

# The Mask of Sensation

## Echoes of Sensation Novel Female Characters in *Gone Full Havisham*

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**Abstract.** During the last decades, social networking sites have become our main of socializing. We create online self-representations in order to participate and the way we modify our lives to make them fit virtual stereotypes can alter our identity. Almost two centuries ago identity loss was a recurrent issue in sensation novels reflecting common social anxiety. Irene Kelleher's play *Gone Full Havisham* (2019) recovers Dickens's Miss Havisham to portray this craze and its side effects. By means of Bakhtin's theories of Carnival and dialogism and Foucault's concept of discourse I will try to unravel how sensation masks, used in the 21st century as identities, are equally built, manipulated and lost.

**Keywords:** identity, masks, discourse, monological voices, polyphony

### Victorian constraintment on 21st century characters

Despite Victorian middle-class high standards of self-repression, decorum and moral continence, scandals and sensational events were as valued as they are nowadays. This love for sensation is something inherent to human nature, as Michael Diamond states: "Curiosity, the inclination to idolize and demonize prominent figures, the tendency to wallow in emotion – the Victorians suffered from these weaknesses just as we do" (Diamond 2003,6). According to Diamond these different Victorian sensations can be split up into different broad categories – royalty, politics, religion and morality, sex scandals, murder mysteries, and to a lesser extent, sports and disasters. Wilkie Collins, Ellen Wood and Elizabeth Braddon were the first novelists to respond to the public's demand, each of them publishing at the beginning of the 1860's respectively *The Woman in White* (1859), *East Lynne* (1861) and *Lady Audley's Secret* (1862), which would settle the genre foundations. Apart from its elements of blackmail, fraud and murder, the sensation novel is also the embodiment of a specific nervousness, prompted by the rapidly modernizing world, and a thematization of multiple Victorian fears that are also familiar with the current ones. Especially they paid attention to anxieties concerning the family. This can be clearly seen, as most sensation novels reveal that the "ideal" Victorian family has some dark secret tucked away (Pykett,1999, 10). The biggest concern among the Victorian middle-class, however, was that of the nature of the feminine and gender roles (Pykett, 1999, 10) which prompted women to start to rebel against their inferior position within society. Female characters were portrayed as strong, taking matters into their own hands (Diamond 2003, 5) and being central in almost every sensation novel.

Stage and Screen actress Irene Kelleher<sup>1</sup> brings Dickens into the 21<sup>st</sup>-century by means of her play *Gone Full Havisham*<sup>2</sup> (2019) where she offers a rewriting of *Great Expectations* (1861) set up in Ireland during the 80's and focused on the figure of a modernized Miss Havisham. Leaving aside Pip's story, Kelleher puts her heart into giving voice to the jilted bride who lacks the capacity of love. The author aims at breaking the characterization Miss Havisham has been victim of by making the audience accompany her in her journey of acceptance and refusal of her assigned role. Emily Halloran, *Gone Full Havisham*'s protagonist is introduced to us while live streaming her break down from her penthouse honeymoon suite where she has been dwelling for five months. In a reflection of today's co-dependent society, she lets her followers take decisions for her as she seems to look for validation in social networks. The daughter of a late businessman who owned the hotel where she is broadcasting from, Emily is the archetype of a poor rich girl who has never been too popular. Brought up to become a brain and a bookworm her only true connection is Elise -her best friend- who leaves her to make a life of her own. Having to cope with the early loss of her mother, Emily's father becomes the main pillar of her life, substituted at his death by her fiancé Jack who has already abandoned her by the time the play starts. We only learn about Emily's story through her own voice, by means of her internet broadcast and her internal monologues. #Gonefullhavisham -the hashtag Emily is trending on- does not only reference Charles Dickens's character in *Great Expectations* (1861) but it is also an indicator of the level of implication between Emily's 21<sup>st</sup> century self and Victorian novel characters. Even if it might seem two centuries is too big a gap, digital society fixates over daily stories echoing literary sensationalism of the 1860s and diverging from it only in the way they are consumed. Posts and shares on Instagram, YouTube or Twitter mirror the nineteenth century magazines where authors published monthly episodes trying to give their public what they demanded.

Irene Kelleher, as sensation writers did back in the day, pushes the limits of psychological and sexual constructs of female characters, unravelling the contradictions on which society based and still bases the notions of normality and stability, revealing the lies behind gender construction and thereby putting in

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<sup>1</sup> Irene is an Irish playwright and performer. Her first play, *Mary and Me*, published by Oberon, toured extensively nationally and internationally to critical acclaim and is also an RTÉ produced radio play. The play was nominated for the Argus Angel Award from the Brighton Fringe and a Bobby Award at the Edinburgh Fringe 2017. It had its US Premiere in October 2020 at the Players Ring and is currently running at the Hat Box Theatre, New Hampshire.

<sup>2</sup> *Gone Full Havisham* is Irene's second play. It enjoyed a sell-out run on its premiere at the Cork Midsummer Festival 2019 and was staged site-specifically in a penthouse suite of the Clayton Hotel. The play also had a critically acclaimed run at the Gilded Balloon as part of the Edinburgh Fringe in August and in Bewleys Theatre, Dublin in January 2020. Nominated for a Bobby Award as part of Ed Fringe, it was named by both *The Irish Examiner* and *The Irish Times* as a Theatre Highlight of 2019. The play is published on the Irish Theatre Institute (ITI) Website as an E-script. It began a national tour in February 2020 and other venues included: Scripts Festival in Offaly, Hawk's Well Theatre, Sligo, Garter Lane Theatre, Waterford and The Garage Theatre, Monaghan. The play was in the middle of a national tour that had to be postponed due to the outbreak of Covid19

question role models and stereotypes. What Kelleher and sensation writers share is their concern with identity and its loss; Laura Fairlie's identity is taken away from her in *The Woman in White* while in *Lady Audley's Secret* Hellen Talboys assumes different identities to climb up the social ladder; Anne Catherick's (TWIW) and Miss Havisham's (GE) identities change after a traumatic experience and they are labelled as insane, one of them confined in an asylum and the other on her own mansion where she is locked for the rest of her life. Kelleher shows a twenty-first century character whose identity has suffered so many attempts to be constructed, taken away from her and reshaped that it is slipping through her fingers. Therefore, she decides to create her own mask by means of social media and one of her beloved characters from *Great Expectations*: Miss Havisham, to show her followers that today's expectations are cages that do not differ much from those used to imprison Victorian female characters.

### Victorian symbols

Emily Halloran struggles against different sorts of imprisonment, both physical and social. Since her first appearance on stage, she is portrayed as someone who needs to obtain validation. Thus, she represents perfectly the role she believes she is expected to play. The ideal role of the female in nineteenth century was one of total submission, managing the entire household alone. The woman was to be passive, dependent, and obedient to her husband or father and could never enjoy any autonomy neither in thought nor action. Victorian women should internalize the image of "the angel in the house" that had been idealized by Coventry Patmore in the mid 1850's character of Honoria. It was an ideal that women should be drawn as the necessary opposite to men and largely identified with goodness but also with weakness and childish behaviour, constantly in need of male supervision and protection. In *Gone Full Havisham* Emily Halloran, a 21<sup>st</sup> century character, is exposed to constraining powers that construct a role as binding as "the angel in the house" was for Victorian women. The pressure of these powers will have a constant symbolic presence thanks to two elements that will haunt her theatre play: The China doll and The Wedding Dress.

#### A. The China Doll: The Surveillance Gaze

Lucy is the name of Emily's mother's China Doll, and one of her most cherished possessions. From her privileged position on top of the China cabinet she watches Emily's every move. Not being allowed to play with Lucy, Emily can see neither her worth nor her use. Nevertheless, she is constantly compared with her mother's favourite whenever something is required from her "Eat up your crusts now and you'll have lovely curls like Lucy." (GFH, I,6) This comparison triggers a need to compete with the doll as it is considered "an object of perfection". The doll shares names with Lucy Graham. Hellen Talboys takes on this identity in *Lady Audley's Secret* in order to prosper in life. Choosing to perform the ideal of the angel in the house she manages an image of innocence and naivety. As a result, everyone who meets Lucy Graham sees her as "light-hearted, happy, and contented under any circumstances" (LAS,1862,8) These traits are highly desirable and the reason for Lucy's success as she is said to be "blessed with that magic power of fascination

by which a woman can charm with a word or intoxicate with a smile. Everyone loved, admired, and praised her" (LAS 1862,12). They grant Lucy her dreamed position for Sir Michael is so struck by her beauty and demeanour that he marries her almost instantly. Lucy-the-doll is the container of this Victorian representation of female gender, Emily's mother idea of the perfect girl.

Should Emily rise to those expectations she would be turning into something she knows she is not. In order to get her mother's validation, she would have to assume a fake identity. Lucy-the-doll is also the manifestation of identity construction and identity masks women are forced to wear and that only sometimes are worn willingly. The very same Helen Talboys / Lucy Graham / Lady Audley hides herself behind these three personae and will be compared to a wax-doll herself to imply that her beauty (as well as her identity) is artificially constructed to match society's standards as Lucy-the-doll preacher in *Gone Full Havisham*.

Emily does not perceive the doll as a totally passive figure, she feels judged by it. 'I hated Lucy. Her eyes followed me around the room in judgement. (*Emily as Lucy*) "Why can't you just be a good little girl like me?" (GFH, 7) Not only does Lucy represent the standards Emily should comply with, but her gaze is the surveillance gaze of Foucault's Panopticon. It objectifies Emily, making her a text, formed by a collection of her father's orders expectations and aphorisms. The Panopticon no longer exists as a large watchtower in the center of a circular prison, it has been recast as the crystal eyes of a doll which is a reminder of all the cages society puts us in nowadays as well as the constraints Victorian women had to battle daily. The fragility of the china doll is a reminder of the fragility of the fake construction of such characters. Once it is broken there is no way it can be fixed because a simple crack on the china makes the truth visible and the mask falls. That is the case with Lady Audley, whose true character and identity are discovered at the end of the novel and, much to her dismay, her wax-doll-self shatters.

The lead character of *Gone Full Havisham* (2019), Emily, willingly tries to do away with the doll by breaking her. In order to oppose the angelic view of Victorian women Braddon and Collins used powerful femme fatale figures as their protagonists to challenge the patriarchal law of the mid-nineteenth century. In *Gone Full Havisham* there are also such characters: Dana International<sup>1</sup>- the figure Emily would rather resemble – challenges parental /patriarchal discourse just with her looks "And when she comes on... you can't help but stare... She is a glistening queen, tall, dark, commanding, mesmerising. I had to dance along, host my own Eurovision in the good room, but a little shuffle on the couch isn't enough. I need the full room here as my stage" (GFH, 7) This role is much more attractive for Emily than Lucy-the-china-doll. Dana made her appearance in the contest as a tall, thin and glamorous woman dressed in a floor-length glitter gown with luscious brown curls. With her presence she signalled the importance of a fun liberated gregarious LGBT culture that saw the Eurovision contest as an open

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<sup>1</sup> Sharon Cohen a.k.a Dana International is an Israeli pop Singer who achieved worldwide fame when becoming the first transwinner ever of Eurovision Song Contest in its 1998 edition.

window to diversity. Therefore, little Emily feels represented, and impersonates her by dancing crazily around the room.

Little Emily shares with Dana a strong desire to transcend class, social barriers and constraints despite the risk of being judged on the basis of the departure from the feminine ideal represented by Lucy-the-doll. Notwithstanding Emily's Dana International-like-dance constitutes a failed attempt to break the bonds that hold Emily down and do away with the discourses that are trying to shape her. In the middle of the dance, Emily feels observed by Lucy's judging eyes imposing once more her values. This feeling makes Emily "morph" into Lucy's character. She abandons her free movements to start dancing on her tiptoes like a proper ballerina, regaining her ordinary "proper" self. This "possession" indicates how deeply society's definitions and gender roles can be engraved in our consciousness. While dancing, quite accidentally, Emily throws the doll to the floor but this accident does not allow her to break free. Trying to escape from her influence and scared for the consequences her actions might have Emily hides her in the laundry room for sometime, but Lucy-the-doll makes a come-back when found by one of Emily's aunts and placed again in 'The Good Room' so that Emily can feel her gaze every day. The doll is not totally broken, part of her face is damaged and one of her eyes gets lost. This fact makes her look more terrifying, symbolizing her everlasting influence despite her blemishes. The incident takes place after Emily loses her mother. Consequently, if the doll represents the expectations both parents have for Emily and the control exercised over her, the loss of the doll's eye stands for the vanishing of her mother's influence. From now onwards she will only represent her father's values. Turned into a reminder that diverting from the norm is a mistake that will always leave a mark and a trace, Lucy-the-doll states there is no place for subversive behaviour in Mr. Halloran's world, as there was no happy ending for sensation female characters either. All their freedom, power and possible success ended with them being punished: enclosed in asylums and unwanted marriages, either physically or socially dead, after losing everything their ruthless behaviour might have helped them to get.

## B. The Wedding Dress: Prison

In *The Woman in White* Marian makes a statement about marriage "Men! They are the enemies of our innocence and our peace – they drag us away from our parents' love and our sisters' friendship – they take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel" (TWIW, 162) Man and marriage constituted the ultimate cage for women in Victorian Britain. An extraordinary focus was put on matrimony and domesticity as driving forces and markers of morality and empire. But much of Victorian literature depicts unhappy marriage as an imprisoning institution that renders women as victims. The ideal marriage in the nineteenth century obeyed the patriarchal model centred on the companionship of husband and wife, giving them defined roles within the marriage that – as Marian claims – denied wives'

their own identity and relegated them to the domestic sphere -where man was still the authority figure to the subordinated female<sup>1</sup>- and locked them from the world.

Even though in *Gone Full Havisham* marriage as such does not take place, the presence of this institution is still strong and its transformational power is symbolized by the wedding dress. The notion of socially constructed identity implies that it can suffer transformations by means of clothing, as dressing is a means of expression and representation. In *Gone Full Havisham* the Wedding Gown is both a shaping instrument and a cage, the natural successor to the corset, the ultimate Victorian symbol and instrument of oppression which enslaved its wearer with the purpose of obtaining a look of delicate femininity which was becoming an imperative signifier of fashionableness for middle and upper middle-class women whose bodies originally configured as reproductive sources and were then, thanks to it, reconfigured in the erotic field.

### 1. *The Shaping Instrument*

Regardless of the fact that the wedding dress is to be worn just one day it is given vital importance as it might define the whole wedding or even the marriage. One of the best kept secrets of the "Big Day" is that its selection usually takes time and concerns the bride and her bridesmaids unless it is inherited from some family member. Tradition says it must be kept away from the groom until the ceremony or, otherwise, it casts misery over the newlyweds. Nevertheless, it is Jack – Emily's husband-to-be – the one who is in charge of finding the perfect wedding dress. Entwistle in her essay, "The Dressed Body," (2007) highlights that our bodies are intimately related to our way of dressing "a part of our epidermis—it lies on the boundary between self and other" (2007:93). Therefore, we shape ourselves and are shaped by the way we choose to dress. The fact that Emily relies on Jack to purchase the dress is proof of her dependency as she does not have a say in the matter. "Honestly babe, wait till you see it. It's that perfect combination of flattery and flash, elegant but sexy, classy yet edgy, pure but deadly, innocence with a touch of dominatrix" (GFH, 13). Jack's choice shares the binary nature- the capacity to restrict female movements and abilities and yet enhance feminine sexuality- with the corset which as pointed out in *Bound to Please: A History on the Victorian Corset* had a crucial role 'in the process of constructing as well as articulating and appropriating Victorian femininity.'(2001:5) The chosen dress symbolises how Jack will articulate and rearticulate Emily's identity altering both body and mind as his reshaping and imprisonment discourse is exercised in two different levels: the physical and the mental.

The wedding dress comes to symbolize the discursive conditions under which Emily lives her corporeality. Its silhouette and structure will modify her body until it provides her with the features that Jack - who stands for the normative speaking subject – wishes her to have, defining Emily's beauty. She is shaped as an attractive woman who feels desired for the first time. But this desire is deeply related to sacrifice due to his fetishization of an extreme thinness that Emily

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<sup>1</sup> Concept found in A. James Hammerton article "Victorian Marriage and the Law of Matrimonial Cruelty" published on *Victorian Studies* vol.33, n2 (Winter).

maintains by not eating. She also starts wearing make-up every day and dressing in a specific way. These restrictions imposed on Emily make her refrain from performing her assigned role as Little Girl Genius / Father's Little Warrior and she falls into that of The Rescued Princess<sup>1</sup> that Jack has in mind and which he constantly verbalizes when addressing Emily.

Participation in a society requires that the body suits itself to a specularization, a speculation that transforms it into a value-bearing object, a standardized sign, an exchangeable signifier, a likeness with reference to an authoritative model [the masculine] (Irigaray 1977/1985b)

Jack, as Irigaray's masculine subject, master of discourse turns Emily into a commodity<sup>2</sup> designed to confirm his status denying her specificity and the possibility to participate in society's system of exchange constructing her as a dependent woman: 'you need to relax, to be looked after, let me take care of everything' (GFH, 12) These definitions are aimed at controlling the other and reducing the other's meaning to the one the subject wants to project on the other. For him Emily's worth lies in her fortune and her condition of sex provider and thus he erases all traces of any other feature in her, like the intelligence her father took great pains to assure. He uses a game called 'My Silly Billy' that is re-enacted by Emily throughout the play as an instrument of construction.

"What is the square root of 144?"

*Emily shrugs shoulders.*

"How many calories are in that chocolate muffin?"

*Emily shrugs shoulders and giggles.*

"What is the capital of Cameroon?"

*Emily shrugs shoulders*

"You're such a silly billy. What you are? Say it?"

Your silly billy.

The princess realises she's actually thick (FGH, 12)

Through his enunciations, Jack actualizes his vision of the world and specifically of Emily and that vision is accepted, internalized and reflected back. The game they play is called Silly Billy which is a common nickname for someone who behaves not very brightly and originated in nineteenth century as a type of clown. This highlights the dependent, girlish, thick vision Jack wants to impose on her and he defines Emily as his property. Not in vain he makes use of the personal pronoun "my" in "my silly Billy" and Emily validates that sense of property by using "your Silly Billy" as well because she acknowledges her condition of commodity.

In *Gone Full Havisham* the bridal gown is understood as a second skin the bride/Emily has to wear designed and chosen by the groom/Jack as the physical representation of the specularization Emily is trapped. Established as the bearer of these damaging regulations and stereotyping, its symbolic meaning is

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<sup>1</sup> The alluring fairy tale of "princess myth" runs deep in many women as an underlying desire to look and feel like a princess most of the times becomes real by being a bride. Emily is living a twisted version of the princess myth and the dress helps enacting it.

<sup>2</sup> This concept of commodity appears in Claude Lévi- Strauss's Alliance Theory, also known as The General Theory of Exchanges and developed in *Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1949)

strengthened and supported by the opinion of the girl in the Bridal Shop and the constant presence along the play of the Bride Magazine Emily constantly checks. The wedding dress has to be tight until it fits Emily's body perfectly and both merge into one, in perfect union, defining her. No matter how tight or how much pain Emily is undergoing the shop assistant goes on tightening it even more. The woman subscribes the oppressive nature of the dress and sees it as something natural: a bride has to comply with social expectations of thinness and beauty. While the ribbons of the dress are fixed, Emily is revealed some truths about it: "A wedding dress is no ordinary dress. A wedding dress is a woman's statement to the world, her essence." When a woman crosses over the threshold into marriage she is leaving behind her attachments to a past identity and embracing a new one as a married woman. Consequently, there is a big number of archetypes attached to each personal choice of dress: the colour, the material, the size, the shape etc. An essence clearly manipulated by man and whose "statement to the world", as an utterance would be void, as Jack is the puppeteer manipulating the strings of the puppet Emily has become.

## 2. *The cage*

In the B.B.C 2018 adaptation of Wilkie Collins *The Woman in White* physical violence is used to exemplify the lack of freedom the old institution supposed for women. Compelled to obey her late father's dying wish, Laura accepts to embark on a marriage without love. Not only does Laura's marriage to Sir Percival Glyde threaten her identity and her fortune, but also her life, for being a wealthy woman, Laura has had little say in the distribution of her inheritance; with her death her fortune will go to her husband and to her aunt, Madame Fosco, conveniently married to Sir Percival's co-conspirator, Count Fosco. The house – as a physical representation of the marriage- becomes a prison for Laura as soon as Glyde starts locking her in against her will each time he meets with her reluctance when trying to obtain something from her. He turns her body into a flesh cage by means of repeated rape and it can be seen how every time Laura tries to take a step towards individuality, Sir Perceval Glyde uses his own body to prevent her from acting freely, incarcerating her with her own presence. In *Gone with the Wind* physical imprisonment is represented by the gown.

Not only is the wedding dress a symbol of the construction of Emily's identity but also of the appropriation of her body. If the wedding dress represents the norms and regulations that will enclose and imprison Emily, Jack becomes her jailer. He gets a say on her way of dressing, what she eats and who she sees: "So Jack decides that it would be good for me to get rid of all negative people in my life." (GFH, 13) Cutting down on her social activities can only emphasise the controlling and restrictive nature of their union. A nature that is highlighted when we discover that the hotel where the celebration is going to take place had been a mental hospital where, owing to the medical discourse about women's self-control and self-preservation, many of the heroines of sensation novels were kept under false pretences.

To some extent Emily is aware of its implications as she is reluctant to put the dress on, as a wild animal would be when seeing a leash. "It's time...for the dress.

CLOSE THE CURTAINS.” Why am I shaking? Calm down Emily. It’s just a dress. Fabric.” (GFH, 14) She is able to foresee the effects the dress is going to have on her. Wearing it will change her forever, as it will mean accepting and assuming the new created identity. On the wedding day the very same Jack makes it fit on her once more exercising the same imprisoning power as Glyde by different means “Jack undresses me. The coldness of the silk slithers around my skin like ice or was it me? My insides finally frozen?” (GFH, 14). Emily’s wedding dress is a straitjacket holding her back, as it was for Miss Havisham, the marker of her alienation and disordered sense of time. The only thing Emily recognizes is the alienated version of her femininity based on Jack’s desire for her. It stops her from feeling anything in her own right, she is just allowed to experience life when man’s desire permits it<sup>1</sup>.

Miss Havisham’s idea of romantic ideals made her believe in a passionate love between her and her fiancé. However, being left at the altar shattered all her expectations. Seducing Miss Havisham had only been part of a business agreement. Her reclusion is not the result of a fruitful marriage- as it is the case with different Victorian novels- but an aborted one that left her hurt, angered and vengeful for many years. These feelings constitute a prison for her forcing her to be away from society “I had been shut up in these rooms a long time (I don’t know how long; you know what time the clocks keep here [...])” (GE 357). An imprisonment which Miss Havisham and Emily share and which once more is represented by wearing the rotten wedding dress for days on end representing how both the bride- to - be and the jilted one are equally oppressed by social constructions, ashamed of being abandoned and considered damaged as a result. Due to its effects Emily does not recognize herself in the mirror on the wedding morning. She realizes the image it is reflecting does not belong to her true self “Is it? Is this it? My whole life flashes before me. Four-year old Emily discussing septic tanks, eight- year- old Emily tackling Killian Desmond to the ground, quoting Dickens at birthday parties, rolling my eyes at baby-borns, Dad’s great expectations. And smashing Lucy’s face” (GFH, 14) She is well aware that her original identity is incarcerated somewhere within her but decides to still refuse it because she has reached the final step and she has become the total woman fetishized reflecting the image that has been projected on her. Her loss of identity equals that of *The White Woman* when Laura Farlie remains traumatized by her experience in the asylum and the total loss of her identity as she was inscribed as Anne Catherick and no one but Marian and Walter believed she was the real Laura.

### The construction of the Expectations discourse: The monological voice

Kelleher permeates the play with the ghost of the discourse of Expectations that is driven to construct women as unidimensional. It refers to both the meta-history with Dickens’s novel and to the expectations the men in Emily’s life have for her. Mr. Halloran states quite early that he pretends to raise Emily in the same fashion Miss Havisham brought up Estella.

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<sup>1</sup> The analyses of Emily’s reaction to the dress follow Luce Irigaray’s concept of Masquerade found in *-This Sex is not one* (1977:220)

But we'll start you off with the books. The most important thing anyone can have, is an education. My little genius. One tough little nut. I'll read it to you now but soon you'll read it yourself. 'Great Expectations.' That's what I have for you Emily. (GFH, 4)

The female protagonists of the Sensation Novel behaved in ways that were not deemed as "feminine" by the culture of the time and neither do Estella nor Emily. Raised as a tool to avenge Miss Havisham broken heart, Estella is objectified into a beautiful manipulative doll. Emily's education seems to challenge the gender norms of the eighties in Irish society as a brainy tomboy. The "secularization" and "degeneracy" in terms of gender roles of sensation novels turns into a sort of "masculinization" here. None of them stands a chance to forge their own identity as their whole lives are totally orchestrated. Even in their early childhood they are not allowed to play freely as their games are monitored and always have a hidden aim. This leads them to claim to have no agency over their lives. Estella confronts Miss Havisham to tell her she is her creation "I am what you made me I must be taken as I have been made. The success is not mine, the failure is not mine, but the two together make me." (GE, 304-306) While Emily never faces her father her constant remembrance of his aphorisms and warnings makes it clear that she is a direct result of it.

As a Foucauldian subject Emily is inscribed in discourse twice: first by her father and later on by her fiancé although both have different expectations for her and the results will be total opposites. Mr. Halloran's heart is set on raising up a strong child, resilient and with a high level of endurance: A Knight or a Brain, while her fiancé wishes to turn her into a princess. Both of them want to render Emily into a docile body to obtain benefit from. Foucault describes the body "as object and target of power" (1977:136). The notion of 'docility'—the point at which "the analysable body and the manipulable body" are joined—is employed to illustrate how individuals within their bodies are subjected to institutional regulation (1977:136) – in this case the discourse of the father. Foucault states that "A body is docile that may be subjected, used, transformed and improved" (1977:136). Mr. Halloran illustrates perfectly the discourse of discipline spatially enclosing, ranking and manipulating Emily's body to maintain "order and discipline" until it becomes "My Warrior/ Little Genius". In order to do so he creates the "Hero Myth discourse" and exposes little Emily to it daily. He will narrate different stories of well-known heroes for Emily to absorb while performing everyday chores: "I love watching him. But it's our chats I love the most. Shaving time means story time, everything from the ancient myths, the story of Beowulf, Cu Chulainn and Gunga Din, Mad Carew" (GFH, 3)

All the myths Emily is exposed to have something in common: they constitute character features Mr. Havisham wants his daughter to have. Published in 1890 as a set of martial poems under the name of *Barrack Room Ballads*, Rudyard Kipling's poem *Gunga Din* praises the bravery of an Indian water boy who - despite being mistreated by the British soldiers he serves - risks and loses his life to save the narrator. It teaches Emily to always do what is expected from her without minding the risks or the reception her actions might have. J. Milton Hayes poem *The Green Eye of the Yellow God* (1911), written as a monologue and to be performed, tells the tale of a wild young officer known as "Mad Carew", who

steals the “green eye” of a “yellow god” to win the heart of his beloved. He sadly ends up wounded in the robbery, and murdered later in retaliation for having mocked the God. This poem works as a mirror that Emily will look up to. She will become Mad Carew willing to do anything for the love of her father first and later for Jack's. Beowulf, the Old English poem narrates the deeds of a man through three separate and increasingly difficult conflicts showing Beowulf's youthful heroism, his bravery as a warrior and his reliability as a king. It will also influence Emily's life as there are also three different conflicts she has to deal with (her monsters to fight): her parents' death, Elise abandonment and Jack's betrayal. The Sensation Novel heroines that permeate Kelleher's play - Laura Fairlie, Helen Talboys and Miss Havisham - share this triple stage road to trade in their identity construction: They are naive ladies, that are later said to be mad, and end up as fallen women with tragic destinies or triumphant ones.

All of the heroes represent different models of virtue, and are characterized by strength and courage, loyalty, courtesy, and pride. But most importantly they all sacrifice themselves for the sake of what is believed to be a greater Good. As heroes they can be analysed according to Joseph Campbell's stages of the hero's journey, as the structural elements of stages are found universally in myths, tales, novels etc. In all these stories the audience or reading public relates to the hero and his everyday ordinary world, discovering his drives and expectations until the call of adventure sets the action when discomfort disrupts the Hero's Ordinary World and he is presented with a quest that has to be undertaken. Emily, Laura, Hellen and Miss Havisham are also presented with a quest. Their quests are never the same but all our heroines meet the challenge. Helen Talboys's wish is to make her life better at whatever cost, Anne Catherick sets her heart on helping Laura and uncovering the truth, and even Miss Havisham has revenge as her quest. Emily shall become her father's knight having to face different tests.

When a child is born, it inherits several distinctive discursive features such as belonging to a community, being male or female, and having distinctive racial or ethnic features. All of these inherited qualities have closely related discursive features (consolidated as the child grows up) ranging from living in a speech community to particular sex- or race related features. As well as the inherited qualities there are also the constructed ones, that lay underneath the stories Mr. Halloran tells her daughter and his constant advice. Emily's father teaches her in strict routine and ritual as a little spartan warrior as the ones we have just mentioned. She clearly says “No time for tears. I'm strong. So strong -I don't notice Mum getting weaker and weaker” (GFH, 15) the little warrior in the making cannot show feelings that will make her weak and this isolates her from the world. Mr. Halloran wants to keep her away from anything remotely related to girly stuff he despises.

This created discourse that does not admit the collaboration of another voice, it is not looking for a dialogue but for assimilation that can be catalogued as Bakhtin's monologism. Monologism emerges where universal truth statements do not allow any other sort of truth and the identity of the person is shaped and modified by daily and ordinary conversational interactions with the self being a social construction, not a fixed feature in our lives, but continuously under negotiation and transformation, as we engage in communication with others. Emily - subjected to Foucault's disciplinary power - is exposed to monologic

utterances that render her into a docile body. The Hero Myth discourse is her source of identity. She is the product of her father's monological voice, who writes her down as a text where social or cultural aspects are continuously brought in and become attached to her identity. Even though she does not recognize herself in that discourse she feels compelled to obey and which constitutes a cage for her.

According to Judith Butler gender is produced by discourses, all bodies are gendered from their beginning of their social existence, without any freedom to choose what gender they are going to enact as it is determined by the regulatory frame. Following her ideas not only is Emily -as the subject- constituted through and dominated by the discourse of power (represented by Hero mythology discourse her father creates) but she remains tied to it as the practices and discourses of power create "subjection."

But if we understand power as forming the subject, as well, as providing the very condition of its existence and the trajectory of its desire, then power is not simply what we oppose but also, in a strong sense, what we depend on for our existence and what we harbour and preserve in the beings that we are [...] Subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never chose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency (Butler 1997b:2)

When her father dies, Emily needs to find somebody to perpetuate the power relation they had. For that reason, Jack comes in as a substitute so that he can construct a new category for her to fit in. She is no longer the isolated brainy tomboy her father had created but a more canonical "feminine" version of herself. She is deprived of agency and constructed as totally dependent being related for the first time with Lucy- the china doll. She is no longer the warrior of her own fairy tale but becomes a princess looking for a prince to save her.

Fairy tale tradition permeates Sensation fiction. In *Moulding the Female Body in Victorian Fairy Tales and Sensation Novels* (2007) Talarach-Vielmas pointed out Wilkie Collins's use of fairy tales generally figures as a means to probe contemporary ideologies of femininity (161): Lady Audley's secret can be read as a Cinderella story in which the beauty of the fairy tale manages madness and criminal behaviour and many husbands such as Collins *The Law and the Lady* or *The Woman in White* let themselves be reinterpreted as Bluebeard. Thus, Kelleher uses Disney Snow White's movie song "My Prince will come again" playing in the background of the performance as a way to represent what Jack's figure means for Emily.

She lip-syncs to the melody of the song embodying the very same Snow White in all her passivity recognizing herself in the role<sup>1</sup>. Jack and Prince Charming merge in the same person. His construction and her acceptance of this role make Emily praise Jack's goodness and aim at the fairy tale happy ending: the wedding. Revealing, once again, its sensation novel core, Kelleher shows *Gone Full Havisham's* links with Victorian spirit as both of them – in fairy tale fashion – describe reality from a different angle, casting light on new modes of representation. Thus, sensation novel heroines are seen as versions of Cinderella,

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<sup>1</sup> In his work *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976) Hugo Bettelheim stated that children needed to identify with characters of fantasy in order to work out their emotional and psychological conflicts on a level removed from their real existence and that is the process Emily goes through.

Snow White or Sleeping Beauty, all in search for the appropriate husband in order to be transformed into princesses for their rightful status to be returned. They have, as Jack Zipes<sup>1</sup> stated, the disposition to change the world-if not always in a global sense, at least their own- in order to make it more acceptable or to fit better in it. Despite the fact that Emily seems to accept willingly the transformation her life is undergoing as well as the transformational power Jack exercises on her, part of her father's creation remains deep within her making her "research" the foundations of her relationship.

But then, I researched into all the Fairy tale princess books that Dad never let me read as a child. I discovered that the first time Beauty met the Beast he had locked her up in a dungeon. Prince Charming had a go off Snow White while she slept and didn't the little mermaid's fella make her chop off a favourite body part ... So hey, I'm not doing too badly (GFH, 10)

Having the codes to break down the archetypes and stereotypes and unravel the truth on the power relation in fairy tale couples, Emily sees her own relationship mirrors them. Far from putting an end to it, she normalizes it as its oppressive core is legitimized by these tales that work as the foundations of cultural expectations and norms that make up gender, 'performance cues' that are placed upon an assigned sexed body.

### Multiplicity and Performativity: The Use of Sensation Masks: The dialogic

As Simone de Beauvoir says: "One is not born a woman, but rather becomes one" (cited in Butler 12). "Becoming" is a constant process; women are continually performing the actions they observe around them, and so "becoming" is perpetual rehearsal. Tired of inhabiting identities that are constructed for her, Emily locks herself in one of the suites of the Halloran Hotel ready to create her own public persona using a twenty-first century tool like the internet. There, she puts in practice her wish to become part of the world of *Great Expectations*, the book her father gave her as a present before she could even read, and which not having much of a social life became her solace on her darkest hour. Through her posts she embodies Dickens's Miss Havisham as her hashtag "Gone Full Havisham" suggests.

Never considered respectable literature - for while Victorian literary establishment reinforced the dominant values of the day Sensation Fiction insisted on being disruptive- sensation writers met with the same pejorative terms that the bloggers have to face nowadays. Despite the fact that today posts could be considered character studies and aspects of "human nature" too much posting is generally deemed narcissistic and the tendency to share intimacy could be due to personality disorder.

Emily sits in front of the computer as a writer would sit in front of blank pages ready to offer something new. We enter her world in the same fashion as Pip enters Miss Havisham's in *Great Expectations*, as we are supposed to be watching

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<sup>1</sup> Jack Zipe develops his theories on how fairy tales reveal truth and falsehood un current society and mirror our world in *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (1991).

her online show, we peep into her life. This online appearance as Miss Havisham is her way of writing her own body back, after being turned into both a fetishized woman and a commodity by the men in her life. Judith Butler's concept of gender performativity is understood as "the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being" (GT, 136). Emily repeats a series of acts in front of the video, each hashtag she proposes is a new episode in the story she has to tell, topics Kelleher wants to criticise or symbols of repressive discourse which are treated grotesquely. Wilkie Collins in *The Woman in White* tells Marian's story through diary entries in order to provide a close-up examination making the inner workings of that character's mind more available to the reader. The video monologues and hashtags we come across in *Gone Full Havisham* share the same purpose and the degree of construction involved in Marian's diary writing. So do Emily's video recordings and livestreaming as her thoughts are previously written down, and have followed a process of check-up and revision before their presentation to the viewer. It is by means of post-its that she writes her own script, which substitutes the regulatory frame that controlled Emily's acts (The discourse of the Hero's Myth her father had created) and then she rehearses her performance, practicing the way to smile until she is able to come up with a grotesque one to share with her viewers or getting into training exercises as actors do before they start shooting. The fact that she behaves differently when she is broadcasting live than when she closes her laptop proves that Emily chooses to "act" gender and to "act" becoming Miss Havisham to draw attention to the constructedness of her identity. According to Butler "If the inner truth of gender is a fabrication and if a true gender is a fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies, then it seems that genders can be neither true nor false but are only produced as the truth effects of a discourse of primary and stable identity" (GT, 136) Through her "acting" Emily shows that both the gender fabrication she was submitted to and her creation of Miss Havisham's are far from being real and follow the same patterns of construction and inscription therefore questioning the discourse of truth established on them.

Resistance to hierarchies for Emily implies participating in Bakhtinian's World. Bakhtin's perception of language "as an area of social conflict" is reflected in literature "particularly in the ways the discourse of characters in a literary work may disrupt and subvert the authority of ideology as expressed in a single voice of a narrator." As Sensation novels used to be narrated by different characters with different narrative voices to defy the authority voice of the writer or the unique narrator, Emily Halloran's voice is permeated with the voices of other female characters: Miss Havisham, Estella, Laura Farlie, Anne Catherick, and Helen Talboys showing the polyphony of Emily's discourse as opposed to her father's. Bakhtin's Carnival covers manifestations of folk culture (Emily constructs the feminine characters she embodies as her personal folk culture), rituals, games, symbols and various forms of corporal excess to the importance of laughter and degradation as a means of inverting hierarchical structures all of which are put in practice by *Gone Full Havisham*'s main character.

Emily Halloran introduces the Carnavalesque grotesque in her online discourse by referencing her lack of health care with such hashtags as "Gone Full Quarantine", "Oral hygiene", playing with the absurd she wants to make emphasis

on the character's disruptive behaviour and to construct an eccentricity discourse close to that of the original Miss Havisham's madness. She builds a decadent environment by wearing her wedding dress for days, not washing herself and not opening the windows. She accepts requests from her uncivilized followers which contribute to her trivialization: she asks them to decide what she should do with a banana to end up smearing her body with it, she even puts a knife to her throat while she is live making the viewers believe she might commit suicide while online. If in the Victorian period, the norms for an appropriate behaviour when it came to gender roles, sexuality and mental health were defined by contemporary social discourse and the normality or the "abnormality" of an individual was observed and estimated through social control in 2019 there is another gaze, the look of the followers which is at the same time constraining and constructive as it allows her to put up her act to be defined as insane. One of the most controversial matters in novels such as *Lady Audley's Secret* or *The Lady in White* and even *Great Expectations* is the madness of their female characters. In the case of Lady Audley, Laura or Marian it is particularly unsettling because there are no obvious signs of them suffering from mental illness and the explanations that the texts provide for locking them down remain quite ambiguous. In the first chapters both Laura and Lady Audley are described as perfect women: beautiful, young, devoted, kind and very accomplished. Insanity was applied to those attitudes which society rejected, as a woman's refusal to submit to her husband's will or her emotional distress after childbirth or when they manifested their true feelings as Emily states on her father's funeral "What would happen if I just roared it at them? Would they think I was mad? Am I mad? Or is this actually what people would do if it wasn't socially inappropriate?" (GFH, 8). Her concept of Internet as Bakhtinian Carnival's marketplace allows her to conceal Emily Halloran's identity with that of Miss Havisham's jilted bride and in the same fashion as the actors who occupied the squares, she degrades herself symbolically invoking the terror of madness and the social inappropriate, exposing it and overcoming it.

## Conclusion

Sensation Novels still have an echo in current fiction. Its most remarkable trait being its scandalous plot placing murder, blackmail, illegitimacy, impersonation, eavesdropping, bigamy and professional detectives in an everyday setting to represent the nervousness or a world whose rapid modernization was creating multiple Victorian fears portrayed in these novels. Our twenty-first century society is undergoing a similar process reflected in the consumption of certain programs and platforms that offer us fictitious or real scandals which are comparable to those of the Victorian era. The plots portrayed in many sensation novels eventually revealed that "ideal" social constructions and institutions had some dark secret tucked away. We still rely on the same strategy to lay social foundations whose truth we do not dare to question and that in the #Metoo era do not differ much from those of the nineteenth century: woman's behaviour is still put into question. The fear of identity loss is reflected in a globalised world that still does not know how to deal with migration and multiculturalism and Twitter and Instagram have built new discourses of truth. Therefore, by

appropriating sensation novel spirit, structure, symbols and characters with a modern touch, we may again cast a light on the falsehood of those established monological discourses which claim there is just one single truth.

Irene Kelleher uses Emily to draw an individual who -like all those heroines who were objectified by patriarchal society and forbidden to be the subjects of exchange – is deeply immerse in twenty-first century multiple constructive discourses and who eventually and by making use of imaginative ways is able to reconfigure herself and foresee a future where she does not have to be ashamed of being who she really is.

In the end Emily takes hold of the mask of madness and uses it to get away from the cages social discourse had constructed for her. Closing her laptop, she tears one of the pages from the bridal magazine and puts it in her mouth as a way to comment on the falsity and danger of the discourse those magazines are a platform for, and to show she will no longer fall for it. In her final scene before walking away, she informs her followers she refuses to be subjected by the gaze any more as she asks them why they are still looking at her while she flees the room "walking *like a caged animal slowly escaping*" (GFH, 16, my italics) Leaving behind all the labels, definitions and masks she has inhabited, she manages to be free.

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