

## Chapter Four

### THE FUNCTION OF VINCENT GILMORE, A SOLICITOR AND A NARRATOR IN THE WOMAN IN WHITE

Vincent Gilmore is one of the minor characters but also a narrator in The Woman In White. Since he is the solicitor of the Fairlie's family, he knows those who have the right with the Limmeridge House's property. Therefore his position makes his role important. Below he explains the succession of those who will inherit the Limmeridge's property. According to the law, since Arthur, the youngest son of the Fairlie's dies and the second brother, Frederick, lives a single man, the property goes to Laura. She is the only daughter of the eldest son, Mr. Philip Fairlie. If Laura dies single or dies childless, the estate would be given to her cousin, Magdalen, the daughter of Mr. Arthur Fairlie. Therefore Sir Percival's desire to marry Miss Fairlie promises him these two advantages, on the death of Laura's guardian, Mr. Frederick Fairlie. First, the use of three thousand a year by his wife's permission, while she lives, and, in his own right, on her death, if he survives her. Secondly, if he has a son, he will be the inheritor of the Limmeridge's estate. (Collins 1860 : 128-129).

Gilmore discloses that the above property is worth

ten thousand pounds. But Miss Fairlie has the right of twenty thousand pounds for herself. This large amount will be absolutely Miss Fairlie's own when she reaches her twenty - first birthday. Since her marriage will be held in December, so she will get her property three months later in the late of March when she reaches her twenty - first birthday. Her uncle Frederick, will not be her guardian anymore.

Furthermore, Gilmore, the solicitor and the narrator states the stipulation with regards to the twenty thousand pounds. The whole amount is to be given to Lady Glyde for the rest of her life, afterwards to Sir Percival for his life ; and the principal to the children of their marriage. Besides Lady Glyde can make a will by herself. If she dies without leaving children, she can leave her property to her half sister, Marian Halcombe, or any other relatives or friends whom she might want to bequeath her wealth upon Lady Glyde's husband's death. The heirs can then divide the property among themselves.

Through this agreement, Sir Percival Glyde will get a large sum of money on his wife's death. Therefore from this agreement, the readers understand why Sir Percival wants to marry Laura Fairlie and then plots her death. The following conversation between Mr. Frederick Fairlie and the narrator shows the benefits of Sir Percival in

marrying Laura Fairlie.

... "I tell you, as a friend. He would inform you that it is against all the rule to abandon the Lady's money entirely to the man she marries. He would decline, on grounds of common legal caution, to give the husband, any under circumstances whatever, an interest of twenty thousand pounds in the event of the wife's death."

"Would he really, Gilmore?" said Mr. Fairlie.

... "Whatever happens in the future, sir," I said, "remember that my plain duty of warning you has been performed. As the faithful friend and servant of your family, I tell you, at parting, that no daughter of mine should be married to any man alive under such a settlement as you are forcing me to make\_\_\_\_\_for Miss. Fairlie." (Collins

1860 : 139).

Such agreement made under Mr. Frederick Fairlie's approval has weakened the position of Laura. However, this agreement has benefitted Sir Percival Glyde. This agreement also gives the readers a clear explanation about Sir Percival's pressuring his wife on his attempt to make her sign the document, for he wants her fortune to be handed over her to him. Unfortunately, this is materialized for Laura is shut away in an asylum so that Sir Percival could get her money.

Undoubtedly the above agreement shows that at the time Wilkie Collins wrote he Woman In White the law allowed little protection to a married woman and her property. The narrator who is a lawyer fails to defend Laura Fairlie's position as the heiress of Limmeridge's property. Consequently he refuses to undertake the procedure of the agreement.

On Tuesday, I sent in the altered settlement, which practically disinherited the very persons whom Miss Fairlie's own lips had informed me she was most anxious to benefit. I had no choice. Another lawyer would have drawn up the deed if I had refused to undertake it. (Collins 1860 : 140).

Because of the weakness of the law at that time, Sheila Smith, a modern critic, says, "Wilkie Collins evokes a solid, commercial society and discloses the pressure and horrors behind the facade." (Phelps 1980 : 383). This opinion is proven by Sir Percival's and Count Fosco's plan to take over the Limmeridge's property. Here the author has created the suspense and pressure experienced by Laura and her step sister, Marian. Both characters realize that the marriage has drawn them into misery. Since the evil intention can no longer be hidden, Sir Percival forces his wife to sign the document for his benefit.

Besides, the author has also another purpose in using Mr. Vincent Gilmore as a narrator. Since he is a minor character, and he tells the story in the first person point of view, he can give an objective description of the hero or the villain, which they cannot do for themselves. According to Leon Surmelian in Techniques of Fiction Writing if the character has a minor role, he can write about the hero rather than about himself. He can praise the hero or criticize him. He can freely comment on the characters and the action.

(Surmelian 1968 : 76).

Besides, Mr. Vincent Gilmore as a first person narrator cannot enter the mind of the hero, such as Marian Halcombe, or any other character. If he is not there, he does not know what happens to the other characters, unless somebody who is there tells him. In this novel, for example, the narrator knows the incidents that happen to Laura after her marriage from Marian who always sends him letters and informs him about the happenings at Blackwater Park.

By using the first person point of view, especially, in detective stories, such as in The Woman in White, the readers feel the suspense and the tension. For instance, in the case of the agreement of Laura's property that her husband would be benefitted by her property creates a suspense. On the other hand, Sir Percival strives hard to take over the property before his wife's death. This evil plan makes the readers think about the possible ways used by Sir Percival to obtain what he wants. Through this way of narration, not only do the readers but also the narrator himself learn the action of the story by following one incident to another. In The Woman In White, for instance, although after Laura's marriage, Marian and Laura are separated from the narrator, they still get in touch with each other through letters.

The narrator's observation on certain characters also brings suspense. On his arrival at the Limmeridge House, Sir Percival tries to pet Miss Fairlie's little Italian greyhound. However, the dog cringes in terror when he tries to pet it.

... The little beast, cowardly and cross-grained as pet-dogs usually are, looked up at him, sharply, shrank away from his outstretched hand, whined, shivered, and hid itself under a sofa. It was scarcely possible that he could have been put out by such a trifle as a dog's reception of him .... (Collins 1860 : 115).

This dog's fear of Sir Percival suggests a foreboding. Later in his marriage to Laura, all the suspicions of Sir Percival come true, that he is really frightening. He treats his wife and Marian badly.

The narrator also observes that Sir Percival is very unconcerned. During the latter's stay at the Limmeridge House, he does not notice the cold response of Laura Fairlie's on him. Even when he is together with the narrator and Marian and Laura, he does not care with the latter's sudden withdrawal from the society. His conduct reveals his characteristic as an apathetic man.

Furthermore, through the first person point of view, the narrator as said is unable to enter the characters' minds. He then presumes the characters' feelings through their looks and behaviour. In this novel, the readers learn that Laura is not happy either after her marriage or before. Because she has promised her father before,

on his death-bed, that she will marry Sir Percival, so she marries him. In fact, she does not love him. Furthermore, The previous chapter has explained her sorrow caused by her marriage. In this chapter of the novel, the narrator explains that Laura also feels sad to accept her marriage.

... " and I may remind you, I am sure, without offence, of the possibility of your marrying Sir Percival Glyde."

She took her hand off the little album as suddenly as if it had turned hot and burnt her. Her fingers twined together nervously in her lap ; her eyes looked down again at the floor ; and an expression of constraint settled on her face which looked almost like an expression of pain. (Collins 1860 : 123).

Therefore from the narrator's explanation, the readers learn about Laura's feelings and situation. She is melancholic and fragile. It is not easy for her to express her feelings verbally. The change in her look and behaviour shows whether she is happy or not. Moreover she is very dependent on her step sister, Marian.

"If it does happen," she began, faintly ; "If I am\_\_\_\_\_"

"If you are married," I added, helping her out.

"Don't let him part me from Marian," she cried, with a sudden outbreak of energy .... (Collins 1860 : 124).

On the other hand, Mr. Gilmore describes Marian to be assertive and protective of Laura.

"I accuse nobody and I suspect nothing," she broke out, abruptly. "But I cannot and will not accept the responsibility of persuading Laura to

this marriage." (Collins 1B60 : 120).

Therefore, although the readers cannot know what Marian feels, yet through the narrator's description, they learn that Marian is ready to stand by Laura. She is very faithful to her step sister. Therefore, Mr Gilmore's narration shows that before Laura's marriage to Sir Percival Glyde, the latter's visit has brought uncomfortable atmosphere in the Limmeridge House.