

Woman in White, continued

Marian as detective

Intrepid!

Reading

Elsewhere: texts as *objects*

The Purloined Letter, for example
And the red herring note in The
Problem of Cell 13

Here: texts as texts

With varying degrees of
interpretability

Characters who carry forward the
activity of our own interpretation
and deciphering

Nerves: who is “sensitive” and in
what way?

Legibility, the gift of interpretation,
and textual possession

What qualities and circumstances
does a character need to have in
order to perceive and participate in
the real plot?

(Note and set aside for now: the
perspicacity/lack thereof of Sir
Percival)

Who's reading what?

Public narratives

The open court, for instance

The text claims for itself the
status of quasi-legal document

The courtroom

- Public, sanctioned
- Always accompanied by a written account
- So, both an oral and a written set of “texts”
- In the public domain
- The verdict, too

Other legal documents

- Contracts
- Public records
- Etc.

Private texts

Letters, private notes, diaries

Always subject to interception

Mr. Gilmore notes the danger of being “obliged to commit to writing questions which ought always to be discussed on both sides by word of mouth”

Letters

Intercepted and interpreted

“I was about to say,” she went on, addressing me again, “that my sister and I have a large collection of my mother's letters, addressed to my father and to hers. In the absence of any other means of getting information, I will pass the morning in looking over my mother's correspondence with Mr. Fairlie. He was fond of London, and was constantly away from his country home; and she was accustomed, at such times, to write and report to him how things went on at Limmeridge. Her letters are full of references to the school in which she took so strong an interest; and I think it more than likely that I may have discovered something when we meet again.”

Anne Catherick's first letter

The handwriting afforded no prospect of a clue. It was traced on ruled lines, in the cramped, conventional, copy-book character technically termed "small hand." It was feeble and faint, and defaced by blots, but had otherwise nothing to distinguish it.

"That is not an illiterate letter," said Miss Halcombe, "and at the same time, it is surely too incoherent to be the letter of an educated person in the higher ranks of life. The reference to the bridal dress and veil, and other little expressions, seem to point to it as the production of some woman. What do you think, Mr. Hartright?"

"I think so too. It seems to me to be not only the letter of a woman, but of a woman whose mind must be——"

"Deranged?" suggested Miss Halcombe. "It struck me in that light too." I did not answer. While I was speaking, my eyes rested on the last sentence of the letter: "Your mother's daughter has a tender place in my heart—for your mother was my first, my best, my only friend."

Anne Catherick's note to Laura

"Did you try to hide the letter?"

"I tried, but he stopped me. 'You needn't trouble to hide that,' he said. 'I happen to have read it.' I could only look at him helplessly—I could say nothing. 'You understand?' he went on; 'I have read it. I dug it up out of the sand two hours since, and buried it again, and wrote the word above it again, and left it ready to your hands. You can't lie yourself out of the scrape now. You saw Anne Catherick in secret yesterday, and you have got her letter in your hand at this moment. I have not caught HER yet, but I have caught YOU. Give me the letter.' He stepped close up to me—I was alone with him, Marian—what could I do?—I gave him the letter."

Marian's letter, entrusted to
Fanny

Documents that *should* be
public, withheld

The contract

Withholding access

Not a literal text: Marian “reads”
Walter’s private feelings

“Crush it!” she said. “Here, where you first saw her, crush it! Don't shrink under it like a woman. Tear it out; trample it under foot like a man!”

Writing and possession

Marian, eavesdropper

Transcriber

Transforming private knowledge into
transmissible text

But what can be possessed in
this way can also be stolen

On the next page of the Diary, another entry appears. It is in a man's handwriting, large, bold, and firmly regular, and the date is "June the 21st." It contains these lines—]

POSTSCRIPT BY A SINCERE FRIEND

The illness of our excellent Miss Halcombe has afforded me the opportunity of enjoying an unexpected intellectual pleasure.

I refer to the perusal (which I have just completed) of this interesting Diary.

There are many hundred pages here. I can lay my hand on my heart, and declare that every page has charmed, refreshed, delighted me.

I condole with her on the inevitable failure of every plan that she has formed for her sister's benefit. At the same time, I entreat her to believe that the information which I have derived from her Diary will in no respect help me to contribute to that failure. It simply confirms the plan of conduct which I had previously arranged. I have to thank these pages for awakening the finest sensibilities in my nature—nothing more.

To a person of similar sensibility this simple assertion will explain and excuse everything.

Miss Halcombe is a person of similar sensibility.

In that persuasion I sign myself,
Fosco.

Reading *and* writing

Taking possession!

Fosco reappropriates the narrative
agency she had temporarily taken
for herself

Reader as eavesdropper

Who are we aligned with?

Next week

We'll talk about interesting doublings

Writing assignment for Group B

- 500 words: Carrying the conversation onward: Discuss some small passage or pattern in “Epoch the Second” that strikes you as illustrating an interesting point of contrast or or similarity between *Woman in White* and the detective stories proper that we’ve read so far in this class. Think about complicating this question a bit – do you, say, see ways that some **same** trope you recognize from another text is cashed out **differently** here?