Introduction

Wilkie Collins, Theorist of Iterability

But this thought of iterability, if it troubles all exclusion or simple opposition, should not capitulate to confusion, to vague approximations, to indistinction.

—Derrida, *Limited* 128

Signs of it are everywhere—the author’s relationship to the text is not a comfortably controlled one. Whole disciplines have been founded on this obvious proposition—certain strains of literary criticism and theory being not the least among these—as well as on its denial. The history of literary criticism is littered with battles fought along these lines, with Empson inevitably coming to contest the complacency of Richardses, Derridas to contest that of Austins. Because literary idealization, wherever and in whatever form it is encountered, will necessarily be constructing its castles on an ethereal basis of repeatable-and-thus-falsifiable linguistic markers, it must necessarily remain fundamentally unstable. Not surprisingly, then, the would-be fixative conceptualizations in literary culture—of copyright and artistic ownership, of a seemingly-singular authorial or personal identity and/or intention, of the conventions set up to safeguard determinate meaning, among other ostensibly incontestable forms of idealized constraint—inevitably end up in conflict with the “borderlessness” of the word.

This study will be considering the ways in which this particular conflict between idealization or would-be deterministic limitation and kinetic muta-
bility manifests itself in the major fictions of the Victorian writer Wilkie Collins. These fictions are constantly alternating between two schemes of reference, represented, on the one hand, by a system of one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified and, on the other, by one of one-to-many correspondences. Indeed, the various surprising twists of plot in Collins's narratives, more often than not, come at their basis to disclose that a given, seemingly-uncomplicated narrative written in the soothingly unfussy style of this perpetually cagey author that had seemed all along to be pledging fidelity to the former system actually had all along been pledging it to the latter. (In this respect, Collins’s readers are continually forced to relive, it would seem, the hotel scene from *Basil.*) To offer one example, among the many possibilities available, of this alternation between referential systems, I would cite the point in *The Moonstone* when that master reader Sergeant Cuff—more than once cautioned by Lady Verinder that “circumstances have misled [him]” (171 and 173)—is finally definitively proved wrong when “plain long cloth” turns out not solely to mean, not both automatically and completely to correspond with, a plain servant’s nightgown. The fact that Collins’s fictions are to be found to be shifting between these two systems of correspondence is itself not surprising since all good, and even some merely passable, writers play with the transparent communication/polyvalent communication dyad. However, the systematic manner in which Collins’s major fictions wholly transition over from one to the other system (a transformation offering a salutary lesson for the modern-day literary critic) is deserving of careful study, and, consequently, it, as well as the ways in which Collins deals with the implications of the manifestly illogical workings of language in general, will be the subject of this book.

**Settling and Breaking**

And indeed those workings *are* patently illogical, at least if logic is understood necessarily to be leading toward something that looks like “progress.” The contrasting elements located at the heart of linguistic repeatability inevitably throw a wrench into this system, inevitably thwart any type of progress that had been on the point of getting underway. The source of the conflict is, to cite a phrase coined by Jacques Derrida in his seminal essay “Signature Event Context,” the “iterability of the mark” (12). Language’s undelimitable repeatability allows for the continual founding, or refounding, of linguistic entities and, in the same breath, for their continual unfounding, not to mention *confounding.* Emphasizing the first half
of this dyad, the literary critic J. Hillis Miller defines linguistic iterability as “the possibility for every mark to be repeated and still to function as a meaningful mark in new contexts that are cut off entirely from the original context” (*Speech Acts* 78; emphasis added). In contrast, placing the stress solidly on iterability’s capacity to escape constraint, Derrida contends, “a written sign carries with it a force that breaks with its context, that is, with the collectivity of presences organizing the moment of its inscription. This breaking force [*force de rupture*] is not an accidental predicate but the very structure of the written text” (“Signature Event Context” 9). A whirligig of effects—iterability’s serving alternately as a means for language, both oral and written, to settle into place within contexts or for it to break out of them—comes to be delineated for this concept caught by Miller and Derrida at different moments along its sine wave of oscillations.\(^1\) The iterable mark is thus disclosed, like the active butterfly, to live a life of constant resting and fluttering, fluttering and resting.

Both of these theorists consider, in essence, iterability’s effects with regard to the system of linguistic reference, a system that is not so distinctly Apollonian versus Dionysian as it is often made out to seem. The system of would-be transparent communication—one-to-one correspondence between a word and its meaning giving the impression of settling—is itself merely a special case of the system of polyvalence—one-to-many correspondences giving the impression of breaking—and, on the other hand, the system of polyvalence is the necessary (hidden) precondition for a successful system of seemingly-transparent communication. In something resembling the yin/ yang dyad, the “one” here constitutes a part of the “many” and the potential for the “many” the basis—the general space of . . . possibility” (Derrida, “Signature Event Context” 19)—for the “one.” Contending that the “play,” or “broaching” aspect, made possible by the “many” situation is necessary for the actualization of the idealized “one,” Derrida writes,

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1. I will be adopting here the terms “settling function” and “breaking function” to describe the two idealized poles of iterability. These labels are derived from Derrida’s early use of the terms “sedimentation”/”de-sedimentation” (*Edmund Husserl’s 36, 40n27; *Speech* 107; *Grammatology* 10; *Writing* 31, 207, and 390n3; and *Margins* 157, 214) and “brisure,” or “hinge,” a term signifying simultaneously “joint” and “break” (*Grammatology* 65). See Derrida writing in *Of Grammatology* of “the breaking of immediacy” (234) and asking, “Does a modern linguistics, a science of signification breaking the unity of the word and breaking with its alleged irreducibility, still have anything to do with ‘language?’” (21). The important sentence connecting de-sedimentation with deconstruction from early on in *Of Grammatology* is also worth quoting: “[Arche-writing] inaugurates the destruction, not the demolition but the de-sedimentation, the de-construction, of all significations that have their source in that of the logos” (10).
Iterability makes possible idealization—and thus, a certain identity in repetition that is independent of the multiplicity of factual events—while at the same time limiting the idealization it makes possible: broaching and breaching it at once [elle l’entame]. . . [E]ven in the ideal case . . . there must already be a certain element of play, a certain remove, a certain degree of independence with regard to the origin, to production, or to intention in all of its “vital,” “simple” “actuality” or “determinateness,” etc. (Limited 61 and 64)

Derrida’s own particular labels for what I am calling here the breaking and settling functions are altering and identificatory iterability. He notes later in the same work that each type both makes possible and limits the other:

[It must be shown why, for what reasons (which are structural, and not empirical or accidental) . . . idealization finds its limit. This limit is neither external nor internal; it is not simply negative since it renders possible the very idealization that it at the same time limits. Such is the strange alogical logic of what I call “iterability.” . . . Let us not forget that “iterability” does not signify simply . . . repeatability of the same, but rather alterability of this same idealized in the singularity of the event, for instance, in this or that speech act. . . . There is no idealization without (identificatory) iterability; but for the same reason, for reasons of (altering) iterability, there is no idealization that keeps itself pure, safe from all contamination. The concept of iterability is this singular concept that renders possible the silhouette of ideality, and hence of the concept, and hence of all distinction, of all conceptual opposition. But it is also the concept that, at the same time, [emphasis Derrida’s] with the same stroke marks the limit of idealization and of conceptualization. (119; emphasis added)

Each entity provides the “rudder” for the other in the respective journeys both are constantly launched on towards their own self-undermining, towards their eventual transformation into their counterpart. This whirligig embracing necessarily-limited idealization and anti-idealization leads, on the one hand, to transparent communication’s “one” losing its privilege and authors losing along with it theirs as original sources and individual controllers of meaning as “altering iterability” inevitably comes into effect and, on the other hand, to “the many” losing its uncoordinated nature as it inevitably comes to be directed by “identificatory iterability.” The two systems of reference, transparent and polyvalent, as well as the two functions through which they manifest themselves, settling and breaking,
rather than being disjoint, are disclosed actually to be articulated, albeit by a whisker.

**The Two Potential Errors**

More than one thinker has been seduced into making one or the other of the complementary mistakes invited by the complex nature of iterability: (1) coming to believe in the conclusive disarticulation of one function from the other or (2) coming to accept the possibility of one function's potential completely to erase the other. However, the inherent connection between the two functions will not allow to stand the theories and systems that those thinkers then would be attempting to “construct” upon these fundamentally erroneous suppositions.

The tenuousness of the connection between the two functions can tend to disappear, as tenuousnesses will, and the cursory observer can be left with the impression that the functions are binary opposites. This perspective is understandable, as the natures of the functions and the language used to describe them are apt to belie those natures’ inherent connection. The *impressions* of identificatory iterability and altering iterability, of settling and breaking, those manifestly mutually exclusive labels, are actually the limit-reifying end-products of the “operationality,” so to speak, of these two markedly-different-seeming-but-actually-related systems of correspondence between signifier and signified. The attempt at faithfully describing this situation can lead thinkers, as it has just my own inquiry, into formulations bordering on the tortuous if not also the self-contradictory. For example, Pheng Cheah summarizes Derrida’s position on iterability thus:

Why is it that any present being always overflows itself and intimates an absolute alterity? Derrida’s point is that in order to be present, any being must persist in time. This means that the form of the thing—that which makes it actual—must be identifiable as the same throughout all possible repetitions. But this iterability implies that any presence is in its very constitution always riven by a radical alterity that makes it impossible even as it makes it possible. By definition, this alterity cannot be a form of presence. Because it both gives and destabilizes presence, it subjects presence to a strict law of radical contamination. (146)

This situation cannot be helped. When one wishes, as does Cheah, to represent iterability correctly, there is no other path besides a complicated one.
The nature of the entity in question necessitates that one describe it as leading to both mutual exclusivity (“makes it impossible even as it makes it possible”) and articulation (“radical contamination”). The tendency to fall into self-contradictory formulations—far from being (with a few exceptions of course) a wish by theorists to be adopting a protective or self-empowering cloak of obscurity—is brought about by the fragility of the connection between the two functions. The side denoted “the settling function” gives the impression of the “complete repetition”—as paradoxical as that may sound—of an utterance and its immediate original context, while “the breaking function” gives the impression of a more or less complete “breaking out” of the original context surrounding that utterance. This situation leaves many thinkers with the impression that the relationship between the two functions is one of a mutually exclusive “paradox.”

This circumstance of a tenuous connection the description of which is constantly poised on the point of announcing that connection’s denial can easily, unless carefully watched, lead to misunderstanding. Indeed, the language used to describe the two functions can itself potentially work towards the goal of misrepresentation. The strong contrast between the two functions naturally invites one to find them to be in a relation of paradox. But the critics’ application of that term is actually an improper “solidification” of the functions’ (pseudo-)disarticulation. There is no actual mutual exclusivity at work in the conflict (“contradiction” being too strong a word) between Miller’s and Derrida’s positions. An insistence on paradox would be to discount the important connection between the two, a connection permitting them to possibly flow and transform into each other (in Cheah’s term “contaminate” one another).

A new concept has to be formulated to appropriately describe this situation, something that both is and is not a paradox at one and the same time. Thus, borrowing the concept of limit or continuum from mathematics, I offer here the concept of a “paradox of degree” as a possible practical description. This novel construction will stand in contrast to the standard form of paradox, the “paradox of kind,” if you like. Theoretically speaking, only paradoxes of kind should be labeled with that term as only they possess the absolute distinctness seemingly demanded by the term (“I am a liar,” for instance, admitting solely of two mutually exclusive interpretations). However, since the paradox of kind would automatically be denying the inherent connection between the two sides of iterability, it is inadequate to the task of describing this particular situation appropriately. While the terms to be used here, “settling” and “breaking,” certainly imply the mutual exclusivity required by the standard form, those functions, are in the case of iterability,
applicable only figuratively (similar to the manner in which the infinite series 0.999 . . . comes to be equated with 1.00) and are actually in a relation of difference of degree.

Here in this study this anomalous concept of the paradox of degree that I am proposing, while technically a violation in terminology, will operate as a useful tool. Particularly amenable to describing the markedly strange operations of language, it will serve in what follows as a conceptual map for tracking the investigations into linguistic stasis and change carried out not only by Collins but also a variety of other linguistically-oriented thinkers and for demonstrating how far, in comparison to those thinkers, Collins was able to progress in his investigations. Thus, in short, in this study the two functions comprising the iterability of the mark will be understood to be not so much “opposed” as “in conflict” with one another, their relationship of paradox of degree leaving open, all the while, the possibility of the one coming to “contaminate” the region of the other.

Should thinkers in the area of iterability somehow avoid being taken in by the potential pitfall of a too-reifying or disarticulative definition of the particular “paradox” characterizing iterability, they still have another to avoid: the tempting desire to facilely erase one or the other of the functions so as to be fitting in with Enlightenment orthodoxy, an orthodoxy under which we still often labor today. Paradox in general (the distinction between degree and kind being left out of consideration for the moment) is itself an alien way of thinking in our modern, reason-governed world.2 (And the

2. Rosalie Colie, in Paradoxia Epidemica, her exemplary study of paradox throughout the Renaissance, ascribes the decline of paradox in the 1700s to the advent of an Enlightenment preference for “progress”: “we are invited to consider either Epimenides is a liar or that he isn’t—our puzzle-ment, our paralysis comes from the fact that we are not permitted a third alternative. In twentieth-century ‘real’ life, after all, Epimenides’ statement seems both obvious and trivial. . . . No wonder Galileo, Locke, and Spinoza turned away from paradox and, because we are willy-nilly educated by Enlightenment values, no wonder paradox is so difficult for us to ‘read.’ We are trained to expect ‘development’ in argument and in art” (517–18). Excluding the realm of quantum physics, paradox remains trivial (and in the case of Oscar Wilde nearly criminal) throughout the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth and only regains legitimacy, to a very limited degree, with the advent of poststructuralist literary theory (to the degree that that itself ever attains legitimacy in the face of the entrenched, age-old resistance to paradox, continuing in certain sectors in our own day, that then comes to lend its weight to the formidable present-day “resistance to theory”). Derrida (along with his precursors Hegel, Freud, and Empson) is to be commended for having brought this style of thinking back into currency in literary debate because it allows for demarcating issues, such as the true nature of iterability, to which Enlightenment-influenced thinking would otherwise have remained insensitive. There are several points in Derrida’s work at which he attempts to relegitimize paradox at the expense of progressive logic. For instance, he writes, “As a philosophy, empiricism is
paradoxical nature of the concept of a “paradox of degree” is even further afield from logic.) Naturally, then, thinkers are tempted to move the situation completely out of this arena. Not surprisingly, iterability, especially over the last few centuries, has been prone to being misrepresented upon its entry into the (Enlightenment logic–dominated) realms of discourse and thinking. That is, more often than not, it has been represented as something half-alien to itself, as the improper privileging of one or the other of its two functions (a privileging bordering on univocity) has continually been set in operation to render it a more “comfortable” conception for our logic-governed and, perhaps more to the point, “progress”-governed world.

Naturally, it is the settling-function-privileging outlook that corresponds best with this quest for progress. This outlook allows for the formulation of systems of conclusive intention-determination, systems that are constantly thereafter being found out to be lacking in solid foundations. This lack is the result of the formularizers’ incorrectly having assumed the settling function to be capable of fully eclipsing the breaking function. They are lured toward this mistake by the requirements of Enlightenment-influenced “tradition,” “history,” and the general understanding of singular-seeming terms such as “meaning” and “intention.” Everyday communication situations, unlike chapters in Collins’s major novels (or in, say, William Empson’s still dominated by a logic I deem it necessary to deconstruct. Doubtless the concept of iterability is not a concept like the others (nor is difference, nor trace, nor supplement, nor parergon, etc.). That it might belong without belonging to the class of concepts of which it must render an accounting, to the theoretical space that it organizes in a (as I often say) ‘quasi’-transcendental manner, is doubtless a proposition that can appear paradoxical, even contradictory in the eyes of common sense or of a rigid classical logic. It is perhaps unthinkable in the logic of such good sense. It supposes that something happens by or to set theory: that a term might belong without belonging to a set. It is of this too that we are speaking when we say ‘margin’ or ‘parasite” (Limited 127). Similarly, a few years earlier he had commented that a “Grammatology” “would no longer have the form of logic but that of grammatics” (Grammatology 28). I am largely in agreement with Barbara Johnson when she remarks, “The incompatibility between deconstruction and its conservative detractors is an incompatibility of logics. While traditionalists say that a thing cannot be both A and not-A, deconstructors open up ways in which A is necessarily but unpredictably already different from A” (World 13–14). I would simply point out that, viewed from my rubric, iterabilists accept paradoxical “solutions” as viable ones, without needing to have recourse to the authority of any sort of overtly termed “logic.” As we will see, Collins’s effort, particularly in The Moonstone, was strategically and structurally to manipulate the deconstructive situation as outlined by Johnson here until that “unpredictability” was brought under control. For more on Renaissance paradox, see Geraldine, Malloch, H. K. Miller, and M. Wiley.

3. The quintessence of the settling perspective might be Knapp and Michaels’ doubly view-truncating contention that the (single) intention is the (single) meaning: “The meaning of a text is simply identical to the author’s intended meaning. . . . The mistake made by theorists has been to imagine the possibility or desirability of moving from one term (the author’s intended meaning) to the second term (the text’s meaning), when actually the two terms are the same. One can neither succeed nor fail in deriving one term from the other, since to have one is already to have them both” (724–25).
literary criticism), are not continually punctuated by moments in which people marvel at the various possible signifier–signified pairings that had been standing in the way of clear understanding (recall Lydia Gwilt’s astonishment upon learning of the existence of two Allan Armadales: “Marry which of the two I might, my name would of course be the same” [Armadale 441]). Normally, people just “get on with” the business of communicating. However, despite these speakers’, writers’, thinkers’, and authors’ best efforts at willed ignorance, the conflicts do and will be arising. Collins felt this potential for misunderstanding deeply, especially its implications for his characters and for himself. He understood that the author, necessarily enmeshed in and intimately engaged with language, is condemned by the conflict between the two functions to establish and lose control—of texts, of contexts, of intentions, of meanings, and even of his or her textual identity. Each of these entities or situations is vulnerable to the possibility of having improperly brought to the fore either side of a bifurcated nature resulting from the bifurcated nature of the iterability founding it, or, more precisely, founding the language founding it. That is, Collins understood that one or the other of the conflicting sides of iterability can appear to be ascendent at different instances in different contexts but that this ascendency—far from being a lasting and/or complete one—is actually illusory and fundamentally transitory.4

These moments of imbalance between the settling and breaking functions, though evanescent and unstable, are of actual and significant consequence. Not only do they allow for, when settling is ascendant, the establishment of the more overt—what are often erroneously considered the sum total—of the effects of language, but they also, on the other hand, when breaking is, call forth many of the potential alienations always threatening to erode the author–work relation, to say nothing of the author–self relation. As Derrida notes,

Through the possibility of repeating every mark as the same [iterability] makes way for an idealization that seems to deliver the full presence of ideal objects . . . but this repeatability itself ensures that the full presence of a singularity thus repeated comports in itself the reference to something else, thus rending the full presence that it nevertheless announces. (Limited 129)

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4. See Maynard’s Literary Intention for a good overview of recent debates regarding authorial intention, a major point of contention in the settling/breaking debates. Several of the disagreements he describes can be ascribed, I believe, to a mistaking of either the settling or the breaking function for the complete picture.
In other words, each function has the potential for seemingly-completely (note the “seemingly” here) subverting the other, for delivering full presence or rending it, or, to put the situation once more in Derridean terms, “iterability is at once that which tends to attain plenitude and that which bars access to it” (129). While the settling function of iterability is the source of the founding of the, so to speak, “identity” of linguistic units (sometimes taking the form of what is specifically understood as “meaning” and more generally as effectivity in the ideological or crudely “historical” realms) and of their authors, the breaking function, on the other hand, is the source of that “something else” referred to by Derrida that would continually be undermining the would-be singularity and purity of the pure presence (an illusory pure presence, not surprisingly) that had made possible those findings in the first place.

Though a chimera, the specter of the complete erasure of the breaking by the settling function nevertheless deserves to be taken seriously. That illusion makes things happen in the material world, while at the same time remaining vulnerable to having at any time its fundamentally illusory nature exposed. The result of this state of affairs is a world composed of adventitiously “stable” textual events, events that are grounded by furtive, provisional happenings that can themselves at any time be unseated. That is, the “bases of construction,” as we might term them, stemming from the settling function, such as the unified authorial identity—the grounding for artistic ownership—and the unified authorial intention, must always necessarily remain at some fundamental level vulnerable to the possibility of destabilization at the hands of the breaking function. This truth is the source of much of the disturbance, even when economic concerns are left out of the reckoning, posed by the related specters of literary piracy and plagiarism for the author throughout recorded history.

Both of the functions comprising iterability have to be honored or else there comes into being an artificially-imposed, imbalanced framework tempting one to understand only one particular function or the other to actually be in existence. This is a lesson explicitly demonstrated by the gradual shift in philosophy in what I will here be calling Collins’s “philosophico-textual unified novel series” or “long–novel project.” In the fictions written during the peak of his powers, the 1850s and 60s, Collins conducted ever-more-foundational experiments into the nature of iterability, experiments that led him to more and more interesting and profound insights. It was this large-scale project to which the Victorian reading public, on some level, was responding, I believe, when it made his masterpieces of the 1860s such
successful bestsellers.\textsuperscript{5} It will be my contention here that the works \textit{Basil; A Story of Modern Life} (1852), \textit{Hide and Seek} (1854), “A Stolen Letter” (1854), “A Rogue’s Life” (1856), \textit{The Dead Secret} (1857), \textit{The Woman in White} (1860), \textit{No Name} (1862), \textit{Armada} (1866), and \textit{The Moonstone: A Romance} (1868) represent a single series composed of diverse fictions. Totaling a number of pages on the order of Proust’s \textit{À la recherche du temps perdu}, these nominally-individualized works nevertheless form a single unit exploring various aspects of what is essentially one issue, the iterability of the mark.\textsuperscript{6} Over the course of his project, Collins shifts from the situation of overweighting the settling function (the standard Enlightenment standpoint) to that of acknowledging and even strategically manipulating the breaking, all the while still honoring the effects of settling. Thus, he moves from an imbalanced to a balanced perspective. In this sense his journey is similar to that currently being taken not only by a particular strain of twentieth-century philosophy deriving from the work of Derrida but also by the study of Print Culture as well.\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{5} John Sutherland holds that while \textit{The Woman in White} may not have been the best-selling English novel of the century “it is quite likely that it was the best-seller of the decade [the 1860s]” (\textit{Is Heathcliff a Murderer?} 117).

\textsuperscript{6} It is thematically consistent that this author who was always expressing skepticism in his narratives towards the efficacy of naming should be found to have ignored as well the propriety of individual titles and continued a particular endeavor across differing fictional “incarnations” or individual works. As noted in the Preface, some of the aspects seen in the Major Phase are also evident in the later works, the post-\textit{Moonstone} productions. However, as it is only in the former that a concentrated and sustained inquiry into the effects of iterability is carried out, it is only the pre-intellectual-breakdown works with which this study will be primarily interested. Beginning with 1870’s excessively-didactic \textit{Man and Wife}, we see a precipitous fall in the quality of Collins’s fictions. Peters writes, “Though Wilkie lived for another twenty-one years [after 1869] and wrote fourteen more full-length novels, as well as shorter fiction and plays, none of his work, interesting though much of it is, ever reached the standard of his novels of the 1860s” (312). Earlier she had written of the two households and families that Collins kept from 1870 onwards (298–301). The economic stress of supporting two domestic ensembles probably compelled him to write and publish too quickly which undoubtedly contributed to the precipitous decline in the complexity of his later fictions. Hayter considers Collins’s decline to have been the result of his opium use: “The most obvious damage to his literary achievement which the opium habit inflicted was its impairment of the power of sustained concentration needed for his tightly-constructed plots which were his greatest excellence. His later novels do not hold together like the best work of the 1860s. He worked as hard as ever at his novels, but the result was second-rate” (270). It is also plausible that Dickens’s death in 1870 contributed in some form. Several essays on Collins’s little-read later fictions are collected in Mangham’s collection, \textit{Wilkie Collins: Interdisciplinary Essays} (see especially those by Beller, Mangham, Cox, Caleb, Depledge, Longmuir, Parker, and Allan). See also the essays by Nayder and Law in Bachman and Cox, \textit{Reality’s Dark Light}; those by Leavy, O’Fallon, and Wiesenthal in Smith and Terry, \textit{Wilkie Collins to the Forefront}; and Talairach-Vielmas, \textit{Wilkie Collins} 93–202.

\textsuperscript{7} It should be pointed out that Derrida claimed merely to be describing a movement already underway rather than originating a new one: “By a slow movement whose necessity is hardly percep-
While over the course of the past few decades the “history of the book” has become a fashionable topic of inquiry, it must stand as a mere footnote to the much longer “history of iterability,” and Print Culture must itself remain supplementary to, surprisingly, “Re-Print Culture.” Book history, given its label’s excessive weighting on the side of materiality/settling, should be expected in the future either to be superceded or continually forced, from the inside, so to speak, to acknowledge (somewhat in the way that I have attempted in my Preface) the breaking side that its name would be implicitly attempting to ignore. This necessary acknowledgment might take the form of more and more strident calls for “theory” to be brought into analyses of the history of the book or for the field to acknowledge points where the book visibly fails in its materializing mission. Our present age’s growing interest in “Tablets” and “E-Readers” can only have a salutary effect on this blindspot of book history. This moment of downloadable and continually replaceable content clearly exposes the book for what it is: a technological form attempting to reify in certain ways the settling function’s
tible, everything that for at least some twenty centuries tended toward and finally succeeded in being gathered under the name of language is beginning to let itself be transferred to, or at least summarized under, the name of writing. . . . The advent of writing is the advent of this play; today such a play is coming into its own, effacing the limit starting from which one had thought to regulate the circulation of signs” (Grammatology 6–7).

8. Book history is a robust field. Considering just the studies of major transatlantic nineteenth-century authors in relation to the history of the book and/or copyright law, one would need to cite Sutherland, Victorian Novelists (1976); Patten, Charles Dickens (1978); Darnton, “What Is the History of Books?” (1982); Darnton, “First Steps” (1986); Welsh, Copyright to Copperfield (1987); Sutherland, “Publishing History” (1988); Dooley, Author and Printer (1992); Shillingsburg, Pegasus in Harness (1992); Sutherland, Victorian Fiction (1995); Whalen, Edgar Allan Poe (1999); McGill, American Literature (2002); Saint-Amour, The Copywrights (2003); Price, The Anthology (2003); Pettitt, Patent Inventions (2004); Hack, Material Interests (2005); Macfarlane, Original Copy (2007); and Alexander, Copyright Law (2010).

9. See Johns, arguing a marginally different point, but nevertheless also implicitly making mine, that in the eighteenth century “Knowledge . . . spread through chain reactions of reappropriations, generally unauthorized and often denounced. . . . Enlightenment traveled atop a cascade of reprints. No piracy, we might say, no Enlightenment” (Piracy 50).

10. The fact that Amazon, upon learning that it no longer had the right to distribute, had no trouble in 2009 deleting George Orwell’s Animal Farm and 1984 from the Kindle devices of purchasers, well after the actual purchase date, shows how significant the immateriality of textuality has become in this new age. A New York Times reporter comments, “Retailers of physical goods cannot, of course, force their way into a customer’s home to take back a purchase, no matter how bootlegged it turns out to be. Yet Amazon appears to maintain a unique tether to the digital content it sells for the Kindle” (Stone B1). In this article, the reporter makes much of the similarity between Amazon’s practice and Big Brother’s policy in 1984 of incinerating bad press by sending it down the “memory hole” (B1). There seems no theoretical impediment (except for the evanescence and capriciousness of the breaking function) to the possibility of some future Shakespeare taking her already-published output back and away with her upon her death.
effects and at the same time to improperly denigrate or ignore the existence of the breaking function. Of course, that function being ubiquitous, this endeavor can never be completely successful. The book has throughout its history failed in its attempts at complete materialization and will continue to fail along specific paths and circuits characteristic to it, in contrast to the ways in which manuscript copying by scribes or internet self-publication in their own ways fail. It is with good reason that the author when “going into print” fears having at some level his or her literary identity unseated by the fissuring made possible by the breaking function, whether at the level of ownership, authority, unified intention, or clarity of communication. That is to say, despite all of its conspicuously flaunted materiality, the book (and therefore its “history”) has never been able—as Collins knew only too well—to stave off the breaking function completely.

11. For discussions of the problems modern intellectual property law is having in dealing with new technologies, see J. Boyle, Shamans, Software, and Spleens (1997) and “Politics of Intellectual Property” (1997); Lessig, Code (1999); Litman, Digital Copyright (2001); Vaidhyanathan, Copyrights and Copywrongs (2001); Lessig, Future of Ideas (2001); Goldstein, Copyright's Highway (2003); Vaidhyanathan, Anarchist (2004); Lessig, Free Culture (2004); Gillespie, Wired Shut (2007); Patry, Moral Panics (2009); Johns, Piracy (2009); Hyde, Common as Air (2010); J. Boyle, Public Domain (2010), and Patry, How to Fix Copyright (2012).

12. One significant problem with recent studies in the history of the book is that their authors—perhaps out of an inability to conceive of the “immaterial book” (the “entity,” one hardly worthy of that name, today being continually downloaded to and deleted from our E-readers), or out of an implicit acceptance of the “intellectual property” outlook so prevalent in legal and cultural discourse in England, an outlook equating “the rights of an author in his intellectual product . . . with the property in corporeal things” (Kase 8), or simply out of a pragmatic, currently fashionable disinterest in theoretical matters—end up uncritically connecting the iterable with the non-iterable, that is, end up collapsing textuality with materiality. For example, see Hack, who in conceiving his inquiry according to a currently-fashionable bias—“My approach is historical and critical rather than theoretical”—cavalierly brings together four concepts within the provenance of one word: “this study seeks to keep distinct the four primary, contemporary referents of materiality—economic, physical, linguistic, and corporeal—while at the same time keeping them all in play, precisely in order to keep open the question of their relationship to one another” (1–2). The element needing more special handling than Hack gives to it is the “linguistic” (as well as “economic” insofar as that refers to copyright and intellectual property). The “linguistic” brings in a very real potential for an immateriality that is, by definition, not characteristic of corporeal entities. Hack understands his un-(anti-?)theoretical standpoint to be characteristic of the way the Victorians themselves approached their texts: “attention to these ‘material’ aspects of writing does not by itself constitute reading against the grain; on the contrary, such attention corresponds to the Victorians’ own, which anticipates and solicits it” (2). However, the English citizens (and certainly American publishers) of the nineteenth century, like people everywhere and at all times, were well aware (for example, through their common vulnerability to literary piracy) of the potential for the practical applicability of the theoretical issues related to language, of the real-world effects of iterability. My study’s interest in iterability’s breaking function, as opposed to simply its settling one, necessitates that “textuality” be rendered fundamentally different from any singular and singularizable “materiality.”
Derrida and Austin

But the fraught processes through which books attempt to come to terms with a fundamentally bifurcated textuality are not the only interactions through which to glimpse signs of this type of struggle. One might also look to the history of philosophical and literary critical thought around the world, specifically as it relates to the questions of meaning and of being’s relation to language. Many a thinker in these areas has been tempted to defend the illusion of one function’s conclusive extinguishment of the other. Consider for example the critic George Steiner commenting on the struggle in literary criticism between, to use his terms, “non-reading” and “common sense”:

It is this provisional subjectivity, this persistent need for reconsideration and amendment, which does give a certain legitimacy to the deconstructionalist project. No external ruling, be it the trope of divine revelation, be it the author’s express dictum, can guarantee interpretation. Nor can consensus, itself always partial or temporary, across “canonic” and general literacy. . . . It is logically conceivable that the text before us signifies nothing, that it purposes or enacts non-sense. It is just possible that the author seeks to ironize his work into playful ghostliness. But the assumptions underlying this non-reading, this dissemination into the void, are themselves arbitrary and rooted substantively in the language in which they are expressed (deconstructionists and post-modernists pour out prolix treatises). I have, throughout my work, most explicitly in Real Presences (1989), proposed the contrary wager: on the relations, however opaque, of word to world, on intentionalities, however difficult to unravel, in texts, in works of art, soliciting recognition. Here, as so often in our muddled being, the vital grain, the life-pattern is that of common sense. (23)

Steiner here means an Enlightenment-influenced and logic-controlled (i.e., anti-paradoxical) “common sense.” What critics like Steiner choose not to understand is that the defense of one or the other function is, of course, doomed to eventual failure. However, the interim can be extensive—allowing for the founding of whole fields of inquiry, including schools of reading, criticism, and philosophy (under such labels as, on the one hand, “enlightenment thinking,” “analytic philosophy,” “ordinary language philoso-
phy,” and, currently, even “tradition,” and, on the other, “postmodernism,” “deconstruction,” and “formalism”)—before the improperly slighted function has a chance to reassert its claims. To such an extent has the possible subdual of one half of the dyad of iterability—an apparently very seductive lure—established itself as a “tried and true” conceptual strategy that the belief in the conclusive excisability, or at least delimitability, of one function and/or unimpeachable ascendency of the other is for many thinkers, unless exceptionally perspicacious as well as courageous, impossible to resist. Time and again they succumb to this temptation, only to have their belief in the specific ordering of the world they have ascribed to, and implicitly founded their philosophy on, eventually overthrown.

Particular examples abound in the history of philosophy and literary criticism of the two possible complementary errors. We might look at representative manifestations allowing them to stand as general models for the two possible arenas of error. Taking first the less common error: offering a clear means for “de-sedimenting” one’s identity, school, or local interpretation, the lure of allowing the breaking function to eclipse the settling could be described as a founding principle of Eastern, specifically Chinese, thought. The China scholar William Alford points out that the West’s devotion to the settling function was not a path that it was absolutely necessary for it to have pursued:

Given the extent to which “interaction with the past is one of the distinctive modes of intellectual and imaginative endeavor in traditional Chinese culture,” the replication of particular concrete manifestations of such an endeavor by persons other than those who first gave them form never carried, in the words of the distinguished art historian and curator Wen Fong, the “dark connotations . . . it does in the West.” Nor, as was often the case in the West, was such use accepted grudgingly and then only because it served as a vehicle through which apprentices . . . developed their techniques with those random ones always available at the hands of simple improper or irresponsible recontextualization, i.e., simple “bad interpretation.” Umberto Eco attempts, too abruptly, to gather together all of these types of subversion (both legitimate and chaotic) into a single, complete package and to denigrate them all under the label “overinterpretation.” In defending this construction, Eco offers examples of interpretations that exceed what he labels a certain “textual economy” and describes these as “paranoiac interpretations” in opposition to “sane interpretations” (Interpretation and Overinterpretation 48). He writes, “I think . . . we can accept a sort of Popperian principle according to which if there are no rules that help to ascertain which interpretations are the ‘best’ ones, there is at least a rule for ascertaining which ones are ‘bad’” (52). Culler, approvingly citing Booth’s concept of “overstanding” and the apparently undirected systematicity of Barthes in S/Z, argues that what Eco calls “overinterpretation” is actually a “state of wonder at the play of texts and interpretation” that should be encouraged rather than censured (Literary 182).
cal expertise, demonstrated erudition, or even endorsed particular values, although each of these phenomena also existed in imperial China. On the contrary, in the Chinese context, such use was at once both more affirmative and more essential. It evidenced the user’s comprehension of and devotion to the core of civilization itself, while offering individuals the possibility of demonstrating originality within the context of those forms and so distinguishing their present from the past. (28–29; emphasis added)

Chinese practice here shows that culture to be more accepting of the breaking function than is in general the West. This acceptance hints that the breaking function actually will not be denied. Thus, it is not surprising that in Western culture the unstable theoretical eclipsings and occlusions carried out on behalf of “foundational certitude” should be continually exposed for what they are by philosophers and thinkers coming later in a type of game of obfuscation-and-disclosure that long ago should have been transcended.

To offer, on the other hand, an example of an allegiance to the idea of a solely efficacious settling function—one that I will touch on again later, in a different context—I would turn to the philosopher J. L. Austin’s attempt at (and failure in) conclusively defending his “performative utterances” from what he describes as “parasitic” language usages such as parody or improper citation (all in one way or another examples of the breaking function making itself felt). In his lecture series published as _How to Do Things with Words_, Austin, envisioning the dream of the complete elimination of the breaking function and then building on that dream, posits the existence of a set of tightly-controlled utterances that would be allowing one, for example, to successfully christen a ship, contract a marriage, make a bet, etc. These “performative speech acts” in which the words are actually able to do what they say, albeit through a serious degree of dependence on a pre-determined context, or reliance on “appropriate circumstances,” are acts simultaneously calling for and justifying, whether explicitly or implicitly, the foundational stabilizations characteristic of the settling function. Austin’s mistake is the result of his implicit assumption that settling can conclusively erase breaking. Derrida will demonstrate (as does also, as we will see below, Collins in the opening of _No Name_) the fundamental dependence of “clear” (which is precisely not to say “simple,” as it involves the intermediary steps of (1) willed ignorance and (2) a forgetting of that willing) communication on the existence of those other, “parodistic,” correspondences and, by implication, the fundamental connection between the two functions.

Austin posits an idealized world in which the settling function will have conclusively triumphed over the breaking:
Speaking generally, it is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, appropriate, and it is very commonly necessary that either the speaker himself or other persons should also perform certain other actions, whether “physical” or “mental” actions or even acts of uttering further words. Thus, for naming the ship, it is essential that I should be the person appointed to name her, for (Christian) marrying, it is essential that I should not be already married with a wife living, sane and undivorced, and so on: for a bet to have been made, it is generally necessary for the offer of the bet to have been accepted by a taker (who must have done something, such as to say “Done”), and it is hardly a gift if I say “I give it you” but never hand it over. (How to Do Things 8–9)

Austin’s performatives are only possible because the settling function through a constant effectivity and constant availability—emphasized here at the implicit expense of an unacknowledged, and perilously ignored, breaking function—makes possible the illusion of its having completely subdued or eliminated its unruly counterpart. A great degree of complacency with regard to the possibility of the complete triumph of settling (and complete exclusion of breaking) is evident in a statement such as “Our performatives, felicitous or not, are to be understood as issued in ordinary circumstances” (22). Austin’s idealized conception of complete and total state control here, of his “ordinary circumstances” successfully having been imposed and easily upheld, signals his having wholly bought into the dream of conclusive exclusion.

He has only, however, set himself up for a return of the repressed, a return that occurs (besides hesitantly and incompletely in his own text: “in some ways there is danger of our initial and tentative distinction between constative and performative utterances breaking down” [How to Do Things 54]) in the form of Derrida’s publication, several years after Austin’s death, of an essay—one might be tempted to call it “groundbreaking” were not the disclosure of the undeniability of the breaking function as old as the hills—entitled “Signature Event Context.” In that critique, Derrida discloses that Austin’s repeated failure to stabilize his distinction between performative speech acts and “constative utterances,” statements that merely report things, is the result of Austin’s having ignored the subversions always being put forward by the breaking function, that function allowing utterances to unauthorizedly slip across the would-be impermeable border created by Austin’s distinction. The possibility existing for each and every one of the protocols or conventions (“ordinary circumstances”) to have been, to some extent or other, parodied (repeated with the insertion of varying degrees
of a break from “ordinariness”) beforehand, the breaking function allows no grounding to remain firm, no “ordinariness” to remain such. Derrida patiently examines several instances of Austin’s attempt at dismissing the undiscussible, at dismissing what Derrida describes as “a general iterability [actually the breaking aspect of iterability, the mere existence of] which constitutes a violation of the allegedly rigorous purity of every event of discourse or every speech act” (“Signature Event Context” 18). The “purity” of Austin’s performative speech acts in their attempt at settling into place within their singular contexts and “ordinary circumstances” is a purity implicitly based on the dream of settling erasing breaking. As such, it is a “purity” not worthy of the name. It is a purity that must remain fundamentally impure, as it must always remain vulnerable to the charge of having attempted to deny the very possible potential—as must all systems premised on the possibility of the settling function’s erasure of its other—of the return of the excluded function and (the consciousness of) its effects.

Negotiating one’s way past the tradition of overweighting the settling function to the detriment of the breaking function is a difficult endeavor. Clearly, any thinker wishing to deal properly with the paradoxical workings of the iterability of the mark would need to be possessed of a personality characterized by a good deal of open-mindedness and an uncommon degree of comfort with rebelliousness. This thinker would have to be willing at certain moments to work against “tradition”—a difficult position to adopt. We have seen Jacques Derrida to be one such thinker. But, not surprisingly—the workings of iterability having remained constant throughout time—there were others before him. This book will be dealing with the investigations carried out in this area—taking the form this time of inviting Victorian fictions rather than complicated twentieth-century philosophical critiques—by another thinker of this type.

Viewing the placement and re-placement of texts through the grid of two conflicted-but-not-contrasting functions has many effects. For one thing, in the intentional realm, the transparent passage of “meaning” from author to reader is disclosed to be a mirage—or more precisely only half the story—as we find iterability to be resulting in both the founding and unsettling of literary understanding and intention at one and the same time. Understanding and intention are, in other words, disclosed to be always already subject to the peculiar “logic” of iterability. Derrida describes the breaking side of this logic well when he observes that iterability leads to the person using language being necessarily absented—insofar as he would wish to “be” his
linguistically manifested “intentions”—from the instrument he would wish to believe himself to be controlling. Summarizing his main points in the discussion after his initial oral presentation of “Signature Event Context” in 1971, Derrida comments,

I don’t think a mark can be constituted without its being able to be cited. Therefore, the entire graphematic structure is connected to citationality, to the possibility of being repeated. And since a mark is repeatable, this means that it no longer needs me to continue to have its effects. Insofar as I make use of an instrument that bears within itself its repeatability, I am absented from what I use. And it’s necessary to take account of this absence. (Derrida and Ricoeur 154)

According to Derrida, the repeatability of language operates through a series of simultaneous steps—the paradox inherent in a “simultaneity” of discrete “steps” being only one of many legitimate paradoxes being invited by the paradox of degree associated with the manifestly “quirky” operations of iterability—to bring about an absenting of the subject without that subject’s full volition. In short, the iterability of language allows the subject to be “the subject” and, at the same time, renders such a fulfillment of identity impossible.

Collins’s interactions with the dyad formed by the settling/breaking functions were not of either of the usual varieties, were not the scientist’s or philosopher’s radical fear and abhorrence of the latter function or the literary artist’s (think Shakespeare or Dickens) desire to constantly seek out (either pell-mell or focused on two or three general themes) situations of breaking as a means of surprising the reader (and sometimes the artist himself or herself) with new combinations and novel associations. Collins’s strategy when embarking on his project was to systematically transition over the course of the 1850s and 60s across this dyad, from settling to breaking—from, to put it crudely, literature viewed as a precise science to literature viewed as an art. (His meticulously controlled transition in his dealings with the dyad was the result of Collins’s striking self-awareness, an awareness probably stemming from the distance from himself and his usual perspective afforded by his excessive opium use. 14 Opium intoxication probably allowed

14. It is interesting that at the same time that Collins’s use of opium increased to habitual proportions, from the composition stage of The Woman in White onwards—“Although Wilkie had almost certainly been an occasional opium user for years . . . it was at this time that Beard prescribed laudanum regularly as a palliative” (Peters 240)—so did his interest in the breaking function of iterability, until, of course, the unexplained, remarkable crash of his intellect after the publication of The Moonstone.
him to look back on his “good” or “proper” self’s allegiance to the settling function and then to counteract it with villains drawn from the breaking side.) As a result, his major phase offers one of the best sites in literary history for watching in operation both sides of the dyad and for demarcating the spectrum of effects made possible by the markedly varied operations of the iterability of language.

I choose to focus on this particular novelist because his dealings with linguistic repetition are uncommonly sustained and insightful and, most significantly, because those dealings exhibit an astonishing degree of open-mindedness to both sides of the workings of the iterability of the mark. A close analysis of Collins’s works of this period allows one to see the potential held out both by, on the one side, a pure allegiance to the settling function and, on the other, a resistance to allowing the breaking side to fall into an indiscriminate jumble of transparent and/or polyvalent communications. Collins maintains a remarkably controlled and organized trajectory from the beginning to the end of his project as he progressively comes to move beyond literary stasis and to acknowledge more and more the inherent complicatedness arising from linguistic repetition. In pursuing this goal, he brings into being one of the profoundest intellectual inquiries ever attempted into the iterability of the word. Thus, here I will be not just investigating Collins’s explorations into the realm of the workings of linguistic iterability but also—it being high time that such a project was attempted—endeavoring to raise the status of this writer’s achievement to a level more philosophically weighty than that accessed by the much-repeated labels of “father of the sensation novel,” “master of mystery,” or, even, “protégé of Charles Dickens.”

Collins’s Unusual Candidness in Thinking

Collins is more resilient and forthright than most thinkers as he comes at a certain point in his career to the realization that he has been improperly,

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15. Dickens made a radical misjudgment in nicknaming Collins “the Genius of Disorder,” in contrast to his own label of “the Genius of Order,” as Collins’s thinking—whatever may have been the state of other aspects of his life—was anything but disordered (See Letters of Dickens 8:161).

16. See Brantlinger in The Reading Lesson remarking, “The Woman in White (1860) was and continues to be regarded as setting the pattern for the ‘sensation mania’” (17). For critics holding a similar opinion, see Braddon in Rance 121; Cvetkovich 24; Kendrick 19; Pykett, “Collins” 50; Sutherland, “Wilkie Collins” 243; and Wynne 4. For critics labeling Collins a master of mystery, see Peterson and Page 137. For critics emphasizing Dickens’s influence on Collins, see, among several others, Burney 178 and Trodd 80.
over the course of the 1850s, overweighting one function (the settling) and underweighting the other (the breaking). This is in itself a very difficult point to reach in one's intellectual progress. It involves a good degree of candidness about one's practices. Indeed, the trajectory of Collins's intellectual development could be said to prove Paul de Man wrong when, in writing about Hegel, he contends, “It is . . . true that he does not exactly tell the story of a threatening paradox at the core of his system against which his thought has to develop a defense in whose service the aesthetic . . . is being mobilized. No one could be expected to be that candid about his uncertainties” (Aesthetic Ideology 191). However, this type of candidness—easier to entertain, admittedly, for the novelist than the philosopher or literary critic—is not the full extent of Collins's exemplary openness to the bifurcated nature of the iterability of the mark. Collins not only acknowledges his difficulties but continues forward past that acknowledgment. He not only over the course of the 1860s comprehends the source (the always-threatening breaking function) of his earlier “uncertainties” but then also accepts and even embraces it, going on to explore the implications of that acceptance (at first centering his investigations on the effects had by the breaking function at the level of publication and then at the level of composition). As a result, Collins offers us an unparalleled case of a Victorian author struggling with both sides of the contradictory grounding of language.

It is the complementary movements, from settling to breaking, from breaking to settling, that open up spaces of possibility for interesting escapings and coincidings to occur. It was these spaces that a century and a half ago entranced Collins to such a degree that he chose to work out what could and could not be accomplished by and within them in the novels written at the peak of his powers. Over the course of pursuing this project, Collins found, for one thing, that those spaces allowed him the opportunity of creating series upon series of startling effects, effects that earned him, whether rightly or wrongly, the label of “the father of the sensation novel.” It is important, however, not to allow this rather constricted and local result—to too quickly singled out by the critics from amongst the panoply available—of Collins's admirably intrepid venturings into the strange region of iterability to lessen the significant depth and breadth of his actual achievement.

It will be my contention here that while writing the fictions of his major phase Collins made the breaking and settling functions of the iterability of the mark his central topic of concern. All the while that he was seemingly solely concerned, say, with the metaphorical representation of the text as land (Basil) or as vulnerable female (The Woman in White), with
parodic repetition’s disclosure of the implicit bad-faith denial of illusion at the heart of realist fiction (No Name), with the author’s loss of “substance” (as “creator rather than “disseminator”) even before being taken up by the publication process (Armadale), or with the drug-induced splitting effects occasionally fundamentally unseating the seemingly-unified personal identity (The Moonstone), Collins was attempting to come to terms with the fact that the linguistic element in which he had immersed himself could either lift him up or drown him—or perform both operations simultaneously. He was coming to accept the somewhat uncomfortable fact that, in a sense, the would-be unified “domesticity” of the author’s psyche established by the settling function could be fissured by a struggle that was always already taking place between the apparently-opposed good angel and evil genius of the two functions of iterability.

The apparently dual nature of the iterability of the mark allowed for the transformation of the simple and single into the complex and double, and back again. This movement captivated Collins. Indeed, so much so that Catherine Peters feels called upon to open her insightful biography with a discussion of precisely this issue, his fascination with doubles, on her way to (rather deflatingly) concluding that this interest indicated he “felt some uncertainty about his own identity” (2). Similarly Taylor writes, “Collins’s novels continually conjure with identity. The self is a screen on which others’ perceptions are projected and enacted; a collection of physical signs whose meaning is uncertain; a subjectivity struggling to gain coherence” (Secret Theatre 63–64), and Kucich contends that “Dreams, suppressed desires, doubles, and premonitions regularly haunt the subjective solidity of Collins’s characters” (Power 95). I will be arguing here, however, that the excessive interest in doubles in Collins’s fictions is not so much a manifestation of a psychological anxiety as it is that of a professional, textual one, that is, that the doubling is not that of the psyche (in the sense of the unconscious or subconscious doubling the conscious) but rather of the page. Collins was intrigued by both the possibility of overcoming iterability’s breaking function and the possibility of its overcoming the singularities of his characters, texts, readers, and even himself. His perspective shuttling back and forth between the contradictory effects of iterability (with his villains generally exploiting the breaking function while his heroes and heroines generally exploit the settling), Collins was an author particularly attuned to the strange and complex movement of language.

In what follows, it may seem at times as if I had, to revise one of Holmes’s better lines in The Sign of the Four, worked the fifth postulate of Euclid (or Derrida) into a love-story or an elopement, that is, as if I had unfairly
discounted the various overtly referential aspects of Collins’s texts and thereby improperly reduced the “romance,” in all senses, in books like *The Moonstone*, explicitly subtitled so, to “mere” textuality or flattened semantics. However, I feel this “reduction” in the case of Collins’s major fictions to be justified. Indeed, I would argue, it actually turns out to be, when the case is looked into closely enough, not a reduction at all, as the “romance” in Collins’s unified novel series is often itself fundamentally formed out of the materials provided by not real-world elopements and love stories per se but the paradoxical workings of textuality.

In other words, Collins’s romance is fashioned not from a foundation in representing “truth as it is in nature” in all its variety but in representing a small, near-magical linguistic aspect of it. His stories of this period grow out of the profoundly exotic nature of the working of textual repetition. Unlike the majority of his novelist contemporaries, and unlike himself during his later “mission fiction” period, Collins in his unified novel series comes not only to value language’s transhistorical, formal, mechanical workings over its contingent and particular, extralinguistically-oriented, referential and representational ones but also wholeheartedly to accept the conflict at the basis of those workings. The incidents from “real life” that interest him are invariably ones in which iterability is breaking through into the material world, so much so that I believe he does not actually see the real world any longer at all. That is, “the world” as Collins perceives it is simply the world of the manuscript page (the object most usually lying in front of this professional author) transposed, with increasing vitality, back onto our “real world.” Coincident with his acknowledgment of an allegiance to a thoroughly textualized world, are his re-creations of facsimiles of standard mid-Victorian fictions apparently operating according to a standard mode of fictional reference. That is, passing himself off—admittedly sometimes with a grand lack of success (see the increasingly critical reviews from 1862 onwards in Page 111 ff.)—throughout his project as a standard Victorian novelist intent on representing the truth of the life of his culture, Collins throughout his unified novel series is actually representing a facsimile world that has been textualized from the ground up. He creates a literary career out of writing and selling stories of near–flesh and blood characters acting according to not real life urgings but rather the formal workings of language. Collins, by creating out of textual elements an image of our own world, content out of what is usually solely empty form, thereby will move himself into a realm that might be described as, if not quite wholly his own amongst those who might be termed “theorists of iterability,” then certainly his own amongst his Victorian novelist contemporaries.
The Showdown at the Tombstone

Nowhere, of course, in Collins's philosophico-textual unified novel series will one find the terms “iterability,” “settling function,” or “breaking function” being employed, but the effects of these concepts are nevertheless felt everywhere within it. This study will be describing Collins's execution of a transition between the two functions. Naturally, then, the cusp in this trajectory is of great interest and deserves a degree of preliminary focus. We might look at the point at which Collins comes first to allow the ascendency of the settling function to be seriously contested by the breaking function, a difficult stage for a creator\(^\text{17}\)—someone whose role would necessarily be predicated to a significant extent on honoring the settling function—to reach. I believe we find such a moment in *The Woman in White*, a work published in 1860, near the midpoint of Collins's multi-novel project. In that work, the two contrasting functions (each championed by one of the sets of contrasting good and bad characters) directly contend for predominance, leaving up in the air until the very end of this thrilling narrative the question of which of the functions is ultimately to triumph.

*The Woman in White* has always been considered remarkable, the source of that remarkablest being ascribed to one particular scene, that of Count Fosco's stealing Marian Halcombe's diary and inscribing his own narrative within it. The reader is understandably shocked at that moment to find one of the patently “bad” characters seizing the power of narration from one of the patently “good” ones. The complete transitions in narration startlingly represented by this scene and by Fosco's exchanging narrative control with Walter Hartright when his own concluding statement is effectively bookended by Hartright's final narrative are signs that our author, having come to acknowledge the connection between the two functions, also acknowledges their possibility of overturning one another—unlike in *Basil* where he appears to believe that the breaking function can safely be ignored.

This type of radical self-critique and adjustment, exemplified in the *Basil–The Woman in White* transition, is, as we have seen, a difficult standpoint for a thinker schooled in the Western Enlightenment tradition to reach, and perhaps only a character as charming as Fosco could have tempted his creator into attempting it. Magdalen Vanstone under the influence of desperate circumstances, Lydia Gwilt before her short-lived reclamation, and Franklin

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17. Here I mean a standard Victorian author-creator, someone whose role is predicated on settling real-world, non-iterable objects into the signifier slots usually assigned them.
Blake under the influence of opium are all the descendants of Fosco. Replaying the dynamic of Milton’s character Satan purportedly winning over to his party the author of *Paradise Lost*, Collins’s grandiloquent creation in *The Woman in White* seduces him into moving beyond the limitations of Western “philosophical protectionism,” as we might term it, as he comes to seriously entertain his “criminal side.” Commenting on this influence late in his career, Collins would remark of Fosco, “His character grew on me,—a great danger to a novelist” (Yates 591). Collins was not the only conquest made by Fosco. Marian Halcombe when she first meets this mysterious, imposing figure comments, “I can only repeat that I do assuredly feel, even on this short acquaintance, a strange, half-willing, half-unwilling liking to the Count. He seems to have established over me the same sort of ascendancy which he has evidently gained over Sir Percival.”

It was with good reason that Margaret Oliphant in her famous review of the novel was prompted to write, “The sympathies of the reader on whom the ‘Woman in White’ lays her spell, are, it is impossible to deny, devoted to the arch-villain of the story” (“Sensation Novels” 566). Oliphant heedily continued,

> [T]here is no resisting the charm of his good-nature, his wit, his foibles, his personal individuality. To put such a man so diabolically in the wrong seems a mistake somehow. . . . No villain of the century, so far as we are aware, comes within a hundred miles of him. . . . The reader shares in the unwilling liking to which, at his first appearance, he beguiles Marian Halcombe; but the reader, notwithstanding the fullest proof of Fosco’s villany, does not give him up, and take to hating him, as Marian does. . . . He is intended to be an impersonation of evil, a representative of every diabolical wile: but Fosco is not detestable; on the contrary, he is more interesting, and seizes on our sympathies more warmly than any other character in the book. (566–67)

This preternaturally-seductive character, and strong advocate for the breaking function (his attraction being partly due to his ability to disclose what must always have been waiting in the wings—of the story and of the reader’s and author’s consciousnesses—i.e., that constantly slighted but nevertheless present function), in seducing readers, characters, and creator alike is able to lead his creator to overcoming centuries of philosophical and narrative tradition. Having once seriously acknowledged the breaking function,

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18. *Woman in White*, ed. Sutherland 226. In this chapter, all further references to this work, unless otherwise noted, will be to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.
Collins will continue down this path and extend this practice (through coming to further understand its implications) of honoring breaking in his next three novels. I will consider in depth in Chapter 3 below the implications of the diary-reading scene. Here, however, I wish to look at a slightly more subdued moment of contention between the two functions coming a bit later in the narrative.

Volume Two of the three-volume edition of *The Woman in White* is meant (as explicitly set down by Collins in the original manuscript [*Woman in White* 691]) to sensationally end with a scene signaling that in this work he has reached a certain intellectual threshold in his project’s development. “The tombstone scene,” as we might term it, offers us, appropriately enough, a showdown. It is a moment when the settling and breaking functions fight it out for ascendency. This encounter is the first (the dream in *Basil* being concerned, as we will see, with the slightly different issue of the status of the literary artist) of various other crucial encounters—often dealing with failures of naming, of textual label or name not matching up with material body—between the functions in Collins’s major fictions: such as Magdalen “Vanstone” learning her parents were not really married in *No Name*; Lydia Gwilt realizing that her marriage to the poor Ozias Midwinter under his real name, Allan Armadale, will afford her the opportunity of pretending to be the rich Allan Armadale’s widow; and Franklin Blake encountering his own name on the nightgown in *The Moonstone*. It represents a moment of contention between the body (and the settled materialization it represents) and the text (specifically that text’s breaking aspects leading, in the case of this particular narrative, to a loss of social identity) and encapsulates the complex interactions that can, as a result of iterability, eventuate from such a meeting.

The scene, as it begins, has our hero Walter Hartright noticing two women approaching him as he stands beside the tombstone of his lost love, a tombstone honoring “the Memory of Laura, Lady Glyde.” One of the approaching women is clearly Marian Halcombe. The other is mysteriously veiled:

> The woman with the veiled face moved away from her companion, and came towards me slowly. Left by herself, standing by herself, Marian Halcombe spoke. It was the voice that I remembered—the voice not changed, like the frightened eyes and wasted face. . . .

The woman came on; slowly and silently came on. I looked at her—at her, and at none other, from that moment.
[Marian’s] voice that was praying for me, faltered and sank low—then rose on a sudden, and called affrightedly, called despairingly to me to come away.

But the veiled woman had possession of me, body and soul. She stopped on one side of the grave. We stood face to face with the tombstone between us. She was close to the inscription on the side of the pedestal. *Her gown touched the black letters.*

The voice came nearer, and rose and rose more passionately still. “Hide your face! don’t look at her! Oh, for God’s sake spare him!———”

The woman lifted her veil.

“Sacred
to the Memory of
Laura,
Lady Glyde—”

Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription, and was looking at me over the grave. (*Woman in White* 419; emphasis added)

Shockingly, Hartright encounters Laura Fairlie over what is supposed to be her grave, the text itself here just failing, because of a significant blank line, to reenact the scene’s all-important encounter between the textuality of the inscription and the “physicality” of the apparent original of “Laura.” There are resonances in this scene with Basil’s dream of fair and dark women pulling him in opposite directions (a scene considered in detail in Chapter 2), especially in an acknowledgment such as “the veiled woman had possession of me, body and soul,” as well as foreshadowing—in Laura’s seemingly impossible encounter with her own name—of Franklin Blake’s self-encounter on the beach in *The Moonstone.* We are also reminded in the

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19. The blank lines surrounding the tombstone inscription—paradoxical signs (lines that both are and are not lines of “writing”) of both settling and breaking, of both inscription and de-inscription (akin to Collins’s later paradoxical titling of *No Name*, a title that is not a title)—exist in the initial *All the Year Round* printing (19 May 1860) as well as in some modern editions of the story (see for example the Sucksmith edition reproducing the original’s sensational varied typefaces, 378). They, along with the central plot turn of a blank space in a marriage register signifying forgery, work to emphasize Collins’s interest in the process through which sometimes something can come of nothing, here exemplified in the particular situation of meaning coming from a lack of signs. Collins was intrigued by the way in which contextualization could render a blank an effective speech-act. See Zigarovich for a suggestive connection between epitaph writing (what she describes as a writing after death) and the signifying effected by the blank in the register.
phrase “her gown touched the black letters” of Walter Hartright’s encountering of Anne Catherick on Hampstead Heath (“every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder” [Woman in White 20]). Following on from the way in that scene, as Oliphant has it, sensation is manifestly communicated from one character to another by touch—“The reader’s nerves are affected like the hero’s” (“Sensation Novels” 572)—here one entity would similarly seem to infect the other.

The tombstone scene demonstrates Collins’s artistry, his genius, in choosing situations that exemplify exactly the paradoxes in which he is most interested. The question here simply becomes: in which direction is this infection traveling? Is the body reifying the letters (as the breaking function is trumped by settling once more in Western thought) or are the letters disarticulating the body and the identity founded on it (as the breaking function comes to infect materiality)? The answer to this question holds the key to indicating the direction in which the conclusion of this constantly-alternating story is finally headed. The fundamental subject-object ambiguity in this encounter between body and text disrupts any simple symbolization in the standard sense that might have been on its way to crystallizing. Materiality and textuality, those equally valid, but not mutually exclusive, interpretations, are in seemingly irresolvable conflict here. Laura’s gown is made to touch, as Hartright has said earlier, “the hard, clear, cruel black letters which told the story of her life and death” (Woman in White 417),20 to touch the letters testifying falsely to her death. The contagion could be traveling from the letters to the body (consolidating the loss of identity aimed at by the villains’ earlier manipulations of the breaking function) or from the body to the letters (undoing the breaking effect through the influence of a solidifying body, that body being, in some sense, not just a particular character’s body but also the author’s body, the anchor of the author–work tie being repeatedly defended throughout this narrative’s lobbying against literary piracy, a topic to be touched on in detail in Chapter 3). It could be exemplifying a giving in to the falsity of inscription (a giving in to the breaking function, here expressed in the form of textual re-inscribability) or to the “truth” of corporeality (the settling function). Put simply, the relevant question is, who wins? Is it to be Fosco’s or the good characters’ standpoint that ultimately wrests control of this text? In which direction is Collins to be understood to be tending at this point in his project? . . .

20. The “Narrative of the Tombstone” thus comes to stand in here for the whole of the narrative, only in reverse, as the larger text of course tells the story of Laura’s death and life.
A D A B H A N D at handling mystery, my subject for instance, would no doubt order the disclosive process differently (i.e., “make ’em wait” appropriately), but I feel it, already, to be high time to relieve my readers of their suspense: the narrative action of *The Woman in White*, in concluding with the reestablishment of Laura Fairlie in her original position, as well as with the death of Fosco, would seem strongly—if perhaps not quite conclusively—to suggest that the settling function eventually must win out, customary order here being restored and the philosophical tradition of settling-eclipsing-breaking being upheld—at least at this point in Collins’s career.

Of course, the “closeness,” so to speak, of this present victory hints at future losses waiting in the wings. T. S. Eliot in an article entitled “Willie Collins and Dickens” famously labels Collins a “master” of the art of melodrama, and likens him to Dickens and Charles Reade in their more shocking narrative moments (*Selected Essays* 381). But I would argue that Collins’s melodrama—like his sensationalism—originates from a more theoretical and textual source than that of many of the other writers to whom H. L. Mansel’s accusation of “preaching to the nerves” in his 1863 review of 24 sensation novels (including *No Name*) might more fittingly have applied (481). Caught up in this conflict between functions, the narrative of *The Woman in White* comes to generate what look like melodramatic effects from what is actually a conflict stemming from the paradox of degree situated at the heart of iterability. That is, the melodramatic interest in this story is generated by its repeatedly approaching the danger zone of allowing the breaking function to triumph before it breathlessly pulls back from fully opening the door to an alienation (initially of the text and eventually of the self) that would seem to threaten to become uncontrollable. What Eliot understood as a “mastery” of melodrama was actually—though he would no doubt have declined to phrase it in this way—a situation of an author gradually transitioning (and occasionally resisting that change) in allegiance between the two functions of iterability.

21. While I am in my analysis taking the narrative “at its word,” so to speak, I would note that critics have recently been prompted to query this type of trusting standpoint. They have questioned whether it really is Laura who is liberated from the asylum (Ablow 158n1 and Dever 123n3) and whether Fosco actually dies at the end of the novel (Hutter, “Fosco Lives!”). While I confess myself to be intrigued by both propositions, especially by Hutter’s suggestive interpretation of the story viewed in the light of Fosco’s famous boat-house assertion that “foolish criminals . . . are discovered, and wise criminals . . . escape” (*Woman in White* 236), I believe both interpretations to be taking things too far. At this point in Collins’s career “propriety” is still on the side of the settling function, on the side of Marian when she describes the Count’s opinions as “glib cynicism” (240). Only after this novel will Collins come to respect the need to honor both functions equally.
The *Woman in White*’s hypnotic appeal is largely the result of the very real fear that the villains, those profiteers of breaking, might indeed end up getting away with it. Thus, it comes as no surprise that the story’s initial two volumes should be devoted to the breaking function. In those volumes, the villains Percival Glyde and Count Fosco make use of the danger posed by the breaking function to threaten not just the identities of fellow characters but also, by implication, the author’s identity and the integral “identity” of his work. Crucial to the success of the villains’ plot is the strategy of exploiting the vulnerability to the breaking function of the markers of Laura’s identity. As a result, what we end up with in the exchange of women in the narrative is a crime of false “printing.” The nurses at the asylum tell the newly (re)captured patient to “Look at your own name on your own clothes, and don’t worry us all any more about being Lady Glyde. . . . Do look at your clothes now! There it is, in good marking-ink; and there you will find it on all your old things, which we have kept in the house—Anne Catherick, as plain as print!” (Woman in White 436). Since it is effectively the labels on the garments in which the Count causes Laura to be dressed that bring about the transformation in identities—linguistic “characters” equaling character (a favorite Collinsian structural “pun”), as the nurses peremptorily testify—the Count’s crime of the theft of identity, like his theft earlier of Marian’s diary (as we will see in Chapter 3), is at its basis a textual crime, a crime clearly exploiting the breaking function of linguistic iterability.

However, as noted, in this one of Collins’s works it will be Walter Hartright’s mission of redemption that will triumph in the end over the perils of that function. The lifting of the veil, in both a literal and figurative sense, and the removal of her false clothes will push Laura toward embodiment and reestablishment within her proper social position. Walter will insist on, among other things, the erasure of the inscription and the counteraction of the inscription’s potential disembodiment of his beloved:

She has been cast out as a stranger from the house in which she was born—a lie which records her death has been written on her mother’s tomb—and there are two men, alive and unpunished, who are responsible for it. That house shall open again to receive her, in the presence of every soul who followed the false funeral to the grave; that lie shall be publicly erased from the tombstone, by the authority of the head of the family; and those two men shall answer for their crime to ME, though the justice that sits in tribunals is powerless to pursue them. (Woman in White 454)
Hartright at the conclusion of the story will invite the villagers present at
the public re-introduction of Laura to watch as the inscription is struck
off the marble, albeit only after he has the previous day made a copy of it
as one of the many “testimonies” he has been collecting (633–35). As he
maneuvers to bring his Eurydice back to life, after a transformative trip to
Central America, Hartright will also be undoing the terrors of American
book piracy, a practice manifestly exploiting the breaking function, and
similarly beyond the reach of judicial tribunals. Here Collins, respectful of
the desires that had originally motivated his copyright allegory, will draw
back from that function as a strong discourse of honorability, in the form
of Hartright’s sense of mission, comes into effect to teach us a lesson that
we so richly deserve, if, that is, we have been supporting that mid-Victorian
system of illicit literary piracy across the Atlantic. In the restoration of Laura
Fairlie to her former position in society, Collins puts forward the belief—
still viable with him at this time in his career, perhaps due to the influence
of his more Pollyanna-ish friend Dickens—that breaking can eventually be
controlled through the expenditure of enough effort on the part of restor-
ative agents such as the characters Marian Halcombe and Walter Hartright.
As they come to reconnect Laura Fairlie’s body with the social identity it had
become disarticulated from, the “good” characters in this narrative fulfill the
role of an ultimately triumphant settling function.

In this sense, Collins is at this point in his career still adhering to the
standard party line. Only in his next three productions will he be allowing
the breaking function truly to have an equal status with the settling, as the
former comes to menace even the author’s identity, at the level of authorial
intention. But before Collins, somewhat like Wordsworth climbing Snow-
don, can reach this stage in his ascent out of the valley of automatic settling,
he will need to move past a particular false obstacle or metaphorical cloud
bank that had preoccupied, as we will see in the next section, thinkers a
century before him, the illusory “barrier” of the act of publication.

The Breaking Function and the
Voluntary Act of Publication

Collins’s major fictions, our present-day culture’s dematerialization of the
book, and Derrida’s philosophical critiques are excellent places to watch in
operation the conflict between textual control and the loss of it. They are
not, however, the only cultural moments at which to find iterability’s inher-
ent tension making itself felt. Iterability having come into being along with language, that is, at its creation, and having been in operation ever since, it would be reasonable to expect—despite (or perhaps especially because of) the ill fit between its nature and the usual patternings of logic—moments in intellectual history of this tension’s “showing through,” moments in various legal, literary, and cultural contexts of the revelation of specific, irresolvable conflicts directly themselves arising from the conflict located at the heart of iterability. In other words, it would be reasonable to expect over its long history—a history coincident with the concept of “history” itself—that the conflicted grounding of iterability should not always have been successfully overlaid with a convincing degree of “reasonableness,” a preferred suppressive strategy in the composition of intellectual histories.

One particularly interesting cultural moment at which to find surfacing language’s fundamental tension, I would argue, is that remarkable era—situated, it should be emphasized, lest we improperly begin feeling ourselves to be especially novelly-situated, a good deal prior to our recent post-structuralist age—of spirited legal discussions in England establishing the modern understanding of copyright. The literary property debates of the late eighteenth century at one significant point call on the judges and legislators involved to consider whether or not the publication of a book has resulted in that book’s copyright also being sold along with the physical copy. When Justice Joseph Yates, choosing to dissent in *Millar v. Taylor* (1769) from the majority opinion of the Court of King’s Bench, argues that it has, he conclusively exposes the disarticulation between the fixed nature of language and his age’s contemporary copyright ideology. What is most remarkable is that Yates seems genuine in his belief that selling a particular copy of a book is equivalent to selling its copyright. At that time, in both England and on the Continent, this type of contention was not so “easy” an issue to dismiss as it might seem to us today. Thoroughly steeped in the modern conception of the operation of copyright as we are, we would find it hard to justify the argument that the author’s voluntary acquiescence to the process of publication is also an abrogation or renunciation of the copyright, for we clearly understand the sale of books to distinctly not be the granting of the right also to reprint and sell their contents—even though in various contexts we do not always honor that understanding.\(^{22}\)

\(^{22}\)See William Alford’s discussion of the history of the operation of intellectual property in China in his *To Steal a Book Is an Elegant Offense: Intellectual Property Law in Chinese Civilization*. For the exploitation of the alienability of iterable traces in a different context, see the more significant twenty-first century music and movie peer-to-peer sharing cases: the 9th Circuit’s decision in *A&M Records, Inc. v. Napster, Inc.* (2001); the Supreme Court’s decision in *Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios,*
But, as Yates’s dissent serves as one prominent means of bringing home, this ease of understanding has not always been the case. The arguments, opinions, and decisions offered in the landmark cases of *Tonson v. Collins* (1762) (no relation to Wilkie), *Millar v. Taylor*, and *Donaldson v. Becket* (1774), the most significant English judicial decisions on copyright in the eighteenth century, manifest a marked difference of opinion with regard to this issue. In this section I will be proposing that the conflicted foundation of the iterability of language is the impetus for that difference (a difference expressed contemporaneously also in a variety of Continental countries and, as already mentioned, in the contrast between Chinese and Western perspectives on intellectual property). That is, it will be my contention that from the moment in *Millar* when Justice Yates states that “[e]very purchaser of a book is the owner of it: and, as such, he has a right to make what use of it he pleases” (234) the debate has begun (or, more appropriately, re-erupted—Yates had argued similarly in *Tonson* while acting in that instance as counsel for the defendant) as to what level of significance should be accorded to the breaking function in the legal construction of copyright, over and against language’s manifestly acknowledged settling function.

Yates’s primary contention in his opinion in *Millar* is that, by publishing, the author has conceded, undone, or undermined whatever undefined elements had been setting off the work as his or her sole property. Yates attempts to map out schematically at a certain point in his remarks what seems to him to be the fundamental conflict:

It is by legal actions that other men must judge and direct their conduct: and if such actions plainly import the work being made common; much more if it be a necessary consequence of the act, “that the work is actually thrown open by it”; no private transaction or secretly reserved claim of the author can ever control that necessary consequence. Individuals have no power, (whatever they may wish or intend), to alter the fixed constitution of

*Inc. v. Grokster, Ltd.* (2005); and the Australian Federal Court’s decision on Kazaa in *Universal Music Australia Pty Ltd. v. Sharman License Holdings Ltd.* (2005). Despite valiant efforts of ideology-inculcation on the part of governments, the social opprobrium currently accorded the act of illegally downloading songs or movies is still felt to be significantly different from that accorded the act of stealing a material object such as a computer or car. To offer merely one example, among many, of attempted copyright ideology inculcation, one might note the commercials advertising an “I”-Rating, for Illegal Downloading, included at the start of modern DVD rentals. In those commercials, copying or downloading movies is equated with stealing a car, a handbag, a television set, and a physical DVD from a store. The simple existence of these morality lessons indicates the difficulty copyright ideology has had over the last two centuries in gaining a foothold in the popular psyche. The continual failure in the establishment of the ideology that the theft of iterable items is as significant as the theft of non-iterable ones is a sign of the breaking function of iterability making itself felt again and again.
things: a man can’t retain what he parts with. If the author will voluntarily
let the bird fly, his property is gone; and it will be in vain for him to say “he
meant to retain” what is absolutely flown and gone. (Millar v. Taylor 234)

Rather than turning a blind eye to breaking, as had been the common
tendency in Yates’s intellectual and legal culture, this particular judge pays
respect to the marked strangeness of what he understands to be the “fixed
constitution of things.” Having accepted the reality of breaking, Yates finds
himself called on as a matter of conscience—the report framing it as such:
“sitting in his judicial capacity . . . he thought himself bound both in this
and in every cause, to declare [his opinion] frankly and firmly” (Millar v.
Taylor 229)—to acknowledge the existence of a particular disconnection
between the writer and his words.24

However, Yates’s standpoint is fundamentally conflicted. His thinking is
situated at the cusp of a seemingly-irresolvable paradox, one that he attempts
avoid through temporal manipulation. He clearly senses that breaking is
present, but he is also well aware that settling is occurring. Allowing for the
existence of that latter function, he remarks, “An author is fully possessed
of his ideas, when they arise in his mind: and therefore from the time these
ideas occur to him; or from the time he writes them down, they are his prop-
erty” (Millar v. Taylor 231). Similarly, William Blackstone, the famous legal
commentator and counsel opposing Yates in Tonson in 1762, had remarked
when refuting a contention made in an earlier hearing by Yates’s predeces-
sor, “Notwithstanding . . . Mr. Thurlow’s assertion, I must maintain, that ‘a
literary composition, as it lies in the author’s mind, before it is substantiated
by reducing it into writing,’ has the essential requisites to make it the subject
of property” (180–81; emphasis added). Both sides having acknowledged

23. Yates’s reasoning would be energetically criticized by Collins’s good friend Charles Reade
in 1875. Reade would characterize Yates as having practically single-handedly invented the break-
ing function of iterability: “Justice Yates . . . founded a school of copyright sophists, reasoning à
priori against a four-peaked mountain of evidence. He furnished the whole artillery of falsehood,
the romantic and alluring phrases ‘a gift to the public,’ &c., the equivoques, and confusions of ideas,
among which the very landmarks of truth are lost to unguarded men. Since it is this British petitfog-
ger who, in the great Republic, stands between us and the truth—between us and law—between us
and morality—between us and humanity—between us and the eighth commandment of God the
Father—between us and the golden rule of God the Son, Judge Yates becomes, like Satan, quite an
important equivocator, and I must undeceive mankind about Judge Yates and his fitness to rule the
Anglo-Saxon mind” (Reade, “The Rights” 172).

24. Yates had not been without some pressure to reconsider his position before putting it on
record. Rose notes that Yates’s dissent from the other three judges on the Court of King’s Bench came
as “the first instance of a final difference of opinion” in that court since Mansfield had taken on the
chief justice role thirteen years prior: “[N]either Mansfield nor his brethren could move Yates from
the anti-common-law position he had taken before the bar in Tonson v. Collins” (Authors 79).
settling to exist from the beginning (perhaps even technically before it),
the task becomes to determine when—or whether—that settling comes to
be eroded. His era representing the apex of the Enlightenment in England,
Yates understandably finds it difficult to “go backwards,” to the Renaissance
mind-set that had welcomed paradox, and to allow incompatibles to exist
side by side. Such a move would unquestionably seem a regression. He has
no other choice, then, but to understand the two functions to be existing
at two separate points in time. Thus, he posits the existence, somewhere in
between composition and mass dissemination of a special moment where
settling turns into breaking, where the author’s ownership turns into alien-
ation, and he aligns this moment with, or collapses it into, the “moment”
of publication.

For Yates, the event of the author’s having agreed to go into print comes
to stand as the (illusory) Rubicon between the two functions. In Tonson he
remarks, “I allow, that the author has a property in his sentiments till be
publishes them. . . . [F]rom the moment of publication, they are thrown into
a state of universal communion” (185; emphasis added). Yates refuses to
allow the two functions to be in direct conflict, his “till he publishes them”
operating as a magically transformative transition point. Yates leaves out of
consideration completely iterability’s possible effects on the pre-publication
text. This is a mistake. A thinker only partially open to the implications of
the situation he is analyzing, he ends up focusing on the relatively insig-
nificant moment of the author’s having agreed to a general publication of
his work rather than on the much more interesting one of the author’s ear-
lier having agreed to manifest himself through “an instrument that bears
within itself its repeatability,” which repeatability then renders the author
“absented from what [he] use[s]” (Derrida and Ricoeur 154). The moment
Yates should have been focusing on was that of the author’s prior conces-
sion of having agreed to appear in language, a devil’s bargain if ever there
was one. This would be the moment the thinkers coming after him, Collins

25. Yates’s colleague Justice Aston, citing William Wollaston’s The Religion of Nature Delineated
in his opinion in Millar v. Taylor, not only upholds reason but denigrates paradox at the same time:
“I think fit (however abstract they may seem) to consider certain great truths and sound propositions;
which we, as rational beings; we, to whom reason is the great law of our nature; are laid under the
obligation of being governed by; and which are most ably illustrated by the learned author of the
religion of nature delineated; that is to say—“That moral good and evil are coincident with right and
wrong: for, that can not be good, which is wrong; nor that evil, which is right. “That right reason is the
great law of nature; by which, our Acts are to be adjudged; and according to their conformity to this,
or deflection from it, are to be called lawful, or unlawful; good, or bad.’ “That whatever will bear to
be tried by that reason, is right; and that which is condemned by it, is wrong.’ “That to act according to
right reason, and to act according to truth, are in effect the same thing” (Millar v. Taylor 213; emphasis
added).
particularly in *The Moonstone* and Derrida throughout his career, would make their primary object of inquiry—after a couple of false starts along the way in Collins’s case (particularly in *The Woman in White*’s interest in the perils of publication).

In Yates’s day the significant points of concern are left improperly dis-articulated by the debaters on both sides. Settling and breaking are evident at every stage of the English legal debate. They are simply never allowed to coalesce into the paradox (admittedly, a paradox of degree rather than of kind) that Collins and Derrida would later be so keen to emphasize. Yates in 1762, while a counselor in *Tonson*, was already arguing for proper respect needing to be paid to the radically alienating effects of publication and to publication’s removal of the distinguishing “indicia” separating the author’s unpublished copy from the purchaser’s copy, such distinguishing indicia being necessary, he maintained, for establishing something as a piece of “property”: “How is an author to be distinguished? . . . The act of publication has thrown down all distinction, and made the work common to every body; like land thrown into the highway, it is become a gift to the public” (*Tonson v. Collins* 185). Blackstone, serving as opposing counsel, forcefully countered this critique:

> It is asserted, that the bare act of publication renders the performance common to all mankind: it was asserted; but the proof of that position, if given, totally escaped my observation. He [Counselor Yates] allows, that to constitute an abandonment, there must be plain tokens of a voluntary dereliction: in the present instance, it is so far from a dereliction, that the very act of publication shews an intention to continue the use of it, for the purpose of profit, so long as the author can. (188)

The non-cooperative nature of the adversarial Westminster legal system was bound to push the paradox of degree relationship between the functions of iterability into the form of an illusory paradox of kind.26 And so it did here, as the act of publication came to be viewed simultaneously in the mutually-exclusive forms of a dereliction of ownership and an assertion of it. The complete contrast between Yates’s and Blackstone’s positions maps out the boundaries of the dispute, a conflict that should have been simultaneous and focused on origins but that ended up being fought around the markedly provisional focal point of the moment of publication.27 This “conceptual

26. For a critique of the adversarial system see Fox 123–26.
27. The illusion of publication’s being the seminal moment of alienation continues to entrance thinkers even up to the present day. In an intriguing analysis Susan Eilenberg elaborates on the im-
extension,” as we might term it, had been in part, as I have mentioned, the result of the Enlightenment’s turn away from paradox, a turn the effects of which we still see ourselves as they come to provide the impetus, for instance, for many of the celebratory pronouncements of and/or hopeful calls for the death of literary theory today.

**The Failed Gambits of Speech and the Unpublished Manuscript**

The debate regarding the possible effects of publication was carried on also in contemporary Continental contexts. The comparison being instructive, we might briefly look, before considering the other judges’ reaction to Yates’s opinion in *Millar*, at what is occurring at the time in Prussia and Germany. In the course of that particular dispute, the philosopher Immanuel Kant is prompted to defend the author’s post-publication control of his or her discourse. An example of the type of standpoint that Kant is contesting can be found in a quotation from a German article of 1783 by Christian Sigmund Krause:

“But the ideas, the content! that which actually constitutes a book! which only the author can sell or communicate!”—Once expressed, it is impossible for it to remain the author’s property. . . . It is precisely for the purpose of using the ideas that most people buy books—pepper dealers, fishwives, and the like, and literary pirates excepted. . . . Over and over again it comes back to the same question: I can read the contents of a book, learn, abridge, expand, teach, and translate it, write about it, laugh over it, find fault with . . . .

The implications of the conflation of the author with his or her text. Noting that the chapter on identity incorporated by John Locke into the second edition of his *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* in 1694 generated a century of debate over such issues as the conception of the integral, single identity and the nature of insanity, she contends, “At the same time that the nation was worrying about the nature of intellectual property, it was also worrying about the nature of identity: the two debates, I suspect, . . . reflected one another. . . . A writer gives the reader custody of the children of his brain. The reader is entitled—for how can he be stopped?—to adopt and raise them as his own, regardless of how the author might wish them to be raised. Thus the author, by the fact of publication, loses control over something he had regarded as his. The question I would like to raise is whether he loses control of himself. Is publication—is allowing another access to one’s thoughts—an implicit alienation or forfeiture of identity?” (Eilenberg, “Copyright’s Rhetoric” 11 and 20–21). I believe that Eilenberg’s analysis is hampered by its tradition-honoring focus on the moment of publication, a focus her argument seems nevertheless to wish—one that remains unfulfilled—to move its way beyond through its shift from a focus on the author’s losing control of some thing, say his labor or his figurative “children,” once regarded as his to his losing control of himself of his identity.

28. See Kawohl for a discussion of the historical background to this debate.
it, deride it, use it poorly or well—in short, do with it whatever I will. But the one thing I should be prohibited from doing is copying or reprinting it? . . . A published book is a secret divulged. . . . Would it not be just as ludicrous for a professor to demand that his students refrain from using some new proposition he had taught them as for him to demand the same of book dealers with regard to a new book? No, no, it is too obvious that the concept of intellectual property is useless. My property must be exclusively mine; I must be able to dispose of it and retrieve it unconditionally. Let someone explain to me how that is possible in the present case. Just let someone try taking back the ideas he has originated once they have been communicated so that they are, as before, nowhere to be found. All the money in the world could not make that possible.29

In 1785 Kant publishes in Berlin an essay entitled “On the Unlawfulness of Reprinting” laying out clear reasoning as to why in his view the right to print a book should stay with the author and his or her authorized publisher and not automatically transfer to the purchaser of an individual copy. He writes,

The author and the owner of a copy can both say with equal right of the copy: it is my book!—but in different senses. The former is regarding the book as a written work or speech, whereas the latter sees in it simply the mute instrument for the delivery of the speech to him, or to the public—ie, he regards it as a copy. This right of the author is, however, not a right to the object, that is, to the copy; . . . rather, it is an innate right, invested in his own person, entitling him to prevent anyone else from presenting him as speaking to the public without his consent—a consent which cannot be taken for granted by any means, since he has already conceded it to someone [to his publisher].30 (“Unlawfulness” 416n)
In his essay Kant “solves,” so to speak, the problem by distinguishing between the author’s exertion (*opera*) and the work itself (*opus*) and argues that what has been sold to the authorized publisher is not a piece of “intellectual property” (as had and would often thereafter be held in English legal judgments) but rather “the right to speak” to the public in the author’s name: “A book is the instrument for delivering a speech to the public. . . . From this follows the essential point that it is not a thing which is thereby delivered, but an act (*opera*), namely a speech, and, what is more, literally. By calling it a mute instrument I distinguish it from those means there are for communicating a speech through sound” (“Unlawfulness” 407n). The ownership of this paradoxical “silent speech” derives from its being a manifestation of the author’s personality or will. In essence, Kant is attempting to connect the book to the author (one presumably fully in control of his or her intentions) as closely as he believes the situation of literary composition warrants. Kant considers phonocentrism to hold the key to the solution of the dilemma. For him, a direct result of speech being, or at least seeming, a more intimate form of expression than mere writing is the consequence of the *opera* (the act) being closer, and presumably less alienable, than the *opus* (the thing). The right of speaking for oneself is, according to Kant, “a personal positive right” (411), “an innate right, invested in his own person” (416n),32 that is essentially the author’s right to dispose of as he or she wishes—“the author’s ownership to his thoughts . . . remains his in spite of any reprinting” (403)—and not something that should (or even can?) be alienated. Justice Aston, sounding very much like modern-day defenders of the settling function, contends something similar in *Millar v. Taylor* when he bases his argument on the non-alienability of the author-proprietor’s “intention”: “[I]s there no difference betwixt selling the property in the work, and only one of the copies? . . . The proprietor’s consent is not to be carried beyond his manifest intent. Would not such a construction extend the partial disposition of the true owner beyond his plain intent and meaning?” (222; emphasis added).33 For Aston, the alienation at the hands of breaking

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31. In the sense of an intellectual effort or speech-act, and not in the sense of the plural of *opus*.
32. Fichte will endorse this line of argument in 1793 (472).
33. Throughout this discussion I will be equating the author’s “intention” to keep to himself the ownership of the published manuscript with his “intention” to convey “a particular meaning” in his writing. Both of these are the same with respect to their vulnerability to the breaking function of iterability.
“manifestly” not being desired by the author, it should simply cease to exist. Kant, being not so dismissive, but nevertheless no more efficacious, moves the issue of the author’s intention to keep control into the contractual, business realm: the reprinter, essentially, is guilty of “conduct[ing] someone else’s business in that person’s name and yet against his will” (“Unlawfulness” 404).

Clearly, Kant’s strategy of emphasizing a close author–work connection is not very different from that that had been adopted by the English judges defending the author’s proprietary right (settling) against publication’s alienating effects (breaking). However, in place of Kant’s conceptualization of an author-as-speaker who is (presumably) automatically tied to his speech, the latter, in their turn, had offered as their preferred grounding for the author’s control of the copyright in the published book the author’s seemingly-incontestable right to the ownership of the unpublished manuscript, a difference that can be crudely schematized as a personality-basis/labor-basis distinction for the grounding of literary ownership. For example, in opposition to Yates’s view of a radical post-publication alienation, the other judges in Millar v. Taylor emphasize the widely-acknowledged (almost sacrosanct) inherent pre-publication connection between the author and the manuscript, the author’s “creation.” This connection is most forcefully

34. The Prussian/German context found the personality to be the foundation of the ownership of the literary creation. In England it came to be generally understood that the ownership of a literary work resided in the labor the author had “mixed” with it. This divergence in theoretical basis for the property then led to the creation of two differing conceptions of authorship, one viewing the author as primarily a creator and the other viewing the author as primarily a disseminator. (This distinction, often operating in the background of opposing copyright arguments with each figuratively “haunting” the opposing side, has ever since plagued English and American copyright law, making it one of the most unpredictable of legal fields). The former system, the author-as-creator perspective, came to defend the author’s “moral rights” (called in France “le droit moral”) and the latter, the author-as-disseminator perspective, came to defend the perspective of literary property viewed as a vendible product that deserved protection because of the effort that had gone into its production. The former perspective stressed the settling aspects of iterability, while the latter stressed alienation and the breaking function. However, it should be noted that the Kantian or Hegelian (personality) and Lockean (labor) views of the grounding for the ownership of literary property interanimate and influence each other much more than is usually acknowledged by copyright historians, as noted in an intriguing study by Brown, who, writing of American scholars, comments that they largely have an “idealist framework” having “achieved a near-consensus, attributing differences to national variations on Enlightenment themes, in which Scottish, English and American thought more closely embraced the author as an individual in the market, whereas French thinking emphasized personal genius as resulting from a social process of Enlightenment and thus conceived literary property law as an encouragement for writers to serve the public good” (232–33). Extending his call for more nuance in copyright histories, Brown notes that the concepts of “droit d’auteur,” “droits d’auteur,” and “propriété littéraire” changed valence in significant and important ways after the Revolution (230–35). Then of course there is the interanimation in the other direction to be considered: for Locke’s influence on France, see Hutchinson.
voiced by Chief Justice Mansfield: “It has all along been expressly admit-
ted, ‘that, by the common law, an author is intitled to the copy [copyright]
of his work until it has been once printed and published by his authority’”
(Millar v. Taylor 251). Mansfield here relies on the settling function of
iterability—or whatever that element is that is seemingly more automati-
cally evident in the connection between author and manuscript than author
and published book—to help him defend the author’s tie to the published
work (not realizing the question-begging nature of his own logic here). The
fundamental proposition on which Mansfield’s analysis is based, that the
settling function is conclusively sealed off—and thus protected—from the
breaking function, allows for the breeding of monsters.

However, both Kant and the judges neglect to adequately address what
it is that might be coming in between, might be coming to disrupt their
chosen seemingly-hermetically-sealed connections between the author and
his will/speech or unpublished manuscript. Both parties ignore the funda-
mental question that their analyses would seem to be posing: how can an
emanation of the will possibly come to be alienated? Mansfield does not
seem to see the contradiction in his extrapolating his argument of a consis-
tent tie extending from undeniably-owned manuscript to unstably-owned

35. The acknowledgment of the unpublished manuscript as the incontestable property of the
author having been of particular use to him, Mansfield paid that issue a great deal of attention in his
decisions. In holding over Tonson v. Collins for a second hearing en banc, he delineated as the first of
the two types of Chancery cases that he desired the justices and counsel to look into in the interim
those cases “where there hath been no printing or publication at all. The Statute of Queen Anne seems
evidently to distinguish this from other cases” (173; emphasis added). It is difficult to pinpoint exactly
to what section of the Statute Mansfield refers as there is no mention of the ownership of manuscripts
in that document. Provision II of the Act (An Act for the Encouragement of Learning 8 Anne c. 19
[1709]), dictating proper registry of the title of the manuscript in the Stationer’s Register as necessary
to a claim to the Statute’s protections, is vague in its use of the important term “secured,” that clause
being evidently designed to make “some provision . . . whereby the property in every such book, as is
intended by this act to be secured to [secured to?] the proprietor or proprietors thereof, may be ascer-
tained” (rpt. in Patry, Copyright Law 3:1462; emphasis added). One is prompted to wonder whether
it is a property already in the person that is being defended here or a property that is first being, say,
“vested” in the person and then defended. Mark Rose writes, “The act, however, is inconsistent: al-
though ‘vesting’ is used in the title, ‘securing’ is employed in the preamble to the second section. . .
Later in the century the proponents of perpetual copyright would seize on this inconsistency and
argue that the use of ‘securing’ in the body of the act had more force than the use of ‘vesting’ in the
title” (Authors 46n11). The issue of the reversion of copyright to the author if he or she should still
be living at the end of the first fourteen year term, referred to in Provision XI of the Statute, suggests
perhaps more forcefully than anything else in the document the strong proprietary tie between au-
thor and manuscript upon which Mansfield’s statement relies. But this is all beside the point as both
of these arguments would have been difficult to make, and they do not at all seem consonant with
Mansfield’s peremptory and summary tone in his use of the word “evidently” in his assertion.

36. Collins will consider this situation when in No Name he has Michael Vanstone ignore the
clear intention expressed in his brother Andrew’s no longer effective will.
published book, the latter being a situation that clearly is continually failing and continually requiring stronger and stronger rhetorical (even ideological) assertions behind it to keep it propped up, with, at one point, Mansfield going so far as to peremptorily declare that the author by publishing his literary work “does not mean to make it common: and if the law says ‘he ought to have the copy after publication,’ it is a several property, easily protected, ascertained, and secured” (Millar v. Taylor 253). Literary property, subject as it is to the breaking function of iterability, as Yates—let alone Collins and Derrida—knows only too well, can never be easily “secured,” and certainly should not be characterized by a reasonable observer as such.

In the same way, Kant, that famously thorough thinker, does not touch on the question of how it comes about that a personal positive right—also a manifestation of the “will,” so to speak that is so closely allied to the “self” as to almost be that entity—can ever possibly through book piracy be “alienated”—properly or improperly being beside the point. Not surprisingly, I find this paradox (Kant’s conceptualization of an extension of the will that nevertheless requires defense from alienation) to be evidence of iterability’s conflicted nature showing through in his thinking.

These issues were left unexplored by the eighteenth-century commentators. However, I believe Collins, writing in the more “progressive” nineteenth century—a century less beholding to a simplistic Enlightenment understanding of anti-paradoxical progress—to be moving toward their elucidation in his unified novel series. He seems to sense—perhaps having been motivated by the dissatisfaction remaining after his earlier attempts to ignore or eliminate the breaking function in Basil and The Woman in White—the presence of a paradox of degree needing to be dealt with. At a certain point in his project (most likely during the formulation and early composition stage of No Name), Collins intuited that in actual fact, the one-to-one and the one-to-many systems of literary reference are not in strict opposition. There always exists the possibility for the singular situation to turn into polyvalence (No Name) and for polyvalence to turn into singularity through structural manipulation (The Moonstone). The possibility always exists for the two arenas to communicate with one another. Such communicability is inherent in the nature of the paradox of degree characterizing iterability. Therefore, alienation in the literary realm is always possible and is—because the paradox-of-kind illusion continually re-seduces—always surprising. A sort of constant “Et tu, Brute?” situation is set up by the workings of language that Collins would be happy to sensationally exploit, as we will see, in his last three masterpieces.
The Disruption Prior to Publication

The debaters in the 1700s, Kant included, fail to formulate truly fundamental critiques and simply move on from the significant questions. Much of this lack of theoretical force is the result of the red herring of publication improperly drawing away these thinkers’ attention. Following Mansfield’s lead, Alexander Wedderburn, counsel for Becket in *Donaldson v. Becket*, in an address delivered before the House of Lords, uncomplicatedly offers the author’s ownership of the manuscript as post-publication justification of ownership:

as it had been admitted on all hands, that an author had an interest or property in his own manuscript previous to publication; he desired to know, who could have a greater claim to it afterwards. It was an author’s dominion over his ideas that gave him his property in his manuscript originally, and nothing but a transfer of that dominion or right of disposal could take it away. It was absurd to imagine, that either a sale, a loan, or a gift of a book, carried with it an implied right of multiplying copies . . . it could not be conceived, that when five shillings were paid for a book, the seller meant to transfer a right of gaining one hundred pounds: every man must feel to the contrary, and confess the absurdity of such an argument. ("Arguments of Counsel" 124)

Completely given over to the hegemony of settling, both Wedderburn and Mansfield see in the unpublished manuscript a safe, physical manifestation of the solid tie between the author and the work. Once the pre-publication right is granted, that is, once the issue of initial settling is itself seemingly settled, the substantive question becomes, what effect, if any, does publication have on that ownership? The answer, as the judges arguing against Yates are quick to point out, has to be none, given that there is no difference, from a theoretical perspective, between a text’s pre- and post-publication manifestations. And in that last contention they are completely on the side of truth (as well as completely at odds with themselves, that is, with their initial project of justifying a connection—unpublished manuscript/published book—that would, apparently, seem to have needed no justification).

Yates correctly senses the existence of the breaking function, and the need to acknowledge its post-publication effects, but, no more than a postmodernist theorist in embryo, he pulls back from describing the unpublished manuscript also as somewhat out of the author’s control. He cannot
envision alienation, specifically the lack of a unified intention, to be existing in the immediate, unpublished iterable utterance. Thus, he is forced into a position of self-contradiction upon his conceding that that private manuscript focused on so persistently by his opponents incontestably is the author’s property (all the better to set up the contrast that he wishes to exploit with regard to the conclusively-alienating post-publication stage). Acceding to the contention that a limited lending of the manuscript can take place without the eventuation of any undue effect on the author’s right, Yates remarks,

If the author had not published his work at all, but only lent it to a particular person, he might have enjoined that particular person, “that he should only peruse it”; because, in that case, the author’s copy is his own; and the party to whom it is lent contracts to observe the conditions of the loan: but when the author makes a general publication of his work, he throws it open to all mankind. ([Millar v. Taylor] 234; emphasis added)

Yates had also proposed this distinction seven years earlier in [Tonson v. Collins]. Pouncing on it in that instance, Blackstone had contended that if a right of ownership was allowed in the case of unpublished manuscripts, it necessarily had also to be allowed in the case of the books printed from those manuscripts: “Printing is no other than an art of speedily transcribing. What therefore holds with respect to manuscripts is equally true of printing” ([Tonson v. Collins] 181). Hitting on the same vein, Mansfield in 1769 asks, “Does a transfer of paper upon which it is printed, necessarily transfer the copy [i.e. copyright], more than the transfer of paper upon which the book is written?” ([Millar v. Taylor] 253). Mansfield is suggesting, through his eminently sensible question, that if there is such a right before publication there should be one after it also, the distinction between the two states being in his eyes untenable (dismissing at one go both all future postmodern schools of thought viewing the pre-publication text as not fully in the author’s control as well as all schools of thought viewing copyright as fundamentally a publisher’s right).

Given that printing and transcribing by hand both actuate iterability to the same extent (see Blackstone’s sensible equation above: “Printing is no other than an art of speedily transcribing”), Mansfield is on a theoretical level correct to dismiss the distinction between the manuscript and book, but the conclusion he should be drawing from this dismissal, I would argue, is not that the author’s ownership bleeds over into the domain of post-publication but that the lack of it extends back into the pre-publication
stage. Mansfield should be concluding not only that there is no inherent perpetual authorial proprietary right in the published text but also that there is not one—or more precisely not the degree of conclusive “control” implied by such a right—in the unpublished manuscript. In other words, contagious alienation rather than contagious reification should be the direction in which this debate moves. However, the time not having been propitious for such “poststructuralist” conceptualizations, the majority of the judges in *Millar v. Taylor*, like Walter Hartright in the Tombstone Scene, would dedicate themselves to restoring proper order to what had in their opinion become a seemingly-unruly (and patently unreasonable) discussion.

The debate over literary property at this time never reaches the foundational level of its actual object of inquiry, coming, as it does, to be sidetracked by an excessive interest in the moment of publication, as opposed to that of composition, as well as by the question of what should and should not be the proper grounding (statute? labor? personality?) for

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37. See Rose writing in *Authors and Owners* that the promulgation of the representation of the author as proprietor in the three major literary property cases “was dependent on the classical liberal discourse of property as represented, most famously, by John Locke’s notion of the origins of property in acts of appropriation from the general state of nature” (5). In these cases the author’s ownership of the manuscript was often justified by the labor that he had “mixed” with it in the process of its creation. This justification proceeded from Locke’s conception of the individual’s right to his own person, as outlined in his *Two Treatises of Government*: “[E]very man has a property in his own person. . . . The labour of his body and the work of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided and left it in, he hath mixed his labour with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his property. It being by him removed from the common state nature hath placed it in, in hath by his labour something annexed to it that excludes the common right of other men” (287–88). This view of labor as the basis for literary ownership was put forward in the debates first by William Blackstone who cited Locke in his argument during the rehearing of *Tonson v. Collins* in 1762 as a means of rendering ownership of ideas as solid as ownership of land: “Locke on Government, part 2, c. 5, same right of occupancy in ideas, as in a field, a tree, or a stone” (*Tonson v. Collins* 180). (Yates was the counsel arguing against Blackstone in that hearing.) Blackstone contended, “it would be unjust, to make him a sharer in the reward, who has been no sharer in the labour” (180). He similarly collapsed material and immaterial property when he argued, “Property may with equal reason be acquired by mental, as by bodily labour” (180). Indeed, the analogy between texts and tangible objects would come full circle as in his famous *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765–69) Blackstone would be making the literary work exemplary of (once solely tangible) “occupancy”: “There is still another species of property, which, being grounded on labour and invention, is more properly reducible to the head of occupancy than any other; since the right of occupancy itself is supposed by Mr Locke, and many others, to be founded on the personal labour of the occupant. And this is the right which an author may be supposed to have in his own original literary compositions: so that no other person without his leave may publish or make profit of his copies” (2:405). However, the paradoxical nature of iterability shows that such an “occupancy” is very unstable (or, more precisely, it is an occupancy manifesting a paradox of degree between its effects of stability and instability).

38. The debate in England, though finding the ownership of the work often to be based on the author’s labor, also occasionally follows a foundation-in-personality line. For example, Justice Aston
the “property” inherent in a literary composition. To be fair, it is difficult to picture the English judges in 1769 formulating the concept of “iterability” and seriously grappling with its conflicted workings (or even the philosophers publishing in Berlin around the same time. Far from considering the effects of iterability’s conflicted character, let alone the issue of publication’s screening of the actual moment of loss of control, the House of Lords ends the English discussion in 1774 on practical political grounds, extinguishing in Donaldson v. Becket—as a means of undoing the London booksellers’ literary “monopolies”—the author’s perpetual copyright over the published work. Deciding in Yates’s favor—at least to the extent that perpetual copyright is denied—but without any real acknowledgment of even his inchoate philosophical complications, the Lords allow politics to

in Millar v. Taylor suggests that the right to keep the manuscript back from publication stems from the author’s role as originator: “there is a material difference in favour of this sort of property, from that gained by occupancy. . . . For, this is originally the author’s: and, therefore, unless rendered common by his own act and full consent, it ought still to remain his” (221; emphasis added). Later, he implies again that the work is consonant with the author’s identity: “I do not know, nor can I comprehend any property more emphatically a man’s own, nay, more incapable of being mistaken, than his literary works” (224). In Tonson v. Collins (1762), Counselor Yates allows for a personality basis when he remarks of the situation in which a printer might print a private manuscript without the consent of the owner, “The piratical printer is here guilty of a double wrong:—in publishing private manuscripts without the leave of the owner; and in anticipating the profits of the first publication, to which, I acknowledge that the author is entitled” (187). Yates’s split here in the piratical printer’s “double wrong” of violating the right of the owner and of enjoying the profits of first publication suggests that the ownership of the manuscript is not based solely on the labor of the author since it is not based solely on the profits arising from that labor. That ownership must therefore be based also on something else. While Yates’s later comments in the debates indicate that he did not acknowledge the text to be a fundamental manifestation of the author’s personality or identity, nevertheless, he seems here to be alluding to a strong inherent proprietary tie between author and manuscript. Indeed, he seems almost to be proposing a type of right to privacy for the unpublished author in his significant use of the word “private” in the phrase “publishing private manuscripts without the leave of the owner.” These types of allusions to some basis besides labor for the author’s claim can be found not only in the judicial opinions but also in private discussions held at the time. For instance, James Boswell, that quintessential disseminator of another person’s bon mots, tells us that at a dinner on 8 May 1773 Samuel Johnson discoursed on the subject of literary property: “There seems (said he), to be in authours a stronger right of property than that by occupancy; a metaphysical right, a right, as it were, of creation, which should from its nature be perpetual; but the consent of nations is against it, and indeed reason and the interests of learning are against it; for were it to be perpetual, no book, however useful, could be universally diffused amongst mankind, should the proprietor take it into his head to restrain its circulation. . . . For the general good of the world, therefore, whatever valuable work has once been created by an authour, and issued out by him, should be understood as no longer in his power, but as belonging to the publick; at the same time the authour is entitled to an adequate reward. This he should have by the exclusive right to his work for a considerable number of years” (2:259). Johnson’s metaphysical right of creation coincides well with the conception of a literary property founded on the viewing of the work as an emanation of the author’s personality. The stark contrast between this pre-publication metaphysical right of creation and Yates’s post-publication “gift to the public” (Tonson v. Collins 188) marks out the boundaries of the dispute.
trump philosophy, deciding that the Statute of Anne had back in 1710 extinguished any common-law perpetual right. The world not being ready for postmodern “illogic” in the late 1700s, England will have to wait for the publication of Collins’s *The Moonstone*, if not also Derrida’s “Signature Event Context,” among other “postmodern” and “poststructuralist” works, before it can come to be situated in a position from which it can possibly properly grapple with linguistic iterability.

From Derrida’s perspective, the unpublished manuscript, like the published one, is vulnerable to alienation, as is even, *pace* Kant, ownership based on books viewed as “speeches” to the public or simply ownership based on books seen as manifestations of the author’s personality. Iterability allows alienation-inviting copies (even only evanescent, mental ones) to be created uncontrollably from the absolute beginning. That proliferation of copies then results in a proliferation of meanings as the same words appearing in different contexts are inevitably going to come to mean different things. Derrida writes,

> [B]y virtue of its essential iterability, a written syntagma can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted or given without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning, if not all possibility of “communicating,” precisely. One can perhaps come to recognize other possibilities in it by inscribing it or *grafting* it onto other chains. No context can entirely enclose it. Nor any code, the code here being both the possibility and impossibility of writing, of its essential iterability (repetition/alterity) . . .

39. Rose writes, “the House of Lords had long been antipathetic to the London booksellers’ monopolies, and the outcome in *Donaldson v. Becket* was consistent with the House’s previous treatment of copyright questions. But on what basis did the peers make their determination? What understanding of the nature of copyright did they adopt? Were they persuaded that there never was a common-law right? Or did they believe that there was but that it ended with publication? Or that it was taken away by the statute? . . . Some peers may have voted on the basis of legal theory, but many others, I suspect, were less concerned with the basis than with the result. Thus the peers gave an answer to the literary-property question, but they did not provide a rationale. . . . [W]hat the House of Lords did in *Donaldson v. Becket* was finally no more than to declare by authority that copyright henceforth would be limited in term” (*Authors* 102–3). Indeed, the roles and rights of the author have never been clearly elucidated, at a theoretical level, in legal discourse. A look at the debates held in England in the eighteenth-century continuing down to our own day through cases such as the 9th Circuit’s decision in *A&M Records v. Napster* (2001) and the Supreme Court’s decisions in the cases of *Eldred v. Ashcroft* (2003) and *MGM Studios v. Grokster* (2005) shows a repeated evasion of the complicated territory of the question of “the author” for the more readily traversable practical terrains of economics and politics (certainly the situation in the eighteenth-century cases), manifesting themselves, for instance, in questions of adequate creators’ incentives or the proper duration of corporate monopolies.
Every sign, linguistic or nonlinguistic, spoken or written . . . can be cited, put between quotation marks; in so doing it can break with every given context, engendering an infinity of new contexts in a manner which is absolutely illimitable [italics added]. This does not imply that the mark is valid outside of a context, but on the contrary that there are only contexts without any center or absolute anchoring [ancrage]. This citationality, this duplication or duplicity, this iterability of the mark is neither an accident nor an anomaly, it is that (normal/abnormal) without which a mark could not even have a function called “normal.” (“Signature Event Context” 9 and 12)

Iterability, an aspect founding to an equal extent both writing and speech, being the actual topic in question, these two contexts are, not surprisingly, indistinct for Derrida—“Every sign . . . spoken or written . . . can be cited.” The stark difference between Derrida’s thinking and that of the late eighteenth century legal theorists indicates a certain progress (a “progress” undoubtedly both heart-warming and intensely aggravating at the same time for the Enlightenment-influenced scholar in us all) having been made over the last two centuries with regard to the struggle for intellectual dominion between sequential logic and (Renaissance) paradox.

The situation in the eighteenth century is one of the undeniable hegemony of the former over the latter. In 1762, Blackstone argues that the author, while being substituted for by words in as many as a hundred different contexts, retains, apparently, all of the force of his original intention:

Consider writing, 1st, as an assistant to the memory; 2dly, as a means of conveying sentiment to distant times and places. In neither of these lights does the writer relinquish his title of making profits by his works; except that, when he has once written and published, he gives up the exclusive privilege of reciting to the ear; since, by parting with his manuscript, he has constituted a substitute in his stead, which speaks perpetually to the eyes of every reader. But, though he has given out one or a hundred copies, has constituted one or a hundred substitutes to speak for him, yet no man has a right to multiply those copies, to make a thousand substitutes instead of one; especially, if any gain is to arise from such multiplication. (Tonson v. Collins 181)

According to Blackstone, who, as a means of avoiding paradox and maintaining logical progress, clearly sees one-to-one correspondences as far as the horizon (both in space and time), the manuscript speaks exactly what the author intends, as do the hundred subsequent copies of it, regardless of the
contexts in which they may end up. On the other hand, for Derrida there is, in a sense, full-scale “publication,” with all its attendant corruptions and disruptions, as soon as there is formulation in language, whether that formulation takes place on paper or merely cloudily in the mind. There is no getting away, even at the most fundamental levels of identity constitution, from this alienation of intention. Operating in their inexorable, machine-like manner, linguistic iterability’s effects are always there, before any volition can get underway on behalf of the multiple possible subsequent voluntary acts of relinquishment.40

The Relentless Pursuit of Breaking in Collins’s Major Phase

The initial proliferation of copies commencing from the moment a repeatable trace or mark is created, iterability has the potential not only for absenting one from one’s text but also from oneself (or, perhaps more properly, one’s self). Insofar as one thinks in language, that is, insofar as one’s consciousness is based in recitable and recontextualizable traces, “one” is absented from “the self,” (or, better, “the” self). To the extent that it relies on language as the means of expressing, and perhaps founding, itself, “the identity” thus becomes manifold or split. It is no longer homogenous. Late in his essay when he turns his critique toward the lack of self-presence characterizing the writing of the signature, Derrida can be seen to be moving toward these propositions, that is, toward a critique of the notion of the singular, unified consciousness. He writes, “By no means do I draw the conclusion that there is no relative specificity of effects of consciousness, or of effects of speech. . . . It is simply that those effects do not exclude what is generally opposed to them, term by term; on the contrary, they presuppose it, in an asymmetrical way, as the general space of their possibility” (“Signature Event Context” 19). As an indication of the fundamental nature of this lack of unity, Derrida has earlier called iterability the “structural unconsciousness” of language (18). He notes that that most adamant testimony to the presence of consciousness, the signature, is necessarily also split by iterability: “to be readable, a signature must have a repeatable, iterable, imitable form; it must be able to be detached from the present and singular intention of its production. It is this sameness which, by corrupting its identity and

40. Derrida often comments on the “mechanistic” aspects of iterability. See, for example, his *Archive Fever; Grammatology* 79; “Psyche” 20; *Paper Machine*; and “Typewriter Ribbon.”
singularity, divides [the signature’s] seal” (20; emphasis added). Similarly, in a response to a question about this passage he comments,

Austin and along with him common sense . . . see the signature as the written equivalent to the source event of discourse. [It’s believed that] when a signature is affixed somewhere, the origin of discourse, of written discourse in this case, is in some way stapled, marked, identifiable, and in some sense, event-like, absolutely singular. . . . [But] [t]here is no pure signature event, no pure signature. Like every event of discourse or of writing, a signature is in itself dubitable, imitable, and, therefore, falsifiable. And a theory of the signature that does not take account of this falsifiability can in no way render an account of what can be the so-called authentic effect of the signature. (Derrida and Ricoeur 142–43)

It is not just the signature’s, but rather also the identity’s, singularity that is here being contested and shown to be eminently corruptible through counterfeiting.

This thinking is mirrored in Collins’s The Moonstone, particularly in the already-remarked paradox of self-alienation that characterizes Franklin Blake’s famous self-realization, “I had discovered Myself as the Thief” (359). (The possible continuation here of “the Thief [of the Moonstone/The Moonstone]” puts me in mind of Derrida’s line, “We must be several in order to write” [“Freud” 226]). However, Collins does not move immediately from general publication (writing to be read by others), and the difficulties attendant upon that act, to internal discourse (“talking to oneself,” in a sense) and its particular difficulties. He comes only gradually to dismantle the system (we will be following the gradations in this dismantling in the chapters to come) by undoing the standard view of the workings of linguistic iterability and communication. In Basil, he seems to consider breaking to be avoidable, attempting to tie rhetorically Basil’s

41. The author’s “intention” in giving “consent” to a particular publisher to bring out his/her work is of central concern in the preamble to the Statute of Anne’s second provision: “And whereas many persons may through ignorance offend against this Act, unless some provision be made whereby the property in every such book, as is intended by this Act to be secured to the proprietor or proprietors thereof, may be ascertained, as likewise the consent of such proprietor or proprietors for the printing or reprinting of such book or books may from time to time be known . . . nothing in this Act contained shall be construed to extend to subject any bookseller . . . to the . . . penalties therein mentioned, for or by reason of the printing or reprinting of any book or books without such consent . . . unless the title to the copy of such book or books hereafter published shall, before such publication, be entered in the register-book of the company of Stationers, in such manner as hath been usual” (rpt. in Patry, Copyright Law 3:1462). The printer’s entry of the title of the book in the Stationers Register thus becomes effectively the sign of the author’s “consent”—effectively the author’s signature on the contract—to allow that particular printer to publish his work.
manuscript to land in order to defend against that more disquieting function’s disturbances. In *The Woman in White*, having Laura Fairlie’s body’s difficulties in matching up with her largely textual identity stand in for the vulnerable author–work tie, Collins acknowledges, but ultimately denies, the possible threat posed by the breaking function to the ownership of (or copyright in) the literary work. Then, having gone over to breaking, in *No Name* he shows the system of would-be one-to-one correspondence to be an unfairly privileged subcategory of the one-to-many correspondences of his particular variety of sensation fiction, that latter system, in the form of citation, apparently always available (and always waiting) to alienate the will from the deed. In *Armadale* he revises the positions he had adopted in *Basil* and *The Woman in White*, this time delegitimizing the solidity of the published text and internalizing the threat of alienation inherent in the process of publication. Thus, by the time he comes to write *The Moonstone*, his thought has no final place of refuge in subterfuge and must finally confront head-on the threat posed by the breaking function to the integrity of the supposedly unified authorial psyche and the supposedly unified intentions emanating from it. By the end of his unified novel series Collins will have come to teach himself that one’s iterable traces do and do not mean what one had intended them to mean—one’s intention to keep control of one’s published text is and is not going to be effective—and as a result one ends up being and not being oneself. The writer in a sense ends up, as a result of iterability, working both for and against him- or herself at the same time. The only way to insert a gap into the operations of iterability in order to allow purchase on and manipulation of its elements (what Yates had unsuccessfully attempted and what we will see Collins succeeding at) is to utilize the author-as-creator/author-as-disseminator distinction that had been lying dormant at the basis of copyright. This will be Collins’s strategy in his culminating, masterful avoidance, in his last major work, of the seemingly-unavoidable trap of self-alienation at the hands of iterability.

**The Temptation** to construct a historical narrative of influence is strong here, especially given the current fashionability of New Historical inquiry.\(^{42}\) However, that modishness notwithstanding, I believe that history in this situation is trumped by theory, and not vice versa.\(^{43}\) In other words, while

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\(^{42}\) See the beginning of Chapter 3 for a discussion of this fashionability.

\(^{43}\) Similarly, Marxist “materialism” is trumped by Hegelian idealism. As a direct result of its particularly materialistic bearings, Marxist critique, in one of its primary failings, must continually fail to assess iterability correctly.
the legal discourse of the late 1700s could be understood to have directly “informed” the understanding of copyright for the legal culture of the era in which Collins is writing, that is, while the Yates–Mansfield debate could be seen to suggest a possible historical “source” for Collins’s conflicted understanding of what it means to be the author and “owner” of his works in mid-nineteenth century England, that is not the direction in which this inquiry will be traveling.

Given that iterability is a timeless component of the trace-making faculty and that its workings violate “logic,” it must come as no surprise that its difficulties should be surfacing every now and again at particular historical moments and be influencing significant historical constructs (constructs that then can sometimes come to be retroactively turned back on those workings, obscuring iterability through having screened it with the historical processes of which it itself was the cause rather than the effect). It is unnecessary in this case to enlist such time-bound or time-associated elements as those that gather themselves together (invariably too vaguely) under the umbrella term “historical influence.” That is, the connection between the different historical moments of Yates and Collins, I am arguing, is more adventitious than causal. What might look like a series of “motivated,” historical-influence-related eruptions of considerations of iterability over the course of intellectual history turn out simply to be structurally connected, as opposed to causally-connected, instances of the theoretical underpinnings of language making themselves felt every now and again, until they are (always unsta-bly) brought under control, usually through peremptory, “common sensical” dismissal. Iterability’s theoretical conflict being prone to surface on occasion, it should come as no surprise that Collins and Yates should both feel the need to honor—in their own particular ways, depending on the intellectual openness of themselves, their eras, and their societies—the conflict at the heart of the linguistic medium.

Collins’s multi-volume unified novel series is a progressive seventeen-year-long exploration by one of the most precise of Victorian authors into the various ways in which the seemingly-inextricably-intertwined establishment and erosion of textual control can each be sustained and/or counteracted through rhetorical and strategic manipulations. His major fictions when looked at as a whole are seen to transition from manifesting a respect for a solidity of representation (the solid connection between signifier and signified, as well as its direct corollary the strong author–work tie) to coming, invariably shockingly, to acknowledge the breaking function of iterability. As they move along this trajectory, they write themselves past the simplistic “legal” standpoint, a perspective outlined in an interview by Derrida:
So I can say, “Well, the one who said ‘I do’ is someone in me but there is another one and another one and another one and I’m more than one.” And what can you object to this? But the legal system implies that [when] . . . the legal subject . . . says “yes,” it’s “yes,” there is no other one saying “no.” . . . Language is such that we say something else. We always say something other than what we say. . . . If you close this possibility then there is no language anymore, there is no language. So, to have the possibility of the authentic, sincere and full meaning of what one says, the possibility of the failure, or of the lie, or of something else, must remain open. That’s the structure of language. (“Following Theory” 43–44)

Collins’s shadowy potential doppelganger always waiting in the wings in his dramatic narratives represents the shadow-like semi-presence—the “other one” always haunting the would-be unified “one”—exemplified in Derrida’s remarks here. That semi-presence is described well by the concept of “hauntology,” mentioned in his Specters of Marx, a concept lying at the basis of the identity composed of iterable markers. This term is intended to denote a mix of “haunting” and “ontology” (Derrida, Specters 50–51). The always available possibility for an unexpected Woman in White potentially to be stealing away our individual identities—through, for example, real-world piracies stealing away our publications’ essences (or at least profits)—thus “haunts” us all continually and forever.