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# The Power of Pain Gender, Sadism, and Masochism in the Works of Wilkie Collins

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Helen is a senior majoring in English with a concentration in Secondary Education.

This paper represents a portion of her honors thesis which she developed under the mentorship of Dr. Kathleen Vejvoda. She owes much gratitude to Dr. Vejvoda for her endless support, guidance, and inspiration. The research for the thesis was funded by two ATP semester grants. Helen, who is graduating in May 2010, plans to continue her studies in Victorian literature and culture in graduate school.

**I**n his novels *No Name* (1862) and *Armadale* (1866), Wilkie Collins explores the social role of women in Victorian England, a patriarchal society that forced women either to submit to the control of a man or rebel at the expense of their own health and sanity. Even though some of his characters eventually marry, thus conforming to social expectations for women, I argue that his portrayal of female characters was subversive. In quests for control over their own lives, Magdalen Vanstone and Lydia Gwilt turn to masochism and sadism, practices which eventually lead to identity loss and self-destruction. Collins suggests that feminine vengeance is provoked by the corrupt laws of the patriarchal order and relocates the source of danger from female sexuality to the social and legal institutions that oppress women.

In several of his novels, Wilkie Collins creates powerful female characters who take control of their own lives and the men in them. Magdalen Vanstone (*No Name*, 1862) and Lydia Gwilt (*Armadale*, 1866) use their femininity to take control of the men in their lives through the use of deception and manipulation. Unsatisfied with the way they have been treated by the patriarchal society which governs the social and financial aspects of their lives, these women move forward with a vengeance to claim a legacy to which each believes she is entitled. While using any means possible to attain their goals, Magdalen and Lydia each fall victim to an internal struggle—a process which leads to the dissolution of each character's identity. Magdalen is consistently aware of her own deterioration, whereas Lydia is mostly numb to her own self-destruction. Magdalen seems less conscious of how her actions may be hurting others, while Lydia revels in the pain she is causing the people around her. In the end, Magdalen is able to overcome the pain she has inflicted on herself, but Lydia succumbs to the opposing forces acting within her and takes her own life in what she describes as an act of atonement. Collins uses these two women to demonstrate that engaging in masochistic and sadistic behaviors as a means of attaining social independence ultimately leads to the breakdown of identity and destruction of self. In doing so, he makes a statement about the connections among female sexuality, agency, and identity. Collins, specifically in *Armadale*, depicts a society in which women “either control others at the expense of passion or they are controlled” and condemns the “corrupt and hypocritical system” that produced these women (Barickman, MacDonald, and Stark 140). *No Name* also addresses the hypocritical nature of a society that forces women to exercise control at their own expense or live under

the control of a man. In both novels, Collins condemns the corruption of the social and legal system that leaves women without redress in matters of their own financial and material security.

In patriarchal Victorian England, women were inferior to men in the social order and were expected to be subservient to them in the home. Even the fairly limited public and commercial activities that upper-class women pursued in the eighteenth century were no longer socially acceptable. Instead, women were limited to taking care of the home and were expected to be submissive to their husbands. Working-class women were the exception to the rule of enforced leisure, but middle- and upper-class women were expected to embody this Victorian ideal of feminine domesticity. Regardless of their class status, women were considered second-class citizens in comparison to men. Up until the second half of the nineteenth century, a woman's possessions were all legally owned by her husband and, in the case of a marital separation, the husband had sole rights to the children. Divorces were determined on a case-by-case basis. A husband needed only to claim that his wife was committing adultery, while a woman needed to provide evidence to support a claim against her husband (Altick 50-59).

This was the context within which Collins was writing, but while the influence of the Victorian culture is evident in Collins's novels, his portrayal of women is distinctive among Victorian authors. Dorothy L. Sayers refers to him as "the most genuinely feminist of all the nineteenth-century novelists," arguing that he displays a respect for women as individuals (qtd. in Lonoff 138). In many of his novels, *No Name* and *Armadale* included, Collins chooses to focus on the sexually fallen woman. The fallen woman was a Victorian image founded on Christian beliefs that labeled a sexually deviant woman as having fallen from innocence. Collins gives these scorned women positive traits and traces their lives through to an end that often results in marriage (Frick 343-44). Magdalen is an example; even though she is fallen, she is sympathetic because of her intellect, beauty, and compassion. In the end, she ends up in a happy relationship with Kirke, despite her past actions and flaws. Lydia also possesses several admirable qualities. Like Magdalen, she is beautiful and intellectual. Her naïveté about her own romantic feelings gives the reader a sense of vulnerability with which to sympathize. Lydia, however, does not end up happily married. Her power reaches a climax as her ambitions become increasingly devious and dangerous. She eventually finds herself unable to handle the strength of her own emotions, and she ends her own life.

At a glance, these two endings seem very different, but some

critics suggest that Magdalen's marriage is just as restrictive as Lydia's death. Patricia Frick argues that many of Collins's heroines, like Magdalen, only remain independent for so long before they must enter into a marriage and subsequently fall under the control of a man (Frick 343-44). In doing so he "strips them of much of their power, independence, and magnetism" (349). Sue Lonoff suggests that by marrying Magdalen to Kirke, Collins is creating a "defense against the threat of a potentially emasculating female" (151). It is as though by creating his characters Collins is giving credit to women for having the potential to take initiative and be independent, but by then forcing them into either death or marriage he is suggesting that they still need to be kept under control. While *No Name* does end with a marriage and the arguments suggesting the oppressive nature of such an ending are valid, this novel is certainly not a traditional Victorian marriage-plot novel. Rather than following the narrative conventions associated with love and the marriage market in Victorian society, the bulk of the narrative focuses on Magdalen's independence and self-fashioning prior to marrying Kirke.

Collins's deviation from the conventional patterns of Victorian narration is evident in the way he condemns the dominant ideology of gender in the period. In *No Name* and *Armadale*, Collins develops two female characters whose flawed characteristics are a result of social injustice against women and a lack of support, both legal and otherwise, for women suffering at the hand of this inequality. He gives Magdalen and Lydia similar traits such as anger, satanic behavior, and suicidal tendencies, to suggest that they are not as different as they may originally appear. Richard Barickman, Susan MacDonald, and Myra Stark argue that "[b]y creating a heroine who is unashamedly sexual, over thirty, worldly, actively scheming rather than passively in pursuit of a husband, and decidedly interested in money, Collins created a dialectic between conformity and deviance: 'good' society creates deviants who then prey upon 'good' society" (134). While they are speaking of Lydia, it can also be argued that Magdalen serves the same purpose. Her vengeful behavior is a reaction to the way she is ostracized by a society that values birthrights which can only be determined by the contract of marriage and a paternally sanctioned surname. In both cases, the women have suffered because of the social codes set in place by the patriarchal society in which they live. Lydia has been physically abused by her husband, and Magdalen has had her fortune taken from her by her uncle.

While both Magdalen's and Lydia's relationships with men suggest that their strong feminine personalities certainly play a role in their vengeful behavior, Collins also suggests that the male-dominated society these women live in and the strict

rules which govern how a female in such a society must act play a key role in inciting their vengeance. Excessive sexuality cannot be the only factor in provoking vengeful behavior since Magdalen's femininity is what ultimately saves her by attracting Kirke, and the very first acts of vengeance seen in *Armada* are committed by men—Ingelby and Wrentmore. Collins chooses to focus on the female characters to show the other influences that affect a woman's behavior. In *No Name*, Collins suggests that within every human there is both good and evil waiting for outside forces to force out one or the other. Barickman, MacDonald, and Stark argue that "Victorian society's oppressive and hypocritical sexual system *produces* the deviants whom it then piously condemns" (139, italics in original). This argument can be supported by the fact that both Magdalen and Lydia are looking for retribution as a result of legal and social discrimination that causes them, as females, to suffer. Speaking of herself and the way she has been denied her inheritance, Magdalen says, "The sense of wrong haunts her, like a possession of the devil. The resolution to right that wrong burns in her like fire" (*No Name* 236). These words could have easily been uttered by Lydia as well who lived in an abusive marriage from which she could not escape and who, like Magdalen, finds herself haunted by a devilish desire for justice. Both women feel that they have been wronged by society and it is the resulting anger that drives their vengeance.

Collins makes it clear that male-dominated society plays a strong role in inciting vengeful female behavior, but Andrew Mangham offers the convincing idea that the "concept of the 'dangerous' woman" could also be, in part, "a shadow of masculine neuroses" and claims this is what Collins is trying to dramatize (196). Citing both Lydia's relationship with the fatalistic Midwinter and Magdalen's encounters with the sleepwalking Admiral Bartram, he argues that "the 'villainess' is a danger generated and driven by the obsessions of men" (203). Mangham seems to be suggesting that men are so frightened of the power of femininity that they subconsciously provoke in women excessive behavior, such as vengeance, as a way to justify their fears and provide themselves with something to fight back against. Collins does suggest that there is a danger to excessive sexuality, but this danger stems from male fears about female sexual agency rather than from any actual immoderate female behavior. Men want to be in control; they want to control the social order, and they want to control their women. Unobstructed female sexuality thus represents a loss of patriarchal control on numerous levels as it symbolizes a man's failure to maintain control in other aspects of his life, therefore producing a fear regarding the collapse of patriarchal order as it pertains to the economy, government, military, and other sources of power that were viewed as being purely masculine.

While he depicts both Magdalen and Lydia as socially deviant and as threats to a patriarchal social order, Collins sets up their characters and histories quite differently, painting Magdalen as a sympathetic character and Lydia as a person deserving of the reader's contempt. They are two women in different stages of life whose experiences have given them very different histories. The narrator emphasizes Magdalen's youth, exuberance, and naïveté, while it is made clear that Lydia is older and has suffered. Lydia is evil, corrupt, and secretive. The fact that Lydia has secrets of which the reader is not even aware makes her a difficult character with whom to sympathize.

Magdalen is established as a character at the beginning of *No Name* and from her first introduction Collins uses a limited omniscient viewpoint to reveal the events of her life that cause her to declare her independence and act out against society. There are places where the point of view shifts and Collins employs an epistolary narrative structure to show the point of view of other characters, but the story is primarily told through the eyes of his heroine. The letters Collins provides in these sections are written by various characters, some by Magdalen herself. In their letters, the characters are able to present their accounts of events, emotions, and thoughts in a way that is unobstructed by conversation or third person narration. It is also a way to share the perspectives of various characters without shifting the point of view of the rest of the narrative too often. Since Magdalen's point of view is shared with readers early on, we are able to begin sympathizing with her from the beginning. We see who Magdalen is before her parents die; we see the way she suffers when they do die; we see what prompts her masochistic behavior; and we watch her suffer.

Collins describes Magdalen's youth and beauty while also emphasizing her sensuality and vitality. He likens her to a blooming flower—a symbol that signifies a future of growth and beauty. Magdalen

bloomed in the full physical maturity of twenty years or more---bloomed naturally and irresistibly, in right of her matchless health and strength [...] the brisk activity of all her movements; the incessant sparkle of expression in her face; the enticing gaiety which took the hearts of the quietest people by storm – even the reckless delight in bright colours [...] all sprang alike from the same source; from the overflowing physical health which strengthened every muscle, braced every nerve, and set the warm young blood tingling through her veins, like the blood of a growing child. (*No Name* 9)

She is presented as a strong, well-defined character with the potential for growth. Everything about her suggests that she knows who she is. Her appearance and personality are well defined. Magdalen's bright clothing and "overflowing" health suggest femininity and sexuality, but they also suggest excess.

According to Mangham, "[r]eferences to Magdalen as blooming [...] are clearly meant to convey ideas of organic fecundity, while the implicit allusions to her over-abundant sexual energies [...] identify her as a character with a high level of carnal energy" (184). This implies that Magdalen's innocence does not make her immune to corruption. Her susceptibility, however, is masked by her beauty and health. Through Magdalen, Collins makes a connection between robust physical health and the perceived danger of excessive female sexuality. Magdalen's health is described in sensual terms. Her physical maturity, sparkling expression, and tingling blood mark Magdalen as a character who is strong, healthy, and sexual. In the Victorian era, physical health and female sexuality were linked by childbirth. A woman needed to be healthy to carry and deliver a child and, up until the late 1800s, women were made to believe that conception could only occur if they reached orgasm (Cooper 12-14). According to Suzanne Fagence Cooper, "[h]er latent eroticism was an essential part of the focus on woman as child-bearer" (12). The female's heightened eroticism and emotions, however, were a cause of concern for males who sought to keep female sexuality under control (Cooper 12-14). While women needed to be sexual to carry out their responsibilities as a child bearer, men sought to restrain female sexuality in all other aspects of women's lives.

By describing Magdalen in this way and then developing her as he does, Collins suggests that there is a danger to excessive female sexuality—a view that was common in the nineteenth century. According to the Victorians, "uncontrolled sexuality seemed the major, almost defining symptom of insanity in women" (Showalter 74). This fear led to an increase in attempted control of the female reproductive system and fear of female sexuality (Showalter 74). In *No Name*, Magdalen's excessive sexuality leads her toward corruption, and she eventually ends up on the brink of insanity: "Her whole nervous system has given way; all the ordinary functions of her brain are in a state of collapse [...]. She may lie on that bed for weeks to come; passing alternately, without a gleam of consciousness, from a state of delirium to a state of repose" (*No Name* 580-1). When Kirke finds Magdalen at the end of the novel she is in a state of emotional and physical decline brought on by her self-destructive actions.

Magdalen knows that by attempting to thwart British laws that prevent her from claiming her inheritance she will eventually

harm herself. Even her decision to leave her family behind to embark on this quest is plagued by the beginnings of an internal struggle. She writes to her sister: "Try to forgive me. I have struggled against myself, till I am worn out in the effort. I am the wretchedest of living creatures [...]. If you knew what my thoughts are; if you knew how hard I have fought against them, and how horrible they have gone on haunting me in the lonely quiet of this house, you would pity and forgive me" (*No Name* 144). Magdalen loses her sense of identity when she is disinherited and loses the prospect for love when Frances subsequently breaks off their engagement. Magdalen's disinheritance strips her of her legal right to her last name. She overhears Mr. Pendril refer to her and Norah as "Nobody's Children" and begins to use the term to define herself (*No Name* 109). She equates her name with her identity and therefore believes that she can no longer identify herself as a member of a family or a member of society until she regains her name. She copies extracts from her father's will and letter and on them notes Mr. Pendril's comment: "Mr. Vanstone's daughters are Nobody's Children, and the law leaves them helpless at their uncle's mercy" (*No Name* 178). She keeps these words close to her at all times as a reminder of what she has lost and what she is seeking to regain—her legal rights to her name and, subsequently, her identity. As a result of her disinheritance and ended engagement, Magdalen also loses her will to be happy. On two separate occasions, she claims: "I have lost all care for myself" (*No Name* 273, 277). Her lack of self-worth ultimately leads to her decline; it causes her to sacrifice her own happiness and sanity to reclaim her inheritance. She begins to hurt herself by forcing herself to leave her sister and engage in the humiliating pursuit of Noel Vanstone. Her masochistic action of forcing herself into a relationship that disgusts and degrades her eats away at what is left of the youthful, innocent Magdalen until she finally breaks down.

Arguably, the most significant result of Magdalen's masochism is her loss of identity. *No Name*, like many sensation novels, addresses the anxieties over class identity that developed among the middle classes in the Victorian era (Thomas 180). Magdalen believes that she loses her identity when her father dies intestate. She internalizes the legal status of her family name and begins to substitute her legal condition for her subjectivity. She seeks to regain a claim on her name and inheritance, and subsequently her identity, by finding a contractual way to reclaim them. She plots to marry into her own family so that her marital rights will legally secure her with her rightful name and inheritance. Ronald R. Thomas argues that characters in sensation novels are defined "not as autonomous moral selves, or as members of a family or class, or even by the sum of their achievements; rather, they are defined through a plot of identification that attends most closely to documenting

the material facts of physical embodiment as overseen by the law” (183). Essentially, Magdalen does define herself by the documents of the law. She does not feel as though she can rightfully identify with her name unless it is legally given to her. The loss of her family name causes her to question who she is, but her quest to reclaim the identity she feels was stolen from her ends up breaking her down even further.

According to psychologist Roy F. Baumeister, masochism may be a way to escape from self-awareness (28). The desire for such escape may be present in people who have recently been rejected or been given reason to believe they will not succeed (Baumeister 34). According to Baumeister, “masochism can serve as an effective deterrent to unwanted thoughts and feelings, perhaps especially feelings of guilt, anxiety, or insecurity” (29). These terms have been applied specifically to acts of sexual masochism. Magdalen’s behavior does not involve sexual acts, but it is sexual in the sense that her pain stems from her forcing herself into a sexually charged relationship with Noel Vanstone that disgusts and emotionally drains her. The sacrifices Magdalen makes as she pursues Noel Vanstone certainly diminish her sense of pride and self-worth. Everything becomes inferior in rank compared to her mission to get back her inheritance—including her health, sanity, and relationship with Norah. These things that were once important to her no longer hold the same significance in her life. Her quest to restore her inheritance is now her only focus.

Despite the fact that Magdalen recognizes how she is hurting herself, she continues her painful endeavors to regain her family fortune. Giles Deleuze discusses masochism such as this in his essay “Coldness and Cruelty,” in which he contrasts masochism with sadism: “We are no longer in the presence of a torturer seizing upon a victim and enjoying her all the more because she is unconsenting and unpersuaded. We are dealing instead with a victim in search of a torturer and who needs to educate, persuade and conclude an alliance with the torturer in order to realize the strangest of schemes” (20). The pain Magdalen is suffering evokes a sympathy that outweighs the harm that she is causing others thus making it easier to sympathize with her than to be disturbed by her actions. Anna Jones argues that “Magdalen is not the murderous *femme fatale* we love to hate, but a loveable heroine whose sins disturb us and cause us pain, just as they disturb and pain her, and whose punishment we both dread and expect, just as she dreads and expects it” (“A Victim” 205, italics in original). Collins consistently juxtaposes descriptions of Magdalen’s emotions with descriptions of her actions, therefore giving the reader insight into the feelings that are driving Magdalen’s behavior. This use of juxtaposition clearly presents Magdalen as a victim of her circumstances and a slave to her own emotions. In *Armada*, however, Collins

does not reveal Lydia’s history and emotions until after she has already been presented as a character whose actions are despicable.

Unlike Magdalen, who is established as a character at the beginning of *No Name*, Lydia is introduced toward the middle of *Armada*. When she is first introduced into the plot, the third-person limited narrator primarily shares the point of view of either Armadale or Midwinter. We do not get any narrative from Lydia’s point of view initially. It is not until she has already been presented as a malevolent and vengeful character that Collins begins providing letters and diary entries that allow the reader to share her point of view. Before we are provided with her letters and diary entries, Lydia’s manipulative and sadistic behavior makes her detestable. Like Magdalen, she is portrayed as beautiful and sensual. In Lydia, however, these characteristics are described as being a danger both to others and herself. Her sexuality, which is defined by its physical rather than emotional nature, has the potential to enrapture and destroy others while also leaving her vulnerable to emotional pain. She is compared to a siren, a dangerous creature ready to lure men to their deaths: “[S]he had all the allurements that feast the eye, all the Siren-invitations that seduce the sense – a subtle suggestiveness in her silence, and a sexual sorcery in her smile” (*Armada* 383). Jonathan Craig Tutor lists Lydia’s attributes as “aggressive eroticism, vampirism, sexual cannibalism, and demonism” (40). Her sinister sexuality contrasts against Magdalen’s youthful purity. Lydia’s sexuality is corrupt and suggests violence, while Magdalen’s sexuality is described as being more natural and untouched by the sexual demands of men. Lydia’s history with men is intertwined with a history of violence. As a teenager, she catches the attention of her married music teacher, who, upon finding himself in love with her, shoots himself. Later in life, Lydia is convicted of murdering her husband. Magdalen has no past experiences with either men or violence. Her first love is Frank Clare, her childhood playmate. Lydia and Magdalen’s contrasting sexualities reflect the two different ways in which the women seize control of their lives: Lydia is already corrupt, so she turns to sadism, while Magdalen desecrates her own innocent self in acts of masochism.

As *Armada* progresses, Collins’s narrative style changes, and Lydia’s diary entries bring readers further into Lydia’s mind. Once Collins presents details about Lydia’s past and insights into her emotions, the reader is able to see her suffering and the events that led her to her current life and therefore sympathize with her more and more. Jennifer Hedgecock argues that

[t]wo processes emerge when Lydia unfolds her story, documenting her vulnerabilities, her manipulations, and her anxieties. First Lydia reveals a split self,

which suggests she is paradoxically a [sic] both good and bad, calculating yet impulsive, and coolheaded but obsessive. On the one hand, she is also a strong, resourceful, independent woman, while at the same time she is a romantic, vulnerable to Midwinter's affection for her. (162)

By providing the reader with Lydia's diary, Collins gives us insight into Lydia's thoughts and emotions and allows the reader to compare those to her actions. As Hedgecock points out, this reveals conflict within Lydia's character. This conflict suggests that Lydia's identity is marked by confusion. Lydia becomes aware of her own paradoxical personality when her struggle between violence and love reaches a climax. Her sense of identity is jeopardized when her love for Midwinter begins to erode her sadistic tendencies. Ultimately, the conflict between her desire to inflict pain and her feelings of love drive her to commit suicide. The one thing she told herself she would never feel again, love, has taken control over her despite her best efforts to resist it. The feelings she has developed are not consistent with her self-image. When she loses her ability to control her emotions, her sense of identity breaks down.

Lydia already has a history of deception by the time she begins plotting against Armadale and using Midwinter to get to Armadale's fortune. If she ever felt it before, she no longer struggles against herself when making her manipulative decisions. Likewise, she has no regard for the suffering of others. In fact, her desire to see others suffer can be interpreted as sadistic. In a letter to Mrs. Oldershaw she writes: "I am in one of my tempers to-night. I want a husband to vex, or a child to beat, or something of that sort. Do you ever like to see the summer insects kill themselves in the candle? I do, sometimes" (*Armadale* 166). Lydia's sadism may be a reaction to the abuse she faced in her past. By being abusive herself, she protects herself from being hurt again as she was hurt by her first husband who was both controlling, keeping Lydia locked away from society, and physically abusive. She sees this as a way to have control and to conquer her own vulnerability. Her desire for control is evident throughout the novel. She uses people and manipulates them in any way necessary to get what she wants.

Erich Fromm says that there are three types of sadism, defined by the sadist's desire to control, exploit, or cause suffering in other people (144). Based on Fromm's three types of sadism, Lydia falls best under the category of control. Fromm defines control as the desire "to make others dependent on oneself and to have absolute and unrestricted power over them so as to make of them nothing but instruments, 'clay in the potter's hand'" (144). Lydia wants to have control over everything in

her life so that she does not fall victim to abusive control. She uses deceit and violence to get what she wants and ultimately Midwinter is the clay in her hands. She manipulates him into doing what she wants him to do, which is evident when he agrees to marry her under his true name of Armadale.

There are moments when Lydia gets a glimpse inside of herself, and the damage she is causing herself is made clear. Toward the beginning of her plot she writes to Mrs. Oldershaw: "In my present situation, and with my present thoughts, the best service you can possibly render me is to lock me up" (*Armadale* 409). She recognizes that the sadism she once turned to as a means of gaining control is now controlling her and that it may get to the point where she becomes blind to the destruction she is causing. As she foreshadows, Lydia carries on with her plan and becomes so deeply involved with her deception that she cannot slow down or stop. Her plotting begins to define her as she imagines her desired results: "And when I was received as Armadale's widow, what a triumph for *me*. Triumph! It is more than triumph – it is the salvation of me" (*Armadale* 447, italics in original). Lydia's obsession with gaining control over everyone around her eventually reaches overwhelming heights and leads to her break down.

As Lydia's sadistic fantasies and narcissistic desires reveal, the threat of insanity is a major theme in *Armadale*, as it is in *No Name*. Victorian psychiatrist John Millar claimed to observe that symptoms of nymphomania were "constantly present" in young women diagnosed with insanity (qtd. in Showalter 74-5). This connection between excessive sexuality and insanity, however weak the evidence supporting it may be, is relevant to the characterization of Lydia. Her excessive sexuality is represented in comparisons between her and the sirens of mythology who seduced men to their death, an action not unlike how Lydia wishes to romantically ensnare Armadale before murdering him and claiming his money as her own. She diagnoses herself with insanity while writing in her diary: "Am I mad? Yes; all people who are as miserable as I am, are mad. I must go to the window and get some air. Shall I jump out? No; it disfigures one so, and the coroner's inquest lets so many people see it" (*Armadale* 434). Here, Lydia's self-destructive notions are overpowered by her vanity. She is aware that her beauty is one part of her identity that has remained untouched. She clings to her physical attractiveness because she knows, even if it is subconsciously, that the rest of her identity is slowly breaking down.

As the story progresses, Lydia begins to develop romantic feelings for Midwinter despite her best efforts to remain detached from him and from love in general. Up until this point in her life, Lydia has lost faith in love and uses her wickedness

as a shield to protect her from the potential pain that can result from falling in love. When she starts to recognize the effect that Midwinter has on her, Lydia's internal conflict begins to surface: "What *can* be the secret of this man's hold on me? How is it that he alters me so that I hardly know myself again? [...] I thought I *had* loved, never to love again" (*Armadale* 490, italics in original). A few pages later, in her diary, she ends the self-deception and admits that she loves him. This love, as Alison A. Case points out, "leads to [Lydia's] undoing when love overpowers self-interest" (141). By acknowledging her feelings for Midwinter, Lydia is also acknowledging that she is not in control of her emotions.

The desire to have complete control over one's own life is a theme that runs throughout both *No Name* and *Armadale*. Both Magdalen and Lydia take charge of their own lives in a way that makes them feel in control. They renounce the control male figures have over them and use their femininity to manipulate and have power over the men in their lives. Barickman, MacDonald, and Stark argue that "Magdalen acts for herself [...] using men for her advantage rather than subordinating herself to them. Though her conscious goal is to regain the name and inheritance unjustly taken from her, she is more profoundly rebelling against the fragility and emptiness of conventional feminine identity" (120). The same can be said of Lydia, who consciously is trying to get a hold of *Armadale's* fortune, but is also fighting back against the society that forced her to submit to an abusive husband. As a masochist, Magdalen "consent[s] to suffer" (Jones, "A Victim" 204). She accepts from the beginning that she is going to suffer, and therefore inflicts pain upon herself to prevent others from doing it for her. She forces herself into a relationship with Noel Vanstone and accepts the suffering she will have to endure being married to him, rather than allow herself to suffer as a nameless, fortuneless girl.

Magdalen and Lydia each have their own methods for controlling the pain they are to experience as females resisting conformity in a patriarchal society. As a masochist, Magdalen hurts herself before she can be hurt by others. As a sadist, Lydia hurts others before they can hurt her. She tries to bring others down before she becomes attached to them and before they have a claim on her emotions. While both women believe that these approaches give them control over their own lives, both end up losing control and suffering far more than either of them had planned as a result of their own actions.

Magdalen and Lydia both illustrate that the heroine of the sensation novel does not possess the same qualities as the heroine found in domestic novels of the same era. The two women are manipulative and deceitful—not the archetypal

traits of a heroic female protagonist. Melynda Huskey says that heroines of sensation novels, like Magdalen, are different kinds of heroines than the heroines of domestic novels. She argues that "they are rarely helpless, rarely innocent, and rarely punished for being neither. They are often guilty of whole Newgate Calendars, including forgery, murder, bigamy, fraud, and adultery" (7). Both Magdalen and Lydia fit this description well, having collectively engaged in fraud, murder plots, and a possible actual murder. Despite this, Collins's readers find sympathy for these women. In each case, albeit in different ways, Collins shows the woman behind the deception. He introduces readers to the pains the women have suffered. He shows the youthful and passionate side of Magdalen and the broken and confused side of Lydia, proving that each woman is not defined solely by her treachery. In Huskey's words, these characters "[remind] us how easily a weak woman can become a wicked woman" (6). In the preface to *No Name*, Collins informs his readers that the story they are about to read "depicts the struggle of a human creature, under those opposing influences of Good and Evil, which we have all felt, which we have all known" (xxi). Later he asks:

Are there, infinitely varying with each individual, inbred forces of Good and Evil in all of us, deep down below the reach of mortal encouragement and mortal repression – hidden Good and hidden Evil, both alike at the mercy of the liberating opportunity and the sufficient temptation? Within these earthly limits, is earthly Circumstance ever the key; and can no human vigilance warn us beforehand of the forces imprisoned in ourselves which that key *may* unlock? (116, italics in original)

These words suggest that Magdalen and, arguably, also Lydia are characters who represent a struggle that is human in nature. With them, Collins seems to be suggesting that there is the potential to be evil within everyone, and that influences from society—physical pain, abandonment, etc.—can manifest that latent wickedness into something real. Collins creates these two women who must choose between conforming to the social standards set for them by the patriarchal society or rebelling and taking control of their own lives socially, financially, and romantically. Ultimately, each woman opts for the more rebellious path. While Magdalen turns masochistic in her quest and Lydia resorts to sadistic behavior, both women eventually lose touch with their own identities, subsequently losing much of the very control they are seeking. With these characters, Collins suggests that feminine vengeance is provoked by the corruptions of the sexual system defined by a patriarchal society. Magdalen and Lydia exemplify the idea that danger does not lie in female sexuality, but rather in the oppressive nature of a male-dominated society.



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