

**VICTORIAN DOMESTIC DISORDERS: MENTAL ILLNESS AND NATURE-
NURTURE CONFUSION**

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Victorian debates about the etiology of madness are examined through a comparative study of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White* and Charles Dickens's *Great Expectations*. The Victorian era is marked by inquiry into the causes of mental illness, defined by a consideration of both heredity and environmental exposures. By combining literary analyses of Dickens' and Collins' novels and Victorian medical and scientific texts, this study examines how literary works reflect contemporary confusion about the origins and treatment of mental illness. Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie of *The Woman in White* represent an emphasis on inherited vulnerability towards mental illness, while *Great Expectations*' Miss Havisham and Estella illustrate the importance of social and circumstantial settings in the development and mental health of the individual. Gender is a considerable factor in the Victorian conceptualization of mental illness, as women are thought to be naturally more susceptible to external influence than men and therefore more prone to states of affected mental capacity. The role of the domestic sphere is considered as a protective factor and treatment model. The activation of inherited vulnerabilities through environmental exposure ultimately combines the nature and nurture theories and provides insight into a Victorian emphasis on control and surveillance of the domestic environment to which women are often confined.

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PREFACE

I would like to thank all the faculty members, colleagues, and friends at the University of Pittsburgh who helped me in the pursuit of this research project. I would also like to express special thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Amy Murray Twyning, who introduced me to the process of literary research and provided immense assistance at every stage. Finally, I would like to thank my family whose constant support made this project possible.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Wilkie Collins' 1859 novel *The Woman in White* tells the story of two women: Laura Fairlie, the beloved heiress, and Anne Catherick, her impoverished half-sister. In the course of the novel, both women are involuntarily committed by Laura's villainous husband, Sir Percival Glyde, and kept in an asylum for the mentally ill. Glyde commits Anne to protect the secret of his illegitimacy and later commits Laura, his wife, to gain control of her fortune and escape his crushing financial debt. Walter Hartright, one of the novel's protagonists and main narrator, becomes involved in the sisters' stories through separate encounters.

Collins develops the parallel fates of the two half-sisters to expose the evils of marriage without property rights, and the detestable Sir Percival acts as a stand-in for the predatory men who marry women for their inheritance. My own interest in the novel, however, is its exposure and critique of the diagnosis and treatment of the mentally ill in the Victorian Era. I am interested in this novel precisely because the exact nature of the critique reveals progressive attitudes to the mentally ill that are nevertheless undermined by ideas about femininity that build a tenuous link between women and mental illness. The Victorian Era is characterized by an array of competing and overlapping ideas about the sources of mental illness and about the best kinds of treatment. Mixed up in the culture's common sense and medical establishment's ideas about mental illness are uncertainties about its origins and consequently the correct methods of diagnosis, prevention, and treatment.

The contemporary Victorian texts collected by Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth in their anthology *Embodied Selves* are integral to a “real-life” understanding of the Victorian medical views of the causes of mental illness and gender differences in diagnosis. By gathering a variety of primary sources, including medical and cultural works, Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth’s scholarly work provides a broad and detailed view of nineteenth century Britain’s perceptions of mental illness. The scholars’ collection of the work of contemporary authors and scientists often deviate from and disagree with each other’s premises, granting access into historical beliefs about the different mental strengths of and challenges facing men and women. Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth’s anthology balances many of the threads of Victorian belief interweaving through the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. Theories addressed include mesmerism, centered on belief in the power of an “animal magnetism” shared by all celestial and earthly bodies and causing health imbalances when obstructed. Other Victorian theorists focused on the inheritance of criminality through the family and applied the pseudoscience of phrenology, studying the size and shape of the cranium, to justify racism. The inclusion of specific scientific theories, articulated by Victorians and collected by Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth, operationalizes the general concepts of “nature” and “nurture.”

Andrew Scull’s numerous studies of the historical and cultural treatment of mental illness, including *Madness in Civilization*, provide me with a historical background in which to base my literary analysis. His work on the relationship between social context and medical diagnosis, exemplified by his study of the condition of hysteria, frequently focuses on the role of gender in the interpretation and analysis of behavior and the treatment of diagnosed illness. This study is complemented by Sarah Wise’s *Inconvenient People*, in which she examines the economic and social factors motivating Victorian modes of treatment in the Victorian lunatic

asylum while questioning an overreliance on fictional literature in the study of medical history. Wise's work reveals that Victorian men are in greater danger of wrongful confinement in lunatic asylums due to their generally greater financial assets.

A close comparative study of *The Woman in White* and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* reveals several trends in thinking about mental illness that I explore in this thesis. Characters in these novels question the causes of mental illness, rooting the debate in questions of gender, heredity, and environmental influences. At the same time, there is confusion over those things that are natural and those that are social or circumstantial. This confusion is particularly pronounced when it comes to representations of women. Most of the characters suffering from mental illnesses in these novels are female, providing a specific view into the influence of gender on Victorian perceptions of mental disorders. Women are generally considered to be more vulnerable than men in the Victorian era, and this perception extends to theories of the mind and its corresponding illnesses.

2.0 *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

The Woman in White critiques the asylum system as an arm of patriarchal power, but it also exhibits ideas about the origins of mental illness that disproportionately target women. In this section, I examine Collins' representation of women as naturally more susceptible to external influence than men and therefore more prone to states of affected mental capacity. I also situate Collins' novel within the context of Victorian gender constructions and Victorian discourse on mental illness.

Before he takes up his post as Laura's and her other half-sister Marian's drawing instructor, Walter encounters and aids Anne Catherick in what turns out to be her escape from the lunatic asylum in which she was placed by her persecutor, Sir Percival and only later discovers the connection between Anne and the Fairlie family. The juxtaposition of Anne's disheveled exterior with the urbanity and wealth of Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco reveals a Victorian overreliance on appearance as an indicator of character.

2.1.1 **The Power of Propriety**

As stated in the introduction, *The Woman in White* is unquestionably an indictment of the patriarchal establishment whose representatives are the predatory and vicious Sir Percival Glyde,

Laura's morally suspect late father, and the current head of the Fairlie family, an effete art-collector ensconced within his mansion and disengaged from the external world so much so that his refusal to concern himself with his niece's marriage settlement in favor of traditional property arrangements aids and abets Sir Percival's predation. The current Mr. Fairlie represents an unhealthy and unproductive adherence to Victorian respectability. Of a Renaissance depiction of cherubs, Fairlie declares, "Quite a model family!" while Walter observes him "leering at the cherubs. 'Such nice round faces, and such nice soft wings and—nothing else. No dirty little legs to run about on, and no noisy little lungs to scream with. How immeasurably superior to the existing construction!'" (Collins 44). Mr. Fairlie's "model" family, his cherubic children, is immobile and silent. Though Mr. Fairlie, characterized as an effeminate and physically weak man with "a frail, languidly-fretful, over-refined look" (Collins 39-40), is not presented as a paragon of Victorian patriarchal power, his wistful statements for a beautiful, socially unobtrusive family align his opinions with the Victorian idealization of the domestic circle, yet his "leering" ties him to other predatory males, Fosco and Glyde, who threaten the sanctity of the home.

Even Count Fosco, a villain, notes the problems with Victorian Britain's sense of propriety. Count Fosco indicts the social propriety of England itself, stating, "English society, Miss Halcombe, is as often the accomplice, as it is the enemy of crime" (Collins 238). Because Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde are moneyed men with titles, they are socially protected and empowered. The assumption that, because of their identities, they must behave in accordance with socially accepted codes of conduct, allows the men to commit crimes against those with less agency and maintain their lofty positions. The ability of Glyde and Fosco to ascend to the heights of British society implies that Victorian structures of respectability may be hollow. Jerome

Meckier agrees, “in *The Woman in White*...the novelist suggests that society’s morals consist mainly of outward forms, scoundrels appeal to propriety more readily than the devil quotes scripture” (Meckier 108).

The emptiness of Victorian propriety represented in Collins’ work is supported by the historical account of Rosina Bulwer Lytton, the wife of Edward Bulwer Lytton who was temporarily confined in an asylum in 1858 after she publicly denounced her husband during his political campaign. In a memoir published in 1880, *A Blighted Life*, she decries the societal structures that enable both the protection of her allegedly abusive husband and the restriction of her own freedom and voice. She even goes so far as to denounce Queen Victoria, who “as she most usually does with all criminals, took him [Bulwer Lytton] by the hand; petted, favoured, and promoted him; while his Victim was driven from Society into poverty and exile, and was for years the unceasing object of abuse, slander and libel” (Lytton 3). Her husband’s masculinity and wealth give him public credibility which he parlays into an increased control and silencing of his wife. The institutional privileges afforded to wealthy men of note reveals how men must protect their own names, while the names of inconvenient men and women, including Anne and Laura, are of less worth. Rosina Lytton creates a clear comparison between the character and resources of herself and her husband, as she outlines “a narrative of persecution of the most base and unmanly kind, practiced by a wicked Man of great talent and resources, upon a Noble Lady, who had hardly anything to defend her but a high spirit, a consciousness of innocence, and a resolve not to be crushed” (Lytton I). Rosina Bulwer Lytton distinguishes between the characteristic of nobility and the possession of “talent and resources,” things that Victorian discourse treated as synonymous. Her narrative proves that possessing the moniker of gentleman does not ensure kind or generous behavior. Bulwer Lytton’s memoir also addresses the fallacies of the Victorian

medical institution that acts as the mechanism of her husband's intimidation strategy. Wilkie Collins also addresses the potentially harmful relationship between an overdependence on propriety and diagnoses of mental illness in the Victorian context.

The Woman in White echoes the belief that medical institutions were too bound up with dominant interests for their diagnoses of mental illness to be reliable. Laura marries Glyde in order to fulfill a promise made to her father. Anne Catherick, intending to aid Laura in service to the memory of her deceased mother figure, Mrs. Fairlie, dies and is buried under the name of Mrs. Fairlie's biological daughter. Laura and Anne's painful experiences, related to their attempted tributes to their deceased parent figures, seem to reinforce Fosco's declaration that English propriety is a tool of manipulation. For Laura and Anne, outward appearances wield more power than internal principles. The half-sisters' motivations of filial duty are forgotten, as their bodies become props of Glyde and Fosco's performances as gentlemen. Both their uncontrolled physical similarities and self-sacrificing tendencies contribute to the danger of their interactions with supposed Victorian gentlemen. The disparity between the principles and outward actions of another Victorian gentleman, the deceased Fairlie patriarch, leads to the women's physical similarities. As Walter notes, "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 568-569) The trials of the daughters atone for the "sin" of the father, suggesting that, despite their morality, Victorian women are still obliged to suffer by and for the actions of men who dictate but are not required to abide by their own rules of conduct. Marian, on the other hand, exists somewhat outside the

system of feminine subjection, and while she is not exempt from suffering, she does not become an object without agency in the transactions of male power. Accordingly, the people outside of the institutions of patriarchal power become those who are able to tell the differences between the appearance of propriety and the reality of wrongdoing. It is the amateur detectives and non-doctors, Marian and Walter, who uncover nefarious plots and free wrongly confined individuals. Doctors and medical staff are the unwitting but effective tools by which Glyde and Fosco steal Laura's fortune and identity. The audience is left to rely on the agency and determination of the untrained Marian and Walter to right the wrongs that were unchecked and indeed enabled by the systems of medicine.

With its extreme sensational design, then, *The Woman in White* exposes the inherent problems with involuntary commitment as compounding the disenfranchisement of women within a legal structure that inadvertently places a premium on their incapacity. Rosina Bulwer Lytton serves as historical evidence of the existence of these problems. If an individual creates social discomfort or disturbances for a member of the gentlemanly elite, in this case her husband, her behavior could be construed as a symptom of madness and support efforts to confine her in an asylum. Bulwer Lytton's failure to maintain a respectful silence regarding her husband's behavior and the disintegration of their marriage represents a lapse in the codes of social propriety that threatens her husband's name and thus motivates his efforts to silence her using the language of pathology and the space of the asylum. Bulwer Lytton's case is one example of how definitions of social disability have been modified throughout history, not in order to be inclusive of more individuals, as we would hope, but to serve the needs of people in power.

2.2 SUSCEPTIBLE FEMININITY

2.2.1 Fragile Bodies and Sensitive Minds

Outside of deliberate manipulations and abuses of the asylum system, many historians note how Victorian constructions of femininity render women more vulnerable to charges of mental illness. In *Trials of Passion*, Lisa Appignanesi explains “not all the mid-nineteenth-century mind doctors in Britain bought into the uterine or ovarian theory of hysteria and presumed it had a physiological base...but many shared a sense of the precarious nature of being woman. Women are both endangered and dangerous” (51). The perception of women’s special gendered nature and greater closeness to the natural carved a narrow path of perceived mental health for women to tread. Susan E. Cayleff, outlining the historical feminization of nervous disorders in Western medicine, focuses on the relationship between female sexual reproduction and mental health. “Any physiological occurrence that disarranged the balance of the elements, including puberty, menses, childbearing, and menarche, were seen as critical junctions that necessitated physician intervention and therapeutic management. Thus, women’s natural physiological processes became seen by certain medical practitioners as medical junctures during which the body and its systems were in danger” (Cayleff 1201). Traditional stages of female adolescent and adult development, bordered by her sexual maturity, are both sites of danger, requiring intense surveillance, and potential moments for social and medical intervention. Other women, such as Anne Catherick, who do not move through these life stages, are also targeted for intervention and treatment that characterizes their failures to conform as indicators of pathology and focuses on the abnormalities of their emotional and physical development.

The Scottish physician and alienist Sir Alexander Morison proposed that the female body, regardless of the female's choice, increased her vulnerability to negative external forces. The Victorian woman's natural moral, emotional, and physical being make her more susceptible to mental illness, making it critical that she be supervised and controlled for her own safety.

Women, both by their temperament and their intellectual and moral dispositions, appear to be more predisposed to insanity. They are, moreover, subject to predisposing causes peculiar to themselves, as menstruation, pregnancy, parturition, lactation, the critical age, etc. It will be evident therefore, that if the influences strictly depending on the sex were the only ones capable of provoking insanity, this disease would be more frequent in women; but the balance is restored on the side of the men by the influence of general paralysis, so frequent among them, by excesses of all kinds, by the impulse of ambition, and by numerous other agencies (Morison 293)

Men, then, are not exempt from the fear of mental illness. But, the source of worry for the Victorian male is not the existence of his reproductive organs but instead the diseases transmitted through his sexual activity, including syphilis: the cause of general paralysis. His body is not dangerous, but rather his choices regarding his body are self-destructive. The female body processes defined as dangerous by Victorian medical professionals are involuntary, uncontrollable, or demanded of women through their prescribed social roles. Women are not in as much danger of excess ambition or sexual disease because they are generally not allowed the same control and freedom of choice as men. Social constructs of gender, supported by Victorian science, present the female body and mind as fragile and in need of control. Victorian men, though, required *self-control* in order to maintain their own freedom. Wise points out:

Perhaps surprisingly, gender was not--to the Victorians—an obvious factor to be borne in mind when pondering the alleged rise in lunacy in England...For every mad-doctor who cited the female reproductive system and weakly constituted intellect as the cause of female insanity, there was a physician to point out that the far more sophisticated masculine mind was under threat from overwork, business ambition, heavy drinking, the solitary vice, debt, gambling, celibacy or debauchery. High levels of self-control and conformity were demanded of 'respectable' males (Wise xix)

The medical institution's internal debate over gender as a factor in the etiology of mental illness contributes to contemporary public doubt of the mad-doctor's expertise reinforces the perception of Victorian society as a place with both high demands for social conformity and high risks for unconventional behaviors.

Men, again, are endangered more by their excessive activity and substance abuse problems than by intellectual stimulation or lack of paternal supervision. But, they must also adopt and fulfill their role in the domestic sphere. They may not be angels of the house, but men are required to supervise and manage the domestic sphere, ensuring the economic future and moral standing of his family. "As with females accused of 'moral insanity', a man's inability to fill his domestic role as a loving husband and respect-inspiring father could contribute heavily to an accusation of unsoundness of mind" (Wise 272). The Victorian man must model proper "gentlemanly" behavior and risks losing control over both himself and his family if his socially visible acts are deemed inappropriate or symptomatic of mental pathology. Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth explain that "While women's entire bodies were pathologized, concern with the male body focused almost exclusively on the genitals, and on explicitly sexual behavior. At its simplest, masculine sexuality was seen as a potentially self-destructive drive that had to be kept

within its proper channels of adult heterosexual intercourse, if it was not to become diseased and morbid...the control of sexuality is literally the sign of control over the self—its breakdown is both cause and symptom of insanity” (Ed. Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth 167). Women arguably are never given much control over their sexuality or bodies in the first place and consequently are not expected to exert as much independent control in the absence of a husband or father figure. But the Victorian white male’s performative domination of others, through cultural, economic, sexual, and colonial means, is the British Empire’s primary way of maintaining control over their territories. If there are examples of individual deviation from this masculine control of others and self, such as a lack of control over sexual impulses, these individuals must be quarantined from general society, including in the lunatic asylum, to prevent social weakening.

The tendency for women to be disproportionately perceived as mentally ill is endemic to the Victorian conception of ideal femininity. *The Woman in White* shares these conceptions of female nature to an extent that undermines its examination of the pernicious effects of systematic oppression. The idea that women are more the products of nature than their own choice and self-determination is at first humorously canvassed in Walter’s description of Mrs. Vesey, Laura’s faithful old nursemaid.

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 46)

Although humorous, this passage emphasizes the association of nature with the feminine in two ways. Firstly, nature ‘herself’ is conceived of as female as in the notion of “Mother Nature.” Secondly, this description of Mrs. Vesey as a cabbage combined with her motherly role and attributes suggest that that which is essentially feminine, motherhood, is also barely sentient. The nature and the natural flaws of motherhood are also associated with Mrs. Fairlie, Laura’s deceased mother. Despite her close charitable work with Anne Catherick, she seems to have been entirely without suspicion of her husband’s part in Anne’s resemblance to her own daughter.

2.2.2 Maternal Inheritance

A deeper examination of the role of mothers and mother figures in *The Woman in White* reveals its share in certain Victorian etiologies of mental illness. Heredity was cited as the cause of many illnesses in the 19th century. In her article “‘Bolder with her Lover in the Dark’: Collins and Disabled Women’s Sexuality,” Martha Stoddard Holmes notes, “Not only physical traits such as hair color and height but also diseases such as syphilis and addictions such as alcoholism were considered truly hereditary in the nineteenth century; an ill parent would produce a ‘vitiated sperm or ovum’ and finally offspring with ‘defective’ constitutions, if not the parent’s particular illness. Both acquired weaknesses and the particular state of the parents’ bodies and minds at the moment of conception were believed to influence the formation of the unborn child” (Holmes 80). Further, Holmes notes that more transitory states could also influence the health of a fetus. For instance, “the theory of maternal impressions or frights, which posited physical

characteristics as something that could be ‘caught’ through the eyes and transmitted to an unborn child...was a commonplace belief among educated people at least through the 1850s” (Holmes 79). The inheritance of characteristics through the maternal eyes both reinforces the Victorian positioning of the mother as a potential danger to the child and the idea of women as especially susceptible to negative influences.

Anne Catherick is an example of this double feminine susceptibility. Her mother is an adulteress and a weak-willed accomplice to Sir Percival’s nefarious designs on Laura’s wealth as well as being complicit in her daughter’s involuntary commitment to an asylum. As a result, Anne suffers from vaguely defined mental and physical weaknesses. She is said to have some congenital heart defect that eventually leads to an untimely death that is precipitated by her confinement in an asylum, her fear of Sir Percival, and her maltreatment by the Foscos. She is also highly susceptible to suggestion. Ironically, Laura and Anne share a father rather than a mother, but the deceased Mr. Fairlie is slightly focused on as an example of the degeneration and sin of the upper classes rather than as an example of the danger of paternal inheritance. The source of her identity as “the woman in white” stems from the maternal Mrs. Fairlie’s influence. In a letter to her husband discovered by Marian, Mrs. Fairlie tells of her “new scholar” in the village:

This poor little Anne Catherick is a sweet, affectionate, grateful girl; and says the quaintest, prettiest things (as you shall judge by an instance), in the most oddly sudden, surprised, half-frightened way. Although she is dressed very neatly, her clothes show a sad want of taste in colour and pattern. So I arranged, yesterday, that some of our darling Laura’s old white frocks and white hats should be altered for Anne Catherick; explaining to her that little girls of her complexion looked neater and better all in white than in

anything else. She hesitated and seemed puzzled for a minute; then flushed up, and appeared to understand. Her little hand clasped mine suddenly. She kissed it, Philip; and said (oh, so earnestly!), ‘I will always wear white as long as I live. It will help me to remember you, ma’am, and to think that I am pleasing you still, when I go away and see you no more’. (59-60)

Mrs. Fairlie seems to share in the culpability of Anne’s fate by overly encouraging this juvenile sensibility in Anne, whom she deems a “quaint” “poor little soul.” She vows that Anne “shall always have a stock white frocks, made with good deep tucks, to let out for her as she grows,” thus ensuring that Anne will never grow out of her immature devotion to pleasing Mrs. Fairlie (59).

Anne’s susceptibility is established as part of her individual nature, influenced by her parentage and inherited to some extent, perhaps from her aristocratic father. She has always been mentally affected, though there is some uncertainty regarding whether her mental weakness has to do with her intelligence or with her sanity. However, this susceptibility appears as a general natural trait related to femininity when we consider Laura Fairlie’s history. Laura Fairlie, an upper class heiress, fits the behavioral standards expected of her gender and social class, unlike Anne. Laura also has more the benefits of more social resources and a less dysfunctional family background than Anne. The shared traumatic experience of the asylum brings the half-sisters closer together in appearance. The lunatic asylum acts as an unintentional crucible for the women, exacerbating or revealing their inherent vulnerabilities towards mental illness, even as the space is meant to cure or contain these sensitivities. At first, the physical resemblance between Anne and Laura suggests both the thinkable and unthinkable possibility that Laura could come to resemble Anne in more than superficial ways. Walter admits, “Although I hated

myself even for thinking such a thing, still, while I looked at the woman before me, the idea would force itself into my mind that one sad change, in the future, was all that was wanting to make the likeness complete, which I now saw to be so imperfect in detail. If ever sorrow and suffering set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of Miss Fairlie's face, then, and then only, Anne Catherick and she would be the twin-sisters of chance resemblance, the living reflexions of each other" (Collins 96-97). This awful suggestion comes true, as we know, in the course of Laura's treacherous marriage and confinement in an asylum.

Laura's purity and lack of knowledge, though attractive to potential male protectors and husbands, does not provide her with the social agency to protect herself against Sir Percival and Count Fosco's cruel plans for her. Laura's nature is a financial boon for her husband, and her social upbringing leaves her without the skills to defend herself. "Every word she had spoken had innocently betrayed her purity and truth to a man who thoroughly understood the priceless value of a pure and true woman. Her own noble conduct had been the hidden enemy, throughout, of all the hopes she had trusted to it" (Collins 173). The priceless value of a woman is in direct relation to her value to the domestic sphere and the morality of the family. As a potential mother, Laura's noble conduct can be used as a model to educate and train her own future children. However, her moral purity, though deemed natural, actually detracts from her ability to survive and reproduce. In contrast to Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest, Laura's most socially prized attribute also leaves her the most vulnerable. Her innocence and ignorance entices the loyalty of characters such as Walter and Marian, but Laura is never completely free to make her own fully informed choices.

Perhaps only "unnatural" women such as Marian and Mrs. Catherick, deemed so due to their bodies and actions, can protect themselves while maintaining independence. Marian, too,

extends her unnatural freedom by rescuing and resurrecting her sister and taking over the role of the novel's hero. Laura, though having experienced the trauma of both the lunatic asylum and Sir Percival Glyde's marital abuse, maintains her moral and intellectual purity. Her memory loss, though a defense against her trauma and a symptom of her deteriorated mental state, also acts as a social protection. By losing her cognitive freedom, Laura is not spoiled as a potential bride for Walter and maintains her status as the beautiful heiress. "Not only virginity, but something more was demanded of a potential bride; she was expected to be 'innocent,' free from any thoughts of love or sexuality until after she had received a proposal" (Kane 97). In the text, Laura symbolically meets the Victorian standards of purity. There are no public displays of spousal affection between Glyde and Laura, and the only physical interactions described between them are those of physical abuse and intimidation. She has not, to Marian's eyes, undergone the change typical to women after marriage and consequently remains a viable option to become Walter's wife. Laura also meets the demands of bridal innocence because she seemingly cannot control her thoughts.

2.3 DOMESTIC DISTURBANCES

2.3.1 Environments of Treatment

Women's susceptibility also makes them vectors for contagion. Walter describes Anne's monomania as like an infectious disease. He reports, "Those words and the doubt which had just escaped me as to the sanity of the writer of the letter, acting together on my mind, suggested an idea, which I was literally afraid to express openly, or even to encourage secretly. I began to

doubt whether my own faculties were not in danger of losing their balance. It seemed almost like a monomania to be tracing back everything strange that happened, everything unexpected that was said, always to the same hidden source and the same sinister influence” (Collins 80). He fears the influence of Anne’s mental illness, and “the monomaniac distressed damsel seems to spread monomania and to contaminate the characters with whom she is in contact” (Talairach-Vielmas 48) even though what stands as her “monomania” is, in fact, rational suspicion of Sir Percival based on ample experience.

This idea of women’s mental illness as a contagion in the domestic space is one logic for incarceration in an asylum. John Connolly, an early proponent of the non-restraint treatment for asylum patients in England, argues, “As respects lady-patients, so long as they remain at home, all domestic influences usually cease to benefit them; they live in an insane reverie...In the meantime, the habitation of the family has been full of anxiety or terror. The remotest parts of it have been rendered awful, by the presence of a deranged creature under the same roof: her voice...her very tread and stamp in her dark and disordered and remote chamber, have seemed to penetrate the whole house; and, assailed by her wild energy, the very walls and roof have appeared unsafe, and capable of partial demolition” (“Mental Maladies” Ed. Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth 235-236)

This description of the “lady-patient” in the family home indicates the fear of the contaminating energy of her madness on the household. From the onset of *The Woman in White*, the “madwoman,” Anne Catherick, is presented as an antagonist of the Victorian domestic sphere and an antithesis to its conventions. Of his initial meeting with her, Walter marvels that, “It was like a dream...Had I really left, little more than an hour since, the quiet, decent, conventionally-domestic atmosphere of my mother’s cottage?” (Collins 23). From the middle-

class domestic sphere of his mother's home, Walter is immediately plunged into the decaying world of the upper class Fairlies and comes into contact with the evidence of their concealed degeneracy in the form of Anne Catherick. She embodies the moral and mental failures of the Fairlies with her individual failure to behave as a proper Victorian woman, while Walter's mother and sister represent "a particular version of feminine gentility embodied in the middle-class wife and mother, or the angel of the house" (Pykett 47-48). Lyn Pykett contends that Anne Catherick and Laura Fairlie are unconventional choices for the Victorian madwoman, citing their adherence to the behavioral codes of the domestic sphere. "The classic nineteenth-century madwoman is the deviant, energetic woman who defies familial and social control. In *The Woman in White*, however, it is the passive, controlled, domestic women, Anne and Laura, who are 'mad'" (38). Anne is not completely passive or controlled, as evidenced by her animalistic comparison and Walter's fear of her violence. But, Laura and Anne do not seek to disrupt the structures of the Victorian family home in the same way as Miss Havisham; instead they actively resist the machinations of Sir Percival Glyde in order to restore the sanctity of the Victorian marriage and family. Anne seeks to honor the memory of Mrs. Fairlie, while Laura returns to the marital fold with the heroic Walter. The half-sisters are not exempt from the control of Glyde and Fosco and are ironically confined to the asylum for their efforts to uphold Victorian conventions of the domestic sphere.

Marriage, in the Victorian mind, seems to be considered, in part, another external influence that exerts change on the passive and receptive woman, a "natural" part of life as well as a financial and social arrangement. However, instead of undergoing the natural change associated with marriage, Laura is stunted by the "wrongness" of her marriage, remaining in a state of arrested development and exhibiting heightened anxiety and paranoia, albeit later

justified. Eleanor Fosco, a woman abused by her husband and involved in his criminal enterprise, is the textual representation of the marital change effectively wrought. Originally an obnoxious social nuisance, through her marriage to Fosco, Eleanor becomes a silent wife whose behavior is directed solely by her husband's wishes. Ironically, Marian at first judges Eleanor's marital transformation, despite its causes, to be a positive event for social good.

For the common purposes of society the extraordinary change thus produced in her [Eleanor Fosco], is, beyond all doubt, a change for the better, seeing that it has transformed her into a civil, silent, unobtrusive woman, who is never in the way. How far she is really reformed or deteriorated in her secret self is another question. I have once or twice seen sudden changes of expression on her pinched lips, and heard sudden inflexions of tone in her calm voice, which have led me to suspect that her present state of suppression may have sealed up something dangerous in her nature, which used to evaporate harmlessly in the freedom of her former life. (Collins 219).

The main positive effect of Eleanor's marriage, in Marian's expressed opinion, is her silence. Eleanor is no longer "in the way," no longer creating conflict, becoming a family embarrassment, or making an independent contribution to society or even conversation without Fosco's instruction. Her husband's dominating influence is an environmental influence curbing her excessive impulses and shaping her into a silent minion whose gender provides access to female victims of Fosco's schemes. In the debate between individual rights and social good, spurred by Walter's debate over aiding Anne, Eleanor's rights are deemed less important than social harmony. But, Eleanor is not completely transformed; instead her marriage seals her prominent personality inside her own body. Once again, there is a conflict between appearance and reality, art and nature. Marian observes Eleanor's true nature through observations of her

body and speech; her face actually reveals the existence of a mask. She is confined within herself and within her marriage to dangerous effect as she exercises malicious impulses against other people, including her relatives. She is in part a product of and a total possession of her husband and works to help her husband acquire more power and property through the confinement and dispossession of her niece. Marian recognizes that behavioral control, rather than stifling an individual's unwanted behavior, may only be a temporary suppression of a future and more violent or hazardous action.

The Fosco marriage is a criticism of the power dynamics within a Victorian marriage and its relationship to beliefs about female nature. Though Eleanor was flawed before her marriage, within her marriage she has no power to resist participation in Fosco's schemes and perhaps views them as her only route to power. Her tractable female nature is now linked to her husband's nature and subsequent influences, but she has little recourse to avoid or escape him. Within the marriage, Fosco uses physical and psychological force to mold Eleanor into a tool, another of his creatures. Even Marian, outside of their marriage, is aware of Count Fosco's violence toward his wife. "The rod of iron with which he rules her never appears in company—it is a private rod, and is always kept up-stairs" (Collins 225). The means of spousal abuse and control, the metaphorical but perhaps also actual rod, is acknowledged but remains unseen. Through Fosco's abuse, Eleanor's family and acquaintances, including Marian, can benefit and delight in the effects of her abuse. By Fosco's concealment of the sight of the rod and the others' allowance of this concealment, both parties can profit from the violence without acknowledging the physical and emotional suffering of Eleanor. In another form of transaction, by containing and concealing people with mental illnesses within asylums, both the medical establishment and Victorian society can profit financially and avoid the social embarrassments possibly inflicted by

uncontrollable people. Marriage, too, can increase financial prosperity and shield individuals from scandals related to improper behavior. Particularly if the disgraced individual is female, marriage can act as a punitive and confining measure, like the lunatic asylum. This is not to say that abuse within the asylum was ignored or that reforms were not enacted but rather that profit, financial or otherwise, could outweigh the cost of human suffering in Victorian society.

2.3.2 Training Models

The Victorian ideal of marriage seems to encourage this process of molding a wife, yet Fosco's marriage transforms his English wife into a weapon against her own country and society. Laura is also subjected to a similarly manipulative marriage: she too is sealed up within the walls of the asylum and her identity taken from her and changed. Like her aunt, Laura's secret self survives the transformative efforts of the marital and medical institutions, but while Madame Fosco is violent, Laura seems to recede into a childlike status, requiring the care of both Marian and Walter. Laura's infantilism is closer to the preferred power dynamic of the Victorian marriage; her vulnerability attracts Walter's care and desire to marry her rather than inspires him to wait until she is more fully recovered from her trauma. Though the novel ends in marriage, the Foscos' example of marriage creates doubt in the value of the Victorian marriage as a training sphere or form of reformation if unbalanced power dynamics are maintained.

The environment of gendered education and domestic training in the Victorian era in fact cultivates the nature of the pure woman, a woman who represents innocence and Victorian moral standards. Marian exclaims against the Victorian woman's limitations within marriage. "Are you to break your heart to set his mind at ease? No man under heaven deserves these sacrifices from us women. Men! They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace—they drag us away

from our parents' love and our sisters' friendship—they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel” (Collins 183). Marriage is not then framed as a protection but as an imprisonment and a dehumanizing experience; it is a transformation from a human to an animal. Like domesticated animals to which Marian explicitly compares them, women are helpless to resist the external force of their “master,” their husband or father and are transferred to the marital home in order to undergo training for the next part of their lives as wives and mothers. Laura, too, undergoes additional “training” in the asylum as she is forced to become Anne Catherick. By the conclusion of the novel, Laura has avoided this in her relationship with Walter, particularly because Marian remains with her, but Laura has also experienced an immense trauma and is infantilized by Walter and Marian in response.

The implied diagnosis of women as naturally weaker and more susceptible to evil influence leading to insanity reveals a peculiar convergence in the Victorian mind where the “nature” of women requires “nurture” to be complete and sane. Jenny Bourne Taylor and Sally Shuttleworth cite the Reverend John Barlow, an Anglican priest and Secretary of the Royal Institution of Great Britain, who believed that nature’s intention for the role of women as society’s moral conscience was undermined by the institution of the madhouse:

We need not ask what women’s destination is—nature has written it in characters too clear to be mistaken: the large development of the intellectual organs, and the feeble muscular power, mark her for the high-minded purifier of society—her strength must be that of knowledge:--yet, we refuse the kind of culture which such an organization requires, hide the victim of mis-management in a madhouse—and then talk proudly about

an enlightened age! (Barlow “The Power of Self-Control” Ed. Bourne Taylor and Shuttleworth 245)

The primary nurturing influence must be the domestic sphere. This is seen through the divergence of Laura and Anne, who are confined in the lunatic asylum and Count Fosco’s domestic space, respectively. Though Anne perishes in the domestic space, it is because of her natural vulnerability and the aberration of Count Fosco’s domesticity. Laura’s rehabilitation in the domestic sphere created by Walter and Marian projects the space as both vital for recovery and reintegration into society and transferable to different physical places, such as an urban apartment. The domestic sphere is repurposed and transplanted to the Victorian asylum, where both women and men are retrained to adhere to the social roles from which they diverged. Collins scholar Nicholas Rance provides a succinct definition of madness in relationship to the social and cultural environment of the Victorians. “Madness was defined in terms of swerving from the precepts of domestic morality. The sole possible remedy was then to be re-educated in such precepts in what presumed to be an approximation to the domestic environment” (Rance 115). If madness is defined by conflict with Victorian standards of morality, the “cure” lies in a return to the family cycle, a return to the training era of childhood. At Tuke’s Retreat in York, patients “were also to be treated in an environment that was self-consciously domestic in a more conventional sense. There was a tireless insistence that the inmates of an asylum were a family...the insistence on the domestic imagery is the more ironic inasmuch as it coincides with the decisive removal of madness from family life” (Social Order/Mental Disorder 76-77). This model of training reasserts the idea that madness is caused by or can at least be impacted by environmental forces. By transferring individuals to a new but familiarly modeled environment, doctors and staff can realign individual behavior with Victorian propriety. Some people deemed

“mad” then, could be reeducated and returned to society to serve their familial and social roles. Those who cannot be retrained will remain in confinement to ensure the safety of Victorian society, if not themselves.

In the world of *The Woman in White*, women who question the sanctified space of the domestic sphere also must be “tamed.” They are going against the “nature” of Victorian sphere by enacting natural impulses without limitation. Eleanor Fosco is one of these women who is subsequently abused and dominated by her husband, Count Fosco, otherwise characterized as a villain in the text. He involves her in his plots, using her to gain access to feminine spaces that are socially inappropriate for him to enter. The silence and labor of Eleanor Fosco, though enacted by a literary antagonist, represents the goals of Victorian domestication. “On the few occasions when her [Eleanor Fosco’s] cold blue eyes are off her work, they are generally turned on her husband, with the look of mute submissive inquiry which we are all familiar with in the eyes of a faithful dog” (Collins 219). Eleanor’s entire purpose is driven by her husband’s agenda; she only pauses to await his next command. Her husband’s training is effective enough so that it is self-sustaining. Her former wildness has been effectively incorporated into her husband’s economic industry and thus is presented by Marian, for a time, as a positive image of marital relations.

Anne Catherick, though unmarried, is defined by her wildness and must be incorporated into or destroyed by the domestic sphere. Mrs. Anne is compared to a wild animal, a kind of “lunatic” werewolf, who is transformed in the moonlight and motivated by wild nature rather than social propriety. Her open emotional expressiveness, typically associated with the sensitive feminine, is coupled with her potential dominating strength, a threat to Hartright’s masculine strength. She, like the mustached Marian, combines the feminine and the masculine, in a

mysterious and unnatural way. But, while Marian is introduced in the domestic space, Anne roams freely with physical agency, provoking fear and distrust in Walter. Her violent emotions, though they are later justified by Glyde's actions, create doubt in Walter's mind that perhaps this unnatural female force *should* be contained and quelled in an asylum.

Laura and her lapdog counterpart display the intended and appropriate goals of the Victorian policy of domestication. The lapdog is not an uncontroversial figure in the Victorian domestic sphere. It "has served to bring out the affections of the woman but has done so in ways unsanctioned by the patriarchy—both of the lesser creatures, woman and dog, have found ways to bring pleasure to each other but neither is serving or servicing the master, who looks on in envious disapproval" (Flegel 21-22). Laura's lapdog, Nina, does provide her with affection but does not result in the exclusion of Walter as a husband or protector. Mr. Gilmore, the Fairlie family solicitor, takes an unfavorable view of the small greyhound because of her reaction to Sir Glyde, but the dog's instincts prove more accurate than the visual perception of many of the human characters by the conclusion of the novel. Gilmore describes the interaction between Nina and Sir Percival, as "the little beast, cowardly and cross-grained as pet-dogs usually are, looked up at him sharply, shrank away from his outstretched hand, whined, shivered, and hid itself under a sofa" (Collins 134). Nina's reaction is not to attack the man but to withdraw in self-protection without aggression. Her domesticated body and training seemingly dissuades her from attacking a human, while her instincts warn of the potential for danger. She retains her natural impulses, while her body is shaped and controlled by the environment and her mistress, Laura. Laura, too, is motivated by her feelings of love for Walter but chooses to marry Sir Percival Glyde in accordance with her moral training and values of honor. The Victorian domestic sphere similarly intends to retain the high-minded moral impulses of the female while surrounding her

with an environment that encourages her to act in accordance with social codes of conduct. Though this training regimen may result in women, like Laura, being more vulnerable to abuse and trauma, the domestic sphere is meant to protect them from such indignities. However, through the many narratives of *The Woman in White*, both the contemporary and modern reader can see society's failures to guard the domestic sphere as a safe and moral training ground for males and females, as well as the sanctioned dehumanization of Victorian individuals in an effort to promote behavioral conformity. Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations* further examines the potential distortion of the domestic sphere as a space for the transmission of socially deviant behaviors and as an environment that can harm the physical, mental, and moral health of individuals, particularly children.

3.0 *GREAT EXPECTATIONS*

Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins' literary peer and friend, presents the environment as the singularly impactful factor in the development of the individual in his 1861 novel *Great Expectations*. Where Collins positions environmental circumstances as influential but secondary, Dickens sees environmental circumstances as primary determiners of character. The novel follows the childhood and emerging adulthood of Pip, an orphan raised in an abusive home and fascinated by the gothic grandeur and chaos of the estate of Miss Havisham and her daughter, Estella. Pip draws the reader along through an array of family environments across the social strata and even explores the origins of the Victorian prisoner through the character of Magwitch. Often disheveled and disillusioned, these orphaned characters, particularly Pip and Estella, illustrate how one's environment, particularly different iterations of the Victorian domestic sphere, shapes the character and behavior of the individual. Though many of these characters might not *appear* to suffer from a mental illness, the social environments detailed in the novel reflect dysfunctional family interactions and improper models of behavior that Victorians believe play a role in many mental and social "abnormalities," including mental illness. The interaction between the younger generation and their parents and quasi-parent figures, especially Miss Havisham, Mrs. Joe, and Magwitch, demonstrates how these valuable early environments are co-opted and made aberrant by ill-meaning "nurturers."

3.1 PIP AND HIS FAMILY

Pip's childhood environment reads as a set of experimental conditions meant to determine the relative power of nature and nurture. His orphaned status admits but also distances the possibility of biological determination while his sister's unchallenged dominion over the family is an exaggeration of an influential environment. Pip's first act in the novel is the visitation of his parents in the graveyard, who are more defined by the stones standing above their bodies than by anything material or biological that they have passed to Pip. His primary guardians, Mr. and Mrs. Joe Gargery, as victim and perpetrator, illustrate how abusive environments shape an individual's future choices. Joe explains his justification for the abusive cycles of his marriage. He tells Pip, "...I see so much in my poor mother, of a woman drudging and slaving and breaking her honest heart and never getting no peace in her mortal days, that I'm dead afeerd of going wrong in the way of not doing what's right by a woman, and I'd fur rather of the two go wrong the t'other way, and be a little ill-conwenienced myself" (Dickens 43). Terrified by the idea of abusing his wife after witnessing and experiencing his father's abuse of his family, Joe accepts Mrs. Joe's domination and her rough treatment of Pip as a necessary side-effect of a moral marriage. Joe Gargery's choice regarding how to behave as a husband and how to respond to his wife is somewhat overly conciliatory, but Dickens is clear that it is a choice. Joe has learned from the environment in which he was raised and chooses to adapt his own behavior. His childhood experiences of violent familial dysfunction define what he deems acceptable treatment

from family members. Pip and Joe view each other as peers, fellow inmates under the eye and hand of warden Mrs. Joe. Pip knows Mrs. Joe “to have a hard and heavy hand, and to be much in the habit of laying it upon her husband as well as upon me, I supposed that Joe Gargery and I were both brought up by hand” (*Great Expectations* 12). It is true that Mrs. Joe is an object of scorn. However, her faults are related to her failure to create the proper home environment rather than her failure to control a natural inclination.

Mrs. Joe’s appearance is a metaphor for her failure to perform the proper domestic role. Her body shape and clothing belie the feminine softness with which the Victorian angel of the house imbues the home. “She was tall and bony, and almost always wore a coarse apron, fastened over her figure behind with two loops, and having a square impregnable bib in front that was stuck full of pins and needles” (*Great Expectations* 13). Like her personality, Mrs. Joe’s uniform is prickly and “impregnable,” emphasizing her failure to fulfill gendered expectations, especially the expectation that she become pregnant or adhere to the usual maternal role prescribed for her. Any emotional intimacy or physical proximity to her is painful rather than soothing. Of course, her uniform signifies the claustrophobic roles that Victorian social environments have declared as natural and proper for women. Mrs. Joe, unlike her brother, is not socially mobile and cannot change her socioeconomic position. While she has become coarse, harsh, and aggressive in an unchanging and poisonous environment, Pip’s male gender, youth, and lack of economic or familial responsibilities allow him to depart from the marshes in which his sister must remain. Unable to change the environmental expectation for herself, Mrs. Joe, like Miss Havisham, invests all of her energy into the roles of exploited caretaker, dissatisfied wife, or brokenhearted bride and dominates others through her limiting identities. Male characters, such as Magwitch, are also subject to the constraints of identity and social expectations.

Magwitch exemplifies the individual whose apparently abnormal nature is revealed to be the result of environmental conditions. After returning from the exile imposed by transportation policy and meeting Pip at the beginning of his adulthood, Magwitch attempts to disguise himself through adopting the clothes of a gentleman. But, Pip believes that changes in appearance are useless and in fact impossible for Magwitch stating, "...that from head to foot there was Convict in the grain of the man" (Dickens 252). Pip believes that Magwitch's criminality is a part of his nature, indicative of degeneracy with which he is born and cannot escape or change. However, as Magwitch tells his own history, it becomes evident that he is equally a product of his environment, and particularly a product of cyclical incarceration. As a child, Magwitch remembers, "I was took up, took up, took up, to the extent that I reg'larly grow'd up took up" (Dickens 259). His behavior and character are molded to the constraints of the Victorian carceral system. Magwitch is raised to be both the passive object of and fuel for the Victorian prison system that disproportionately targets people of lower socioeconomic status. Though he describes himself by the duration of his childhood as "grow'd up," Magwitch has not grown but has adapted to fit the expectations that society holds for him. As a man with a criminal history, he is believed to have an inferior or base nature, and society treats him thusly. The criminal justice system reinforces Magwitch's behavior until it becomes *engrained* in him, providing Pip and others with the excuse to banish him because of his *grain*.

Because of his traumatic childhood encounter with Magwitch, Pip pays attention to passing prisoners, noting, "The great numbers on their backs, as if they were street doors; their coarse mangy ungainly outer surface, as if they were lower animals; their ironed legs...and the way in which all present looked at them and kept from them..." (Dickens 175). Prisoners are maintained as living social warnings by the means of their grim appearances. They act as the

specters of potential “doors” through which people may pass if they do not behave according to approved codes of conduct. Yet, simultaneously, they are portrayed as beings of a lower order which are naturally predisposed to crime and cannot even, be considered human. The prisoners are both preventive warnings and reminders of upper and middle class individuals’ superior and moral natures.

3.2 MISS HAVISHAM AND ESTELLA

3.2.1 Toxic Environments

Miss Havisham, whose decades-long obsessions have disrupted her social functioning and caused her extreme distress is the character with most clearly defined mental illness in the text. However, through Miss Havisham’s maternity, Estella is “guilty” of the potential for mental illness by adverse training. The environments of Satis House and Miss Havisham’s unconventional parenting style have affected Estella’s mind and emotional expressions. Where *The Woman in White* presents circumstances as bringing out certain innate potential, *Great Expectations* emphasizes Miss Havisham’s failure to create the conditions that would make Estella have a soul. She tells Pip, ““You must know...that I have no heart...I have a heart to be stabbed in or shot in...But you know what I mean. I have no softness there, no—sympathy—sentiment—nonsense”” (*Great Expectations* 183). Estella vociferously criticizes Miss Havisham, stating

If you had brought up your adopted daughter wholly in the dark confinement of these rooms, and had never let her know that there was such a thing as the daylight by which

she has never once seen your face—if you had done that, and then, for a purpose had wanted her to understand the daylight and know all about it, you would have been disappointed and angry? If you had taught her, from the dawn of her intelligence, with your utmost energy and might, that there was such a thing as daylight, but that it was made to be her enemy and destroyer, and she must always turn against it, for it had blighted you and would else blight her; --if you had done this, and then, for a purpose, had wanted her to take naturally to the daylight and she could not do it, you would have been disappointed and angry? (Dickens 231)

Estella, of Dickens's female characters, illustrates the power of environmental influences in an individual's development. Catherine Waters, studying Dickens' portrayal of familial dynamics suggests that Pip's focus on Estella's nature belies Miss Havisham's determinative role in creating Estella. "However, the very notion of female 'nature' involved in this account is put into question by the insistence upon the constructedness of identity in Pip's narrative, by the suggestion that women like Estella are not born but made"" (Waters 159). Estella's character is completely shaped by Miss Havisham's training regimen and decrepit home. Miss Havisham clearly outlines her reasons for adopting Estella, stating, "I adopted her to be loved. I bred and educated her, to be loved. I developed her into what she is, that she might be loved. Love her!" (Great Expectations 184). Miss Havisham has "bred" Estella like an animal, a tool to be used to wreak havoc on the patriarchal system that inculcates systems of masculine dominance and female vulnerability. Estella has only been taught to attract and inspire love rather than engage in any meaningful or reciprocal relationships with other humans.

Dickens' belief in the power of environment is evident in descriptions of Satis House. The environment of Miss Havisham's home is filled with parasitic-seeming fungi, from the

social lubricant of fermented alcohol to the decomposing remains of Miss Havisham's useless wedding feast. The putrid environment that Pip encounters and in which Estella grows raises fear in the Victorian mind of contamination and "bad air." "All the uses and scents of the brewery might have evaporated with its last reek of smoke. In a by-yard, there was a wildness of empty casks, which had a certain sour remembrance of better days lingering about them; but it was too sour to be accepted as a sample of the beer that was gone..." (Dickens 54). Satis House is wild and useless; it does not serve as a space of industry or as an appropriate domestic sphere. Instead, Miss Havisham's home is a memorial to the past in which she both neglects and reveres aesthetic images, choosing to live in as a perpetual bride with the corresponding decorations in a rotting house. Her past infects the home and grows by feeding off the energy of Miss Havisham. Her table "was so heavily overhung with cobwebs that its form was quite indistinguishable, and as I looked along the yellow expanse out of which I remember its seeming to grow like a black fungus..." (Dickens 69). The black and yellow fungi are more life-like than the skeletal Miss Havisham, who has buried herself alive and lives only to haunt Victorian society vicariously through Estella. "I saw that the dress had been put upon the rounded figure of a young woman, and that the figure upon which it now hung loose, had shrunk to skin and bone. Once, I had been taken to see some ghastly wax-work at the Fair, representing I know not what impossible personage lying in state. Once, I had been taken to one of our old marsh churches to see a skeleton in the ashes of a rich dress that had been dug out of a vault under the church pavement. Now, wax-work and skeleton seemed to have dark eyes that moved and looked at me" (Dickens 50). Miss Havisham, like Anne Catherick and Mrs. Joe, is bound by her choice of clothes. Though these women signal their abnormality through their clothing, they are not wearing unusual dresses or clothing suitable for children or men. Their clothing perturbs the narrator

because it is nearly unchanging; Miss Havisham, Mrs. Joe, and Anne are no longer malleable or often even human.

Satis House, like the Victorian lunatic asylum, works to condition the individual to act in accordance with codes of conduct and, like the Victorian educational system, controls a gender-specific transmission and acquisition of knowledge. Because the purpose of Miss Havisham's education of Estella is motivated for her individual desire rather than constructs of social good, it is considered a danger. But, Estella's outburst proves that it has also negatively affected her and that she recognizes what she has lost because of being Miss Havisham's daughter. Havisham's home "had a great many iron bars to it" and "some of the windows had been walled up" (Dickens 48); she is the controller of her domestic space but it remains a prison in which she has chosen to contain herself. The environment of Satis House must be destroyed, however, because it is the education space for Estella where she is taught dominance over men through the model of Pip. Miss Havisham's home is a potential breeding ground for female manipulation and tyranny that weakens male judgment and logic, and so must be destroyed.

3.2.2 Family and Education

Estella's "secluded" (Dickens 183) childhood under Miss Havisham's roof represents the perversion of the Victorian model of education, meant to accommodate for the problems of the family. Of the relationship between the Victorian state and family, Laura C. Berry describes one Victorian theory combining the areas of public health and educational reformation. "The family was not only diseased, it also frequently perpetuated disease by way of reproduction. In the place of the institution of family, reformers advocated a new institution, one that would prove increasingly influential throughout the decade and eventually take as its mission some of the

‘work’ of the family: education” (41). Miss Havisham’s education of Estella takes place within the family home, signaling the conflict between the need for girls and young women to be trained in the domestic sphere and the danger of potentially subversive mothers and their unsupervised training techniques and messages.

Problematic homes and educational spheres extend beyond that fostered by Miss Havisham and impact both male and female children. Pip describes a school peer and his family, stating “Startop had been spoilt by a weak mother and kept at home when he ought to have been at school, but he was devotedly attached to her, and admired her beyond measure. He had a woman’s delicacy of feature, and was ‘as you may see, though you never saw her,’ said Herbert to me— ‘exactly like his mother’” (Dickens 158). Startop’s mother’s unwillingness to separate from him emasculates him and even shapes his features. Her feminine “weakness” and emotional attachment are detriments to her son, who should have been taken from her domestic sphere to avoid the dangers of her over-powerful maternity. By physically separating children from their mothers, Victorian educational institutions can fit individuals to the template of male identity that is expected in society. Startop’s devotion to his mother “spoils” him and is suggested to be potentially social harmful for him in the future. Startop should not carry or represent his mother’s physical features but instead should represent the masculine strength of his unmentioned father. His likeness to his mother reinforces her disproportionate influence and wrongful incursion into masculine spheres. However, his support of Pip and Magwitch suggests that Startop has the potential for agency despite his relationship with his mother. Excessive paternal developmental control nearly damage Mrs. Pocket’s usefulness as a mother and wife in the domestic sphere. Her father “had directed Mrs. Pocket to be brought up from her cradle as one who in the nature of things must marry a title, and who was to be guarded from the acquisition of plebian domestic

knowledge. So successful a watch and ward had been established over the young lady by those judicious parent, that she had grown up highly ornamental, but perfectly helpless and useless” (Dickens 148). The protection of Mrs. Pocket’s childhood works too well, rendering her useless to the Victorian domestic sphere that requires women to have economic purpose. She is naturally predisposed to domestic usefulness as a trophy and asset for her husband and is shaped to fit this expectation through her father’s intervention. However, after her marriage to Mr. Pocket, Mrs. Pocket is still receptive to intervention, though the work of domestic staff, and can adapt to her maternal role.

Miss Havisham, in contrast to Startop and Mrs. Pocket, displays an intractability that makes training difficult. Herbert Pocket explains Miss Havisham’s backstory to Pip, stating, ““Miss Havisham, you must know, was a spoilt child. Her mother died when she was a baby, and her father denied her nothing...”” (Dickens 141). Miss Havisham risks being “spoiled” for proper womanhood early on. Because her father did not teach her to limit her desires, perhaps even her unwomanly ambitions, Miss Havisham requires the training ground of marriage to transition from the tyrannical child to the malleable mother. But, without the tutelage or influence of a male patriarch, Miss Havisham blends the roles of the girl and the mother. There is no delineation between these two figures, as there should be in the proper Victorian domestic sphere. She lives in a decaying matrilineal home and is solely driven to satiate her learned hatred of men. The unnatural existence of Miss Havisham proves *Great Expectations*’ argument that environment has the greatest influence over the character of the individual, as well as their physical and mental health.

Finally, the fact that Estella has nothing in common with her biological mother’s character reinforces the importance of environment and upbringing on a person’s character.

Molly, Estella's mother, is the violent, murderous woman whom Jaggers rescued from legal execution and keeps under strict control. As we have seen, chance glimpses of Estella reveal to Pip her resemblance to Miss Havisham and argue for the power of environment to impress itself on the growing child. Later, Pip notices the resemblance between Molly, who he knows as Jaggers' housekeeper, and Estella. In a flash of realization, he discovers that Molly's "hands were Estella's hands, and her eyes were Estella's eyes" (292), but Pip also emphasizes the intervention of circumstances. He recounts, "I looked at those hands, I looked at that those eyes, I looked at that flowing hair; and I compared them with other hands, other eyes, other hair, that I knew of, and with what those might be after twenty years of a brutal husband and a stormy life" (292). Estella's character, though, has none of the volatility that Molly shows, even after her husband's brutality. Instead, she exhibits the coolness and aloofness bred in her by Miss Havisham's treatment.

Molly, Estella's mother, and Abel Magwitch, her father, represent the limits of Dickens' belief in environment and education. Or rather, these two characters expose how Dickens' belief in the power of circumstance and education is not also a belief that individuals are self-determined. I return to the image of Magwitch as having a criminal "grain." The grain of a wood is partly a matter of nature and partly a matter of circumstance. An environmental circumstance can affect, deform, or alter the natural growth of a tree. By that token, Magwitch may not have had a criminal *nature*, but the life of a criminal is engrained in him. Estella is another case of adverse upbringing becoming a part of her nature.

3.2.3 Dehumanization of Individuals

Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, while charting a young man's social ascent, also exposes the widespread dehumanization of individuals for economic and social gain and the use of morality as an excuse for mistreatment. Through his inclusion of convicts as characters in the novel, Dickens examines the treatment of social misfits and outcasts who are characterized as animalistic and immoral savages and exposed to horrendous and vicious treatment intended to treat and retrain their own supposed vicious impulses. In apprehension of their dinner with Mr. Jaggers, Wemmick warns Pip about Molly, Estella's biological mother, promising, "...you'll see a wild beast tamed. Not so very uncommon, you'll tell me. I reply, that depends on the original wildness of the beast, and the amount of taming'" (Dickens 157). Molly is no longer considered human and is solely defined by her role as Mr. Jaggers' domestic servant. Mr. Jaggers uses her, like the death masks that adorn his office walls, as a living but dehumanized display of his masculine power. Her former violence is remarked upon, not for its victims, but for its pertinence as evidence of Mr. Jaggers' power.

Like Mrs. Joe, Estella actively reverses the typical gender-defined power dynamics and presents the male figure as the object of domestication. Pip vividly recalls his initial encounters with Estella, including her intense derision of him: "She gave me the bread and meat without looking at me, as insolently as if I were a dog in disgrace" (Dickens 53). Pip internalizes this dehumanized image of himself while vowing to erase it through social mobility, ironically made possible by another "dog" man in Magwitch. Estella's dehumanization of Pip is "repaid" to her in the narrative through Drummle's dehumanizing assaults on her, which results in character changes that are treated as constructive and indeed healthy in the novel. Pip also describes Mrs. Joe's physical and mental state after Orlick's attack in both positive and negative terms.

“However, her temper was greatly improved, and she was patient. A tremulous uncertainty of the action of all her limbs soon became a part of her regular state, and afterwards, at intervals of two or three months, she would often put her hands to her head and would the remain for about a week at a time in some gloomy aberration of mind” (Dickens 98). Mrs. Joe is forced by vicious physical violence into submission. Her traumatic brain injury robs her of motor control, verbal communication, and sends her into a major depression. But these results are less important than the improvements in her temperament and patience. She is no longer able to abuse her husband or control herself. Rather than being justifiably removed from the domestic space because of her treatment of Joe, she must be violently restrained and unwillingly silenced. Mrs. Joe’s opportunity for training, sacrificed because of Joe’s inability to train her, is replaced by the external control of her mind and body.

This brutal treatment of Mrs. Joe corresponds with her own policies regarding the development of Pip, including her use of dietary supplements. Pip retroactively bemoans the fact that “Some medical beast had revived Tar-water in those days as a fine medicine, and Mrs. Joe always kept a supply of it in the cupboard; having a belief in its virtues correspondent to its nastiness...” (Dickens 16). Treatment, in the view of Mrs. Joe and some Victorian medical professionals, can be painful and even distressing to the patient, if sanctioned experts with a reasonable expectation of favorable results administer it. A historical movement towards inculcating the moral strength of patients, through moral management treatments, and lessening of physical restraint, as well as a general doubt in the expertise of mental health professionals, creates skepticism in the requirement of pain in treatment. But, Mrs. Joe’s assailant, Orlick is an unauthorized actor who also later threatens Pip’s life and whose actions may be considered socially unapproved. But, the character’s reactions to his assault suggest that his means are less

important than the results of Mrs. Joe's deterioration in self-control and the entry of Bidley as a more appropriate female model. Furthermore, the traumatic experiences of her female peers in *The Woman in White*, such as Eleanor Fosco, suggest that distress may be considered a routine aspect of the domestication of individuals.

Pip, though lacking Estella's natural charisma and learned social skills, becomes mobile and avoids becoming immured in a single dangerous environment through the intervention of Magwitch. While Miss Havisham's intercession into Estella's life continues a trend of maternal objectification of the girl as a weapon to be used in revenge against mothers, Pip gains agency in his life, as well as the opportunity to encounter a variety of people, including friends and acquaintances that support him in his endeavors. Estella, with a social support limited to Miss Havisham, lacks the breadth of experience and optimism that Pip is afforded by his anonymous benefactor and peer influence. While Estella has a life based in grim survival, vengeance, and resentment, community characterizes Pip's life and offers him a potentially more enriched future than Estella's lonely struggles.

4.0 CONCLUSION

The characters of *The Woman in White* and *Great Expectations* struggle to escape cycles of behavior and social control forced upon them by natural inheritance or the physical and social realities of the environment in which they are raised. Both “nature” and “nurture” operationalized by heredity and social environment are determining factors of character and behavior in these texts, implying that personal choice is less important than the place and family of one’s birth and childhood. Deviations from social norms of male and female behavior, including tenets of marital dynamics, and parenthood, that signal deviation are viewed as pathological. The confusion of prevalent Victorian theories about the etiology of mental illness is even more compounded the confusion created by the cultural and historical context of the Victorian era, which shapes both theories of causality and the practice of diagnosis. Laura, Anne, Miss Havisham, and Estella must all be examined through the lens of Victorian femininity. Characters such as Walter, Count Fosco, Magwitch, and Joe Gargery represent the opposing Victorian masculine figures who conform or deviate from standards of behavior; the counterparts, antagonists and fellow sufferers to the traumatized women at the center of Collins’ and Dickens’ novels. Ultimately, both male and female characters of these novels are subject to both the forces of nature and nurture and their interaction. Human nature is present and modified by social circumstance, providing the possibility of both prevention and intervention before the development of a mental illness or other mental, physical, or spiritual problem. The discourse

surrounding the causality of mental illness attempts to quantify the factors dividing the sane and the “mad.” Instead, both *The Woman in White* and *Great Expectations* reveal how a change in circumstance can reveal a corresponding internal potential for change in the individual.

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