

MARKETING “PROPER” NAMES: FEMALE AUTHORS, SENSATION
DISCOURSE, AND THE MID-VICTORIAN
LITERARY PROFESSION

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For Sean, with gratitude for your love and unrelenting support

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INTRODUCTION

In the 1860s English literary marketplace, the newly hybridized sensation genre became a discursive keynote of the period, emerging out of a constellation of cultural anxieties about identity, gender, inheritance, and modernity. During the mid-Victorian period, proper names functioned as the ultimate sensational trope, particularly for women: they provided easy, straightforward identification and self-definition—the ultimate signifier of patriarchal inscription—while also being always unstable, changeable, and alienable. In this dissertation, I focus on female authors who use both their “proper,” legal names and strategic alternative names to navigate the literary marketplace in an attempt to gain and maintain economic security. In so doing, they not only insist on but actually legitimate their roles in the nascent literary profession. Their names gain momentum, separate from these original “authors,” once they enter the literary market as celebrity signifiers and brands, becoming encoded with an array of overlapping, contradictory narratives. In the process, the circulation of these names reconceptualizes the literary profession as an unstably gendered space that is neither masculine nor feminine. These names further de- and reconstruct categories of gender and identity in an array of interpenetrating social structures, including legal discourse, the family unit, and the economic market.

Female authors in the nineteenth century published under a variety of naming conventions, from maiden names and married names to pseudonyms and substitutes for names, such as “by the author of” and “anonymous.” Overall, these names are fraught textual constructs that elide embodied writers while seemingly defining their identities.

Much critical work has been done on anonymous and pseudonymous publication, but little work has been done addressing what Gerard Genette terms “onymity,” or the act of publishing under one’s given name. Genette elaborates with regard to his coinage, “After all, to sign a work with one’s real name is a choice like any other, and nothing authorizes us to regard this choice as insignificant” (39-40). In his edited volume on anonymous authorship, Richard Griffin argues that, “[t]he author’s name is another artifact, at a distance from the empirical writer, a signifier within the semiotics of the text that can be manipulated strategically...” (10). Notably, though, his critical volume proceeds to analyze anonymity, rather than onymity. I argue that “proper” names and processes of authorial naming merit increased critical attention, since they function as a nexus for considering new phenomena in the literary marketplace, including increasingly professionalized female authors. My dissertation analyzes both the “artifactual,” as Griffin terms it, and rhetorical nature of legal names that belong to celebrity women sensation authors who achieved literary success in the 1860s.

My project is fundamentally about gender in the mid-Victorian period, and as such the notion of separate spheres is crucial to my arguments about the difficulties female authors had in gaining recognition as professional writers. However, I follow critical tradition in treating the distinction between public and private as a powerful discursive, fictional construction, rather than as a true binary. As Caroline Levine insists in “Strategic Formalisms,” “[S]cholars have successfully unsettled the notion of a rigid divide between public and private, showing that Victorian women played significant roles outside of the home, while men struggled to find their proper places within the domestic sphere” (627). The ordering discourse of separate spheres remains useful to my project

insofar as it remains a powerful, albeit unstable, narrative in Victorian culture. I argue that the idea of the proper name functions as a similarly policing, ordering discourse that is similarly disrupted and destabilized in practice. My dissertation is invested in tracing the pseudonymous, “improper” condition of women’s names in Victorian England, in distinction to the socially accepted, properly valenced name, while also mapping their increasing power and importance.

Throughout this dissertation, I discuss and theorize the construction of names and the concept of naming in the mid-Victorian period through the lens of women’s unstable nominative status and the tension between patronymic nominal inheritance, with its ostensible reassurance of domestic propriety, and market-driven authorial branding. The names of women authors carry multiple meanings, including legal signature, linguistic/textual sign, brand name (in the case of celebrity authors), familial/ancestral marker, and, particularly for sensation authors, potential scandalous disguise. While names convey powerful epistemological assurance, my argument will demonstrate that they ultimately guarantee nothing of the kind.

My argument about names in the Victorian era could expand tremendously into practically all aspects of critical inquiry with regard to the period, and far beyond the period. However, I strategically focus my discussion temporally around the 1860s in order to foreground the way names were explicitly activated via sensation discourse as unstable, constructed signifiers, rather than transparent, naturalized identifiers. The scope of my dissertation is not strictly limited to the 1860s, as my second and third chapters on Queen Victoria and Caroline Norton in particular cast critical attention on events of the 1830s and 1850s, since these preceding events fundamentally helped shape the sensation

discourse of the '60s. Even these chapters are anchored in the 1860s, though, and the ways Victoria and Norton function as celebrity authors in the sensation era.

The 1860s also serve as a crucial period for the Victorian marketplace in terms of increased professionalization for celebrity women authors who were publishing under their own names. Thus, my dissertation focuses on the phenomenon of onymity and women who published under their socio-legally defined “proper” names, from “Queen Victoria” and “the Hon. Mrs. Caroline Norton” to “Mrs. Henry Wood,” “Mrs. Oliphant,” and “Mary Elizabeth Braddon.” While my arguments about names, celebrity, and professionalization can partially be extended to more traditionally, historically canonical Victorian female authors such as Charlotte Bronte/“Currer Bell” and “George Eliot,” their pseudonymity situates their literary personae differently, I would argue, in the interplay between gender and the marketplace.¹ Their pseudonyms are already admittedly unstable constructions. The female authors I discuss crucially insist on, and in the process attempt to construct, legitimate positions within the literary profession for themselves by strategically deploying their given names in a variety of guises.² In the end, the discursive nexus operating between sensation, professionalization, and gendered celebrity stands at the center of my dissertation. I have selected only those figures whose

¹ In terms of professional identification, as Linda Peterson argues, “Charlotte Bronte was not a professional woman of letters—at least not in Victorian terms” (131), though she was more “professionalized” than Gaskell’s *Life of Charlotte Bronte* admits (147).

² “Elizabeth Barrett Browning”/“E.B.B” at least partly fits into these criteria for publishing under a strategically deployed legal name, but her work as a poet working primarily before the 1860s, rather than as a novelist, places her in a different category from the authors I consider in this dissertation. And while “Mrs. [Elizabeth] Gaskell” stands as another strategically-denominated female novelist, she belongs to an earlier tradition of proto-professional women’s publication, and thus she is not involved as directly with the sensation genre or the creation of sensation discourse (in part because she died in the middle of the sensation decade in 1865).

public identities, along with their works, help constitute and are constituted by these overlapping discursive networks.

My claims about authorial identities and personae remain specific to historical individuals, but they are predicated on the idea that such identities are discursively formed through a complex interchange between author, critical community, and reading public.³ The idea of a collaborative yet still potentially reactive construction of authorial identity at both the private and public levels is crucial to my larger argument about naming and gender. Moreover, these historical figures are critically inaccessible as “real” individuals. Gail Turley Houston, in her work on Victoria and Victorian authors, *Royalties*, captures this issue with a reminder: “This is not to say that we can fully identify their reality. Nor can we erase the multiple, varied, intertextual, and conflicted fictional emanations and personas with which Victorian authors and their queen were and are associated” (5). I approach the figures at the center of my work—Queen Victoria, “the Honourable Mrs. Caroline Norton,” Ellen “Mrs. Henry” Wood, “Mrs. Margaret Oliphant,” and Mary Elizabeth Braddon—fully aware of their “abundant fictionality,” as

³ As Rachel Sagner Buurma argues, in another article on anonymity, “authorship practices like anonymity, pseudonymity, and onymity (the condition of being named) could tell a number of possible, sometimes conflicting, often multiply meaningful stories about literary authority” (26). Buurma focuses on the narratives encoded through anonymity, though, while I focus on onymity. Mark Schoenfield, theorizing Romantic periodicals, makes an argument that largely rings true for the mid-Victorian period: “The construction of a literary self was a corporate effort, even if...the corporation was an unholy alliance of writer(s), publishers, reviewers—anonymous, named, pseudonymous, and mistakenly or purposefully misidentified or unmasked in other publications” (231). And Heather Morton, in a rare dissertation on signed names, aptly summarizes this phenomenon: “The individual can be a collective enterprise” (199). While Morton’s dissertation focuses on canonical authors, signature, and a reader-based construction of a consistent “author-character,” my work focuses on sensation authors, the literary profession, and the conflicting, productive narratives encoded in such names and produced from a variety of sources.

Houston aptly terms it (5). Additionally, my focus is on their names, encoded as they are with biographical narratives and linked as they are to historical, individuated bodies, and the way these names circulate both as tools of self-marketing as well as independently of their “owner.”

I. The “Sensation” Decade

The newly hybridized sensation genre emerged in England in the 1860s as a crystallization of numerous socio-legal and economic anxieties, particularly about gender and identity. The ideology of “separate spheres” and the gendered distinctions between public and private work and identity construction were breaking down with the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which led to increased publication of private sexual affairs via divorce court coverage, as well as the slow but steady entry of women into the professional sphere, particularly the literary profession. Sensation novels frequently centered around themes of fallen women, marriage, inheritance, and procreation, foregrounding disguise and the potential instability and fungibility of identity. At the beginning of the 1860s, critics named the “sensation” genre in order to foreground the scandalous, exceptional content of its novels as well as the embodied, sensory reactions such works were supposedly meant to provoke. “Our Female Sensation Novelists,” an 1863 anonymous article on the sensation phenomenon, encapsulates this duality:

Sensation writing is an appeal to the nerves rather than to the heart...We suppose that the true sensation novel feels the popular pulse with this view alone—considers any close fidelity to nature a slavish subservience injurious to effect, and willingly and designedly draws a picture of life which shall make reality insipid and the routine of ordinary existence intolerable to the imagination...And sensationalism does this by drugging thought and reason. (210)

Authors and critics deemed “sensational,” such as George Sala, quickly reclaimed the term, as I discuss in more detail in chapter four, but it remained a stigmatizing and delimiting word nonetheless. However, sensation discourse came to inflect broader cultural conversations about gender, sexuality, the law, economics, and politics. As Laurence Talairach-Vielmas astutely argues, “Playing upon femininity as a masquerade, the sensation novels of the 1860s embedded their narratives within a capitalist society where the construction of ‘woman’ subversively depended upon the market economy” (57).

Contemporary critics have approached Victorian “sensation” from a variety of angles, from D. A. Miller’s emphasis on detection and authority in *The Novel and the Police* to Ann Cvetkovich’s work on the gendering and construction of affect in *Mixed Feelings*. Cvetkovich and other critics such as Talairach-Vielmas and Lynn Voskuil also foreground the way sensation novels thematize and link performativity, embodiment, and commodification. My work builds from these feminist and queer approaches to sensation fiction, although I depart from these earlier works by charting the way the name, rather than the body, is privileged as a problematic signifier of gender, sexuality, authority, and performativity in sensation fiction and in sensation discourse more broadly.⁴ I argue that sensation fiction, and the broader sensation discourse of the 1860s, is by turns, at and times simultaneously, normative and non-normative, conservative and radical. I owe a particular scholarly debt to later critics such as Andrew Maunder, Marlene Tromp, Solveig Robinson, and Jennifer Phegley, who have focused on building the sensational

⁴ My conceptualization of sensation fiction is also indebted to the pioneering works of feminist identification of the sensation genre as a genre, including Winifred Hughes’ *Maniac in the Cellar* and Lynn Pykett’s *The Improper Feminine*.

canon, as it were, and have by turns complied and provided careful readings of works, beyond novels, that are crucial to a contemporary understanding of the sensation discourse.⁵

Many of the most famous sensation novels, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Lady Audley's Secret*, Ellen Wood's *East Lynne*, and Wilkie Collins's *Armadale* position themselves explicitly around the instability of women's names and the disturbing possibility that such nominative instability covers a more insidious mutability of female identity whereby the angel of the house can become the adulterous murderer. In one of the most extreme cases of nominative disguise, the eponymous sensation heroine of *Lady Audley's Secret* begins her life as Helen Maldon, marries to become Helen Talboys, assumes the identity of Lucy Graham after being abandoned, marries again to become Lady Audley, and is finally institutionalized as Mrs. Taylor, aka Madame Taylor in Belgium, after her criminal acts of disguise are uncovered. This pattern of pseudonymous disguise is repeated throughout sensation literature, and in my first chapter I focus on how this trope plays out in a number of bestselling sensation novels. I argue that names emerge as the archetypal sensation trope—mutable signifiers of ostensible stability that can encode competing and contradictory narratives of sexual propriety or impropriety, familial cohesion or dissolution, legal inheritance or criminal theft. Throughout this dissertation, I maintain that celebrity sensation authors, particularly women authors, capitalized on this newfound awareness of the sensational, unstable

⁵ For compilations, see Maunder's general-edited 6-volume 2004 collection *Varieties of Women's Sensation Fiction*, also edited by Tamar Heller, Mark Knight, and Graham Law and Solveig Robinson's *A Serious Occupation: Literary Criticism by Victorian Women Writers*. For critical studies, see (among others) Maunder's "Ellen Wood was a Writer," Tromp's edited *Beyond Sensation: Mary Elizabeth Braddon in Context*, Robinson's "Editing *Belgravia*," and Phegley's "Domesticating the Sensation Novelist."

nature of names in Victorian society to market themselves as powerful forces within the literary marketplace and within Victorian culture more broadly.

The 1860s also witnessed the escalation of the “signature debates” in periodical culture, during which an increasing number of journals jettisoned a policy of anonymous corporate authorship in favor of individually signed articles. As this policy developed, many prominent women sensation novelists became “showcase editors” of family magazines or well-known critics by the decade’s end.⁶ In chapter five, I link the phenomenon of signed reviews with the nominal obsession of the bestselling “new” genre of the decade, precisely because of their shared preoccupation with names and nominal instability.⁷ Both discourses build on anxieties about naming, although one strand creates fictional spaces while the other deploys a less fictionally mediated debate on anonymity and disguise. Jonathan Loesberg articulates the anxiety of the sensation novel, of which *Lady Audley’s Secret* is an archetypal example, as hinging on the idea that “when one loses one’s legal and class identity, one enters an anonymous world that operates by no rules one has ever learned before” (120).⁸ This “anonymous world” of course already had its equivalent in the practice of anonymous review that persisted in newspapers and

⁶ In their introduction to *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*, Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green, and Judith Johnston use the term “showcase editor” to refer to Charles Dickens, William Thackeray, and other famous novelists whose names were used to market their respective magazines (18).

⁷ Bradley Dean is one of only a few critics to explore this link, arguing “The sudden critical construction of the category of sensation novels corresponds precisely with a movement to transform the function of periodical criticism in the late 1850s and early 1860s, and it is in the context of this transition that the advent of the genre must be analyzed” (67). However, his reading does not focus on names and a shared discourse on identity, which I argue is crucial to a comparison of the two literary marketplace phenomena.

⁸ He clarifies, in terms of Braddon’s novel in particular, that “the recurrence of the image of loss of identity as loss of class identity in *Lady Audley’s Secret* is not largely changed by the transformation of loss of identity into a false assumption of identity” (120).

monthly magazines until the end of the Victorian era.⁹ I read the sensation genre as working through questions of name, particularly women's names, and the instability of identity within a largely domestic, familial space, while the move from anonymous publication engages in similar, though differently gendered, work on the professional, public front.

I categorize sensation literature and sensation authors more broadly than do many other critics. By including the ostensibly anti-sensational Margaret Oliphant as well as even more controversially "sensational" authors Caroline Norton and Queen Victoria in my discussions, I am arguing for a critical definition of "sensation" as a capacious, heteroglossic discourse in dialogue with a wide variety of cultural concerns and claims in the mid-Victorian period, including seemingly antithetical claims.¹⁰ In chapters two through four, I argue that select 1860s publications of Victoria, Norton, and Oliphant, respectively, *are* sensational and that their self-marketing tactics and public personae implicitly involve them more generally with sensation.

Moreover, these authors' participation in sensation discourse aligns them, albeit in distinct ways, with a larger discursive movement to carve out a space for women authors

⁹ Robert Griffin traces the beginning of signed reviews to the policy implemented by *The Fortnightly* in 1860 (7). It is certainly true that over the course of the 1860s anonymous review became a less dominant mode of authorship, although it certainly persisted in many journals up through the 1880s and in newspapers through the 1890s (Buurma "Anonymity, Corporate Authorship..." 21).

¹⁰ In doing so, I am following a Victorian commonplace of wrestling with the capacious sensation genre. In his 1867 article in defense of "sensation," "The Cant of Modern Criticism," George Augustus Sala blew open the temporal constraints of the sensation novel, claiming precursors among the most celebrated (and notorious) novels of the Victorian period: "*Jane Eyre* was to all intents and purposes a 'sensational' novel, and some fastidious parents might forbid their daughters to read a book in which there is a deliberate attempt at bigamy...*Adam Bede* too is clearly 'sensational.' There is murder, and there is frailty in it" (201).

in the ostensibly “male” literary profession of mid-Victorian England by revealing it to be already sensational, unstable, and gender-blurred. In *The Improper Feminine*, Lynn Pykett argues, “the gendered discourse on fiction was part of a broadly based nineteenth-century crisis of gender definition, and...the unstable, shifting and multivalent nature of the gendered terms of this critical discourse was bound up with a desire to fix gender boundaries and categories at a time of profound anxiety about the nature and fixity of those categories” (23).

All of these figures, from Victoria to Braddon, use names and nominative instability as key themes within their works, but they also more importantly extend and adapt this nominative play to create “real” narratives of their own celebrity and professional status. I would argue that this nominative play, and the public, biographical narratives that result, are some of the most potent forms of self-marketing available to these women. With the term self-marketing, I am highlighting the way these authors intentionally create and deploy their own public personae, in contrast to the marketing and public circulation of their names and texts that occurs independently of such intention. These figures use the sensationalized valence of names to market themselves as worthy of both celebrity status and professional stature, not in spite of their sensational connections, but in some ways because of them. As authors launching themselves into a “sensational” literary marketplace, all of these figures had to confront and navigate the commodification of both text and author, resulting in an increased embracing of economic success and cultivation of an authorial “brand.” Sensation novels brought the stigma of text-as-commodity to the foreground in an acutely gendered way.

Henry Mansel, in a contemporary jeremiad against such works, sets forth the disturbing rhetorical conjunction of artistic creation, procreation, and commodification so endemic to discussion of the sensation genre in particular, “No divine influence can be imagined as presiding over the birth of his work, beyond the market-law of demand and supply; no more immortality is dreamed of for it than for the fashions of the current season” (33). The sensation novel here emerges as a monstrous child, whose “birth” is denied even the pretence of a muse-like, artistic “divine influence,” and is instead granted a “market-law” midwife. The emphasis on commerce and fashion suggests a contemporary awareness of how, as Ann Cvetkovich articulates, “the sensation novel’s success owed much to the rise of consumer culture in the Victorian period” (18). Commodification corrupts and makes monstrous the family dynamic, as the sensation novel corrupts proper domestic relations, according to Mansel. At the same time, Mansel is deploying an implicitly gender-blurring rhetoric by which the presumably male author is giving birth to his literary offspring, thereby already destabilizing the gender-normative family unit. The commodified production of literature is thus implicitly already a problematically gendered process, even for a conservative defender of literary tradition, suggesting that the profession of literature is also a problematically gender-blurred construct. And, notably, the rhetoric used to encode this gender-blurring is catalyzed by the sensation genre’s prominence in the literary market.

The link between gendered economic concerns, gender destabilization, and the sensation genre goes beyond the commodification of sensation texts, however, to the scandal journalism and divorce court reform of the late 1850s that would inform the sensation novels of the ‘60’s. These discourses surrounding sensation fiction were

partially refracted throughout Victorian society as a result of the Matrimonial Causes Act of 1857, which made divorce slightly easier to obtain but made accounts of such divorce much more prominent in newspapers of the period.¹¹ Sensation novels and sensation discourse more generally are informed by a variety of discourses, from the gothic, sentimental, Newgate, and silver-fork genres of the pre- and early-Victorian eras to the drive toward literary professionalization that was slowly building from the late Romantic era onward. However, legal redefinitions of the rights of women, including the Infant Custody Act of 1839 and the 1857 Matrimonial Causes Act, also crucially informed the 1860s genre. These legal debates repeatedly brought issues of women's rights and women's identities—issues fundamental to sensation discourse—to the cultural foreground. Over the last two decades, critics have traced the sensation novel to the “sensation journalism” emerging from this 1857 legislation, emphasizing how sensation discourse was to some extent catalyzed by debates about women's legal status and the publicization of “private” domestic affairs.¹² In this dissertation, and particularly in chapter three, I extend these arguments to focus on the way names, particularly married

¹¹ The Parliamentary Act shifted divorce trials from ecclesiastical courts to a newly formed civil court in London. Husbands could now petition for divorce on the grounds of adultery, without having to request a costly private act of Parliament. Thus, the act opened divorce to the upper middle class (since legal fees still made it an expensive process) rather than just the aristocracy. However, women could only sue for divorce based on aggravated adultery (compounded by incest, sodomy, bestiality, or extreme cruelty), revealing how one-sided the “reform” bill was.

¹² Lyn Pykett, Jenny Bourne Taylor, and Anne Humphreys, among others, have aptly drawn this link between legislation, journalism, and sensation fiction. In *Culture and Adultery*, Barbara Leckie observes, “the legal context of the divorce court provided one of the few Victorian forums in which participants were urged to speak about sex; the publication of these divorce cases in daily newspapers, moreover, made them readily available to diverse readers” (62).

women's names, are deployed, deconstructed, and reconstructed through the court system and within sensation literature, focusing on the legal fiction of coverture and the contrast between "improper" gendered behavior and "proper," legal names. The divorce legislation of the 1850s brings the specter of divorce and the destabilization of patriarchal inheritance to the foreground of contemporary Victorian discourse, giving legal force and momentum to anxieties about women's faithfulness and the presumption of a basic fungibility, or unfaithfulness, of their identities. Sexuality and one's "proper name" are thus legally intertwined, as implications of scandal and notoriety—the publication and subsequent erasure of one's good name—destroy the private, domestic family space.

II. Proper Names, Property, and Propriety

During the Victorian period, female identity was legally constructed and reconstructed as an amalgamation of patriarchally-oriented roles (daughter, wife, mother), signaled through seemingly transparent traditions of naming such as christening and marriage. Women inherited names, not property, and these names became constitutive of their identities. A proper name was a crucial piece of property for both middle- and upper-class men and women, though, ensuring as it did legal ownership of familial property and the transmission of such property from one generation to the next. John Locke's theory of property, by which "every Man has a *Property* in his own *Person*," may not extend to women in his own wording or under mid-Victorian law (qtd. Rose 5), but synecdochally and etymologically this link is preserved for both genders through the proper name, which by definition belongs to a person and simultaneously designates their "proper"-ty in themselves. In other words, the legal construction and

policing of the proper name links it intimately with personal property both intrinsically and extrinsically to a given person. In this way, names construct and define personhood, and if names themselves are unstable and constructed through official, legally sanctioned channels, and are revealed to be so in contemporary cultural discourse, concepts of personhood and individual identity are destabilized, along with the legal superstructures on which they are predicated. My dissertation examines this etymological link between the “proper” and “property” by focusing on gendered names operating in the literary marketplace during the mid-Victorian period precisely because it is during this period that these epistemological and ontological instabilities come to the discursive foreground. To compound this awareness of destabilization, the idea of literary and intellectual property became a source of heated debate and continual redefinition as the literary profession began to become reified in the mid-Victorian period as well, creating a perfect storm of anxieties about ownership and identity that can most effectively be navigated through an examination of authorial names, particularly the doubly destabilized female author’s name.

For women, though, a legal proper name implied propriety as well. Married women’s names were “proper” insofar as they represented their participation in legally-sanctioned sexual relationships that would ensure the proper transmission of property, but they remained “proper” only as long as such sexual propriety could ostensibly be assured. In other words, women’s proper names, unlike men’s names generally, came pre-inflected with connotations of moral judgment. Proper names thus also implicitly invoked the specter that haunted Victorian gendered discourse—the improper and impropriety. For the purposes of my dissertation, the term “proper” implies adherence to

social norms and normative binaries, while “improper” connotes the transgression, whether intentional or otherwise, of such normative conceptual structures and behavioral models. If legal names are, or ostensibly should be, proper, nominative disguises such as stage names and the pseudonyms assumed by many a sensation heroine would be by definition improper. However, much as women’s roles were not fully constrained by the public/private divide inherent in the doctrine of separate spheres, women’s names signified well beyond such proper/improper socio-legal binaries.

Demonstrating how gendered names are both constrained by and vacillate between categories such as “proper” and “improper,” onym and pseudonym, is a crucial element of my project. The construction of female identity through patriarchal traditions and ceremonies of naming was naturalized in Victorian culture (and remains so in many cultures today), and only through the mid-Victorian debates surrounding the at times obvious artificiality of authorial naming in the marketplace could these complex reworkings of gendered identity become de-naturalized. In examining these debates, and the way celebrity female authors deployed and constructed their brand names within the literary market, the legal name emerges as a pseudonym, and the proper name becomes productively improper. With the increasing entry of women into the literary marketplace under their own names, as it were, particularly during the sensation decade of the 1860s, the paradox of simultaneously public and private identities comes to the cultural foreground. In order to capture this paradox, I focus both on authorial names and on the operation of names within published works of the period. In the following section, I will briefly demonstrate this methodology by exploring two christening narratives—stories that foreground both legal and religious ceremonies of naming as well as the way names

themselves encode competing, complex narratives. The first, Lytton Strachey's account of the christening of Queen Victoria, contextualizes what would become a "real," archetypal yet singular brand name in terms of patriarchal tradition and a rhetoric of nationhood. The second, a striking christening scene in Ellen "Mrs. Henry" Wood's *East Lynne*, provides a sensation fiction analogue that employs many of the same themes, albeit in a more extreme, potentially destabilizing fashion.

Ceremonies such as christenings and marriages powerfully encode the problematic, overlapping discourses of religion, class, and the law in and around acts of naming and re-naming. The religious and legal power of these ceremonies exist in tension with one another, particularly as the Victorian era unfolded and religion became at times a less dominant force in such ceremonies. However, christenings and marriages remained moments of patriarchally-inscribed identity formation for women in particular. These official events definitively link a proper name with an individual and stand as the clear origin for these legal names. During the mid-Victorian period and thereafter, though, narratives of such ceremonies highlighted their inherent instability and the ways in which even legally and religiously sanctioned processes of naming could go awry.

In his 1921 biography of Queen Victoria, Lytton Strachey begins his section on Victoria's childhood with an extended account of her christening:

At any rate, [Victoria's father] would christen the child Elizabeth, a name of happy augury. In this, however, he reckoned without the Regent, who, seeing a chance of annoying his brother, suddenly announced that he himself would be present at the baptism, and signified at the same time that one of the godfathers was to be the Emperor Alexander of Russia. And so when the ceremony took place, and the Archbishop of Canterbury asked by what name he was to baptise the child, the Regent replied "Alexandrina." At this the Duke ventured to suggest that another name might be added. "Certainly," said the Regent; "Georgina?" "Or Elizabeth?" said the Duke. There was a pause, during which the Archbishop, with the

baby in his lawn sleeves, looked with some uneasiness from one Prince to the other. "Very well, then," said the Regent at last, "call her after her mother. But Alexandrina must come first." Thus, to the disgust of her father, the child was christened Alexandrina Victoria. (10)

Not only does this narrative emphasize how arbitrarily "Victoria" was appended to the future queen's name, it reveals the competing paternal and patriarchal forces at play in denominating this royal infant. Politics and seniority play a large role in this narrative, by which Victoria's father's power over his daughter's name, a paternal power, is usurped by his elder brother, who as Prince Regent in a way incarnates patriarchal power, simply to "annoy[]" the former man. Strachey's own retrospective position as a twentieth-century Bloomsbury group member should not be overlooked in this analysis, as his wry narration makes it impossible to forget the level of temporal distance and mediation inherent in this biography. However, as yet another example of the long-lasting power of narratives encoded in and through names, his anecdote remains a useful illustration of the formation of celebrity, despite, or perhaps even because of, its mediation. Moreover, Strachey's narrative draws from (though it does not cite) published Victorian accounts of this event that primarily appeared in memoirs and edited journals of female court insiders.¹³

¹³ Contemporary biographies, such as Christopher Hibbert's 2001 *Queen Victoria: A Personal History*, cite *The Journal of Mary Frampton*, ed. by her niece Harriet Mundy, and published in 1885, as a source for this anecdote. *The Journal of Mary Frampton* recounts the christening debacle only in a footnote, inserted by Mundy, quoting *Recollections of the Early Years of the Present Century* (published as *Recollections from 1803 to 1837*), by the Hon. Amelia Murray, in 1868. Murray was a court regular who went on to be one of Victoria's maids-of-honor at her 1837 coronation. In *Recollections*, she recounts:

"It was believed that the Duke of Kent wished to name his child 'Elizabeth,' that being a popular name with the English people; but the Prince Regent, who was not kind to his brothers, gave notice that he should stand in person as one Godfather, and that the Emperor of Russia

Victoria's christening, according to this narrative, stands as a semi-playful, albeit high-stakes battleground of fraternal, masculine superiority. Interestingly, though, the infant becomes "Alexandrina" in a move to politically ally England with Russia, and she becomes "Victoria" dismissively ("very well then") after her mother. I discuss the shift from "Alexandrina" or 'Drina, as the young princess was nicknamed, to the famous name "Victoria" in my second chapter, but here it is worth noting that this middle name aligns the princess with her mother only as an afterthought of patriarchal discourse. Princess Victoria of Saxe-Coburg-Saafeld is notably present in name only in this narrative, emphasizing the extent to which such christenings, presided over by a clergyman, were a male affair, even when the infant concerned was female. Strachey's anecdote also highlights the way names could be constructed in simultaneously arbitrary and highly strategic ways, both in the process of christening and in the process of narrating such powerful events in celebrity biographies.

The inclusion of origin-stories for the names of celebrities may be fairly commonplace, but extended christening scenes are hardly common in the Victorian

was to be another. At the ceremony of baptism, when asked by the Archbishop of Canterbury to name the infant, the Prince Regent gave only the name of 'Alexandrina;' the Duke requested that one other name might be added. 'Give her the mother's name also, then,' 'but,' he added, 'it cannot precede that of the Emperor.' The Queen, on her accession, commanded that she should be proclaimed as 'Victoria' only." (62-63)

In the footnoted excerpt of this included in *The Journal of Mary Frampton* almost twenty years later, the following addition is made: "Extract from a letter from Miss Muray to Mrs. Mundy, September 19th, 1868:—'I am happy to find the Queen has not been annoyed by anything I have inserted in my little book. She sent me one correction, which was a very new bit of information, viz. that it was not 'Elizabeth,' but 'Georgiana' that the Duke of Kent wished to name her.'" (316, footnote 2). Indirectly, then, there is some evidence that the story was true, and was acknowledged by Victoria herself.

novel. The narrative momentum of Ellen “Mrs. Henry” Wood’s *East Lynne*, one of the bestselling sensation novels of the nineteenth century, temporarily stalls around an unnecessarily protracted moment of naming. Generally, the naming of newborn children is a straightforward process in Victorian novels, but the christening of the firstborn child of Lady Isabel and Archibald Carlyle almost goes awry:

The clergyman took the child. ‘What name?’ he asked.
Mr. Carlyle had never thought about the name. But he replied pretty promptly.
‘William.’ For he knew it was a name revered and loved by Lady Isabel. The minister dipped his fingers in the water. Joyce interrupted, in much confusion, looking at her master.
‘It is a little girl, sir. I beg your pardon, I’m sure I thought I had said so; but I am flurried as I never was before.’
There was a pause, and then the minister spoke again. ‘Name this child.’
‘Isabel Lucy,’ said Mr. Carlyle. Upon which a strange sort of resentful sniff was heard from Miss Corny. She had probably thought to hear him mention her own; but he had named it after his wife and his mother. (174)

This brief moment of gender reassignment troubles even the idea of straightforward christening, suggesting just how arbitrary and unstable such processes are. The baby, physically present in the clergyman’s arms, could certainly have been named William despite her easily verifiable biological sex, were it not for the servant Joyce’s timely interruption. The fact that this nominal confusion occurs long before Lady Isabel, the sensation heroine, becomes a “fallen woman” and assumes a false name suggests the extent to which names and identities are *already* in flux in such narratives. The gender destabilization at play in this protracted moment signals larger ideological instabilities in the novel that may be temporarily contained but cannot be fully quelled, as I discuss further in chapter four. This odd little scene also parallels Strachey’s narrative of the christening of Victoria in that it emphasizes the origins of Isabel Lucy’s name and the doubly matrilineal inheritance that links her with both her mother and paternal

grandmother. However, this matrilineal legacy is once again created by a male relative, this time her father Archibald, producing a tension between patriarchy and matrilineal ties.

These scenes of problematic christening find themselves fascinatingly refracted in certain figurations of marriage in canonical mid-Victorian novels. According to my argument, christening and marriage stand as similar ceremonies for women (though not for men); they are unique in their ability to legally denominate women. Charlotte Brontë's textual progenitor to the sensation novel *Jane Eyre* and Charles Dickens's quasi-sensational *Our Mutual Friend* extend this link even further, figuring marriage as a type of birth. These hybridized tropes can't help but recall the rhetoric of reproductive "monstrosity" employed by Henry Mansel to describe the production of novels themselves during the period.

In *Jane Eyre*, the eponymous heroine exclaims the night before her wedding, "Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist: she could not be born till to-morrow...and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive..." (234-35). In this passage, Jane figures her married self, encoded by the name "Mrs. Rochester," as a new creation, not merely a re-named woman. The extended metaphor of birth further defamiliarizes the process, troublingly suggesting that the adult, fully-individuated Jane could be annihilated and reproduced as a (potentially stillborn) child. This rhetoric re-emerges a decade and a half later towards the end of Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, when "the church-porch having swallowed Bella Wilfer for ever and ever, had it not in its power to relinquish that young woman, but slid into the happy sunlight, Mrs. John Rokesmith instead" (650). Through this labored syntax, an even more graphic image of the

traditional nominative birth of a Victorian wife emerges. Metaphorically, Bella and Jane become “monstrous” newborn-matrons, newly christened and wholly disconnected from their former unmarried selves. Married names thus emerge as bizarre constructions that annihilate their “maiden” counterparts.

If these fictional (or potentially fictionalized, in the case of *Queen Victoria*) narratives of christenings and marriages suggest ways in which the proper name and the improper, or problematic, collide, and in which women are alienated from owning even their own proper names, many actual mid-Victorian female authors harnessed the power inherent in the destabilized proper name in order to market themselves most effectively, and most lucratively. In chapter four, I look more closely at Ellen “Mrs. Henry” Wood and “Mrs. Margaret Oliphant” as women who used their married names as a type of nominative veil, or quasi-pseudonym, in order to market themselves and their proliferating work during the sensation decade. In the process, I explore the ways these figures and their authorial names re-conceptualized the public/private divide into a sensationally symbiotic space in which family *and* profession were not mutually exclusive.

An examination of the nascent profession of authorship is particularly useful in understanding the breakdown of the private/public binary, and its gendered manifestation as the doctrine of separate spheres, in the mid-Victorian period. In terms of professional authorship, the analogue for private property, whose generational transmission was assured only by the transmission of “proper” names, is copyright. Copyright and attempts to legally define intellectual property were at the center of many debates in the literary marketplace, and, as Catherine Seville argues, “[t]he nineteenth century sees the

birth of the profession of authorship, and copyright is the first issue around which the new profession coalesces” (216). In chapters three and five I discuss intellectual property and copyright reform in the context of Caroline Norton’s public persona, but the issue of copyright, and its unstable legal status, is crucial to my dissertation as a whole. In *Authors and Owners*, Mark Rose compellingly argues that “copyright stands squarely on the boundary between private and public. Understanding copyright in this way helps to explain its notorious duplicity: copyright is sometimes treated as a form of private property and sometimes as an instrument of public policy created for the encouragement of learning” (140). The liminal nature of copyright, as designating by turns public *and* private property, signals the unstable legal structures of property and ownership that support not only artistic and textual property but property more generally. The increasingly fraught category of copyright, however, reveals this instability most effectively.

Copyright also raised metaphysical questions of ownership and ontology, as Mary Poovey points out: “If literary property resided in the original idea for an article or book, and not in the physical object in which the idea was produced, marketed, and consumed, then how could this property be defined and owned?” She elaborates on this problem, stating that “[p]recisely because literary labor exposed the problematic nature of crucial capitalist categories, writing, and specifically the representation of writing, became a contested site during this period” (105). Marilyn Strathern diagnoses this instability similarly, though she approaches the issue from the point of view of ownership, rather than property, and thus ends with temporary reification, rather than ontological destabilization: “Ownership re-embeds ideas and products in an organism (whether a

corporation, culture or individual author). Ownership gathers things momentarily to a point by locating them in the owner, halting endless dissemination, effecting an identity. We might even say that emergent forms of property signify new possibilities for corporeality or bodily integration in lives that observers constantly tell themselves are dispersed.” (qtd. Pettitt 5). Clare Pettitt summarizes this theorization with regard to intellectual property, stating, “The conflict between ‘fixed identity’ and ‘dispersal’ nestles at the core of any discussion of intellectual property, making it a fraught and unstable concept, particularly in a century that witnessed so many ‘new possibilities’ for ‘endless dissemination’” (5). In *Nobody’s Story*, Catherine Gallagher approaches this issue more broadly with regard to the text itself. She argues, “[t]he text...multiplies the loci of the split between matter and value, and at each locus materiality slips away or is translated into ideas and yet persists...The textual ‘signifier’...is what spoils the distinction between things and ideas, the material and the ideational” (xxiii, xxiv). My argument builds off of and owes much to these theorizations of textuality and intellectual property, but I focus my theorization around the links among property, ownership, and the name. In other words, the name, with its potential legal and epistemological instabilities, is crucial to understanding and theorizing copyright—and, more broadly, property—as an unstable concept, since the latter is fundamentally legally predicated on its ties to the former.

III. From Celebrity to Brand: A New Model of Professionalization

Commodification and the ways that the literary marketplace transformed celebrity authors into brands went hand in hand with the literary professionalization movement of

the mid-Victorian period. In an article enumerating the “Popular Novels of the Year” in 1863, an anonymous critic elaborates on the importance of marketing, the commodification of novels, and a good authorial brand name:

In the course of a few weeks the book has been read by everybody who intends to read it; the surplus copies are sold off at a reduced price; and the book and the author pass simultaneously into oblivion-unless by some great good luck, or a more than usually striking scene, the story happens to be dramatized, acted by rival players at several different theaters, and advertised in letters half a yard long on every temporary paling and old wall in or about London. Even then, the author must keep his name well before the public by some marvelously prolific process, under which he produces three or four startling and thrilling romances at a time. (11)

In this formulation, advertisement and adaptation are highlighted as important for success, but a well-publicized name is the crucial element to avoid textual and personal “oblivion.” In an article on anonymity and pseudonymity, Wendy Ripley re-articulates this notion, “Names were commodities and if they sold well, fame would be the result” (71). In other words, names could become iconic brands in the marketplace as well as celebrity signifiers of fame. Names and texts, then, are commodified in the literary marketplace in a reciprocal process that can generate both economic and symbolic cultural capital.¹⁴ In a sense, the commodified celebrity name is by definition a brand. Names are also arbitrary signifiers that can be appropriated and transformed at will, as demonstrated by the prevalence of pseudonymous and anonymous publication in the Victorian period. Robert J. Griffin points out that even the ostensibly clearest identification of authorship is imbricated with commodification and unstable identity: “The phrase ‘by the author of’ it should be noted, refers us not so much to a situated

¹⁴ In *Becoming a Woman of Letters*, Linda Peterson compellingly argues that “For the modern man or woman of letters, symbolic and economic capital will be intertwined as well, perhaps inextricably so” (57).

person as to a previous performance and acts as a kind of advertisement” (10). Catherine Gallagher casts this relationship between authorial name and commodification in a different light in her argument about female authors in the 18th century, emphasizing the arbitrariness of names as signs independent of the “real” individuals they signify. She argues, “the names of these author-selves refer to entities that are neither identical to the writers nor wholly distinct from them. They are rhetorical constructions, but constructions that playfully point to their role in keeping the physical writers alive” (xix), forecasting the way physical subsistence and successful self-branding went hand-in-hand for authors by the mid-Victorian period. In other words, names emerged as a particularly fraught site of ideological anxiety during this period, as authors frequently played with their textual signatures in a high-stakes game that literally involved the preservation of their own lives and those of their families.¹⁵ With the reification of “author” as a solid middle-class profession over the course of the Victorian period, such economic security became easier to maintain.

With the fall of the patronage system at the beginning of the nineteenth century and the rise of periodical culture and a thriving literary market, authorship became increasingly identified as a profession in its own right by the 1860s. In *Becoming a Woman of Letters*, Linda Peterson quotes a much earlier article, “The Condition of Authors in England, Germany, and France,” written by George Henry Lewes in 1847, in which he explicitly asserts, “Literature has become a profession. It is a means of subsistence almost as certain as the bar or the church” (qtd. Peterson 34). For Lewes,

¹⁵ My own rhetoric may seem overblown, but the rhetoric of the period, particularly involving copyright law, mirrors this idea. In chapter three, I extend this argument to focus on the way widowed women like Margaret Oliphant and Ellen Wood used their names and their professional standing to literally feed their extended families.

“subsistence” was the bar for successful professionalization. Peterson goes on to argue, “[i]n England, periodicals rather than books had raised authorship to the status of a profession and allowed able writers to attain solid middle-class status” (64). In other words, periodicals and the iterative, guaranteed assignment of reviews, serialized novels, and essays created the profession, rather than simple collective efforts, such as those of Charles Dickens and Edward Bulwer Lytton, to create professional guilds and regulating bodies. These periodicals were generally corporately-authored works written in a presumably masculine voice, which suggests the extent to which the new profession was considered male or masculine. The fact that it was a quasi-“public” profession (integrally linked with publication) further underscored its ostensible identification with men and masculinity.

Authors, as professional figures and as presumed middle- and upper-class men, possessed a level of authority, even if such authority was compromised by the network of competing claims of publisher, editor, illustrator, etc. in the literary marketplace, and such that authority was rhetorically gendered male as well. As Alexis Easley argues in her book on women’s anonymous writing, *First Person Anonymous*, however, “The rise of the woman of letters at mid-century had a destabilizing effect on cultural definitions of literary authority” (5). In other words, women’s entry into the authorial profession troubled the seemingly fundamental gendering of authority in the literary sphere, as it troubled the culturally foundational myth of separate spheres as well. I would argue, though, that by the 1860s, women authors’ presence in the literary profession did more than “destabilize” these cultural definitions: it rewrote them entirely, in the process revealing the extent to which they were and had already been compromised. The

profession was neither male nor female, neither masculine nor feminine, but a gender-blurred socio-legal construct that was equally disabling and enabling for both men and women. The circulation of female authors' professional brand-names, once they had achieved celebrity status, reveals the way the profession was rewritten, a process that gained substantial momentum during the sensation decade.

Much critical work has been done tracing the rise of the celebrity in both the Romantic period and the 20th century, including Tom Mole's seminal work on Lord Byron as the first major celebrity figure, and work on the star system and more comprehensive accounts of contemporary celebrity culture by P. David Marshall, among others. Notably, little work had been done on the role of the celebrity in the Victorian period until the last few years, with the publication of Alexis Easley's *Literary Celebrity, Gender, and Victorian Authorship*, Sharon Marcus's work on Sarah Bernhardt, and other critical interventions that generally focus around a single famous figure and the apparatus of cultural marketing.¹⁶ My dissertation focuses on the unique role of the celebrity author's name, as it encodes narratives about the celebrity persona (or multiple personae), circulating simultaneously as a brand name and socio-cultural, individuated signifier in the mid-Victorian literary marketplace, the period when the term "celebrity" came into common usage.¹⁷

¹⁶ Easley also analyzes the way female celebrities are imbricated with the drive to (and flight away from) literary professionalization, but her work focuses primarily on the periods before and after the 1860s, rather than the mid-Victorian moment. Moreover, while Easley analyzes literary tourism, reception history, and the construction of literary celebrity, my work focuses on the way already established female literary celebrities navigated the marketplace with their names (and the way these names continued to navigate cultural discourses as signifiers of "celebrity").

¹⁷ Easley elaborates, "It was during the second half of the nineteenth century that the term *celebrity* came into common usage in the press, to a large extent replacing terms such as

In *Byron's Romantic Celebrity*, Tom Mole identifies this translation from celebrity to brand: "In order to boost the celebrity individual's visibility over that of other aspirants, the celebrity apparatus [individual, industry, and audience] turned his or her proper name into a brand name" (16). Fundamentally, my treatment of celebrity is in agreement with Tom Mole and his argument that "the growth of celebrity culture helps to blur the boundary between the private and the public experiences of individuals...Rather, celebrity is a tendency that cuts across all public and counter public spheres, emphasizing not just the permeability of private and public, but their commercialized interpenetration" (*Byron's Romantic Celebrity* 5). My approach also owes something to P. David Marshall's explication of the "celebrity system": "Critical to the understanding of the celebrity, therefore, is the *intertextuality* of the construction of the celebrity sign;" "The celebrity system is a way in which the sphere of the irrational, emotional, personal, and affective is contained and negotiated in contemporary culture" (58; 72-3). My project builds off of these nuanced and powerful theorizations of celebrity by concentrating on female Victorian sensation author-celebrities, a subsection of study that is still critically under-represented despite a plethora of rigorous work on either sensation authors or celebrity authors. Moreover, by bringing together questions of gender and genre, propriety and property, and sensation and professionalization as encoded in the structuring-yet-deconstructive mechanism of the celebrity name, I am arguing for increased critical attention to names themselves within theories of celebrity, gender, law, and the marketplace.

hero, lion, or notable person. According to the [OED], the use of the term *celebrity* to refer to a person, rather than the state of being celebrated, was first introduced in 1849. By the 1880s and 1890s, the term was widely employed in the periodical press..." (*Literary Celebrity* 137-38).

My dissertation explores the way women writers used names, as sensationalized tropes of unstable identity, to insist on a legitimate place for themselves within the literary profession. My first chapter charts how names became prominent as sensational tropes in the 1860s. It details how pseudonyms and nominative anxieties feature prominently in the most popular sensation novels of the period. From this foundational argument, I proceed to consider individual female authors and their strategic authorial names. Moving from Queen Victoria to the Honourable Mrs. Caroline Norton to Ellen “Mrs. Henry” Wood, Mrs. Margaret Oliphant, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon—from monarchical to aristocratic to middle class conventions and ceremonies of naming—I simultaneously trace class-based anxieties about gender and authority that arise from the period’s drive toward professionalization within and beyond the literary market. In my third chapter, I explore the legal status of married women and authors through Caroline Norton’s productive response to infamy, revealing how Norton identified and used names as powerful, and surprisingly empowering, legal fictions. In the fourth chapter, I concentrate more fully on the sensation decade and sensation authors, charting how Ellen “Mrs. Henry” Wood and “Mrs. Margaret Oliphant” use their quasi-pseudonymous proper married names to market their prolific literary output, in the process legitimating the simultaneous valuation of family *and* profession. My final chapter focuses on periodicals and female celebrity editors, returning to Norton, Wood, and Oliphant, and introducing Mary Elizabeth Braddon, in order to analyze the way these women used their seemingly authoritative positions and famous names to both sensationalize the literary profession more broadly and reveal its inherently sensational roots.

By beginning with Victoria, though, I am signaling the scope of this dissertation and the breadth of my definition of a “sensation author,” as well as the extent to which names matter for periodization and contemporary critical inquiry, and for identifying as a “Victorianist.” With the publication of *Leaves from the journal of our life in the Highlands* in 1868, Victoria emerged as a semi-professional author at the height of the sensation decade. This work’s privileging of the typically sensational trope of disguise reveals, as I will show, the extent to which Victoria, as an author, is imbricated in the sensation discourse of the period. In *Royalties*, Gail Turley Houston maintains that “The modern field of English literature has taken for granted an inherent connection between the life span of English monarchs and the literature produced within those spans, an assumption that figures the monarch and writer as cultural icons as well as the supreme owners of cultural capital” (145). My argument explores this connection by taking it at its word, as it were, examining the ways “Victorian” and “Victoria” brand the era they denominate.

CHAPTER I

“PLAIN AS PRINT”: NAMES IN SENSATION NOVELS

In Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s bestselling sensation novel *Lady Audley’s Secret*, at least one of the major secrets signaled by the novel’s title hinges around the eponymous Lady Audley’s series of nominative disguises, and the social and legal havoc her disguises have wrought. Robert Audley, her nephew by marriage and a barrister turned amateur detective, successfully tracks these identity shifts by the novel’s end, establishing that Lady Audley was first Helen Maldon, who married and became Helen “Mrs. George” Talboys, after which she disguised herself as Lucy Graham, a teacher and governess, who then married and became Lucy, Lady Audley. At the conclusion of the novel, Robert has re-named her Mrs. (or Madame) Taylor, the name under which she languishes and dies in a Belgian mental institution. Notably, the novel’s detective plot hinges on textual evidence of Helen/Lucy’s nominative overwriting.

When Robert confronts Lady Audley about her proliferating identities, she demands proof, to which he responds, “What evidence?” “The evidence of two labels, pasted one over the other, upon a box left by you in the possession of Mrs. Vincent, the upper label bearing the name of Miss Graham, the lower that of Mrs. George Talboys” (287). This damning proof sends Lady Audley into a murderous fugue and sparks the extended climax of the novel. It also illustrates in microcosm the ways in which the sensation genre foregrounded names, particularly the instability of women’s names, in

both highly literal and extreme ways. Lady Audley's "original" identity as "Mrs. George Talboys (notably already a changed identity through marriage) is *literally* overwritten with the "upper label" of Miss Graham, which simplifies Robert's detective work but illustrates an extreme case of pseudonymity. In other words, the instability of names and the threat this instability poses for "proper," normative Victorian upper- and middle-class society is central to the plot of what has become arguably the most famous and critically resurrected sensation novel.

I would argue that the trope is equally crucial in a number of other popular sensation novels, including Wilkie Collins's 1860s works *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, and *Armadale*, and Ellen "Mrs. Henry" Wood's *East Lynne*. In this chapter, I briefly discuss how each of these works destabilizes the ostensibly stable idea of given, "proper" names, concentrating primarily on Collins's perversely titled 1862 novel *No Name* and the way its heroine Magdalen navigates anonymity, pseudonymity, as well as an overdetermined "Christian" name. By identifying and exploring the sensation genre's widespread focus on names and the extreme social and narrative breakdowns that emerge around these moments of nominative instability, I am making an argument about Victorian socio-cultural anxieties surrounding women's identities more broadly, anxieties that came to a head during the "sensation decade" of the 1860s. The remainder of my dissertation examines how female authors harness (or, in the case of Caroline Norton, help construct) the prominently sensationalized trope of names to successfully market themselves as women *and* professional authors in the Victorian literary sphere. This chapter provides a way of reading the sensation genre and the "sensation decade" that

becomes a lens through which to view the way names and personal narratives are deployed by the real, historical figures I discuss in more detail in proceeding chapters.

I. Feigning Names

As I mention briefly in the dissertation's introduction and discuss in more detail in chapter four, Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* hinges on a sensation heroine's pseudonym, although Isabel Vane changes identities far fewer times than does Lady Audley in Braddon's novel. After she flees her husband and three children for an adulterous affair with a typical romance blackguard, she almost dies in a train accident and re-names herself Madame Vine. "Vine," whose new name playfully echoes Isabel's original patronym "Vane," disguises herself as a French widow and soon becomes governess to her own children. In this novel, the discovery of Isabel's original identity comes from her own lips as part of her death-bed redemption, but as I discuss in chapter four, "proper" names assume a more ambiguous role throughout the novel than this straightforward narrative of disguise and discovery would imply. At the same time, the potential recognition of Madame Vine as Isabel Vane drives the narrative of the second half of the novel, revealing how crucial such false identities are to satisfy the generic conventions of such a sensational plot. I would argue that this insistence, along with the narrative tension building around such threats of unmasking, separate such sensation novels from the earlier proto-sensation novels on which they build.

In a much earlier forbear of the sensation genre, Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, the eponymous heroine similarly assumes the false name Jane Elliott when she flees Thornfield Hall after her failed marriage to Edward Rochester and encounters the Rivers

family. However, while this pseudonym does stall and eventually re-ignite the plot, it remains a background detail that primarily delays the coincidence-riddled resolutions that rapidly ameliorate Jane's quality of life towards the conclusion of the novel. In other words, pseudonyms are obviously important elements of many pre-sensation novels, but the instability of names such pseudonymous identities imply come to drive plots so urgently, and on such a widespread scale, only through works that comprise the sensation genre.

Wilkie Collins was and is considered by many to be the foremost—and first—sensation novelist of the 1860s. His novel *The Woman in White* essentially founded the genre, causing a “sensation” in its own right when it first began serialization in 1859. *The Woman in White* features no explicitly criminal or sexually transgressive sensation heroine, unlike *Lady Audley's Secret* or *East Lynne*, casting a pair of spuriously aristocratic men as its villains instead; but it still exhibits a profound interest in names, pseudonyms, and false nominative inheritance. The secret whose discovery drives the plot and stands at the center of the novel is the fact that Sir Percival Glyde, one of the central villains, is in fact a bastard who has doctored the wedding registry to ensure his false claim to his father's aristocratic title. Or, as another character acidly declares in a letter to the main detective character, Walter Hartright, “He never had a name: you know that, by this time, as well as I do” (564).

If Sir Percival's name is finally revealed as the true center of instability and social turmoil in the novel, though, the confusion of names between two similarly-featured, secret half-sisters, Anne Catherick and Laura, Lady Glyde (née Fairlie), provides a more violent and traumatic instance of nominative instability. When Sir Percival and his

colleague Count Fosco institutionalize Laura as Anne Catherick, who has recently died disguised as Laura, she has no recourse to maintain her own identity and name because, “her own eyes informed her that she had Anne Catherick’s clothes on” (420). The narrative continues, belaboring this point:

The nurse, on the first night in the Asylum, had shown her the marks on each article of her underclothing as it was taken off, and had said, not at all irritably or unkindly, ‘Look at your own name on your own clothes, and don’t worry us all any more about being Lady Glyde. She’s dead and buried; and you’re alive!...Anne Catherick, as plain as print!’ (420)

Her name, and thus her identity, are “plain as print,” and the literal quality of this simile cannot help but prefigure the plain “evidence” of the trunk labels that damn Lady Audley in *Lady Audley’s Secret*. However, while the textual evidence in Braddon’s novel creates epistemological assurance and simplifies the proliferating names and identities surrounding its sensation heroine, the name in Laura Fairlie’s “underclothing” only *seems* to ensure epistemological certainty while actually revealing just how uncertain and unstable such knowledge actually is. The location of the name, written on Laura’s most intimate garments and coming into physical contact with her otherwise naked body, further links this nominal and epistemological instability with potential sexuality and that other staple of sensation fiction—the eroticized, usually female, body.

The extent to which this, the first sensation novel, troubles nominative stability and epistemological assurance only becomes clear toward the end of the novel, when Hartright declares that, “I tell this story under feigned names” (580). In other words, even within the reality of the text, the names of all concerned are already pseudonyms, and have been from page one. By intimating this at the end of the novel, after Laura Fairlie has assumed her original identity and Sir Percival has been revealed as a fraud,

Collins essentially throws his readers for a final, albeit minor, loop, reminding us of the instability of names as well as the fictionality of this narrative through what would otherwise be the strongest meta-fictional assertion of the work's non-fictionality. Names are always in flux in Collins's novels, and this instability is constantly undercutting not only social and domestic stability in his narratives, but the formal stability of his works as well. Even in his self-avowed anti-suspense novels, such as his follow-up to *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, Collins maintains this sensational focus on the disruptive power of names.

II. *No Name* and the Literary Forbears of “Nobody’s Children”

With 1862's *No Name*, Wilkie Collins creates a sensation heroine who embodies the nominal dilemma of mid-Victorian women. Magdalen Vanstone, with her overdeterminedly allegorical name, is also the eponymous “no name.” The tension between this overt investment in her given name and the stripping away of any name at all serves as a limit case of the unstable identity of English middle-class women during the period. In his Preface to the novel, Collins attempts to distinguish it from his previous bestseller, *The Woman in White*, claiming:

[T]he narrative related in these pages has been constructed on a plan, which differs from the plan followed in my last novel, and in some other of my works published at an earlier date. The only Secret contained in this book, is revealed midway in the first volume. From that point, all the main events of the story are purposely foreshadowed, before they take place.
(xxvii)

This insistence on the “purposely foreshadowed,” anti-suspense construction of the novel attempts, I would argue, to cast it as a non- or anti-sensational work, and critics such as

Deirdre David concur to an extent.¹⁸ However, its transgressive, scandalously criminal heroine and foregrounding of disguise and an inheritance plot make it unequivocally sensational.¹⁹ Throughout *No Name*, its sensation heroine occupies various roles and assumes a variety of names, yet this polyvalence always emerges in tension with both her legally-sanctioned anonymity as “no name” and her allegorically overdetermined proper name Magdalen. As a true sensation novel, despite Collins’s assertions to the contrary, *No Name*’s plot cannot be summarized in a few sentences, but a comparatively brief account of the intricate plot is useful to follow my analysis.

As the novel opens, sisters Magdalen and Norah Vanstone live an idyllic life as sheltered upper class daughters, though Magdalen’s spitfire ways, along with her lack of resemblance to either parent, suggest that trouble lies over the horizon. Trouble comes from an unexpected source, with the death of their father by railway accident and the death of their mother from complications in childbirth and grief. After their parents’ deaths, the daughters learn of the sensational prequel to their lives: their parents were not married until a few months before their death, due to an early “ill-advised” youthful marriage made by Mr. Vanstone that he was unable to escape. The couple’s recent marriage has rendered Vanstone’s will void due to a legal technicality, and has left his daughters penniless and dependent on their next of kin, their completely estranged uncle Andrew Vanstone. The daughters thus have “no name” and are “nobody’s children,” a phrase incanted throughout the narrative.

¹⁸ David argues that the novel, “rattles no nerves with sensational excitement” (35).

¹⁹ Melynda Huskey actually designates Magdalen Vanstone, “Collins’s first truly sensational heroine” (7).

Magdalen, having recently discovered an aptitude as a “born actress” through a foray into home theatricals, embarks on a quest to regain her “rightful inheritance” (and ostensibly to remain true to her father’s wishes) through a series of fraudulent impersonations. Her uncle Andrew suffers an untimely death before she is able to try her skill, but his sickly son Noel remains fresh for the duping. Accompanied by a confidence artist who also happens to be her step-uncle (this being Collins, relations proliferate), Captain Wragge, and his simple yet kind “giant” of a wife, Magdalen courts and marries the younger Mr. Vanstone under the assumed name and persona of Susan Bygrave, regaining her name (Vanstone) by assuming a false one. However, due to the machinations of a fascinating antagonistic housekeeper, the well-matched Mrs. Lecount, Noel discovers his wife’s true identity and manages to disinherit her via his will right before he dies. At this point, because of a convoluted set of terms in this will, Magdalen assumes another identity to follow “her” inheritance to yet another cousin, Admiral Bartram. She takes on the name and skill set of her former ladies’ maid, Louisa (who, perhaps tellingly, never gains a family name), with the consent of said maid, and enters her cousin’s house as his parlor maid. She is once more thwarted on the brink of success, just as she discovers a secret codicil to Noel’s will that gives all his money to his other cousin, Robert Bartram, upon the latter man’s marriage. Discovered in the act of reading this document, Magdalen is cast out of the house and re-emerges in the narrative in her penultimate incarnation, as a feverish, penniless woman with the given name “Grey.” She is rescued from death by the power of allegory, in the form of the well-named Captain Kirke (“kirke” meaning church in Germanic roots), whose father saved *her* father in America after his ill-formed marriage. Coincidence rules the day, as Kirke comes

across Magdalen, after having glimpsed her once and become indelibly obsessed, being carried on the brink of death from the boarding house at which she was staying. Magdalen finds a redeemer, completing her allegorical trajectory, and she ends the novel—notably *as* Magdalen—penitent and engaged. This ending may seem ideologically conservative, but the fact that Magdalen fails to die and actually receives her inheritance due to another coincidental marriage, distinguishes it from other famous sensation novels, such as *East Lynne* and Collins’s later novel *Armadale*. Magdalen is at once triumphant and disenfranchised, active and passive, improperly pseudonymous and properly contained as a penitent “magdalen” figure; and the tension between Magdalen’s nominative identities most forcefully foreground novel’s ambiguous/ambivalent ideological underpinnings.

No Name, through its very title, signals to its readers how important names (and the lack thereof) will be within this narrative, yet it elides just how crucial bodies are as well. After all, Magdalen is constructed as a “born actress” whose dexterity with “characters” facilitates a fair degree of success with her sensational disguises, yet she almost never creates these roles. Her disguise is always a form of identity theft, from her amateur theatrical depiction of her sister Norah to a more seriously motivated impersonation of her ladies’ maid, Louisa. Her dependence on such pre-constructed, “real” identities suggests a reliance on epistemological and ontological stability that this novel seems often aggressively to resist. Her very acts of mimicry destabilize any easy mapping of names onto bodies as well as any notion of discrete, non-performative identity. In short, *No Name* takes a character whose allegorical name—Magdalen—should represent the height of epistemological certainty as a fallen-but-redeemed female

archetype, and, up until the conclusion, strips away this sense of assuredness, both for the characters and for the reader. The ostensibly rigid, identity-defining Victorian legal structure gets narratively repurposed as a catalyzing force for this destabilization. Yet names and bodies become interchangeable in highly productive, albeit socially illicit, ways, creating a contested space for “nominal agency” for both Magdalen, with her overdetermined Biblical name, and for the playfully named text. While “bodies” signify most strongly for the sensation heroine herself, “names” emerge as the foremost paratextual preoccupation, and the title *No Name* primes the reader to pay particular attention to the way names operate, and fail to operate, in the novel.

The central conceptual tension in *No Name* can be encapsulated in two competing terms: its title, “No Name,” which appears once in the text, and “Nobody’s Children,” which is introduced to describe Magdalen and Norah’s legal status and is repeated a few times throughout the narrative. In other words, both names and bodies are explicitly privileged, and destabilized, in the novel. “No Name” stands at the outset of the novel as a powerful phrase because of its privileged status as the title, and the disproportionate power of “No Name” stands in tension with the incanted phrase “Nobody’s Children.” The two phrases have textual momentum in different ways, but I would argue that it is the former phrase, with its paratextual privilege, that encapsulates the novel’s primary concerns and teaches the reader what to focus on in the midst of an extremely complex narrative. The novel is fundamentally about names, and the way these names operate legally and extra-legally. “No Name” transforms the novel itself into a bit of a riddle: The novel both has a name and has “no name.” It *does* have a sensational title, but it’s a vacant one, which perversely makes it polyvalent. “Naming” a book *No Name* highlights

the perverse resistance to identification or categorization that becomes a defining trope not only of sensational heroines, but also of the sensation novel itself. “No Name,” as the name of the book, negates the idea of a title, while as a signifier of the Vanstone daughters’ legally dispossessed status, it enacts a similar emptying-out gesture within the narrative itself.

The phrase “No Name,” in all of its capitalized, stigmatized glory, appears only once in the novel, right after the revelation of the girls’ illegitimacy, in a letter from their former governess Miss Garth to the family lawyer. It bears quoting in full: ““The last time you were so good as to come to this house, do you remember how Magdalen embarrassed and distressed us, by questioning you about her right to bear her father’s name? Do you remember her persisting in her inquiries, until she had forced you to acknowledge that, legally speaking, she and her sister had No Name?”” (*NV* 143). This seems like a fairly straightforward allusion to a past narrative event, coupled with an admittedly heavy-handed insertion of the title into the text. However, this brief section was in fact inserted into the text at the last minute, just before serialization began.²⁰ Furthermore, the “scene” to which this digression refers never actually appears in the text, or appears in an unrecognizable guise. In a way, identifying Magdalen and Norah as possessing “No Name” evacuates name and textual identity, while leaving their signified beings intact. The interpolated scene does the opposite—it names something that has no prior textual existence. In other words, this invocation of “No Name” refers back to a

²⁰ *No Name*, 612, footnote 1. The original manuscript version reads: “The last time you were so good as to come to this house, do you remember how Magdalen embarrassed and distressed us, by questioning you about her right to bear her father’s name? Do you remember her persisting in her enquiries, until she had forced you to acknowledge that she had, strictly speaking, no such right and that you had yourself registered her birth in her mother’s name” (qtd. Blain 28).

narrative absence that has no existence beyond the *coercive* “remembrance” Miss Garth is attempting to create in the lawyer, Mr. Pendril, as well as in the reader. This brief interpolated passage takes on a disproportionate significance, however, through its reference back to the title of the book, and it powerfully overwrites the actual narrative encounter between Magdalen and Pendril, which occurs in the second “scene” of the novel.

In this extended scene, a different crucial phrase is highlighted in the lawyer’s speech, which is overheard by Magdalen and repeated like an incantation at least three more times over the course of the novel: “Mr. Vanstone’s daughters are Nobody’s Children; and the law leaves them helpless at their uncle’s mercy” (113). Through Miss Garth’s interpolated letter, and in the title of the novel itself, “Nobody’s Children” is rewritten as “No Name.” Anonymity is still perversely present in both overdetermined phrases, but only the former involves the body. The phrase “Nobody’s Children” provides a comparatively overt reminder of the embodied foundations of inheritance law; procreation is implicit in the conjunction of “body” and “Children,” while its potentially illegitimate nature is foregrounded by the modifying “No.” Illicit sexual union thus, in this tight formulation, de-legitimizes, or even annihilates, body and identity for both offspring and parents. Despite the denying “No,” though, the “body” and its possessive link to its products, “Children,” remain literally present in this textual formation. Under one reading, then, the shift from “body” to “name” suggests an elision of problematic, productive bodies, transfiguring them into mere names which can then, in turn, also be annihilated. I would argue, however, that this shift actually encodes names with the larger cultural anxieties about sexuality, women’s bodies, procreation, and proper,

familial inheritance that are at the center of not only this novel, but the sensation novel more broadly.

While Magdalen may take up the phrase “Nobody’s Children” and give it narrative momentum throughout the rest of the text, it is worth noting that the phrase enters the text through the mouthpiece of Victorian inheritance law, the family’s lawyer. It therefore stands as a construction of dominant—and dominating—ideological structures, even as Pendril’s apologetic role foregrounds the seemingly merciless power of the law to arbitrate and reconfigure familial relationships, inheritance structures, names, and wholesale identities. *No Name*, like many sensation novels, and particularly like most Collins novels, hinges around problems and inconsistencies in inheritance and marital law in Great Britain. In this way, Collins’s work finds a close precursor in Charles Dickens’s *Bleak House*, a novel that not only focuses on the life-destroying slowness of chancery court but also investigates an alternative “no name” character, Nemo. While I would argue that Dickens’s 1853 novel is an unequivocal precursor text for his protégé’s later sensation novel as well as a crucial literary forebear for the sensation genre more generally, a closer analysis of this earlier novel reveals the difference between such forebears and their sensational offspring of the 1860s.

Both Dickens and Collins were interested in the interplay between names, identity, professional authority, and gender in their works. By the 1860s, editorials both pro- and anti- sensation were invoking Dickens as a proto-sensation novelist, and certain narrative threads in novels such as *Bleak House* certainly substantiate those claims. Dickens was in fact Collins’s editor during the first part of the ‘60s, and there is ample

documentation of his involvement with the composition of *No Name*.²¹ However, Collins often ignored his mentor's advice, such as the list of twenty-seven potential titles that Dickens sent when Collins was stymied and the print deadline was looming. In a way, though, Collins does owe the idea of his title to Dickens, or more particularly to his character Nemo, whose name means "no one" in Latin.

Bleak House's engagement with concepts of legality, inheritance, and sexuality makes it a textbook forebear of the sensation genre. In Dickens, Nemo's identity is posthumously reconstructed without his consent and against his desires through the machinations of a lawyer, Tulkinghorn, who happens to be the most skilled representative of the law (by a wide margin) in the novel. The etymology of Nemo's name—"no one"—also comes from Tulkinghorn, the master apparently not only of "secrets" but of linguistic knowledge more generally. Nemo, his old lover the now Lady Dedlock, and his illegitimate daughter Esther Summerson are central to these themes and to the proto-sensational quality of the novel as a whole. Nemo is the quintessential "no name" figure in Dickens's novel, having renounced his name in order to efface his shameful past. However, his subsistence as a transcriber for a legal firm underlines his dependence on writing and textuality on a literal, economic level. The fact that he only appears in the novel once dead, as a corpse, further suggests his imbrication with language—he doesn't even exist within the confines of the novel as an embodied character. This absence also

²¹ For an account of Dickens's editorial suggestions for *No Name*, including excerpts from their lengthy correspondence, see William Baker's "Wilkie Collins, Dickens and *No Name*." In "The Naming of *No Name*," Virginia Blain cites a letter from Dickens to Collins on January 24, 1862, in which the former proposed twenty-seven potential titles for the novel, none of which Collins selected. And in October, when Collins's rheumatic gout was particularly acute, Dickens offered "to come to London straight, and do your work...so like you as that no one should find out the difference" (qtd. Ford, Introduction to *No Name*, xv). Again, though, Collins refused.

points to a crucial way of distinguishing the proto-sensational from the sensational: the “no name” character is functionally important but narratively absent. He and his overtly compromised, disguised identity are not the center of this novel, as Magdalen and similar sensation heroines are by the 1860s. Once his body is present, his consciousness no longer is, and he can only be defined by the stories of others—and by his own damning handwriting.

Through a series of coincidences and a paper trail, his handwriting eventually connects him with his “real” identity, Capt. Hawdon, and thereby begins a series of machinations that lead to the deaths of Lady Dedlock and Mr. Tulkinghorn, among a variety of other plot twists. In other words, Hawdon’s handwriting overwrites his chosen pseudonym, serving as textual evidence of his identity despite himself. In a text so concerned with language and its material ramifications, Nemo’s story illustrates in microcosm the larger preoccupations of the work. In a sense, Nemo stands as the antithesis of Collins’s Magdalen, since he attempts to strip himself of his own name but is thwarted by material texts, while Magdalen becomes unnamed through the letter of the law and regains her identity, to the extent that she does, only through her acts of re-naming.

III. Pseudonymous Power in *No Name*

Magdalen’s numerous pseudonyms position her as an archetypal sensation heroine along the lines of Braddon’s Lady Audley and Wood’s Isabel Vane, despite her lack of murderous tendencies or seeming sexual desire, and despite Collins’s assertions about the anti-suspense, anti-sensational nature of *No Name*. Throughout the novel,

Magdalen assumes a variety of pseudonyms in order to combat the nominative erasure that the law, and the text, have enacted on her. This succession of nominative disguises provides the primary narrative thrust of the novel, further highlighting how much this novel is concerned with, and even structured around, names. While this proliferation of names fails to fully counteract the paratextual power of the stigmatizing brand “no name,” it does ensure Magdalen’s status as a sensation heroine par excellence. She begins the novel with tentative forays into pseudonymity, playing the role of Lucy in Sheridan’s *The Rivals*. This role finds a nominative echo, as Debra Morris and other critics have pointed out, in her penultimate disguise as her former ladies’ maid Louisa (Morris 284).²² In the meantime, Magdalen operates as Susan Bygrave, a name and accompanying identity assigned by her stage manager Captain Wragge from his book of “Skins to Jump Into,” which lists names and backgrounds of actual individuals who are either dead or abroad and can thus be impersonated with impunity. Wragge’s book encapsulates the novel’s preoccupation with the mutually constitutive relationships among names, bodies, and texts. Magdalen assumes this “skin” and the name that goes with it, and parlays this identity into her initial nominative goal, becoming “Mrs. Vanstone” through marriage to her unsuspecting cousin Noel. This name, built on the pseudonymous identity of Susan Bygrave, is legally sanctioned and thus not fully a

²² Upon first meeting Louisa, the narrative pauses to stress that Magdalen “disliked her name” though she came to like her eventually (411). This visceral dislike, based partially around a name, calls attention to itself particularly considering her eventual adoption of that very name, perhaps as an ironic bit of foreshadowing. Perhaps her visceral dislike can be attributed to this narrative echo of her initial role-playing as Lucy, recalling a much more halcyon time for the now-bereft Magdalen.

pseudonym, and it is also perversely Magdalen's original patronym.²³ Magdalen regains her patronym only briefly, however, as Noel dies within a few months, leaving her disinherited. At this point, she becomes the housemaid Louisa.

Arguably, Magdalen assumes many names because the socio-legal system has stripped her of her rightful name, although it has and continues to arbitrate just what that "rightful" hinges upon. By this reading, her polyvalence is a reaction to this wholesale stripping of identity—an over-assertion of presence in response to a complete ontological destabilization. This is true, yet it fails to capture the underlying argument of Collins's narrative: that such ontological instability isn't merely an unfortunate result particular to Magdalen's extreme case, though such extremity strategically foregrounds a more fundamental instability. This instability is the condition of almost all women (and many men) under Victorian society's patronymic laws of property, inheritance, production, and reproduction.

Before she gets thrust into the final redemptive trajectory of the narrative, though, Magdalen assumes a final pseudonym: the poor, friendless young woman dying in a boarding house where she had "given the name of Gray" (577). In the past, Magdalen has always constructed her "characters" based upon real people—this is the only

²³ This quasi- or extra-legal marriage prefigures a related plot strand in Collins's next novel, 1866's *Armada*. While this later novel hinges around two men who are both named Allan Armadale (although one has long assumed the purposefully ludicrous pseudonym Ozias Midwinter) the second half of the work focuses on Lydia Gwilt, who assumes no pseudonym but attempts to marry one Armadale and pass herself off as the wife of the other (since she would be "Mrs. Allan Armadale" legally in either case). Gwilt fails and dies, having balked at poisoning her actual husband, but her role as a sensation (anti-)heroine and manipulation of the technicalities of marriage law certainly recall Magdalen Vanstone's temporary success in regaining her "rightful" patronym, and regaining it legally. These two instances also reveal Collins's repeated satirization of marriage law and the married condition of women in Victorian England.

departure from this paradigm. Tellingly, the simple surname “given” fails to include either title (she is neither Miss nor Mrs., occluding any question of her marital status) or first name. In a way, this final “invention” emerges as a perverse fulfillment of the novel’s title. Separated from her own first name, or any first name, and divorced from the martial sphere altogether, the exhausted heroine has become “Gray”—a nominative adjective connoting dullness or neutrality. Just before the end, then, the dying Magdalen seemingly gives in and becomes “No Name.” Of course, this scene is charged with internal contradiction: this is the first moment in which Magdalen has departed from her successful career of impersonation and mimicry to create a name, and yet it is a moment of creative exhaustion and bodily trauma. For a moment, it seems as if the narrative is going to act out the harshest reading of what having “no name” can do to a woman, and in a way that mockingly implicates Magdalen in this destructive un-naming.

Here, again, it is useful to revisit *Bleak House* as a literary forebear, and its heroine, Nemo’s illegitimate daughter Esther Summerson. Esther also provides a striking contrast to her more stereotypically “sensational” successor Magdalen, though the heroines are hardly antithetical. Both women stand revealed as physical remnants of their parents’ sexual impropriety, and both bear a massive social stigma because of this transgressive inheritance. Their “shameful” pasts inform their present, for Esther first as a mistreated child and then as a guilty adult, and for Magdalen as an externalized issue against which she must fight. As Chiara Briganti argues, “Esther’s story reveals... a personality so deeply imbued with the values of patriarchal authority that it literally becomes its voice” (215). Esther’s passive acceptance of this shame, even before she knows its true nature, immediately distinguishes her from the more overtly resistant

Magdalen. Esther goes yet a step further, insisting that she “had a terror of [her]self, as the danger and the possible disgrace of my own mother and of a proud family name.”

The perversity of transferring onto her own self the shame and abjection society heaped onto any bastard is striking, but what is more striking is the importance in her own narration of that “proud family name”—Dedlock—even over concern about her own mother. Esther privileges names and insists on denying her own (Hawdon) in order to save her mother’s current patronym. Conversely, Magdalen privileges the sanctity of her own original patronym to the detriment of all other “proud family names” possessed by those around her.

Even before discovering her origins, Esther narrates a fugue-like descent into sleep in which she loses track of her bedside companion, musing “[l]astly it was no one, and I was no one” (*BH* 42). This desire for passivity and nominal annihilation links her with her father, perversely, at the very moment when she loses her meager link to him—her own physical self. She gains a variety of nicknames early in the narrative (“Cobweb,” “Little Old Woman,” “Dame Durden”), but they are all domestic and they are all, notably, assigned to her by others.²⁴ In *No Name*, Magdalen jealously guards the link between herself and her deceased father precisely through her attempts to regain her original patronym, taking on pseudonyms only to re-claim both her nominal and monetary inheritance. Broadly put, Esther’s self-effacing and self-abjecting posture places her in sharp contrast to the proactive Magdalen.

²⁴ Briganti insists on the uniqueness of *Bleak House* in the Dickensian canon, unwittingly pinpointing one the reasons it became an archetypal sensational forebear. She states, “Nowhere else does Dickens provide his characters with so many alternative names, thus making them no more than provisional labels which emphasize the uncertainty of identity already suggested by the uncertainty of paternity.” (216)

However, Magdalen also suffers from periods of total passivity or emotional breakdown throughout Collins's narrative, particularly during her plot to marry Noel Vanstone as the eligible young lady Susan Bygrave. Narratively, Esther has a much more active role in *Bleak House*, a role which allows her to put on the abject posture she so skillfully assumes. One could certainly say that Esther's abject tone is as much a performance, albeit a narrative one, as Magdalen's most expert impersonations. The reader of *No Name* is much less privileged in terms of access to Magdalen's interiority, receiving her unmediated narration only through letters that are already tonally compromised. In a sense, Esther controls the narrative voice in her sections but not the plot, while Magdalen is in control of the plot but not the narrative voice. I would argue that this tension, and Magdalen's proactivity as a character but not as a narrator, provides yet another distinction between Dickens's proto-sensational work and Collins's properly sensational novel. In other words, sensation heroines are agents, but that agency is almost always fundamentally compromised by the tropes of the genre itself.

Even this contrast is destabilized with a comparison of the two works' conclusions, though, for in *Bleak House* Esther trails off disingenuously musing, "they can very well do without much beauty in me—even supposing—" (989); while in *No Name* Magdalen commands her new fiancé Kirke to, "Say what you think of me, with your own lips" (610), after which he kisses her. In the sensation novel, language is forcibly stopped with a physical, embodied act by the command of the sensation heroine herself, while in the earlier work language fades into silence, but that silence remains under the command of the female narrator. In other words, Magdalen remains both proactive and linguistically compromised, in control and disenfranchised, while Esther

loses her voice by choice. Multiple competing readings are readily available for these conclusions, combating the nominative determinism that would pin these women characters, whose biblical names code them, to one narrative.

IV. Magdalen, Proper and Perverse

No Name concludes with what Daniel Hack calls a “blatantly allegorical” ending (143). Magdalen is redeemed, and is about to get another name through her union with the ludicrously idealized, redemptive Captain Kirke. This fable of Christian redemption comes at the cost of Magdalen’s agency—nominative determinism, by which she becomes a properly penitent “magdalen,” and patriarchal redemption come back with a vengeance to write over all of Magdalen’s past identity “sins.” Epistemological certainty reasserts itself at what Margaret Oliphant critically termed “the cheap cost of a fever,” albeit in a happily-ever-after fashion that horrified critics of the day (qtd. Horne 286). At the same time, while Magdalen is busy revealing herself and abnegating her identity in the process, the title of the book remains *No Name*, as if mocking any effort from within the narrative to revoke that destabilizing claim. The title serves as a reminder that Magdalen has had agency and transformative power, even though, in a way that’s both exhilarating and devastating, in the end it’s only nominal.

The tension between the titular recognition of this character as “No Name” and her proper, Christian name Magdalen couldn’t be more pronounced, and the narrative itself signals its knowingness early on:

Magdalen! It was a strange name to have given her? Strange, indeed; and yet, chosen under no extraordinary circumstances. The name had been borne by one of Mr. Vanstone’s sisters, who had died in early youth; and, in affectionate remembrance of her, he had called his second daughter by

it, just as he had called his eldest daughter Norah, for his wife's sake. Magdalen! Surely, the grand, old Bible name-suggestive of sad and somber dignity; recalling, in its first associations, mournful ideas of penitence and seclusion-had been here, as events had turned out, inappropriately bestowed? Surely, this self-contradictory girl had perversely accomplished one contradiction more, by developing into a character which was out of all harmony with her own Christian name! (9)

The amount of exclamation and question marks interspersed throughout this passage, along with the perhaps all-too-obviously disingenuous "surelies," code this narrative interjection as a deeply ironic bit of foreshadowing. The exclamatory reiteration of "Magdalen!" emphasizes the sensational quality of her name, a quality that must of necessity emerge within the character, simply because of her existence in a Collins sensation novel. At the same time, though, this passage claims a quotidian, domesticated (albeit typically morbid) lineage for her name by invoking her father's dead sister. In this way, as with the narratives of christening in *East Lynne* and the christening of Queen Victoria I discuss in the introduction, the links between names and patriarchy underwrite a lineage of women and feminine signification. Men do the naming, forging links between women, at least in this formulation. Here the added phrase, "just as he had called his eldest daughter Norah, for his wife's sake," is particularly resonant. This is the only oblique mention of Mrs. Vanstone's first name, and it comes through a patriarchally-inscribed doubling of mother and daughter, a doubling made more extreme as Norah later falls in love with her cousin, who looks just like her father.

In this passage, the narrator combines the concept of patriarchally-imposed, "nominal" matriarchy with the disingenuously rhetorical question of whether Magdalen will be able to escape the narrative trajectory implied by her name. In so doing, the novel constructs a knowing reader who is well-versed in the tropes of such sensation fiction and

who has been primed, at least by the anti-suspense-claiming Preface, for a resolution of the “perverse” “contradict[ion]” that Magdalen’s pleasant nature creates. In other words, the narrative posits as its reader one who expects such a nominal mismatch to be corrected. Epistemological reassurance ostensibly enters the text when Magdalen stands revealed as a true “magdalen,” the archetypal representative of the type of fallen woman to which her name also refers.

While the narrative partially undergirds this reassuring, simplifying, and containing gesture with its redemptive conclusion, in which Magdalen arguably completes her nominatively predetermined character arc, multiple elements of the novel disturb this reading. Magdalen herself comes to undo the internal contradiction of “perversity” bestowed on her by the narrator rather early in the novel. This is interesting in light of how perversity would usually be harnessed in a discourse about “magdalens,” namely as an improperly sexual quality inherent to their identity. Provocatively, or perhaps just ironically, the narrator refers to Magdalen’s *failure* to live up to her name as perverse. Glossing this nominative failure as “perversity” signals the way the text itself constructs perversion, not as sexual impropriety but more simply as something unexpected. Naming and names themselves become potentially perverse, again suggesting the ways in which the sensation genre is overtly locating cultural anxieties about sexuality and impropriety in names and nominal instability.

In order to truly live up to her name and overcome this nominal perversion, Magdalen perversely has to become “No Name” legally—it is this forcible stripping of identity that fully activates her, as it were, at least according to the narrative. In the post-manuscript interpolated passage in which Miss Garth inserts the title into the text, she

continues by claiming, “Whatever natural reluctance she might otherwise have had to deceiving us, and degrading herself, by the use of an assumed name, that conversation with you is certain to have removed” (144). Magdalen then embraces her namelessness, taking on a number of assumed names and identities in order to accomplish a re-inheritance of sorts—an inheritance that perversely will render her a Vanstone once again.

According to various characters within the narrative, when Magdalen becomes “No Name,” she becomes even more of a fallen woman, or “magdalen”—the troubling destabilization implied by the titular phrase is immediately corrected, despite the character’s best efforts. Through her own narrative efforts, though, she also becomes “Mrs. Vanstone,” at least for a portion of the novel, eliding her narratively weighted first name entirely. She only accepts her “real” name at the end of the novel, upon confession to her physical and economic savior, the deus-ex-machina-like Capt. Kirke. Thus, “perversely,” Magdalen escapes her own name only to willingly inhabit it. This may be a narratively conservative move, with its recourse to Biblical paradigms, but it continues to upset the reader’s ability to pinpoint Magdalen amidst the discourses she’s both operating under and deploying. Furthermore, Magdalen, even when “fallen,” is hardly a “magdalen”—her marriage to her cousin may be under a false name, but her status as “Mrs. Vanstone” thereafter is legally sanctioned. Her fall, adamantly disconnected from her sexuality, is thus a rather unique play on the “fallen woman” paradigm of mid-Victorian discourses. Rather than typifying the “type” to which her name inextricably links and seems to destine her, she stands as a disturbing, perverse variation, asserting her own individual nominal agency over the collectivizing power inherent in her name.

Magdalen's own agentive role throughout the narrative further disturbs all trends toward epistemological reassurance; for the bulk of the novel, the "fallen" woman creates her own set of identities and controls the plot and the actions of other characters. The law claims for itself arbitration of "proper" names, yet it proves itself largely impotent by the novel's conclusion. It has stripped Magdalen of all nominal power, ostensibly, but she harnesses a nominal power of her own, overcomes the nominative determinism imposed on her by her Christian name (at least until the very end of her narrative), and thwarts the law repeatedly. Her names have their own power in the novel, while "proper" names become partially stripped of their legal force.

Names are crucial to an understanding of Victorian discourse because they straddle the line between arbitrary signifier and meaning-infused symbol—they are intimately linked with personal identity in an intensely public way, and they are both pre-linguistic (one is generally christened before one is conscious), and malleable, particularly for women through marriage. Names signal the transmission of property, patronyms represent and indeed *are* a sort of nominal inheritance (as are, often, given names), and married names signal sanctioned sexual congress. In other words, names in the Victorian era encoded all structures of the transmission of inheritance, from the economic to the genetic (assuming the names are "properly" applied and transmitted) to the sexual. "Proper" names are more than a legal technicality: they shore up many of the central structures of the law itself. Thus, a world in which names can be changed—and changed by young, legally and socially disempowered but self-empowering women—is a disturbing world indeed for normative, "proper" social binaries. It is a world that acknowledges the contingent nature of identity and the constructed nature of "propriety,"

and one in which the transmission of wealth and property is completely up for grabs. The parallel between this fictive world, as found in the popular sensation fiction of the 1860s, and the “real” world of Victorian publishing, in which created, “authored” property and self-authored identity are crucial for the legal autonomy of texts as well as physical personal survival, are myriad. Patronymic social structures ensure that women are particularly implicated in this struggle, and in the next chapter I chart how the name of that most exceptional of Victorian women—Queen Victoria—both played on and resisted these paradigms.

CHAPTER II

THE “VICTORIA(N)” PROFESSION

In the late 1990s, there was a brief surge in critical interest in Queen Victoria and her role(s) throughout the Victorian period, as well as her cultural legacy. Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich both published monographs analyzing various aspects of Victoria, and they also co-edited a volume of somewhat non-traditional approaches to reading the monarch. Gail Turley Houston published a fascinating book considering the relationship between Victoria, as newly professional monarch, and professional celebrity authors, such as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Barrett Browning. These critics issued a call for more scholarship about Victoria herself and the cultural apparatus that rose up around her; but this call, I would argue, was generally left unanswered.²⁵ Homans argues, “we use the word ‘Victorian’ without thinking about Queen Victoria; her name designates a diffuse global culture before it designates a person who once lived, wrote, and made aesthetic judgments” (227). With this chapter, I attempt not only to reinsert Victoria into these formulations, as a “person who once lived,” as Houston, Munich, and

²⁵ A strong critical tradition has emerged around the analysis of Queen Victoria’s image, independent of her person, as it circulated on stamps, coins, and in more overt celebrity-building ways. As Dorothy Thompson wrote in her 1991 feminist biography of Victoria, “In earlier centuries the monarch was known by name and perhaps by repute, but not until the nineteenth century did the diffusion of cheap printed words and pictures bring the image of the monarch and her family regularly into the consciousness of her subjects” (139). However, only brief mention is ever made about the circulation of Victoria’s *name*, as a sign and as a brand, or the circulation and construction of “Victorian” during the era. My analysis of Victoria’s name and brand runs by turn in parallel and tangentially to these deft critical analyses, as I shift from the oft-discussed images to that most common word that is ever-present in discussions of the queen.

Homans herself have done, but also to analyze more closely the ways both “Victorian,” as a powerful, defining adjective, and “Victoria,” as a brand-name, signify throughout the nineteenth century, concentrating primarily on the tumultuous decade of the 1860s. As Elizabeth Langland argues in an article contrasting “Victorian” with “Englishness,” though, “[t]o return her to those stories of national identity...is not to stabilize them” (29). The competing narratives encoded in “Victoria” and “Victorian” do not resolve clearly or easily, but they do surprisingly speak to the prominence of literary celebrity and the publicity surrounding female authors in the Victorian era.

By the end of the 1860s, the “sensation” decade during which female authors jockeyed for higher levels of professional acknowledgment, the narrative encoded in the name “Victoria” came to include successful author, with the publication of her *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands From 1848 to 1861* in 1868.²⁶ *Leaves* is fundamentally concerned with that most sensational theme, disguise, which implicates it, along with its author, in the sensation discourse of the period. Thus, I argue, Victoria emerges as one of the most unexpected and critically unacknowledged quasi-sensation authors of the period. With the emergence of the female-run Victoria Press and *The Victoria Magazine* during the early 1860s, though, I contend that not only did “Victoria” signify female authorship, and sensational female authorship at that, it was also implicated in broader narratives of women’s professionalization in the literary marketplace. At the same time, “Victorian” came to denominate an “era” and, interestingly, a set of male canonical authors (in addition to the frequently exceptional George Eliot and Elizabeth Barrett Browning), long before it was applied to British

²⁶ She was always a writer, though—she wrote on average 2,500 words per day throughout her reign (Houston 161).

subjects more generally. Thus, by the 1860s, the unstably gendered literary profession was deeply involved in what it meant to be “Victoria(n).” In a way, at least during this period, female celebrity authors were practicing the most “Victorian” profession there was.

Critics and historians trace the popularization of the term “Victorian” to 1851, “the year of the Crystal Palace and the founding of the Australian colony of Victoria” (Stein, qtd. Langland 25). For the most part, before the 1860s “Victorian” was used to refer to the geography and people of Victoria, Australia, revealing just how implicated the very term “Victorian” was with the imperialist, colonizing British discourse of the period. Its emergence at the same time as the Great Exhibition extends beyond this colonial narrative, but it remains similarly rooted in this ancestry. In other words, “Victorian” emerged initially as a descriptor of cultural, political, and economic dominance. It became a dominating, momentum-driven term, often erasing individuated cultural and social identities and subsuming them with its collectivizing force. Victoria’s name had transformed into a powerful signifier of imperial and imperialist narratives. In England, though, to be “Victorian” meant something rather different by the 1860s. At this point, the “Victorian Era” was a fairly accepted term in the press, but extending the adjective to English and British citizens (“Victorians”) hadn’t become an idiomatic commonplace, by any means. The reification of 19th-century British society as a collective group united around their monarch, as “Victorians” and “Victorian people,” only gained true momentum after the “Victorian Era” had ended, at the beginning of the

twentieth century.²⁷ However, during that crucial decade when anxieties of name, gender, branding, and the literary marketplace were at the foreground of English culture, the term “Victorians” did emerge in a very specific, surprising context. After the deaths of William Thackeray and Charles Dickens, obituaries in *The Reader* and *The St. James Magazine*, respectively, invoked “the Victorians” as an exclusive coterie of celebrity authors, a group to which Thackeray and Dickens must unequivocally belong. By referring almost exclusively to male authors, this usage also implicitly establishes a gender-destabilizing valence to “the Victorians,” as a group of talented, authoritative men denominated (and, in some ways, nominally overwritten) by the foremost signifier of female authority. This gender-destabilization radiates more broadly, and perhaps more ambiguously, at the beginning of the twentieth century, once “Victorians” come to represent the entire population, male and female, of the “Victorian Era,” but it is important, I would argue, that these early usages are limited to famous male authors.

If, as Gail Turley Houston argues in *Royalties*, Victoria “subversively accrued to herself the professional authority of queen and writer while secretly subverting the ostensible source of all authority—the masculine” (Houston 64), her powerful name continued this subversion even independent of her own actions. In the obituary for William Thackeray that appeared in *The Reader* on January 2, 1864, the anonymous writer traces the etymology of the “Victorian” individual: “If we reckon this age from the beginning of our present sovereign’s reign in 1837 and if, adopting a collective name that

²⁷ I have traced the use of the “Victorian Era” in periodicals from the 1850s, though the term gained momentum in the 1860s and was often used in other publications in advertisements, to signal contemporaneity or modernity, or in contrast to “Elizabethan,” which was also a nineteenth-century coinage (Langland 27, qting, Ormond). The term was not used in *The Times* until 1882, and “Victorians” was not used in that publication until after the death of Victoria.

has been proposed, we call the British authors of these last twenty-six years ‘the Victorians’...” (3). In this formulation, the “collective name” is explicitly one for “British authors,” rather than citizens more generally. By introducing the “name” in this painstaking way, the piece suggests how new, or how potentially divisive, such a term is, but the writer legitimates it by citing a pre-existing lineage and by using the traditionally authoritative editorial “we.” The reader is co-opted into aligning British authorship, and then Thackeray, with “Victorian.” Thackeray is soon owned as “[o]ne of our Victorians,” “a writer whom our era can claim” as “characteristically a Victorian” (3). These formulations further emphasize a distinction between the collectively voiced “we” assumed by the writer and the “Victorians,” who are “eminent” and celestial (Thackeray is “[o]ne of the great stars of our Victorian cluster”) yet able to be “claimed” and owned by “our” possessive force. In other words, this article (and others like it) posits an exclusive, exceptional model of the “Victorian,” one coterminous with the literary; and it suggests that this usage has persuasive precedent (it has already “been proposed”). Thus, a “Victorian” is first a literary celebrity long before she or he is simply an individual alive during the reign of Victoria.

In an obituary for Charles Dickens in the *St. James's Magazine* in April 1870, another anonymous writer invokes Dickens as “first and greatest of the Victorians” (698). In this article, the editorial “we” is differentiated from a spectral “they,” as the writer muses, “How sore a loss [Dickens] is to ‘the Victorians’ they hardly know as yet” (698), before incorporating “his” voice into the more traditional “we.” This formulation only makes sense if, once again, “the Victorians” are a separate category from the collective “we” of the writer/editor/reader network. It remains striking because both “the

Victorians” and “they” would most commonly be replaced by “us” and “we” in a traditional mournful obituary of a public figure. By inserting such potentially jarring, distancing language, the writer maintains the category of “Victorians” as unfamiliar and exceptional. The gender-blurring nominatively inherent in replacing male authors’ names with the term “Victorians” is mitigated somewhat in this obituary, as “Evans” and “the Brownings” are classed alongside Dickens in “the goodly muster of ‘the Victorians’” (697). However, the focus remains on Dickens, and his celebrated “brand” name is at least partially re-christened, as his identity as a celebrity author is dissolved into, the collective term “Victorian.”

Perhaps Gail Turley Houston’s contention that, “the queen’s own invasion of the male writer’s terrain added to [Dickens’s] fear that women were taking over his profession” (65) is true in the case of Dickens when he was alive, but his identification as one of the most prominent “Victorians” cuts against this fear, in terms of its afterlife in the literary market and public sphere. In other words, regardless of whether English authors felt anxiety about their own cultural capital with respect to that of the queen, their posthumous literary legacy was, for a time, partially overwritten by their exceptional identities as “the Victorians.” The construction of the “Victorian” author, before the term lost its exclusive, celebrity properties and began to refer to a much wider group of people, was almost tautological—to be a successful professional author was to be a “Victorian,” and vice-versa. I argue that this nominative construction produces an alternative “Victorian” that is both competing with and strengthening alternative narratives of “Victoria” as an exceptional, gender-blurring authority, authorizer of female professionalization, and celebrity author. Rather than “gender-bending,” Victoria and the

“Victorian” culture blur the boundaries between gender categories, existing in a shifting space of both/and, while revealing that the space for women already exists in these supposedly “masculine” discourses and professions. These discourses are not “feminized” in this process of discovery; instead they are revealed as already gender-blurred and unstable. In this chapter I chart a progression from “Victoria”-as-wife, a gender-blurring authority figure, to “Victoria”-as-brand, an official authorizer of the feminist Victoria Press, to “Victoria”-as-author. I will first turn to a discussion of Victoria’s nominative exceptionality and the construction of “Victoria” before she became “Victoria Regina.” I continue with a discussion of her role as an exceptional wife under the law, noting the gender-blurring rhetoric that surrounds her singular position as a site of authority. I then turn to the 1860s and how “Victoria” operates once the Queen becomes a widow and retreats from the public gaze. I first concentrate on the officially authorized narratives of “Victoria” more broadly in the literary marketplace, as a signifier of a feminist literary profession in Emily Faithfull’s Victoria Press (founded in 1859) and *The Victoria Magazine* (first published in 1863). The chapter concludes with an analysis of Victoria’s emergence as a celebrity author with the publication of *Leaves from the Journal of Our Life in the Highlands* in 1868 and the ways in which her work crucially engages with sensation tropes. As an unexpected sensation author, Victoria stands as a fitting figure to begin exploring the ways sensation discourse informed surprising avenues of Victorian life.

I. Constructing Victoria Regina—baby ‘Drina and Angelic Albert

As a woman whose name defined the Victorian era, Victoria was strikingly exceptional in many ways, particularly as a female celebrity and as a wife. She used her cultural authority to manipulate this exceptionality, bolstering narratives that by turns privileged her self-authoring agency, insisted on her “proper,” feminine submissiveness, and created a gender-blurring rhetoric that could more easily accommodate Victoria’s unstable social roles. Throughout it all, the authority invested in “Victoria” was crucial to the proliferation of these narratives. The name “Victoria” became coded as an important site of Victoria’s authority over the course of her reign. Even before she became “Victoria Regina,” however, Victoria’s name was complicated and exceptional. As the daughter of a prince, Victoria had no patronym equivalent to those of middle- and working-class individuals. In a way, this would seem to place her outside of the patriarchal structure of nominal inheritance fundamental to most English traditions of naming. In a memoir by one of Victoria’s ladies of the bedchamber, Marie Mallet remembers that she “asked the queen to satisfy a correspondent who wrote to H.M. what her surname would be. She said she thought Guelf D’Este of the House of Brunswick (not Hanover)” (*Life with Queen Victoria*, qtd. Munich 53). According to this anecdote, others were curious about Victoria’s “surname” as well, and the fact that she cites a long list of European dynasties (Welf—Este—Brunswick) suggests the her royal exceptionality is one of excess rather than lack—her patronym is her entire patrilineal ancestry. However, the phrase “she said she thought” implies doubt, or at least a lack of official verification, and the parenthetical aside that she chose Brunswick, “(not Hanover),” suggests that she had a choice in how to “surname” herself, and chose

deliberately.²⁸ In other words, not only was the existence of Victoria's patronym up for debate, it was fungible as well; and Victoria was able to use her authority to choose that name.

Victoria was well within the bounds of patriarchal, if not paternal, caprice when it came to her christened name, however, as I discuss in the dissertation's introduction. Her uncle the Prince Regent christened her Alexandrina Victoria, against the wishes of her father, according to Lytton Strachy, after both Tsar Alexander I and her mother, Princess Victoria of Saxe-Colburg-Saalfeld. Thus, like many of the historical and fictional figures I examine in this dissertation, while Victoria was named after her mother, this nominative link signified patrilineal, or patriarchal, intervention and authority, rather than matrilineal inheritance. In this instance, Victoria was hardly exceptional as a woman in England in the nineteenth century. However, the cultural reverberations of her name did soon make her exceptional.

In his biography of Victoria, Walter Arnstein calls attention to the exceptionality of these names, stating, "in the Britain of 1819 the name Victoria was virtually unknown. Both of the princess's names impressed the English people as distinctly foreign, and during the 1830s several Members of Parliament introduced bills to change the legal name of the young princess" (Arnstein 18-19). Her "proper" names were a subject of

²⁸ The House of Hanover is an offshoot of the House of Brunswick, and most authorities list Victoria as belonging to the House of Hanover. Victoria's own distinction in terms of her surname perhaps arises because she was *not* Queen of Hanover, because she was a woman. Hanover was governed by Salic law, while Britain was not, and though their thrones were originally linked before Victoria inherited the British throne, she could not inherit the Hanoverian throne, and thus her uncle Ernest Augustus I became king. In other words, she was partially alienated from "the House of Hanover" because of her sex, and in this anecdote she disowns that House in her "surname," creating an alternative patronym by using the alternative "House of Brunswick."

public, political debate, and their “foreign” resonance further alienated the young Victoria from the country she was to ostensibly lead (which is ironic, considering the later British imperialist thrust encoded in the legacy of the term “Victorian”). As a child, Victoria was known as ‘Drina, and she did not learn to speak English until she was three years old (Arnstein 12, Thompson 1), further underscoring her non-British exceptionality. Arnstein notes that when Victoria was declared Queen, however, “They were prepared to hail her as ‘Queen Alexandrina Victoria,’ but she insisted that the ‘Alexandrina’ be dropped from her formal title once and for all...” (31). The shift from “Alexandrina”/”Drina” to “Victoria” could be read as both political and familial: the new queen is no longer pronominally tied, or metonymically indebted, to the tsar of Russia, but she is now more closely tied to her mother (though their personal relationship remained fraught).²⁹ Regardless of her relationship with her mother, this nominal shift aligned “Victoria” with family, and with matrilineal continuity, and it was this name that gained such discursive traction over the course of the queen’s reign. As with the anecdote of Victoria’s surname, this narrative similarly highlights the Queen’s exceptional authority to choose her own name. Though her name remained and became further implicated in patriarchal and imperialist discourses, and her agency in self-naming may not have been as strong as these narratives imply, these anecdotes do invest “Victoria” with self-determining ideas of authority. In this way, the name and the figure emerge as self-authoring long before Victoria herself became a published author.

²⁹ Anecdotes that have taken on the cultural weight of urban legends or fairy tales, such as the fact that the young Victoria was not allowed to sleep in her own bedroom nor to go downstairs without literally holding someone’s hand, have provided ample motivation for the rift between Victoria and her mother (see Lytton Strachey, p. 15-16, etc.). The fact that, on ascending to the throne, Victoria insisted that her mother’s rooms be far away from her own provides stronger evidence of the rift in their relationship.

Victoria's otherwise fraught position with regard to gender and her own cultural and political authority has been well addressed by feminist critics. Thompson observes, "[a] female on the throne must always have appeared less 'political' in an age in which public political action was exclusively a male preserve" (138), while Adrienne Munich argues, "the relative rarity of English female sovereigns grants a queen a prominence unavailable to a king" (7). In other words, built into Victoria's gendered role there is an inherent tension between her lack of political power and comparative excess of cultural visibility. She was an exceptional figure in terms of her legal status as a sovereign woman, though, and as a woman who had to constantly navigate the "public" and domestic realms because of her own singular profession. As an exceptional figure, I would argue, her reign and her celebrity continuously enacted a gender-blurring that was by turns accepted and protested by public voices, and that only fully found an outlet through authorship. In the preface to her *Leaves*, her editor Arthur Helps captures the duality of her performance, lauding "the patriarchal feeling (if one may apply such a word as 'patriarchal' to a lady) which is so strong in the present occupant of the throne. Perhaps there is no person in these realms who takes a more deep and abiding interest in the welfare of the household committed to his charge than our gracious Queen does in hers" (*Leaves* ix). The "patriarchal" Victoria is explicitly masculinized, albeit self-consciously, and this gender-blurring is highlighted at the end of this excerpt as the possessive "his charge" and "hers" become co-referential. The "interest" described in this passage is also a normatively feminine concern with "welfare," particularly during a period when upper-class women were undertaking charity work more and more frequently, but the ostensibly authoritative role of "our gracious Queen" seemingly

necessitates a translation away from “proper” feminizing rhetoric. This brief excerpt reveals how Victoria’s position and behavior complicate and deconstruct normative Victorian narratives about gender and authority. Her identification as a “patriarchal” “lady” both explodes the idea of a strictly male patriarchy even as it reifies the concept by pointing out the queen’s crucial difference.

In her introduction to *Royalties*, Gail Turley Houston argues that because Victoria is “[v]irtually always associated with her gender and its effect on her reign, her subjects, and the nation-state, Victoria—as many of her subjects asserted—‘womanized’ or ‘feminized’ the age” (1).³⁰ She elaborates, “to fail to see Victoria as pivotal is to miss how crucial gender issues were to the Victorians” (2). I would agree fully with the second statement, but the fact that Arthur Helps comfortably asserts Victoria’s “patriarchal” charms in his preface to her published volume calls into question the extent to which Victoria “womanized” or “feminized” her age, even in terms of how her contemporaries viewed her influence. Of course, there certainly was a robust strain of thought during the period that lamented Victoria’s “feminine” influence, but I would argue that any re-gendering of the cultural apparatus during the middle of her reign could more usefully be seen as gender-blurring, rather than “masculinization” or “feminization.” An analysis of Victoria’s marriage, including her legal status as a wife and her own references to her marriage, most readily reveal her destabilizing position.

As “Queen Regnant,” Victoria was already of course set apart from other women, but her position also set her apart legally as well. Under the laws of England, married women were traditionally “covered” by their husbands’ identities. In the oft-cited

³⁰ She complicates this idea in her own argument throughout her monograph, categorizing Victoria as “gender-deviant” at one point (88).

Commentaries on the Law from the 1760s, William Blackstone summarized this condition: “By marriage, the husband and wife are one person in law: that is, the very being or legal existence of the woman is suspended during the marriage, or at least is incorporated and consolidated into that of the husband; under whose wing, protection, and *cover*, she performs everything;...and her condition during her marriage is called her *coverture*” (qtd. Houston 17). As a reigning monarch, however, Victoria simply *could not* exist under this legal condition, and thus she emerged after her marriage to Albert as a glaring exception: the un-“covered” woman. This anomalous situation ostensibly forced Albert into an analogously exceptional role—that of the legally-nonexistent, “covered” man. The gender-blurring implications of this legal exception were readily acknowledged during the period by numerous individuals, including Victoria and Albert themselves. These reactions reveal the extent to which Victoria, as a person both under and distinct from English law, was inherently implicated in that most “Victorian” project of gender-blurring, despite her regular self-avowals to the contrary.

Throughout her reign, and particularly during her marriage, Victoria navigated the “separate spheres” of private domesticity and public display constantly. Dorothy Thompson, in her feminist biography of Victoria, summarizes the queen’s exceptionality, “As the one figure who escaped from the legal categories which governed male and female property-owners, and who in so many ways avoided the male/female gender roles, she was in her life torn between the public and private worlds” (Thompson 142). Many critics have argued that Victoria’s domestic performances contributed to preserve the monarchy as a non-threatening institution during the at-times politically tumultuous

nineteenth-century.³¹ In a way, then, Victoria's efforts preserved her profession, even as her later efforts after Albert's death extended this "professional" identification to that of published author. Throughout her marriage, a fundamental part of these paradoxical displays of privacy was Victoria's insistence that she retain the traditional, "proper" role of submissive wife to her husband, after their marriage.³² She even insisted that the marriage service remain unchanged, maintaining the vow "to obey" Albert, and making a distinction that she be "married as a woman, not as Queen."³³ This distinction between wife and monarch may have proved effective for Victoria's own self-construction, but the numerous parodies of the time about Victoria *not* vowing "to obey" show that this effectiveness was isolated to the private sphere.³⁴ Publicly, Victoria's wifely dominance over Albert was frequently seen as cause for anxiety (although Albert's foreignness was no less anxiety-inducing in the same press). As a way to allay some of this anxiety, the couple publicly emphasized their "middle-class" cultural values, though again Victoria's exceptional position played against this performance. As Margaret Homans describes the phenomenon, "Queen Victoria's resemblance to a middle-class wife made her seem ordinary, but its meaning and effectiveness depended on the contrast with her extraordinariness. Her ordinariness was at once genuine and deliberate, that of a unique individual empowered to be exemplary" (Homans 5). In other words, the interplay

³¹ See Dorothy Thompson, Walter Arnstein, etc.

³² See Margaret Homans's section on "Photographic Realism's Abject Queens" in *Royal Representations* (43-57) for a more in-depth reading of the figuring of submission and gendered propriety in the royal photography and portraiture of Victoria and Albert.

³³ Qtd, in Munich, 21.

³⁴ A London street ballad from 1841 includes the lines: "Since the Queen has no equal, 'obey' none she need;/So of course as the altar from such vow she's freed;/And the women will all follow suit, so they say--/ 'Love, honour,' they'll promise, but never— 'obey.'" (qtd, Homans 1).

between Victoria's performance as the archetypical "Victorian" and her inherent exceptionality as "Victoria Regina" was crucial to her cultural identity and celebrity status, and crucial to her later entry into the literary marketplace in the 1860s. Victoria harnessed the authority that came with her exceptional celebrity status to publicly market herself as a "proper" [middle-class] wife and widow, but her private correspondence, in opposition to the public images discussed above, reveals an opposing rhetoric of gender-blurring that was ongoing *during* her marriage.

The narrative that arose after Albert's death in 1861, through Victoria's publicly published *Leaves* and other outlets, was that while initially Victoria played the dominant role in their relationship, Albert corrected her and soon assumed his "proper" role as ruler of their domestic household, and co-leader in political affairs. Gail Turley Houston takes this reading further, stating that "*The Early Years* implies that during this early period the royal couple's gender-bending threatened the stability of their home and the nation" (Houston 44). She goes on to note that this "threat," and the public assertion by Victoria of Albert's power, occurs in 1868, long after he is dead and when, despite her grief-filled retreat from public display, he could only have a spectral form of power in any case. In a way, then, this authorized narrative of Victoria and Albert posthumously invokes a "gender-bending," as Houston terms it, only to categorically disavow it. Victoria certainly worked to have Parliament grant her husband a legal title—and therefore a legal identity—in England, which did not occur until 1857, when he was officially denominated "Prince Consort."³⁵

³⁵ Dorothy Thompson describes this: "Victoria wanted Albert to be designated 'King Consort' and to share the throne equally with her...although Albert was referred to as the prince consort, the title was not formally bestowed upon him until 1857" (36, 38). The

However, private correspondence among Victoria, Albert, and their family reveal the extent to which Victoria's exceptional "uncovered" legal position informed her marriage. Their uncle, Leopold, who was by then King of Belgium, stated outright, "The Queen being the Queen Regnant, Prince Albert's position was to all intents and purposes that of a Queen Consort" (qtd. Houston 38). His "to all intents and purposes" colloquially codes what he is almost directly stating: that Albert, under English law, is and cannot help but perform in a kind of drag, or perhaps even as a woman outright. The law included no place for an "unincorporated" married man, and thus Albert by analogy must function extra-legally, or as a woman. Precedent for Albert's royal stipend was found by examining previous Queen Consorts' stipends, emphasizing this analogous relationship. Victoria herself casts Albert as her "angel," invoking, as Houston and Homans compelling argue, the "angel of the house" that so defined a "proper" domestic woman during the period.³⁶ She made this extended metaphor clearer in a letter to her eldest daughter, Victoria, "He was my father, protector, my guide and adviser in all and everything, my mother (I might almost say) as well as my husband" (qtd. Arnstein 58). Here, Victoria uses a similar colloquial parenthetical "(I might almost say)" to cut against the gender-blurring momentum of her language, yet the fact that it *is* parenthetical further undercuts its own normalizing force. Her excessive affective relationship with Albert transcends the bounds (well, "almost") of "proper" Victorian familial as well as gender roles, arguably overcompensating, in this formulation, for her "uncovered" position by thoroughly conflating Albert with most, if not all, normative authority roles. At the same

distinction between "King" and "Prince" shows that Albert's formal designation was more of a compromise than a victory for Victoria.

³⁶ Houston 37.

time, her repetition of “my” configures all of these roles, even the most gender-blurring and seemingly transgressive “mother,” in relation to her, cast grammatically as the center of the relationship.

In private correspondence, Albert himself also acknowledged Victoria’s centrality, at least in terms their public relationship, stating that he wished “to sink his own individual existence in that of his wife—to aim at no power by himself or for himself...to assume no separate responsibility before the public” (qtd. Houston 173). This figure of self-abnegation transcends mere legal “covering” of identity, suggesting that on at least one level of self-presentation, Albert wanted to be seen as co-extensive with his wife. This metaphorical “sink[ing]” of his identity is perhaps the ultimate figure of gender-blurring. It is already a potentially sexualized image, and it raises questions about how such a merging would affect the gendering of both participants. As an extreme, quasi-embodied troping of the condition of coverture, this expression more broadly reveals just how strange and gender-blurring a concept coverture—in which a woman is legally incorporated into the identity of a man—is. As husband to an exceptional wife, though, Albert can project this self-abnegating desire while maintaining a separate identity in private (as his concluding tag “before the public” suggests). Victoria, however, crucially maintains a double identity, both in relation to and distinct from her husband, in both the public and private spheres. The fact that these more explicit tropes of gender-blurring occur largely in private correspondence that Victoria assumed would be burnt after her death casts them as potentially transgressive or “improper.” *Leaves* was published as an edited-for-the-public version of Victoria’s private journals, and thus its attempts to depict a more traditional narrative of a wife

“properly” corrected by her husband into accepting his dominance underscore this point. At the same time, these ostensibly transgressive tropes were acknowledged repeatedly and in different ways, suggesting how common, though perhaps still non-normative, such ideas actually were. The project of gender-blurring is inherent, if unacknowledged, in the legal concept of coverture to begin with, and Victoria’s exceptional authority brought this fact partially to the foreground. After Albert’s death, I would argue, her exceptional authority was temporarily channeled into acts of authorization through which “Victoria” operated in the public marketplace, even as Victoria the individual attempted to retreat to the private sphere. In the next section I turn to a particularly powerful authorization of “Victoria” and the ways literary professionalization and gender-blurring were linked in the Victoria Press and *Victoria Magazine*.

II. Branding and Authorizing an Alternative “Victoria”

Victoria’s public and private signification changed drastically after she became a widow in December of 1861. She retreated from the public gaze, and, some argued, from her duties as a by-definition public, celebrity queen during the decade, but she became involved with alternative forms of self-publicizing, particularly in the literary sphere. Shortly after the death of Albert, in July 1862, Victoria officially denominated Emily Faithfull, head of the Victoria Press, “Printer and Publisher in Ordinary to Her Majesty.” Faithfull founded the Victoria Press in 1859 with funding from that stalwart of proto-feminist work and center of the Langham Place Group, Bessie Parkes. The Victoria Press was, or was meant to be, an exclusively woman-run publishing house, and it soon produced *The English Woman’s Journal* followed by *The Victoria Magazine* in 1863. I

argue that by granting Faithfull royal sanction, Victoria authorized the use of her name in the “Victoria Press,” authorizing by extension an alternative “Victoria” that was proto-feminist and deeply implicated in the project of female professionalization in the literary marketplace. The gender-blurring public dyad of Victoria-and-Albert shifted, after Albert’s death and Victoria’s withdrawal from public life, into the professionally-destabilizing signifier “Victoria,” and this shift occurred with the Queen’s official consent. During the 1860s, then, the primary resonances of “Victoria” were textual, and occurred within the literary marketplace.

The Victoria Press was founded as an essentially feminist project, explicitly “for the Employment of Women” (as was parenthetically noted on the frontispieces of its first books), and though *The Victoria Magazine* took a much less politically charged path, as I will discuss shortly, it remained invested in the overall ideological work of its parent organization. Solveig Robinson aptly diagnoses the political potential for the project, arguing, “having an acknowledged press of their own provided a framework within which Victorian women of letters could successfully translate feminist politics into a feminist criticism” (Robinson 161). Ironically, Victoria herself was privately against “the women’s movement” in its more broad incarnations, going so far as to write to her then-Prime Minister William Gladstone to, “make whatever use they can of her [Victoria’s] name” to combat it (qtd. Houston 46). By invoking her name explicitly, the Queen offers “Victoria” as a politically conservative weapon to be wielded by others (notably, by male politicians). However, through the Victoria Press and *The Victoria Magazine*, “Victoria” had already been activated as an analogously liberal weapon, wielded by professional

women, and one officially authorized as well.³⁷ Interestingly, it is the feminist valence of “Victoria” that received public authorization, while its more conservative signification was endorsed only in private correspondence. And while both meanings were widely available to the general public and contributed to the “Victorian” brand being constructed throughout the century, the Victoria Press and its *Victoria Magazine* ensured that the eponymous circulation of the Queen in the literary market was a decidedly woman-centric, professional one.

Emily Faithfull founded the Victoria Press in 1859 as a space for women to learn and practice the publishing trade. Soon, it was a fully operational press, and its 1861 special anthology *Victoria Regia* earned Faithfull official endorsement from Victoria as publisher, a fact which was emblazoned with her name (as publisher, though not initially editor) on her next project in May of 1863, *The Victoria Magazine*. Martha Westwater argues that this magazine “might well be termed a one-woman operation” (445; qtd. Frawley 95), and Faithfull’s celebrity as a public figure, center of scandal, and lecture-circuit speaker, certainly soon eclipsed her co-editor, Emily Davies, who soon resigned.³⁸ The sensational valence of Faithfull’s celebrity coalesced around the Codrington Divorce Case of 1864, in which she was cast as by turns the lesbian lover of Helen Codrington or the “attempted rape victim” of Admiral Codrington (Frawley 97).³⁹ This scandal

³⁷ As I discuss shortly, *The Victoria Magazine* was by no means exclusively run by women, though the inclusion of men was strategic on the part of its initial editors, Emily Davies and Emily Faithfull.

³⁸ Frawley argues that by the 1870s, Faithfull “had become the magazine’s...queenly center,” eclipsing Victoria (97). Pauline Nestor says that “Emily Faithfull herself was the centre of much of the *Magazine’s* mythologizing” (102).

³⁹ Many contemporary critics point to the alleged relationship between Faithfull and Helen Codrington as a homoerotic, potentially lesbian bond that was “outed” during a

prompted Faithfull to temporarily resign her editorship of *The Victoria Magazine*, though she maintained her role as publisher.

From 1867-1873, this “editorial interregnum,” as Solveig Robinson terms it, occurred, as men assumed editorial control of the publication. During this period, articles became more reactionary, though the tone of *The Victoria Magazine* was always more moralistic and less politically charged than its precursor publication, *The English Woman’s Journal*, as Pauline Nestor argues (Robinson 169; Nestor 102). Temporarily (though not inconsequentially, for six years of its seventeen-year run), the magazine became similar to its similarly-titled competitor, *The Queen*, which was addressed to women but published by Samuel Beeton, edited by Frederick Greenwood (whom I will revisit in chapter five as editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*), and written predominantly by men.

Yet *The Victoria Magazine* was from its inception invested in including male contributors, as Emily Davies intimated in a letter to Barbara Smith Bodichon prefacing the official “Programme” of the magazine: ‘We mean to employ chiefly men [as contributors] at first, & not to press our special subject til we have got a character. *Then*, once we have once gained a hearing, we shall give the public as much of it as they will swallow’” (qtd. Robinson 168). This bait-and-switch approach lays bare the mainstream, though covertly proselytizing, goals of the publication (Robinson 167). It also foregrounds the goal of transitioning the magazine away from this model, toward a more “special subject” (i.e., women’s issues) oriented periodical that would glut its readership with women’s stories and women’s voices (“give...as much of it as they will swallow”),

period when society did not know how to publicly process such relationships. By 1890, though, she was living with her life partner Charlotte Robinson (Easley 138).

thereby enacting political change. The shift from “chiefly men” contributing to men editing, and the concomitant change in tone Robinson sees, suggests the extent to which Faithfull’s (and Davies’s) project was potentially correct in privileging female editorship and publishing as a more fundamental guarantee of less normative gender coverage in the mid-Victorian era. In a way, then, by the end of the 1860s, the “Victoria” of *The Victoria Magazine* came more in alignment with the “Victoria” that the Queen had privately directed Gladstone to invoke against proto-feminist movements. Ideological narratives signified by “Victoria” may have shifted under the dictates of the literary marketplace, as often happened with the Queen’s overdetermined brand name as it moved in the public sphere; but the name still retained its initially authorized, gender-blurring resonance as well as its intimate connection with the literary sphere.

Emily Faithfull emphasized the importance of the name “Victoria” to this larger ideological project in a report to the Social Science Association, stating that she had named the Victoria Press “after the Sovereign to whose influence English women owe so large a debt of gratitude, and in the hope also that the name would prove a happy augury of victory” (qtd. Robinson 167). This “victory,” etymologically encoded in the sovereignly signifier, was more than an ideological victory, however, as Robinson points out: “Davies and Faithfull chose a neutral yet triumphant name for their new venture...[to] appeal to a large number of subscribers—possibly men as well as women” (167). This victory was meant to be economical as well, or even primarily. Considering this, it is perhaps unsurprising that even the first issues of *The Victoria Magazine* also manifested concern with normative, “Victorian” ideas of “womanliness,” culminating in an article comparing Queens Elizabeth and Victoria that claimed the former was

“masculine” while the latter was “womanly.”⁴⁰ Ironically, the very publication that, through its title and lineage, coded “Victoria” as a gender-blurring signifier of women’s valid participation in an otherwise male-dominated constellation of professions (writing, publishing, editing, etc.), also attempted to reify her position as archetypally “womanly” in its content. Similarly, the magazine showed a “characteristic deference to the sovereign” as well as publishing “regular enthusiastic reports on the activities and virtues of the Queen” (Nestor 102).

The Victoria Magazine, as a literary entity, reveals a fundamental tension between text and paratext, between its typical content, its over-signifying title, and the political narrative projected by its editors connecting it to its other namesake, the Victoria Press. I would argue this tension can be traced to the dual roles of the magazine: it was intended to be both the clearly denominated organ of the progressive Victoria Press, as implied by their shared name, as well as a more “mainstream,” economically successful, politically compromising (and compromised) publication.⁴¹ However, in its attempts to be more economically viable and broaden its readership, the publication explicitly aligned “Victoria” with “womanly,” even as the authorial voices behind it became more and more those of men. In other words, *The Victoria Magazine* was branding itself, by analogy, as arch-feminine (“womanly”) even as it was being constructed by male writers writing *as* women, or with “female” voices, addressed to an expanded male, though still explicitly

⁴⁰ “Elizabeth and Victoria: A Woman’s View,” anon. Jun 1864, qtd. Frawley 96.

⁴¹ As many critics argue, and as Robinson implicitly argues with regard to William Wilfred Head, the Langham Place member and replacement editor of *Victoria Magazine*, the Langham Place group itself was politically compromised in similar ways, as were numerous other “proto-feminist” movements of the period.

female, audience. Thus, the gender-blurring momentum of “Victoria” was still ongoing, even as its eponymous magazine seemed most conservative.

The Victoria Magazine had a final function as well, independent of its existence as a money-making engine or ideological battleground—it was a “surrogate” for Victoria herself, who by 1863 (and throughout the rest of the 1860s) had retired from public life to engage in private and prolonged grief over the death of Albert in December 1861 (Frawley 94). In a way, while Victoria the embodied individual was only occasionally glimpsed as a veiled widow, “Victoria” the brand was continuing on, if not gaining momentum without a “real,” constantly on-display public figure to cut against it.⁴² By the mid-1860s, “Victoria” was authorized shorthand for a narrative of professionalizing women in the literary marketplace. While *The Victoria Magazine* deployed this overdetermined name toward varying ideological ends, in terms of its content, the magazine did remain intimately tied to advocating extra-textual literary professions for women. Its circulation, along with the growing notoriety of its publishing house and publisher, shifted what “Victoria” could mean. If we, along with Maria Frawley, “think of ‘Victoria’ as a historically compromised name” (93), this compromised quality both informs and is informed by the alternative “Victoria” of the Victoria Press and *Magazine*. By the end of the decade, though, “Victoria” would enter the literary market much more directly.

III. Victoria Auctor, and the Problem of “Mrs. Brown”

⁴² My argument builds off of Frawley’s analyses, but I argue for both an initial partial agency behind this “surrogacy” (Victoria authorized the narrative attached to her name/brand by “the Victoria Press”) and the way this “surrogate” functioned as a powerful brand independent of Victoria after this initial act of authorization.

With the publication of *Leaves from the journal of our life in the Highlands* in 1868, Victoria emerged as a celebrity author. Her nominative circulation through the Victoria Press and *The Victoria Magazine* in the early 1860s had already strengthened the “Victoria” brand as a literary signifier, even as Victoria’s own body was no longer on display to reify that brand. Her much more direct entry into the literary market shifted this self-marketing from simple authorization to fully engaged authorship, implying a desire for more direct control of her brand. Margaret Homans and other critics have argued that *Leaves* was published as a very “proper” surrogate for the still-in-mourning Queen, whose absence was drawing increasing public irritation as the 1860s progressed. While, as Margaret Homans and Adrienne Munich admit in their introduction to *Remaking Victoria*, the work is now “often read like merely dutiful recordings of pleasant activities, drained of their pleasure,” strange emotional sparks and preoccupations remain. As Homans discusses in *Royal Representations*, *Leaves* is preoccupied with disguise and concealed identities as Victoria engages in numerous incognito day-trips throughout Scotland. I would extend Homans’s observations further and argue that this central theme of disguise and concealed identity situates *Leaves* at least partially within the sensation genre, activates the character of “Queen Victoria” featured therein as a potential sensation heroine, and launches “Victoria,” the literary celebrity brand, within the sensation discourse of the period.

I argue that in deploying the sensational trope of disguise repeatedly, *Leaves* underlines the instability of “Victoria”’s identity and the delight she takes—as author and character—in manipulating this identity. While the Queen remains quite unique among sensation heroines in her privileged class position and singular profession, which would

ostensibly grant her the freedom to enjoy this identity-play without life-or-death anxieties about consequent changes to reputation or fortune, these disguise narratives do still activate a potentially sensational resonance around “Victoria.” This potentiality becomes actualized through scandalizing gossip about Victoria’s allegedly sexual relationship with her Scottish gillie turned head-servant John Brown. This gossip began to emerge around the time of *Leaves*’s publication, and it was at least partially based on interpretations of brief, generally objective references to Brown in that work, including an extended footnote.⁴³ Thus, while Victoria’s entry into the literary market might have been an attempt to control and contain her own proliferating brand-image and the signification of “Victoria” throughout British society, it arrives already inflected with sensational tropes and vulnerable to even more scandalous interpretations. *Leaves* ensures that at least one of the competing narratives encoded in “Victoria” is sensational, in more ways than one.

Victoria emerged onto the literary stage as an immediate success because of her pre-existing celebrity, with *Leaves* selling 18,000 copies in its first week, temporarily topping bestsellers such as *Little Women* and Wilkie Collins’s sensational *The Moonstone*.⁴⁴ At this point, her celebrity took on a new valence, as a quasi-professional author, legitimated by sales figures. Members of her family had advised her that such publication would compromise her queenly authority (Houston 59), and in a sense by adding authorial celebrity to her exceptional royal celebrity, this was the case. However, the fact that the most “authorized” woman in the country relished being a successful

⁴³ Her second publication of journal extracts, *More leaves from the journal of a life in the Highlands, from 1862 to 1883*, was notably published soon after the death of John Brown. This pairing (the first *Leaves* as a response to her grief over losing Albert, the second as a response to losing Brown) suggests a similar response to grief, if not the nature of their relationship.

⁴⁴ Arnstein 125.

author suggests the extent to which “authority” was imbricated with professional authorship. As discussed previously, though, Victoria was a woman attempting to operate under the separate spheres ideology of the period, even as her social, political, and legal status fundamentally broke that mold, and *Leaves* at times reflects these attempts to cast herself in a primarily domestic, private role.

In the Preface to *Leaves*, Victoria’s editor Arthur Helps not only insists on the predominantly domestic, private settings of these extracts, but also emphasizes her reluctance to be an author in the first place. He asserts, “The Queen, however, said that she had no skill whatever in authorship; that these were, for the most part, mere homely accounts of excursions near home; and that she felt extremely reluctant to publish any thing written by herself” (v-vi). From the repetition of “homely” and “home” to the diminishing “for the most part,” “mere,” and “near,” Helps continues by calling attention to the lack of “public,” political content in the volume (content that is by no means lacking in Victoria’s unpublished journals as a whole): “All references to political questions, or to the affairs of government have, for obvious reasons, been studiously omitted. The book is mainly confined to the natural expressions of a mind rejoicing in the beauties of nature” (vii). He reiterates this “natural” troping of Victoria as artless, unstudied, and thus unprofessional, on the next page, insisting that “in every page the writer describes what she thinks and feels, rather than what she might be expected to think and feel” (viii). This assertion is fascinating in its dual implications: Victoria is artless and “natural” in thought and emotion, a “proper” “womanly” condition, and she is also unsusceptible to social “expect[ations]” and thus extra—if not anti—social. Thus, the project is already overtly compromised and in tension with itself, even before the

actual text begins. Margaret Homans summarizes this problem with regard to the explicitly meta-textual nature of this entire preface, stating, “Because Helps states the principles of editing he and Victoria agreed on rather than silently removing references to matters of state, the volume proclaims its own artificiality in contriving to isolate the private (or what resembles the private in Victoria’s life) away from the public aspects of the Queen’s daily life” (Homans 137). Rather than self-avowedly “natural,” the work is demonstrably “artificial,” calling attention to the way it is crafted text marketing not only itself, but “Victoria” as a woman, as a queen, *and* as an author and a brand. Through the Preface, Victoria is overtly constructed as an author despite herself, authorship standing in contrast to the queen’s “natural” actions; but she is also implicitly cast as a self-marketing agent with authorial talent. In other words, even in the Preface to *Leaves* “Victoria” assumes multiple conflicting, overlapping identities, an instability that signals, I would argue, its participation in sensation discourse.

As mentioned previously, many of the journal entries excerpted in *Leaves* engage the idea of disguise and the revelation of the queen’s identity. Broadly, as Homans argues, the exercise of *Leaves* is a partial disguise, as her “retreat from embodied self-representation” is balanced by this “substitute form of royal representation” (100, 115). By allowing publication of journal extracts that were previously only available in private circulation (since 1865), Victoria seems to bare herself to her reading public while maintaining various levels of editorial privacy (as her private journals were first extracted for “private” consumption by court retainers and then re-formatted for truly “public” consumption). Homans argues that Victoria “takes pleasure in assuming the disguise of an artificial privacy” (135), much as she enjoys assuming “real” disguises during the

travels recounted in *Leaves*. The enjoyment in these scenes of physical and nominative disguise, however, comes from the (often fulfilled) potential to be found out. I would argue, similarly, that Victoria's "artificial privacy" is similarly intentionally flimsy: her identity as a public figure—and now as a public *author*—is readily visible below the veil of domestic, "proper" privacy and the pose of hesitant authorship.

These scenes of disguise and discovery are rare loci of emotion in an otherwise frequently dry account. On one occasion, "fearing we had been recognized," Victoria, Albert, and their small retinue pass through a village, only to soon realize that "the people had just discovered who we were, and a few cheered us as we went along" (*Leaves* 194. 196). This "fear" is a mildly disingenuous euphemism for excitement, which the reader has been prompted to understand by this point by the numerous other pleasing moments of "recognition" that have occurred earlier in the text. A few pages prior, Victoria recounts a particularly involved concealment that she and her party attempted to enact: "We had decided to call ourselves *Lord and Lady Churchill and party*, Lady Churchill passing as *Miss Spencer*, and General Grey as *Dr. Grey!* Brown once forgot this, and called me 'Your Majesty' as I was getting into the carriage; and Grant on the box once called Albert 'Your Royal Highness,' which set us off laughing, but no one observed it" (180). In this formulation, nominative slips by the servants are funny, not frightening, and not simply because "no one observed it"—we soon learn that people *did* realize Victoria was "Lady Churchill," and assembled a makeshift parade, much to her delight. This nominative concealment is quite elaborate and perhaps needlessly complicated: the real Lady Churchill is demoted to "pass" as the unmarried "Miss Spencer," Victoria herself assumes her friend's name "Lady Churchill," Albert remains her husband but as

“Lord Churchill,” and General Grey becomes a civilian professional “Dr. Grey.” Each individual is temporarily demoted in some way, and while these disguises are certainly superficial, being in name only, they also suggest a crucial link between names, nominative titles, and public identity. The excitement and potential shock-value encoded in this pseudonymous play is evident from Victoria’s rare exclamation mark—it is something seemingly innocuous, yet literally out of character.

This theme of disguise, particularly nominative disguise, and the constant, albeit potentially pleasurable, threat of discovery or recognition recalls the most successful genre on the literary market in the 1860s, against which *Leaves* was in direct competition, the sensation novel. Of course, disguised sensation heroines like Isabel Vane and Lucy Audley generally could not relish the possibility of being recognized as their “true” selves, unlike the playful queen, nor did such fictional recognition result in parades or seemingly jubilant crowds. The fact that Victoria’s unacknowledged colonizing presence in “the Highlands” would suggest that such crowds might not have been so unilaterally jubilant does not diminish the fact that, fundamentally, Victoria emerges from these moments of disguise as almost an anti-sensation heroine of sorts, a secure, firmly “authorized” and most “proper” woman, belonging incontrovertibly to the highest class in society.⁴⁵ However, the overt pleasure she takes in playful disguise, displayed so prominently in a book published towards the end of “sensation” fervor, allies Victoria as an author and literary persona with the sensation movement, or at least the sensation-inflected discourse of the mid-Victorian period.

⁴⁵ “The couple’s emotional embrace of the wild landscapes of the Scottish Highlands can be viewed as another colonizing masquerade, where territory retrospectively reaffirms their ancestry” (Munich 39).

Earlier in the decade, after her retreat into private life, she was even directly blamed for the popularity of sensation fiction. In an anonymous pamphlet, “A Letter to the Queen on her Retirement from Public Life,” the author invokes sensation novels, “in which vice is described,” and laments that “[s]ociety, wanting its natural head and guide,” allows such sensation novelists “to mould public opinion” (qtd. Houston 54). While this attitude was, culturally speaking, an extreme one during the period, the idea of a powerful link between Victoria and the larger cultural movements of her “era” is compelling. The fact that when she did re-emerge, with *Leaves*, she did so as a quasi-sensation author, with an implicitly sensational awareness of and delight in concealed, multiplied identities and disguises gives the lie to the anonymous author’s delineation between the otherwise moral queen and malleable “public opinion.”⁴⁶

Leaves also tangentially addresses what would arguably become the most “sensational” narrative to emerge around Victoria—her relationship with her servant John Brown. She included numerous footnotes about her servants, often giving mini-biographies of them, but the longest was used to describe John Brown. She praises Brown repeatedly, stating, “the latter [Brown], particularly, is handy, and willing to do every thing and any thing, and to overcome every difficulty, which makes him one of my best servants any where” (*Leaves* 187). Her repeated discussions of Brown are by no means

⁴⁶ The fact that she *could* delight in such disguises speaks to her subject-position as an individual at the top of the class system, and as a secure monarch (which security was by no means assured at the beginning of her reign, critics argue). This is not to say that Victoria existed in any way extrinsically to the British class system, or that her gender was irrelevant to this privileged position. It should be said, though, that “Victoria” encoded a powerful, imperialist, colonizing narrative that did much and lasting harm to individuals, people-groups, and cultures, and Victoria the individual benefited greatly from this legacy, even as she navigated the compromised identities and alternative narratives that “Victoria” *also* encoded, as a signifier of womanhood.

sexually or even romantically charged, but their mere presence was potentially damning to a public spurred by gossip about the queen and her “best” servant. This is not to say that Victoria did not have an intimate relationship with Brown. By the time this book was published, the queen had developed a close relationship with Brown and insisted that he be nearby her during the majority of every day. On his death in 1883, she ordered memorial brooches with his image and her initials (V. R.) distributed to her other servants (Thompson 70), and she mourned him much as she mourned her husband Albert’s death.⁴⁷ In the 1870s, gossip began that the pair were not only a sexually active couple, but that Brown had fathered a child with her, to whom she had given birth in secret and then sent off to live with a clergyman in Switzerland.⁴⁸

In other words, Victoria’s relationship with John Brown, whatever its nature may have been in reality, was cast as either quasi-sensational (the widowed queen is sexually active with her Scottish servant) or arch-sensational (. . .and they had a hidden love child being raised on the Continent!). She was re-branded as “Mrs. Brown” in certain publications (Thompson 72), suggesting that nominative shifts could be damaging for women, even the privileged queen. In a way, this nominative de-throning is the converse to the gender-blurring between Albert and Victoria I discussed in the first section of this chapter. Victoria is being forced into a most “proper” role—married, middle-class woman—yet the move is obviously a mockery of respect and “propriety,” an ironic encapsulation of what, for a Victorian woman, even (or *particularly*) Victoria herself, was the most improper, sensational behavior. This scandal also reveals how vulnerable

⁴⁷ She also allegedly attempted to write and publish a biography of Brown, though here she was stopped by her family and advisors (Thompson 70).

⁴⁸ Thompson traces this rumor to a story in the *Lausanne Gazette* of Switzerland in 1866.

to scandalous narratives Victoria was, as a still-potentially-sexually-active widow. Rather than actively playing with these tropes, as she does with Albert in *Leaves*, the widowed Victoria, and the narrative of “Victoria,” are acted against and molded in harmful yet compelling ways. In this narrative redefinition, though, “Victoria” signifies (and can signify) a myriad of identities, but *not* that of John Brown’s lover, while “Mrs. Brown” ironically signifies just that, rather than the married identity it would seem to. “Victoria” has been activated in terms of a variety of discourses, including that of sensation, but “Mrs. Brown” is overtly, if perversely and paradoxically, sensational.

This public debacle recalls a much earlier quasi-scandal in Victoria’s life: public reaction to her close relationship with her first prime minister, Lord Melbourne. In his biography of Victoria, Lytton Strachey recounts that “‘Mrs. Melbourne’ was shouted at her when she appeared at her balcony” (Strachey 39) in the first year after she had been crowned. Here, a relationship that critics have read along a spectrum from sexual attraction to filial/paternal love to student/mentor respect is reduced under the same sensationalizing optic that would re-emerge over thirty years later. The “Mrs. Melbourne” moment, I would argue, is a proto-sensational moment and also aligns the public narrative of Victoria, however briefly and in however tangential a fashion, with that of Caroline Norton, the focus of my next chapter. For “Victoria Regina,” though, “proper” middle-class married women’s names were a shaming identity to assume, or be forced to assume, despite her performance of middle-class respectability. As “Mrs. Melbourne” and “Mrs. Brown,” the queen is reconstructed as a scandalous figure that, by the 1860s, can be aligned with the wider tropes of the “sensation” genre. Just as her

identity could be over-invested with meaning, her book could be, and was, over-read for its sensational potential, rather than for its actual sensational theme—cavalier disguise.

However, much like her fleeting identification as “Mrs. Melbourne” dispersed and left almost no trace on the competing narratives of “Victoria,” “Mrs. Brown,” though a more persistent name, was superseded by the more powerful brand. And, after 1868, that brand was indelibly tied with authorship and quasi-sensational play. In *Royalties*, Gail Turley Houston posits a fundamental tension between Victoria and successful authors such as Charles Dickens and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, claiming, “Whether or not they were explicitly aware of a desire to trade places professionally, Victorian writers and the queen competed with each other for the right to represent the culture” (Houston 4). I would argue, however, that Victoria’s status as a celebrity author, and the momentum of her name in the literary marketplace, suggests a reciprocal, mutually constitutive relationship among the queen, her “era,” and the profession whose instability figures so prominently in the midst of this period. In the next chapter, I turn to a pre-Victorian model of female literary celebrity, Caroline Norton, to discuss sensational identities, legal fictions, and the legal status of women and professional authors at the beginning of the Victorian era.

CHAPTER III

“A NAME WHICH MIGHT HAVE BEEN ONLY FAVOURABLY KNOWN”: CONSTRUCTIONS AND RECONSTRUCTIONS OF CAROLINE NORTON

Caroline Elizabeth Sarah Sheridan, who became “the Honourable Mrs. Norton” after her marriage, emerged as one of the most striking female celebrities to straddle the line between literary celebrity and public, scandalous notoriety in the Victorian era. As the “poetess” granddaughter of the playwright Richard Brinsley Sheridan and the intimate friend of Prime Minister Lord Melbourne, Norton also straddled eras themselves, standing as a liminal figure between the Romantic, pre-Victorian period, when she achieved initial fame for her Romantic-tinged poetry and silver fork stories, and the Victorian period, during which she became a powerful voice for political and legal reform as well as a quasi-sensation novelist. Her most infamous moment on the public stage came just before the coronation of Victoria, when her abusive Tory husband, in an act of political opportunism, accused staunch Whig Lord Melbourne of committing adultery with his wife. The trial for “criminal conversation,” *Norton v. Melbourne*, was covered in all of the major newspapers, irreparably damaging Norton’s “good name” despite a verdict that found Melbourne not guilty.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ While there has continued to be some debate about whether Caroline Norton and Lord Melbourne did in fact have an affair, the generally accepted critical consensus is that George Norton brought the suit at the prompting of Tory leadership in an attempt to cripple Melbourne’s political efficacy. In terms of resolving an irresolvable question about Norton’s sexual behavior (the desire for which, even in contemporary criticism, seems telling), her letter to Melbourne in “late Summer, 1836” (right around the trial), offers the most definitive of resolutions available: “and in the sight of Heaven my crime is the same as if I had been yr mistress these five years” (107, ed. Hoge).

This pre-Victorian instance of media spectacle essentially divided her professional corpus in two, and the Victorian portion of her output became increasingly politicized as she produced pamphlets published under her name, along with the occasional strategic anonym and pseudonym, in support of married women's reform acts, such as the Infant Custody Act of 1839 and the Marital Causes Act of 1857. Even her later novels are inflected with this political activism, to varying extents. I argue that through these pamphlets and later novels, Norton identifies and deploys a theory of "proper" names as "legal fictions," a concept she learned through her experience at the periphery of *Norton v. Melbourne*. In so doing, she reconstructs her own authorial name as a powerfully unstable, and therefore manipulable, brand, strategically embracing her scandalous, traumatic public history while moving beyond it to gain economic security as well as to enact public socio-legal change. This reconstruction stands as a strategic response to the way Norton's name signified at the beginning of her career in the 1830s, when it was initially overwritten and constructed in the public discourse by an array of male, aristocratic names (Melbourne, George Norton, Sheridan, and even the Romantic poet Byron), a phenomenon I discuss in more detail in the second section of the chapter. Through her later political work, Norton further responded to these early male, aristocratic denials of her self-marketing agency by deconstructing the names and identities of aristocratic men more generally, a deconstruction that was predicated on her identification of names with legal fictions. With these nominative redefinitions and reconstructions, I would argue, Norton emerges as a proto-sensational figure whose work, political efforts, and methods of self-marketing helped lay the foundation for the sensation discourse of the 1860s.

Beginning with Mary Poovey's groundbreaking chapter on Norton in *Uneven Developments*, critics have most frequently approached Norton through her political writings and the way she explicitly deploys and implicitly cuts against Victorian gender norms.⁵⁰ Increasing attention has been paid to her role as a pre-Victorian "poetess" and her not insubstantial corpus of published poetry, but even Yopie Prins's nuanced article on Norton, "Personifying the Poetess," shifts to focus on her political pamphlets in addition to her poetry. Another strand of criticism, which has older foundations in the early biographies of Norton, reads "Caroline Norton" and her works through a biographical lens, focusing on Norton as a mother in addition to figures of abjected maternity in her works. More recent critical works, such as Randall Craig's 2009 monograph *The Narratives of Caroline Norton* and Kiernan Dolin's 2002 article on visual representations of Norton, "The Transfigurations of Caroline Norton," take a much more diffusive approach, reading the competing public and semi-private biographical narratives written about and by Norton in dialogue with one another.

My work builds on all of these approaches, in a way, although I am particularly indebted to Craig's meticulous work on almost the entirety of Norton's corpus. I would argue that Norton's work, along with the scandals that rose up around her name, insists on at least some level of biographical engagement, since her private life was repeatedly made public by others as well as by herself over the course of her career. My argument

⁵⁰ In Poovey's "Covered but not Bound," she partially focuses on Norton's two pamphlets responding to the 1854 Matrimonial Causes Bill, arguing that, "Initially...Norton justifies publicizing her private story by rhetorically splitting herself into two persons: the long-suffering victim of social injustice and the vindicating polemical writer...implicitly the former is female and the latter male" (65). However, she argues, "Norton's usurpation of the defender's role, her revelation of the role politics and money have played in her domestic woes, and her entry into political discourse have already collapsed the very differences she seems to support" (69).

hinges around the idea that Norton's forms of self-marketing and deconstruction of the figure of the aristocratic man are inextricably and at times strategically bound up with her own personal narrative, and thus this narrative should not be ignored. At the end of the chapter, I extend my analysis to a pair of Norton's later novels, 1851's *Stuart of Dunleath* and 1868's sensational *Old Sir Douglas*, works that have not received much critical attention. I examine the way Norton inverts generic structures of the melodrama and sensation novel in each work, respectively, to position improper aristocratic men at their center. My chapter primarily departs from previous critical work, though, in its attention to the name in particular as a crucial concept and trope in Norton's political work, as well as through my identification of Norton as a crucial progenitor of sensation discourse.

I. Marital Fiction/Professional Reality

While Norton often de-emphasized her professional status as she began reconstructing her celebrity brand beginning in the late 1830s, she had been and remained a rather omnipresent force in the literary marketplace. Early in her career, Norton was a playwright, a poet, a novelist, and a prolific short-story writer, as well as an editor of numerous books of beauty and fashionable annuals. In her 1850s political pamphlets, 1854's *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century* and 1855's *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage & Divorce Bill*, Norton attempts to foreground her role as a victimized married woman, but she repeatedly invokes her literary career and the need for copyright reform, suggesting the extent to which, for Norton, the two narratives are inextricably linked. Since the very beginning of her marriage to George Norton, Caroline had been the primary breadwinner in her household.

In *English Laws for Women*, she writes that, “[i]t was on my literary talents and the interest of my family, that our support almost entirely depended, while I still had a home” (12). In private correspondence during *Norton v. Melbourne*, she more adamantly insisted, “I have written day after day, and night after night, without intermission; I provided for *myself* by means of my literary engagements; I provided for my *children* by means of my literary engagements; and I am still willing to do so—for *my children*.”⁵¹ Thus, while she may have asserted privately that “literature...is a sort of *half profession* for me,” she was clearly a professional writer, similarly positioned to female authors I will discuss in the next chapters such as Margaret Oliphant, Ellen Wood, and Mary Elizabeth Braddon, despite Norton’s comparative upper-class status.

Norton was primarily known as a “poetess” at the beginning of her career, and her poetry did at times adhere to that quasi-Romantic, feminine tradition. Ann Mellor characterizes the “poetess” figure as involving: “the adoption of the mask of the improvisatrice, the insistence on the primacy of love and the domestic affections to a woman’s happiness, the rejection or condemnation of poetic fame...and the acceptance of the hegemonic doctrine of the separate spheres” (1). Contemporary critics such as Mellor, Isobel Armstrong, and Angela Leighton have read a strong measure of ideological resistance in the work and public personas of these “poetesses,” and Norton could certainly be included in this critical re-reading. However, while Norton’s initial literary celebrity coalesced around her poetic output and her beautiful appearance, she occupied a variety of other roles in the literary marketplace that more substantially contributed to her economic security, including the role of editor.

⁵¹ Letter, July 20, 1836, qtd, Acland 99.

Norton edited multiple “Books of Beauty” and aristocratic annuals in the ‘30s and even into the ‘40s, in addition to contributing numerous short stories to other periodicals. These annual publications were expensive, gift-book style forerunners to women’s magazines, and as Harriet Devine Jump argues, “The world of the annual was essentially a woman’s world: women were the primary readers, of course, but they were also contributors and, increasingly.... editors” (3). Jump posits, with regard to Norton, that, “[h]er desirability as an editor probably owed something to her title as well as to her literary fame” (5), suggesting the extent to which these publications played on aristocratic tropes. Norton assumed the editorship of *La Belle Assemblée and Court Magazine* from 1832-1837, *The English Annual* in 1834, and *Fisher’s Drawing-room Scrap-book*, a late hold-over, from 1846-1849. As editor, Norton had to solicit work from acquaintances as well as fill space with her own literary output.⁵² Norton self-deprecatingly wrote of these roles in *English Laws for Women*:

Luckily for me, light serial literature was the express fashion of the day. Nor did the greatest authors we had disdain to contribute their share to the ephemeral ‘Annuals’ and Periodicals, which formed the staple commodity of the booksellers at that time. I rejoiced then, at finding—woman though I was—a career in which I could earn that which my husband’s profession had never brought him. (13)

Here, again, Norton disavows her role as a “professional,” instead insisting on her “career” in opposition to her husband’s satirically-invoked “profession.” However, such an emphasis on her lucrative “career” belies this feminine retreat from professional literary legitimacy to “ephemeral...Periodicals” and “light serial literature.”

⁵² In her biography of Norton, Jane Perkins Grey insists that Norton was the sole contributor to the *Fisher’s Scrap-book*, which she “edited” in the ‘40s.

By the 1850s and '60s, Norton also became a fairly successful novelist. In 1835, her *The Wife and Woman's Reward*, a novella and silver-fork novel joined in three volumes, was a commercial failure.⁵³ In 1851, she published *Stuart of Dunleath*, a melodramatic novel I discuss in more detail in the final section of this chapter. 1866's *Lost and Saved* is the most traditionally sensational of Norton's works, despite the lack of punishment for its central sensation heroine signaled by the title ("Saved" rather than "Damned").⁵⁴ In 1868, she published her final novel, *Old Sir Douglas*, which I also discuss at the end of this chapter as a by turns sensational and anti-sensational novel.⁵⁵ Strikingly, for a woman who is now known for her political pamphlets and was originally lauded for her skills as a "poetess," after her death reviewers insisted that it was "as a novelist she was chiefly known" (*Frasers*, April 1878, qtd. Fluhr 54, footnote 8). In other words, it remains impossible to define the dominant generic narrative in Norton's literary career. Norton herself, however, insisted on the primacy of her political writing, stating in a private letter, "I hold Poetry to be as infinitely below prose, as *reason* is below *fancy*. I also hold prose to be a much rarer gift of good writing among women. And I think (as the climax of obstinacy) that prose *on a real subject* must be of higher

⁵³ "The novel *Woman's Reward* was a commercial failure that kept Norton away from novel writing for the next fifteen years..." (Chase 31).

⁵⁴ Contemporary critics certainly read the novel as sensational. In her biography of Norton, Alice Acland describes a review in the *Illustrated London News* as having decried the fact that, "there are so many scenes which border on the improper that it is fortunate that 'she who has had the boldness to describe them in all their naked deformity is one so elevated both by social position and literary reputation as the Hon. Mrs. Norton'" (147)

⁵⁵ Again, though, some have read it as straightforwardly sensational. Jane Perkins Grey critiques it as being "full of inconsistent and often sensational incident" (283).

value than prose for a work of imagination. Infinitely rather would I have written my two pamphlets on the Infant Custody Bill” (qtd. Craig 182).⁵⁶

In the aftermath of *Norton v. Melbourne*, Caroline Norton learned of the powerful “legal fictions” that made her, as a married woman, “nonexistent under the law,” with no recourse against her husband’s withholding their three young sons from her, or against his desire to retain her literary copyrights.⁵⁷ As a married woman, she legally owned no property—everything belonged to her husband, even her children. In her 1850s political pamphlets, she emphasizes her disenfranchisement as a married woman, though this disenfranchised position was equally predicated on her other role, one she would not explicitly claim: professional author. As a professional author *and* married woman, Norton was earning money, but she had no legal authority as owner of that income. In *A Letter to the Queen*, Norton explicitly addresses Victoria as, “the one woman in England who *cannot* suffer wrong; and whose royal assent will be formally necessary to any Marriage Reform Bill” (154). She constructs Victoria as a potential legal reformer, in spite of the fact that the monarch’s acknowledgment of laws is largely ceremonial and “necessary” only “formally.” Norton invokes her legal alienation from her “copyright” repeatedly, creating a theory of textual production that is strikingly embodied: “(amazing to say), the copyrights of my work are *his*, by law: my very soul and brains are not my own!” (83). She concludes provocatively, before invoking the hoped-for “royal assent:”

⁵⁶ Randall Craig excerpts an earlier letter than reveals similar prioritization: “In 1844, upon learning that R. H. Horne’s *the Spirit of the Age* would include commentary on her work, Norton wrote to the editor asking ‘if there is to be any criticism of my writings, to include, not only the trifles published *with* my name, but more serious efforts, published *without it*: and more especially two Pamphlets on the Infant Custody Bill” (181).

⁵⁷ Norton uses the phrase “nonexistent under the law” repeatedly in 1854’s *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century* and 1855’s *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth’s Marriage & Divorce Bill*.

“Let [Norton] claim the copyright of THIS” (154), confrontationally acknowledging even the very “letter” she is writing to be alienated literary property.

Both this pamphlet and the previous year’s *English Laws for Women* brought increased public attention to the marriage reform debates, as many critics have argued, in turn affecting the passage of the Marital Causes Act in 1857, though not the expanded Married Women’s Property Act. Randall Craig asserts that, “Lord Lyndhurst quoted Norton extensively during the debate of the measure...” (201), and Mary Poovey has argued that Norton’s *Letter to the Queen* “helped Barbara Bodichon convince the Law Amendment Society to take up the issue of married women’s property” (70). However, Norton was implicitly privileging literary property along with married women’s property. Clare Pettitt argues that, “[m]ore than the issue of married women’s property, the campaign and the 1856 petition served to highlight the issue of *intellectual* property for women” (205), and it certainly seems true that for Norton, one was predicated on the other. I would argue that by recalling aspects of her literary career and the idea of “copyright” explicitly, Norton argues for professional security for female authors even as she ostensibly disavows her own identity as a professional author. As a female writer who became critically aware of the “legal fictionality” and instability of names through her own encounters with the Victorian legal system, Norton was presumably also aware of the way copyright, predicated as it was on authorial names, was a similarly unstable legal construct.⁵⁸ In other words, her experience as a female celebrity with the instability of “proper” names and the proliferating public narratives they encode crucially informed the way she deployed tropes of the authorial profession. These experiences also

⁵⁸ I discuss Norton’s awareness of the instability of the concept of copyright for both male and female authors more fully in chapter four.

fundamentally influenced the way she marketed herself simultaneously within and in opposition to such professional narratives. In the next section, I briefly consider two of these early public narratives by examining the way Norton's name and authorial persona were constructed through and overwritten by the powerful male, aristocratic names of "Sheridan" and "Byron."

II. Early Literary Celebrity: Aristocratic Constructions

In the first two decades of her literary career, and long before scandal clouded her public reception, Norton most frequently found her name coupled with two of the most famous literary figures to come before her: Richard Brinsley Sheridan and Lord Byron. Sheridan was her famous grandfather and the reason for her existence at the edge of British aristocracy, the ostensible originator of her literary talent. Byron, according to some early critics who perhaps misread Norton's poetry, was the direct Romantic literary ancestor to her own poetic style. However, these alternative male narratives were not initially invoked to describe Norton's textual output. In fact, they were most frequently deployed in complete disregard to the content of either their work or Norton's work. Instead, "Sheridan" and "Byron" were offered up, I would argue, as upper-class bywords that could contain the problematic potential of "Mrs. Norton" as a famous female author.⁵⁹ These celebrity names came pre-inflected in public and critical discourse with

⁵⁹ "The Hon. Mrs. Caroline Norton" was not strictly speaking aristocratic, although some of George Norton's close relatives, including his uncle and brother, Lord Grantley, *were* members of the aristocracy. The Nortons straddled the boundary between the upper-middle-class and the aristocracy. Her honorific title was even more compromised because, as the Tory paper *John Bull* pointed out soon after her marriage, such a title was traditionally the right only of the son of a peer and his spouse, rather than the brother of a peer (Norton's brother inherited the title from his uncle, rather than their father) (cited

an array of competing narratives. In the public journals and reviews of the period, the name of Sheridan could be invoked as a byword for an entire narrative of literary genius and political savvy, while Byron's name stood as a narrative of self-aggrandizing celebrity and Romantic sentiment. Both were class-inflected, Sheridan as a self-made MP and shabby-genteel quasi-aristocrat, and Byron as unequivocally, though at times awkwardly, aristocratic; and both were male.

In the process of invoking the nominative bywords of Sheridan and Byron in the 1830s and early '40s, the critical discourse of the period effaced Norton's status as a female literary celebrity and professional author, repeatedly linking her to male paradigms of celebrity. Overtly, such reviews customarily stressed Norton's femininity through non-literary, non-professional tropes, such as her domesticity and her physical beauty. The invocation of "Sheridan" also attempted to align Norton with family, a potentially feminizing move, but the Sheridan family name's status as a literary brand cut against any pairing of the familial with the domestic. Ironically, I would argue, these critical acts of re-naming—Norton as Byron, Norton as Sheridan—rewrite "the Honourable Mrs. Norton" as aristocratic men. These reconstructions rhetorically destabilize her name and the public narratives circulating around it even as they attempt to circumscribe, and thereby ideologically authorize, her public role. In the process, they establish a strong link between married women and aristocratic men that Norton

Grey 25). However, the fact that "the Hon. Mrs. Norton" became accepted as Caroline Norton's usual authorial name perhaps suggests that these nominative niceties didn't matter. Alternatively, it suggests that Caroline Norton successfully marketed herself, and thus "passed," as liminally aristocratic, despite the fact that her grandfather and husband were compromised members of the upper-middle-class.

identifies and exploits later in her career, both through her own self-marketing and more overtly in her increasingly politicized writings.

Throughout the 1830s, due in part to the death of Walter Scott and the death or semi-retirement of many of the most prominent Romantic poets, literary journals began to reappraise and catalog new representatives of literary talent.⁶⁰ *Fraser's* magazine developed a running series of over eighty such "Living Literary Characters" over the course of the decade, though other magazines ran similar (if less numerous) columns.⁶¹ Caroline Norton was the first woman included in such collections, in both *The New Monthly* magazine in January 1831 and in *Fraser's* shortly afterwards in March. In *The New Monthly*, Norton is depicted as an ethereal beauty, and her ties to her grandfather are stressed repeatedly. *Fraser's* inclusion of Norton can be read as a response to *The New Monthly*, as it cites and condemns the more liberal journal's portrayal of the married "poetess," choosing to depict her in a fully domestic scene, albeit still overseen (in this, case, literally by a portrait) by her grandfather. In both "characterizations," Norton's ancestry is privileged along with her beauty and feminine propriety.

Richard Brinsley Sheridan was an immensely famous playwright of comedies of manners such as *The Rivals* and *The School for Scandal* who parlayed his literary talent, and consequent wealth, into an elected seat as a Whig MP in the House of Commons,

⁶⁰ See James Eli Adams's *Dandies and Desert Saints*, ch. 1, and Judith Fisher's "'In the Present Famine of Anything Substantial': 'Fraser's' 'Portraits' and the Construction of Literary Celebrity."

⁶¹ Linda Peterson writes that *Fraser's* "Gallery" is "usually considered the first important attempt to represent the professional author" (14). She continues, "These portraits initiate the cult of the author's home, underscore the importance of public personae, even at this early stage of professionalism, and foreshadow the celebrity journalism that will dominate the fin-de-siecle literary field, allowing readers to peep into the private lives of authors" (26).

thereby forging a strong link between the Sheridan family and the more radical wing of the Whig party that would last multiple generations. In the process, he became “The Right Honourable Richard Sheridan” and skirted the margins of the aristocracy, though his radical politics and outspoken nature somewhat scandalized and alienated him from upper-class society, much as his grand-daughter would find herself alienated decades later. And while he died in poverty, his name remained a byword in British literary *and* political discourse long after his 1816 death, as evidenced by the early treatment of his granddaughter’s published work. The *New Monthly* evokes historical scope in the introduction to its “Living Literary Characters” series on “Mrs. Norton:”

Our readers are aware that Mrs. Norton is another link in that long chain of hereditary talent which has now extended itself through nearly a whole century. She is a Sheridan by descent, the daughter of Thomas, the grand-daughter of Richard Brinsley Sheridan, and one, consequently, of the rich cluster of genius and talent which is wreathed round the name she inherits. The intellectual honors of her lineage will certainly not degenerate in her hands; while there is hope she may transmit them to those by whom they will be displayed as proudly for the delight and admiration of a succeeding generation. (180)

This digression situates Norton in an ancestral tradition wholly divorced from the family and name she married into (Norton), which is perhaps why the responding characterization in *Fraser’s* privileges her relationship to her husband so much, in compensation.⁶² In other words, this article foregrounds Norton’s participation in a patrilineal line of inheritance, firmly anchored to her father and grandfather through her

⁶² *Fraser’s* version insists on the impropriety of the earlier “Character,” mentioning “the Honourable Mr. Norton” as equally important to the young author and insisting, “We display her as the modest matron making tea in the morning for the comfort and convenience of her husband. He does not appear, because we had no notion of wasting a lithograph upon any male creature this month” (222). This absent presence thus hovers over the “lithograph” that appears on the facing page, even as the strictly “female” (and properly feminine) beauty on display there is playfully underscored.

originally christened patronym.⁶³ The forward-looking reference to “transmit[ting]” her literary gifts does re-situate her in a feminized discourse of procreation and inheritance, since such “hope” never appears in discussions of male literary celebrity, but it does not fully remove her from this patrilineal, male genealogy.

In a sense, this article rewrites Norton’s name as Sheridan even while referring to her exclusively by her properly titled married name “Mrs.Norton.”⁶⁴ Notably, the literary, biographical, and political narratives ostensibly encoded in the name “Sheridan” are never explicitly detailed, aside from its historical scope (which is hyperbolically stretched to include “nearly a whole century”). This famous name becomes linguistic shorthand for not only the personality or “character” of the person identified by it, but for an entire backlog of public (and semi-private) discourse surrounding that individual’s life, including his published work. In other words, names, particularly celebrity names, are condensed narratives. Norton’s pre-marital surname, together with her own history of publication, ineluctably brand her along certain narrative lines. As the third-generation member of this “Sheridan” narrative, Norton rewrites this familial brand as a literary dynasty. In this way, she continues the “Sheridan” brand, the narrative of which is

⁶³ This linking of Thomas Sheridan and his father failed to acknowledge the fact that Thomas never published successfully, though he was still largely considered talented in a similar vein as his father. His public persona remained that of a talented youth, despite his failures. The tension between the all-too-stark economic reality of his final years (he died in 1816, in the same year as his father) and the fictionalized public narrative of his literary potential finds a parallel in the tension in his daughter’s literary reputation and her socio-political narratives of scandal that also rose up around her, though Caroline Norton notably rose above these narratives to achieve economic success and literary fame.

⁶⁴ Norton was traditionally linked with her grandfather, though. Thomas Moore was thought to have said that her physical appearance was ‘strikingly like old Brinsley’ (qtd. Grey 16). Also, Jane Perkins Grey, in her biography of Norton, emphasizes the family name in describing Norton’s politics: “Caroline in taking the Norton name, remained openly a Sheridan” (18).

already familiar to contemporary consumers of pre-Victorian literature and journals, even as she departs from the literary genre that was her grandfather's forte—drama—into poetry. At the same time, Norton is cast in a male “narrative,” previously defined by her father and grandfather, in a rhetorical move that overwrites and thus, I would argue, destabilizes her properly feminine name and public persona.

The New Monthly's entry on Norton also privileges names as inherited commodities in addition to self-made brands. However, the convoluted, almost tautological structure of the claim that “she is...one...of the rich cluster of genius and talent which is wreathed round the name she inherits” (i.e., she is a person contributing to the signification and significance of her own name) suggests some confusion around this privileging. This confusion is hardly surprising, I would argue, since as both narratives and disembodied commodities, names fundamentally straddle ontological and discursive categories. This entry implicitly suggests that married women like “Mrs. Norton” inhabit multiple narratives and subject positions and are by no means divorced from their family names through the ceremony of marriage.

Fraser's “Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters” similarly privileges Norton's heritage, insisting that “she is a sprig of nobility—and she is the granddaughter of that right honourable gentleman whose picture is suspended above her head... We all know that she is Tom Sheridan's daughter—and that she has wooed successfully the muses from her earliest days” (222).⁶⁵ Norton's links to the highest level of society are not only stressed but *over-emphasized* throughout this piece, with the succession of “nobility,” “right honourable,” and “gentleman.” Sheridan may not be an aristocrat, but

⁶⁵ Note that *Fraser's* doesn't mention Norton's grandfather's name explicitly—just her father's.

he is satirically cast as one by this Tory journal. While the depiction of her “woo[ing]” muses seems to cast her in a masculine or queered role to the always-feminized muses, most of the piece goes out of its way to focus on her femininity. Towards this end, and on a class-based level, she seems to be an aristocrat, rather than a professional author, just as she is meant to seem a peaceful, proper mother rather than a harried, ink-stained writer.⁶⁶ By failing to use Richard Sheridan’s name explicitly and instead relying on a series of deferred descriptors and an actual image, the author of this piece (presumably *Fraser’s* well-known editor, William Maginn) relies on the fame of Norton’s grandfather and the seeming fact that his name, though unspoken, will be readily recalled by *Fraser’s* readership. In the context of this piece, then, Richard Sheridan stands in an inverse position to George Norton: the former is “seen” but never named, while the latter is named but emphatically never “seen.” Both are spectrally present in this purported “portrait” of Caroline Norton in ways that call attention to their absence and detract from the woman whose name stands as the title of the article.⁶⁷ Her father Thomas Sheridan is explicitly named, again linking back at one remove to the “gentleman whose picture is

⁶⁶ In *the Spectacle of Intimacy*, Karen Chase and Michael Levenson argue that after the Nortons’ marriage and Caroline’s discovery of George’s dissoluteness, “Under the pressurers of need, her gentility passed quickly into a professionalism” (26). They also argue that “the affront of the Nortons was precisely to invert the spheres,” insofar as George emerged as a throwback dandified, lazy aristocrat while Norton set to work as a diligent middle-class professional (27). Thus, *Fraser’s* was working hard to contradict this transgressive “reality,” though it still, perhaps unintentionally, foregrounded Norton’s literary career.

⁶⁷ Judith Fisher focuses on the portraits themselves, as well as the way *Fraser’s* implicitly theorizes a new, anti-Romantic paradigm of celebrity, in her article “In the Present Famine of Anything Substantial’: ‘Fraser’s’ ‘Portraits’ and the Construction of Literary Celebrity.” Kieran Dolin has compellingly explored Norton’s “Portraits,” as well as numerous other visual images of Caroline Norton, in “The Transfigurations of Caroline Norton.” My work builds on these analyses, particularly Fisher’s, but focuses on names and nominative narratives rather than visual representations.

suspended above her head” (saying his name and yet not saying it), yet his status is undercut by the familiar use of his nickname “Tom” (in opposition to *The New Monthly*, which preserves his unabbreviated first name) and the obvious yet oddly emphatic familiarity at play in the phrase “[w]e all know.” For the Tory magazine, “Tom” is the un-titled, un-aristocratic peer, Richard Sheridan, although a Whig, is the posthumously respected patriarch, while “the Honourable Mr. Norton” is the properly-titled member of the upper class.⁶⁸ “The Honourable Mrs. Norton,” on the other hand, is essentially overwritten by her patrilineal inheritance, while her potential power as a female author is politically and professionally contained and inoculated through her Tory marriage.

The early write-up in *The New Monthly* indirectly gestures toward another, notably female and matrilineal, alternative narrative of nominal inheritance for Norton. Norton was named after her mother, Caroline Henrietta (Callander) Sheridan, who, according to this early piece, attempted to thwart the young Norton in her literary endeavors as a child.⁶⁹ This narrative, given without authentication from Norton herself, suggests a stereotypical antagonism between mother and daughter that finds an analogue in the public narratives of the relationship between Queen Victoria and her mother, to invoke one prominent example. According to this narrative, Norton’s male relatives, particularly her paternal grandfather and father, legitimate her own career and textual output, while her mother attempted to thwart such creativity at its very inception.

⁶⁸ Frankly, the respect granted to Richard Sheridan is a bit of a fiction: the emphasis on how he is “rubicund in the nasal feature” is a not particularly subtle critique of his carousing lifestyle.

⁶⁹ It asserts, “[h]er mother rather discouraged than incited her juvenile attempts at composition, as being a too trifling occupation of her time, and resolutely denied her all access to her own stores of pen, ink and paper” (181).

However, outside of this simple narrative in this magazine, the “real” narrative becomes complicated by Caroline Henrietta Sheridan’s own work. In 1830, just prior to the publication of this “portrait,” Caroline Sheridan published *Carwell*, a novel about criminals and forgery, which was followed by two more novels in the next few years.⁷⁰ The fact that Norton’s mother—that other Caroline—was already a semi-successful novelist by 1831 offers up an alternative narrative of inheritance unfolding in tandem with the more famous Sheridan one. If Norton inherited her talent with her name from her published grandfather, she could equally be said to have inherited both from her mother as well (and, notably, her mother’s name was one she could keep, even after marriage). This counter-narrative, one apparently never deployed during Norton’s lifetime, is equally compelling and powerful. The fact that it was adamantly effaced suggests how much Norton’s role as a celebrity author and public figure had to be absorbed into, and thereby contained through, male, patrilineal narratives of celebrity.

Potential discomfort with this matrilineal paradigm of inheritance reveals itself further in accounts of Norton’s intellectual curiosity. The authors of *The New Monthly* “portrait” offer up yet another alternative narrative of intellectual inheritance: “In all her earlier efforts Mrs. Norton was encouraged and flattered by the partiality of her uncle, Mr. Charles Brinsley Sheridan; and she has frequently said she imbibed the most ardent notion of future fame from watching him while he translated a collection of Romaic

⁷⁰ Jane Perkins Grey somewhat critically summarizes Caroline Sheridan’s output at the beginning of her Norton biography: “She published three or four short stories of fashionable life (all now out of print), all rather stiff with the style of the late eighteenth century, but none without a certain charm and wit which make them fairly readable today. ‘Carwell’, her most ambitious effort, is in quite another vein, and shows real imagination in peopling the dark courts and side-alleys of the author’s own familiar Westminster with secret lives and hazards; and a real knowledge and sympathy with the sufferings and conditions of the poor” (3).

songs...” (183). By indirectly citing Norton’s own “frequent” claims, the article creates a sense of authenticity that simultaneously outs Norton’s own self-described desire for “fame,” hardly a socially normative, proper feminine desire. The fact that she inherits this “notion of future fame” patrilineally, from her father’s brother, seems to inoculate any gender-destabilizing potential inherent in a woman asserting a desire for public fame. At the same time, though, Norton still remains unequivocally a woman asserting this “notion,” suggesting how these tropes that re-write Norton through her male Sheridan ancestors fail, and in failing cast Norton’s celebrity as destabilizing, despite assertions to the contrary.⁷¹ In a sense, Caroline’s link to her uncle is yet another alternative narrative of literary inheritance, one publicly asserted, whereas her links to her mother and her mother’s literary skill are disavowed by the press of the time.⁷² The comparatively silent and silenced Caroline Sheridan was overwritten by her more famous last name—and the patriarchal narrative of inheritance that goes along with it—much as her daughter Caroline Norton’s personal narrative and claim to literary celebrity were, for an extended period of time, overwritten by the public scandal and stigma of *Norton v. Melbourne*. These familial Sheridan narratives, which are eventually overwritten by Norton’s scandalous publicity, find a generic analogue in terms of Norton’s status as a poet, although this analogue is predicated on a mis-reading of Norton’s own early quasi-Romantic poetry.

⁷¹In an un-cited private letter from Norton quoted in Grey’s biography, she is much more explicit about her own personal desire for fame, describing her “wish for literary fame so eager that I sometimes look back and wonder if I was punished for it by unenviable and additional notoriety” (qtd. 24).

⁷²It seems interesting to note, biographically, that after the disastrous *Norton v. Melbourne*, Caroline Norton lived with her uncle until his death, after which she lived close to her mother for many years.

Aside from the name Sheridan, the other central name coupled with Norton in her early days of literary work was “Byron,” that archetypal literary brand. In “Building Brand Byron,” Nicholas Mason argues that the Romantic poet was one of the earliest literary figures to embrace self-marketing in a variety of cultural spheres and the economic arena of advertising.⁷³ Tom Mole similarly contends that Byron was one of the first true celebrities of the modern era.⁷⁴ However, he locates Byron’s success in his class position as well as this celebrity status: “Lord Byron, as both an aristocrat and a celebrity, eased the transition to a new form of personal distinction” (14). In other words, by the 1830s Byron’s name was already a firmly established “brand” with a class-based and sexually scandalous narrative to accompany it. Once again, Norton’s nascent celebrity as an author is filtered through comparisons to a male analogue, in this instance one that is both properly aristocratic and scandalously sexual. Her identity as a professional, celebrity *female* author is diminished through these comparisons, even as her role as a famous center of potential scandal is foregrounded.

When the “literary “portraits” of Norton in *The New Monthly* and *Fraser’s* invoke this link with “Byron,” they do so indirectly or through extended, belabored analogy. Appearing long before the scandalous *Norton v. Melbourne* trial took place in 1836, these links position “Byron” as signifying a paradigm of celebrity against which Norton’s own fame and success can be measured. *The New Monthly* compares Norton more directly to

⁷³ Mason argues, “The real story of *Childe Harold I and II* is not so much one of a text speaking to its age as one of a marketing-savvy publisher and a poet with a flair for self-promotion converging at an ideal moment in literary and advertising history” (425).

⁷⁴ In the introduction to *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity*, he asserts that “modern celebrity culture began in the Romantic period and that Lord Byron should be understood as one of its earliest examples and most astute critics” (xi).

Byron, invoking a parallel between her alleged struggles to publish with those of her more famous predecessor, referring to his complaints in private letters:

It is not merely the friendless and unknown scholar, the threadbare child of fancy, who is doomed to this chilling ordeal; not merely the *poor* author, of whom it may be assumed that his poverty, and not his capability, is the exciting cause. Look at the disclosures made in the letters of Lord Byron, with regard to some of *his* works—and, we may add (as an illustration of our argument,) look at the individual of whom we are now speaking. Her rank, her station in society, not even the *prestige* of her name, were sufficient... (182)

This comparison to “Lord Byron” privileges the upper-class backgrounds of both authors as well as their celebrity status—Byron through his own efforts and Norton through the inherited, duly stressed “*prestige* of her name.” Notably, though, the article never explicitly couples their names, using such linguistic convolutions as “the individual of whom we are now speaking” to avoid such nominative coupling. However, this comparison does suggest that Norton and Byron are operating on a similar class- and fame-based level, in terms of marketing themselves to publishers.

This formulation is indirectly challenged in *Fraser's*, which, as Judith Fisher contends, was a Tory magazine that was rabidly anti-Byron and the gender-destabilizing, dandified literary realm they felt he represented. As Fisher notes, “*Fraser's* did not use the term celebrity... [their] idea of celebrity had its roots in Byronmania, which established this particular kind of fame as embodied in the person, not the product” (99). She goes on to argue that through collections such as the “Gallery of Illustrious Literary Characters,” the magazine began to position itself as having “the authority to confer celebrity,” constructed as a type of “non-Byronic, proto-Victorian celebritydom,” even if it wasn't termed as such (99, 98). In other words, their very concept of celebrity and the selection of individuals to include in their collection of “literary characters” were

predicated on, and indeed against, the existence of the “Byron” narrative. His name is thus a specter, according to Fisher’s argument, that lurks in the background of these eighty-plus articles, among which Norton was notably the first woman. Thus, implicitly, *Fraser’s* posed Norton and her proper name *against* the Byronic name and image. If, as has been suggested, the *Fraser’s* entry is a response to the portrait in *The New Monthly*, this antithetical positioning of Norton with regard to Byron makes sense. However, I would argue that these contradictory and competing refractions of the “Byron” narrative in descriptions of “Norton,” along with continual references to “Sheridan” narratives, reveal the instability of “Norton” as an independent celebrity signifier. The authors of these “portraits” seemingly had to market her using alternative male brands—brands that fit with her own biographical and authorial narrative but also partially effaced the individual elements of those narratives. In the process, these entries circumscribe the female proto-professional valences of “the Hon. Mrs. Caroline Norton” by over-writing her own celebrity with those of her family and ostensible generic predecessor.

If in 1831 Norton could be invoked indirectly as both professionally analogous to “Lord Byron” and also as an anti-Byronic figure, after *Norton v. Melbourne* comparisons between the pair began to stress the scandalous inflection of “Byron” more overtly. In 1840 she was explicitly branded “the Byron of modern poetesses” in Hartley Coleridge’s “Modern Poetesses.”⁷⁵ With this formulation, Coleridge plays on a variety of competing narratives encoded in Norton’s literary persona, including her prominence, her identification with the critically denigrated and ostensibly overly proper “poetess”

⁷⁵ By 1883, after her death, she was flippantly called “the female Byron,” with the valence of scandalous, self-seeking empty celebrity that the “Byron” narrative implied now fully operational.

tradition, her Romantically-inflected poetry, as well as the scandalous, “Byronic” accusations of sexual impropriety that recategorized her celebrity from fame to infamy. After *Norton v. Melbourne*, despite the exoneration of Melbourne, calling Caroline Norton “the Byron” of *anything* could not help but recall shades of scandal that had been before the public eye, and in every prominent newspaper, less than five years prior. Indeed, recalling Byron in particular would have been especially ironic in terms of Norton’s immediate history, since Caroline Lamb, the wife of Norton’s alleged paramour Lord Melbourne, had been the very public lover of Byron in the early 1810s. Nonetheless, Hartley Coleridge’s article privileges Norton as the first among “modern poetesses,” more than implying that the resonance of naming her a “Byron” has much to do with her poetic skill and Romantic style as well, though by 1840 her poetic style was hardly Byronic. Once again, her name is coupled with that of a man and a male narrative of literary celebrity; and the feminizing “poetesses” implies a diminution and inferiority that shouldn’t be overlooked.^{76 77} However, this act of re-naming indelibly links her with aristocratic masculinity, public notoriety, Romantic poetic tradition, and extreme celebrity in ways that reveal the competing and co-existing narratives that could be encoded in overdetermined, publicly circulating names. Norton herself recognized

⁷⁶ In an article on Norton and textual representation, Yopie Prins inverts this relationship between poetesses and Byron. She argues, with regard to Byron’s paradigm of literary celebrity: “of course a precedent for such identification was already established by the selling of women poets earlier in the century; one might argue, in fact, that the poetic career of Byron is modeled on the circulation of popular poetesses within an increasingly feminised literary marketplace” (65, footnote 2).

⁷⁷ Norton herself, in private correspondence with John Murray, discussed her distaste for Byron and his poetic style. In *The Spectacle of Intimacy*, Karen Chase and Michael Levenson argue that Norton’s 1835 novel *Woman’s Reward* includes, in its despotic and sexually promiscuous central male figure Lionel, a representation of Norton’s husband George as well as a depiction of Byron, fictionally linking her “hatred” of the pair (32).

and repurposed this narrative multiplicity, if not the Byronic register, in the political and fictional prose work that came to define her public persona in the Victorian period proper.

III. Norton's Reconstructions: Marriage, Legal Fictions, and the Aristocracy

While her marriage to George Norton transformed Caroline Sheridan into “the Hon. Mrs. Caroline Norton,” conferring a classed title as well as a title of marriage, her original patronym “Sheridan” remained a powerful trace in her public persona and in the way she was marketed by others, as I have shown. The ever-present trace of her original patronym also granted her a measure of political independence, as she remained a vocal (and, some critics argued, problematically influential) Whig despite her husband’s family’s staunch Tory allegiances. This tenacious trace was arguably effaced only through the sensationalized criminal conversation suit George brought against Lord Melbourne in 1836, *Norton v. Melbourne*, through which Caroline Norton’s name was publicly coupled with, and scandalously overwritten by, yet another aristocratic man, Lord Melbourne. In other words, the scandalous trial that made Caroline Norton infamous was yet another in a series of nominative couplings that overwrote her own identity as a female literary celebrity in her own right. While earlier comparisons of Norton to Sheridan and Byron functioned as attempts made by others to market her, albeit in problematically gendered ways, the public link between her name and Melbourne’s almost made her into a social pariah.⁷⁸ During this period, and even a bit

⁷⁸ Ironically enough, Caroline Norton’s intimacy with Melbourne had originated from her husband’s own urging that she use her family connections *as a Sheridan* to secure him a job at the beginning of the decade, after his brief political career as an MP had failed in

earlier, her name became synonymous with adultery and impropriety throughout aristocratic society and in the pages of every prominent newspaper.⁷⁹ These newspaper accounts provided transcripts of court proceedings in which Caroline Norton could take no part, as a legally non-existent *feme covert* who was by definition absorbed into her husband's identity. Hyperbolic pamphlets with titles such as "*Extraordinary Trial! Norton v. Viscount Melbourne, for Criminal Consort. Damages laid at \$10,000!!!*" were produced to capitalize on public demand for more sensationalistic accounts of Norton's alleged adultery.⁸⁰ While the criminal conversation suit failed, exonerating Melbourne handily in the process, Caroline Norton's name remained inflected with the scandalous narratives that surrounded the trial. Moreover, the failure of the suit ensured that the Nortons could not legally obtain a divorce, and thus she remained coupled with that

1830. The historical narrative claims that Caroline thus wrote to Melbourne as a potential patron, relying on his fondness for her father, with whom he had been friends, and his respect for her grandfather, whose biography he had begun work on in the early 1820s. (The project was completed by Thomas Moore and was published in 1825.) A close friendship began immediately, with Melbourne granting George a sinecure position that he retained many decades after the infamous criminal conversation suit. In a sense, then, the name of Sheridan continued to resonate powerfully in Caroline's life, allowing her to engage in political influence in ways that the arguably more aristocratic name of Norton would never have facilitated.

⁷⁹ In her biography of Norton, Alice Acland claims that, "Throughout the spring of 1835, Caroline and Melbourne suffered from the insinuations of the more scurrilous newspapers. Of these, *The Satirist* paid particular attention to their friendship. From March onwards they became one of the standing dishes in the highly libelous column entitled 'chit chat'" (76). However, this gossip is nothing compared to the notoriety that accompanied her husband's criminal conversation suit a year later. As a high-profile case, the suit garnered "four close-printed pages...amounting to over 41,000 words" in *The Times* (Leckie 32). (Divorce court proceedings were commonly included in the back pages of newspapers—they shifted to become front matter in the 1870s.)

⁸⁰ See Randall Craig for a brief account of this pamphlet and others (88).

original quasi-aristocrat who had so violently re-shaped her identity, “the Hon. Mr. George Norton.”⁸¹

Thus, she remained “the Honourable Mrs. Caroline Norton,” though in the public eye she had become the opposite of “honourable.” At the same time, her current surname became a trace of conjugal marriage that the separated, essentially single Caroline no longer experienced. Her name became a bitterly prominent link to speculative narratives of potential sexual impropriety and, more disturbingly, real narratives of physical violence and ongoing emotional trauma on the part of George Norton. She remained a Norton “in name only,” yet her public persona was encapsulated in that vestigial name “Norton.” As a public figure and published author, Norton already obtained more publicity than was considered “proper” for a lady, and the new narrative strain that her name acquired exponentially increased that impropriety, even as it remained her legally “proper” name. For all intents and purposes, her name emerged from the failed criminal conversation trial as a legal fiction—something decreed by law, in one sense a lie, but in another sense very real and powerful. As time went on, Norton embraced this duality—

⁸¹ In order for a petitioning spouse (almost always the husband) to be granted a complete divorce, termed divorce *a vinculo*, a criminal conversation suit had to result in a ruling for the plaintiff, which would then be followed by a series of legislative steps and culminate in a private Act of Parliament. Such divorces were immensely expensive and therefore only open to the upper strata of aristocratic society. By these laws, men could divorce women by proving adultery, whereas women could only obtain a divorce if they could prove “aggravated adultery,” in which adultery was compounded by bigamy, incest, or the impossible-to-prove “desertion or cruelty.” It is therefore unsurprising that while 276 divorces were granted to men between 1765 and 1857, when the laws changed, only 4 were granted to petitioning women. Caroline Norton did explore the possibility of obtaining a Scottish divorce, which had less stringent rules, but her lawyer husband circumvented her there. As for a divorce in England based on “aggravated adultery” via cruelty, the fact that she had returned to her husband after one such incident of physical abuse represented what the law termed “condonation” of such treatment, which left her irrevocably tied to her abusive husband.

and the dual, impossible position she occupied in Victorian society as a separated, married woman—in order to make a stronger case for the paradoxical, unstable positions of *all* married women.

Having been denied a voice legally and in terms of her initial literary marketing, Norton responded by re-launching her name as a politically active literary brand. The scandal of *Norton v. Melbourne* caused her to develop a much more strategic approach to such self-narrativizing, and thus self-naming, in her later published endeavors. She used the concept of legal fictions, of which she had so forcibly been made aware, to develop and deploy a conceptualization of names that would allow her to navigate, or at least attempt to navigate, the public sphere on her own terms, and to her own ends. Under the law, as she learned, her husband retained full property rights to both her income as a professional writer as well as to their children until they came “of age” at fourteen. Essentially, then, Norton had absolutely no *legal* recourse to regain custody of her children or, later in her career, to contest her husband’s threatened claims to assert his ownership of her literary copyrights and the income that went along with them. She turned to politics and publishing, particularly political pamphlets and politically-inflected novels, in order to effect fundamental change in the legal status of married women. In the late 1830s, just after her husband’s failed trial, she became a fervent activist for the Infant Custody Act, so much so that some members of the press sneeringly deemed it “Mrs. Norton’s Bill” (Prins 62). The bill was passed in 1839, granting limited custody and visitation rights to separated married women who had not been found guilty of adultery, and some credit has customarily been given to Norton for this success. In the mid-1850s, the Matrimonial Causes Act, a divorce reform bill, became another cause she

championed, and once again some of its (however mitigated) success has been attributed to Norton's efforts, as I discussed earlier. I argue that through the four major political pamphlets she wrote concerning these acts—the anonymous *Separation of Mother and Child by the Laws of Custody of Infants Considered* (1837), the pseudonymous *Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill* (1839), and *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century* (1854) and *A Letter to the Queen on Lord Chancellor Cranworth's Marriage & Divorce Bill* (1855), both published under her own name—Caroline Norton identified and made use of names as legal fictions, drawing from her own circumstances. In doing so, she deconstructed the seemingly stable legal status of married women as well as aristocratic men.⁸²

By forging this link between married women and aristocratic men, Norton was able to acknowledge her own scandal-ridden personal history, which had arguably become an inescapable part of the narrative of “Caroline Norton” as well as an inescapable motivation for her ongoing career, while also moving past this history to effect real political and legal reform. Her personal circumstances and traumatic public history became a stepping-off point for broader social change, and Norton herself acknowledged and strategically used these personal narratives, without diminishing their power, to construct a new “Norton” brand, of which she was more fully in control. The

⁸² In Leslie Bruce's dissertation *Outlaw Mothers: Marital Conflict, Family Law, and Women's Novels in Victorian England*, she directs attention to Norton's use of the term “legal fiction” and provides a long list of alternative definitions for the phrase, as used throughout the last two centuries. She compellingly argues that Norton “de-naturalizes” these legal fictions through her use of maternal characters and tropes, but I am arguing that Norton starts from a position in which such “fictions” are un-natural and proceeds to de-naturalize the very foundation of personal social identity—names—as analogous to such strange legal fictions.

catalyzing force of this personal narrative remained powerfully embedded in many, if not most, of Norton's later published works.

Blackstone's commentaries, that compendium of legal wisdom used throughout the nineteenth century in Britain, defines a legal fiction as "the assumption or supposition that something which is or may be false is true, or that a state of facts exists which has never really taken place" (qtd. Craig 191). Norton employs this concept repeatedly in her political pamphlets, though her two pamphlets from the late 1830s build on the idea more covertly, while her 1850s pair of pamphlets are considerably more explicit. In 1854's *English Laws for Women in the Nineteenth Century*, she rails against the "legal fiction which assumes that a married couple are ONE" (84); and in her publicly printed *A Letter to the Queen* in 1855 she expands on this definition, insisting on "the legal fiction that married women are 'non-existent,' and man and wife are still 'one'" (29).⁸³ These pamphlets were published under her own name and thoroughly detail her own personal narratives and traumas as a married woman in England, in the process developing class and gender-based arguments for the immediate necessity of divorce reform. In these pamphlets, Norton highlights the "legal fictions," as she terms them, of both the legal nonexistence of women as well as the quasi-religious claim that a husband and wife are "one" and thus women are "covered" by their husband's legal existence. As I discussed in the previous chapter with regard to the marriage of Victoria and Albert, the force of the legal principle of coverture was powerful in Victorian society, particularly in the upper classes, where the dispensation of property was particularly important.

⁸³ *English Laws* uses the term "legal fiction" once, while *A Letter to the Queen* uses it three times.

While Norton invokes the notion of “legal fictions” explicitly in defense of divorce reform in the 1850s, immediately after *Norton v. Melbourne* in the late 1830s, she was more circumspect about pointing out the wholesale instability of women’s legal status. In the pseudonymously published *A Plain Letter to the Lord Chancellor on the Infant Custody Bill* in 1839, “Pearce Stevenson, Esq.” relegates the one mention of “legal fiction” which occurs in the body of the pamphlet to a lengthy footnote:

In the pretended Review, allusion is made to an action brought against this gentleman by one of his wife’s creditors, and the speech of his counsel is quoted, asserting that it was the *lady’s* fault this action was brought; and that the object was “to ruin Mr. N. and drive him out of the country.” The lady could make no answer, for (as in a more important case) she was no party to the cause; and as it would appear by recent explanations, that [O]ne of the privileges of the legal profession is to be able *professionally* to assert that which is untrue with impunity, the boldness and ingenuity with which the clever advocate made the aggrieved appear to be the aggrieved, is probably deserving of *professional praise*. But the simple *fact*, (to which the “Reviewer” preferred the legal *fiction*,) is, as I have already shewn, that Mr. Norton having refused to submit to any opinion as to what *ought to be* his conduct to his wife; and having preferred threats and advertisements to the usual and decent course adopted by persons in his rank of life, left no other course open to those who had given the lady credit, than to attempt to recover from *him* the debts he did not choose to enable *her* to pay. (footnote, p. 85)

Here, “Stevenson” refers to a “Review” that appeared in the *British and Foreign Review*, which attacked Norton’s role in publicizing the Infant Custody Bill, falsely attributing another pamphlet to her in addition to the anonymous *Separation of Mother and Child* of 1837. This “Review” also insinuated a sexual relationship between Norton and the main MP defending the Bill, Serjeant-at-Law Thomas Talfourd.⁸⁴ I will revisit the significance

⁸⁴ In her biography of Norton, Jane Perkins Grey describes this “Review” as: “personal attack upon both Serjeant Talfourd and Mrs. Norton, coupling their names together in offensive innuendo, accusing Mr. Talfourd of being the tool of a dangerous woman, who, besides being an undutiful and rebellious wife, was also the author of several violent pamphlets on the equality of the sexes” (148). The *British and Foreign Review*

of these accusations shortly, but I want to stress the significance of Norton-as-Stevenson's use of "legal fiction" here. Responding to this review serves as "Stevenson"'s excuse to interject Norton's personal narrative, along with her name, into this supposedly independent pamphlet. In this footnote, though, "he" explicitly contrasts "*fact*," emphatically italicized, to "legal *fiction*," which is here defined as the "*professional*...asser[tion of] that which is untrue." In her dissertation, Leslie Bruce notes Norton's expansion of the term "legal fiction" to discuss such hypothetical narratives recounted in a courtroom, and this formulation certainly does expand it beyond Blackstone's intended definition. However, this expansion is also a conservative move on "Stevenson"'s part, since it reduces "legal fictions" to literal lies (that can nonetheless damage reputations) and contrasts them with easily-known "facts," such as those given about the events surrounding the Nortons' economic disputes. This falls in line with the more conservative aim of the two 1830s' pamphlets, which rely on a common-sense appeal to "naturalness" and the idea that women are better nurturers of children than men are, both emotionally and physically, and are thus better suited to retain custody of "infants." "Stevenson" still links this ideologically conservative argument with tropes of names and fiction, though, arguing that, "the custody of the father must, from the nature of the circumstances, be purely nominal" and later mentioning the fact that, "this matter of nominal and fictitious custody, on the part of the father, is elsewhere alluded to in my letter" (8; 45). Norton may not be attempting to reform Victorian gender ideologies wholesale, but she is already emphasizing and exploiting the empty, and therefore precarious, socio-legal position of fathers in such a gendered society.

maintained, perhaps only somewhat disingenuously, that, "It is not we, but Mrs. Norton, who has forced her case upon the public'" (qtd. Chase 42).

Norton's later two pamphlets from the 1850s, while insisting on the fundamental inequality of the sexes and trafficking in what Mary Poovey categorizes as the ideologically conservative genre of melodrama, implicitly call for a broader reappraisal of married women's status under the law, at least partially belying her insistence on the inherent superiority of men over women (Poovey 83). Her explicit discussion of fundamental "legal fictions," in the proper, Blackstonian sense of the term, cannot help but upset the entrenched ideology surrounding married women in the period, just as her explicitly and "properly" signed political pamphlets upset the gendered ideology of separate spheres that would seemingly prohibit proper women from commenting on public affairs.⁸⁵ Particularly with her *Letter to the Queen*, which is signed with her name, Norton implicitly draws a parallel between married women's legal status, which is "nonexistent" and thus a *fiction*, and her ever-present name, which is just as fictionally constructed.⁸⁶ By analogy, if the idea that "man and wife are *one*" is a legal fiction, then the textual signifier of this "one-ness"—the married name—is as much, if not more, of a fiction in its enduring textuality (*Letter to the Queen* 29). At the same time, a legal fiction is a special kind of fiction, one that blurs the line between Blackstone's notions of "false[hood]" and "truth" in ways that trouble the basic ontological distinction between the two categories. They are fictions that resonate and affect individuals in the real

⁸⁵ In a way, the doctrine of separate spheres is a crucial foundational element in the legal fictions that Norton crusaded against. It is therefore quite a powerful "nominal fiction." It has become a critical commonplace that the gendering of public and private spheres (and the separating of the two) is fictitious and unworkable in real Victorian lives, but the fiction generated influential narratives that had real effects on individual reputations and lives.

⁸⁶ Or, as Yopie Prins aptly writes, "Norton's appeal to the Queen therefore concerns the legal status of the signature: while this letter is written in the first person and signed in her own name...Norton demonstrates that she can never 'own' her signature" (63).

world, just as they underscore the fact that the boundary between reality and discourse can rapidly blur. In a way, then, they are *nominal* fictions—fictions in name only.

Paratextually, Norton's four major political pamphlets reveal the evolution of her attempts to successfully navigate the literary marketplace with a destabilized, scandalous "brand" and a newfound awareness of the fictionality of names, as she moves from tentative anonymity through strategic masculine pseudonymity and finally to an equally strategic public use of her proper name. With her married name a troubling legal fiction, she took control of such powerful "nominal fictions" both by temporarily re-naming her public persona and by becoming active in the political arena against such legal fictions. Norton's first pamphlet, *The Separation of Mother and Child by the Law of "Custody of Infants," Considered* was privately printed in 1838 anonymously, though some correctly identified its author. Norton's new friendship with Serjeant Talfourd, who was backing the reform legislation, was certainly public knowledge, but the newly notorious author wanted to distance herself from public commentary on the Infant Custody Act, savvily anticipating the resistance that her very name would engender in an already hostile reading public.⁸⁷ At the same time, the popularity of the pamphlet, in terms of potential sales, simultaneously turned on its ties to its "real" author and her personal narrative, and thus the gamble of anonymous publication played on and anticipated the open secret of her authorship, to an extent. Norton learned, however, that using no name at all was worse than using a proper name, however infamous.

⁸⁷ In a private letter to her publisher John Murray, Norton wrote, "I entreat of you, if such shall be the case [if the pamphlet becomes well-known], to use your influence to prevent my name (which has grown to be only the watchword of insult and cruel abuse) from being any more alluded to" (qtd. Grey 151).

As I mentioned above in my discussion of the lengthy footnote in *A Letter to the Chancellor*, the *British and Foreign Review* capitalized on the narrative potential opened up by Norton's act of anonymous publication to falsely attribute another pamphlet on the Infant Custody Act to her. In other words, the anonymous pamphlet triggered an almost infinite array of possible links between author and text, and the public awareness of Norton's authorship established persuasive precedent in attributing other anonymous works to her name. The attack in the *British and Foreign Review* merely illustrated one of the ways that Norton's attempt to divorce her writing from her name left her with even less control over her authorial "voice" than before. Narratives were already proliferating around her outside of her control—the socio-legal system of England had made sure of that—and her first volley into the public sphere had been co-opted into such narratives. Anonymity, at least for the all-too-public Norton, was the ultimate nominal fiction.

Perhaps, then, it is unsurprising that Norton's second political pamphlet was published pseudonymously, rather than anonymously. The construction of "Pearce Stevenson, Esq." for the 1839 *Letter to the Chancellor* was a bit of an open secret as well, but the strategic move of adopting a male pseudonym was arguably effective.⁸⁸ By deploying a masculine name, which would signify a male body that would write using a male authorial voice, Norton attempted to further distance herself, and her improperly publicized "proper" name, from the public realm of politics. If anonymity caused her public narrative to proliferate wildly, perhaps male pseudonymity would create a

⁸⁸ Jane Perkins Grey cites the letter of an American traveler, Sumner: "[*A Letter to the Chancellor*] purports to be by Pearce Stevenson, Esq., a *nom de guerre*.... The world here does not suspect her, but supposes that the tract is the production of some grave barrister" (qtd. 155). Sumner's generalizations about what "the world" "suspects" are certainly up for debate, but his letter does prove that at least some social insiders were aware of Norton's authorship.

narrative of authority. While it had become somewhat socially acceptable for women to publish certain kinds of fiction and poetry, as evidenced by Norton's early success, nonfictional political commentary was still deemed too "public" and therefore too masculine an enterprise.⁸⁹ Within the pamphlet, Norton adopts a more objective tone that could have been read as "masculine" during the period. "Stevenson" argues that "All legislation is for individual exceptions" (88); and he logically presents and argues fairly hyperbolic claims: "It cannot be doubted, that if it once comes to be clearly understood among women, that the power of protection, which up to the present time they have ignorantly appealed to, does not exist and is refused by the legislature; the temptation to divorce among those who are struggling to bear and forebear in an unhappy home for their children's sake, will be fearfully increased" (89). Discussion of "Mrs. Norton" and her personal narrative are mentioned briefly, as in the footnote cited a few pages above, but only as they relate to the opposition's mischaracterization of the Infant Custody Act. To an extent, "Pearce Stevenson" remains partisan but measured and ostensibly objective throughout his pamphlet, characteristics that would have telegraphed his masculine identity according to the stylistic codes of the period. In a sense, then, the pseudonym is useful and savvy primarily because it is male.

⁸⁹ Ironically, the *Fraser's* portrait that so lauded the young Caroline Norton in 1831 concluded with the seemingly off-topic condemnation-disguised-as-gallantry, "We think that a lady ought to be treated, even by Reviewers, with the utmost deference—except she writes politics, which is an enormity equal to wearing breeches" (p. 222). The parallel between "cross-writing" and cross-dressing is made explicit here, suggesting how some at least would have perceived Norton's forays into political writing as a performance in drag. It is worth considering what Maginn, and others who felt similarly, would have made of a woman "writing politics" under a male *nom de plume*, if merely by choosing the subject she is *already* in drag.

However, it is Norton's almost superfluous inclusion of the honorific tag "Esq." in her male pseudonym that is most striking in relation to her later exploration of class distinctions and the fragile, constructed status of aristocratic men's names in particular. "Esquire" clearly branded the pseudonym as denominating an upper-class, educated gentleman, and while this characterization aided in painting the author as highly respectable, it was certainly not a necessary addition. By making her pseudonym designate a gentleman, Norton not only strategically marketed her political pamphlet, but she also developed a parallel between her spectrally present name as a married woman (a "real" woman with a textually absent "proper" name that had been rendered fictional and linked with narratives outside of her control) and a constructed aristocratic man (a "false" man who was entirely fictional *except* for his textual presence). Here, Norton literally constructs a gentleman out of nothing, or rather out of text, illustrating the potentially fictitious nature of such nominative titles of aristocratic names in the process.

With her two political pamphlets concerning divorce reform in the 1850s coming after the success of the Infant Custody Bill in 1839, Norton was perhaps more secure in her status as a woman writing about and having an effect on politics. Historically she was more removed from the scandalous public narratives that circulated around *Norton v. Melbourne*, although the 1853 trial *Thrupp v. Norton*, between a merchant to whom she owed payment and her husband, who was legally responsible for all of her debts, had brought her name back into the public spotlight in narratives of domestic dysfunction once again rather than just literary celebrity. In any case, Norton published both *English Laws for Women* and *A Letter to the Queen* under her own name and firmly in her own voice, emphasizing her personal history and her own words by quoting both her own

testimony in *Thrupp v. Norton* and her numerous letters to the *Times* throughout the 1850s. Therefore, it is in the voice and persona of a married woman that she explicitly stresses the terrible power of “legal fictions” to wholly define such women’s lives.

Though these works overtly emphasize the disabling power of such legal fictions, they paratextually challenge this idea by embracing Norton’s name as an unstable legal fiction and using it as a powerful marketing tool. Strikingly, while *A Letter to the Queen* was published under “the Hon. Mrs. Norton,” Norton published *English Laws* as “C. Norton,” without honorific or married title, though the content of that pamphlet repeatedly foregrounds its author’s status as a married woman. I would argue that this nominative construction implicitly highlights Norton’s recognition of the constructedness, and thus manipulability, of her proper name, which she poses in contrast to the powerful nominal fiction described in the text itself of her married status, which is still defining her reality.⁹⁰ In this pamphlet, she laments that her name “might have been only favourably known, but...my husband has rendered [it] notorious” (66). Both pamphlets reveal Norton’s increasing preoccupation with names, implying that while she became reconciled to her own name and more comfortable with deploying the narratives encoded within it, she remained preoccupied with the fundamentally puzzling, constructed nature of the name, particularly for the two groups whose interpenetrations largely defined her public persona and even her life: married women and aristocratic men.

⁹⁰ Her decision to publish *A Letter to the Queen* as “the Hon. Mrs. Norton,” instead of “C. Norton,” “Caroline Norton,” or even “the Hon. Mrs. Caroline Norton” also highlights Norton’s nominative manipulation, albeit in a more traditional, and thus less overt, manner.

In *English Laws for Women*, Norton mentions “names” or “nominal” states of being sixty-six times, while in *A Letter to the Queen* the count stands around forty-seven. Even colloquially, “namely” is her most-used transitional term, and it seems clear that she was deeply invested in the importance of names. Her attacks on her husband in these works, however, are not at first glance at all about his name. They are instead about his character, particularly his status as a “man of honour” and his failure to adhere to his “word of honour.”⁹¹ His dishonorable conduct, in this instance, generally refers to his unwillingness to adhere to a contract he had drawn up with his wife guaranteeing her a life income. (Since husband and wife were “one,” legally, a husband could not legally contract with his wife, and thus while George Norton was bound, as his wife and various lawyers insisted, “in honour” to fulfill his side of the contract, he was not bound “in law” [*English Laws* 79].) Caroline Norton incants the phrases “word of honour” and “man of honour” thirteen times in *English Laws for Women*, in addition to a variety of other mentions of “honourable conduct.”⁹² She also explicitly positions this narrative as analogous to but distinct from her fictional works: “I give them, in lieu of such a work, this ‘Story of Real Life,’ taking place among the English aristocracy...” (76). Strikingly, Norton insists on the aristocratic milieu of this “story,” despite the fact that she and her husband were not strictly aristocrats. This casual insistence strengthens my argument that for Norton, the “aristocracy” included the titled upper-class and quasi-aristocratic figures, such as her grandfather “The Right Honourable Richard Sheridan” and her husband “the Honourable George Norton.” However, and as mentioned above, Norton eschews the honorific from her authorial name (“C. Norton”) in this pamphlet, in addition

⁹¹ *English Laws* p. 44, 45, 79, 86, 90, etc.

⁹² Perhaps tellingly, “dishonourable” is only used once (*English Laws* 79).

to her marital status, further severing her link from George Norton and class-signifiers of gentility. She parallels this paratextual move within the pamphlet by referring to her husband as simply “Mr Norton” instead of his full title, “the Honourable Mr. George Norton.”

By continually emphasizing the word “honour” and the tropes of “man of honour” and “word of honour” that were so crucial to Victorian constructions of aristocratic masculinity, Caroline Norton echoes her husband’s “proper” name and deconstructs it, revealing his aristocratic title to be as much a legally-mandated lie, and thus a legal fiction, as her married name had become. He is *not* a “man of honour,” and yet he remains indelibly, officially “Honourable.” The fact that she does not draw a direct parallel between her husband’s official titled name and his dishonourable conduct forces the reader (who, in order to follow the pamphlet, would need to be well-versed in the Nortons’ personal history already) to draw the connection, arguably making her destabilization of aristocratic male titles even more powerful, albeit subtle. In this way, she implicitly transforms her personal history of injuries into a broader diagnosis of Victorian social ills.

Norton saves direct confrontation for her *Letter to the Queen*. In a quotation I invoked much earlier in this chapter, which occurs after a discussion of how she cannot legally claim the copyright to her own literary works, she declares, “Let him [Norton] claim the copyright of THIS” (154). This imperative challenge, coming right before the final salutation of this “letter,” essentially transfers this textual consideration of the plight of married women into the possession of George Norton, the representative (even, according to the narratives Norton puts forward, the villainous archetype) of aristocratic

manhood and the champion of “legal fiction.” What’s more, the exclamation reveals that, by the laws and “legal fictions” currently operating in Victorian England, such problematic considerations are *already* the property of upper-class gentlemen. The fictitious, “nonexistent” status of married women links them inseparably to their spouses and the legislators who continue to reify this status. And names—which overtly couple married women to their husbands and underwrite their disenfranchised legal status by overwriting their pre-marital identities, while also preserving the titled distinctions of the upper classes—serve as fundamental narratives that preserve, and indeed instantiate, such class- and gender-based social difference. Norton’s pamphlets reveal an awareness of this fact, and they covertly work to deconstruct such compelling, tenacious fictions by pointing to their very constructedness.

Norton’s status as a famous *and* infamous female author gave her the experience to more fully identify and then illustrate how names had become a nexus of social, political, and legal forces, a crucial site where public considerations of celebrity and reputation mingled with private issues of family and domesticity. As an early, pre-Victorian literary celebrity, she had been overwritten at times by the names of “aristocratic” men such as Sheridan and Byron; and her climactic moment of social notoriety—*Norton v. Melbourne*—was predicated on an even more forceful public pairing with male aristocracy. In a powerful way, Norton’s celebrity and authorial brand were constructed through and refracted by the names and narratives of aristocratic men. Through the trial of 1836, her name was laid bare as a publicly constructed legal fiction. She responded to these public manipulations of her name by repurposing the concept of names as legal fictions to her own ends; and she countered the male, aristocratic

construction of her brand name by deconstructing and destabilizing male, aristocratic titles and roles themselves. In the process, she drew a parallel between married women and aristocratic men that becomes most clearly refracted in her later fictional output. In the proto-sensational *Stuart of Dunleath* and the half-sensational *Old Sir Douglas*, I argue, Norton explicitly deconstructs the aristocratic male role by building on and challenging traditional generic paradigms. With *Old Sir Douglas*, she enters directly into a genre that she had unwittingly helped to build.

IV. A Novel Man: Norton's Sensational Aristocratic Heroes

In two of her later novels, Norton imports her preoccupation with the power and constructed nature of names into the fictional realm. With *Stuart of Dunleath*, published in 1851 (before her later political pamphlets), and *Old Sir Douglas*, published at the height of the sensation decade in 1868, Norton highlights the constructedness of aristocratic men's names while developing central male characters whose significant positions in their narratives, as signaled by the titles of both novels, would more generally be occupied by a female character. *Stuart of Dunleath* stands generically as a melodramatic, proto-sensation novel, while *Old Sir Douglas* stands as an almost perversely anti-sensation sensation novel, with numerous sensational elements contrasted with an idealized, blameless heroine. Both novels deploy aristocratic male figures in ways that disrupt and destabilize some of the central generic paradigms of the proto-sensational melodrama and the sensation novel, respectively.

The plot of *Stuart of Dunleath* revolves around the title character David Stuart, the morally compromised scion of a formerly aristocratic family, and his ward Eleanor

Raymond. She falls in love with him, while he accidentally loses all of her inheritance in a bank scheme that was meant to secure him the funds to buy back the traditional family home, Dunleath. Penniless and believing Stuart has committed suicide, Eleanor marries a cold aristocrat who eventually kills both of their sons through negligence, has another family with a servant whose ties to him pre-date his marriage, and breaks his wife's arm in a fit of brutal irritation. Meanwhile, Stuart returns in disguise as "Mr. Lindsay," having earned back much of Eleanor's former fortune working in Quebec. The renewed friendship between Eleanor, who immediately recognizes her former guardian, and Stuart/Lindsay creates the dramatic tension in the second half of the book, culminating in her husband's discovery and that breaking of her arm that finally dooms their marriage. Eleanor leaves her husband but cannot bring herself, on moral principle, to divorce him, despite Stuart's newfound desire to marry her. She dies emotionally exhausted within the year, while Stuart marries his childhood friend while grieving the possible life he could have had with Eleanor.

In this novel, as in all of Norton's novels, the woman remains blameless in action and all-but blameless, even by the mores of Victorian society, in thought; yet Eleanor is doomed to a wasting death due to her extra-marital love for David Stuart as well as, more provocatively, for her moral inflexibility in separating from but not divorcing her husband.⁹³ David Stuart is the transgressive figure, as he accidentally defrauds his ward, contemplates suicide, disguises himself (always a sign of extreme impropriety in Victorian novels), and attempts to seduce Eleanor away from her terrible husband. It is

⁹³ In private correspondence, Norton actually agreed with the position taken by Eleanor, suggesting that she fundamentally disagreed with the concept of divorce on religious grounds but upheld it because of pragmatic, personal circumstances (Craig 122).

David Stuart, the disenfranchised member of the Scottish landed gentry, who is continually alienated from his name, and who constructs an alternative name—Mr. Lindsay—that he uses, as the narrator and other characters stress, for “over eight years” (II. 95, III.1). Randall Craig argues that, “*Stuart of Dunleath* is the first of Norton’s works to engage questions of law directly and to use the novel to make readers aware of women’s legal status” (116). Norton herself seems to confirm this reading, as well as the reasoning behind it, in a private letter to William Gladstone: “But I did express [my opinions on divorce and law] in a form where opinions are less challenged, in the description of fictitious characters in a novel I published two years ago...” (qtd, Craig 122). This more direct engagement with socio-legal issues allows Norton to distance herself from her own personal narrative of victim-hood while still refracting that narrative in an identifiable way. For instance, Eleanor’s brutal husband declaims, ““The fortune your father left you. NO married woman has a fortune of her own, as you call it, that isn’t specially settled upon her. There’s no such settlement in your case, the money has fallen in, and been replaced, that’s all. I’m your husband, and it’s mine”” (III.72), and later summarizes more succinctly, ““the money’s mine, and you’re mine”” (III.76). These statements rather straightforwardly parallel Norton’s own personal experience of the law and implicitly challenge the “honourable” foundation of aristocratic husbands by explicitly foregrounding the legal realities of marriage.

The narrator and Stuart himself may dwell on the fact that “Eleanor Raymond was Eleanor Raymond no more...she was a wife; the wife of Stephen Penryhn!” (III.270), thereby emphasizing the changefulness of women’s names, but it is the fungibility of the aristocratic gentleman’s name, so privileged in the novel’s title, that catalyzes the

melodramatic portion of the plot. Or, as another character puts it, linking ease of disguise with social class, “It is easy for a gentleman, whose name is Mr. Stuart, to call himself Lindsay” (III.2). The formulation of his name in the title, “Stuart of Dunleath,” equally privileges his patronym and his family’s land, which had been lost to the family due to David’s father’s spendthrift ways. In other words, through its very title, this novel signals the instability of aristocratic nominative identity, reliant as it can be on property and inheritance.

Within the novel, David Stuart remains colloquially synonymous with “Stuart of Dunleath” even when he is penniless, but legally he only re-assumes the name at the end of the novel, after he marries Margaret Fordyce, who has re-purchased the estate on his behalf. Ironically, then, the act of marriage re-constructs the aristocratic name of the title, even as it deconstructs Margaret’s own name, which the narrative calls attention to with the assurance that there will be “no more letters signed Margaret Fordyce, for that the next would be from Margaret Stuart.” The narrative continues from Eleanor’s perspective, “‘Margaret Stuart!’ Why did those two written words make all seem more real to Eleanor than any of the sentences that had preceded them? Her new signature—her claim to his name—to his future-to his past! To his past! Was it possible?”

(III.318).⁹⁴ Once again Norton emphasizes the constructed natures of married and

⁹⁴ This passage echoes an earlier extended passage in Norton’s first novel, *Woman’s Reward*. I excerpt it in full to show the extent to which even Norton’s fictional works are preoccupied with names and their significance more generally:

What is there in the signature of a beloved name which makes it more precious than all the written words which precede it? What is there that makes it more bitter, when al is passed and gone, to meet that name on the blank title page of a book, than to hear it spoken a thousand times in ordinary conversation... Surely there is some strange instinct of the human heart which sets store on those few syllables;--and which gives to that

aristocratic names, yet she subverts the melodramatic paradigm of aristocratic men protecting victimized married women put forward in her political writings by creating an ineffectual fallen aristocrat who is returned to his “proper” name by a married woman.⁹⁵ It is worth noting that, in the process, the traditional melodramatic heroine, Eleanor, must be written out of the narrative altogether (though Eleanor’s earlier domestic fights also hinged on her desire to purchase Dunleath for Stuart). *Stuart of Dunleath*, in its narrative and through its very title, reveals the troubling extent to which the names of the most powerful figures in Victorian society—male aristocracy—are legal fictions and social constructions.

mysterious representation of ourselves, with all our thought, passions, and power of understanding; that badge of our existence among our fellow-men;--a power which no other words can ever obtain. Who does not pause at a name inscribed in a book, and gaze upon it as if it told the history of the years which have passed away since it was written? The hand which traced it may be grown feeble and tremulous with age, or may lie, cold and forgotten dust, in the grave; it may have become ‘an empty sound,/ to which no living thing lays claim;’ but its magic power remains. We feel, while we look on it, that we behold the certain and visible stamp and impress of a human existence, since passed away, like a shadow from the earth. Two syllables on that silent page make oath to us that a being *was*, with health, strength, and reason; who hoped like ourselves, laughed like ourselves, and breathed the air we breath; ‘*C’est une étincelle de sa vie,*’ a spark which burns on after the lamp of life is extinguished—a moment of the full possession of human energy of body and soul, saved from the blank of a passed existence. A name! It suffices to will away broad lands and fair domains; to curse with life-long poverty, or bless with prosperity and wealth; a power lies there, which mocks the grave; and the living obey the dead! A name! It suffices to wring the heart with a sudden pang, and send the hot tears gushing to the weary eyes. Thereon we gaze,--and weep and clasp our hands, and make a lament to Heaven. For what? Two written words! And so a name may suffice to feed the flame of love” (v. I, p. 185).

⁹⁵ I allude to these melodramatic narratives briefly in my analysis of Norton’s political writings. For a more thorough reading of Norton’s use of melodramatic tropes in her political pamphlets, see Mary Poovey’s “Covered but not Bound” in *Uneven Developments*.

Old Sir Douglas similarly deconstructs aristocratic names while developing a parallel between upper-class men and married women. While “Old Sir Douglas” is hardly the sensational figure that even David Stuart becomes in Norton’s earlier work, he *is* the paratextually-privileged character of a novel whose genre, a variation on sensation, would most commonly locate a sensational heroine in such a position. This novel hinges around Sir Douglas Ross, his blackguard nephew Kenneth Ross, and Gertrude, who chooses to marry the elder Ross, much to the chagrin of the younger. The bulk of the sensational elements come into the novel with the arrival of John Forbes, a confidence man who assumes a variety of identities, many of them aristocratic, and forges a letter between Gertrude and Kenneth that destroys her marriage until a last-minute deathbed confession and consequent reconciliation. While sensation novels often center around a married woman and an aristocratic or upper-class gentleman, *Old Sir Douglas* departs from generic tradition by featuring aristocratic gentlemen as almost the *sole* forces of sensation and unstable identity in the novel.

The novel opens with a brief exposition about how “Old Sir Douglas,” who was quite young, came to be called by his non-sequitur nickname, immediately signaling the arbitrariness and socially constructed nature of his name: “He was called Old Sir Douglas, chiefly, as it seemed, because everybody else was so young” (I.2). By privileging this casual formulation as the novel’s title and by foregrounding this seemingly random nominative lineage, Norton once again deconstructs aristocratic men’s names and identities. This is particularly striking in a novel published during the “sensation decade,” when such destabilized identities almost always belonged to married women who were narratively positioned as bigamous, murderous, or simply adulterous

heroines. Norton bypasses this route with Gertrude Ross, who is once again completely blameless, instead distributing blame between the untrusting Sir Douglas and the completely culpable forger John Forbes (alias Jonas Field, alias Spencer Carew, Esq., alias John Delamere, alias Rev. Francis Ferney).⁹⁶ In other words, aristocratic men, or men who can successfully *pass* as aristocrats, for however abbreviated a period, are revealed as the driving force behind such sensation narratives, even when the role of sensation heroine, and thus the traditional center of such a narrative, is utterly vacant.

In both of these novels, Norton transforms an aristocratic title into a fictional title, in the process revealing the true, mathematical “identity” relationship that inheres between the two nominative categories. In doing so, she reveals the unstable nature of Victorian classed and gendered identities, which are so reliant on and constructed by tenuous socio-legal codes. What began as a personal response to male, aristocratic constructions of her public identity and as an attempt to regain ownership of her “name,” becomes a broader social commentary on aristocracy and marriage more generally. With the rise of the sensation genre in the 1860s, these concerns about married women and unstable identity experienced much broader cultural prominence. I would argue that a measure of this prominence was due in part to Norton’s early and extended non-fictional and fictional work, work that effected legal reform and explicitly played with traditional generic paradigms. With *Old Sir Douglas*, Norton is responding to a genre that “the Hon. Mrs. Caroline Norton,” with its array of competing public and semi-private narratives, in

⁹⁶ “He had gone by the name of Jonh Delamere in that employment; he dropped that tile for one still more aristocratic, and called himself ‘Spencer Carew...He answered the advertisement as the Rev. Francis Ferney, and referred for his recommendation to Spencer Carew, Esq.” (II. 95)

part helped create. In the next chapter, I turn to a pair of middle-class female authors whose professional careers solidified in the “sensation decade”: “Mrs. Henry Wood” and “Mrs. Oliphant.” As their authorial names perhaps suggest, these women were similarly invested in the way marriage constructed and defined a woman’s name and identity. They were also particularly invested in the ways married names could function as strategic literary brands, and my chapter focuses on how these names, as self-marketed celebrity signifiers, blur the ideological boundary between family and the literary profession.

CHAPTER IV

A GENERATIVE PROFESSION: THE SELF-MARKETING LEGACIES OF “MRS. HENRY WOOD” AND “MRS. OLIPHANT”

While Caroline Norton spent the first two and a half decades of the Victorian era identifying and making use of the unstable legal fictionality of names, and women’s married names in particular, by the 1860s, some celebrity women authors were able to exploit this inherent instability by publishing under their full married names. Prominent sensation and quasi-sensation novelists such as Margaret Oliphant and Ellen Wood used their married names as strategic tools of self-marketing and, once they became famous enough, self-branding, superficially covering over their identity as creators of scandalous texts with “proper” signifiers of middle-class domesticity. By the 1860s, as mentioned previously, the sensation genre had emerged as a powerful force in the literary marketplace, though its scandalous—and scandalizing—core lent more than a hint of impropriety to “sensation authors,” particularly women sensation authors.

Ellen Wood, whose 1861 *East Lynne* became perhaps *the* bestselling sensation novel of the Victorian era, was generally associated with sensation throughout her career, although more recent critical interventions have shown how generically dexterous many of her works actually were. Margaret Oliphant, whose popular *Chronicles of Carlingford* novels were mainly published during the sensation decade as well, has generally been pigeonholed by critics as an anti-sensation, realist novelist. Again, though, recent work has shown the influence of sensation tropes and plots on some of her most popular works, particularly the third novel in her *Chronicles*, 1863’s *Salem Chapel*. As a supremely

hybrid genre, sensation was informed by and proceeded to permeate all manner of literary production.⁹⁷ While Oliphant did write condemnatory, albeit anonymous, reviews in *Blackwood's* of sensation novels and the sensation genre more broadly, these works assume the corporate voice of a Tory magazine that remained the primary stable source of Oliphant's income throughout her career. In other words, they can hardly be taken as a straightforward representation of her personal attitudes toward sensation and gender. While Ellen Wood becomes an unequivocal celebrity sensation author, I would argue that Oliphant emerges as a quasi-sensation author over the course of the 1860s, precisely the decade when she emerges as a cultural celebrity as well.

Oliphant and Wood were also similarly positioned as women working professionally at a time when professional women were regarded skeptically, and both women wrote and published prodigiously. Both Oliphant and Wood were also similarly positioned in their personal lives: they were, for the most part and certainly throughout the 1860s, the sole breadwinners in their large households. By occupying these positions, both women implicitly challenged Victorian ideological binaries, if not necessarily Victorian economic practices. They were middle-class women who were simultaneously nurturing mother-figures (literally supplying food for their children and extended families) and also professional writers whose gender cast them as the ultimate threat to the breakdown of the domestic sphere. I argue that Oliphant and Wood use married names as an alternative marketing strategy that highlights this dual role even as it ostensibly effaces its threatening potential.

⁹⁷ In one parsing of the genre, Tamara Wagner draws attention to sensation as a “genre that evolved from such apparently contradictory formal elements as romance, realism, and new versions of the gothic” (54).

“Mrs. Henry Wood” and “Mrs. Oliphant” collapse the ideological binary and implicitly gendered hierarchy between family and profession.⁹⁸ By using these names, Wood and Oliphant insist on and construct a legitimate position in the marketplace that is essential for the economic stability of the families they support. By foregrounding their married status, both women firmly repositioned themselves back in the familial sphere, even if it was—literally—in name only. With these names, both Oliphant and Wood signaled their role not only within the family, but specifically as wives and potentially procreative, and thus, however implicitly, potentially sexual, beings.⁹⁹ In the cases of Wood and Oliphant, who both had numerous offspring to support through their literary creations, the link between procreation and literary creation signaled by these female authorial names was even more apparent. As these familial signifiers repeatedly appeared printed on the title pages and spines of publicly circulated novels, the link solidified between procreative capacity and textual creation; and a concomitant blurring of the boundary between family and professional spaces occurred. These married names did still partially efface the sensational traces that clung to these women’s authorial personae both because of their work in the sensation genre and, more broadly, because of their inherently empowered and paradoxical roles as professional breadwinners. However,

⁹⁸ In an unpublished dissertation, Shannon Brown neatly summarizes the way Oliphant stood in tension with Victorian ideologies: “Although in Victorian society, the public and private spheres were considered separate, Oliphant presents them as inextricably entwined for women who desired a profession... for her, family and career are never separate” (10; 15).

⁹⁹ Steven Davies argues, “To declare oneself ‘Mrs. Wood’ is to say to the reading world that one is a safe, harmless, respectable, God-fearing, middle-class Englishwoman, probably endowed with children... To add one’s husband’s Christian name for good measure... is to emphasize the point doubly [Davies v].” (qtd. Maunder, “Ellen Wood was a Writer”)

they also retained powerful traces of the fundamental instabilities they strategically seemed to efface.

As sensation novelists, both Wood and Oliphant were keenly aware of the problematic power of names and the way names could encode licit and illicit sexuality. Many of their most famous works, particularly *East Lynne* and *Salem Chapel*, respectively, refract the theme of nominative power and strangely privilege moments of nominative construction. In this chapter, I argue that Ellen Wood fashions “Mrs. Henry Wood” as a demurely veiled reaction to the excessive, powerful “Isabel” of *East Lynne*, the first work published under her “proper” name. “Mrs. Henry Wood,” though, remains a more complicated, unstable, and destabilizing construction than this reactive genealogy would suggest. Margaret Oliphant, on the other hand, begins her prolific career in the pre-sensation decade of the 1850s with an array of competing anonymous textual genealogies (“by the author of...”) that culminate in a seemingly straightforward brand-name, “Mrs. Oliphant.” While on the surface Wood’s and Oliphant’s authorial names seem similar, a reading of Oliphant’s private correspondence and posthumously published *Autobiography* rewrites “Mrs. Oliphant” as the signifier of a radically alternative matrilineal genealogy despite its unequivocal patriarchal roots. While this alternative signification is not publicly available during the 1860s, I would argue that Oliphant’s sensational novels such as *Salem Chapel* refract her own efforts at nominal self-marketing by foregrounding moments of female self-generation and powerful self-naming. My analysis pairs Wood and Oliphant in order to show how the married authorial brand name emerges as a strategic marketing tool particularly resonant in the

1860s as well as to explore how such strategies, and the constructed names they produced, diverge despite superficial similarities.

Oliphant's nominative strategies, as revealed in published correspondence with her publishers, underscored her strategic self-marketing throughout her career. As a woman supporting not only herself, her husband until his premature death, and her three surviving children, but also an alcoholic brother as well as a handful of nieces, nephews, and assorted younger relatives at any given point in time, Oliphant had to produce and sell an enormous quantity of work in order to maintain her barely-comfortable middle-class lifestyle. Her correspondence with publishers reveals a realistic concern with flooding the market that she addressed by strategic instructions as to when, and where, her name should be used versus when she should remain anonymous. By this strategic silencing of her own marketed name, as well as the cultivation of a variety of publishing houses distributing her work almost simultaneously, Oliphant created an array of textual genealogies that were by turns linked to her name directly or to a variety of her own texts ("by the author of..."). Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant was doubly an Oliphant because she married a maternal cousin and her middle name was her mother's maiden name. By the mid-1860s, notably after she was widowed, she began publishing as "Mrs. Oliphant." Due at least in part to coincidences of nominal inheritance, Oliphant was able to rewrite this traditionally patriarchal formulation as a matrilineal genealogy centering around her mother, rather than her husband or her maternal ancestors.

"Mrs. Henry Wood," with her most proper published name, illustrates the converse of this gynocentric genealogical rewriting. By publishing under her "full" married name, Wood is of course signaling her staunch propriety—she is a "proper"

married woman, fully subsumed into her husband's identity, as the law of coverture intends. However, as I argue in chapter three, this legal "fact" is by turns a productive and destructive fiction that signifies widely beyond the "proper" identity relationship that simply equates husband and wife. In a sense, by publishing as "Mrs. Henry Wood," Ellen Wood veils herself with the proper title "Mrs." while also maintaining full proprietary claim over her husband's full (male) name. Her name operates both as a fully authorized, proper name and also a slightly gender-blurring pseudonym, a tension I term gender-veiling. Her gender is readily apparent ("Mrs." is never masculine), but it is veiled ("Henry Wood," minus the veiling title, *is* masculine). And, perversely, this veiling both underscores her femininity and partially hides it from view. In other words, her name signified and attempted to obscure a brand that was perceived as both staunchly conservative *and* unapologetically sensational, private and proper as well as public and scandalous.

I divide this chapter roughly into two sections, first discussing *East Lynne*, Ellen Wood, and her seemingly conservative but implicitly destabilizing gender-veiling pseudonym. I then turn to Margaret Oliphant and her more overtly destabilizing but initially unpublicized, and therefore initially inaccessible, rewriting of her authorial name. At the end of each section, I briefly discuss the posthumous legacies of these women via their published biography, in the case of Wood, and autobiography, in the case of Oliphant. Oliphant's *Autobiography* was arranged and edited in 1899 by her niece Denny Oliphant (who notably changed her last name by deed poll later in life to that of her aunt) and young relative Annie Coghill (who perhaps tellingly published the book under her married name, "Mrs. Henry Coghill"); and *The Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood*

was written and published in 1894 by Wood's son Charles W. Wood. These works, through their very generic status and paratextual genealogies, forcibly blur the boundaries between family and profession. I argue that while critics have read both of these works as attempting to overwrite professional accounts with domestic scenes as an ostensibly more "proper" legacy for female authors such as Oliphant and Wood, they actually contain striking moments of gender-bending, explicit self-marketing, and abject, excessive emotional breakdown. In other words, both works remain fundamentally imbricated in the destabilization of gendered binaries that was so crucial to these female authors' abilities to create and insist on legitimate professional positions. The fact that these textual legacies can be so persuasively read against these moments of social transgression, as conservatively traditional narratives, speaks to the effective self-marketing of the "proper," inoculating narratives encoded by "Mrs. Henry Wood" and "Mrs. Oliphant." That these egregious ideological fissures remain in such seemingly traditional life narratives suggests that they are a truly "proper" legacy to the destabilizing momentum encoded, almost despite their best efforts, in these authorial brand names. They are the legitimate textual offspring, and simultaneous textual incarnations of, complex professional legacies built on the instability inherent in the Victorian family.

I. *East Lynne* and the Powerful Legacy of "Isabel"

“Mrs. Henry Wood”’s most famous novel, *East Lynne*, was also the first work published commercially under her own name.¹⁰⁰ First serialized in 1861, *East Lynne* is still considered one of the founding texts of the sensation genre.¹⁰¹ The majority of sensation novels have at least one plot strand centered around disguise and the assumption of a pseudonym, suggesting just how crucial names and their inherent instability are to the genre; and *East Lynne* is no exception. In the second half of the novel, the adulterous, aristocratic sensation heroine Isabel Vane almost dies in a train crash and re-emerges as Madame Vine, a widowed, bespectacled governess who attempts to re-insert herself into her children’s lives unsuspected. However, *East Lynne* spends almost as much time foregrounding and failing to contain Isabel’s original, powerfully shameful “proper” name, a name that gains further momentum when it is inherited by Isabel’s daughter, Isabel Lucy. “Isabel” emerges as a powerful, excessive name that unsettles both the traditional Victorian family unit as well as patriarchal authority more generally, particularly as represented by that bastion of middle-class masculinity, Isabel’s original husband Archibald Carlyle. I would argue that the novel’s emphasis on Isabel’s “proper” name, and the way it encodes all manner of scandalous behavior and impropriety, parallels Wood’s own vested interest in the circulation and signifying power of women’s names, particularly her own. I contend that not only is “Mrs. Henry Wood”

¹⁰⁰ Her first novel, *Danesbury House*, was written for submission for a Scottish Temperance League prize, which it won. Thus I consider its publication under a separate paradigm from *East Lynne* and subsequent novels, which she pitched and/or submitted to publishers under more traditional paradigms.

¹⁰¹ In the introduction to Wood’s *St. Martin’s Eve*, Lyn Pykett quotes Sally Mitchell and notes, “*East Lynne*, alongside *The Woman in White* and *Lady Audley’s Secret*, ‘introduce most of the themes and situations that became the sensationalist’s stock-in-trade: bigamy, adultery, illegitimacy, disguise, changed names, railway accidents, poison, fire, murder, concealed identity, false reports of death, the doubling of characters and incidents’” (Pykett viii).

a strategic construction, it is a strategic response to the paradigm of powerfully excessive, scandalous names put forward by *East Lynne* with “Isabel.” The almost overly “proper” “Mrs. Henry Wood” emerges, under my reading, as an attempt to cut against the destabilizing power encoded in “Isabel,” though I will argue that this attempt is only partially successful, and, moreover, that its partial failure is both somewhat strategic and inevitable. Before I turn to a more detailed analysis of Ellen Wood’s authorial name, though, I want to provide a more thorough reading of the way “Isabel” emerges as a powerful name in *East Lynne*, a name against which “Mrs. Henry Wood” must distinguish herself.

The plot of *East Lynne* centers around Isabel Vane, an aristocratic heiress whose fortunes change drastically when her father dies in debt. To avoid life with an abusive aunt, Isabel accepts the marriage proposal of Archibald Carlyle, her former family lawyer and current owner of the eponymous family manor, East Lynne. Through a combination of sexual dissatisfaction, jealousy, and an almost ludicrously overbearing sister-in-law, Isabel eventually flees East Lynne, her three children, and her husband with the seductive blackguard Francis Levison, who, in a typically sensational twist, is also guilty of a murder of which the brother of Archibald Carlyle’s admirer, and later second wife, Barbara Hare, stands wrongfully accused. Isabel’s flight, unsurprisingly, ends badly: Levison dupes her, impregnates her with a bastard child, refuses to marry her, and eventually essentially abandons her. Her infant dies in a train crash that leaves her maimed and almost unrecognizable, after which, through a series of accidents, she becomes governess to her own children under the name of Madame Vine. Her death from illness and the revelation of Levison’s criminal actions occur almost

simultaneously, and just before “Madame Vine” dies, her true identity is revealed to her former husband (having been recognized months earlier by a servant). By the end of the novel, Isabel/Madame Vine’s transgressive power is certainly contained and punished through her abjection as her children’s unsuspected governess and finally through death. However, I would argue that the power encoded in her name cannot be contained so easily, despite explicit efforts in the novel to the contrary.

Isabel’s proper name is first activated as a site of shameful excess after she flees from her husband and children with Francis Levinson, when the narrative begins to call attention to its absence and the ways it is being silenced. Archibald Carlyle forbids any mention of “Isabel” at this point, privileging her name as an absent presence that echoes throughout the remainder of the text. After the deathbed revelation that Madame Vine was in fact his former wife, Archibald confesses the discovery to his current wife Barbara at the very end of the novel, declaring his steadfast love for the latter and insisting, “Never let it come back again, Barbara. Neither need her name be mentioned again between us. A barred name it has hitherto been: let it so continue” (*EL* 624). Notably, he refrains from mentioning the once again taboo name in this final decree, though this silence calls forth the unspoken name all the more powerfully. In other words, Carlyle’s final words to his wife, which occur a mere two paragraphs from the end of the lengthy novel, ironically invoke the forbidden name and belie his protestations that he thinks nothing of his former, fallen wife. Dan Bivona goes so far as to argue that this final interchange between Carlyle and his wife “sacralizes” Isabel (118). I would agree with Bivona insofar as Isabel does seem to achieve an apotheosis-via-abjection by the novel’s end, but I would also argue that the narrative encoded by her unspoken name remains

problematically—and productively—improper, tingeing this final invocation with a destabilizing touch of the profane in the midst of the sacred or “sacralizing.” In any case, this nominative invocation does reveal Archibald’s over-investment in the power of Isabel’s name, which speaks to a larger theme about the power of names in the novel.

In this instance, Isabel’s name becomes the locus of excessive feeling—shame and presumably also the remnants, or more-than-remnants, of sexual attraction and affection that Carlyle once felt for his wife. “Isabel” emerges as a byword for licit and illicit sexual desire and sexual transgression, as it encodes Carlyle’s original, socially and legally “proper” passion for his wife, her sexual affair with Levison, and the potential continuation of Carlyle’s sexual attraction, rendered newly illicit through his new identity as the husband of another woman. Notably, and for a brief moment before “Madame Vine” dies, Carlyle realizes that legally he has been a bigamist. However, by encoding all of these conflicting emotions and desires into the narrative signified by “Isabel,” Carlyle—and the narrative itself—seems to contain this excess. Carlyle invests Isabel’s name with a talismanic property by refusing to speak it, doubly containing these improper emotions within a correspondingly proper receptacle, her “proper” name, rather than the problematic pseudonym “Madame Vine,” which notably has no such taboo attached to it. This act of linguistic containment succeeds, to the extent that it does, at least in part because it is a narrative trope. In a sense, it illustrates in microcosm what tropes do more generally: they reduce excess or complexity to a linguistic signifier. That this containment is attempted by the repressed, middle-class bastion of masculinity Archibald Carlyle and with the signifier of destabilizing femininity, “Isabel,” speaks to Ann Cvetkovich’s argument about the novel’s gendering of emotion and affect; but I would

argue that Carlyle's final disingenuous discussion of the "barred name" suggests that such excess emotion is not as unilaterally equated with women and femininity as it might seem.¹⁰² By calling attention to the absent "Isabel," the narrative repeatedly signals this excess and its inability to fully be contained, even as such silence surrounding the name reifies this containment. Furthermore, the threat to patriarchy and patriarchal norms that Isabel seemingly poses finds an analogue in the excessive emotions of Carlyle that are encoded in her powerful name. In other words, "Isabel" stands at the nexus of patriarchal

¹⁰² Cvetkovich claims, "[e]motion is also gendered in the novel by being depicted as that which, like women, distorts reality. This connection raises the question of the novel's relation to its own narrative strategies, which included both sensationalism and realism" (109). I would argue that *East Lynne* is concerned with the way emotion is normalized as feminine but how reality is "distorted" by and for individuals of both genders. Another, similarly shame-invested talismanic name that further problematizes a reading that would completely equate emotion with femininity (or indeed, simply put, with women) and instability is "Richard Hare," the name of Barbara Hare's brother, who is presumed guilty of a murder and has been in hiding for over a decade by the end of the novel. Barbara tells him concerning their father, Judge Hare:

'He never mentions your name, or suffers it to be mentioned: he gave his orders to the servants that it never was to be spoken in the house again. Eliza could not, or would not, remember, and she persisted in still calling your room 'Mr Richard's'. I think the woman did it heedlessly; not mischievously to provoke papa: she was a good servant, and had been with us three years, you know. The first time she transgressed, papa warned her; the second he thundered at her, as I believe nobody else in the world can thunder; and the third time he turned her from the doors, never allowing her to get her bonnet...' (EL 35).

The parallels between this reaction and Carlyle's own reaction to his wife's flight are readily apparent. The fact that Richard is repeatedly described as feminine or feminized, by others as well as by himself, may partially undercut the power of this exchange as counter-evidence in any discussion of gendering and emotion in the novel. However, the feminization of Richard does underscore the way the novel repeatedly and explicitly destabilizes and dismantles gender binaries and Victorian gender norms. At the same time, the irony of Judge Hare's response becomes staggering when the reader discovers, almost at the very end of the novel as well, that his son shares his name. This nominative doubling, which has another parallel with Isabel and her daughter, Isabel Lucy, as I will discuss shortly, primarily functions to further satirize the overreactions of the pompous, heartless Judge; but this generational doubling also further thematizes the novel's preoccupation with pointing out the instabilities inherent in families and in Victorian patriarchy more generally.

destabilization in the novel, even as the novel ostensibly works to cover over this nominal threat.

The question of the persistence versus absence of Isabel's name in the Carlyle family can't be neatly resolved with a simple decree from the patriarch either, since their daughter's name is Isabel as well. The narrative repeatedly implies that not only will the young daughter suffer because of the stigma around her mother's well-known shameful actions, but also perhaps due to a similar character defect, passed on from mother to daughter and tacitly signaled through their shared name, which of course socially codes their shared gender. Carlyle attempts to immediately sever the link between the young Isabel and her mother, however, upon hearing of the elder Isabel's flight. When the loyal maid Joyce asks, "Sir, please, must not Miss Isabel go back to bed?" he seems not to hear her, but instead, "touched Isabel's shoulder to draw Joyce's attention to the child. 'Joyce—*Miss Lucy*, in future'" (218). The narrative immediately continues, "He left the room, and Joyce remained silent from amazement. She heard him go out at the hall door and bang it after him. Isabel—nay, we must say 'Lucy' also..." (218). In this moment, the younger Isabel is irrevocably re-christened with her middle name, as her first, "proper" name is rendered shameful and a byword for illicit sexuality, both her mother's, and, thanks to her mother's social transgressions, her father's as well. The excessive nexus of shame, promiscuous sexuality, and desire encoded in the name echoes down the generations, underscoring how it is the phonetic name itself, as a signifier, rather than the name/body sign, that generates such affective reactions.¹⁰³ As a "fallen," adulterous

¹⁰³ Afy Hallijohn, in providing the disguised Madame Vine with gossip from home, decries, "No wonder...that he could not longer endure the sound of her mother's, or suffer the child to bear it" (392), provides another illustration of how the novel

woman, Isabel's name becomes *too* powerful and generative, becoming invested with illegitimate powers of procreation and illicit sexuality that are in fact made manifest in Isabel's bastard fourth child, Francis. By making the liaison between Isabel Vane and Francis Levinson productive, the narrative not only increases the stakes for the dissolution of their relationship and the depths of Isabel's "fall," it validates the idea that Isabel and her talismanic name *are* problematically generative.

The name takes on a shameful and shaming power that affects young Isabel Lucy beyond even the biological link that already indemnifies her as the offspring of a now-fallen woman. The fact that even the narrator meta-textually calls attention to this nominative switch ("Isabel—nay, we must say 'Lucy' also") underlines just how fundamental this shift is, even as "Isabel" is once more "spoken" only to be silenced. In a way, then, this playful textual slip mirrors Carlyle's final invocation of the "barred name," placing more emphasis on the taboo name through the very act of effacing it. "Isabel" explicitly slips through the narrative cracks to continue destabilizing the patriarchal foundation of the novel. For Carlyle, as the primary site of patriarchy in *East Lynne*, though, "Isabel" "must" be silenced and absent not only for Isabel Vane and her memory, but for the next generation as well as all characters who know her. "Lucy" later recounts her silent schooling in her new "proper" name to her mother, disguised as Madame Vine:

Papa said I was never to be called Isabel again, but Lucy. Isabel was mamma's name...I heard him. He said it to Joyce, and Joyce told the servants. I put only Lucy to my copies. I did put Isabel Lucy, but papa saw it one day, and he drew his pencil through Isabel, and told me to show it to Miss Manning. After that, Miss Manning let me put nothing but Lucy. I

foregrounds names themselves. Her formulation emphasizes the aural trauma along with the emotional trauma that such "sound" creates.

asked her why, and she told me papa preferred the name, and that I was not to ask questions.’ (417)

Lucy attempts to reassert her full “proper” name, but she is stopped through a series of deflections: her father remains silent, uses pencil not pen, and forces the governess Miss Manning to clarify his position, without having spoken to her himself. The patriarchal voice remains silent but his will is just as ineluctable, as Carlyle successfully renames “Lucy” not only for others but for herself as well. However, the powerfully silent name weighs on the daughter’s mind as much as the final paragraphs of the novel reveal that it does on her father’s, insisting once again that the excessive name retains a power that can’t fully be overcome by this male force.

East Lynne’s focus on Isabel’s and her daughter’s names manifests even earlier in the novel, though, long before the elder inadvertently invests her name with such negative weight. In the introduction to this dissertation, I briefly discuss the problematic, extended christening scene in this novel, which hinges around “Isabel Lucy,” who is eventually named for her mother and grandmother after being temporarily mistaken as a boy by her father and almost being christened “William.” Thanks to the servant Joyce’s timely intervention, this potentially gender-blurring event fails to officially occur, and the narrative resumes:

There was a pause, and then the minister spoke again. ‘Name this child.’ ‘Isabel Lucy,’ said Mr Carlyle. Upon which a strange sort of resentful sniff was heard from Miss Corny. She had probably thought to hear him mention her own; but he had named it after his wife and his mother. (174)

The extended scene functions, under the guiding tropes of the sensation genre, to foreshadow the further destabilization that will occur within this seemingly “proper” family, but its power to unsettle securities in that most reassuring and official of

ceremonies, the christening, speaks to a wider, though no less sensational, purpose. This brief stalling of the narrative suggests that the nominative repercussions and instabilities resulting from Isabel's sexual transgressions are just further symptoms of larger ideological instabilities. This odd little scene also emphasizes the origins of Isabel Lucy's name and the seemingly matrilineal inheritance that links her with both her mother and paternal grandmother. However, as I mention in the introduction, this matrilineal legacy is still created by her father, producing a tension between patriarchy and matrilineal ties that I have already discussed with regard to Queen Victoria and Caroline Norton. These matrilineal ties do encode another trope that is key to the Isabel Lucy plot arc of *East Lynne*, though: generational doubling, or generational correction.

In Wood's novel, the ten-year-old Isabel Lucy becomes the object of affection for her teenaged cousin William, who admits to Madame Vine that he loves her partly for the sake of her mother, on whom he had a childish crush as well. In the second half of the novel, William vows to marry "Lucy," and the narrative insinuates that this coupling will eventually occur. Andrew Maunder has suggested that the narrative of *East Lynne* is preoccupied with the specter of degeneracy and moral decay, but I would argue that at least with this plotline, a sort of generational correction is being forecast. The kind, idealized William, future Lord Mt. Severn, will rehabilitate the legacy of "Isabel" (which is still a part of Lucy's "proper" name regardless of her father's decrees), in a doubling that is particularly highlighted by the doubled names shared between child and parent. However, William remains loyal to the original Isabel's memory, despite her social and sexual transgressions, implying that the more powerful, destabilizing valences encoded in "Isabel"'s legacy for her daughter might well be underscored in this relationship, rather

than effaced or contained. This focus on generational dynamics and the problematic narrative echoes that shared inter-generational names can create emerge as central preoccupations of the sensation genre. In this instance, however, the fact that Isabel Lucy is almost christened William, in honor of that very William who declares he will marry her, perversely complicates and multiplies this doubling. If we read, as this novel teaches us to read, by linking character and name across individuals and even generations, Isabel Lucy's alternative existence as "William" (and, frankly, the entire William plotline) has particularly pre-Freudian ramifications in terms of sexual, familial, and narcissistic relationships. The Isabel Lucy/William dyad is troubled on the surface by the specter of Isabel Vane's alleged behavioral degeneracy, but it is actually haunted by the trace of the mother, as an early object of William's desires, explicitly encoded in the daughter's name, problematically blurring the lines between generations and socially proper sexual desire. Moreover, their relationship is further destabilized by the trace of "William" that the narrative encodes in the origin of "Isabel Lucy" itself—not only is she nominally her mother, she was, or almost was, her potential future husband. In other words, names echo and powerfully signify in this novel in a way that remains perversely problematic for the Victorian family unit, even the most seemingly idealized potential ones.

Of course, Isabel Lucy's perverse pre-conscious identification as "William," the name of her potential future husband, also merely foreshadows her future identity as a married Victorian woman whose full name, in its most proper form, would be overwritten with that of her husband.¹⁰⁴ "Mrs. Henry Wood" was certainly attuned to the

¹⁰⁴ The fact that William Mt. Severn is a member of the aristocracy and would become William, Lord Mt. Severn on his father's death, making Isabel into Lucy, Lady Mt. Severn (rather than a middle-class Mrs. William Mt. Severn), complicates this analogy,

phenomenon of nominative coverture, and I would argue that she used this seemingly conservative naming tradition to distinguish herself from the power of excessive sensational names in her first bestselling novel. While *East Lynne* repeatedly manifests Wood's own concerns about gender and the power of names in extreme, destabilizing, albeit somewhat contained ways, her own marketed name manifests these concerns toward different ends: gaining a legitimate, "proper" place in the literary marketplace. However, much as the nominative shifts around "Isabel Lucy" and "William" can be both a proper foreshadowing of marital coverture *as well as* a sign of patriarchal instability, gender-blurring, and perverse families, "Mrs. Henry Wood" is at once a signifier of the utmost propriety and a successful marketing tool, *as well as* a powerful source and sign of ideological instability and the breakdown of gender binaries.

II. Mrs. Henry Wood: Taking the Veil

Ellen Wood's literary career began in the 1850s, with anonymous, largely unpaid short stories and essays for Harrison Ainsworth's *New Monthly Magazine* and *Bentley's Miscellany*. When *East Lynne* was originally serialized in the *New Monthly Magazine* beginning in 1860, it also appeared anonymously, with only the byline "By the Author of 'Ashley'" linking it with a previously popular short story in the magazine.¹⁰⁵ With the publication of *East Lynne* in book form in 1861, though, she began publishing under her

though I would argue that the significance of temporarily over-writing the child's name with that of her future husband is still meant, in however coded a fashion, to invoke the idea of nominative coverture.

¹⁰⁵ "Ashley" appeared in the July 1856 issue of the *New Monthly Magazine*, and was presumably written by Wood. Almost all subsequent short stories she wrote for the magazine appeared under the attribution, "By the Author of 'Ashley.'" The attribution of "Ashley" was "By the Author of 'The Unholy Wish.'"

“own” name, insisting in private correspondence that, “the Christian name (Henry) is [always] inserted’ (8 Aug 1861, qtd. Maunder “Ellen Wood was a Writer”). Thus, “Mrs. Henry Wood” emerges as an example of crafted, deliberate self-marketing, rather than simply an extension of the way Ellen Wood saw herself as an upstanding middle-class wife.¹⁰⁶ The fact that it emerges with the book publication of *East Lynne*—before the novel became wildly popular but after some measure of public interest had been found via its serialization—strengthens my argument that it is partially a response to that novel and an anticipation of public reaction to such a sensational work. Wood also insists on this authorial name precisely at the moment she is shifting roles, from un- or underpaid anonymous amateur and writer-for-prize-money to professional novelist. “Mrs. Henry Wood” is thus strategic on two levels: as a “proper” refraction of the sensational names she has created with *East Lynne* and, more broadly, as a professional moniker that, through its very construction, obscures this professional identity.

Andrew Maunder suggests that this “trademark name” “became as identifiable as any commercial logo,”¹⁰⁷ and his formulation draws attention to the interpenetration of domesticity and marketability for women authors during the period. In other words, “Mrs. Henry Wood” represents the breakdown of the barrier between public and private spheres; and by tracing its history through public reception as well as Wood’s private,

¹⁰⁶ Maunder expands, “[this insistence] has generally been read as an example of her innate conservatism and a recognition of the binding power of patriarchal norms. However, there are other implications. Most obviously it is a reminder that Wood’s own identity as a writer was created as consciously as those of her characters.” I am extending Maunder’s argument by aligning Wood’s authorial self-naming with the operation of “Isabel Vane” in *East Lynne*. In other words, Wood’s name was deployed along with, and in distinction to, her most famous character.

¹⁰⁷ Maunder, “Ellen Wood was a Writer” (online publication).

personal correspondence, its status as both successful “matronly sobriquet” (Palmer 91) and professional “brand” stands revealed. Interestingly, these competing histories chart an inverted relationship between public and private names: the public circulation of “Mrs. Henry Wood” privileges its matronly, private, and “proper” signification, while the private history of its creation, as suggested through Wood’s correspondence, reveals its publicly-oriented, professionally constructed status. What is most professional seems familial, and what is most familial and intimate (private correspondence, a son’s anecdotes) is explicitly professionalized. Wood’s authorial name, through its form, signals her participation in the domestic economy of marriage, while its very existence as authorial name, in public and in circulation, signals its participation in the literary marketplace and the monetary economy.

As a writer of sensation fiction, amongst many other genres, Wood sometimes came under fire for her scandalous and immoral subject matter.¹⁰⁸ However, critics have argued that her name, and the literary persona so successfully coded by that name, insulated her from many of these accusations.¹⁰⁹ In other words, “Mrs. Henry Wood” was a successful literary performance that distinguished her authorial persona from her novels, regardless of how closely Ellen Wood herself identified with the persona it

¹⁰⁸ In terms of her massive output, Wood was very similar to Margaret Oliphant. Emma Liggins claims, “Wood had a career that was prolific even when measured by the standards of a prolific age” (150), and this is even more the case for Oliphant.

¹⁰⁹ Deborah Wynne summarizes, “Despite frequent accusations of vulgarity and philistinism, Wood was seen by reviewers as the most wholesome of the female sensation writers” (90). Andrew Maunder approaches this insulation from a different angle, arguing “In an age which saw the emergence of the marketing of ‘star’ personalities, Wood thus remained an elusive figure, a celebrity who maintained her fame by making a spectacle of her absence.”

signified.¹¹⁰ Her name built a link between her gendered social position, as a matron and potential (and in this case actual) mother, and her works, legitimizing her creation of texts as it already implicitly legitimated her procreative potential as a married woman. This legitimization was particularly important because the topics of sexual promiscuity, *impropriety*, and *illegitimacy* were so crucial to her first professionally published novel. Her name authorized her works in a way that by turns mitigated potentially scandalous qualities by covering them over with the sign of coverture, the married woman's name, or made such scandal all the more potent, since sexual content might become even more shocking when a married woman was discussing it. Her critical reception may have skewed toward the former narrative, but over the course of her career, and particularly in the 1860s, it certainly cut both ways.¹¹¹

“Mrs. Henry Wood” not only created a link between her literary creations and her socially sanctioned procreative capacity; its own socially constructed status destabilized considerations of propriety and impropriety, the sexually licit and illicit, morality and marketability, and familial and professional roles more broadly. I would argue that fundamentally, Wood's authorial name blurs the line between “proper name” and pseudonym, generally considered so clear. In the process, it becomes a sign of what I am calling gender-veiling, as the “Mrs.” veils what is otherwise a wholly “male” name legally attached to a male body—that of her husband. Of course, everyone knew “Mrs.

¹¹⁰ In her *Memorials*, written posthumously by her son, he insists that she was a “strong Conservative” (234). This may certainly be the case, but as Maunder argues, “there is something very modern about the way in which she carefully moulds her image through selective publicity and creates her own legend” (Maunder).

¹¹¹ Of course, throughout and certainly by the end of her career, the former narrative of inoculated scandal and domestic propriety provided grounds for critics to simply dismiss her and her works as “women's writing,” which led to her exclusions in the canon-building work that was done around the turn of the century.

Henry Wood” represented a woman, and there could be no confusion even if readers couldn’t link the name to the body of Ellen Wood, which is why the name is not fully gender-bending.¹¹² In order to explain my use of gender-veiling, I now turn to a brief history of the “veil” as a trope that resonated for women authors in mid-Victorian literary discourse.

The “veil of anonymity” emerges as a catchall term categorizing women’s anonymous authorial efforts during this period, and it has both positive and negative valences. In the middle of the century in an edition of *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, women were advised that “It is certainly well for a young lady who wishes to test her ability before adventuring herself in the full glare of popular notice to keep her veil on” (qtd. Ripley 60). On the other side of the spectrum, the article “Works of Imagination in 1864” includes the sarcastic comment that, “It is likewise gratifying to observe that none of the writers of the books here alluded to, have the courage to put their names to them, but hide their lights either under the veil of the anonymous, or under a nom de plume” (131).¹¹³ In one formulation, veiling preserves modesty in the public sphere, while in the other, veils and pen names connote shameful work that must be detached from proper names and signatures. Thus, the veil emerges as an overdetermined signifier, inconsistently naming (and gendering) a condition that often functions as an attempt to

¹¹² Her name thus stands in contrast with other pseudonymous female writers, such as “George Eliot,” as a masculine pseudonym could—and sometimes did—create confusion.

¹¹³ The fact that the anonymous writer of this article places him- or herself squarely behind that protective “veil” should be ironic, but I would argue that the gendering of this “veil” as feminine, coupled with the fact that, as Kate Flint demonstrates, the default gendering of such anonymous critical writing as male, suggests a tenuously maintained disconnect between the critic and what “he” is describing (Flint 147).

un-name and de- or re-gender.¹¹⁴ Notably, such feminine nominative disguise euphemistically emerges, outside of “women’s magazines” like *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, as presumptive evidence of illicit sexual knowledge.¹¹⁵ In this way, the discourse emerging around shifts in women’s authorial practices echoes the narrative trope of female disguise so prevalent in sensation novels. In both instances, the nominatively overdetermined figure of the woman is recoded as socially, and often sexually, transgressive. The “veil” of anonymity also implicitly raises the specter that women, divorced from proper names, could be mis-identified as men, and vice-versa, or, more troublingly, and more germanely for my argument, that behind such “veils” genders become indistinguishable.

In opposition to this paradigm, it would seem on the surface that Ellen Wood cultivates an authorial persona based on a thoroughly socially “proper” understanding of gender differentiation. “Mrs. Henry Wood” signals her status as a properly interpellated member of the Victorian middle class, as it publicizes her marriage and absorption into her husband’s family. Closer examination of this form of wifely nominalization, however, reveals how similar such a construction is to the “veil[ing]” rhetoric of the period. The common prefix is all that codes the name as feminine, while the masculine

¹¹⁴ In contrast, men’s authorial nominal disguises were often figured as masks. As Tighe Hopkins wrote much later in 1890, “sufficient objection to the anonymous system that, whilst this system does not and cannot give any *real* force to the work of an honest writer, the dishonest may borrow from it a *simulacrum* of power which, if his mask were stripped from him, would vanish at once” [qtd. Buurma “Anonymity...” 22].

¹¹⁵ In *The Woman Reader*, Kate Flint draws on the rhetoric of the “veil” in detailing a particularly egregious case of this sexual re-interpretation and the presumed link between femininity and impropriety involving George Eliot: *The Saturday Review* wrote that “‘Eliot is at fault in giving so much detail in the stages preceding the birth of the child, making ‘the account of her misfortunes read like the rough notes of a man-midwife’s conversations with a bride.’ The attacks on the novel’s supposed immorality appeared after Eliot’s pseudonymic veil was lifted, and thus can be related to the author’s gender, even to her particular circumstances, rather than to what had previously been regarded as a tactful treatment of error and repentance” (146).

name remains very present. Obviously, the pseudonymity resulting from a wife taking her husband's name was a socially normalized action rarely acknowledged as a process of un- and renaming, though the use of this nominative construction by authors, in a market saturated with anonyms and regendered pseudonyms, drew at least a measure of attention to its constructedness.¹¹⁶ As I discussed in the previous section, Wood's own *East Lynne* teaches its readers to re-examine these normalized processes of naming through a series of deflections and refractions that foreground problematic moments of naming and re-naming. Isabel Lucy's christening ceremony, which disturbingly foreshadows her potential future marriage, stands as a perverse, extended moment of narrative instability that calls attention to its very purposelessness. In the process, the scene almost insists on over-reading.¹¹⁷ Thus, Wood's own most famous work is at least partly preoccupied with revealing the constructedness of names and the ceremonies that should ostensibly reify them, while her own marketed name is at least partly capitalizing on the social stability that such constructed names seemingly imply.

¹¹⁶ As I discuss in more detail shortly, Margaret Oliphant's reaction to *The Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood* satirically foregrounds the strange artificiality of Wood's authorial name, suggesting that at least some did recognize the formulation as non-normative. However, the fact that Oliphant herself, as I argue, was keenly attuned to names and nominative resonances hardly makes her an average Victorian literary consumer.

¹¹⁷ As I discuss in the introduction to this dissertation, earlier canonical Victorian novels (often distinguished as proto- or quasi-sensational) more explicitly link birth and marriage for Victorian women. In *Jane Eyre*, before Jane's aborted marriage, she exclaims, "Mrs. Rochester! She did not exist: she could not be born till to-morrow... and I would wait to be assured she had come into the world alive..." (234-35). Fifteen years later, the monstrous newborn-matron rhetoric re-emerges at end of Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, when "the church-porch having swallowed Bella Wilfer for ever and ever, had it not in its power to relinquish that young woman, but slid into the happy sunlight, Mrs. John Rokesmith instead" (650). In this formulation, the socially normalized nominative birth of a Victorian wife is even more graphically rendered.

By “gender veiling,” I am attempting to evoke both the gender-blurring at play in the construction of the wife’s “proper” nominative coverture (which I discuss more fully in chapters two and three), as a veil visually blurs what it covers; and the very present, and visible, retention of the female gender, as coded by the proper accessory of the “veil.” My formulation is fundamentally paradoxical: gender and identity categories blur together, yet an over-arching categorical identification (“Mrs. Henry Wood” is female) remains visible and recognizable. “Mrs. Henry Wood,” as a gender-veiling (quasi-)pseudonym, may not be fully subversive or gender-bending, but it does provocatively break down boundaries between seemingly opposing ideological categories, particularly the gendered false binary of family and profession.

Ellen Wood’s authorial name continued this tradition of unsettling the divide between familial and professional roles, while seeming to cover over such destabilization, even after her death. Contemporary critics have argued that *The Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood*, written posthumously by her son Charles W. Wood, simplifies this legacy by focusing on her domestic role and the “frail, lady-like persona” of the “matronly amateur” that was so crucial to the “public image she had crafted” while still alive (Wynn 66; Phegley 193).¹¹⁸ However, I would argue that the work actually insists on foregrounding the familial, rather than the domestic, *as well as* the professional, despite occasionally explicit claims to the contrary. For example, the *Memorials* certainly do highlight Wood’s domesticity at times, with such assertions that, “[n]o home duty was

¹¹⁸ Jennifer Phegley focuses on Charles Wood’s own self-interest in composing the *Memorials*, arguing that he, along with Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s son William B. Maxwell, “came to terms with the success of their mothers by depicting them as quaint, domesticated writers redolent of a feminized Victorian past while forging more virile, modern, and professional roles for themselves” (189).

ever neglected or put aside for literary labors...” (228). Charles Wood repeatedly takes pains, though, to stress his mother’s professional savvy, fame, and economic success. This implicit tension replicates Wood’s own postures of self-marketing, as encoded most successfully and overtly through her name; it insists that she legitimately belongs to both ideological spaces, though it pretends to disavow the way such insistence fundamentally breaks down the boundaries between these spaces. In my formulation, Charles Wood may partially cast Wood as a “matronly amateur,” but she remains an ideologically hybrid and unsettling “matronly professional” despite this corrective impulse.

Earlier in the work, Charles Wood overtly emphasizes his mother’s desire and capacity for literary work, stating that “she was conscious of a strange power” (95); and he provides an alternative explanation for the separation between domesticity and professional endeavors for Wood: “In her own house she scarcely ever spoke of her work, for which she had too great a reverence and regard to make it a theme of ordinary conversation” (198). According to this formulation, it is not matronly or feminine duty, but quasi-religious “reverence” for her professional work, that causes the separation between her family and her textual creations. This statement radically disrupts traditional constructions of piety, investing Wood’s professional output, and by extension her professional identity, with an almost sacred air that cannot help but recall the “sacraliz[ing]” apotheosis of the tabooed “Isabel” at the end of *East Lynne*. This professional “reverence” is blasphemous in terms of a Victorian Christian ideological hierarchy. In other words, if this passage is an attempt to reify the boundary between family and profession, it succeeds only at the expense of blurring another traditional Victorian ideological boundary, between the professional and the religious. By blurring

this boundary, the implicit hierarchy by which religious duty exceeds professional duty, a hierarchy that remained particularly crucial for “proper” middle-class women during the period, becomes inverted. The narratives about “Mrs. Henry Wood” therefore continue to destabilize ideological binaries. The fact that her reputation as a proper lady novelist emerged essentially unscathed despite this radical reformulation also suggests that her powerfully veiling name, foregrounded so prominently in the title of this posthumous work, continued to cover over these transgressive moments in terms of public reception.

The *Memorials* do still privilege Wood’s familial roles, but the work frequently does so in ways that simultaneously foreground her professional roles and legacy. Charles Wood spends a fair amount of time linking Ellen Wood’s literary talent back a generation to her parents, the Prices. The narrator insists that her “talent seemed inherited from both parents: the deeper qualities from the father, all the vivacity and ease from the mother” (21), and later allegedly quotes her mother saying, “In my opinion...the talent is a good deal inherited from the mother, and that I by no means count for nothing in this matter” (30). Both of these sections disparage the maternal “inheritance” Wood has ostensibly received, particularly in comparison to the paternal “deeper qualities” that are not backed up by a slightly self-aggrandizing quotation.¹¹⁹ However, to undercut is not to erase, and Ellen Wood’s creative “inheritance” remains officially traced to both father and mother, equal in portion if not in degree. Her literary capacity, and by extension the literary persona she creates and markets, and which

¹¹⁹ This maternal disparagement recalls the way Caroline Norton’s literary forebears were treated in periodicals in the 1830s, which I discuss in chapter two. In these formulations, Norton inherited her talent from her playwright grandfather, Richard Sheridan, and fought against her mother’s efforts to keep her from writing as a child (despite the fact that Caroline Sheridan was herself a published novelist).

continues to be marketed through these *Memorials*, is shaped and defined by familial inheritance, creating an inter-generational bridge that she herself extended into the next generation by becoming the literal breadwinner for her children as a professional author.

At times, *The Memorials* even seems to privilege the professional at the expense of the familial. This bias becomes immediately evident when approaching the work metatextually through an examination of its author's identity and genre in contrast to its narrative voice. As Jennifer Phegley has pointed out, *The Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood* is problematic as a domestic memoir because "[t]he narrative voice effaces Charles's identity as Wood's son (ironically, his primary qualification for writing) and endows him with an institutional authority ("We" vs. "I"). Charles thus avoids the emotionalism of the typical family memoirs and works to establish himself as a professional biographer, despite the fact that he is eulogizing his mother" (192). This tone is particularly ironic, since, as Phegley also argues, Charles used his mother's connections, and the *Memorials* themselves, as a way to further his own career as a writer. (His parallel career as a travel writer certainly comes through in this work, with its over-extended meditations on the landscapes Ellen Wood traveled through over her lifetime.)¹²⁰ His excision of his own voice, as a son and member of the next "Wood" generation, is doubly ironic considering the emphasis he places on Wood's literary indebtedness to her own parents, but by eliminating textual traces of the affective bond between author and subject—between son and mother—he implicitly privileges the "professional" role of the "matronly professional." Indeed, by disavowing his own identity as offspring, Charles's rhetorical

¹²⁰ His indebtedness to his mother for his literary career has firmer grounds: he apparently wrote and published a novel, *The House of Halliwell* in 1890, after her death, from a series of stories she wrote for the *New Monthly* during the '50s (Pykett x).

move elides the “matron” part of his construction of “Mrs. Henry Wood” almost altogether.

“Mrs. Henry Wood” continues to operate as a veil of propriety throughout the *Memorials*, even as Charles Wood foregrounds her most gender-bending professional endeavors. As just discussed, the work begins by emphasizing equal paternal and maternal creative inheritance, constructing a version of literary talent that is both masculine and feminine, and perhaps even predominantly masculine. Later in the work, the narrator points out Wood’s dexterity at creating both male and female characters and, more strikingly for her public persona, male and female narrators. Charles Wood dwells on Wood’s two most gender-bent textual creations, which feature male narrators/alleged authors. Her “Stray Letters from the East,” which were published anonymously in July, September, and December of 1854 in the *New Monthly*, purported to be real letters written by Ensign Thomas Pepper, a soldier at the front in the Crimean War. Her Johnny Ludlow stories, which were published in her *Argosy* magazine from 1870 until her death in 1887, feature an English gentleman, the eponymous Ludlow, reminiscing about his school days, rural hijinks, class-based conflicts, and the occasional interaction with a “fallen” woman. As my descriptions possibly suggest, the Johnny Ludlow stories are generically more nuanced, and at times more sensational, than contemporaneous readers or contemporary critics generally admit, but for the purposes of my argument their identification as non-fictional accounts written by a man will suffice as the most non-normative element of their textual lineage. The *Memorials* linger over anecdotes of friends and acquaintances who believed that the Crimean letters and the Johnny Ludlow stories were straightforwardly written by their apparent authors, Thomas Pepper and the

eponymous Johnny Ludlow, respectively.¹²¹ Charles Wood also mentions more than a few examples of false claims made by others to have written the Ludlow stories, some of which ended with the younger Wood filing suit in court.¹²² He writes of Wood's relationship to Johnny Ludlow, "he had become part of her life; a reality, endowed with existence; and she could no more have placed finis at the end of any one paper than she could have signed a death-warrant of a personal friend" (266). With these passages, Wood actually *does* make a case for his mother's successful literary gender-bending, as her voice in these stories "passes" publicly for a "real" male voice; and the public was shocked, though notably not outraged, when she revealed herself to be the author in the 1880s. By emphasizing her ease with this cross-dressing performance, the *Memorials* once again have it both ways: Wood is a transgressive figure anonymously cutting across

¹²¹ "Friends would occasionally say to her: 'Mrs. Wood, who *is* the author of *Johnny Ludlow*?' And she would laugh and reply: 'That is a secret that will no doubt some day be known'; and none suspected that the writer stood before them" (275). With regard to *Ensign Tom Pepper's Letters from the Seat of War*, Charles Wood delightedly recounts an extended anecdote: "On one occasion, when living abroad, Mr. and Mrs. Wood had come over on a visit to England...where they made the acquaintance of some charming people...One morning, the lady in question mentioned to Mrs. Wood that her husband had gone out for a magazine. 'He is deeply interested in some letters that are appearing in *Colburn's New Monthly*...and can scarcely wait patiently from one month to another. *We are both certain they are genuine*,' she emphatically added. Mrs. Wood...could not help laughing at the singular situation, and in the impulse of the moment betrayed herself; and great was their astonishment at finding that the author of those masculine and realistic letters was none other than the calm and gentle lady whose acquaintance they had so recently made" (279-80).

¹²² "But the mystery caused various people to claim the authorship. Amongst these was one who, in the course of a trial at a fashionable watering-place, declared upon oath that he was the writer of *Johnny Ludlow*. This could not be treated as a mere dishonest boast. The lawyers conducting the case were communicated with, and the author of the assertion had publicly to retract his statement. He wrote to the papers declaring that what he had said was untrue, and that he had never written one line of *Johnny Ludlow*...Others had occasionally done the same thing, though less publicly..." (275-77).

gender boundaries, but she is also “Mrs. Henry Wood,” secure in her proper pseudonym, veiled and therefore protected from any charge of real impropriety

This trope of not-at-all shocking gender-bending finds a rather more literal analogue—as sartorial transvestism—earlier in the *Memorials* in an extended account of Ellen and Henry Wood’s visit to the Grande Chartreuse monastery, where the only way Ellen Wood can see inside the all-male enclave is disguised as a monk. Charles Wood recounts how his father gave his mother a cloak, making her think it was only to keep her warm, yet how she “might have been mistaken for a young diminutive monk or novice; the face almost hidden” (137). He continues, narrating his mother’s witnessing of a midnight mass, “[d]uring the whole time Mrs. Wood had felt as one in a dream” (140), and concludes, after narrating how Ellen Wood discovered the subterfuge and was shocked, “Mrs. Wood never knew whether the remembrance gave her pleasure or pain. A nervousness had come upon her in that midnight gallery she never liked to recall” (141).

This scene, aside from Wood’s confused affective response, is almost straight out of a sensation novel, with its cross-dressing, foreign setting, and gothic trappings. Its inclusion in *The Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood* suggests that the work, and by extension the narrative of Wood herself, is more generically destabilized, hybridized, and inflected with sensation than might be supposed. Wood’s alleged reaction of “nervousness” and affective uncertainty between “pleasure or pain” suggests an almost perverse discomfort with such “real” sensational scenes. This discomfort stands in opposition to the ease with which she creates and deploys sensational tropes and scenes on the page, under the authorizing veil of her quasi-pseudonym. Deborah Wynne glosses this extended anecdote: “This ‘perfect’ lady became a passive transvestite... Wood’s relationship to the

transgressive continued to be ‘nervous’” (65). She may be a “passive transvestite” as depicted in this narrative scene, neatly separated from any potentially transgressive agency, and the narrative may simultaneously attempt to evacuate the shock-value from this account of transvestism even for its readers, but it remains an odd and striking scene whose inclusion speaks to the larger destabilizing ideological work on which Wood’s career was predicated. Even her own life narrative, as recounted in a public, ostensibly conservative “memorial” work, has shocking moments that are seemingly inoculated by her powerful, veiling name. Through the *Memorials*, Wood’s posthumous legacy refracts the duality encapsulated by her gender-veiling brand name: it can be gender-bending and sensationally destabilizing while also being properly contained and socially acceptable, at the same time. Ironically, when the problematically proper “Mrs. Henry Wood” most overtly blurs ideological boundaries, it is not as a sensation heroine nominatively disguised, but as a cross-dresser in her own biographical narrative. She “takes the veil” not as a nun, but as the nun’s male analogue, the monk. The woman whose name represents the height of gender-veiling inadvertently goes a step further, veiling the veil under a cassock.

III. Mrs. Oliphant and Alternative Genealogies: Rewriting the Family Tree

In an anonymous review of biographies for *Blackwood’s* in April 1895 titled “Men and Women,” Margaret Oliphant provides a rather different reading of Wood’s *Memorials*, derisively musing, “She is mysterious because there is no mystery about her” (645). Strikingly, Oliphant focuses on Wood’s name and its odd, constructed formality,

which becomes so apparent by being continually repeated in a domestic memoir. She sarcastically elaborates:

Nay, we feel that we do her a wrong even by calling her Mrs. Wood in this brutal and over-intimate way. To take a scrap of the conventional from her is to do the good lady wrong. She is Mrs. Henry Wood to the end of time, outside and in, on her visiting-cards and in the minds of her children, who, we are sure, would not sacrifice that distinction for the world... In one way, indeed, we know her like our A B C. She is Mrs. John Smith, Mrs. William Brown, Mrs. David Jones, however you may please to ring the changes on these respectable appellations... She was Mr. Henry Wood's good lady: she was Mrs. Henry Wood. What more? Well, there is this unaccountable, unimaginable fact—that she wrote a prodigious number of novels, and that they have all gone into a prodigious number of editions. (645-46)

This critique, which caustically reduces the author to her supposedly all-encompassing name, “Mrs. Henry Wood,” also theorizes that such “respectable appellations” are interchangeable—mere forms to be occupied both phonetically and behaviorally. Her comment that “Mrs. Wood” would be too intimate an address draws tongue-in-cheek attention to the fact that Ellen Wood’s authorial brand name, which becomes transformed through Oliphant’s reading of the *Memorials* into her only name, is overly “respectable” to the point of being unconventional.¹²³ In this way, Oliphant’s reading effaces the destabilizing potential I have located in “Mrs. Henry Wood,” although her satirical fixation on the paradoxical “mysterious” lack of mystery in the woman’s life and output still hints at the more complex gender-veiling that the name creates. In other words, Ellen Wood’s name functions almost too successfully as a “veil” for Oliphant, and this veiling

¹²³ It also indirectly casts “Mrs. Oliphant” as an comparatively intimate form of self-marketing. Oliphant, who generally published her works after the mid-1860s under the name “Mrs. Oliphant,” wrote this review (along with almost all of her 250+ reviews for *Blackwood’s*) anonymously. The tension between her anonymous critique of Wood’s name and her own public marketing choices makes the distinction between “Mrs. Wood” and “Mrs. Henry Wood” all the more pointed.

finds echoes in Oliphant's admittedly ironic use of the term "mystery." And if Oliphant's reading of the *Memorials* is taken to be symptomatic of the work's reception during the period, it becomes evident that the veiling power of "Mrs. Henry Wood" was particularly effective, indeed perhaps too effective, at effacing the more socially transgressive elements of her literary persona and personal narrative, such as those gender-bending anecdotes I highlighted at the end of the previous section.¹²⁴

Oliphant's own nominative history provides ample reasons why she might hold the seemingly arch-patriarchal "Mrs. Henry Wood" in particular contempt. By the mid-1860s, Oliphant also began to publish under a version of her married name—"Mrs. Oliphant"—but while this name publicly and strategically signaled middle-class matronly propriety, the private history of its construction recasts its signification. Due to a series of nominative and familial coincidences that Oliphant productively used, her name gets re-imagined as the product of an alternative matrilineal genealogy, and "Mrs. Oliphant" emerges as a fairly radical act of self-naming still seemingly founded on socially "proper," normalized traditions of patriarchal nominative inheritance. In the process, I would argue, her professional name privileges not only the familial and the matronly, but the matrilineal.

Oliphant published most frequently as "Mrs. Oliphant" beginning in the 1860s, after her novels became popular and, perhaps not entirely coincidentally, after she

¹²⁴ Of course, the fact that Oliphant seemingly held Wood and her works in critical contempt makes it difficult to draw parallels between her review and any more general reception the *Memorials* received when they were first published. However, for my arguments about women authors and the literary market, Oliphant's emphasis on Wood's name does show that, particularly for individuals like Oliphant who were intensely aware of self-marketing and self-branding, names were important and read as representative of an array of social markers. Ellen Wood's marketed name emerges as particularly anomalous, even for those engaging in such intense public self-construction, though.

became a widow.¹²⁵ She signed her correspondence most frequently “M. O. W. Oliphant.”¹²⁶ Her full name, after her marriage, was Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant, because she married a maternal cousin and had been christened with her mother’s maiden name as her middle name. Deirdre D’Albertis, in a tellingly brief parenthetical argument, partially diagnoses the significance of Oliphant’s name: “(even the name under which she signed most of her writings, Margaret Oliphant Wilson Oliphant...is an over determined signifier of her amalgamation of domesticity with professionalism)” (820). My argument stands in distinction to D’Albertis’s first by expanding on its parenthetical approach—I take her authorial name to be crucial to any critical understanding of her role in the marketplace and identity as an author—and by focusing on her most common authorial brand name, “Mrs. Oliphant,” instead of the her more extended proper name. Critics such as Elisabeth Jay have made much of Oliphant’s investment in her matrilineal patronym,¹²⁷ and in her posthumously published *Autobiography* Oliphant herself explains with regard to her mother: “She had a very high idea, founded on I have never quite

¹²⁵In her biography of Oliphant, Elisabeth Jay writes, “She first used the name by which she was to be best known, Mrs. Oliphant, in the year of her widowhood” (Jay 241). Oliphant’s 1860s output, including the more traditionally sensational *Salem Chapel*, garnered more economic and popular success for the author. In the sensation decade, such success, attached to a young widow, might partially explain the timing of Oliphant’s transition to the authorial name “Mrs. Oliphant,” as the veiled quasi-pseudonym could provide an extra level of social security, or an added nominative buffer, against accusations of impropriety.

¹²⁶ Vineta and Robert A. Colby, 4.

¹²⁷ “The multifaceted nature of Mrs. Oliphant’s output makes her case unusually interesting in its revelation of the complicating factors that surround an individual woman’s self-advertisement...Her mother acted as her first publicity agent, attempting to secure literary introductions for her talented daughter...Contempt for the patronymic heritage had been early instilled in Mrs. Oliphant, whose mother held the Wilson family, their name, breeding, and constitution, in great contempt. Mrs. Oliphant’s marriage to a maternal cousin, and her subsequent adoption of the initials M.O. W.O., effectively beleaguered the paternal name while also insisting upon a right, independent of her husband, to bear the name Oliphant” (Jay 241).

known what, of the importance of the Oliphant family, so that I was brought up with the sense of belonging (by her side) to an old, chivalrous, impoverished race. I have never got rid of the prejudice, though I don't think our branch of the Oliphants was much to brag of" (Jay *Autobio.* 57, Coghill version 13).¹²⁸ Oliphant writes in a self-deprecating manner here, but her pride in the name "Oliphant" is well-documented. Moreover, this autobiographical anecdote underscores the fact that while her mother venerated "Oliphant" as a signifier of family power, and thus as a sign of patriarchy, Oliphant herself partially dismissed this reading. Instead, the daughter appreciated the name as a link to her mother, whom she loved deeply, and appreciated the link to the "chivalrous...race" only insofar as it was important to her mother. In other words, Oliphant draws a distinction between "Oliphant's" valence as a patriarchal name, which she denigrates, and as a matrilineal, matriarchal symbol, which she preserves and extends. With this rewritten genealogy in mind, "Mrs. Oliphant" (and certainly "M. O. W. Oliphant") stands as a very different signifier than "Mrs. Henry Wood," despite their similar marital signification.

This alternative signification of "Mrs. Oliphant" remained publicly inaccessible, for the most part, until the posthumous publication of her *Autobiography*. However, Oliphant created fictional analogues that foreshadow her alternative approach to self-redefinition and nominalization in a number of her novels. Her bestselling novel, 1863's *Salem Chapel*, refracts her own female-centric self-naming through a much more extreme

¹²⁸ Mrs. Henry Coghill and Denny Oliphant released a highly edited and arranged version of Oliphant's admittedly rough *Autobiography* manuscript soon after her death. Elisabeth Jay discovered the "original" version of this MS, which was published in 2002. I cite both paginations as the differences between the editions become important later in my argument.

account of the physical regeneration of one of its troublingly sensational characters, Susan Vincent, via a combination of incantatory self-naming and homosocial reunion. Though *Salem Chapel* was published anonymously, it became an anchoring text in the public formulation and identification of Oliphant's growing oeuvre, and it was later republished under her name. By examining these scenes in more detail, I wish to demonstrate the extent to which Oliphant privileges the destabilizing, but potentially productive, power of names. First, though, I will briefly turn to a much more explicit fictional analogue to Oliphant's particular nominative situation, in her most critically resurrected novel, 1866's *Miss Marjoribanks*.¹²⁹

In *Miss Marjoribanks*, often described as an anti-sensation novel, Oliphant refracts her own nominative pride through the central character of Lucilla Marjoribanks.¹³⁰ Lucilla emerges in her eponymous novel as a dissatisfied, independent woman in pursuit of a profession, attempting to navigate the narrow roles available to her in "proper," normative middle-class Victorian society by casting herself as an over-eager housekeeper for her father, an erstwhile society hostess in her small community, and a political backing force in a local election. Her character oscillates throughout the novel as by turns an object of satire and sympathy for the narrative itself, which has made the novel a source of critical contention since its rediscovery, as it were, by Q. D. Leavis in the late 1960s. After a series of narrative incidents that delay and even question the

¹²⁹ *Miss Marjoribanks* was attributed "By the Author of *Salem Chapel*," as was *The Perpetual Curate*, the *Chronicles of Carlingford* novel whose publication date fell between the two volumes. Thus, while Oliphant's name was not yet explicitly attached to these works, their own relationship was immediately established.

¹³⁰ Elisabeth Jay notes that this title was a particularly savvy bit of naming on Oliphant's part, "[A]s a professional novelist she recognized the market value of titles featuring female Christian names that offered promise of romantic addition in the course of the novel..." (105).

suitability of the marriage plot, the eponymous character Lucilla Marjoribanks eventually marries her cousin Tom Marjoribanks, and they buy the old and long-alienated family property, Marchbank, which, the narrative takes pains to note, is pronounced the same as their patronym. The narrator calls attention to this coincidence, stating, “at the moment of taking leave of her, there is something consoling to our own mind in the thought that Lucilla can now suffer no change of name” (496). This passage is often cited as a clear parallel to Oliphant’s own investment in having the same maiden and married names, and it does certainly reflect Oliphant’s own privileging of female nominative independence, at least to an extent.¹³¹ However, Monica Cohen argues that with this emphasis, “Oliphant posits a fundamentally new conception of property by allowing Lucilla to keep a maiden name that becomes a signifier of landed property... That Lucilla’s ‘own’ name however, remains her father’s attests to Oliphant’s willingness to play both with and within the conventions of traditional patriarchy” (Cohen 109). Cohen provides a needed corrective to readings that equate Lucilla’s retention of her “own” name with Oliphant’s own presumed pride in her name. Oliphant’s name, as another patronym, of course cannot escape its imbrications with patriarchy, but under my argument, her matrilinealization of “Oliphant” does at least partially accomplish this. She and her authorial brand name may still “play both with and within conventions of traditional patriarchy,” as Cohen deftly puts it, but she insistently remains more outside the bounds of those conventions than “within” them, in the process destabilizing such boundaries altogether. In contrast, Lucilla Marjoribanks’s name is never severed from its patriarchal

¹³¹ Of course, the fact that Oliphant’s proper maiden name was Wilson (and that Oliphant was her middle name, and her mother’s maiden name) would already trouble this straightforward quasi-biographical reading of Lucilla. The similarity remains, though.

ties—indeed, those ties become stronger over the course of the novel, though her power remains undiminished.

Miss Marjoribanks is the fifth installment of Oliphant's Trollope-esque series *Chronicles of Carlingford*, which were primarily written and published over the course of the 1860s (except for the final volume, 1876's *Pheobe Junior*). The third work in the series, *Salem Chapel*, does have what many critics now consider a strong sensation plot involving marital separation, abduction, threatened rape, murder, and a trauma-induced coma (in an almost overdetermined excess of sensation), though it also interweaves a fairly strong anti-sensational plot about dissenting church politics. It is perhaps unsurprising that this, arguably Oliphant's most overtly sensational novel, was by far her bestselling and most popular work, as she later remarked.¹³² In *Salem Chapel*, women are fairly central to the narrative, although they are still not fully central, as they will be in the tellingly named *Miss Marjoribanks* and *Phoebe Junior*. While half of the novel describes Arthur Vincent's travails as a pompous dissenting minister newly arrived in Carlingford, the second, "sensational" half deals with Mrs. Rachel Mildmay, disguised as Rachel Hilyard, and her abusive, adulterous husband, whose plot dovetails with Vincent's when Colonel Mildmay attempts to seduce and eventually kidnaps Arthur's sister, Susan Vincent, along with Rachel's mentally disabled daughter. Tara Macdonald and Marlene Tromp have argued that "Rachel is the sensational force in the novel," while Tamar

¹³² In her *Autobiography*, Oliphant wrote in self-deprecatory fashion of her *Carlingford* series, "[it] made a considerable stir at the time, and almost made me one of the popularities of literature. Almost, never quite, though 'Salem Chapel' really went very near it, I believe" (135).

Heller holds that Susan Vincent is the locus of such narrative energy.¹³³ Both women characters inject sensational elements into the plot, but it is Susan who emerges at the end of the novel as a self-aware, powerful figure, while Rachel gets diminished by the narrative in striking and ideologically disturbing ways.¹³⁴ I argue that Susan consequently emerges as a refracted, albeit extreme and sensationalized, surrogate for Oliphant herself.

Susan is transformed over the course of the narrative from a proper Victorian young woman—who gets no real narrative attention as such, as is perhaps cast in a doubly “proper” feminine role—into a gender-destabilizing, arguably queered agent whose self-assurance disturbs her brother and the narrative itself. She is abducted—though some readers would argue that this is an initially consensual seduction—by Colonel Mildmay, operating, in typical sensation novel fashion, under the alias of Mr. Fordham; but she eventually escapes and flees across the countryside, re-entering the narrative as a nearly-naked, almost dead ghost of a woman. Mildmay, in the process, is shot and almost dies. Susan’s transformation hinges around a lacuna in the text—the traumatic period during her abduction, and the twin questions of whether she was sexually assaulted and whether she attempted to murder her captor. Her family, the press, and, it would seem, the narrative itself are at pains to insist that she was not raped or

¹³³ Macdonald 26. In *The Private Rod*, Tromp argues, “The novel becomes a means of obsessively telling Rachel’s tale...in the space of her vexed identity and the impact her identity has on others” (159). In “‘No Longer Innocent’: Sensationalism, Sexuality, and the Allegory of the Woman Writer in Margaret Oliphant’s *Salem Chapel*,” Tamar Heller focuses on Susan Vincent as the textual locus of legal and medical professional anxieties. She also reads Susan as “on trial” for “sexual desire,” though she identifies this desire as heterosexually directed towards her abductor (96). I fundamentally disagree with this reading, though not necessarily the idea that Susan is “guilty” of sexual desire, but, as I argue shortly, such desire coalesces around Alice Mildmay, and not her rapist father.

¹³⁴ Leslie Bruce argues that Oliphant “chastens her sexualized female characters” (73).

assaulted in any way, beyond the initial trauma of the kidnapping. She is similarly absolved of all involvement with the shooting of Mildmay, though this absolution occurs after a more extended period in which her guilt is at the center of the narrative. However, Susan's traumatized, shocked reactions certainly call into question these tacit assumptions, and they also open the door to a more skeptical reading of Rachel Hilyard's confession to the shooting of Mildmay. Susan shockingly re-appears in the novel, after a prolonged search for her, as a specter: "Ghastly white, with fixed dilated eyes...could it be Susan who stood there, without a word, without a movement, only with a blank dark gaze...Had it any consciousness at all, this dreadful ghost? Had it come from another world?" (vol. II, 48). Susan has clearly seen and experienced more than the narrative can admit. From this abject position, I would argue, Susan regenerates herself through the repetition of her own name. The narrative calls attention to the uncanny, and yet still deeply embodied nature, of this ceremony:

[W]ith a shudder which shook her entire frame, seemed to come to herself. 'I am Susan Vincent,' said the awful ghost. It began to shiver with dreadful trembling fits-to be convulsed with long gasping sobs. 'I am-Susan-Susan Vincent'—it said at intervals, with a pitiful iteration. (II, 49)

Before she fully recovers, she enters into a coma-like state that almost results in her death, but this moment catalyzes her character's transformation. The narrator describes this profound shift while Susan is still unconscious, "[a]s she lay there in the majesty of unconsciousness, she resembled more a woman who could avenge herself, than a soft girl, the sudden victim of a bad man" (II, 83).¹³⁵ This about-face, from "soft" girl-victim

¹³⁵ Tamar Heller reads Susan's plot arc as "symptomatic" of Oliphant's "distrust of female sexual expression" and "her anxiety about the authority that women's words have in an economy that increasingly commodifies them" (96), and she sees Susan's story "as

to avenging “woman,” seems to be the legacy of her furious struggle to come back to herself, as it were: to re-name herself. However, her name does not recall her to herself, the innocent individual untouched by trauma. It regenerates her as a new “Susan Vincent,” incanted into being by a woman whose sole remaining link with her past *was* her own “proper” family name, the linguistic signifier of selfhood. In this narrative, Susan becomes her own agent, and she remains in possession of her own name and the self-defining powers that come along with it, regardless of whether, in the newspapers, her “innocent honourable name was already sullied by the breath of the crowd” (II, 78). She transcends this public stigma, and her character and narrative emerge as an extreme, and extremely embodied, refraction of Oliphant’s own act of recasting herself by using only her “proper,” patriarchally-inflected name. In her article on *Salem Chapel*, Leslie Bruce argues that Susan Vincent is dehumanized, and almost sanctified, through this process, and that in doing this Oliphant differentiates her from the problematic sexualized female characters, such as Rachel Hilyard, whose desires must be punished (Bruce 74). I would argue, however, that this quasi-apotheosis is a partial failure, recalling the incomplete “sacralization” of Isabel at the end of *East Lynne*, and that Susan remains human and provocatively gendered, and perhaps sexualized.¹³⁶ Oliphant ensures that Susan remains female, rather than angelically asexual, but she casts her in a powerfully

being about both female sexuality and authorship” (97). She reads Susan as a seduced, sexual woman whose sexual knowledge and assurance must be undercut, within the narrative, by her delirium. I, however, would invert the narrative trajectory of this reading: Susan is a victim (of rape or attempted rape, and possibly a murderer in self-defense) who emerges from a delirious fugue as a self, sufficient, potentially (homo)sexual agent.

¹³⁶ Interestingly, while *East Lynne* insists on Isabel’s failed apotheosis and posthumous endurance as a sexualized object for her ex-husband via nominative silencing, *Salem Chapel* privileges Susan’s self-recreation as a statue-like woman via an almost glossolalic incantation of her name.

destabilizing role with regard to ideological binaries of gender and “proper” gendered behavior in the novel.

Crucially, Susan is saved from death, and awakened from her fugue state, by the surprise arrival of her fellow kidnapping victim, Rachel Mildmay’s daughter Alice. She soon asserts to her family and the policeman standing by, “‘Nobody shall touch her—we will protect each other,’ said the voice that had grown strange even to her mother’s ears” (II, 242). When queried about the depth of this connection between the two girls, Alice’s governess explains, with regard to her charge, “[g]irls of that age, if you will not think it strange of me to say so, very often fall in love with a girl older than themselves—quite fall in love, though it is a strange thing to say” (II, 247). “Strange[ness]” becomes the byword of this narrative section. The nurse’s “strange thing to say” cuts both ways, presumably, explaining Susan’s attachment to Alice as well as the disabled girl’s attachment to Susan. This emphatically “strange” but straightforward assertion of certainly homosocial, and possibly lesbian, love grounds “Susan Vincent,” that newly regenerated figure, in the human realm, although it does arguably remove her from the arena of heterosexual exchange in a way that might seem dehumanizing to a brother and mother utterly reliant on a binary model of gender.¹³⁷ The fact that this anomalous regeneration begins with a sensational, uncanny scene of nominative incantation offers an alternative genealogy for “Susan Vincent,” one that is by turns self-generating and

¹³⁷ The novel ends with jarring insinuations that Arthur Vincent, who leaves Carlingford, will marry Alice Mildmay. I would argue that these hasty implications work to undo the ideological damage to propriety that has been incurred in the narrative, and to the relational networks that persist at the narrative’s end, by the governess’s fairly blunt comments. However, this projected union occurs outside the bounds of the narrative, and such a union still allows Alice and Susan to co-habit. And though the conclusion is mediated through Arthur’s perspective, Alice and Susan remain forcefully, and “strange[ly]” prominent.

gynocentric.¹³⁸ I read this alternative genealogy as an extreme version of Oliphant's own practice of re-casting herself via the signification of her proper, marketed name. It refracts and amplifies Oliphant's radical use of names at a time when the author herself was most vehemently covering over this radical significance by deploying "Mrs. Oliphant" for the first time, as a plain signifier of patriarchal propriety, with no accompanying biographical family narrative.

Prior to emerging as "Mrs. Oliphant," though, and to some extent afterwards, Oliphant published a variety of works semi-anonymously in order to maintain a high output but refrain from flooding the market, most frequently using the common attributive "by the author of." By the end of her career Oliphant had produced over 90 novels and well over 200 reviews, but in order to secure their publication, particularly in the 1860s at the height of her output, she had to create competing textual genealogies at competing publishers. Much as "Mrs. Oliphant" emerges as an alternatively matrilineal signifier through Oliphant's posthumously published *Autobiography*, her semi-anonymous attributions emerge as strategic constructions of what I'm calling textual genealogies. By textual genealogy, in this case, I mean the generational relationship between texts whereby "by the author of X," which appeared on the title page of text Y, would become "by the author of Y" or "X and Y" on text Z, and so on. These textual genealogies function analogously to the matrilineally-valenced "Mrs. Oliphant" because

¹³⁸ This regeneration stands in opposition to Isabel Vane's transformation in *East Lynne*, as she assumes a pseudonym but retains her abject subject position. Ellen Rosenman compellingly argues that, "Isabel rises from both shame and the grave for a second, unauthorized life... Isabel owns the symbolic power of monstrosity" (27). However, in comparison with Susan Vincent, Isabel's power and monstrosity seem particularly diminished. Additionally, it is the very "unauthorized" quality of Isabel's second life that makes her pseudonym so weak—she, and her new signature, cannot even authorize her own narrative.

they highlight the way the literary profession is predicated on the concept of genealogies and family structures. For Oliphant (as for Wood), this relationship is explicitly tied up with the relationship between textual creation and physical procreation, or between profession and family, since her self-marketing savvy, prolific output, and insistence on professional legitimacy were necessary for economic success, and by extension for the physical subsistence of her children and extended family.

Oliphant was particularly involved with relatively minute marketing decisions, including the creation of her works' complex and interpenetrating textual genealogies. These attributions were by turns informed by concerns about genre-based marketing (similar-themed novels would be used to refer to one another), publisher-based marketing (pragmatically, only the titles in one publisher's catalog could be used to market her other novels there), and partially by more strategic, nuanced self-marketing concerns.¹³⁹ In her biography of Oliphant, Elisabeth Jay summarizes some of Oliphant's earlier decisions:

She expressed her preference for the initials M.O.W.O. on the title page, although she claimed that she was also happy for the Blackwood's to 'take the greater risk of nameless publication' since 'there seems to be something very disagreeably pompous and self-important in 'the author.' By *Zaidee* she was insisting upon her right to appear at least under the name of Margaret Oliphant if her initials proved too cumbersome. She did not wish this novel to be attributed to the author of either *Katie Stewart* or *Margaret Maitland* since it bore no resemblance to them and in any case it

¹³⁹ In terms of a specific publisher, Hurst and Blackett produced a series of novels by Oliphant in the 1850s (many of her earliest novels). In 1851, *Merkland* was attributed "By the Author of *Passages in the Life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland*" (which had been published anonymously the previous year); later that year *Caleb Field* was marked "'By the Author of *Passages in the Life of Mrs. Margaret Maitland, Merkland &c.*" (notably the &c. was an empty signifier at this point); 1853, *Harry Muir* "By author of *Maitland, Merkland, Adam Graeme, etc.*" A reader could trace an author, still anonymous, through this textual genealogy, which sometimes shifted and became more capacious, and sometimes became narrower. In other words, this genealogy signaled its textual generator—an absent presence—and partially obscured her extreme productivity by only calling attention to select works.

was ‘the most important book I have ever written and the one I should be best pleased to put my name to.’ . . . She first used the name by which she was to be best known, Mrs. Oliphant, in the year of her widowhood, and in the next decade had real reason to protect her trademark zealously. (241)

In all of these cases, and many more, Oliphant strategically deployed variations on her name in order to produce an array of texts and textual genealogies that both competed against each other in the marketplace and directed interested readers from one to the next.¹⁴⁰

A particularly fascinating example of Oliphant’s textual genealogies and their link to her actual family genealogy can be found in her brother William Wilson’s publication of a few of her earliest novels under his own name, or, even more tellingly, under “By the Author of” tags that eventually linked up with novels attributed to his name. Critics vary in opinion on whether William, whom Oliphant supported for much of his later life, published these four novels with her permission (she certainly spun it as such in her *Autobiography*). Regardless of Oliphant’s initial feelings, though, William Wilson did eventually obtain her sanction, going on to publish a few of his own novels in this alternative genealogy that both was and was not an “Oliphant” series of textual creations. The fact that she allowed her work to be published under the “Wilson” name in this way has interesting ramifications for her championing of her own matrilineal genealogy, but it

¹⁴⁰ In a letter to her regular publisher Blackwood from June 23, 1865, she stated, “At the same time, I never would for an instant dream of giving a story by the author of the Carlingford Series to any periodical whatever on any terms, unless indeed you were first to throw me overboard. I have decided to tell the ‘Good Words’ people that they may have a novel by Mrs. Oliphant or the author of ‘Margaret Maitland’ if they wish it” (Autobio. And Letters, 203). In 1863 she wrote to publisher Alexander Macmillan, “No name please—not even initials. This I particularly desire in respect of this article and trust you will be good enough to secure that it shall be *quite anonymous*” (qtd. Vineta and Robert A. Colby, 3).

also underlines her privileging of family and the ways her work generated a living for her dependents. In *Becoming a Woman of Letters*, Linda Peterson partially explains this phenomenon by arguing that, “[i]deologically, Oliphant treats the acts of writing and publishing not as the beginning of an independent professional career but as an example of collaborative domestic effort” (268). I would argue instead that while this extended episode does seem to reveal a prioritization of family over profession, it remains an illustration of the interpenetration of family and profession. Moreover, it stands as just one in a large and continually increasing web of competing textual genealogies, at which Oliphant remains the center despite her nominative absence. Her professional strategies (which, in the 1850s, were still professionalizing strategies) were capacious and, through their very nature, could handily include and contain such familial co-opting.

Through her letters and posthumous *Autobiography*, Oliphant repeatedly signals that this work of creating so many textual genealogies is for the most part in order to support her family, that human genealogy she is continually attempting (and sadly failing, as she outlived all of her children) to preserve. In a letter to Blackwood in the middle of her career, Oliphant mentions her “name, which my boys, I hope, will make something of” (qtd. Jay 244). Jay continues, positing that “in the name, of which she was so fiercely proud, her work and her family, that so often seemed at odds, appeared to achieve identity of interest” (244). In other words, for Oliphant the tropes of creation and procreation, of profession and family, were inextricably bound. However, she outlived both of her sons, whose careers faltered despite her efforts to have them carry on the literary tradition she had begun. Her niece, Denny Oliphant, who changed her last name as a sign of loyalty to her aunt, and young cousin Annie Coghill (who went on to publish

five novels), actually did take up her literary tradition by editing her *Autobiography* for publication after her death. However, the reworked edition excises her emotional outpourings of grief over the death of each of her children and reorders the “fragmented” narrative which many critics believe to be so central to Oliphant’s own theory of autobiography, and women’s autobiography more generally.¹⁴¹ Similarly to Charles Wood’s *Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood*, though, *The Autobiography of Margaret Oliphant* remains an unstable, destabilizing work even less successfully contained and normalized by its subject’s seemingly proper literary persona.

As an autobiography initially created during spare hours through journal entries, the work is inherently and already resistant to certain ideological binaries: it is deeply family-oriented but also explicitly market-driven. Despite Denny Oliphant and Annie Coghill’s editorial interventions, the work continues Oliphant’s tradition of blurring the boundaries between family and profession and dismantling gender binaries. It remains a work explicitly, and excessively, about both intimate emotional breakdowns and self-conscious, strategic self-marketing. Oliphant’s autobiographical persona repeatedly foregrounds her family tragedies as well as her own theories of successful authorship and

¹⁴¹ Laurie Langbauer argues, “Just what authorizes autobiography may be important to Oliphant because autobiography itself seems like an act of authorization to her, an act of self-authorization, a way to become or create one’s self” (127). Laura Green summarizes, “Recent readings of the *Autobiography* itself have emphasized the gender- and genre-challenging ambivalence, indeterminacy, and nonlinearity of its narrative...her experience and representation of maternity, shaped as much by the brute facts of Victorian mortality as by the complexities of Victorian domestic ideology, make the *Autobiography* exemplary of the pluralist account of Victorian gender ideologies that feminist scholars have been building for the past several decades” (38;40). Whether this reading that Oliphant believes that the condition of woman’s existence in Victorian society is “fragmented” is true, or is necessarily embodied by the text that was written at odd hours and unedited by Oliphant, can never perhaps fully be resolved. I would argue that such an investment in Oliphant’s ordering of her work in the *Autobiography* is perhaps an over-reading, though.

savvy self-presentation, in the process calling attention to her own unapologetically unique role in the profession as an individual opposed to categorization by gender-binary roles. This unique, excessive voice withstands the editing process, posthumously insisting on “Margaret Oliphant” as an emotional mother *and* as a strategic textual construct. In the end, I would argue, the *Autobiography* erases the boundary and implicit hierarchical relationship between family and profession altogether, as she becomes one of her own textual creations.

In 1864, Oliphant’s only living daughter Margaret died in Rome, after catching a fever. Her “original” *Autobiography* begins soon after this date, with often painful to read expressions of new grief. Much of this section and other sections about this grief were cut in the originally published volume in an attempt to shore up her legacy as a proper woman writer—and not as a publicly grieving mother—against the by turns self-reflexive, wry, and bitterly emotive confessional tone of the fragmented work. In the excised portions, Oliphant dwells on Maggie’s name and her inability to speak it in ways that recalls and recasts the talismanic over-signification of Isabel in *East Lynne*. She meditates, after her eldest son has died, “This is how we are to take our sorrow, never to avoid his name. From the time of her death till now I have never named Maggie’s name. I have avoided it and called her my child, my darling, never that familiar sound named” (85). This section is not included in the original publication. However, the following passage does appear: “Up to five years ago I could not say her dear name without the old pang coming back; since then, when there came to be another to bury in my heart, my little girl seemed all at once to become a tranquil sweet recollection” (154; 95). Notably, while the second passage mentions Oliphant’s taboo around her daughter’s name, it also

moves past this excessive emotional coding, focusing on a “tranquil[ity]” that suggests the author is no longer excessively grieving but simply meditating on her daughter. Only once such excessive emotions of abject loss have been contained can the strangely powerful name be invoked “publicly,” or at least so it would seem according to this editorial intervention.

As Deirdre D’Albertis has argued, Oliphant’s *Autobiography* has “traditionally been read as a maternal document” (812). However, she provides a needed corrective to this reductive reading by insisting that, “Maternity is most usefully regarded as continuous with her hopes and fears as a writer, rather than an overriding and conflicted source of self-authorization. Her children, like her books, were works Oliphant struggled to place well” (816). D’Albertis’s claim foregrounds the parity between textual creation and procreation that I am arguing was at the core of Oliphant’s insistence on professional legitimacy. Oliphant herself explicitly addresses the fraught relationship between family and profession in an unpublished excerpt from the beginning of her *Autobiography*: “it was necessary for me to work for my children. That, however, was not the first motive, so that when I laugh inquiries off and say that it is my trade, I do it only by way of eluding the question which I have neither time nor wish to enter into” (48). In other words, family subsistence necessitated professional labor, but this necessity did not fully characterize, define, or explain such “work.” The relationship between family and profession is not simply equal, but it is not strictly hierarchical either. For the otherwise forthright Oliphant, her professional persona remains strategically both under- and over-determined. It is reductively a “trade” “only” because Oliphant does not want to discuss the mysterious “first motive” she mentions but will not name, and it is the capacious

answer to “the question” that would allegedly take more “time” than Oliphant has to fully answer. This meditation on a deliberate textual silence once again calls attention to itself, providing yet another reason why the passage may have been excised for publication. On the surface, it seems to be an assertion of an inversion of “properly” gendered hierarchical allegiances, privileging the professional over the familial; but it actually destabilizes this binary altogether by refusing to adhere even to this radical but straightforward recalibration.

The *Autobiography* makes D’Albertis’s description of a “continu[ity]” between familial and professional roles explicit, perversely, after Oliphant can no longer successfully play her original maternal role due to her children’s deaths. Oliphant muses, “How strange it is to me to write all this, with the effort of making light reading of it, and putting in anecdotes that will do to quote in the papers and make the book sell! It is a sober narrative enough, heaven knows! And when I wrote it for my Cecco to read it was all very different, but now that I am doing it consciously for the public, with the aim (no evil aim) of leaving a little more money [for Denny], I feel all this to be so vulgar, so common, so unnecessary, as if I were making pennyworths of myself” (140;75).¹⁴²

Notably, this striking passage remains in the originally published version, despite the fact that it explicitly rails against the “vulgar[ity]” of the author herself for compiling such a work and, by extension, the vulgarity of the work itself. Later in the work, at her most meta-textual, Oliphant more philosophically admits that, “It is rather a fictitious sort of

¹⁴² It is worth noting that “for Denny” is included in the original MS, but not the original publication, suggesting how Denny and Annie evacuated themselves and their implicit profit from this work from its published edition. This move not only recalls Charles Wood’s depersonalized authorial voice in *The Memorials of Mrs. Henry Wood*, it also undercuts Oliphant’s own recasting of herself as a mother-figure for Denny, once more perversely undercutting the familial momentum of the narrative.

thing recalling those semi-professional recollections” (192; 138). Aside from the self-denigrating qualifier “semi-professional,” Oliphant is foregrounding the constructedness of these “anecdotes” and “recollections” by emphasizing their involvement with and rewriting for the literary marketplace. Oliphant’s self-marketing cannot be any more overt, though this very transparency is an equally strategic self-marketing pose. When Oliphant uneasily comments that she feels “as if [she] were making pennyworths of myself,” she rewrites her own quasi-fictitious self-construction as not only fictional, but textual and economical. Through this figure, she is transformed into tiny commodities as she creates, markets, and sells herself. This depiction of her self-marketing calls attention to itself as an extended metaphor, and it perhaps cannot help but draw a tacit parallel between Oliphant’s profession (or “semi-profession”) and the more traditional female profession of selling oneself, prostitution.

I would argue that this implicit allusion to prostitution stands as a culmination of sorts of Oliphant’s career-spanning paratextual attempts to blur the boundary between the ideologically gendered spheres of family and profession. Prostitution is, after all, a potentially generative profession and stands as the improperly sexual analogue to the properly sexual role signified by “Mrs.” Margaret Oliphant’s early competing textual genealogies and the matrilineally rewritten “Mrs. Oliphant” are posthumously refracted through the trope of a commodified, and therefore prostituted, authorial persona that is both public and strategically, uncomfortably private and intimate. The fact that she is still considered by many critics to be an ideologically conservative anti-sensation figure of the Victorian era shows the extent to which her bid for professional and cultural legitimacy succeeded. However, such pigeonholing fails to recognize her radical practice

of collapsing ideological binaries and re-writing genealogies, both real and textual, a practice that both perversely and fittingly ensured her professional and economic success. In the next chapter, I continue my discussion of women authors and professional legitimacy by focusing on accusations of plagiarism amongst centrally and peripherally “sensational” authors Mary Elizabeth Braddon, Oliphant, Wood, and Caroline Norton. I shift from questions of gender, family, and the “generative” profession, however, to questions of gender, sensation, and even more overt comparisons of prostitution and the literary profession.

CHAPTER V

A SENSATIONAL PROFESSION: PERIODICALS AND PLAGIARISM

The literary marketplace of the 1860s was defined not only by the sensation genre but also by changes in the periodical system as well. The decade witnessed an influx of female author/editors—generally celebrity sensation authors like Mary Elizabeth Braddon and Ellen Wood—as well as a renewed interest in the signature-vs.-anonymity debates that had been simmering within and around periodicals since the 1830s. I argue that these phenomena are linked: concerns about unstable identity and gender are fundamental to both the sensation genre as well as the implicitly gendered anonymity debate. This debate revolved around whether journals should require or encourage their contributors to sign, and thus publicly claim ownership of, their reviews, essays, and other miscellaneous contributions; or whether the more common model of anonymous (or pseudonymous) contribution might provide a less morally compromised, more objective paradigm. At issue, fundamentally, were questions of critical responsibility and individual vs. corporate ethics, and while signature policies eventually won out (as can be seen through contemporary magazine publishing practices), the 1860s saw the beginnings of explicit, though tentative, adoption of such policies.¹⁴³

¹⁴³ For a more thorough exploration of the signature debates, see Dallas Liddle’s “Salesmen, Sportsmen, Mentors: Anonymity and Mid-Victorian Theories of Journalism” and Sarah Nash’s “What’s In a Name? Signature, Criticism and Authority in The Fortnightly Review.”

The 1860s also saw women becoming editors in higher numbers and of more prominent magazines, some of which, such as Mary Elizabeth Braddon's *Belgravia*, were founded as vehicles to expand and capitalize on their editors' famous brand names. A former actress in regional theater, Braddon had achieved lasting fame as the author of *Lady Audley's Secret* in 1862; and she and her lover, co-parent, and publisher, John Maxwell, founded *Belgravia* in 1866 as both a forum for some of Braddon's prolific fictional output as well as a vehicle to increase and legitimize her literary celebrity. Ellen Wood took over the editorship of the *Argosy* in 1867 for similar reasons, although she was attempting to distance herself more overtly from sensation discourse than was Braddon. As Braddon and Wood achieved even more power in the literary marketplace through their editorships, their works and authorial personae increasingly came under fire from a variety of sources, most scandalously with accusations of plagiarism against Braddon in 1867 and Wood in 1871. Such allegations brought the sensationalized idea of malleable names, female propriety, and questions of property (in this case intellectual property) to the forefront of literary discourse at the end of the sensation decade. I argue that these accusations in particular catalyzed published exchanges that in turn recoded the literary profession as fundamentally sensational. Strikingly, the erstwhile sensation author Margaret Oliphant anonymously penned one of these accusations against Braddon in 1868 in her role as "general utility woman" for *Blackwood's*,¹⁴⁴ while that progenitor of sensation discourse, the notorious Caroline Norton, directly accused Wood of plagiarizing *East Lynne* in 1871 in the *Times*.

¹⁴⁴ Oliphant uses this term in her *Annals of a Publishing House: Willaim Blackwood and His Sons*, v.II 475. Qtd. Brown 119.

Figures such as Braddon and Wood were hardly the first women to edit periodicals, however. George Eliot had anonymously assistant-edited the *Westminster* a decade earlier while Eliza Cook edited and published her eponymous *Eliza Cook's Journal* even before that. In the 1830s, upper-class female authors including Caroline Norton had edited annuals and books of beauty, soliciting and assembling contributions from upper-class acquaintances. However, the female celebrity author/editors of the mid-to-late 1860s were fairly unique in terms of their prominence as “conductors” in addition to the cost and frequency of publication of the magazines themselves.

Oliphant and Norton both lacked the security and degree of literary power ostensibly created by an editorship. Oliphant remained an anonymous contributor to *Blackwoods* who repeatedly petitioned for and never received an editorship, while Norton was a former prolific editor of a profoundly different genre of periodicals during the 1830s and '40s. Both figures position themselves against the more successful author/editors Braddon and Wood. All four of these women are professional hybrids of necessity in a profession that remained inimical to their gender, however, taking on a number of roles in the literary marketplace. Furthermore, all four authors remain deeply engaged with the rhetoric of sensationalism, even in “objective” reviews such as those Oliphant wrote for *Blackwood's*. In this chapter, I first examine the accusations of plagiarism made against Mary Elizabeth Braddon in 1868 by Oliphant in *Blackwood's* and by Frederick Greenwood in *The Pall Mall Gazette*, along with Braddon's strategic responses to these accusations in *Belgravia*. In the second half of the chapter, I focus on a slightly later exchange among Norton, Wood, and a variety of other literary figures in 1871 in the letters to the editor column of the *Times*. I contrast the way Braddon

responds indirectly within the pages of her own magazine, by assigning one rebuttal to frequent contributor George Sala and by penning another reaction under an obviously false pseudonym, with the way Wood responds under her own name but outside of the pages of her *Argosy*, in the *Times*. I also analyze the ways Braddon, Wood, Norton, and even, to an extent, Oliphant deploy a variety of sensational tropes in these exchanges that recast the literary profession, along with the literary marketplace, as inherently sensational and gender-destabilized. In so doing, I would argue, these authors attempt to carve out a space for women *and* men as professionals in a literary economy that is unstable, disabling, and yet potentially empowering through this very instability.

I. Expanding Sensation: Braddon and *Belgravia*

Mary Elizabeth Braddon was hounded with accusations of plagiarism almost from the moment she began publishing under her own name, but these accusations only peaked in 1867, just after she assumed the editorship of *Belgravia* in late 1866. In September of 1867, both Margaret Oliphant and Frederick Greenwood, writing anonymously for *Blackwood's* and the *Pall Mall Gazette*, respectively, directly accused Braddon of plagiarizing two of Braddon's more recent novels from French sources. These claims (particularly Greenwood's) triggered a wider debate about authorial ownership, pseudonymity, and sensationalism in many of the most prominent periodicals of the time. With the November 1867 issue of *Belgravia*, Braddon had a public platform to respond to these accusations and interject her voice directly into the debates. However, Braddon chose an alternative route, delegating the response to *Blackwood's* to George A. Sala, whose "The Cant of Modern Criticism" still stands as an archetypal defense of sensation.

Braddon herself elected to address the *Pall Mall Gazette* in the person of Captain Shandon, that magazine's erstwhile fictional founder and original editor (as recounted in William Thackeray's *Pendennis*).

These two articles redefine the literary marketplace as an already and inherently sensational discursive space, provocatively expanding the definition of "sensation," in the case of Sala, and enacting a meta-literary, meta-sensational counter-attack, in the case of "Shandon." At the same time, Braddon's pragmatic retreat from direct response serves as a commentary on just how crucial such sensational tropes of veiled identity were to women author/editors in the mid-Victorian period. Braddon's position as editor and emblazoned "conductor" of the fairly successful *Belgravia* should have brought with it a certain level of market power and protection, if the precedent of male celebrity editors such as Dickens were taken into account, but unsurprisingly her status as a woman *and* a sensation author (not to mention her social position as the unmarried mother of her publisher's children) considerably mitigated this potential power. However, the sensationalizing of the literary marketplace in the November 1867 issue of *Belgravia* illustrates how this potential power was already compromised for all editors of the period, both men and women.

To an extent, Braddon's marketplace identity was already a hybrid long before the bestselling sensation author assumed the mantle of magazine "conductor." She was churning out penny-dreadful installments even before her success with *Lady Audley's Secret*, and she continued to publish such pseudonymous work throughout the '60s alongside her higher-profile, properly denominated novels. She occasionally revamped such shilling-novels into triple-deckers, but when she converted *The Banker's Secret* into

Rupert Godwin two years after it had been serialized in the *Halfpenny Journal*, critics bristled.¹⁴⁵ In one of her many anonymous reviews for *Blackwood's*, Margaret Oliphant inserted an overdetermined condemnation of Braddon's novel into a more general treatise against immoral fiction, and the immoral fiction of and about women more particularly. This article is one of the strongest pieces of evidence used by critics over the last few decades to assert Oliphant's staunch anti-feminist leanings. It is worth considering, as some critics have, the fact that this is hardly unadulterated Oliphant, since she is writing in the decidedly Tory *Blackwood's* as an anonymous, and therefore presumptively male, editorially sanctioned writer. Mark Schoenfield's analyses of the authorial voice in Romantic periodicals remains somewhat true for Oliphant and her longstanding relationship with the arch-traditional *Blackwood's*, "publications consolidated distinct authorial voices into single corporate, authoritative voices" (3). He continues, "Institutional heteroglossia unmoors intentionality from the particular author and renders it an effect of material production" (26).

However Oliphant's own attitude did seemingly skew anti-sensational, suggesting her own complicated relationship with literary market trends and being identified as a popular author. Her vitriol towards Braddon's copious, sensational output comes through in her review, in which she asserts:

The author of 'Rupert Godwin' has compelled the world to accept not only a copy, but a very miserable copy, by the mere form of her name. She has

¹⁴⁵ This practice was routine, it would seem. Ellen Wood expanded some of her early, anonymous stories for the *New Monthly* into full novels in the 1870s, and indeed the accusations of plagiarism that Caroline Norton lodged against Wood, which I discuss in the next section, stem from the notion that Wood enacted a similar process with one of Norton's early stories from the 1830s. Presumably critics reacted against *Rupert Godwin* because of the title change and the fact that Braddon was adapting a novel into a novel, rather than substantially expanding a story into a full novel.

palmed off upon three intelligent nations, according to her own account, a fairy changeling, bewitched out of natural beauty into decrepitude and ugliness... (178)

Here, Oliphant references the prefatory note appended to *Rupert Godwin*, which charted its pirated lineage from “a cheap Weekly Journal...into...French...in the *Journal pour Tous*. It was there discovered by an American, who retranslated the matter back into English, and...obtained an outlet...in the columns of the *New-York [sic] Sunday Mercury*” and “that has not been published in England except in...crude and fragmentary shape” (qtd. Wolff 122). Oliphant interprets this account of piracy and reclamation as literary sleight-of-hand, transforming an admittedly self-serving explanation of literary self-adaptation into a fantasy fiction of fairy changelings. She soon transitions from the rhetoric of fantasy directly to sensation, asserting, “[Braddon] never invented any circumstance so extraordinary as this public faith and loyal adherence which she seems to have won” (179). By claiming that Braddon’s celebrity is the most sensational element in or out of her novels, Oliphant gestures, albeit in a satirical manner, to the underlying condition of the literary marketplace. Unsurprisingly, she shies away from explicitly naming “sensation” as this condition, but this critical move underscores how expansive the sensational influence was. It no longer needed to be named to be fully understood, or at least recognized.

Oliphant proceeds to eviscerate Braddon’s novel as not only a “miserable copy” but one directly plagiarized from Charles Reade’s *Hard Cash*. By charting this overdetermined, compromised literary lineage, she effectively completes this character assassination, taking Braddon from a “lad[y who] might not know...any better” (175) to an outright thief. Oliphant diagnoses Braddon’s success with regard to *Rupert Godwin* as

“one of the finest privileges of a great name...[a] climax of fame and success” (178), inscribing a direct link between such accepted plagiarism and established celebrity, as signified by a “great name” or brand. While Oliphant’s own name arguably never had quite the same cultural cache of Braddon’s, the fact that she was the Queen’s avowed favorite author and a bestseller in her own right makes this statement, made by the famous Oliphant under the “veil of anonymity” and as part of a series of reviews that assured her economic independence and the survival of her large family, fraught and conflicted to say the least. It suggests both Oliphant’s bitterness at Braddon’s success as well as the corporate persona Oliphant essentially had to adopt when writing for Blackwood’s. By using the term “climax” in her critique of Braddon, Oliphant is also of course insistently casting the whole trajectory of Braddon’s career and publicity as a literary plot, thereby maintaining the link between the market and the novels that it so effectively produces. While Oliphant, in the persona of *Blackwood’s* corporate critical voice, decries this sensational climax, though, George Sala celebrates the world of the sensational in his response in *Belgravia* two months later.

Sala begins his essay by appropriating famous Victorian novels into the sensation genre, stating, “*Jane Eyre* was to all intents and purposes a ‘sensational’ novel” and “*Adam Bede* too is clearly ‘sensational.’ There is murder and there is frailty in it” (52). He ends this brief litany with the uncontested claim that “*Lady Audley’s Secret*, *Aurora Floyd* [and Braddon’s other novels]...are also indubitably sensational” (52), creating an alternative auspicious literary lineage for Braddon’s novels in response to Oliphant’s accusation that *Rupert Godwin* was a “changeling” product of piracy, plagiarism, and self-copying. In the process, he is building an alternative lineage for the sensation genre

itself, one that he expands even further a few months later in his essay “On Sensation” to include Shakespeare and Scott. This is a legitimizing move that plays on the foundational tropes of the sensation genre itself—Sala rewrites the history of the entire genre, insisting that rather than arriving newly formed in 1860, “sensation” had earlier, properly canonical novelistic forebears (though even these novels were frequently deemed “improper” when first released). In other words, he inscribes “sensation” with propriety, a move that could by turns de-sensationalize the genre and sensationalize propriety itself, at its very foundation.

Sala delivers the coup de grace to the anti-sensation camp soon after establishing this alternative lineage, declaiming, “we... want novels about That which Is, and not about That which never Was and never Will be... We want meat; and this is a strong age, and we can digest it” (54). Writing as a champion of the oftentimes feminized genre, Sala reinscribes the age, and by extension the mode of sensation, with more stereotypically masculine tropes—“meat” and strength. Rather than re-gendering sensation as a masculine endeavor, though, I argue that these tropes destabilize such gender-mappings altogether, positioning sensation as not only generically hybrid but gender-blurred as well.

Sala’s central and most forceful claim comes at the beginning of this statement: “we...want novels about That which Is.” The portentously capitalized “That which Is,” or reality, is the “meat” that readers desire, most effectively served up by sensation novels and their authors. In other words, sensation novels are about reality, and, by extension, the sensational is the condition of reality. In a response to Sala’s follow-up treatise on what “sensation” is, the *Saturday Review* quipped, “Mr. Sala is certainly sensational

enough in his answer” (Feb 15, 1868 201). This is perhaps a fair enough assessment, but all of these accusations, counter-accusations, and reclamations surrounding “sensation” speak to its permeation of literary discourse, if nothing else. The *Saturday Review*’s analysis also fits in perfectly with Sala’s own philosophy of sensation. Past a certain point, *everything* becomes, or potentially can be, sensational. Arguably, this is the condition of a society in which identity and property (in this case literary property), as encoded in the proper name, can never truly be fixed and known.

Sala’s own role in shaping the literary marketplace of the 1860s speaks to this social instability. He was a vocal proponent of a policy of signature in periodicals, and he even co-founded a journal, *The Train*, that was the earliest adopter of an explicit signature policy (in fact, it was its main reason for existence), though it quickly failed.¹⁴⁶ He edited the *Temple Bar* until 1863, but by 1866 he was a contributor to *Belgravia*. His early involvement with the signature debate suggests that ideologically, he was an ideal fit with Braddon, who in private correspondence revealed that she hated anonymous reviews for facilitating personal attacks (such as Oliphant’s own anonymous “Novels” allowed).¹⁴⁷ Thus, *Belgravia* had a tacit policy of signature, at least for the literary essays published in it.¹⁴⁸ As discussed in the introduction to this chapter, the signature/anonymity debate hinged around a variety of issues, and the compelling

¹⁴⁶ In a footnote to his comprehensive article on the signature debates, Dallas Liddle summarizes, “*The Train*, a signed collection of light, non-political entertainment, for railway travelers, was launched by journalists G. A. Sala and Edmund Yates in 1856; it folded in 1858 with this farewell: ‘The promoters of the magazine—all working men in journalism—considered that they would be doing good service by helping to break through the custom of anonymity’ (5 June 1858)” (Liddle, p. 64, note 2).

¹⁴⁷ Letter Qtd. Robinson 116.

¹⁴⁸ Solveig Robinson underlines this fact: “all literary essays in *Belgravia* are signed” (119). I discuss the fact that Braddon almost constantly published novels pseudonymously in the magazine in the next section.

rhetorical force behind the corporate, editorial “we” can be seen in that even Sala, in his famous signed treatise, insistently incants “we want...we want...we can...” He may avowedly be a single individual, but he can still co-opt the plural subject position, speaking for a collective interest that *must* exist if his arguments are to be found persuasive and true. This rhetorical register implies that, even beyond the fact that Braddon used pseudonyms in her magazine almost constantly, a strict policy of signature was for all intents and purposes untenable in a mid-Victorian periodical. The marketplace required a savvier, more multifarious approach to names, brands, and self-presentation in order to achieve literary success. Braddon’s delegation of the Belgravian response to the *Blackwood’s* accusations underscores this fact.

In an important early article on Braddon and the critical philosophy of *Belgravia*, Solveig Robinson asserts, “Braddon’s correspondence makes it clear that Sala’s essays were the result of her own careful behind-the-scenes work as editor” (113). In other words, “The Cant of Modern Criticism” is not simply Sala chivalrously coming to the textual aid of his lady-editor-in-distress, but a strategic assignment deflecting further attention from Braddon as well as a protective, insulating measure made to distance Braddon from the kind of overt championing of the sensational mode that Sala, who was not a sensation author, could more securely make.¹⁴⁹ Jennifer Phegley summarizes the editorial signature policy of *Belgravia*, emphasizing Braddon’s role in its establishment and its effects:

Braddon also made an effort to combat...the use of anonymity. Most of the critics who wrote for *Belgravia* revealed their identities in the

¹⁴⁹ Beth Palmer provides an alternative reading of their relationship: “Sala would help to consolidate and corroborate Braddon’s self-performance by taking on elements of her own sensational style” (30).

magazine, thus creating the appearance of a more honest and open format that sustained a critical mass of opinion that did not emanate solely from Braddon. (165)

In other words, the signature policy decentralized the magazine away from its “conductor” into its orchestral constituents, at least in “appearance.” As with Sala’s trope of a sensational mode that becomes so naturalized as to be coterminous with “That which Is,” Braddon’s signature policy lets her have it both ways. She is the proper veiled lady editor who never speaks directly to her readers and whose participation in the literary marketplace is now, through *Belgravia*, legitimated; and she maintains at least partial, if not near-total, control of the content and format of this legitimating journal. For a celebrity woman editor, signing her own name could be both a powerful act of agency and also a self-defeating opening to vulnerability and attack. This ambivalently gendered duality has an easy analogue in sensation fiction, and I would argue that the signature debate came to a head in the 1860s due in no small part to the influential role played by such sensation tropes in the discourse of the period. Braddon herself exploits the sensational potential built into such a signature policy when she assumes the pseudonym of Captain Shandon to combat the more damaging (because somewhat true) accusations of plagiarism made by the *Pall Mall Gazette* the same month that Oliphant launched her all-encompassing attack.

Circe was serialized in *Belgravia* from March-September 1867 under the name “Babington White,” a pseudonym Braddon frequently used in order to run two novels concurrently in her magazine (or elsewhere). Braddon’s identity as Babington White was not fully public knowledge, although many critics and insiders in the literary arena were

aware of the nominative disguise.¹⁵⁰ However, Braddon's pseudonymity was not the catalyst for the scandal surrounding this work, although it did contribute to the accusations. *Circe* was an adaptation of the French play *Dalila*, written by Octave Feuillet in 1857, which led the *Pall Mall Gazette* to decry it as an overt act of plagiarism. It seems unequivocal, though perhaps somewhat beside the point, that Braddon's novel was indeed taken from the obscure French drama, as even Braddon (writing as Capt. Charles Shandon) describes the work's genesis as follows:

[It was] founded on a French drama, from which source the English writer has taken only the broad idea of his characters, and the general bearing and moral of his *story*. But then he has translated about half a page of the French writer's dialogue, that half-page being the key-note of his theme, and he has thus enabled you to quote a parallel passage, and by a little clever manipulation to make it appear to your readers (who, you speculate, are not acquainted with the French drama) that the whole work is a mere translation, or, in your less guarded assertion, 'a novel stolen from the French. ("Remonstrance," 82)

At issue was the definition of plagiarism itself, and what separates adaptation, translation, and outright theft. In a period when international copyright law was non-existent, though anxiously lobbied for by professional authors, accusations of plagiarism were difficult, if not impossible, to prove, even in the most egregious of cases. In the case of *Circe*, as the *Spectator* noted in the midst of this scandal, White/Braddon's borrowing was a common and completely acceptable practice in the theater.¹⁵¹ In other words, in singling out Braddon's novel the *Pall Mall Gazette* is engaging in a quasi-personal attack on a newly

¹⁵⁰ "Babington White" came from her maternal grandmother's maiden and married names: she was "Anne Babington White;" and Braddon herself named one of her sons "William Babington." This matriarchally-inflected masculine name recalls Margaret Oliphant's investment in her own patronym, inherited from her mother's side of the family, though it also suggests a curious gender-blurring that is only available when one is made aware of Braddon's own fraught family narrative. Otherwise "Babington White" is unproblematically masculine.

¹⁵¹ "[It] was done every day upon the English stage" (qtd. Wolff 214).

empowered literary figure, rather than trying to work through the epistemological intricacies of adaptation vs. translation (a moot point for the period, in any case). As editor of the *PMG* and writer of almost all of the Braddon-related material to appear therein in September 1867, Frederick Greenwood used plagiarism and the trope of pseudonymity as a means to criminalize Braddon's name. In the process, he left himself open to counter-accusations that Braddon did not hesitate to deploy, further heightening the miniature literary scandal until it turned in on itself in a meta-literary, and meta-sensational, climax.

On September 16, the *PMG* published a straightforward accusation against *Circe*, complete with an injunction that "Babington White" apologize: "Its adapter is simply trying to palm off upon the English public as an original novel a book stolen from the French... We...protest against a proceeding so fraudulent...obligation to the original author should be publicly acknowledged and formally placed upon record" (qtd. Wolff 208). The next day, the journal published a letter purporting to be from Braddon herself, which declared, "I was unconscious of Mr. Babington White's deception, he having undertaken to contribute an original novel...I should wish at once to publish my willingness to return the amounts paid by my subscribers for those numbers of *Belgravia* in which 'Circe' has usurped a place" (qtd. Wolff 208). This (forged) letter asserts that Braddon and White are separate individuals, though within the next few days the journal intimated that *Circe* was really written by "a certain lady novelist of considerable popularity" (208) and later that, "The anonymous is for people who work honestly; when they work dishonestly, they ought to be stripped of the mask under which the work is done...the writer who is called Mr. Babbington [sic] is simply a literary thief" (210).

Notably, the coyness of “a certain lady novelist” descends to “simply a literary thief” within days; and the misspelling of “Babington” and translation of his first name into a patronym further undermine the credibility of his name. The *PMG*’s final volley is almost Borgesian in its intricacy: Greenwood published a Dutch advertisement—in Dutch as well as translated into English—naming *Circe* as “A new novel of Miss Braddon’s derived from the French of Octave Feuillet by Babington or Babbington White” (211). The advertisement, along with the letter by Braddon, were apparently forged by Greenwood (as perhaps the clarification of “Babington or Babbington” might suggest), creating a heteroglossic, sensational net of textual evidence that was seemingly meant to condemn Braddon, through a gradual outing of White as a pseudonym for the more famous literary celebrity. On another level, though, this escalation is also a bitter set of literary in-jokes that could have real-world consequences in terms of Braddon’s future economic income.

In a sense, then, this plagiarism scandal was rewritten as a scandal of pseudonymity, with plagiarism as a secondary charge. During that busy September, the *Saturday Review* diagnosed this phenomenon: “No sensation in any one of Miss Braddon’s novels has equaled the sensation which has been excited within the last few days by the supposed identification of her with a certain ‘Babington White,’ the author of a novel with a plot taken from the French” (399). This rhetoric recalls Oliphant’s more sweeping claim that Braddon’s fame was more “extraordinary” than any plot twist she ever devised, although here the anonymous author is unafraid of explicitly citing the “sensation” elements at play in the “real” marketplace. The article goes on to satirically excuse her pseudonymity while condemning her plagiarism, thereby providing a

corrective to the conflation of the two “literary crimes” in public discourse, but this recalibration remains in effect.¹⁵² In other words, the scandal revolves around names and identity, rather than just property. In her response in the November issue of *Belgravia*, Braddon takes advantage of this accusation of pseudonymity to write under an obvious pseudonym—the fictional Capt. Shandon. In the process, she in turn rewrites the stakes of this literary fight, lodging a battery of counter-accusations that lay bare the plagiaristic roots of not only the *PMG* itself, but, I would argue, the literary marketplace more generally.

“A Remonstrance” purports to be written by Capt. Charles Shandon, founding editor of the *PMG*, writing from “Hades” to excoriate the contemporary editor for ungentlemanly behavior to a “Lady.” Shandon is a character from William Thackeray’s *Pendennis*, and the *Pall Mall Gazette* is the fictional magazine he founds in that novel. Indeed, the “real” *PMG* took not only their name but their motto (“By gentlemen for gentlemen”) from *Pendennis*, as “Shandon” is quick to point out. Thus, Braddon-as-Shandon’s main accusation condemns Greenwood, and by extension the *PMG*, on two fronts: as an unchivalrous forger (for publishing a forged letter casting aspersions on and stealing the identity of a “lady”) and as a plagiarizer. Shandon accuses the editor of

¹⁵² The article puts the case, “To borrow a plot instead of inventing one, and to invent a name instead of using your own, would appear from the public perturbation to constitute a literary crime of the first magnitude...The practice of palming off sham pieces under sham names, apart from its morality, breeds confusion and mistrust...” The author continues, with a hyperbolic edge, though, “If, wearied with the glitter of fame and name, she chooses to mix with the crowd in disguise, why should she not?...Miss Braddon is, without any breach of moral or literary law, perfectly free to descend from her lofty throne, and take her place in the rank of magazine-writers, just like any common unqueenly person.” “She had covered the name of Braddon with immortal glory. But this may have paled on a nature of sublime capacity. So she created Babington White somewhat in her own image, and him too she resolved to crown with laurels” (399).

“having purloined that noble sentence of which I was so justly proud” (80), and with this accusation (s)he cleverly deflects the debate from Braddon’s alleged plagiarism to the fundamental literary theft that defines the *Pall Mall Gazette*.¹⁵³ Shandon goes on to decimate wholesale the contents of the magazine, listing “A bundle of cuttings from other papers, garnished with flippant and frivolous comment...and sham letters from sham correspondents, all breathing the same malignant feeling against some one or something respected by other people, and, to give spice to the whole, an occasional forgery” (80). However, it is the “purloined sentence” that fundamentally redefines and compromises the identity of the magazine itself, rather than just an occasional article or contribution. This accusation recalibrates what plagiarism is, reminding the *PMG* (but really the readers of *Belgravia*) how ubiquitous fictional borrowing is throughout the literary market. This meta-literary accusation, which is doubly “meta” in that it is written by a fictional character publishing a “nonfiction” article, rewrites the literary landscape in a way that serves Braddon’s own ends, certainly, but also reveals an underlying sensational, though quotidian, element to the literary sphere.

Unsurprisingly, Braddon-as-Shandon maintains the singular identity of Babington White as a male author unconnected with Braddon herself, and (s)he transforms the desire to link the two names into a voyeuristic pathology, once again invoking the trope of chivalry to demand, “by what right, sir, do you ask to know more of any author than the book which it is your pleasure to review, and the name on the title-page of that book?” (82). This seems to be a straightforward declaration of Braddon’s own views on

¹⁵³ One could argue that this plagiarism only becomes plagiarism (rather than an authorized borrowing) when the co-opted motto is violated—i.e., in the forging of a letter purporting to be by Braddon—but in either case the accusation is sweeping and redefines the entire magazine.

celebrity and private identity, though the fact that it is written in the guise of a fictional male character (writing from Hell, no less) and with an avowed rhetorical purpose should complicate any such simplified reading.¹⁵⁴ In defending White, Braddon-as-Shandon appeals to the precedent provided by Thackeray himself, declaring that White “did not consider himself bound to blazon the fact upon his title-page anymore than William Makepeace Thackeray considered himself bound to tell the world that he derived the broad idea of his wonderful Becky Sharp, with her tricks and lies and fascinations... from the Madame de Marneffe of Honore de Balzac” (84). By invoking Thackeray by name for the first time toward the end of the article, “Shandon” begins playfully edging around his own metafictional lineage. Before, “Shandon” appeared to be enacting a literary joke for the benefit of the educated reader, but he never appeared in on the joke. By the end of the essay, he enjoins Greenwood, “Above all, sir, study the writings of William Makepeace Thackeray, from whose great mind you derived the title which your mistaken policy has so degraded” (86). Here, finally, Braddon-as-Shandon revels in the meta-literariness of this essay and this authorial persona, while still channeling this playful wink into yet another counter-accusation against the *PMG*. With this acknowledgment that Thackeray, not Shandon, created the “title” of “Pall Mall Gazette,” this counter-accusation becomes about collective, corporate plagiarism, rather than about individualized plagiarism (Greenwood taking the name and motto of Shandon’s *PMG*).

¹⁵⁴ Indeed, the “Remonstrance” closes with an imposition of the utmost humility on Braddon: “Miss Braddon, I imagine, has no higher aspiration than to please that novel-reading public which has hitherto applauded and encouraged her efforts to amuse its leisure hours; and I am sure her readers will not withdraw their support from her because she has been made the subject of a most unmanly attack in a journal which professes to be written by gentlemen for gentlemen” (86). This humility may be a savvy pose for the all-too-public Braddon, but the fact that she is writing this, under a male character’s name, suggests just how high her aspirations (and ability to execute them) truly were.

The *PMG* itself becomes a metafiction, and Braddon's choice to write her "Remonstrance" as Charles Shandon, in a magazine whose tacit signature policy would imply that he really "wrote" it, explicitly metafictionalizes the whole exchange. In the process, this "sensation," as the *Saturday Review* termed it, gets rewritten as a chronic condition of the literary marketplace, rather than an anomalous scandalous event.

Braddon notably accomplishes this rewriting of the marketplace without publishing anything under her own name. While Sala's article, under her catalyzing direction, expands the "sensational" to encompass "That which Is," "Shandon"'s essay shows how "That which Is" the literary market is already permeated with the fictional. Braddon's role as female sensation author/editor arguably prohibits her from taking up any overt cheerleading role as to the ubiquity of "sensation" in mid-Victorian society; but she accomplishes this through her magazine nonetheless, using accusations of plagiarism as excuses to shore up her own seemingly tenuous position against the idea of a literary marketplace that was straightforwardly realist, objective, and, most importantly, male. Three years later, in the autumn of 1871, Ellen Wood and Caroline Norton attempted a similar rewriting of the literary marketplace, albeit from antagonistic positions. In the next section, I examine Norton's public accusations of plagiarism against Wood, detailing how each woman maintains the rhetoric of sensation. I also explore the crucial differences between these women's letters and accusations in the *Times*. I read Norton's struggle to gain power in the contemporary literary marketplace, as a disempowered archaic holdover of an earlier era and a different model of female editorship, against Wood's secure (though never mentioned) and relatively powerful position as celebrity editor of the *Argosy*.

II. A Study in Contrasts: The “Uncertain Trade of Brain-Selling”

From late September to early November 1871, the *Times* published an increasingly accusatory series of letters to the editor under the sub-headings “American and English Pirates” and “International Copyright.” What began with a satirical injunction made against “American pirates” who cavalierly plundered English literary property escalated to more scandalously personal allegations of plagiarism with the contributions of that periodic center of public scandal, Caroline Norton. In a series of sardonic letters to the editor, Norton set off and then continued to feed a miniature literary firestorm by accusing Baron Bernhard Tauchnitz, the pre-eminent European publisher of British literature, of pirating her four novels. Authors and publishers alike rushed to defend Tauchnitz, and Norton was forced to qualify her accusations with a redefinition of what “piracy” actually meant. During this exchange, she also accused Ellen Wood of plagiarizing her bestselling sensation novel *East Lynne* from an early story of Norton’s that was published in the 1830s in what she called one of “the once fashionable race of ‘Annuals’ now extinct.”¹⁵⁵

By the 1870s, Norton’s status as a celebrity poet, novelist, and political activist was on the wane, and this litany of accusations recounted so publicly in the *Times* certainly shows the author straining for renewed cultural, economic, and creative relevance. By focusing on *East Lynne* in 1871, though, Norton actually proposes an alternative chronology of sensation fiction that not only extends back to the silver fork stories of the ‘30s but expands forward, past the “sensation decade” of the ‘60s and into

¹⁵⁵ Letter, Oct. 25, 1871.

the '70s. This chronological expansion of the sensation genre is mirrored by a similar narrative expansion: not only is *East Lynne* a touchstone sensation novel, according to Norton; it is a novel whose own composition history is a sensational narrative of plagiarism. Through these accusatory letters, Norton sensationalizes the entire debate on authorship, authority, and copyright that was occurring in the pages of the *Times*. Her rhetoric echoes the way both George Sala and Braddon, writing as "Capt. Shandon," bring sensation into the Belgravian response to plagiarism charges three years earlier. In the process, I would argue, this exchange foregrounds yet again the way that sensational tropes already did crucially inform the laws surrounding copyright and intellectual property--what Norton goes on to call "brain-property."¹⁵⁶ In other words, Norton's powerful meta-sensation narrative crystallizes just how imbricated sensation discourse was with broader concerns about economics, law, and professionalization in public literary discourse during the period.

The fact that this exchange appeared in the *Times* rather than in a monthly magazine more intimately affiliated with the sensation genre, suggests the breadth of sensation discourse even after the "sensation decade" had officially come to a close. By responding to Norton's accusations in the *Times* rather than in her own magazine, the *Argosy*, Ellen Wood separates her powerful editorial position from her vulnerable role as a sensation author (a role she was trying to downplay in any event, through editing the ostensibly staid, spiritual magazine).¹⁵⁷ Unlike Braddon, who responded in *Belgravia* but

¹⁵⁶ Letter to the Editor, Oct. 25, 1871

¹⁵⁷ Beth Palmer summarizes this facet of Wood's literary performance: "Wood's editorial strategies and serialized fiction for the *Argosy* magazine created an ongoing culture of feeling, evangelically rooted, which like a house style, marked her production as trustworthy and simultaneously elicited an affect on her readership" (97).

not in her own “proper” textual voice, Wood signs her own name (notably “Ellen Wood” and not the veiled, domesticated “Mrs. Henry Wood”) but responds in another periodical. I argue that these deflecting moves are analogous, though a comparison of the two approaches reveals the way these two sensation author/editors constructed their professional roles differently. While Braddon positions *Belgravia* as a powerful, legitimizing voice for sensation discourse, Wood attempts to distance her *Argosy* from explicit, overt sensationalism, turning instead to *The Times* to engage in direct, sensationalized debate. Similarly, Norton’s inciting accusations could be read as analogous to Margaret Oliphant’s overdetermined condemnation of Braddon in her article “Novels,” since neither woman author gained an editorship during the mid-Victorian period. Oliphant’s status as a constant reviewer for *Blackwood’s* granted her a measure of economic capital, if not direct symbolic or cultural capital, though, in addition to a peer-sanctioned platform from which to voice her opinions. As a member of a different literary generation, Norton had to wrest such a platform for herself, hence her frequent recourse to the public *Times* letters to the editor column. While Norton may have had a measure of economic and cultural capital as an editor of books of beauty and annuals in the 1830s, it was under a somewhat different market paradigm, as I discuss in chapter three, and such capital had long disappeared by 1871. However, I would argue that Norton understood the contemporary literary marketplace as an extension of the early Victorian one she helped shape (and was shaped by). Her accusations against Wood may have been essentially empty, but she used them to speak out about the literary profession more generally as a gender-blurred, unstable, essentially sensational concept. Her

willingness to explicitly name this condition, as “brain selling,” makes her unique among the female literary celebrities I consider in this project.

By 1871, Norton had a long history of writing letters to the *Times* that pointed out the numerous wrongs that had been done to her, both great and small. Her first letters in the late 1830s were the only ways she could make her voice publicly heard about her abusive husband and his politically motivated accusation of adultery against then-prime minister Lord Melbourne. By the 1860s, her sporadic letters detailed various misuses of her name in print and by private individuals.¹⁵⁸ Throughout the decades, Norton used the letters to the editor column of the *Times* as a platform to publicize personal wrongs. The *Times* was in a sense her only outlet for such public, personal writing. It was also one of the most prominent outlets for other, less successful professional authors to announce their perceived wrongs, and this is how the exchange that was soon co-opted by Norton and her incisive rhetoric began.

By the 1870s there was still no International Copyright Act between Britain and the United States. Thus, it’s perhaps unsurprising that this 1871 exchange was catalyzed by anger over “American Piracy,” with all of the scandalous, melodramatic registers that the term “pirates” evoked. However, these letters quickly turned back across the Atlantic, focusing primarily on Britain and Continental Europe. Strikingly, these letters were already somewhat affiliated with the sensation genre even before Norton struck her

¹⁵⁸ In 1866, she wrote to provide an account of a woman who had forged Norton’s name to a letter in order to authenticate a forged check. She followed this mini-sensation narrative in 1869 with a letter disavowing any ties with a “shilling manual on Byron” that cited her as having written an article on Harriet Beecher Stowe’s work on the poet. This false link is particularly ironic considering the way her poetic style and name were linked with Byron at the beginning of her career, a link I discuss in more detail in chapter two.

personalized blows on October 25. Norton's first letter was in fact an explicit reply not to the original letter in the sequence, but to a letter by Dion Boucicault, the famous dramatist best known for his sensational, spectacular plays of the '60s such as the *Colleen Bawn*. Boucicault turns the lens of legal inquiry inward, insisting that "the French stage has been pillaged during the last 20 years as freely as ever" by the British. In this brief letter, Boucicault details a loophole in the International Copyright Convention of 1851 that distinguishes between direct translations, which are illegal, and "imitations," which cannot be regulated.¹⁵⁹ In a way, then, he reveals the unstable ontological categories on which copyright law rests—since what determines an "imitation" versus a plagiarized translation is almost impossible to assess. Boucicault's inward turn—revealing the hidden faults and deceptions at home, as it were—certainly echoes an archetypal sensation trope in which the criminal and the domestic perversely overlap. His focus on ontologically unstable categories similarly finds an easy analogue in sensation fiction, which is so often concerned with defamiliarizing what seems most intimately familiar.

In her "reply," Norton cites Boucicault's claim that "it requires something more than audacity to talk of American piracy while our pockets are full of French plunder," before recalibrating the national critique down to an almost purely personal, individual level, as was her custom in the *Times*.¹⁶⁰ In these letters, Norton continually adopts the pose of a victim, even when she is adamantly asserting her rights, recalling a pose she strategically struck in many of her earlier political pamphlets. In *Uneven Developments*, Mary Poovey argues that, "[w]hat Caroline Norton is doing... is reappropriating the identity of a wronged woman by casting herself as the victim in a familiar Victorian

¹⁵⁹ "American and English Pirates," Oct. 18, 1871.

¹⁶⁰ Letter to the Editor, Oct. 25, 1871

genre, the melodrama” (66). This self-victimization is matched, as Poovey also argues, by an equal amount of self-advocacy, even in the very act of publishing, and thus publicizing, these wrongs. Her letters may not always be strategically successful (as public backlash against her, particularly against her work in favor of the Infant Custody Bill of 1839, showed), but they do contribute to her public persona and the tension—between victim and quasi-legal advocate—that defined it.

In a similar way, Norton’s career is not seen as being particularly involved with or defined by the sensation genre, even though one of her more successful novels, *Lost and Saved*, serves as a somewhat gentle example of that genre. The 1860s saw the end of her novelistic output, after all, and she died in 1877. In chapter three, I argue against critical tradition and for her identification as a sensation novelist and progenitor of sensation discourse. As her letter to the *Times*, along with her own history as a notorious public figure, show, Norton’s personal narrative was imbricated with sensational tropes long before the sensation genre became codified, both due to circumstances beyond her control and due to her own machinations in publicizing her “story.” Her very name, if not her literary work, became encoded with whispers of scandal and, by extension, sensation.

Her accusation against Wood deploys a meta-sensation narrative that expands to not only create an alternative history of the genre but also to inflect that objective organ of public discourse, the *Times*, with sensational overtones as well. As discussed earlier, Norton’s primary claim, amidst a number of other grievances and accusations of more minor literary theft against a number of unnamed thieves, is that, “the story from which

East Lynne is taken is mine.”¹⁶¹ This straightforward assertion of ownership is complicated, she admits, by the fact that she can’t find a copy of the story, nor could she when *East Lynne* was first released (which, she claims, prevented her from saying anything at the time). Wood’s alleged appropriation of Norton’s literary property forms only the capstone of a litany of “instances,” as Norton terms them, of such acts of piracy and plagiarism. Her focus on *East Lynne* and her claim to be the creator of its narrative (whichever narrative in that multi-plot novel that might be) creates an alternative timeline for sensation as a genre that wildly pre-dates Wilkie Collins’s *Woman in White*. This move recalls Sala’s expansion of the sensation genre by citing *Jane Eyre* and *Adam Bede* as textual progenitors, although Norton’s move is both less explicit and wider reaching, reaching back to the beginning of the Victorian era itself. Both of these rhetorical moves insist that “sensation” is a broader category than was commonly accepted, suggesting that even during the Victorian period the definition of what (and where, and when) it meant to be “sensational” was rapidly expanding. Strikingly, Norton’s reformulation casts sensation discourse as coterminous with the beginning of the “Victorian era” itself. According to Norton, then, the sensation decade becomes a sensation era that still has relevance even after the decade has closed, in 1871.

By positing an alternative creation story for *East Lynne*, Norton essentially rewrites its lineage, transforming “Mrs. Wood” into a deceitful, fraudulent sensation heroine in her own right. The fact that Norton goes on to call such output “brain property” underlines these sensational elements by creating an embodied link between the otherwise incorporeal, ontologically unstable intellectual property and the body of its

¹⁶¹ Letter, Oct. 25, 1871

creator.¹⁶² This striking emphasis on the body implies a link between literary creation and sexual procreation that has particular resonance for female authors, as I discuss in chapter four, who are already, as published authors and thus public women, at least a bit “improper.”

Ellen Wood’s response to Norton on Oct. 28 indignantly rebuts her accusations, as might be expected, but she also contributes to the sensation narrative being formed around her work and around this copyright discourse more broadly with her forms of proof. Wood contends, “*East Lynne*--if it concerns the public and Mrs. Norton to know so much—was taken partly from my own imagination, partly from a romance enacted in real life, some of whose actors are living yet and will recognize what I say as true.”¹⁶³ Wood’s qualifying “if it concerns the public,” which calls into question the idea that she needs to reveal what are essentially the private roots of her novel, recalls Braddon-as-Shandon’s chivalric championing of an author’s privacy (“by what right, sir, do you ask...”). Wood’s phrasing is both more hesitant, with its qualifying albeit rhetorical “if,” and more direct, signed as it is under “Ellen Wood”’s own name. Nevertheless, it highlights the public/private distinction that is so crucial to the sensation genre. By making the private inspiration of *East Lynne* public knowledge and a matter of public record in the *Times*, Wood enacts what much of sensation fiction is so preoccupied with—making the intimate public. Thus, her response is even more effective in the

¹⁶² Marilyn Strathern theorizes, in terms of property more generally: “Ownership re-embeds ideas and products in an organism (whether a corporation, culture or individual author). Ownership gathers things momentarily to a point by locating them in the owner, halting endless dissemination, effecting an identity. We might even say that emergent forms of property signify new possibilities for corporeality or bodily integration in lives that observers constantly tell themselves are dispersed” (qtd. Pettitt 5).

¹⁶³ Letter, Oct. 28, 1871

widely circulating *Times* than it would have been in her *Argosy*, which, while successful in its genre, was nothing compared to the newspaper of record of the period. One can read her refusal to engage Norton in her own magazine as doubly strategic, then, as it shores up the “public-ness” of this declaration while also keeping the ostensibly proper, un-sensational *Argosy* fully separate from such marketplace concerns (and from this sensational momentum).¹⁶⁴ The fact that she details two origins for her narrative—“imagination” and real events—further underscores *East Lynne*’s status as archetypally sensational. The “romance enacted in real life” Wood refers to is already couched as a sensation plot in her language —“romance” points to the literary genre, particularly as it is “enacted” and thus staged with “actors...living yet,” which lends a fictional tinge even to the “real,” verifiable foundation of her novel.

In addition to publicizing the “real” origins of her novel, Wood cites precedent in already having defended *East Lynne* against plagiarism charges that were lodged in a review when the novel was first published. Indeed, as Elisabeth Jay points out, *East Lynne* with its many plots does resemble many famous (and not so famous) Victorian novels, such as Gaskell’s *North and South*.¹⁶⁵ And Elaine Hadley makes a case that *East Lynne*, with its melodramatic preoccupations, does not so much plagiarize any of Norton’s stories as mirror her own “real” narrative through the character of Isabel Vane (168). In other words, *East Lynne* possesses many archetypal plot elements of not only

¹⁶⁴ The *Argosy* had more than its share of sensational momentum, though it avoided overt sensationalism, as I discuss briefly in chapter three with regard to Wood’s pseudo-eponymous “Johnny Ludlow” stories about fallen women. However, lip service was paid to the idea that the magazine was anything but sensational (as illustrated by the fallout from publishing Charles Reade’s scandalizing *Griffith Gaunt* in 1866, just before Wood assumed the editorship).

¹⁶⁵ Jay, xiiii, footnote 11.

sensation novels, but Victorian narratives more generally, both “real” and fictional, which makes it difficult, if not impossible to adjudicate “plagiarism” charges. The hybrid generic nature of sensation novels more generally, in terms of borrowing and synthesizing from a variety of older fictional genres as well as the fusion of fiction with nonfiction scandal journalism, poses a particular problem for questions of “imitation” and therefore plagiarism. How can the law determine what constitutes an imitation when, by definition, these works are frequently “imitations” already?

The sensational, scandalous nature of this interchange of course had a gendered component as well. In private correspondence to her publisher William Blackwood, George Eliot wrote in the midst of these exchanges, “One feels rather ashamed of authoresses this week after the correspondence in the *Times* between Mrs. Norton and Mrs. Wood. One hardly knows which letter is in the worst taste.”¹⁶⁶ (Notably, Eliot never publicized her opinion, as, presumably, that might have implicated her in the “shame” she was casting upon Norton and Wood.) Her use of the diminutive “authoresses” is telling, since it stigmatizes these two professional, public figures and reduces them to their gender. Eliot also fails to distinguish between either woman, the accuser or the accused, which underscores the fact that, for a woman writer, the simple act of publication could be damning (or at least as damning as an accusation of plagiarism). Eliot markedly separates herself from these authoresses with the objective, genderless pronoun “one,” which in a personal letter to her editor, who knew her identity, seems a bit disingenuous. Her emphasis on “shame” and bad “taste” emphasize the

¹⁶⁶ Private letter to John Blackwood, Oct. 29, 1871

scandalous, and thus sensational nature, of this interchange just as it highlights how public the interchange was.

Norton's accusations against Baron Tauchnitz, while not nearly as inherently sensational as her interchange with Wood, were opposed with such vehemence from other authors and publishers, including Braddon as "The Author of *Lady Audley's Secret*," that even that exchange became sensational too.¹⁶⁷ In fact, Norton's back-and-forth in response to the firestorm that her words sparked was cut off only through editorial intervention. Following days of accusations that Norton's letters were, "the random fling of an angry woman," in the words of Sydney Williams,¹⁶⁸ and her own threats suing for libel, a brief footnote amusingly interjects: "There must be an end of this correspondence, which is becoming too heated for our columns. The controversy will be best concluded in the cool atmosphere of a court of law."¹⁶⁹ The binary of hot columns and cool courtrooms crystallizes the extent to which Norton's letters have sensationalized the (presumably often "cool") pages of the *Times*, whose generally silent editorial voice must intervene to stop this powerful quasi-force-of-nature. It also reminds the reader of the usual relationship between periodicals and the courts: newspapers recounted events that had already taken place in trials, not vice-versa. This inversion, and the wry way in which it is introduced into this dialogue as a definitive final note, speaks to the power and momentum of Norton's sensational counter-narrative. The corporate editorial voice

¹⁶⁷ By writing as "The Author of *Lady Audley's Secret*," Braddon arguably distances herself from the celebrity/personal-attack mode that Norton and others are deftly deploying in these letters. She literally emphasizes her authorization and by extension her professional authority in defending Tauchnitz, while de-emphasizing (in fact eliding) her somewhat scandalous, and certainly famous, authorial brand.

¹⁶⁸ Letter, Oct. 28, 1871

¹⁶⁹ Footnote, Letter, Nov. 4, 1871

reifies the distinction between itself, a footnoted, wryly objective, presumably masculine, presence, and the woman author, coded as hysterical, who seemingly will not stop producing “heated” text. The exercise of male editorial authority is easy, swift, and disturbingly playful, emphasizing its privilege as well as the unbalanced state of the literary marketplace. After all, there exist few if any such moments of the exercise of female editorial authority, an authority that Braddon or Wood, as celebrity author/editors, surely should have had if any individual during the period did. But the final, authoritative footnote of the *Times* “editors” has no analogue in the pages of *Belgravia* or the *Argosy*.

Perhaps tellingly, with regard to how gender dynamics and the stigma of sensation played out within this “heated” dialogue, only Ellen Wood took up Norton’s accusation that *East Lynne* was plagiarized, whereas over a dozen public figures wrote in to defend Tauchnitz. Norton’s letters most provocatively raise the issue of gender in this debate in a response to these numerous individuals. She dismisses those who “have known better how to protect their rights in this uncertain trade of brain-selling, (a trade which, however honourable the men may be who carry it on, very often leads to a confused struggle between the assumed rights of the creators of such brain-work and the asserted rights of those who purchased it ‘ready-made’.)”¹⁷⁰ Once again, Norton invokes “brain work” and an embodied sense of literature, but she goes one step further, by labeling her profession “the uncertain trade of brain-selling.” Now, not only are these works embodied output, as “brain work” and “brain property,” but the very job (or, as Norton diminishes it, “trade”) is “brain-selling.” In other words, Norton recasts

¹⁷⁰ Letter, Nov. 3, 1871

professional writing as a kind of mental prostitution. This phrase invokes the specter of the fallen woman, linked already and implicitly to this discussion between women sensation writers who were already somewhat “improper” for being so public, and linked always to Norton because of her scandalous past and willingness to air her grievances publicly and in detail.

However, Norton is hardly limiting those who undertake “this uncertain trade” to women, which she promptly underlines in the parenthetical reference, “however honourable the men may be who carry it on.”¹⁷¹ In a sense, she blurs the stringently gendered categories between improper women writers and proper male public figures, suggesting that they are all implicated in the mental prostitution that is simply a condition of, or indeed the foundation of, their “trade.” The disingenuous “however honorable the men may be” creates doubt as to how much “honour” can be preserved, regardless of personal intentions or character, in such a trade and under such a set of legal, economic, and social laws. In the process, Norton continues to build on her sensational narrative, implicating not only herself and Wood, already sensation authors, in this sensational paradigm, but all authors touched even indirectly by piracy and plagiarism. Her powerful phrase argues for the inherently sensational quality of copyright law, and, by extension, for the sensational quality of all authors who operate under its economic system (that “trade of brain-selling”). Sensation discourse and sensational narratives, according to this argument, define the mid-Victorian literary profession, and were doing so for some time. Even though the term “sensation” is never deployed in these exchanges, it is

¹⁷¹ Here she also echoes her earlier attention to “Honourable” as an honorific, appended to her own name and to her abusive husband. (I discuss this phenomenon in more detail in chapter two.)

powerfully encoded throughout and informs the entire dialogue. Norton may be making a personal argument, but her letters also illustrate in microcosm the ways sensational tropes and concerns about bodies, creation (and procreation), property (and inheritance), and gender (and sexuality) crucially informed copyright law and the construction of the professional author in the mid-Victorian period. As a once-central and now-peripheral figure in this marketplace, Norton is able to say what others such as Wood, Braddon, and Oliphant can never explicitly, publicly acknowledge during the height of their professional careers.

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