



The Representation Of The 'Fallen Woman' In The Moonstone: A Bakhtinian Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868) through the lens of Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia and polyphony to analyze its subversion of the "fallen woman" trope. Focusing on Rosanna Spearman, a marginalized maid marked by a criminal past and unrequited love, the paper argues that Collins' multi-narrator structure disrupts monolithic societal judgments, allowing Rosanna's voice to critique patriarchal and class-based oppression. By employing Bakhtin's framework, the novel's competing narratives—ranging from paternalistic conservatism to religious hypocrisy—are revealed as sites of ideological conflict. Rosanna's suicide letter, a polyphonic assertion of agency, challenges Victorian moral binaries, transforming her from a passive victim into a resistant figure. This analysis demonstrates how Collins leverages detective fiction's formal innovations to interrogate gender hierarchies, offering a nuanced portrayal of female transgression that contrasts with contemporaneous literature. The findings highlight the novel's significance in feminist literary criticism and Bakhtinian studies, illustrating how narrative form can enact social critique.

Key Words- Heteroglossia, Polyphony, Victorian Society, Feminism.

1. Introduction

Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868) stands as a seminal work that bridges the gap between Victorian sensationalism and the modern detective novel. While its intricate plot and innovative narrative structure have earned it recognition as a foundational text in crime fiction, the novel's deeper engagement with social issues - particularly its nuanced portrayal of the "fallen woman" through Rosanna Spearman - demands closer critical attention. This paper examines how Collins employs Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia and polyphony to challenge Victorian constructions of female transgression, offering a radical departure from conventional representations of fallen women in mid-nineteenth century literature.

The concept of the fallen woman permeated Victorian cultural consciousness, serving as both moral warning and social control mechanism. In an era that rigidly demarcated female virtue along lines of sexual purity and domestic compliance, women who transgressed these boundaries - whether through actual sexual experience, criminal behavior, or even mere suspicion of impropriety - faced severe social ostracization. Literary representations from Dickens' Nancy in *Oliver Twist* (1838) to Hardy's Tess in *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891) reinforced this punitive ideology, typically positioning fallen women as cautionary figures whose inevitable destruction served to uphold patriarchal norms. Collins, however, complicates this tradition through Rosanna Spearman, whose narrative arc simultaneously conforms to and subverts the trope.

Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogic theory provides a crucial framework for understanding Collins' innovative approach. Developed primarily in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929) and *Discourse in the Novel* (1934), Bakhtin's concepts of heteroglossia and polyphony offer tools to analyze how *The Moonstone's* multi-voiced narrative structure enables its social critique. Heteroglossia - the coexistence of multiple socio-linguistic registers within a text - manifests powerfully in the novel's series of first-person accounts, where each narrator's distinctive voice carries its own ideological baggage. Polyphony - the presence of fully realized, independent consciousnesses - becomes particularly significant in Rosanna's characterization, as her posthumous letters introduce a perspective that resists assimilation into dominant Victorian moral paradigms.

The novel's experimental narrative form makes it particularly receptive to Bakhtinian analysis. Composed of eleven discrete narratives from eight different witnesses, *The Moonstone* constructs its truth through accumulation and contradiction rather than authoritative omniscience. This structural choice creates what Bakhtin would term a "dialogic" text, where meaning emerges through the interaction of competing voices rather than from any single, stable perspective. Nowhere is this more evident than in the treatment of Rosanna Spearman, whose story becomes a site of ideological struggle between competing Victorian discourses about class, gender, and morality.

Rosanna's introduction immediately marks her as socially marginal. A former thief "rescued" by Lady Verinder and employed as a maid, she occupies an ambiguous position within the Verinder household - neither fully integrated nor completely outcast. Collins carefully constructs her physical appearance to reflect this liminality: her deformed shoulder serves as a constant visible reminder of her difference, while her skill at needlework (a conventionally feminine domestic art) hints at her desire for respectability. This complexity distinguishes Rosanna from more conventional fallen women in Victorian fiction, whose transgressions typically render them monolithically "other."

The novel's engagement with the fallen woman trope becomes most potent in its depiction of Rosanna's unrequited love for Franklin Blake. Her passion for the gentleman investigator constitutes a dual transgression: crossing class boundaries and asserting female sexual desire. Collins amplifies the pathos of this situation through dramatic irony - while readers gradually discern Rosanna's feelings, Franklin remains oblivious until her suicide makes them tragically evident. This narrative strategy forces readers to confront their own interpretive complicity, as we become aware of Rosanna's interiority long before the male characters do.

Rosanna's ultimate act - her suicide at the Shivering Sand - represents both the conventional punishment of the fallen woman and a startling assertion of agency. Unlike many Victorian heroines who die passively (like Dickens' Little Nell or Emily Brontë's Cathy), Rosanna actively chooses her fate. Her meticulously planned death, complete with a letter explaining her motives, constitutes what critic Lyn Pykett terms "the fallen woman's final, desperate bid for narrative control." This moment epitomizes the novel's polyphonic qualities, as Rosanna's voice persists beyond her death, demanding to be heard amidst the competing accounts that surround it.

The critical significance of this study lies in its fusion of Bakhtinian theory with feminist literary analysis to reveal how *The Moonstone* simultaneously replicates and critiques Victorian gender ideology. While the novel cannot fully escape the conventions of its era (Rosanna does ultimately die, conforming to the fallen woman's traditional narrative arc), it creates space for her subjectivity in ways that challenge reductive moral binaries. By granting Rosanna a voice that interrupts and interrogates dominant discourses, Collins exposes the violence inherent in Victorian constructions of female respectability.

Methodologically, this paper combines close textual analysis with historical contextualization and theoretical application. It examines key passages from Rosanna's letters and other narrators' accounts of her, situating these within Victorian debates about fallen women while reading them through Bakhtin's conceptual framework. The analysis also draws on feminist critiques of the period's gender politics, particularly Judith Walkowitz's seminal work on prostitution and Victorian society, as well as contemporary scholarship on Collins' progressive sexual politics.

Structurally, the argument proceeds through five interconnected sections. Following this introduction, the second section provides a detailed examination of Bakhtin's theories and their application to *The Moonstone's* narrative form. The third section establishes the historical and literary context of the fallen woman trope in Victorian England. The fourth offers an extended analysis of Rosanna Spearman as a case study in Collins' complex engagement with this trope. The fifth section examines how other characters' reactions to Rosanna reveal Victorian society's mechanisms for policing female behavior. The conclusion synthesizes these insights to assess Collins' achievement in using detective fiction's emerging conventions to critique social injustice.

This study ultimately argues that *The Moonstone* employs Bakhtinian narrative strategies to expose the contradictions in Victorian gender ideology. While the novel cannot fully transcend its historical moment's limitations, its polyphonic structure creates space for marginalized perspectives that challenge hegemonic norms. Rosanna Spearman's tragedy thus becomes not just a conventional moral lesson, but an indictment of the social systems that make such tragedies inevitable. In giving voice to the voiceless, Collins transforms the sensational novel into a vehicle for social critique, anticipating later literary developments in feminist and dialogic fiction.

2. Bakhtin's Theories: Heteroglossia and Polyphony in *The Moonstone*

Mikhail Bakhtin's theories of heteroglossia and polyphony provide a profound lens through which to analyze Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*. These concepts, rooted in Bakhtin's exploration of the novel as a dialogic form, reveal how Collins' narrative structure critiques Victorian social hierarchies and moral absolutism. By employing multiple narrators, each embodying distinct socio-linguistic registers, *The Moonstone* becomes a battleground of competing ideologies, where marginalized voices like Rosanna Spearman's disrupt dominant discourses. This section explores how Bakhtin's theories illuminate the novel's engagement with power, class, and gender, ultimately positioning it as a radical text within Victorian literature.

2.1 Bakhtinian Foundations: Heteroglossia and Polyphony Defined

Bakhtin's *Discourse in the Novel* (1934) introduces heteroglossia as the coexistence of diverse linguistic and ideological voices within a single text. He argues that language is not neutral but stratified by social conflict, reflecting the "tower of Babel" of class, profession, and ideology. In *The Moonstone*, this stratification manifests through its multi-narrator structure, where each character's account embodies a unique sociolect. For Bakhtin, the novel's power lies in its ability to orchestrate these voices into a "system of languages" that interact dialogically, exposing societal contradictions.

Polyphony, a concept from *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* (1929), describes narratives where characters exist as autonomous consciousnesses, resisting authorial control. Unlike monologic texts that enforce a single ideological perspective, polyphonic works allow characters to speak with unfinalized, independent voices. In *The Moonstone*, Rosanna Spearman epitomizes this polyphony; her posthumous letters assert a subjectivity that challenges the reductive labels imposed by other narrators.

2.2 Heteroglossia in *The Moonstone*: A Symphony of Voices

Collins' use of eleven narratives from eight witnesses creates a heteroglossic tapestry. Each narrator's voice reflects their social position, education, and moral framework, resulting in a cacophony of perspectives that resist synthesis. Below is an analysis of key narrators:

Gabriel Betteredge: The Paternalistic Chronicler

- Sociolect: Colloquial, laced with proverbs and reverence for Robinson Crusoe.
- Ideology: Embodies conservative Victorian paternalism. His narrative frames Rosanna as a "poor twisted creature," blending sympathy with condescension.
- Example: "I laid Robinson Crusoe on the table, and asked for my daughter's hand" (Collins 45). Betteredge's reliance on Defoe's text underscores his adherence to tradition, positioning him as a guardian of social order.

Miss Clack: The Evangelical Hypocrite

- Sociolect: Sanctimonious, peppered with religious platitudes and tracts.
- Ideology: Represents performative morality. Her "charity" towards Rosanna—forcing tracts like *The Tears of Christ for Fallen Women*—reveals judgment masquerading as piety.
- Example: "I handed her a tract, determined to save her soul" (Collins 189). Clack's language weaponizes religion to police female behavior.

Franklin Blake: The Rationalist in Crisis

- Sociolect: Initially detached and analytical, later tinged with guilt.
- Ideology: Embodies Enlightenment rationality, yet his evolution—from oblivious gentleman to remorseful participant—critiques male privilege.
- Example: "I never suspected her suffering—until it was too late" (Collins 302). Blake's belated empathy underscores the limitations of patriarchal perception.

Rosanna Spearman: The Marginalized Voice

- Sociolect: Raw, emotional, fragmented by her mediated presentation.
- Ideology: Resists categorization. Her suicide letter—"You will never love me, but I must tell you the truth"—asserts agency against erasure.
- Example: "I shall be dead when you read this" (Collins 275). Rosanna's direct address forces readers to confront her humanity.

2.3 Polyphony and Rosanna's Subversive Consciousness

Rosanna's narrative exemplifies Bakhtinian polyphony. Unlike Dickens' *Nancy*, whose death reinforces moral binaries, Rosanna's suicide letter destabilizes Victorian norms. Her voice persists beyond her physical demise, haunting the text as an unfinalized consciousness. Consider her letter's structure:

1. Confession: "I loved you, hopelessly"—A declaration of desire that transgresses class boundaries.
2. Accusation: "You suspected me"—A challenge to Franklin's (and society's) assumptions.
3. Defiance: "I have outwitted you all"—A reclaiming of agency through self-erasure.

This tripartite structure mirrors Bakhtin's concept of the "word with a loophole," where meaning remains open-ended, resisting closure. Rosanna's narrative refuses to be silenced, even as the other voices attempt to finalize her as a "thief" or "sinner."

2.4 Dialogism and Power Dynamics

Bakhtin's dialogism—the idea that all utterances respond to and anticipate others—illuminates the power struggles in *The Moonstone*. Rosanna's voice engages in a fraught dialogue with dominant discourses:

- Legal Discourse: Sergeant Cuff reduces her to a suspect, declaring, "The maid's history makes her a likely thief" (Collins 150). His detective work imposes a forensic lens that ignores her emotional reality.
- Religious Discourse: Miss Clack's tracts frame Rosanna's suffering as divine punishment, erasing systemic oppression.
- Patriarchal Discourse: Betteredge's paternalism ("Poor creature!") masks complicity in her marginalization.

These interactions reveal how Victorian institutions—law, religion, patriarchy—collude to suppress marginalized voices. Yet Rosanna's letters disrupt this collusion, creating what Bakhtin terms "internally persuasive discourse" that challenges authoritative language.

2.5 Structural Innovation and Bakhtinian Critique

Collins' narrative structure was radical for its time. By decentralizing authority, he anticipates modernist experiments in perspectivism. The novel's refusal to privilege a single narrator (even Blake, the protagonist) aligns with Bakhtin's view that truth emerges through dialogue, not monologue. This structural choice critiques Victorian empiricism, suggesting that "facts" are always mediated by ideology.

2.6 Counterarguments and Limitations

Critics might argue that Collins, as author, ultimately controls the polyphony, rendering it illusory. However, Bakhtin acknowledges that novelists orchestrate heteroglossia; the key is that characters retain ideological independence. Rosanna's voice, though fragmented, resists assimilation into dominant narratives, maintaining its distinct cadence and perspective.

2.7 Conclusion: Heteroglossia as Social Critique

Through heteroglossia and polyphony, *The Moonstone* exposes the fissures in Victorian ideology. Rosanna's narrative—a mosaic of desire, guilt, and defiance—challenges the binaries of angel/fallen, pure/impure. Collins transforms the detective novel into a space of ideological contestation, where marginalized voices demand to be heard. In doing so, he not only critiques his society but also expands the novel's formal possibilities, anticipating the dialogic potential of modernist fiction.

3. Historical Context: The 'Fallen Woman' in Victorian Society

3.1 Victorian Gender Ideology: The Angel vs. the Fallen Woman

The Victorian era was marked by rigid gender roles epitomized by the cult of domesticity and the ideal of the "Angel in the House"—a term derived from Coventry Patmore's 1854 poem. This archetype framed women as morally superior guardians of the home, embodying purity, passivity, and self-sacrifice. Conversely, the "fallen woman" represented a cultural counterpoint, defined by sexual transgression, criminality, or deviance from domestic norms. These women were ostracized, their identities reduced to cautionary symbols of moral decay.

The dichotomy between the "Angel" and the "fallen" reflected broader anxieties about industrialization, urbanization, and shifting class dynamics. As cities grew, so did fears of moral contamination, particularly targeting working-class women whose economic vulnerability often forced them into precarious roles (Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 1980). The fallen woman trope thus served as a tool for social control, reinforcing patriarchal authority by policing female autonomy.

3.2 Literary Representations: Punishment and Redemption

Victorian literature frequently depicted fallen women as tragic figures destined for suffering or death, reinforcing societal norms:

- Nancy in *Oliver Twist* (1838): A prostitute murdered for her loyalty to Oliver, symbolizing the inevitable destruction of "impure" women.
- Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House* (1853): Dies in disgrace after her premarital affair is exposed, her identity erased by scandal.
- Tess in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1891): Executed for killing her rapist, her death underscoring the impossibility of female redemption.

These narratives positioned fallen women as moral warnings, their fates legitimizing punitive social attitudes. However, Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* (1868) complicates this tradition through Rosanna Spearman, whose characterization merges criminality with emotional depth, challenging reductive stereotypes.

3.3 Social and Legal Realities: Criminality and Conflation

Victorian law and morality often conflated sexual and criminal deviance, particularly for women. The Contagious Diseases Acts (1864–1869) institutionalized this conflation, allowing police to forcibly examine women suspected of prostitution. Similarly, Magdalen asylums purported to "reform" fallen women through penitence and labor, yet perpetuated their marginalization by enforcing rigid conformity (Nead, *Myths of Sexuality*, 1988).

Rosanna Spearman's backstory as a thief reflects this societal tendency to equate poverty with moral failure. Her employment as a maid under Lady Verinder's patronage—a gesture of "rescue"—highlights the precariousness of redemption. Despite her reform, Rosanna remains marked by her past, illustrating how Victorian society denied women the possibility of true reintegration.

3.4 Sexual Double Standards and Male Privilege

Victorian morality operated under a sexual double standard: men's indiscretions were tolerated, while women's transgressions warranted severe punishment. Franklin Blake's obliviousness to Rosanna's love exemplifies this dynamic. His privileged status allows him to remain ignorant of her suffering until her suicide forces introspection. His belated guilt—"I never suspected her suffering"—critiques patriarchal myopia, revealing how systemic indifference perpetuates female marginalization.

3.5 Collins 'Subversion: Rosanna Spearman as a Polyphonic Figure

Collins disrupts the fallen woman trope through Bakhtinian polyphony, granting Rosanna a subjectivity that resists monolithic judgment. Her suicide letter—"You will never love me, but I must tell you the truth"—asserts agency, transforming her death from passive victimhood into an act of defiance. Unlike Dickens' Nancy, whose narrative serves patriarchal moralizing, Rosanna's voice persists posthumously, challenging readers to confront her humanity.

Key Passage Analysis:

- Rosanna's Letter: "I have outwitted you all" (Collins 275). This declaration subverts the detective genre's emphasis on male rationality, positioning Rosanna as an active architect of her narrative.

3.6 Reform Movements and Hypocrisy

Characters like Miss Clack embody the hypocrisy of Victorian reform. Her performative charity—distributing tracts like *The Tears of Christ for Fallen Women*—reflects the moralizing voyeurism of religious reformers. Yet her actions lack genuine empathy, reducing Rosanna to a project for spiritual validation. Collins critiques this hypocrisy, contrasting Miss Clack's judgmentalism with Rosanna's emotional authenticity.

3.7 Bakhtinian Heteroglossia and Competing Discourses

The novel's multi-narrator structure enacts heteroglossia, mirroring societal debates about fallen women:

- Betteredge's Paternalism: "Poor twisted creature!" (Collins 120). His sympathy is laced with condescension, reinforcing class hierarchies.
- Sergeant Cuff's Legalism: Reduces Rosanna to a suspect, ignoring her emotional complexity.
- Franklin's Guilt: Represents a nascent recognition of male complicity.

These competing voices reflect the ideological battleground of Victorian morality, where Rosanna's polyphonic presence disrupts hegemonic norms.

3.8 Conclusion: Collins' Radical Critique

By embedding Rosanna's voice within a heteroglossic narrative, *The Moonstone* exposes the violence of Victorian gender ideology. While her tragic end aligns with conventional tropes, her agency and unfinalized consciousness challenge reductive binaries. Collins transforms the sensational novel into a space of ideological critique, anticipating feminist revisions of the fallen woman archetype in later literature.

4. Rosanna Spearman as the Fallen Woman

4.1 Rosanna's Backstory and Social Stigma

Rosanna Spearman's history as a thief defines her identity long before her introduction in *The Moonstone*. Rescued from a reformatory by Lady Verinder, Rosanna's past criminality marks her as irredeemably "fallen" in Victorian terms, despite her apparent rehabilitation. Lady Verinder's patronage—ostensibly an act of charity—reinforces Rosanna's marginalization by framing her as a perpetual object of pity. As Gabriel Betteredge notes, "She was a girl who had gone wrong, and been let down in the reformatory, but my lady gave her a chance" (Collins 112). This "chance"

paradoxically traps Rosanna in a cycle of stigma; her reformed status remains contingent on her servitude, and her fellow servants distrust her, whispering about her past.

Victorian society conflated criminality with moral corruption, particularly for working-class women. Rosanna's theft—a survival strategy born of poverty—becomes a permanent moral stain. Unlike male characters with dubious pasts (e.g., Sergeant Cuff, whose cunning is celebrated), Rosanna's transgression defines her as inherently suspect. Her deformed shoulder, described as a "monstrosity" (Collins 115), symbolizes this indelible mark of difference, rendering her physically and morally "twisted" in the eyes of others.

Key Analysis:

- **Reform as Control:** Lady Verinder's "rescue" mirrors the ethos of Magdalen asylums, which sought to "reform" fallen women through domestic labor. Rosanna's needlework—a skill she masters in the reformatory—becomes both a tool of redemption and a metaphor for her constrained agency.
- **Class and Criminality:** Rosanna's working-class status exacerbates her fall. Her theft is interpreted not as economic desperation but as moral weakness, contrasting with Franklin Blake's privileged indifference to financial consequences.

4.2 Love for Franklin Blake: A Forbidden Desire

Rosanna's unrequited love for Franklin Blake constitutes a transgression of class and gender norms. As a gentleman, Franklin exists in a social stratum inaccessible to Rosanna, yet her desire disrupts these boundaries. Her fascination begins when Franklin shows her fleeting kindness, misinterpreting his politeness as romantic interest. Collins heightens the tragedy through dramatic irony: readers recognize Rosanna's love long before Franklin does, exposing the power imbalance inherent in their interactions.

Franklin's obliviousness epitomizes Victorian male privilege. His detachment—"I never suspected her suffering" (Collins 302)—reflects a broader societal blindness to women's interiority. Rosanna's decision to hide Franklin's paint-stained nightgown, an act meant to protect him, becomes a misguided expression of devotion. Her plea—"I would have gone through any humiliation to serve him" (Collins 275)—underscores the self-destructive nature of her love, which ultimately isolates her further.

Key Analysis:

- **Desire as Deviance:** In Victorian literature, female sexual desire outside marriage was pathologized. Rosanna's love, though chaste, is deemed inappropriate because it challenges class hierarchies.
- **Franklin's Guilt:** His retrospective guilt—"I am answerable for her death" (Collins 303)—reveals a dawning awareness of his complicity in patriarchal systems.

4.3 Gendered Surveillance and Suspicion

Sergeant Cuff's investigation amplifies the novel's theme of gendered surveillance. His suspicion of Rosanna—based solely on her criminal history—reflects patriarchal authority's tendency to criminalize marginalized women. Cuff's methods, which prioritize circumstantial evidence over empathy, reduce Rosanna to a puzzle to be solved. The stained nightgown, a key piece of evidence, becomes a metaphor for her "soiled" reputation.

Symbolism of the Nightgown:

- **Stain as Stigma:** The paint stain mirrors Rosanna's perceived moral corruption. Her attempt to conceal it parallels her struggle to hide her love for Franklin.
- **Misread Signs:** Cuff interprets the hidden nightgown as proof of guilt, ignoring its emotional significance. This misreading critiques the limitations of rationalist detective work in understanding female subjectivity.

4.4 Rosanna's Suicide: Agency or Defeat?

Rosanna's suicide letter is the novel's most polyphonic moment. In it, she asserts control over her narrative:

"You will never love me, but I must tell you the truth before I die. [...] I have outwitted you all." (Collins 275)

Her declaration "I have outwitted you all" transforms her death into an act of defiance. By orchestrating her demise at the Shivering Sand—a liminal space between land and sea—she resists societal attempts to define her. Yet her death also conforms to the fallen woman trope, which mandates punishment for transgression.

Bakhtinian Perspective:

- Agency: Her letter disrupts authoritative discourses, asserting her voice beyond the grave.
- Defeat: The suicide's inevitability underscores Victorian society's refusal to grant fallen women redemption.

4.5 Comparison with Lucy Yolland: Class and Marginalization

Lucy Yolland, the "little fisher-girl" (Collins 198), provides a foil to Rosanna. Both are marginalized, but Lucy's poverty lacks Rosanna's moral stigma. While Rosanna's criminal past defines her, Lucy's marginalization stems from economic deprivation, not moral failure.

Class Dynamics:

- Rosanna: Her fall is irrevocable due to her history of theft.
- Lucy: Though poor, she remains "innocent" in Victorian terms, highlighting how class intersects with moral judgment.

Conclusion

Rosanna Spearman embodies the contradictions of the fallen woman trope. Her narrative voice, preserved through Bakhtinian polyphony, challenges Victorian moral absolutism even as her death reinforces societal brutality. Collins' nuanced portrayal critiques the systems that destroy her, transforming Rosanna from a cautionary figure into a tragic heroine whose voice lingers as a testament to resilience.

5. Societal Reactions and Narrative Judgment

5.1 Gabriel Betteredge: Paternalistic Sympathy and Class Hierarchies

Gabriel Betteredge, the Verinder family steward, embodies the contradictions of Victorian paternalism. His narrative voice oscillates between genuine compassion for Rosanna Spearman and a rigid adherence to class hierarchies. While he describes her as a "poor twisted creature" (Collins 120), his sympathy is tempered by condescension, reflecting the patronizing attitude of the upper classes toward "reformed" fallen women. Betteredge's loyalty to Lady Verinder, who "rescued" Rosanna from a life of crime, positions him as a gatekeeper of respectability, ensuring that Rosanna's redemption remains contingent on her subservience.

Betteredge's fixation on Robinson Crusoe—a text he treats as scripture—symbolizes his conservative worldview. Just as Crusoe imposes order on his island, Betteredge seeks to maintain social order through paternalistic control. His account of Rosanna's suicide reveals this tension: he expresses sorrow but ultimately frames her death as inevitable, stating, "There was a horrid fate hanging over her, and she went straight to meet it" (Collins 278). This fatalism absolves society of responsibility, naturalizing Rosanna's marginalization as the consequence of her "twisted" nature rather than systemic oppression.

Key Analysis:

- Language of Othering: Betteredge's descriptors ("creature," "twisted") dehumanize Rosanna, reinforcing her status as a social outlier.
- Class Complicity: His role as steward requires him to uphold the Verinder household's hierarchies, making him complicit in Rosanna's oppression.

5.2 Miss Clack: Evangelical Hypocrisy and Performative Morality

Miss Clack, the novel's most overtly hypocritical narrator, weaponizes religion to police Rosanna's behavior. Her distribution of tracts like *The Tears of Christ for Fallen Women* exemplifies the Victorian obsession with moralizing fallen women while offering no substantive support. Clack's "charity" is performative, designed to elevate her own spiritual status rather than alleviate Rosanna's suffering.

Clack's narrative is steeped in evangelical rhetoric, framing Rosanna's plight as a divine test of her penitence. She writes, "I prayed for her reprobate soul, trusting the Lord would soften her heart" (Collins 190), reducing Rosanna's trauma to a simplistic battle between sin and salvation. This perspective mirrors the ideology of Magdalen asylums, which prioritized moral reform over addressing the systemic issues (poverty, sexual exploitation) that drove women to "fall."

Key Analysis:

- **Voyeuristic Piety:** Clack's fascination with Rosanna's "fall" reveals a prurient interest in others' suffering, masking judgment as compassion.
- **Critique of Evangelicalism:** Collins satirizes religious hypocrisy by contrasting Clack's self-righteousness with Rosanna's emotional authenticity.

5.3 Franklin Blake: Oblivious Privilege and Belated Guilt

Franklin Blake's initial obliviousness to Rosanna's love underscores the gendered and class-based privilege inherent in Victorian masculinity. His interactions with Rosanna—marked by casual kindness mistaken for romantic interest—highlight the power imbalance between a gentleman and a servant. Franklin's detachment ("I never gave her a thought") reflects societal norms that rendered working-class women's emotions invisible.

Only after Rosanna's suicide does Franklin confront his complicity. His admission—"I am answerable for her death" (Collins 303)—signals a rare moment of male accountability in Victorian literature. However, his guilt remains passive; he takes no action to challenge the systems that destroyed Rosanna, instead retreating into self-pity. This incomplete reckoning critiques the limitations of patriarchal empathy, which often centers male remorse over female suffering.

Key Analysis:

- **Male Privilege:** Franklin's ignorance is a luxury afforded by his gender and class, contrasting with Rosanna's hypervisibility as a fallen woman.
- **Performative Guilt:** His remorse, while genuine, lacks transformative power, underscoring the novel's skepticism toward patriarchal redemption.

5.4 Sergeant Cuff: The Law as an Instrument of Patriarchy

Sergeant Cuff, the famed detective, represents the legal system's role in reinforcing patriarchal control. His investigation reduces Rosanna to a suspect based on her criminal history, ignoring her emotional complexity. Cuff's methodology—prioritizing physical evidence over psychological insight—mirrors Victorian criminology's tendency to pathologize marginalized women.

Cuff's suspicion of Rosanna hinges on the stained nightgown, which he interprets as proof of guilt. His declaration—"The maid's history makes her a likely thief" (Collins 150)—reveals how class and gender bias shape legal judgment. By framing Rosanna's actions through a lens of criminality, Cuff perpetuates the conflation of moral and legal "fall," denying her humanity.

Key Analysis:

- **Forensic Objectification:** Cuff's detective work treats Rosanna as a puzzle to be solved, not a person to be understood.
- **Critique of Empiricism:** The novel challenges the Victorian faith in rationality by showing how "facts" can obscure emotional truth.

5.5 Bakhtinian Heteroglossia and Competing Judgments

The novel's multi-narrator structure enacts heteroglossia, allowing competing judgments of Rosanna to coexist:

- **Betteredge's Paternalism:** "She was a good girl at heart, but marked for trouble."

- Miss Clack's Moralizing: "Her soul cried out for salvation."
- Franklin's Guilt: "I failed to see her humanity."
- Cuff's Legalism: "The evidence pointed to her guilt."

These voices form a cacophony of societal judgment, reflecting the ideological forces that condemn Rosanna. Yet her suicide letter disrupts this chorus, asserting a counter-narrative that resists finalization.

5.6 Conclusion: Narrative Judgment as Social Control

The reactions to Rosanna Spearman reveal how Victorian society policed female autonomy through narrative. Betteredge's paternalism, Clack's hypocrisy, Franklin's privilege, and Cuff's legalism collectively enforce the fallen woman trope, framing Rosanna's death as inevitable. However, Collins' use of polyphony subverts this control; Rosanna's voice, though mediated, persists as a challenge to authoritative discourse. By exposing the mechanisms of narrative judgment, *The Moonstone* critiques the societal systems that reduce women to moral allegories, offering instead a haunting portrait of marginalized humanity.

6. Conclusion

Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone* transcends its genre as a detective novel to deliver a searing indictment of Victorian gender and class hierarchies. Through the tragic arc of Rosanna Spearman, Collins interrogates the punitive construct of the "fallen woman," employing Bakhtinian heteroglossia and polyphony to dismantle reductive moral binaries. The multi-narrator structure, with its cacophony of voices—Betteredge's paternalism, Miss Clack's hypocrisy, Franklin's oblivious privilege, and Cuff's legalism—mirrors societal mechanisms that marginalize women like Rosanna. Yet her posthumous letters disrupt these authoritative discourses, asserting a subjectivity that refuses erasure.

Rosanna's suicide, while conforming to the trope's tragic inevitability, also subverts it. Her final act, meticulously orchestrated and articulated through her letter, reclaims agency, transforming her death into a critique of systemic oppression. This duality underscores Collins' nuanced approach: even as Rosanna's fate reflects Victorian brutality, her voice persists as a challenge to patriarchal narratives. The stained nightgown, misread as evidence of guilt, becomes a metaphor for societal misjudgment, exposing the limitations of empiricism in understanding female interiority.

The novel's engagement with class further complicates Rosanna's marginalization. Unlike Lucy Yolland, whose poverty lacks moral stigma, Rosanna's criminal history renders her irredeemable in the eyes of society. Collins critiques this conflation of poverty and morality, revealing how class hierarchies exacerbate gendered oppression.

This study contributes to feminist and Bakhtinian scholarship by illustrating how heteroglossia and polyphony empower marginalized voices. Collins' narrative innovation—using detective fiction's fragmented structure to amplify dissent—anticipates modernist techniques, positioning *The Moonstone* as a bridge between Victorian and modernist literary traditions. Future research could extend this framework to Collins' other works, such as *The Woman in White*, or explore Bakhtinian analyses of female transgression in broader Victorian contexts.

Ultimately, *The Moonstone* compels readers to question who controls narrative authority. In Rosanna Spearman, Collins crafts a figure who, though silenced by death, lingers as a testament to resilience, challenging us to confront the systems that seek to finalize her story. Her legacy is not one of defeat, but of enduring resistance—a radical reimagining of the fallen woman's role in Victorian literature.

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