



The Woman in White, White Space
and Mid-Victorian Print Technology

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As Nicholas Daly notes, “The early 1860s are white years. The arrival of ‘sensation’ as a byword for the breathlessly modern (...) seems curiously wedded to that color. To be more precise, the sensation era is ushered in by a series of female figures identified with whiteness.”¹ Daly cites numerous examples of the repeated image of the woman in white during this decade, an image that occurred across fiction, melodrama, and painting: Willie Collins’s novel *The Woman in White* (1859-60), Dion Boucicault’s play *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) (Irish for “the white-haired girl”), and James McNeill Whistler’s portrait *Symphony in White No. 1: The White Girl* (1862), to name a few examples. Daly argues that these repeated images of women in white signal a departure from mid-Victorian realist representation in narrative and painting. He emphasizes how Collins’s novel departs from realism in favour of sensational shock effects, interpellating the modern reader as obsessed with bodily reaction rather than textual nuance. Similarly, he notes, the carpentry and “spectacular set-piece[s]” of sensational melodrama upstaged the actors. Finally, he argues that, in Whistler’s painting, the use of paint and texture upstages content, stressing instead the “material medium (...) its nature as paint on canvas.”² All three texts, he notes,

¹ N. Daly, “The Woman in White: Whistler, Hiffernan, Courbet, Du Maurier”, *Modernism/modernity*, 12.1, 2005, p. 1.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.

manifest their modernity by failing to conceal the technology of their own production.

This article takes up the subject of the woman in white in the early 1860s in order to explore her significance as a repeated image. Our paper will focus on the famous serial novel that started the sensational craze for women in white: Collins’s *The Woman in White* (1859-60). The novel was serialized simultaneously on both sides of the Atlantic: in Britain, it was published in Dickens’s unillustrated journal, *All the Year Round*, and in America it appeared in *Harper’s Weekly*, a journal that prided itself on the quality and quantity of its illustrations³. As we will show, in both illustrated and unillustrated versions of the serial, Collins’s woman in white is figured by tropes of insistent repetition, both verbal and visual. At the verbal level, her speech is formally repetitive to the point of saturation or loss of meaning: she is characterized not so much by the content of her utterances but by their iteration of formal structures: repeated questions, words, and phrases. At a visual level, the unillustrated text relies on the phenomenon of characters who are indistinguishable, whose appearances repeat one another’s in a manner figured by the ghost or revenant. Collins’s women in white, then, are insistently figured by tropes of repetition and iteration.

These tropes are strengthened in the illustrated print serial of the novel, where the woman in white’s whiteness was not associated with texture or brush strokes but with absence. This absence was created by the printing process itself, in which whiteness was produced by the spaces that engravers hollowed out, by the part of the engraving plate or wood block that did not come in contact with ink. Whistler’s white girl was famously created by the application of paint and creation of texture by brush and palette knife; by contrast, Collins’s illustrated Victorian serial renders the image of the woman in white by removal and excavation. In print, the woman in white is constituted through contrast with the dark lines around her, but her figure itself is identical with the pristine whiteness of the original page. She is, therefore, literally a blank. We will suggest that her figure foregrounds the creation of meaning

³ W. Collins, *The Woman in White*, *All the Year Round*, 26 Nov. 1859-25 Aug. 1860; *Ibid.*, *The Woman in White*, *Harper’s Weekly*, 26 Nov. 1859-25 Aug. 1860.

through contrast, absence, and repetition—thus, ultimately, Collins’s woman in white becomes a figure for mid-Victorian print reproduction itself.

The sensation scenes of Collins’s novel focus on two women who look unaccountably alike and who both consistently dress in white garments: Anne Catherick, who wears only white because of her childhood love of Mrs. Fairlie; and Laura Fairlie, Mrs. Fairlie’s daughter, who often wears simple white muslin in order to detract attention from the fact that she is richer than her beloved half-sister, Marian. The text’s criminal plot relies on this visual identification between the two women: Laura’s husband, Percival, schemes with the evil Count Fosco to substitute Anne for Laura and to take Laura’s money. They stage Laura’s death by passing the dying Anne off as Laura and then burying Anne Catherick under a gravestone with Laura’s name on it. Meanwhile, they imprison Laura in an asylum under the identity of the mad Anne Catherick. By this means, they defraud Laura’s estate and take her inheritance. However, Marian, and her friend Walter Hartright (Laura’s art teacher and true love) try to foil this scheme. They discover Laura in the asylum and set out to prove that she is not Anne Catherick, but herself, alive, and sane. The plot, then, revolves around the sensational conflation and subsequent separation of identity. Laura is, paradoxically, at once the “living image”⁴ of Anne Catherick and, as Hartright and Marian insist, separate from her. The novel’s most sensational scene, as we shall see, focuses on this paradox.

In the British serial edition of the novel, these two women in white had no visual presence, as Collins’s novel was published in an unillustrated journal. However, even without the added force of illustration, Anne and Laura were forcefully associated by means of both visual and verbal repetition. This repetition occurs upon Collins’s introduction of his woman in white as the protagonist, Hartright, meets her at night, alone, on a road to London through Hampstead Heath. At this moment, Anne Catherick materializes in the narrative without any diegetic explanation or context whatsoever. She thus appears as a mystery, a blank, a trope to be deciphered. Let us consider the unillustrated British text first. Initially, the encounter is purely tactile: as Hartright recounts, “Every drop of blood in my body

⁴ W. Collins, *The Woman in White, All the Year Round*, 10 Dec. 1859, p. 146.

was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me."⁵ Hartright's sensation of shock is captured as his "fingers [tighten] round the handle of [his] stick,"⁶ but he comes no closer to defining this woman. Hartright then switches to visual interpretation: "There, in the middle of the broad, bright high-road (...) the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments (...) her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London."⁷ Female vs male, country vs. city, brightness vs. darkness, white vs. black: the woman in white is defined almost purely by contrast, by what she is not. Her interpreter struggles to read this cipher: "All I could discern distinctly by the moonlight, was a colourless, youthful face, meagre and sharp to look at."⁸ He tries to read her clothing and demeanour, but to little effect: "Her dress—bonnet, shawl, and gown all of white—was, so far as I could guess, certainly not composed of very delicate or very expensive materials."⁹ Although he is a drawing master and therefore expert at visual interpretation, Hartright is defeated: "What sort of a woman she was, and how she came to be out alone in the high-road, an hour after midnight, I altogether failed to guess."¹⁰

The unnamed woman's dialogue contributes to her mystery, as she reveals little of herself or her circumstances. Instead, very strikingly, she poses a series of questions that become the defining feature of her speech. Many are untagged, or minimally tagged, with references to her "mechanical" voice and "rapid" delivery: "Is that the road to London?" "Did you hear me?" "You don't suspect me of doing anything wrong, do you?" "May I trust you?" "You don't think the worse of me because I have met with an accident?" "Can I get a fly, or a carriage of any kind?" "Is it too late?" "Will you promise?" "Do you know many people in London?" "Many men of rank and title?" "Are you a man of rank and title yourself?" "Do you live in London?" "North, or south?"¹¹ At the level of plot, such sparsely rendered speech impels the reader to speculate as to what kind of back story might prompt the

⁵ *Ibid.*, 26 November 1859, p. 101.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 101-103.

unknown women to ask such questions. At the level of form, this repetition of the question associates the woman in white with the negative, not the positive, with interrogation rather than affirmation. It also establishes the trope of repetition that will characterize her speech and visual identity throughout the narrative.

Just as Hartright struggles to decipher the woman in white at this first meeting, so in her May 1862 review, Victorian critic Margaret Oliphant found no positive terminology for Anne, but rested her description on tropes of absence, negation, silence, and blankness: "there is nothing frightful or unnatural about her; one perceives how her shadow must fall on the white summer highway in the white moonlight, in the noiseless night."¹² Modern critics have found in this blankness an invitation to impose multiple and often contradictory meanings on Collins' cipher. Some have filled in her blankness with biographical narrative, quoting John Everett Millais's account of the midnight meeting of Collins, his brother Charles, and Millais with an enigmatic "woman in distress" who had been kept prisoner "under threats of violence and mesmeric influence."¹³ Others have read Hartright's encounter with the woman in white as symbolizing the breakdown of class boundaries¹⁴ or as a scene of "gender slippage," in which the unmanned Walter Hartight's grasping of his stick is a symptom of "male nervousness" prompted by "female contagion."¹⁵ The variety and incompatibility of such interpretations replicate Hartright's efforts to ascribe meaning to the woman in white. In such criticism, the woman in white becomes a signifier of everything and nothing, a sign—in short—of cultural longing for interpretative stability.

The illustrated novel in *Harper's Weekly* produces a very different reading experience because the first page of Part 1 features a prominent illustration of Hartright's encounter with the woman in white. This means that readers see the enigmatic woman before they read Hartright's account of their meeting. The image

¹² M. Oliphant, qtd. in W. Collins, *The Woman in White*, eds. M.K. Bachman and D.R. Cox., Peterborough, Broadview, 2006, p. 643.

¹³ J. E. Millais, qtd. in W. Collins, *The Woman in White*, eds. M.K. Bachman and D.R. Cox., Peterborough, Broadview, 2006, p. 14-5.

¹⁴ J. Loesberg, "The Ideology of Narrative Form in Sensation Fiction," *Representations* 13, 1986, p. 115-38.

¹⁵ D. A. Miller, "Cage aux Folles: Sensation and Gender in Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*," *The Nineteenth-Century British Novel*, ed. J. Hawthorn, London, Edward Arnold, 1986, p. 95-124.

(which depicts the woman raising her arm to point to London and Hartright grasping his stick) places the unidentified woman in stark relief, her white figure set off against a predominantly dark background characterized by dense cross-hatching representing woods and sky. Clad in dark clothing, Hartright's figure blends almost completely with the scenery except for the whiteness of his collar, face, cuff, and waistcoat. In contrast, the woman's skirt is composed almost exclusively of white space, with perspective minimally suggested by cross-hatching on its folds; her shawl and bonnet are cross-hatched, against which her face (other than her eyes and other facial features) stands out in ghostly contrast. As we have already pointed out, printing techniques dictated that such ghostly figures were produced by the evacuated and uninked part of the engraving. The visual text thus anticipates and strengthens the verbal text's construction of the unnamed woman through contrast: male vs. female, country vs. city, darkness vs. brightness, black vs. white, inked vs. un-inked paper. Before the American serial reader arrives at the woman's enigmatic dialogue and Hartright's attempts to decipher her, therefore, she is already identified on the page as a visual blank, readable only by means of what she is not.

Part 1's opening page layout in *Harper's* reinforces this association of the unnamed woman with a blank page to be read, as the chapter head at the upper left-hand corner features a largely blank page held up by the excited Professor Pesca. In the text, this is the letter that gets Hartright his job as drawing master at Limmeridge. However, on the printed page of *Harper's Weekly*, the letter appears largely as white space. Like the woman in white, it appears first a blank to be filled in, a text to be read. The association of the woman in white with visual white space continues throughout the forty weeks of the *Harper's* serial: even after she is named as Anne Catherick and given a back story, the woman in white is consistently associated with the blank, un-inked portion of the engravings.

The most significant of these is Part 6's image of Hartright encountering Anne crouched upon Mrs. Fairlie's white gravestone and cleaning its textual inscription. As in the illustration to Part 1, this image is dominated by contrasts. At Mrs. Todd's suggestion, Anne wears a dark cloak to conceal her white clothing, a textual detail that the artist deploys as a means of highlighting the white space of her dress, which in turn comprises the illustration's focal point. Hartright, again portrayed in dark

clothing, stands to the right of the gravestone, which stands out in relief against his dark clothing and Anne’s dark cloak. The visual effect associates Anne with the grave that she is cleaning and predicts her early death. Significantly, the illustration also repeats Part 1’s association of the woman in white with text, as the caption indicates she is engaged in “cleaning the inscription” of Mrs Fairlie’s grave marker.¹⁶ She is thus performing a task that parallels that of the serial’s engravers: she is preoccupied with meaning that is created by hollowed spaces, by what is not there.

As in Part 1, where her dialogue is marked by the repeated form of the question, in Part 6, Anne is once again characterized by a bizarrely repeated speech pattern. In this case, it takes the form of homiologia—that is, the repetition of a word to the point of redundancy. Her dialogue with Hartright is dominated by the single word, *white*. The repetition of this word first reinforces meaning, but as it approaches saturation, meaning is evacuated:

*Ah! she was fond of white in her lifetime; and here is white stone about her grave – and I am making it whiter for her sake. She often wore white herself; and she always dressed her little daughter in white. Is Miss Fairlie well and happy? Does she wear white now as she used when she was a girl?*¹⁷

In verbal and in visual text, then, the woman in white is linked to repetition: the repeated image of white space, the repeated question, and the repeated word *white*. In each instance, such repetition is itself associated with the negative or the empty: the evacuated or un-inked part of the image, the question rather than the answer, the word from which meaning is evacuated.

As we have noted, the novel’s plot revolves first around the identification of Laura with the woman in white and then around Hartright and Marian’s attempts to distinguish between the two and thereby to reestablish Laura’s unique identity. In the verbal text, the identification between Anne and Laura starts when Marion reads to Hartright a letter from Mrs. Fairlie to her husband describing Anne Catherick’s childhood arrival in the village. Mrs. Fairlie’s letter reveals how she gave to Anne Laura’s castoff white clothes and how Anne promised gratefully to “always wear

¹⁶ W. Collins, *The Woman in White*, *Harper’s Weekly*, 31 December 1859, p. 841.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 842, our emphasis.

white."¹⁸ As Marian reads this passage, Hartright sees Laura passing on the terrace: "There stood Miss Fairlie, a white figure, alone in the moonlight (...) the living image (...) of the woman in white!"¹⁹ Just as the clothes pass from Laura to Anne, so too does the identification of the woman in white pass from Laura (as girl in white) to Anne (as girl, then woman in white), then back to Laura (as woman in white).

Visually, the *Harper's Weekly* serial underscores this identification by transferring the association of white space from Anne, the initial woman in white, to Laura, her visual double. The illustrations consistently depict Laura as a white figure, either in relief against a background or contrasted with her half-sister Marian's dark form. The pairing of the two sisters establishes a striking visual pattern of repeated pairings: a woman in white with a woman in black. This association of Laura with hollowness and blankness symbolizes her legal status under marital coverture and prepares readers for the moment at which her identity is finally stolen by Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde. In this scheme, as we have said, they substitute Anne for Laura in order to stage Laura's death and to pass off Laura as the mad Anne Catherick, thereby defrauding Laura's estate by burying Anne Catherick under a gravestone with Laura's name inscribed on it. Famously, Collins got the details wrong on the transfer of identity: the plot, as the *Times* reviewer noted, is temporally impossible. But visually, the identification of the two women prepares the reader for this conflation of identity, as Anne and Laura have been consistently represented by the same technique of white space, which is in itself a form of evacuation, or creating of blankness.

The novel's most sensational scene occurs when Hartright goes to mourn Laura at her grave (which will later be revealed as Anne's rather than Laura's). While he is there, he sees two veiled women approaching, who turn out to be Marian and Laura; however, Hartright does not recognize Laura until she lifts her veil, which is when she stands directly over the gravestone inscribed with her death date. In this, the novel's pivotal scene, the verbal trope of repetition reaches its climax, with Hartright taking on the speech pattern hitherto associated with Anne Catherick:

¹⁸ *Ibid*, 10 décembre 1859, p. 796.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 10 December 1859, p. 796.

I saw, at the end, the date of her death; and, **above it** –

Above it, there were lines on the marble, there was a name among them which disturbed my thoughts of her. I went round to the other side of the grave, where there was **nothing** to read – **nothing** of earthly vileness to force its way between her spirit and mine.

I knelt down by the tomb. **I laid my hands, I laid my head** on the broad white stone, and closed my weary eyes **on the earth around, on the light above**. I let her come back to me. **Oh, my love! my love!** my heart may speak to you now! It is **yesterday** again **since** we parted—**yesterday, since** your dear hand lay in mine – **yesterday, since** my eyes looked their last on you. **My love! my love!** [...]

Beyond me, in the burial-ground, standing together in the cold clearness of the lower light, I saw **two** women. They were **looking toward** the tomb; **looking towards** me.

Two.

They came a little on; and **stopped** again. Their **vails** [sic] were down, and hid their faces from me. When they **stopped**, one of them raised her **vail**. In the still evening light I saw the face of Marian Halcombe.

Changed, changed as if years had passed over it! The eyes large and wild, and looking at me with a strange terror in them. The face worn and wasted piteously. Pain and fear and grief written on her as with a brand.

I took one step towards her from the grave. **She never** moved – **she never** spoke. [...]

The woman with the veiled face moved away from her companion and came toward me slowly. Left **by herself**, standing **by herself**, Marian Halcombe spoke. It was **the voice** that I remembered – **the voice** not changed, like the frightened eyes and the wasted face.

“**My dream! my dream!**” I heard her say those words softly in the awful silence. She sank on her knees, and raised her clasped hands to the heaven. “**Father!** strengthen him. **Father!** help him, in his hour of need.”

The woman **came on** – slowly and silently **came on**. I looked **at her – at her**, and at none other, from that moment [...]

The woman lifted her veil.

Sacred

TO THE MEMORY OF

LAURA,

LADY GLYDE –

Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription, and was looking at me over the grave.²⁰

This passage is saturated with figures of repetition: 1) anaphora, wherein words repeat at the beginnings of phrases; 2) epistrophe, wherein words repeat at the ends of phrases; 3) anadiplosis, wherein the first word of a phrase repeats the last word of the previous phrase; and 4) epanalepsis, wherein words repeat after intervening matter. The effect is similar to homiologia in that, after a certain saturation of repetition, meaning is evacuated, rather than reinforced. The passage thus creates its sensational

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19 May 1860, p. 311.

effect by evoking in Hartright's voice Anne's verbal tic of repetition over Laura's gravestone (which is really Anne's grave) while Hartright sees Laura (without recognizing her).

At the same time, the visual text in *Harper's Weekly* evacuates all perspective from Laura's figure: she is no longer three-dimensional but flat—that is, depicted by white space with a mere outline. Paradoxically, these visual depictions affirm her association with ghosts at the very moment when she appears in the flesh, alive. Moreover, the verbal text evacuates meaning from the gravestone inscription: if Laura is alive, then the engraved letters are literally and metaphorically hollow.

From this point on, the novel becomes an investigation of these contradictions, a setting to rest of their sensational effects. Now dead, Anne disappears from the temporal present of the narrative, appearing only analeptically. In terms of illustration, the disquieting visual conflation of Anne with Laura disappears as Laura becomes progressively more three-dimensional, acquiring bodily solidity and visual darkness in her depictions. Notably, Hartright never goes to court to seek legal confirmation that Laura is not dead. Instead, he and Marian resort to narrative (telling the story of the conspiracy) and then to visual evidence (showing Laura to the tenants on the estate to prove her identity). What they provide, then, is not legal proof but a multiplication of narratives, one substituted for the other. Only then do they efface the inscription on her gravestone, chiseling out Laura's name so that only a blank space remains, to be re-engraved later with Anne's name.

This ending with blank space constitutes the text's modernity. If, as Daly notes, sensation fiction manifests its modernity by failing to conceal the technology of its own production, then *Harper's* illustrated serial version of *The Woman in White* provides a quintessential example of this phenomenon. As we have seen, the visual images of Anne and Laura are linked by their affiliation with blank space, which in the era of print engraving signified whiteness. Hartright and Marian, then, may affirm Laura's presence, but the printing process nevertheless establishes this presence with absence or negativity. Moreover, while they try to assert Laura's identity as unique, her image is finally one of repetition insofar as all images in the era of mass production are reproductions. Even the novel's resolution—which hangs on Hartright's discovery that Sir Percival forged his own christening record in order to

inherit his title—never rests on legal proof because the forgery is burned in the same fire that kills Sir Percival. The “real” Percival and his falsified christening record perish together, the original and the forgery disappearing simultaneously. Once again, Hartright and Marian can only resort to spinning an alternate narrative to replace the first. The novel’s assertion of uniqueness thus relies on the multiplication of narratives.

Whistler’s and *Harper’s Weekly’s* women in white, then, both draw attention to their own material circumstances of production: Whistler’s by the visibility of paint and brush stroke, *Harper’s* by the thematization of the double, the forgery, the multiplied narrative, the repeated image of blank space. However, Whistler’s painting simultaneously asserts its uniqueness as a work of art, marked by the very hand of the artist, while Laura’s image in *Harper’s* asserts the proliferation of identical copies, the very notion that Hartright attempts to dispel. The image of the woman in white in this serial thus contradicts the novel’s strenuous assertion of unique identity in favour of the endless repetition of sameness in the industrial era.

Victorian critics such as H.L. Mansel reviled sensation fiction as exuding “a commercial atmosphere (...) redolent of the manufactory and the shop.” Mansel accused publishers of producing sensation fiction as a commercial product that could be endlessly produced and reproduced—“so many yards of printed stuff, sensation-pattern, to be ready by the beginning of the season.”²¹ Sensation fiction was, in this view, an industrial product, mass-produced from a template to satisfy market demand. In Pierre Bourdieu’s terms, it was characterized not as art but as “the product of the system of large-scale cultural production.”²² This debate about sensation fiction’s status extended to other genres. Notably, as Lorraine Janzen Kooistra argues, John Ruskin objected to Gustave Doré’s illustrations to Alfred Tennyson’s *Elaine* (1866), because “the artist’s army of engravers were merely cogs in

²¹ H. L. Mansel, in M. E. Braddon, *Aurora Floyd*, ed. R. Nemesvari and L. SurrIDGE, Peterborough, Broadview, 1998, p. 574.

²² P. Bourdieu, “The Market of Symbolic Goods,” *The Critical Tradition: Classic Texts and Contemporary Trends*, ed. David H. Richter, Boston, Bedford, 1998, p. 1242.

the machine of mass production, churning out illustrated book after illustrated book.”²³

In this debate over the value of mass-produced art, Collins’s fiction stood for what Walter Benjamin has termed “the work of art in an age of mechanical reproduction.”²⁴ The *Saturday Review* deemed his talent “mechanical”: “he is (...) a very ingenious constructor; but ingenious construction is not high art, just as cabinet-making and joining is not high art.”²⁵ Similarly, critic Margaret Oliphant referred to the “machinery” of *The Woman in White*’s sensation scenes.²⁶ Specifically, Oliphant accused Collins of having created in Count Fosco a villain “destined to be repeated to infinitude.” Ironically, Collins perceived Fosco as original because composed in “opposition to the recognised type of villain,”²⁷ but even this claim to originality acknowledges Fosco’s derivation from a stereotype. In Oliphant’s image of endless copying or reproduction, she evokes the stereotype as it existed at mid-century as a technology of print production: that is, as a cast-iron plate for the mechanical reproduction of text and image that permitted publishers to duplicate set type as an endlessly reproducible image, one that could be “repeated to infinitude” for a mass market. She thus describes Fosco as unquestionably, destined to be repeated to infinitude, as no successful work can apparently exist in this imitative age without creating a shoal of copyists; and with every fresh imitation the picture will take more and more objectionable shades. The violent stimulant of series publication – of weekly publication, with its necessity for frequent and rapid recurrence of piquant situation and startling incident – is the thing of all others most likely to develop the germ, and bring it to full and darker bearing²⁸.

²³ L. J. Kooistra, *Poetry, Pictures, and Popular Publishing: The Illustrated Gift Book and Victorian Visual Culture 1855-1875*, Athens, Ohio UP, 2011, p. 240.

²⁴ W. Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, New York, Schocken, 1968, pp. 217-51.

²⁵ Anonymous, [Review], in W. Collins, *The Woman in White*, *Op. cit.*, p. 629.

²⁶ M. Oliphant, in W. Collins, *The Woman in White*, *Op. cit.*, p. 640.

²⁷ E. Yates, in W. Collins, *The Woman in White*, *Op. cit.*, p. 648.

²⁸ M. Oliphant, in W. Collins, *The Woman in White*, *Op. cit.*, p. 642.

As we have shown, *The Woman in White* relies on doubles and repetition at the levels of both plot (doubled characters, repeated images, and forgery) and form (repeated questions, anaphora, anadiplosis, epanalepsis, epistrophe, and homiologia). The novel's conclusion, with its insistence on Laura's uniqueness and Sir Percival's "real" identity, attempts to consolidate the value of the original. But the text's emphasis on doubling and repetition also inadvertently thematizes critics' complaints about serial fiction's inseparability from the techniques of mechanical reproduction. For such critics, this reproducibility or repetition forms an intrinsic part of the genre: Fosco is not unique, but endlessly reproducible; the woman in white spawns copies, the novel prompts parodies, stage adaptations, and merchandise. The woman in white stands, therefore, as a quintessential symbol of the 1860s, of the era when mass reproduction of print materials became possible and a mass readership made sensation serials vastly profitable. She represents the spectre that haunts the work of art in this era: the figure of repetition that undermines the notion that aesthetic value inheres only in the unique, the unrepeatable image.