SUSAN POZNAR Untitled Article

In Cecil Harley's 1893 novel, *The Shadow of a Song*, Jack Helstone, dazed with the aftereffects of being mesmerized by the Pre-Raphaelitish Elsie Marriott, is puzzling over his own behavior at a dance:

> Did he or did he not have a long discussion in the garden with a short girl in blue, who had views on political matters, and advocated the rights of women? He did not know. He had a vague recollection of having shocked such an one by referring to her favourite paper as the 'Daily Nuisance,' and of having quieted her by a promise to attend a women's rights meeting the next day in Pilchester. (94)

Mesmerism muddles Jack's ideas on women's rights, but it might not be too much to suggest that women's rights debates and improvements in their legal status influenced the fictional uses of mesmerism. Much popular fiction from the 1870's through the early twentieth century registers a similar confusion regarding women's rights. The recent work of Alison Winter (*Mesmerized*), Daniel Pick (*Svengali's Web*), and others has examined various aspects of the prolonged craze for mesmerism/hypnotism* during Victoria's reign, but the subject is certainly not yet exhausted.

In particular, there is little written about the sprawling body of now-neglected popular fiction devoted to the subject, and or about certain sociocultural and sociopolitical issues raised by this literature. Literally hundreds of short tales and novels written between1850 and 1905 exploit mesmerism/hypnotism as a central or peripheral feature. Scholarly work has investigated some of this material – especially fiction by

better-known authors such as George du Maurier (*Trilby*) and Arthur Conan Doyle (*The Parasite*) – in terms of, for example, gender politics, racism and anthropology, emergent crowd psychologies, and theories of hysteria.* However, one of the most urgent anxieties expressed in this fiction is virtually neglected: concerns about women's property, in light of legal changes of the 1870's and 1880's.* Fiction employing mesmeric or hypnotic scenes is peculiarly suited to engaging these issues, since (in the popular view of mesmerism) the subject's body, mind, and possessions are vulnerable to appropriation. In most English novels of mesmerism the dominant anxiety, at first glance, seems to concern individual autonomy and free will: to what extent can the passive subject (especially the female subject) retain her self-control, autonomy and individuality under the hypnotist's gaze? However, as I see it, this is a rather sensationalistic "straw" issue in most of this fiction, which registers a much more culturally specific and acute anxiety and bafflement concerning property and ownership, particularly in women's lives.

The aforementioned *Shadow of a Song* is unusual in subjecting a male hero to a female mesmerist's manipulations. In the typical fictional mesmeric transaction, the female subject loses control of her body, her voice, and her will, to significantly varying degrees, consequently jeopardizing both her physical virtue and/or her material property — and often she is ignorant *of* her danger until too late. Between the 1860's and World War I, English society witnessed a contentious series of debates and legislation on these questions: Should married women retain any property? Should their rights be equivalent to single women's (admittedly limited) property rights? Were women, married or single, capable of managing their own property? And, should a married woman retain property rights, would this alter the nature of marriage? In what situations might a wife obtain

custody of her children, in the event of legal separation or the rare divorce? Each of these debates was complicated by class implications, since English common law and equity law diverged disturbingly on these matters. (Generally speaking, upper-class fathers had the legal means to protect their daughters' property upon their marriages, but working-class women had no such securities.) If we look at late-Victorian reform, we find that a broader theme of female possession and self-possession is at stake, when the "angel in the house" bestrode her newly-purchased bicycle, perhaps collected her salary as a typist or telegrapher, and became the "New Woman." Although by the 1890's key legislation regulating women's property had been passed, the public had not thoroughly digested its implications. I have chosen several novels of that decade to illustrate how fiction utilizing mesmerism or hypnotism sustains late Victorian doubts about the dangers of giving women, whether married or single, control of their financial resources.

Midway through *A Woman's Face*, by Florence Warden (1890?), the captivating Aphra Kildonen protests to Frank Armathwaite against the injustice of her father's leaving all property in trust for her, under her husband's control (whereas Lord Kildonen has brought to the marriage only his title). She says, "[Papa] had great notions about the rights and duties of property, and other things I didn't care a straw about. So he ferreted out a steady-going gentlemen of his own age, who might be supposed to look well after the family acres, and I was thrown in to close the contract." (91)

[Also: 132]

Manay a woman like Aphra must have wondered whether her marital happiness or the careful preservation of family property was the strongest factor in the choice of her husband. Aphra mockingly criticizes her role as a counter in a business deal between men, with herself as merely a trivial portion of the ancestral property. The reader might be tempted to assent to her indignation, had not the narrator already undermined Aphra's credibility, revealing her selfish, heartless, vain, and mercurial nature. Moreover, it is plain that she is not only squandering her own generous allowance in some mysterious way, but has even been draining money, vampire-like, from her hard-working but besotted old friend Ned Crosmont, undermining not just his physical strength, but his marriage and his wife's comfort, since he must stint her to pay for Aphra's unspecified indulgences. The narrator magnifies Aphra's financial irresponsibility in several ways: by the reader's sympathy for the wife (Alma Crosmont), by Aphra's constant deceit, by her exploitation of her charms, bordering on the scandalous, and most of all by the continuous implication that her mysterious activities are sexual, possibly promiscuous. By the time we realize that her vice is compulsive gambling (rather an anti-climax for the modern reader!), her financial wantonness has nonetheless been constructed as the sensual greed and abandon of a bacchante. Indeed, by obscuring the question of whether Aphra and Ned are lovers, the narrative further infuses their nocturnal gambling expeditions with erotic overtones. While Ned Crosmont is criticized for devoting his income to Aphra's misuse, his wastefulness does not carry the same erotic dimension, and the narrative partially excuses his behavior by attributing it to an irresistible fascination with an amoral siren. A woman's unfettered control of money is symbolically equated with public immodesty, sexual promiscuity, marital betrayal: the narrator stresses

the scandal of a refined, high-born woman being seen and despised by lower-class and criminal men in the gambling den she frequents, and the terrible danger to her reputation if her adventures become public. Significantly, Armathwaite, when discussing "passion" with Aphra, construes her confession to a "fire nothing can put out" as an admission to adulterous lust, when she really is referring to her gambling. (248-49)

The novel weaves other alarming associations around a woman's misuse of her financial resources. Aphra complains that her father and husband's arrangements treat her like a child (132) and the novel both confirms the wisdom of their patronage and punishes her for defying it by, in fact, reducing her ultimately to a child-like state. At first it seems that Alma is kept in financial leading-strings because, according to her father's letter to her husband, her very feminine "reckless generosity" would make her the "prey of every scamp" (142). What her father truly dreads is that his daughter will gamble her birthright away, but, again, the text obliquely connects the "natural" feminine tendency both to undiscriminating benevolence and romantic gullibility with Aphra's tendency to gamble, with the female's undisciplined expenditure of money.

The man who helps Aphra to fritter away his and her property must be destroyed completely: Crosmont is robbed progressively of his scruples, his hard-earned salary, his wife's love and trust, his personal comfort, his reputation amongst his neighbors, his physical health, and, eventually, his life. Indeed, the novel's male characters all are damaged by giving in to a woman's assertion of power. Lord Kildonen blames himself for not controlling his wife better; Dr. Peele is mildly censored for vacillating behavior caused by his affection for Aphra and Alma. When Mrs. Peele resists the claims of masculine authority, she is criticized, and ultimately yields to their demands ("But there

was a stronger will than hers at work." [323]). Despite Mrs. Peele's masculine appearance -- a face in which "long years of dictatorship" have resulted in "eagle eyes, hooked nose, and closely-shut mouth so overpoweringly fierce . . ." (113) – Armathwaite quickly learns not only to undercut her power, but to charm her while doing it. Like both Alma and Aphra, Mrs. Peele cannot maintain her most desperate resolutions. Even at the end of the novel the kindly Armathwaite usurps his future wife's responsibilities by redecorating his house before proposing to her. What seems like tact and consideration masks the narrative's inability to allow the women characters any autonomy or role in managing their lives.

The novel allows Ned Crosmont to punish himself, though it leaves the agency of his death in some doubt*, but refuses the self-willed Aphra any agency for the rest of her life. It scourges Aphra's spendthriftiness severely, by depriving her of her adult personality, her memory, her independence, and, virtually, her wifely status. When discovered returning from her gambling orgy, Aphra falls on the train tracks, concussing herself and injuring her spine. Thereafter she recovers only a childish apprehension of the present and loses all her splendid vitality and mobility, barely able to navigate her own house. After her willful career of indulging her "passion," and exacting service from all who know her, she becomes dependent and submissive; her fire is quenched, much like Catherine Linton's just before her death in *Wuthering Heights*. She will never again assert her rights, even remaining woefully ignorant of her loss. More significantly, her illness eradicates her addiction to gambling, which has driven her relentlessly all her life and destroyed many of her paternal ancestors! This implausible consequence merely serves to underline the text's imperative need to convert Aphra into the "daughterly"

angelic wife demanded by Victorian sentiment, albeit under cover of gentle mercy: her husband forgives her and, like Edgar Linton, wishes only to protect her for the rest of her life.

The novel is no less interested in physical and psychological legacies than in financial legacies. It might even seem that the author wishes to exculpate Aphra's indecency by ascribing it to paternal inheritance, but this is unconvincing for several reasons. First of all, by conflating her inheritance of addiction with her inheritance of property, the text suggests that the financial inheritance is as dangerous to the female as the psychological inheritance. Then the text withholds from the reader the documents revealing this terrible secret and summarizes them so sparingly that their impact is weakened. Much, much more space is devoted to the sympathetic Armathwaite's reflections on Aphra as a criminal seducer; her victimhood is far less compellingly presented.

Further, the dangers of woman's controlling resources and her inability to deal with paternal inheritance is underlined in the conjoined plot of Alma: Aphra's and Alma's destinies are paralleled and interdependent. For some time the novel hints that Alma, like Aphra, has inherited mania. We find out later that Alma has in fact inherited an artistic sensitivity from her father, and that his magnum opus (an unfinished opera based on the legend of Psyche) controls her destiny, while his ghostly music, heard by her at whiles, comforts her. (See 228) This mystical aura of ghostly music haunting the unresisting daughter endows the tyrannies of her life with a kind of glamour and fascination that disguise the brutal fact that her life -- even her dreams and daydreams, even her imagination -- is never in any sense her own. Alma, presented as an ideal of

femininity, needs the direction and support of men in every dimension of her life – there is no aspect of her life free of male influence. She cannot resist the control, whether malign or benign, of the men in her life, even her long dead father. Not only is she mesmerized by her husband, she doesn't realize what is happening. By suggesting that Alma was supposedly born while her mother was in a mesmeric trance (222), the novel implies that the susceptibility and passivity of this quintessential woman are innate, irresistible. Male legacies may be dangerous to women, but maternal inheritance menaces them perhaps more.

Alma does take a few important actions in the novel, such as wandering out in the snowy night for her first dramatic encounter with Armathwaite, but this is at the behest of mysterious and irresistible impulses. Admittedly, Armathwaite, her future husband and present doctor, also yields to similar mysterious calls and impulses, but he reasons about them, and they are clearly alien to his native bent. Moreover, his salvation of Alma and exposure of Aphra's secret depends on decisive, well-considered interventions, not the promptings of some occult power.

Another symbolic, latent connection lies between the two women's secrets (strikingly, in Armathwaite's early vision, the faces of Aphra and Alma alternate and melt into one another*). Aphra's secret is an inherited gambling mania. To satisfy her craving, she drugs her husband, travels secretly with a man suspected to be her lover, and exploits and undermines others' trust. She wastes money not her own. Alma's secret is that her husband is mesmerizing her to bring her under his control and keep her from suspecting his relations with Aphra. Both women are incapable of self-possession and self-control. Aphra seems resolute in pursuing her object, but loses control when she

needs it most. Her vice is figured as an addiction that physically drains her. Alma has only the resource of passive endurance. Even when she eventually knows that Ned will try to mesmerize her, she cannot resist his machinations. At bottom, the text asserts that the strongest-willed woman, as well as the gentlest, cannot control her body or emotions.

Alma does evince a certain feminine power that traditionalists like Sarah Stickney Ellis* would approve: " . . . the lady fixed upon her husband a look so eloquent with dignity, pleading, and wifely submission, that it seemed a revelation of noble depths in the woman's character, and filled him, the onlooker, with admiration and reverence." (42-3) Later, Armathwaite feels the "magnetic attraction of her eyes drawing his to meet them . . ." (76). The women captivate by their beautiful "looks" in both senses of the word. But their gaze, while influencing men, endangers themselves: Alma admits, "But you know that when I get very much excited – and it is so easy to excite me – I fancy I see all sorts of things; and though I know very well all the time it is only fancy, and that they are not really there, yet if the fancy is very strong, it is quite as dreadful as reality." (48) A woman's nerves and emotions overpower her intellect, deprive her of rational self-control, and affect her very sense of vision. The text never clarifies whether this tendency to visions predates her mesmerism or not, leaving open the interpretation that such instability is simply woman's nature, the natural concomitant of her angelic sensitivity.

Aphra's own instability is signaled by all the different descriptors attached to her: queen, siren, vampire, bacchante. etc. She has become an artist at manipulating her physical appearance and erotic magnetism (note that she disguises herself to gamble). But this awareness and immodest use of her charms makes her, paradoxically,

unwomanly: she symbolically unsexes herself by her efforts at control while plotting, conspiring, and treating others as things; this is signaled in details such as her "very masterly style of coachmanship" (91). The narrator refers to her "unsexing passion" (348), implying not only that gambling but sensuality as well are unfeminine, since the two passions are so linked throughout. She has reneged on her proper feminine activities – when redecorating the Kildonen mansion, she "gave one of the big London upholstery firms *carte blanche*, and told them above all not to make it gloomy." (93) – and the result is unhomelike and repellent, whereas, when Armathwaite later redecorates, the result is delightful. Looking superficially (like Lady Braddon or Rosamund Vincy) like the "angel of the house," she seems nevertheless to Armathwaite "with her golden hair disordered by the wind and her hungry luminous eyes . . . a picture of the destroying angel bearing a plague-torch over some death-stricken city" (175). She is associated throughout with excessive, and therefore masculine, appetites. Aphra's power is limited, however. She can temporarily deprive men of their senses, like a siren, but these men, forewarned, are capable of stopping their ears to her blandishments: her husband toughens up and doggedly investigates her iniquities, as does Armathwaite; they retain their sense, principles and powers of reason.

Like so many fin de siecle novels, the novel flirts with androgyny in its hero without condemning it, though the aggressive "masculine" aspect of Aphra's nature is expunged by her near-death experience. A "feminine" tendency to dreaminess, idealism, and reverence that merges with Armathwaite's "chivalry" clearly threatens to unman him:

> . . . a fear which this sensible, practical young man began to feel,

> lest the interest of this case and the weirdly fascinating personality of the patient should end by absorbing his mind so completely as to render insipid and unsupportable the prosaic details of his life and the rest of the people among whom that life was passed. There was something uncanny and alarming in the influence by which she [Alma] drew him to her presence without the least exertion of his own will, and something dangerous in the absolute reverence with which, once in her presence, he regarded her. While looking into her dreamy eyes he saw, not merely a young, beautiful, and good woman, but a being to whom he bowed down as to one who bore no stamp of common clay . . ." (167-68).

This is a confused passage. On one hand, Alma is set up as an angel worthy of worship and the novel insists on maintaining her spiritual charm and gluing her to her pedestal; she never loses her saintly glamor. Yet this narrative cannot allow its hero to remain prostrated by her uncanny influence, and so Armathwaite must decisively defeat her more sensual counterpart Aphra, must save Alma repeatedly, physically and emotionally constituting himself as her adored defender. The narrative registers a troubled resistance to confusion of gender characteristics. Though Alma is weak of will, her fascinating personality can "absorb" Armathwaite's "mind" as completely as her husband's mesmerism does hers. Alma's dreaminess evokes her admirer's own dreams and dreaminess. These "feminine" attributes collude with the laudable "masculine" attributes of chivalry to women and devotion to one's calling in weakening him. Most insidious of all, the doctor and lover's fear that ordinary life will become "insipid and insupportable"*

to him because of his obsession with Alma reminds the reader of Aphra's ennui with her quotidian realities, and thus his obsession with Alma is linked with Aphra's gambling mania.

However, the novel re-contains these ambiguities: Armathwaite's feminine tendencies eventually merely underline his ultimate strength, for he conquers both women easily. Periodically, the narrative suggests strongly that all the characters' lives are guided by some higher power, and "dispossesses" the men of their sense of force and independence; for example: "The waiter withdrew, and Armathwaite, again possessed by the overpowering restlessness which had driven him like an evil spirit throughout the day . . . began to feel acute curiosity concerning the series of unaccountable and apparently crazy impulses by which he had that day been led out of his course . . . " (20) Crucially, though, he doesn't panic; his reaction is "curiosity," not hysteria, and he warily and expertly sets up a counter-plot to reveal Aphra's malfeasance to her husband.

Finally, if *A Woman's Face* depicts women doomed by their inheritance, mishandling their resources, and wielding powers that must be contained, it also offers a reassuring, contrasting, vision of men bequeathing their best to other men in order both to safeguard personal welfare and preserve the social order. Dr. Peele, virtually adopting Armathwaite as his son (emasculated by his wife, he has none of his own), and bequeaths to him his practice, the guardianship of his daughter, and the secrets about his patients that will enable the young man to control them (that is, he leaves a legacy of knowledge). Armathwaite proves supremely worthy of this trust: an even more diligent physician than his mentor; a kindly father/brother surrogate to the daughter; and a wise user of intimate materials of his future patients.

I would like to turn now to a slightly later novel that, in plot and characterization, seems more "feminist" than Warden's, but nevertheless again registers subtextual uneasiness about women's handling of property and exertion of power, Frank Barrett's 1893 novel *The Woman of the Iron Bracelets.**

This novel focuses on a disarmingly bland but devious retired clergyman, Mr. Lawson – greedy and lascivious, weak and cowardly. He uses his hypnotic powers to induce a respectable middle-class widow, Mrs. St. John, to re-marry, and to dominate her and her daughter Olive, alienating their affections from brother Harry, who leaves home to support himself. Like a number of other contemporaneous novels, *Bracelets* links "will" in the sense of "willpower" and "intention" with "will" in the sense of testamentary disposition. Lawson encourages Mrs. Lawson's to indite a will entirely to Olive's benefit, and hypnotically seduces his daughter-in-law's affections; he plans to marry her after killing her mother (by neglecting her during a heart attack).

Lawson's quasi-incestuous plot intersects with another mysterious plot: the kindly physician Dr. Harvey (the Lawsons' physician and friend) encounters on the train a woman manacled for some alleged but unspecified felony. The reader suspects she is the same young woman who, for mysterious reasons, has just escaped from a mysterious institution in the country and accompanied a young man, Spottiswoode, to the Epsom Races, where she won impressively. During a train wreck Harvey saves her. This Mary Smith disappears, but is subsequently rescued and cared for by Harry St. John, and becomes Harvey's treasured housekeeper and surrogate sister. The novel's suspense pivots on several problems: How will the good characters thwart Lawson, and how save victims who have been hypnotically brainwashed not to want to be saved? Who is Mary

Smith, really? What are her origins and crimes? Will she succeed in reconciling Harry, with whom she has fallen in love, to his family, and thus in thwarting Lawson in his lewd and mercenary plot?

Mary Smith, who is actually Veronica Vane, succeeds ultimately, but with great difficulty, in saving the St. Johns, by throwing an emotional spanner into Lawson's works, charming him so that he is divided and distracted in his pursuit of Olive. Unlike the well-educated males, including Dr. Harvey (who should know all about hypnotism), Mary quickly divines the secret of Lawson's power and does her homework by reading the books he has consulted in order to assess and counteract her adversary's skills. It is Mary who concocts the scheme to defeat Lawson and carries it out virtually single-handed – who has the self-possession to act a part she abhors, the determination and courage to carry it out despite possible harm to herself, and the ingenuity to turn unexpected events to her advantage. Ultimately, Mary stands up for a woman's power to choose her own future: "Mr. St. John . . . I shall be guided entirely by my own discretion, and be sole mistress of my actions . . ." (285)

Notably, the novel insists that Mary Smith alone can circumvent Lawson. The male characters (a cultivated workingman, an experienced doctor and his friend, and the lawyer Fawcett) form no effective plans. Mary is the forward-thinking, disciplined strategist and the men, likable adjuncts, more often than not get in her way. As we ultimately discover when her identity and past are revealed, as a child she preserved her sanity when wrongly placed in an asylum for the weak, mentally retarded and insane, proving herself a heroine of self-control and of action – never wavering either in her composure or her virtuosic performances. Conversely, the domestic and gentle Harvey is

placed in the traditional feminine position: he must wait and watch, ignorant of Lawson's and Mary's plans, merely reacting to events.

Mary's schemes prosper, the novel's problems are solved, and the mysteries are cleared up. We learn that Mary is innocent of Spottiswoode's death (he died from natural causes); Mary's money was won at Epsom, not stolen from Spottiswoode; Mary's parents died long ago and she was institutionalized by a grasping trustee; Lawson is murdered by the two servants who were his instruments. Olive recovers from her grotesque hypnotic infatuation with Lawson; the family that Lawson splintered is reunited; Mary and Harry are married. Justice is served: Dr. Harvey is repaid for his train wreck heroics by gaining (for a while) a loving helpmeet; Harry is repaid for his kindness to a helpless stranger by gaining the best of wives, who preserves his own family when he is too overwrought to help them; Lawson gets his just deserts; Mary's name is cleared; and Mrs. Lawson's legacy will presumably be fairly divided between the son and daughter.

However, while in some respects reversing traditional gender roles by making Mary the heroine of complicated plots and bold action – and relegating the men to admiring and nurturing roles and the free indulgence of their emotions -- the text strains against unequivocal approval of the empowered woman employing her resources for self-determined ends. Mary Smith usurps male powers to effect traditionally feminine goals: restoring Harry to his place in the affections – and inheritance – of his mother, preserving Olive against male seduction, achieving harmony, reconciliation, and mutual understanding among those she loves, and overcoming the prejudices and petty selfishness that rupture family relations. She also performs the soothing and beautifying function of the domestic angel in Harvey's already comfortable home. I would

emphasize that she does not exercise her cleverness in exonerating herself, even when the law is at her heels and Dr. Harvey is clearly wondering why she was manacled on that train. Selflessly, she never shares her problems with any of the kindly men who would certainly assist her. The reader is encouraged to construe this as laudable feminine unselfishness, rather than bold independence. Indeed, eluding the police and disculpating herself from her alleged crimes seem barely to concern her; she subordinates her difficulties to the problems of those she loves.

Though, as we eventually find out, Mary-as-Veronica-Vane is heiress to comfortable means, we never see her in an independent position, but always dependent in some fashion on men: assisted in escaping by Spottiswoode, manacled by the police, saved from the train wreck by Harvey, nursed in her shock and weakness by St. John, "hired" by Harvey – and married to Harry. She doesn't employ financial resources or social connections (as male heroes often do) to rescue others, but utilizes her charms and brains. The novel, furthermore, rewards her self-sacrificing strategies by demonstrating that they enable her own vindication as a kind of bonus: her efforts to obtain others' desires accomplish her own. Had she concentrated on her own predicament, she could have quickly exonerated herself from the charges of murder and robbery. Barrett engineers the plot so that Mary's efforts to absolve Harry and Olive of an illusionary guilt, to save Mrs. Lawson from a murder by neglect, to disclose the secret of Lawson's power – all facilitate her own happiness. (Conversely, Lawson's guilt-ridden, jealous, and vengeful efforts to destroy Mary only backfire and have the opposite effect: revealing her innocence).

Implicitly, the novel also argues woman's incapacity for handling property. It is significantly unclear whether Mrs. St. John remarried because of Lawson's mesmeric manipulations or because of her own feminine neediness, but we never see any strength of character in her. Mrs. Lawson, according to Harvey, " . . . was always an over-sensitive, highly-excitable woman. She loved your [Olive's] father intensely, and the shock of his death seemed to snap an overstrung chord in her nervous temperament." (32) She has some legal control over her property, and Lawson does not, but the text suggests that even women with limited financial autonomy are endangered, easily influenced by mercenary men and, in fact, Lawson is more dangerous to the St. Johns just because he must maneuver for material gain. (He cannot just hypnotically "suggest" that his wife leave her money to him and then let her die during a heart attack, or he would be suspect, so he must turn her against her son, induce her to leave her money to Olive and then plot to marry the daughter later on). Mrs. Lawson is not only prompted by Lawson into unjust suspicions of her children (shockingly unfeminine behavior), she also undermines the wishes of her first excellent husband, who left all his property to her with the understanding that "she should bestow at least a part of it upon us [Harry and Olive] when we came of age." (33) This result to some extent endorses the lawyer Fawcett's cynical and misogynist reaction (47-48) to the news of her changed will. Wilkie Collins' Lord Verinder may have felt safe in leaving everything to his wife in *The Moonstone*, but Mr. St. John would evidently have done better not to trust the future Mrs. Lawson.

Most strikingly, we are encouraged to view Mary with suspicion because the male narrator, Dr. Harvey, who records events in his daily diary, filters our views of her. Harvey is a paragon of compassion, gentlemanly behavior, and benevolence – inclined,

indeed, to trust people a little too far, though a clever and experienced doctor. He soon admires and loves Mary, and depends wholly on her to heal the diseased relations that Lawson has created, yet even he frequently disputes her "unfeminine" methods. Mary will stoop to eavesdropping – "Not a very lady-like proceeding on my part . . ." -- "[w]hen the happiness of those [she] love[s] is at stake." (179) She is compared to a "gambler" (185) when essaying her schemes, and "a perfect little witch" (206) in achieving them. At one moment Harvey writes: "What fiend was it that reminded me at that moment of her [Mary's] past offences, of her calculating foresight with regard to Lawson's movies, and the consummate duplicity with which she had worked her designs and kept him in hand?" (238) Near the climax of the narrative, indeed, Mary seems almost to have lost herself in the part of seductress, when she discusses with Harvey Lawson's proposition of a "settlement" of 500 pounds per annum on her in return for his "possession" of her. Harvey writes in his diary: " . . . it shocked me to find that she could be playful upon such a subject, and talk of honor lightly." (309) Like Aphra Kildonen, Mary Smith skirts wantonness and female dishonor in exercising her powers and playing with others' property. And, just because Harvey is such a beguiling character, the reader accepts his scruples unquestioningly.

Of course, Dr. Harvey's retention of the "bracelets" that would only fit a woman or child reminds us that Mary has been doubly imprisoned within at least two sets of false but constraining images: that of the lunatic and that of the criminal: an emblem of women's relegation to the status of lunatics and children prior to the legislation of the 1870s and 1880s.* But she has learned the cleverness of the powerless: how to read others and use their weaknesses, how to hide her own strength when necessary, how to

learn from men's books, how to produce a desirable appearance, how to be patient. These lessons will enable her to triumph later over a man who is so accustomed to triumph that he is, paradoxically, more defenseless.

Thus, as I read it, the novel has it both ways. It extols the power of the clever and self-possessed woman who conquers men for their own and others' good and escapes the constraints that family and society have imposed upon her. But it also clings to the conservative, submissive, victimized, sweet angel who is all the more innocent and inexperienced from having been incarcerated all her life. The incompatibility of the two personae is embarrassingly evident. The Mary Smith who is living as his sister with Harry St. John after the train episode seems very different from the Mary Smith who takes charge once installed in Wrotham. This is mirrored in Harvey's own perceptions of her. Most of the time, he trusts her fully, but he gives way to doubts about her honesty and purity fairly often, even when her conduct is ambiguous or otherwise explicable. Although, eventually, all doubts vanish and Mary Smith is fully vindicated, there is no dispelling a certain latent uneasiness about a woman who protects the marriage bond by seducing the married man, who helps her beloved by deceiving him for his own good, who "bosses" her protector and employer, who helps her future sister-in-law by stealing her stepfather and future husband from her, who helps her future mother-in-law by destroying her husband, and who gambles not just with money, but with others' affections. It is almost as if she can "get away" with all this as long as she is "officially" a suspected felon, an apparent alias, a mysterious wanderer belonging to no one. She acquires a name, origins and history just after her activities are over, and she has then

only to slide into the role of devoted wife. Mary is the most active character in the novel, and, through the gentle male narrator, her activity is questioned frequently.

NOTE: THIS ARTICLE STILL LACKS TITLE, CONCLUSION, NOTES AND WORKS CITED.