



**WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY JOURNAL**  
**VOLUME III**  
**1983**

THE  
CORNHILL MAGAZINE.

NOVEMBER, 1864.

Armada.

BOOK THE FIRST.

CHAPTER I.

THE TRAVELLERS.



IT was the opening of the season of eighteen hundred and thirty-two, at the Baths of WILDBAD.

The evening shadows were beginning to gather over the quiet little German town; and the diligence was expected every minute. Before the door of the principal inn, waiting the arrival of the first visitors of the year, were assembled the three notable personages of Wildbad, accompanied by their wives—the mayor, representing the inhabitants; the doctor, representing the waters; the landlord, representing his own establishment. Beyond this select circle, grouped snugly about the trim little square in front of the inn, appeared the towns-

people in general, mixed here and there with the countrypeople in their quaint German costume placidly expectant of the diligence—the men in

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25.

Beginning of the serialisation of *Armada* in *Cornhill Magazine*, X, Nov. 1864, p. 513

THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY JOURNAL

Volume III

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THE TWO ARMADALES.

'The Two Armadales' by W. Thomas in *Cornhill Magazine*, X, Dec. 1864, fp 641



Wilkie Collins Society Journal

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## Editor's Note

In 1932, in his "The Early Novels of Wilkie Collins" (The Eighteen-Sixties, ed. John Drinkwater), Walter de la Mare noted a general weakness in Collins's male characters and an unusual strength in the novelist's female characters. De la Mare did not elaborate on his observation, nor have most subsequent critics. For the 1983 issue of the Wilkie Collins Society Journal, Natalie Schroeder provides a detailed study of Collins's unusual women in Armadale, and in so doing she indicates some potentially fruitful avenues for future investigations of Collins's characters.

In addition to Schroeder's interesting essay, the 1983 volume of the Journal presents provocative commentary by Robert Ashley on The Dead Secret and reviews by Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV and Schroeder of R. V. Andrew's Wilkie Collins and Sue Lonoff's Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers. The Journal is fortunate to have its pages graced by such perceptive commentaries.

The note on page 33 of the present volume is of special interest to those Society members who wish to participate in the Society's activities and who hope that the Society will gain wider public recognition. Please note that there will be no Society meeting at the MLA Convention this year.

The Journal continues to attract fine essays, and the Society continues to attract members of all sorts from hobbyists to professional scholars. The editor thanks one and all for their support and interest.

K.H.B.





'The Moth and the Candle' by W. Thomas in *Cornhill Magazine*, XII, Oct. 1865, fp 461



Armadale: "A Book That Is Daring Enough  
to Speak the Truth"

Natalie Schroeder

In his Preface to the 1866 edition of Armadale, Wilkie Collins wrote: "Readers in particular will, I have some reason to suppose, be here and there disturbed, perhaps even offended, by finding that 'Armadale' oversteps, in more than one direction, the narrow limits within which they are supposed to restrict the development of modern fiction--if they can. . . . Estimated by the claptrap morality of the present day, this may be a very daring book. Judged by the Christian morality which is of all time, it is only a book that is daring enough to speak the truth."<sup>1</sup> U. C. Knoepfelmacher has shown that in The Woman in White Collins undermines conventional morality with what Knoepfelmacher calls "the counterworld," a world that is "asocial and amoral."<sup>2</sup> The counterworld of Armadale, however, does not simply involve the sympathetic treatment of a murderess. In his characterizations of the major characters, presumably the heroes and heroines, Collins undermines prevailing contemporary beliefs in the superiority of men and the subjection of women; but, in his refusal to uphold chastity as an ideal--to desexualize his major characters--Collins is even more daring. In Armadale Wilkie Collins explores aspects of female sexuality and female psychology; and while ultimately he is deeply ambivalent about independent women, he treats the relations between the sexes with a candor unmatched by other Victorians.

All the heroes and heroines of Victorian fiction, of course, are not stereotypes of the ideal of masculinity and femininity. But the morally perfect, strong, aggressive hero and the frail, passive heroine are certainly in the majority. There is no sign in Armadale, though, as there is in The Woman in White, of the traditional capitulation to the norm in the form of a conventionally masculine hero and feminine heroine like Walter Hartright or Laura Fairlie.<sup>3</sup> Both sets of heroes and heroines of Armadale reverse the commonly believed stereotypes about masculinity and femininity prevalent in the fiction and in the medical books of the 1860's.

According to William Acton, author of the popular book The Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs (1857), by learning to repress his sexual desires a man could experience "mysterious sensations



which make up "VIRILITY." As a result he would gain a "consciousness of his dignity, of his character as head and ruler of his importance, which is absolutely essential to the well-being of the family, and through it, of society itself. It is a power, a privilege, of which the man is, and should be, proud. . . ."4

Allan Armadale, the weaker and less compelling of the two heroes of Armadale, never rules. He is led, and he is particularly susceptible to the manipulations of women. According to Miss Gwilt, "Any moderately good-looking woman who chose to take the trouble could make him fall in love with her" (XIII, 482). Because he is made to fall in love first with Miss Milroy, then with Miss Gwilt, and again with Miss Milroy, Miss Gwilt's first impression of Armadale is validated. Also, unlike the "virile" hero of Victorian fiction--the superior man who is intelligent, dignified, honorable, and self-possessed--Allan Armadale is a flighty, somewhat dense blunderer whose behavior is more characteristic of the "weaker sex." He "acted recklessly on his first impulses, and rushed blindfold at all his conclusions" (XIII, 83). His only conventionally "erotic" aspect is an attractive physical appearance--he is "handsome" and blond. The lack of any specific description of Armadale's features, though, in contrast to the detailed descriptions of the other characters in the novel, suggests that Collins's "rosy, light-haired, good-tempered" hero (XIII, 482) is a parody of the convention.

Although Charles Dickens "could not stomach" Ozias Midwinter, he is a more conventionally masculine hero.<sup>5</sup> Miss Gwilt, for example, describes him as "little and lean, and active and dark, with bright black eyes which say to me plainly, 'We belong to a man with brains in his head and a will of his own'" (XIII, 486). Midwinter's unrepressed sexual desires, on the other hand, which allow him to be manipulated by Miss Gwilt, are atypical for a Victorian hero. Although Midwinter's "double"--the "miserable, shabby, dilapidated" Bashwood (XIII, 490)--cannot be termed a "hero," I shall discuss his character (also unconventional) along with Midwinter's.<sup>6</sup>

Collins clearly intended for the elder man to serve as the younger's alter-ego from their first meeting. Seeing Bashwood on the road, Midwinter is strangely affected: "For the first time in his life, Midwinter saw his own shy uneasiness in the presence of strangers reflected, with tenfold intensity of nervous suffering, in the face of another man--and that man old enough to be his father" (XIII, 332). Midwinter continues to think of Bashwood, but it does not yet occur to him



that the old man reminded him of himself. Midwinter's second reaction to Bashwood mingles compassion and distrust, but when Armadale leaves the two alone, they are drawn closer:

The two strangely assorted companions were left together--parted widely, as it seemed on the surface, from any possible interchange of sympathy; drawn invisibly one to the other, nevertheless, by those magnetic similarities of temperament which overleap all difference of age and station, and defy all apparent incongruities of mind and character. From the moment when Allan left the room, the hidden Influence that works in darkness began slowly to draw the two men together, across the great social desert which had lain between them up to this day. (XIII, 392).

Although Midwinter and Bashwood do not realize it, they are also "drawn together" by their sudden, intense, and unsettling passions for Miss Gwilt. Describing the different ways that they handle their sexual desires, Collins offers important observations about male sexuality.

In an age when any erotic excess was considered immoral and unhealthy, Miss Gwilt's sexual attraction for Bashwood and Midwinter makes their characters most remarkable. When Bashwood initially responds to Miss Gwilt with a "mixture of rapture and fear," (IX, 62) he responds to the Victorian fear of the dangers of sex.<sup>7</sup> His response is also connected to his weakness--to the absence of his male power. Bashwood's lack of "virility" is emphasized by his being neither head nor ruler of his household; he could control neither his wife's drinking nor his son's behavior. Because he lost his "manhood" (i.e., his male dominance) because of his domestic tragedy, he is initially unprepared for the desires that Miss Gwilt awakens in him: "His past existence had disciplined him to bear disaster and insult, as few happier men could have borne them; but it had not prepared him to feel the master-passion of humanity, for the first time, at the dreary end of his life, in the hopeless decay of a manhood that had withered under the double blight of conjugal disappointment and parental sorrow" (IX, 65-66). Because Bashwood's desire is stronger than his fear of sex, Miss Gwilt is able to tyrannize him.



Like Bashwood, Midwinter is unready for the "master-passion"--for the way that Miss Gwilt's "sexual sorcery" (IX, 73) arouses him. Collins's explicit sexual innuendoes are indeed candid and daring:

The magnetic influence of her touch was thrilling through him while she spoke. Change and absence, to which he had trusted to weaken her hold on him, had treacherously strengthened it instead. A man exceptionally sensitive, a man exceptionally pure in his past life, he stood hand in hand, in the tempting secrecy of the night, with the first woman who had exercised over him the all-absorbing influence of her sex. At his age, and in his position, who could have left her? The man (with a man's temperament) doesn't live who could have left her. (IX, 71)

Both Bashwood's and Midwinter's sexual excitement confirms--perhaps for the first time--that they are men; that is, they possess all the equipment and energy for some of the active male eroticism that was typically associated with male dominance.

In Bashwood's case, however, Miss Gwilt simply succeeds in castrating the man. She uses the power that she has aroused in him, speaking to him "with a merciless tyranny of eye and voice--with a merciless use of her power over the feeble creature whom she addressed" (IX, 63). Even though Bashwood learns the truth about her past and tries to use his knowledge to control her (to keep her forever with him), Miss Gwilt continues to make his new-born power work for her. Thus Bashwood remains at her mercy:

He struggled desperately to go on and say the words to her . . . which hinted darkly at his knowledge of her past life; words which warned her--do what else she might, commit what crimes she pleased--to think twice before she deceived and deserted him again. In those terms he had vowed to himself to address her. He had the phrases picked and chosen; he had the sentences ranged and ordered in his mind; nothing was wanting but to make the one crowning effort of speaking them--and, even now, after all he had said and all he had dared, the effort was more than he could compass! In helpless gratitude, even for so little as her pity, he stood



looking at her, and wept the silent, womanish tears that fall from old men's eyes. (IX, 533-34)

Through *Bashwood*, Collins deals with the melancholy aspect of a man's not becoming a man until too late in life, and then at the expense of a humiliating discovery thanks to a manipulating woman.

Midwinter, on the other hand, does achieve "virility" for a while. He is better able to channel his sexual drives after he marries Miss Gwilt. As a result, he, not his wife, becomes the master. His male dominance contributes to Miss Gwilt's disappointment with her marriage. Collins even specifically attributes the change that she senses in Midwinter to his acquiring the power to control his sexual energy: "It is only at night, when I hear him sighing in his sleep, and sometimes when I see him dreaming in the morning hours, that I know how hopeless I am losing the love he once felt for me. He hides, or tries to hide, it in the day, for my sake. He is all gentleness, all kindness; but his heart is not on his lips when he kisses me now; his hand tells me nothing when it touches mine" (IX, 351). In order to regain her independence once her husband has gained power over her, Miss Gwilt must leave him. Ultimately, Midwinter is unable to control his wife, who finally denies him to his face.<sup>8</sup> Midwinter vows, "She has denied her husband to-night, . . . She shall know her master to-morrow" (IX, 496), but he never has the opportunity to exhibit such mastery.

Although the characterizations of the heroes of *Armada* challenge Victorian conventions, the strength of the novel, both literally and figuratively, lies in its female characters. They are hardly frail vessels. They are, in fact, more masculine than the men--they are the aggressors and manipulators.<sup>9</sup> Acton's repeatedly quoted description of women can be applied to the majority of the heroines of Victorian fiction, particularly those who appeared regularly on the pages of the contemporary periodicals: "The best mothers, wives, and managers of households, know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of home, children, and domestic duties, are the only passions they feel. As a general rule, a modest woman seldom desires any sexual gratification for herself. She submits to her husband, but only to please him; and, but for the desire of maternity, would far rather be relieved from his attentions."<sup>10</sup>



The majority of Victorian heroines were described as perfectly beautiful and sexless--often, especially in Dickens's novels, childish. The perfection of their features reflected the moral perfection of their characters. The heroine of The Woman I Loved, and the Woman Who Loved Me, a sentimental novel replete with cliches, for example, is described as "the perfection of prettiness. . . . [her] beauty is not only undeniable, but it is singularly expressive of herself. That limpid purity of complexion, and that exquisite regularity of outline, are symbolical . . . of great innocence of heart, and an inexpressible genuineness . . . of character."<sup>11</sup>

Miss Milroy is, in Mr. Pedgift Senior's eyes, the "heroine" of Armadale; Collins's emphasis, however, is that Miss Milroy is not perfectly beautiful, nor is she sexless: she is "self-contradictory." She lacks the classic beauty of the conventional heroine. Her complexion is not clear and white (which would imply inner purity), but rosy and freckled: "She was pretty; she was not pretty; she charmed, she disappointed, she charmed again. Tried by recognized line and rule, she was too short and too well developed for her age. And yet few men's eyes would have wished her figure other than it was . . . Her nose was too short, her mouth was too large, her face was too round and too rosy" (XIII, 287-88). Miss Milroy's "well developed" figure and her large mouth are clues that she is sensual rather than sexless.<sup>12</sup>

Neelie Milroy's behavior, like her appearance, is not that of the passive, passionless heroine. When she first meets Armadale, she is deliberately flirtatious and coy: "She saw the way, on her side, to a little flirtation. She rested her hand on his arm, blushed, hesitated, and suddenly took it away again" (XIII, 292). She knows it is wrong to speak with him without a chaperone, refers to the impropriety of their walk, and continues to act as she pleases. Miss Milroy is also spoiled, jealous, and short-tempered. Her hypocritical manipulation of Armadale during their private interviews (observed secretly by Mill Gwilt) indicates that once married, Neelie Milroy will probably never agreeably submit to her husband. Miss Gwilt's description of Miss Milroy's behavior during one such clandestine meeting, for example, affirms that the latter is more akin to Becky Sharp than to Agnes Wickfield. As Miss Gwilt tells it, Miss Milroy sends Armadale away, apparently outraged by his proposal of a runaway marriage, but actually delighted that she has landed him. Then "She waited, after he had gone, to compose herself, and I [i.e., Miss Gwilt] waited behind the trees to see how she would succeed. Her eyes



wandered round slyly to the path by which he had left her. She smiled (grinned would be the truer way of putting it, with such a mouth as hers); took a few steps on tiptoe to look after him; turned back again, and suddenly burst into a violent fit of crying. I am not quite so easily taken in as Armadale, and I saw what it all meant plainly enough" (IX, 156).

The fascinating Lydia Gwilt, however, is the major character of Armadale; and because of Collins's undisguised admiration for her, I consider her the "heroine" of the novel. Significantly he entitled the stage adaptation of Armadale "Miss Gwilt." Destructive, aggressive females like her (what Gilbert and Gubar call monster women) are quite conventional in Victorian fiction. They reflect a classical conception of women; but such women are generally not the major character, nor are they treated sympathetically. Furthermore, a destructive female is usually counter-balanced by a saintly figure--the heroine.<sup>13</sup> Miss Gwilt's independence does not make her a revolutionary character; Collins's compassion for her does. As a heroine Miss Gwilt is chiefly unconventional because of her past crimes: forgery, murder, thievery, adultery, blackmail. Collins invokes sympathy for her, though, by revealing her sordid past through the narration of "the vile creature . . . the Confidential Spy of modern times" (IX, 305), James Bashwood. Her history also affirms what she writes to Midwinter at the end: "I might, perhaps, have been . . . [a] better woman myself, if I had not lived a miserable life before you met me. . . . Even my wickedness has one merit--it has not prospered. I have never been a happy woman" (IX, 559).

Like Marian Halcombe of The Woman in White, Lydia Gwilt is a "mannish" woman; but Halcombe is an ugly, swarthy-complexioned spinster, and the upper lip of her "large, firm, masculine mouth" sports an "almost" moustache.<sup>14</sup> Gwilt, by contrast is exquisitely beautiful and voluptuous:

[Her] forehead was low, upright, and broad toward the temples; her eyebrows, at once strongly and delicately marked, were a shade darker than her [red] hair; her eyes, large, bright, and well opened, were of that purely blue color, without a tinge in it of gray of green, so often presented to our admiration in pictures and book, so rarely met with in the living face . . . the nose . . . was the straight, delicately molded nose (with the short upper lip beneath) of the ancient statues and busts. . . . [Her] lips were full,



rich, and sensual. Her complexion was the lovely complexion which accompanies such hair as hers--so delicately bright in its rosier tints, so warmly and softly white in its gentler gradations of color on the forehead and the neck. Her chin, round and dimpled, was pure of the slightest blemish in every part of it, and perfectly in line with her forehead to the end. (XIII, 470-71)<sup>15</sup>

With the exception of her perfect nose and complexion, Miss Gwilt's features are not like those of the ideal sexless Victorian heroine. First of all, her red hair hints at her sexuality, her apartness. And, according to Jeanne Fahnestock, the broadening of a female's forehead towards the temples indicates intellect, the roundness of her chin, "the desire to love."<sup>16</sup> Collins was undoubtedly familiar with physiognomy, for he tells the reader (through Midwinter) that her "full, rich" lips are sensual. Also, her every movement expresses "that subtle mixture of the voluptuous and the modest, which, of the many attractive extremes that meet in women, is in a man's eye the most irresistible of all" (IX, 63).

Ironically, this beautiful, sensual woman is actually more "manly" by conventional Victorian standards than most of the male characters in the novel. Even Mr. Pedgift, Senior, her enemy, displays a reluctant admiration for Miss Gwilt's abilities: "What a lawyer she would have made . . . if she had only been a man!" (IX, 36). One of Miss Gwilt's masculine traits is her creativity, which trait, according to Francoise Basch, the Victorian doctrine of women's inferiority denied most women. Men alone were believed to have the "intellectual capacity for creation, invention and synthesis"; women were believed to be able only to exercise "judgment on details and insignificant things."<sup>17</sup> Unlike many a Victorian heroine who regarded music "as a means to an end, as an accomplishment enhancing her prospects in the marriage market,"<sup>18</sup> Miss Gwilt turns to music because she passionately loves it and because it soothes her when she is frustrated or depressed. She writes to Mrs. Oldershaw: "Instead of feeling' offended when you left me, I went to your piano, and forgot all about you till your messenger came" (XIII, 359). She finds a similar fulfillment through writing: "Why have I broken my resolution [to stop writing in her Diary]? Why have I gone back to this secret friend of my wretchedest and wickedest hours? Beause I am more friendless than ever; because I am more lonely than ever, though my husband is sitting writing in the next room to me" (IX, 350).



Miss Gwilt is also "unfeminine" because of her wit, her impatience, and her intellect, actually mocking many of the commonly accepted stereotypes about women. When she notifies Mrs. Oldershaw that she has changed her mind and will apply for the governess position, she writes: "I want a husband to vex, or a child to beat, or something of that sort" (XIII, 276). Later, when she relays her plan for deceiving Mr. Brock: "Some brute of a man says, in some book which I once read, that no woman can keep two separate trains of ideas in her mind at the same time" (XIII, 360). Also, when she begins to become irritated by Armadale's presence in Naples and by Midwinter's continued neglect, she writes in her Diary: "If so lady-like a person as I am could feel a tigerish tingling all over her to the very tips of her fingers, I should suspect myself of being in that condition at the present moment. But, with my manners and accomplishments, the thing is, of course, out of the question. We all know that a lady has no passions" (IX, 363).

Miss Gwilt's passions and her unwilling sexual attraction to Midwinter are the most compelling aspects of her character.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the ease with which she manipulates Armadale and Bashwood, she finds it difficult to deceive Midwinter because she desires him. In "a sudden panic of astonishment," she wonders, "Am I mad enough to be thinking of him in that way?" (IX, 82). Miss Gwilt's description of the love scene by the pool, which culminates in Midwinter's proposal of marriage, is boldly explicit. Midwinter's very presence makes Miss Gwilt warm: "Either the night was very close, or I was by this time literally in a fever" (IX, 130). Yet, his declaration of love makes her feel old; when she submits to her passion, she loses some of her vibrant energy. As she runs her fingers through his hair, she shudders as she remembers her former "lovers"--her other moments of passion that ended in her being dominated. She actually believes that she sees the ghosts of those lovers when Midwinter proposes to her. In a final desperate effort to preserve her power, she forgets to maintain her mask of femininity. In order to make Midwinter reveal his name, she become her unreserved self--the aggressor: "My curiosity, or more likely my temper, got beyond all control. He had irritated me till I was reckless what I said or what I did. I suddenly clasped him close, and pressed my lips to his. 'I love you!' I whispered in a kiss. 'Now will you tell me?'" (IX, 138). Ironically, instead of the conventionally passive angel inspiring the man to dominate with her gentility, the aggressive-tigerish Lydia Gwilt gives Midwinter his "courage," his masculinity; and "in a new voice" he commands her to sit "as only men can [command]" (IX, 139).



Miss Gwilt's attempts to resist her passion for Midwinter are easy to understand. She is an independent woman; she remembers the degradation she suffered from her earlier experience with passion. Because she is reluctant to place herself again in a man's power, she scorns herself.<sup>20</sup> Miss Gwilt's decision to marry Midwinter, however, is inconsistent with her mannish character. It appears to derive neither from her desires for sex nor for power, but rather from a desire to become innocent--to become the ideal passive woman for whom she had earlier exhibited such contempt: "I have won the great victory; I have trampled my own wickedness under foot. I am innocent; I am happy again. My love! my angel! when tomorrow gives me to you, I will not have a thought in my heart which is not your thought, as well as mine!" (IX, 302)

It is somewhat unsettling for Miss Gwilt to choose suddenly to become a "relative creature" approximately two-thirds of the way into the novel--a woman who is nothing in herself, who "can only justify her presence on earth by dedicating herself to others; [who] through deliberate self-effacement, duty and sacrifice, . . . will discover the identity and raison d'être of which, by herself, she is deprived."<sup>21</sup> Collins, however, implies that marriage is not the salvation that many Victorians supposed. The creative Miss Gwilt cannot share all her thoughts with her husband, nor find fulfillment only through her relationship with him. Then too, he no longer satisfies her sexually: "How happy I was in the first days that followed our marriage, and how happy I made him! Only two months have passed, and that time is a by-gone time already!" (IX, 351). She is confused about the change in their relationship, especially about the control Midwinter maintains over his former passion for her; and she fears that either he loves her less or that he suspects the truth about her character. None of her speculations is validated by his behavior. The fact is, she is unhappy being married--being submissive rather than independent. She equates her present unhappiness with the despair she suffered from the other men who mastered her--with her first husband's whipping her and with her lover Manual's deserting her. Her misery, she says, when she resumes writing in her Diary, "is a woman's misery" (IX, 350). Midwinter channels his new energy into his writing, and she becomes lonely and depressed: "I have often heard that the wives of authors have been for the most part unhappy women. And now I know why" (IX, 354).<sup>22</sup> Just as earlier she mocked feminine conventions, she ironically comments on her role as a neglected wife: "What a pattern wife, what an excellent Christian I am" (IX, 365). Finally, when Manual contacts her and his presence causes her to feel



like the woman she once was, she abandons her attempt to become the woman she had tried to be.

When Miss Gwilt and Dr. Downward become accomplices at the end, he often reminds Miss Gwilt that she is female--almost as if he is determined to keep her in her place: "'So like a woman!' he remarked, with the most exasperating good humor. 'The moment she sees her object, she dashes at it headlong the nearest way. Oh, the sex! the sex!'" (IX, 433).<sup>23</sup> Miss Gwilt reacts like a twentieth-century feminist: "'Never mind the sex!' I [i.e., Miss Gwilt] broke out, impatiently. 'I want a serious answer--Yes or No?'" (IX, 434). Denying her husband makes Miss Gwilt even more masculine. That bold action, in fact, seems to erase most of her amazing beauty; she appears haggard and old. When she saves her husband's life, however, she again becomes "womanly and lovely" (IX, 558). Her final kiss is "her last weakness" (IX, 560).

Ultimately, Collins is ambivalent about independent women. The word "woman" is repeatedly associated with Miss Gwilt in the final pages. The woman who sacrifices her life for her husband at the end significantly raises her moral status. She is no longer masculine, though, nor is she voluptuous: "She silently bent over him and kissed his forehead. When she looked up again, the hard despair had melted from her face. There was something softly radiant in her eyes, which lit her whole countenance as with an inner light, and made her womanly and lovely once more" (IX, 558). In fact, she dies a conventional combination of the ideal angel-woman and the melodramatic repentant sinner: "Oh, God, forgive me! . . . Oh, Christ, bear witness that I have suffered!" (IX, 560).

Collins's unconventional attitude towards sex, however, remains unwavering. In the Victorian age sexual decency was intricately connected to social stability,<sup>24</sup> and sexual misconduct was especially pernicious in a woman.<sup>25</sup> Collins implies, however, that Miss Gwilt's sexual sins are not as serious as her criminal propensities. When Armadale believes that Miss Gwilt is a fallen woman, Collins says that her story is "infinitely less revolting, and yet infinitely more terrible" (IX, 7). That Miss Gwilt became an adulteress (and, in a sense, also a fallen woman) when she married the already married Manual is never an issue--the murder of her first husband and her three attempts on Armadale's life are.

True, Miss Gwilt finally repents, but she confesses to her civil not to her sexual crimes. She writes to her husband: "I am worse than the worst you can think



of me. You have saved Armadale by changing rooms with him to-night; and you have saved him from Me. You can guess now whose widow I should have claimed to be, if you had not preserved his life; and you will know what a wretch you married when you married the woman who writes these lines (IX, 559). The ending of Armadale is melodramatic, unbelievable, and conventional, but because Lydia Gwilt never feels the "overwhelming remorse of little Em'ly,"<sup>26</sup> Collins succeeds in challenging the "clap-trap" morality of his day.

## NOTES

1 Wilkie Collins, Armadale (Part One and Part Two), The Works of Wilkie Collins, XIII and IX (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, Publisher, 1900), XIII, 4. All subsequent references will be to this edition and will be included in the body of the text.

2 U. C. Knoepfmacher, "The Counterworld of Victorian Fiction and The Woman in White," The Worlds of Victorian Fiction, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1975), p. 352.

3 Although Knoepfmacher argues that both Walter Hartright and Laura Fairlie become, for awhile, unconventional and then return to their stereotypical roles at the end (pp. 362-365), for most of the novel Hartright is a stereotypical embodiment of "the Jacob figure"--the faithful lover. See John R. Reed, Victorian Conventions (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1975), pp. 79-89. Laura Fairlie Glyde is the epitome of what Reed calls "the Griselda" figure (the long suffering wife), pp. 40-44.

4 Quoted in Steven Marcus, The Other Victorians: A Study of Sexuality and Pornography in Mid-Nineteenth-Century England (New York: Basic Books, Inc., 1964), p. 25.

5 See Nuel Pharr Davis, The Life of Wilkie Collins (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 246.

6 Despite the assertions of John R. Reed and David Blair that Armadale and Midwinter are doubles, there is little evidence in the novel to support their claims. Reed cites as evidence Midwinter's saving of Armadale's life "by taking his place." Bashwood, however, saves Midwinter's life by leaving the latter's handkerchief in the room. See Reed, p. 319, and David Blair, "Wilkie Collins and the Crisis of Suspense," Reading the



Victorian Novel: Detail into Form, ed. Ian Gregor (New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1980), p. 48.

<sup>7</sup> See Marcus, pp. 12-28; note also that Bashwood has the "deplorable infirmity of perspiring at the palms of the hands" (XIII, 395). Collins's description recalls William Acton's, of a boy who habitually masturbates. Marcus says that such descriptions were commonplace, occupying, "therefore, the status of official belief" (p. 19). Bashwood also has fleshless cheeks, a limp shrinking posture, and eyes that look "hither and thither," all of which, according to Acton, were further signs of masturbation. See also Eric Trudgill, Madonnas and Magdalens: The Origin and Development of Victorian Sexual Attitudes (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1976), pp. 50-55.

<sup>8</sup> Dickens was especially concerned about the potential objections to that scene in the dramatic version of Armadale. In his July 9, 1866 letter to Collins, he wrote: "I do not think any English audience would accept the scene in which Miss Gwilt in that Widow's dress renounces Midwinter." The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Mamie Dickens and Georgina Hogarth (New York: Walter J. Blank, Inc., 1893), p. 179.

<sup>9</sup> Julian Symons says that "Collins had a liking for strong, mannish women"--"Introduction," Wilkie Collins, The Woman in White (Middlesex England: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 14-15.

<sup>10</sup> Quoted in Marcus, p. 31; see also Reed, pp. 34-44; Trudgill, pp. 56-100; Françoise Basch, Relative Creatures (New York: Schocken Books, 1974), pp. 3-74; and Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 16-27.

<sup>11</sup> Once a Week, Feb. 15, 1862, p. 204; see also Jeanne Fahnestock, "The Heroine of Irregular Features: Physiognomy and Conventions of Heroine Description," Victorian Studies, 24 (Spring 1981), 325-330.

<sup>12</sup> According to Fahnestock, the large mouths, which became prevalent on the heroines of the 1860's, "brings a tinge of sensuality to their characterizations" (342), while short noses (like Miss Milroy's) suggest characters who follow their "inclinations, or their noses, into misfortune" (345).

<sup>13</sup> See Reed, pp. 44-58; see also Gilbert and Gubar, p. 29.



14 Collins, The Woman in White, p. 58.

15 Of The Woman in White, Gavin Lambert states that Collins "infers that the only chance for a woman to become independent in Victorian society is to be like Marian, strong but freakish": The Dangerous Edge (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), p. 14. Lambert does not note, however, how this inference changes in Armadale. Perhaps he is not totally familiar with the novel, for he describes Armadale as a product of Collins's early experimentation with drugs--as a novel in which "a beautiful young drug addict plans to kill her enemies with a portable contraption that leaks poison gas" (p. 15). Note also that Miss Gwilt's un-freakishness (i.e., her beauty) was a major contemporary objection to the novel because, as the critic for The Spectator complained, her appearance did not suggest either her age or all the sordidness of her life to date. Kenneth Robinson, Wilkie Collins: A Biography (London: The Bodley Head, 1951), p. 195.

16 Fahnestock, 340 and 346.

17 Basch, p. 5; see also Trudgill, p. 70; and Gilbert's and Gubar's discussion of the pen as "a metaphorical penis," pp. 3-16.

18 Dutton Cook, The Prodigal Son, Once a Week, May 10, 1862, p. 536. Cook describes the "typical" Victorian heroine in his serialized novel.

19 Robinson calls Miss Gwilt's "half-unwilling love" for Midwinter "strangely real and moving" (p. 192). Winifred Hughes, on the other hand, finds it "somewhat difficult to believe in her strange, unwilling affection for Midwinter": The Maniac in the Cellar: Sensation Novels of the 1860s (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 158.

20 See Hughes, pp. 158-159.

21 Basch, p. 5.

22 Gilbert's and Gubar's linking of writing with sexuality supports my argument. (See note 17 above.) It is significant that Mill Gwilt begins to fight her husband's dominance by resuming her writing.

23 Ironically, that is the very way that Collins describes Allan Armadale--as a man who acts recklessly on first impulses. See the description of him that I quoted earlier.

24 Trudgill, p. 30.



25 According to Martha Vicinus, "The woman who broke the family circle, be she prostitute, adulterer, or divorcee, threatened society's very fabric. The most unforgivable sin . . . was the married woman who committed adultery": "Introduction," Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age, ed. Martha Vicinus (Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1973), p. xiv; see also Helen E. Roberts, "Marriage, Redundancy or Sin: The Painter's View of Women in the First Twenty-Five Years of Victoria's Reign," Suffer and Be Still, pp. 63-76.

26 Vicinus, p. xiv.



tiful applications, of credit; but, by the side of the bank-note, there rests a vacant place, which our obligations are called upon to fill. The principal of these obligations being to be repayable, only at an epoch corresponding to that of the property which they represent in our portefeuille, and to bear interest to the profit of the holder, their issue is exempt from every inconvenience. In accordance with the economy which serves as the basis of our Society, these vouchers are not only pledged (*gagés*) by property of corresponding amount acquired under government control, and whose union offers, by the application of the principle of mutuality, the advantages of the compensation and the division of risks; but they will have moreover the guarantee of a capital which we have raised with this object, to a considerably high figure (sixty millions).

But interested parties may talk till they are tired. An institution of credit, like the *Crédit Mobilier*, useful, even necessary, in respect to its object, has outgrown the proportions and range of action allowed to private companies. An institution which can only exist by the support of the public faith, cannot be made use of for the furtherance of private interests. Such an application of its powers is nothing less than a fraudulent abuse; and the authorities who tolerate it, and the speculators who make it their tool, incur—the one the blame of the nation, the other the censure of honest men. As to buying in now, or at any other time, every one must judge for himself; just as every one must form his own decision whether he will dance a fandango on a cracked tight-rope, whether he will cross an Alpine ravine on a rotten plank, or whether he will plunge his hand into a smooth-surfaced caldron of oil with a brisk fire burning beneath it.

### THE DEAD SECRET.

CHAPTER THE FIRST. THE TWENTY-THIRD OF AUGUST, 1829.

"WILL she last out the night, I wonder?"

"Look at the clock, Joseph."

"Ten minutes past twelve! She *has* lasted the night out. She has lived, Robert, to see ten minutes of the new day."

These words were spoken in the kitchen of a large country-house situated on the west coast of Cornwall. The speakers were two of the men-servants composing the establishment of Captain Treverton, an officer in the navy, and the eldest male representative of an old Cornish family. Both the servants communicated with each other restrainedly, in whispers—sitting close together, and looking round expectantly towards the door whenever the talk flagged between them.

"It's an awful thing," said the elder of the men, "for us two to be alone here, at this

dead, dark time, counting out the minutes that our mistress has left to live!"

"Robert," said the other, lowering his voice to a whisper that was barely audible, "You have been in service here since you were a boy—did you ever hear that our mistress was a play-actress when our master married her?"

"How came you to know that?" inquired the elder servant, sharply.

"Hush!" cried the other, rising quickly from his chair.

A bell rang in the passage outside.

"Is that for one of us?" asked Joseph.

"Can't you tell, by the sound, which is which of those bells yet?" exclaimed Robert, contemptuously. "That bell is for Sarah Leeson. Go out into the passage and look."

The younger servant took a candle and obeyed. When he opened the kitchen-door, a long row of bells met his eye on the wall opposite. Above each of them was painted in neat black letters the distinguishing title of the servant whom it was specially intended to summon. The row of letters began with Housekeeper and Butler, and ended with Kitchenmaid and Footman's Boy.

Looking along the bells, Joseph easily discovered that one of them was still in motion. Above it were the words, *Lady's Maid*. Observing this, he passed quickly along the passage, and knocked at a large, old-fashioned oak door at the end of it. No answer being given, he opened the door and looked into the room. It was dark and empty.

"Sarah is not in the housekeeper's room," said Joseph, returning to his fellow-servant in the kitchen.

"She is gone to her own room, then," rejoined the other. "Go up and tell her that she is wanted by her mistress."

The bell rang again as Joseph went out.

"Quick!—quick!" cried Robert. "Tell her she is wanted directly. Wanted," he continued to himself in lower tones, "perhaps for the last time!"

Joseph ascended three flights of stairs—passed half-way down a long arched gallery—and knocked at another old-fashioned oak door. This time the signal was answered. A low, clear, sweet voice inside the room, inquired who was waiting without? In a few hasty words Joseph told his errand. Before he had done speaking, the door was quietly and quickly opened, and Sarah Leeson confronted him on the threshold, with her candle in her hand.

Not tall, not handsome, not in her first youth—shy and irresolute in manner—simple in dress to the utmost limits of plainness, the lady's-maid, in spite of all these disadvantages, was a woman whom it was impossible to look at without a feeling of curiosity, if not of interest. Few men, at first sight of her, could have resisted the desire to find out who she was; few would



## A Second Look at The Dead Secret

Robert Ashley

The Dover reprint and a request from Kirk Beetz have prompted this second look at The Dead Secret; my first look occurred in the late forties when I was struggling with a doctoral dissertation on Collins. In re-reading the novel, I purposely refrained from peaking at the pages of the dissertation as well as its subsequent condensation for the English Novelists Series;<sup>1</sup> the second look should, consequently, be an unbiassed one.

As I re-read what I wrote over thirty years ago, it seems that my overall impression of The Dead Secret, whether I realized it then or not, was one of contradictory strengths and weaknesses. The novel opened impressively, but ended lamely. The convergence of the rival "agents" on the "dead secret" hidden in a typically "sinister house" was perhaps Collins' best bit of sustained narrative to date, but the overall pace, especially for Collins, was surprisingly sluggish. The novel was Collins' first serial, but the effect of serialization was not exactly what one would have expected. Since Collins had always ended his chapters or, in his plays, the scenes and acts with "strong curtains," he needed no increase in suspenseful situations to create cliffhanging installments. But his attempt to create unity of tone and effect in each installment might have helped cause the novel's sluggish movement.

Each of the main characters was skilfully conceived to meet the demands of the plot: for example, Mr. Treverton was made a sea captain so that his absence from home could make possible the deception practised upon him; Mrs. Treverton was made an actress so that she could temporarily exchange places with Sarah Leeson when the latter had her illegitimate daughter; Leonard Franklin was given the trait of family pride to heighten the reader's foreboding about the discovery of the secret. Rosamond was the most convincing, lifelike, and attractive of Collins' early heroines, but her blind husband, Leonard, was a stuffy and colorless hero. Furthermore, Collins made no attempt to study the psychological effect of being blind, nor did Leonard's blindness have any impact on the plot. Sarah Leeson was the most elaborately drawn character in the early novels, and in this portrait, Collins attempted to



trace "the influence of a heavy responsibility on a naturally timid woman, whose mind was neither strong enough to bear it, nor bold enough to drop it altogether."<sup>2</sup> In this attempt, Collins was not entirely successful. But the skill with which the entire plot was made to hinge upon Sarah's character was something new in Collins; furthermore, the study of the effect of the secret's burden upon her revealed an interest in the psychology of character that Collins was often assumed not to possess.

The novel's chief weakness was that the disclosure of the secret, led up to with such fanfare, had virtually no effect on the lives of the main characters. The illegitimate Rosamond ceded her fortune to her uncle, the legal heir, but he promptly gave it back; Leonard toyed briefly with the idea of being righteously indignant, but decided to lose his family pride in his love for his wife; Sarah found peace of mind, but passed on to the next world, as she was about to do anyhow, before she could enjoy her newly found happiness. On the whole, The Dead Secret was Collins' best novel to date, but by a narrower margin than might have been expected. By the time he completed The Dead Secret, he had developed all of the skills, all of the character types, and all the motifs found in his later work. What he had not yet created was a plot complex enough, a secret mysterious enough, a situation serious enough to give full scope to his talents.

Before comparing my first and second "looks" and reaching a final verdict on The Dead Secret, it would be instructive to summarize the reactions of other Collins biographers during the years between the fifties and the eighties. Kenneth Robinson found the novel "strangely deficient in plot" and complained that "Sarah never quite comes to life and her dilemma seems altogether too contrived."<sup>3</sup> According to Nuel Pharr Davis, The Dead Secret succeeded as a serial, but not as a novel: "Read at one sitting it was tiresome and repetitive . . . . But the instalments when read one at a time each created a sense of chilly interest and creeping excitement."<sup>4</sup> William Marshall examines The Dead Secret in the context of his thesis that Collins possessed to a limited degree the "talent for literary compromises between the two sensibilities--the intellectual and the popular."<sup>5</sup> In the character of Sarah Leeson, who can be viewed either as "a truly pathetic character" or as a guilty sinner, Marshall believes that Collins came closer than in his previous novels to reaching the compromise.<sup>6</sup>

Whether one agrees with him or not, Gavin Lambert offered an especially provocative analysis based on his



"dangerous edge" theory about crime writers. For him Sarah Leeson was both a reflection of Collins' mistress Caroline Graves and an anticipation of Anne Catherick in The Woman in White.<sup>7</sup> One of "two darkly original characters . . . she walked the borderline of sanity, unable to find release. Dostoevsky was not the only novelist who anticipated Freud."<sup>8</sup> The other darkly original character was Rosamond's uncle, a misanthrope, a hermit, and a drop-out from a privileged family<sup>9</sup>--in the latter respect, an astonishingly twentieth-century figure. Lambert even managed to find something of significance in Rosamond's husband: in one scene he became a blind detective "some seventy years before Ernest Bramah's popular creation, Max Carrados."<sup>10</sup> For Lambert, The Dead Secret was a successful novel which "collapses only in the last chapter."<sup>11</sup>

At long last, what is the final verdict after a second read? Perhaps to the disappointment of Dover, of Kirk Beetz, who wrote me that The Dead Secret was one of his favorites, and of many devoted Collinsians, I am somewhat less impressed than I was thirty years ago. I still find Rosamond an appealing, early example of Collins' strong-minded heroines, I still find Uncle Joseph an amusing eccentric (he, not Sherlock Holmes, first faced "a three-pipe problem"<sup>12</sup>), I still admire the suspense-filled opening scene, and I still marvel at Collins' skill in prolonging a narrative after it seems to have run its appointed course. However, I am now inclined to agree with Robinson and Lonoff<sup>13</sup> that the characterization of Sarah Leeson is more successful in conception than in execution. I still find the novel tedious at times and, more often than tedious, somewhat trivial, little more than exercise in ingenuity. But what has struck me most forcibly is the enormous qualitative gap between The Dead Secret and The Woman in White in a time lapse of only two years. Who, after reading Collins' earlier novels, could have predicted such a great leap forward? The Woman in White's almost incredible advance over its predecessors is due not only to the immortal Fosco and the redoubtable Marian or to the skillful adaptation of the epistolary technique to the demands of a mystery story or to the novel's richness of texture, but also to the fact that something vital is at stake and that the resolution of the plot really "matters." What is at stake and what matters in The Woman in White is not only the righting of a terrible moral, let alone legal, wrong, but the happiness and prosperity of the three leading "good" characters. Whereas the discovery of the secret in the earlier novel changes the lives of no one, the discovery of the secret and the defeat of Fosco radically change the lives of several people. The difference between The Dead Secret and The Woman in



White is something like the difference between Golden Age puzzles by Agatha Christie and Raymond Chandler's best work or Lawrence Sanders' "deadly sin" novels. I do not wish to be misunderstood. There are times when there is nothing I would rather read than a Golden Age whodunit, but I don't kid myself that I am reading a serious piece of fiction. Even if one accepts Marshall's and Lambert's interpretations, The Dead Secret does not emerge as a truly serious novel.

For years, scholars and critics rather cavalierly underestimated Collins' later work. Did they at the same time overestimate his early work? Are Hide and Seek and The Dead Secret really superior to Poor Miss Finch and The Law and the Lady?

#### Notes

1 Robert Ashley, Wilkie Collins (London: Arthur Barker, 1952 and New York: Roy Publishers, 1952), pp. 52-54.

2 Preface to the second edition.

3 Kenneth Robinson, Wilkie Collins (London: The Bodley Head, 1951), p. 111.

4 Nuel Pharr Davis, The Life of Wilkie Collins (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 196.

5 William H. Marshall, Wilkie Collins (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970), p. 21.

6 Marshall, p. 39.

7 Gavin Lambert, The Dangerous Edge (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1975), p. 5.

8 Lambert, pp. 5, 6.

9 Lambert, p. 6.

10 Lambert, p. 7.

11 Lambert, p. 7.

12 Wilkie Collins, The Dead Secret (New York: Collier, 1900), p.

13 Sue Lonoff, Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers (New York: AMS Press, 1982), p. 160.



R[ay]. V[ernon]. Andrew. Wilkie Collins: A Critical Survey of His Prose Fiction with a Bibliography. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1979. xi, 358 pp. \$35.00.

#### Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV

This is an unusual book. Part of a series, "The Fiction of Popular Culture," supervised by E. F. Bleiler, in which the nineteen other titles treat writers of Gothic romance (Radcliffe, Maturin) or crime-detective fiction (Ainsworth, Doyle), it implies one prevalent outlook on Collins's work. Unlike most others in the series, Andrew's book is no reprint of a previously published book; it is a photographically reproduced doctoral thesis for Potchefstroom University (1959). Twenty-four years, however, have not dimmed its luster. Along with Sue Lonoff's book, reviewed elsewhere in these pages, and the never completed study by Dorothy L. Sayers (also lately published), it joins the ranks of significant Collinsiana.

Andrew structures his book such that critiques of writings (fiction, drama, non-fictional prose) leading up to the four "greats"--The Woman in White, No Name, Armadale, and The Moonstone--are set forth chronologically. The four major novels then receive critiques. Finally, there are sections outlining the winding down from the great years (1859-1868), chronologically set down, and conclusions. No piece by Collins is too minor to go unnoticed, if tersely, and that feature adds value to this book. Surprisingly, few of Andrew's judgments of the major novels have been surpassed, although Lonoff's chapter on The Moonstone might profitably be read with Andrew's comments on that novel.

Several minuses are evident in Wilkie Collins, let it be boldly stated. Some will object to the ample plot summaries, yet, with Collins's writings being often eclipsed by those of Dickens, Thackeray, Eliot, or Trollope, those outlines provide handy guides. The long quotations, principally from Collins's own writings, may be equally worthwhile, although they appear in predictably dissertationesque format that grow fairly mechanical. The vast numbers of typos, and the omission of what in spots are key words (p. 79, 1st par.; p. 92, 4th l. from bottom) or of quotation marks (p. 21) detract from swift perusal. Erratic forms in many notes and the failure to italicize entire titles: these are



just plain sloppiness, of sorts, moreover, that could have been prevented by thorough, and courteous, checking. A minus of different proportions is Andrew's aim to draw biographical inferences from the texts; these are frequently unsubstantiated, and they are the more glaring because of occasional swipes at Nuel P. Davis for offering shaky speculation (p. 217). Davis's The Life of Wilkie Collins (1956) otherwise receives fairly soft-pedalled treatment, perhaps because his method is so like Andrew's. One should read with caution Andrew's attempts to link Collins's life with his fiction, particularly that comment yoking Ezra Jennings with his creator (p. 233). Usually these sections that "see the life" in the works should be approached with the salt box handy. Much concerning Collins's personal life still remains cloudy, alas, and that in despite of biographical labors of Kenneth Robinson, Robert Ashley, and Kirk H. Beetz, whose edition of Collins's correspondence would do much in the way of affording biographical enlightenment.

Now to the plus factors in Andrew's book. Still in biographical regions, we note his sensible corrective to J. G. Millais's sensational record of the genesis of The Woman in White, in his biography of his father (1899). That less-than-reliable story, nevertheless, maintains vitality after many years, as have so many legends connected with Edgar Allan Poe or the biased biographical portraits of George Meredith (I have lately acquired letters by Meredith with which S. M. Ellis obviously tampered before publishing them in his biography of Meredith). Andrew, rightly, laments the absence of an edition of Collins's letters, a lament that is still relevant after nearly a quarter of a century. Nuel Davis projected a published collection of Collins's letters, but that failed to see light. Maybe some enterprising firm will publish Beetz's edition, a feat that would materially assist Collinsians. The plays, to which Andrew devotes more space than any other scholar has done, need similar editorial treatment and publication for convenient availability.

Another merit in Andrew's assessments shows in fairly detailed (or at least lengthier than elsewhere) discussion of Collins's use of dramatic techniques in his fiction. With his own words about the novel and the play as "twin sisters," in the preface to Basil, those cross-currents are important. No other critic, though, gives so much, and so much good, thought to the topic. Collins frequently adapted his novels to the stage, although in Man and Wife he reversed the procedure, failing abominably to bring a play to length and art essential in good fiction. A sister art, painting, with which he had more than passing familiarity, cropped up



functionally throughout Collins's fiction. Thence the "atmosphere" for which he remains well-known. Artist figures, too, continue to be familiar characters in the Collins gallery, and their appearances combine with dramatic aspects to give Collins an odd type of kinship to Henry James, as I see it (and not heretically, I hope), that has previously gone unspoken.

Generally, Andrew's theories concerning the four great novels have weathered well the passage of time. He gives just dues to The Woman in White, then gives like eminence to No Name (shades of Geoffrey Tillotson). With that latter opinion many are bound to disagree, but Andrew's case is well presented. (I except the matter of trying to see Collins's personal circumstances as a mainspring for No Name.) Then, citing Harry Quilter, who to many remains Collins's most astute Victorian critic, Andrew concurs in praising Armadale, another view with which many may find fault (not, however, the present reviewer). It is no small irony to read here now serialized Armadale saved Harper's Monthly from losses it sustained during the run of Our Mutual Friend. Time and John Forster have swayed favor toward Dickens. In this same vein, Andrew's emphasizing how The Woman in White made the reputations of both Collins and All the Year Round is valuable. Indeed the more far-reaching subject of Collins as magazinist is given shrewd soundings, and in line with that his relationship with Dickens on professional levels. That they diverged because of Dickens's jealousy over the success of The Moonstone and because of his preoccupation with Ellan Ternan and his readings: these are matters not trumpeted by John Forster and company. Andrew's readings of The Moonstone is fresh and persuasive after many years. His demonstration of its culminating many earlier Collinsian methods and character types is fine. One might, if wishing to be strict historian, argue that Dickens in Bleak House had beat Collins to the punch, so far as the "first detective novel in English" goes. Nonetheless, Andrew's placement of Collins's novel is a good one, and his later remarks about neglect of Collins in histories of detective fiction is still pertinent. More likely to elicit caveats are Andrew's praises for The Law and the Lady, a novel still much and unjustly passed by. Collins's delineation of abnormal characters never soared so high as it did in Miserrimus Dexter.

Collins's relationships with other writers show well in Andrew's pages. The Dickens-Collins question, on both sides, is handled more dispassionately than it has been in many other chronicles. The debts to Poe are noticed so tersely as to whet one's curiosity about their full significance (on which Earle Davis's The



Flint and the Flame ought also be consulted). Twain, Stevenson, Doyle, Stoker, Bennett, Daphne du Maurier, Graham Greene: most are not commonly associated with Collins, and further investigation may well devolve from Andrew's leads. The name of Dorothy L. Sayers, of course, has often been bracketed with that of Collins, and her writings about him are awarded deserved respect. E. L. Gregory has recently (1977) edited Sayer's unfinished study of Collins and produced an essay in which her literary debts are noted. A name absent from Andrew's list, and one that may ring strangely in some ears, is that of George Meredith. Mr. Phippen in The Dead Secret is a dead ringer for hypochondriacal Hippias Feverel in The Ordeal of Richard Feverel. Other characters and incidents in Collins's novel found their ways to Meredith's second novel, Evan Harrington. Meredith, too, we remember, wrote for Household Words during the very time The Dead Secret ran serially there; therefore, in his apprentice novels what more natural than his turning to established models? Perhaps the meager success of his early fiction led to Meredith's expression of deprecatory opinion about Collins in his correspondence. At any rate, Meredith's name deserves inclusion with others listed above.

In closing I suggest that a long incubation has not rendered valueless R. V. Andrew's study of Collins. It is for the most part cannily critical. The bibliography has been superceded by those of Kirk H. Beetz and Andrew Gasson. This book actually reads (bad typing and all negatives included) like a product of the 1970s or 1980s. It contains information available nowhere else for students of new and old acquaintance with Wilkie Collins. I recommend it as the best introduction to Collins's writings to be had, barring its theories of the writer's personal life entering the works. Andrew's leads (pp. 166-167) may develop into an extended study of Collins's women, a subject approached intermittently by Lonoff. Worthwhile reading awaits those who turn these pages.



Sue Lonoff. Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1982. ix, 298 pp. \$27.50.

Natalie Schroeder

Focusing on Collins's fiction in relation to his reading public, Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers: A Study in the Rhetoric of Authorship presents some fresh insights into Collins's fiction. Sue Lonoff declares that: "Collins wrote to be read. Whatever inner needs or motives drove him to write and kept him writing through years of ill health, he was always concerned with his effect upon his audience, and that concern permeates his fiction" (p. 15). Her study also examines Collins's apparent ambivalent attitude toward his reading public: "He avidly sought popularity, yet he often attacked his readers' preconceptions and criticized the failings of the English. He tried to win approval but he also tried to shock, not only by thrilling or surprising his readers, but also by introducing characters and issues that were bound to be controversial" (p. 15).

One of the most impressive aspects of Lonoff's book is the comprehensiveness of her scholarship. She obviously began her research years ago (in her "Acknowledgments," for example, she thanks Walter Kendrick for allowing her to see his "forthcoming" article, published in 1977); however she also refers to some of the most recent publications on Collins--articles, books, and journals (i.e., The Wilkie Collins Society Journal). It is also helpful that her partially annotated "Selected Bibliography" indicates which works do not appear in Kirk H. Beetz's Wilkie Collins: An Annotated Bibliography, 1889-1976.

While Lonoff's organization leads to a somewhat haphazard and sometimes repetitious treatment of Collins's fiction, it is well suited to her thesis. She begins with a general survey of the Victorian reading public. Then she focuses more specifically on Collins--on how he planned and wrote his novels and on the readers who mattered to him--his family and friends (particularly Dickens), his reviewers, and his "ordinary" reading public. After analyzing Collins's readers, Lonoff illustrates the reciprocal relation of his concern with audience and his writing: "his most effective techniques evolved from his attempts to



maintain the reader's interest and served the purpose of luring the reader into active involvement" (p. 79). She also explores the games Collins played with his plots and characters, with his readers, and with "the text as a text" (p. 117).

The final two chapters of Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers, though, are the most valuable. In the penultimate chapter Lonoff discusses the kinds of things Collins included in his novels when he wrote to please himself rather than his readers: women and deviance. She argues that Collins was most definitely attracted to masculine women, but like "so many Victorian men, he also found female potency a threat, a source of fear and anxiety" (p. 146). Unfortunately, the section on physical deviance is not as well developed as the ones on women and on psychological deviance.

The final chapter on The Moonstone as a reader-oriented work treats the sources of the novel to illustrate how Collins adapted various materials to please his readers. A few points Lonoff makes about sources, though, remain dubious. She admits, for example, that there is no proof that Collins read Confessions of a Thug, but she goes on to imply he did read it because "Queen Victoria herself read the proof sheets, and when the book was published it was widely and favorably reviewed" (p. 178). Similarly, although she admits there is no proof that Collins read "The Spectre of Tappington," because he "certainly" read Bentley's Miscellany (where it was first published), she says, "it [is] very likely that he did" (p. 182).

Lonoff does, however, offer some original insights into The Moonstone. She discusses it as not simply an entertaining detective novel, but as a serious work that indirectly tackles some very controversial Victorian social issues: for example, imperialism and religion: "like knowledge, peception [sic], and reason, faith becomes paradoxical. The professing Christians are un-Christian, true Christians cannot survive in the atmosphere the others have created, and the most profoundly religious people in the novel are not Christian but Hindu" (p. 223). In addition, the Appendix, which presents the serial divisions of The Moonstone, should prove profitable to Collins students and scholars.

While Lonoff's book is certainly an important addition to Collins scholarship, there are some stylistic and mechanical problems that tend to distract the reader. At times the chapters ramble on without clear transitions, and the typographical errors (I



noticed at least four) indicate careless proofreading. Despite those minor problems Wilkie Collins and His Victorian Readers clearly illustrates that Collins was, indeed, more than an entertaining story teller. Lonoff's book affirms that Wilkie Collins was "proud of his methods and their outcome, that he felt his work would have enduring value" (p. 230).





THANKS TO THE THUNDER.

'Thanks to the Thunder' by W. Thomas in *Cornhill Magazine*, XII, Nov. 1865, fp 576



## Notes

The Modern Language Association of America (MLA) has denied the Wilkie Collins Society allied status, asserting that the Society has not enough North American members and too few MLA members. There will be no meeting of the Society at the 1983 MLA Convention. The MLA has indicated its willingness to consider including a special session for the Society in the program of the December 1984 MLA Convention in Washington, D.C. No promises have been made, but the MLA Convention committee will consider a proposal that has a well defined topic, includes a list of speakers and their paper topics, and indicates the speakers' background and expertise in the chosen topic.

Kirk H. Beetz proposes to chair such a meeting. He suggests that the topic be "Wilkie Collins: Father of the Detective Novel." However, Society members are encouraged to suggest alternative topics. Those who wish to present papers should send abstracts (or complete papers) to Dr. Beetz at 1307 "F" Street, Davis, California 95616, USA. All proposals will be considered for publication in the Journal unless their authors specify otherwise. Papers for the proposed meeting should take between 15 and 20 minutes to read. Please try to have the abstracts (or complete papers) to Dr. Beetz by December 1983. Please remember, all this work is for a proposed session at the 1984 MLA Convention; the proposal may or may not be accepted.



## Notes on the Contributors

Natalie Schroeder teaches English for the University of Mississippi. Her previous publications include "John Jasper: Hero Villain" (University of Mississippi Studies in English, N.S. vol. I, 1980), an outstanding essay. She is writing a book on sensation fiction.

Robert Ashley is one of the pioneers of modern studies of Wilkie Collins. His 1952 book Wilkie Collins and his essays on Collins have strongly influenced the direction and temper of research into Collins's life and work. His essay "'Within My Experience: An Essay Suggested by the Dover Reprint of Wilkie Collins' Basil" appeared in the 1981 issue of the Wilkie Collins Society Journal. Dr. Ashley teaches English for Ripon College, Wisconsin.

Benjamin Franklin Fisher IV is a noted literary researcher who has published numerous articles on American and British authors. He has authored and edited books on Edgar Allan Poe and by Frederick Irving Anderson. His forthcoming books include bibliographies of A. E. Houseman and Gothic literature, and he is presently editing Wilkie Collins's plays for publication. His essay "Wilkie Collins and the Critics" appeared in the 1981 volume of the Wilkie Collins Society Journal. Dr. Fisher teaches English for the University of Mississippi.