *Moonstone*, pp. 384.

from fever to scholarship. Transformation of detection into scholarship is highlighted through Mrs. Merridew's preface to the experiment, commenting, "Mr. Jennings is about to try a scientific experiment tonight. I used to attend scientific experiments when I was a girl at school. They invariably ended in an explosion" (408). However, rather than an explosion, Jennings' experiment ends in Franklin's sedated slumber. The absence of "explosion" in favor of sleep proves the remediation of *detective fever's* symptomatic anxiety.

## 7. The Detective and the Psychoanalyst

By presenting the Moonstone's *detective fever* as a façade for want of confession of feminine erotic desire, the detective becomes analogous to the psychoanalyst. In *The History of Sexuality Volume 1: An Introduction*, Foucault comments on the Christian pastoral's ever-expanding arsenal of confessional techniques that "helped to give the confession a central role in the order of civil and religious powers." Foucault further establishes sex (subconsciously, erotic desire) as the "privileged theme of confession" (Foucault 61). In this view, the Moonstone's conception of *detective fever* stands in for the detective's *Scientia Sexualis*.<sup>18</sup> Within the Foucauldian model, the priest, psychoanalyst, and detective all construct and discipline the social conception of "rational" self-control. Furthermore, the gender-anxiety of the detective aligns the role with the psychoanalyst. Much like Freud's own description of the psychoanalyst in *Fragment of an Analysis of a Case of Hysteria* (1905), Collins' *detective fever* assumes the existence of cells of feminine erotic desire and prescribes confession, at the expense of feminine privacy. *The Moonstone's* problematic anxiety with female privacy calls for a

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<sup>18</sup> See Foucault, *History of Sexuality Volume 1: Introduction*, esp. Part III.

reexamination of the post-Victorian total-war approach to psychoneurotic symptom treatment.

Like with Freud's conception of hysteria, symptoms of prejudice in culture at large may instead underlie diagnostic obsession.

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