



WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY JOURNAL
VOLUME I
1981



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY
JOURNAL

The Wilkie Collins Society is dedicated to serving the Study of Wilkie Collins and related subjects. Dues are \$10.00 per year, USA.; £4.50 per year, UK. Its officers are:

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The Wilkie Collins Society Journal is published by the Society for its members. Submissions should follow MLA format. Query first for reviews. Send submissions to Kirk H. Beetz, Editor, 813 Radcliffe Dr., Davis, California, 95616, USA.

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Editor's Note

Although the Wilkie Collins Society is only in its first year, its ambitions begin to be realized. The Journal is representative of those ambitions. I hope to expand the number of reviews in future volumes, as well as broaden the Journal's services to Society members. Comments and queries are invited for future issues, and book collectors are invited to advertise needs and extras. The Journal is open to submissions not only about Wilkie Collins, but on related topics such as Charles Reade and sensation fiction. Already, I have received several inquiries about possible topics for future articles: the entire membership is encouraged to participate.

Volume I of the Journal offers high quality essays. Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV provides a discussion of the various works which relate to Collins published in the last five years. Robert Ashley honors the Journal with an essay on Basil. Long the doyen (as Dr. Fisher remarks) of students of Collins, Ashley gives further insight into Collins's art. His essay is a welcome addition to Collinsian criticism. The third essay of the present Volume is by a brightening star in the firmament of scholarship, Natalie Schroeder. She reviews an important recent study of Collins.

The Wilkie Collins Society Journal is in its infancy; it will grow. Its present contents promise much for its future prosperity.

K.H.B.

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Wilkie Collins and the Critics

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

The reputation of Wilkie Collins has long endured a twofold suffering. First, other Victorian writers seem ever to receive greater attention. Second, a principal but-bear in this neglect of Collins, The Life of Charles Dickens John Forster, continues as a much touted, oft consulted book from and about the nineteenth century. There, Forster's jealousy over what he imagined was the usurpation of his place in Dickens's affections by Collins led him to ignore the younger man's relationship with the King of English novelists. Successive Dickensians have maintained that rank, one of low esteem, for Collins much this past century and more.

Recently, loud lamentations have sounded concerning the paucity of biographical materials relevant to Collins. We must remember, ironically, that his was not a life for detailing from those governed by Victorian prudery, and that consequently much-significant documentation was scrapped by those whose personal delicacies supported "respectability." These tendencies toward avoidance or evasion of ambivalent matters in Collins's personal affairs have seemingly affected criticism of his fiction, and only now is he coming into his own within that house of many mansions (even those untenanted by Dickens, Eliot, Trollope, or Thackeray) that is "Victorian Fiction." Even if Collins has not attained the industry proportions of some of these others, he would be pleased to know that interest in his writing continues, and that much of it comes from America -- where his work called forth acclaim during his own times.

Testimony to his sign of the times appears in E. R. Gregory's "Murder in Fact" (NR, 22 July 1978: 33-34), wherein persuasive appreciation lures all but the hardest of hearts to the major novels: The Moonstone, The Woman in White, Armadale, and No Name, with Man and Wife running a possible fifth. Much more of a milestone, Kirk H. Beetz's Wilkie Collins: An Annotated Bibliography 1889-1976 (METUCHEN 1978) clarifies long clouded records as it lists and comments upon primary titles and then addresses secondary materials from Collins's death through recent years. My essay is intended to supplement Beetz by commentary about developments since his cut-off date, although some (and there are few) items falling within his time span are noticed.

Primary Collinsiana has waxed of late with the appearance of Dover's reissues of important titles, a series spearheaded by that indefatigable seeker after recondite nineteenth-century fiction, Everett F. Bleiler. His efforts are saluted herewith; the Collins series ought to make convenient works all too often inaccessible. A plus is the appearance of several less familiar, though not unimportant, titles. Instead of The Moonstone and The Woman in White, Dover gives us Armadale, No Name, The Dead Secret, Hide and

Seek, and Basil. A volume sampling the supernatural short fiction, as well as that inaccurately named Little Novels, are also available. A notice of these books, prepared by Beetz, will appear in the forthcoming UMSE, for 1981, and so lengthy comment upon them here is supererogatory. Would that funds and devoted workers could be had for the assembling of a Collins edition of the scale of the Clarendon Dickens or the Duke-Edinburgh Carlyle.

Production of the Dover reprints at a time when textual studies of Collins are also on the increase points the way toward an unplowed but potentially rich field. The inherent fertility is evident in John A. Sutherlands's study of The Woman in White Ms., now in the Morgan Library. In "Two Emergencies in the Writing of The Woman in White" (YES, 7: 148-165) we find a scrutiny of Wilkie's mastering hold over the large majority of readers, who do not detect discrepancies in chronology, consequent upon his being pressured to complete the serial. Crucial observations on Collins's serial talents in The Woman in White occur in Larry K. Uffleman's review of the Dover No Name (NCF, 34: 96-100), where he compliments the choice of the 1873 text, supervised by Collins as opposed to the version rife with misprints put out by Anthony Blond in 1967.

Turning now to secondary materials, one must move from Beetz's book to Robert P. Ashley's terse check-up on recent scholarship, in Victorian Fiction: A Second Guide to Research, ed. George H. Ford (MLA, 1978). Building upon his chapter in the first guide, ed. Lionel Stevenson, Ashley, doyen to all Collins scholars, creates a model survey of the cream of primary and secondary Collinsiana. He also suggests certain paths still to be charted. For example, the letters, of which many more exist than has long been believed, and the dramas cry out for editing. Fortunately, since the publication of Ashley's essay, Beetz has announced an edition of correspondence, and I am undertaking editorial work on the plays. Both should shed light upon Collins's literary aims and methods, supplement critical approaches to the fiction, and provide handy documents in the illumination of biographical matters. By such, and other, means, the pioneering of astute scholars like Clyde K. Hyder, H.J.W. Milley, Ashley, Noel Pharr Davis, and Kenneth Robinson may be amply expanded.

Further bibliographical clarity is achieved in Andrew Gasson's "Wilkie Collins: A Collector's and Bibliographer's Challenge" (The Private Library, 3rd ser., vol. 3, No. 2: 51-77). Gasson leads us securely through the welter of serials, first and later hardcover and soft-cover volume editions or reissues (authorized and pirated), to a position of understanding better the traits of individual works in and the spans of Collins's voluminous output. Gasson obviously knows in the in's and out's of collecting, and his knowledge is expressed in a most readable

sketch. He deftly updates Sadleir's XIX Century Fiction with statistics on relative scarcity of Collins titles, and comments in particular about the altered rank of The Guilty River. This essay is another chapter in the history of Victorian Fiction, wherein collecting first and early editions becomes ever more perilous in terms of availability of the collectibles and their costs! Assisting in creating additional literary history, exemplified by the case of Wilkie Collins, Anne Lohrli details magazine composition, contributions and labor in Household Words: A Weekly Journal 1850-1859, Conducted by Charles Dickens—Table of Contents, List of Contributors, and Their Contributions (University of Toronto Press, 1973). Her compilation is based on the office book for the journal, now in the Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists, at the Firestone Library of Princeton University. Lohrli offers not merely bibliographical listings; she supplements studies of the Dickens-Collins situation. Deborah A. Thomas's shorter pieces on Household Words should also be consulted (Dick., 69: 163-172; idem., 70: 21-29). Sensible outlines of Collins's career, along with synopses, brief critiques, and bibliographical aids in English Novel: Richardson to Hardy, ed. Frank N. Magill (Salem Softbacks, 1980), bring into a single volume material available for nearly two decades. Apart from some howlers in spelling and bibliography, e.g., p. 115, where Hill's article is cited as pages 57-57, Magill's screeds are useful for introductory purposes.

Looking now at more critical-analytical items, we cite two books to flank Beetz's on the shelf of serious Collins fans: R[ay] V[ernon] Andrew's Wilkie Collins: A Critical Survey of His Prose Fiction, with a Bibliography (Garland, 1979) and Dorothy L. Sayers's Wilkie Collins: A Critical and Biographical Study (The Friends of the University of Toledo Libraries, 1977). Actually, both are much older than their publication dates indicate. Andrew's is a Doctor Litterarum Thesis completed in 1959 for Potchefstroom University, photographically reproduced for Garland's series, "The Fiction of Popular Culture: Twenty-four Important Resources for the Study of Mystery and Detective Stories, Gothic Novels, Nineteenth Century Sensation Novels, Etc." This rubric may suggest the regard in which Collins is commonly held. Sayers commenced her work during the 1920's, and as late as July 1957 she still entertained notions of completing it. As in the cases, say of Collins and Blind Love, Dickens and Edwin Drood, or, after nearly fifty years' labors, Thomas Ollive Mabbott and The Collected Works of Edgar Allan Poe, death wrested the pen from Sayers's hand before she could finish her long-awaited work.

Comparison of Andrew's and Sayers's books may initially seem invidious toward the former, which carries all the ill features of thesis-writing: stilted tone and mechanical, boresome repetition in chapter structuring. An index would also enrich the book. If synthesized, penetrating information is what a thesis should supply as its main ware, however, Andrew's book does merit plaudits. It is divided into five large segments. First comes

essential biographical information. Next, the early literary experiments and the acquaintance with and work for Dickens is set forth. Third, analyses of The Woman in White, No Name, Armada, and The Moonstone. Fourth, critiques of the novels and selected short fiction from Man and Wife through Blind Love. Finally, part Five surveys Collins's life and literary or other art influences that shaped his writing. Andrew's view, overall, is dispassionate. A brief conclusion emphasizes how Collins's work during Dickens's era and his incurring Forster's enmity conspired with the wary regard of other contemporaries and their successors to bury his literary reputation beneath hushed hints and critical neglect for many years.

The conclusions presented above may no longer seem wholly new or fresh, but in 1959 the Dickens-Collins relationship, not to mention the image of Collins as a writer with artistic gifts, had not been so well sifted as it has been since, by friend and foe alike. Andrew's opinions convey calm and soundness; Collins did profit from association with Dickens, so far as fiction goes, in matters of dramatic sense, dialogue, an "eye for character" (notably in Captain Wragge), as well as in abilities to coordinate the multiple elements of lengthy novels into felicitous unity. The Dickens-Collins situation received proper attention, vis-a-vis the Drood mystery, in Charles Forsyte's The Decoding of Edwin Drood (Charles Scribner's Sons, 1980). After reviewing similarities between The Moonstone and Edwin Drood, Forsyte notes likenesses of the latter with "Miss or Mrs?" a Collins tale in The Graphic for 1871, a document which, Forsyte argues, penetrates dangerously close to the heart of the Drood case. Here is food for thought.

Andrew deals a blow to the question of Reade's "influence" and sends that long cherished notion down the pipe. He observes, too, that Gaboriau's impact is less than generally supposed, arguing solidly upon bases of chronology, but claims much for Poe's contributions to Collins's aims and methods—a subject inviting further examination. Treatment of Collins's literary descent through later writers is terse. The names of Le Fanu, Stoker, Innes, and Sayers do not surprise; those of Yonge, Twain, and Bennett might. Overall, Andrew's book must not be by-passed, despite its long delayed appearance. From Andrew, one might profitably turn immediately to R.F. Stewart's ...And Always a Detective (David & Charles, 1980). Bracketing Collins with Poe, Stewart's charting the vicissitudes of the former's reputation, his keen pinpointing of Collins's contributions to detective fiction, and his criticism of The Moonstone, are all presented in lively fashion.

Had she lived to see it through, Dorothy Sayers might have managed the best critical-biographical book on Collins to date. I speak thus with regard for the work of Ashley, Robinson, Davis, and William H. Marshall, but with like realization that quantities of relevant materials have only come to light in more recent times, and that even now many remain to be made available. What Sayers

left is an unfolding of Collins's young life and its links to his writings through Hide and Seek, that is, up to 1854. With thirty-five years of her subject's life unattended, Sayers's Wilkie Collins has decided limitations. The riches therein, however, only make one yearn for more. Sayers thoughtfully relates the fiction and plays as no other has done. With her own predilections for detective fiction in mind, we must respect her analyses of the portion of Collins's oeuvres she does encompass. Like Andrew, she does not hesitate to speak of Wilkie's defects. She has also not left one of Collins's early good novels, Hide and Seek, to rust unburnished on the shelf.

Two other books in which Collins figures prominently place him as a Sensationalist. Not so objective as it might be toward Collins, because of its author's evident bias toward his own Victorian Novelist, Michael L. Wolff's Sensational Victorian: The Life and Fiction of Mary Elizabeth Braddon (Garland, 1979) fleshes out yet another chapter in the chronicles of nineteenth-century fiction, and one often derided in past years, that of Sensation fiction. Although the verdict of time favors Collins, Wolff implies that Braddon has the edge over him in creating fine novels, hauling in Henry James, no less, to bolster his opinion (P. 155)! Braddon's career resembles Collins's, though, in that both were Sensation novelists, who grew clear-sighted about the requirements for producing gripping serials. Their novels are near relatives, too, in terms of intermittent social criticism and dramatic qualities, plausible enough characteristics in two whose lives diverged from accepted norms and whose involvement with stage plays is a matter of record.

A book of more objective proportions in Winnifred Hughes's The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the Eighteen Sixties (Princeton, 1980), the first major study of this topic, superseding Walter C. Phillips's Dickens, Reade, and Collins: Sensation Novelists (Columbia, 1919), a book subsequently oft deplored. Bracketing Collins with other Sensationalists, like Braddon and Reade, Hughes applauds the great dramatic gifts coursing through his fiction. Recalling the strident antipathies toward Sensation novels that have held sway for over a century, we may find a salubrious change—as well as a forecast of more sound work on this area to come, we hope—in The Maniac in the Cellar. Hughes's praise for Sensation fiction echoes in a voice from the grave (appropriately located, given our context), that of Montague Summers, who devotes a chapter to Victorian novelists, with major attention and laudation to Sensationalists, in his autobiography, The Gallant Show, ed. Brocard Sewell (Cecil Wolf, 1980). As might be expected, Summers's tome implies that he never considered writers like Collins, Braddon, and Reynolds anything but the greatest. His gusto, however, does not blind him to genuine artistic merits in Collins, and his chapter is one more item not to be omitted from Collinsians' reading lists.

Moving now to shorter studies, we properly note here Walter

M.Kendrick's argument (NCF, 32: 18-35) against dismissing Sensationalism in The Woman in White as sleazy melodramatics. It is rather the product of a mind attuned to numerous ambivalences in human existence. Thus, in this novel Collins departs from mid-Victorian realism to achieve multiple subtleties in narrative technique [cf. Sutherland above]. Like views appear in A. Brooker Thro, "An Approach to Melodramatic Fiction: Goodness and Energy in the Novels of Dickens, Collins, and Reade" (Genre, 11: 359-374). Represented respectively by Oliver Twist, The Woman in White, and Griffith Gaunt, these novelists resort to no clumsy handling of melodramatic strategies, but employ them subtly, as they create goodness, a feature they prize more than such admirers of energy as Lewis in The Monk and Maturin in Melmoth the Wanderer, among older Gothic novelists. This article should be dear to those charting modifications in Gothicism between Maturin and, say, Hardy or Doyle. Teaming with Thro's outlook is Keith B. Reirstad, whose "The Demon in the House; or, The Domestication of Gothic in the Novels of Wilkie Collins" (University of Pennsylvania, 1976) is one of the most impressive dissertations to date on Wilkie Collins. There are long, but never dull, opening chapters on Mrs. Radcliffe and Bulwer-Lytton as precursors, followed by two on Sensationalism and Collins's theories of fiction. The last four chapters survey the novels chronologically, with keen criticism of all. This work merits publication. Similarly, Paul J. Delmar's "The Sensation Fiction of Wilkie Collins" (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1978) follows the recurring "splitting" of character traits, in both villains and heroes, thereby establishing a tone from which readers respond to the novel at hand. Some attention goes to Antonina, but the lion's share is accorded The Woman in White, Armada, and The Moonstone. At no great distance we reach Sue Lonoff's "Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship" (CUNY, 1978). She draws upon unpublished letters and other Ms. documents, plus the fiction itself, to determine Collins's relationship to his audience. Dickens, Reade, as well as his English and French readers, gave advice in many instances. Lonoff's consideration of The Moonstone as a detective novel makes one wonder if indeed it is so "modern" as she implies. A published portion of her work, "Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins," will interest readers (NCF, 35: 150-170). Although a book growing out of her dissertation is listed as available in the current Books in Print, no copy has been forthcoming as of this writing. Collins, therefore, still provides bibliographers' mares' nests.

Finally several items in which we might not immediately detect the presence of Collins must not be ignored. Several analyze the blends of realism with Gothic fantasy with which he often worked. Some do not concern him directly, but they contain critical methodology that is applicable to him because of his imbibing main currents in fiction a century ago. The first, Barbara Silberg's dissertation, "Rhoda Broughton: A Victorian Popular Novelist" (Pennsylvania State University, 1977) nicely outlines the career of this niece of Sheridan Le Fanu. Often a

social critic and blunt realist—too much so for many of her readers and reviewers—Broughton also wrote tales of the psychological-supernatural variety. Such traits, along with Silbert's commentary on her popularity, which resembles that of Collins, make her a fit literary companion for him. Like implications reside in the evaluations of "G. [sic] M. Reynolds, Dickens, and the Mysteries of London" (NCF, 32: 188-213), by Richard C. Maxwell, Jr., and "Exorcising the Past: Scott's The Bride of Lammermoor" (NCF, 32: 379-398), by George Levine. Mysteries and terrors evolving from concrete realities, and powerful when linked with psychological bases, are delineated in all. The course of the Gothic during the nineteenth century is manifest in many implications throughout these two fine articles. Collins's name turns up in yet another outré spot, where violence and mystery are staples, Jame B. Twitchell's The Living Dead: A Study of the Vampire in Romantic Literature (Duke University Press, 1981). Unfortunately, the title for The Dream Woman pluralizes the final word (does nobody proofread anymore?). Another distinguished critique not to be missed by Collinsians, is Albert D. Hutter's "Dreams, Transformation, and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction" (VS, 19: 181-209). Beginning with a synthesis of and his departures from modern psychoanalytic theories of literature, Hutter turns these tools to a keen reading of The Moonstone, although the names of other writers, like Poe, who he draws into his discussion, make clear that the novel exists in no vacuum. The dream as a literary motif, of course, has received overloads of attention, but Hutter's fresh observations ought to stimulate further application of his principles to examinations of Collins. His excellent analysis of submerged sexuality in The Moonstone may also provide keys to new doors in studies of our author. A glance into Crime, Detective, Espionage, Mystery, and Thriller Fiction and Film: A Comprehensive Bibliography of Critical Writing through 1979 (Greenwood Press, 1980), a self-explanatory title, will keep the curious informed about tendencies in these aspects of Collins's writings. Like information is supplied by Janet Pate's The Great Villains (David & Charles Ltd.: Bobbs-Merrill, 1975), with sketches of Godfrey Abelwhite and Sir Percival Glyde, accompanied by lists of films and printed editions. Why Fosco, whose name is misspelled with an -e- on the end, does not figure in this book is an enigma: he is a far greater character than Abelwhite or Glyde.

What should we conclude from this survey? Foremost, Wilkie Collins's fiction does not in its entirety offer gems of purest ray, although at its best it yields ample support to his continuing fame among Victorian writers. The Moonstone, The Woman in White, Armadale, and No Name are the stars of this writer's crown, as is evident from the sweep of this essay. Collins is ripe for ranking among Victorian novelists as more than a second-rate Sensationalist or, when not presented as that, a would-be social reformer whose artistry, like that found in so much of the later Mark Twain, gives way to ranting ideology. Collins's fiction is not the simple heir of timeworn Gothicism, as so much

of G.W.M. Reynolds's is. Evidence offered above demonstrates the care and art underlying many of Collins's works, and study of such subjects is needed. A comprehensive, annotated checklist of contemporaneous reviews would be a valuable tool for this research. Editorial and textual work will likewise expedite the process. The Woman in White alone has received creditable editing, but what about The Moonstone, Armadale, and No Name--or others? A well edited anthology of the short stories could take a merited spot on library shelves. Handy volumes of the correspondence and plays will clarify understanding of Collins's fiction. We also need a census of manuscripts for imaginative works and others like the letters, biographical, and critical writings. Were Collins collectors to make known their holdings, our organization, and others would benefit. Assessments of influence, to and from Collins, await their makers, as does that "magisterial" summation of his drawing into the composition of prose fiction elements customarily deemed those of stage drama--and I don't mean solely that of a suspense-filled "curtain" or cliff-hanger. Such methodology aligns Wilkie Collins with others who were instrumental, if not always conscious of that faculty, in collapsing generic fixities, even before the novel had achieved that peak of eminence as art now considered so much a matter of course. "Novels," we must remember were new and different among literary forms, even during much of the reigns of Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, not to mention minor fictionists, and thus the term for newness and difference was meetly applied. Thus, nineteenth-century periodicals overflow with reviews of fiction that depend heavily on the terminology associated with visual arts synthesized into criticism of the literary babe, so to speak, or perhaps, more accurately in certain cases, "seized" for purposes of strengthening a notice. Totals for "painters" of fiction might dangerously approximate those for visual artists, were one to pursue the matter diligently! Although the 1890's is typically the time for generic breakdowns, according to the critical lights of numerous students, Collins ought not to be consigned outside ranks of earlier pioneers engaged in such pursuits. In closing I am reminded after surveying Collinsiana of Goethe's remarks about the smallness of accomplishments when they are compared with what remains yet to do.

I express my gratitude to Andrew Gasson, Kirk H. Beetz, William J. Zimmer, Jack H. Barton, Anne I. Barton, Shona L. Barton, and James A. Barton for their help in the completion of this essay.

Within My Experience

An Essay Suggested by the Dover Reprint of Wilkie Collins's Basil

Robert Ashley

In adding Basil to its series of Wilkie Collins reprints, Dover Publications chose wisely and well since it is likely to have stronger appeal to modern readers than many another Collins "minor" novel. It is relatively short and uncomplicated. It has power and intensity seldom, if ever, equaled in Collins's later work. It has lurid scenes, and for a Victorian novel, remarkably explicit treatment of sexual passion, jealousy, and revenge, surpassed if at all, only by Dickens in his final two novels. Taken together with a "Letter of Dedication," notable both for what it reveals and what it conceals, the narrative is rife with autobiographical and psychological implications. And for those readers primarily interested in Collins's development as a novelist, Basil foreshadows practically everything for which Collins later became famous.

Most importantly, after mildly successful excursions into historical romance (Antonina, 1851) in the mold of Bulwer-Lytton's The Last Days of Pompeii and into sentimental comedy (Mr. Wray's Cash Box, 1851) in the mold of Dickens' Christmas stories, Basil (1852) sets Collins squarely into the territory where he belonged, the melodrama of contemporary Victorian life. Against a backdrop of two families--Basil's own family, dominated by his proud, excessively class-conscious implacably unyielding and intolerant father, and the Sherwins, dominated by a greedy, miserly, social-climbing linendraper, as tyrannical, though less justifiably so, as Basil's father -- Collins unfolds a typically sensational plot. Basil sees Margaret Sherwin on an omnibus and falls utterly in love at first sight, a favorite Collins motif. Mr. Sherwin agrees to an immediate marriage, but stipulates that the marriage be kept secret and unconsummated for a year. This not too convincing plot device ensures the entrapment of Basil as well as a rise for the Sherwins from the lower middle class into the gentlemanly society of Basil's family, but at the same time presumably gives Basil a year in which to polish Margaret into acceptability by his father, a task at which he fails miserably because of his wife's shallow character. Another stipulation of the marriage contract is that the two young people never meet unchaperoned. Fortunately for them, the chaperone is the bullied invalid Mrs. Sherwin (Does Dickens' Mrs. Gradgrind of Hard Times, written two years later than Basil, owe anything to Mrs. Sherwin?), who sits silently in a darkened corner, thus allowing for a certain amount of hanky-panky between Margaret and Basil, which Collins, however, never explicitly mentions. On the night before the year's postponement elapses, Basil becomes a virtual witness of his wife's

deflowering, in a cheap hotel bedroom, by the villain Mannion, confidential clerk to Mr. Sherwin. When the guilty couple leave the hotel, Basil, in a fury of sexual rage and jealousy, flings Mannion to the ground, grinding his face into the macadamized surface of the road, blinding him in one eye, and horribly disfiguring his handsome features. In a long letter to Basil, Mannion reveals his motives: He had planned to marry Margaret himself; furthermore, his father had been detected in forgery by Basil's father and subsequently hanged. Thus Mannion's seduction of Margaret is both an act of thwarted sexual passion as well as an act of revenge on Basil's whole family. In these and subsequent acts, Mannion is an early example of Collins's best-known character-type, the humanized villain: sinister, mysterious, singleminded, yet deserving some measure of respect or sympathy. Mannion's letter also announces his intent, like Falkland's in Caleb Williams, to pursue Basil implacably to the ends of the earth, poisoning his reputation wherever he goes and publishing his disgrace to the world. Basil flees to Land's End in Cornwall, followed by Mannion. But Mannion's diabolic plans come to an abrupt end when, hot on the trail of Basil, he falls to his death from a Cornish cliff. Since Margaret has already died of typhus contracted in the hospital where Mannion recuperated, Basil is free for a gradual reconciliation with his family.

Over the whole novel broods that sense of fatality and foreboding for which Collins is justly famous. This is partly due to abundant hints of Margaret's true character and of her sexual infatuation with Mannion, hints which the equally infatuated Basil ignores, but more impressively to Collins's typical skill in creating atmosphere. Here is a description of the great black hole into which Mannion falls:

In one of the highest parts of the wallside of granite... there opened a black, yawning hole that slanted nearly straight downward, like a tunnel, to unknown and unfathomable depths below....Even at calm times the sea was never silent in this frightful abyss, but on stormy days its fury was terrific. The wild waves boiled and thundered in their imprisonment, till they seemed to convulse the solid cliff about them like an earthquake. (Basil, Dover, 1980, pp.321-322)

Technically, Basil embodies Collins's first experiment with the multiple first-person point of view used most notably in The Woman in White and The Moonstone. By far the largest segment is an autobiographical account by Basil of his experiences up to his arrival in Cornwall. Into the midst of this segment, however, is inserted Mannion's long letter detailing his family history, his relations with Margaret, and his plans for revenge. The Cornwall segment consists of excerpts from Basil's journal, and the novel ends with "Letters in Conclusion": two by a Cornish

miner and his wife and one by Basil to a friend.

The dedicatory letter in Basil is one of Collins's most informative and intriguing prefaces. For the first time Collins set down his artistic creed: 1) a novel should be based on a solid foundation of fact drawn from the novelist's own experiences or experiences related to him by others; 2) the dramatic and exceptional incidents of real life are as legitimate materials for fiction as are "common-place, everyday realities"; 3) the novelist is privileged to admit "scenes of misery and crime" provided "they are turned to a plainly and purely moral purpose"; and 4) the novelist should bring to the writing of fiction "the patient, uncompromising, reverent devotion of every moral and intellectual faculty." No one would seriously quarrel with these precepts, but Collins, in words anticipating those Hardy was to use in his first preface to Tess, attacked those readers and reviewers who had labeled Antonina prurient:

To those persons...who shrink from all honest and serious reference, in books, to subjects which they think of in private and talk of in public everywhere; who see...improper allusions where nothing improper is alluded to; whose innocence is in the word, and not in the thought; whose morality stops at the tongue, and never gets on to the heart—to those persons...I do not address myself...in this book, and shall never think of addressing myself to them in any other. (Basil, Dover, 1980, pp.vi-vii)

This was asking for trouble, and Collins got it from the reviewers. Despite a warning from Dickens (who did not always follow his own advice), the dedicatory note to Basil was merely the first in a series of bristling prefaces which kept Collins in a lifetime battle with Victorian critics.

But by far the most provocative statement in the "Dedication" was Collins's claim that he had "founded the main event out of which this story springs on a fact within my own knowledge." Now Collins says, "within my own knowledge," not "within my own experience." Nevertheless, certain modern scholars have wondered whether "the main event," presumably Basil's "witnessing" the seduction of his wife before the marriage had been consummated, actually happened to Collins. Kenneth Robinson, certainly a levelheaded critic of Collins, says, "...it is probable that Wilkie had recently undergone a violent emotional experience and wrote Basil as a form of catharsis."¹ In his psychoanalytic analysis of The Moonstone, Charles Rycroft concludes that Collins was "compelled...to give symbolic expression to an unconscious preoccupation with the primal scene [sexual intercourse]" and that "he was obsessed with the idea of virginity."² These two obsessions, he theorizes, may have originally sprung from the autobiographical event which lay behind Basil.³ But Nuel Pharr Davis, who usually sees autobiographical significance lurking behind every bush in Collins's works, states that the "Letter of

Dedication" is deliberately intended to conceal the real source of the plot.⁴ "Wilkie," he says, "based his novel on the life of the celebrated fourth Earl of Chesterfield and derived almost everything from this source": the Earl is Basil's father; the Earl's illegitimate son, Philip Stanhope, who secretly married beneath his station, is Basil; Dr. William Dodds, whom Chesterfield might have saved from hanging for forgery, is Mannion's father.⁵ Davis does admit that the introductory portion of the novel is "astonishingly autobiographical": the stern, but basically affectionate, father; the trip to Italy; the brief flirtation with matriculation at Oxford; the lukewarm legal studies; the choice of a literary career; the writing of a historical novel; the habit of riding the omnibus, "a perambulatory exhibition-room of the eccentricities of human nature" (Basil, p. 27 Part One, Chapter Seven).⁶ Davis also points out that Basil and Mannion retrace Wilkie's own trip through Cornwall, described in Rambles Beyond Railways (1851). Likewise, the secret marriage may owe something to Wilkie's role in arranging Henrietta Ward's elopement with her namesake Edward Ward, brother of Charles James Ward, to whom the novel was dedicated.⁷ In addition, the Basil-Margaret relationship may have been suggested by Wilkie's brother Charles' unrequited passion for Maria Rosseth.⁸ For the gruesome details of Margaret's death from typhus, Collins drew upon his uncle Frank's death of the same disease.⁹ But on the central question of whether the seduction of Margaret had an autobiographical source, Davis remains silent except to state that the sordid hotel setting was probably one with which Wilkie was familiar.¹⁰

Another critic whom one might have expected to make much of Basil is Gavin Lambert. In The Dangerous Edge, Lambert offers the theory¹¹ that crime writers are driven to write "by some childhood wound, shock or experience--too much for the child to master at the time."¹² Basil would seem to be the perfect example of this thesis, but Lambert uses The Dead Secret (1857) instead. Possibly, he rejected Basil because the central episode could not be a reproduction of a childhood experience. It could, however, be a reproduction of something Wilkie witnessed or knew of.

Ultimately, the central riddle of Basil seems unsolvable. However, one intriguing question persists; whether Collins experienced something like the seduction of Margaret Sherwin or witnessed it or merely heard of it, is it at least a partial explanation of why he never married?

Notes

¹Kenneth Robinson. Wilkie Collins (London: The Bodley Head, 1951), p. 69.

²Charles Rycroft. "A Detective Story: Psychoanalytic Observations," Psychoanalytic Quarterly, 26 (1957) 238.

³Rycroft, p. 239.

⁴Nuel Phar Davis. The Life of Wilkie Collins (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 119.

⁵Davis, p. 116.

⁶Davis, p. 118; see also pp. 48-49.

⁷Davis, p. 118.

⁸Davis, p. 119.

⁸Davis, p. 119.

⁹Davis, p. 118.

¹⁰Davis, p. 118.

¹¹Gavin Lambert. The Dangerous Edge (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975), pp. ix-xiv.

¹²Patricia Highsmith, "The Power of Fear," Times Literary Supplement, 15 August, 1975, p. 912.

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Reading the Victorian Novel: Detail into Form, ed. Ian Gregor, pp. 314. A Barnes and Noble Critical Study. New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980, \$27.50.

Natalie Schroeder

In the final interchapter of Reading the Victorian Novel, Ian Gregor writes: "This is a book for reading: so, like others, its pages will be turned fast or slow once, or more often, its details remembered or forgotten, its form registered and rejected" (p. 309). Unfortunately, Reading the Victorian Novel is likely to be a frustrating book for a reader who approaches it as a unified whole rather than what it is—a collection of essays that range widely in content and style. The book with its two-fold thesis examines these topics: 1. the process of reading, "the way novels come to us as a page by page experience," and 2. the articulation of detail into form, "finding a suggestive contour in the parts to express the whole" (p. 9). The attempt to unify fifteen essays to accommodate the double thesis is the major weakness both of the work as a whole and of some individual essays. In his "Introduction" Ian Gregor comments that the focus on the reading process brought all the contributing writers "to experience the diversity of that process. In consequence, it is not a book which presses towards a specific conclusion" (p. 13). The several authors did not leave it at that, however; they apparently attempted to press towards some sort of conclusion by addressing themselves to the same dual thesis.

The five interchapters appear to be another try to unify the whole, but they are annoying at times and incomprehensible at others. Ironically, Reading the Victorian Novel has a kind of internal coherence which makes the predetermined thesis and the interchapters extraneous. The most useful and compelling aspects of the book are the comparisons the authors make between the novels discussed in other essays in the volume.

Some of the essays are labored (especially as a result of the authors' attempts to address themselves to the group thesis) and bog down in theory (e.g., Doreen Roberts's "Jane Eyre and 'The Warped System of Things'" and Ruth Raider's "'The Flash of Fervour': Daniel Deronda"). Some, on the other hand, are surprisingly good. Essays like A. Robert Lee's "The Mill on the Floss: 'Memory' and the Reading Experience" and Keith Carabine's "Reading David Copperfield" are able to adapt the thesis well, and the results are fresh approaches to some already critically saturated Victorian novels.

Happily, David Blair's "Wilkie Collins and the Crisis of Suspense" belongs with the latter group, especially since Armada has not been saturated with criticism. The essay does have some problems, however. Although Blair makes some important observations about the function of detail in Collins's fiction, he tends to be too self-conscious of the group thesis. His frequent

repetition of the words "detail" and "form," for example, are distracting.

Blair begins by refuting the charge that sensation fiction is not realistic because "every detail is ... equally important" (p. 33). He shows instead that through Collins's narrative methods, the "institution of suspense and the resultant provocation of the reader to scrutiny and anticipation provides a crisis ... for the identity and 'meaning' of individual details as [it does] for the identity and 'meaning' of form" (p.44). The two Allan Armadales, Blair says, are two halves of a single self that "enact a crisis between different 'novels'" (p. 41). Midwinter's novel is suspenseful, "dark, doom-laden, sensational"; Armadale's is comic, "light, inconsequential social and romantic" (p. 41). Armadale, who lives in a world of "important and unimportant details ... in uncritical juxtaposition" (p. 41), provides the novel with verisimilitude. Blair's explanation of the function of Miss Gwilt in Armadale is especially illuminating. As he puts it, she "inherits the full burden of this crisis"; the "'identity crisis' of the novel is, in a sense, her crisis: she is caught between ... her apparent identity as a detail, 'the shadow of a woman,' ... and ... her own sense of her passion and complexity" (p. 44).

Blair feels, though, that finally Collins fails in Armadale because the novel "poses questions about its own life and identity in an extraordinarily self-conscious way" (p. 39). He doesn't, however, provide enough specific examples from the novel to illustrate this point. He simply states (in his abstract way) that "the life of detail frustrates the various senses of possible or probable forms, and the novel proves to be, in some respects, a labyrinthine hoax" (p.45). On the other hand, Blair says that Collins more "mutedly" and thus more successfully used detail "to suggest an alternative focus, the experience of each character an alternative 'novel'" in his "two great novels" (p. 45). His essay would have been more satisfactory had Blair illustrated the "failure" of Armadale more specifically by contrasting it with The Woman in White and The Moonstone to show "how subtly the 'intermediate' sense of detail can be made to provide a productive complication of response and meaning" (p. 45). The one extended example of contrast that he does give—to Charlotte Bronte's Villette—is only marginally relevant.

Overall, "Wilkie Collins and the Crisis of Suspense" makes some useful points about Collins's narrative techniques and the reader's role in suspense fiction, but the essay is limited because of the author's tendency to manipulate his ideas to fit the preconceived thesis of the collection. Blair's style is also occasionally objectionable; he lacks clarity at times, and he is unnecessarily wordy. The complicated explanation of how Collins successfully created suspense in one part of Armadale is symptomatic of his bothersome, stylistic quirks: "The reader in the process of reading can never wholly share the neutrality of Armadale's experience of detail because the possibility of fatality is more dominant for him than for his 'surrogate': thus

suspense acts upon his experience to give 'neutral' detail colouring and resonance" (p. 43). How much easier it would have been for the reader had Blair simply said, "Collins achieves suspense through the use of dramatic irony." Sadly, he didn't.

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Queries

Andrew Gasson (3 Merton House, 36 Belsize Park, London, N.W.3. 4EA) wishes to purchase a copy of The Life of Wilkie Collins, by Nuell Pharr Davis (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1956). Anyone with a copy who is willing to part with it is asked to contact Mr. Gasson.

William Clarke (37 Park Vista, Greenwich, London S.E. 10) is seeking materials for his biography of Wilkie Collins. He wishes to find the diary and commonplace book of William Collins, father of Wilkie, which was sold at Sotheby Parke Bernet in New York in 1948 or 1949. He also seeks any correspondence relating to Caroline Graves and Martha (Rudd) Dawson which might be privately owned.

Thomas D. Clareson (Box 3186, College of Wooster, Wooster, Ohio 44691) seeks information about the relationship of Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade for use in his biography of Reade.

Kirk H. Beetz seeks letters by Wilkie Collins which may be in private hands. (813 Radcliffe Drive, Davis, California 95616.)

Notes on the Contributors

Robert Ashley's work and Robert Ashley, the man, have both long been focuses of Wilkie Collins research. He is author of numerous works on Collins, including Wilkie Collins, a biographical study published in 1952 and still in print. His essays include studies of Collins's plays, detective fiction, sources, and reputation. His essays "Wilkie Collins Reconsidered" (Nineteenth-Century Fiction, Vol. 4, March 1950, pp. 265-273) and "Wilkie Collins and the Dickensians" (The Dickensian, Vol. 49, March 1953, pp. 59-65) remain the definitive statements on the problems with Collins's reputation and relationship to Charles Dickens. Recent publications include the essay on Collins in Victorian Fiction (1978). Dr. Ashley is a Professor of English at Ripon College, Wisconsin.

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV teaches in the Department of English, The University of Mississippi, where he edits University of Mississippi Studies in English. President of the Poe Studies Association (and a charter member), Bibliographer for the Houseman Society, and a Director for the Edgar Allan Poe Society of Baltimore, he is active in the areas of Victorian, Gothic, and American Literature. He has published books on Poe, many studies of writers from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, and is particularly interested in detective fiction. Recently, he has prepared an introduction for a reprint of the rare volume of detective short stories by Frederick Irving Anderson, Adventures of the Infallible Godahl, to appear in the Gregg Press series of mystery reprints sometime in Fall, 1981. He has also written the article about Anderson for the Dictionary of Literary Biography, another piece for a Festschrift honoring Darrel Abel ["Playful 'Germanism' in 'The Fall of the House of Usher': The StoryTeller's Art"], and the section on Victorian and nineteenth-century American Gothic in Anatomy of Horror: Guide to Horror Fiction, published by R. R. Bowker in 1981. He wishes here to acknowledge the inspiration and the generous assistance in many of his projects from Professor Clyde K Hyder.

Natalie Schroeder is author of articles on Regina Maria Roche and Charles Dickens. Her essay "John Jasper: Hero Villian" (University of Mississippi Studies in English, New Series, Vol. I, 1980) is the best study of Dickens' troubled character in Edwin Drood. Dr. Schroeder is writing a book on sensation fiction and an essay on Armadale. She is an Instructor of English at the University of Mississippi.