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Hybrid Masculinity: Between Gentlemanliness and Psychopathy in Caroline Clive's Sensation Novel *Paul Ferroll: A Tale*

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Abstract. Although the popularity of *Paul Ferroll* by Caroline Clive has waned considerably since its first publication in 1855, the book still deserves critical attention not only for being an antecedent of sensation fiction mastered by Collins, Braddon or Wood, but also for its exceptional portrayal of Victorian masculinity exemplified by the eponymous character. At first glance, Mr. Ferroll seems to be the paragon of gentlemanly virtues, in both public and domestic milieus. Nevertheless, under the mask of respectability and benevolence there lurks a heinous villain, who terrorizes his family, manipulates other people, delights in hazard and kills in cold blood for his self-serving ends. John Sutherland (1989, 133) calls Paul Ferroll "the most unusual criminal hero of the Victorian period," reflecting at the same time considerable controversy that the novel aroused among readers, puzzled by this equivocal and morally dubious construction of masculinity. The unique blend of gentlemanliness and moral debasement stems from the fact that, in light of modern psychology, the protagonist exhibits symptoms of psychopathic personality. Caroline Clive's text may be regarded as an amateur study of how a Victorian psychopath could assert his manliness in society obsessed with strict moral codes and instructive approach towards gender enactment. A careful scrutiny of the protagonist's demeanor underpinned by modern psychological concepts provides convincing evidence that *Paul Ferroll* may be called not only an undeservedly forgotten forerunner of sensation fiction, but also a pioneer (though unprofessional) text of criminal psychology.

Key words: Clive Caroline, psychopathy, gentleman, Victorian, sensation novel

Caroline Clive's debut as a novelist in 1855 was a kind of unexpected sensation. A minor author of religious pamphlets and middlebrow poems published a book that took both the audience and reviewers by storm. A critical commentary from the *Saturday Review* (January 12, 1856, 192) aptly illustrates the enthusiastic response to the text: "This idea is a capital hit. The novel is in its third edition. 'Strikingly original' – 'a

phenomenon in literature' – 'never to be forgotten' – 'grand and fearful force of contrast' – 'marvellous' – 'powerful effect' – 'faultless work of art' – 'admirable and almost awful power' – such are the praises of an applauding press. We beg to add the humble tribute of our homage." The phenomenal success of *Paul Ferroll: A Tale* was mainly caused by the unprecedented and highly ambivalent construction of the eponymous character, who despite his genteel origin and manners, turns out to be a callous murderer. The aura of fascination commingled with repulsion exuded by the protagonist is enhanced by the detached, clinical voice of the narrator, who never expresses disapproval of Ferroll's conduct. Caroline Clive tries to be an objective story teller and leaves the final judgement entirely to the reader. As Adeline Sergeant (1897, 172) notes, the writer demonstrates a particular case of human nature "neither diagnosing it like a physician, nor analysing it like a priest." Indeed, the fact that the culprit gets away with his crimes, untouched by the sword of justice, added even more fuel to the fire. John Sutherland highlights (1989, 133) that Clive "produced the most unusual criminal hero of the Victorian period," paving the way for sensation fiction that flourished in the 1860s. Many critics have labelled the novel as a forerunner of the genre (e.g. Beller 2013, 12; Gavin 2008, vii; Edwards 2004; Sergeant 1897, 164), but some scholars have also indicated the writer's attempt at creating a complex psychological portraiture of a man, who can effectively cover his abnormal obsessions and antisocial behaviors with the mask of gentlemanliness. Ernest. A. Baker (1950, 107) calls Mrs. Clive a pioneer, "but in psychological fiction, which was a novelty then." This statement seems plausible, given the writer's explicit interest in mental disorders, criminal cases, and macabre themes. She is known to have gathered a collection of newspaper articles about homicides (Beller 2013, 15); furthermore, she also had a habit of reading her husband's letters concerning his work as governor of a mental hospital (Brackett and Gaydosik 2006, 338). Clive's fascination with criminal psychology may have found its reflection in the construction of Paul Ferroll, whose duplicitous personality bewildered contemporary readers. However, what the Victorians found puzzling may be accounted for by modern psychological theories, as the protagonist seems to exhibit a considerable number of symptoms characteristic of psychopathy. Thus the originality of the story may stem not from the deliberate violation of the Victorian custom of presenting protagonists as admirable heroes (Sergeant 1897, 172), but from the psychological complexity of the story and the riveting presentation of (what I propose to term as) hybrid masculinity, embracing a constellation of dangerous psychopathic traits disguised as commendable gentlemanly attributes.

According to Theodore Millon, Erik Simonsen, Morten Briket-Smith, and Robert D. Davis (1998, 28), "[p]sychopathy was the first personality disorder to be recognized in psychiatry." It is worth stressing that the beginnings of clinical studies of a mental disorder recognized today as psychopathy date back to the early nineteenth century. Philippe Pinel, a French physician, generally regarded as the precursor of the research, noticed that some of his patients performed impulsive and self-destructive acts, at the same time, being fully aware of the damaging effects of their behavior. In 1801 he coined the term *manie sans délire* ("insanity without delirium"), categorizing lack of impaired reasoning power as a syndrome of the disorder (in Kiehl and Lushing 2014). Similar examples of abnormal, socially harmful reactions in people with lucid thinking were noted by one of the founding fathers of American psychiatry, Benjamin Rush. In his seminal work *Medical Inquiries and Observations, Upon the Diseases of the Mind* (1812) he examines "cases of innate, preternatural moral depravity" probably resulting from

"defective organization in those parts of the body, which are occupied by the moral faculties of the mind" (Rush 1830, 358). Unlike Pinel, Rush applied moral principles to the appraisal of the offenders' mental condition, indicating that their behavior bears signs of insanity particularly when examined in light of "human or divine laws" (358). The ethical implications of the disease were further investigated by the acclaimed English alienist, James Cowles Prichard, who in *Treatise on Insanity and Other Disorders Affecting the Mind* (1837, 16) defined the concept of "moral insanity." His construal refers to "madness consisting in a morbid perversion of the natural feelings, affections, inclinations, temper, habits, moral dispositions, and natural impulses without any remarkable disorder or defect of the intellect or knowing and reasoning faculties, and particularly without any insane illusion or hallucination." At the end of the nineteenth century the strong emphasis on the moral depravity of people plagued by such pathologies was abandoned by leading psychiatrists, like Julius Ludwig Koch, who in *Die Psychopathischen Minderwertigkeiten* [*The Psychopathic Inferiorities*] (1891) discarded Prichard's notion of "moral insanity" and implemented the label "psychopathic inferiority" to reflect the physiological etiology of brain malfunctions responsible for the condition (in Skeem *et al.* 2011, 99). The validity of Koch's designation was later upheld in twentieth-century psychiatry.

Although there is no hard evidence that Caroline Clive was familiar with the early theories about psychopathy, *nota bene* formulated during her lifetime, her peculiar curiosity about criminology might have inspired her to produce a character whose personality was modelled on contemporary clinical and press reports of 'morally insane' villains. No matter whether the creation was scientifically informed or coincidental, Paul Ferroll possesses a number of traits that could by recognized as typical of psychopathy, according to recent measuring methods, like the widely used Psychopathy Checklist—Revised (PCL-R), introduced by Robert D. Hare in 1991. There is little doubt that the protagonist exhibits a threatening and yet powerful fusion of admirable and pernicious features, which could render him both an idol and monster in the eyes of a wide audience. The narrator indicates that "[i]t was as if he were two men" (Clive 2008, 224), suggesting the duplicity of his mental structure, so similar to the well-masked antisocial behavior of psychopaths.

Modern conceptualizations of psychopathy are based to a considerable extent on Hervey Cleckley's ideas delineated in his ground-breaking study *The Mask of Sanity* (1941). The American psychiatrist pays attention to the fact that psychopaths are generally capable of making a positive impression of sociable, clever and independent people, covering thus their pathological tendencies; he compares them to "a subtly constructed reflex machine which can mimic the human personality perfectly" (Cleckley 1988, 369). Cleckley's examination of the disorder has served as a signpost for other clinicians, including Robert D. Hare, who codified a new system of evaluating psychopathic traits. Lauded as "the gold standard for the assessment of psychopathy" (Acheson 2005, 430), Psychopathic Checklist–Revised (PCL-R) remains the most widely accepted instrument in research on psychopathy nowadays (Hare and Neumann 2009, 792). The metric is divided into two item subsets: an interpersonal-affective factor (referring to interpersonal relations and emotional aspects) and an antisocial factor (concerning lifestyle and antisocial behavior aspects) (Skeem *et al*. 2011, 101). The 20-item symptom rating scale allows to estimate the degree of psychopathy of tested individuals and requires taking into consideration the following facets:

"Glibness/superficiality charm, Grandiose sense of self-worth, Pathological lying, Conning/manipulative, Lack of remorse or guilt, Shallow affect, Callousness/lack of empathy, Failure to accept responsibility for own actions, Need for stimulation/ proneness to boredom, Parasitic lifestyle, Lack of realistic long-term goals, Impulsivity, Irresponsibility, Poor behavioral controls, Early behavioral problems, Juvenile delinquency, Revocation of conditional release, Criminal versatility" (Hare and Neumann 2009, 793). The list is supplemented with two facets that do not belong to any of the major categories, i.e. "promiscuous sexual behaviour" and "many short-term marital relationships" (2009, 793). It should be added that people who comply with the prototypical picture of psychopath in about sixty-three percent (the rate for England and Scotland) may be already qualified as psychopaths (Hare *et al*. 2000, 625). Although Hare's PCL-R was designed to examine lawbreakers it may prove useful in analyzing criminal fictional figures, like Paul Ferroll, as in light of psychoanalytic literary criticism "characters in a text can be analyzed psychologically, as if they were real people" (Klarer 2004, 91). The case of Paul Ferroll is a thrilling subject of an inquiry constituting an exceptional combination of outward attributes classifiable as gentlemanly qualities and internal pathological inclinations, which may make Clive's book one of the first amateur literary portraits of psychopathy.

The first striking feature of the protagonist is the impression of respectability and authority that he conveys, which may indicate the first symptom of psychopathic personality, namely superficiality charm. At first glance, he is the paragon of manly virtues and epitome of the mid-Victorian gentleman. Both peers and common people praise his talents and personal deportment. In Lord Ewyas's opinion: "'[t]here is not so useful a man, so accomplished a man in the county" (Clive 2008, 60). What is more, he enjoys high esteem in London literary circles as a prominent writer (19-20), and is generally viewed as "an active member of all public business, a man of high intellectual reputation" (158). He possesses strong charisma that magnetizes both men and women. Lady Lucy's (his neighbor's) unconditional regard of for his accomplishments illustrates best how easily people succumb to his charm: ". . . half afraid, half fond of him, she knew how clever he was, how able to talk to everybody, and how valuable at her table, and in her affairs" (18). Apparently, he fits the definition of the gentleman presented in "The English Gentleman" article published in *The Spectator* (1845): "The English gentleman is brave – physically and morally. The English gentleman is veracious . . . decorous . . . humane. The English gentleman has a taste for literature and science. The English gentleman abhors ostentation . . ." (1845, 13). Nonetheless, the positive public image that he manages to build is merely shallow, for his strong personal appeal does not originate from inner qualities, but from the ability to manipulate and mislead others, which is indicative of psychopathic traits, according to PCL-R.

Paul Ferroll can trick people into thinking highly of him with utmost ease. For eighteen years he plays the role of a dependable, benevolent and prudent citizen and head of the family. Gradually, he subjugates his second wife, pretending to be an affectionate and protective husband. Elinor adores her spouse, completely ignorant of the predatory mental power he wields over her. Her diary entries reveal how blindly she accepts the man's domination and utter control of her life: "What a delightful companion he is – everything he has seen and done is reproduced for me, so that I and he become one as to the events and feelings of the day he has passed. All I have done, and am doing, is equally interesting to him. What I write, and what I read, what I sing, and whom I see;

what I think, will all come before us two again this happy evening." (Clive 2008, 43). The naïve woman virtually worships him, admitting that "[his] will was always an omnipotent will" (155). She is a mere puppet in his hands unconditionally submissive to his tyranny. Mrs. Ferroll even fears going away to visit their ill daughter, Janet, lest her absence might ignite his irritation: "I can't do that. I can't have him come home, and find me gone, without his saying go, to my going" (46). When she finally decides to leave to look after the suffering child, the protagonist is so envious of the attention given to their offspring and so determined to monopolize the object of his obsession (Mitchell 2022) that he considers getting infected or dying as effective methods of reaching his goal: "'I want Elinor most. I will fall ill to get Elinor'" (Clive 2008, 48). These unusual circumstances of his wife's absence, even worsened by lack of regular correspondence from her, set free a whole spectrum of deeply hidden negative emotions. In his journal he mentions: "evil," "black temper," "constant feeling of the want of a letter" and "being so cross and peremptory" (50). The bitter frustration finally explodes and he "set out galloping . . . it was piercingly cold," and he "rode straight into the Meer", taking "a great delight in swimming [his] horse across" (49). The growing tension leads to irrational and dangerous acts, which jeopardize his health and life, thus revealing proneness to impulsivity and irresponsibility enumerated in Psychopathic Checklist–Revised.

Apart from that, he molds his child's character in such a way that she becomes his most devoted slave. Since early childhood the girl is forced to get accustomed to the central, possessive position of the paterfamilias in the domestic sphere. She never experiences the feeling of being the apple in the father's eye. When she returns home after the aforementioned illness, she is neglected and ignored by the parent, who is interested solely in getting back his wife's solicitude, as the passage illustrates: "She fell at once back into her unimportance, and felt she was the object of least consequence in all the house" (Clive 2008, 52). Janet never dares to question her parent's rightfulness, always ready to carry out his wishes uncomplainingly and forgive even the blackest of sins, like murder, because "advice from him was to her immutable law" (224). The original conclusion of the story, when she arranges her convicted parent's escape from prison, reveals that the innocent girl has fallen victim to his vile maneuvers: "'Can you still love me, Janet?' said he. 'Love you? Oh yes – my father!'" (223). Both women live in a kind of fool's paradise deluded by Ferroll's feigned munificence and care.

The protagonist succeeds in hiding his true face not only from his family, whose judgement may be impaired due to their feelings, but also from other members of the local community. He manages to sail under false colors for eighteen years, maintaining excellent reputation among his neighbors, who, on top of that, want to nominate him as a parliamentary candidate. Representatives of the local gentry are mesmerized by his charisma to such an extent that they plan to obtain a pardon, after Paul Ferroll receives death sentence for unjustified killing of James Skenfirth, a working-class riot leader. In other people's eyes his uprightness is beyond a shadow of doubt; some of them even refuse to accept his admission of guilt: "'I did kill that man.' Oh not at all, Mr. Ferroll. I'm sure . . . oh nobody can think . . .'" (Clive 2008, 106). Nevertheless, the protagonist is too proud and self-confident to reach for a helping hand. He declines party invitations, offers of release on bail and proposals to obtain exemption for him with parallel determination and disregard. In addition, he demonstrates perfect nonchalance about public opinion: "'People! what is it to me what *people* think!' 'It is a great deal, when a man is going to stand his trial for life and death.' 'It don't matter. I will stand alone.'"

(85). This intention of depending on any but his own resources may be perceived as a sign of independence and self-help, two qualities highly celebrated by the mid-Victorians under Samuel Smiles's influence (Best 1985, 281), but his attitude may as well be indicative of excessive self-importance and the pathological sense of superiority termed by Dr. Hare (2009, 793) as "grandiose sense of self-worth."

His machinations are so effective also thanks to other psychopathic traits, namely shallow emotions as well as lack of empathy and remorse. He does not experience any pricks of conscience, when he takes advantage of people's trust and goodwill, for the need to gratify his desires is the primary motivation in life. Both in trivial affairs, like inducing Elinor to take a walk with him despite her illness and bad weather (Clive 2008, 175), and in matters of life and death, like saving Lady Lucy's house from fire set by her mad butler (33-34), Paul Ferroll always tries to achieve his self-serving ends. Under the mask of civility and thoughtfulness there lurks his morbid fixation with pain and hazard. The narrator is explicit about his soullessness: "He enjoyed life, and no nervousness about himself, or sensibility to the sufferings of another, disturbed him" (34). This complete indifference to human misery becomes evident when he agrees to visit the town stricken with cholera. For him the sight of "the frightened and dying; the starving, fevered, tortured" is just a "curious scene" that he observes "at [his] ease" (38-39). What is more, he derives pleasure from witnessing the agony, sorrow and extreme mental and physical tortures that the patients undergo. In his diary he writes that "the excitement of rushing about with a human spectacle everywhere, so kindled my spirits, that I stopped at the end of a by-way, and indulged in one quiet laugh" (40). What is more, he explicitly confesses that the sight and odor of omnipresent death and decay, "the atmosphere of horrible smells gave [him] pleasure" (50).

Similarly, there is no trace of agitation or nervousness after he knifes the first Mrs. Ferroll to death in her own chamber, in the early-morning hours. Having cut her throat and washed away her blood, he takes a horse ride to his tenant's cottage in order to help him manage financial calculations. He amicably chats with local peasants along the way, enjoys a gallop "with eager relish" (Clive 2008, 4) and has breakfast "with appetite" (5). There is no trace of agitation or discomfort visible in his bearing right after taking the victim's life. When the message about Anne's tragic death reaches the farm, he receives it with a deadpan expression. It may be argued that his stoic reaction is caused by negative feelings that he bred for his wife, who had hatched a fiendish plot to separate Paul from his beloved Elinor. Alternatively, this poker face could be possibly interpreted as a sign of self-control, defined by Samuel Smiles as "the root of all the virtues" (Smiles 1871), and commonly endorsed as a gentlemanly virtue in the Victorian age. Nevertheless, the callous manner in which he slays the sleeping woman and the subsequent emotionless attitude rather imply his inability to experience any deep feelings. The fact that he does not develop any close bond with his only child, whom he treats as a dangerous rival for Elinor's love, is another sign of his shallow emotionality and narcissistic personality. On top of that, the news concerning his supposedly dear Elinor's sudden death does not devastate him either; it does not disturb him much. His "absolute silence" strikes Janet, who happens to be the herald of the sad information, "as if death were again present" (Clive 2008, 209). Such an impassive and imperturbable manner may prove that even his relationship with the second wife is devoid of any genuine emotional ties; it may be argued that his principal incentive to marry her was to boost his wounded

ego and satisfy the egoistic drives of winning back and retaining a woman from whom he had been mischievously estranged a few years before.

The protagonist displays poor affective reactions, yet, like Hare's model psychopath, he has a strong craving for stimulation. Mrs. Ferroll admits that "[d]anger puts him in high spirits always" (Clive 2008, 29). Mr. Ferroll enjoys life-threatening situations, risky behaviors and deadly peril. He likes tempting fate whenever there is fire, epidemic or social upheaval. In addition, like many other psychopaths, he behaves in an irresponsible way imperiling other people's health and safety, especially his wife's. When Lady Lucy's mansion bursts into flames instead of evacuating Elinor he calls her to assist him and is so excited that feels "like a man slightly intoxicated. The excitement had roused up every power of life; and his wit, his knowledge, his force of character, were all in activity" (34). When he is commissioned to visit the Cholera Town he comes back home thrilled with the idea of infecting his wife: "if I had [caught the disease], I should like to give it her, and die" (39); later he also adds: "dying together, and now, would be such a pleasure" (42). Given the exhausting and severe symptoms that the illness produces (diarrhea, vomiting, muscle convulsions, extreme dehydration), visualizing the ecstasy of death seems gruesome. Furthermore, he seems to derive some kind of sick satisfaction from teasing the woman and watching her distress, as the following quotation demonstrates: "'I told you so,' said Mr. Ferroll to his wife, smiling as he showed her the warrant; but it would not do to ask for smiles from her. Frightened, dismayed, she was pale as death" (81). Indeed, such heinous thoughts may indicate a subconscious fantasy of murdering Elinor, too. This speculation does not appear wild considering the fact that Paul Ferroll commits another homicide in the story. While watching a working-class tumult he shoots in cold blood a man that he befriended during the cholera outbreak. Although his peers testify that he acted in defense of the local judge and mayor, he admits to his wife that "it *was* willing violence" (80). There was no apparent reason for using a pistol, for the man was armed only with a club, but Ferroll feels inwardly "happy in the past excitement" (78). Adrienne E. Gavin calls this irrational conduct "erupting violence" (2008, xxvi), which may serve as another example of the aforementioned psychopathic tendency, i.e. impulsivity. Afterwards, he uses the tragic incident to torment Elinor mentally and test the strength of her affection. Even though he is aware that she is of a very sensitive disposition, he keeps asking vexing questions: "could you love me if the law hanged me?" (Clive 2008, 80) and orders her to come to prison, paying no regard to her shattered nerves. Finally, it seems justifiable to suggest that he kills Elinor, though unintentionally, as she dies of shock at learning the truth about the premeditated homicide of his first wife; ". . . she has died for loving me" (210), as he freely admits.

The rationale behind his confession to the murder of the first Mrs. Ferroll is also anything but unequivocal. He claims that he cannot let any guiltless person pay for his crime; the bold declaration: "I come to die for the deed I have done" (Clive 2008, 196) sounds heroic. Rescuing an innocent suspect and bringing himself to justice are ostensibly noble acts worthy of a genuine gentleman, and yet his conduct apparently lacks resolution and sincerity, for he grasps the opportunity of getting away with the crime the moment it arises. There is little doubt that, similarly to the typical psychopath, he fails to take responsibility for his atrocious deeds. He prefers escaping like a coward to facing the consequences of his unlawful acts. All in all, he continues to live peacefully in Boston with Janet, who sacrifices love and personal happiness for her father's sake. The illusion of a man of honor that he creates is finally dispelled. Fleeing legal custody is

another unlawful action that he dares to perform, beside murder with malice aforethought, hiding a murder weapon, manslaughter, and mental maltreatment, which evidences another psychopathic characteristic, namely criminal versatility.

The writer's fascinating, though nonprofessional, sketch of the Victorian seeming psychopath not only offers insight into the intricacies of human psychology, but also touches upon sociological questions of masculine gender construction in the Victorian period. The conclusion that may be drawn from the analysis of the eponymous character of Caroline Clive's novel *Paul Ferroll* is that he fits the modern definition of psychopath to a considerable degree. Undeniably, the examination is incomplete, since there is no information available about his juvenile behavior, and his sexual life is virtually unmentioned, as in the case of most Victorian fiction. Furthermore, the diagnosis is inconclusive, for not all symptoms of psychopathic personality can be recognized in his conduct; for instance, the protagonist neither lies pathologically, leads a parasitic lifestyle nor is unable of designing long-term goals. However, many psychiatrists argue that psychopathy "is not monolithic: it appears to be a combination and perhaps configuration of multiple traits, including disinhibition, boldness, and meanness" (Skeem *et al.* 2011, 142). What is more, Paul Babiak and Robert D. Hare (2006, 39) compare psychopaths to chameleons that "can hide who they really are and mask their true intentions from their victims for extended periods. The psychopath is a near-perfect invisible human predator," which makes their manipulations successful and renders their disclosure troublesome. The model of hybrid masculinity verging between insanity and respectability represented by the protagonist is intriguing. Mr. Ferroll seems to develop his masculinity by camouflaging his psychopathic traits with gentlemanly features. He takes advantage of the superficiality of the ideal based on external attributes. No one suspects that a member of the local gentry, a rich landowner, a talented writer, an intelligent magistrate and an adored paterfamilias could possess deviant instincts. The hybrid masculinity personified by Paul Ferroll may be interpreted as a monstrous aberration of Victorian gentlemanly ideals, employed by a psychopathic mind to cover his antisocial impulses and perverted propensities. The book seems to be an illustrative example of the thesis that "hero and psychopath are twigs on the same genetic branch" (Lykken 1995, 118). The unprecedented depiction of a psychopathic gentleman makes Clive's novel an invaluable contribution to the sensation novel genre, and crime fiction in general.

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