

ABSTRACT

Metanarrative Suspense in Four Sensation Novels

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This thesis explains how sensation novelists Ellen Wood, Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, and M.E. Braddon use secondary narratives, or metanarratives, as defined by critic Gerard Genette, to create textual suspense. These four novelists use metanarratives that suspend the main narrative and allow the narrator to interact with the reader to foster moral reform or urge the reader to solve the novel's mysteries. Chapters 2 and 3 discuss Wood and Reade's use of metanarratives to fulfill their objective of personal and social moral reform. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on Collins and Braddon's placement of textual clues in metanarratives which help the reader solve mysteries and puzzles while increasing the author's popularity.

Metanarrative Suspense in Four Sensation Novels

by

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

A class of literature has grown up around us, usurping in many respects, intentionally or unintentionally, a portion of the preacher's office, playing no inconsiderable part in moulding the minds and forming the habits and tastes of its generation; and doing so principally, we had almost said exclusively, by 'preaching to the nerves.' (Mansel 482)

The fascination which he exercises over the mind of his reader consists in this – that he is a good constructor. Each of his stories is a puzzle, the key to which is not handed to us till the third volume. Each part is elaborated only so far as is consistent with its due subordination to the whole. He allows nothing to distract our attention from the narrative, or to induce us to forget that what he is putting before us is a riddle, and has its answer. The great object of the author – the one man who is behind the scenes – is to say what he has got to say so well as to make us follow up the thread he gives us right on to the very end. At the end comes the explanation. The secret spring is touched – the lock flies open – the novel is done. ("The Woman in White" 249)

These two quotations – the former from Henry Mansel's 1863 critique and the latter from an anonymous 1860 critique on Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* – describe two goals for the sensation novel. The first goal is to create moral reform by affecting the readers' emotions with descriptions of sensational events and characters in the text. The second goal is to engage the readers through the creation of a text which brings them into the novel's mysteries and urges them to solve those mysteries.

One of the most important strategies the sensation novelists use to achieve these two purposes is narrative interruption or, to use the critical terms employed by the French literary critic Gerard Genette, "metanarrative suspension." One group of sensation novelists "preaches to the nerves" of readers and through suspensions of the main narrative to insert moral examples or moral warnings promotes personal and social

reform; the other group of sensation novelists employs suspensions of the main narrative to enhance mystery and thereby to engage the readers' interest in unlocking the secrets of the narrative. To achieve each of these goals, sensation novelists wrote to create a "sensation" in the reader. This sensation was both physical and psychological – Victorian readers were physically affected by the contents of these novels and were both scandalized and titillated by the novels' indecorous content. Winifred Hughes summarizes these varied rhetorical goals when she argues that sensation novelists

place their highest value on plot, on what will happen next if not what has happened already. On the largest scale, this preference leads to elaborate construction, which in its extreme form leads to mystery; the "purest type" of the sensation genre is the "novel-with-a-secret," or more likely, a secret-within-a-secret. On a smaller, more local scale, it produces "sensation scenes" of the most immoderate description, with their torrents of passion and their astonishing "curtains," which in Reade and Collins shamelessly coincide with the close of a serial installment. (*The Maniac* 20)

Hughes's comments help us understand that both mystery and sensations play important roles in a sensation novel's structure. Plot and solving mysteries coincide and are connected to "elaborate construction," whereas sensations and emotions are associated with melodramatic scenes and conclusions.

In order to understand how sensation novelists use narrative interruptions or metanarratives to achieve their purposes, it is necessary to explain *what* they are, and *how* they function in a text. Genette in *Narrative Discourse* employs Etienne Souriac's term "diegesis" defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary* as "the narrative presented by a cinematographic film or literary work; the fictional time, place, characters, and events which constitute the universe of the narrative" to refer to the primary narrative of a literary work ("diegesis").¹ And since the diegesis is the "time, place, characters, and

events” of the primary narrative, Genette defines metanarrative as a secondary narrative placed within a main narrative or diegetic universe. Genette argues that “the *metanarrative* is a narrative within the narrative, the *metadiegesis* is the universe of this second narrative, as the *diegesis*...designates the universe of the first narrative” (footnote 41 228). The intradiegetic universe of a literary work includes both the diegesis and the metadiegesis and is conveyed to the reader in the complete text of the work which incorporates both the narrative and all the metanarratives. The interruption of the main narrative and the insertion of some metanarrative or textual objects that are external to the diegesis of the primary narrative in chronology, subject matter, or point of view can thus be called “narrative interruption” or “narrative suspension”. I use both terms interchangeably here.

Due to a metanarrative’s interruptive qualities, the content contained therein may be *disconnected* from the diegesis. In this kind of metanarrative, the narrator frequently shifts from the third person point of view in the main narrative to the first person and second person points of view to address the reader directly and to lecture the reader on moral behavior. This direct address by the narrator is discussed in detail by Robyn Warhol in *Gendered Interventions*. These intrusive narrators may tell their female readers to stop nagging their husbands, to be more forgiving, or to be content with their roles in the domestic sphere within the home.

Warhol points out that the metanarrative lessons for the reader may use inclusive or exclusive languages. An inclusive narrator identifies himself or herself with his or her readers by using pronouns such as “us,” “we,” or “ours,” whereas an exclusive narrator separates himself or herself from the reader by using pronouns like “you,” and “yours,”

or “the reader” (66,74-75). Warhol presents another division in narrative point of view with her descriptions of engaging or distancing narrators. Engaging narrators directly address the reader with endearing, sincere, and friendly language such as “my dear reader” (33-34). Distancing narrators avoid directly addressing the reader unless affecting sarcasm or irony (34-36). This kind of narrator may use the phrase “dear reader” but will do so in an insulting context.

On the other hand, the metanarrative may contain content which is connected to the diegetic action. In these metanarratives, the narrator may add his or her comments on the text. Also, the author may insert a form of metanarrative which continues the diegetic action, but changes perspectives, such as Collins’s use of multiple narrators who use an epistolary framework. The metanarratives may also come as documents relevant to the main narrative, like the image of the receipt in Charles Reade’s (1814-1884) *Very Hard Cash*, or as thoughts or reflections by a character that transcend the chronological confines of the main narrative. Genette explains,

every intradiegetic narrating does not necessarily produce...an oral narrative. It can consist of a written text...or even a fictive literary text, a work within a work....But the second narrative can also be neither oral nor written, and can present itself, openly or not, as an inward narrative...or...as any kind of recollection that a character has.... (230)

Genette’s explanation makes clear that a metanarrative can still be connected to the diegesis through content even if that metanarrative’s structure (i.e. letter, journal, image) is different from the main narrative.

Genette analyzes and labels metanarratives according to their functions as *explanatory or thematic* if they are directly related to the narrative and as *distracting or obstructive* if there is “no explicit relationship between the two story levels” (233).

When a metanarrative explains and gives background about some aspect of the text, it fulfills the explanatory function. The distracting function is particularly important for the sensation novel because the interruption shifts the reader's focus to the content of the metanarrative, which may be in the form of a moral lesson or the insertion of a textual clue. The explanatory and thematic functions, I would argue, are utilized more often when the primary purpose of the narrative interruption is to encourage moral reform. Obstruction and distraction, I would argue, are utilized more often when the primary purpose for the textual suspension is to enhance the mystery and increase the suspense of the metanarrative. When the diegetic text is suspended by the metadiegetic content, the main flow of the diegesis is obstructed or *prevented* from developing further until the interruption is complete. The reader is momentarily *distracted* from following the diegesis when the narrator suspends the plot in order to insert the metanarrative. The reader's attention is diverted from the diegesis by the new and disconnected content.

East Lynne by Ellen Wood (1814-1887) provides us with an example of both the distraction and the explanation functions in one metanarrative. In this passage, Wood's narrator explains to the reader how Lady Isabel, the main character and anti-heroine of the novel, feels after her scandalous elopement with a former suitor. The narrator asks,

How fared it with Lady Isabel? Just as it must be expected to fare, and does fare, when a high-principled gentlewoman falls from her pedestal. Never had she experienced a moment's calm, or peace, or happiness, since the fatal night of quitting her home. She had taken a blind leap in a moment of wild passion; when, instead of the garden of roses it had been her persuader's pleasure to promise her, (but which, in truth, she had barely glanced at, for that had not been her moving motive), she had found herself plunged into an abyss of horror, from which there was never more any escape; never more, never more. The very hour of her departure she awoke to what she had done: the guilt, whose aspect had been shunned in the prospective, assumed at once its true, frightful colour, the blackness of darkness; and a lively remorse, a never dying anguish, took possession of

her soul for ever. Oh, reader, believe me! Lady – wife – mother! should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you awake. (Wood 283)

In this passage, the narrator describes Isabel's emotional turmoil. The narrator explains that Isabel "had found herself plunged into an abyss of horror", was experiencing guilt and "a lively remorse, a never dying anguish" (283). The reader experiences Isabel's mental sensations of guilt, anguish, remorse, and horror through the narrator's language; this assertion is strengthened by the last sentence of this selection in which the narrator directly addresses the reader. The reader is warned, "Oh, reader, believe me! Lady – wife – mother! should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you awake" (283). The narrator's message to the reader is clear: cheat on your husband, and you will be just as miserable as Isabel is in this passage.

Wood's metanarrative also distracts the reader from the content preceding it in the narrative through expressive language. Here, the narrator interrupts the diegesis to insert a moral commentary about Isabel's remorse, implying that she would not be emotionally distraught if she had stayed home with her husband and family. The diegesis had just concluded the terrible discovery scene at Isabel's home East Lynne only to be abruptly suspended to include this moral lesson. The reader's attention, previously focused on the diegesis, is momentarily redirected to the metanarrative; when the metanarrative ends, the reader's attention is no longer diverted and thus he or she is able to focus again on the main narrative.

This passage also illustrates the various functions of the narrator that Genette identifies, functions that are connected to various "aspects of narrative" (255). The functions of the narrator and the aspects of the narrative that Genette identifies in addition

to the *narrative function* of relating the *story* are the *directing function* that indicates the “articulations, connections, interrelationships, in short, [the] internal organization” of the *text*; the *function of communication* that deals with the “*narrating situation*” and the “narrator’s orientation toward the narratee – his care in establishing or maintaining with the narratee a contact, indeed a dialogue”; the *testimonial function*, that accounts for the *relationship that the narrator has with the story* he is relating; and the *ideological function* that manifests itself in “the more didactic form of an *authorized commentary* on the action”.

Wood’s narrative suspension about Lady Isabel’s remorse contains examples of these extra functions of the narrator and characteristics of the narrative. In this passage, Wood’s narrator provides the reader with an *authorized commentary* on the novel’s actions; specifically, the narrator explains to the reader what Isabel’s thoughts and emotions are after her elopement. The narrator, not Isabel, tells the reader that “Never had [Isabel] experienced a moment’s calm, or peace, or happiness, since the fatal night of quitting her home” (283). When the narrator directly addresses the reader in the last two sentences of this passage, she *communicates* with the reader and “maintain[s]...a contact, indeed a dialogue” with him or her (Genette 255). This dialogue is a lesson for the reader about appropriate moral behavior as a “Lady – wife – mother!” in Victorian England (Wood 283). The narrator’s passion for the text’s subject also emerges in the last sentences of this passage. When the narrator exclaims, “Oh, reader, believe me!”, her emotional attachment to moral reform is clearly expressed to the reader as a testimonial. The novel’s structure is briefly addressed by the very existence of this passage – *East*

Lynne is organized by the author's presentation of content and subsequent analysis for the reader of that content in metanarratives like this one.

The communication function is labeled as such because it concerns the narrator's ability to portray him- or herself in an approachable way. A narrator who is concerned with communication considers a relationship with a reader more important than the text itself (Genette 256). Examples of the communicative function include a letter written by a character to another character (the stated reader or "narratee"), or a metanarrative which directly addresses the reader ("my dear reader," etc.). The narrator's relationship with the reader – whether that reader is fictional or real – emerges in the content and diction of the letter. Many communicative metanarratives are extremely long and detailed; Frederick Fairlie's letter to Marian and Walter illustrates this feature of communicative metanarratives. The length of a suspension means that the narrator can easily provide the reader with clear and specific information. Easy communication means that the rhetorical purposes of the novel are more likely to be fulfilled.

In *The Woman in White*, Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) uses the communication and testimonial functions in Frederick Fairlie's metanarrative. This character is one of many metanarrators of the text and as such, has complete authority to express himself in whatever way he chooses. Fairlie narrates with a whining, self-interested tone that clearly expresses his priorities to the reader – Fairlie only cares about himself. Mr. Fairlie explains (while voicing complaints of ill-usage) why he is suddenly the novel's narrator in this passage before moving on to describing his brother-in-law's visit. Here Mr. Fairlie states that

The last annoyance that has assailed me is the annoyance of being called upon to write this Narrative. Is a man in my state of nervous wretchedness

capable of writing narratives? When I put this extremely reasonable objection, I am told that certain very serious events, relating to my niece, have happened within my experience, and that I am the fit person to describe them on that account. I am threatened, if I fail to exert myself in the manner required, with consequences which I cannot so much as think of, without perfect prostration. There is really no need to threaten me. Shattered by my miserable health and my family troubles, I am incapable of resistance. If you insist, you take your unjust advantage of me; and I give way immediately. I will endeavour to remember what I can (under protest), and to write what I can (also under protest); and what I can't remember and can't write, Louis must remember, and write for me. He is an ass, and I am an invalid: and we are likely to make all sorts of mistakes between us. How humiliating! (332)

Fairlie's self-importance clearly comes across in statements such as "Is a man in my state of nervous wretchedness capable of writing narratives?" (332). Claims of "shattered" health and illness combined with complaints of ill-usage communicate Fairlie's apathy towards any subject other than himself. Thus, his metanarrative will focus on his own thoughts, actions, and emotions and portray the actions and words of other characters as irrelevant. Genette's communication function in this instance achieves the opposite effect from that which is usually expected. Instead of making Fairlie as approachable as he wishes, his incessant complaints distance the reader from his content. Fairlie fails to communicate to the reader anything useful – except that he is a narrator not to be trusted. In this sense, the reader learns to use caution when reading Fairlie's metanarrative; this caution is useful because Fairlie's information concerns the devious Count Fosco (who does not always tell the truth to other characters). The reader is thus forewarned of possible false or misleading details in Fairlie's narrative. In a way, the metanarrative's communication function is fulfilled by encouraging the reader to read carefully.

Testimonial functions appear "when the narrator indicates the source of his information, or the degree of precision of his own memories, or the feelings which one or

another episode awakens in him” (Genette 256). This function reveals how a narrator is affected by the text or how closely intertwined the narrator and the text really are in terms of thoughts and actions. A testimonial metanarrative will include phrases similar to the ones “written” by Marian Halcombe, another metanarrator of *The Woman in White*. Marian tells her journal that Count Fosco “took my hand, and put it to his poisonous lips. Never did I know all my horror of him till then. That innocent familiarity turned my blood, as if it had been the vilest insult that a man could offer me” (Collins *The Woman* 299-300). Marian’s loathing of her enemy the count is evident in this testimonial selection from her diary. This excerpt reveals that Marian’s journal is an extension of her own thoughts and actions; her language expresses the emotions of fear, horror, and disgust, all of which she felt at that moment. This kind of metanarrative will also contain words that reveal the narrator’s emotions towards a character or event like “poor Isabel” in *East Lynne* and “poor Valerie” in *The Trail of the Serpent*.

The ideological function is the sensation novelists’ most common metanarrative technique. In order for the narrator to effectively communicate with the reader, the narrator must ensure that a shared ideology is in place, such as Christian morality in Victorian Britain. To further explain the ideological function, Genette argues that “the narrator’s interventions, direct or indirect, with regard to the story can also take the more didactic form of an authorized commentary on the action” (256). This authorized commentary becomes credible for the reader when the narrator presents information in such a way that the reader is able to correctly interpret the narrator’s intended meaning. Charles Reade’s frequent comments in *Very Hard Cash* about his characters’ moral or immoral traits are an example of ideological metanarratives. At one point in the novel,

Reade describes Jane Hardie's thoughts after hearing her brother Alfred's evidence against their thieving father. The narrator describes Alfred's effect on his sister when he tries to cheer her up: "In this strain he continued till he made her blush a good deal and smile a little; a sad smile. Her Piety was unflinching; but her justice not so stern as his. She could not shake off a father, just for cheating" (143). Jane's "Piety" is a manifestation of her Christian goodness – "she could not shake off a father, just for cheating" and stealing his client's money (Reade *Very Hard Cash* 143). Instead, the narrator tells us that Jane tries to see her father's potential for redemption and will not give up on his soul. Throughout *Very Hard Cash*, the narrator assumes that the reader is a Christian and thus understands Christian morals and values like Jane's.

In addition to categorizing the types of metanarratives and the narrative functions, Genette also describes two other important narrative strategies: focalization alterations and narrative order. Focalization alterations are more than just changes in narrative point of view; focalization alterations are also "momentary infraction[s] of the code which governs [a coherent] context without thereby calling into question the existence of the code" (Genette 194). Genette labels these alterations in a novel's narrative style as paralipsis and paralepsis. *Paralipsis* occurs when a narrator gives the reader less information than is necessary for full comprehension of the text. In the context of the sensation novel genre, paralipsis is a deliberate omission of relevant content that the reader needs to follow the plot or solve a mystery. A lack of detail leaves the reader wondering what information is missing and if the information is relevant to the novel's development. Genette cites Roland Barthes's analysis of modern mystery novels as an example of paralipsis. Here, Genette refers to Barthes's "intermingling of the two systems"

of paralipsis (omission) and omniscient narration through a central character. Genette tells us about the importance of Barthes's argument for Agatha Christie's novels:

Apropos of what he calls the "intermingling of the two systems," Barthes rightly mentions the "cheating" that, in Agatha Christie, consists of focalizing a narrative like *The Sittaford Mystery* or *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* through the murderer while omitting from his "thoughts" simply the memory of the murder; and we know that the most classical detective story, although generally focalized through the investigating detective, most often hides from us a part of his discoveries and inductions until the final revelation. (196-197)

Because sensation novels are the precursors to the modern detective mysteries, we can use Barthes's and Genette's comments in our analysis. Paralipsis and omniscient narration allow the narrator to "cheat" and leave out important information, as Genette and Barthes argue is the case in Christie's novels. This narrative cheating "occurs" in a sensation novel in a similar manner. Sensation novelists may leave out the murderer's firsthand description of a crime or the true nature of a crime – whether or not a crime has taken place. For example, in Collins's *The Moonstone*, the main narrator Franklin Blake fails to mention his complicity in the novel's chief mystery – the theft of Rachel Verinder's valuable diamond moonstone brooch. Blake himself does not know that he was the thief (he was drugged with opium and stole the diamond in his sleep), and so his omission is somewhat excusable. In this novel, Collins uses paralipsis to heighten suspense and create a complicated mystery; his explanation for the omission (opium drugging) is plausible and even accepted by the reader.

Sensationalists like Collins may give the reader obscure hints about the past or future action of the novel, but these hints are sometimes so vague that the reader is unable to process them as clues in the novel's mysteries. This inability to process means that a reader cannot discover the truth about the obscured action. Only through the author's

careful construction and placement of information can the mysteries be revealed to the reader.

Whereas paralipsis is an omission of information, *paralepsis* is an overabundance of details in the text. Sensation novels contain numerous examples of *paralepsis* in metanarratives. In *Very Hard Cash*, Reade interrupts the diegesis to insert a metanarrative about the growth and development of girls into young women, using Julia Dodd as an example. The narrator explains to the reader that

There is a fascinating age, when an intelligent virgin is said to fluctuate between childhood and womanhood. Let me add that these seeming fluctuations depend much on the company she is in; the budding virgin is princess of chameleons: and, to confine ourselves to her two most piquant contrasts, by her mother's side she is always more or less childlike: but, let a nice young fellow engage her apart, and, hey presto! she shall be every inch a woman; perhaps at no period of her life are the purely mental characteristics of her sex so supreme in her: so her type, the rose-bud, excels in essence of rosehood the rose itself.

My reader has seen Julia Dodd play both parts; but it is her child's face she has now been turning for several pages; so it may be prudent to remind him she has shone on Alfred Hardie in but one light; a young, but Juno-like, woman. Had she shown "my puppy" her childish qualities, he would have despised her; he had left that department himself so recently. But Nature guarded the budding fair from such a disaster. (Reade 37)

In this passage, Reade suspends the diegesis to describe the differences between a woman and a girl, the "rose" and the "rosebud". This metanarrative is somewhat relevant to the surrounding text because the narrator has just described the awkward but sweet courtship between Julia and Alfred Hardie; the content of the metanarrative is about Julia's growth into womanhood because of her love for Alfred. However, this metanarrative contains extra (or *paraleptic*) information that is not necessary to move the reader forward in the diegesis. *Paralepsis* is often used by sensation novelists in this way to distract the reader from the novel's plot.

Authors may also write paraleptic metanarratives in the form of lectures directed at imagined readers of the novel. These metanarratives are often found in sensation novels such as *East Lynne* and *Very Hard Cash* which aim to reform the reader or society. Wood includes many long lectures directed at her readership, but this next short passage illustrates paralepsis perfectly. In this passage, Wood's narrator directly addresses the reader to lecture her on proper Christian behavior. This lecture explains why Isabel's decisions throughout the novel were all morally wrong; thus, the passage is a commentary on the novel's action and is superfluous information. This metanarrative does not contain content necessary to finish the novel, but it does enrich the reader's experience by providing a moral lesson:

‘She brought it upon herself! she ought not to have come back to East Lynne!’ groans our moralist again. Don't I say so? Of course she ought not. Neither ought she to have suffered her thoughts to stray, in the manner they did, towards Mr Carlyle. She ought not; but she did. If we all did just what we ‘ought,’ this lower world would be worth living in. You must just sit down and abuse her, and so cool your anger. I agree with you that she ought never to have come back; that it was an act little short of madness: but are you quite sure that you would not have done the same, under the facility and the temptation? And now you can abuse me for saying it, if it will afford you any satisfaction. (Wood 591)

The sentence embedded in the center of the passage – “If we all did just what we ‘ought,’ this lower world would be worth living in” – tells the reader what she (Wood's imagined readers are women) should do. The reader is told that she should always live the “right” way, as per Victorian Christian morals. That central sentence contains the message of the entire paraleptic metanarrative – the reader and society in general can make the world a better place by behaving appropriately.

Genette cautions readers that interpreting paralepsis and paralipsis in novels can be difficult. Genette suggests that “we should not confuse the information given by a

focalized narrative with the interpretation the reader is called on to give of it (or that he gives without being invited to)” (197). What Genette means here is that the reader’s perception of the text’s information may be different than the actual content contained within the text. When a sensation novelist presents the reader with a paraleptic or paralipsic metanarrative, the reader is expected to respond in a certain way. Using the preceding passage from *East Lynne* as an example, the reader is supposed to reform her own sinful actions and thus make the world a better place. However, the reader may have a negative interpretation of this passage instead.

Two additional terms from Genette’s analysis of narrative are relevant for my argument: prolepsis and analepsis. Genette defines *prolepsis* as “any narrative maneuver that consists of narrating or evoking in advance an event that will take place later” (40). In a sensation novel prolepsis may be merely foreshadowing, such as when the author hints at events which he or she will write about later on in the same novel. We may also see prolepsis in a narrator’s statement claiming that he will explain some unmentioned detail to us later. In M.E. Braddon’s (1837-1915) novel *The Trail of the Serpent*, the narrator uses prolepsis as foreshadowing – the narrator “questions” whether or not the orphan Slosby will be instrumental in solving a crime. The narrator asks the reader, “If in the wonderful course of events, this little child shall ever have a part in dragging a murderer to a murderer’s doom, shall it be called a monstrous and a terrible outrage of nature, or a just and a fitting retribution?” (Braddon 50). The novel’s future content is briefly mentioned in this proleptic narrative intrusion. Here, the reader learns enough details to assume that the child Slosby will help catch a murderer later in the novel.

Genette's technique *analepsis* performs the opposite action in a text from prolepsis. Analepsis is "any evocation after the fact of an event that took place earlier than the point in the story where we are at any given moment" (Genette 40). We see this technique in a narrator's notation of previous events, such as "yesterday, I said that I talked to so and so about such and such". This technique frequently appears in novels like *The Woman in White* which have multiple narrators and numerous metanarratives. In *The Woman in White*, Marian Halcombe's text contains many examples of analeptic metanarratives like this one: "A whole fortnight has passed; and I have not once opened these pages" (Collins 183). This direct statement refers to the past fortnight of action, omitted by Marian from the diegesis as presumably nothing happened of note. Other analeptic passages in sensation novels are less direct and may describe past actions in detail instead of in summary.

Genette's techniques and functions may be combined in any number of ways. We can see metanarratives in sensation novels which are communicative and testimonial, while being analeptic and paraleptic at the same time.

The Uses of Metanarrative Suspense in Sensation Novels

In a sensation novel, an author uses narrative interruptions to place his or her thoughts and ideas within the text, create suspense, elicit emotional responses, and ask for moral reform. An author who interrupts the text also suspends the diegesis; when the text of the novel is interrupted for a metanarrative, the main text is held in suspension and not allowed to develop further until the metanarrative concludes. This delay in the main action of the novel forces the reader to wait for further factual revelations until after the

author resumes the diegesis. On the importance of suspense to a novel's structure, Caroline Levine writes,

Victorian writers and readers understood suspenseful narrative as a stimulus to active speculation. For a startling array of nineteenth-century thinkers...the experience of suspense was not a means of social regulation, but a rigorous political and epistemological training, a way to foster energetic skepticism and uncertainty rather than closure and complacency. Suspense fiction was all about teaching readers to suspend judgment. (2)

While Levine's larger work analyzes the "typical" Victorian novels by authors of the established canon (Charles Dickens, Charlotte Bronte, Henry James), I find that the general arguments she makes in her introduction apply even more significantly to novels of the sensation novel genre. I would argue that for the sensation novel, suspense *is* "a means of social regulation" (Levine 2). These novelists use suspense to inspire personal and social reform, but sensationalists also used suspense to further their own pecuniary and social situations. By "teaching readers to suspend judgment," the sensation novelists also taught readers to be open to new ideas and instruction on topics presented in each novel (Levine 2). Thus, Victorian sensation novelists appropriated suspense into metanarratives as a means to two specific end results. These goals are to inform the reader of a social or moral problem and inspire reform and to interact with the reader to increase the novelist's fame and fortune.

The first group of sensation novelists attempts to educate the reader about a social or moral problem such as marital discord or mental hospital atrocities. In such a situation, an author first inserts a metanarrative on the appropriate moral iniquity to draw the reader's attention to the subject. One example of such a metanarrative is in *Very Hard Cash*. The narrator interrupts the diegesis to describe Alfred Hardie's mental and physical anguish at being locked up in a mental asylum on his wedding-night. Here, the

narrator asks the reader to “[t]hink of [this situation], for your own sakes” and thus sets the stage for later metanarratives about the asylum’s horrible conditions (Reade 162).

The reader is told that Alfred has been

[c]hained sane among the mad; on his wedding-day; expecting with tied hands the sinister acts of the soul-murderers who had the power to make their lie a truth! We can paint the body writhing vainly against its unjust bonds; but who can paint the loathing, agonized soul in a mental situation so ghastly? For my part I feel it in my heart of hearts, but am impotent to convey it to others; impotent, impotent.

Pray think of it for yourselves, men and women, if you have not *sworn* never to think over a novel. Think of it, for your own sakes; Alfred’s turn to-day, it may be yours to-morrow. (Reade 162)

The narrator’s first-person exclamations about Alfred’s physical “writhing” emphasize the injustice of his situation in the asylum. Directly addressing the reader in the last passage catches the reader’s attention; the narrator’s statements to the reader cause the reader to pause and imagine him or herself in Alfred’s situation. This transference makes the reader focus on this metanarrative’s content. With this passage, the narrator introduces a new section of the novel which focuses on asylum patient mistreatment and the corruption of asylum directors and employees.

After the sensation novelist presents the social problem in a metanarrative, he or she must also emphasize that the problem is a real danger so that the reader will accept that the problem requires reform. After a narrator establishes that a problem is real, the narrator may directly address the reader to ask (implicitly or explicitly) him or her to reform him- or herself and society. Victorian novelists understood that social reform is impossible until an individual’s bad habits are reformed. A sensation narrator will use sensations to highlight the points which he or she tries to make in a metanarrative. The

reader becomes attracted to a sensational passage, and thus more easily remembers the content therein.

The following chapters will examine two novels that use metanarratives to elicit social reform, Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* and Charles Reade's *Very Hard Cash*, and two novels that use metanarratives to engage the reader in the process of solving the mystery behind the narrative, Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and M.E. Braddon's *The Trail of the Serpent*.

Chapter two examines Wood's use of metanarratives, narrative functions, and physical sensations to present her reform message directly to women of all ages. Metanarratives in *East Lynne* are frequently a testimonial or communicative analeptic passage narrated by an anonymous, omniscient person with the purpose of telling the female readers to follow conventional Victorian morality and be good Christian wives, mothers, and daughters.

Chapter three discusses the second novel we will examine for metanarratives and reform, Charles Reade's *Very Hard Cash*. Reade's novel addresses the problems of asylum patient neglect, legal injustice, and the shirking of individual responsibility. Reade creates sympathy in the reader's mind for those affected by such problems through metanarratives and suspense. However, Reade does not always suspend his text and insert a metanarrative about the need for reform. Instead, he uses the attention-grabbing qualities of a suspension to direct the reader to other content. An example of this is an excerpt from Alfred's fiancée's diary which Reade places in the narrative soon after Alfred is imprisoned in order to elicit sympathy for the fiancée Julia's misery. The cruel nature of Alfred's confinement affects Alfred's friends and family. Reade wants the

reader to conclude that such situations happen in the real world, and real families are also negatively affected like the one in the novel.

Chapters four and five examine the works of a second pair of sensation novelists, Wilkie Collins and M.E. Braddon. These writers use suspense to provide readers with an entertaining and interactive product – their novels. In this grouping, realism is not as important as “creat[ing] a sensation in every sense of the word” (Hughes “The Sensation Novel” 259). Metanarratives in these novels suspend the main text to accomplish two distinct but connected ends.

The first purpose is to elicit a physical response from the reader – the “sensational” aspect of the sensation novel. Novelists who use suspensions for this purpose create sudden changes in the text to startle the reader and cause him or her to react physically. These sudden textual changes may be found when the author abruptly places a metanarrative in the middle of a scene/conversation between characters, or alternately, changing subjects/scenes in the narrative without proper textual clues. Authors who use metanarratives to create a physical response may use non-intrusive techniques as well. A character’s thoughts, words, or actions may be so sudden or shocking to the reader that he or she may be physically affected.

The second purpose for using metanarratives is to attract or hold the reader’s attention by involving him or her in the text’s development. This development does not mean “production”, such as when an author uses reader feedback on earlier installments to change the outcome of a serial novel (Charles Dickens and *Oliver Twist*). Instead, the author interacts with the reader by providing textual “clues” for solving the mystery or mysteries that inform the action of the novel. The author slows the process of solving the

mysteries by suspending the central narrative through the insertion of metanarratives and narrative intrusions. This slow process of revelation involves the reader in the text by making him or her think back to reinterpret information already given and ahead to possible future clues and revelations. The reader's deductive guesswork means that he or she becomes a "textual detective."

Whether through sensational invocation or amateurish sleuthing, the sensation novelist's interaction with readers is designed to elicit one outcome – the success of the novel. The novelists' success was dependent on the effective use of these rhetorical strategies. The more practiced a novelist became at creating sensations and puzzles, the more popular he or she became.

Chapter four examines Collins's novel *The Woman in White*. This novel contains one mystery and one puzzle. The mystery is Sir Percival's "Secret" known only to himself and the mother of Anne Catherick, the Woman in White. Sir Percival spends the entire novel trying to prevent Anne from revealing this secret to his wife, Laura. The novel's puzzle is a case of mistaken identity. Laura's identity is switched with that of Anne – Laura takes Anne's place at an asylum, and Anne is buried under Laura's name.

Collins uses metanarratives to form his novel's structure and to postpone the resolution of the mystery and the solving of the puzzle. The diegesis of *The Woman in White* is narrated by Walter Hartright. Walter's personal and altruistic interest in the novel's mysteries leads him to request information from other characters, which comes in the form of metanarratives. These metanarratives provide clues to the novel's mysteries and puzzles and the metanarrators, who are in possession of certain facts and observations, narrate events which occur in a limited period within the novel's time frame.

Walter then “arranges” these metanarratives in chronological order to show a mystery’s development and ultimately the resolution. All of these metanarratives contain relevant content, but some contain important clues which the reader is supposed to analyze to solve the text’s mysteries.

Chapter five looks at M.E. Braddon’s first novel *The Trail of the Serpent*. This novel incorporates sensations, mystery, and metanarratives like *The Woman in White*. *The Trail of the Serpent* contains mysteries about two main subjects: the murder of rich merchant Montague Harding and the apparent murder of opera singer Gaston de Lancy. The author uses metanarratives to present the reader with clues about each mystery. Clues about Harding’s murder generally concern finding evidence to bring his killer to justice, while clues about de Lancy’s “murder” hint that he is still alive. Braddon wants the reader to use his or her judgment to arrange these clues in a logical order. After arranging the clues, the reader is supposed to analyze their importance to solve the novel’s mysteries.

The Trail of the Serpent also contains sensational content. Specifically, the reader experiences physical and psychological sensations through the narrator’s expressions in metanarratives. When Valerie, de Lancy’s wife, agonizes over her decision to murder her husband, the reader experiences the same agony because of the text’s expressive details.

Braddon uses a mysterious tone in cryptic statements or passages, such as Valerie’s “sixth sense” about her husband’s presence soon after his “murder”. Valerie tells another character, the chemist Blurosset, that she feels her husband’s presence near her in a room: “I feel as though the dead were near me to-night” (Braddon 185). The repetition of this thought throughout this scene creates a mysterious, ethereal atmosphere.

The chemist Blurosset also adds a mysterious tone to the novel in passages that illustrate his scientific knowledge. The narrator describes one of Blurosset's chemical tricks in this passage: "While [Valerie's] face is thus hidden, Blurosset takes from a little cabinet on one side of the fireplace a handful of a light-coloured powder, which he throws upon the expiring cinders in the grate. A lurid flame blazes up, illuminating the room with a strange unnatural glare" (Braddon 311). The "lurid flame" and "strange unnatural glare" make the reader think that Blurosset has mysterious supernatural powers. Passages that contain mysterious or sensational content do not overpower this text, however. These kinds of passages complement and enhance metanarratives. The combination of mystery, suspense, and sensation improves the reader's consumption and enjoyment of the novel.

Notes

¹ Henry M. Taylor in his article “Discourses on Diegesis: The Success Story of a Misnomer” in *OFFSCREEN* Vol. 11 Nos. 8-9, Aug/Sept 2007, says, “According to Gérard Genette, it was Etienne Souriau who first used the term in 1948; whereas Anne Souriau claims in the *Vocabulaire d'esthétique* to have coined it herself in 1950; and David Bordwell in his *Narration in the Fiction Film* refers to Etienne Souriau’s introduction of the concept in a widely known 1953 publication, which is presumably appropriate regarding the expression’s historical reception. This dispute notwithstanding, the English terms diegesis and diegetic, referring to the spatial story worlds primarily of fictional texts/films, are translations of the French words *diégèse* and *diégétique* – the matter being complicated by the fact that Genette (aligning himself with Etienne Souriau) asserts that these terms are not derived from the Greek *diegesis*.”

CHAPTER TWO

“If we all just did as we ought...”: Metadiegetic Suspensions and Reform in Ellen Wood’s *East Lynne*

In her sensation novel *East Lynne*, Ellen Wood uses the rhetorical strategy of narrative interruption to place her personal thoughts and ideas within the text for the purpose of educating her female readers and inspiring in them a desire for personal moral reform. *East Lynne* follows two storylines: the life of Lady Isabel Vane and a murder mystery about the death of George Hallijohn, a poor farmer who lived near the town of West Lynne. In the first plot the orphaned Lady Isabel marries wealthy lawyer Archibald Carlyle. They have three children together and live at their estate East Lynne near West Lynne. Isabel is seduced by her old suitor Francis Levison and they flee to France together, where they have an illegitimate son. Carlyle quickly divorces Isabel, and then Levison abandons her. She is disfigured in a train crash which also causes the death of her young son. Isabel’s changed appearance allows her to return to East Lynne as the governess to her three older children by her marriage to Carlyle. The divorced Carlyle marries Barbara Hare, who had earlier been Isabel’s rival. At the end of the novel, Isabel dies of a broken heart following the death of her oldest son. The other half of the novel focuses on the mystery surrounding the murder of poor farmer Hallijohn. Barbara’s brother, Richard Hare, is accused of Hallijohn’s murder though he is innocent of the crime. Levison is revealed as the true murderer and is tried and convicted at the end of the novel. Richard then returns to his family a free and vindicated man.

Although Gerard Genette identifies many types of narrative interruptions, Robyn Warhol in her work *Gendered Interventions* is primarily interested in the influence of gender on the nature of the interventions. She argues that female narrators attempt to establish common ground with the reader by adopting a first person point of view, speaking of “I,” “we,” “our,” or “us” and addressing the reader directly as “you” or “my dear reader.” Male narrators, she argues, are more distant and avoid using second person and addressing the reader directly unless they are doing so sarcastically.

The narrator of *East Lynne* clearly assumes a feminine voice. The omniscient narrator sometimes interrupts the narrative with metanarratives using first person to explain directly to the reader a character’s actions or thoughts or to reinforce the moral themes of the novel by advising the reader on proper moral behavior when confronted by a moral issue. Wood’s narrator also sometimes interrupts the main narrative with fictive written texts containing dialogue and multiple secondary narratives or metanarratives in many different forms, including letters between characters that may also provide explanatory information that illuminates elements in the main narrative or that support the moral themes of the novel.

As Genette says, “the narrator’s discourse, novelistic or not, can take on other functions” than explanation or distraction (255). And in *East Lynne* and in many other sensation novels, the three most relevant functions of the narrator are the communication function, the testimonial function, and the ideological function. In *East Lynne*, long didactic suspensions reveal the importance of communication for Wood’s narrator; when the narrator uses a large amount of diegetic space to explain a detail, she shows that she cares whether or not the reader fully understands why that detail is important for the

novel's development. The length of a suspension also means that the narrator can easily provide the reader with clear and specific information. Easy communication means that the rhetorical purposes of the novel are more likely to be fulfilled.

The testimonial function or function of attestation reveals how a narrator is affected by the text or how closely intertwined the narrator and the text really are in terms of thoughts and actions. In *East Lynne*, the narrator is emotionally involved with her text and frequently breaks into the narrative to bemoan Isabel's decisions, pass judgment on Barbara's misplaced affection for Carlyle, and heighten the emotional impact of narrative interruptions for the reader.

The ideological function is the most frequently and most directly used technique in a sensation novel's metanarratives. In order for the narrator to effectively communicate with the reader, the narrator must ensure that a shared ideology is in place, such as Christian morality in Victorian Britain. The authorized commentary on the action is believable when the narrator presents information in such a way that the reader is able to correctly interpret the narrator's intended meaning.

Frequently, this implied message is directed at a specific imagined reader as opposed to a generalized audience represented by the label "dear reader." In a sensation novel, the reader is asked to be an active participant by the narrator. When the narrator of *East Lynne* asks the reader questions such as "are you quite sure that you would not have done the same, under the facility and the temptation [as Lady Isabel]?", the reader is forced to evaluate his or her own modes of action, and to decide if his or her harsh judgment of Lady Isabel's actions is warranted (Wood 591). Self-evaluation is just one mode of narrator-reader interaction, however, with the most important interaction of all

being the narrator's challenge to the reader regarding personal improvement based upon narratorial advice and textual examples of bad behavior to avoid.

Narrator-reader interaction becomes more important when the narrator targets a specific audience in a metanarrative. This specific audience is always imaginary. Warhol focuses on an author's use of the imagined reader or "narratee" in her work, developing a concept that Genette only briefly mentions. Genette also argues that "[l]ike the narrator, the narratee is one of the elements in the narrating situation, and he is necessarily located at the same diegetic level; that is, he does not merge a priori with the reader (even an implied reader) any more than the narrator necessarily merges with the author" (259). In the sensation novel, this means that the author realizes that the narratee directly addressed in a metanarrative is not the only reader of the text. The author knows that individuals with different socio-economic backgrounds and ages are reading along with the target audience represented by "my dear reader".

In addition to metanarratives in which the narrator speaks directly to the reader, suspense is also created when the narrative is suspended by another kind of interruption such as letters sent from one character to another – sometimes a secondary narrator (usually a character in the novel) records a letter from another character, or records another character's personal correspondence with yet another character – song lyrics, poems, random statements in another language, and finally images.

Some suspensions have a rhetorical purpose unique to the sensation novel. In this genre, a textual interruption often attempts to inform or educate the reader about a particular subject. While this desire to improve the reader's knowledge and behavior is seen in other realistic Victorian novels, such as the works of Charles Dickens, this

rhetorical purpose emerges in the sensation novel particularly through metanarratives. As Jennifer Phegley suggests, the realism of the story needs to be emphasized in some way to make the reader believe the information provided in the suspension is true – a statement which is all the more applicable to women authors like Wood and M.E. Braddon (187-188). Warhol is surely correct in arguing that the rhetorical purpose of these suspensions is different for women and men. The two female authors this work discusses, M.E. Braddon and Ellen Wood, focus on the domestic sphere, the expected limit of a woman's influence in Victorian society. Female sensation novelists had to be realistic and yet sensational – the resulting works were “domesticated sensationalism” (Phegley 183). Interruptions in the works of these two authors therefore inform the reader about how to live a moral life as a respectable woman of variable age. Nicholas Rance argues that “[t]he effects of the conservative sensationalists [like Wood and Braddon] who followed [Wilkie] Collins are derived not from implying the relativity of rules and conventions but from intimating the consequences of not deferring to them” (64). The female novelists use implication and indirect hints to pass along their moral lessons.

In *East Lynne*, Wood's main goal for using sensational suspensions is reform. After being educated about a problem present in Victorian society, the reader is asked (usually implicitly) to reform either his or her behavior and thoughts. The premise behind this step is that an individual must first be reformed and have a perfectly stable moral life before society as a whole may be improved.

The sensation novel fulfills the same goals as many other Victorian novels by advocating reform and portraying good Christian morality. What makes sensation novels

different from the rest of Victorian literature is their sensational content – literally, these novels sought to create a physical sensation in the reader such as chills, gasps, and fluttering hearts (Hughes 259). Dan Bivona argues that “[t]he function of the sensation novel’s ‘sensation’ effects was ultimately to create an emotional bond between audience and characters that was ideologically grounded” (113). This emotional bond is exploited by the narrator through suspensions. Suspensions can elicit a physical sensation through content or rhetorical purpose when they cease and the original diegesis is continued at an unexpected place in the storyline. The suddenness of this continuation could create a physical response to the content such as gasps of astonishment, screams of horror, and blushing out of shame. This physical response draws the reader’s attention to the content of the novel at that particular place in the text. Such a technique makes the highlighted content more memorable to a reader. The overall effect created by the suspensions is that the reader is enlightened by the author’s knowledge of the domestic sphere and morality.

The narrator’s interruptions in *East Lynne* either admonish the reader against “bad behavior” or provide examples of “bad behavior” to avoid by using Isabel as the main illustration. One such metanarrative is found in *East Lynne* when Isabel is visited by Carlyle during her convalescence. Isabel is worried that her former affection for Levison will be aroused and that her feelings for him and the betrayal of her husband that those feelings would represent would make her unhappy for years to come, as the narrator states:

But, do not mistake the word terror; or suppose that Lady Isabel Carlyle applied it here in the vulgar acceptance of the term. She did not fear for herself; none could be more securely conscious of their own rectitude of principle and conduct; and she would have believed it as impossible for her ever to forsake her duty as a wife, a gentlewoman, and a Christian, as for the sun to turn round from the west to the east. That was not the fear

which possessed her; it had never presented itself to her mind: what she did fear was, that further companionship, especially lonely companionship, with Francis Levison might augment the sentiments she entertained for him to a height, that her life, for perhaps years to come, would be one of unhappiness and concealment: more than all, she shrank from the consciousness of the bitter wrong that these sentiments cast upon her husband. (Wood 412)

Here, the narrator tells the reader of Isabel's fears and thoughts about her husband and former suitor. Isabel knows that her husband loves her, and that she values his affection. However, she also knows that she is still vulnerable to Levison's charms if left alone with him for a long period of time. The narrator uses this short metanarrative to tell the reader that such a situation can be dangerous for women, and that such women should be careful. The reader is told that the consequences could last for many years and make such a woman very unhappy.

Some interruptions elicit an emotional response calculated to draw the reader's attention to the reforming message. For example, the female reader is supposed to value her husband's affection, never question his fidelity, not marry one man if she loves another, stay within her own social sphere or else be aware of the differences in lifestyle that will follow, avoid the temptations of seducers, not covet another woman's husband, and never abandon her children or family. I refer to the female reader because, as Lyn Pykett accurately notes, "[t]he address of Wood's novels is consistently (and certainly more emphatically than Braddon's) woman-to-woman. The way in which the story is unfolded replicates the rhythms of women's conversation" (118).

Winifred Hughes and Patrick Brantlinger claim that the sensation novel undermines conventional morality; however, this is inaccurate in the case of Braddon and Wood. Although male novelists such as Charles Reade and Wilkie Collins may be more

focused on other problems like social reform and justice, which concern morality on the public level, Braddon and Wood use their novels to provide readers with moral guidelines for proper living.

The narrator of *East Lynne* introduces several key metanarratives that provide moral lessons for the reader's benefit. The first notable interruption in *East Lynne* is a long, rambling passage warning against marital discontent directed at young, unmarried women with romantic notions in their heads about marriage and love. Here, the narrator directly addresses a reader with the words "young lady," jolting the young reader into awareness about the possible disappointment she might face in her marriage. The narrator argues that time brings change in relationships whether between husband and wife just as in any other relationship and that wives need to accept that natural process.

The narrator's rhetorical questions bring a conversational tone to the metanarrative:

Mr Carlyle's demonstrative affection, shown so greatly for her in the first twelve months or so of their married life, had subsided into calmness. Is not a similar result arrived at by every husband that the Church ever made one with woman? It was not that his love had faded, but that time and custom had wrought their natural effects. Look at children with their toys; a boy with a new drum, a girl with a new doll. Are not the playthings kissed, and hugged, and clasped in arms, and never put down? Did ever playthings seem like them? Are not all others [*sic*] things neglected, or submitted to unwillingly – the reading lessons, the sports, the daily works, even the pudding at dinner, while the new toy is all in all? But, wait. A little time, and the drum (if it has escaped breakage) is consigned to some dark closet; the doll to its cradle; and neither of them is visited or looked at. Tell the children to go and get their lately-cherished playthings, to make them their evening's amusement; and they will go unwillingly (if they don't openly rebel), for they are tired of them. It is of no use scolding the children for being fickle: it is in their nature to be fickle, for they are human. Are grown children otherwise? Do we not all, men and women, become indifferent to our toys when we hold them securely in possession? Young lady, when he, who is soon to be your lord and master, protests to you that he shall always be as ardent a lover as he is now, believe him if you like, but don't reproach him when the disappointment comes. He does not wilfully [*sic*] deceive you; he only forgets that it is in the

constitution of man to change, the very essence of his nature. The time will arrive when his manner must settle down into a calmness, which to you, if you be of an exacting temperament, may look like indifference, or coldness; but you will do well to put up with it, for it will never now be otherwise. Never: the heyday of early love, of youth, and of novelty is past. (Wood 198)

This long metanarrative interrupts the novel's primary narrative just when Lady Isabel's jealousy of Barbara begins to develop. The subject matter that immediately follows the interruption explains the status of Carlyle and Isabel's marriage – Carlyle's affection for her is the same, even though his expressions of love are different.

Wood's metanarrative develops the argument that change is universal by comparing children and their new toys with men and their new wives. The narrator uses this passage to give female readers a clear explanation of marital dynamics. Wives are reassured that their husbands still love them, but that they may be fickle like children in their expression. Furthermore, the narrator gives young unmarried women specific advice in a direct address. These readers are advised to be flexible and understanding once they are married to their sweethearts. Because the household was a woman's sphere of influence, by passively allowing her husband to do as he wishes a woman is maintaining control over the household. More importantly, the narrator suggests that if the woman were to object to her husband's neglectful actions, she would lose control of the comforts available at home, as the atmosphere would no longer be welcoming and nurturing but instead be painful and frustrating.

Another long metanarrative interrupts the text at the beginning of chapter 29, providing transitional content between the night of Isabel's elopement and the "present time" of her stay in France with Levison. The narrator uses this secondary narrative to

explain Isabel's state of mind, which in turn illustrates a lesson for the reader. The passage begins thus:

How fared it with Lady Isabel? Just as it must be expected to fare, and does fare, when a high-principled gentlewoman falls from her pedestal. Never had she experienced a moment's calm, or peace, or happiness, since the fatal night of quitting her home. She had taken a blind leap in a moment of wild passion; when, instead of the garden of roses it had been her persuader's pleasure to promise her (but which, in truth, she had barely glanced at, for that had not been her moving motive), she had found herself plunged into an abyss of horror, from which there was never more any escape; never more, never more. The very hour of her departure she awoke to what she had done: the guilt, whose aspect had been shunned in the prospective, assumed at once its true, frightful colour, the blackness of darkness; and a lively remorse, a never dying anguish, took possession of her soul for ever. Oh, reader, believe me! Lady – wife – mother! should you ever be tempted to abandon your home, so will you awake. Whatever trials may be the lot of your married life, though they may magnify themselves to your crushed spirit as beyond the endurance of woman to bear, resolve to bear them, fall down upon your knees and pray to be enabled to bear them: pray for patience; pray for strength to resist the demon that would urge you so to escape; bear unto death, rather than forfeit your fair name and your good conscience; for be assured that the alternative, if you rush on to it, will be found far worse than death. (Wood 283)

Here, the narrator directly addresses a specific narratee with “Lady – wife – mother!”

And the implied lesson is clear: a woman's decision to run away from her family with a lover will only bring mental and physical anguish and social ostracism. The narratee is told that the alternative to endurance in a relationship is “far worse than death” (Wood 283). The narratee is given preventative activities to help her avoid shame: prayer, passivity, and fortitude. Hughes claims that in metadiegetic passages like this one, “*East Lynne* reliably delivered both a good read and a good cry for at least two generations of novel-readers and theater-goers while still comfortably upholding what Wood's narrator considers ‘the ordinary rules of conduct and propriety’” (270). In this suspension, the narrator uses emotionally charged language to describe predicaments like Isabel's such as

“trials,” “magnify,” “crushed spirit,” “beyond the endurance of woman,” “demon,” and “bear unto death.” Such language emphasizes the narrator’s moral lesson for the female narratee about marriage.

In the final metanarrative we will examine, the narrator explains how Isabel’s health declined as a result of her elopement. This passage takes the form of a conversation with an imagined reader and is found near the end of the novel, after Isabel’s older son dies of consumption:

When Lady Isabel was Mr Carlyle’s wife, she had never wholly loved him. The very utmost homage that esteem, admiration, affection, could give, was his; but that mysterious passion called by the name of love (and which, as I truly and heartily believe, cannot in its refined etherealism be known to many of us) had not been given to him. It was now. I told you, some chapters back, that the world goes round by the rules of contrary – counter-ary, mind you, the children have it in their game – and we go round with it. We despise what we have, and covet that which we cannot get. From the very night she had come back to East Lynne, her love for Mr Carlyle had burst forth with an intensity never before felt. It had been smouldering almost ever since she quitted him. ‘Reprehensible!’ groans a moralist. Very. Everybody knows that, as Afy would say. But her heart, you see, had not done with human passions: and they work ill, and counterariness (let the word stand, critic, if you please), and precisely everything they should not. (Wood 590)

In this passage, the narrator’s conversational tone again emerges. Parenthetical asides lend a friendly manner to this monologue that helps set the reader at ease. Moral platitudes such as “We despise what we have, and covet that which we cannot get” help the reader imagine a knowledgeable matron consoling younger women who have been crossed in love (Wood 590). The narrator uses an ingratiating tone to make the reader more receptive to arguments found later in the same metanarrative. Hints about these arguments are found near the end of the passage when the narrator agrees with “a moralist” who says Isabel’s behavior is “reprehensible.” The narrator then points out that

Isabel is afflicted with “human passions” which “work ill” on the heart (590). However, the benign moralist morphs into a “critic” in the narrator’s eyes, as we see in the direct address found at the paragraph’s close. The critic is told “let the word stand, critic, if you please” – the “word” referred to being the made-up “counter-ary” discussed earlier in the novel and also in the same paragraph (Wood 590).

The narrator then moves on to discuss in the next paragraph why she dares to “attempt to defend” Lady Isabel’s rebellious thoughts about Carlyle. Using sympathetic language, the narrator explores emotions surrounding recent divorce laws. Hughes states that “Wood was one of the first novelists to probe the emotional implications surrounding the recent changes in divorce law, generating sympathy for the cast-off wife, however erring herself, who was separated from her children and forced to watch her former husband showering caresses on her legal replacement” (270). This emotional exploration is evident in the next part of the interruption:

I shall get blame for it, I fear, if I attempt to defend her. But it was not exactly the same thing, as though she had suffered herself to fall in love with somebody else’s husband. Nobody would defend *that*. We have not turned Mormons yet, and the world does not walk upon its head. When Queen Eleanor handed the bowl of poison to Fair Rosamond, she challenged the execrations of posterity, and they have been liberally bestowed upon her from that hour to this. The queen gets all the blame, the lady all the sympathy. Putting the poison out of view, I think the judgment should be reversed. Had Lady Isabel fallen in love with –say – Mr Crosby, she would have deserved a little judicious chastisement at Mr Crosby’s hands. Perhaps an hour or two spent in some agreeable pillory might have proved efficacious. But this was a peculiar case. She, poor thing, almost regarded Mr Carlyle as *her* husband. The bent of her thoughts was only too much inclined to this. (That evil human heart again!) Many and many a time did she wake up from a reverie, and strive to drive this mistaken view of things away from her, taking shame to herself. Ten minutes afterwards, she would catch her brain reveling in the same rebellious vision. Mr Carlyle’s love was not hers now; it was Barbara’s: Mr Carlyle did not belong to her; he belonged to his wife. It was not only that he was not hers; he was another’s: you may therefore, if

you have the pleasure of being experienced in this sort of thing, guess a little at what her inward life was. Had there been no Barbara in the case, she might have lived and borne it: as it was, it had killed her before her time; that, and the remorse together. (Wood 590-591)

First, the narrator admits that her opinion may differ from that of the public when she fears that she will be “blamed” for wishing to defend Isabel. Actions like Isabel’s were reprehensible and shocking for Victorians because they conflicted with the Christian ideology so interwoven with everyday life. Gentlewomen who abandoned their families, husbands, and households were ostracized by polite society and were thus unable to remarry or hold proper jobs – such “fallen” women were often forced into prostitution to support themselves and any illegitimate children they might have, making their life choices even more scandalous for polite society.

Then, the narrator unapologetically defends her character’s behavior by arguing that “it was not exactly the same thing, as though she had suffered herself to fall in love with somebody else’s husband” (Wood 590). The reader is next provided with a story which, on first appearance, parallels that of Isabel and Barbara. However, the narrator goes into great detail when explaining what makes Isabel’s story different from the example, and why her case not wholly morally reprehensible. The narrator uses first person to validate her unconventional opinion in the sentence “Putting the poison out of view, I think the judgment should be reversed” (Wood 590). With this statement, the narrator exposes her non-traditional views on divorced spouses and remarriage – Isabel, the narrator argues, is “a peculiar case.” The great detail used to describe Isabel’s struggle within herself to “strive to drive this mistaken view of things away from her, [by] taking shame to herself” is exactly the mindset that the narrator wishes for the reader to have, should the reader ever be in a similar situation (Wood 591). Isabel knows her

thoughts are wrong, and she works hard to correct them. To support the claim that the reader should also be remorseful, the narrator casually tells the reader “you may therefore, if *you have the pleasure of being experienced in this sort of thing*, guess a little at what her inward life was” (my emphasis) (Wood 591).

The metanarrative concludes with a final paragraph in which the narrator is much more assertive and vehement than previously seen in this novel. This passage begins with an imagined exclamation by a specific imagined reader, and closes with the narrator’s petulant remark defending her position. Wood’s narrator says:

‘She brought it upon herself! she ought not to have come back to East Lynne!’ groans our moralist again. Don’t I say so? Of course she ought not. Neither ought she to have suffered her thoughts to stray, in the manner they did, towards Mr Carlyle. She ought not; but she did. If we all did just what we ‘ought,’ this lower world would be worth living in. You must just sit down and abuse her, and so cool your anger. I agree with you that she ought never to have come back; that it was an act little short of madness: but are you quite sure that you would not have done the same, under the facility and the temptation? And now you can abuse me for saying it, if it will afford you any satisfaction. (Wood 591)

The fictive moralist narratee once again provides a line of reasoning which the narrator agrees with in an imaginary conversation. This conversation condemning Isabel’s thoughts and behavior is supported by another moral platitude, “If we all did just what we ‘ought,’ this lower world would be worth living in” (Wood 591). An implicit plea for personal reform – the ultimate goal of these sensational suspensions – lies within those words. The narrator intends for the reader to take the advice to heart and thus make “this lower world...worth living in” (Wood 591). The reader should fulfill the vague notions of “doing the right thing” and make him or herself a better person, therefore making the world a better place for everyone else.

Undermining this key argument however, are several statements which conclude the passage. The narrator asks the judgmental moralist narratee “are you quite sure that you would not have done the same [as Isabel], under the facility and the temptation?” (Wood 591). The narrator elicits pity for Isabel through this question. The hopefulness of the statement preceding this question is marginally restored by the last sentence in the paragraph: “And now you can abuse me for saying it [that the reader could be tempted like Isabel], if it will afford you any satisfaction” (Wood 591). In a way, this “step back” in trying to establish personal growth may also somehow encourage such growth. By admitting the foolishness of such radical thoughts as “Isabel couldn’t help her daydreaming”, the narrator distances the reader from those thoughts and brings to the forefront the key message of this metanarrative – “If we all just did as we ought...” (Wood 591). The sympathy generated by the narrator for Isabel in this passage is unique. Such blatant solicitation for pity is not found anywhere else in the novel; the narrator always tempers such appeals with content corresponding to the stern Christian moralist’s ideology, and the narrator is not usually so direct when wording her appeals.

The metanarratives found in Ellen Wood’s sensation novel *East Lynne* suspend the text of the novel in order to provide the reader with moral lessons about life. These moral lessons concern female readers, who are occasionally directly addressed by the narrator as “dear reader.” Young women are instructed to be less naive when entering a marriage, middle-aged wives are told to be less jealous and rude to their husbands, and women in general are advised to turn to religion for comfort or affirmation regardless of the situation. Wood’s novel illustrates the importance of narrative suspensions to the

sensation novel genre, as we will see in the novels of Charles Reade, Wilkie Collins, and M.E. Braddon.

CHAPTER THREE

Asylum Reform, Suspense, and Metanarratives in Charles Reade's Sensation Novel *Very Hard Cash*

“Hard Cash,” like “The Cloister and the Hearth,” is a matter-of-fact Romance, – that is, a fiction built on truths; and these truths have been gathered by long, severe, systematic labor, from a multitude of volumes, pamphlets, journals, reports, blue-books, manuscript narratives, letters, and living people, whom I have sought out, examined and cross-examined, to get at the truth on each main topic I have striven to handle. (Reade *Hard Cash* 1)

Here, then, are three cases following one upon the other in rapid succession. How many remain behind of which we know nothing? The fact would appear to be that under existing arrangements any English man or woman may without much difficulty be incarcerated in a private lunatic asylum when not deprived of reason. If actually deprived of reason when first confined, patients may be retained in duress when their cure is perfected, and they ought to be released. (Reade *Hard Cash* 414)

Sensation novelist Charles Reade is notorious for compiling notebooks of information to support the content of his novels. Like his friend Charles Dickens, Reade was interested in social justice and exposing society's neglect of the disadvantaged. Reade's novels discuss social issues with support from these notebooks. In the sensation novel *Hard Cash*, first published as *Very Hard Cash* in Dickens's periodical *All the Year Round*, Reade addresses mistreatment of insane asylum patients. To emphasize the gravity of this social problem, Reade wrote a detailed letter to the editor of the *Daily News* (the second quotation above is an excerpt). Reade's letter outlines the true stories of several former asylum “prisoners,” the “three cases following one upon the other in rapid succession” (Reade *Hard Cash* 414). Reade tells the reader that sane men and women have already been imprisoned against their wills and mistreated like one of the

main characters of the novel, Alfred Hardie (Reade *Hard Cash* 414). Reade exposes such patient abuse to the public with his strategic placement of metanarratives throughout the novel. The metanarratives in *Very Hard Cash* contain a large number of Gerard Genette's functions of the narrative and narrator, focalization alterations and narrative order. Reade uses metanarrative suspense and sensations to expose social injustice and call for moral and social reform.

Very Hard Cash follows the lives of two families over several years. The first family includes David and Lucy Dodd and their children Edward and Julia; the second family consists of Richard Hardie and his children Alfred and Jane. Julia and Alfred fall in love as do Jane and Edward. Richard disapproves of Alfred's desire to marry and refuses to give him his blessing. As the town banker, Richard steals David's life savings, which leads to David's mental breakdown and his incarceration in a mental asylum. After learning of his father's treachery, Alfred decides to marry Julia and support her family, but he is prevented from doing so when his father forcefully has him also committed to a mental asylum. As Reade points out, the system allows individuals to be easily imprisoned in a mental asylum but does not offer any avenue for their gaining their release. By a strange coincidence Alfred and David are placed in the same asylum, from which both men escape: David to become a sailor once again and Alfred to repair the damage to his relationship with Julia and her remaining family. Eventually, Alfred's reputation is restored, David regains his sanity, and Richard is punished by becoming insane himself.

The metanarratives found in *Very Hard Cash* are varied in structure, content, and purpose. In the first kind of metanarrative, Reade employs narrative intrusions in which

the first person narrator summarizes or gives further information about some detail in the diegesis. For example, the narrator suspends the diegesis to tell the reader what he or she is not being “shown” about Alfred’s treatment in the asylum. The narrator explains that Alfred was forced against his will to take an opiate which affects his mind. The narrator comments, “Then ensued a struggle, on which I draw a veil: but numbers won the day, with the help of handcuffs and cow-horn” (Reade *Very* 165). The narrator’s presence is represented by the phrase “on which I draw a veil” (Reade *Very* 165).

Another kind of metanarrative that appears in *Very Hard Cash* consists of song lyrics and poetry. Reade inserts several of these metanarratives into the novel during quiet evenings in the Dodd household. One narrative intrusion contains the narrator’s remarks on singing and the sensibility of many Victorian lyrics. The narrator explains that “[t]he song Julia Dodd sang on this happy occasion, to meet the humble but heterogeneous views of Messrs. Sampson and Hardie, was a simple eloquent Irish song called Aileen aroon. Whose history, by the by, was a curious one” (Reade *Very* 52). After the narrator finishes his explanation, Reade inserts the lyrics to “Aileen aroon.” Thus, the metanarrative containing the lyrics to Julia’s song “Aileen aroon” distracts the reader twice: first, when the narrator suspends the text to comment on songs and performance, and again when the metanarrative is interrupted with the lyrics. This long metanarrative interrupts the narrator’s description of a quiet evening at the Dodd house with Alfred and Dodd family friend Dr. Sampson present. Julia is asked to perform “Aileen aroon” after her mother refuses. This evening is the one in which Lucy receives a letter from Richard asking her to refuse to admit Alfred into her house. This

metanarrative performs no other function except to distract the reader from the diegesis by presenting extraneous content.

A third kind of metanarrative used by Reade is the insertion of letters such as personal correspondence between characters like Lucy Dodd and Richard Hardie.

Richard writes to Lucy after his son Alfred sends a letter requesting permission to marry Julia. This letter explains his reasons for refusing to approve of the match; in the process Richard insults the Dodd family. Richard writes:

Madam, – I have received a very juvenile letter from my son, by which I learn he has formed a sudden attachment to your daughter. He tells me, however, at the same time, that you await my concurrence before giving your consent. I appreciate your delicacy; and it is with considerable regret I now write to inform you this match is out of the question. I have thought it due to you to communicate this to yourself and without delay, and feel sure that you will, under the circumstances, discountenance my son's further visits at your house.

“I am, Madam, with sincere respect,

“Your faithful servant,

“Richard Hardie.” (Reade *Very* 53)

Metanarratives like this letter move the plot development along by introducing new information to the reader. The reader learns the next diegetic “step” through the letter’s contents as opposed to through the narrator’s third person rendition of the correspondence.

The fourth kind of metanarrative uses a revelatory technique similar to letters – Reade also incorporates journal excerpts into the novel. These journals are narrated by Julia and Jane and are inserted into the diegesis to “conduct this narrative forward, and relieve its monotony a little: only of course the reader must not expect to see the plot of a story carried minutely out in two crude compositions written with an object so distinct: he must watch for glimpses and make the most of indications” (Reade *Very* 129). Reade’s words prefacing these journal excerpts explain his “purpose” for including them in the

diegesis. The “glimpses” of the novel’s plot in each journal slowly develop the novel’s action and begin a textual conversation about the novel’s mysteries and social issues. In her journal, Julia writes of the orderlies’ corruption when her father is taken away to the first asylum: “mamma bribed them with money to use him kindly: I thought they would be offended and refuse it: but they took it, and their faces showed she was wiser than I am” (Reade *Very* 130).

Another passage in Julia’s journal bemoans the laws that allow any relative to sign over a person to an asylum if he or she possesses the proper paperwork. Here, Julia discusses her aunt’s decision to place David in an asylum after he attacks his wife:

It does seem strange that any one but mamma should be able to send papa out of the house, and to such a place; but it is the law: and Edward, who is all good sense, says it was necessary; he says mamma is unjust: grief makes her unreasonable. I don’t know who is in the right: and I don’t much care: but I know I am sorry for Aunt Eve, and very, very sorry for mamma. (Reade *Very* 130)

Julia in her naiveté states that “[i]t does seem strange...but it is the law” that someone other than the spouse can place a person in an asylum. This “strange” practice is one of the legal injustices Reade fights to correct with this novel. Reade argues that a person should not be forcefully admitted to an asylum unless examined by qualified physicians who are regularly interviewed and kept abreast of new medical knowledge. Later in the novel, Reade implies that these physicians should be incorruptible but willing to keep an open mind about a patient’s history. This passage and others later in the diegesis also argue that a patient’s next of kin should be firmly established, and that only this person be responsible for important decisions.

The final form of metanarrative in *Very Hard Cash* is an image. The best example of this form of narrative interruption is found at the end of the novel, when

Reade inserts the image of David's receipt for the £14,000 he deposited with Richard. The importance of the image is emphasized by the abrupt means by which the narrator introduces it into the diegesis. The narrator describes the scene of discovery thus: "[T]hey soon noticed in his left hand a paper: it was discolored by the vapor, and part hid by the dead thumb; but thus much shone out clear and amazing, that it was a banker's receipt to David Dodd, Esq., for £14,000, drawn at Barkington, and signed for Richard Hardie by Noah Skinner" (Reade *Very* 249). The image of the receipt appears precisely in the center of the page in order to catch the reader's eye. The reader is startled into paying attention to the content of this visual metanarrative – the facts missing from the diegesis at the beginning of the novel. The scene in which the narrator inserts this receipt is all the more dramatic because David returns to his family a sane man right after the receipt is announced.

Reade's metanarratives reflect all of the three types identified by Gerard Genette, those directly related to the diegesis that have an explanatory and thematic relationship to the primary narrative and those that have "no explicit relationship between the two story levels" and which function as distractions or obstructions to the primary narrative (233). These intrusions also reflect the directing, communicative, testimonial, and ideological narrative functions that Genette describes. Reade uses these strategies throughout his novel and within metanarratives to create suspense and highlight the importance of social reform.

Reade uses the explanatory qualities of a metanarrative to clarify information from the diegesis for the reader's benefit. To explain the single-minded focus of the boat-race section near the beginning of the novel, the narrator tells the reader, "But I,

unhappy, have nothing to do with this race, except as it appeared to two ladies seated on the Henley side of the Thames, nearly opposite the winning-post” (Reade *Very* 14). Here, the narrator explains to the reader why he chooses to focus on Julia and Mrs. Dodd’s conversation instead of the omitted technicalities of the boat race.

Reade frequently uses metanarratives to reinforce the central themes developed in the diegesis. In this next example, the narrator describes another “true” story about asylum abuse, this time about the mistreatment of a pregnant woman who died as the result of abuse. The narrator talks of Alfred’s fellow patient Mrs. Dale and refers to the death of Mrs. Carey, an event with which the reader would likely have been familiar from government and newspaper reports:

Why I think Mrs. Dale would otherwise have left this shifting scene, Mrs. Carey, the last woman in her condition they tanked and then turned into a flagged cell that only wanted one frog of a grotto, was found soon after moribund; on which they bundled her out of the asylum to die. She did die next day, at home, but murdered by the asylum; and they told the Commissioners she died through her friends taking her away from the asylum too soon. The Commissioners had nothing to do but believe this, and did believe it. Inspectors, who visit a temple of darkness, lies, cunning, and hypocrisy, four times a year, know mighty little of what goes on there the odd three hundred and sixty-one days, five hours, forty-eight minutes, and fifty-seven seconds. (Reade *Very* 194)

The narrator’s shocking revelation of the way these pregnant women were treated by their caregivers gives support to previous content in the narrative. Before the narrator described these horrors, Alfred was trying to persuade the women’s supervisor Mrs. Archbold to help him escape the asylum. Alfred had just discovered the “tanking” (submersion of a person in a tub full of cold water) of a very pregnant woman by asylum workers and was horrified that she was treated in such a manner. This metanarrative, while verifying the real-life inspiration for Reade’s Mrs. Dale, also conveys evidence that

supports the truth of the events being related in the diegesis with the story about Mrs. Carey.

Genette's communicative and directive functions are frequently used by Reade to ingratiate himself with the reader and to provide "stage directors' of the discourse" (256). Reade's narrator (an extension of himself) asks the reader if he can skip irrelevant details and move ahead a year in the diegesis. Here, the reader is given what appears to be a choice between a narrative leap and the inclusion of extraneous details; however, the novelist moves ahead anyway based on his assumption of the reader's answer. The narrator asks the reader:

Can nothing, however, be done to restore, in the reader's judgment, that just balance of "the sensational" and "the soporific," which all writers, that have readers, disturb? Nothing I think without his own assistance. But surely something with it. And, therefore, I throw myself on the intelligence of my readers; and ask them to realize, that henceforth pages are no measure of time, and that to a year big with strange events, on which I have therefore dilated in this story, succeeded a year in which few brilliant things happened to the personages of this tale: in short, a year to be skimmed by as chronicler or novelist, and yet (mind you) a year of three hundred and sixty-five days six hours, or thereabouts, and one in which the quiet, unobtrusive troubles of our friends' hearts, especially the female hearts, their doubts, divisions, distresses, did not remit, far from it. Now this year I propose to divide into topics, and go by logical, rather than natural sequence of events. (Reade *Very* 228)

Reade shows that he cares about the reader's opinion when he asks "[c]an nothing...be done to restore [in this novel]...that just balance of "the sensational" and "the soporific," which all writers...disturb?" (Reade *Very* 228). Reade then gives directions to the reader, making clear how the reader is to read the next section of the narrative: "Now this year I propose to divide into topics, and go by logical, rather than natural sequence of events" – thus, Reade proposes a change in organization (Reade *Very* 228). Reade's explanation directs the reader to expect a change in the pattern of organization.

The testimonial function is reflected in the metanarrative “when the narrator indicates the source of his information, or the degree of precision of his own memories, or the feelings which one or another episode awakens in him” (Genette 256). In *Very Hard Cash*, the narrator testifies about the origins of his asylum “horror stories” when he asserts their veracity. This next metanarrative provides an example of the narrator’s true stories. Here, the narrator describes one of the tortures forced on patients at one of Alfred’s asylums. The narrator states,

Every art has its secrets: the attendants in such mad-houses as this have been for years possessed of one they are too modest to reveal to justices, commissioners, or the public: the art of breaking a man’s ribs, or breast-bone, or both, without bruising him externally. The convicts at Toulon arrive at a similar result by another branch of the art; they stuff the skin of a conger eel with powdered stone; then give the obnoxious person a sly crack with it; and a rib or back-bone is broken, with no contusion to mark the external violence used. But Mr. Cooper and his fellows do their work with the knee-joint: it is round, and leaves no bruise. They subdue the patient by walking up and down him on their knees. If they don’t jump on him as well as promenade him, the man’s spirit is often the only thing broken; if they do, the man is apt to be broken bodily as well as mentally. Thus died Mr. Sizer in 1854, and two others quite recently. And how many more God only knows; we can’t count the stones at the bottom of a well. (Reade *Very* 170)

The final two sentences make a stronger case for the fact of Victorian asylum torture when the narrator says “Thus died Mr. Sizer in 1854, and two others quite recently. And how many more God only knows...” (Reade *Very* 170).¹ This statement of fact, that of naming a specific man who died in a specific year as well as naming an immeasurably large quantity, supports Reade’s claims for a “fiction built on truths” (Reade *Hard Cash* 1).

The final narrative function concerns ideologies. In *Very Hard Cash*, Reade draws upon the Victorian ideology of Christian morality. Regarding the ideological

function, Genette argues that “the narrator’s interventions, direct or indirect, with regard to the story can also take the more didactic form of an authorized commentary on the action” (256). The narrator’s commentary is authorized by the underlying ideologies of the text, specifically Victorian morals. Reade fulfills the ideological function when he inserts comments about his characters’ thoughts and actions or about social injustices.

One example of an ideological metanarrative occurs during the Dodds’ house auction. In this passage, the action narrated in the diegesis is of Jane using consoling Biblical language that both girls can draw strength from. Inserted into the text is a metanarrative commenting on the ideological soundness of Jane’s action. The narrator notes,

Jane kissed [Julia], and, with the tears in her eyes, proceeded to pour out, from a memory richly stored with Scripture, those blessed words it is full of, words that in our hours of ease or biblical criticism pass over the mind like some drowsy chime; but in the bitter day of anguish and bereavement, when the body is racked, the soul darkened, shine out like stars to the mariner; seem then first to swell to their real size and meaning, and come to writhing mortals like pitying seraphim, divinity on their faces and healing on their wings. (Reade *Very* 154)

This passage establishes the shared Christian tradition of the narrator/author and the characters; the shared ideology emerges when the narrator includes himself in the “hours of ease or biblical criticism” and the “bitter day of anguish and bereavement” which are alternately not affected and greatly influenced by Scripture, respectively (Reade *Very* 154). The prose of the girls and the narrator/author is strengthened, often inadvertently, by Christian morality.

These metanarrative functions may be used in the novel in conjunction with each other; that is, a metanarrative may fulfill one or more function at the same time without conflict. Several of the examples I have examined share obvious elements of another

function; for example, Jane's words of comfort to Julia in this last ideological passage also fulfill the explanatory function – this metanarrative explains the characters' actions in the two paragraphs before it in the diegesis.

In *Very Hard Cash*, Reade's metanarratives also illustrate two of Genette's narrative strategies: focalization alterations paralipsis and paralepsis and those which alter the chronological order of the narrative.

Paralipsis occurs in Reade's novel when the narrator skips content because it is either irrelevant or will be fully explained later in the diegesis. One example of a paralipsic metanarrative occurs during Julia, Edward, and Lucy Dodd's time spent in London. Here, the narrator suspends the diegesis to explain why he passes over the details of Julia's ministry to the poor. The narrator claims that "were I to enumerate the ghastly sights, the stifling loathsome odors, the vulgar horrors upon horrors this refined young lady faced, few of my readers would endure on paper for love of truth, what she endured in reality for love of suffering humanity, and of Him whose servant she aspired to be" (Reade *Very* 202). Not only does the narrator leave out content, he also provides a detailed explanation for the missing narrative. This detailed explanation gives the reader enough minutiae to understand why the narrator's paralipsic metanarrative is in place of a longer passage with even greater shocking detail. Paralipsic metanarratives like this one occur frequently in *Very Hard Cash* because the narrator must cover the action of several years in a confined space (the diegesis).

Paralepsis is the narrator's inclusion of extra information which is not relevant to the novel's development. This strategy also recurs in *Very Hard Cash*. One example of paralepsis in Reade's novel occurs during David Dodd's first long voyage home. Here,

the narrator interrupts the diegesis to insert extra comments about David's sailors which heighten the scene's tension and excitement. The narrator tells the reader to

Realize the situation, and the strange incongruity between the senses and the mind in these poor fellows! The day had ripened its beauty; beneath a purple heaven shone, sparkled, and laughed, a blue sea, in whose waves the tropical sun seemed to have fused his beams; and beneath that fair, sinless, peaceful sky, wafted by a balmy breeze over those smiling, transparent, golden waves, a blood-thirsty Pirate bore down on them with a crew of human tigers; and a lady babble babble babble babble babble babble babbled in their quivering ears. (Reade *Very* 71)

In this metanarrative, David's crew will soon be attacked by a ship of pirates in a tropical sea; the narrator's elaborate descriptions are full of adjectives. These descriptions, while pretty, do not need to be so exhaustive; the reader can reach the same conclusions about the ship's beautiful location with less detail. Reade incorporates elements of *paralepsis* into almost every scene of the novel; his detailed explanations of everything from Alfred's torture sessions in the asylums to Julia's agony at being abandoned on her wedding day contain excess information which the reader does not need to move forward in the narrative. This *paraleptic* detail does, however, lend itself to developing the novel's sensational content and case for social reform.

Reade also uses Genette's elements of narrative order throughout his novel. These elements are *prolepsis* and *analepsis*. Using *prolepsis*, the narrator interrupts the diegesis to remind the reader about information which has already been presented. One example of this technique occurs soon after David's return to England. Here, the narrator suspends the narrative at the beginning of a chapter to explain the future plot order and remind the reader of what has just happened. The narrator tells the reader that

The Hard Cash sailed from Canton [Asia] months before the boat-race at Henley recorded in Chapter 2.; but it landed in Barkington a fortnight after the last home event I recorded in its true series. Chapter IX.

Now this fortnight, as it happens, was fruitful of incidents; and must be dealt with at once. After that, “Love” and “Cash,” the converging branches of this story, will flow together in one stream. (Read *Very* 97)

The “Hard Cash” referred to is David’s fortune of £14,000 which he has brought home to his family upon his retirement as a merchant captain. Here, the narrator tells the reader which places the “Hard Cash” has already visited with David up to this point in the diegesis. This reference to the past is an example of Genette’s analepsis. In this passage, the narrator says that “the converging branches of this story will flow together in one stream” – by referring to the future, the narrator uses Genette’s prolepsis.

“Try and remember it is their misfortune, not their crime” – Reade’s Social Reform and Sensational Metanarratives

Metanarratives in Reade’s novel *Very Hard Cash* expose the unethical treatment of asylum patients by caregivers, relatives, and law-makers. Key passages provide horrifying details of the “madhouse” abuse performed on these victims and also illustrate Reade’s use of Genette’s functions and narrative strategies.

This passage describes Alfred’s second night at his first asylum. Here, the narrator uses physical sensations to explain the widespread attacks by vermin on patients. Alfred’s experience is used as a specific example of miserable conditions. The narrator tells the reader that

Just as he was dropping off he felt something crawl over his face. Instinctively he made a violent motion to put his hands up. Both hands were confined, he could not move them. He bounded; he flung, he writhed. His little persecutors were quiet a moment, but the next they began again: in vain he rolled and writhed, and shuddered with loathing inexpressible. They crawled, they smelt, they bit.

May a poor soul these little wretches had distracted with the very sleeplessness the mad-house professed to cure, not create. In conjunction with the opiates, the confinement, and the gloom of Silverton House, they

had driven many a feeble mind across the line that divides the weak and nervous from the unsound. (Reade *Very* 162)

By using the vague terms “something” and “loathing inexpressible,” Reade leaves the type of “little persecutors” up to the reader’s imagination (Reade *Very* 162). The vermin could be roaches, mice, bedbugs, lice, or any other creature which lives in an unclean room like Alfred’s. The narrator’s omission of the pests’ name is a form of paralipsis. Here, the narrator evokes the reader’s Christian ideologies and the Golden Rule – “do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” The reader’s horror at imagining another human living in such horrible conditions works in Reade’s favor. By continuing to present the reader with other shocking or disgusting tales from the asylum, Reade believes he can cause the reader to reform the system which allows such horrors to exist.

Another metanarrative explains the legal loopholes which allow family members to commit sane relatives to asylums; the narrator also explains the reasons for such treachery here. The narrator argues

For when an Englishman, sane or insane, is once pushed behind his back into a mad-house, those relatives who have hidden him from the public eye, i.e., from the eye of justice, can grab hold of his money behind his back, as they certified away his wits behind his back, and can administer it in the dark, and embezzle it, chanting “But for us the ‘dear deranged’ would waste it.” Nor do the monstrous enactments, which confer this unconstitutional power on subjects, and shield its exercise from the light and safeguard of Publicity, affix any penalty to the abuse of that power, if by one chance in a thousand detected. In Lunacy Law extremes of intellect meet: the British senator plays at Satan; and tempts human frailty and cupidity beyond what they are able to bear.

So behold a son at twenty-one years of age devoted by a father to imprisonment for life. But stop a minute; the mad statutes, which by the threefold temptation of Facility, Obscurity, and Impunity, insure the occasional incarceration and frequent detention of sane but moneyed men, do provide, though feebly, for their bare liberation, provided they don’t yield to the genius loci, and the natural effect of confinement plus anguish, by going mad, or dying. The Commissioners of Lunacy had power to liberate Alfred in spite of his relations. (Reade *Very* 186)

In this passage, the narrator explains a family's possible motivation for locking up a relative in an asylum – greed. The narrator states “those relatives...can grab hold of his money behind his back, as they certified away his wits behind his back, and can administer it in the dark, and embezzle it...” (Reade *Very* 186). This account fulfills Genette's explanatory function and is also vaguely analepsis, as the narrator uses generalities to describe Alfred's present situation as a prisoner. By detailing the steps such conniving families take, Reade once again describes an aspect of patient abuse – but with a new element. Here, the narrator adds that the Commissioners of Lunacy can stop this cycle of abuse. Reade's implication is clear – holding the commission accountable for its actions will curb cruelty and neglect like Alfred's.

Another metanarrative explains that both male and female patients were subjected to the same kinds of cruelty and physical abuse by their keepers. Here, Reade reveals in detail that women are psychologically abused by the female asylum workers. The narrator says that

In Drayton House the keeperesses eclipsed the keepers in cruelty to the poorer patients....With unflagging patience they applied the hourly torture of petty insolence, needless humiliation, unreasonable refusals, to the poor mad women; bored them with the poisoned gimlet, and made their hearts bleeding pin-cushions. But minute cruelty and petty caprice were not enough for them, though these never tired nor rested; they must vilify them too with degrading and savage names. (Reade *Very* 193)

Reade presents the psychological torture inflicted on female patients using elaborate diction and appeals to the reader's sympathy. The gory description of how the “keeperesses” “made [the patients'] hearts bleeding pin-cushions” calls up a vision of torture which elicits gasps of horror from the sensitive reader (Reade *Very* 193). Reade's use of the adjectives “needless,” “unreasonable,” and “petty” emphasizes that the workers

did not need to insult their patients in such a manner; these tortures “never tired nor rested,” leaving the reader with an image of the workers’ never-ending taunts and insults (Reade *Very* 193). The metanarrative continues with a description of physical abuse. Here, the female patients are physically assaulted by a form of water torture. Reade’s narrator claims that

this was not all; [the keepersesses] had got a large tank in a flagged room, nominally for cleanliness and cure, but really for bane and torture. For the least offense, or out of mere wantonness, they would drag a patient stark naked across the yard, and thrust her bodily under the water again and again, keeping her down till almost gone with suffocation, and dismissing her more dead than alive with obscene and insulting comments ringing in her ears, to get warm again in the cold. This my ladies called “tanking”. (Reade *Very* 193)

This “tanking” is described in so much detail that the reader can visualize each step involved. The patient is “drag[ged] stark naked across the yard, and thrust...bodily under the water again and again” until she is unable to breathe or stay warm (Reade *Very* 193). The narrator explains that the “obscene and insulting comments” are also used against the innocent patients while this water torture lasts.

In this passage, the narrator describes physical sensations felt by the patients. The frigid water and the cold stone room bring chills to the reader’s arms as he or she studies this passage. When the narrator tells the reader that the keepersesses “keep...her down til almost gone with suffocation, and dismiss...her more dead than alive,” the reader experiences the same shortness of breath as the afflicted patient and gasps along with her (Reade *Very* 193).

In the last section of this metanarrative, the narrator explains the harmful effect of this water torture on weak patients. One last shocking detail is given to the reader: the

patients were forced to drink their dirty bath water at mealtime and presumably between torture sessions:

In the ordinary morning ablutions they tanked without suffocating. But the immersion of the whole body in cold water was of itself a severe trial to those numerous patients in whom the circulation was weak; and, as medical treatment, hurtful and even dangerous. Finally these keepers, with diabolical insolence and cruelty, would bathe twenty patients in this tank, and then make them drink that foul water for their meals. (Reade *Very* 193)

Here, the narrator does not spare the reader's innocent sensibilities. By this point in the narrative, Reade has provided enough minutiae about torture for the reader to be somewhat used to the blunt mode of presentation. The whole metanarrative is paraleptic; that is, the metanarrative meticulously describes the misery of female asylum patients to the reader. Reade's careful use of detail ensures that his readers have a full understanding of the atrocious conditions in asylums and are thus ready to think about social reform.

Reade's goal for *Very Hard Cash* is to encourage his readers to reform society and the legal system. By portraying Alfred's imprisonment and other prisoners' suffering in detail, the narrator forces the reader to come to terms with social realities. The reviewer in *The Round Table* supports this claim by stating: "The life in the lunatic asylums is set forth with much more minuteness than is usual to the author. It is therefore startling in its reality, and awakens the mind to the existence of wrongs that were hardly dreamed of" ("Very Hard Cash" 295). The "startling" nature of Reade's realities and the "awakening" process that the readers undergo, combined with the existence of this supporting critique, show us that Reade's novel and his strategies were effective in reaching his audience and making them reevaluate this issue.

Notes

¹ The article “The System of Restraint in Our Public Asylums”, found in the *London Review of Politics, Society, Literature, Art, and Science* 8.193 (March 12, 1864), discusses in great detail the case of Reade’s “Mr. Sizer”. Not only are the contents recognizably similar, but Reade appears to have “borrowed” the anonymous author’s wording in several places. This article states, “in the Surrey Asylum at Wandsworth a man was done to death in a manner which excited great attention at the time, for the reason that it was accomplished in the name of science....It will be remembered this poor wretch was first knocked down with a torrent of water directed upon his head from a shower-bath of unusual dimensions, and in which he was immersed an unheard-of time, and then was finally put out of existence by means of a powerful dose of tartar emetic which paralyzed the weakened action of the heart. Yet all this was done apparently *secundum artent*. Better a thousand times the iron upon the wrists and the strait waistcoat binding the limbs – harmless, though irritating mechanical restraints – than these new methods of prostrating the muscles through the medium of the nervous system. There is no longer any fear of the ugly instruments in use of old, but there is a very great necessity to be watchful that the beneficent element – water – be not converted into an element of restraint of a much more objectionable nature.”

CHAPTER FOUR

Wilkie Collins's Textual Detection: Mystery and Metanarrative Suspense in *The Woman in White*

As the judge might once have heard it, so the Reader shall hear it now. No circumstance of importance, from the beginning to the end of the disclosure, shall be related on hearsay evidence. When the writer of these introductory lines (Walter Hartright, by name) happens to be more closely connected than others with the incidents to be recorded, he will describe them in his own person. When his experience fails, he will retire from the position of narrator; and his task will be continued, from the point at which he has left off, by other persons who can speak to the circumstances under notice from their own knowledge, just as clearly and positively as he has spoken before them.

Thus, the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in Court by more than one witness – with the same object, in both cases, to present the truth always in its most direct and most intelligible aspect; and to trace the course of one complete series of events, by making two persons who have been most closely connected with them, at each successive stage, relate their own experience, word for word. (Collins 9-10)

These two passages outline sensation novelist Wilkie Collins's mode of narration for *The Woman in White*: multiple narrators present the diegesis to the reader in a series of long metanarratives. Collins's argument for truthful representation in the second paragraph above highlights the second purpose for using sensational metanarratives: Collins and M.E. Braddon use metanarratives to present textual "clues" to the reader which, when arranged in the proper order, reveal the novel's mysteries and puzzles. This textual detecting is reminiscent of Collins's "story of an offence against the laws [as] told in Court by more than one witness" which he argues for in this passage (Collins 10). When Collins has the reader examine clues and "witness testimony" (the novel's metanarratives), he "deputizes" the reader as a textual detective whose goal is to "present

the truth always in its most direct and most intelligible aspect” (Collins 10). This reader/text/author/narrator collaboration means that readers become interested in the novel’s development and finish reading the novel; thus, one of Collins’s goals is fulfilled, as Sue Lonoff notes. Lonoff argues that Collins “was conscious of a bond between himself and his readers, and that consciousness affected every aspect of his novels, from format to content to significance” (2). This bond between Collins and his readers determined his level of success in the publishing industry; thus, by interacting with the reader Collins ensures the popularity of his novel as well as high sales figures.

Each metanarrative in *The Woman in White* is narrated by a different character in the form of a written eyewitness account. This novel is therefore written in the epistolary style. These accounts are structured as letters, journal excerpts, memoirs, and transcribed statements; the metanarratives also vary in terms of style, length, and relevant content. When Walter Hartright, amateur detective and main narrator, inserts one of these metanarratives into the main text, he forces the reader to pay attention to the new content and secondary narrator. This new content (or “testimony”) is a clue which illuminates either past or future action in the novel. Hartright expects the reader to follow his investigation by combining his clues to form judgments about the novel’s mysteries. His own narrative creates a frame for the metanarrative cluster in the center of the novel.

In short, the reader is asked to become a textual detective and solve mysteries with Walter, who does not know what he will do with the novel’s villains once they are caught. All Walter knows that he must do, and the reader along with him, is to solve the diegetic mysteries and puzzles and thus restore Laura’s rightful place in society. As Patrick Brantlinger states in his genre-encompassing article “What is ‘Sensational’ about

the ‘Sensation Novel’?”, detectives like Walter “do not have a solution but they know how to arrive at one” (16). The sensations and mysterious events detailed in each metanarrative hold the reader’s attention and guarantee he or she will continue reading until all facts are revealed and connected at the end of the novel, where the reader discovers that solutions to the novel’s problems are no longer needed.

In *The Woman in White*, artist Walter Hartright falls in love with his rich pupil Laura Fairlie; her sister Marian Halcombe forces them apart because of social differences as well as Laura’s previous engagement to Sir Percival Glyde. This engagement was orchestrated by Laura’s deceased father Mr. Fairlie; Laura agrees to marry Sir Percival out of filial duty. After the wedding, the Glydes, Marian, and Laura’s uncle and aunt Count and Countess Fosco live at Blackwater Park. At Blackwater Park, Laura is abused by her husband, Count Fosco manipulates everyone, and Marian falls ill. During this illness, Marian and Laura are separated, and Laura’s identity is switched with that of her other half-sister, Anne Catherick. Anne claims to know a dreadful secret about Sir Percival, but never reveals the secret. As a result of their confused identities, Anne dies and is buried as Laura at Limmeridge, and Laura is committed to an insane asylum. After Walter returns from Central America he lives with in London with Marian and Laura, who has escaped from the asylum. There, under assumed names, Walter and Marian work to restore Laura’s true identity and her rightful place in society. In the novel’s multiple climaxes, Walter discovers Sir Percival’s secret and Count Fosco’s own secret, and both villains die. Walter and Laura marry and live with Marian in Limmeridge.

Collins’s metanarratives that break into Walter Hartright’s narrative are narrated by Laura’s lawyer Vincent Gilmore, Marian Halcombe, Laura’s uncle Frederick Fairlie,

Count Fosco, Blackwater Park housekeeper Eliza Michelson, Fosco household cook Hester Pinhorn, Dr. Alfred Goodricke, funeral assistant Jane Gould, and Anne Catherick's mother Mrs. Catherick. Because Walter is the main narrator and "textual organizer," his text is the diegesis and thus is interrupted by all metanarratives and their narrators, called "metanarrators" here. As narrator-in-chief, Walter can also interrupt his own narrative and insert metanarratives of his own narration.

Not all of Collins's metanarrators stay focused on the assigned topic; Frederick Fairlie and Marian have brief passages of irrelevant content which distract the reader from the important details. Each of these metanarratives contains smaller narratives, or *meta-metanarratives* as defined by Gerard Genette; meta-metanarratives suspend the universe of the metanarrative, called the *metadiegesis*, for the same reasons that metanarratives suspend the diegesis (footnote 41, 228). The meta-metanarratives in *The Woman in White* take the same forms as their metanarratives: these passages are either distracting or explanatory. Collins's meta-metanarratives fulfill the same narrative functions as his metanarratives: these functions are narrative, directing, communication, testimonial, and ideological. Genette's functions help the reader interact with the text of *The Woman in White*.

When Collins uses a distracting metanarrative or meta-metanarrative he makes the reader focus on intrusive content which is disconnected from the diegesis. One type of metadiegetic narrative distracts the reader from the main narrative: a suspension is supposed to distract the reader from the diegesis or metadiegesis in order to insert secondary information which may or may not be relevant for plot development. For example, near the beginning of *The Woman in White*, Walter describes Laura's former

governess Mrs. Vesey in greater detail than the reader needs to be able to continue reading the novel. This humorous portrayal distracts the reader from learning about Limmeridge House and the principal inhabitants, Laura and Marian. Walter theorizes that

Nature has so much to do in this world, and is engaged in generating such a vast variety of co-existent productions, that she must surely be now and then too flurried and confused to distinguish between the different processes that she is carrying on at the same time. Starting from this point of view, it will always remain my private persuasion that Nature was absorbed in making cabbages when Mrs. Vesey was born, and that the good lady suffered the consequences of a vegetable preoccupation in the mind of the Mother of us all. (Collins 48-49)

While Walter's comparison of Mrs. Vesey to cabbages is amusing, it is irrelevant for the novel's development – the vegetative Mrs. Vesey does not play an important part in the novel's mysteries and puzzles. The reader is only momentarily distracted by a metanarrative of this length; however, longer diversions may cause reader confusion and delay the reader's textual mystery-solving. This delay in turn creates more diegetic space for the narrator to insert new content; new content means that the novel contains more detail and is thus more interesting for the reader.

Explanatory metadiegetic narratives and meta-metanarratives contain a description, analysis, or interpretation of a character's statements and actions. Collins uses explanation throughout *The Woman in White* to call the reader's attention to specific details; in this kind of metanarrative or meta-metanarrative he also illuminates unclear statements by conversations between characters. The multiple narrators of Collins's metanarratives each explain a specific moment in time as represented by each page of their text. An example of an explanatory meta-metanarrative occurs when Marian pauses her metadiegetic narrative to explain and summarize her actions one night at Blackwater

Park. Here, Marian tells her journal that she wrote in her journal, sat with Laura, and went downstairs to say good night to the other characters:

It was then twenty minutes to nine. After going to my room to get my journal, I returned, and sat with Laura; sometimes writing, sometimes stopping to talk with her. Nobody came near us, and nothing happened. We remained together till ten o'clock. I then rose; said my last cheering words; and wished her good night. She locked her door again, after we had arranged that I should come in and see her the first thing in the morning.

I had a few sentences more to add to my diary, before going to bed myself, and, as I went down again to the drawing-room after leaving Laura, for the last time that weary day, I resolved merely to show myself there, to make my excuses, and then to retire an hour earlier than usual, for the night. (Collins 309)

This explanatory passage fills a gap in Marian's metanarrative between her previous actions – writing letters begging for assistance to extricate Laura from her abusive marriage – and the content to follow which concerns an important conversation Marian overhears between Sir Percival and Count Fosco.

When Collins communicates with the reader, he attempts to establish a connection between the reader and metanarrator while at the same time illustrating the metanarrator's opinion of him or herself. Lonoff also notes that tacit communication exists between reader and author when she argues that “[t]he voice of the narrator breaking in upon the story reaffirmed this sense of solidarity [i.e. respectable people should distrust stage melodramas] and tacitly assured the reader that he was an object of solicitude” (9). The narrator's communicative intrusions provide comfort for the reader and make him or her more receptive to scandalous diegetic content. In a communicative metanarrative or meta-metanarrative in *The Woman in White*, a metanarrator includes content which interests the reader. The author implicitly asks the reader to evaluate and arrange this

content in order to discover textual clues. When a metanarrator uses a communicative meta-metanarrative, he or she desires a relationship with the reader.

Walter's narrative contains many examples of Genette's communication and directive functions. In this passage late in the diegesis, Walter once again tells the reader why the novel is organized in such a unique way; this explanation contains an excuse for abruptly removing and inserting various characters in the diegesis. Walter's explanatory metanarrative gives the reader a "buffer zone" between the previous diegetic content (musings about how to catch Count Fosco) and the content which will immediately follow the metanarrative suspension (Walter's friend Professor Pesca's sudden reappearance in the diegesis). Walter tells the reader that:

It is the necessary law of such a story as mine, that the persons concerned in it only appear when the course of events takes them up – they come and go, not by favour [*sic*] of my personal partiality, but by right of their direct connection with the circumstances to be detailed. For this reason, not Pesca only, but my mother and sister as well, have been left far in the background of the narrative. My visits to the Hampstead cottage; my mother's belief in the denial of Laura's identity which the conspiracy had accomplished; my vain efforts to overcome the prejudice, on her part and on my sister's, to which, in their jealous affection for me, they both continued to adhere; the painful necessity which that prejudice imposed on me of concealing my marriage from them till they had learnt to do justice to my wife – all these little domestic occurrences have been left unrecorded, because they were not essential to the main interest of the story. It is nothing that they added to my anxieties and embittered my disappointments – the steady march of events has inexorably passed them by. (Collins 556)

In this passage, Walter attempts to interact with and direct his readers by explaining his structural choices and the sudden reappearance of characters involved only in the early sections of the diegesis. Walter's use of the phrases "It is the necessary law of such a story as mine" and "For this reason" signal a desire to interact with the reader on a more personal level through explanations (Collins 556). Collins uses communicative

metanarratives like this one to draw the reader into the novel's content; by using passages to direct the reader and to explain structural choices Collins strengthens his interaction with the reader. This interaction in turn ensures the novel's popularity and success.

Communicative metanarratives and meta-metanarratives also reveal a metanarrator's opinion of him or herself. In the previous passage, Walter's self-perception is visible in the first sentence. Walter's explanation contains phrases which hint at self-righteousness; phrases such as "my vain efforts to overcome the prejudice, on her part and on my sister's" illustrate Walter's self-absorption (Collins 556). This phrase shows that Walter believes that his opinions are the "right," and indeed only, opinions which his sister and mother should adopt about Laura's situation. This controlling attitude emerges in another phrase which re-explains his differences with family: "the painful necessity which that prejudice [of Walter's mother and sister] imposed on me of concealing my marriage from them till they had learnt to do justice to my wife" (Collins 556). Why Walter feels he must hide his marriage from his relatives is suspect. He claims that he wants his mother and sister to improve their opinion of Laura before they learn the news; but Walter's desire to change the family's attitude lowers himself in the reader's estimation and causes the reader to question his true motives.

Collins's metanarrators uses testimonial meta-metanarratives to prove that he or she is telling the truth about a textual occurrence. In *The Woman in White*, Walter frequently testifies as to the origins of his information. Soon after he moves with Laura and Marian to London, he decides to collect written accounts of the events which he missed while overseas. In this passage, Walter explains the sources of some of the novel's collected content. Walter tells the reader,

I instructed Marian to write (observing the same caution which I practised [*sic*] myself) to Mrs. Michelson. She was to express, if she pleased, some general suspicion of Count Fosco's conduct; and she was to ask the housekeeper to supply us with a plain statement of events, in the interests of truth. While we were waiting for the answer, which reached us in a week's time, I went to the doctor in St. John's Wood; introducing myself as sent by Miss Halcombe, to collect, if possible, more particulars of her sister's last illness than Mr. Kyrle had found the time to procure. By Mr. Goodricke's assistance, I obtained a copy of the certificate of death, and an interview with the woman (Jane Gould) who had been employed to prepare the body for the grave. Through this person, I also discovered a means of communicating with the servant, Hester Pinhorn. She had recently left her place, in consequence of a disagreement with her mistress; and she was lodging with some people in the neighbourhood [*sic*] whom Mrs. Gould knew. In the manner here indicated, I obtained the Narratives of the housekeeper, of the doctor, of Jane Gould, and of Hester Pinhorn, exactly as they are presented in these pages. (Collins 429)

Here, Walter explains how he "obtained" the metanarrative accounts of Mrs. Michelson, Mr. Goodricke, Jane Gould, and Hester Pinhorn. This straightforward passage fulfills Genette's testimonial function by "indicating the source" of the novel's information (Collins 429).

In *The Woman in White*, ideological metanarratives contain Christian morals which the reader can relate to. Walter suspends his narrative to insert this metanarrative about moral platitudes and Christian behavior; this metanarrative appears after he receives a letter from Mrs. Catherick. He explains his thoughts here:

As this surmise floated through my mind, there rose on my memory the remembrance of the Scripture denunciation which we have all thought of, in our time, with wonder and with awe: 'The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children.' But for the fatal resemblance between the two daughters of one father, the conspiracy of which Anne had been the innocent instrument and Laura the innocent victim, could never have been planned. With what unerring and terrible directness the long chain of circumstances led down from the thoughtless wrong committed by the father to the heartless injury inflicted on the child! (Collins 546)

Walter's scripture quotation does not contain a reference to the specific passage in the Bible from which it came (Exodus); this lack of information shows that Collins expects the reader to know where this quotation is located in the Bible, and what it refers to.

Walter's application of the quote to Laura and Anne's predicament parallels the Bible's intended lesson – sinners' actions affect their families. In this case, Laura and Anne's "heartless injury" is "directly" connected to their father's sin – he impregnated Anne's unmarried mother but did not marry her, nor did he take care of Anne like a Christian Victorian father was supposed to.

Collins also incorporates focalization alterations and elements of narrative order into *The Woman in White*. The textual strategies which affect narrative order are prolepsis and analepsis. Prolepsis concerns the future actions of the text and thus resembles foreshadowing; in some cases, prolepsis and foreshadowing perform the same action. In *The Woman in White*, Collins frequently uses prolepsis to encourage the reader to continue reading. Collins uses analepsis, or the frequent references to past narrative events, throughout his novel. One passage soon after Walter meets Marian and the recently liberated Laura uses both prolepsis and analepsis. Using prolepsis, Walter quotes one of his promises to Laura earlier in the novel. The analeptic section of this metanarrative describes the steps Walter will take to restore Laura's true identity. Walter explains:

Before the sun of that day had set, before the last glimpse of the home which was closed against her had passed from our view, the farewell words I spoke, when we parted at Limmeridge House, had been recalled by both of us; repeated by me, recognized by her. 'If ever the time comes when the devotion of my whole heart and soul and strength will give you a moment's happiness, or spare you a moment's sorrow, will you try to remember the poor drawing-master who has taught you?' She, who now remembered so little of the trouble and terror of a later time, remembered

those words, and laid her poor head innocently and trustingly on the bosom of the man who had spoken them. In that moment, when she called me by my name, when she said, ‘They have tried to make me forget everything, Walter; but I remember Marian, and I remember *you*’ – in that moment, I, who had long since given her my love, gave her my life, and thanked God that it was mine to bestow on her...In the right of her calamity, in the right of her friendlessness, she was mine at last! Mine to support, to protect, to cherish, to restore. Mine to love and honour [*sic*] as father and brother both. Mine to vindicate through all risks and all sacrifices – through the hopeless struggle against Rank and Power, through the long fight with armed deceit and fortified Success, through the waste of my reputation, through the loss of my friends, through the hazard of my life. (Collins 406-7)

Walter’s previous statement is quoted here word-for-word: “If ever the time comes when the devotion of my whole heart and soul and strength will give you a moment’s happiness, or spare you a moment’s sorrow, will you try to remember the poor drawing-master who has taught you?” (Collins 406). This quotation and the reference Walter makes to the past, “the farewell words I spoke...had been recalled by both of us”, are examples of analepsis.

This narrative intrusion also uses prolepsis to tell the reader what will happen to Walter in the future. When Walter claims that Laura belongs to him now “through the hopeless struggle against Rank and Power, through the long fight with armed deceit and fortified Success, through the waste of my reputation, through the loss of my friends, through the hazard of my life”, he lists the different problems he will have to overcome before the end of the novel to “keep” her (Collins 407). The two phrases “waste of [his] reputation” and “the loss of [his] friends” refer to his mother and sister’s unwillingness in the narrative future to accept Laura under her own identity. Walter will lose “friendships” with others who will argue he is being taken advantage of by an

opportunist. Walter's "life hazard" is a reference to his future near-death experience in the Welmingham church fire that will kill Sir Percival.

The second group of narrative strategies is focalization alterations: paralipsis and paralepsis. *Paralipsis* describes when the narrator gives the reader less information than is authorized by the novel's development. Near the end of *The Woman in White*, Walter fails to record Count Fosco's narrative at the moment in which the contents are read aloud to him. The omission is easily recognized in this passage:

[Fosco] sat down cross-legged on the floor, among his papers; strung them together with a bodkin and a piece of string; revised them; wrote all the titles and honours [*sic*] by which he was personally distinguished, at the head of the first page; and then read the manuscript to me, with loud theatrical emphasis and profuse theatrical gesticulation. The reader will have an opportunity, ere long, of forming his own opinion of the document. It will be sufficient to mention here that it answered my purpose. (Collins 584-585)

Instead of placing the contents of Fosco's manuscript in the diegesis, Walter places a sentence explaining the omission. The reader is merely told "[i]t will be sufficient to mention here that [the manuscript] answered my purpose" (Collins 585). This lack of information forces the reader to continue reading in order to find out what Fosco writes.

Genette supports an argument made by Roland Barthes regarding paralipsis and narrative "cheating." This narrative cheating occurs when the narrator fails to include information concerning his or her own culpable actions into the diegesis. Genette states that

Apropos of what he calls the "intermingling of the two systems," Barthes rightly mentions the "cheating" that, in Agatha Christie, consists of focalizing a narrative like *The Sittaford Mystery* or *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* through the murderer while omitting from his "thoughts" simply the memory of the murder; and we know that the most classical detective story, although generally focalized through the investigating detective,

most often hides from us a part of his discoveries and inductions until the final revelation. (196)

The narrative cheating which Barthes and Genette refer to occurs in *The Woman in White*, but in a different context than the one found in Christie's novels. Collins's cheating is found in Count Fosco's first metanarrative, which immediately follows Marian's journal entries in the diegesis. In this metanarrative, Fosco fails to specifically mention his involvement in Sir Percival's abusive and controlling actions at Blackwater Park, even though Fosco was the mastermind behind each brilliant and mysterious decision concerning Sir Percival's affairs. What Fosco does mention on the subject of responsibility concerns his future actions. Fosco says,

I condole with her [Marian] on the inevitable failure of every plan that she has formed for her sister's benefit. At the same time, I entreat her to believe that the information which I have derived from her diary will in no respect help me to contribute to that failure. It simply confirms the plan of conduct which I had previously arranged. I have to thank these pages for awakening the finest sensibilities in my nature – nothing more. (Collins 331)

This reference to the future, or prolepsis, draws the reader's attention away from the omitted content (Barthes's cheating) and directs it instead at a new subject: Fosco's future plans for Marian and Laura.

Collins uses paralepsis when he inserts extraneous, irrelevant details into the text of his novel. In *The Woman in White*, Mrs. Michelson's metanarrative contains a meta-metanarrative which discusses her opinions about the count's culpability for Laura's troubles. Mrs. Michelson's metanarrative describes the time period in which Marian was ill at Blackwater Park. Any comments she makes about Count Fosco's involvement in separating Marian and Laura are extraneous, unnecessary information and as such, are paraleptic. In this narrative intrusion, Mrs. Michelson says,

In the first place, I wish to record my own personal conviction that no blame whatever, in connexion [*sic*] with the events which I have now related, attaches to Count Fosco. I am informed that a dreadful suspicion has been raised, and that some very serious constructions are placed upon his lordship's conduct. My persuasion of the Count's innocence remains, however, quite unshaken. If he assisted Sir Percival in sending me to Torquay, he assisted under a delusion, for which, as a foreigner and a stranger, he was not to blame. If he was concerned in bringing Mrs. Rubelle to Blackwater Park, it was his misfortune and not his fault, when that foreign person was base enough to assist a deception planned and carried out by the master of the house. I protest, in the interests of morality, against blame being gratuitously and wantonly attached to the proceedings of the Count. (Collins 390-391)

This commentary is unauthorized because it states Mrs. Michelson's opinion, not proven facts, that Count Fosco is innocent. She claims that there is no evidence to support Fosco's involvement, but yet she does not state any proof that he is not responsible either. The length of this passage also supports my assertion that it is *paraleptic*. If Mrs. Michelson had briefly stated, in one sentence, her belief in Count Fosco's innocence, it could have been overlooked by the reader. However, because her defense extends over an entire paragraph, the reader's attention is drawn to the content contained therein. The reader's focus is centered on Mrs. Michelson's bias, and the truthfulness of her entire *metanarrative* is called into question as a result.

Genette's advice concerning focalized narrative interpretation is important for us to remember. Genette says that "we should not confuse the information given by a focalized narrative with the interpretation the reader is called on to give of it (or that he gives without being invited to)" (197). This claim means that the reader's interpretation of the diegetic and metadiegetic content is sometimes different from the meaning of the actual content itself. Critic Winifred Hughes notes Collins's discrepancies in her work *The Maniac in the Cellar*. Hughes argues that "[t]here are suggestions, as yet fleeting

and indirect, that the same facts or events will bear opposing interpretations, according to the different perspectives from which they are evaluated” (140). I argue that the reader’s perspective is different from that of the narrator, obviously because of the difference in knowledge, and thus their interpretations are forever bound to be in opposition.

For example, in *The Woman in White*, Collins leads the reader to suspect that there is a biological connection between Laura and Anne, but Walter as narrator does not confirm this assumption until after he reads Mrs. Catherick’s letter thanking him for “wreaking vengeance” on Sir Percival. Walter explains to the reader his logical deductions about Anne’s parentage in this metanarrative:

Knowing, now, that Mr. Philip Fairlie had been at Varneck Hall in the autumn of eighteen hundred and twenty-six, and that Mrs. Catherick had been living there in service at the same time, we knew also: – first, that Anne had been born in June, eighteen hundred and twenty-seven; secondly, that she had always presented an extraordinary personal resemblance to Laura; and, thirdly, that Laura herself was strikingly like her father....Such were the facts we knew; such was the character of the man. Surely, the plain inference that follows needs no pointing out? (Braddon 545)

Here, Walter proves to the reader that Anne is Laura’s sister and Mr. Philip Fairlie’s daughter. The reader’s uninformed assumption about Anne’s parentage is thus replaced by a logical conclusion supported by facts.

Textual Detection and Metanarrative Suspense – Unraveling the Novel’s Secrets

Collins uses metanarrative suspense in *The Woman in White* to involve the reader in the diegetic action as a textual detective. This reader/author interaction results in an increase in the author’s popularity. Metanarratives and meta-metanarratives in this novel contain clues and sensations which the reader is supposed to arrange and analyze to solve

a mystery or mysteries; these passages also illustrate Collins's use of narrative functions and strategies.

The mystery evaluated here concerns Sir Percival's "secret" which is known only by himself and Mrs. Catherick. The secret is first introduced in the diegesis by Anne Catherick, Mrs. Catherick's mentally ill daughter, when she first meets Laura at Blackwater Park. Here, Marian asks Laura what she did to try to learn the secret from Anne:

'Surely, you followed her?'

'Yes; my anxiety made me bold enough to rise and follow her. Just as I reached the entrance, she appeared again, suddenly, round the side of the boat-house. "The secret," I whispered to her – "wait and tell me the secret!" She caught hold of my arm, and looked at me, with wild, frightened eyes. "Not now," she said; "we are not alone – we are watched. Come here to-morrow, at this time – by yourself – mind – by yourself." She pushed me roughly into the boat-house again; and I saw her no more.'

(Collins 276)

In this passage, Laura and Marian discuss the end of her long and confusing conversation with Anne about Sir Percival and his secret. Here, Anne tells Laura to return tomorrow by herself and then she will tell her the secret. Anne's statement "Come here to-morrow, at this time" is a directive which tells the reader to read further and find out what Laura and Anne will talk about the next day. This passage contains a textual clue – Anne's instructions – for future action in the diegesis. Collins's reference to the future here is a use of Genette's prolepsis.

The next discussion of the secret is between Laura and Marian again. Their conversation occurs after Laura was locked in her bedroom by Sir Percival after he discovered her waiting for Anne at the boathouse. Laura was able to read a letter which

Anne left behind for her to read; Marian recorded the letter in her diary. Marian asks
Laura,

‘Can you remember what the writing was? Do you think you can repeat it to me?’

‘In substance I can, Marian. It was very short. You would have remembered it, word for word.’

‘Try to tell me what the substance was, before we go any further.’

She complied. I write the lines down here, exactly as she repeated them to me. They ran thus:

I was seen with you, yesterday, by a tall stout old man, and had to run to save myself. He was not quick enough on his feet to follow me, and he lost me among the trees. I dare not risk coming back here to-day, at the same time. I write this, and hide it in the sand, at six in the morning, to tell you so. When we speak next of your wicked husband’s Secret we must speak safely or not at all. Try to have patience. I promise you shall see me again; and that soon.

A. C.’ (Collins 292)

Anne’s letter interrupts Marian’s metadiegesis in this passage; this means that Anne’s letter is a meta-metanarrative. This meta-metanarrative refers to “yesterday” as it was described in Marian’s journal entry; Anne’s reference to “yesterday” is an example of analepsis. Anne makes Laura a vague promise for the future, “I promise you shall see me again; and that soon,” thus incorporating prolepsis into the meta-metanarrative.

At the end of Marian’s metanarrative (in her last journal entry), she records a conversation she overheard between Sir Percival and Count Fosco. Marian’s recorded eavesdropping is another clue about Sir Percival’s secret for the reader to consider. Here, Count Fosco tells Sir Percival that

‘You have had a secret from me, Percival. There is a skeleton in your cupboard here at Blackwater Park, that has peeped out, in these last few days, at other people besides yourself.’

‘Well, suppose it has. If it doesn’t concern you, you needn’t be curious about it, need you?’

‘Do I look curious about it?’

‘Yes, you do.’

‘So! so! my face speaks the truth, then? What an immense foundation of good there must be in the nature of a man who arrives at my age, and whose face has not yet lost the habit of speaking the truth! – Come, Glyde! Let us be candid one with the other. This secret of yours has sought me: I have not sought it. Let us say I am curious – do you ask me, as your old friend, to respect your secret, and to leave it, once for all, in your own keeping?’

‘Yes – that’s just what I do ask.’

‘Then my curiosity is at an end. It dies in me, from this moment.’
(Collins 322-323)

In this conversation, Count Fosco asks Sir Percival to tell him what his secret is. Sir Percival declines; this refusal to share information once again leaves the reader guessing about what the secret is. Collins uses reminders such as this one to keep the reader interested in the development of this textual mystery.

Fosco’s statement about “a skeleton in your cupboard here at Blackwater Park” refers to the secret that Anne keeps claiming to know. Fosco learns of this secret when he overhears Marian and Laura’s conversations; Fosco asks Sir Percival the significance of this secret here. Sir Percival’s evasive answers show the reader that even his closest friend does not know his secret – the reader must look for clues about its contents elsewhere in the text.

Collins’s clues about Sir Percival’s secret are absent from the text until Walter returns from Central America and moves to London with Marian and Laura. After Laura’s health slowly returns due to Marian’s careful attention, Walter decides to begin his search for the truth about her identity. Marian counsels Walter about the steps he must take in this search. In this passage, Walter tells Marian that Sir Percival can be manipulated into admitting his role in Laura’s troubles by using his secret as leverage.

To do so, Marian and Walter must first discover what this secret is. They must actively seek out clues to uncover the secret. Walter says to Marian,

‘Marian! There is a weak place we both know of in Sir Percival’s life – ’

‘You mean the secret!’

‘Yes: the Secret. It is our only sure hold on him. I can force him from his position of security, I can drag him and his villainy into the face of day, by no other means. Whatever the Count may have done, Sir Percival has consented to the conspiracy against Laura from another motive besides the motive of gain. You heard him tell the Count that he believed his wife knew enough to ruin him? You heard him say that he was a lost man if the secret of Anne Catherick was known?’

‘Yes! yes! I did.’

‘Well, Marian, when our other resources have failed us, I mean to know the secret. My old superstition clings to me, even yet. I say again the woman in white is a living influence in our three lives. The End is appointed; the End is drawing us on – and Anne Catherick, dead in her grave, points the way to it still!’ (Collins 442)

In this conversation, Walter makes another analeptic observation about past narrative content – he mentions that Marian overheard Sir Percival say the secret could ruin him. That reminder refers to a previous passage from Marian’s metanarrative. The longer conversation described by Marian at the end of her journal entries contains this admission.

The “End” that “Anne Catherick, dead in her grave, points the way to” is a prolepsic statement as it directs the reader to a place in the novel’s future – the “End” of the novel’s mysteries, and the end of the diegesis (Collins 442).

The next textual clue which Walter presents to the reader is in the form of an explanatory metanarrative. In this passage, Walter explains the logical progression of actions he will take in the future of the narrative. Walter’s main goal is to uncover the mystery of Sir Percival’s secret so that he can manipulate Sir Percival. Walter says,

The way to the Secret lay through the mystery, hitherto impenetrable to all of us, of the woman in white. The approach to that, in its turn, might be gained by obtaining the assistance of Anne Catherick's mother; and the only ascertainable means of prevailing on Mrs. Catherick to act or to speak in the matter, depended on the chance of my discovering local particulars and family particulars, first of all, from Mrs. Clements. After thinking the subject over carefully, I felt certain that I could only begin the new inquiries by placing myself in communication with the faithful friend and protectress [*sic*] of Anne Catherick. (Collins 447)

This metanarrative briefly tells the reader what Walter will do next in the story. First, Walter needs to speak to Mrs. Clements and find out about the Cathericks. Then, Walter will use this information in his conversation with Mrs. Catherick and hopefully learn the truth about Sir Percival's secret. This detailed "to-do" list is a prolepsic clue: Walter does go speak to Mrs. Clements and Mrs. Catherick.

After interviewing Mrs. Catherick, Walter writes metanarratives which contain more of his thoughts and deductions on the mystery so far. This next metanarrative describes what Walter knows and assumes about Sir Percival's secret based on Mrs. Catherick's information. Walter tells the reader,

Reasoning on these assumptions, and always bearing in mind the one certain fact to guide me, that Mrs. Catherick was in possession of the Secret, I easily understood that it was Sir Percival's interest to keep her at Welmingham, because her character in that place was certain to isolate her from all communication with female neighbours [*sic*], and to allow her no opportunities of talking incautiously, in moments of free intercourse with inquisitive bosom friends. But what was the mystery to be concealed? Not Sir Percival's infamous connexion [*sic*] with Mrs. Catherick's disgrace – for the neighbours [*sic*] were the very people who knew of it. Not the suspicion that he was Anne's father – for Welmingham was the place in which that suspicion must inevitably exist. If I accepted the guilty appearances described to me, as unreservedly as others had accepted them; if I drew from them the same superficial conclusion which Mr. Catherick and all his neighbours [*sic*] had drawn – where was the suggestion, in all that I had heard, of a dangerous secret between Sir Percival and Mrs. Catherick, which had been kept hidden from that time to this?

And yet, in those stolen meetings, in those familiar whisperings between the clerk's wife and 'the gentleman in mourning', the clue to discovery existed beyond a doubt.

Was it possible that appearances, in this case, had pointed one way, while the truth lay, all the while, unsuspected, in another direction? Could Mrs. Catherick's assertion that she was the victim of a dreadful mistake, by any possibility be true? Or, assuming it to be false, could the conclusion which associated Sir Percival with her guilt, have been founded in some inconceivable error? Had Sir Percival, by any chance, courted the suspicion that was wrong, for the sake of diverting from himself some other suspicion that was right? Here, if I could find it – here was the approach to the Secret, hidden deep under the surface of the apparently unpromising story which I had just heard. (Collins 462-463)

In this explanatory metanarrative, Walter's assumptions about the novel's clues thus far are shared with the reader. These passages allow the reader to "compare" his or her own assertions to Walter's and see if they correspond. Thus far, Walter and the reader have discovered that Mrs. Catherick is not as independent as she claims. Walter and the reader also know that Sir Percival had taken advantage of the scandal created by the gossips of Welmingham to control Mrs. Catherick. These two characters capitalize on each other's secrets and blackmail each other for different reasons – Mrs. Catherick for money so that she does not have to depend on the allowance left by her estranged husband, and Sir Percival for Mrs. Catherick's silence on the subject of his illegitimacy.

Several sentences in Walter's metanarrative here specifically discuss past diegetic events. The reference to these previous actions is an example of Genette's analepsis. When Walter says that Sir Percival's reason for forcing Mrs. Catherick to stay in Welmingham is to ensure her silence, Walter refers to the scandal created when the town thought the two conspirators were having an affair. The scandal also concerned Anne's parentage – Welmingham gossips thought that Anne was Sir Percival's daughter and not Mr. Catherick's. A reference to the past is also in the sentence, "And yet, in those stolen

meetings, in those familiar whisperings between the clerk's wife and 'the gentleman in mourning', the clue to discovery existed beyond a doubt" (Collins 463). The meetings which Walter refers to took place so that Mrs. Catherick could let Sir Percival alter the church records to show his parents' marriage.

The next diegetic clue about the secret and Anne's knowledge of its contents comes from her former caregiver and friend, Mrs. Clements. In Walter's conversation with Mrs. Clements, she tells him that Anne often spoke of the secret as if she really knew what it was; in reality, Anne knew nothing more than that a secret existed. Walter asks Mrs. Clements about Anne's connection with Sir Percival:

'You know, Mrs. Clements, why Sir Percival Glyde shut her up?'

'I only know what Anne herself told me, sir. The poor thing used to ramble and wander about it, sadly. She said her mother had got some secret of Sir Percival's to keep, and had let it out to her, long after I left Hampshire – and when Sir Percival found she knew it, he shut her up. But she never could say what it was, when I asked her. All she could tell me was that her mother might be the ruin and destruction of Sir Percival, if she chose. Mrs. Catherick may have let out just as much as that, and no more. I'm next to certain I should have heard the whole truth from Anne, if she had really known it, as she pretended to do – and as she very likely fancied she did, poor soul.'

This idea had more than once occurred to my own mind. I had already told Marian that I doubted whether Laura was really on the point of making any important discovery when she and Anne Catherick were disturbed by Count Fosco at the boat-house. It was perfectly in character with Anne's mental affliction that she should assume an absolute knowledge of the Secret on no better grounds than vague suspicion, derived from hints which her mother had incautiously let drop in her presence. Sir Percival's guilty distrust would, in that case, infallibly inspire him with the false idea that Anne knew all from her mother, just as it had afterwards fixed in his mind the equally false suspicion that his wife knew all from Anne. (Collins 465-466)

The metanarrative in the third paragraph contains Walter's reflections on what he has just learned from Mrs. Clements. Collins includes this explanation to keep the reader informed about Walter's clues and assertions so far. Walter says that he had formed the

same opinion as Mrs. Clements about Anne's knowledge of Sir Percival's secret: both characters believe that Anne never knew the secret at all but pretended to do so in order to have a small amount of power over Sir Percival.

Collins incorporates Genette's testimonial function into this passage as well. Walter claims that "[t]his idea [about Anne's true knowledge] had more than once occurred to my own mind" (Collins 466). By making this claim, Walter affirms to himself that he has followed the correct order of textual clues and discovered the "right" answers to his questions about Sir Percival's secret. Walter's self-confidence in the quoted metanarrative is subtle; this self-confidence is transferred to the reader by Walter's recitation of his conclusions about Anne and Sir Percival. One of Walter's conclusions leads to the next, which leads to the next, much like the detection process in this novel.

Walter reveals another clue about Sir Percival's secret in this next metanarrative. Here, he analyzes the information he learned from Mrs. Catherick. In this passage, Walter explains to the reader the conclusion he has drawn:

Now, the woman's paroxysm of terror associated the crime, either directly or indirectly, with the vestry, and convinced me that she had been more than the mere witness of it – she was also the accomplice, beyond a doubt....The next consideration to be disposed of led me a step farther from this point.

Mrs. Catherick's undisguised contempt for Sir Percival plainly extended to his mother as well. She had referred, with the bitterest sarcasm, to the great family he had descended from – 'especially by the mother's side'. What did this mean? There appeared to be only two explanations of it. Either his mother's birth had been low? Or his mother's reputation was damaged by some hidden flaw with which Mrs. Catherick and Sir Percival were both privately acquainted? I could only put the first explanation to the test by looking at the register of her marriage, and so ascertaining her maiden name and her parentage, as a preliminary to further inquiries. (Collins 484-485)

Walter's self-reflection reveals the next clue in the mystery of the secret. Mrs. Catherick's "paroxysm of terror" at the mention of the church vestry gives Walter a hint about where to look for information next – the church register. The reader is meant by Collins to interpret this clue in the same manner; the reader must continue reading the novel to find out if Walter discovers any more pertinent information. Walter's statement about looking at the register is prolepsis – he refers to an action that he will perform in the near diegetic future.

Walter says that "Mrs. Catherick's undisguised contempt for Sir Percival plainly extended to his mother as well" (Collins 485). This statement is a clue veiled as a mere observation on Walter's part about Mrs. Catherick's emotions. Walter thinks that Mrs. Catherick's contempt *must* be connected to some "blemish" on the mother's reputation. Thus, his next step is to find out what that blemish is, and begin with "looking at the register of her marriage" (Collins 485).

When Walter looks at the marriage register, he learns that a second copy is kept in the neighboring town and updated regularly. The significance of this information is not fully explained by Walter until *after* he visits this second register. In this brief metanarrative, Walter tells us what the original church register says about the Glydes' marriage: "The register of the marriage of Sir Felix Glyde was in no respect remarkable, except for the narrowness of the space into which it was compressed at the bottom of the page. The information about his wife, was the usual information given in such cases. She was described as 'Cecilia Jane Elster, of Park-View Cottages, Knowlesbury; only daughter of the late Patrick Elster, Esq., formerly of Bath'" (Collins 491). After reading

this information, Walter decides to look at the second register to see if it contains any different information which may help him in his quest for the secret.

Walter's search for the truth causes him to look at the second church register kept in Knowlesbury, the town next to Welmingham. There, Walter discovers the final clue for unearthing Sir Percival's secret. In this metanarrative Walter explains the register's contents and the conclusions he draws from them:

I turned to the month of September, eighteen hundred and three. I found the marriage of the man whose Christian name was the same as my own. I found the double register of the marriages of the two brothers [Walter's textual markers for the Glyde entry]. And between these entries, at the bottom of the page – ?

Nothing! Not a vestige of the entry which recorded the marriage of Sir Felix Glyde and Cecilia Jane Elster, in the register of the church! (Collins 499)

Collins builds suspense by having Walter temporarily omit information from the text.

This use of paralipsis is redeemed by the exclamation following which reveals the withheld information – that Sir Percival's parents were not married on the date he claims. This information is significant because it shows that Sir Percival is an illegitimate child – his parents were not married when he was born and thus he is not the legal heir to the Glyde family estate and fortune.

Walter explains this revelation himself in a continuation of the same metanarrative:

My head turned giddy; I held by the desk to keep myself from falling. Of all the suspicions which had struck me in relation to that desperate man, not one had been near the truth. The idea that he was not Sir Percival Glyde at all, that he had no more claim to the baronetcy and to Blackwater Park than the poorest labourer [*sic*] who worked on the estate, had never once occurred to my mind. At one time, I had thought he might be Anne Catherick's father; at another time I had thought he might have been Anne Catherick's husband – the offence of which he was really

guilty had been, from first to last, beyond the wildest reach of my imagination. (Collins 499-500)

In this passage, Walter's description of his discovery corresponds to the physical manifestations of his surprise. Walter tells us that "[m]y head turned giddy; I held by the desk to keep myself from falling" after he saw the register (Collins 499-500). Using his eyesight, one of the five senses, Walter had discovered the most important clue about Sir Percival's secret. This sudden discovery caused the momentary failure of his thoughts and vision –Walter could not stand up nor see clearly after reading the register.

Walter fulfills the testimonial function in this metanarrative when he admits his failure as a detective. He tells us that "not one [of his suspicions] had been near the truth" (Collins 500). Walter's opinion of himself does not seem to be lowered, however, because the true secret was so "shocking" and sensational that it had never been an option in his mind, as he states in the last sentence of this metanarrative passage.

In *The Woman in White*, Collins uses metanarratives to slowly reveal textual clues about Sir Percival's secret to the reader. The reader is then supposed to arrange and analyze these clues to discover what Sir Percival's secret is and why it is significant. The reader's interaction with the text is a manifestation of the reader's relationship with the author. The more involved a reader is in unraveling the novel's mysteries, the closer his or her relationship with the author becomes. When a reader is interested in the text in this manner, the novelist's success is ensured.

CHAPTER FIVE

M.E. Braddon, Suspense, and the Textual Detective

In her sensation novel *The Trail of the Serpent*, M.E. Braddon's narrator uses a rhetorical technique called narrative suspense to present "clues" to the reader. Braddon creates a suspension when she suddenly interrupts the text of her novel with new content in the form of a metanarrative which provides the reader with information or "clues." The reader is supposed to collect and analyze these clues in order to solve the text's mysteries. This objective means that the narrator "deputizes" the reader to take an active role in the novel's action; thus, the reader becomes a textual detective operating out of the comforts of his or her home. Such reader/author interaction improves the author's public reputation, which in turn increases the author's financial success.

The Trail of the Serpent is structured using multiple perspectives similarly to Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*. Braddon's novel contains several storylines which are connected by various plot events and characters. The difference between the two novels is that Collins uses multiple characters as metanarrators, but Braddon only uses one narrator who follows multiple characters' actions through different storylines.

The main mystery of the novel concerns the murder of rich merchant Montague Harding. His nephew, Richard Marwood, is wrongfully convicted of this murder and is imprisoned in an insane asylum for eight years as punishment. Richard's friends eventually help him escape to London where they begin searching for the real murderer. Two of these friends are the mute detective Joseph Peters and the physician Augustus Darley. Meanwhile, Harding's murderer, Jabez North, escapes to France by faking his

own death using his twin brother's body. North then reinvents himself as Raymond Marolles. Marolles blackmails the heiress Valerie de Cevennes into marrying him – he knows that she murdered her husband Gaston de Lancy. In fact, Marolles manipulated Valerie into murdering her husband through a complicated chain of events. De Lancy suddenly reappears in the narrative, having been drugged and not poisoned by Valerie. Eventually, Marolles is caught and convicted of murder, Richard is vindicated, and Valerie is reunited with her husband. Valerie and de Lancy and Richard and his wife move to South America to escape the bad memories of Europe.

In *The Trail of the Serpent*, the reader is given “clues” in each metanarrative that invite him or her to solve the novel's mysteries. Metanarratives are presented by the omniscient, anonymous narrator who is not a character in the novel. Metanarratives involve the reader in the novel's action – simply reading about the crimes and secrets of the novel makes the reader a co-conspirator with Jabez North or Valerie de Cevennes, even as the reader works to solve those characters' crimes. On solving textual mysteries in the sensation novel, Patrick Brantlinger argues that a sensational “plot unwinds through the gradual discovery – or better, recovery – of knowledge, until at the end what detective and reader know coincides with what the secretive or somehow remiss narrator-author has presumably known all along” (19). In *The Trail of the Serpent*, this means that the reader gains knowledge from metanarratives throughout the novel. The process ends at the same point as the diegesis – this is when the reader is finally as well-informed as the narrator. When the narrator uses metanarrative suspensions, the distraction created by such a suspension helps the reader remember clues. The reader remembers these clues

when they are associated with sudden revelations, cliffhanger chapter endings, and physical sensations.

Unlike *The Woman in White*, the reader of Braddon's novel is not necessarily in a race with the narrator to see who can uncover the truth first. This is because the narrator of *The Trail of the Serpent* gives the reader less information in *The Trail of the Serpent*, and thus creates more mystery about the truth. On the process of solving a novel's secrets, Caroline Levine argues that

in so many Victorian fictions, the secret, when it finally emerges, turns out to be entirely different from what we have been invited or expected to imagine. Readers and characters may put forward a range of guesses and conjectures, but narrative mysteries remind us that even the plentiful range of our guesses may be narrow when compared with the hidden truth. And so, as we read suspenseful plots, we learn to doubt and guess, to speculate and hypothesize, to pause in the knowledge that we do not know. (2-3)

One of the important aspects of a mystery is finding out a "secret." In this novel, the characters hide several secrets – about themselves and about other characters. The reader's job is to discover these secrets and the process used by the author to hide secrets within the text. The strategies that Braddon uses to incorporate mysteries into the diegesis correspond to critic Gerard Genette's narrative functions; she also uses Genette's prolepsis, analepsis, paralipsis, and paralepsis to create and solve these textual mysteries. In this novel, each metanarrative builds on the information provided by the previous ones; several metanarratives re-present information already given. The narrator may refer to past information, but does not always provide illuminating details. When the characters themselves retell the past they frequently divulge an excess of information.

Braddon's narrator uses both explanatory and distracting metanarratives, the two types Genette identifies. Braddon's explanatory metanarratives explain or analyze a

detail from the diegesis. An example of this function is found at the end of Richard's murder trial when the narrator explains a statement made by Richard:

The prisoner seemed little affected by the verdict. He looked with a vacant stare round the court, removed the bouquet of rue from his button-hole and placed it in his bosom; and then said, with a clear distinct enunciation –

“Gentlemen of the jury, I am extremely obliged to you for the politeness with which you have treated me. Thanks to your powerful sense of justice, I have won the battle of Arcola, and I think I have secured the key of Italy.”

It is common for lunatics to fancy themselves some great and distinguished person. This unhappy young man believed himself to be Napoleon the First. (Braddon 67)

The explanatory metanarrative is the third paragraph quoted here. In this metanarrative, Braddon's narrator explains why Richard made the statement about Arcola and Italy – he is a “lunatic.”

In *The Trail of the Serpent*, distracting narratives momentarily divert the reader's attention from the diegesis – the reader has to focus on the metanarrative content to discern if it is relevant to the plot. One example of a distracting metanarrative is located during Darley and Peters's trip to a Slopperton bar. Here, the narrator interrupts the diegesis to insert a moral lesson not unlike that seen in Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* and Charles Reade's *Very Hard Cash*. In this metanarrative, the narrator directly addresses a specific imagined reader, Mrs. Jones, and gives her marriage advice. One section of this metanarrative says,

You are angry with poor Tom, whom you henpeck so cruelly, Mrs. Jones, because he came home last night from that little business dinner at Greenwich slightly the worse for the salmon and the cucumber – not the iced punch! oh, no! he scarcely touched that! You are angry with your better half, and you wish to give him, as you elegantly put it, a bit of your mind. My good soul, what does Tom care for you – behind his pipe? Do you think he is listening to *you*, or thinking of *you*, as he sits lazily

watching with dreamy eyes the blue wreaths of smoke curling upwards from that honest meerschaum bowl? (Braddon 348)

The only connection which this entire metanarrative has to the diegesis is tobacco-smoking. The narrator created this tangential metanarrative because Darley was smoking his pipe in the bar while thinking and staring out the window. This metanarrative may contain a moral lesson for the reader – women need to be kinder and more understanding towards their husbands – but this metanarrative ultimately distracts the reader from the diegesis and also from the narrator’s reason for following the characters to the bar.

When Braddon inserts a communicative metanarrative into the diegesis, most likely the narrator will directly address the reader using terms such as “my dear reader” following the conventions of gendered intrusions outlined by Robyn Warhol in *Gendered Interventions*. The narrator may also ask rhetorical questions throughout the diegesis to encourage the reader to interact with him- or herself and the text by answering. In this metanarrative, the narrator explains to the reader why he or she writes about the previously mentioned topic – the sights and smells of home. Also, the narrator uses a conversational tone in this passage which lends itself to open communication with the reader. The narrator says,

Pleasures and palaces are all very well in their way, as the song says; but there is just one little spot on earth which, whether it be a garret in Petticoat Lane or a mansion in Belgrave Square, is apt to be dearer to us than the best of them; and the Smasher languishes for the friendly touch of the ebony handles of the porter-engine, and the scent of the Welsh rarebits of his youth. Perhaps I express myself in a more romantic manner on this subject, however, than I should do, for the remark of the Left-handed one [the Smasher], as he pours himself out a cup of tea from the top of the teapot – he despises the spout of that vessel as a modern innovation on ancient simplicity – is as simple as it is energetic. He merely observes that he is “jolly sick of this lot,” – this lot meaning Liverpool, the Count de Marolles, the White Lion, three-handed all-fours, and the detective police force. (Braddon 365)

The narrator's comment "Perhaps I express myself in a more romantic manner on this subject, however, than I should do" is conversational in tone and casual in style. This statement shows that the narrator is willing to be open about any subject, including his or her personal thoughts about his or her narration.

Throughout *The Trail of the Serpent*, Braddon uses testimonial metanarratives to give the narrator a voice to express her textual authority. Braddon inserts a testimonial metanarrative in a scene set in Darley's London shop. This passage is a testimonial of "the feelings which one or another episode awakens in" the narrator (Genette 256). The narrator exclaims, "Poor Richard! In spite of the gratitude and happiness he feels in his release [from the asylum], there is a gloom upon his brow and an abstraction in his manner, which he tries in vain to shake off" (Braddon 240). When the narrator says "Poor Richard!", his or her feelings of pity for Richard's situation appears in the text. At this point in the novel, Richard has escaped from the asylum, but is still "guilty" of murder in the eyes of the law. This situation accounts for the "gloom upon his brow and...abstraction in his manner" and thus gives the narrator reason to pity him (Braddon 240).

An example of Braddon's use of the ideological function occurs at the beginning of the novel when Richard reaches his mother's home after a long absence. Here, the narrator describes Richard's appearance and thoughts:

Heaven, indeed, have pity upon that wanderer, out on the bleak highroad to Slooperton; out on the shelterless Slooperton road, a mile away from the Black Mill! The wanderer is a young man, whose garments, of the shabby-genteel order, are worst of all fitted to keep out the cruel weather; a handsome young man, or a man who has once been handsome, but on whom riotous days and nights, drunkenness, recklessness, and folly, have had their dire effects. He is struggling to

keep a bad cigar alight, and when it goes out, which is about twice in five minutes, he utters expressions which in Slopperton are thought very wicked, and consigns that good city, with its virtuous citizens, to a very bad neighbourhood. (Braddon 12-13)

In this passage, the narrator's omniscience emerges in statements such as "he utters expressions which in Slopperton are thought very wicked"; the narrator has to be "authorized" by Braddon to know "everything" that all the residents in Slopperton think, especially about cursing. Braddon also allows the narrator to know what Richard has done in the past to have "riotous days and nights, drunkenness, recklessness, and folly" affect him in a negative way (Braddon 12).

In *The Trail of the Serpent*, Braddon uses vague prolepsic passages to hint at what will come later in the diegesis. These passages are rarely used and are harder to discern than the inverse technique analepsis. In this example, Marolles and Valerie argue about her husband's arrival in her garden home. This passage is part of the scene in which Marolles manipulates Valerie into poisoning her husband when he returns to town.

Marolles says,

"No, he will not be here. You do not suppose, madame, that when I contemplated, nay, contrived and arranged an interview with so charming a person as yourself, I could possibly be so deficient in foresight as to allow that interview to be disturbed at the expiration of one quarter of an hour? No; Monsieur Don Giovanni will not be here to-night."
(Braddon 134)

Marolles's repeated use of the phrase "will not be here" is analeptic, as Marolles knows that de Lancy will not show up for his scheduled meeting with Valerie. Marolles knows this because he sent de Lancy a false letter saying that he needed to go visit his deathly ill mother.

Analepsis is more common than *prolepsis* in *The Trail of the Serpent*. *Analepsis* may be a short statement or a long metanarrative passage reminding the reader of past events in the *diegesis*. An example of this technique is used by Braddon to reintroduce Gus Darley to the reader after Richard's trial. The narrator says that, "It has been eight years since this gentleman was last in Slopperton; then, he came as a witness in the trial of Richard Marwood; then he had a black eye, and was out-at-elbows..." (Braddon 205). The phrase "It has been eight years," combined with the narrator's use of the word "then," are references to earlier *diegetic* content.

An example of Braddon's *paralepsis* is seen in the long metanarrative describing Darley's neighborhood and the route Richard takes to get there. Here, the narrator inserts an excessive amount of information about this journey, far more information than the reader needs to understand the directions. The narrator says,

If you go straight across Blackfriars Bridge, and do not suffer yourself to be beguiled either by the attractions of that fashionable transpontine lounge, the "New Cut," or by the eloquence of the last celebrity at that circular chapel some time sacred to Rowland Hill – if you are not a man to be led away by whelks and other piscatorial delicacies, second-hand furniture, birds and bird-cages, or easy shaving, you may ultimately reach, at the inland end of the road, a locality known to the inhabitants of the district of Friar Street. Whether, in any dark period of our ecclesiastical history, the members of the mother church were ever reduced to the necessity of living in this neighbourhood [*sic*] I am not prepared to say. But if ever any of the magnates of the Catholic faith did hang out in this direction, it is to be hoped that the odours [*sic*] from the soap-boiler's round the corner, the rich essences from the tallow manufactory over the way, the varied perfumes from the establishment of the gentleman who does a thousand pounds a week in size, to say nothing of such minor and domestic effluvia as are represented by an amalgamation of red herrings, damp corduroy, old boots, onions, washing, a chimney on fire, dead cats, bad eggs, and an open drain or two – it is to be hoped, I say, that these conflicting scents did not pervade the breezes of Friar Street so strongly in the good old times as they do in these our later days of luxury and refinement. (Braddon 236)

In this passage, the narrator describes Darley's neighborhood – Friar Street. The detailed descriptions of smells and sights which assail travelers and residents alike do not contribute information that is relevant to the narrative and that enlightens the reader about the events of the narrative. Brief explanations which summarize these details for the reader would suffice, providing him or her with a glimpse of the scene without distracting him or her from the text's development.

Braddon's narrator suspends the diegetic narrative by inserting a metanarrative to make the reader ask questions about missing content – an example of Genette's paralipsis. Here, the narrator describes the reaction of Peters's housekeeper Kuppins to his return home:

What made Kuppins in such a state of excitement on this particular evening, who shall say? Certain it is that she was excited. At the first sound of the click of Mr. Peters's latchkey in the door of No. 5, Little Gulliver Street, Kuppins, with a lighted candle, flew to open it. How she threw her arms round Mr. Peters's neck and kissed him – how she left a lump of tallow in his hair, and a smell of burning in his whiskers – how, in her excitement she blew the candle out – and how, by a feat of leger-de-main, or leger-de-lungs, she blew it in again, must have been seen to be sufficiently appreciated. (Braddon 223)

Braddon's pointed omission of "[w]hat made Kuppins in such a state of excitement" causes the reader to ask the same questions in the text. Here, paralipsis is used to delay this revelation until the narrator is done describing the characters and the setting.

Genette makes an interesting statement concerning a mixture of paralipsis and normal diegetic explanation; citing Barthes, Genette says,

Apropos of what he calls the 'intermingling of the two systems,' Barthes rightly mentions the 'cheating' that, in Agatha Christie, consists of focalizing a narrative like *The Sittaford Mystery* or *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* through the murderer while omitting from his 'thoughts' simply the memory of the murder; and we know that the most classical detective story, although generally focalized through the investigating detective,

most often hides from us a part of his discoveries and inductions until the final revelation. (196)

This “cheating” also occurs in *The Trail of the Serpent*, but in a slightly different way from that which Genette describes. The omitted information from *The Trail of the Serpent* is not who de Lancy’s murderer is, but whether or not a murder was committed at all. The narrator provides the reader with obscure hints on several occasions regarding the murder, but the reader is unable to process them as clues. This inability to process means that the reader cannot discover the truth about whether or not the murder took place. We will examine several passages concerning this mode of focalization.

Genette offers advice about interpreting focalized narratives like *The Trail of the Serpent* when he says that “we should not confuse the information given by a focalized narrative with the interpretation the reader is called on to give of it (or that he gives without being invited to)” (197). What Genette means here is that the reader’s perception of the text’s information may be different from the actual details contained within the text. The reader is expected to react in a certain way based on the author’s style of narrating, but the facts may later be proven to support an alternate view. This claim is also true for Braddon’s novel. In *The Trail of the Serpent*, the reader is supposed to assume, based on the clear evidence given, that a horrible murder was committed – Valerie murdered her husband Gaston. Overt clues, however, contradict this assumption and when followed reveal the truth – that Gaston was merely drugged.

To examine the ways in which the narrative strategies and functions identified by Genette work in this novel, we need to look at metanarrative passages in the text. This first grouping of metanarratives follows the first major clue presented in *The Trail of the Serpent* – a coin. The first metanarrative is told by Mr. Peters to Richard, Darley,

Darley's sister Bell, and another friend. Here, Peters tells this group about Richard's arrest and the subsequent events leading up to the murder trial. Peters overhears a conversation in a bar between a young man and a young woman with a baby. The young man later turns out to be the murderer Jabez North, and the young woman is his lover who bore him a son. Curious, Peters follows North into the town, but later backtracks and learns the young woman drowned herself and tried to drown her child in the river. Peters adopts the child and names him Slosby, after the river Slosby he was found in. Peters tells the group,

Now, just as I was a-thinkin' this, he said something' that sent the blood up into my face as hot as fire – 'I expected a sum of money, and I've been disappointed of it,' he said; and before the girl he was a-talkin' to could open her lips, he caught her up sudden – 'Never you mind how,' he says, 'never you mind how.'

"He expected a sum of money, and he'd been disappointed of it! So had the man who had murdered this young gent's [Richard's] uncle.

"Not much in this, perhaps. But why was he so frightened at the thoughts of her asking him how he expected the money, and how he'd bin disappointed? There it got fishy. At any rate, says I to myself, I'll have a look at you, my friend, so in I walks, very quiet and quite unbeknownst.... "Now, what did I see in his face when he looked at me? Why, the very same look that I missed in the face of this young gent when [Detective] Jinks took him in the mornin'. The very same look that I'd seen in a many faces, and never know'd it differ, whether it came out one way or another, always bein' the same look at bottom – the look of a man as is guilty of what will hang him and thinks that he's found out. (Braddon 245)

This passage fits our definition of a suspension because it suspends the diegesis to insert a narrative from one of the characters' point of view. The reader is distracted from the main text, but the content is still relevant to the "present" time of the novel. The content of the longer suspension refers to past events in the novel which are still related to the novel's "present" time of narrating. This connection is explained at the end of the suspension.

The narrator uses Genette's "reported speech" to present Peters's metanarrative to the reader. This occurs when the narrator lets the character tell his or her own story in his or her own words (Genette 172). In this passage, the metanarration is complicated by Peters's reported speech as well as by a language barrier – technically, the reader is getting the *narrator's* version of Peters's metanarrative. Peters is unable to speak, so he communicates using sign language, called the "dirty alphabet" by the narrator. Therefore, the reader gets the narrator's "translation" of Peters's narrative into English from sign language, as sign language is difficult to write down as it appears in Peters's friends' vision.

Several sentences in this metanarrative show differences between Peters's "speech" and that of the narrator. Peters uses words such as "a-thinkin'" and "somethin'," whereas the narrator would use "thinking" and "something" instead. Peters also uses third-person conjugations of verbs to refer to his own actions instead of first-person – he uses "walks" and "says" instead of "walk" and "say". This language difference helps the reader determine what passages belong to Peters's metanarrative, and which belong to the narrator.

The purpose of including this metanarrative in the diegesis is to inform the other characters of information that the reader already knows. This overheard conversation was presented to the reader earlier in the novel from the narrator's distanced point of view. Thus, this conversation is an analeptic metanarrative. The reader's memory is refreshed by this reminder of the past, and the event's importance to the plot is cemented by the retelling process. The passage serves to activate the reader's interest in the subject

– this, like the distracting function fulfilled by the metanarrative’s placement, makes the reader remember the content.

Peters tells his audience how this confrontation will help him identify North later. The coin mentioned by Peters becomes the novel’s first important clue here. Peters explains,

Presently he offered her some money – four sovereigns. She served him as he ought to have been served, and threw them every one slap in his face. One cut him over the eye; and I was glad of it. ‘You’re marked, my man,’ thinks I, ‘and nothin’ could be handier agen I want you.’ He picked up three of the sovereigns, but for all he could do he couldn’t find the fourth. So he had the cut (which was a jolly deep un) plastered up, and he went away. She stared at the river uncommon hard, and then she went away. (Braddon 246)

The clue presented in this passage is the coin, a sovereign. The coin scars North and he will always be recognizable as a result. In fact, the scar is how Peters will later identify North as the murderer and a fraud. The reader does not understand the significance of this event until later because Peters does not include all necessary information, such as Peters’s later identification of North, or that North will fake his own death and make this mark of identity necessary. This omission is an example of Genette’s paralipsis, as the narrator (not Peters) withholds important information from the reader. Peters merely tells the group what he thought at the time: “You’re marked, my man...and nothin’ could be handier agen I want you” (246).

While out on a walk with his foster-son Slosby, Peters notices the scar on Raymond Marolles’s forehead – the same place where North was marked by the coin in the bar. This scar means that North is not dead, as previously assumed, but is alive and living under a new name, Raymond Marolles. About the past bar scene, Peters tells Slosby,

“There was one thing...which struck me as curious, when I found the body of that young gent. Where was the scar from the sovering as that young woman throwed at him? Why nowheres! Not a trace of it to be seen, which I looked for it particular; and yet that cut wasn’t one to leave a scar that would wear out in six months, nor yet in six years either....” The count stops, gets off his horse, and throws the reigns to the groom. It happens at this very moment that an open carriage, in which two ladies are seated, passes on its way to the Grosvenor Gate. One of the ladies bows to the South-American banker [North/Marolles], and as he lifts his hat in returning her salute, Mr. Peters, who is looking at nothing in particular, sees very distinctly the scar which is the sole memorial of that public-house encounter on the banks of the Slosby. (Braddon 265)

This metanarrative combination contains another example of reported speech – Peters’s distinct manner of communicating, transcribed here into words, is easily identified by the reader. Peters uses the words “sovering,” “throwed,” “nowheres,” “particular,” and “nor yet”; whereas the narrator would use words such as “sovereign,” “threw,” “nowhere,” and “nor”. “Particular” would be removed and a different phrase entirely would be used by the narrator in its place.

The narrator suspends Peters’s metanarrative here to tell the reader what Peters sees with Slosby while on their walk. The author’s reasoning for doing so is unclear; perhaps this technique is to ensure that the reader will understand the full implications of the action.

The narrator reveals to the reader more information about the coin as the text develops. Peters proves North’s involvement in the murder with a foreign coin – not an English sovereign like we were told early in the novel. Peters’s argument is strengthened by later and earlier passages than this one. Here, Peters and Darley visit the Slopperton bar mentioned in the first passage we examined about this clue. The bartender asks them,

“Shall I tell you why I never changed it? Sovereigns ain’t so plentiful in these parts that I should keep this one to look at. What do you say to its not being a sovereign at all?”

“Not a sovereign?”

“Not; what do you say to its being a twopenny-halfpenny foreign coin, with a lot of rum writin’ about it – a coin as they has the cheek to offer me four-and-sixpence for as old gold, and as I kep’ knowin’ it was worth more for a curiosity – eh?” (Braddon 352)

The foreign origin of the coin will prove important, as we will see in the last passage of this part of our analysis. The clue provided here merely asserts the truthfulness of Peters’s earlier testimony to the group about a lost coin that was thrown at the murderer. Thus far, what has been proven to the other characters involved in the story is that Richard is innocent of murdering his uncle, North is guilty, North has a scar on his forehead created by a coin, and the coin is of foreign origin. Also, Harding was a merchant overseas for many years and created a fortune there – the rumor of this fortune’s physical existence in England was the motive for Harding’s murder.

In this next metanarrative, the narrator describes Peters’s discovery of a coin similar to the one which scarred North in the bar. This second coin was hidden in Harding’s bedroom at his sister’s house (Richard’s mother). Peters’s story about the bar fight connects North to a foreign coin, and Peters’s discovery of this similar foreign coin at the scene of the crime connects North in turn to the murder. The clue’s importance in the text is not fully used up until North’s murder trial. In this metanarrative, the narrator tells the reader about Peters’s discovery of the coin:

Mr. Peters twisted this bag in a moment of absence of mind between his fingers, swinging it backwards and forwards in the air. In so doing, he knocked it against the side of the cabinet, and, to his surprise, it emitted a sharp metallic sound. It was not empty, then, although it appeared so. A moment’s examination showed the detective that he had succeeded in obtaining the object of his search; the bag had been used for money, and a small coin had lodged in the seam at one corner of the bottom of it, and had stuck so firmly as not to be easily shaken out. This, in the murderer’s hurried ransacking of the cabinet, in his blind fury at not finding the sum he expected to obtain, had naturally escaped him. The piece of money

was a small coin, only half the value of the one found by the landlord, but of the same date and style. (Braddon 358)

The revelation contained within this passage is withheld by the narrator until later in the diegesis; thus, the narrator delays the reader's full comprehension of Peters's important discovery. Peters himself does not tell the reader of the coin – instead, the narrator reports Peters's actions to the reader in a metanarrative, forcing the reader to wait, possibly forever, to hear Peters's personal account of his discovery. Making the reader wait for information is one form of suspense. This passage is an example of the “cheating” which Genette attributes to Barthes – this strategy is not paralipsis nor is it paralepsis, as the narrator does not provide an excess of information nor does he withhold information. The narrator stretches the reader's understanding of these two focalization techniques to create suspense.

The next string of passages concerns another mystery – the mystery surrounding de Lancy's murder and Captain Lansdown's identity. This seemingly straightforward crime soon develops into a complicated mystery due to the author's careful omission and placement of information. To remind ourselves of the background, North arrives in Paris and assumes the identity of Raymond Marolles. He then realizes that the best way to make a fortune in a respectable manner is to marry an heiress. Marolles decides to use trickery and blackmail to marry the beautiful and rich Valerie de Cevennes. He discovers that she is secretly married to Gaston de Lancy and tricks her into murdering her husband. Valerie watches him die onstage from her poison; this makes her crazy and sick. After she recovers, Marolles visits her at her uncle's estate and tells her he wants his “reward” – a marriage:

“Then, mademoiselle, I have little more to say, except to claim my reward. That reward is – your hand.” He said this as if he never even dreamt of the possibility of a refusal.

“Are you mad, monsieur?” She had for some time anticipated this climax, and she felt how utterly powerless she was in the hands of an unscrupulous villain. How unscrupulous she did not yet know.

“Nay, mademoiselle, remember! A man has been poisoned. Easy enough to set suspicion, which has already pointed to foul play, more fully at work. Easy enough to prove a certain secret marriage, a certain midnight visit to that renowned and not too highly-respected chemist, Monsieur Blurosset. Easy enough to produce the order for five thousand francs signed by Mademoiselle de Cevennes. And should these proofs not carry with them conviction, I am the fortunate possessor of a wine-glass emblazoned with the arms of your house, in which still remains the sediment of a poison well known to the more distinguished members of the medical science. I think, mademoiselle, these few evidences, added to the powerful motive revealed by your secret marriage, would be quite sufficient to set every newspaper in France busy with the details of a murder unprecedented in the criminal annals of this country. But, mademoiselle, I have wearied you; you are pale, exhausted. I have no wish to hurry you into a rash acceptance of my offer. Think of it, and tomorrow let me hear your decision. Till then, adieu.” He rose as he spoke. (Braddon 175)

In this passage, Marolles tells Valerie the evidence he possesses which proves her guilt. He warns her, “Easy enough to set suspicion, which has already pointed to foul play, more fully at work”, and then proceeds to list the evidence against her. This veiled threat is used to blackmail Valerie into marrying Marolles. Marolles is very specific about the evidence he has; this specificity reminds the reader that Valerie killed her husband.

In a way, this passage is a form of analepsis – a reference to past events in the narrative. Here, Marolles reminds Valerie of the several times they were in each other’s company, and he also reminds her of what she has done. The “few evidences” Marolles mentions are enough to force Valerie into marriage.

A seemingly disconnected passage found later in the narrative causes the reader to question Marolles’s evidence. The narrator’s mysterious and vague description of

Blurosset's apartment creates doubt in the reader's mind. Here, the chemist Blurosset observes the illness of an unidentified man:

His little apartment has two doors. One, which leads out on to the staircase; a second, which communicates with his bedchamber. This door is open a very little, but enough to show that there is a feeble light burning within the chamber. It is in the direction of this door that the blue spectacles are fixed when Monsieur Blurosset suspends his calculations in order to listen; and it is to a sound within this room that he listens intently.

That sound is the laboured [*sic*] and heavy breathing of a man. The room is tenanted.

"Good," says Monsieur Blurosset, presently, "the respiration is certainly more regular. It is really a most wonderful case." (Braddon 181)

We are not told the man's identity, but are led to wonder if this scene is connected in some way to the section preceding it: the passage in which Marolles blackmails Valerie. The reader is forced to actively think about who this "mystery man" is. This active questioning on the part of the reader means that he or she is now a detective searching for answers and information in the text.

Later in the same scene of the novel, Valerie arrives to beg Blurosset for more poison. Valerie senses "someone" – the reader is to assume her dead husband – in the apartment. Valerie tells Blurosset about this sensation:

"Do you believe, then, that by some subtle influence, whose nature is unknown to us, we may have a strange consciousness of the presence or the approach of some people, conveyed to us by neither hearing nor sight, but rather as if we *felt* that they were near?"

"*You* believe this possible, madame, or you would not ask the question."

"Perhaps. I have sometimes thought that I had this consciousness, but it related to a person who is dead –"

"Yes, madame."

"And – you will think me mad; Heaven knows, I think myself so – I feel as if that person were near me to-night."

The chemist rises, and, going over to her, feels her pulse. It is rapid and intermittent. She is evidently violently agitated, though she is trying with her utmost power to control herself.

"But you say that this person is dead?" he asks.

“Yes; he died some months since.”
 “You know that there are no such things as ghosts?”
 “I am perfectly convinced of that!”
 “And yet – ?” he asks.
 “And yet I feel as though the dead were near me to-night. Tell me
 – there is no one in this room but ourselves?”
 “No one.”
 “And that door – it leads – ”
 “Into the room in which I sleep.”
 “And there is no one there?” she asks.
 “No one. Let me give you a sedative, madame: you are certainly
 ill.”
 “No, no, monsieur; you are very good. I am still weak from the
 effects of a long illness. That weakness may be the cause of my silly
 fancies of to-night. To-morrow I leave France, perhaps for ever.”
 (Braddon 184-185)

This passage focuses on Valerie’s physical sensations and the mysterious omissions contained within the scene. Valerie has a physical sense of her husband’s presence; she testifies that she has felt this “consciousness” of another being in the past, and feels it again during this scene. The mysterious tone which this scene takes is expressed through the physical recognition of another person’s presence without touching one another. Valerie tells Blurosset several times that “I feel as though the dead were near me to-night”, an exclamation which prompts the chemist to ask her if she believes in ghosts.

We know, however, that there is a mysterious man in the other room who had trouble breathing. Based on Valerie’s physical sensation of her dead husband, we can conclude that this man might be de Lancy – but *how*, we wonder? Did Blurosset somehow bring de Lancy back from the dead, or did Blurosset find de Lancy in time to save his life? The questions raised by this passage encourage the reader to move forward in the text and see if more clues will be revealed. This questioning process is another manifestation of the reader as textual detective.

The narrator abruptly changes scenes into this next passage from one of Richard's detective friends. This passage is found later in the diegesis than the previous one, but still focuses on Blurosset's apartments. In this passage, however, Blurosset is in England with friends. The first passage is about Captain Lansdown, Blurosset's friend:

You still, however, persist that this faithful Mujeebez here is in some manner or other linked with my destiny?"

"I do."

"And yet it is very singular! What can connect two men whose experiences in every way are so dissimilar?"

"I will tell you again that he will be instrumental in confounding your enemies."

"You know who they are – or rather, who he is. I have but one."

"Not two, Captain?"

"Not two. No, Blurosset. There is but one on whom I would wreak a deep and deadly vengeance."

"And for the other?"

"Pity and forgiveness. Do not speak of that. There are some things which even now I am not strong enough to hear spoken of. That is one of them." (Braddon 276)

Although Lansdown does not provide the reader with particulars, the similarities between his situation and that of de Lancy are noticeable. Both men were wronged by two people. We know that in de Lancy's case, his wife was motivated by love and an incorrect belief that she was wronged. This fact could be grounds for her husband's forgiveness, if he were still alive. We know that de Lancy has cause to hate Marolles for stealing his wife and her fortune, and that Lansdown wants to "wreak a deep and deadly vengeance" on one of his enemies. The absent name of Lansdown's enemy is an expression of Genette's paralipsis. Here, the captain refuses to talk in specific terms about his past, leaving his past shrouded in mystery for the reader. All we know is that he has one enemy, not two. Any assumptions on our part about the enemy's identity are not based on fact – yet.

A later narrative intrusion briefly explains Captain Lansdown's past. The narrator's brevity leaves the reader with few details and more questions about Lansdown.

In this metanarrative, the narrator tells the reader,

Captain Lansdown (that is the name of the officer) is of French extraction; he speaks English perfectly, but still with a slightly foreign accent. He has distinguished himself by his marvellous [*sic*] courage and military genius in the Punjaub, and is over in England on leave of absence. It is singular that so great a friendship should exist between this impetuous, danger-loving soldier, and the studious French chemist and pseudo-magician, Laurent Blurosset; but that a very firm friendship does exist between them is evident. They live in the same house; are both waited upon by Egerton Lansdown's Indian servant, and are constantly together. (Braddon 278)

The narrator's musing "It is singular that so great a friendship should exist between" these two men causes the reader to wonder if there is a connection between Blurosset's and Lansdown's pasts. Is Lansdown the mysterious man with troubled breathing from the earlier passage? The reader is urged to keep reading to find out the answers.

In this next passage, the reader is given a new perspective on some events presented earlier in the narrative. This is a form of Genette's analepsis. While the reader previously observed these events from the narrator's perspective (which followed Marolles), this time the reader learns the viewpoint of Mosquetti, the mimic who impersonated de Lancy at Marolles's request. Valerie overhears Mosquetti tell a drawing-room full of people about his role in her misfortunes:

"He wanted me, he said," continued Mosquetti, "to decide a little wager. Some foolish girl, who had seen De Lancy on the stage, and who believed him the ideal hero of romance, and was only in too much danger of throwing her heart and fortune at his feet, was to be disenchanted by any stratagem that could be devised. Her parents had intrusted [*sic*] the management of the affair to him, a relation of the lady's. Would I assist him? Would I represent De Lancy, and play a little scene in the Bois de Boulogne, to open the eyes of this silly boarding-school miss – would I, for a consideration? It was only to act a little stage play off the stage, and

was for a good cause. I consented; and that evening, at half-past ten o'clock, under the shadow of the winter night and the leafless trees, I – ”

“Stop, stop! Signor Mosquetti!” cry the bystanders. “Madame! Madame de Marolles! Water! Smelling-salts! Your flacon, Lady Emily: she has fainted!”

No, she has not fainted; this is something worse than fainting, this convulsive agony, in which the proud form writhes, while the white and livid lips murmur strange and dreadful words.

“Murdered, murdered and innocent! while I, vile dupe, pitiful fool, was only a puppet in the hands of a demon!” (Braddon 288-289)

Here, Valerie learns the truth – Marolles faked de Lancy’s affair to coerce Valerie into later marrying him. The last sentence of this selection is uttered by Valerie and is proof that she now knows the truth. Valerie exclaims, “Murdered, murdered and innocent! while I, vile dupe, pitiful fool, was only a puppet in the hands of a demon!” (Braddon 289). Valerie knows that Marolles manipulated her emotions to ensure the outcome that he desired. Our earlier knowledge of de Lancy’s innocence is strengthened by this retelling here – de Lancy really loved Valerie, and was innocent of any suspected wrongdoing. This passage marks the place where one of the novel’s mysteries is revealed.

This passage is an expression of paralipsis – the narrator omitted this viewpoint earlier in the narrative – the reader was given only Valerie and Marolles’s view when Mosquetti acted in this role. The narrator skipped over most of the content of the interview between Marolles and Mosquetti. All we are told is that the two men meet, and that Marolles asks Mosquetti to “assist with this talent in a little farce I am preparing for the amusement of a lady?” (Braddon 142). This passage thus elaborates on the earlier minimalized passage. The change in focalization for this event is from the narrator’s point of view to that of Mosquetti.

Valerie meets with Blurosset and threatens him with public exposure as Marolles's accomplice in order to avenge herself on Marolles. Blurosset, however, persuades her to remain silent. Captain Lansdown overhears their conversation in the hallway and is affected: "[t]he Indian officer, in the shadow of the doorway, is more affected than the chemist and philosopher, for he falls on his knees by the threshold and hides his pale face in his hands [upon hearing Valerie's agonized confession]" (Braddon 307). Lansdown is agonized by hearing Valerie's tormented confession to murder and her accusations against Marolles and Blurosset for conspiring to provoke her actions. The reader does not understand why because of paralipsis (intentional omission by the narrator), and so must keep reading to learn more. Valerie asks Blurosset:

"How, monsieur! – you had no part in the murder of my husband? – you, who gave me the drug which killed him?"

"You jump at conclusions, madame. How do you know that the drug which I gave you killed Gaston de Lancy?"

"Oh, for pity's sake, do not juggle with me, Monsieur. Speak! What do you mean?"

"Simply this, madame. That the death of your husband on the evening on the day on which you gave him the drugged wine may have been – a coincidence."

"Oh, monsieur! in mercy –"

"Nay, madame, it was a coincidence. The drug I gave you was not a poison. You are guiltless of your husband's death."

"Oh, heaven be praised! Merciful heaven be praised!" She falls on her knees, and buries her head in her hands in a wild burst of tearful thanksgiving.

While her face is thus hidden, Blurosset takes from a little cabinet on one side of the fireplace a handful of a light-coloured [*sic*] powder, which he throws upon the expiring cinders in the grate. A lurid flame blazes up, illuminating the room with a strange unnatural glare.

"Valerie, countess de Marolles," he says, in a tone of solemn earnestness, "men say I am a magician – a sorcerer – a disciple of the angel of darkness! Nay, some more foolish than the rest have been so blasphemous as to declare that I have power to raise the dead. Yours is no mind to be fooled by such shallow lies as these. The dead never rise again in answer to the will of mortal man. Lift your head, Valerie – not

Countess de Marolles. I no longer call you by that name, which is in itself a falsehood. Valerie de Lancy, look yonder!"

He points in the direction of the open door. She rises, looks towards the threshold, staggers a step forward, utters one long wild shriek, and falls senseless to the floor.

In all the agonies she has endured, in all the horrors through which she has passed, she has never before lost her senses. The cause must indeed be a powerful one. (Braddon 310-311)

Narrative suspense is created here when the narrator fails to include information at the end of the passage. This passage is literally left in suspension – the mini-narrative is not brought to a conclusion by the revelation of what hides beyond the open doorway. The reader is forced to wait and find out if the truth will be revealed later. We can assume, based on Captain Lansdown's presence in the hallway during the earlier part of this metanarrative, that Lansdown is to walk through the doorway, and that it is he who causes Valerie to "lose her senses."

The sensational aspect of this scene is emphasized through Valerie's physical reaction to her husband's reappearance. Valerie "falls senseless to the floor" after looking at the doorway and then moving toward the person standing there (Braddon 311). The narrator tells us that "[i]n all the agonies she has endured, in all the horrors through which she has passed, she has never before lost her senses" (Braddon 311). In this context, the word "senses" represents the mental and physical state of being awake. All of Valerie's "senses" – touch, hearing, sight, smell, and taste – have suddenly failed her, causing her to pass out and lose awareness of her surroundings.

Blurosset creates suspense in this scene by drawing out each revelation of a new fact. Valerie learns one piece of information at a time by either asking a question or pleading with Blurosset to tell her the truth. Not only does Blurosset create suspense in this manner, he also creates a sense of mystery. When Blurosset throws the "handful of a

light-coloured powder” into the fire, he creates a “lurid flame” and a “strange, unnatural glare” (Braddon 311). The fire’s strange qualities influence the tone of the scene.

Valerie’s senses are affected; the reader’s perceptions of the information provided in this passage are also similarly affected. Blurosset adds to the strangeness by boasting of his odd titles and the way the public perceives him and his practices. Blurosset tells Valerie that “men say I am a magician – a sorcerer – a disciple of the angel of darkness!”

(Braddon 311). The titles “magician” and “sorcerer” are supported by his familiarity with strange chemicals and powders and also his actions regarding the “poison/sedative” that he gave to Valerie. Blurosset also claims that people accuse him of bringing the dead back to life. Valerie knows that Blurosset has no such ability, as he asked her in an earlier scene if resurrection were possible, and she said “no.” Thus, by stating this string of false labels, Blurosset sets Valerie up for a shocking revelation that is even more mysterious due to a lack of clues. Valerie was not given the same textual clues as the reader, and so has no idea her husband waits in the hallway to be reunited with her.

Because the revelation of Lansdown’s true identity is not straightforward, we have to follow the clues given to us in the narrative regarding Lansdown and de Lancy. One more is found in the scene when Valerie talks to her uncle in vague terms about not needing his help anymore. This help concerned Marolles and escaping her marriage to him. Valerie tells her uncle,

“When I wrote to you, I told you that I appealed to you because I had no other friend upon earth to whom, in the hour of my anguish, I could turn for help and advice.”

“You did, you did. If you had not been my only brother’s only child, I should have waited a change in the wind before I crossed the Channel – I am such a wretched sailor! But life, as the religious party asserts, is a long sacrifice – I came!”

“Suppose that, since writing that letter, I have found a friend, an adviser, a guiding hand and a supporting arm, and no longer need the help of any one on earth besides this new-found friend to revenge me upon my enemies?”

Raymond’s bewilderment increases every moment. Has she indeed gone mad, and is this new light in her eyes the fire of insanity?

“I am sure, my dear Valerie, if you have met with such a very delightful person, I am extremely glad to hear it, as it relieves me from the trouble. It is melodramatic certainly, but excessively convenient. I have remarked, that in melodrama circumstances generally are convenient. I never alarm myself when everything is hopelessly wrong, and villany [sic] deliciously triumphant; for I know that somebody who died in the first act will come in at the centre doors, and make it all right before the curtain falls.” (Braddon 323)

Here, Valerie is purposely cryptic when speaking to her uncle – her indirect manner of speaking allows just enough information for the reader to know what she refers to.

Valerie’s vague suggestions are meaningless to her uncle and even Marolles, who is listening to the conversation, but the reader knows that the “friend” of whom Valerie speaks is really de Lancy. Valerie refers to “a friend, an adviser, a guiding hand and a supporting arm” that will help her gain “revenge” on her enemies (Braddon 323). Her uncle is not interested in Valerie’s reasons for asking for help and her subsequent reasons for revoking her pleas, whereas Marolles is “bewildered” and does not know anything about her sudden change of mind. The reader’s previous knowledge of the scene in Blurosset’s apartment leaves him or her more informed than the characters but still unsure of the outcome. Despite this disparity of knowledge, the reader must continue reading to find out what will happen in the rest of the novel. The reader’s motivation is to see justice done to Marolles now that de Lancy has returned “from the dead.”

The Marquis de Cevennes, Valerie’s uncle, makes some interesting comments in this passage as well. He says that Valerie’s request for help and then her sudden change of heart are “melodramatic certainly, but excessively convenient” (Braddon 323). The

sensation novel's similarities to Victorian melodrama, especially on the stage, have been noted by several critics (Hughes 167). The marquis's last comment is almost prophetic, as it tells the reader exactly what has happened and will happen in this novel: "I know that somebody who died in the first act will come in at the centre doors, and make it all right before the curtain falls" (Braddon 323). De Lancy was assumed murdered at the beginning of the novel (the "first act"), but has returned to the text in his true identity while the mystery is still unsolved (the "centre doors" of the text – the center of the mystery), and is going to help Valerie "make it all right" again, as she claims. This statement is a combination of prolepsis and analepsis, as the marquis refers to past events and future actions.

The last passage concerning Valerie and de Lancy is at the end of the novel when they and the Marwoods leave for South America. This passage takes the form of a metanarrative; the narrator interrupts the text of the novel in first person to provide the reader with pertinent information. The narrator tells the reader some missing information about de Lancy, a form of analepsis:

There is a peculiar style about the gentleman, on whose arm the lady leans, that bespeaks him to the most casual observer to be a military man, in spite of his plain dress and loose greatcoat. And the lady on his arm, that dark classic face, is not one to be easily forgotten. It is Valerie de Cevennes, who leans on the arm of her first and beloved husband, Gaston de Lancy. If I have said little of this meeting, of this restoration of the only man she ever loved, which has been to her as a resurrection of the dead – it is because there are some joys which, from their very intensity, are too painful and too sacred for many words. He was restored to her. She had never murdered him. The potion given her by Blurosset was a very powerful opiate, which had produced a sleep resembling death in all its outward symptoms. Through the influence of the chemist the report of the death was spread abroad. The truth, except to Gaston's most devoted friends, had never been revealed. But the blow had been too much for him; and when he was told by whom his death had been attempted, he fell into a fever, which lasted for many months, during which period his

reason was entirely lost, and from which he was only rescued by the devotion of the chemist –a devotion on Blurosset’s part which, perhaps, had proceeded as much from love of the science he studied as of the man he saved. Recovering at last, Gaston de Lancy found that the glorious voice which had been his fortune was entirely gone. What was there for him to do? He enlisted in the East India Company’s service; rose through the Sikh campaign with a rapidity which astonished the bravest of his compeers. There was a romance about his story that made him a hero in his regiment. He was known to have plenty of money – to have had no earthly reason for enlisting; but he told them he would rise, as his father had done before him, in the wars of the Empire, by merit alone, and he had kept his word. The French ensign, the lieutenant, the captain – in each rising grade he had been alike beloved, alike admired, as a shining example of reckless courage and military genius. (Braddon 404-405)

This passage is an analeptic summary because it refers to de Lancy’s actions after his attempted murder but before he was reunited with Valerie. The narrator summarizes events which took place over the course of a large section of the novel. Here, the narrator tells the reader the missing information needed to form the complete story of de Lancy’s portion of the diegesis. We learn how de Lancy survived the “poison,” how he and Blurosset became friends, and why he joined the military. This passage and several more analeptic summaries mark the end of the novel, so we can assume the narrator uses this technique to bring the text’s mysteries to a close by revealing missing information.

The Trail of the Serpent is a metanarrative-filled novel. In this novel, metanarratives create suspense by holding the diegesis in stasis until the narrator is finished presenting information to the reader. The information given in these metanarratives is occasionally a textual clue for the reader to follow. The narrator intends for the reader to arrange these clues into a coherent and logical sequence in order to solve the mysteries of the text. This process of discovering, analyzing, and arranging textual clues makes the reader complicit in the novel’s action while ensuring that the

reader will complete the novel. When the reader solves the novel's mysteries, he or she becomes a textual detective.

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