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Family Secrets and the Mysteries of The Moonstone

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FAMILY SECRETS AND THE MYSTERIES OF *THE MOONSTONE*

By Elisabeth Rose Gruner

> What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?
> Some demon whispered — "Wilkie! have a mission."
> Swinburne, "Wilkie Collins"

SWINBURNE'S FAMOUS JUDGMENT on Wilkie Collins is not generally applied to *The Moonstone*, the work which T. S. Eliot called "the first and greatest of English detective novels" (377). While few readers today would go so far as to concur with William Marshall's opinion that the novel reveals a "general absence of social criticism, overt or implied," still it is rarely considered one of Collins's "message" novels — and probably for this reason it has received far more critical attention than those later works (77–78).[1] But *The Moonstone*, like those later novels with purpose which Swinburne found so unaesthetic, is a novel dominated by a social message — a message probably both riskier and more central to Collins's own life and those of his readers than some of those which pervade his later works, such as his diatribes against vivisection, prison life, the cult of athleticism, and Jesuits. Not easily reducible to "beware opium," "don't bring back sacred diamonds from India," or "don't steal your cousin's jewels," the message of *The Moonstone* yet involves all three of these strictures. The novel calls into question what writers like Sarah Ellis had celebrated as "one of [England's] noblest features . . . the home comforts, and fireside virtues" of the Victorian family, and it asks us not to trust in its appearance (Ellis 2). Drugs, imperialism, and theft are subsumed into the larger question of family relations (cousinly or closer) which is at the heart of *The Moonstone*. What is the Victorian family, and whose purposes does it serve? Collins asks, and the answer does not come back in the family's favor.[2]

Theorists of detective fiction usually discuss the genre's interest in the discovery and expulsion of a crime, perceived as a foreign element which has invaded a secure community or family.[3] While this tendency is apparent

in *The Moonstone*, one of the genre's founding texts, a contradictory impulse runs equally strongly through the novel, one with profound implications for the security of the Victorian family. For *The Moonstone* is, to a great extent, motivated by an impulse to secrecy, not to tell, to cover up the family's complicity in crime. Franklin Blake's editorial strategy seems designed to this end: he has chosen witnesses loyal to the family, unreliable as observers (Gabriel Betteredge remarks, "It is one of my rules in life, never to notice what I don't understand"), and often monomaniacal to the point of selective blindness (Collins 75). They are, singly or together, almost incapable of telling "the truth." But the impulse to conceal is built as well into the very material of the novel, Collins's most important source for *The Moonstone*, the Road murder case of 1860, which remains unsolved today.

If we read *The Moonstone* in the context of the famous murder case on which it was in part based, we find a scathing commentary on the Victorian family in Collins's selective recapitulation of the details of the case. Far from remaining within the protected private space which Victorian ideology reserved for family, the Kent family in the Road case and the Verinder-Herncastle-Ablewhite clan of *The Moonstone* cross boundaries and break traditions, rules, and commandments. Yet, Collins implies, these transgressions are not anomalous; the reasons for them are deeply imbedded in the Victorican ideology of the domestic sphere, especially in the concept of domestic privacy. For Collins the Victorian family, far from protecting one from the increasingly complex and dangerous public world, is itself the source of many of its own complexities and dangers.

I

EARLY IN THE MORNING of 30 June 1860, the murdered body of four-year-old Francis Savile Kent was found in an outhouse close by his father's house.[4] (The house, known as Road House or the Road-Hill House, furnishes the popular name for the case.) The circumstances of the case soon made it clear that a member of the Kent household must be the murderer, and the case became a cause célèbre in both the local and the national press.

The case received national attention, as Richard Altick notes, primarily "because it occurred in a substantial middle-class family" (130). The murder and the arrests of two young female members of the household (first Savile's sixteen-year-old half-sister, Constance, then his twenty-one-year-old nursery governess Elizabeth Gough) raised the disturbing possibility that the security of the Victorian home was an illusion. Anthea Trodd writes:

> The whole Road case affronted the popular conception of the domestic sanctuary in the most violent manner imaginable. . . . A young lady had been dragged

> from under her father's roof into a police-court, and her reputation and prospects irretrievably blighted. . . . (442–43)

She adds, "All the features of the case recommended themselves to intense publicity," and Collins was certainly aware both of the case and of its publicity value (Trodd 441). As Collins and the rest of the newspaper-reading public must certainly have known, Francis Savile Kent (known as Savile) had been stabbed several times and his throat was cut, although he did not appear to have bled profusely. (This detail, as hardened readers of detective fiction now know, raises the possibility that the child was stabbed after death.) The child was the son of Samuel Kent and his second wife Mary (née Pratt) — who had been a nursemaid and governess in the Kent household before the death of the first Mrs. Kent.

The appearance of the house and the testimony of the servants made it clear that the house had not been broken into, so the local police suspected those in the house: the family and the servants. It was suggested that Elizabeth Gough had admitted a lover into her room and that they had murdered the child when he awoke inopportunely. This was the most comforting suggestion possible, in an entirely uncomfortable affair, since it exonerated the immediate family and cast blame on a servant and — to some eyes — an outsider. When Jonathan Whicher, the celebrated Scotland Yard detective (and the model for Collins's Sergeant Cuff), entered the picture almost two weeks after the murder, he seized on one (missing) piece of evidence and arrested sixteen-year-old Constance Kent, Mr. Kent's third daughter by his first marriage. The missing evidence was one of Constance's nightgowns, entered into the washing book but never received by the washerwoman. Since no bloodstained clothes were found in the house, Whicher surmised that Constance's missing nightgown was the bloodied evidence which could have incriminated her, and that she had destroyed it. Other examinations of the evidence, however, have turned up reports of no less than three nightgowns, one belonging to Constance's elder sister Mary Ann, stained by what witnesses euphemistically called "natural causes"; Constance's, which some witnesses claimed to have seen — unstained — the morning after the murder; and a mysteriously bloodied "night shift" which was discovered hidden in the boiler-stove and then lost by the bumbling police. By the time Whicher entered the case several days later, there was only the one — now missing — nightgown of Constance's to be reckoned with, and he arrested her. Her putative motive was jealousy of her stepmother and her father's second family.[5]

Local opinion was against Whicher, and soon after Constance was released on the grounds of insufficient evidence, Whicher resigned from the force in disgrace. Elizabeth Gough was arrested some months later after a second

investigation and released when she was proved to know no one in town, thus disproving the "outside lover" theory. Five years later, in 1865, Constance Kent confessed to the crime, and a weeping judge condemned her to death in a melodramatic courtroom scene. Constance's lawyer called no witnesses for her defence in the initial hearing and spoke in the second trial only to record her plea of guilty; Constance herself maintained a stony silence throughout the proceedings.

Like Rachel and Lady Verinder in Collins's transformation of the case, Constance, her stepmother, and Elizabeth Gough appear to have been hostile to or at least uncooperative with the police investigating the case. As Bridges remarks, this seems particularly strange on Mrs. Kent's part, as she was by all accounts a fiercely devoted mother who could be expected to be zealous in her prosecution of her son's murderer. Like Rachel's belligerent silence after the theft of her diamond, Mrs. Kent's refusal to cooperate seems to imply some special knowledge of the case which her personal concerns required her to hide; as the injured parties, both would seem to have had the most to gain by cooperating with the investigation. Constance's confession itself, which failed to account for many circumstances of the murder (including motive, and, especially, the lack of blood), appeared to many contemporary commentators to have been dictated, perhaps by her confessor in the Anglican convent where she had spent the last two years. In a letter written after her confession, Constance pointedly disavowed revenge or jealousy as a motive for the murder, although no other motives were ever suggested. Her confession and subsequent silence failed to convince many of her guilt, including, it seems, the judge who reluctantly sentenced her.[6]

Perhaps the most disturbing aspect of the whole disturbing Road case was the reluctance of the family to assist in the investigation of the crime. The suggestion that the family was not all it seemed, especially because its members would lie or at least remain silent even in the investigation of such a brutal murder, is inescapable. The Kent family's silence seems to imply that no one is innocent, least of all the young women whose innocence, in other circumstances, the family could have been expected most zealously to protect. Family secrets, the Kent case seems to say, are both disturbing and dangerous, and murder may not even be the worst of them.

II

THE MOONSTONE, DESPITE ITS narrative technique based on eyewitness testimony and a stated devotion to "the interests of truth," is a novel characterized and perhaps even motivated by secrets (39).[7] The prologue's narrator has kept a secret which protects John Herncastle's theft of the moonstone, Mr.

Candy's secret trick keeps Franklin Blake's motivations mysterious, Godfrey Ablewhite's secret life must be uncovered to solve the crime, and Franklin Blake's secret from himself complicates both the mystery and his relationship with Rachel. Most obviously, perhaps, both Rachel Verinder and Rosanna Spearman keep secrets to hide Franklin's, and in some sense their own, guilt. Like the mystery of the Road case which inspired it, the plot of *The Moonstone* is complicated by the silence of women. Rachel, Rosanna, and even Miss Clack conceal their own motivations and what they know of others' in order to protect secrets of their own, thus complicating and ultimately doubling the plot: Franklin Blake's "strange family story" becomes both a mystery and a courtship novel, a story of both theft and passion (39). And the secrecy which creates this mystery is deeply implicated with the family's privacy.

The Victorian family depended on the privacy which earlier generations had carefully cultivated with innovations like corridors and locks and had increased by rejecting earlier practices like fostering out children and boarding in apprentices.[8] In *Sesame and Lilies*, John Ruskin eulogized the family home in terms of its security and privacy:

> within [a man's] house . . . need enter no danger, no temptation, no cause of error or offence. This is the true nature of home — it is the place of Peace; the shelter, not only from all injury, but from all terror, doubt, and division. In so far as it is not this, it is not home; so far as the anxieties of the outer life penetrate into it, and the inconsistently-minded, unknown, unloved, or hostile society of the outer world is allowed by either husband or wife to cross the threshold, it ceases to be home; it is then only a part of that outer world which you have roofed over, and lighted fire in. (59)

As Sissela Bok notes, domestic privacy and secrecy are closely related:

> The private constitutes, along with the sacred, that portion of human experience for which secrecy is regarded as most indispensable. In secularized Western societies, privacy has come to seem for some the only legitimate form of secrecy; consequently, the two are sometimes mistakenly seen as identical. (7)

In this context, the notion of "family secrets" becomes almost redundant: the family's privacy necessarily involves a certain amount of secrecy, even if the two are not, as Bok notes, identical.

As Patrick Brantlinger has noted, sensation novels like *The Moonstone* rely on secrecy for their appeal: "the plot unwinds through the gradual discovery — or, better, recovery — of knowledge, until at the end what detective and reader know coincides with what the secretive or somehow remiss narrator-author has presumably known all along" (19). Even the supposed "eyewitness" character of *The Moonstone*'s narration requires, because of its retrospectivity, a certain suppression of evidence in the retelling. Betteredge,

for example, confesses that he is concealig his present knowledge of the case in his reconstruction, leaving his readers "in the dark" (233); and Miss Clack ("condemned to narrate," 241) similarly includes in her narrative an exchange of letters which indicates her inability to "avail . . . herself of the light which later discoveries have thrown on the mystery" (241; 285).

The absence of testimony from several key witnesses, among them Penelope Betteredge (whose diaries, we are told, provide many of the important facts in Gabriel's narrative), Godfrey Ablewhite, and Rachel Verinder, is even more disturbing than possible omissions in the testimony we do have. Obviously their silence is a necessary element in the novel's mystery plot, but these characters are silenced for another reason as well: they are witnesses to the development of a counterplot involving a young woman's sexual passion and desire.[9] The counterplot of Rachel's passion for Blake is witnessed by Penelope and doubled in Godfrey's secret suburban life, but because this second story is told only or at least primarily through the voice of the demented Miss Clack it remains buried through most of the novel. Clack — like Franklin, keeping a secret from herself — provides a grotesque parody of Rachel in her determined suppression of her own and, by implication, of Rachel's desire.[10]

Rosanna Spearman provides another parallel to Rachel: her passion for Blake is an open secret, known at least to Penelope and Limping Lucy, and the narrative gives her, unlike Rachel, a voice — albeit a voice from beyond the grave. Her "testimony" — the letter to Blake — is both a clue to the eventual solution of the theft mystery and a hint at the other, buried mystery; it is Rosanna who tells us, far more explicitly than Clack or Betteredge, of Rachel's desire for Franklin. It is Rosanna who unites the mystery and the marriage plots by her recognition that the paint on Franklin's nightgown is evidence *against* him, evidence of at least an illicit visit to Rachel's room, if not of his theft of the moonstone.

Female secrecy is, of course, not unique to *The Moonstone*. Elaine Showalter believes that "secrecy was basic to the lives of *all* respectable women" of the mid-nineteenth century. She quotes Jane Vaughan Pinkney's *Tacita Tacit*, a novel of 1860: "Women are greater dissemblers than men . . . by habit, moral training, and modern education, they are obliged to . . . repress their feelings, control their very thoughts" (2). Margaret Oliphant went further than to note the tendency toward concealment; she endorsed it and regretted that young women in modern novels (particularly sensation novels, with which *The Moonstone* shares many generic characteristics) could not keep their feelings secret. She wrote in 1867, just one year before *The Moonstone* was published:

> That men and women should marry we had all of us acknowledged as one of the laws of humanity; but up to the present generation most young women had

> been brought up in the belief that their own feelings on this subject should be religiously kept to themselves. (259)

But the secrecy which Oliphant calls for in modern heroines becomes dangerous in *The Moonstone* when it becomes epidemic, as the women who in concealing their passions also conceal a crime and set off a chain of circumstances which includes theft, suicide, and murder. The family's reliance on secrecy for its normal maintenance quickly translates, in *The Moonstone*, into an almost pathological — and certainly criminal — secrecy. The secrecy of Collins's own family life seems benign by comparison to the secrecy which permeates both the Road case and *The Moonstone*.[11]

Collins makes it clear that the family is not, as Ruskin would have it, a place of peace; and the mysteries of *The Moonstone* do not arise from a foreign invasion which can be expelled, leaving the family complacently untouched — they are inherent in the very nature and structure of the family. The secrecy which, as Bok and Showalter agree, is part of family life, is primarily women's part. But the women of *The Moonstone*'s extended family, like the women of the Road case, keep their secrets too well, covering up crime rather than expose their passionate secrets to a prying public (primarily the police, but also — especially in the Road case — the press). Like the mystery of the Road Murder of 1860, in which Collins found the original of Sergeant Cuff and the evidence of the missing nightgown, *The Moonstone*'s mystery operates on at least two levels, only one of which — the fictional theft of the diamond or the actual murder of the child — can be publicly acknowledged. And, as the Road Murder seems to hinge on a familial conspiracy of silence, so *The Moonstone*'s mysteries hinge on the silence and the secrecy of the Verinder-Herncastle clan, especially its women.

III

In its bare outlines, there seems to be little to connect the Road murder with *The Moonstone* beyond the ineptitude of the local police and the evidence of the missing nightgown. But Collins's focus on the social pathology of female silence seems also to derive from his understanding of the Road case. It is the silence which Constance and Rachel share which unites the cases and sets these women apart from many of their fictional counterparts, at least in the sensation novels Mrs. Oliphant deplores; it is a silence which brings them under suspicion of one crime but may in fact have been designed to conceal another. In Rachel's case, and Collins probably believed in the Road case as well, the second "crime" is illicit passion. In a letter to Collins on 24 October 1860 Dickens outlined his theory of the Road murder. As Dickens puts it:

> Mr. Kent intriguing with the nursemaid, poor little child awakes in crib and sits up contemplating blissful proceedings. Nursemaid strangles him then and there. Mr. Kent gashes body to mystify discoverers and disposes of same. (qtd. in Bridges 187).[12]

Dickens's theory neatly domesticates the widespread — and more popular — theory of Elizabeth Gough's guilt, which involved a lover coming in from outside the house. Trodd cites other contemporary reports which did, however, in more guarded terms, express variations on the same theme (443).[13] Bridges proposes Constance's 1865 confession, then, as a form of self-sacrifice intended to protect her family, keep the secret, and lay the matter to rest. While Rachel keeps silent to protect her cousin-lover and to hide her own feelings for him, Bridges theorizes that Constance's silence (and her stepmother's), and the odd way in which she broke it, were designed to protect her father and to hide his — and Elizabeth's — illicit passion.

Collins's two passionate and silent women — Rachel and Rosanna — recall aspects of Constance and Elizabeth without providing an easy parallel. Rosanna, a servant in love with her master, recalls Elizabeth Gough — but hides a criminal past rather than an (allegedly) adulterous present. And Collins conflates the two roles of Constance and Elizabeth (knower and lover) into the single character of Rachel, thus increasing the pressure on the family to solve or hide its own crimes and its own deviations from familial norms. Of course Rachel is neither murderer or fornicator, nor even an accomplice to any serious crime; yet her silence in the face of a police investigation suggests that Collins could expect her passion to be widely read as almost as guilty as the adulterous Elizabeth's. Any woman who would allow herself to be suspected of theft (or, in Elizabeth and Constance's case, murder) must, the reasoning goes, be hiding something far worse.

As Richard Altick notes, behind the shocking violence of the murder lay other shocking circumstances in the Kent family. The first Mrs. Kent was widely believed to have gone mad after bearing her third child "but her loss of mind did not deter her husband from begetting six more [children] on her body" (Altick 131). Bridges hypothesizes that the first Mrs. Kent was not indeed mad but jealous of her husband's relationship with Mary Pratt the governess (and her successor), and she notes the striking similarities between the situations of the first Mrs. Kent with Mary Pratt, and the second Mrs. Kent (née Mary Pratt) with Elizabeth Gough. Whatever the particular circumstances, the Kent home clearly concealed a most unfamilial (or un-Ruskinian) reality.

So, of course, does the Herncastle-Verinder clan. Mr. Ablewhite, Senior, acknowledges a seamy family history when he attributes Rachel's stubbornness to her Herncastle blood, implying that she is, unlike himself, "descended

from a set of cut-throat scoundrels who lived by robbery and murder'' (305). The moonstone, then, is not the only legacy Rachel has received from the wicked colonel; in some ways, however, it seems to be emblematic of them all. Perhaps we need to examine the moonstone itself more closely to determine just what these characters are protecting with their secrets.

IV

IT IS A COMMONPLACE OF Collins criticism to see the moonstone as symbolic of Rachel's virginity — this bright jewel that ''seemed unfathomable as the heavens themselves,'' which Rachel displays proudly in the bosom of her dress (97).[14] Hutter, building on this connection, notes the more important detail that the diamond is flawed, perhaps ''suggest[ing] some of the sexual prejudice so strongly attached to women in the nineteenth century'' (200–1). More threateningly, because the diamond would be more valuable cut into smaller stones, the flaw may suggest that a woman's value is not in her wholeness and self-sufficiency but in her multiplicity and her reproductive ability. In fact, as a symbol of woman's status as ''exchange value,'' one could hardly do better than the flawed diamond. For, as Luce Irigaray notes, only virgins are exchange value for men. Once violated (divided, cut up, married) they become use value, recognized only for their ability to reproduce themselves. Rachel and her (uncut) diamond are both more valued in a capitalist economy for their potential than for themselves.[15] Lady Verinder, recognizing this, puts Rachel's inheritance in trust to protect her from a too-rapacious consumer such as Godrey Ablewhite. Only the Hindu priests, who are outside of English life and the capitalist economy, are able to value the diamond for itself; no one (with the possible exception of Franklin Blake) seems able to value Rachel for herself.

John Reed, in his interesting examination of *The Moonstone*'s anti-imperialist implications, makes a similar claim for the symbolic value of the diamond but focuses on its status as sacred gem and stolen object:

> In itself ambiguous, its significance lies in its *misappropriation*. Because it is so desired by *men*, it signifies *man's greed*. . . . More particularly, however, the Moonstone becomes the sign of England's imperial depredations — the symbol of a national rather than a personal crime. (286; my emphasis)

While I agree with Hutter that Reed ''oversimplifies the novel'' in this symbolic reading, his insights are helpful (196). For, as he points out, Rachel Verinder has no more right to the diamond than Godfrey Ablewhite — it belongs, in fact, to the Indians from whom Franklin and Betteredge try so

hard to protect it and to whom it is finally returned. Like a woman's virginity, its greatest value is a symbolic one: it is less valuable to the possessor (Rachel) than the desirer (whether Ablewhite or the Indians), it is most valuable in exchange, and the desirer is only and always male. The diamond thus points in (at least) two directions: outward, towards England's treatment of its colonies, and inward, to its treatment of women at home.[16] And Rachel's insistence on maintaining control of it challenges both of these (analogous) power structures: she refuses to treat the diamond as a prize, preferring to maintain it in its native setting (the Indian cabinet), and she refuses to give up her own independent judgment. Jenny Bourne Taylor claims that "Rachel thus tacitly upsets the conventions of feminine propriety . . . she is dark, positive, purposeful, independent — yet silent" (200). Constance Kent, who once ran away from home to escape her stepmother's tyranny, was similarly accused (by her father) of a wish "to be independent" (Bridges 39). Her habitual reserve and self-dependence are among the characteristics John Rhode — who believes in her guilt — notes when he claims that "in a sense, the crime saved her character. Before it . . . she was a wayward, passionate girl . . . and she would probably have developed into a selfish, headstrong woman" (83).[17] The Verinder family lawyer, Bruff — more sympathetic to Rachel than Rhode is to Constance Kent — comments that Rachel's "absolute self-dependence is a great virtue in a man . . . [but] has the serious drawback of morally separating her from the mass of her sex" who are, presumably, more compliant (319).

Bruff's comment points out a characteristic which all of Rachel's observers note. Rather than claiming that she has been changed by the theft of the diamond into a secretive person, Gabriel, Clack, Lady Verinder, and Bruff agree that she has always been "secret and self-willed" (262; see also 87; 205). Bruff's correlation of secrecy with self-will corresponds with Bok's observation that "secrecy guards against unwanted access by others — against their coming too near, learning too much, observing too closely. Secrecy guards, then, the central aspects of identity" (13). Rachel's secrecy, both after the theft of the diamond and after her broken engagement with Ablewhite, signifies her insistence on maintaining herself as a separate identity and her refusal to be known and thereby possessed.

Why does Rachel's secrecy so annoy her family, when she seems simply to be complying with the Oliphantian code of self-suppression? I believe it is because she, and Constance Kent, and Elizabeth Gough, are forced into the ironic position of defending their identities through the very means Oliphant would use to urge their suppression. Silence for Oliphant signifies a lack of desire — for these women, it signifies an excess.[18]

When Franklin steals the diamond and Rachel refuses to condemn him, we can see that she is tacitly accepting his right to her sexuality, even to her

virginity — but not her identity (Hutter 202–3; Lawson 67).[19] Her silence, however, cuts two ways: while protecting Franklin, it puts Rachel herself under suspicion, as well as endangering Rosanna Spearman. While Rachel keeps silent, the truth will remain hidden. Thus the plot of the mystery — the discovery of the diamond — is inextricable from woman's passion, and her identity.

If the mystery plot is inextricably linked with passion, perhaps marriage, the courtship plot is similarly mysterious. Not only must Rachel conceal her passion for Franklin until he becomes a "suitable" suitor, but the moonstone itself becomes a pawn in the marriage negotiations. Money and marriage are often related, both in novels and in life; in *The Moonstone* Gabriel Betteredge first hints at the connection which will later loom large by giving us his own history.

> Selina, being a single woman, made me pay so much a week for her board and services. Selina, being my wife, couldn't charge for her board, and would have to give me her services for nothing. That was the point of view I looked at it from. Economy — with a dash of love. I put it to my mistress, as in duty bound, just as I had put it to myself.
>
> "I have been turning Selina Goby over in my mind," I said, "and I think, my lady, it will be cheaper to marry her than to keep her." (43)

Betteredge's euphemistic "services" implies an illicit relationship with Selina not unlike the one Rachel and Franklin metaphorically begin when he enters her boudoir. And, as Betteredge's account implies, money enters into both relationships. Rachel seizes on Franklin's implied debts to explain his "theft" of the diamond: "I had reason to know you were in debt, and . . . that you were not very discreet, or very scrupulous about how you got money when you wanted it" (400). When Franklin comes to Rachel for an explanation of her actions, she immediately assumes that as he has inherited his father's wealth, perhaps he has come to "compensate [her] for the loss of [her] Diamond" (392). The compensation for the symbolic loss (of virginity) will of course be marriage, but here Rachel's concern is with literal, monetary compensation.

Jean E. Kennard argues that the conventional marriage plot of the Victorian novel most often involves a choice between suitable and unsuitable suitors and that each of the suitors "represents one pole of value in the novel in which he appears" (13). Rachel's suitors take on roles which mask their suitability, however: Godfrey appears as "the Christian Hero" and Franklin as a philandering debtor and suspected thief (Collins 239). According to Kennard, when these roles are sorted out — a sorting out which here requires the solution to the mystery — the marriage plot can be satisfactorily, conventionally, concluded. In *The Moonstone*, however, the sorting out muddles

the "poles of value": we establish that Godfrey is both a philandering debtor and a thief, but we never really establish that Franklin is neither. In fact he is certainly, according to Betteredge's testimony, at least a philanderer and a debtor. Twice constrained from returning to England by "some unmentionable woman," on his return he borrows money from Lady Verinder to repay an earlier debt (Collins 48). The conclusion of the courtship plot does, however, literalize the "poles of value": Franklin, who has inherited his father's wealth, is simply worth more than Godfrey.

But Franklin is Rachel's choice even before his father's death makes him wealthy; so while convention demands a fortune for the novel's heroine, Collins also provides her with passion. Rachel's love for Franklin survives her conviction that he is a philanderer, a debtor, and even a thief — it is only his seeming hypocrisy in calling the police which threatens to destroy her love. For the reader, her passion is an ill-kept secret, but among the characters of the novel only the voiceless Penelope seems to be privy to Rachel's passionate secret — as to so many other secrets of the novel.

Penelope, one of *The Moonstone*'s silent women, only comes to us filtered through her father Gabriel. Her narrative silence helps conceal Rachel's love, since her correct observations are always followed by her father's contradictory opinions. Her silence does more than conceal Rachel from us, however; it also conceals herself. Since her diaries supply dates and times for Gabriel, he suggests that "she should tell the story instead of me, out of her own diary, [but] Penelope observes, with a fierce look and a red face, that her journal is for her own private eye, and that no living creature shall ever know what is in it but herself" (46). Her insistence on her own privacy, which mystifies her father, is a more benign version of another important silence in the novel: Rosanna Spearman's. Both women are, of course, servants, and as such are barely even named by the other narrators of the novel — Miss Clack remembers Penelope only as "the person with the cap-ribbons" (259). But servants are part of the extended family, at least in Gabriel's view, and as such privy to and part of family secrets. Resented for "her silent tongue and her solitary ways," Rosanna, as Gabriel informs us, is hiding a criminal past; and, as we later discover, she is also hiding an unsuitable and uncontrollable passion (55). In this, she not only doubles Rachel but provides another connection to the Road case: like Elizabeth Gough, she is a servant in love with a master, although her passion is not, like Gough's, adulterous. By comparison, Penelope's "Sweethearts" seem insignificant — and they are, except as evidence of the need for concealment in even the most complacent and commonplace of families (46).

The women of *The Moonstone*, from Penelope to her mistress and including Rosanna and Clack, are forced to conceal their passions, forced to conform to Oliphant's rules. But this conventional concealment has fatal consequences;

Collins seems to suggest that these rules are not, in fact, designed so much to protect female modesty or propriety as to conceal the criminal underpinnings of the Victorian family. While the secret of Penelope's sweethearts seems to have no effect on her household, the "necessary" concealments practiced by the other three women create the mystery, complicate relationships, and prevent simple solutions. Again, the line between benign and fatal secrets is not easy to draw.

Because she is complying with Oliphantian strictures against self-revelation, Rachel must not speak until Franklin proposes. But Franklin is not in a position to propose through most of the novel — he is poor, and his chosen lover suspects him of a crime. The situation is a stalemate: only Rachel can solve the crime, but because Franklin is the suspect, she cannot solve it without revealing her passion (and her acceptance of his presence in her bedroom at night). Despite its mysterious underpinnings, however, Rachel's dilemma is not unlike that of any other courtship heroine; any such heroine, of course, must not speak of love until she is spoken to. According to Kennard, she must also learn to read her suitor correctly and must "adjust . . . to society's values" (18). Ruth Bernard Yeazell similarly argues that marriage in the Victorian novel is usually a metaphor recognizing the heroine's internal growth and an enactment of the "union of Self and Other . . . [resolving] the tensions between the individual and the larger human community" (34–35; 37). Although she already finds him desirable, Rachel must learn to see Franklin as acceptable. Her "growth," then, may look to us like regression, as it involves both a rejection of her former status as self-dependent and a recognition of society's commercially-derived values; she must relinquish her "unnatural," unwomanly, anti-social silence and allow herself to be mastered by the now-wealthy Blake. After Franklin has inherited his father's money, he confronts Rachel about her silence; only then can he claim that "while her hand lay in mine I was her master still!" (393).

Of course, Godfrey Ablewhite's mercenary machinations also make him an unsuitable suitor. Again, it is Betteredge who first makes Ablewhite's character clear: "Female benevolence and female destitution could do nothing without him" — for he uses female benevolence to create female destitution (89). Ablewhite's aborted engagement to Rachel and his secondary theft of the diamond are both evidence of his deviance from acceptable behavior. As Barickman, and others, point out:

> Godfrey Ablewhite's secret . . . involves Victorian sexual roles at their worst; he hypocritically becomes a champion of charitable ladies while he is keeping a mistress, embezzling another man's money, and preying upon Rachel in order to gain control of her money. (143)

It is not so much Ablewhite's preoccupation with wealth as his hypocrisy which condemns him; ironically, he is really guilty of just the kind of hypocrisy of which Rachel suspects Blake.

So Franklin becomes the right suitor when Rachel learns to read him "correctly," when Ezra's hypothesis about his behavior proves a more satisfying one than her own; she must believe that he came to protect, not steal, her virginity. And Collins, having upset convention by valorizing his passionate, secret, self-willed heroine and exposing the hypocrisy and criminality of the Victorian family, quietly reinscribes her into the system with her marriage to Franklin.

V

THE MOONSTONE IS, THEN, a detective story, but it is also a family story. Indeed, it is perhaps not even the "*strange* family story" Franklin believes it to be, but simply a story about the necessary concealments families practice (39; my emphasis). Gabriel even comments on the text's reliance on secrets, insisting in the "Eighth Narrative" that his "purpose, in this place, is to state a fact in the history of the family, which has been passed over by everybody, and which [he] won't allow to be disrespectfully smothered up in that way" (518). Godfrey Ablewhite — himself a member of the family — *has* been rather disrespectfully smothered up, but not so Gabriel's news.

Yet even in this triumphant conclusion, Gabriel himself contributes to the pervasive silence of the novel by cutting Franklin off with "You needn't say a word more, sir," and leaving the news of Rachel's pregnancy — which may stand both as visible evidence of female passion and as final proof of her capitulation to her status as "use value" — unspoken (519). The family, even in its triumphant return, is still relying on secrecy, is still, perhaps, not entirely innocent. The "scattered and disunited household," disrupted by the theft and Rachel's cover-up, is never wholly restored (225). Although Rachel and Franklin are married, Rosanna, Lady Verinder, and Godfrey are dead, Gabriel is retired, and Clack is exiled.

Cuff's failure to solve the crime on his own, like Whicher's failure in the Road Murder, clearly implies that there are family secrets which the police cannot penetrate — secrets not, perhaps, worse than murder or theft, but more difficult to reveal. Cuff's low interpretation of Rachel's behavior considers the possibility of "family scandal," but this version of the family scandal, involving as it does debts and pawnbrokers, is entirely *outside* what Ruskin and even Gabriel Betteredge would recognize as the sphere of family, in the more common and public realm of the police. And, in fact, when this realm becomes central to the case in Ablewhite's unmasking, Cuff acquits himself brilliantly. As D. A. Miller shows in his discussion of *The Eustace Diamonds*, fictional police are notoriously inept when forced to act within the sphere of

family; thus "the plot of the novel 'passes on,' as it were, the initial offense until it reaches a place within the law's jurisdiction" (13; see also 33–57). But it is not really the family's inviolability which the police cannot penetrate; it is precisely its inseparability from the public sphere which confounds them. For the police, like the family, still believed in the family's privacy in the mid-1860s; remember that the police in the Road case waited to be invited in, preserving a boundary which had presumably already been broken. While we may want to read Godfrey's crime as a crime outside the sphere of family, involving as it does pawnbrokers and Indians and London and its suburbs, we cannot separate the spheres so easily. Like Rachel's implied crime, Godfrey's is both a family scandal and a police matter; the two spheres are inextricably linked, and no amount of artistic pleasure in neat solutions can separate the two. "The complexity and even incomprehensibility of the truth" are not, as Kalikoff would have it, "related to the invasion of the respectable," so much as they are related to the instability of the respectable (125). No family is secure, Collins's novel implies, from the dangers of its necessary concealments.

The lesson of *The Moonstone*, like the lesson of the Road Murder, is that the family is complicit in the failings of the larger society; murder and robbery are not invasions from without but manifestations of societal tensions — involving especially the dangerous desires of greed and sexuality — within. The fabled privacy of the domestic sphere protects it not from the public world but from discovery. If we are to understand the Victorian family at all, we must examine its pathological need for secrecy and understand, as does Collins, the kinds of secrets it protected.

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NOTES

1. John R. Reed and D. A. Miller are two notable exceptions to this trend, although they find different (and, in Miller's case, deeply buried) messages in the novel. Even Philip O'Neill, however, in his recent attempt to unify the Collins oeuvre in terms of social criticism, finds little to say about *The Moonstone*, reading it primarily as an allegory of literary criticism. But see Sue Lonoff, who writes of *The Moonstone* that "none of [Collins's] novels is as profoundly critical of Victorian values . . . and none is more subtle in linking its political, social, and religious censure to its central images and symbols" (211). Lonoff finally sees Collins's social criticism as less conflicted than I do, but her reading is nonetheless perceptive and interesting.
2. I take the term "family" in its broadest possible sense here, meaning both "blood kin" and "members of a household." As we will see in my discussion of the Road case and Collins's novel, the "traditional" nuclear family is something of a chimera. The Kent household comprised parents, children of two mothers, and

servants; the Verinder household consists of only one parent, a daughter, and servants — as well as frequent visitors, most of them cousins. Most of the primary characters in *The Moonstone* — Rachel, her mother, Godfrey Ablewhite, Franklin Blake, Drusilla Clack, Rosanna Spearman, and Gabriel Betteredge — are members of the same "family," either by blood or service. See Steven Mintz for a review of recent work in family history (esp. 11–20).

3. See, for example, W. H. Auden. George Grella also claims that "the fabric of society will be repaired after the temporary disruption" of crime (38). Many readings of *The Moonstone* depend on seeing the criminal Godfrey Ablewhite as an outsider; Beth Kalikoff, for example, claims that the crime in *The Moonstone* represents an "invasion of the respectable" (125; see also Miller 41–46). Yet Ablewhite and Blake stand in exactly the same relation to Rachel; both are her cousins, and both are clearly established and accepted as family members — thus Ablewhite's father, Rachel's nearest male relative, becomes her guardian on her mother's death.
4. The case is detailed by Yseult Bridges, John Rhode, Richard Altick, and Mary S. Hartman. As Bridges's is the most detailed account, my summary of the case relies most heavily on her reconstruction of it (as verified by Hartman).
5. Bridges here relies on the testimony of the police and an account of the crime written by Mr. Kent's doctor and friend, J. W. Stapleton (72–73; 77–84).
6. Contemporary accounts of the trial reveal that Constance was asked three times to enter a plea before she would say the word, "guilty," and that the judge was forced to pause twice while pronouncing the sentence to choke back sobs (Bridges 237–39).
7. In my use of the concept of secrecy, I am relying on Sissela Bok's discussion of the topic. Her definition makes it clear that while not all secrets involve deception or are necessarily wrong, our conceptions of secrecy almost always involve "prohibition, furtiveness, and deception" as well as "sacredness, intimacy, privacy, [and] silence" (6). "The defining trait of secrecy," she says, is "intentional concealment" (9) — although she later discusses the possibility of keeping a secret from oneself — also an issue for Franklin Blake (see, 59–72).
8. Ian Watt discusses the rise of domestic privacy in relation to the novel in chapter six of his *The Rise of the Novel* (see esp. 188). See also Michelle Perrot's claim that "the nineteenth-century family tended to subsume all the functions of private life" (97). Lawrence Stone's evidence concurs with Watt's and Perrot's; he characterizes the intense privacy of the mid-Victorian family as an "explosive intimacy" (423; see also 169). Hartman, writing specifically of the Kent case, claims that "new middle-class privacy provided relative isolation from outside pressures," especially with regard to the treatment of children and Mr. Kent's alleged adultery (117).
9. Jenny Bourne Taylor writes, "Rachel's silence is the essential secret that generates the Story; but in its very structural indispensability this suppression turns the conventions of moral management into hysterical repression on the one hand, and on the other suggests that the ascription of hysteria is the uncomprehending response to female autonomy" (201).
10. Beth Kalikoff argues that "Clack is a comic distortion of the other passionate women in the novel. Cloaking all her prejudices and greed beneath excessive religiosity, she seeks attention, love, and money" (122).
11. The irregularities of Collins's family life are now well known, although they were perforce "secrets," at least from the novel-reading public, during his lifetime and

have been obscured rather than clarified by his biographers. He lived for most of his adult life with a mistress, Caroline Graves, and her daughter Harriet; and he kept for some years a "second family" consisting of Martha Rudd and her three children by Collins. Martha Rudd and Caroline Graves were equally provided for in Collins's will. Nuel Pharr Davis's highly imaginative biography makes the most of these irregularities, to the extent of using Collins's fiction to "comment" on the still sketchy picture of his domestic life (see, for example, 164, 166). Robert Ashley's biography refers to Caroline Graves as an "alleged 'intimacy' " and, while reporting speculation that she was his mistress, suggests as well that Collins's bequest to her may simply have been a reward to "an affectionately respected housekeeper" — a hypothesis which is by now largely rejected (72, 77). The two relationships are also discussed by Kenneth Robinson.

12. It seems more likely that the child was — like Godfrey Ablewhite — smothered, not strangled. In the outline of means and motive, however, both Bridges and Hartman substantially agree with Dickens.
13. Lonoff puts forth the more traditional view that "the [Road] murder itself has nothing in common with the crime or the plot of *The Moonstone*" (179).
14. Psychoanalytic critics such as Charles Rycroft and Lewis Lawson have made the most of this symbolism. Rycroft's perceptive and often amusing reading also notes the Franklin Blake gives up cigar smoking during his courtship: Collins provides both hero and heroine with symbolic representations of their sexuality (Rycroft 235; see also Lawson 66).
15. Irigaray writes:

> *The virginal woman . . . is pure exchange value*. She is nothing but the possibility, the place, the sign of relations among men. In and of herself, she does not exist: she is a simple envelope veiling what is really at stake in social exchange. . . . The ritualized passage from woman to mother is accomplished by the *violation of an envelope*: the hymen, which has taken on the value of *taboo*, the taboo of virginity. Once deflowered, woman is relegated to the status of use value, to her entrapment in private property; she is removed from exchange among men. (186; emphasis in original)

While these comments seem problematic as a rendering of contemporary women's experience, they do clearly point up Rachel's (and her flawed diamond's) status. They may also recall to us the situation in the Kent household, in which Mr. Kent seems to have moved from one virgin to another (his first wife to Mary Pratt to Elizabeth Gough) as if they were interchangeable. The "madness" of the first Mrs. Kent and the silence of the second in the face of his virgin–consumption seems to signal the powerlessness of the woman who has been relegated by motherhood to the private sphere.

16. See Mark M. Hennelly, Jr., for a discussion of Collins's research into gemology. Hennelly sees the diamond itself as uniting the major themes of the novel, which he characterizes as both detective and domestic.
17. Apparently Constance's most unforgivable behavior was cutting off her hair and running away from home — at age thirteen — with her younger brother William (see Hartman 110).
18. Hartmann writes of Constance's confession, "Ironically, this act of confession was finely 'female,' just the sort of submissive, sacrificial, and self-destructive

act which, in lesser forms, was explicitly demanded of all respectable creatures of her sex" (127). Anita Levy discusses the way in which what in one context is good and "feminine" becomes in other contexts destructive and "masculine," especially in her discussion of the "Venus Hottentot" and the "Bushwoman" dissection (69–72). She writes:

> When anthropological writing contrasted the "bad" female, disruptive of familial and sexual order, with the "good" female, the upholder of that order, it pinpointed female choice as the decisive factor in the transition from nature to culture. . . . Most important, anthropological writing helped middle-class women to understand their gender as a contradictory phenomenon precisely because it was both crucial to woman's identity and the gravest threat to it. Being female meant (as it does today) constant self-regulation; neither too little nor too much femininity would do. (74)

19. I seem to be arriving, by some what different methods, at John Kucich's thesis that "Victorian repression produced a self that was actually more responsive libidinally, more self-sufficient, and — oddly enough — more antisocial than we have yet understood" (3). While I would not claim that Rachel's secrecy is typical of Victorian repression — certainly Bruff and Betteredge find it unusual enough to remark on it — it seems to be operating as Kucich defines the term here.

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