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“Twin sisters”: intermediality and sensation in Wilkie Collins’s *The New Magdalen*

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Dion Boucicault’s *The Colleen Bawn* (1860) is typically considered a foundational text for the dramatic genre of sensation.¹ The famous “sensation scene,” in which Myles na Coppaleen dives into a lake to save the heroine from drowning, began a trend to foreground elaborate, “special-effects-driven” climaxes as *the* primary attraction for theatregoers (Daly 2009, 3). Boucicault continued to use sensation scenes to draw in audiences over the next two decades. For instance, *Arrah-na-Pogue*, which opened in London in 1865, includes a death-defying jail-break, in which the hero scales an ivy-covered tower. This emphasis on stagecraft as a vehicle to shock and amaze audiences indicates that sensation dramas offered a form of escapism which defied the mundane or quotidian. Unlike concurrently popular sensation novels, which titillated readers by suggesting that illicit secrets were concealed in respectable, bourgeois homes, sensation dramas were concerned to represent extraordinary scenes. So, while Mary Elizabeth Braddon’s novel *Lady Audley’s Secret* (1862) exposes cases of bigamy and attempted murder in leafy, modern-day Essex, her drama *The Missing Witness* (1874) is based in Switzerland and culminates with a spectacular avalanche.

Different though sensation dramas and novels appear to be on first glance, their promised visceral affect for audiences and readers is very much aligned. Both sought to elicit physical reactions, such as shocks, starts, and a racing pulse by creating an immersive experience. In this sense, as Lynn Voskuil long-since argued, the emphasis sensation dramas placed on bodily responses paradoxically “located authenticity at the very heart of the theatrical experience” (2004, 64). Voskuil examines how the sensational affect – otherwise, these felt responses – was produced by the concurrent realism and spectacle of the stagecraft. Theatres ensured the dramatic effectiveness of their productions by investing in up-to-the-minute stage technologies to create convincing special effects. Nevertheless, she argues that the success of the scenes to stimulate bodily reactions also depended on the audience’s complicity, by choosing to suspend their disbelief. However “realistic” the stagecraft was, audiences still knew they were in a theatre. Readers of sensation novels similarly chose to suspend their disbelief simultaneously to

recognising that sensation novelists deliberately evoked conventions from literary realism to make extreme events seem possible, even likely; such as recognisable settings, crowded with material detail.

Sensation novelists (most famously Charles Reade) also argued that their plots were no more extraordinary than occurrences reported daily in newspapers. However, the quipping commentary of the *St. James's Magazine* emphasises that readers were not credulous, but actively consented to be amazed:

In excuse for such writers it has been advanced, that incidents equally violent occur in our daily experience ... Nature, to be sure, produces earthquakes and volcanoes—but both are phenomena. In the state of society sensation novelists represent, they insist upon giving us earthquakes as matters of course, and volcanoes as every-day occurrences. (1862, 343)

This suggests that the sensational affect was less the result of a convincing "reality effect" than it was a "hyperreality effect." For Jean Baudrillard (1995), hyperreality is the phenomenon of representation becoming more real than reality. In Baudrillard's concept of the hyperreal, the simulacrum, or image, precedes our knowledge of the real, and thus constructs our experience of reality. This can be applied to the sensational affect, as the representation of shocking events precedes and produces the real felt responses of audiences and readers, even though audiences and readers are aware that they are reacting to an illusory event. Thinking about the sensational affect as a "hyperreality effect" allows us to analyse the visceral effect of sensation as an involuntary response. For, if the representation produces bodily reactions, then readers' and audiences' agency to choose to suspend their disbelief does not negate the fact that the hyperreal has become more immediate than the world outside the theatre or novel.

Of course not all representations elicit a sensational affect. The difficulty for modern critics, then, is how to identify this affect in action, given that audience and reader responses are necessarily elusive, and performance itself is an ephemeral form. This article will argue that tracing and analysing intermedial intersections between sensation fiction and drama offers one way to conceptualise the sensational affect. The concept of intermediality was first used by Dick Higgins in 1969 but has since been applied across disciplines including film and television studies, music, and importantly for the purposes of this article, performance and theatre. It has been defined as

“refer[ring] to the co-relation of media in the sense of mutual influences” (Kattenbelt 2008, 21) as opposed to “multimedia” which is premised on the possibility for many media occurring in the same object and “transmedia” which emphasises the process of transfer from one medium to another. It is a term that allows us to deal with the drama and the novel as distinctive but simultaneous entities, rather than presenting them as disconnected, or, in the case of adaptations, derivative.² Broadly speaking, therefore, intermediality can be defined as “the medial equivalent of intertextuality” (Werner Wolf, qtd in Grishakova and Ryan 2010, 3). Not only is the term similarly expansive – it can be flexibly applied to “[cover] any kind of relation between different media” – but it also foregrounds dialogic interactions between cultural products as key to the creation of meaning (Werner Wolf, qtd in Grishakova and Ryan 2010, 3). Using intermediality rather than intertextuality in this article highlights our intention to examine the theatre as an embodied channel for the communication of ideas and sensory experience that may be non-textual, non-linguistic and non-verbal (gesture, music, facial expression) alongside textual analysis. Thus we follow Grishakova and Ryan’s broad understanding of a medium as a “‘language’ with a specific storytelling power” or a “semiotic phenomenon” including verbal language, sound and image (2010, 2).

In its emphasis on “the participation of more than one medium — or sensory channel — in a given work” (Grishakova and Ryan 2010, 3), intermediality has much in common with Jacky Bratton’s concept of intertheatricality. In her definition of intertheatricality, Bratton insists that the play script is only one aspect of a dramatic event. The construction of meaning on stage depends equally on “systems of the stage – scenery, costume, lighting and so forth – but also genres, conventions and, very importantly, memory” (2003, 38). Still, intermediality – in the specific sense we intend for this article – is different to intertheatricality because it allows us to examine “the attempt to realise in one medium the aesthetic conventions and habits of seeing and hearing in another medium” (Balme 2004, 7). So, while intertheatricality implies that multiple media cooperate to produce a dramatic effect, intermediality highlights attempts to simulate the effects of one medium in another.

Foregrounding acts of reading in theatrical performances, or embodied performances in literary texts, are examples of intermediality we see in sensation novels and drama. These intermedial events emphasise the role of media in constructing and communicating cultural meanings, and so cause the reader or audience to reflect how such artificial structures or patterns

are incorporated into their perception or judgement of reality. Caroline Radcliffe has already productively applied the concept of intermediality to nineteenth-century popular drama. Radcliffe, using Bolter and Grusin's influential concept of remediation, suggests that, "Victorian sensational drama required the viewer both to 'look through' and 'look at' a multiplicity of media," that is, it required viewers both to suspend their disbelief in order to experience a construction of the "real" and at the same time to "consciously acknowledge remediation in the form of literary adaptations and translations, operatic and popular music references, paintings and prints, historical events and personages, myths and fairy tales and the use of various technologies" (2009, 39).³ Radcliffe sees this emphasis on the conscious experiencing of one medium in relation to others as integral to melodrama, and we agree with her argument that it is crucial to the sensational affect as well. For, even though intermediality precludes the audience immersion Voskuil sees as necessary to produce the sensational affect, by making audiences and readers more aware of the medium they are consuming, it also points to the permeable borders between literary or theatrical representation and felt responses. In this sense, intermediality makes the sensational affect traceable, as it prompts readers and audiences to confront the experience of hyperreality, by drawing attention to the effectiveness of representation to produce emotive responses.

Wilkie Collins's play and novel *The New Magdalen* (1873) is an effective case study for the analysis of intermediality and sensation. From the outset, *The New Magdalen* was written for both the stage and the page. The opening night of the play in London (19 May 1873) was timed to coincide with the final serial instalments of the novel version of *The New Magdalen* that ran in *Temple Bar* from October 1872 to July 1873, and with the publication of the two-volume edition of the novel in May 1873 by Collins's publisher Bentley.⁴ Collins jokingly complained about the "double labour" he was facing in May 1873, attending rehearsals by day and correcting proofs of the two-volume reprint by night (*Letters II* 1999, 398). His work on *The New Magdalen* thus allowed him to take on a number of linked roles: novelist, playwright, producer, and promoter, but the connection Collins forged between drama and novel was not only a marketing device.⁵ Collins was well-placed to self-consciously consider the relationships between media and their capacity for creating sensational affects. In fact, *The New Magdalen*, in both its stage and fiction versions, explores intermediality thematically to interrogate how aesthetic forms are co-opted to evoke and exploit felt responses.

The New Magdalen follows the story of Mercy Merrick, a former prostitute who, at the beginning of the plot, has left a women’s refuge to become a military nurse in the 1870 Franco-German war. Collins overtly flags his interest in how intermedial references toy with reader expectations by using the terminology of scenes rather than chapters in the novel version. Thus, the action in both the play and the novel is aligned scene by scene.⁶ At the outset, Mercy encounters Grace Roseberry, a young woman travelling to England to seek the protection of a distant relative, following her father’s death in Italy, which has left her orphaned and penniless. Caught in crossfire, Grace is wounded in the head and presumed dead. But, just after Mercy makes the decision to adopt Grace’s identity and seek out her relations, Grace is revived by the timely intervention of a German surgeon. Her recovery remains unknown to Mercy, however, and by the opening of the “Second Scene” Mercy is established as the companion of Lady Janet Roy, and engaged to a gentleman-journalist, Horace Holmcroft. Unaware of her true identity, Lady Janet and Horace struggle to understand why Mercy delays her wedding and often seems ill and dispirited. Enter Julian Gray: a campaigning preacher, and Lady Janet’s nephew. Julian supports and encourages Mercy’s decision to reveal her past, and meanwhile falls in love with her. Yet before she is able to confess, Grace reappears to expose Mercy’s secret. Ultimately, Mercy is forgiven by Lady Janet (although Grace and Horace’s judgemental attitudes are implacable), and Mercy and Julian marry and emigrate. In the novel, this final part is related through diaries and letters, while the play closes with the central romantic pair preparing to start their new life together.⁷

Richard Pearson (2015), Lyn Pykett (2005), and Janice Norwood (2007) are among those who have drawn attention to Collins’s interest in the relation between the theatre and the novel.⁸ Pearson suggests that *The New Magdalen* is particularly significant for understanding Collins’s sense of the relationships between the media in which he worked because, unlike some of Collins’s other works, it was “planned from the start as a multi-media production” (2015, 165). That is, the play and novel were written simultaneously, the play not adapted from the novel after publication as with other of his works such as the adaptation of the novel version of *The Moonstone* (published 1868) into a play (staged 1877). For our purposes, *The New Magdalen* is well-suited as a case study for intermediality and sensation because multiple manuscript copies of the play survive in the British Library’s collection, which reveal traces of how Collins’s ideas and his working methods for the play and book evolved in tandem. In April 2016, the British Library bought Collins’s working manuscript of the play. The manuscript joined related texts in the

library's collections, such as the official licensing copy held in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection, and the printed script which Collins self-published in 1873 to capitalise on the play's success. These print and manuscript copies offer different versions of the drama. The licensing copy, for instance, often gives skeleton versions of characters' dialogues which are extended in the printed script, indicating how performances shifted dynamically over the course of its initial runs.⁹ By contrast, pages from the novel are pasted into the working manuscript, which form the basis of theatrical "scenarios" from which dialogue is often preserved word for word. An unusually rich and full store of archival evidence thus offers us opportunities to analyse intermedial dialogues embedded in *The New Magdalen*'s development, as well as how Collins evokes intermediality thematically.

Collins famously stated that plays and novels are "twin sisters in the family of Fiction" ("Letter of Dedication," 1852, xxxvii). As this article will go on to explore, Collins writes intermediality into *The New Magdalen* by foregrounding literary reading experiences in his play script, and embodied, theatrical gesture in the novel. He directed both the readers of his novel and the audiences of his play to experience each with conscious knowledge of, and in relation to, alternate (or, in Collins's words, "twin") media, rather than as isolated cultural productions. While it might seem provocative to suggest that a textual evidence base is appropriate to the study of drama¹⁰ or affect, Collins certainly saw the theatre-goer as an experienced and competent reader, and the novel-reader as equally well attuned to the invocation of the non-verbal, bodily, or aural within the text. Indeed, he attempted to woo the actor John Clayton to take the part of the male lead by sending him the serial version in *Temple Bar*. He suggested to Clayton's agent "if he [Clayton] fancies the idea. The play is there" (*Letters* II, 1999, 384). He has no doubt in the actor-reader's ability to apprehend the dramatic within the serial novel. By offering his readers and viewers an intermedial experience, Collins was tying his sensational productions together and inviting his audiences to understand his fiction in relation to his drama, and vice versa. This was a key strategy for Collins in the 1870s as his interests turned increasingly towards the stage while his popularity continued to stem primarily from his fiction. In self-consciously highlighting the literary and dramatic techniques that the *St James's* contributor would call the "artificial aids introduced to complete the illusion" (1862, 341), the intermediality of *The New Magdalen* foregrounds the constructedness of the aesthetic experience. Play and novel versions create a sensational affect, because each exploit the idea that aesthetic forms precede, mediate, and

influence personal feelings and interactions, both for the characters and for Collins’s contemporaries.

Tracing intermediality in the play versions of *The New Magdalen*

The content of *The New Magdalen*, its events and characters, is developed in Collins’s working draft acquired by the British Library in 2016 and designated at auction as a “working draft of the play ‘The New Magdalen’; 1871–1872” (“Major Heritage Acquisitions,” 2016, 4). In these early draft stages, Collins uses “scenarios”: rough narrative sketches of scenes and plot points. Folios 50–59 of the British Library manuscript are made up of scenarios giving synopses of ten scenes. In the scenarios the conventions of the novel – here, the use of narrative prose distinct from stage directions – are to be found in the dramatic script. Moreover, on some folios Collins cut and pasted sections of printed text directly into the play manuscript, which were possibly early proofs from the novel version. Collins added in the names of the speakers in the blank space to the left of each piece of dialogue and deleted narration indicating who is speaking:

[Julian]

“What is it?”

[The Servt]

“I hardly know if I can tell you sir, before her ladyship,”

[Lady J]

“I know what has happened. [T]hat abominable woman has found her way here again. Am I right?”
(Add MS 89175, 1871–1872, f98)

In these folios, the content of the play and the novel are closely aligned. The dialogue remains entirely unaltered and the narratorial voice is unceremoniously cut with no stage directions inserted to provide similar guidance. Collins quite literally, through the material presence of the pasted prose, retains the novel within the play. We are not suggesting that prose took precedence over considerations of staging, nor did it provide a “master” narrative but his manuscript allows us to see that the processes of Collins’s writing were intermedial from the outset of his *New Magdalen* project.

From this very early draft, we can see that Collins decides to set both the prose and play versions of *The New Magdalen* in contained and limited locales. After the action of the Prologue in France the play is set entirely within Lady Janet's home, specifically the dining-room of Mablethorpe House, described as "*richly furnished*" with "*An entrance at the back opening into the conservatory*" and further doors to right and left in stage directions in the printed version of the play script (1873, 24).¹¹ This is, of course, convenient for the stage version but also demonstrates the conventions of sensation fiction appearing in the ostensibly dramatic script. While the "claustrophobic feel" (Pearson 2015, 166) created by *The New Magdalen*'s closet drama setting is not typical of sensation drama, it was common in sensation novels. Collins's own *The Moonstone* hinges almost entirely on action taking place within the Verinder family home. The confined setting of *The New Magdalen* helps to ramp up the tension in the second half of the play, as we wait to see whether Mercy will confess. The middle-class dining-room setting connects the play of *The New Magdalen* to a central tension of many sensation novels: the presence of fraudulent or criminal individuals within contemporary bourgeois homes. By using the genteel domestic setting with which his novel readers would be familiar, Collins immediately invokes the themes and affective potential of his sensation fiction within the play version of *The New Magdalen*. Radcliffe (2009) has stressed the importance of stagecraft in exploring the intermedial aspects of sensation drama, but here, despite the lack of special effects, we can see how Collins's play brings the conventions of the novelist to bear in the play.¹²

Unlike other sensation dramas, *The New Magdalen* does not include a sensation scene. The closest the story comes to this is the early scene of military crossfire, in which the real Grace is hit by a shell and Mercy damps the fire and attempts to help her. In part, Collins's decision not to include a sensation scene may have been informed by an awareness that the Olympic Theatre, where the play enjoyed its first run, had suffered "an interval of privation" immediately prior to its production of *The New Magdalen*, and so could not afford to invest in extravagant new scenery ("Theatres. Olympic" 1873, n.p). However, contemporary reviewers recognised that the dramatic version of *The New Magdalen* engaged with some of the central preoccupations of earlier sensation novels (and dramas), despite the absence of the tell-tale sensation scene. The *Saturday Review* highlighted the story's focus on fake identities by calling it the "female version of the *Ticket-of-Leave Man*," an earlier success on stage and page, which also used the threat of exposure of an assumed identity to provide its dramatic interest ("The New Magdalen" 1873, 683).

Further, Collins's sympathetic engagement with wider cultural debates about the status of "fallen" women connects with other well-known sensation novels, such as Ellen Wood's *East Lynne* (1861). The working draft gives a list of possible titles for the piece: "Vice and Virtue," "The New Magdalen," "A Creature from the Streets," "Sarah the Sinner," "An Outrage on Society," "The Priest of the People" (Add MS 89175, 1871–1872, f50). Ultimately Collins dismisses a title like "Vice and Virtue," with its resonances of eighteenth-century morality tales, in favour of a more explicitly challenging application of Christian iconography to contemporary prostitution.¹³ Importantly, he selects a title that invokes audience's memories of his earlier fictive heroine, Magdalen Vanstone in *No Name* (no play version of *No Name* was produced in England in the 1860s so Collins must have been invoking the earlier novel while drafting his latest play).¹⁴ This intermedial connection is pressed further in Act 1 when Julian encounters Mercy at Mablethorpe House and tells her about his work to help the rural poor. When she offers him a subscription he asks, "What name shall I put down on the list?" she replies "No name. My subscription is anonymous" (Add MS 89175, 1871–1872, f60). Although Mercy and Magdalen are two very different characters, Collins sets his audience up to view the new Magdalen (Mercy), in relation to his previous novelistic character who receives forgiveness and redemption.¹⁵ In this, Collins is evoking a preceding literary representation, and the feelings the reading experience stirs, to mediate the audience's emotive response to the drama. The play's intermediality thus draws attention to the hyperreality of its affect.

The audience were not passively receptive to Collins's authorial suggestions, however. Comparing print and manuscript versions of the play script recovers a sense of how the performance of the play may have shifted in response to the audience and allows us to detect Collins invoking the experience of reading within the theatrical versions of *The New Magdalen*. In performance, the dialogue probably varied night by night, as annotations encourage the actors to respond flexibly to the audience. For instance, the licensing copy held in the Lord Chamberlain's Collection brackets large sections of text in parentheses to indicate where the script might be cut to shorten the play:

If it is desired to shorten the Act, or if the actress who plays "Lady Janet" fails to amuse the audience, this scene can be abridged as follows. The parts to be omitted are distinguished thus: [] (Add MS 53122 R, 1873, f77)

By downplaying Lady Janet’s role as Mercy’s adopted mother, the love triangle between Mercy, Julian and Horace becomes the centre of the emotional drama, rather than Mercy’s redemption. Similar notations and brackets recur in the script, indicating potential variations in tone and mood between separate performances. Although offering possibilities for adjustment or abridgement in nineteenth-century working play scripts was not unusual, we can again situate the relationship between the dramatic and the novel versions of *The New Magdalen* in an intermedial framework by suggesting that such abridgements might invoke the experience of reading the novel within the dramatic setting. The reviewer of the play in *The Saturday Review* writes:

The story after all is well enough in a book, where the absurdity of some of the characters and situations appears less distinctly than upon the stage. Readers of the novel escape the elocutionary tricks of the theatre, and may skip any page of sermonizing which they find dull. (“The New Magdalen” 1873, 684)

For this reviewer, novel readers retain control of their experience while theatre-goers are reactive consumers unable to intervene. However, by making their disfavour or lack of interest in a particular character clear – through lack of applause, catcalls, or even just silence – the audience could actually shape their theatrical experience and cause the actors to “skip” sections that did not seem to play well to a particular night’s audience. Collins allows the possibility for an un-amused audience to exercise control over the content of the piece, aligning the more private possibility of selection involved in novel reading with the public response. By allowing for a variety of audience reactions in this way, Collins maximises the play’s potential to engage the audience and produce a sensational affect.

“Let my actions speak for me”: reading Mercy Merrick’s gestures in the novel version of *The New Magdalen* (Collins 1873, 78)

Intermediality is also evident in the modes of dramatic signification we see brought into the novel *The New Magdalen*. This section focusses on fictive characters depicted in the act of interpreting visual cues, and how the embodied gestural vocabulary of the nineteenth-century stage

contributes to shaping the conclusions they draw.¹⁶ In so doing, the characters model the hyperreality of the reader's experience, as they experience affective responses to Mercy's (self-)representation through performance. Intermediality thus simulates a sensational affect. It frames a representation that produces felt responses, despite characters' awareness of how non-literary media shape their perception of reality. However, Collins also encourages readers to question the reliability of Mercy's performance. Her former employment as an actress alerts readers to how she co-opts embodied theatrical gestures to convey scripted cultural meanings, which mediate her relationships with other characters. Readers are thereby faced with an intermedial demand to visualise and interpret embodied actions at the same time as analysing written text. This is integral to Mercy's characterisation, but also thematically interrogates the concept of identity. Collins thereby foregrounds the hyperreality of the novel world by embedding theatrical performance in ordinary social relations, and characters' perceptions of reality.

When Grace and Mercy first encounter each other in France, Mercy initially refuses to offer any confidences about her past. As a result, Grace begins to construct an imaginary history for Mercy, which evokes plotlines familiar in multiple forms of popular culture, including the theatre, (such as Laura Courtland's plight in Augustin Daly's *Under the Gaslight* [1867]), but bears no resemblance to Mercy's later personal narrative: "'Should I be guessing right,' [Grace] asked, eagerly, 'if I guessed you to be some great lady in disguise?'" (1874, 12)¹⁷ Grace's invention reveals her own desires for wealth and status, intimating how readily she projects her own value system onto other people. Grace is characterised as selfish and mean-spirited, and so her eagerness to believe that she might have made an influential acquaintance does not surprise the reader. Still, Grace is not the only character to interpret Mercy through the prism of their own making. Lady Janet requires no proof of Mercy's identity: "Your face is your introduction, my dear; your father can say nothing for you which you have not already said for yourself" (1874, 60). Although Lady Janet's generous reading differs from Grace's self-interested romanticisation of Mercy's past, her suggestion that a person's inner nature can be discerned from physical cues patterns both pseudo-scientific (physiognomy) and melodramatic models of characterisation, whereby beauty tends to denote virtue. Each of these examples draws attention to a structuring hyperreality which influences social relations within the text. For, while the reader discerns that these characters' understanding of Mercy's character is based on a simulation, it nevertheless effects others' behaviour to her in real terms. Lady Janet adopts Mercy as a surrogate daughter on

solely imagined credentials, for instance. The reader is thereby forced to confront how hyperreality is embedded in social relations presented in the text. Meanwhile, the distance between Mercy’s “real” backstory, and the hyperreality of these romantically-inflected projections, points to Collins’s contrasting refusal to make definitive statements about her character, and puts the reader on edge.

The unsettling affect of Collins’s portrayal is emphasised by the importance of theatrical gesture and body language to Mercy’s (self-)representation.¹⁸ When *The New Magdalen* was first staged, an actor’s “natural” representation of a character was not considered necessarily oppositional to a highly stylised gestural vocabulary – deployed to enable the physical expression of interior emotion, or to clearly display relationships between characters on stage. As Jim Davis explains, many actors “used codified gestures and postures to enhance the ‘accuracy’ of the emotions they depicted” (2004, 273). Acting handbooks and stylistic treatise were published which recommended how actors could effectively convey a character’s interior life without direct speech. For example, Henry Siddons’s *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action* (1822) and Leman Thomas Rede’s *The Road to the Stage* (1827) give detailed instructions of the poses and expressions actors should adopt to affect different passions. While these texts are not intended to be prescriptive, they nevertheless provide evidence of formalised performance practices that were recognisable to nineteenth-century playgoers. For, as George Henry Lewes pithily summarises in his 1875 *On Actors and the Art of Acting*: “Trusting to the inspiration of the moment” in a naturalistic acting style “is like trusting to a shipwreck for your first lesson in swimming.” (107)

Collins’s intermedial concern with physical gestures in the novel alerts readers to the fact that he did not anticipate cultural meanings to be conceived in isolation, but through intermedial dialogues, which alternate between written and embodied media. Determined to discover Mercy’s reason for delaying their marriage, for example, Horace analyses her body language:

I am afraid she has some motive for deferring our marriage which she cannot confide either to you or to me ... I have once or twice caught her in tears. Every now and then—sometimes when she is talking quite gayly—she suddenly changes colour and becomes silent and depressed ... (didn’t you notice it?). (1874, 66)

Speaking confidently to Lady Janet, Horace's probing question "didn't you notice it?" implies that an interpretative model can be applied to read Mercy's body language, which is very much in line with dramatic convention. However, while a sensational affect is traceable in Horace's emotional response to Mercy's physical – rather than written or verbal – cues, Collins's intermediality creates a still more challenging affect by questioning the reliability of physical signs as a way of discerning feeling. Lady Janet's dismissive response to Horace's concerns suggests that embodied expressions can be misread or evoked to mislead. "'You foolish boy!' she said, 'the meaning is plain enough. Grace has been out of health'" (1874, 66–67). The ephemerality of performance as a medium thus denotes a corresponding ineffability in the extent to which Mercy's character can be read.

Mercy's experience as an actress is further evoked to cast doubt over her self-representation. Collins explicitly evokes a theatrical gestural vocabulary in her movements and actions, which invites the reader to interpret her actions alongside, and in contrast to, her words.¹⁹ This is evident in how frequently Mercy's behaviour closely patterns the dramatic postures suggested by Rede's acting handbook. For instance, when Mercy is apparently consumed with despair about having deceived Horace, her physical gestures echo Rede's instructions of how one might perform "*Melancholy, or fixed grief*." Rede explains that:

Melancholy, or fixed grief, is gloomy, sedentary, motionless; the lower jaw falls, the lips become pale, the eyes are cast down, half-shut and weeping, accompanied with a total inattention to everything that passes. The words are dragged out rather than spoken; the accent weak and interrupted, sighs breaking into the middle of sentences and words. (1827, 78–79, original italics)

Rede was a minor actor, and his manual gives practical advice about the day to day workings of the profession. For instance, he details which costumes an actor should acquire to enable them to play a variety of stock characters, actors being expected to provide their own wardrobe. Rede's manual thus has a wide-ranging real-world applicability and provides an insight to common nineteenth-century stage practices, because it was intended as a general user-friendly guide. Although first published around fifty years before *The New Magdalen* appeared on stage, it was reprinted in 1861 and the highly stylised mode of acting it describes was still widely used.

Naturalistic acting was not widely popularised until the late-nineteenth century. In his 1885 memoir of acting in minor and provincial theatres, Jerome K. Jerome recalls the "sensation" caused when a visiting star performer threw aside "rule and tradition," made "business [the common term for pre-arranged action ...] out of the question," and instead acted according to "what came natural" (1885, 137). It cannot be proven that Collins read *The Road to the Stage*, and we use it as an illustrative rather than a definitive description of a common acting style. Still, the recognisability of the gestures Collins details means that corollaries can be drawn between Mercy's actions and the postures or actions set forth by Rede. In line with Rede's description of melancholy, Mercy's apparent unhappiness about deceiving Horace is physically evidenced by her "total inattention to everything that passes:" "She never moved; she sat heedless, absorbed in her thoughts" (1874, 77). For readers as well as for the characters who interpret Mercy's body language, therefore, the emotional dynamics of the novel are intermedial: read through the juxtaposition of diegetic narration and embodied theatrical gesture, which prompt us to respond empathetically to Mercy's situation.

However, Collins also suggests that Mercy's gestures cannot be taken at face value. Within the novel Collins shows his protagonist deploying false gestures to mediate the tone of her relationship with different characters, revealing how she adopts different strategies of self-representation depending to whom she is speaking. Mercy deliberately uses loving gestures to manipulate Horace. For example, she entirely changes the direction of hers and Horace's plans when she fears that her past will be exposed by Julian Gray's arrival – the latter having preached at the women's refuge while she was a resident. As the last example indicated, immediately prior to hearing of Julian's visit, Mercy performs to elicit sympathy, by indicating her melancholy concern that she cannot honestly marry Horace under an assumed identity, and without informing him of her past. Conversely, when Julian's arrival threatens to derail her marriage plans entirely, she instantly changes her body language and employs coaxing gestures to alter the tone of hers and Horace's discussion, and so speed their union. "She persisted in playing her part ... The caressing action and the easy tone had their effect on Horace" (1874, 83). He is delighted. Horace's reaction is an involuntary, felt response to a representation he perceives as a truthful expression of her feelings for him, and is thus an example of sensational affect.

This is not the only example of intermediality preceding sensational affect. Mercy also uses gestures recognisable from Rede's manual in her interactions with her "adopted mother," to whom

she plays the part of dutiful child by employing supplicating gestures such as “[falling] on her knees [... with] outstretched hands” at Lady Janet’s feet (1874, 364). Mercy is clearly deploying theatrical gestures to maximise the effectiveness of her plea. For, Rede explains, “[i]n soliciting it is frequently necessary to kneel, and to speak with ardour” (1827, 89). The emotional effect that such embodied gestures have on the other characters is evidence of Collins’s intermedial design in the novel, because it highlights how theatrical conventions contribute to constructing and communicating cultural meanings and so shaping social interactions in the novel. The ability of dramatic representation to effectively stage-manage “real” situations is thus provocatively juxtaposed with the reader’s consciousness of Mercy’s potentially insincere use of intermedial tropes. We see the sensational affect in action because the reader is forced to recognise the hyperreality at the base of plausible, apparently artless interactions between characters at the same time as seeing through the illusion to its structural intermediality.

Conclusion

Reading *The New Magdalen* as play and novel, and attending to its archival and non-archival variants allows us to see Collins’s self-conscious use of methods that purposefully display “the devices of performance in performance” (Chappel and Kattenbelt 2006, 11). These effects (like the use of theatrical gestural conventions to display emotion in the novel, or the dividing of the novel into scenes not chapters) draws the readers’ attention to the complex modes of interpretation required in consuming Victorian media and to the way in which media might shape meaning. Chiel Kattenbelt argues that, “theatre provides, as no other art, a stage for intermediality” due to its “capacity to incorporate all media” (2008, 23). This emphasis on the intermediality of the stage gives a new perspective on critiques like contemporary reviewer Richard Holt Hutton’s mocking affirmation that, “[t]he melodrama of the cheap theatres is an acted sensational novel” (1868, 932). Sensation theatre can indeed incorporate the sensation novel, not by a wholesale and simplistic usage of its complex and exciting plots, but by invoking its aesthetic conventions and affective modes. Likewise, as this article has shown, Collins’s novel version of *The New Magdalen* drew upon the extra-textual and embodied medium of the theatre to create a hyperreal sensational affect. In traditional adaptation studies the transfer between printed (or manuscript) source and performed text “primarily entails a loss; all of our imagined versions of characters are replaced and fixed into

a single, solid figure, a myriad of interpretative possibilities are cast aside and only one reading is left standing" (Buckmaster 2013, np). By framing the relationship between the novel and the play through an intermedial lens we can replace a rhetoric of loss with one of gain. Through the conscious experiencing of one media in relation to another, the audience and reader could experience sensational affects while simultaneously recognising how that affect was constructed.

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Notes

¹ Although melodramas had used special effects to excite audiences throughout the nineteenth-century, contemporary commentators regularly remark a shift in dramatic culture that is crystallised by the sensation genre. That inveterate theatregoer, Henry Morley, complained: "Nobody can feel less mercifully than I do towards some of the claptrap dramas of Mr. Boucicault, and the corresponding school of fiction. Always, however, the complaint should be not of their strength of incident, but of their poverty of wit. The sort of 'sensation' novel or play against which protest cannot be too constant and too strong, is that which depends wholly upon the heaping of crime, mystery, and surprise, and relies on tricks of plot or stage effect, without making any use of the story as means for the subtle development of character, and without any charm of wit or wisdom in the language through which all is told" (1866, 367).

² Using the concept of intermediality to emphasise the simultaneity of the drama and the novel enables us to bypass some of the difficult questions that have historically faced adaptation studies, notably how to dissociate the temporal primacy of the source from an assumed qualitative superiority. See Hutcheon with O'Flynn 2013 (2006), xv.

³ Although Bolter and Grusin are primarily concerned with new digital media they suggest that remediation, the process by which one medium refashions its predecessors, has a genealogy dating back "at least to the Renaissance" (1999, 21).

⁴ The novel was also serialised in America in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, October 1872–June 1873 and the first volume edition in America was also published by Harper in 1873.

⁵ Few writers chose to take on all of these responsibilities and Collins's participation in many areas of the production process shows how closely he was concerned with the dissemination of his text in different media. He told his publisher George Bentley proudly about the enthusiastic reception for the play on opening night, assuring him that he had advertised the novel in the playbill (*Letters* II 400). Karen Laird has written about Collins's "very modern" sense of himself as an

“auteur, or the leading part in a collaborative project” (2014, 194) in relation to the staging of his adaptation of *The Woman in White* (1877).

⁶ Others of Collins’s works, such as *No Name* (1863), also use “scenes” to segment the narrative.

⁷ Collins purposefully created differences between the fictive ending and the final act of the play to foil the threat of piracy. He wrote to Carlotta Leclercq, who played Mercy in the American version of *The New Magdalen* in New York, to emphasise this difference: “If you are threatened with competition on the part of stealers of plays, let the public know that I have reserved scenes and effects for the author’s own dramatic version which are not to be found in the novel” (*Letters II* 393).

⁸ Collins’s working relationship with the theatre has also been of interest to his two main biographers, Catherine Peters (1993) and Andrew Lycett (2014).

⁹ The play opened on 19 May 1873 and enjoyed a four-month run at the Olympic Theatre in London. This was followed by a provincial tour in the UK and successful performances in Paris, Berlin, Vienna and Rome. In America the play opened on 9 May at the Globe Theatre in Boston followed by a further run at Augustin Daly’s Broadway Theatre in New York (opening 10 November 1873). This early success paved the way for several tours and revivals over the following decades. It was performed internationally, and toured to provincial theatres in Britain, as well as appearing at several London theatres. (See *Olympic Theatre 1873 Production File: Standard Shoreditch, The New Magdalen* (17 May [1875]), theatre programme; Gaiety Theatre, *The New Magdalen* (24 June 1875), theatre programme; Brixton Theatre, *The New Magdalen* (27 February 1905), theatre programme.) See also Gasson (1998, 26, 46, 113).

¹⁰ Bratton makes a strong argument against over-reliance on the text in the intertheatrical methodology put forward in *New Directions in Theatre History* (2003).

¹¹ Add MS 89175 (1871–1872) and Add MS 53122 R (1873) describe the staging similarly.

¹² See Radcliffe (2015) for analysis of the staging of Collins's adaptations of *The Red Vial* (1858), *Miss Gwilt* (1875) and *The Moonstone* (1877).

¹³ The name of the protagonist was also unsettled during this early draft stage. In the list of "Persons of the Story" Rhoda Judkin is crossed out and "altered to Mercy Merrick" appears in square brackets above the deleted name. Her name is also given as "Sarah Merrick" in some parts of the manuscript, before being corrected to Mercy (1871–1872, Add MS 89175 f19). The choice of "Mercy," of course, makes explicit the ways in which the play urges its readers to take a merciful and redemptive attitude towards fallenness.

¹⁴ *No Name* was produced by Augustin Daly in New York, opening 7th June 1871.

¹⁵ Buckmaster makes a related point in arguing that when Ada Cavendish, who first played Mercy Merrick and became associated with the role, later acted as the less sympathetic Lydia Gwilt in *Miss Gwilt* (1875) the earlier role modified audience's reactions to the later (np).

¹⁶ Simon Cooke (1998) has previously examined the role of melodramatic gesture in Collins's novels, but from a different perspective.

¹⁷ All references to the novel version of *The New Magdalen* in this section are to the Collins (1874) single volume Bentley edition.

¹⁸ In each of these examples, Mercy's presumed identity reflects the character of her interpreter rather than herself. Collins encourages the reader to question what part their own cultural assumptions play in their view of her characterisation. The varying levels of sympathy displayed by different characters and the various ways in which they engage with (or refuse to engage with) the story of Mercy's past life as a prostitute force readers to gauge their own responses to Mercy's status as fallen woman.

¹⁹ Laurie Lyda (2013) has noted how Mercy's actions frequently belie her words or characterisation in the novel. She questions why, despite advice to the contrary, Mercy chooses to open the window

when this effectively advertises her position to enemy troops, and consequently causes Grace’s injury and supposed death. Lyda argues, “Collins’s construction of the narrative invites the audience to question Mercy’s so-called ‘innate goodness’” (np).