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WILKIE COLLINS AND HIS VICTORIAN READERS: A  
STUDY IN THE RHETORIC OF AUTHORSHIP.

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WILKIE COLLINS AND HIS VICTORIAN READERS :

A STUDY IN THE RHETORIC OF AUTHORSHIP

by

SUE LONOFF

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate  
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## Preface

Wilkie Collins was famous for beginning his books with Prefaces that explained and defended his motives and his methods. In beginning this study of Collins and his readers with a Preface, I deliberately follow his example; but my aims are rather different.

First, I wish to delimit the scope of my investigation. Although much remains to be said about Collins's short stories and plays, this study is confined to his novels and to the Prefaces, articles, and letters that articulate his views of fiction. Again, although Collins had a large Continental and American following, I have concentrated here on his relations with the British reading public because they seem to me to have had the most decisive effect on his work.

Second, I want to explain my choice of texts and the documentation. While Collins issued his first English editions through a variety of publishers and only signed a contract with Chatto and Windus for a uniform edition in 1875, Harper and Brothers became his American publisher early in his career, and relations between them remained cordial. Collins promptly and punctiliously corrected the proofs that Harper sent him. "Your careful and regular transmission of copy on the various books which we have published for you has frequently elicited the grateful admiration which is naturally felt by us as practical printers for authors who are never behindhand," they wrote him in 1872 (J. H. Harper, The House of Harper [New York: Harper, 1912], p. 346). When he announced his intention of coming to America in 1873, they prepared a uniform edition

of his work and issued it in 1873-74, adding subsequent novels over the years. This Harper Library Edition, which he dedicated "to the American people," is the one I cite whenever possible. The only drawback to using this edition occurs in connection with The Moonstone, a novel he revised after the Harper text was established. But few of these revisions are substantial, and where the later edition differs materially, I indicate the changes in brackets in my text. (See also Ch. II, n. 18 below.) For later novels that Harper did not publish, or novels that I could not obtain in this edition, I have used the Peter Fenelon Collier Edition, which is more complete but less reliable.

Since neither series is readily accessible to modern readers (though the recent AMS reprint series follows the Collier pagination), I have indicated chapters rather than page numbers after my quotations. This practice, however, raises problems of its own. Collins rarely numbered his chapters consecutively, and his textual divisions vary from novel to novel. Some are divided into books and chapters, some into scenes and entr'actes, still others into narratives and journals. Thus the citations are more than occasionally awkward and intrusive. To shorten them, I have taken the liberty of abbreviating and of converting numerals from Roman to Arabic where such alternatives seemed clearer.

In quoting from Collins's letters I have tried to retain his punctuation, which is sometimes erratic and hard to decipher. Where the letters have already appeared in print, I have generally adopted the published orthography and indicated both of my sources. Permission to quote from the letters in the Morris L. Parrish Collection of Victorian Novelists, Princeton University Library, has been granted by the Curator.

Permission to quote from the letter to le Baron Ernouf has been granted  
by the Houghton Library, Harvard University.

## Chapter I

### Background

Wilkie Collins was thirteen when Victoria came to the throne, twenty-seven in the year of the Great Exhibition (with two early novels behind him),<sup>1</sup> and at sixty-five, one of the last survivors from the great age of Victorian fiction. Thackeray, Dickens, the Brontës, Mrs. Gaskell, George Eliot, Bulwer-Lytton, Disraeli, Reade, and Trollope all died before him; only Meredith and a handful of minor mid-Victorian novelists outlived him. His career spanned a period of more than forty years at the very heart of the era. When he was born, the novel was regarded as a dubious form of amusement; when he died, it was the leading form of literature.

Collins had no greater ambition than to be a popular novelist--popular in the double sense of selling widely and of appealing to middle-brow, middle-class readers.<sup>2</sup> In this, he was hardly exceptional. All the great mid-Victorian novelists were immensely concerned with their public. They wanted to be widely read, and by and large they were. We who live in an age when the writer views himself as someone set apart, when serious fiction has become the preserve of the initiated, when few writers of any literary pretension admit to courting popular tastes, tend to underrate the ramifications of this essential fact. Yet until early in this century, or very late in the last, there was no dichotomy between the "art" novel and the popular novel. There were varieties of audience--Dickens was generally felt to write for a lower class of reader than Thackeray--and a trend toward more carefully crafted and analytical

books as the century progressed. But no Victorian novelist (except perhaps George Meredith) deliberately aimed his books away from ordinary men and women. It would never have occurred to Dickens to cater to a cultivated minority; his admonition to one of his contributors--"You write to be read, of course"<sup>3</sup>--voices the assumption of an age.

To underrate the implications of that assumption is to risk misinterpreting or misevaluating most Victorian novelists. Wilkie Collins, for example, was not just a writer of mysteries and thrillers but, rather, one who sought to please a specifically Victorian audience. Like his fellow novelists, he was conscious of a bond between himself and his readers, and that consciousness affected every aspect of his novels, from format to content to significance. It is important, therefore, to explore the nature of that bond: to trace the growth of the unique rapport between the novelist and the reading public, and to discuss the literary climate in which he came of age and wrote his most important novels.

\* \* \*

We tend to regard the Victorian novel as a special form of fiction: bourgeois in its outlook and its moral stance, catering to middle-class tastes and values, promoted by the circulating library system and serial publication. Yet nearly a century before The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club launched the great age of Victorian fiction, there were novelists who catered to a middle-class audience with a growing rate of literacy and a growing appetite for fiction. Defoe had the pulse of his public. Richardson and Fielding were best-sellers, and if their works sold in the thousands rather than the tens or hundreds of thousands, the population itself was smaller. (In 1749, when the population of England

was between six and seven million, Tom Jones--an amazing success--sold out in a pre-publication edition of 2500 copies and reached sales of 10,000 within a year;<sup>4</sup> in 1851, when the population of England was about eighteen million, The Old Curiosity Shop--another amazing success--reached a peak of 100,000 copies in its serial edition.<sup>5</sup>) Circulating libraries were advertising by the 1740s,<sup>6</sup> and cheaper forms of distribution--the chap-book, the periodical, the newspaper containing stories and even serials--offered reading matter to those who could not afford the price of a volume. Publication in parts was not uncommon. Richardson issued the first two volumes of Clarissa in December 1747, the next two in April 1748, and the last three in December 1748, leaving the public to wonder for months about the fate of his heroine. These earlier readers were rarely as effusive as their mid-Victorian counterparts, but their letters leave little doubt of their involvement in the stories and the characters. "Tom Jones is my old acquaintance, now;" Joseph Spence reported in 1749, "for I read it, before it was publisht; & read it with such rapidity, that I began & ended within the compass of four days; tho' I took a Journey to S<sup>t</sup> Albans, in y<sup>e</sup> same time."<sup>7</sup>

Eighteenth-century novelists were well aware of their readers' tastes and opinions. Richardson's letters reveal that he sent parts of his manuscripts out to selected friends, and at one point he proposed to continue, discontinue, or abridge Clarissa "according to the Reception it met with."<sup>8</sup> Fielding's concern for his audience is implicit in his texts. By inventing an omniscient narrator who digresses from the story to lecture and confide--a practice most Victorians adopted--he changed the reader's role from that of an observer to that of an acknowledged participant. . . short, the English novel from its

inception was directed toward a middle-class public by authors who strove to please it. Why then maintain that Victorian writer-reader relations were unique?

Several elements distinguish them from their eighteenth-century antecedents. However popular the novel might become as the eighteenth century progressed, it was regarded as a lower form of literature, fit for the idle and frivolous. By the turn of the century the field was dominated by hack writers, the kind of fiction put out by the Minerva Press had become a byword for vulgarity, and even Jane Austen felt obliged to defend the novel from its detractors:

. . . we [novelists] are an injured body. Although our productions have afforded more extensive and unaffected pleasure than those of any other literary corporation in the world, no species of composition has been so much decried. From pride, ignorance, or fashion, our foes are almost as many as our readers. And while the abilities of the nine-hundredth abridger of the History of England, or of the man who collects and publishes in a volume some dozen lines of Milton, Pope, and Prior, with a paper from the Spectator, and a chapter from Sterne, are eulogized by a thousand pens, there seems almost a general wish of decrying the capacity and undervaluing the labour of the novelist, and of slighting the performances which have only genius, wit, and taste to recommend them.<sup>9</sup>

The strong Evangelical and Utilitarian currents of the earlier nineteenth century reinforced the charges against the novel: to the Dissenters, fiction reading was impious, to the Benthamites, unproductive. But as the nineteenth century progressed, the novel became increasingly respectable, until by mid-century it had become the dominant literary form. "The novel now really represents the mind of a country in all its phases, and, if not the only, is nearly the best of its literature," one critic wrote in 1848;<sup>10</sup> and by 1870, Trollope could say with confidence:

We have become a novel-reading people. Novels are in the hands of us all; from the Prime Minister down to the last-appointed scullery-maid. We have them in our library, our drawing-rooms,

our bed-rooms, our kitchens,--and in our nurseries. Our memories are laden with the stories which we read, with the plots which are unravelled for us, and with the characters which are drawn for us. Poetry also we read and history, biography and the social and political news of the day. But all our other reading put together hardly amounts to what we read in novels.<sup>11</sup>

What changed the prevailing view of fiction was not so much the erosion of social strictures against it as an accommodation by the novelists to the stricter mores of the era and (in an age of hero-worship) the emergence of powerful, prolific writers who attracted a wide and hungry audience: Scott, Bulwer-Lytton, and then Dickens. Scott established the ground rules for most of the novelists who followed. He stabilized the format of the novel at three volumes and drove the price up to a guinea and a half, where it remained, at least in theory, until 1894.<sup>12</sup> He made colloquial dialogue and local color essential ingredients of fiction. More important, his work was unexceptionably moral; none of his stories corrupted young minds or exploited illicit passion. Yet while he was the most admired of novelists for the better part of the century--Collins called him "the glorious Walter Scott (King, Emperor, President, and God Almighty of novelists)"<sup>13</sup>--he himself remained at a distance from his readers, set apart by personal reserve (he published his novels anonymously) and by his overwhelming reputation. Bulwer-Lytton, with his aristocratic background and his penchant for portraying the extremes of society rather than its middle layers,<sup>14</sup> was also at a distance from his readers. But Dickens published his first book under the family nickname of Boz, and from the start of his career he identified his interests with those of his readers. Their tastes were his tastes, their problems his problems, and he came among them as an intimate.

Dickens initiated the characteristically Victorian relationship between the writer and his public, a "communion" described by Thackeray as "something continual, confidential, something like personal affection."<sup>15</sup> He assumed a common sympathy or outlook that transcended the actual differences between his views and those of his readers. Eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers might address the reader directly, draw him into their confidence, involve him in the lives of their characters, move him to tears or to laughter. But none of them made the fictional assumption that all their readers were their friends. Richardson distrusted the opinions of ordinary readers, and disdainfully contrasted the vulgar "Many" with "the well-judging and discerning Few."<sup>16</sup> Fielding made his readers his confidants and yet retained his authority by creating editorial personae who were guides as well as companions. Compare the opening of Tom Jones with that of A Tale of Two Cities:

An Author ought to consider himself, not as a Gentleman who gives a private or eleemosynary Treat, but rather as one who keeps a public Ordinary, at which all Persons are welcome for their Money. In the former Case, it is well known, that the Entertainer provides what Fare he pleases: and tho' this should be very indifferent and utterly disagreeable to the Taste of his Company, they must not find any Fault . . . . Now, the contrary of this happens to the Master of an Ordinary. Men who pay for what they eat, will insist on gratifying their Palates, however nice and whimsical these may prove; and if every Thing is not agreeable to their Taste, will challenge a Right to censure, to abuse, and to d--n their Dinner without Controul.<sup>17</sup>

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way--in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.<sup>18</sup>

Both Fielding and Dickens begin by taking their audience into their confidence; but the tone, the emphasis, the outcome are fundamentally different. Fielding plays the host, regaling the reader whose palate he hopes to gratify. Never is he on the reader's level; his urbane and witty prose implies condescension or at least authorial distance.<sup>19</sup> But Dickens embraces the reader with a fervor that is almost Evangelical. His "we" is as significant as it is characteristic, for it implies the whole audience is with him.<sup>20</sup> No actual divergence of opinion intrudes on his confident rhetorical stance. (Note too the increase in prudery, from "d--n their dinner" to "the other way.")

While not every Victorian author affected this tone of familiarity, they all assumed a rapport with their readers, whether they lived in the heart of London or an obscure Yorkshire parsonage. Lionel Trilling has described the "sense of community" that permeates Victorian literature:

. . . we have only to listen to the voices of the great Victorian writers as they addressed their audience to appreciate the assumption they were able to make--that they were speaking to people who, in the face of all differences, knew that they had much in common, who were there to be spoken to. . . . [I]n one degree or another, Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, and George Eliot thought of themselves as directly confronting the reader, telling their stories with a due concern for his interest, comfort, and moral welfare. This show of companionly regard waned with the century and came eventually to be thought old-fashioned . . . . But for the Victorian novelist the reader was a personal presence, as the novelist was a personal presence for the reader.<sup>21</sup>

The familiar atmosphere was fostered by the methods of distribution and by period reading habits. Publication in parts, as I have said, began in the eighteenth century, but it became customary among reputable novelists only after Dickens's and Thackeray's great success with shilling numbers and the growth of magazines that relied on serials to attract a purchasing public. Some Victorians never issued their novels in installments;

the Brontës are notable examples. Others did so with reluctance. George Eliot agreed to publish Romola in the Cornhill after George Smith persisted in his lucrative offers, but even in accepting she refused £10,000 for sixteen monthly numbers, fearing to divide the story too narrowly, and instead took £7000 for fewer installments and eventual retention of her copyright.<sup>22</sup> Even those who preferred to publish serially--and they included Wilkie Collins--were apt to complain of the pressures: the inexorable deadlines, the need for concluding each installment in a way that would bring the reader back, the impossibility of revising early chapters to conform with later inspirations. On the other hand, and in addition to the obvious financial benefits, publication in parts undoubtedly drew the novelist and reader closer. Following a novel for a period of months (Dickens's novels generally ran for nineteen, and Thackeray's ran as long as twenty-four),<sup>23</sup> the reader came to feel like a participant with a vested interest in the story, while the writer could gauge his success as he wrote and adjust his characters or situations to suit the public fancy. So Dickens, when the sales of *Martin Chuzzlewit* were lagging, sent his hero off to America, and Thackeray, faced with objections to *Pendennis*'s approaching immorality, kept him from having an affair with Fanny Bolton.

Still the three-volume novel, rather than the serial, remained the standard form throughout the period; indeed, part publication was often the prelude to the first three-volume edition. The format was not invariable; some of Trollope's books appeared in two volumes, for example, and George Eliot's last two novels ran to four. Nor was it as fixed as the Procrustean bed to which it was sometimes compared, since the number of words could vary from less than 100,000 to more than 250,000.<sup>24</sup> But

shorter books were less likely to appeal to a public accustomed to the leisurely pace, the multiple plots, and the diversified characters of novels that spanned three volumes. And while "three-deckers" frequently came under fire--the Saturday Review called them "articles of commerce . . . constructed with a view to certain well-established usages and well-ascertained tastes"<sup>25</sup>--they were invincible until the 1890s. They were also the mainstay of the circulating libraries where, for as little as a guinea a year, the reader could continue to exchange his volumes as quickly as he could finish them. In fact, by buying in quantity to serve their patrons, librarians like Mudie and W. H. Smith kept the three-decker system afloat. For while the £31.6 price of new fiction discouraged individual buyers, it assured the authors and publishers of modest to substantial profits and forced the expanding middle-class public to rely upon the libraries' services, thereby promoting circulation and feedback as the volumes were returned.

Like the novel itself, the circulating library had come a long way from the eighteenth century, when it was considered potentially corrupting if not an active hot-bed of vice. Sir Anthony Absolute's speech to The Rivals has often been quoted to illustrate the libraries' low reputation: "a circulating library in a town is as an evergreen tree of diabolical knowledge! It blossoms through the year!--and depend on it, Mrs. Malaprop, that they who are so fond of handling the leaves will long for the fruit at last."<sup>26</sup> But by the mid-Victorian era, Mudie and his compeers had made the libraries respectable and powerful enough to incur another kind of complaint. From 1844, when Mrs. Gore decried them as "The Monster-Misery of Literature,"<sup>27</sup> to 1885, when George Moore attacked them in Literature at Nurse, or Circulating Morals,<sup>28</sup> the

libraries were blamed for all the ills the Victorian novel was heir to: its cumbersome length, its circumscribed content, its failure to deal with subjects that might mislead the young or offend the British matron. But the critics (who were often the exasperated novelists) tended to forget that the librarian reflected his subscribers' views--that these limitations were imposed by the audience as well as by the system that served it. The great mass of middle-class readers expected novels of substantial length and detail and objected to dubious topics in books intended for family reading.

Every genre of Victorian fiction, from the silver-fork novels of the 1830s to the intellectual novels of the 1870s, was designed for domestic consumption. Every author realized that his books went into households where they were accessible to people of all ages. Papa gathered Mama, the children, and perhaps the servants to hear the new installment of Dickens; sons and daughters traded the volumes in the latest box from Mudie's; adults read aloud to each other--George Eliot to G. H. Lewes, William to Jane Morris, Swinburne to Watts-Dunton. Robert Colby has assessed the effects of this domestic orientation:

The custom of family reading . . . enabled, even obliged, the writer, to address himself to all ages. The necessity for providing "parts" for all yielded one of the richest blessings of Victorian fiction--its multiplicity and variety of characters, ranging through all the life cycle. Knowing that he was going to be read aloud tested the writer's sensitivity to colloquial speech and brought out his dramatic gifts. The consciousness of young ears in the audience, however it may have limited his subject matter and language, certainly did not force the author to simplify or condescend. . . . The family moreover assured the novelist a receptive and cohesive audience and kept the novel itself close to domestic life, to ordinary people and their problems.<sup>29</sup>

The conversational tone of Victorian fiction suited the tastes of families who gathered to listen to the stories and make the acquaintance of the characters. The very prevalence of dialogue, much of it colloquial, encouraged the habit of reading aloud and of identifying with the characters by speaking in their voices. The speeches also provided psychological clues, signaling a character's moods and motives as they brought him vividly to life.<sup>30</sup> The frequently dramatic confrontations and disclosures--Rawdon Crawley walking in on Becky and Steyne, Jane Eyre confronting the savage Bertha Rochester--offered the pleasures of a theater at home to people who rarely went out. Dickens, Reade, and Collins wrote plays as well as novels, and incorporated into their fiction many of the staple ingredients of melodrama: the curtain lines, the emotional exchanges, the direct appeals to those beyond the footlights. "[I]f I know anything of my own faculty, it is a dramatic one," wrote Collins,<sup>31</sup> expressing a view that other novelists undoubtedly shared. But the theater was stagnant, playwrights were ill-paid, and respectable people still distrusted the stage, while the capacious novel transposed the excitement of the drama to the hearth.

The voice of the narrator breaking in upon the story reaffirmed this sense of solidarity and tacitly assured the reader that he was an object of solicitude. "I would not for the value of this chapter have it believed by a single reader that my Eleanor could bring herself to marry Mr. Slope, or that she should be sacrificed to a Bertie Stanhope." Thus Trollope concludes a digression in Barchester Towers in which he has promised his audience not to delude them with false apprehensions.<sup>32</sup> Henry James denounced this kind of intervention as "deliberately in-artistic"--a "pernicious trick" that undermined the reality of the

created world.<sup>33</sup> But in fact, these incursions into the text are a calculated form of artifice that serve complex rhetorical functions. Thackeray, congratulating himself on not displaying Becky's vices ("the monster's hideous tail"),<sup>34</sup> remains within the confines of decorum while he fires his readers' imaginations. George Eliot, expanding her narratives with moral disquisitions, confronts her readers with the hidden dimensions of commonplace lives, not unlike their own, and compels them to weigh and judge. As we shall see when we come to Collins, the Victorian novelist often plays elaborate games with the public. Even Trollope, for all his ingenuous protests, is not averse to games of strategy; if he lets the readers of Barchester Towers know that he is pulling the strings, he also makes them feel that they are there alongside him, privy to his manipulations.

If, as Colby says, "the Victorian novelist conceived his public as the family circle extended out to the great human family,"<sup>35</sup> the Victorian reader conceived of the writer as a friend or acquaintance to whom he could appeal, and the characters, rather than fictional constructs, as people he could love or hate. "Poor little Nell!" said Mrs. Oliphant in a long review of Dickens's novels, "how we defied augury, and clung to hope for her--how we refused to believe that Kit and the strange gentleman, when they alighted amid the snow at the cottage door, could not do some miracle for her recovery! Mr. Dickens acted cruelly to his youthful readers in this conclusion. Does he not confess to a host of letters begging him to spare the child?"<sup>36</sup> The ubiquitous custom of concluding a novel by talking about the character's futures--unless, like Little Nell, they died within its pages--suggests

that the audience thought of them as people with continuing lives, and that the writer considered it his duty to promote that belief.

Victorian comments on contemporary fiction were effusive and voluminous. Whether they appeared in diaries and letters or in national reviews and journals, they reveal a degree of subjective involvement that is almost inconceivable today. Here, for example, is E. B. Hamley in a review of 1857, "Remonstrance with Dickens":

Therefore, dear Dickens, don't listen to your adulators--listen to us, your true friend and admirer . . . . And if you take our advice, and give your rare powers fair play, laying aside your pen for a while, collecting fitting materials in your own fields, without wandering into regions strange to you, and, when fully ripe, expressing the results of your marvellous faculty of observation in your old natural, humorous, graphic, pathetic way, we, as we read, gladdest of your readers, that matured evidence of your genius, will bow ourselves before you, and (while secretly exulting in the fruit our words have borne) will humbly crave forgiveness for our bold though honest remonstrance, rejoicing more over your repentance than over ninety and nine respectable writers who have never gone astray.<sup>37</sup>

Even the most intelligent Victorians blurred the line between fiction and life. Geraldine Jewsbury, a respected reader for Bentley and a reviewer for the Athenaeum, wrote to her close friend, Jane Carlyle:

. . . one day last week there came 'Hide and Seek' by Wilkie Collins. Get it and read it; it is the most lovely story I ever remember to have read! It left me feeling inclined to pitch every sheet I had written of my own into the fire! . . . Please get 'Hide and Seek'! I don't know whether I did most laughing or crying over it. It is so pretty, and so healthy in its nature. I am sure Wilkie Collins must be a good man, though he did once write that atrocious 'Basil.'<sup>38</sup>

The effect of this extensive audience participation was double-edged. It gave the reader an overwhelming sense of intimacy with the characters, but lessened the aesthetic distance between them. It opened fiction to a large audience, but insured that nothing could appear in

print unsuited to the young and innocent (although, as Kathleen Tillotson has pointed out, there were more and less restrictive decades; novelists of the 1840s could write more frankly than those of the '50s and '60s). It created unlimited appetites for even the longest novels, but mitigated against conciseness and control. And while it guaranteed an audience whose preferences could be gauged, it also nurtured hundreds of home-grown critics who carped at expectations disappointed. Thus, if the novelist had the undeniable advantage of confident relations with his readers, he also had the problem of accommodating them while standing by his art and beliefs--a problem compounded by his identification with his era and its mores.

The great eighteenth-century novelists were sensitive to their readers' demands but better able to withstand them. ". . . You thought in your heart the vein of humour too free & gay for the solemn colour of My coat," Lawrence Sterne wrote, defending *Tristram Shandy*; ". . . I will use all reasonable caution--Only with this caution along with it, not to spoil my Book. . . ." <sup>39</sup> One thinks of Dickens, who altered the ending of *Great Expectations* because Bulwer-Lytton advised him to make it more "acceptable," <sup>40</sup> or of Thackeray, who married Clive Newcome improbably to Ethel because "[s]o many people wanted 'em married." <sup>41</sup> Of course, both *Clarissa* and *Little Nell* die, despite the letters that reached their authors pleading for a happy ending. But Richardson consciously wrote against the current; though he feared that his sales would be adversely affected, he disdained the opinions of the "Vulgar" and clung to his conception of the tragic. <sup>42</sup> Dickens watched the sales of his serial soar as his heroine sank, and further gratified his readers'

taste for the pathetic with the death of little Paul in Dombey.<sup>43</sup>

This is not to deny the Victorian novelist's skill at challenging his readers' complacencies--or the importance of Victorian fiction as an agent of social reform. As literary conscience and moral instructor, the writer could unmask the Pecksniffs and the Bulstrodes, strip the fripperies from *Vanity Fair*, reveal the gulf between the "two nations" or the gap between North and South. Furthermore, while fiction was frequently called "light literature" it was rarely taken lightly. The novelists, the critics, and the general public agreed on its power to inculcate values and influence behavior; like Trollope, they were certain that "lessons of life are being taught from the first page to the last."<sup>44</sup> But what happened when the writer had lessons to teach that offended his readers' sensibilities? Or when the realities that he saw fit to convey were unacceptable to the censors? Or when his ideas of what he owed his art conflicted with the popular notion of what he owed his public?

Hippolyte Taine, writing about the correspondence between Dickens's talent and English public sentiment, said that Dickens did not submit to public opinion as to some external constraint, but rather felt it as an inner persuasion which only repeated aloud what he was saying to himself in a whisper.<sup>45</sup> Other Victorian authors must also have heard in the voice of public opinion the echoes of an inner persuasion, for the impulse to remain one at heart with the reader was hardly to be resisted. Nonetheless, like Dickens, most if not all of them were sometimes at odds with their critics--with the reviewers, the editors and publishers, the librarians, and the ordinary readers who found parts

of their novels distasteful. "Having thus acknowledged what I owe those who have aided and approved me, I turn to another class; a small one, so far as I know, but not, therefore, to be overlooked. I mean the timorous or carping few who doubt the tendency of such books as 'Jane Eyre.'"<sup>46</sup> So Charlotte Brontë defended her novel from charges of immorality. Bulwer-Lytton's preface to Paul Clifford, Thackeray's to Pendennis, Dickens's to Bleak House, and a score of others are similarly defensive. Charles Reade and George Moore aired their grievances in pamphlets; George Eliot, George Meredith, and many others confided theirs to friends and relatives. Clearly, the Victorian novelist's rapport with his readers was not undisturbed by family squabbles.

The very ambivalence that modern critics attribute to the collapse of religious and moral certainties stems in part from these novelists' divided loyalties and clashing aspirations. Thackeray complained about the prudery of his audience: "You will not hear--it is best to know it--what moves in the real world, what passes in society, in the clubs, colleges, messrooms,--what is the life and talk of your sons."<sup>47</sup> Yet as editor of the Cornhill he rejected Trollope's story about a man with illegitimate children and a woman of dubious purity. Dickens, exalting the domestic idyll even as his own marriage crumbled, created counterworlds that are more dynamic, and often more attractive, than the conventional milieus to which he relegates his heroes and heroines. Mid-Victorian romance, as Taine observed, had to be tempered and tamed, made morally acceptable to middle-class readers even when the writer's experience prompted a skeptical response to easy solutions and placid matrimonial felicity. In the area of social reform contradiction is just as evident. Mrs. Gaskell, writing Mary Barton to enlist her readers'

sympathies for the factory-people of Manchester, shows her workers living in intolerable conditions but condemns their resistance whenever it threatens to impinge upon middle-class prerogatives. Disraeli symbolically unites his two nations through the marriage of Sybil and Egremont--except that Sybil, the beautiful working-class girl, is revealed as a lady by birth, and the problems that generate the workers' unrest are unresolved in fiction as in fact.

Still it is essential to remember that the restrictions imposed by public taste and solidarity were not necessarily negative. Much of the buried richness of mid-Victorian fiction--the social symbols, the metaphors of psychic tensions, the repressed but vibrant sexuality--grows out of the attempt to transcend these limitations in effective but acceptable ways. And if some limits were insurmountable, at least their existence placed writer and reader in a common and well-defined territory, enabling the writer to proceed with a certainty the modern author lacks.

\* \* \*

This, then, is the literary context in which Wilkie Collins came of age and grew to be a popular novelist. He was born in 1824, the son of a respected painter, William Collins, and the godson of an even more respected painter, Sir David Wilkie. He went to private schools, travelled with his family to the Continent, and before becoming a writer by profession, worked in the office of a tea merchant and studied to become a barrister. His domestic life was unconventional. While he never married, he cohabited for years with one woman, Caroline Graves, and fathered three children by another, Martha Rudd (who was to tend his

and Caroline's grave).<sup>48</sup> He died in 1889, having written twenty-one novels, numerous short stories, novelettes, essays, and articles, a biography, a travel book, and sixteen plays--several of these in partnership with Dickens.<sup>49</sup>

In his lifetime, Collins was known for his complex, ingenious plots. Some critics denounced them as mechanical--Trollope, though admiring, claimed that he could "never lose the taste of the construction"<sup>50</sup>--while others, like Swinburne, found them technically "far beyond the reach of any contemporary."<sup>51</sup> However mixed the critical verdict, he was very popular with ordinary readers, and even the high-brow Meredith suggested that Hardy study him to learn the art of narrative. The Woman in White, the rage of 1860, confirmed his fame as a sensational novelist and remained his best known book throughout the century. The Moonstone was not quite as successful when it was published in 1868, but by the time of his death it was widely acclaimed and by now, thanks partly to its reputation as the first detective novel in English, it has become his most familiar work.

While his other novels and stories remain in print and attract occasional critical attention, Collins tends to be recognized today for extra-literary reasons. He was Dickens's closest companion during the later 1850s and throughout the 1860s, much to the chagrin of older friends like Forster; and he was the only writer with whom Dickens frequently collaborated. His tastes were intriguingly unorthodox. By the time he was in his thirties he was addicted to opium, and he eventually consumed it by the glassful to relieve the pains of his chronic illnesses. He was sexually bohemian--his defense of fallen women and women of spirit

ranks him as an early, if unproclaimed, feminist--and he repeatedly depicted cases of physical and mental deformity (much to the disgust of contemporary critics).

But if in his personal habits and tastes Collins was scarcely a typical Victorian, he was surely representative in his desire to appeal to his public. Few Victorian authors worked harder at winning an audience or more deliberately calculated their effects upon their readers. Robert Ashley has said, "In all his literary judgments he was guided by one principle alone--that of reader interest";<sup>52</sup> and if this statement disregards Collins's other criteria, it nonetheless corroborates the dominant impulse behind his long career.

Collins's concern for his reading public--his faith in the principle of reader interest--is the focus of this dissertation. My thesis is that his work was extensively and intricately influenced by his awareness of his audience, and that exploring this awareness will lead to a fuller understanding of his fiction. I do not mean to imply that he was invariably guided by his readers' reactions. On the contrary, he often went out of his way to upset his readers' preconceptions and expectations, or to criticize the failings of the English. These warring tendencies, as we shall see, produce dichotomies and tensions within his work, though they are not necessarily vitiating; for if his least successful novels reveal the strain between his conflicting desires to gratify and shock, his most successful novels reconcile antitheses or use them as a source of energy. This, however, is material for the more detailed study to come.

In the following pages I shall consider the various facets of Collins's interaction with his audience--the ways in which that special

rapport molded the convictions and hence the fiction of one mid-Victorian writer. The next two chapters survey the foundations of his attitudes. Chapter II, which draws on his prefaces, articles, novels, and letters, explores the connections between his theories and his attitudes toward the reading public. Chapter III assesses the influence upon his work of several kinds of readers: his fellow novelists, above all Dickens; the critics, English and foreign; and the people he called "Readers in General."

Chapter IV begins to analyze his fiction from a reader-oriented perspective. The first part describes Collins's views of his readers, the ways in which his conception of their preferences and prejudices enters his novels, and his attempts to convert them from attitudes he disapproved of. The second part traces his pervasive use of contrast and antithesis, which I believe is rooted in his twofold desire to please and to shock.

Chapter V, which cites the theories of period reviewers as well as modern critics, discusses the games that Collins played, the strategies and tactics he employed to hold his readers' interest. And since words are not only the equipment of his games but the means by which he persuades us to participate, it also examines his rhetoric.

Chapter VI is a close, reader-oriented study of a single novel, The Moonstone. The first part shows that the book, which has been hailed as a "modern" detective story, is deeply rooted in reader interests and period events. The second investigates the ways in which Collins's awareness of his readers' tastes and interests permeates the novel. The last part of this final chapter confronts the issue I raised earlier:

how a Victorian author, bound by convention and his own desire to please, can introduce distasteful topics and advocate unpopular views without alienating his public. In addition, it suggests that Collins's subtle rebellion against prevailing popular opinion provides a deeper level of meaning--and of social and religious significance--than the novel is thought to possess.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Antonina (1850) and an unpublished novel, no longer extant, about life in Polynesia. See George M. Towle, "Wilkie Collins," Appleton's Journal No. 75 (3 September 1870), p. 279.

<sup>2</sup> Dorothy L. Sayers (whose comments I read after this chapter was written) makes the classification more pointed: "If the world is to be divided into high-brows and low-brows, Collins was a low-brow unqualified. He studied to please and was proud to do so." Wilkie Collins, A Biographical and Critical Study, ed. E. R. Gregory (Toledo: Friends of the Univ. of Toledo Libraries, 1977), p. 79. She also intimates that Collins' father fostered his high regard for popularity (pp. 56-57).

<sup>3</sup> The Letters of Charles Dickens, ed. Walter Dexter (Bloomsbury: The Nonesuch Press, 1938), II, 679; hereafter cited as Letters.

<sup>4</sup> See J. Paul de Castro, "The Printing of Fielding's Works," Library, 4th ser. 1 (1920-1), 264, and Ronald Paulson and Thomas Lockwood, eds., Henry Fielding: The Critical Heritage (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), p. 165.

<sup>5</sup> See Richard D. Altick, The English Common Reader (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1957), p. 384. Altick provides statistics on other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century best-sellers, pp. 49-50, 383-86.

<sup>6</sup> Altick, pp. 59-60 and see also the 1842 advertisement in the OED (under "circulating").

<sup>7</sup> Paulson and Lockwood, p. 165.

<sup>8</sup> Selected Letters of Samuel Richardson, ed. John Carroll (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Northanger Abbey and Persuasion, ed. John Davie (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1971), Northanger Abbey, Ch. V.

<sup>10</sup> [John Eagles], "A Few Words About Novels--A Dialogue," Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, 64 (October, 1848), 462.

<sup>11</sup> "On English Prose Fiction as a Rational Amusement," Four Lectures, ed. Morris L. Parrish (London: Constable, 1938), p. 108. First delivered as a lecture in Edinburgh on 28 January 1870.

<sup>12</sup> In fact the large circulating libraries, like Mudie's and W. H. Smith and Sons, had demanded and received substantial discounts since 1852, when free trade in books was first permitted. See Altick, pp. 304-5. And experiments in altering the price structure were made from the 1850s

through the 1880s, though with little success. See Guinevere L. Griest, Mudie's Circulating Library (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1970), pp. 64-75.

- 13 ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 14 January 1883.
- 14 His bourgeois fiction--the three Caxton novels--appeared long after his reputation was established, and while he certainly wrote to sell, he also had strong hermetic tendencies. See Allan Conrad Christensen's theory and discussion in Edward Bulwer-Lytton (Athens, Ga.: Univ. of Georgia Press, 1976).
- 15 "A Box of Novels," Fraser's Magazine, 29 (February, 1844), 167.
- 16 Richardson, p. 100. This is a characteristically eighteenth-century distinction. Cf. Smollett on the reception of Roderick Random in The Letters of Tobias Smollett, ed. Lewis M. Knapp (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 7.
- 17 The History of Tom Jones, A Foundling, Introd. Martin C. Battestin, ed. Fredson Bowers (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), Bk. I, Ch. I (The Wesleyan Edition).
- 18 A Tale of Two Cities (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1949), Ch. I.
- 19 Wayne C. Booth says of the narration of Tom Jones, "The author is always there on his platform to remind us, through his wisdom and benevolence, of what human life ought to be and might be." The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 217.
- 20 Cf. Altick's comment on the popular writing of the period: "The typical literature of a democracy became, in a way appropriately, a conversation between equals. And where the writers were actually more intelligent and better educated than their readers, it was essential that they hide the fact behind a matey tone whose cultivation was one of mid-Victorian journalism's proudest achievements." "The Literature of an Imminent Democracy" in 1859: Entering an Age of Crisis, ed. Philip Appleman, William A. Madden, and Michael Wolff (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1959), p. 226.
- 21 Victorian Prose and Poetry (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1973), p. 5.
- 22 See The George Eliot Letters, ed. Gordon S. Haight (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1955), IV, 17-20, 33-34.
- 23 Dickens's usual format was twenty monthly parts, with the last two issued as a double number. Thackeray's format varied; Vanity Fair ran for twenty months, Pendennis, The Newcomes, and The Virginians for twenty-four, and Henry Esmond came out in three volumes. On serial and volume publication, see Kathleen Tillotson, Novels of the Eighteen-Forties (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), pp. 21-47.

- 24 See Griest, pp. 45-46.
- 25 "One-Volume Novels," Saturday Review, 7 (1 January 1859), 11.
- 26 Richard Brinsley Sheridan, "The Rivals," Sheridan's Plays (London: Dent, 1966), Act I.
- 27 Blackwood's, 55 (May, 1844), 556-60.
- 28 London: Vizetelly, 1885.
- 29 Fiction With a Purpose (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1967), p. 22.
- 30 Cf. Frederick R. Karl: "Characters came to reveal themselves by their talk. Lacking a suitable psychological method and yet aware of the 'inner man,' the nineteenth-century novelist relied on conversation to disclose the unconscious. . . . Dickens's characters, for example, are close to the reader because their language reveals submerged details of their personality; they are, as it were, speaking directly to the reader." An Age of Fiction (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1964), p. 20.
- 31 ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 21 March 1862, previously quoted by Nuel Pharr Davis in The Life of Wilkie Collins (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1956), p. 79.
- 32 Barchester Towers, Introd. Robert H. Taylor (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), Ch. XV.
- 33 "Anthony Trollope," Partial Portraits, ed. Leon Edel (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1970), p. 116.
- 34 Vanity Fair (New York: Harper, 1898), Ch. 64. This and all subsequent quotations from Thackeray are from the Biographical Edition.
- 35 Colby, p. 23.
- 36 "Charles Dickens," Blackwood's, 77 (April, 1855), 458.
- 37 Blackwood's, 81 (April, 1857), 503.
- 38 Selection from the Letters of Geraldine Endsor Jewsbury to Jane Welsh Carlyle, ed. Mrs. Alexander Ireland (London: Longmans, Green, 1892), p. 339.
- 39 Letters of Laurence Sterne, ed. Lewis Perry Curtis (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1935), p. 76.
- 40 Letters III, 226.
- 41 Letters of James Russell Lowell, ed. Charles Eliot Norton (New York: Harper, 1894), I, 239.

- 42 Richardson, pp. 86-87.
- 43 See George H. Ford, Dickens and His Readers (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1955), pp. 57-59.
- 44 "On English Prose Fiction," p. 110.
- 45 History of English Literature, trans. H. Van Laun (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1965 [reprinted from the 1883 edition]), IV, 142.
- 46 Preface to Jane Eyre, ed. Jane Jack and Margaret Smith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969).
- 47 Preface to The History of Pendennis (New York: Harper, 1898), p. xlviii.
- 48 The most accurate source of biographical information on Collins is Kenneth Robinson's Wilkie Collins; A Biography (London: The Bodley Head, 1951). Robert P. Ashley's Wilkie Collins (London: Barker, 1952) is essentially a critical study with biographical information. Nuel Pharr Davis's The Life of Wilkie Collins is stimulating but unreliable.
- 49 See Appendix A for a chronological list of Collins's novels. Estimating their number is difficult because in some cases the distinction between a novel and a novelette is arbitrary. I have counted as a novel any book that originally filled at least two volumes, and I have included his last book, Blind Love, which was completed by Walter Besant. The number of his plays is also difficult to estimate because some (like the dramatic version of No Name) never reached the stage, one (A Court Duel) was a translation from an unidentified French source, and still others were collaborations. My count is based on R. V. Andrew's in "A Wilkie Collins Check-List," English Studies in Africa, 3 (1960), 83-94.
- 50 An Autobiography, pref. Frederick Page (London: Oxford, 1850), p. 257.
- 51 "Wilkie Collins," in The Complete Works of Algernon Charles Swinburne, ed. Sir Edmund Gosse and Thomas James Wise, IV (London: Heinemann, 1925), p. 254. The essay originally appeared in the Fortnightly Review, n.s. 275 (1 November 1889), 589-99.
- 52 Ashley, pp. 109-10. These "literary judgments" extended beyond the books that Collins himself wrote and read. In an article written at the request of the Pall Mall Gazette, he says frankly that "positive literary value means positive literary attraction to the general reader," and that the "only useful books" he knows of are "books in all departments of literature which invite the general reader, as distinguished from books that repel him." "Books Necessary for a Liberal Education," Pall Mall Gazette, 43 (11 February 1886), 2.

## Chapter II

### Collins's Views of Fiction

Collins continues to baffle those who want to know more about him.<sup>1</sup> We can learn the essential facts of his life from Kenneth Robinson's biography, but we can only infer his motives and anxieties from minimal and fragmentary evidence. Unlike Dickens, or Thackeray, or George Eliot, or Trollope, Collins left a scanty record for posterity. His friends were reluctant to disclose his secrets while he lived, and no biographer traced them at his death. His correspondence has never been collected, and much of it has disappeared. Thus, we know little about his relations with the two most important women in his life, Caroline Graves and Martha Rudd, we do not know what became of his illegitimate children, nor have we many indications of what he felt most deeply about. He seems to have concealed his emotional and intellectual complexities as successfully as he concealed the solutions to his better mysteries.

Yet reluctant as he was to reveal the way he lived, he was open about the way he wrote. Abundant testimony of his work habits, his literary credo, and his feelings about his audience survives, not only in the fiction itself, but in letters, essays, interviews, and, above all, in his Prefaces.<sup>2</sup>

Dickens never approved of Collins's practice of addressing the reader directly, a habit he adopted at the start of his career and continued throughout his life. To Dickens, the Prefaces violated the contract between reader and novelist. ". . . I have no doubt that the

prefatory letter would have been better away, on the ground that a book (of all things) should speak for and explain itself," he commented on Basil<sup>3</sup>--a somewhat paradoxical objection, since Collins was undoubtedly inspired by his example and the practice was common enough. Still, there are grounds for Dickens's reservations; Collins's Prefaces were rarely limited to textual or background information. They were exercises in self-defense and, because they were so often polemical, tended to provoke fresh critical attacks. Nevertheless, they are invaluable to anyone concerned with audience relations, for Collins used them to clarify his views on fiction and the public.

Fundamentally, he aimed at holding his reader's interest by giving them a story they couldn't put down. "I have always held the old-fashioned opinion that the primary object of a work of fiction should be to tell a story," he said in the Preface to The Woman in White;<sup>4</sup> and it was as a master of plot construction that his contemporaries rated him most highly. In laying the primary stress upon story, Collins (and the sensation novelists who followed him) counteracted the trend of the 1850s toward the rambling domestic chronicle. Whereas many mid-Victorian novels are discursive--thick with subplots, digressions, and incidental detail--Collins's novels, with the exception of his first, Antonina, are decisively linear, tightly knot constructions that proceed along a plot-line with a minimum of distraction.<sup>5</sup> To maintain unity, he planned his stories in four stages: first coming up with a central idea, next inventing the characters to act it out, then letting the incidents evolve "from the nature of the characters," and finally working out the action chronologically from its inception.<sup>6</sup> This method not only eliminated

superfluous scenes and people, but also kept the stress upon a strong central plot and its various ramifications.

Why did he insist upon the supremacy of the story? In part, because he had a flair for narrative. As a schoolboy he learned that telling a story effectively could earn him praise and pastry,<sup>7</sup> and as we shall see, praise retained a decisive influence on his fiction. Then, too, his favorite authors--Scott, Balzac, Hugo, Dumas, Fenimore Cooper<sup>8</sup>--were all outstanding narrators. But beyond any personal predilection, he was convinced that the ordinary reader wanted most of all to be involved in the plot. Jessie Yelverton, the "Queen of Hearts" in the book of that name, expresses the view that, for Collins, epitomized the outlook of the novel-reading public:

I'm sick to death of novels with an earnest purpose. I'm sick to death of outbursts of eloquence, and large-minded philanthropy, and graphic descriptions, and unsparing anatomy of the human heart, and all that sort of thing. Good gracious me! isn't it the original intention or purpose, or whatever you call it, of a work of fiction, to set out distinctly by telling a story? And how many of these books, I should like to know, do that? Why, so far as telling a story is concerned, the greater part of them might as well be sermons as novels. Oh, dear me! what I want is something that seizes hold of my interest, and makes me forget when it is time to dress for dinner--something that keeps me reading, reading, reading, in a breathless state, to find out the end.<sup>9</sup>

This plea for an all-engrossing story, too impassioned to have come from Jessie alone, appears to indicate a shallow conception of fiction, a penchant for slick, rapid movement at the cost of analysis and depth. But to dismiss Collins as an ingenious constructor of plots, or as a hack who catered to a fiction-hungry public, is to miss the skill and subtlety of much of his best work. Nor should his habit of referring to his novels as stories (so pervasive in his letters) or to himself as a story-teller,<sup>10</sup> blind a modern reader to the seriousness with which

he took his vocation. Story-telling was the "first condition" of the art of fiction,<sup>11</sup> an art which, in his opinion, all too many novelists neglected. Over and over again in his Prefaces, Collins impresses the reader with the "anxious care" he has lavished on every aspect of his work.<sup>12</sup> Just as the stories themselves are illusions, plausible counterfeits of reality, so the apparent ease of style and fluidity of narration are illusions, laboriously achieved.

"If the public only knew that every writer worthy of the name is the severest critic of his own book before it ever gets into the hands of the reviewers, how surprised they would be!" So Bernard Winterfield of The Black Robe begins an exchange on the ardors of writing with the aspiring author, Lewis Romaine:

"The man who has worked in the full fervor of composition yesterday is the same man who sits in severe and merciless judgment today on what he has himself produced. What a fascination there must be in the Art which exacts and receives such double labor as this?"

Romaine thought--not unkindly--of his wife. Stella had once asked him how long a time he was usually occupied in writing one page. The reply had filled her with pity and wonder. "Why do you take all that trouble?" she had gently remonstrated. "It would be just the same to the people, darling, if you did it in half the time."<sup>13</sup>

But for the novelist who wrote that passage it was never "just the same." He perfected his deceptively simple style by reading his sentences aloud, rejecting what sounded unnatural as likely to seem strained or awkward to his readers. He tested his plots on his literary friends--especially Dickens, who often served as a trial audience for the earlier novels and stories. (One of the strongest bonds that united them was their common belief in the craft of fiction, their mutual conviction of the need for taking pains.) He revised his books extensively, composing and then

correcting up to seven versions.<sup>14</sup> The pages of the autograph manuscripts are black with additions, corrections, and deletions, and the manuscripts were only the first stage in the passage from proof to serial to three-volume edition. He also liked to experiment, and varied his techniques from novel to novel in order, as he said in the Preface to No Name, "to enlarge the range of my studies in the art of writing fiction, and to vary the form in which I make my appeal to the reader as attractively as I can."<sup>15</sup> No wonder he derided "the holiday authors, who sit down to write a book as they would sit down to a game at cards--leisurely-living people who coolly select as an amusement 'to kill time,' an occupation which can only be pursued, even creditably, by the patient, uncompromising, reverent devotion of every moral and intellectual faculty, more or less, which a human being has to give."<sup>16</sup>

Collins's dedication to the art of fiction was not unalloyed. He was as interested in making money as he was in writing well, and earned a reputation for shrewdness in his business dealings that threatened to outweigh his reputation as a popular novelist, at least in publishing circles.<sup>17</sup> Nor was he always as conscientious as he claimed to be. He enjoyed impressing his readers with the amount of care he had taken, sometimes beyond the point of accuracy. In the Preface to the 1871 edition of The Moonstone, for example, he claimed that he had carefully revised the story; but aside from reappportioning a couple of long chapters and changing a few words here and there, the book remained unaltered.<sup>18</sup> Such occasionally exaggerated claims, however, must be weighed against the more abundant evidence that he labored over his novels, tending them carefully through all the stages of proofreading and printing.

Perhaps he felt obliged to keep reminding the public of his efforts because of his reputation for writing slick, sensational novels. His books and stories are unabashedly melodramatic; he was credited with founding the school of sensation fiction;<sup>19</sup> but his blatant theatricality does not preclude a concern for technique. On the contrary, he considered fiction an essentially dramatic medium and strove to exploit its theatrical possibilities. In the Letter of Dedication to Basil (its Preface by another name), he first expressed the theory "that the Novel and the Play are twin-sisters in the family of Fiction; that the one is a drama narrated, as the other is a drama acted; and that all the strong and deep emotions which the Playwriter is privileged to excite, the Novel-writer is privileged to excite also. . . ." <sup>20</sup> This theory underlies his reliance on dialogue as the best means of revealing character, as opposed to the strictly literary methods of analysis and speculation. It also underlies his preference for the striking dramatic incident, and for a series of well-staged episodes rather than the slow accumulation of detail. Finally, it underlies his attempts to reproduce, through highlighted entrances, the raising and lowering of the curtain on stage--a technique as well suited to the serial novel as it was to the theater.<sup>21</sup> But there were drawbacks to using such methods, as his detractors were quick to point out. If, at his best, he created a dramatic ambience that envelops the reader and holds him spellbound, at his worst, he wrote books that are stagy, contrived, and patently improbable.

Collins's insistence upon the drama of fiction should be viewed in a historical context. Throughout most of the century, as I have said,

the English stage lacked the novel's vitality, and in any case many middle-class people avoided the theater on moral and religious grounds. Collins, who had a passion for the theater, lamented the conditions that kept him from becoming a playwright: the low rate of remuneration, the managers' reliance on French translations or "insufferably coarse entertainments,"<sup>22</sup> and the "ignorant insensibility" of the majority of the audience.<sup>23</sup> Yet while he believed he had a talent for the drama, the plays he did write are shallow period pieces, and had he won acceptance as a playwright his work would now be forgotten. As a novelist, however, he benefitted from the stagnant condition of the stage, for respectable readers, deprived of the theater, had to rely upon fiction to satisfy their appetite for thrills and chills, for comedy and pathos. The scheming villains, troubled lovers, and humorous eccentrics who act out his stories are scarcely new to literature; such figures had appeared in centuries of comedy, and in Gothic and epistolary novels. But Collins endowed them with fresh life by casting them in commonplace domestic settings--by blending the strange and the familiar.

His passion for drama was not the only force behind this merger of the mundane and extravagant. He also relied upon Romantic principles, tailoring and trimming them to suit the tastes of his own Victorian public. "Is not the noblest poetry of prose fiction the poetry of everyday truth?" he inquired in the Basil dedication (p. iii)--a question reminiscent of Wordsworth, who was poet laureate when he began to write.<sup>24</sup> Collins grounded nearly all of his novels in conventional, bourgeois environments. Even when he mingled ordinary people with more exalted characters, lords and ladies who satisfied the yearning of his middle-class

audience for glamor, he included homely, familiar details and wrote in a plain and simple style. Yet he also treated his subjects imaginatively, confronting his readers with the possibility that even in the most prosaic of lives, remarkable things could happen. "I have not thought it either politic or necessary, while adhering to realities, to adhere to every-day realities only," the Basil dedication continues:

In other words, I have not stooped so low as to assure myself of the reader's belief in the probability of my story by never once calling on him for the exercise of his faith. Those extraordinary accidents and events which happen to few men seemed to me to be as legitimate materials for fiction to work with--when there was a good object in using them--as the ordinary accidents and events which may, and do, happen to us all. By appealing to genuine sources of interest within the reader's own experience, I could certainly gain his attention to begin with; but it would be only by appealing to other sources (as genuine in their way) beyond his own experience that I could hope to fix his interest and excite his suspense, to occupy his deeper feelings, or to stir his nobler thoughts. (pp. iv-v)

Like Coleridge (and the Gothic novelists), he was drawn to the strange and the uncanny; and while the extremes of human experience replace the supernatural in most of his work, he too had to trust his audience for "that willing suspension of disbelief . . . which constitutes poetic faith."<sup>25</sup>

But not all of his readers were willing to suspend their disbelief. Collins and the critics were frequently at odds on the subject of plausibility--or "truth to Nature," as he and most Victorians preferred to call it.<sup>26</sup> So he often assured the public, in the Prefaces and footnotes within the novels, that what he had depicted could have taken place, even if it fell outside the range of common experience. Knowing too that "there is nothing the British reader enjoys so much as catching his author in the wrong,"<sup>27</sup> he was careful to verify his

data. He consulted lawyers on legal points and doctors on medical phenomena. "A solicitor of great experience in his profession most kindly and carefully guided my steps, whenever the course of the narrative led me into the labyrinth of the law," he wrote in the Preface to The Woman in White, ". . . and all the proof-sheets which referred to legal matters were corrected by his hand before the story was published." His own physician, Francis Carr Beard, was his authority on physical and mental disorders; Beard even conducted the gout-ridden author to a running-track to check the authenticity of a scene in Man and Wife.<sup>28</sup> Whether he was studying Roman history in Gibbon and the British Museum, or soliciting information on Hindu castes and customs, or scanning newspapers and magazines for reports of scientific gatherings, Collins always found a source or an authority.

Yet despite his research, an air of the improbable pervades much of his work. Dorothy L. Sayers comes closest to explaining it: "While each one of his astonishing contrivances and coincidences might, taken separately, find its parallel in real life, it remains true that in cramming a whole series of such improbabilities into the course of a single story he does frequently and by staggering all belief."<sup>29</sup> In Poor Miss Finch, for example, the reader is asked to believe in a blind heroine who first regains and then loses her sight, and in a hero who suffers from epileptic fits as the result of an assault by robbers, who turns blue from taking silver nitrate to control the seizures, and who nearly loses the heroine through the machinations of his identical twin. The wonder is not that events so incredible would alienate the critics, but that Collins retained a large and appreciative audience for most of

his career.<sup>30</sup> But then, the Victorians had a taste for melodrama. Like Dickens and Collins, they were impressed by "the coincidences, resemblances and surprises of life,"<sup>31</sup> at least to the point of accepting them in many of their favorite novels. Besides, at his best Collins integrated the alien elements, so that they seemed to spring from character and situation rather than controlling them.

The other issue that set him at odds with the critics was character development. "We do not care, and are not meant to care, about the characters of the story," said the Saturday Review, appraising No Name<sup>32</sup> -- a judgment that the critics frequently repeated, along with charges that his people were theatrical players who never could have existed, or puppets who tended to hold the same views and speak with a similar inflection. Modern critics have tended to exonerate all but his later novels from these charges; as Robert Ashley says, "his dramatis personae exceed the requirements of sensation fiction, where characterisation need not be more than rudimentary."<sup>33</sup> Some have even begun to recognize new dimensions to his characters. William H. Marshall sees many of his villains as studies in alienation and praises his pioneering exploration of memory and the unconscious.<sup>34</sup> Such subtleties, however, were lost on Victorian readers, who simply demanded characters whom they could take to heart.

Collins's letters indicate that he was aware of the demands of his audience and took character invention seriously. In more than one Preface, he expressed the hope that he had increased his readers' circle of fictional friends.<sup>35</sup> He also defended himself against the critical charges of weakness in this area. "It may be possible," he said in the

Preface to The Woman in White,

to present characters successfully without telling a story; but it is not possible to tell a story successfully without presenting characters: their existence, as recognizable realities, being the sole condition on which the story can be effectively told. The only narrative which can hope to lay a strong hold on the attention of readers, is a narrative which interests them about men and women--for the perfectly obvious reason that they are men and women themselves.

Yet while he managed to produce a handful of people--Count Fosco and Marian Halcombe of The Woman in White, and Sergeant Cuff of The Moonstone--who gratified Victorian expectations and who retain a charm for modern readers, many of his other characters, compared to the larger-than-life creations of other Victorian novelists, to Micawber and Pecksniff, to Heathcliff and Grandcourt, to Jane Eyre and Tess and even Mrs. Proudie, seem sadly one-dimensional.

Dickens indicated part of the trouble in a letter on The Woman in White: "[T]he three people who write the narratives in these proofs have a DISSECTIVE property in common, which is essentially not theirs but yours; . . . my own effort would be to strike more of what is got that way out of them by collision with one another, and by the working of the story."<sup>36</sup> Unfortunately, the "dissective property" was not so much a weakness per se as the by-product of a more basic problem, narrowness of scope. However effectively they function, Collins's characters subserve the demands of the plot and rarely rise above it. Even Zo, the "capital child" in Heart and Science whom Swinburne praised so highly,<sup>37</sup> exists to offer comic relief and bring the hero home from Canada. When they are not subordinated to the story, his characters attract the reader's notice through some mental or physical deformity; Madonna of Hide and Seek is deaf and dumb, and Miserrimus Dexter of

The Law and the Lady is a legless egomaniac. Those who are neither deformed nor grotesque are frequently humours rather than people, like Uncle Joseph, the Mozart-loving German of The Dead Secret, or Captain Wragge, the shifty rogue of No Name. In this century, Walter de la Mare has astutely summarized their defects:

But whatever value he set on them, in the playing out of his literary chess he was content to use even his best and brightest too much as mere pieces. As such they interest, excite, mystify, amuse and engross us. But they never positively possess us--storm the very citadels of mind and heart. He refuses to allow them their full freedom. They have their being more for his sake than for their own; and though their average not only in life-likeness but in sheer intelligence may surpass that of Dickens's, how many of Collins's characters have become household words?<sup>38</sup>

On the other hand, a close reading of his novels reveals characters who are surprisingly modern in their neuroses and complexities. Few of his heroes behave heroically; they are more likely to be weak and anxious, or too naive to act effectively. His heroines, in contrast, are often strong-willed and brave enough to accomplish what the men have left undone. Marian Halcombe rescues her half-sister from a mad-house; Valeria Macallan of The Law and the Lady proves her husband's innocence of murder after he has given up in despair.

While Collins's conception of character was limited, he was eager to shed the stereotypes that plagued so many period novels. In an article written for Household Words in 1856, he pleaded the novelist's right to challenge the reader's preconceptions of the feminine:

I know it is a rule that, when two sisters are presented in a novel, one must be tall and dark, and the other short and light. I know that five feet eight of female flesh and blood, when accompanied by an olive complexion, black eyes, and raven hair, is synonymous with strong passions and an unfortunate destiny. I know that five feet nothing, golden ringlets, soft blue eyes, and a lily brow, can not possibly be associated by any

well-constituted novelist with any thing but ringing laughter, arch innocence, and final matrimonial happiness. I have studied these great first principles of the art of fiction too long not to reverence them as established laws; but I venture respectfully to suggest that the time has arrived when it is no longer necessary to insist on them in novel after novel. . . . Although I know it to be against all precedent, I want to revolutionize our favorite two sisters. Would any bold innovator run all risks, and make them both alike in complexion and stature? Or would any desperate man (I dare not suggest such a course to the ladies) effect an entire alteration, by making the two sisters change characters? . . . Would the public accept the tall dark-haired sister, if she exhibited a jolly disposition and a tendency to be flippant in her talk? Would readers be fatally startled out of their sense of propriety if the short charmer with the golden hair appeared before them as a serious, strong-minded, fierce-spoken, miserable, guilty woman? It might be a dangerous experiment to make this change; but it would be worth trying. . . .<sup>39</sup>

Whenever two sisters appear in his novels, the darker one behaves more admirably. But fair or dark, his female characters tend to upset the reader's expectations. Lydia Gwilt, the red-haired temptress of Armadale, is a murderer and a suicide; but before she dies she behaves sympathetically, as even John Forster admitted.<sup>40</sup> Mercy Merrick of The New Magdalen, a dark-haired and dark-eyed woman, has actually been a prostitute; but through her efforts to redeem herself she wins the respect of her noble employer and the love of her employer's nephew, a devoutly religious reformer.

To create such women as Lydia and Mercy, and to focus directly on sexual problems, was no mere breach of convention; it offended against propriety and assaulted Victorian standards. Collins claimed that he was challenging cant and hypocrisy rather than virtue, replacing "the clap-trap morality of the present day" with "the Christian morality which is of all time";<sup>41</sup> but it would be more accurate to say that, in novels like these, he deliberately tried to shock his readers even as he labored to please them.

This tendency to outrage convention--and then protest his moral integrity with the fervor of an injured martyr--grew more pronounced in the later novels, the novels with a purpose.<sup>42</sup> For as he becomes increasingly convinced of the novelist's duty to alert his readers to legal and social abuses--faulty marriage laws, faulty criminal laws, misconceptions about fallen women--his stories became more controversial and his defenses of them more militant. This note of belligerence is audible in the earliest of his Prefaces.<sup>43</sup> It sounds whenever he feels that his morals or his credibility may be impugned; it echoes through the a priori defenses of his methods, and in the remarks he addresses to the critics who have previously attacked him. After the publication of The Woman in White (1860), a popular success that many early reviewers mistakenly condemned, he divided his audience into two opposing camps: "Readers in General," the ordinary public whom he loved and tried to please, and "Readers in Particular," the critics and their allies whom he frequently rebuked.<sup>44</sup> To the second group, whom he regarded as narrow-minded and suspicious--destructive of the novelist's freedom and perhaps of the potential of fiction itself--he directed the bulk of his remarks about the purity of his motives, the accuracy of his statements, the veracity of his characters, and the diligence of his labors.

Nonetheless, it would be a mistake to believe that his addresses to the public were primarily belligerent, or even primarily defensive.

Robinson offers a more accurate assessment of their purpose:

However deplorable they may be on artistic grounds, these Prefaces are of interest in revealing something of the writer. They underline his intentions, even where these are perfectly clear from the pages that follow; they tell us a little of his working methods; they are sometimes addressed to his critics, not always in terms calculated to evoke a favourable review; from time to time

they attack the prudes, or the snobs; but above all they seek to establish a closer relationship between author and reader. The reader is often warned, sometimes encouraged, occasionally flattered, but all the time Wilkie is assuring him of the author's friendly interest in him, an interest which he modestly hopes will be reciprocated.<sup>45</sup>

Collins was a dedicated craftsman; he was also a rebel who sought an outlet for his anger through his prose; but most of all, he was a writer who aimed to satisfy his audience. Hoping to win acceptance, and conscious of the "heavy debt of gratitude"<sup>46</sup> he owed "the much-lectured and much-enduring reader,"<sup>47</sup> Collins implied in every possible way, "your sympathy will find me grateful . . . my motive has been to please you."<sup>48</sup>

\* \* \*

Next to the Prefaces, Collins's letters provide the fullest record of his attitudes toward his audience, both in the comments they offer on his writing and in the techniques they employ. Unlike the correspondence of many Victorian authors, they have not been edited and published, both because they are hard to trace and because their value has been underestimated.<sup>49</sup> Then too, anything that might have exposed his private life or revealed his inner conflicts, aside from a few innocuous references,<sup>50</sup> has probably been destroyed. Dickens burned the letters Collins sent to him, and Reade retained only a fraction of what must have been a fuller correspondence. Nonetheless, at least 1500 letters remain,<sup>51</sup> and while some are no more than brief notes accepting or declining invitations, others are detailed narratives containing the rudiments of plot and dialogue, or humorous accounts of his travels, or reports about work in progress.

Like Dickens, Collins was concerned with provoking an immediate audience response. He needed to visualize the reader laughing, crying, and shivering by turns at what he wrote. At the very least he wanted an estimate of the response he was likely to evoke so that he could proceed with confidence. Writing letters to a private audience of friends enabled him to test his skills and to follow up on what he had written, besides providing a repository of descriptions and events that he could later rework into fiction.

The wide variations in the tone of his letters reflect his lifelong awareness of the need for tempering his style to his readers. With his publishers, he was businesslike and sometimes overbearing;<sup>52</sup> with the patrons from whom he solicited subscriptions for the biography of his father's life, he was deferential but persistent;<sup>53</sup> with those he knew and loved best--his family, his friend Charles Ward, Robert Lehmann and his wife Nina--he was familiar and affectionate, writing sometimes as a suppliant, but always as an entertainer.

One of the earlier extant letters, written to his father when Collins was eighteen, describes a "conversation" during a recent visit to his mother's sister:

It turned (it generally somehow does whenever I am in her company) upon literature, and I sat with my back to the window, and my hand in my pocket, freezing my horrified auditors by a varied recital of the most terrible portions of the Monk and Frankenstein. Every sentence that fell from my lips, was followed in rapid succession by--"Lor!"--"oh!" "ah!" "He! He!" "Good gracious!" &c &c None of our country relations I am sure ever encountered in their whole lives before such a hash of diablerie, demonology & massacre, with their [ ? ] and bread and butter. I intend to give them another course, comprising, the Ancient Mariner, Jack the Giant Killer, the Mysteries of Udolpho and an enquiry into the life and actions (when they were little girls) of the witches in Macbeth.<sup>54</sup>

Of note in this early account is the rather Dickensian attempt to be funny--which anticipates his friendship with Dickens by ten years; his delight in shocking this domestic audience; the admixture of humor and horror; and the deft insertion of details that pin down the scene and the speaker's position. But in terms of his future vocation, the most significant features are his love of story-telling--his joy in entertaining both his country relations and the recipient of his letter--and his choice of subjects. Not only does this passage indicate several of his literary sources; it shows Collins at the outset of his career relying on macabre and sensational stories to captivate an audience.

His frequent trips through England and the Continent, taken for amusement, or for his health, or to gather material for future novels, provided the grounds for a detailed correspondence. No one was more eager to hear from him than his mother, Harriet Geddes Collins, who formed an audience of one for the many letters in which he tried out his skills, confessed his hopes, and shared his triumphs.<sup>55</sup> A letter written to her from Paris when he was twenty-one reveals his developing narrative powers.

The old characteristic and indiscriminate regard for "the small sweet courtesies of life" withstands the innovations of the new school of melodramatic rudeness more stoutly than I supposed. . . .

I was just passing the 'cuisine' of this hotel in my way to the Café where I breakfast when I was stopped by a loud cry of Monsieur Collins! I turned round and confronted the kitchen maid with an immense pan of some boiling ingredient, which in her hurry, she had forgotten to lay aside--"Comment"? said I. Virginia, desires her kindest remembrances to you, Monsieur" said she--and here the kitchen maid put down the boiling ingredient and wiped a "black" off her nose with the end of her apron. "I am extremely obliged to Virginia", said I, "but who is she"?--"What! Monsieur has forgotten Virginia, said she, oh Heavens! this is very desolating"--(I translate literally) "She had my place, that poor Virginia, and hearing on a visit to the landlady, that you were here, she could not refrain from charging me with her kindest remembrances". By this time I discovered that Virginia was last year's kitchen-maid, but I had not then and have not now a clear recollection

of her-- However, I told a lie and said I had, for fear of hurting Virginia's feelings. Is not this deliciously French? Fancy the astonishment of a thoroughbred Englishman at hearing that a kitchen-maid named Virginia (!) whom he scarcely recollected and whom he never feed [sic] with money, had sent him her kindest remembrances when she heard he was again in the Hotel where she had once served!<sup>56</sup>

Here, as in his fiction, Collins holds the reader's attention by dramatizing the incident. His careful staging of the scene, his use of dialogue, his selection of telling details like the "black" on the kitchen-maid's nose, and his tendency to guide the reader through superfluous authorial comment ("Is not this deliciously French?") prefigure the techniques of his later work. His concern for the servants is also typical; unlike most other writers of the period, he was able to see domestics as people with independent lives and concerns whose feelings were to be respected.

In a postscript to this letter, another element that would figure in his later work emerges:

On returning from the Beaux Arts, I looked in at the Morgue. A body of a young girl had just been fished out of the river. As her bosom was "black and blue" I suppose she had been beaten into a state of insensibility and then flung into the Seine. The spectators of this wretched sight were, for the most part, women and children.<sup>57</sup>

Such observations, on this trip and others, were to furnish raw materials for future novels; Count Fosco's body would be found at the Morgue. The fascination with physical and mental deformity which is so pronounced in his novels and stories is intimated here, as is his awareness that such horrors--and by inference, their counterparts in fiction--would attract a curious audience.

A number of his letters allude to the stories, plays, and novels he was writing; but the majority refer to the locations he would visit, the labor involved, or the sums he would earn, rather than the content.

During the writing of Armada, however, he was frequently ill or abroad, and therefore eager to communicate his progress, by mail, to his mother and Ward. As a result, the Armada references shed light, not only on his methods and working habits, but on the extent to which he thought about his readers as he wrote and published his books.

The first explicit reference to the new novel occurs in a letter of 1863 from Strasbourg, where he had gone after seeking a cure for his gout in Wildbad:

I have had a most kind and friendly letter from Mr Smith (of Smith & Elder) allowing me until the 1st of December next to send in the first number of the new story for the Cornhill--and, what is more, for that same story, I have Got an Idea! So, if the summer sees me on my legs, the autumn will see me (and God knows how I long for it) back at my work. . . . If the sympathies of my readers at Wildbad can help me to get well, I ought to be a marvel of health.<sup>58</sup>

Significantly, even at this early stage he tied his inspiration--or rather, the sound health that led to creativity--to the goodwill of his publisher and readers. By November, he was sufficiently improved to report to his mother, "I am getting ideas--as thick as blackberries--for another book. But say nothing about it yet."<sup>59</sup> The warning was characteristic; he never wanted to share his secrets. But so was the implicit optimism, which became even clearer in December: "I think I am going to hit on a rather extraordinary story this time--something entirely different from anything I have done yet."<sup>60</sup> By January, he was anticipating the impression his new book would make on the critics. ". . . I am at work again constructing my story," he wrote to Charles Ward. "If I know anything about it, I have got a fine subject this time--something entirely new at any rate. And so the Times is beginning to pat me on the back--is it? Well, we shall see what they say to my next book if I live to

write it."<sup>61</sup> This allusion belies his claims, so frequent at this point in his career, that he paid no attention to reviews. In truth, while he professed indifference, he was wondering what The Times would say about his new book--before he had written its first chapter.

In the planning stages, Collins referred to his novels in architectural terms. He would not begin work on the text itself until he had laid the "foundation"<sup>62</sup> or "constructed the framework"<sup>63</sup>--a difficult and tedious process. ". . . I am slowly putting up the scaffolding of the book which is yet to be built," he had written to Reade about No Name, the novel that preceded Armada. "My poles tumble about my ears, and my lashings come undone, and my boards won't fit--in plainer words, I have cut myself out a tough job in invention and construction of story this time, but I hope to get the better of it in a few weeks more."<sup>64</sup> Armada took even longer to plan because its plot was so complex. But by April of 1864 he was beginning to write,<sup>65</sup> and six months later the first proofs were ready. A letter to his mother, written in October, reports on the first reactions:

Talking of work, Dickens has read my proofs, and is greatly struck by them. He prognosticates certain success. Miss Hogarth couldn't sleep till she had finished them--and (to quote quite another sort of opinion) Mr Smith tells me that the Printers are highly interested in the story. I set great store by getting the good opinion of these latter critics--for it is no easy matter to please the printers, to whom all books represent in the first instance nothing but weary hard work. Upon the whole, therefore, "Armada" seems to promise fairly enough at starting.<sup>66</sup>

While most Victorian novelists would have been concerned with the initial reception of their proofs, few would have responded as he did to his publisher's information. Naturally he cared about Dickens's good opinion, for Dickens was his friend and mentor as well as the greatest living novelist. He could also be expected to care about Miss Hogarth,

Dickens's sister-in-law, whose sleeplessness might forecast the excitement of the middle-class readership he counted on. But his interest in the printers was unusual, for they were workmen who fell outside the range of the classes (and their attendant domestics) at which most novelists aimed.<sup>67</sup> In citing them as "critics"--important critics, who required stronger incentives than ordinary readers--and in rating their opinion as highly as that of the educated public, he revealed a concern for mass-audience tastes that was uncommon in his day.

Yet while he valued the opinions of all sorts of readers and openly expressed his gratitude, he never let the public dictate changes in his stories when the serial parts were coming out. In this he differed from Dickens and Thackeray, who were willing to alter their plans if sales were lagging or the characters offended their readers, and who sometimes began to publish without knowing how they were going to conclude. "In the story I am now writing ('Armada')," Collins wrote to an American reader,

the last number is to be published several months hence--and the whole close of the story is still unwritten. But I know at this moment who is to live and who is to die--and I see the main events which lead to the end as plainly as I see the pen now in my hand--as plainly as I see the ground laid, months since, in the published part of the story, for what (if I am spared to finish it) you will read months hence. How I shall lead you from one main event to the other--whether I shall dwell at length on certain details or pass them over rapidly--how I may yet develop my characters and make them clearer to you by new touches and traits--all this, I know no more than you do, till I take the pen in hand. But the characters themselves were all marshalled in their places, before a line of "Armada" was written. And I knew the end two years ago in Rome, when I was recovering from a long illness, and was putting the story together.<sup>68</sup>

He treats this correspondent--a total stranger--as a confidant entitled to a substantial explanation. He freely discusses his methods and his

flexible handling of details; but he also makes it clear that his course is fixed beyond the possibility of change.<sup>69</sup>

As he labored over his manuscripts, Collins experienced all the joys and sorrows that he hoped his audience would share. He did not simply try to put himself in the place of the anonymous reader; he actually became his own audience, responding as he wanted the reader to respond, to stimuli of his own invention. At times, he behaved as if he were both the writer and the reader, reacting and then noting his reactions. "I am making my flesh creep with what I am writing just now of the new book. Whether the public flesh will follow my example remains to be seen."<sup>70</sup> So he wrote to his mother in September of 1864; and in April of 1866, he similarly confessed, "I was never so excited myself when finishing a story as I was this time. Miss Gwilt's death quite upset me."<sup>71</sup> Nor did he confine these identifications to *Armadale* and his mother. To a friend whose hunting breeches he had "celebrated" in a story, he wrote, "I laughed a good deal in writing it, and I am glad you have matched me in reading it."<sup>72</sup> Many years later, he wrote to an American friend, "What you kindly say of The Dead Secret has greatly pleased and encouraged me. I cried so myself over that passage in writing it, that I was obliged to make a fair copy of the page, when I was able to compose myself."<sup>73</sup>

The spectacle of an author laughing, crying, or freezing with horror over his pages may produce discomfort today. But it was probably not an uncommon one in the middle-nineteenth century. Furthermore, in an era when the novelist enjoyed a genuine rapport with his readers--when he could reliably regard them as familiars in taste and habits--

his own reactions were a valid gauge of what he might expect from the public.

Not that Collins ever rested on the knowledge of his own reactions. After Armadale--"a tremendous job"<sup>74</sup>--was finished in April of 1866, he looked to his friends, the public, and the press for favorable responses. In a letter to his mother he quoted the comments of Dickens and John Forster and mentioned two reviews he had mailed to her, "'The Athenaeum' in a state of virtuous indignation, 'The Reader' doing the book full justice, and thoroughly understanding what I mean by it."<sup>75</sup> He was not unduly upset by the Athenaeum review, which bewailed the "diseased invention" of the period and attacked "the sorceress of Armadale" and her cohorts as "writhen creatures";<sup>76</sup> for he probably deduced the identity of its vitriolic author, H. F. Chorley, and dismissed him as a narrow-minded censor.<sup>77</sup> Besides, to counteract it there was the praise of the understanding Reader, which defended him at his most sensitive points, his morals and his credibility: ". . . all of these persons are depicted with a marvellous fidelity to nature, and, still more difficult, are skilfully and carefully made subservient to the one design. We cannot think that anything but good can result to the reader, who is thus shown the wickedness of his own day, not softened down, but glaring in all its worst and most repulsive features."<sup>78</sup> Dickens, as sympathetic as ever, extolled "the force of the working out, the care and pains, and the art," and found the ending "extremely powerful," though he doubted that Collins could induce his readers to believe in Miss Gwilt's "tenderness or compassion"--an indication that he was not as moved by her death as the author had been.<sup>79</sup> Forster, to whom

the book was dedicated, also treated it kindly, despite his growing resentment of the man who had replaced him in Dickens's affections: "It is a masterpiece of art which few indeed have equalled to bring even pity and pathos to the end of such a career as hers. You certainly have done this--and the single page [?] in which it is done is the finest thing in the book."<sup>80</sup>

To a man who counted so heavily on the goodwill of his readers, such praise was immensely gratifying. But sales were the essential form of tribute. A month later, writing to tell his mother that so far, his publishers were satisfied with sales, Collins noted that his "faithful public" had created "an unexpectedly large demand" for the novel at the circulating library.<sup>81</sup> To him, the support of these ordinary readers was always the ultimate accolade. More than that, he considered it the essential means of promoting and distributing his novels. When the subscription list for his next book, The Moonstone, proved somewhat disappointing, he hastened to assure his publisher, Tinsley,

. . . we have only to wait a few weeks--until the book has had time to get talked about. I don't attach much importance to the Reviews--except as advertisements which are inserted for nothing. But the impression I produce on the general public of readers is the lever that will move anything--provided the impression be favourable. If this book does what my other books have done, in the way of stimulating the first circle of readers among whom it falls--that circle will widen to a certainty. It all depends on this.<sup>82</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the title of J.I.M. Stewart's recent review, "The Mysterious Mystery Writer" (TLS, 2 December 1977, p. 1398). Sayers allegedly abandoned her attempt at a biography because of "the extreme obscurity which surrounds the whole of Collins's private life" (Hesketh Pearson, Charles Dickens: His Character, Comedy, and Career [New York: Harper, 1949], p. 210). See also Sayers's letters to Robinson, quoted by Gregory in Wilkie Collins, A Critical and Biographical Study, p. 9. Several attempts to edit Collins's letters have also been abandoned.

<sup>2</sup> Collins put his prefatory statements into Letters of Dedication as well as Prefaces, but I shall use "Preface" for all such remarks to the reader.

<sup>3</sup> Letters II, 436.

<sup>4</sup> New York: Harper, 1874; subsequent citations will appear in the text.

<sup>5</sup> Antonina, Collins's only historical romance, is more disjointed than the novels he wrote later, and the fiction of the 1880s tends to be less taut than his earlier work, in part because he was slipping and in part because he thought many readers were more interested in character and humor than in plot. For a different opinion--that at least one of his books is not essentially linear but, rather, a "complex mosaic"--see Walter M. Kendrick, "The Sensationalism of The Woman in White," NCF, 32 (June, 1977), 32-34.

<sup>6</sup> See Edmund Yates' interview, "Mr. Wilkie Collins in Gloucester Place," Celebrities at Home, 3rd Series (London: World, 1879), p. 150.

<sup>7</sup> See Collins's "Reminiscences of a Story-Teller," The Universal Review, 1 (May-August, 1888), 183-84.

<sup>8</sup> Robinson, pp. 328-29. In a letter of 1884, Collins termed Fenimore Cooper, Scott, and Balzac "the three Kings of Fiction" (Saturday Review of Literature, 3 [7 August 1926], 30).

<sup>9</sup> New York: Harper, 1874, Ch. IV. Jessie is reacting to her guardian's suggestion that she amuse herself on a rainy day with the box of novels he has ordered.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, the title that Collins selected for his reminiscences, reprinted in n. 7 above.

<sup>11</sup> Preface to The Woman in White.

<sup>12</sup> Preface to Hide and Seek (New York: Harper, 1873).

- <sup>13</sup> New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, c. 1900, Book the Third, Ch. IV.
- <sup>14</sup> According to "How I Write My Books," an open letter which appeared in the Globe newspaper in 1877. I have used a manuscript version from the Huntington Library.
- <sup>15</sup> New York: Harper, 1873; subsequent citations will appear in the text. T. S. Eliot found Collins's resources "inexhaustible" compared to those of his twentieth-century counterparts. See "Wilkie Collins and Dickens," TLS, 4 August 1927, p. 526, reprinted in Selected Essays, New Edition (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1950), p. 417; subsequent references will be to this edition.
- <sup>16</sup> Basil (London: Richard Bentley, 1854), p. vii. This passage, which first appeared in the 1852 edition, was deleted when Collins revised the novel and its dedicatory letter ten years later.
- <sup>17</sup> Cf. Edward Marston, a partner in the firm of Sampson Low (the original publishers of The Woman in White, No Name, and My Miscellanies): "I may say that Mr. Collins had a perfect knowledge of his own value; he stood in no need of a literary agent to make bargains for him, at all events, till his health broke down." After Work (London: Heinemann, 1904), p. 85.
- <sup>18</sup> Aside from minor changes in wording and typography, the revisions fall into two categories: redistribution of lengthy chapters and additional clues to the reader--as, for example, when "the lawyer" becomes "our family lawyer, Mr. Bruff" (First Period, Ch. 6). In the original version, the First Period contains twenty-two chapters. In the revised version, it contains twenty-three, with the new divisions beginning toward the end of the original Ch. 20 (see Appendix C). In the Second Period, Miss Clack's Narrative originally had seven chapters, rather than eight; in the revised version, the seventh has been subdivided. The content is, however, unaffected.
- Ashley in his dissertation, "The Career of Wilkie Collins" (Harvard 1948), p. 100, cites similarly exaggerated claims for revisions in Hide and Seek.
- <sup>19</sup> Notably by Mrs. Oliphant in her important article, "Sensation Novels," Blackwood's, 91 (May, 1862), 565-66. Reprinted in Wilkie Collins, The Critical Heritage, ed. Norman Page (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), pp. 111-12.
- <sup>20</sup> Revised edition (New York: Harper, 1873), p. iv.
- <sup>21</sup> On this topic, see also Walter G. Phillips, Dickens, Reade, and Collins, Sensation Novelists (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1919), pp. 12-13.
- <sup>22</sup> "Dramatic Grub Street," My Miscellanies (New York: Harper, 1873), p. 353. Originally published in Household Words, 6 March 1858.
- <sup>23</sup> "Dramatic Grub Street," p. 360.

24 We have no first-hand evidence that Collins knew the theories of the early Romantics, but the letter quoted on p. 41 indicates his relish for the "Ancient Mariner," and as his friends included poets and men of letters (his brother Charles and Rosetti were intimates), it would be unlikely that he was unaware of Wordsworth's and Coleridge's ideas.

25 Coleridge, Biographia Literaria, ed. J. Shawcross (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1967, reprinted from the 1907 edition), II, 6. The Gothic elements in Collins's work have been the subject of a recent study by Keith Brown Reierstad, "The Demon in the House; or, The Domestication of Gothic in the Novels of Wilkie Collins," Diss. Univ. of Pennsylvania 1976. Sayers finds a classical precedent for his theories in the work of Corneille (Wilkie Collins, p. 81).

26 The subject of probability comes up in the Prefaces to Basil, No Name, and Heart and Science, and indirectly in several other places--an indication of its importance and of Collins's defensive attitude.

27 Robinson, p. 166, quoting a letter to W. H. Wills. Cf. Collins's remarks in "Reminiscences of a Story-Teller," p. 190, about the number of readers who wrote him about an incorrect date in one of his stories.

28 See Nathaniel Beard, "Some Recollections of Yesterday," Temple Bar, 102 (July, 1894), 322.

29 The Omnibus of Crime (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1929), p. 27. In Wilkie Collins (p. 102) she describes the events of Hide and Seek as "an accumulation of coincidence that sticks in the gullet."

30 Critics at the time of Collins's death and early in this century promoted the idea that Collins fell into obscurity in his later years. But as Page has conclusively demonstrated (pp. 20-25), Collins's novels continued to sell widely in England and America throughout the nineteenth century.

31 This is John Forster's comment; see The Life of Charles Dickens, notes by A. J. Hoppé, 2 vols. (London: Dent, 1966), I, 59. T. S. Eliot subsequently extended it to Collins.

32 15 (17 January 1863), 84; Page, p. 136.

33 Ashley, p. 135.

34 Marshall, p. 85 et passim.

35 See the Prefaces to The Woman in White, The Moonstone, and especially Heart and Science.

36 Letters III, 145.

37 Swinburne, p. 301.

38 "The Early Novels of Wilkie Collins," in The Eighteen-Sixties, ed. John Drinkwater (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1932), pp. 78-79.

39 "Petition to the Novel-Writers," My Miscellanies, pp. 65-66; originally published in Household Words, 6 December 1856.

40 See p. 49.

41 Preface to Armadale (New York: Harper, 1874); subsequent citations will appear in the text.

42 Collins introduced elements of moral or social protest into his novels before 1870; No Name, for example, protests against the laws that determined illegitimacy. But with Man and Wife (1870) the element of protest began to predominate.

43 I.e., the original Dedication to Basil, especially pp. vii-ix. Subsequent citations of both versions will appear in the text.

44 See the Preface to Armadale, and Robinson, p. 147.

45 Robinson, pp. 68-69; my underline.

46 Preface to The Woman in White.

47 Preface to My Miscellanies.

48 Preface to Heart and Science (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, c. 1900); subsequent citations will appear in the text.

49 In his chapter on Collins in Victorian Fiction, A Guide to Research, ed. Lionel Stevenson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1964), Robert Ashley offered little encouragement to scholars eager to trace Collins's letters: "Since the most interesting and valuable portions of Collins's correspondence has disappeared, it is doubtful that a worthwhile collection of letters can be assembled" (p. 284). Since then, however, numerous letters have found their way into libraries and collections in the United States and England--enough to convince Ashley to eliminate a similar statement from his chapter in the forthcoming guide. Nonetheless, no one has as yet produced either a selected edition or a checklist, perhaps because few scholars are aware of their existence, perhaps because they are so widely scattered.

50 I.e., the direct but discreet allusions to Caroline Graves and her daughter Harriet in letters to Dickens, Edward Pigott, and other close friends.

51 This is a conservative estimate, based on what I have found in the course of my research. Substantial collections exist in the Morris L. Parrish Collection, the Berg Collection, the Pierpont Morgan Library, the University of Texas at Austin, the University of Illinois at Urbana, the Huntington Library, Harvard, Yale, U.C.L.A., and the Fales Collection at New York University. Smaller but important collections exist in England and at various other American universities, and--as numerous Sotheby's catalogues indicate--letters that have been in private hands are continually turning up.

52 Cf. Davis, pp. 109-110 and various ALSs in the Berg Collection.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. ALSs in the Morris L. Parrish Collection to George Godwin, William Charles Macready, and John Wilson Croker, whose initial refusal prompted a second letter.

<sup>54</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 24 August 1842.

<sup>55</sup> It is not quite accurate to call Mrs. Collins an "audience of one," since Collins expected her to share portions of his letters with relatives and friends; however, he occasionally warned her to keep portions (or whole letters) to herself.

<sup>56</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 23 September 1845.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., continued on September 24th; partially quoted by Robinson, p. 40.

<sup>58</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 18 June 1863.

<sup>59</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 13 November 1863.

<sup>60</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 4 December 1863.

<sup>61</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 14 January 1864.

<sup>62</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 14 January 1864.

<sup>63</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 8 January 1864.

<sup>64</sup> Letter in the possession of Mr. Michael Reade, 4 June 1861.

<sup>65</sup> Robinson, p. 187, quoting a letter of 20 April 1864.

<sup>66</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 19 October 1864; mentioned by Robinson, p. 188.

<sup>67</sup> It is important to remember that in this period "common reader" was not synonymous with "middle-class reader"; see Altick, Ch. 1. Collins was interested in both classes, even though he wrote for the second. See his article, "The Unknown Public," My Miscellanies, pp. 126-42, which originally appeared in Household Words on 21 August 1858.

<sup>68</sup> ALS Fales Collection, 5 October 1865.

<sup>69</sup> Collins impressed the same point on his publishers. Cf. his letter to Thomas D. Galpin, a partner in the firm that was publishing Man and Wife in serial form: "I will at all times readily receive, and consider, any suggestions which the proprietors of the Magazine [Cassell's] are disposed to offer to me. But I must, at the same time, frankly tell you that I reserve to myself the sole right of deciding whether I do, or do not, avail myself of the suggestions. In stipulating that the final revise of each weekly part shall go to press, without the slightest alteration being made in it by any other person, I am only claiming a privilege which has been already accorded to me by Mr. Dickens in All the Year Round and by the publishers of the Cornhill Magazine. You will, I am sure,

see the necessity of leaving me to be the sole judge of what is right in this matter, when I remind you that mine is the only hand which holds the threads of the story, and mine are the only eyes which see it as one complete whole--while others merely see it as a succession of parts." ALS Humanities Research Center, The University of Texas at Austin, 17 August 1869; reproduced by William Rollin Coleman in "The University of Texas Collection of the Letters of Wilkie Collins, Victorian Novelist," Diss. Univ. of Texas at Austin 1975, pp. 134-35.

<sup>70</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 9 September 1864.

<sup>71</sup> Robinson, p. 190.

<sup>72</sup> ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 3 July 1862. The letter suggests that the "story" was No Name, but I have been unable to find the passage.

<sup>73</sup> ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 27 April 1883.

<sup>74</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 12 April 1866.

<sup>75</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 4 June 1866.

<sup>76</sup> Athenaeum, 2 June 1866, p. 732; Page, p. 147. Cf. the discussion on p. 75.

<sup>77</sup> Even if his literary friends did not reveal the author's identity, Collins could have guessed that it was Chorley's work from internal evidence. Chorley, the Athenaeum's leading critic of fiction, had written on March 16, 1850: "Need we remind a painter's son how much Terror and Power are enhanced by Beauty? There is possibly no more rivetting picture in the world than Da Vinci's 'Medusa' in the Florence Gallery,-- yet how calm it is as compared with many a Mater dolorosa by inferior hands" (p. 285; Page, p. 41). In his review of Armada on 2 June 1866 he wrote: "What artist would choose vermin as his subjects? The serpents that wreath a coil about the head of Da Vinci's Medusa, in the Florence Gallery, are mere accessories to the grand, fatal face" (p. 732; Page, p. 147).

<sup>78</sup> The Reader, 2 June 1866, p. 538.

<sup>79</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 4 June 1866.

<sup>80</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 4 June 1866.

<sup>81</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 4 July 1866.

<sup>82</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 11 July 1868; quoted in John Sutherland's Victorian Novelists and Publishers (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1976), p. 46.

### Chapter III

#### Readers Who Affected Collins's Attitudes

Who were the readers that influenced his novels? Who were the people he listened to? Aside from his mother and the imaginary audience he courted as he wrote, there were three distinct classes of readers who affected Collins's work: his fellow writers, particularly Dickens; the reviewers, friendly and hostile; and the friends and strangers who sent him letters, expressed opinions that reached him in the form of gossip, or otherwise supplied him with feedback.

#### Charles Dickens

Writers on Collins have always given Dickens credit for his extensive and manifold influence upon his younger colleague,<sup>1</sup> but until the middle of this century, the Dickensians who touched upon the Dickens-Collins friendship either attacked or defended it without carefully assessing its effects. John Forster, whose jealousy of Collins seems to have destroyed his objectivity, ignored the relationship whenever possible and so, according to Hesketh Pearson, vitiated the latter part of his biography.<sup>2</sup> Percy Fitzgerald expressed open hostility, stating that their collaborations were "most injurious" to Dickens.<sup>3</sup> J.W.T. Ley, while he conceded Collins's influence, considered the friendship "the most unfortunate happening in Dickens's life" and accused Collins of leading him toward "a prostitution of his genius."<sup>4</sup> But as Robinson and Ashley have shown, these three members of the Dickens circle all had personal reasons for resenting Collins's intimacy with the master.<sup>5</sup> And on the other hand,

there were Thomas Seccombe, who wrote in 1901, "there is reason to believe that Collins had nearly as much influence upon the latest works of the greater writer as Dickens had upon him,"<sup>6</sup> Willoughby Matchett, who noted in 1915 that several of Dickens's later novels were "leavened with art borrowed from his friend,"<sup>7</sup> and T. S. Eliot, who credited to Collins's influence the "more elaborate and finished construction" of Dickens's later "dramatic" novels.<sup>8</sup> As H.J.W. Milley has remarked, however, the earlier appraisals, positive and negative, display a "remarkable vagueness";<sup>9</sup> none of their authors seems to have combed through the letters and novels for evidence.

More recent scholarship has verified what the Collins scholars acknowledged all along: a mutual influence, with the preponderance of benefits to Collins. By the 1960s Milley, Ashley, Jack Lindsay, and others had explored a number of their novels and detected signs of borrowing, or at least of unmistakable resemblance.<sup>10</sup> Later, Robert Louis Brannan, who examined their production of The Frozen Deep,<sup>11</sup> Anne Lohrli, who edited the account books of Household Words,<sup>12</sup> and Deborah Thomas, who worked with its Christmas numbers,<sup>13</sup> clarified other aspects of their professional relationship. Conclusive evidence of their mutual indebtedness is also given in their letters, which may be discreet about their peccadilloes but leave no doubt about the extent of their literary interaction.

Dickens valued Collins's talent as well as his friendship and, finding him easy to work with and amenable to suggestion, relied upon his help in a number of projects. Thus Collins acted in Dickens's amateur theatricals, collaborated with him on Christmas stories, plays, and

assorted articles, served on the staff of Household Words and All the Year Round until he gained financial independence,<sup>14</sup> and otherwise attended the older writer, at home or abroad. In return, Dickens guided and encouraged his younger colleague, read his manuscripts, advised him on contracts, commended his work to family and friends, and generally promoted his career.

The effect of this friendship upon the susceptible Wilkie Collins can hardly be overestimated. He was a writer eager to please the humblest of his readers. If he reacted with equanimity when a rude guest mentioned at a dinner party that his books were "read in every back-kitchen in England,"<sup>15</sup> how flattered he must have been to win the approval of the greatest writer of the age! "We . . . were as fond of each other as men could be," he recalled near the end of his life. "Nobody (my poor dear mother excepted, of course) felt so positively sure of the future before me in Literature, as Dickens did."<sup>16</sup> Dickens's approval was not unqualified; while he praised Collins lavishly, he never hesitated to correct what he considered to be lapses of taste, weaknesses in character and plot development, or even errors in grammar. In fact, Dickens acted as Collins's mentor, a situation that suited both of them for the greater part of their friendship.

Collins was scarcely alone in his desire to win a colleague's approval or to have one confidant whose help and opinions were decisive. Dickens himself had a mentor in John Forster, who read his manuscripts, corrected his proofs, and served as his business advisor, and Collins in his turn acted as mentor to Charles Reade. Nor were such instructive friendships limited to the Dickens circle. Thackeray found a confidante

in Mrs. Brookfield, and George Eliot's professional reliance on G. H. Lewes is too well known to need elaboration here. The novelist's need for someone whose responses and counsel he could trust must have been especially pressing in this period when audience reactions were all-important--when establishing rapport with one's readers was both a function of the creative process and a leading cause of anxiety.

Collins clearly benefitted from having Dickens as his mentor. When he met the famous author in 1851, he had already published a first novel, Antonina--a historical romance that bore little resemblance to his later works of fiction--as well as a biography of his father and a travel book; and while he was certain that he wanted to write, he was uncertain of his direction. Dickens took him in hand. As Robinson suggests, he probably "helped the less experienced novelist to find himself within a very few years."<sup>17</sup>

When Collins presented him with a copy of his second novel, Basil, Dickens responded enthusiastically:

. . . I have read the book with very great interest, and with a very thorough conviction that you have a call to this same art of fiction. I think the probabilities here and there require a little more respect than you are disposed to show them. . . . But the story contains admirable writing, and many clear evidences of a very delicate discrimination of character. It is delightful to find throughout that you have taken great pains with it besides. . . .

For these reasons I have made Basil's acquaintance with great gratification, and entertain a high respect for him. And I hope that I shall become intimate with many worthy descendants of his, who are yet in the limbo of creatures waiting to be born.<sup>18</sup>

These comments typify the mixture of praise and admonition that he was to offer through the rest of their friendship. By commending the pains and the admirable writing, he encouraged Collins in workmanlike habits--habits in which he set an example during many of the days they passed together.

And by making a point of the delicate touches in character development, he counteracted the younger man's taste for crudely melodramatic figures. In addition, he provided the steady stream of reassurance that was so necessary to Collins.

There was one drawback to being the protégé of the age's foremost novelist, which Collins acknowledged in a letter to his mother: "[I]f my goodnatured friends knew that I had been reading my idea to Dickens-- they would be sure to say when the book was published, that I had got all the good things in it from him."<sup>19</sup> The Dead Secret, which is the book he refers to, does reveal signs of Dickens's influence. Uncle Joseph, the German admirer of Mozart, suggests one of Dickens's gentler eccentrics, and the misogynistic Andrew Treverton is clearly a Dickensian miser.<sup>20</sup> But by and large, the "good things" that Collins got from Dickens were lessons in technique and judicious editing, rather than characters and incidents. For example, to unify the stories that he collected and republished in After Dark and The Queen of Hearts, he used the kind of framework or connecting narrative that Dickens had developed in such Christmas numbers as The Seven Poor Travellers, The Holly-Tree Inn, and The Wreck of the Golden Mary.<sup>21</sup> Yet if the idea of a frame came from Dickens, the themes themselves reflect Collins's interests. The Queen of Hearts is narrated by a widower who persuades his two brothers to help him entertain his spirited young ward so that she will not leave their residence before his son arrives. After Dark begins with the diary of a portrait-painter's wife, and her convalescent husband continues the narrative by dictating the stories to her. The object of this framework, Collins says in the Preface, is "to give the reader one more glimpse at that artist-life which

circumstances have afforded me peculiar opportunities of studying. . . ."22

Again, the books that Collins wrote after he met Dickens are funnier than his first two novels, and they begin to vary suspense with humor in a manner suggestive of Dickens. But it is unjust to conclude, as Earle Davis does, that Collins's unaffected style and sense of humor derive from his Household Words experience.<sup>23</sup> Letters that antedate his friendship with Dickens indicate his flair for humorous narration and his typically unaffected style. Dickens brought out or reinforced propensities that were already present.

As the friendship deepened and Collins matured, influence often became inseparable from common inspiration. Dickens grew so close to Collins that he could offer to continue No Name when Collins fell ill, "so like you as that no one should find out the difference,"<sup>24</sup> and Collins grew adept enough at Dickens's style to make the authorship of some parts of their joint productions a matter of continuing dispute.<sup>25</sup> Collins also felt increasingly free to suggest ideas to his mentor,<sup>26</sup> and whether he suggested them or not, themes that he had previously explored began to appear in such Dickens novels as A Tale of Two Cities and The Mystery of Edwin Drood.<sup>27</sup> But whatever the older author may have gained from the younger in terms of motifs and more consistent plotting, he gave far more than he received. And despite the occasional discomfort of not receiving credit for his own ideas, Collins valued Dickens's sound advice. Directly after warning her not to mention that he read his ideas to Dickens, the letter to his mother continues, "He found out, as I had hoped, all the weak points in the story, and gave me the most inestimable hints for strengthening them."<sup>28</sup>

Perhaps the soundest advice that Dickens offered was on the subject of audience relations. Time and again, he cautioned his friend against directing the reader too forcefully. "If I be right in supposing that the brother and sister are concealing the husband's mother," he wrote about "Sister Rose," a story that appeared in Household Words in 1855, "then will you look at the closing scene of the second part again, and consider whether you cannot make the indication of that circumstance a little more obscure--or, at all events, a little less emphatic . . .?"<sup>29</sup> Again, when Collins offered suggestions on A Tale of Two Cities, he commented:

I do not positively say that the point you put might not have been done in your manner; but I have a very strong conviction that it would have been overdone in that manner--too elaborately trapped, baited, and prepared--in the main anticipated, and its interest wasted. . . . I think the business of art is to lay all that ground carefully, not with the care that conceals itself--to show, by a backward light, what everything has been working to--but only to suggest, until the fulfillment comes. These are the ways of Providence, of which ways all art is but a little imitation.<sup>30</sup>

As we shall see in Chapter VI, Collins took a more ambivalent view of Providence than Dickens. While his fiction abounds in providential elements, in chance encounters and startling coincidences, he wanted his readers to recognize the skill with which he confused or surprised them. His preference for exerting "the care that conceals itself" helps to explain the mechanical quality of many of his less successful novels.

Dickens continued to warn his friend against over-directing the reader. In his letter on The Woman in White, he said:

I seem to have noticed, here and there, that the great pains you take express themselves a trifle too much, and you know that I always contest your disposition to give an audience credit for nothing, which necessarily involves the forcing of points on their attention, and which I have always observed them to resent when they find it out--as they always will and so. But on turning to the book again,

I find it difficult to take out an instance of this. It rather belongs to your habit of thought and manner of going about the work.<sup>31</sup>

Dickens could not change Collins's habits of thought where audience relations were in question. But while Collins could not be entirely dissuaded from steering the reader through the story, the tendency was at its lowest ebb during the later 1850s and the 1860s, the years when the two men were closest. Only once during that period did Collins monitor the reader obtrusively, and the book in which he did so, Armada, was the one least affected by Dickens, first because his travels precluded close contact with Dickens during much of the writing, and then because he serialized it in The Cornhill instead of in All the Year Round.

The tremendous success of The Woman in White in 1860 did little to alter Dickens's role as confidant and consultant. While Collins was working on No Name, for example, he consulted his mentor at every phase from outline through final volume. He may have been more nervous than usual during this period (1861-63), since No Name was bound to be measured against its best-selling predecessor, but Dickens bolstered his confidence by lavishly praising his efforts. Dickens was also accustomed to passing Collins's stories and manuscripts along to people he trusted, and then reporting their favorable verdicts.<sup>32</sup> In this way, he gave his colleague the sense of a sympathetic audience before a single chapter was in print.

In July of 1861, buoyed by Dickens's enthusiasm, Collins wrote his mother from Broadstairs:

You will be glad to hear that I tried the outline of this said story upon Dickens, that he was immensely struck by it, and that he gave such an account of it to Wills, in my absence, that the said Wills's eyes rolled in his head with astonishment when he and I next met at the office. If I can only write up to my design, I think I can hold

the public fast, with an interest quite as strong as in The Woman in White, and with a totally different story.<sup>33</sup>

Apparently the story did live up to its design, for Dickens wrote him the following January:

I have read the story as far as you have written it, with strong interest and great admiration. . . .

I find in the book every quality that made the success of the Woman in White, without the least sign of holding on to that success or being taken in tow by it. I have no doubt whatever of the public reception of what I have read. You may be quite certain of it. I could not be more so than I am.<sup>34</sup>

To further guarantee the strength of the new book, he offered pages of recommendations. Primarily, he cautioned Collins against telling the story "too severely," and suggested that he "play around it here and there," supplying touches of "whimsicality and humour," as he did in their private theatricals, to offset the heroine's grim determination.<sup>35</sup>

We cannot say with finality that Dickens's letter altered the course of No Name. Collins may have been planning to "play around" with the story in any case. After ten years of exposure to Dickens's way of thinking and a substantial career as a popular writer whose stories and articles usually appeared in Dickens's periodicals, he knew already that whimsy and humor would appeal to the reading public. But certainly the second volume of No Name was constructed on Dickensian principles. Collins even explained his method in the Preface so that his readers would not misjudge his motives:

Round the central figure in the narrative other characters will be grouped, in sharp contrast--contrast, for the most part, in which I have endeavored to make the element of humor mainly predominant. I have sought to impart this relief to the more serious passages in the book, not only because I believed myself to be justified in doing so by the laws of Art--but because experience has taught me (what the experience of my readers will doubtless confirm) that there is no such moral phenomenon as unmixed tragedy to be found in the world around us.<sup>36</sup>

It was typical of Collins to justify his procedures on moral grounds. Dickens rarely brought morality into his suggestions; he was more concerned with keeping the action plausible and technically refining the narrative.

When the second portion of No Name displayed the humorous strokes he favored, Dickens wrote to Collins enthusiastically:

There are some touches in the Captain which no one but a born (and cultivated) writer could get near--could draw within hail of. And the originality of Mrs. Wragge, without compromise of her probability, involves a really great achievement. But they are all admirable. . . .

I cannot tell you with what a strange dash of pride as well as pleasure I read the great result of your hard work.<sup>37</sup>

One suspects that he was proud, not only of having predicted Collins's success, but of having played so great a role in his protégé's development.<sup>38</sup>

Collins did not accept Dickens's recommendations blindly. He was selective in his adaptations and rejections, weighing the demands of the story, as he saw them, against the advice of a master whose skill and popularity exceeded his own. Thus, when Dickens suggested giving the lawyer, Mr. Pendril, "some touches of comicality,"<sup>39</sup> Collins wisely kept him sober. And though Dickens came up with a list of twenty-seven possible titles, Collins chose his own. On the other hand, when Dickens later suggested that the devious Mrs. Lecount break a laudanum bottle before the eyes of her cowardly employer, Noel Vanstone, reasoning that otherwise Vanstone might think she had the means of getting rid of him, Collins altered the passage so that she threw the poison and the bottle out the window (Fifth Scene, Ch. II).

He rarely rejected technical advice. When informed by Dickens that a testator had to be told that he was signing a will, he not only

added the information but made the addition the subject of a lively exchange between two of the characters (Fifth Scene, Ch. III). He tended, however, to balk at changes that affected the dramatic thrust of the story or his relations with his readers. So, although Dickens found Mrs. Le-count's procedures with Vanstone in the third volume "rather violently sidden" and suspicious,<sup>40</sup> Collins retained their violence, apparently relying on the strength and pace of the narrative to sweep away all doubts. He also retained a hint about the heroine's sister's future marriage that Dickens would have omitted,<sup>41</sup> for he preferred to "lay all that ground carefully" and alert his readers in the process.

After Dickens, Collins's closest literary friend was Charles Reade, another melodramatic novelist. The two men met in the 1850s,<sup>42</sup> and their friendship ripened through the 1860s, but Reade seems not to have had much influence on Collins while he remained close to Dickens. After The Moonstone began appearing in 1868, however, Collins and Dickens saw less of each other;<sup>43</sup> and when Dickens, "the Inimitable," died in 1870, Collins looked to Reade for support.<sup>44</sup> Although Reade was Collins's senior by ten years, Collins generally acted as his mentor and advisor in literary matters. He took Reade's side in a libel suit, suggested details for his serial installments, and revised at least one of his plays (Free Labour).<sup>45</sup> Reade, for his part, persuaded his friend to confront social issues in his novels and supplied him with some of the materials.<sup>46</sup> He also supplied, in Collins's words, "such encouragement as only a brother writer can give,"<sup>47</sup> and was apparently oblivious to the declining quality of Collins's work.

There is nearly universal agreement that Collins's work began to deteriorate after The Moonstone, and that by the 1880s his novels were

vastly inferior to those he wrote in his prime. A number of reasons have been suggested. By the 1870s, he was a prolific and popular author of plays as well as novels, and he had begun to spread himself thin. Frequently ill with rheumatic gout and a variety of other ailments, he had less strength, as well as less time, for taking pains. He was also addicted to laudanum, which Robinson believes, above all, to have led to the gradual decline in his abilities--although the drug did not interfere with The Moonstone, a novel he wrote about its effects and, ostensibly, under its influence.<sup>49</sup> But while all these elements affected his decline, I think there is one that takes precedence.

Collins had always needed an editor or mentor to curb his excesses. So long as Dickens was alive, he had a firm, judicious guide, and a genius for his closest friend. Dickens had worked energetically in two directions to trim away the excesses. He had remonstrated with his younger colleague and he had directed his subeditor, W. H. Wills, to prune the articles and stories that appeared in Household Words and All the Year Round. ". . . I particularly wish you to look well to Wilkie's article about the Wigan schoolmaster, and not to leave anything in it that may be sweeping and unnecessarily offensive to the middle class," he had warned Wills when Collins submitted an article he had suggested. "He always has a tendency to overdo that--and such a subject gives him fresh temptation. Don't be afraid of the Truth, in the least; but don't be unjust."<sup>50</sup> Collins permitted no one else to interfere with his control over his manuscripts. He was willing to take advice from Reade, but Reade was a follower who praised his weaknesses rather than his strengths.

Collins's fiction did not taper off gradually after Dickens's death; there was a marked and immediate drop. Man and Wife, the novel

that follows The Moonstone, is full of the kinds of excesses that Dickens would have tried to eliminate. Apparently the publishers of Cassell's, the magazine in which it was serialized, attempted to tone some of them down, but Collins quickly put them in their place. He agreed to remove an "objectionable 'Damn it,'" but added that his concession should not be construed as a precedent:

Readers who object to expletives in books, are--as to my experience--readers who object to a great many other things in books, which they are too stupid to understand. It is quite possible, that your peculiar constituency may take exception to things to come in my story which are essential to the development of character, or which are connected with a much higher and larger moral point of view than they are capable of taking themselves. In these cases, I am afraid you will find me deaf to all remonstrances--in those best interests of the independence of literature which are your interests (properly understood) as well as mine.<sup>51</sup>

The mood of this letter is echoed in the novel it refers to. Man and Wife, the first of Collins's novels of purpose, forces its message upon the reader with an uncomfortable insistence. Its issues also tend to be more limited and topical than those of the earlier novels. Whereas No Name deals with the legal and social position of illegitimate children, and The Woman in White with a woman's legal and marital identity, Man and Wife deals with organized athletics and the peculiar marriage laws of Scotland.

Swinburne suggests that Collins emulated Dickens's example, but in fact, it was Reade, rather than Dickens, who encouraged the didacticism that Swinburne lamented in his couplet:

What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition?  
Some demon whispered--'Wilkie! have a mission.'<sup>52</sup>

Dickens had tried to keep Collins from lecturing his readers. Reade, on the other hand, applauded when he lectured, and Collins, bereft of the one friend who might have dissuaded him, adopted Reade's criteria.

Of course, the determinants in cases like these are too complex to be explained so simply. But the available evidence indicates what J.I.M. Stewart has consistently maintained,<sup>53</sup> that Dickens's death and Collins's decline are inextricably connected.

#### Readers in Particular

When Collins divided his audience into "Readers in General" and "Readers in Particular," he formalized a distinction that most nineteenth-century novelists tacitly accepted. Readers in general--the Victorian public--were hungry for new novels and relatively easy to please. Readers in particular--primarily Victorian reviewers<sup>54</sup>--were far more difficult. For while reviewing had become less partisan by the middle of the century, in that reviewers were less apt to condemn a book because they were politically or personally hostile to its author,<sup>55</sup> they still measured novels by what we would now describe as extra-literary standards. An English novel had to be moral. It had to be true to nature and imitate life, but avoid the indelicate and indecent. It had to have a credible, engrossing plot, but living characters were more important. Most critics saw themselves as guardians of morality as well as judges of literature, and in their efforts to combine these roles they frequently ignored or misapprehended the merits of what they read. Collins's books, for example, were frequently attacked for their lurid sensationalism, their emphasis on shock and incident at the expense of characterization, and plots that were contrived and implausible. But the critics undervalued the qualities that were inseparable from these "defects": adroit manipulation of the reader's attention, imaginative fusion of the common and extravagant, the play between reality and artifice that Walter Kendrick has described so well.<sup>56</sup>

Collins lambasted the English critics for being so hard on his novels, but nevertheless they affected his work, though not in the ways that they intended. Their charges encouraged him to take the offensive in increasingly polemical Prefaces, forced him to define and clarify his purposes, and probably strengthened his determination to write as he saw fit.

Many novelists, treated roughly by uncomprehending reviewers, chose to disdain their pronouncements. Dickens claimed that after 1838 he stopped reading reviews of his books, and George Eliot claimed that she never read reviews at all. But such disclaimers cannot be accepted unequivocally. George H. Ford has amply demonstrated that, while Dickens and Eliot may or may not have read the reviews themselves, they kept abreast of what the critics were saying.<sup>57</sup> As he became established as a writer, Wilkie Collins followed Dickens's lead in professing to ignore bad notices. "Whatever the critics may say," he wrote to his mother, "readers are certainly grateful for a story that interests them. So don't mind what the Quarterly Review, or any Review says. Or, rather, do as I do--don't waste your time in reading them."<sup>58</sup> Despite this disingenuous pronouncement, he avidly read the reviews of his novels for the greater part of his life. His letters through the years contain allusions to such diverse publications as The Times, The Morning Post, the Athenaeum, the Saturday Review, the Spectator, and the Reader in England, and to the Revue des Deux Mondes, the Revue Britannique, the Revue Contemporaine, and Le Nord in France. Furthermore, he recognized the value of reviews in promoting sales. ". . . I consider it important to advertise regularly until the reviews come out," he wrote in reference to Man and Wife, which appeared in 1870, long after he first expressed his disdain of critical

notices. "The sooner we can inform the public that the book is ready for them, the larger will be the orders sent to the libraries. . . . The reviews will help us here--but we must help ourselves before the reviews come out."<sup>59</sup>

As a novice writer, he went out of his way to solicit the notice of the more influential periodicals. Nuel Pharr Davis has described his attempts to court the reviewers in the early 1850s, and while Davis's biography must be used with caution because it tends to present conjectures as fact,<sup>60</sup> its comments on this subject corroborate the impression Collins makes in his letters of a man who conducted his literary business shrewdly. Thus he sent copies of his first novel, Antonina, to two or three periodicals, accompanied by letters "written to ensure for them a favorable reception."<sup>61</sup> He also had his friend, Douglas Jerrold, take a copy to the Athenaeum and speak in its favor to two of the reviewers. When his second novel, Basil, was published, he relied on the help of his friend Edward Smyth Pigott, the owner and editor of the Leader (a journal to which he contributed), to secure a favorable review; and he probably discussed the novel with his publisher's son, George Bentley, in whose magazine, Bentley's Miscellany, the book received an excellent review.<sup>62</sup> But even if he could sway some of them, Collins did not know all of the reviewers, nor could he have prevented hostile reactions from those who shuddered at his sexual references and opposed such literature on principle.

More than a decade after Basil was written, the Archbishop of York attacked sensation novels in a speech which sums up the charges that Collins had to contend against all his life. It was bad enough, he implied, that sensational stories excited the minds of their readers to a

pitch of "overwrought interest"; but they went further than that. Professing to provide a "deeper insight" into the social system, sensational novelists presented all of life as "a mere welter of crime, misery, and confusion"--a damaging and one-sided view. Worse yet, they encouraged their readers to surrender to their passions, for they implied that once a man had been seized by passion "there was no possibility of escape." The more beautiful the evil heroine, the stronger the struggling protagonist, the greater the risk that young, weak, and "half-fallen" readers would take them as models and enter on a life of crime.<sup>63</sup>

Many critics of the 1850s and 1860s shared the Archbishop's views. They firmly believed that novels exerted both a moral and a practical influence. If the plots and the characters were lofty and pure, that influence would be benevolent, but if they were low and degraded, the reader might be tempted into sin and violence. Collins, on the other hand, considered it hypocritical to ban from fiction what his readers discussed among themselves or read about in the newspapers. Crime and misery existed, with or without the sensation novel; why not present them openly, so long as one's purposes were ultimately moral?

In Basil, a story about a secret marriage between two people of unequal rank, he included all the elements of which the Archbishop later complained. There is a corrupt but beautiful heroine, a strong and unscrupulous villain, and a hero whose uncontrollable passion nearly makes him a murderer. Worst of all, there is a seduction scene in which the hero discovers his wife's infidelity the night before their marriage is to be consummated.<sup>64</sup> Collins was anticipating trouble from the critics when he wrote the original Dedication:

Nobody who admits that the business of fiction is to exhibit human life, can deny that scenes of misery and crime must of necessity, while human nature remains what it is, form part of that exhibition--nobody can assert that such scenes are either useless or immoral in their effect on the reader, when they are turned to a plainly and purely moral purpose. . . .

To those persons who dissent from the broad principles here adverted to; who deny that it is the novelist's vocation to do more than merely amuse them; 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 covert implications where nothing is implied, and 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 should consider it loss of time, and worse, to offer any further explanation of my motives, than the sufficient explanation which I have given already. I do not address myself to them in this book, and shall never think of addressing myself to them in any other. (pp. viii-ix)

But it is one thing to anticipate rebukes for dealing with controversial subjects, and quite another to provoke them. The reviewers who considered themselves custodians of purity and public morals rose to Collins's bait and attacked the Dedication as well as the story. D. O. Maddyn, in the Athenaeum, rebutting the "crude criticism" of the preface, warned Collins against the vices of the French school and the "aesthetics of the Old Bailey."<sup>65</sup> The Westminster Review termed the novel's main incident "absolutely disgusting" and censured the taste of an author who could bring such "hateful details" before the reading public.<sup>66</sup>

Ten years later, when he revised the novel, Collins condensed the rest of the Dedication but lengthened his rejoinder to the critics:

On its appearance, [Basil] was condemned off-hand by a certain class of readers as an outrage on their sense of propriety. Conscious of having designed and written my story with the strictest regard to true delicacy, as distinguished from false, I allowed the prurient misinterpretation of certain perfectly innocent passages in this book to assert itself as offensively as it pleased, without troubling myself to protest against an expression of opinion which aroused in me no other feeling than

a feeling of contempt. I knew that "Basil" had nothing to fear from pure-minded readers; and I left these pages to stand or fall on such merits as they possessed. Slowly and surely, my story forced its way, through all adverse criticism, to a place in the public favor which it has never lost since. Some of the most valued friends I now possess were made for me by "Basil." (p. vii)

Conspicuous in both of these excerpts is a note of rebelliousness, of an angry young man taking arms against a close-minded critical establishment. His protests were not spurious; Basil conforms to the morals of its period in that the guilty lovers are punished by death and the hero repents his folly. But its claims to purity and delicacy are belied by a series of sensational episodes which, though hardly "disgusting" by modern standards, would have offended those Victorian readers who considered such exposés corrupting.

Of course, Victorian censorship was formidable, and many novelists chafed at the restrictions they were forced to impose upon their plots and their characters. "Since the author of 'Tom Jones' was buried," Thackeray complained in the Preface to Pendennis, "no writer of fiction among us has been permitted to depict to his utmost power a MAN."<sup>67</sup> And Thackeray had less cause for complaint than Dickens, Reade, or Collins, whose stock in trade was melodrama and whose object, as W. C. Phillips has suggested, was to shatter their readers' complacency through scenes of passion and violence.<sup>68</sup> But in Collins, who was a less purposive reformer than either Dickens or Reade, there was an added combative urge or element of provocation. Most of his fallen women, for example, are provocative in two senses. By poignantly dramatizing the consequences of sexual error, they urge the reader to be less hypocritical, more tolerant of human weakness; yet by their attractions, they appeal to the emotions whose consequences they exemplify.

Armadales, which begins with the Preface in which he distinguishes between the two classes of readers, is another case in point. Lydia Gwilt, its leading female character, is as unscrupulous as she is attractive. Having already poisoned one husband and served two years in prison, she vows to marry the young hero of the novel, schemes her way into his affections and the affections of his closest friend, and nearly destroys them both. Collins makes no secret of the charms that lure men on:

She sighed, and, walking back to the glass, wearily loosened the fastenings of her dress; wearily removed the studs from the chemisette beneath it, and put them on the chimney-piece. She looked indolently at the reflected beauties of her neck and bosom, as she unplaited her hair and threw it back in one great mass over her shoulders. "Fancy," she thought, "if he saw me now!"

(Third Book, Ch. 7)

Here, without further editorial comment, was more than sufficient grist for the mill of the censorious critics. But Collins intervened anyway: "Readers in particular will, I have some reason to suppose, be here and there disturbed, perhaps even offended, by finding that 'Armadales' oversteps, in more than one direction, the narrow limits within which they are disposed to restrict the development of modern fiction--if they can" (Preface). Thus he forced upon the reviewers a prediction that "was no doubt self-fulfilling," as Norman Page has indicated;<sup>69</sup> and when he added, "I am not afraid of my design being permanently misunderstood, provided the execution has done it any sort of justice," he virtually dared them to dispute him.

On the other hand, despite his protests to the contrary, he did curb his tendency toward sexual frankness in the novels between Basil and Armadales. While Hide and Seek, The Dead Secret, The Woman in White, and No Name each involve at least one illegitimate birth, they contain no explicit seduction scenes or sirens who undress before the reader.

Collins seems to have paid more attention to the critics' accusations than he cared to admit. His belligerent Prefaces may even have been a compensation for his textual timidity, a means of denying that he had partially yielded in order to retain his popularity.

Sayers believes that such accusations "cowed" him, that they "did undoubtedly influence and to some extent stunt the natural expression of his genius," and that his potential as a sexual realist was thereby arrested before it could develop.<sup>70</sup> Even if she overestimates the damage, the anger that the critics provoked had strong and mixed effects upon his fiction. It reinforced his determination to write about women whose misfortunes made them outcasts, and helped him to become what Dougald MacEachen has termed a "Victorian Crusader."<sup>71</sup> But when the crusade or rebellion grew too vehement, it undermined his story. Numerous passages of his later novels deteriorate in fierce attacks upon such objects of his opprobrium as vivisectionists or overbearing matrons or, even more disastrously, the straitlaced, sexually squeamish people who made up so large a portion of his public. Positively or negatively, however, the audience he designated "Readers in Particular" supplied a focus for his energies, a target to be borne in mind not merely when he added the Prefaces, but as he wrote the novels themselves.

Not that Collins invariably saw all reviewers as enemies. No writer of his era was more courteous in acknowledging favorable reviews,<sup>72</sup> or fairer in conceding his shortcomings when he felt that the critics were right. He was especially receptive to French reviewers, for he felt that they understood his purposes, as the English did not. "I assure you I feel honoured by having deserved such a recognition from French criticism as you have given me," he wrote to the Baron Ernouf, who praised his work

in the Revue Contemporaine. "You have told me of my faults tenderly and kindly, and you have given me credit for my merits with the warm sympathy of a man who can appreciate as well as criticise. There is not a page of the review which I could wish unwritten."<sup>73</sup>

His enduring friendship with Emile Forgues, the editor and critic who was later to translate many of his novels and plays, began with the appearance of Forgues' lengthy appraisal of his work in the Revue des Deux Mondes in 1855. While he was generally enthusiastic, Forgues did not praise blindly; he had an accurate and perceptive grasp of Collins's faults and limitations. The young writer had, he said,

the principal qualities of a novelist, above all those of a skillful narrator and a delicate observer; but if he has the merits of his age, he has also too often its defects. The confident optimism which marks his talent, still in the course of formation, seems to extend to his manner of writing. A clever conception seduces and suffices him too quickly. An approximation of character sketched with wit, except that he neglects to accentuate, to particularize enough;--a pleasing outline, traced lightly with the pencil,--a group artistically disposed, but occupying in the general composition too much or too little space--are enough to satisfy his facile enthusiasm. . . . [In our day the novel] requires more patient studies, more searchingly analyzed character, more refined and complex interrelationships. . . .<sup>74</sup>

He added that he would not have proposed such goals had he not believed that Collins could attain them.

Collins valued both the praise and the admonitions. "I read that article, at the time of its appearance, with sincere pleasure and sincere gratitude to the writer, and I have honestly done my best to profit by it ever since," he acknowledged when he dedicated The Queen of Hearts to Forgues. (p. v). Indeed, his next few novels offer evidence that he heeded Forgues's advice about facile development and superficial treatment of character, although he never lost his fondness for a clever stratagem or

his self-confident manner of writing. In The Dead Secret, the first of his novels to follow Forgues's review, Collins presented Sarah Leeson, a character more complex than any of his earlier creations. A middle-aged woman on the verge of a breakdown, beset by anxieties and insecurities that are skillfully exposed throughout the story, Sarah was not only an unusual figure to appear in a Victorian novel, but also the keeper of the "dead secret" and hence the pivot of the plot. Her personality was too indecisive to please a Victorian audience, but she remained a favorite of her author's. ". . . I privately give 'Sarah Leeson' the place of honour in the little portrait-gallery which my story contains," he announced in the Preface to the second edition.<sup>75</sup>

His following novel, The Woman in White--on which he was working when he wrote the Dedication to The Queen of Hearts--contains his finest studies of character. Count Fosco, its subtle and sophisticated villain, recalls another of Forgues's mandates. Forgues felt that Collins's good-natured approach to characterization might prove a liability and prevent him from portraying someone genuinely wicked: "If . . . he had to set some profound villainy in action, one suspects he would feel a certain embarrassment, a certain remorse, about it. He is only at ease and happy in his writing when his beloved characters are prosperous and fully comfortable."<sup>76</sup> But in The Woman in White, Collins turned that liability into an asset. Fosco is a triumphantly successful villain precisely because he appears to be so genial and prosperous; his bonhomie is the shield that screens an evil all the more effective for being insidious.

One could certainly argue that Collins would have developed such characters without Forgues's intervention. Influence of this kind is at

best conjectural. But then again and again, the English critics had made him painfully aware of what they considered deficiencies in his characterizations, so that in all of these earlier novels he was struggling to make his characters more memorable and vital. A biographical notice from the same period, edited if not dictated by Collins, shows that he thought he had eliminated some of his earlier weaknesses:

Although toughly handled by many critics, those who have studied the works of Mr Collins will bear testimony to their distinctness of plot and incident and their clearness and simplicity of style. His earlier works were, no doubt, tinged with the colours of exaggeration but with time came mellowness, and when he does write now he writes well and vigorously.<sup>77</sup>

There is also evidence that in at least one instance he allowed a critic to amend his work. On October 30, 1860--two months after the first edition of The Woman in White appeared<sup>78</sup>--The Times reviewed it favorably, but pointed out a discrepancy in the dates of certain events that rendered the whole third volume improbable. On October 31st, just back from Paris and about to leave for Devonshire, Collins wrote his publisher:

If any fresh impression of The Woman in White is likely to be wanted immediately, stop the press till I come back. The critic in The Times is (between ourselves) right about the mistake in time. Shakespeare has made worse mistakes--that is one comfort. And readers are not critics, who test an emotional book by the base rules of arithmetic, which is a second consolation. Nevertheless we will set the mistake right at the first opportunity.<sup>79</sup>

He then corrected the errant dates, and informed his readers of the revisions in the second Preface to the novel.

#### Readers in General

While Dickens was instrumental in curbing Collins' excesses and inspiring him with confidence, and while the critics were important as a focus for his anger and as judges to be reckoned with, there was one group

whose influence from the beginning outweighed any other, the ordinary reading public. As we have seen, Collins tended to compose with an invisible reader at his elbow, an imaginary sympathizer who cried when he cried, laughed when he laughed, and shivered with horror when he shivered. But equally important were the real readers whose approval he found indispensable. Early in his career, he coined a term for this ordinary audience: "King Public."<sup>80</sup> Later, he defined the role that the "intelligent readers of the civilized world" play in the novelist's life:

They represent all nations and all ranks. Whether they praise or whether they blame, their opinions are equally worth having. They not only understand us, they help us. Many a good work of fiction has profited by their letters when they write to the author. Over and over again he has been indebted to their stores of knowledge, and to their quick sympathies, for information of serious importance to his work which he could not otherwise have obtained. . . . In places of private assembly and in places of public amusement, their opinions flow, in ever-widening circles, over the outlying mass of average readers, and send them on their way to the work of art, when they might stray to the false pretence. In one last word, our intelligent readers are our truest and best friends, when we are worthy of them. Their influence has raised fiction to the great place that it occupies in the front of Literature.<sup>81</sup>

Today, the very idea of public approval being indispensable to a serious writer tends to make us bristle. Even the novelist who admits that he writes to win a sophisticated literary audience is regarded with suspicion; his motives are felt to be impure, his dedication to his art debased by a vulgar concern with fame and profit. We prefer to forget that Hawthorne grumbled because the "female scribblers" had a wider, more devoted audience than he did, that Henry James took pride in earning his living by his pen, that every novelist--hack or aesthete--writes, as Dickens explained, "to be read." To Collins, as to most Victorian writers, there was never any question of this fact. He was eager to improve himself in his art, eager to earn the sums that his painstaking labor would

justify; but above all, he was eager to give his ordinary readers pleasure, to keep them turning the pages.

His first novel--Antonina; or, the Fall of Rome--was a resounding critical success, greeted, as he later said, "with such a chorus of praise as has never been sung over me since."<sup>82</sup> Norman Page has summarized its highly favorable reception:

When Bentley advertised it in the Athenaeum (16 March 1850) two weeks after publication, he was able to quote a full column of effusive praise from nine dailies and weeklies. The Observer, for instance, described it as 'a remarkable book', and the Morning Post hailed it as 'sufficient to place [its author] in the very first rank of English novelists'. In addition to these, Harper's (July 1850) lauded its 'splendour of imagination', and the Athenaeum (No. 2) and the Eclectic Review (April 1850) both compared Collins to Shakespeare.<sup>83</sup>

Even The Times, which would ignore his novels for the next ten years (until he wrote The Woman in White), treated it deferentially: "Let us conclude by stating that Antonina has placed its author in the rank of our writers of romance, and that the alliance of sober judgment, vivid powers of imagination, and conscientious study of human characters which it displays, gives promise of a brilliant career in the field which he has chosen."<sup>84</sup> Yet despite this enormous succes d'estime, Collins never wrote another historical fiction. He seems to have accepted the reviewers' advice about his purple prose and his lengthy digressions,<sup>85</sup> for none of his subsequent novels employs such florid rhetoric or such awkward breaks in the narrative. He did not, however, even attempt to fulfill his "brilliant" promise as a writer of historical romances. On the contrary, with his next novel--Basil, A Story of Modern Life--he turned emphatically to the nineteenth century and rarely abandoned it again.<sup>86</sup>

Why did a writer as conscious of the critics as Collins fail to follow the course that had brought him praise? For one thing, he was aware that historical fiction was not the most congenial outlet for his talents. To write Antonina, he had studied Gibbon and other classical sources and imitated Bulwer-Lytton. But he was neither an avid classicist nor a dedicated scholar; in Antonina, his interest (like the reader's) lay in the sensational events of the siege and in the characters he had invented.

Perhaps more important, from his own point of view, was the fact that he began his career at a time when the vogue for historical romances was waning. Even Bulwer-Lytton, while he lamented the change in public taste, switched in 1850 from the highly colored romances that were his specialty to The Caxtons, a novel of domestic manners and mores.<sup>87</sup> Antonina's subject matter rendered it more contemporary than the ordinary classical romance, for it was written at a time when the Italian revolutions of 1848, and particularly the new siege of Rome, were still making news in London. Collins emphasized this selling point in a letter to Richard Bentley: "Having nearly completed an Historical Romance in three volumes . . . I have thought it probable that such a work might not inappropriately be offered for your inspection, while recent occurrences continue to direct public attention particularly on Roman affairs."<sup>88</sup> He increased the contemporaneity of his fifth-century story by inventing characters with whom his readers could identify: a sternly Evangelical father, a pure and modest maiden, a Goth who bore a strong resemblance to a sturdy British yeoman.<sup>89</sup>

But despite his attempts to present his classical material "in the graphic form most likely to be attractive to the taste of readers of the

present day,"<sup>90</sup> and despite the critical accolades, Antonina did not sell widely. The prestigious Edinburgh Review might call it a popular success;<sup>91</sup> but the Edinburgh reviewer did not see the balance sheet. Antonina went through two early editions--neither of them large compared to those of his later novels--and then it was forgotten for ten years, until the growing vogue for Collins' novels led to a third edition.

To a writer who equated success with sales and popularity, this outcome was decisive. He continued to enjoy his status as a promising young author, but he directed his pen toward subjects more likely to interest the general public. In the original Dedication to Basil, he attempted to justify the shift:

. . . it may be thought strange, by those who recollect enough of my former attempt to take some little interest in this, that I should have abandoned the field of my first labours, and have left past centuries for the present. The reason for this change is simple and soon told. I could not find, in Ancient History, any second subject which, to my judgment, offered itself so perfectly to all the requirements of romance, as the subject I was fortunate enough to find for "Antonina." On that account, therefore, I abandoned the idea of building my second work on a classical foundation. Many subjects in Modern History I knew were open to me. . . . But, on this occasion, the temptation of trying if I could not successfully address myself, at once, to the readiest sympathies and the largest number of readers, by writing a story of our own times, was too much for me. So I wrote this book.

(p. iv)

While his lack of historical inspiration was no doubt genuine, it probably stemmed from his suspicion that no classical romance could appeal "to the readiest sympathies and the largest number of readers" as directly as a modern novel.

After Collins had made his appeal, he wanted to hear from his audience that he had been successful. Large sales were an important indicator, but just as important were the gossip that reached him confirming the effect of his strategies, and the letters that praised their writers'

favorite passages and characters. It is impossible to retrace all or most of this feedback a century later. But fortunately, Victorian readers were in the habit of recording their reactions in diaries, memoirs, and letters which their dutiful children preserved. Even more fortunately for Collins scholars, he was so pleased when his readers wrote to him that he frequently wrote them back, incidentally providing at least a partial record of their comments. What remains of his correspondence with his public is far less detailed and revealing than that of Dickens or George Eliot, but enough exists--at least about The Woman in White--to allow a qualified assessment of its significance and value to him.

The Woman in White was his first best-seller and one of the great sensations of the period. Despite an initially icy reception by the critics, who had come to regard Collins as a writer of mechanical and implausible fiction, it went through seven editions in six months--1350 copies in the first week alone, a remarkable figure for that era--and has never since been out of print. But the number of editions scarcely reveals the excitement the novel inspired. In serial form, it was the subject of bets and dinner-party conversations. It sold more copies of All the Year Round than A Tale of Two Cities, which preceded it. Sampson Low advertised the first edition a full two months in advance and warned potential customers to order early "to provide against disappointment."<sup>92</sup> "While the novel was still selling in its thousands," Kenneth Robinson reports, "manufacturers were producing Woman in White perfume, Woman in White cloaks and bonnets, and the music-shops displayed Woman in White waltzes and quadrilles. Even Dickens had hardly known such incidental publicity."<sup>93</sup> In The Victorians and Their Reading, Amy Cruse has recorded the praises of such prominent Victorians as Prince Albert, Thackeray,

Gladstone, Edward FitzGerald, Swinburne, Lord Rayleigh, and John Forster (who was obliged, despite his dislike of its author, to term it "a pre-eminent success").<sup>94</sup>

But much as he must have relished the regard of the rich and famous, Collins was more concerned with the attention he received from less exalted men and women. "All sorts of good news still reaches me about The Woman in White," he wrote his mother a month after it was published:

It is soothing the dying moments of a young lady--it is helping (by homeopathic doses of a chapter at a time) to keep an old lady out of the grave--and it is the first literary performance which has succeeded in fixing the attention of a deranged gentleman in his lucid intervals!! The other day I reckoned up what I have got by it thus far. One thousand four hundred pounds--with the copy-right in my possession, and the disposal of all editions under the extravagant guinea and a half price. Cock-a-doodle-doo! The critics may go to the devil--they are at the book still as I hear, but I see no reviews.<sup>95</sup>

Nor did his pride in his success prevent him from responding to the letters of ordinary people with gratitude and modesty. To the twin sister of Eliza Chambers, a writer's daughter anxious about the fate of the female characters, he wrote while the novel was still coming out:

I beg to assure Miss Chambers solemnly that nobody about whom she is interested and over whom the undersigned can exercise benevolent control shall come to any harm. If she will look at the number published to-morrow she will see that Laura is not murdered, and in another week she will know that Anne Catherick is caught. In the same two numbers Miss Halcombe's whereabouts is satisfactorily ascertained and Miss Halcombe's recovery positively asserted.<sup>96</sup>

To a Mr. J. Bunting of Darby, Pennsylvania he wrote at about the same time:

I should be insensible indeed, if I did not feel gratified and encouraged by such a recognition as you send to me of the appeal which I am now trying to make to the sympathy and interest of readers in your country and in mine--and I am especially pleased to find that the part of my story which was perhaps the most difficult of all to write, is exactly that part which you think the most successfully written. "The Woman in White" has made me many friends both in England and America--and I am glad to know that I number you among them.<sup>97</sup>

And to a Miss M. L. Wrigley, he wrote apologetically a year later:

Absence from home has allowed me no earlier opportunity of writing these lines, and of assuring you that I am sincerely gratified to hear that "The Woman in White" has interested and pleased you, after more than one reading.<sup>98</sup>

These answers affirm the strength of Collins' bond with "Readers in General" and his desire to befriend them--indirectly through his characters and stories, and directly through his correspondence. They also demonstrate his eagerness to satisfy his readers' expectations, however much he might strive to keep them guessing during the course of the novel.

In contrast to the shrillness of his more acerbic prefaces, the friendliness of his letters corroborates his preference for the common reader over the literary critic, a predilection that was to have serious consequences in the years to follow. In this respect, the letters about The Woman in White are especially significant for, according to Hall Caine (his friend in later years), his attitudes crystallized during this period. Collins told Caine that he returned from a trip to find his desk heaped high with letters and reviews, and that after going through them he said to himself, "These letters are nearly all from total strangers, and may be said to represent in some measure the opinion of the general public. These reviews are by professional writers, some of them my intimate friends. Either the public is right and the press is wrong, or the press is right and the public is wrong. Time will tell. If the public turns out to be right, I shall never trust the press again."<sup>99</sup>

Occasionally he relented; he obviously trusted The Times reviewer's correction of The Woman in White. He also made an exception of French reviewers, who were in any case more sympathetic and less incensed about his morals.<sup>100</sup> To Louis Dépret, for example, he wrote in gratitude, "I have

read your Review of 'La Femme en Blanc' [in Le Nord] with great interest and great pleasure. It is written in a spirit of just and generous consideration towards the author and the work, of which, I assure you, I am heartily sensible. You have added in no small degree to the obligation which I am glad to owe to French critics and to French readers."<sup>101</sup> But if he felt an obligation to the French reviewers, he felt none to their English counterparts.

Looking through the reviews in the English periodicals, which were rarely just or generous, one can understand his anger and chagrin; yet not all of the critics were hostile. Mrs. Oliphant, after reading it twice, gave The Woman in White a glowing review in Blackwood's Magazine, hailing it as the prototype of a new school of fiction and shrewdly assessing its techniques:

His effects are produced by common human acts, performed by recognizable human agents, whose motives are never inscrutable, and whose line of conduct is always more or less consistent. The moderation and reserve which he exhibits; his avoidance of extremes; his determination, in conducting the mysterious struggle, to trust to the reasonable resources of the combatants, who have consciously set all upon the stake for which they play, but whom he assists with no weapons save those of quick wit, craft, courage, patience, and villainy--tools common to all men--make the lights and shadows of the picture doubly effective. The more we perceive the perfectly legitimate nature of the means used to produce the sensation, the more striking does that sensation become.<sup>102</sup>

But Collins' disdain of the press after 1860 made him sceptical of nearly all reviews, even those that clarified his work or offered sound suggestions.

This failure to distinguish between popularity and literary merit--in itself a sign of confused values, as Robinson has suggested<sup>103</sup>--contributed to the decline in quality of his later novels. So long as his books sold widely--and in the 1870s, they sold no matter what the critics said--

he could afford to ignore the widespread complaints about his heavy-handed missions and his increasingly contrived plots, and he could dismiss the valid assessments of reviews like Mrs. Oliphant's, relying instead upon contrivance and the supernatural for his sensational effects.

If he had been less obsessed with pleasing the common reader, he might have given more thought to the development of the intellectual side of his talent. Reading the best of his novels today, one is aware of exceptional powers of analysis insufficiently developed, of psychological perceptions rarely worked through, of a writer, in short, who might have had the genius to be more than a masterful story-teller. There is a remarkable scene in The Law and the Lady (1875) in which Miserrimus Dexter, driven to the breaking point by guilt, anxiety, and the neglect of his health, loses his mind as he is making up a story. The fairy-tale he attempts to tell is actually a stream-of-consciousness narrative in which bits and fragments of remembered events--later used to solve the novel's actual mystery--invade the fantasy and finally supplant it. The rendering of this "advancing eclipse of the brain" (Collins' term)<sup>104</sup> is unforgettable--a psychological tour de force unrivalled in its period. Yet to Collins it was simply part of the plot, its deeper implications submerged in the melodrama of Dexter's retribution.

One can argue that, on this side of the Atlantic, writers of genius did very well without a loving audience to sustain them. But Collins was no Melville, able to survive, however precariously, on the strength of his own convictions. Like virtually every English author of the period, he required rapport with his readers; he had to have his self-assurance bolstered by feedback.

The letters he received as he completed The Woman in White had little effect on that novel. As we have seen, he worked out his plots conclusively before he ever wrote a page, and though a friend of Dickens's stature could convince him to alter details for the sake of greater clarity or accuracy, no ordinary reader could persuade him to make last-minute changes during the course of serialization. But the comments of his readers certainly affected his future novels. While he prided himself on varying his techniques and not blindly repeating his successes, he rarely abandoned a formula that had been successful with the public. Thus he repeated the narrative formula of The Woman in White in The Moonstone, disclosing the story through the accounts of different characters and limiting the reader's perceptions in those of each successive narrator. And he continued to fashion heroines with the qualities of Marian Halcombe, a favorite of the women as well as the men.

Feedback also helped him to gauge and take advantage of current trends in literature, and when his own predilections agreed with his estimate of popular taste he was generally successful. Believing, for example, that contemporary readers wanted well-told stories about affluent but essentially middle-class people, he concentrated his energies on the complicated plots and the sensational but domestic mysteries that made his reputation. His reliance on audience preferences, however, could also work against him. He was keenly interested in mental and physical deformity, in the aberrations in human personality; but since he felt that most readers were concerned only with the superficialities of characterizations--with people who were obviously funny or capricious or frightening--he displayed such figures melodramatically instead of probing into

their behavior. This practice gained him foes among the critics and friends among ordinary readers; ultimately, however, it atrophied a talent that could have developed. Most novelists attain greater depth of characterization with maturity, but Collins' earlier characters are more profound than his later ones. Mannion, the villain of Basil, written when Collins was twenty-eight, is more interesting than Father Benwell, the villain of The Black Robe, written when he was fifty-seven; and Count Fosco, whom he created at the age of thirty-five, is the subtlest villain of them all. One can never be certain of the reasons for an author's failure to develop his potential; besides, ill health and opium addiction might be reason enough in Collins' case. Still, his ability to see into a character, or at least create the illusion of a multifaceted being, reached a plateau in the 1860s--that is, not in the years when he was steadily ill, but rather, in the years when he was steadily popular.

Toward the end of his life, he came to feel that changes in popular taste were driving his audience away. Aware of the trend toward more analytic fiction (as practiced by George Eliot and Meredith), but unaware of the deficiencies that cost him a large part of his audience, he lamented in the Preface to Heart and Science (1883) that incident and dramatic situation were becoming less important to the general reader than character and humor:

A novel that tells no story, or that blunders perpetually in trying to tell a story--a novel so entirely devoid of all sense of the dramatic side of human life, that not even a theatrical thief can find anything in it to steal--will nevertheless be a work that wins (and keeps) your admiration, if it has humor which dwells in your memory, and characters which enlarge the circle of your friends.

I have myself always tried to combine the different merits of a good novel, in one and the same work; and I have never succeeded in keeping an equal balance. In the present story you will find the scales inclining, on the whole, in favor of character and humor. This

has not happened accidentally.

. . . Without waiting for future opportunities, I have kept your standard of merit more constantly before my mind, in writing this book, than on some former occasions.

But although he wrote an American friend (William Winter), "The success of the book here has been extraordinary. 'Benjulia' has matched 'Fosco,'"<sup>105</sup> his attempts to recapture his audience by catering to their preferences resulted in a second-rate novel. In Zo, who was probably modelled after one of his own "morganatic" children,<sup>106</sup> he created a refreshing little girl; but Mrs. Gallilee, her callous mother, verges on the ludicrous, and Dr. Benjulia, the secretive scientist, is only intermittently credible.<sup>107</sup>

Still, as Swinburne argued after Collins' death, "A man who has amused our leisure, relieved our weariness, delighted our fancy, enthralled our attention, [and] refreshed our sympathies" should retain at least the friendly recollection of the reading public.<sup>108</sup> T. S. Eliot's later tribute went further: ". . . there is no contemporary novelist who could not learn something from Collins in the art of interesting and exciting the reader."<sup>109</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See, for example, Robinson, p. 244, and Ashley, "Wilkie Collins and the Dickensians," Dickensian, 49 (March, 1953), 59.
- <sup>2</sup> Pearson, p. 2. While "vitiating" may be too strong a word, Forster's biography undoubtedly encouraged the underrating of Collins's role in Dickens's life that still occurs today.
- <sup>3</sup> Memories of Charles Dickens (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1913), p. 263.
- <sup>4</sup> "Wilkie Collins's Influence Upon Dickens," Dickensian, 20 (April, 1924), 66 and 68.
- <sup>5</sup> Robinson, pp. 60-63; Ashley, "Wilkie Collins and the Dickensians," p. 63.
- <sup>6</sup> DNB, 1901 Supplement, p. 473.
- <sup>7</sup> "A Chat About Dombey," Dickensian, 11 (May, 1915), 122.
- <sup>8</sup> Introduction to The Moonstone (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1928), p. vi. But also see Page, p. 11, who points out that Eliot was confused in his chronology.
- <sup>9</sup> "The Achievement of Wilkie Collins and His Influence on Dickens and Trollope," Diss. Yale 1941, p. 177.
- <sup>10</sup> It is impractical, not to say impossible, to list all the studies of the mutual influence of Dickens and Collins. But among the more explicit are Milley's dissertation, which studies Collins's influence on Dickens's last four novels; Ashley's dissertation, which assesses Dickens's influence on Mr. Wray's Cash-Box and The Dead Secret; Jack Lindsay's Charles Dickens: A Biographical and Critical Study (New York: Philosophical Library, 1950), which traces Collins's influence on The Mystery of Edwin Drood; and Earle Davis's The Flint and the Flame (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1963), which evaluates Collins's role more skeptically.
- <sup>11</sup> In Under the Management of Mr. Charles Dickens: His Production of The Frozen Deep (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1966), esp. pp. 22-49.
- <sup>12</sup> Household Words (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973), pp. 233-35.
- <sup>13</sup> "Contributors to the Christmas Numbers of Household Words and All the Year Round," Dickensian, 69 (September, 1973), 170-72 and Dickensian, 70 (January, 1974), 23, 28-29.

<sup>14</sup> In a biographical sketch that he corrected (British Library MS, c. 1860), Collins claimed to be "independent of literature." The claim is echoed in several editions of Men of the Time, a collection of biographical sketches: "He is, however, not dependent on literature for support, and can consequently afford, if it so likes him, to make hazardous experiments on the public taste" (London: David Bogue, 1856), p. 162. But in fact he depended on an allowance from his mother well into his twenties (if not his thirties), welcomed the fixed income that he got as a member of the Household Words staff (beginning in 1856), and only resigned from All the Year Round in 1861 after George Smith of Smith and Elder offered him £5000 for a novel (Armadale).

<sup>15</sup> William Powell Frith, My Autobiography and Reminiscences (New York: Harper, 1888), p. 495.

<sup>16</sup> ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 15 March 1886.

<sup>17</sup> Robinson, p. 244.

<sup>18</sup> Letters II, 435-36.

<sup>19</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 5 April 1856.

<sup>20</sup> Ashley points out additional influences in tone and style; see "The Career of Wilkie Collins," pp. 100-12.

<sup>21</sup> The Christmas numbers, respectively, for 1854, 1855, and 1856. Collins contributed to all three. See Harry Stone, ed., Charles Dickens's Uncollected Writings from Household Words, 1850-1859 (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1868), II, 523, 541, 563 et passim.

<sup>22</sup> New York: Harper, c. 1873, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Earle Davis, pp. 185-86.

<sup>24</sup> Letters III, 311.

<sup>25</sup> Lohrli, p. 234, notes that Stone attributes sections of several Christmas numbers to Dickens, whereas the office book assigns them to Collins alone. Such problems in attribution are not new. J. H. Harper quotes Collins as saying, "On one of these occasions, we agreed to exchange styles, so as to puzzle the critics; Dickens was to adopt my style and I was to imitate his. The plan succeeded perfectly, and it was amusing to see the reviewers point out a passage of mine as an example of Dickens's peculiar vein, and in the next sentence comment on a paragraph of Dickens's as a sample of Wilkie Collins's sensational style" (House of Harper, p. 394).

<sup>26</sup> See the Dickens letter quoted on p. 62

<sup>27</sup> See Milley, "Wilkie Collins and A Tale of Two Cities," MLR, 34 (October, 1939), 525-34, and Lindsay, pp. 391-99.

- 28 ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 5 April 1856.
- 29 Letters II, 643.
- 30 Letters III, 124-25. On this subject, see also Earle Davis, pp. 191-94 and--for a perceptive analysis of the authors' differing outlook on Providence--Harland S. Nelson, "Dickens' Plots: 'The Ways of Providence' or the Influence of Collins?" VN, No. 19 (Spring, 1961), 11-14.
- 31 Letters III, 145.
- 32 See, for example, the letter quoted on p. 45 above. In Letters III, 304 he mentions Georgina Hogarth's reaction to No Name, and in Letters III, 309 he says that he has heard of the story "on all sides" in town.
- 33 ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 11 July 1861.
- 34 Letters III, 281.
- 35 Letters III, 281.
- 36 New York: Harper, 1873; subsequent citations will appear in the text.
- 37 Letters III, 304.
- 38 Cf. his pride in Collins's story, "The Diary of Anne Rodway," Letters II, 792.
- 39 Letters III, 281.
- 40 Letters III, 309.
- 41 Letters III, 309. See No Name, Between the Scenes (Four and Five), letter IV. The "anticipation" Dickens mentions may have been modified, but the hint remains.
- 42 While no one knows exactly when Reade and Collins met, Nuel Pharr Davis suggests that they might both have attended Collins's bachelor dinner for Millais (pp. 175-76). The earliest confirmation of their friendship appears in a letter written by Collins in which he speaks of "my friend, Mr. Reade" (Morris L. Parrish Collection, 4 June 1857).
- 43 On the cooling of their friendship and their later reconciliation, see Robinson, pp. 215-16. Arthur A. Adrian suggests that they became estranged over Dickens's treatment of Charles Collins (Wilkie's brother and Dickens's son-in-law) who was dying slowly and painfully of cancer; see "A Note on the Dickens-Collins Friendship," Huntington Library Quarterly, 16 (February, 1953), 211-13.
- 44 In a letter of 4 January 1868 (Morris L. Parrish Collection), Collins speaks of "the inimitable Reade." As "the inimitable" was Dickens's joking name for himself, I think the transfer may be significant.

<sup>45</sup> See, respectively, Letters III, 510-11 (Collins had tried to interest Dickens in a lawsuit over Reade's book, Griffith Gaunt); Charles Reade and Compton Reade, Charles Reade, A Memoir (New York: Harper, 1887), pp. 343-45; and Thomas D. Clareson, "Wilkie Collins to Charles Reade: Some Unpublished Letters," in Victorian Essays. A Symposium, ed. Thomas D. Clareson and Warren D. Anderson (Kent, Ohio: Kent State Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 118-20.

<sup>46</sup> See Robinson, p. 238, and Clareson, p. 115.

<sup>47</sup> Clareson, p. 117.

<sup>48</sup> Clareson, p. 117 and note his qualification of the quotation.

<sup>49</sup> On the validity of Collins's claims, see ch. VI.

<sup>50</sup> Letters III, 58.

<sup>51</sup> Robinson, p. 232.

<sup>52</sup> Swinburne, p. 305.

<sup>53</sup> "Of the degeneration of such talent it is natural to seek an explanation. Laudanum . . . may have played a part. . . . But the real determinant appears to have been the death of Dickens." "From mystery to mission," TLS, 6 September 1974, p. 954. See also Stewart's Introduction to The Moonstone (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), pp. 21-22.

<sup>54</sup> While Collins used the term "Readers in Particular" to refer to both the close-minded critics and the more prudish members of his audience, he also distinguished between the reviewers and the public at large. See his remarks to Hall Caine, which I quote on p. 86.

<sup>55</sup> On the changing status and standards of Victorian reviewers, see John Gross, The Rise and Fall of the Man of Letters (London: Weidenfield and Nicolson, 1969), esp. ch. I.

<sup>56</sup> Kendrick, pp. 20-22, 34, et passim.

<sup>57</sup> Ford, pp. 52-53, and p. 275, n. 60.

<sup>58</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 18 June 1863.

<sup>59</sup> ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 28 June 1870.

<sup>60</sup> Many Collins scholars have noted the weaknesses of Davis's biography, but see especially Francis Russell Hart, "Wilkie Collins and the Problem of Biographical Evidence," VN, No. 12 (Autumn, 1957), 18-21.

<sup>61</sup> David, p. 68. (The American spelling of "favourable" is his.)

<sup>62</sup> Bentley's Miscellany, 32 (November, 1852), 576-86.

63 "The Archbishop of York on Works of Fiction," The Times, 2 November 1864, p. 9.

64 Davis (p. 125) cites correspondence between Collins and Bentley, now at the University of Illinois (Urbana), which indicates that the discovery scene was initially more explicit. Apparently in an early draft Collins made the hotel a place of assignation, but at Bentley's suggestion he changed it to "a neglected, deserted, dreary-looking building." In the published version, the discovery is discreetly phrased: "I listened; and through the thin partition, I heard voices--her voice, and his voice. I heard and I knew--knew my degradation in all its infamy, knew my wrongs in all their nameless horror" (Part II, Ch. 7).

65 4 December 1852, pp. 1322-23; Page, pp. 47-48.

66 69 (October 1853), 372-73; Page, p. 52.

67 Thackeray, p. xlvi.

68 Phillips, pp. 102-6.

69 Page, p. 18.

70 Wilkie Collins, pp. 84 and 87.

71 This is part of the title of MacEachen's dissertation (Cincinnati 1948), which traces Collins's crusading and reforming efforts in morality, law, education, medicine, etc.

72 Evidence for this statement appears in several letters, including one to Alfred E. Galloway of the Spectator (Morris L. Parrish Collection, 12 April 1861) and the one to Louis Dépret of Le Nord partially quoted on pp. 86-87.

73 ALS Houghton Library, Harvard University, 16 September 1862.

74 "Études sur le roman Anglais contemporain. Les romans de Wilkie Collins," Revue des Deux Mondes, 2<sup>e</sup> série de la nouvelle période, 12 (1 November 1855), 847. My translation. For a more graceful but less literal translation, see Page, pp. 65-66.

75 Quoted by Ashley in "The Career of Wilkie Collins," p. 187, from a 1913 edition of The Dead Secret which I have been unable to obtain.

76 Forgues, p. 844. My translation.

77 British Museum MS 28.509 ff346. Internal evidence indicates its date as 1859-60.

78 It came out originally in All the Year Round (26 November 1859--25 August 1860) and was published by Sampson Low in three volumes on 15 August 1860.

- 79 Robinson, p. 148.
- 80 ALSs Huntington Library (to Edward Smyth Pigott), *passim*.
- 81 "Reminiscences of a Story-Teller," p. 192.
- 82 Robinson, p. 54, quoting the Preface to the 1863 edition of Antonina.
- 83 Page, p. 6.
- 84 4 April 1850, p. 3.
- 85 See the Eclectic Review, ser. 4, 27 (April, 1850), 493, and the Spectator, 23 (14 March 1850), 257; Page, p. 39.
- 86 Like many Victorian authors, he often set his stories earlier in the nineteenth century, and to establish the background for events in the novel he sometimes returned to the eighteenth. Armadale begins in 1832 (with the sins of the previous generation) and then continues in the early 1850s. The Moonstone begins with the Battle of Seringapatam in 1799 and then resumes in 1848. But his interest clearly lay within the period of his own lifetime.
- 87 See Edwin M. Eigner, "Raphael in Oxford Street: Bulwer's Accommodation to the Realists," in The Nineteenth Century Writer and His Audience, ed. Harold Orel and George J. Worth, Univ. of Kansas Humanistic Studies no. 40 (Lawrence: Univ. of Kansas Pub., 1969), pp. 61-74.
- 88 ALS Berg Collection, 30 August 1849, and see also the letter quoted by Nuel Pharr Davis, p. 66. In pointing up contemporary analogies, Collins was following the practice of other historical novelists, notably Bulwer. Cf. too the subtitle of Kingsley's Hypatia: New Foes with an Old Face.
- 89 But as Sayers says, "The historical facts are there, but not the historical sense; Goths and Romans alike hail from Wardour Street; the fifth-century Christians are nineteenth-century Protestants; the stock villain, virgin, and fanatic utter the stock sentiments appropriate to villainy, virginity, and fanaticism" (Wilkie Collins, p. 66).
- 90 ALS Berg Collection, 30 August 1849.
- 91 92 (October, 1850), 486.
- 92 Publishers' Circular, 24 (1 August 1860), 407.
- 93 Robinson, p. 149. See also S. M. Ellis, Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu, and Others (New York: Richard R. Smith, 1931), pp. 29-30.
- 94 Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1935, p. 322. Published in England as The Victorians and Their Books. See also Forster, II, 230.

- 95 ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 12 September 1860; Robinson, p. 147.
- 96 Cruse, p. 322. The letter (15 May 1860) is now in the University of Texas Collection.
- 97 ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 12 June 1860.
- 98 ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 18 September 1861.
- 99 As quoted by Caine in My Story (London: Heinemann, 1908), pp. 337-38.
- 100 Collins was one of the few English novelists of the period to enjoy an extensive Continental reputation. His books were routinely translated into French and German and often into other languages. Perhaps his foreign popularity was due to the fact that his novels were less insular than most British novels, perhaps to the fact that foreign readers judged his work less moralistically.
- 101 ALS Berg Collection, 11 July 1863.
- 102 "Sensation Novels," p. 566; Page, p. 112. Mrs. Oliphant's own novel, Salem Chapel, imitates The Woman in White.
- 103 Robinson, p. 147.
- 104 New York: Harper, 1875, Ch. 40; subsequent citations will appear in the text.
- 105 ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 3 July 1883, and see also a similar letter in the Parrish Collection of 3 November 1882.
- 106 This was the term he used to refer to his three illegitimate children by Martha Rudd.
- 107 While the Spectator reviewed Benjulia favorably (46 [26 May 1883], 680; Page, p. 217), the "success" of the book was due mainly to its controversial stand on vivisection. See MacEachen, "Wilkie Collins' Heart and Science and the Vivisection Controversy," VN, No. 29 (Spring, 1966), 22-25.
- 108 Swinburne, p. 289.
- 109 Eliot, Collected Essays, p. 417.

## Chapter IV

### The Reader-Oriented World of Collins's Novels

How did Collins interest and excite the readers of his novels?

On the one hand, as we have seen, he paid close attention to his craft; he planned his stories meticulously, constructed them ingeniously, wrote them simply and clearly, enlivened them with sensational events, manifested a theatrical sense of dialogue and timing, and used his settings to create mood and atmosphere. On the other hand, he paid close attention to his audience; he envisioned the reader's reactions as he wrote, tested outlines and proofs on selected friends, and kept in touch with public tastes and preferences even in his invalid years. By combining the knowledge of his craft with the knowledge of his audience, he produced immensely absorbing books, the best of which still keep the reader in a state of suspense or anticipation until the final pages. But to say that he merely combined these two elements ignores their inherent connection. Collins's art required reciprocity; his most effective techniques evolved from his attempts to maintain the reader's interest and served the purpose of luring the reader into active participation. It is therefore important to consider the kinds of people he wrote for--or, more accurately, the ways in which he perceived their tastes and habits, their attitudes, and even their anxieties.

Dougald MacEachen in his dissertation has described the world of Collins's novels; and since his description reflects both the community of interest between writer and reader and the reflection of audience values

in the stories, it is worth quoting at some length:

Collins, the son of a successful and respectable painter, began and ended his career as a member of the middle classes, and he deliberately wrote for a rank-conscious, wealth-worshipping, middle-class reading public. Most of his main characters are the kind of people he and his readers were interested in, people whose ancestors had been given a baronetcy because of their money-making abilities, or whose wealth put them in the upper middle classes.

Collins and his Victorian readers had a weakness for gentlemen, particularly the newer type of gentleman whose gentility came from wealth. His heroes and heroines, for the most part, do not work; they live pleasantly on inherited incomes. When they are said to be engaged in gainful occupation, the reader rarely sees them actually at work.

Business, however, is perfectly respectable in the Collins world, for business produces money and money is overwhelmingly important in a Collins story. Exact incomes are frequently given. Nearly everyone of his plots involves a struggle for property, and the reward of virtue is usually financial security [MacEachen adds, however, that Collins could ridicule Victorian mammonism when he chose to]. . . .

It is the well-to-do middle classes who form the solid foundation of Collins's fictional world. There is a sprinkling of aristocrats in it too, usually represented by baronets and dowagers. The lower classes are also present, but as family servants, not as artisans or factory laborers or agricultural workers. It is from the solid middle-class center of this world that Collins launches his criticism of contemporary society and champions the various causes, but the cause of the teeming proletariat can hardly be said to be one of them. From where he stands, the proletariat can scarcely be seen.<sup>1</sup>

One qualification should be appended to this generally accurate account.

While Collins often wrote about "the well-to-do middle classes," it was the ordinary middle classes that he was writing for. Household Words and All the Year Round, which published most of his shorter pieces and all but one of his serial novels up to Dickens's death, were not designed for the erudite or affluent.<sup>2</sup> They catered to a frankly bourgeois readership (and peripherally, those even lower on the scale)--to people who looked aspiringly and sometimes enviously upon the rich and established, but who also congratulated themselves on the status they had achieved. Of all his novels, only Armada was serialized in an upper-middle-class

publication, the Cornhill, and Armada failed to repay the outlay of its publisher, George Smith, although in America it revived the fortunes of the less elite Harper's Monthly.<sup>3</sup>

Collins's work appealed largely to the people Matthew Arnold called the Philistines: an essentially conservative, pragmatic, family-centered public whose values derived from the leading movements of the early nineteenth century, Evangelicalism and Utilitarianism. Not that his readers were likely themselves to be Dissenters or Benthamites; on the contrary, the orthodox of both these creeds deplored the reading of novels as an evil or idle pursuit. But the atmosphere they had helped to create affected every stratum of society, and especially the middle classes. By mid-century the Evangelical movement had led, not only to more visible piety, but to the sense of duty and moral earnestness which pervaded the Victorian household whether High Church, Low Church, or Broad Church, while the Utilitarian movement sanctified the belief in self-help and practical advancement that arose with the industrial age. Collins himself, though averse to a career in business and skeptical of organized religion, was affected by both of these movements. Their influence helps to account for his brisk and business-like approach to plotting (he rarely wasted an incident), his conviction that hard work in his craft would bring him both financial and artistic success, his anger at being charged with writing novels that were not morally earnest, and his dutiful dispensation of justice at the conclusion of every novel--sometimes against all the odds. There are also, as we shall see, subtler manifestations of these ideologies in his work.

Collins understood that fiction provided an outlet for those whose lives were narrow and confined. In Armada, there is a passage in which Doctor le Doux (alias Doctor Downward) invites a number of people in the neighborhood to come and visit his new Sanitarium. Despite the fact that he issues the invitation only a day in advance, nearly all the women who live nearby accept it. To explain their alacrity, the voice of the author intrudes upon the narrative:

In the miserable monotony of the lives led by a large section of the middle classes of England, any thing is welcome to the women which offers them any sort of harmless refuge from the established tyranny of the principle that all human happiness begins and ends at home. While the imperious needs of a commercial country limited the representatives of the male sex . . . to one feeble old man and one sleepy little boy, the women, poor souls . . . had seized the golden opportunity of a plunge into public life.

In Man and Wife, Sir Patrick Lundie supplies a corollary to this passage when he tells his restless niece, "You are suffering, Blanche, from a malady which is exceedingly common among the young ladies of England. As a disease it is quite incurable--and the name of it is Nothing-to-Do."<sup>4</sup>

It would be inaccurate to say that Collins's audience consisted entirely or even largely of bored and idle women. In America, the ladies might be regarded as the bearers of culture, the sex that read books and attended lectures while their coarser husbands earned the money that vindicated their leisure. But among the English middle classes, as we have seen, both sexes read novels avidly. Collins himself received as many letters from men as he did from women, for even the men, who were largely chained to their shops or offices by day and their firesides by evening, led lives of considerable monotony. They too sought in books a "harmless refuge"--sometimes, a thrilling and romantic refuge--from the routine and the commonplace. As for the English upper classes,

"Gentlefolks in general," says Gabriel Betteredge, the house steward of The Moonstone, "have a very awkward rock ahead in life--the rock ahead of their own idleness."<sup>5</sup>

All sensation fiction rested on the premise that readers welcomed vicarious excitement, that they looked to contemporary novels to provide the spice that was lacking in their own lives. Collins catered to this appetite from the time of his second novel, Basil, until the end of his career. Undoubtedly, he shared the conviction of his good friend, Charles Reade:

I write for the public, and the public don't care about the dead. They are more interested in the living, and in the great tragedy-comedy of humanity that is around and about them and environs them in every street, at every crossing, in every hole and corner. An aristocratic divorce suit, the last great social scandal, a sensational suicide from Waterloo Bridge, a woman murdered in Seven Dials, or a baby found strangled in a bonnet-box at Piccadilly Circus, interests them much more than Margaret's piety or Gerard's journey to Rome. . . . The paying public prefers a live ass to a dead lion.<sup>6</sup>

But as we have seen, he always grounded the sensational elements in a thoroughly domestic setting, familiar to his readers in its homely outlines if not in its particulars. Magdalen Vanstone, the fiercely unconventional protagonist of No Name, takes time out to help the weak-minded Mrs. Wragge read an omelet recipe. Basil meets the fatal Margaret Sherwin on an omnibus.<sup>7</sup> Marian Halcombe's and Lydia Gwilt's dramatic revelations are conventionally recorded in their diaries. And Laura Fairlie's sketchbook, into which she inserts a lock of hair for Walter Hartright the day before she marries Sir Percival, is a domestic prop as evocative for Victorian readers as Fosco's more exotic mice and cockatoo.

Reade's remark indicates that for him the "tragi-comedy of humanity" originated in or depended upon the more shocking affairs of the day. And in fact, he often introduced contemporary scandals into his novels. In It Is Never Too Late to Mend (1856), he based his study of the evils in the prison system on an actual case at Winston Green gaol, and in Put Yourself in His Place (1870), he played on audience fears of disruptive trade unions, a subject that often made news. Collins also recognized the literary value of contemporary violence and scandal, but his perspective differed from Reade's in that he was not primarily concerned with current events. Nathaniel Beard (the son of Collins's physician) mentions that he never seemed to read the newspapers, and that he depended on his friends for the latest information on popular or topical subjects.<sup>8</sup> But his habits may have changed as his health deteriorated, and in any case his ostensible lack of familiarity with the latest political and social affairs should not be taken too seriously. No man could be part of the Dickens circle and remain aloof from current events. Besides, to write articles for Dickens's publications and for the Leader, he had to be well-informed.

In his fiction, however, he seems to have preferred a measure of temporal distance, working more congenially with the recent past than with the freshly topical. The Moonstone, published in 1868 but set in 1848-9, is partly based on a notorious murder case of 1861, and Sergeant Cuff bears some resemblance to the detective assigned to that case whom Dickens had written up in Household Words in 1850.<sup>9</sup> By and large, though, Collins did not take his crimes directly from the popular press; instead he worked with a number of older and often obscure sources, such as

Maurice Méjan's Recueil des Causes Célèbres (Paris, 1808), from which he adapted the crime of The Woman in White and a number of short articles,<sup>10</sup> J. Peuchet's Mémoires tirées des Archives de la Police de Paris (Paris, 1838),<sup>11</sup> and M. Richer's Causes Célèbres et Intéressantes (Amsterdam, 1772-81). In his library at the time of his death were also several Parliamentary Blue Books (on the West Indies and Marriage) and Dodsley's Annual Register from 1758 to 1851, volumes that claimed to provide "a detailed view of the Politics, Literature, Biography, Parliamentary History, Commerce, Statistics, &c. of the past century."<sup>12</sup>

The advantage of taking ideas from sources unfamiliar to his readers was obvious: he could astound them with original stories of mystery and mayhem, yet assure them that the wildest events were based upon actual cases.<sup>13</sup> Of course, as the last two titles indicate, he supplemented the bizarre materials with facts and figures drawn from more mundane sources or from the experience of his friends. Thus prepared with data that were both familiar and exotic, he presented his readers with novels that blended the real and the imaginative. Count Fosco's murder, for example, derives its credibility from at least three factual elements. Fosco is initially detected by a man who, like thousands of real foreign visitors, has been drawn to London for the Crystal Palace Exhibition of 1851. He is singled out for murder because he has betrayed a secret Brotherhood--an allusion to the fiercely vindictive secret societies of the Italian Risorgimento.<sup>14</sup> And after he is killed, his mammoth corpse is exposed outside the Paris Morgue, just like the bodies Collins had viewed on several of his visits.

In another way, too, Collins's position differed from the one implied in Reade's quotation. Reade asserts that the public enjoyed hearing about the murders of the lower orders and the scandals of the aristocracy; but neither social extreme figures prominently in Collins's work, in part because he himself was staunchly middle-class and wrote from his own point of vantage, but also because, as a writer of sensational stories for a respectable middle-class audience, he had to avoid both crudity and blatant sexuality. He wanted to stimulate his readers, to keep them on edge with excitement, but if he went too far his books would not only have been damned by the critics but rejected by the circulating libraries. When the critics fulminated, he could defend himself in belligerent Prefaces and let his stories stand; but if the librarians objected he would lose their subscriptions and thereby most of his audience. George Moore in the 1880s might claim immunity from their censorship by selling his books independently; but no novelist of the 1860s could afford to antagonize "the twin tyrants of literature," as Collins dubbed Mudie and Smith.<sup>15</sup> He could rage against the restrictions they imposed and privately berate them, but he had to concede their power. Mudie once suggested that Collins change the title of a novel (The New Magdalen), and while Collins angrily refused, he also admitted in a letter to his publisher, "this ignorant fanatic holds my circulation in his pious hands. Suppose he determines to check my circulation--what remedy have we? What remedy have his subscribers?"<sup>16</sup>

In his calmer moments, he probably recognized that the circulating libraries reflected the opinions of the customers they served. An insistence on moral earnestness, a disdain for explicit sexuality, a Podsnappian obsession with "the cheek of the young person," were

characteristics of the middle class at large, and not just of the librarian. But it was easier to blame Mudie--or Readers in Particular--than to blame the majority of readers with whose tastes he generally sympathized.

Like Dickens, he felt it part of his duty as a novelist to call attention--from an insider's perspective--to such middle-class failings as cant, smugness, selfishness, prudery, hypocrisy, and (unlike Dickens) repressive sexual attitudes. But while Dickens was often a persuasive crusader, Collins was largely ineffectual, both because he worked heavily-handedly and because he sometimes forced views upon his readers that they were unprepared to accept. His unorthodox defense of fallen women, for example, attracted the attention of the public and the critics but rarely won them over. Dickens, who admired Collins's tolerance and frankness, maintained a double standard. Publicly he stood as a defender of the family, considered fallen women dubious subjects, and when his plots required their presence, obscured their vices beneath a layer of sentiment. Privately, he supported a home for errant women (whose inhabitants are vividly described in his letters)<sup>17</sup> and kept a secret mistress. Collins, who lived with one woman and had children by another, came much closer to reconciling his private life with his public position. In an age when the mere breath of sexual scandal could topple a public figure--when Boz himself would have lost half his readers had the news of Ellen Ternan leaked out--he consistently advocated a forgiving attitude toward fallen women who had repented, whether they had been outright street walkers or victims of a single deception, and he filled his later novels with worthy examples.<sup>18</sup>

Mercy Merrick of The New Magdalen (1873) is the most appealing of these creations. She has reformed long before the beginning of the story but despairs of overcoming her past and regaining social acceptance. Then, assuming the identity of Grace Roseberry, a woman she believes to have been killed, she becomes the companion of Lady Janet Roy. Her new security, however, is short-lived; first her conscience is aroused by Lady Janet's nephew, Julian Gray, a clergyman she had heard and admired at the fallen women's Refuge, and then the real Grace, saved by a surgeon, arrives to challenge her false position. Eventually Mercy confesses her deception, wins Julian's love and respect, and agrees with some misgivings to marry him. But the couple must emigrate to America--Collins's favorite haven for the sexually repentant--because respectable English people (like their real-life counterparts, Readers in Particular) disdain her for her past.

Predictably, the novel was attacked by the critics. Andrew Lang later complained, with justice, that the author stacked the odds in Mercy's favor: "He is certainly unfair in his handling of the characters. His repentant and beautiful Magdalen does not repent much of her imposture till she gets into an inextricable position, while her respectable and offensive foil is handicapped by ugliness in opposition to the beauty of the woman who has stolen into her place. . . ." <sup>19</sup> He might have added that the noble and dedicated Mercy is a highly unlikely ex-prostitute, no matter what the provocation for her fall. Swinburne, recognizing her falseness, uttered "the bitter cry of the long-suffering novel-reader" and rhetorically demanded, "When will the last reformed harlot vanish into space in the arms of the last clerical sceptic . . . ?" <sup>20</sup> Yet on the other side, Matthew Arnold called the book "his favourite

sensation novel,"<sup>21</sup> and the play version that Collins wrote along with it became his greatest theatrical success. Perhaps, freed from the burden of the novel's pointed moralizing and its blatant appeals for tolerance, the play's melodramatic and sentimental aspects--which were greatly to the taste of its audience--overcame their objections to its heroine. Then too, not every reader who objected to the message saw fit to abandon the novel. Collins reports travelling on a train with a clergyman's daughter who read the naughty book while her father took a nap, and blushed when its author caught her reading it.<sup>22</sup>

Whenever he wrote about guilty women who had not behaved like ladies, Collins was sure to antagonize some part of his audience. But when he attacked cant and hypocrisy he was generally successful, for there he struck a responsive chord in the majority of middle-class readers. Aside from the out-and-out villains and Jezebels, who derive from a long tradition of melodrama, Collins's more offensive characters exhibit typically Victorian failings. Some, in the service of questionable motives, distort or exaggerate traits that would ordinarily have been laudable. Count Fosco, who claims to be a man of feeling, uses displays of sentiment to mask a cold and calculating energy, while his wife, a model of conjugal submission, carries her fanatical regard for her husband to criminal extremes. Both are thorough hypocrites. Other unpleasant characters--the ones who are smug, self-serving, repressive, or duplicitous--appear to pervert the age's leading ideologies. Of course it was a rare Victorian, in or out of fiction, who remained untouched by the strict moral code of the Evangelicals, the pragmatism of the Utilitarians, and the spirit of industry and progress. These were the hallmarks of the age, endorsed by the great mass of readers.

But the reading public could, and did, respond with indignation when religious fervor was carried to excess, or when the zeal for improvement and industry overcame the wisdom of the heart.

Dickens broke ground novelistically in both these areas with the *Murdstones* and rigid Mrs. Clennam, with *Dombey*, *Bounderby*, and *Gradgrind*. And Collins seems to have followed his lead--although as a keen observer, and as the son of a pious self-made painter, he may have had enough personal experience of religious and social hypocrisy to proceed without Dickens's examples.<sup>23</sup> At any rate, in *Basil* he portrayed the quintessential nouveau-riche businessman, a linen-draper who uses his daughter as bait to catch the son of a proud aristocrat. Readers of the period would have recognized Mr. Sherwin as the prototypal household autocrat, the petty snob whose self-interest dominates his every action. Mr. Thorpe of *Hide and Seek* is another kind of domestic tyrant who would have been familiar to Collins's readers, the overly zealous Evangelical. Determined to guard his son Zack against temptation, he condemns the child to dismal Sundays and locks him up when he fails to learn his lessons, though they are clearly beyond his capacity. Drusilla Clack, the prying spinster of *The Moonstone*, exaggerates the traits of the officious Evangelical, distributing religious tracts wherever she goes and lecturing everyone she meets. Many contemporary readers relished the caricature, for they recognized in Miss Clack's confusion of religious and egotistical motives a common Victorian failing. Mrs. Catherick, the mother of the Woman in White, is the grimmest of Collins's hypocrites. She hates her illegitimate daughter for having ruined her reputation and feels no grief when Anne dies. She is guilty of "serpent-hatred" for Sir Percival Clyde (Third Epoch, *Hartright's First Nar.*, VIII), and her response to his

terrible death, a letter of "hardened shameless depravity" (Third Epoch, Hartright's Second Nar., I), shocks Walter Hartright into voicing the disgust that the reader is meant to share. Cold and unrepentant, she has spent her life in search of respectability and, in one memorable paragraph, she recapitulates her triumph. "I came here a wronged woman," she tells Hartright:

I came here robbed of my character and determined to claim it back. I've been years and years about it--and I have claimed it back. I have matched the respectable people fairly and openly, on their own ground. If they say any thing against me now they must say it in secret: they can't say it, they daren't say it, openly. I stand high enough in this town to be out of your reach. The clergyman bows to me. Aha! you didn't bargain for that, when you came here. Go to the church and inquire about me--you will find that Mrs. Catherick has her sitting, like the rest of them, and pays the rent on the day it's due. Go to the town-hall. There's a petition lying there; a petition of the respectable inhabitants against allowing a Circus to come and perform here and corrupt our morals: yes! OUR morals. I signed that petition this morning. . . . The doctor's wife only put a shilling in the plate at our last charity sermon--I put half a crown. Mr. Church-warden Soward held the plate, and bowed to me. Ten years ago he told Pigrum the chemist I ought to be whipped out of the town at the cart's tail. Is your mother alive? Has she got a better Bible on her table than I have got on mine? Does she stand better with her trades-people than I do with mine? Has she always lived within her income? I have always lived within mine. (Third Epoch, Hartright's First Nar., VIII)

Somehow she neglects to mention that her "income" is a bribe paid by Sir Percival.

Not all readers responded to these characters as Collins wanted them to. Mrs. Oliphant called Mrs. Catherick a "disagreeable apparition," and denounced the bow she got from the clergyman as "a false effect of the Dickens school."<sup>24</sup> Andrew Lang defended the Evangelicals against Collins's exaggerations: "No one who has met, among people of that faith, the very best, most kindly, and, in spite of the gravest trials, the happiest of his friends, will charge the creed of Miss Clack and Mr. Thorpe

with the vices of these two deplorable persons."<sup>25</sup> But Collins had no desire to disparage kindly and happy people of any religious persuasion; his attacks were directed against those who perverted morality, those who had sacrificed human sympathy and understanding for a creed. The fanatics he portrayed in his later novels are scientists and Jesuits; there are, for example, a wily priest who coaxes a troubled man away from his wife, a doctor whose practice of vivisection corrupts his moral sense, a matron who cares only for science and schemes against her own son and niece.<sup>26</sup> But these figures fail as credible characters because they are clumsily one-sided.

Yet while he was often heavy-handed in exposing his characters' frailties, Collins could deftly manipulate his readers' anxieties and frailties. He knew, for example, that one of the most effective tyrannies in all Victorian life was public opinion. The great drive for respectability during the period stemmed in part from its stern moral code and in part from the insecurity that plagues any era of transition. Newly settled in the burgeoning cities, towns, and suburbs, often newly arrived at middle-class status, uneasily ranked in a society where the money that determined their social position could be lost as well as gained, the members of the middle classes, outwardly so smug and secure, lived with an anxious sense of the importance of keeping up appearances. In this aspect of Victorian life Collins differed from most of his readers; he was both middle-class and bohemian--middle class, in that he wrote from an essentially bourgeois point of view and, despite his unorthodox alliances, preferred a generally domestic routine, but bohemian in that he eschewed the conventional, in food and dress as in marital

relations, and had no fear of being different. Yet if he himself was less awed by public opinion than his readers, he was keenly aware of their apprehensions and often exploited them effectively.

He first put the threat of public opinion to work in Basil. After Basil discovers his wife trysting with her father's clerk, Mannion, he follows Mannion out into the street and dashes him to the ground. He believes that he has killed Mannion, but Mannion recovers, although he is horribly disfigured. Later Mannion writes to Basil, reveals himself as an outcast (he is the son of a forger whom Basil's father could have kept from being hanged), and vows a "life-long retaliation":

Your father shall see you living the life to which his evidence against my father condemned me--shall see the foul stain of your disaster clinging to you wherever you go. The infamy with which I am determined to pursue you shall be your own infamy that you can not get quit of--for you shall never get quit of me, never get quit of the wife who has dishonored you. You may leave your home, and leave England; you may make new friends, and seek new employments; years and years may pass away and still you shall not escape us. . . . The terrible secret of your dishonor, and of the atrocity by which you avenged it, shall ooze out through strange channels, in vague shapes, by tortuous intangible processes; ever changing in the manner of its exposure, never remediable by your own resistance, and always directed to the same end--your isolation as a marked man, in every fresh sphere, among every new community to which you retreat. (Part III, Ch. V)

To modern readers, Mannion's threat is an empty gesture, impossible of fulfillment. After all, Basil is guilty of no more than following his romantic impulses, marrying a woman who deceives him, and lashing out at her seducer. But to Victorian readers, the threat expressed an alarming possibility, awakening their dormant fears of exclusion and disgrace. The story soon confirms the promise of Mannion's vengeance. Basil, fleeing to a remote fishing village, discovers that his neighbors shun him "because," as one woman tells him, "we want our children's

faces left as God made them" (Journal). He leaves the village without even attempting to defend himself, for he is certain--as Collins expected his readers to be certain--that the mere rumor of his "infamy," reinforced by the presence of his disfigured enemy, will cause him to be ostracized. To save him, Collins must resort to the contrivance of a fatal accident: pursuing Basil along the Cornish cliffs, Mannion trips, loses his footing, and plunges to his death.

In Armadale, Collins exposed another aspect of the tyranny of public opinion: the ironies involved in reputation. Lydia Gwilt comes to Thorpe Ambrose, ostensibly as Neelie Milroy's governess, but actually to be in the neighborhood of the wealthy young bachelor, Allan Armadale. However, she is forced to leave her position because Neelie's mother, a pathologically jealous invalid, discovers that her references have been falsified. Mrs. Milroy has maneuvered the unsuspecting Allan into doing her dirty work, and Allan, who discovers too late how she has used him, cannot expose her because he has given his word as a gentleman to keep her secret. Miss Gwilt thus appears to have been forced from her position by a man with questionable designs on her--although, as the reader knows, he was on the verge of proposing. Unfortunately, he has already offended the respectable people of the neighborhood by a series of well-meaning gaffes. "It would come out," he tells Ozias Midwinter, "that I couldn't make speeches--that I had been brought up without a university education--and that I could enjoy a ride on horseback without galloping after a wretched stinking fox or a poor distracted little hare. These three unlucky defects of mine are not excused, it seems, in a country gentleman (especially when he has dodged a public reception to begin with) (Book the Second, Ch. IV).

His misconduct with the governess completes the destruction of his reputation. Allan, who is thoroughly decent and cheerful, becomes a social outcast; Miss Gwilt, a gold digger, liar, and poisoner, wins the neighbors' sympathy. There is added irony in the fact that Allan's respectable neighbors had their counterparts in Collins's reading public. so that to condemn the fictional gentry as fools was effectively to censure a sizeable proportion of the audience.

I have been citing scattered examples to show Collins's skill at playing to his readers, his ability to turn their foibles to account or stir their indignation. But there is a broader sense in which he reveals his understanding of his audience. His insights into his readers' aspirations, his tacit comprehension of their doubts and fears, can also inform his work thematically, giving it coherence as well as a relevance to nineteenth-century concerns. The Woman in White sold in the thousands not only because it was a fascinating thriller, a novel with a suspenseful plot and a memorable cast of characters, but also because it was a fable for the times, a fairy tale that offered a marvellous solution to a genuine Victorian predicament.

The Victorian middle classes were torn between two conflicting attitudes toward money, especially as it influenced marriage. On the one hand, most of them endorsed--at least in public--the Biblical injunctions against wealth and pride of place so frequently recalled in the Sunday sermon and in many family parlors. On the other, most of them were firmly involved in the getting and spending of money; and as they struggled toward affluence, so they measured their neighbors and acquaintances in terms of material success. Closely connected to this double-edged attitude toward money was the prevalent view of marriage.

In theory, marriage was to be based upon reciprocal love. But all too often, as everyone knew, marriages were made for the worldly motives of financial security and status. "Mammon marriage" was one of the commonest themes in Victorian fiction: Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, Eliot, even Meredith, continually worked with it. Almost as common was the message Thackeray expounded in Vanity Fair: that worldly position is transient and empty, that money cannot buy happiness. Yet still, fathers struggled to bring home luxuries, and mothers dreamed of marrying their children advantageously.

In The Woman in White, Collins reconciled these antithetical attitudes by grafting on to a fairy-tale stock a number of distinctly modern elements. He must have sensed that there was nothing likelier to please his ordinary readers than the story of a character, no better off than themselves, who legitimately rises to rank and riches, and marries the girl who had once been inaccessible; so he launched the novel with a romance that was patterned on the familiar myth of the poor boy who loves a princess. Of course, the protagonist could not appear to covet rank and riches; they would have to come unbidden because he deserved them--or earned them by rescuing the maiden in distress.

Walter Hartright, the hero of The Woman in White, is a poor but virtuous and respectable drawing master, who falls in love at first sight with a rich and beautiful heiress. He has no mercenary motive; he loves Laura Fairlie for herself. But nonetheless, her fortune and position effectively prevent him from marrying her, and as an artist, he has no chance of amassing a comparable fortune of his own. Laura is further removed from Walter by becoming the victim of a marriage for money--the Mammon marriage so deplored by the Victorians--and although her decision

to wed Sir Percival Clyde is an act of filial piety, she nonetheless agrees to a loveless marriage, and even worse, marries one man when she loves another.

Paradoxically, the evil scheme of which she is a victim becomes the means of freeing her to marry Walter and of putting them on equal terms. For when Sir Percival not only robs Laura of her fortune but imprisons her in a mad-house, she is abruptly deprived of rank and riches--deprived of her very identity, as Walter notes--and the only man who can save her is the lowly drawing master. Walter's path is beset by obstacles--the gigantic villain Fosco, the stony Mrs. Catherick, the web of deceitful evidence--but he perseveres and bravely overcomes them. "It was strange to look back and to see now, that the poverty which had denied us all hope of assistance, had been the indirect means of our success, by forcing me to act for myself" (The Story Concluded, I), Walter innocently remarks a few pages before he discovers that his infant son is the new heir of Limmeridge House, a possibility that seems not to have occurred to him. But if the author's purpose was to satisfy his readers on every level, it isn't strange at all.

First, Laura has had to expiate the "sin" of consenting to a loveless marriage, just as Marian by her illness has had to expiate the offense of urging Laura into it. (Subsequently, Marian behaves like a fairy godmother to Laura and Walter, a role that is confirmed realistically when they make her the baby's godmother.) Second, Laura must be destitute before Walter can prove his mettle; and Walter must prove that he loves her devotedly--despite the loss of her beauty, her fortune, and to some extent, her intellect--before he obtains material rewards. But even more important, the reader must acknowledge the propriety of

the marriage. This conclusion enables him to reaffirm the platitudes that poverty is a blessing, that the love of money is the root of all evil, and that love will win out in the end--even as he vicariously enjoys the poor man's sudden rise to affluence; for Walter returns to the manor, not as a humble employee, but as its ruling male, the father of its heir, and the husband of the woman he loves (who turns out to be rich and lovely after all). What reader would quibble that he has arrived at the summit of worldly prosperity without ever having earned the money? He has paid his passage by tracking down the villains and overcoming the legal difficulties that blocked Laura's way to her lost position. The critics might deplore the vapidness of Laura and her faithful admirer;<sup>27</sup> but it is hard to fault Collins's skill at manipulating their romance so as to satisfy conflicting value systems.

#### Balance and Antithesis

"Conflict" is a word that is rarely used in reference to Collins's novels. We do not think of him as a man perplexed by doubts or torn by ambivalent values. But the more one studies his fiction, the more it becomes apparent that antithesis or dichotomy is its leading source of interest and tension. Collins has been credited with the famous formula, "Make 'em laugh, make 'em cry, make 'em wait."<sup>28</sup> He worked and thought in terms of contrasting elements, which he yoked together or alternated in the course of any given story. His novels unite the bizarre and the domestic, the mundane and the mysterious, the terrifying and the reassuring. The disordering of ordinary life is the starting-point of nearly all his plots.

An early reviewer of Basil described the effects produced by these dichotomies, and although what seemed "rude and barbarous" then may seem merely sensational today, his comments are not imperceptive:

There is a startling antagonism between the intensity of the passion, the violent spasmodic action of the piece, and the smooth, common-place environments. The scenery, the dramatis personae, the costumery, are all of the most familiar everyday type, belonging to an advanced stage of civilization; but there is something rude and barbarous, almost Titanic, about the incidents; they belong to a different state of society. But this very discrepancy enhances the terror of the drama; and there is something artist-like even in this apparent want of art.<sup>29</sup>

A later critique by Harry Quilter, who was one of Collins's most ardent admirers, explores the apparently conflicting attributes of "mystery and simplicity," of certainty and perplexity:

No books are ever at the same time so straightforward, and so intricate; the straightforwardness is in the execution, in the march of the narrative, the clear presentment of the characters, but the goal is nowhere in sight, nor to the end of the book does the reader know whither he is being led. . . . [Yet] we feel more and more certain, with every page we read, that every detail and every action, nay, and even every speech, is helping on the development of some purpose which we cannot guess, but dimly foreshadow.<sup>30</sup>

The antitheses within Collins's work were not produced by inner turmoil, for he was rarely confused about what he wanted to say or ambiguous about his own values, at least in the early and middle novels. Rather, he juggled opposing elements to hold the reader's attention. Furthermore, he wrote with dual aims: to shock and to satisfy the public. From adolescence, when he entertained his country relations with horror stories, to the last months of his life, when he was writing about a beautiful girl corrupted by her love for a wild young lord, these two contrasting elements, shock and satisfaction, were never absent from his work.

Of course, they are not necessarily opposing forces. Most novelists want to keep their readers on edge, to make them apprehensive about the outcome or alert to what will happen next; and sensational novelists (like their modern descendants, the writers of thrillers and detective stories), had a more pressing need than most to maintain an aura of apprehension. Collins was justly famous for fabricating plots that upset the reader's expectations. "You will be glad to hear that Dickens is delighted with my new story," he wrote his mother about

The Moonstone:

He thinks the old man [Gabriel Betteredge] excellent--and he predicts that this will be the most successful book I have ever written. The grand point of the story--about three parts of the way to the end, took him--when I told it roughly, viva vice--as completely by surprise as if he had been an ordinary novel reader. You may imagine, from this, what the effect will be on the general reader. I certainly never expected to astonish Dickens with an effect in a novel--which is carefully prepared for, and which is yet invisible till it comes.<sup>31</sup>

But he did not confine his surprises to unexpected twists of the plot or limit himself to unsuspected traits of character, for he also had the rebel's desire to confront the reader with unpleasant truths. Thus he shocks in two ways. One is indigenous to the genre; it arises from and is imposed by the development of the story. The other is imposed by the author for ulterior ends, to upset or challenge the complacent. In both cases he was likely to go to extremes, and when he did he flawed his novels.

Dickens was able to integrate radical criticism into his stories, to convey human failings and social grievances functionally and thematically, so that in Bleak House, for example, Chancery becomes both a symbol of legal injustice and a palpable force of evil in the lives of

the characters, and in the earlier Martin Chuzzlewit, selfishness and hypocrisy emerge not only as vices endemic to the period but as vitiating forces in specific human relationships. But as many period reviews attest, even Dickens encountered problems with his readers when he shocked them too profoundly;<sup>32</sup> and Collins, who had neither Dickens's genius nor strength of character, was far likelier to run into trouble.

Man and Wife, as I have said, was the first book in which he deliberately took the offensive. He had flaunted convention in Basil and incorporated elements of social protest into the novels of the 1860s, but in Man and Wife, for the first time, the urge to shock predominated over his usual urge to satisfy. "I sit here all day," he wrote to Frederick Lehmann, "attacking English Institutions--battering down the marriage laws of Scotland and Ireland, and reviling athletic sports--in short, writing an un-popular book, which may possibly make a hit, from the mere oddity of a modern writer running full tilt against the popular sentiment instead of cringing to it."<sup>33</sup> But while he obviously enjoyed the prospect of antagonizing various sectors of his audience, Collins expected his new novel to be read and appreciated. In the next sentence, he noted that his publishers, especially his American publishers, were delighted with what he had done.

In fact, if Man and Wife did not "make a hit," it certainly sold well on publication. It raised the circulation of Cassell's Magazine to over 70,000,<sup>34</sup> sold out in a first edition of 1000 copies, and was immediately reprinted.<sup>35</sup> Mrs. Oliphant, who gave it a mixed review in Blackwood's Magazine in November of 1870, remarked that it had "probably by this time been read by most readers of fiction, and . . . largely commented upon by critics, so that it is unnecessary to enter into the

details of a story which everybody knows."<sup>36</sup> But Man and Wife would have had a more lasting success if Collins had disciplined his tendency to batter and revile and set the shocking details in a plausible framework.

His double thesis required a woman dubiously married (to expose the weakness of the Scottish marriage laws) and a boorish athlete who progressively deteriorates as he develops his body at the expense of his moral and ethical faculties. The two strands are united at the outset of the story, when the athletic Geoffrey Delamayn is revealed as the seducer of Anne Sylvester. Because the seduction has occurred in Scotland, where a promise to marry can constitute legal proof of marriage, Geoffrey eventually finds himself bound to Anne despite his attempts to prove that she has unwittingly wed his closest friend. He grows more anxious to cast her off after he meets a wealthy young widow, until at last he determines to kill her. Anne is saved only by the fatal stroke that overcomes him as he attempts to suffocate her.

The sexual elements in the novel are ingeniously blended with the athletic. Geoffrey's struggles to free himself from Anne coincide with his training for a famous Foot-race, and his emotional deficiencies parallel the physical deficiency that prostrates him as he runs the final lap.<sup>37</sup> But the reasoning behind both elements is facile and incongruous. Collins would have the reader believe that the physical decay which causes Geoffrey's death is the direct result of the moral decay that stems from his excessive love of sport. This theory, however, is as implausible as are the characters themselves. Anne, a refined and discriminating woman of considerable intelligence, seems hardly likely to have allowed the handsome but crude Geoffrey to seduce her without some

compelling motive or at least a hint of passion; but Collins is more concerned with the woes of her situation than with its plausibility. Geoffrey's decline into brutality is also insufficiently motivated. Collins apparently felt that he could explain all of Geoffrey's vices-- his betrayal of his closest friend, his contempt for women, his plans to murder the hapless Anne--by portraying him as "the natural man" whose vicious instincts are untempered by upbringing or education (Ch. 21).

Underlying the lack of credibility is a lack of effective authorial control. Collins's desire to shock the reader ran away with him. Not even the sober admonitions of Sir Patrick Lundie, an older character who serves as a voice of authority, can moderate the excesses of the sensational episodes. Besides, Man and Wife is overloaded with warnings and gratuitous lectures. In The Woman in White and The Moonstone, Collins rarely seems to press or guide the reader; the story develops smoothly out of the characters' own narratives. But in Man and Wife, he frequently interrupts the narrative to drive the lesson home. "Now that [Geoffrey] had committed himself to the betrayal of the friend who had trusted and served him, was he torn by remorse?" the author asks the reader. "He was no more torn by remorse than you are while your eye is passing over this sentence," he answers (Ch. 21), before he explains the motives of the character whose actions he has forcibly directed.

Unfortunately, Man and Wife set the pattern for Collins's later novels. But his desire to shock as well as satisfy did not always weaken his work. Both The Woman in White and The Moonstone contain shocking incidents and unpalatable observations; but the author is always in control, maintaining a sense of balance. In these books, he was able to achieve both ends--to keep the reader on edge and, at the same time, to

introduce subtle elements that challenged middle-class complacency. U. S. Knoepfmacher cites The Woman in White "as a unique instance of a mid-Victorian novel in which the author openly acknowledges an anarchic and asocial counterworld as a powerfully attractive alternative to the ordered, civilized world of conventional beliefs";<sup>38</sup> and as I shall show in Chapter VI, The Moonstone questions a number of Victorian assumptions--intellectual, religious, and political--as it mystifies and entertains.

The Moonstone also balances a number of antitheses that Albert D. Hutter has discussed. It connects "elements of rational detection with subjective distortions" in its narrative structure,<sup>39</sup> "deepens, simultaneously, our belief and our distrust,"<sup>40</sup> and produces "that tension between rational deduction and the presence of the irrational" which is crucial to detective fiction generally.<sup>41</sup> The theft of the diamond requires the conjunction of a chain of logically connected events with fortuitous events, like the rainstorm. To solve the mystery of its disappearance, two forms of detection are necessary: a methodical analysis of words and events (a quasi-scientific investigation) and leaps of intuition or inspired reconstruction. Correspondingly, the reader must assess the plot developments objectively as he responds to them subjectively; he must thrill to the imaginative brilliance of the logical solution.

Marshall sees the opposing forces in Collins's work, not as the result of his desire both to please and upset the reader, but rather as the product of two conflicting sensibilities, one artistic and intellectual, the other frankly popular. To some extent, what Marshall says holds true for every serious Victorian novelist. Theirs was a period,

as we have seen, in which both authors and critics were uneasy about the nature of the novel. They were not quite sure whether it was popular entertainment that ought to edify its readers, or whether it was a new form of art that might reflect, or reflect upon, the deeper aesthetic and intellectual currents of the age. In Collins's Prefaces, we find evidence for both these views of the novel, for on the one hand he assures us that he means to please, and on the other, he tries to impress us with his seriousness, his pains, and his artistry.

Within his novels, the opposition takes more elaborate forms. Although Collins was neither a rabid intellectual nor a writer with an aching conscience, he was, as Marshall has pointed out, "a sensitive and intelligent man" who "responded to the intellectual forces at work in his own time."<sup>42</sup> Let us consider the effect of just one of these forces upon his work.

Like many thoughtful people of his era, Collins was troubled by doubt--doubt about the nature of God and Christianity, doubt about the efficacy of reason, and doubt about the ultimately moral and beneficent purpose of the universe.<sup>43</sup> In some of his contemporaries--Carlyle and Mill, Tennyson and Arnold, and a host of other figures--doubts of this sort engendered feelings of loss and alienation so severe that they drove the sufferer to seek new meanings and values, or solace in human love. But nothing in Collins's work suggests that he suffered intense and lasting anguish. In his case (as attested by memoirs and letters, as well as by his mode of living), doubt seems to have taken the form of a deep-seated, abiding skepticism. While he never fully abandoned his belief in God and the ethical values of the New Testament,<sup>44</sup> he eschewed conventional social forms as well as conventional Christianity.

As a popular writer, however, he was bound to satisfy an audience that practiced traditional forms of Christianity, believed in a moral and rational universe, and trusted the Almighty--or His surrogate in fiction, the omnipotent author--to set everything to rights in the end.

The discrepancy between these antithetical positions impaired a number of his novels. Perhaps as an extension of his own skepticism, his protagonists are often doubters--despairing outcasts who seek to remake their lives or escape intolerable problems. Magdalen Vanstone, abruptly deprived of her name and her inheritance, runs off to face the hazards of the world in order to reclaim her position; Ozias Midwinter, a wanderer who has known neglect and cruelty since childhood, seeks stability through his friendship with Allan Armadale, the one man who has been kind to him; Mercy Merrick, repentant but still unaccepted, attempts to reenter society by assuming a false identity; Eustace Macallan, unable to live among people who may suspect him of murder, retreats to France where he nurses wounded soldiers. The complexities and neuroses of such characters were clearly of interest to Collins. But in order to satisfy the general public he had to resolve all their problems, even when his only means of doing so were simplistic or implausible; for the ordinary Victorian reader expected happy endings, preferably with wedding bells, and he also expected every character to inhabit a tidy moral world with just rewards and punishments. Thus, although their stubborn or self-destructive personalities forebode less favorable results, Magdalen marries Captain Kirke and receives her share of the inheritance because her sister has married the next heir; Midwinter is dramatically snatched from death (and a marriage that would have been worse than death) and succeeds as a foreign correspondent;

Mercy marries a clergyman; and Eustace, who nearly dies abroad, is re-deemed by the loving wife who conclusively establishes his innocence.

One must not underestimate Collins's own desire for a neat and happy ending. He may have been a religious and social skeptic, but he was at one with his readers in their demand for stories with moral, optimistic conclusions. He also took pride in tying up the various strands of a plot so as to resolve all outstanding difficulties, a practice that mitigated against a subtle or problematic denouement. To some extent, he could counteract the tidiness of the moral structure with untidy and inconsistent characters--a heroine with nagging faults, for example, or a villainess with contradictory impulses.<sup>45</sup> Or he could conceal the more disturbing elements so deeply beneath the optimistic surface that only the most perceptive readers would be able to discern them. But ultimately he had to conform to convention to be popular, and when he did, according to Marshall, he forfeited "intellectual integrity" and "structural consistency."<sup>46</sup> Thus, while the high-point of The Woman in White occurs at the end of Book Two, the story continues through a whole third volume. Part of the material in that volume had to be included so as to resolve the mystery of Laura's false death and the fate of the other characters. But, as even some contemporary critics were aware,<sup>47</sup> the third book is anticlimactic; its purpose is to let the reader see for himself that Count Fosco and Sir Percival have been properly punished and Laura properly rewarded, and to tie up all the loose ends.

In Fosco's death, there is a loss of intellectual as well as structural consistency, for he has committed a virtually perfect crime and thereby vindicated the theory that he expressed much earlier in the novel:

"Crimes cause their own detection, do they? And murder will out (another moral epigram), will it? Ask Coroners who sit at inquests in large towns if that is true, Lady Glyde. Ask secretaries of life-assurance companies if that is true, Miss Halcombe. Read your own public journals. In the few cases that get into the newspapers, are there not instances of slain bodies found, and no murderers ever discovered? Multiply the cases that are reported by the cases that are not reported, and the bodies that are found by the bodies that are not found, and what conclusions do you come to? This. That there are foolish criminals who are discovered, and wise criminals who escape. The hiding of a crime, or the detection of a crime, what is it? A trial of skill between the police on one side, and the individual on the other. When the criminal is a brutal, ignorant fool, the police in nine cases out of ten win. When the criminal is a resolute, educated, highly-intelligent man, the police in nine cases out of ten lose. If the police win, you generally hear all about it. If the police lose, you generally hear nothing. And on this tottering foundation you build up your comfortable moral maxim that Crime causes its own detection! Yes--all the crime you know of. And what of the rest?"

(The Story Continued by Marian Halcombe, III)

Collins later mentioned in an interview that Fosco's theory of crime was his own.<sup>48</sup> Nonetheless, as a law-abiding author, he was bound to punish Fosco not only to satisfy the claims of justice and morality but also to satisfy his readers. So he contrived Fosco's murder, which has nothing to do with Marian and Laura, but arises instead from his treachery to an Italian brotherhood that finally exacts retribution.

Yet if the conflict between morality and artistry weakens the conclusion of The Woman in White, much of its appeal stems from the juxtaposition of contrasting or opposing elements. Mrs. Oliphant recognized one of them when she reviewed the book for Blackwood's Magazine in 1862. After criticizing authors who produced sensations by "violent and illegitimate means,"<sup>49</sup> she praised Collins for avoiding the miraculous, for using human agents and rational means to evoke his shocks and sensations.<sup>50</sup> She may have given him more credit than he deserved, since he did not always use ordinary means to produce sensational effects. The fateful encounters and accidents that proliferate in Armada

could only have been accepted by an audience addicted to melodrama or imbued with a trust in Providence, and the laudanum trance that accounts for the theft of the Moonstone is hardly a "common human act," although Collins provides an explanation convincing enough to win the reader's confidence. But by and large, with the exception of his ghost-stories,<sup>51</sup> a genre with its own conventions, he produced his most agonizing thrills when he kept his apparatus plain and reasonable, when he avoided Gothic paraphernalia or supernatural intervention.

But the contrast that Mrs. Oliphant describes is only one aspect of a subtler dichotomy. As Kendrick has suggested, The Woman in White, like all sensation fiction, involves an interplay between reality and artifice, between those elements that link it to the "real" world, the events and characters that make the story lifelike or (to use the current term) mimetic, and those elements that call attention to the novel as a construct, the puzzles and the strictly internal conventions of narrative and language. To put it another way, the reader must believe the story and go along with the game.

Collins could vouch for the realism of much of his sensational material. He himself had met a woman as Walter does,<sup>52</sup> and he took the madhouse scheme from a true French case that he discovered in Méjan's book. His chagrin when The Times pointed out a discrepancy in his dates, his remarks in the Preface on their rectification, and his general concern with authenticity indicate his efforts to make the book a plausible and accurate document. He also attempted authenticity in characterization, for he knew that his readers were counting on characters with whom they could identify. In a letter to Nugent Robinson, he described the ways in which he drew from life in creating Marian:

Marian Halcombe is "no abstract personification of my own ideas." The first conception of her character originated in my own observation of many women who personally, morally, and mentally resemble her. In delineating her, I have had these "living models" constantly present to my mind, and have drawn from them, now in one way and now in another, to make the complete picture which I am happy to find has so much interested you. A character in fiction can only be made true to the general experience of human nature, by a principle of Election which is broad enough to embrace many individuals who represent, more or less remarkably, one type. There are many "Marian Halcombes" among us--and my Marian is one of the number.<sup>53</sup>

His technique was so successful that some men refused to believe she was fictitious and wrote asking for her real name and address in order to propose to her.<sup>54</sup>

Yet while, as Kendrick puts it, the novel "is founded in the realistic faith which it violates,"<sup>55</sup> it is the violations--the shocks, sensations, and adroit manipulation of the reader's expectations--that made the book a best-seller. The device of using narratives that start and end strategically, the texts within the text, the mosaic of evidence, Hartright's allusions to links and chains or the road the story is taking<sup>56</sup>--all refute the proposition that the novel is as real as life and make the reader conscious of following a fiction that is carefully composed. Contemporary critics held this effect against the sensation novelists. They repeatedly attacked Collins's stories as contrived or mechanical and failed to see that artifice, or rather, the dynamic interplay between reality and artifice, gave them their distinctive appeal. (I shall have more to say on this subject in Chapter V.)

This form of contrast is further illustrated by an episode from No Name, praised by one Victorian critic as "the finest scene Mr. Collins has ever described."<sup>57</sup> Magdalen Vanstone, sick with despair at the thought of marrying the cousin who possesses her inheritance, sits

in her room overlooking the sea with a bottle of laudanum in one hand, contemplating suicide:

She resolved to end the struggle by setting her life or death on the hazard of a chance.

On what chance?

The sea showed it to her. Dimly distinguishable through the mist, she saw a little fleet of coasting-vessels slowly drifting toward the house, all following the same direction with the favoring set of the tide. In half an hour--perhaps in less--the fleet would have passed her window. The hands of her watch pointed to four o'clock. She seated herself close at the side of the window, with her back toward the quarter from which the vessels were drifting down on her--with the poison placed on the window-sill, and the watch on her lap. For one half-hour to come she determined to wait there and count the vessels as they went by. If in that time an even number passed her, the sign given should be a sign to live. If the uneven number prevailed, the end should be death.

With that final resolution, she rested her head against the window, and waited for the ships to pass.

The first came, high, dark, and near in the mist, gliding silently over the silent sea. An interval--and the second followed, with the third close after it. Another interval, longer and longer drawn out--and nothing passed. She looked at her watch. Twelve minutes, and three ships. Three.

The fourth came, slower than the rest, larger than the rest, farther off in the mist than the rest. The interval followed; a long interval once more. Then the next vessel passed, darkest and nearest of all. Five. The next uneven number--Five.

She looked at her watch again. Nineteen minutes, and five ships. Twenty minutes. Twenty-one, two, three--and no sixth vessel. Twenty-four, and the sixth came by. Twenty-five, twenty-six, twenty-seven, twenty-eight, and the next uneven number--the fatal Seven--glided into view. Two minutes to the end of the half-hour. And seven ships.

Twenty-nine, and nothing followed in the wake of the seventh ship. The minute-hand of the watch moved on half-way to thirty, and still the white heaving sea was a misty blank. Without moving her head from the window, she took the poison in one hand, and raised the watch in the other. As the quick seconds counted each other out, her eyes, as quick as they, looked from the watch to the sea, from the sea to the watch--looked for the last time at the sea--and saw the EIGHTH ship.

She never moved, she never spoke. The death of thought, the death of feeling, seemed to have come to her already. She put back the poison mechanically on the ledge of the window, and watched, as in a dream, the ship gliding smoothly on its silent way--gliding till it melted dimly into shadow--gliding till it was lost in the mist. (Fourth Scene, Ch. XII)

Even today, one can find oneself counting along with Magdalen, and for period readers who had a strong sense of the workings of fate or Providence, the scene would have been fully credible despite its melodrama. Collins sets the stage by preceding it with Magdalen's discovery of a newspaper article in which a murderer confesses that his decision was determined by the toss of a Spud (or plough-tip). Throughout the novel, Magdalen's character has been so well established that the reader would believe her more than capable of risking her life in this fashion. The exercise of counting random objects has obvious parallels in ordinary life, and the terse explanation gives the numbering process a psychological validity. Yet the scene is also artifice, a set-piece that is carefully designed and controlled, and the supposed hazard of events is belied by the perfection of the form. It is a synecdoche, a part that suggests the novel as a whole, for as the window frames Magdalen's destiny, giving pattern and significance to events that would otherwise be random, so the text itself--the reader's window--registers and orders language in meaningful sequences and episodes. Further, it illustrates the frequently deceptive candor of Collins's prose.

As we have seen, he preferred to write for an audience of ordinary men and women, for people who were in the habit of reading aloud within their families. To hold their attention, he told his stories clearly and directly, reproducing the natural rhythms of speech or the patterns of theatrical dialogue. Thus his sentences tend to be brief and tauter than those of his contemporaries, his use of adjectives and subordinate clauses more sparing and selective. ". . . I think so much of sound that, when I do not like the look of a sentence, I read it aloud, and alter it till I can read it easier," he said to Edmund Yates.

". . . A long involved inter-parenthetical sentence which may be comprehensible on paper requires a tremendous effort to read aloud, and should therefore be avoided."<sup>58</sup> But in back of his seemingly artless prose is a skillful and subtle rhetoric. Magdalen's vigil is described in simple words and simple sentences. Read aloud, however, it assumes the contours of a somber poem in prose. Its drabness and flatness complement the fatalistic mood of its subject, and its power derives from a sophisticated use of parallelism, repetition, and rhythm.

Other antitheses within his work cater directly to popular tastes. Victorian readers expected the good and evil characters to be sharply differentiated--if not from the start of the novel, then at least as the story unfolded--so that they might make the appropriate emotional identifications. Collins fed their expectations by creating pairs of heroes, heroines, and villains with contrasting characteristics. Laura Fairlie is a typical Victorian heroine, fair, lovely, gentle, and confiding; her half-sister Marian Halcombe represents the new breed of heroine that followed in the wake of Jane Eyre. Dark, plain, determined, and intelligent, she upsets the reader's initial expectations but eventually proves more attractive than the weak and conventional Laura. Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde are also counterpointed. Collins later told Edmund Yates that, "having thought out his big villain, he felt that a minor villain was necessary--a weak shabby villain, the tool of Fosco";<sup>59</sup> and so he created Sir Percival, the Count's emotional and intellectual opposite, a man who is mean and crude where Fosco is grandiose and subtle, or dense and quick-tempered in situations where Fosco is coldly intelligent. Another combination that recurs in Collins's work but is otherwise less common in Victorian

fiction has been defined by Sayers: "the weak and amiable man, set over against the strong, masculine, domineering woman, eaten up with the passion to be and do."<sup>60</sup> Such opposing pairs are found in his earliest novels--*Hermanric and Goisvintha of Antonina*--as well as in his latest books--*Philip Dunboyne and Helena Gracedieu of The Legacy of Cain*.

Sometimes the very houses that the characters inhabit enforce the sense of contrast. In *No Name*, the comfortable house at Combe Raven in which the Vanstone daughters grow up is effectively matched against the sparse, cramped lodging in which Magdalen lives with the Wragges. The main events of *The Woman in White* occur in two country houses, Limmeridge House, the home of Marian and Laura, and Blackwater Park, the seat of the Glydes. While both are centers of affluence, preserves of the gracious living dear to the hearts of middle-class readers, Limmeridge House is a haven of tranquillity and calm domestic order, whereas Blackwater Park is sinister and suggests the cold-hearted profligacy of its illegitimate owner. Collins's scenery and houses generally reflect the moods and circumstances of his characters,<sup>61</sup> but sometimes he departs from tradition. Franklin Blake, the hero of *The Moonstone*, begins the darkest period of his life on a beautiful morning:

The sunlight poured its unclouded beauty on every object that I could see. The exquisite freshness of the air made the mere act of living and breathing a luxury. Even the lonely little bay welcomed the morning with a show of cheerfulness; and the bared wet surface of the quicksand itself, glittering with a golden brightness, hid the horror of its false brown face under a passing smile. It was the finest day I had seen since my return to England. (Third Nar., Ch. 3)

The antithesis implied by this description recalls Walter de la Mare's accurate remarks about the final outcome of these contrasts (which every period reader would have expected): "Indeed, in these novels, however

gay and radiant the English sunshine may be, however clear the bird song and spring-like the young women in their muslins and shawls; somewhere--as a sidling glance over the shoulder will prove--there waits a hearse, with its mutes and its mourners and its swish-tailed horses; and night is coming on! But it is not the night. Towards Finis there will come a call for candles; or, possibly, gas; and all will be well."<sup>62</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> "Wilkie Collins: Victorian Crusader," pp. 30-32.
- <sup>2</sup> Dickens's "A Preliminary Word" to Household Words indicates the broad range of his audience. "We hope to be the comrade and friend of many thousands of people, of both sexes, and of all ages and conditions, on whose faces we may never look," HW, 1 (30 March 1850), 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Smith offered Collins £5000 for a novel at the height of his popularity, but Armadale, which was finished more than four years later, did not measure up to The Woman in White artistically or commercially. J. H. Harper reports, however, that "with the issue containing the first instalment of Armadale the demand [for Harper's Monthly, whose circulation had been badly damaged by the Civil War] rapidly increased, until before the story was completed the MAGAZINE had reached its former circulation" (p. 233).
- <sup>4</sup> New York: Harper, c. 1873, Ch. 37; subsequent citations will appear in the text.
- <sup>5</sup> New York: Harper, 1874, First Period, Ch. 8; subsequent citations will appear in the text.
- <sup>6</sup> John Coleman, Charles Reade as I Knew Him (London: Treherne, 1904), pp. 263-64. Reade's comment was inspired by his disappointment over the sales of The Cloister and the Hearth.
- <sup>7</sup> In the dedicatory letter, Collins calls attention to the reality behind this scene: "the first love-meeting of two of the personages in this book, occurs (where the real love-meeting from which it is drawn, occurred) in the very last place, and under the very last circumstances which the artifices of sentimental writing would sanction. Will my lovers excite ridicule instead of interest, because I have truly represented them as seeing each other where hundreds of other lovers have first seen each other, as hundreds of people will readily admit when they read the passage to which I refer?" (Bentley ed., pp. v-vi).
- <sup>8</sup> Beard, p. 321.
- <sup>9</sup> See the more extended discussion in Ch. VI, pp. 184-85.
- <sup>10</sup> Clyde K. Hyder first identified this source of The Woman in White. See "Wilkie Collins and The Woman in White," PMLA, 54 (March, 1939), 297-303. Collins also drew on it for several of his "Cases Worth Looking At," a series of articles on crime in Household Words, reprinted in My Miscellanies, which includes "The Poisoned Meal" and "The Cauldron of Oil."

<sup>11</sup> In My Miscellanies, p. 215, Collins identifies this book as the source of "Memoirs of an Adopted Son."

<sup>12</sup> M. L. Bennett, Catalogue No. 198 (February, 1890). Richer's book and the Blue Books are also listed in this Catalogue. In a letter, Collins mentions another book, Pièces intéressantes et peu connues pour servir a l'Histoire, et a la Littérature (1790), as his source for "The Little Huguenot" (ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 14 June 1858).

<sup>13</sup> Cf. his remarks in My Miscellanies (p. 215): "In this instance, and in the instances of those other papers in the present collection which deal with foreign incidents and characters, while the facts of each narrative exist in print, the form in which the narrative is cast is of my own devising. If these facts had been readily accessible to readers in general, the papers in question would not have been reprinted. But the scarce and curious books from which my materials are derived have been long since out of print, and are, in all human probability, never likely to be published again."

<sup>14</sup> Collins, who had lived briefly in Rome as a boy and returned to Italy with Dickens and Augustus Egg in 1853, was familiar with Italian events and alluded to them while writing Antonina. His association with Rosetti, whose father had been a member of the Carbonari, may also have provided information. He may even have borrowed the idea of secret societies from Balzac, whose books he read avidly; see Alma Elizabeth Murch, The Development of the Detective Novel (London: P. Owen, 1958), p. 108.

<sup>15</sup> Griest, p. 32, and cf. pp. 9-10 above.

<sup>16</sup> ALS Berg Collection, 18 March 1873; Griest, p. 75.

<sup>17</sup> See Philip Collins, Dickens and Crime (London: Macmillan, 1962), Ch. IV.

<sup>18</sup> I.e., Anne Silvester of Man and Wife, Mary Dermody of The Two Destinies, and Simple Sally of The Fallen Leaves.

<sup>19</sup> "Mr. Wilkie Collins's Novels," Contemporary Review, 57 (January, 1890), 22; Page, p. 266.

<sup>20</sup> Swinburne, p. 301; Page, p. 261.

<sup>21</sup> Robinson, p. 261.

<sup>22</sup> "Reminiscences of a Story-Teller," p. 191.

<sup>23</sup> Collins's father, a strict and pious Christian and a painter who assiduously cultivated the rich and well-connected, may have suggested aspects of Mr. Sherwin and Mr. Thorpe. But the evidence can only be conjectural, and Nuel Pharr Davis goes too far in his biographical readings of the novels; see Marshall, p. 138. Davis is also contradicted by a number of Collins's letters and by his Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, and Longmans, 1848).

- 24 "Sensation Novels," p. 574; Page, pp. 120-21.
- 25 Lang, p. 23; Page, p. 267.
- 26 Father Benwell in The Black Robe, Dr. Benjulia and Mrs. Gallilee in Heart and Science.
- 27 The Dublin University Magazine in a generally negative review remarked, "Both hero and heroine are wooden, commonplace, uninteresting in any way apart from the story itself" (57 [February, 1861] 201; Page, p. 105). Mrs. Oliphant said "that one cares very little for these characters [Laura, Marian, Anne Catherick] on their own account, and that Mr. Hartright and Sir Percival Glyde and the rest are persons whom we regard with but the mildest interest" (p. 570; Page, p. 117). Later in the same review she called Laura's marriage to Sir Percival "a slovenly piece of work" that fulfilled the exigencies of the story, adding that the heroine loses the reader's sympathies "entirely after the very first scenes" (pp. 573-74; Page, p. 120).
- 28 By Phillips (p. 89), among others. But Tillotson (p. 21) is probably more accurate in calling it an old actor's saying.
- 29 Bentley's Miscellany, 32 (November, 1852), 586; Page, pp. 46-47.
- 30 Preferences in Art, Life, and Literature (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1892), pp. 252-53; Page, p. 235.
- 31 ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 1 July 1867.
- 32 See especially Ford, pp. 100-7 et passim.
- 33 ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 25 October 1869; Robinson, p. 230.
- 34 ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 19 January 1870; Robinson, p. 236.
- 35 ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 30 June 1870. Collins later reported that when he gave the printers permission to distribute the type, 400 copies were left of the third edition. ALS Fales Collection, 29 September 1870.
- 36 Blackwood's, 108 (November, 1870), 628; Page, p. 188.
- 37 The surgeon in the novel refers to Geoffrey's "narrow escape from a paralytic stroke" (Ch. 45); later, as he tries to murder Anne, the stroke occurs. Here, as elsewhere, Collins's medical advisor was Francis Carr Beard.
- 38 "The Counterworld of Victorian Fiction and The Woman in White," in The Worlds of Victorian Fiction, ed. Jerome H. Buckley (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1975), p. 353.

39 "Dreams, Transformation, and Literature: The Implications of Detective Fiction," VS, 19 (December, 1975), 192. But see Hutter's full explanation, pp. 191-207.

40 Hutter, p. 198.

41 Hutter, p. 199.

42 Marshall, p. 25.

43 For a fuller exposition of this topic, see Walter E. Houghton, The Victorian Frame of Mind, 1830-1870 (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1957), pp. 64-89.

44 See Ch. VI, pp. 231-32.

45 His paradoxical heroines include Rachel Verinder of The Moonstone and Lucilla Finch of Poor Miss Finch; Lydia Gwilt is his most contradictory villainess, and Magdalen Vanstone is too controversial to fit either category.

46 Marshall, p. 25.

47 Quilter, for example, thought the story should end with 'Hart-right's departure from Count Fosco's lodgings, and his catching sight, as he left, of the Italian member of the 'Brotherhood'' (p. 261; Page, p. 241).

48 Yates, p. 152.

49 "Sensation Novels," p. 565; Page, p. 111. She singled out Hawthorne, and spoke somewhat more charitably of Bulwer and Dickens.

50 See p. 87, above.

51 E.g., "The Dream Woman," "The Haunted Hotel," "Mrs. Zant and the Ghost." A number of his other stories and novels include supernatural or telepathic elements, e.g., The Two Destinies.

52 See John Guille Millais, The Life and Letters of Sir John Everett Millais (London: Methuen, 1899), I, 278-81.

53 ALS Robert H. Taylor Collection (Princeton University), 28 August 1860.

54 Robinson, p. 151.

55 Kendrick, p. 22.

56 See Kendrick, especially pp. 24-33, for more detailed analysis and a most interesting argument on the artifice of the novel.

57 Spectator, 36 (10 January 1863), 1501.

58 Yates, p. 146.

59 Yates, p. 152.

60 Wilkie Collins, p. 69.

61 Marshall (p. 133) deals briefly with Collins's "ambiguous handling of symbols," and especially with "his use of natural phenomena to express the mood of human events."

62 de la Mare, p. 94.

## Chapter V

### Collins at Play

What do games have to do with a study of Collins and his audience, or with the ways in which a writer seeks to involve his readers in his stories? There are modern critics who consider play a part of every experience of literature. Reader-oriented critics like Stanley Fish suggest that the objective text is an illusion, and that the very act of reading consists of the reader's pursuing the strategies that make the text his own.<sup>1</sup> Deconstructionists like J. Hillis Miller suggest that the critical process itself is a game--that, like the text, interpretation is a labyrinth to be followed for the pleasure of the exercise, with no hope of an ultimate solution.<sup>2</sup> For such critics, the bond between writer, text, and reader is intrinsically strategic. But when I speak of the games that Collins engaged in, I have something more specific in mind. Collins liked to play with his readers--to involve them in his complicated mysteries, to hold them in suspense, or make them guess the secrets of his plots. Through a rhetoric that was alternately obvious and subtle, he induced them to follow the contests between his characters and to pursue the twists and turns of his literary mazes. Reciprocally, his readers regarded his novels as a species of literary puzzle.

He wrote in a period that Patrick Beaver has called "the Golden Age of the parlour game"<sup>3</sup>--a period that, as Ian Ousby says, "was fascinated by crime and its nemesis, by mysteries and their solution."<sup>4</sup> His

readers were used to solving riddles and conundrums, to acting out charades and deciphering their meanings, to playing hide-and-seek as well as card games. Collins integrated every one of these amusements into a fictional format. He also played upon his readers' expectations and assumptions, enriching his texts with plays on names, allusions, and related verbal strategies. Above all, he dealt in mysteries which it behooved his readers to solve, if they could, before he provided the keys.

The earliest remarks on Collins's games occur in the period reviews and refer to the nature of his plots. That Victorian critics should have noticed the games-playing proclivities of an author who titled one novel Hide and Seek and another The Dead Secret is scarcely surprising. What is more surprising, considering the enormous popularity of parlor games throughout the century, not to mention that of the novels themselves, is that these tendencies were generally regarded with disdain, or as evidence for his lack of higher talent. The Saturday Review repeatedly berated him for constructing "puzzles" which, however ingenious, lost interest once they were solved. The author of The Woman in White, it said, was no better than a Chinese conjurer: "As soon as we have found out the secret of his tricks, and admired the clever way in which he does them, we send him home again."<sup>5</sup> The North British Review expressed the same opinion with a different metaphor: "When once the secret is discovered, when once the mystery is unravelled, his books collapse at once, their interest perishes, they are flat as conundrums to which you have the answers."<sup>6</sup> The Spectator rejected The Moonstone with similar contempt: "The making and guessing of conundrums are both harmless exercises of ingenuity, but when men of intellect engage in them

they ought at least to succeed."<sup>7</sup> The Nation suggested its resemblance to "Who's got the button?"<sup>8</sup>--thereby dismissing as a form of child's play the book that T. S. Eliot has called "the first, the longest, and the best of modern English detective novels."<sup>9</sup> The Times came up with its own analogy, which could hardly be construed as flattering:

The whole school [of sensation novelists] has this habit of laying eggs and hiding them. But Mr. Wilkie Collins has a complex variety of this propensity for secretiveness. He is not satisfied with one false clue, but is perpetually dropping clues, and, like a bird, by his demonstrative employment of various arts to lead his readers elsewhere, away from the spot where he originally induced them to fancy the nest was, only makes them more eagerly bent on keeping the old path.<sup>10</sup>

And the Pall Mall Gazette, in a scathing review, reiterated most of the old metaphors and added a few of its own:

Everybody knows quite well that his single principle of composition is to hide away a needle in a bottle of hay, which the reader may be thoroughly sure will not discover itself until the end of the third volume. All the rest, all the talk about character influencing circumstances or the reverse, is the mere make-believe verbiage of the conjuror, his Presto and Abracadabra, which mean nothing, and have nothing to do with the true success of the trick. The real business is done up the shirt-sleeve. . . . In all the apparatus of his craft, in false bottoms and false tops, sliding panels, trap-doors, artificial beards, ventriloquial effects, he is nearly as clever as anybody who ever fried a pancake in a hat or poured a score of liquors out of an inexhaustible bottle. But is this, then, what fiction has come to? Is this the choicest power of modern inventiveness? . . . [In Mr. Collins's novels y]ou behold only a cunning game of puppets playing at hide-and-seek or hunt-the-slipper or blind-man's-buff very laboriously and strenuously, and that is all.<sup>11</sup>

Occasionally the critics defended him:

If The Woman in White were indeed a protracted puzzle and nothing more, the reader's attention would often grow languid over its pages; he would . . . be strongly tempted to skip to the end and find out the secret at once, without more tedious hunting through labyrinths devised only to retard his search, and not worth exploring for their own sake. But he yields to no such temptation, for the secret which is so wonderfully well kept to the end of the third volume is not the be-all and end-all of his interest in the story.<sup>12</sup>

So the Spectator, in a friendlier mood, responded to the charges of the Saturday Review.<sup>13</sup> And in the Athenaeum, Geraldine Jewsbury upheld the craftsmanship behind The Moonstone:

The unravelment of the puzzle is a satisfactory reward for all the interest out of which [its readers] have been beguiled. When, however, they have read to the end, we recommend them to read the book over again from the beginning, and they will see, what on first perusal they were too engrossed to observe, the carefully elaborate workmanship, and the wonderful construction of the story. . . .<sup>14</sup>

But even his defenders tended to excuse his games-playing and look beyond it for more redeeming qualities. It was not until the present century and the development of critical interest in the detective story that scholars and critics began to view his ploys with professional enthusiasm.

The shift from disdain to respect was accompanied by a shift in metaphor. Whereas mid-nineteenth-century reviewers referred to his games as puzzles or conundrums, later critics tend to describe them as skillful games of chess or elaborate sets of Chinese boxes.<sup>15</sup> Thus Sayers has praised his mastery of "the art of plot and counterplot" and the "magnificent duels" of several of his characters: "Move answers to move as though on a chessboard (but very much more briskly), until the villain is manoeuvred into the corner where a cunningly contrived legal checkmate has been quietly awaiting him from the beginning of the game."<sup>16</sup> T. S. Eliot has defined another strategy that Collins loved to employ, "delaying, longer than one would conceive it possible to delay, a conclusion which is inevitable and wholly foreseen."<sup>17</sup> In The Dead Secret, for example, the reader is virtually certain half-way through the novel that the heroine will turn out to be illegitimate; but the letter which reveals her illegitimacy evades discovery until Book V, chapter V, and in the meantime the search for it lures the reader on. A related form

of play, noted by Ashley, involves successive layers of mystery; no sooner does the reader solve one puzzle than he is confronted with another.<sup>18</sup> In The Law and The Lady, for example, the heroine (and the reader) discover Eustace's secret--that he was tried for the murder of his first wife--only to be faced with the riddle of who actually caused her death.

In his 1941 dissertation, H.J.W. Milley examined a number of the motifs which recur in Collins's novels. Milley called them "themes" rather than strategies and identified five of major importance (with some reservations about the last, which he said was really "a device or background"<sup>19</sup>):

1. The "dead-alive" theme, "in which a character, supposedly dead, makes a startling reappearance at a crucial moment in the story."<sup>20</sup>

2. The "hide-and-seek" theme, which always involves "a search carried on under difficulties for some concealed and elusive object."<sup>21</sup>

3. The "theme of fatality," whereby "a malignant force directs the characters towards a predestined end."<sup>22</sup>

4. The "social outcast" theme<sup>23</sup> (closely related to the author's interest in mental and physical deformity).

5. The "sinister house" theme, which Collins carried over from the Gothic romance.<sup>24</sup>

It is easy to see that the first three, at least, involve some form of strategy or gaming. When a supposedly dead character turns up alive, someone--the other characters, the reader, or both--has been deliberately tricked by the author. (In The Woman in White, such a ruse is the hinge on which the whole third volume turns.) The "hide-and-seek theme" (the title derives from one of Collins's books as well as the

popular children's game) recurs with variations: in the object sought, in the method of search, in the number of seekers. The "theme of fatality" rarely results in death in Collins's novels; more commonly, a character finds himself drawn on by events against his will, as if the fates were playing with him.<sup>25</sup> The "social outcast" theme is not a game per se, but the alien figures often carry out some form of charade, disguising themselves or deceiving the other characters as to their true identities. Finally, the "sinister house" is commonly the background against which these games are played or conceived. In The Woman in White, Sir Percival's mansion is the sinister house in which he and Fosco plot Laura's false death; in Man and Wife, an isolated cottage is the sinister house in which Geoffrey Delamayn schemes to murder his wife by hollowing out a secret entrance to her bedroom through the wall.

All of the games described above are played by Collins in Armadale, a thriller whose elaborate plot depends upon a number of inter-related strategies. At the core of the novel is one of the oldest ruses of all, mistaken or double identity. As the Prologue explains, there were originally two Allan Armadales, one a scapegrace whose father disinherited him, the other a cousin who has taken the same name in order to become the new heir. The original Allan gets even by marrying the woman intended for his successor, and the new Allan takes revenge in his turn by murdering the first. But each man begets a son before his death (the second dies later of natural causes), and so in the next generation there are again two Allan Armadales. The murdered man's son grows up to inherit a substantial estate; the murderer's son, harshly treated by his mother and his stepfather, runs away from home and calls himself Ozias Midwinter to avoid detection. Predictably, the plot depends

upon his concealing his real name from some of the characters, while revealing it strategically to others.

The original Allan was aided in his marriage by his wife's young maid-servant. Now, at the time of the novel's main action, the maid reappears as the beautiful but treacherous Lydia Gwilt, looking much younger than her thirty-five years despite everything she has passed through.<sup>26</sup> (Her youthful appearance, together with the veil that conceals the color of her flaming hair, prolongs the riddle of her true identity for hundreds of pages.<sup>27</sup>) The chess game, or game of wits, that quickens the plot takes place between the unscrupulous Miss Gwilt and the suspicious lawyers and clergyman who are determined to prevent her marriage--a "check-mate" in more than one sense. Not that her defeat is accomplished solely by her antagonists; she is also undone by her self-incriminating diary, by the dossier that reveals her wicked history, and by her own fondness for Midwinter. After a number of wrong moves, alternately motivated by rage, remorse, and revenge, she dies by locking herself inside a poisoned room in a sinister asylum, the victim of her own machinations.

Miss Gwilt is too unscrupulous, not to say satanic, to survive the novel unscathed. Any reader used to the system of justice that prevails in Victorian fiction can predict her ultimate downfall by the middle of the story; but Collins adroitly delays her death until the last page before the Epilogue. He also prolongs the excitement in this longest of his novels by creating layers of mystery. The Prologue itself raises questions about the destinies of all the major characters, and no sooner does the reader begin to glimpse the answers than Allan has a horrifying dream in seventeen parts. Midwinter, his dark double and

superstitious friend, believes in the fatal dream; and one by one, as the plot unfolds, the steps of the dream are enacted, until even the sceptical reader wonders whether a malignant fate will triumph. The element of hide-and-seek appears in the search for Miss Gwilt's true identity, and the dead-alive theme appears when Miss Gwilt, now married to Midwinter-Armadale, reads the false report of Allan's death by drowning and poses as his widow in order to collect a substantial inheritance.

Armadale suffers from an overdose of contrivance. The twists of the plot grow mechanical, the games overshadow the human interest, and the reader is finally surfeited. Used sparingly, however, the strategies Collins lavished on Armadale resulted in first-rate mysteries. In fact, he is now given credit for introducing many of the ploys and games that have become the stock-in-trade of modern detective-story writers. Sayers first called attention to his early use in The Moonstone of the "fair-play rule": allowing the reader to play the sleuth by giving him no more information than the characters in the novel.<sup>28</sup> She also noted his use of the "most unlikely person" motif--where the criminal turns out to be the least suspicious character--and his practice of introducing both amateur and professional detectives.<sup>29</sup> Other detective-story devices first employed by Collins have been discussed by Robert Ashley. In addition to "the humanized detective" they include "the altercation between the incompetent local police and the efficient city police, the solution by an amateur of a crime which a professional has failed to solve, the difficulties caused by a character's withholding vital evidence, the scientific reconstruction of the crime, the detective's summation of the case, and the skillful shifting of suspicion from person to person."<sup>30</sup> To Collins, too, belongs the credit for exploring the

potential of the jury trial, the courtroom scene, and the questioning of suspects, so effectively handled in The Law and the Lady, which also has the first woman detective.<sup>31</sup>

The most recent studies of Collins's strategies go beyond the recognition of themes and devices to assess the sensation or detective novel itself as a mode of play. In a dramatic reversal of the period verdict, Kendrick and Hutter imply in different ways that by writing stories which were games as well as novels, Collins really did display "the choicest power of modern inventiveness." Like Marshall, they argue that his best books begin the transition from Victorian to modern, or at any rate, broach the kinds of problems that fascinate modern writers and analysts. Kendrick speaks of the "contract" between the writer and the reader of sensation fiction,<sup>32</sup> and as I have said, explores the ways in which Collins opposes reality with artifice:

By focusing the reader's attention on the chains that constitute a novel's plot, [the sensation novelists] made of fiction merely a game, an activity which dictates its own rules and which stands to the real world in at best an arbitrary relation. . . . The reader of a sensation novel engages in the discovery of an artificial pattern, and the enterprise need not teach him anything, even anything false, about the real world. At its best, the sensation novel aspired towards the condition of a crossword puzzle, a system of language which is governed only by its own design. As such, it was potentially subversive of the belief that fiction is and must be mimetic.<sup>33</sup>

Collins would hardly have conceded that his novels were self-contained systems. He was too anxious to create fictional friends for his readers, impart an authentic flavor to his narratives, and make his sensations credible. But what he did, and what he thought he did, are surely not synonymous. The elaborate construction, the moves and counter-moves, the careful tying up of every loose end, his predilection for effects that are stylized as well as sensational, and his concern for internal

consistency even where realism all but disappears, suggest that he conceived of fiction as game, craft, and story combined.

For example, he makes the reader more aware of The Moonstone as a game by bringing the word "puzzle" into the story in a variety of contexts. When Sergeant Cuff remarks three times that he is "puzzled" by Rosanna Spearman's actions (First Period, Ch. 15), and when he speaks of a paint-smear and the loss of the diamond as "pieces of the same puzzle" (First Period, Ch. 20 [21]), he reminds the reader that the story itself is a puzzle to be solved. Jennings's explanation that he has treated Mr. Candy's delirious remarks "on something like the principle which one adopts in putting together a child's 'puzzle'" (Third Nar., Ch. 9) is an analogous reminder. But here the game goes further, for Jennings continues, "It is all confusion to begin with; but it may be all brought into order and shape, if you can only find the right way," an observation that applies, not only to the transcript that he is about to produce, but to the author's control over the apparent confusion of the text and the reader's corresponding attempts to find the right way amid the perplexities.

Hutter, who is interested in the psychology of detective fiction, views the element of play from a different angle:

Detective fiction intensifies a quality present in dreaming, in literary experience, and indeed in all those activities our culture defines as "play" by taking as both its form and its subject a conflict between mystery and unifying solution. Put another way, the tension between mystery and solution is so essential to every detective story that it superimposes itself onto any subject matter or plot and thus becomes a second story. Tzvetan Todorov has claimed that there must always be two stories in a single detective tale--the story of the crime and the story of the investigation. . . .

The ultimate conflict of The Moonstone is not within the novel but within the reader who must distrust the story's various narratives in order to create his own more authentic story. The

resolution of the mystery is never as important as the process itself of connecting and disconnecting, building a more complete account from an incomplete vision or fragment.<sup>34</sup>

By shifting the burden of making the connections from the writer to the reader, Hutter reveals an affinity with such reader-oriented critics as Norman Holland, who suggest that reading is intrinsically a process of rewriting, of taking a text into oneself and subjectively reconstituting it.<sup>35</sup> But more specifically, his observations define the nature of the reader's involvement. The reader of a novel like The Moonstone necessarily plays with the text as he tries to assess what is happening, interpret the evidence, predict new developments, and guess at solutions to its mysteries or problems. In the course of sorting out what he reads--resolving the conflicts, in Hutter's terms--he becomes an active participant, and the activity, rather than the resolution, is the primary source of his enjoyment. As we have seen, Victorian reviewers belittled such pleasures. As they disdained Collins's novels for being mere puzzles, so they disdained the satisfactions that come from the process of working them out. Today, on the other hand, the study of process has become a critical enterprise whose satisfactions are readily conceded.

Hutter's remarks on the superimposition inherent in detective fiction may also be taken further. At the core of The Moonstone, for example, is the disappearance of the diamond. The investigations conducted by the characters--Sergeant Cuff, Franklin Blake, Ezra Jennings, Mr. Murthwaite--reconstruct the story of the theft and in the process become a complementary account that is superimposed upon the mystery. The interlacing expositions of the crime and its solution, together with the complications of plot that they engender, are in turn investigated by the reader of the novel who becomes an armchair detective as he

superimposes his theories and reactions, or to view the process from another perspective, reconstructs what Collins has written. Beyond the casual reader are the modern scholars and critics who superimpose their own constructions on the text and the reading process. They are the ultimate investigators who trace the interplay between the novel and its readers and expose, even if they cannot resolve, the mysteries of its language and structure.

Collins was aware of the complexity of the investigative process. One of his most effective techniques for drawing his readers into his stories was to create counterparts for them within the text, to make them surrogate sleuths or observers. The Moonstone is particularly rich in examples of his methods. When Penelope Betteredge spies on the mysterious Indians shortly before Franklin Blake arrives with the Moonstone, or when Drusilla Clack, hidden behind the curtains, observes Godfrey Ablewhite proposing to Rachel Verinder, they are acting as interior audiences, as invisible to the people they observe as the readers beyond the novel's borders. Collins further refines the device of the interior audience by making the characters stand-ins for various members of the reading public. When Ezra Jennings, the doctor's assistant, induces an opium trance in Franklin to duplicate the one in which he stole the Moonstone, he requires several witnesses. Two of these witnesses, Mr. Bruff the lawyer and Betteredge the house-steward, are openly skeptical of Jennings; and in this, they mirror the tough-minded readers who were skeptical of Collins. But Betteredge quickly succumbs to the detective fever, and even Mr. Bruff abandons his work when Franklin begins to stir. ". . . I saw the Law (as represented by Mr. Bruff's papers) lying unheeded on the floor," says Jennings. "Mr. Bruff himself was

looking eagerly through a crevice left in the imperfectly-drawn curtains of the bed. And Betteredge, oblivious of all respect for social distinctions, was peeping over Mr. Bruff's shoulder" (Jennings's Journal, June 25th, 2:00 A.M.). While Blake excites the fictional audience by responding to the opium equivocally, Jennings excites the actual audience by his pessimistic questions: "Was it possible that the sedative action of the opium was making itself felt already? . . . Were we to fail, on the very brink of success?" (ibid.). But of course they do not fail, and the experiment ends successfully. Bruff subsequently atones for his doubts, and so, by implication, does the reader whom Collins has convinced by the lawyer's example.

Then there is the climactic scene in which Franklin Blake--and the reader--discover the identity of the criminal. Blake, the narrator, has entered the room in which the thief of the Moonstone has been murdered; with him are the landlord, Sergeant Cuff, and Mr. Bruff's young employee, Gooseberry:

I felt another pull at my coat-tails. Gooseberry had not done with me yet.

"Robbery!" whispered the boy, pointing, in high delight, to the empty box.

"You were told to wait down stairs," I said. "Go away!"

"And Murder!" added Gooseberry, pointing, with a keener relish still, to the man on the bed.

There was something so hideous in the boy's enjoyment of the horror of the scene that I took him by the two shoulders and put him out of the room.

At the moment when I crossed the threshold of the door I heard Sergeant Cuff's voice asking where I was. He met me, as I returned into the room, and forced me to go back with him to the bedside.

"Mr. Blake!" he said. "Look at the man's face. It is a face disguised--and here's the proof of it!"

He traced with his finger a thin line of livid white, running backward from the dead man's forehead, between the swarthy complexion and the slightly-disturbed black hair. "Let's see what is under this," said the Sergeant, suddenly seizing the black hair with a firm grip of his hand.

My nerves were not strong enough to bear it. I turned away again from the bed.

The first sight that met my eyes, at the other end of the room, was the irrepressible Gooseberry, perched on a chair, and looking with breathless interest, over the heads of his elders, at the Sergeant's proceedings.

"He's pulling off his wig!" whispered Gooseberry, compassionating my position, as the only person in the room who could see nothing.

There was a pause--and then a cry of astonishment among the people round the bed.

"He's pulled off his beard!" cried Gooseberry.

There was another pause. Sergeant Cuff asked for something. The landlord went to the washhand-stand, and returned to the bed with a basin of water and a towel.

Gooseberry danced with excitement on the chair. "Come up here, along with me, sir! He's washing off his complexion."

The sergeant suddenly burst his way through the people about him, and came, with horror in his face, straight to the place where I was standing.

"Come back to the bed, sir!" he began. He looked at me closer, and checked himself. "No!" he resumed. "Open the sealed letter first--the letter I gave you this morning."

I opened the letter.

"Read the name, Mr. Blake, that I have written inside."

I read the name that he had written. It was--Godfrey Ablewhite.

"Now," said the Sergeant, "come with me, and look at the man on the bed."

I went with him, and looked at the man on the bed.

GODFREY ABLEWHITE!

(Fifth Nar., Ch. I)

Again, the audience outside the novel is mirrored by the audience within, which contains three widely different characters: Gooseberry, the uncouth boy who relishes sensational discoveries; Franklin Blake, the genteel narrator; and Sergeant Cuff, who guides the other observers, knowing what they will find. Blake is the most important of these characters, because he serves as surrogate for the exterior audience (as Cuff serves as surrogate for the author).

Collins had a problem with the readers of his time that we tend to be unaware of; he wanted to prolong the suspense, yet if he dilated on this raw and brutal scene, he would have been charged with bad taste

and vulgarity by the very public he sought to excite. He forestalled this kind of criticism by introducing it himself, through the medium of Blake, the reluctant witness who ejects the gloating Gooseberry, suffers from nerves, and looks at the corpse only when he is ordered by an officer of the law. The author's strategy is a calculated mixture of sensation and propriety; while he nurtures the reader's excitement, postponing identification of the body through Gooseberry's description of the vanishing disguise and Blake's opening of the envelope, he assuages any possible feelings of guilt by treating the approach to the corpse as an exercise of duty--Blake's duty, as the man who can identify Ablewhite, the reader's as a member of the audience.<sup>36</sup>

Godfrey's disguise is a form of charade, and by stripping it away Collins simulates a game familiar to many of his readers. But more importantly, he gratifies the common human urge to detect the truth behind appearances. Long before the advent of H.M.S. Pinafore, Victorian audiences had come to realize that things--especially in sensational novels--were seldom what they seemed. The revelation of a character's real nature might occur when he was unmasked by an agent of the law or by a hidden will; but the pleasure of the game was heightened when the character unmasked himself.

Like Browning who, along with Byron, probably set him the example,<sup>37</sup> Collins grew skilled at allowing a character to reveal himself unwittingly. One of the most exciting of these revelations occurs in The Woman in White where, in a manner that recalls Browning's sinister Duke or one of his worldly Bishops, Fosco appropriates Marian's Diary--the Diary in which she has faithfully recorded all her suspicions of him--and concludes her entries with his own ironic "POSTSCRIPT BY A SINCERE FRIEND":

The illness of our excellent Miss Halcombe has afforded me the opportunity of enjoying an unexpected intellectual pleasure.

I refer to the perusal (which I have just completed) of this interesting Diary.

Yes! These pages are amazing. . . . The presentation of my own character is masterly in the extreme. I certify, with my whole heart, to the fidelity of the portrait. I feel how vivid an impression I must have produced to have been painted in such strong, such rich, such massive colours as these. I lament afresh the cruel necessity which sets our interests at variance, and opposes us to each other. Under happier circumstances how worthy I should have been of Miss Halcombe--how worthy Miss Halcombe would have been of ME.

The sentiments which animate my heart assure me that the lines I have just written express a Profound Truth.

Those sentiments exalt me above all merely personal considerations. I bear witness, in the most disinterested manner, to the excellence of the stratagem by which this unparalleled woman surprised the private interview between Percival and myself. Also to the marvellous accuracy of her report of the whole conversation from its beginning to its end.

I condole with her on the inevitable failure of every plan that she has formed for her sister's benefit. At the same time I entreat her to believe that the information which I have derived from her Diary will in no respect help me to contribute to that failure. It simply confirms the plan of conduct which I had previously arranged. I have to thank these pages for awakening the finest sensibilities in my nature--nothing more.

To a person of similar sensibility this simple assertion will explain and excuse everything.

Miss Halcombe is a person of similar sensibility.

In that persuasion, I sign myself,

FOSCO

(The Story Continued by Marian Halcombe,  
Ch. X)

This passage incorporates several kinds of literary artifice, above all, dramatic irony. The Postscript not only makes an impression at variance with the character's intentions, but also confirms the reader's growing suspicion that Fosco is a villain. His egotism, his sinister motives, and his threatening intelligence are all revealed between the lines. As Sir Percival behaves politely only when he has some evil purpose in view, so the Count grows sentimental only when his plans are especially nefarious. He may claim that his feelings exalt him above

all personal considerations, but he is ruthless in achieving his ends. The reader's sympathies are wholly with the victim he admires; she deserves a better fate.

But more than dramatic irony is involved in the exposition. Fosco's monologue is a postscript, a superimposition on a diary that is itself a fictional device. Both the diary and its postscript (like the letters in epistolary novels) convey a sense of immediacy and bring their authors to life. Nonetheless it is essential to remember what Victorian readers were likely to forget, that the authors themselves were fictional constructs whose entries were contrived by Collins to further his design. Marian and Fosco, created out of words, record the words that carry the novel forward, words that additionally induce the reader to believe in their reality.

The Postscript is not just an end in itself, but also a means of advancing the plot and playing on the reader's emotions. As soon as he sees the words "sincere friend," the reader must suspect that Marian's stratagem has failed and that Fosco's is about to succeed; yet he is as much in the dark as ever about the nature of this "plan of conduct." Fosco grandiosely boasts of his triumph without making its details explicit: "Events are hurrying me away. . . . Circumstances are guiding me to serious issues. Vast perspectives of success unroll themselves before my eyes. I accomplish my destiny with a calmness which is terrible to myself" (ibid.). But, as the reader will later discover, the joke here is on Fosco, whose "destiny" is to be murdered by the Brotherhood he has treacherously deserted.

As significant, then, as the ironic and sinister portrait of the Count--which Browning might perhaps have done with greater finesse--

is the interplay between the characters inside the book and the reader perusing its pages. Fosco's appeal is ostensibly to an audience within the novel, to whoever happens to pick up Marian's diary; but Collins is actually aiming the Postscript at the audience beyond. It is the author's intention (as distinct from the character's) to reveal Fosco as an evil opportunist, and thereby turn the reader decisively against him. When Fosco says, "To a person of similar sensibility, this simple assertion will explain and excuse everything," the reader is prompted to deny his similarity. When Fosco says, "In that persuasion I sign myself," the reader is confirmed in his distrust and his fear for Marian and Laura.

Collins manipulated his readers' responses in another way, by playing with the stereotypes and character conventions of the era. As we have seen, he objected to the cliché of the lovable blond heroine and the dark-haired passionate temptress, so he made the great majority of his heroines dark-haired, dark-eyed, and forthright, like Marian.<sup>38</sup> He once said of Lady Macbeth, "You may depend upon it that she was a rather small, fair-haired, blue-eyed woman, with a pink and white complexion, and very determined,"<sup>39</sup> but he himself never wrote a novel with a blond and blue-eyed villainess. That step forward was taken by Mrs. Braddon in Lady Audley's Secret (1862), a book with an obvious and often-cited debt to him. However, a number of his more unpleasant women--Lydia Gwilt, Grace Roseberry, Helena Gracedieu--are decidedly fair and feminine. Recognizing too that his readers might be tired of the predictable cad or villain, he went to great lengths to baffle their preconceptions in novel after novel. Godfrey Ablewhite, blond and handsome, leads a double life; the pious consultant to ladies' charities is finally revealed as a thief, embezzler, and sexual bon vivant. Geoffrey

Delamayn, a good-looking, much-admired athlete, betrays his closest friend and nearly kills the woman he deceived. Fosco has some of the earmarks of a villain--he is stealthy, smooth, and egregiously foreign--but his absurd love of animals and music redeems him, and the reader cannot be sure of his maleficence until the end of Marian's diary. In his interview with Yates, Collins discussed Fosco's obesity:

You ask me why I made him fat: his greatest beauty in the opinion of the majority of competent judges. You give me good reason for making him fat: that fat men are malevolent and ruthless, and that the first Napoleon was a fat man, together with the chemical demonstration that fatty substances when heated above a certain temperature develop an acid known as butyric acid. I knew all this, but none of these considerations influenced me. I had begun to write my story, when it struck me that my villain would be commonplace, and I made him fat in opposition to the recognised type of villain.<sup>40</sup>

\* \* \*

While Collins's detective-story ploys have been investigated since the 1920s, surprisingly little has been made of his word-games. Early in the century, Wybert Reeve recalled Collins telling him how Dickens used to note the "names of people on shop-fronts or on tombstones--and how they often compared notes together when walking or travelling."<sup>41</sup> Since then, Dickens's names have been repeatedly analyzed, while Collins's are generally ignored. Much more recently, Peter L. Caracciolo, citing two etymological articles that appeared in All the Year Round, has stated that "Dickens and his 'young men' took a keen interest in English and foreign etymologies,"<sup>42</sup> and that Collins exploited "a wide range of significance in the names of people, places, and things."<sup>43</sup> But aside from Caracciolo's own study of the names and allusions in The Woman in White, the work on Collins's word-play has been cursory. There are the standard remarks on his two Magdalens--

Magdalen Vanstone of No Name and Mercy Merrick of The New Magdalen--both errant women who redeem themselves with the help of the men who marry them; scattered comments on the obvious utility of Walter Hartright's surname;<sup>44</sup> Herbert van Thal's introductory remarks on the revealing nomenclature of No Name;<sup>45</sup> Robinson's remark that the Heart and Science characters--Ovid Vere, Mrs. Gallilee, Dr. Null and Mr. Mool--"are as unreal as their names";<sup>46</sup> and little else.

Yet a moderately attentive reading of Collins's novels will confirm his tendency to play with the names of his characters and to make casual literary references that he expected his readers to recognize. In The Law and the Lady, he makes a point of directing the reader's attention to the meaning and significance of names. Miserrimus Dexter, speaking as a witness at a trial, says "in a low, clear, resonant voice which penetrated to the remotest corners of the Court,"

"I may inform the good people here that many names, still common among us, have their significations, and that mine is one of them. 'Alexander,' for instance, means, in the Greek, 'a helper of men.' 'David' means, in Hebrew, 'well-beloved.' 'Francis' means, in German, 'free.' My name, 'Miserrimus,' means, in Latin, 'most unhappy.' It was given to me by my father, in allusion to the deformity which you all see--the deformity with which it was my misfortune to be born. You won't laugh at 'Miserrimus' again, will you?" (Ch. XX)

As a young man, Collins lacked the elaborate source-books on names that libraries and bookstores feature today, but he did have other resources: native and foreign dictionaries, myth and legend, the classics, and the Bible. His father William Collins, an ardent Christian, saw to it that both his sons studied the Scriptures,<sup>47</sup> and if the exercise was largely lost on Wilkie it may nevertheless have given the boy a familiarity with biblical names and a lifelong interest in their import. In 1857 and 1859, books on Christian names were published in England,<sup>48</sup> and in

1863, Charlotte M. Yonge, whose Heir of Redclyffe Collins had attacked in a Household Words article,<sup>49</sup> came out with a thick two-volume History of Christian Names. Yonge believed that her book was the first thorough study of the subject by an English author, but she listed dozens of earlier contributory sources that Collins might also have consulted.<sup>50</sup>

Caracciolo has worked in depth with some of the names in The Woman in White, tracing their etymologies and linking them to Dantean themes. For example, he hypothesizes that Walter Hartright's Christian name is a homophone and obsolete form of water, "the life-giving element,"<sup>51</sup> and that Marian's first name suggests the Virgin Mary in Dante's Commedia, while her last combines the English "Hal"--"holy, healthy, and vigorous," with "combe"--"a valley on the flank of a hill running up from the coast."<sup>52</sup> But while some of his suggestions are illuminating, a number strain credulity, and in any case there are more basic points to be made about Collins's nomenclature. He himself might have relished such erudite allusions, but as a popular author, his primary aim was to entertain his audience.

In inventing names, he often combined a pun or related form of word-play with a literary reference common enough to be discerned by his more perceptive readers. The character's name would accordingly signal his temperament, qualities, or habits. Walter Hartright, the devoted drawing master, has a heart that is in the right place; and in his gallant attentions to helpless women, he resembles Sir Walter Raleigh. Count Fosco's surname, on the other hand, comes from an Italian word meaning "dark," and as Caracciolo suggests, it may aptly associate him with the Prince of Darkness.<sup>53</sup> The first name of brave Marian Halcombe may suggest Maid Marian of the Robin Hood legends, just as the name of

Allan Armadale may suggest Alan-a-Dale, Robin's merry and light-hearted companion; but these suggestions are tentative.<sup>54</sup> More basic is the point that Allan, a name that means either "cheerful" or "comely and fair," comes from a Scottish or Celtic source and is therefore native in origin,<sup>55</sup> whereas "Ozias" is Hebrew or Greek and thus reflects Midwinter's alien roots.<sup>56</sup> "Midwinter" may seem an odd name for someone who is sensitive and temperamental, but this initially reclusive and isolated man thaws out during the course of Armadale, acquiring friends and a new career. Magdalen Vanstone of No Name also undergoes a process of regeneration. Throughout most of the book she is stone-hard of purpose, seeking revenge upon the relatives who have legally usurped her fortune. But after a number of bitter and humiliating experiences, she repents and marries a gallant seaman, appropriately named Captain Kirke (the Scottish word for "church"), who saved her life when she was ill. Mrs. Lecount of the same book not only suffers from illusions of gentility but also counts up the cost of every move; and Captain Wragge, whose name anticipates the portmanteau words of Lewis Carroll, is a waggish rogue, somewhat ragged in appearance. The surname of Lydia Gwilt of Armadale plays similar tricks with language. It suggests something wilted or guilty, or perhaps even tainted gold, while "Lydia," a country in Asia Minor, was famed (according to a modern book on names) for "the richness of its men and the voluptuous beauty of its women," hence implying a woman both "luxurious and voluptuous."<sup>57</sup> The onomatopoeic surname of Drusilla Clack of The Moonstone reflects her sharp tongue, while her first name may allude to the biblical Drusilla, the daughter of Herod Agrippa who heard Saint Paul "concerning the faith in Christ."<sup>58</sup> Godfrey Ablewhite's surname, suggestive of ability and purity, mirrors the deceit

of its bearer, a man devoid of scruples and of godliness who pretends to be a "Christian hero." In contrast, the surname of Franklin Blake stems from an Anglo-Saxon word for "white" or "pale,"<sup>59</sup> and this man's character turns out to be as spotless as the Old English name he bears.

Although Collins was, by his own admission, an indifferent student of the classics,<sup>60</sup> he enjoyed using Latin words and phrases. In his later novels, many of the heroines bear Latin names that reflect their characters. The first name of Lucilla Finch, the blind girl who regains her sight and loses it again in Poor Miss Finch, comes from the Latin word for light. Regina Mildmay of The Fallen Leaves is a regal, unemotional girl who cannot sacrifice her sense of propriety and duty for her fiancé. Stella Romaine of The Black Robe is the "star" who finally guides her husband back from the Roman Catholic priesthood. Valeria Macallan of The Law and the Lady also has a Roman name, as Miserrimus Dexter indicates; it stems directly from a famous Roman gens or clan but indirectly reflects the Latin "valeo"--to be mentally and physically strong and healthy. Dexter himself has a name that is doubly Latinate, and while he defines Miserrimus, he neglects to mention that Dexter too is Latin; it means "right" or "right-handed" and, by extension, "skillful" or "propitious." The combination aptly characterizes the contradictory, self-destructive solipsist who cooks, composes, and paints.

The nomenclature of the later novels frequently became so pointed as to lose its credibility. (Amelius Goldenheart of The Fallen Leaves is saddled with a name that would put off all but the most indulgent reader.) But when he played with names judiciously, Collins added a dimension to his characterization. He also enriched his stories with literary allusions that would have appealed to the more cultivated

members of his audience. For example, he referred to Paradise Lost in at least three novels of the 1870s: Man and Wife, The Law and the Lady, and The Two Destinies. There is nothing exalted about the characters presented in these novels (although one couple is telepathic); they are always middle-class Victorian lovers. But in each case, the allusion to Milton's poem presages their fall from an Edenic state of blissful ignorance. In Man and Wife, Blanche Lundie asks her fiancé to read her some poetry, and he randomly selects the first book of Paradise Lost, little guessing that it obliquely hints at what the reader suspects already: the threat to his "happy state" and his imminent marriage posed by the deceitful Geoffrey Delamayn. In The Two Destinies, George Germaine begins the history of his "love story" by invoking the spirit of young Mary: "Come to me once more, my child-love, in the innocent beauty of your first ten years of life. Let us live again, my angel, as we lived in our first paradise, before sin and sorrow lifted their flaming swords and drove us out into the world."<sup>61</sup> The man who has driven Mary into exile by deceiving her into a fraudulent marriage is appropriately named Van Brandt, a term suggestive of the sword, the flame, and painful and conspicuous scarring.

Sometimes, as in Man and Wife, the literary allusion is casual and occurs only once. Sometimes, as in The Two Destinies, it is more pointed and recurs with variations later in the story. And sometimes, as in The Law and the Lady (or The Moonstone, as we shall see later), there is a more complicated pattern of references.

Collins divided The Law and the Lady into two parts. The first, subtitled "Paradise Lost,"<sup>62</sup> concerns the wife's discovery of her husband's secret past and his subsequent desertion of her; the second,

subtitled "Paradise Regained," recounts her steps toward getting him back. Apparently, Collins wanted to dignify this story of a threatened middle-class marriage through the use of Miltonic allusions. But, to the reader who knows anything of *Paradise Lost*, these subtitles also suggest the idea of disobedience--a primary theme in a novel whose heroine succeeds by disregarding her husband's injunctions and the advice of legal authorities.

This important motif is reinforced and expanded by allusions to The Tempest and Prometheus Unbound--works that center on protagonists who take the law into their own hands. Dexter, the neurotic villain of the novel, lives in a world of his own devising, has a half-witted servant whom he names Ariel, and fancies himself a wizard at cooking and the arts. But unlike Prospero, whom he appears to parody, Dexter is a misshapen magician whose universe is founded on deception--or rather, on the concealment of his knowledge about a murder case. At one point, he recites the "magnificent lines" from Prometheus Unbound in which the Earth responds to the Spirit of Love: "'The joy, the triumph, the delight, the madness! the boundless, overflowing bursting gladness! the vaporous exultation not to be confined!'" (Ch. XXX). But Dexter is far from Promethean; even as he rejoices, he deceives.

Incidentally, Shelley said in the Preface to his lyrical drama that although Prometheus is the one imaginary being who resembles Satan, he is "the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and the truest motives to the best and noblest ends," whereas the Satan of Paradise Lost "engenders in the mind a pernicious casuistry which leads us to weigh his faults with his wrongs, and to excuse the former because the latter exceed all measure. . . ."63

Any reader of The Law and the Lady familiar enough with Shelley to follow out the inference (admittedly, a very small minority) would know which description suited Dexter; he is the Satanic casuist who covers up his faults--and another man's innocence of murder--out of the sense that he has been wronged. The only remotely Promethean character in the novel is Valeria, its brave and disobedient heroine who, in the spirit of love for her husband, releases him from suspicion, extracts the truth from Dexter, and solves all the novel's mysteries.

Collins is rarely credited with working at this level of allusiveness.<sup>64</sup> Critics who are more than willing to concede the intricacies of his plots are reluctant to concede his concomitant attempts at reinforcing his major themes through literary referents. It is true that even at his most erudite he plays with allusions and images instead of working them out in depth or forming them into complex layers of imagery, in the manner of modern novelists. Yet when traced back to their sources, the most seemingly casual allusions prove to bear upon his stories in a way that is little short of remarkable, considering the period in which he wrote and the popular level of his fiction. (T. S. Eliot, who noticed so much in his stories, never consciously noted this aspect of his art; but the master of the objective correlative may have been drawn to Collins because unconsciously he sensed the kindred impulse behind these more primitive allusions.)

But the question remains, could his readers discern or appreciate these word-games and allusions? If modern scholars have overlooked them, would period audiences not have been more likely to ignore their existence? The answer, I think, is that where names were concerned the Victorians were more alert than we are, and they were well prepared to deal

with fleeting allusions, if not with Collins's subtler suggestions. They could not have traced the etymologies that sources like the OED delineate, but many had had some exposure to the classics and more were in the habit of reading their Bibles, so that for them names retained a significance that is lost to general readers today. Furthermore, the playing of parlor games would have sharpened their sensibilities. Charades accustomed people to breaking words down and considering their homonyms or multiple meanings. Riddles and conundrums alerted them to tricks of language and prepared them for verbal entertainment. Finally, there was the precedent Dickens had set. After Bumble, the Cheerybles, Sampson Brass, Pecksniff, Esther Summerson, the Murdstones, and Podsnap, could names like Hartright, Ablewhite, and Clack possibly have passed unnoticed?

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Fish's Self-Consuming Artifacts (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1972), esp. pp. 400-10 and the cover.

<sup>2</sup> The play of the text, the play of meaning, and the play of language itself are concepts fundamental to the deconstructionist theories of Miller and Jacques Derrida. For a comprehensive (if inimical) view of these topics, see M. H. Abrams, "The Deconstructive Angel," Critical Inquiry, 3 (Spring, 1977), 425-38. On the labyrinth, see Miller, "Stevens' Rock and Criticism as Cure," I, Georgia Review, 30 (Spring, 1976), 5-31 and esp. pp. 14-16; see also "Ariadne's Thread: Repetition and the Narrative Line," Critical Inquiry, 3 (Autumn, 1976), 57-77.

<sup>3</sup> Victorian Parlour Games for Today (London: Peter Davies, 1974), p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Bloodhounds of Heaven (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), p. viii.

<sup>5</sup> 10 (25 August 1860), 249; Page, p. 84. See also Page, pp. 74, 83, and 136, which illustrate the consistency of the Saturday Review's attacks on Collins's "puzzles."

<sup>6</sup> 38 (February, 1863), 183; Page, p. 141. The author has been identified as Alexander Smith.

<sup>7</sup> 41 (25 July 1868), 881; Page, pp. 171-72.

<sup>8</sup> 7 (17 September 1868), 235; Page, p. 173. (I have made an exception and included this American review because it is particularly appropriate.)

<sup>9</sup> "Introduction" to The Moonstone (London: Oxford, 1928), p. v. Cf. Sayers's comment: "The Moonstone is probably the very finest detective story ever written. . . . Nothing human is perfect, but The Moonstone comes about as near perfection as anything of its kind can be" (Omnibus of Crime, p. 25).

<sup>10</sup> 3 October 1868, p. 4; Page, pp. 176-77. In the review of The Woman in White, The Times used another game-and-animal metaphor, letting the cat out of the bag (30 October 1860, p. 6; Page, p. 98).

<sup>11</sup> 17 July 1868, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> 33 (8 September 1860), 864; Page, p. 92.

<sup>13</sup> 10 (25 August 1860), 249-50; Page, pp. 83-87.

- <sup>14</sup> 25 July 1868, p. 106; Page, p. 170.
- <sup>15</sup> By the time of Collins's death, the critics were starting to refer to his plots as chess-games. For example, Meredith White Townsend calls Collins "a literary chess-player of the first force" and develops the metaphor in a cogent paragraph in the Spectator, 63 (28 September 1889), 395; Page, p. 250. But professional tributes to his gamesmanship really began in the 1920s.
- <sup>16</sup> Omnibus of Crime, p. 25, n. 2.
- <sup>17</sup> Selected Essays, p. 416. Eliot also uses the chess metaphor, but less enthusiastically than Sayers.
- <sup>18</sup> "Wilkie Collins and the Detective Story," NCF, 6 (June, 1951), 55.
- <sup>19</sup> Milley, p. 35.
- <sup>20</sup> Milley, p. 2.
- <sup>21</sup> Milley, p. 9.
- <sup>22</sup> Milley, p. 19.
- <sup>23</sup> Milley, p. 28.
- <sup>24</sup> Milley, p. 35.
- <sup>25</sup> Collins's preoccupation with fatality may have been one of the elements that attracted Thomas Hardy to his novels. On Hardy's appreciation of Collins, see Arthur Compton-Rickett, "Wilkie Collins," The Bookman (London), 42 (June, 1912), 114.
- <sup>26</sup> Her misadventures include the poisoning of her previous husband and a two-year term in jail. The fact that she retained her beauty and charm after such a career infuriated several contemporary critics. See, for example, H. F. Chorley's review in the Athenaeum (2 June 1866, pp. 732-33), and the Spectator, 39 (9 June 1866), 639; Page, pp. 148 and 150.
- <sup>27</sup> The riddle is highly complex. Her first appearance in Book One, Ch. II, as a heavily veiled woman who attempts to extract money from Allan's mother, and her second, as an attempted suicide, are conundrums in themselves. Her identity becomes clear to the reader at the time she first exchanges letters with her confidante, Mother Oldershaw, but her mysterious past is not revealed until the fifteenth chapter of Book Three. Meanwhile, the characters are variously aware of her scheme and her identity and some, like the two Allans, never perceive the solution that Collins gives the reader.
- <sup>28</sup> Omnibus of Crime, p. 101; see also her Introduction to The Moonstone, p. v.
- <sup>29</sup> Omnibus of Crime, p. 27; Introduction to The Moonstone, p. vii.

- 30 "Wilkie Collins and the Detective Story," p. 53.
- 31 "Wilkie Collins and the Detective Story," pp. 55-56. Ashley also discusses other detective-story motifs in Collins's work, *passim*.
- 32 Kendrick, p. 24.
- 33 Kendrick, p. 21.
- 34 Hutter, p. 208. The source of Todorov's statement is "Typologie du roman policier," in Poétique de la prose (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1971), p. 57.
- 35 In another article, "The High Tower of His Mind: Psychoanalysis and the Reader of 'Bleak House,'" Criticism, 19 (Fall, 1977), 297-98, Hutter discusses both the uses and the limits of Holland's methods; his own work balances the reader-response approach with other critical perspectives.
- 36 For American readers of the original Harper edition or the Harper Library Edition the suspense was further protracted; the reader had to turn the page before he could discover Ablewhite's identity.
- 37 See Marshall, p. 59. Collins possessed an edition of Byron's poems, and Nuel Pharr Davis has claimed that Byron was "Wilkie's favorite poet" (p. 161). There is no record of his owning Browning's, but certainly by the late 1850s Browning was not unknown among literary men.
- 38 E.g., Rachel Verinder, Mercy Merrick, and Valeria Macallan.
- 39 Beard, p. 325.
- 40 Yates, pp. 151-52; my underline.
- 41 "Recollections of Wilkie Collins," Chamber's Journal, 6th ser., 9 (9 June 1906), 459.
- 42 "Wilkie Collins's 'Divine Comedy': The Use of Dante in The Woman in White," NCF, 25 (March, 1971), 400, n. 24.
- 43 Caracciolo, p. 403.
- 44 See Kendrick on the reader's belief "that a man named Hartright has a heart which is right and writes from his heart" (p. 32) and Caracciolo, in a Dantean context, on Hartright as the True Lover (p. 399).
- 45 Caracciolo (p. 403, n. 28) alludes to van Thal's work in this area (Introduction to No Name, p. ii) but I have been unable to find the book.
- 46 Robinson, p. 302.
- 47 See Sayers, Wilkie Collins, pp. 40-43 and Robinson, pp. 22-23. Both allude to a letter from Collins's Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, II, 51.

48 The first book is listed in the British Museum Catalogue as Christian Names. The Christian names in general use, with their various meanings, translated from the original into English (London: J. Waters, 1857); I have not been able to trace the reference further. The second is Thomas Nickle Nichols's "What's in a name? being a popular explanation of ordinary Christian names of men and women (London: Routledge, 1859); it is not very reliable.

49 "Doctor Dulcamara, M.P.," written in collaboration with Dickens, HW, 19 (18 December 1858), 50-52; Stone, II, 621-25.

50 History of Christian Names (London: Parker, Son, and Bourn, 1863), Preface and footnotes passim. Later that year still another book on the subject was published: Sophy Moody, What is your name? a popular account of the meanings and derivations of Christian names (London: Bentley, 1863).

51 Caracciolo, p. 397, n. 20.

52 Caracciolo, p. 401, n. 25.

53 Caracciolo, p. 398.

54 Yonge, however, also makes the connection between "Allen" and "Allen-a-dale," I, 397.

55 Yonge says the name probably came into England and Scotland before the Norman Conquest (pp. xxii-xxiii); more modern sources list it as Celtic.

56 Biblical concordances give the name as an alternate to "Uzziah," who was one of the kings of Judah.

57 Evelyn Wells, A Treasury of Names (New York: Essential Books, 1946), p. 112. Though this is obviously not a scholarly text, it is useful in tracing Collins's names; furthermore, it is the kind of popular source-book that he would have consulted had any been available.

58 Acts 24.24.

59 The OED notes that in some regions this word was confused with a verb that meant "to grow black or dark"; the black-blake confusion is interesting in view of Blake's alleged criminality and the light and darkness imagery that pervades the novel (see Ch. VI, 225-26).

60 Nuel Pharr Davis goes too far when he asserts that Collins "hated Latin and never could read it" (p. 23). Collins may have been weak in the classics judging by the standards of his period, but the references to his work belie his indifference to them. One of his letters, now in the Morris L. Parrish Collection, is a verse rendition of Horace (Book I, Ode 12); even if it was adapted from a prose translation, as R. C. Lehmann indicates (Memories of Half a Century [London: Smith, Elder, 1908], p. 62) it shows his familiarity with Latin sources.

<sup>61</sup> New York: Harper, 1875, *The Narrative*, Ch. I.

<sup>62</sup> There is a discrepancy between the English and American versions of this novel. The serial version printed in Harper's Weekly from a manuscript supplied by Collins contains the subtitle at the heading of every installment, and all subsequent American editions include both "Paradise Lost" and "Paradise Regained." But the English serial version, printed in The Graphic, contains only "Paradise Regained," which appears at the beginning of Book II.

<sup>63</sup> The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley, ed. Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck (New York: Gordian Press, 1965), II, 172.

<sup>64</sup> Caracciolo, in a footnote to his article (p. 385) announces plans for future work in this area.

## Chapter VI

### The Moonstone and Its Audience \*

The Moonstone appears to be a singular choice for a study of reader relations. Certainly it qualifies in terms of popularity, for despite the usual carping reviews it sold well from the outset. William Tinsley, who published it in book form, reports that the serial version did more to increase the circulation of All the Year Round than Dickens's own

#### Great Expectations:

During the run of "The Moonstone" as a serial there were scenes in Wellington Street that doubtless did the author's and publisher's hearts good. And especially when the serial was nearing its ending, on publishing days there would be quite a crowd of anxious readers waiting for the new number, and I know of several bets that were made as to where the moonstone would be found at last. Even the porters and boys were interested in the story, and read the new number in sly corners, and often with their packs on their backs. . . .<sup>1</sup>

In Collins's own lifetime it was his greatest success after The Woman in White, and since then its popularity has burgeoned, so that today it is the book most likely to be known by casual readers of his work. But because of the way in which it was written it would seem not to have been influenced by reader tastes and preferences.

Collins's mother died on March 19, 1868, and at least a month before that, distraught with anxiety and the strain of working out his new novel, he suffered an acute attack of rheumatic gout, the pain of which he attempted to relieve by massive doses of opium. Years later he confessed to two American friends, William Winter and the actress Mary Anderson, that he was scarcely aware of what he was doing during much of the writing,

\*A summary of the plot of The Moonstone will be found in Appendix B.

that he had to dictate large portions of the story to an amanuensis with iron nerves as he moaned and groaned in his bed, and that afterwards he did not recognize the finale as his own.<sup>2</sup> If these confessions are reliable, then The Moonstone of all his novels would be the one least likely to reveal that conscious and deliberate awareness of audience which was otherwise so characteristic of him.

Fortunately, however, the manuscript itself, the letters he wrote while composing the novel, and the Preface he added in 1871 offer evidence that contradicts the accounts he later gave his friends. Despite his claims that he dictated most of the story to a stoic young woman, the manuscript (now at the Pierpont Morgan Library) is almost entirely in his own hand. Only seven pages out of 418 are in another handwriting, and even there he made his own corrections. "In the intervals of grief, in the occasional remissions of pain, I dictated from my bed that portion of 'The Moonstone' which has since proved most successful in amusing the public--the 'Narrative of Miss Clack,'"<sup>3</sup> he reported in the Preface he appended three years after the novel first appeared; and in fact these seven manuscript pages occur within the course of that narrative.

Even without the corroborating manuscript, his later accounts would seem exaggerated, for to know anything of Collins's work habits is to be certain that he had the novel firmly in hand before he began to write it. He said in the new Preface that when he fell ill he had written no more than a third of the story; but even if he did most of the actual writing from his sickbed, he had completed the research, constructed the plot, and devised the characters and settings months before his illness began. "The minor details of incident, and the

minuter touches of character, I leave to suggest themselves to me at the time of writing for publication," he had told a correspondent three years earlier, "but the great stages of the story, and the main features of the characters, invariably lie before me on my desk before I begin my book."<sup>4</sup>

A number of his letters attest to his control of the narrative well before the onset of his illness. In May of 1867 he was negotiating with All the Year Round for the story and looking through source materials at the Club Library.<sup>5</sup> By July 1st, Dickens had read the first three numbers, "gone minutely through the plot of the rest to the last line,"<sup>6</sup> and professed his satisfaction to Collins and Wills (though he later changed his mind).<sup>7</sup> On July 18th, Collins told his mother that he was "in a whirl of work."<sup>8</sup> Two days later, he completed his arrangements with Harper Brothers, his American publishers; before accepting their terms, he stipulated that they publish the installments from printed proofs which contained his latest corrections. "These corrections will not affect the scenes which your artist may choose for illustration," he explained, "but they will very often, by apparently trifling means, assist the influence of the story on the reader's mind."<sup>9</sup> On November 12th, he sent the first installment to America, well in advance of the serial publication date of January 4th. Despite his mother's grave condition, he was able to keep ahead of the printers through most of the winter; on January 30th, he mailed Harpers a portion of the thirteenth installment, which was not to appear in Harper's Weekly until March 28th, and on February 22nd, he sent them a "carefully corrected proof" of the fifteenth installment, noting that by his calculations they had now received "one full half of the book."<sup>10</sup>

Later on he was to lose his lead. "It proceeds more slowly than I had anticipated, from two causes," he had written to Harper in November. "My own MS, for the press here, is so altered and interlined as to be very difficult to read--and the literary necessities of this story force me to correct and re-correct the first half, with a special view to what is to come in the second."<sup>11</sup> But this meticulous care at the outset was probably what saved him when he was prostrated by grief and illness. "I am having a hard fight of it to finish my book, in my exhausted state," he wrote to Nine Lehmann in May of 1868;<sup>12</sup> nonetheless, he managed to meet his deadlines and maintain the novel's structural integrity.

What is one to make of the discrepancy between Collins's accounts to his friends and the evidence? Above all things, he loved to tell a story; and it would scarcely be surprising if he later embellished the story of The Moonstone's composition so as to make it more exciting and dramatic. Indubitably, he was in pain during much of 1868; the second Preface testifies to the full extent of his misery: "While this work was still in course of periodical publication in England and the United States . . . the bitterest affliction of my life and the severest illness from which I have ever suffered, fell on me together." But the same paragraph substantiates the cathartic effect of his writing, the relief he experienced whenever he could occupy himself with his work. And nothing--not even the strongest dose of laudanum--could dull his awareness of his audience:

My good readers in England and in America, whom I had never yet disappointed, were expecting their regular weekly instalments of the new story. I held to the story--for my own sake, as well as for theirs. . . . Of the physical sacrifice which the effort cost me I shall say nothing. I only look back now at the blessed

relief which my occupation (forced as it was) brought to my mind. The Art which had been always the pride and pleasure of my life, became now more than ever 'its own exceeding great reward.' I doubt if I should have lived to write another book, if the responsibility of the weekly publication of this story had not forced me to rally my sinking energies of body and mind--to dry my useless tears, and to conquer my merciless pains.

(Preface to the Revised Edition)

Emotional and physical affliction do not necessarily enfeeble creativity. In Collins, on the contrary, they seem to have released powers of energy and concentration that make The Moonstone a gripping and superbly crafted novel. It is also, not incidentally, a book that owes its existence to his sense of obligation toward his public.

Still, conceding that his concern for his readers enabled him to finish the novel when he was emotionally and physically exhausted, the question remains: why choose it for a study of reader relations? How does it reveal the effects of the bond between the writer and his audience? The answer involves a study of several topics. First, Collins considered his readers' tastes and interests as he was preparing to write; he researched the book with his customary thoroughness, so as to satisfy their cravings for the new and strange and to meet any possible objections. Then, in the writing, he attempted to balance plot and characterization--those two fundamental ingredients of fiction from his readers' point of view--and to meet their demands in both areas. He also thickened the texture of the story by adding features that period readers expected, such as humor and discreet sexuality. The examination of these topics that I shall now undertake cannot fully explicate the novel; but it can show how Collins's efforts to please helped to make The Moonstone successful.

### Sources and Antecedents

Although its current reputation rests on its fame as a detective story, The Moonstone is initially a novel of the 1860s and draws on topics of period interest to produce its most memorable effects. T. S. Eliot, Dorothy Sayers, V. S. Pritchett, and others have hailed it as the first detective novel in English, but this claim is open to question, for Collins did not deliberately invent a new kind of fiction, and even if we call it a detective novel in retrospect it was not the first of its kind. Its predecessors in the field of detection and mystery include William Godwin's Caleb Williams, Thomas Gaspey's Richmond, the Memoirs of Eugène François Vidocq, several of Edgar Allan Poe's short stories, portions of Bleak House, and the early books of Émile Gaboriau.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, as Julian Symons has indicated, there was a previous detective novel written in England: The Notting Hill Mystery, published serially in 1862-63 and in book form in 1865.<sup>14</sup>

Yet certainly The Moonstone makes significant advances toward the modern detective story. Its plot revolves around a mystery, the inexplicable theft of a fabulous diamond. It is related by a series of narrators who know no more than the reader at any given point, and whose efforts prompt the reader to play along with them--or, in Gabriel Betteredge's words, to catch "the detective-fever." A professional inspector with distinctive traits and habits is summoned from Scotland Yard after a local inspector has bungled the case, and although he is only partly successful he remains an exemplar of his kind.<sup>15</sup> Suspicion is skillfully shifted from one character to another and the number of false leads increases until in the end, the least likely person (or persons), using entirely unexpected means, is uncovered as the thief. Finally, the

story abounds in the paraphernalia of detective fiction: a vital clue which is initially neglected, the mugging and drugging of several characters, and a garbled message that yields significant information when properly deciphered.

How could Collins, who was necessarily ignorant of the genre to which he was contributing, have adhered so closely to so many of its conventions? The answer, as several critics have pointed out, is that he was also working within the tradition of mid-nineteenth-century fiction--specifically, of the sensation novel--and that every one of these detective-story elements can also be explained in terms of reader tastes and interests. As Howard Haycraft says, "What he did, essentially, was to write a full-bodied novel in the fashion of his time, using detection as a central theme to catalyze the elaborate ingredients; much as another novelist of the same era might have employed a love or revenge motif as the unifying factor for the crowded canvas of his three-decker."<sup>16</sup> Some of these "elaborate ingredients" were foreign or exotic and required careful research. Others, closer to home, were connected with current or recent events that Collins converted into fiction. Still others derived from his intimate knowledge of the mores and manners of his society. All were carefully blended and balanced--given form and direction, or "catalyzed," by the search for the missing Moonstone.

Collins's preliminary notes for the novel (which fortunately survive in the Morris L. Parrish Collection) indicate that, from the earliest stages, he was planning to introduce both a fabulous jewel stolen from an idol and a cast of Indian Brahmins--although at some point in his research the gem underwent a change of identity. It was originally to be a Serpent's Eye revered by a cult of snake worshippers, but it

wound up as a yellow diamond sacred to Vishnu the Preserver, the four-handed god of the moon. Walter de la Mare suggests that Collins was influenced by a moonstone brought from India by Charles Reade's brother, while Lady Constance Russell suggests that he was influenced by stories about the Pitt Diamond that he heard during visits to Swallowfields, the estate of Pitt's descendant, Sir George Russell.<sup>17</sup> Whatever his initial inspiration, he confirmed it with his usual diligence. At the Athenaeum--the "Club Library" he mentioned in the letter to his mother<sup>18</sup>--he consulted the 8th edition of The Encyclopaedia Britannica, The Natural History . . . of Precious Stones and Gems by C. W. King, The Life of Sir David Baird, and Talboys Wheeler's History of India.

The first two supplied him with facts about real diamonds that he later adapted to his Moonstone, e.g., "The diamond is highly electric, attracting light objects when heated by friction; and alone among gems has the peculiarity of becoming phosphorescent in the dark, after long exposure to the sun's rays."<sup>19</sup> From the Britannica he took information on an enormous diamond the size of a pigeon's egg (the Orloff), "said to have been the eye of an Indian idol, pillaged by a deserter from the French service" and presently in the scepter of the Emperor of Russia.<sup>20</sup> From King he took a further account of the Orloff theft and the history of the famous diamond brought by Governor Pitt from India. Apparently, Pitt, a man as ruthless as the novel's Colonel Herncastle, later found his "too precious stone" more of a curse than a blessing and spent the next several years of his life protecting it from robbery.<sup>21</sup> The other diamonds in King's book that interested Collins were the Koh-i-noor and the Sancy. The Koh-i-noor--which, as Collins told his readers, carried the threat of "certain misfortune to the persons who should divert

it from its ancient uses" (First Preface)--was one of the newer Crown jewels, having come into British possession when the Punjab was annexed in 1849--the year when the fictional Moonstone made the reverse trip from England to India. It was presented to the Queen at a grand reception in St. James's Palace in 1850, and subsequently suffered the fate that threatens the imaginary diamond, for it was cut in Amsterdam and thereby deprived of all its historical value.<sup>22</sup> The Sancy, on the other hand, disappeared in the famous Garde-Meuble robbery of 1792 and was later reputedly returned to the East by "a singular freak of fortune" after it was purchased by a Bombay Indian.<sup>23</sup>

From the Britannica and the Life of Sir David Baird Collins gathered the raw materials of his Prologue: facts about sacred idols, the storming of Seringapatam, the death of the Tippoo Sultan, and the looting of the Sultan's treasury by English officers, including one "gentleman" who should have known better.<sup>24</sup> But apparently he could not get enough information on the Indians from the volumes in the Athenaeum library, for he also consulted a member of a distinguished Anglo-Indian family--John William Shaw Wyllie<sup>25</sup>--who, like Murthwaite in the novel, had travelled through "a good deal of a very outlandish--and intensely Hindoo--part of India. . . ."<sup>26</sup> Wyllie suggested Kattia-war, and especially its holy cities, Somnauth and Dwarka, as the locale that would best suit Collins's purposes; he affirmed that a European traveller might be present "with tolerable safety" at a Hindu religious ceremony, but could hardly hope to participate without being discovered; and he answered Collins's query about the possibility of a high-caste Brahmin in service to a Hindu shrine making the forbidden "passage of the Black Water" and later regaining admission to his caste.<sup>27</sup>

From this source material--and I have given only a partial account of it--Collins was able to create the most romantic and exotic sections of his novel, fully confident that the facts would back him up. If questioned, he could reassure his readers that the sacred nature of the gem, its phosphorescence, its daring theft from Seringapatam, the discomfort of its unlawful owner, the voyage of its priests from India, their ruthless and triumphant pursuit of the stone, their return to Somnauth and their subsequent purification, as attested by a traveller disguised as a native, were based on historical episodes or verified by experts. Even the method of Godfrey Ablewhite's death was suggested by his research. "The Brahmins would not Thug 'Godfrey,'" he noted; "--They would also object to additionally sacrifice their caste by shedding his blood [sic]. They would most probably smother him."<sup>28</sup>

The allusion to thugging may indicate Collins's use of still another source, the novels of Philip Meadows Taylor. Colonel Taylor, an officer in India, introduced the word and the practice to the English in Confessions of a Thug (1839). In his second novel, Tippu Sultan (1840), he dealt with the events that form the background to the Prologue of The Moonstone.<sup>29</sup> Collins does not mention Taylor's books in his notes or his extant correspondence, but as a young man who read such stories avidly and was thinking of becoming a novelist, he was hardly likely to have missed them. Confessions of a Thug was especially successful, thrilling its readers with its realistic details of outlandish Indian rituals; Queen Victoria herself read the proof sheets, and when the book was published it was widely and favorably reviewed.<sup>30</sup>

Most of the exotic details in The Moonstone were new to Collins's readers. But India itself was frequently before them in the newspapers,

and many had ties there in the form of relatives or friends connected with the army, the Foreign Service, or British mercantile interests abroad. By the time the novel began to appear, India had been under Crown rule for nearly ten years. Peace had been maintained throughout the 1860s, except for some sporadic local incidents. But few Victorians could forget the Indian Mutiny of 1857 and the atrocities committed on English women and children at Cawnpore and Lucknow.<sup>31</sup> It made no difference to the vast majority of Collins's readers that British policy in India had planted the seeds of the Mutiny, or that the subsequent British reprisals were as brutal as the Sepoy outrages. The Indians had been firmly established in their minds as an alien, mysterious, and potentially violent people. "The sacrifice of caste is a serious thing in India, if you like," says Murthwaite to Franklin Blake. "The sacrifice of life is nothing at all" (First Period, Ch. X).

But Collins's Indians, though capable of murder, are not portrayed as monsters. In fact, as we shall see, he induces his readers to alter their views of the Brahmins, for he presents them first as sinister figures but later as dedicated priests whose service to their god condemns them to perpetual pilgrimage. The ambivalence of his presentation may well owe something to the Governor Eyre case and the public furor it aroused. In October of 1865, native insurgents at Morant Bay in Jamaica rebelled against the British colonists. Fired by his own anxieties as much as by exaggerated reports of the uprising, the English governor countered with a wholesale campaign of reprisals: the rioters killed twenty-two people, the governor and his subordinates, 586.<sup>32</sup> At first, he was applauded in Britain for swiftly curbing the rebellion: memories of the Indian Mutiny continued to haunt a public whose

assumptions were racist to begin with. But when the true facts began to come out, Eyre was removed from his post and forced to face charges in England where the case aroused sharply divided reactions. The Eyre Defense Committee, backed by Carlyle and Ruskin and favored by most ordinary Britons, felt that the natives deserved whatever they got and sympathized with the governor. The opposition, headed by John Stuart Mill, attacked Eyre's defenders and condemned him as infinitely more brutal than the natives he had massacred.

Collins, who conceived and began The Moonstone while the Eyre case was in the headlines, could hardly have avoided taking sides. After all, he was writing about other dark-skinned natives who were feared and distrusted by the English. To some extent, his fictional Hindus warranted that distrust, for they are ruthless in pursuit of the diamond, not stopping at murder to obtain it. Nonetheless, they are jailed on an unwarranted suspicion, and at least two of the Englishmen who fear them are as reprehensible as they are: Septimus Luker is more devious than any Hindu, and Godfrey Ablewhite is a greedy thief masquerading as a pious Christian.

The Moonstone also draws upon local violence, and on events closer to home. The most frequently cited source of the book is the Road Murder Case of 1860, in which the sixteen-year-old Constance Kent killed her four-year-old half-brother. The murder itself has nothing in common with the crime or the plot of The Moonstone, but parts of the investigation bear upon the novel. The incriminating evidence was a nightgown that had disappeared (Constance had removed it from the laundry basket and burnt it in her bedroom); and the detective from Scotland Yard, summoned after a local inspector got nowhere, was a man of uncommon

abilities whom Dickens had praised in two Household Words articles of 1850. Jonathan Whicher, whom Dickens called "Witchem," bears little physical resemblance to Collins's Sergeant Cuff. Dickens describes him as "shorter and thicker-set [than another detective] and marked with the small-pox,"<sup>33</sup> while Cuff is "a grizzled, elderly man, so miserably lean that he looked as if he had not get an ounce of flesh on his bones in any part of him" (133). But despite the physical differences, Cuff would have reminded contemporary readers of Whicher, just as Franklin Blake's hidden nightgown would have recalled the evidence in the Road Murder Case, for it was only three years earlier, in 1865--after Witcher, unable to prove his suspicions, had been forced by public opinion to retire in disgrace--that Constance Kent had confessed to the murder and to destroying her bloodstained nightgown.<sup>34</sup>

Some Victorian readers would have recalled another recent crime when they read that Godfrey Ablewhite and Septimus Luker had been lured away and then attacked by the Indians. The Murray Case was never as notorious as the Road Murder, but it figured prominently in the newspapers, and crowds of people gathered at the scene of the encounter.<sup>35</sup> In July of 1861, a Major Murray was accosted in the street by a man who addressed him by name and then persuaded him (for business reasons) to go to Northumberland-chambers, an address off the Strand. Leading Murray into his room, the stranger, a Mr. Roberts, asked him to be seated; but after Murray had complied, to quote the Times, "he observed the stranger approaching him from behind, and the next instant he experienced a stunning sensation and fell forward on the floor. He had been struck by a bullet."<sup>36</sup> Murray managed to recover and eventually killed his attacker--and in that he differs from Collins's victims, who are mugged and bound

before they can defend themselves from their mysterious brown-skinned assailants. Nor are there bullets in the novel, for the Indians are not after personal revenge, only clues to the missing Moonstone. But Collins seems to have borrowed the outlines and the address of the Murray case, for Godfrey, like the Major, is decoyed to a house in Northumberland-street, Strand. Collins could have used the actual case in still another way. The Times had declared, "there is, apparently, some inexplicable mystery enveloping the circumstances connected with this fearful affray,"<sup>37</sup> and hinted at future revelations that were never provided. Similarly, scandal in the novel connects the attacks on Ablewhite and Luker to the mystery enveloping the Moonstone. But like the real reporters, the fictional gossips cannot prove their suspicions.

Perhaps the most interesting contemporary parallel or analogue--and one that has not been cited since Andrew Lang referred to it in 1890--is a story that anticipates Collins's masterstroke of making the thief a somnambulist as well as the man most eager to solve the crime he himself has committed. It is called "The Spectre of Tappington" and is the first of The Ingoldsby Legends, a series of prose and verse tales by Richard Harris Barham that began to appear in Bentley's Miscellany in 1840 and later went through numerous editions in book form. (Bentley alone printed 425,000 copies by the end of the century.) We have no direct proof that Collins read the story, but it is very likely that he did, since he certainly read Bentley's Miscellany (the magazine in which The Pickwick Papers and Oliver Twist appeared as serials), and Bentley was the publisher to whom he submitted his earliest novels.<sup>38</sup>

"The Spectre of Tappington" tells the story of a young man, Charles Seaforth, who, during a visit to the country house of his cousin

Caroline Ingoldsby, discovers every morning that his breeches are missing. Legend has it that a ghost haunts his bedchamber, and Seaforth repeatedly dreams that the spectre enters his room, dons his trousers, and then walks off with them. Finally, when he is reduced to his last pair of borrowed breeches, Caroline's brother Tom spends the night with him, hidden in a closet, and discovers the "spectre's" secret: Seaforth walks in his sleep. Tom follows him down a private staircase and out into the garden, watches as he starts to bury his trousers with the help of the gardener's spade and, as the sleepwalker bends over to inter his pantaloons, grabs the spade, whacks him on the rump, and wakes him up.

There are obvious differences between The Moonstone and "The Spectre of Tappington"; Ingoldsby's sleepwalker has not been drugged, and the loss of his trousers is merely amusing. Nonetheless there are remarkable parallels between the novel and the story. In both works the hero, who has just returned from abroad, goes to visit his first cousin in a country house, promptly falls in love with her, and eventually marries her. "He had gone out as a boy--he returned a man; but the impression made upon his youthful fancy by his favorite cousin remained unimpaired, and to Tapton he directed his steps," says Barham,<sup>39</sup> in a statement which, except for "Tapton," describes Franklin Blake as well as Charles Seaforth. In both cases, three relatives are involved, a young woman and two young men, though in "The Spectre of Tappington" Tom is Caroline's brother, whereas in The Moonstone both Godfrey and Franklin court their cousin Rachel. In both, there is an Indian motif: Charles has just come from India, where he has been a lieutenant in the Royal Bombay Fencibles. In both, the hero is indignant over the theft, zealous in trying to solve it, and wholly unconscious of his guilt.

In both, he begins to sleepwalk at about one in the morning and is observed by a witness or witnesses, although Charles is whacked into instant recognition, while Franklin must wait a year to discover what he has done. Finally, there is a similarity between the names of Barham's Lieutenant Seaforth and Collins's Superintendent Seegrave, the policeman who precedes Sergeant Cuff. These may all be mere coincidences; but they defy the laws of probability.

While Collins's reliance on The Ingoldsby Legends remains conjectural, he undoubtedly took elements of Franklin's trance from one of his own novels, No Name, published in 1862. In that book Magdalen Vanstone, disguised as a servant, goes to work for old Admiral Bartram so as to discover where he has hidden her late husband's will. Searching for it one night, she is startled to see the Admiral coming toward her in the darkness, like "a spectre in the ghostly Hall" (Sixth Scene, Ch. IV); but when she finds that he is sleepwalking she draws closer to observe him. The Admiral is restless because he fears for the safety of the valuable document; taking it from the cabinet in which it has been locked, he transfers it to a more secure hiding place and then returns to his bed. His somnambulant behavior thus anticipates Franklin Blake's anxiety, his journey to Rachel's cabinet, and his attempted retrieval of the diamond. It also makes one wonder why more Victorian readers, familiar with both novels, failed to predict at least this portion of The Moonstone's complicated plot.

Perhaps Collins kept them so closely involved in the story that they never thought about its possible sources or recalled them only in retrospect. Eventually some of them would have remembered "The Spectre of Tappington" and No Name, but only after they had been surprised by

Franklin's trance. Collins further forestalled discovery by creatively transforming his materials. When they remained recognizable, like the clue of the paint-stained nightgown, they prompted the sense of deja vu, or rather, the antithetical reactions of familiarity and novelty. Recalling sources or analogues rarely helped Victorian readers to guess what would happen next, but they might feel that they had had a peek behind the scenes.

Underpinning the exotic and the criminal elements are the local settings and the ordinary characters. Collins had to have some knowledge of the Yorkshire coast to describe the Shivering Sands, the walk to the Yolland's cottage, and the retrieval of the buried metal box; and according to Ellis, he visited the region in 1864.<sup>40</sup> But to devise most of the domestic details--the staff of servants, the birthday dinner, the conversations and actions of the characters--he need never have left his study. Not that he was less careful about the domestic portions of the novel. When the first American illustrations reached him, for example, he wrote back to Harper:

In the second number, there is a mistake (as we should call it in England) of presenting "Gabriel Betteredge" in livery. As head-servant, he would wear plain black clothes--and would look, with his white cravat and grey hair, like an old clergyman. I only mention this for future illustrations--and because I see the dramatic effect of the story (in the first number) conveyed with such real intelligence by the artist that I want to see him taking the right direction, even in the smallest technical details.<sup>41</sup>

Even in the matter of a servant's clothing he would not misinform his audience. Besides, he realized from past experience that if he did not correct such details before the story was in print, his readers would complain of his lapses. But he rarely erred in these particulars; as Walter de la Mare has said, "Collins is never more at home than when

at home."<sup>42</sup> He knew how people of means lived and behaved in the city or the country. He knew what went on below stairs better than most of his fellow novelists. And he rendered the texture of domestic life, from Betteredge's beehive chair to Miss Clack's bag of tracts to the pins beneath Rachel's carpet, with accuracy and conviction.

Miss Clack herself is a caricature of the pious, self-righteous Evangelical, but her alacrity in distributing her "precious publications" could hardly be exaggerated; for tracts, as Richard Altick has noted, "were a ubiquitous part of the social landscape."<sup>43</sup> Dougal MacEachen speculates that the tracts Miss Clack distributes would have come from the Religious Tract Society--a group that had an output in the neighborhood of twenty million tracts in 1861 alone.<sup>44</sup> Collins's titles are obvious parodies, but again, they are rooted in fact: "A Word With You On Your Cap-Ribbons" and "Hush for Heaven's Sake" travesty such actual titles as Friendly Hints to Servants and A Word to the Profane.<sup>45</sup> As for the Mothers'-Small-Clothes-Conversion-Society, it too had real-life antecedents in the charitable groups that had begun to organize early in the century, and fictional precedents in the works of Dickens and Thackeray. Dickens poked fun at "The Ladies' Societies" in Sketches by Boz and protested more bitterly in Bleak House through Mrs. Pardiggle and Mrs. Jellyby, while Thackeray concluded Becky Sharp's career by putting her name on all the Charity Lists and making her the friend of the "Destitute Orange-girl, the Neglected Washer-woman, the Distressed Muffin-man. . . ."<sup>46</sup>

On one subject, Collins knew as much as any expert and more than most contemporary writers. Since the early 1860s (and perhaps even earlier) he had been taking increasing amounts of opium. He relied upon

the drug to bring him respite from the pain of rheumatic gout--to give him the strength to keep working. He thus brought to the resolution of The Moonstone, not only an intimate knowledge of the nature and effects of laudanum--"that all-potent and all-merciful drug" (Third Nar., Ch. 9)--but also an unshakeable conviction of its power. He did not expect his audience to take his conviction on faith. In the Preface to the first edition he assured his readers that he had first ascertained the result of the experiment that vindicates Franklin Blake "not only from books, but from living authorities" and shaped the story accordingly. In the text Ezra Jennings, the fictional physician, names and quotes from some of these sources: Dr. Carpenter (a professor of forensic medicine whose books were in Collins's library), Dr. Elliotson, the author of Human Physiology, and De Quincey's Confessions of an English Opium Eater. Jennings himself, in his reliance on the drug and his ability to solve the mystery, functions as an author surrogate. His appearance is based on that of an extraordinary man whom Dickens and Collins had encountered on one of their trips,<sup>47</sup> and his name may have been borrowed from a doctor Collins's family knew in his childhood,<sup>48</sup> but his tragic past and his opium addiction seem to be the author's own invention.

Collins carefully differentiated between the trance induced by opium in Franklin Blake and other forms of trance that might appear in period novels. Somnambulism, a trance-state long familiar to his readers through Macbeth, had suited his purposes in No Name; but he explicitly barred it from The Moonstone. "Did you ever discover me walking in my sleep?" Franklin says to Betteredge, who answers, "You never did such a thing in your life!" (Third Nar., Ch. 6). The other alternative would have been a trance induced by mesmerism, a subject of interest to

many Victorians, including Dickens. Mesmerism had already begun to appear in fiction. For example, The Notting Hill Mystery, which Collins may or may not have seen, has a plot that turns upon an exceptional case of clairvoyance: a hypnotist uses his sinister powers to murder at least two women, one of whom is also a somnambulist. Collins's allusion to the famous Dr. Elliotson has mesmeric undertones, for Elliotson was a leading English advocate of mesmerism and promoted it in Human Physiology, the volume Jennings quotes from.<sup>49</sup> But Collins was skeptical of mesmerism, and besides, in The Moonstone he wanted to avoid any trace of the supernatural. The book has its share of exotic elements, but all can be logically accounted for--even the episode in which the Indians hypnotize their boy and ask him to predict Blake's arrival. This incident, which counterpoints Blake's opium trance, gives Collins the opportunity to justify his methods. For when Mr. Bruff later tells the explorer, Mr. Murthwaite, that he cannot accept any explanation that is based on the theory of clairvoyance, Murthwaite reassures the skeptical lawyer (and, by extension, the skeptical reader) that the Indians' behavior is rooted in reason and not in the occult:

"The clairvoyance in this case is simply a development of the romantic side of the Indian character. . . . Their boy is unquestionably a sensitive subject to the mesmeric influence--and, under that influence, he has no doubt reflected what was already in the mind of the person mesmerizing him. I have tested the theory of clairvoyance, and I have never found the manifestations get beyond that point. . . . We have nothing whatever to do with clairvoyance, or with mesmerism, or with any thing else that is hard of belief to a practical man, in the inquiry that we are now pursuing. My object in following the Indian plot, step by step, is to trace results back, by rational means, to natural causes." (Second Nar., Ch. 3)

With the addition of Jennings and the laudanum solution, the novel acquires "a Chinese box intricacy," as Alethea Hayter has noted, in that

"the actions of an opium-dosed man are described by an opium addict who is the invention of a writer heavily dosed with opium."<sup>50</sup> (She might have added that the Moonstone was bequeathed to Rached by "a notorious opium-eater" [First Period, Ch. 6].) But the drug element, while it is effective and powerful, never dominates the novel. In fact, none of these elements--the exotic, the criminal, the domestic, or the drug-linked--consistently dominates the novel. Like the luster of the diamond, they wax and wane as they are called into play to further the plot or illuminate the actions of the characters.

#### Plot and Characterization

In his classic study of detective fiction, Régis Messac denies Collins's works the status of detective or mystery novels because they are "three times too long"<sup>51</sup> and contain too many extraneous elements. Messac recalls Poe's reproaches to Dickens for "having introduced into his narrative [Barnaby Rudge] elements of interest foreign to the intrigue":

This is what Collins also does, and if Poe had lived long enough to criticize The Moonstone, without a doubt he would have found old Betteredge too long-winded. Collins, by temperament, would doubtless have preferred to adopt the same ideal as Poe, but, constrained to obey the laws of a different esthetic, he ended up denying what suited his temperament and expressing himself almost in the same terms as Trollope. . . .<sup>52</sup>

Messac is surely correct in identifying one of Collins's major dilemmas, whether to please the tastes of his public or follow his own proclivities. But while the extraneous elements may impair The Moonstone as a detective story, they are not aesthetically damaging from a broader perspective.

In the past fifty years, a number of critics have praised the balanced construction of The Moonstone and the ways in which it reconciles antitheses. For T. S. Eliot, "it exhibits all of Collins's qualities in more perfect proportion than any other of his novels."<sup>53</sup> To Patrick Anderson, "it succeeds in balancing liberal doses of suspense with the leisurely and soothing quality of Victorian three-volume fiction, so that the reader finds himself now almost digressively lingering over character and social comment and now propelled thrillingly forward in a kind of submarine world where the light is continually shifting and cave is succeeded by cave."<sup>54</sup> To Haycraft, its detective portion is "an almost perfect example of the balanced type--a consummate blending of narrative and logical deduction."<sup>55</sup> Clues to the balance of opposing elements appear within the narrative: ". . . here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian Diamond," says Betteredge, "--bringing after it a conspiracy of living rogues, set loose on us by the vengeance of a dead man. . . . Who ever heard the like of it--in the nineteenth century, mind; in an age of progress, and in a country which rejoices in the blessings of the British Constitution?" (First Period, Ch. 5).

Of all the Victorian novelists, Collins had the firmest sense of structure. He never created what Henry James called a "loose baggy monster" of a novel. But while his high respect for plot construction prompted him to keep the action moving and never to waste an incident, his regard for audience tastes prompted him to leave room for comic diversions and for depictions of scenery and character. By the time he wrote The Moonstone he had learned to balance humor with suspense, romance with domesticity, the ordinary with the unexpected. Yet still he found

it difficult to strike a balance between plot and character development-- an issue that concerned him, not only as a craftsman, but as a writer meeting audience demands.

Critics of the 1860s tended to divide contemporary novelists into mutually exclusive groups. In one, they placed the novelists of manners and the chroniclers of everyday life, the "anti-sensational" writers; in the other, they placed the sensational writers with whom Collins was invariably aligned. Novelists in both groups protested against being pigeon-holed. "I am realistic," said Anthony Trollope, allying himself with the first group:

My friend Wilkie Collins is generally supposed to be sensational. The readers who prefer the one are supposed to take delight in the elucidation of character. Those who hold by the other are charmed by the continuation and gradual development of a plot. All this is, I think, a mistake,--which mistake arises from the inability of the imperfect artist to be at the same time realistic and sensational. A good novel should be both, and both in the highest degree. If a novel fail in either, there is a failure in art.<sup>56</sup>

As we have seen, Collins from the other side made similar complaints: "It may be possible in novel-writing to present characters successfully without telling a story, but it is not possible to tell a story successfully without presenting characters: their existence, as recognizable realities, being the sole condition on which the story can be effectively told" (Preface to The Woman in White). His protest was essentially defensive; he knew he was admired as a master technician, an unrivalled constructor of stories, but he wanted to be known too for characters who delighted the reading public and remained in the memory as friends. "I have myself always tried to combine the different merits of a good novel, in one and the same work," he wrote in the Preface to Heart and Science (1883); he added, however, "I have never succeeded in keeping an equal balance."

In The Moonstone, he made a determined effort to give more weight to characterization--to span the gap between the "novel of incident" and the "novel of character." First, as in The Woman in White, he had several of the characters narrate the story--which meant that as they revealed the plot they also revealed themselves. Second, he created and mixed a wide range of characters; rich and poor, local and foreign, stolid and picturesque. Third, as he explained in the original Preface, he attempted to make the action emerge from the characters' personalities--a reversal of his usual procedure<sup>57</sup>--and above all, to make the heroine's behavior the crux of the plot:

In some of my former novels the object proposed has been to trace the influence of circumstances upon character. In the present story I have reversed the process. The attempt made here is to trace the influence of character on circumstances. The conduct pursued, under a sudden emergency, by a young girl, supplies the foundation on which I have built this book.

The same object has been kept in view in the handling of the other characters which appear in these pages. . . . Right or wrong, their conduct, in either event, equally directs the course of those portions of the story in which they are concerned.

But Collins's reputation stood in the way of a serious appraisal of these statements. With the lone exception of The Times, which attempted to show how the characters' conduct directs the course of the action,<sup>58</sup> the critics either ignored his pronouncement or reacted as skeptically as Edmund Yates: "But who stops to consider the psychological problem presented by Rachel Verinder? What we want to find out is, what has become of the diamond?"<sup>59</sup>

And yet Collins's claims are in large measure substantiated by the story. If Rachel had not childishly insisted on keeping her new jewel in an unlocked cabinet, Franklin could not have removed it. If she had been less proud and secretive, or lacked a sense of honor, she

would have revealed Franklin's guilt to Sergeant Cuff or her mother and immediately ended the search. And if she had not sworn with passionate conviction to her cousin Godfrey's innocence (in a scene that misleads both Mr. Bruff and the reader), he would have become the obvious suspect and the ending would have lost all its force. In short, if the theft of the Moonstone is the event that sets the detective apparatus in motion, Rachel's conduct is the force that keeps it in motion for several hundred pages.

Of course, to speculate on Rachel's alternatives is to commit the common Victorian fallacy of treating a character as a real person. The author dictates her choices; and he also attempts to make her someone the reader will remember with pleasure. But here, he is less successful. Dorothy Sayers saw the character as Collins wished her to be seen: "In Rachel Verinder, Collins has achieved one of the novelist's hardest tasks; he has depicted a girl who is virtuous, a gentlewoman, and really interesting, and that without the slightest exaggeration or deviation from naturalness and probability." Sayers adds that "his success was so great as almost to defeat itself. Rachel is so little spectacular that we fail to realize what a singularly fine and truthful piece of work she is."<sup>60</sup> This defense, however, ignores the problem that most readers encounter with the character. While Rachel shows to advantage in her dialogues with Godfrey and in the later scenes with Franklin, she rarely emerges as a vital young woman--a failure largely attributable to the limits of the narrative method.

Collins cast his plot in the form of a series of interlocking narratives; each character takes up the thread in turn, honestly reporting everything he knows, but stopping before he can reveal too much of

the plot. Obviously Rachel could never be a narrator, since her first words would give away the secret. But this restriction puts the burden of presenting her upon the other narrators, and few of them are equal to the task. Betteredge announces her qualities early in the narrative. He says that she has ideas of her own, that she is stiff-necked and independent, that she judges for herself and goes her own way, that she is secretive but rigidly honest:

I can call to mind, in her childhood, more than one occasion when the good little soul took the blame, and suffered the punishment, for some fault committed by a playfellow whom she loved. Nobody ever knew her to confess to it when the thing was found out, and she was charged with it afterwards. But nobody ever knew her to lie about it, either. She looked you straight in the face and shook her saucy little head, and said, plainly, "I won't tell you!" (First Period, Ch. 8)

But while this description satisfies the plot requirements, in that it accounts for her behavior after the theft, it is not enough to make her a vibrant heroine who will linger in the reader's memory. Betteredge asserts that she is "the finest creature . . . that ever walked the ways of this lower world" (ibid.). But what the reader sees for much of the book, through the eyes of several witnesses, is an irritable creature whose behavior is often inexplicable.<sup>61</sup> Fortunately, Rachel's weaknesses do not interfere with the excitement or momentum of the story, and the structure that limits her development becomes an asset in most other cases. No third person could damn Miss Clack as convincingly as she damns herself, or create the tension which is climaxed by Franklin's discovery that he has stolen the diamond.

Collins was not skilled at sustained or profound analysis of character, nor did he shine at the authorial digressions typical of Thackeray and George Eliot. While he handled dialogue with competence,

his real strength lay in the first-person confession and the brief, revealing sketch of personality. The narrative method of The Moonstone permits him to exploit his strengths and minimize his weaknesses. It gives the characters room to expose themselves as they evaluate or comment on the others, allows for considerable complexity in the form of ironic undertones, and cuts them short before they grow tedious. Consider, for example, what he accomplishes through one of Gabriel's descriptions. In a few pithy sentences, he portrays the essential Godfrey Ablewhite, confirms our impression of the naive but informative Gabriel, and deftly mocks Victorian philanthropy:

If you ever subscribed to a Ladies' Charity in London, you know Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite as well as I do. He was a barrister by profession; a ladies' man by temperament; and a good Samaritan by choice. Female benevolence and female destitution could do nothing without him. . . . he was vice-president, manager, referee to them all. Wherever there was a table with a committee of ladies sitting round it in council, there was Mr. Godfrey at the bottom of the board, keeping the temper of the committee, and leading the dear creatures along the thorny ways of business, hat in hand. I do suppose this was the most accomplished philanthropist (on a small independence) that England ever produced. As a speaker at charitable meetings the like of him for drawing your tears and your money was not easy to find. He was quite a public character. The last time I was in London my mistress gave me two treats. She sent me to the theatre to see a dancing woman who was all the rage; and she sent me to Exeter Hall to hear Mr. Godfrey. The lady did it, with a band of music. The gentleman did it with a handkerchief and a glass of water. Crowds at the performance with the legs. Ditto at the performance with the tongue. And with all this the sweetest-tempered person (I allude to Mr. Godfrey)--the simplest and pleasantest and easiest to please--you ever met with. He loved every body. And every body loved him. What chance had Mr. Franklin--what chance had anybody of average reputation and capacities--against such a man as this? (First Period, Ch. 8)

Collins has a problem in presenting Godfrey that escapes most modern readers. Whereas today we readily see "hypocrite" where Gabriel writes "Samaritan," period readers were apt to admire Godfrey's oratorical performances; after all, some of them spent their evenings at places like

Exeter Hall and their afternoons on charity committees. To make these members of the audience properly suspicious of Godfrey, Collins has Betteredge go overboard. He praises the paragon so warmly that he makes the reader skeptical and generates sympathy for Franklin, the underdog. (Miss Clack's narrative affirms this skepticism by linking the techniques of Godfrey's marriage proposal with those of his public speeches.)

When the novel first appeared, Betteredge met with a mixed reception. The Daily Telegraph thought he was a marvel:

. . . we cannot refrain from saying how deeply indebted we feel . . . for the pleasure we have experienced in making the acquaintance of the enthusiastic admirer of Robinson Crusoe. No character in "The Moonstone" can compare with Lady Verinder's House Bailiff. He is worth all the plots that ingenuity ever invented. It is not often that one feels inclined to ask a novelist to return to any of his characters. . . . But let us see Gabriel Betteredge again, we say.<sup>62</sup>

But the Spectator deplored him for lacking verisimilitude: "Gabriel Betteredge [is] a butler like no butler the world ever saw, now a garrulous old goose, now shrewd enough to detect the effect of several educations on his interlocutor."<sup>63</sup> And the Pall Mall Gazette dismissed him as a "stupid old servitor."<sup>64</sup> Of course, no real house-steward would have had the literary training to write as Gabriel writes; his homely style barely masks the polished use of balance and antithesis and epigram: "She was one of his committee-women--a spiritually-minded person, with a fine show of collar-bone and a pretty taste in champagne; liked it dry, you understand, and plenty of it" (First Period, Ch. 10). Nor, for that matter, would a former thief turned housemaid be capable of writing the letter that Rosanna Spearman writes to Franklin. But as Dorothy Sayers says, Gabriel's narrative "has an ideal truth--it is the

kind of thing that Betteredge might think and feel, even if he could not write it."<sup>65</sup> And in these cases Collins had other criteria than literal fidelity.

Betteredge is Collins's intermediary between the story and its public. His function is not just to narrate but to establish a bond of intimacy between the characters and the audience. Time and again, he interrupts himself to appeal to the reader directly, inviting the reader to share his reactions or simply to pay close attention:

Here follows the substance of what I said, written out entirely for your benefit. Pay attention to it, or you will be all abroad, when we get deeper into the story. Clear your mind of the children, or the dinner, or the new bonnet, or what not. Try if you can't forget politics, horses, prices in the City, and grievances at the club. I hope you won't take this freedom on my part amiss; it's only a way I have of appealing to the gentle reader. Lord! haven't I seen you with the greatest authors in your hands, and don't I know how ready your attention is to wander when it's a book that asks for it, instead of a person? (First Period, Ch. 5)

This is pure artifice on Collins's part, a strategy designed to blur the line between fictional construct and reality.

Betteredge further serves his author's purposes by proclaiming the humanity of servants to an audience that tended to ignore it. As nearly every recent critic has noted, Collins was one of the few novelists of his day to treat domestics as people in their own right, rather than as adjuncts to their masters or droll inventions to make the reader laugh. Most mid-Victorian fiction investigates domestic arrangements or family relationships, but only The Moonstone depicts the servants as comprehensively as the gentry. In addition to Betteredge, the Verinder's staff consists of the cook, Lady Verinder's personal maid, Gabriel's daughter Penelope who is Rachel's maid, the first housemaid, Rosanna the under-housemaid, Samuel the "fresh-faced" footman, and Nancy

the kitchenmaid. Three of these servants play more than cursory roles in the novel: Samuel assists Gabriel in various ways and returns Miss Clack's tracts to her lodgings; Penelope, whose affection for her father counterpoints Rachel's for her mother, is the one who first detects Rosanna's feelings and vainly tries to help her; and Rosanna, the book's most poignant character, embodies the pathos and frustration of the ugly, the maimed, the outcast who are nonetheless human in their passions. Betteredge himself, as a family retainer with more than fifty years of service, holds a position midway between a servant and a trusted old friend, bridging the space between the domestics and the gentry and facilitating communications between characters of diverse classes.

Victorian readers had encountered articulate servants before, in the pages of Dickens and Thackeray; but neither Sam Weller nor C. J. Yellowplush, to cite only the most outstanding examples, is free of distortion or authorial condescension, whereas Betteredge and the other servants in The Moonstone meet the reader on the reader's own level. Betteredge himself is as apt to make condescending judgments as any member of the audience. When he first hears of Rosanna's love for Franklin he cannot stop laughing:

You have heard of beautiful young ladies falling in love at first sight, and have thought it natural enough. But a housemaid out of a Reformatory, with a plain face and a deformed shoulder, falling in love, at first sight, with a gentleman who comes on a visit to her mistress's house, match me that, in the way of an absurdity, out of any story-book in Christendom, if you can! I laughed till the tears rolled down my cheeks. Penelope resented my merriment in rather a strange way. "I never knew you cruel before, father," she said, very gently, and went out. (First Period, Ch. 7)

But he comes to view Rosanna as warmly as any reader: "My girl was just her age. My girl . . . might have lived that miserable life, and died

this dreadful death" (First Period, Ch. 19). Anthony Burgess is quite right about the service that Gabriel's laughter performs: it "purges the Victorian reader of an unworthy response"<sup>66</sup> and opens the way to understanding. There is thus an unobtrusive didacticism in Collins's presentation of domestics. He pleases his rank-conscious audience by creating a family that keeps eight servants, but he also reminds them that these servants are human and must often suffer in silence. "People in high life have all the luxuries to themselves--among others the luxury of indulging their feelings," Betteredge remarks after Rosanna's suicide. "People in low life have no such privilege. Necessity, which spares our betters, has no pity on us. We learn to put our feelings back into ourselves, and to jog on with our duties as patiently as may be. I don't complain of this--I only notice it" (First Period, Ch. 20).

In addition to the servants and the gentry, Collins includes a layer of professional men--a detective, two doctors, and a lawyer--who have in common their specialized training and experience, and their sense of professional dedication. Mr. Candy gives Blake laudanum, not in revenge, but to prove the value of his medicine; Ezra Jennings refuses to tell Blake his suspicions (and thereby reveal Mr. Candy's indiscretion) until he is convinced of the necessity; Sergeant Cuff, hired from Scotland Yard by Lady Verinder, as was the practice at that period, will not accept his fee until he has completed his assignment--which prompts Betteredge to remind the reader that "even in the Detective Police, a man may have a reputation to lose" (ibid.). Collins's positive attitude toward these professionals was by no means the rule in his era. Before the establishment of a detective force in 1842, policemen were customarily maligned in English novels; Dickens, while admiring detectives, was usually contemptuous of lawyers; and Reade lambasted the medical quacks. But Collins treated lawyers and doctors with respect in most

of his novels; and in The Moonstone, above all, he invoked the reader's sympathy by making them human and fallible. Sergeant Cuff's love of roses and his habit of whistling counteract his professional impassivity; Mr. Bruff's kindness to Rachel and his more than professional concern for the family belie his dry, businesslike manner; even Mr. Candy's premature senility is touchingly rendered by Franklin Blake and the melancholy Ezra Jennings.

Collins's own emotional and physical suffering at the time he wrote the novel may have deepened his compassion. At any rate, with the exception of Miss Clack and Godfrey, he treats his characters with marked respect and a freedom from conventional bias. One has only to compare the crooked money-lender, Septimus Luker, with the typically villainous usurers of fiction--or Mrs. Yolland and her daughter, Limping Lucy, with the romantic fisherfolk of other period novels--to appreciate his sense of tact.<sup>67</sup>

Did Victorian readers value Collins's attempt to give more weight to characterization? Beyond his own affirmation, there is little extant evidence that they did. Dickens told Wills that The Moonstone had "excellent character in it,"<sup>68</sup> and Robert Louis Stevenson found the detective "prime,"<sup>69</sup> but Swinburne alone praised Collins's "especial genius" for exposing character through varying estimates and contrasting explanations.<sup>70</sup> Still, the novel was very popular, selling briskly in serial and three-volume form, and the author himself was satisfied. "Never have I had better reason than this work has given me to feel gratefully to novel-readers of all nations," he wrote in the second Preface. "Everywhere my characters made friends, and my story roused

interest." But as we know, he sometimes exaggerated the warmth of Readers in General; and on the other side, there can be little doubt about the mixed reactions of the critics.<sup>71</sup> While Geraldine Jewsbury in the Athenaeum extolled the workmanship and praised Ezra Jennings,<sup>72</sup> the Daily Telegraph commended Blake and Cuff as well as Betteredge, and The Times paid him the supreme compliment of taking his Preface seriously, other English reviewers derided the construction and the characters. The Spectator condemned Franklin Blake as a hero who "has no qualities at all" despite Collins's efforts to make him remarkable.<sup>73</sup> The Pall Mall Gazette concluded in the most vitriolic of all the reviews, "as a creator of character, a depicter of the mutual play of character and circumstances, as a humourist, may heaven defend us from him!"<sup>74</sup>

But by the time of his death, contemporary critical opinion had altered. Not only did Swinburne hail the book as Collins's masterpiece; Andrew Lang described it as "perfection, in its own class,"<sup>75</sup> M. W. Townsend called it "the best of all the stories, the one which will live for years,"<sup>76</sup> and Edmund Yates (who was one of Collins's earliest admirers) said that in its "own peculiar way" it had never been surpassed.<sup>77</sup> Yet even the appreciative critics withheld their approval from Collins's characterization. They selected a few favorites, defended them subjectively, and then dismissed the rest as mechanical. Only in this century has he been commended for his skill at creating character.

Dorothy Sayers began the reassessment by praising his treatment of women: "[H]e is the most genuinely feminist of all the nineteenth century novelists, because he is the only one capable of seeing women

without sexual bias and of respecting them as human individuals in their own right, and not as 'the ladies, God bless them!'" She added that The Moonstone "contains two of his finest and subtlest studies of women in love."<sup>78</sup> More recently, J.I.M. Stewart has remarked on his "ability to delineate character vigorously--whether with marked fidelity to contemporary social types, as in a novel of manners, or in terms of more or less grotesque invention, such as Dickens excelled in. Cuff is himself an admirable mingling of fact and fancy. . . ."<sup>79</sup> It is significant, I think, that both of his defenders have not only written detective fiction but have actually paraphrased The Moonstone, Sayers in The Documents in the Case and Stewart (under the pen name of Michael Innes) in Lament for a Maker.<sup>80</sup> Collins's contemporaries compared him to writers who excelled at the novel of character--to Dickens, Thackeray, Trollope, and George Eliot; but The Moonstone is essentially a novel of incident, and compared to most stories of adventure and suspense it is unusually rich in character. The impact of psychology and the development of new critical procedures have also been favorable to Collins. For while he did not plumb the depths of the psyche or analyze hidden motives, none of his characters is truly simple, as Marshall has pointed out, and some are complex and contradictory.<sup>81</sup> Franklin's trance suggests the existence of a second self, hidden from the ordinary consciousness--as opposed to Godfrey's deliberate and hypocritical creation of a double life, or Rachel's conscious but helpless ambivalence toward the man who has "stolen" her diamond.

Yet while modern readers regard The Moonstone's characters more favorably than did most Victorians, we have lost sight of some of its

complexities because of the form in which we read it. Few Victorians first read the book in one compact and individual volume. Americans who had missed the serial installments might buy the Harper single-volume edition or one of the pirated versions,<sup>82</sup> but in England, where the price was a guinea and a half for a new three-volume novel, most readers either followed the story from week to week in the pages of All the Year Round or caught up with it at the library, where they borrowed each volume in turn. Thus Collins had to organize the action on three levels--so as to quicken the interest of the serial, the three-volume, and the single-volume audience. He claimed that he constructed the plot without thinking in these terms, that his object was "to keep the story always advancing, without paying the smallest attention to the serial division in parts, or to the book publication in volumes";<sup>83</sup> but the evidence puts his claim in question. A writer who felt obliged to know every step of the story before he wrote a word of it would hardly start to publish without giving some thought to the serial divisions. He mailed the novel to his publishers in batches of several installments, and he always indicated the break-points; no one else chose them for him. But the most conclusive proof is internal: while The Moonstone has a master plan and an elaborate overall structure, nearly all of the thirty-two separate installments end memorably or suspensefully--a pattern that can hardly be fortuitous. There are no deliberate cliff-hangers, no final paragraphs patently contrived to put the reader in a state of anxiety, but neither do the segments trail off randomly or leave the reader satisfied. \*

\* A list of the serial divisions of The Moonstone appears in Appendix C.

For example, the fifth installment begins just after the final guests have arrived at Rachel's party and ends when they have departed. But the narrator, Betteredge, does not conclude by saying, "and so we got rid of our dinner company"; he adds a single-sentence paragraph-- "the next thing to tell is the story of the night"<sup>84</sup>--and so leaves the reader to wonder for a week what happened after the party. The next installment, the one in which the Moonstone disappears, covers a great deal of territory and contains several clues to the denouement: Franklin's brandy-and-water, his morning stupor, the summoning of Superintendent Seegrave, and Rachel's strange reaction. It breaks off in the middle of a chapter (as only three other segments do) and in the midst of the household confusion. Collins could have ended the installment at any of several adjacent points--after the paragraph in which the servants express their hostility to Seegrave, or after the one in which Gabriel reports that the police are getting nowhere--but instead he concludes with Gabriel's discovery that Rosanna has been in the library: "[the door] was suddenly opened from the inside, and out walked Rosanna Spearman."<sup>85</sup> In the volume format, this statement arouses only mild curiosity, for Rosanna immediately offers an excuse for having entered the room. But the serial reader must have wondered for a week what she was doing in the library and whether she would clear up the mystery or complicate it further.

Sometimes the installments conclude with the parting words of their narrators--words that function as a signature of personality. Thus the nineteenth installment ends with Miss Clack's resolution to bequeath to Rachel the Life, Letters, and Labours of Miss Jane Ann Stamper, and

the thirtieth ends with Ezra Jennings's valediction, "I have seen a little sunshine--I have had a happy time."<sup>86</sup> But most frequently, the endings are curtain lines designed to stimulate the thoughts of the audience during the week's intermission. Mr. Bruff, preparing to go out to dinner, concludes the twentieth installment, "I went upstairs . . . little suspecting that the way to my dressing-room and the way to discovery, meant, on this particular occasion, one and the same thing."<sup>87</sup> Franklin, about to see Rachel after nearly a year of estrangement, concludes the twenty-fourth installment by saying, ". . . I roused my manhood, and opened the door."<sup>88</sup> To read the novel in its serial divisions is to experience a periodic ebb-and-flow pattern as the suspense increases at the end of one episode and subsides at the start of the next. But Collins has joined the parts together so smoothly that the pattern is effaced in the volume edition.<sup>89</sup> Only by marking up a copy of the book to indicate the serial divisions can the modern reader regain the sense of weekly anticipation that serial readers took for granted. (Victorian publishers were well aware of the commercial value of suspense. Tinsley published the three-volume edition before the serial had run its course, hoping to boost the demand for the final volume at the circulating libraries.)

A somewhat different sense of anticipation distinguishes the ends of the volumes. Whereas many of the serial parts conclude by piquing the reader's curiosity, the first two volumes conclude with climactic events--perplexing and ominous discoveries. Volume I ends with Rosanna's death and Betteredge's grim announcement, "through the driving rain we went back--to meet the trouble and terror that were

waiting for us at the house." Volume II ends with Franklin's incredulous confession, "I had discovered myself as the Thief." But neither of these major stopping-points interferes with the basic flow of the narrative, for as Guinevere Griest has noted, several devices smooth the transition from volume to volume.<sup>90</sup> The narrator of Volume I (Betteredge) resumes the story in Volume II, and the narrator who closes Volume II (Blake) resumes his role in Volume III, giving the reader a sense of continuity despite the interruptions. Nor do the volume breaks correspond with the formal divisions of the story into "periods" and "narratives"--the structure most likely to be noted by readers of the single or three-volume edition.

As I have said, the plot is presented as a series of interlocking, first-person accounts. Collins lists eight narratives in the Table of Contents, but this figure is somewhat misleading, for it omits the longest one of all--Gabriel's account of events through the theft--while it includes Mr. Candy's brief report of Jennings's death and Gabriel's farewell statement. Not counting the Prologue and the Epilogue, which are also related by witnesses, there are six principal narrators--Betteredge, Miss Clack, Mr. Bruff, Franklin Blake, Ezra Jennings, and Sergeant Cuff--whose contributions range from a few terse chapters to better than a volume. But even this figure belies the complexity of the structure, for both Betteredge and Blake narrate twice, and Blake's first account includes Rosanna's letter, an eye-witness report in itself. Together, these narratives make up "The Story," which is subdivided into two periods: "The Loss of the Diamond" (Gabriel's first narrative) and "The Discovery of the Truth" (all the others). Framing the story are a Prologue, "The

Storming of Seringapatam," and an Epilogue that recounts the Indians' flight and the return of the diamond to Somnauth. Betteredge, the house-steward to the mystery, also functions as a frame within a frame: "I am the person (as you remember, no doubt) who led the way into these pages, and opened the story. I am also the person who is left behind, as it were, to close the story up" (Eighth Nar.). But readers of the novel are not overwhelmed by these organizational complexities, for despite the shifting narrators the plot develops chronologically and the story-line remains constant. From the first page to the last, the reader's attention is directed toward the diamond, and to the diamond it returns, no matter who is talking.

Collins found the method of developing the story through the points of view of several narrators eminently suited to his talents. His claim to have invented it is not completely valid, for the epistolary novels of the eighteenth century consist of the first-person accounts of one or more characters, and the Newgate Novels of the early nineteenth century sometimes include the criminal's confessions. He did, however, improve upon tradition by shifting from narrator to narrator and by using the characters as witnesses. Apparently he first conceived the idea while attending a criminal trial about 1856. As he told Louis Dépret, he was impressed both by the manner in which the evidence built up through successive testimony and by the mounting effect upon the spectators. In the elements of the trial he saw a parallel to the exposition of events within the novel; he also saw a new and powerful method of holding the reader: "Certainly by the same means employed here, I thought, one could impart to the reader that acceptance, that sense of belief, which

I saw produced here by the succession of testimonies so varied in form and nevertheless so strictly unified by their march toward the same goal."<sup>91</sup>

He made his first attempt to adopt the method to fiction in The Woman in White. Characteristically, he explained his aims to the reader at the start of Hartright's narrative (the Preamble in the serial version):

. . . the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offense against the laws is told in Court by more than one witness--with the same object, in both cases, to present the truth always in the most direct and most intelligible aspect; and to trace the course of one complete series of events, by making the persons who have been closely connected with them, at each successive stage, relate their own experience, word for word. (Ch. I)

But in The Moonstone, far more than in The Woman in White, the characters do not merely present the truth or function as eye-witnesses; they also color and distend their narratives by the force of their personalities. Gabriel, reminding the reader of the limits imposed upon him, defends the fair-play rule: ". . . I am to keep strictly within the limits of my own experience, and am not to inform you of what other persons told me--for the very sufficient reason that you are to have the information from those other persons themselves at first hand" (First Period, Ch. 22 [23]). Drusilla Clack laments it: "I write with the tears in my eyes, burning to say more. But no--I am cruelly limited to my actual experience of persons and things" (First Nar., Ch. 7 [8]).

Furthermore, the narrational shifts enable Collins to pace the story and to time the dramatic disclosures so that the reader is neither bored nor scandalized. It is no accident that Betteredge speaks first, for his garrulity, which would be intolerable after the suspense has mounted, gives Collins time to set the stage and casually insert the

clues that will figure in the later chapters. Miss Clack's account counterpoints Gabriel's but retains the comic touches and long-windedness, for it is still early in the story and delaying tactics are in order. Bruff's portion, which is that of a practical man who cannot afford to waste time, accelerates the pace and provides relief from Miss Clack's distorted rendition. Franklin Blake's--the most neutral stylistically--conveys the distress of an ordinary man, whose reactions approximate the ordinary reader's, on finding himself a proven thief and the subject of a wild experiment. Between the two accounts by Blake comes the journal of Ezra Jennings, the book's most extraordinary character, who provides (like Rosanna) the sentiment and pathos that Victorian readers craved. The emotional Jennings is balanced in turn by the impassive Sergeant Cuff, whose professional status permits him to broach sex and violence with impunity. Finally, in the Epilogue, Murthwaite's romantic but plausible letter home effectively closes the novel.

The range of voices, the balance among them, and the careful sense of pacing testify to Collins's control of his medium. When he wrote The Woman in White, Dickens complained that the narrators had in common a dissective quality which betrayed the author's manipulation.<sup>92</sup> But by the time he wrote The Moonstone, Collins had polished his techniques; if he did not fully efface himself behind his narrators, he certainly provided them with different styles and points of view. In this respect the novel's closest parallel is not the earlier Woman in White but Browning's masterpiece, The Ring and the Book, whose first two volumes also appeared in 1868.<sup>93</sup> Both Collins and Browning were drawn to the device of diverse or antithetical narrators; both were inspired by the

procedures of a trial;<sup>94</sup> and both present their characters as witnesses whose views of events are partial or biased, so that it becomes the reader's duty to appraise them as well as the plot. But Browning's characters elaborate on a story whose outlines the reader learns early, so that the mystery is not in the tale itself but in the question, "What is truth," whereas Collins's characters are primarily designed to advance the narrative.

The main drawback to Collins's structure was that his readers might forget about clues that had been unobtrusively imbedded in the text several hundred pages earlier. Having taken pains to provide the necessary hints in Betteredge's narrative, Collins was reluctant to waste them, so the later narrators, especially Blake, keep reminding the reader to look backward: "The foolish wrangle which took place, on that occasion, between Mr. Candy and myself, will be found, described at much greater length than it deserves, in the tenth chapter of Betteredge's Narrative" (Third Nar., Ch. 10). These awkward reminders were necessitated, not only by the modes of publication and the complicated structure, but by the sheer length of the novel, a length which was greatly influenced by audience tastes and expectations.

#### Humor and Sexuality

Long before the 1860s, Victorian readers had come to look for standard ingredients in fiction, much as the audience for television programs today has come to expect standard ingredients in situation comedies. They expected in each novel at least one pair of lovers whose union was fraught with impediments. They expected humor in character and incident. To balance the humor, they expected several sentimental

or "tragic" figures. They expected from Collins in particular evocative and vivid descriptions of scenery. And they were far from averse to a whiff of sex when the subject was handled with discretion.

The Victorian novel was ample enough to include all of these ingredients; indeed, they were frequently added to stretch a book to the requisite length. For as every experienced novelist knew, a novel to be profitable had to fill three volumes no matter what the intrinsic demands of the material. If it did not, the audience felt cheated of substance, the libraries paid less, and the publisher's profits diminished. A novelist of manners could overcome the problem by creating multiple plots, expanding the cast of characters, adding incidents to show them off, and dilating on their motives and circumstances; but a novelist who focussed on a single plot and shunned the wasted incident, as Collins did, had a harder problem to solve. I can make the difference clearer by comparing two novels of the middle 1860s with similarly humorous excursions: Can You Forgive Her? by Trollope and Armadale by Collins. Trollope interrupts his primary story of Alice Vavasor and her suitors with a comical seaside picnic that diverts the reader for two full chapters. But Collins, who devises a picnic by boat, cannot afford to distract the reader's attention from his complicated plot. His excursion therefore does triple duty: it injects a note of humor, separates the lovers, and sets the scene for the fateful arrival of the villainess, Lydia Gwilt.

During the 1860s Collins became so adept at enriching his stories that he often exceeded the designated length. The Moonstone was originally scheduled to run for twenty-six numbers of All the Year Round but, at 185,000 words, it ran for thirty-two.<sup>95</sup> Most of what he added to

thicken the texture requires no explication; the tribulations of the lovers, Jennings's poignant journal, the descriptions of the seacoast and the Shivering Sand, are ingredients that feed onto the plot and satisfy Victorian appetites. But a few words might be said about the levels of humor and the novel's tactful sexuality.

To mention humor in connection with The Moonstone is to summon up visions of Miss Clack, the pious voyeur, dispensing tracts for every occasion. Collins himself was quite proud of her and later called her narrative "that portion of The Moonstone which has since proved most successful in amusing the public" (Preface to the Revised Edition). But not all of the Victorian comments substantiate his claim. The Spectator called her "an absurd exaggeration of the bitter evangelical type,"<sup>96</sup> Andrew Lang found her "somewhat mechanical and exaggerated . . . too profuse a writer in 'the patois of Zion,'"<sup>97</sup> the Daily Telegraph dismissed her as "tiresome,"<sup>98</sup> and the hostile Pall Mall Gazette attacked her as "his horrible Miss Clack": "To have introduced the creature now and again might have been endurable; but imagine an author's infatuation in making her the mouthpiece of an important part of his story, and severely exaggerating all the conventional peculiarities of her tribe at the same time. . . . No such stale and strained fun was ever before offered for the regalement of a discerning public."<sup>99</sup> On the other hand, The Times declared, "We could not spare an item of Miss Clack's 'patience' and 'abstinence from judging' others, though all pious ladies are not malignant,"<sup>100</sup> and Swinburne praised "the Evangelical hag who is one of her creator's most thoroughly and simply successful creations."<sup>101</sup> As for the reactions of ordinary readers, Amy Cruse has asserted that she was "a special favourite" and that her narrative "did much towards giving the book its great success."<sup>102</sup>

Like Little Nell, whose reception George Ford has assessed so well in Dickens and His Readers, Drusilla Clack is a character designed to appeal to a distinctly Victorian sensibility. She is an amalgam of several stereotypes endemic to Victorian fiction (and perhaps to Victorian culture): the sex-starved spinster, the meddling busybody, above all the canting moralist or holier-than-thou Evangelical whose religion masks self-interest. Her reception by readers of the period (insofar as it has come down to us) divided along religious lines. Those who, like Andrew Lang, felt that Collins was demeaning all Evangelicals through one exaggerated specimen, tended to judge her harshly. Others, who could divorce her from the genuinely pious or accept her without religious scruples--not to mention the sizeable audience that was prejudiced against the Evangelicals--generally relished the portrait.

Today, the critical assessment of Miss Clack derives from different criteria. Collins laid her qualities on with a trowel. He made no attempt at understatement; the humor is as heavy as her bag of tracts: "Oh, my young friends and fellow-sinners! beware of presuming to exercise your poor carnal reason. Oh, be morally tidy! Let your faith be as your stockings, and your stockings as your faith. Both ever spotless, and both ready to put on at a moment's notice!" (First Nar., Ch. 1). The narrative style permits the densest reader to see through her hypocrisy:

Not the slightest pecuniary interest in Lady Verinder's Will. Oh, how thankful I felt when I heard that! If my aunt, possessed of thousands, had remembered poor Me, to whom five pounds is an object--if my name had appeared in the Will, with a little comforting legacy attached to it--my enemies might have doubted the motive which had loaded me with the choicest treasures of my library, and had drawn upon my failing resources for the prodigal expenses of a cab. Not the cruellest scoffer of them all could doubt now. Much better as it was! Oh, surely, surely, much better as it was! (First Nar., Ch. 3)

While time has not diminished the comic absurdity of Miss Jane Ann Stamper and those "precious publications"--"Satan in the Hair Brush," "Satan Among the Sofa Cushions," and "Hush for Heaven's Sake" among others--the Victorians accepted Miss Clack in doses that now appear excessive, much as they relished vast quantities of food at their dinners or yards of showy fabric in their dresses. Some of the remarks that they found hilarious seem to us to have darker intimations. Collins was particularly fond, for example, of the Select Committee of the Mothers'-Small-Clothes-Conversion Society, whose object, "--as all serious people know--[is] to rescue unredeemed fathers' trousers from the pawnbroker, and to prevent their resumption, on the part of the irreclaimable parent, by abridging them immediately to suit the proportions of the innocent son" (First Nar., Ch. 1). He thought enough of the joke to reiterate it throughout her narrative and to include it in the drastically abridged dramatic version of The Moonstone.<sup>103</sup> Today, the vision of "charitable" women systematically depriving men of their trousers by cutting them down to a child's size suggests a less humorous phenomenon--symbolic emasculation.

But Miss Clack is not the novel's sole source of amusement, though she tends to put the others in the shade; Betteredge is also a comic character, of a very different stamp. Whereas the humor in Miss Clack's narrative is heavy and satiric, the humor in Gabriel's is casual and epigrammatic. Where Miss Clack antagonizes, Betteredge befriends the reader and confides in him through twenty-three garrulous chapters. But the battle of the sexes, comically waged, is an element common to both:

I agree with the late William Cobbett about picking a wife. See that she chews her food well, and sets her foot down firmly on the ground when she walks, and you're all right. Selina Goby

was all right in both these respects, which was one reason for marrying her. I had another reason, likewise, entirely of my own discovering. Selina, being a single woman, made me pay so much a week for her board and services. Selina, being my wife, couldn't charge for her board, and would have to give me her services for nothing. That was the point of view I looked at it from. Economy--with a dash of love. (First Period, Ch. 1)

Another source of humor is the irony implicit in the statements of several of the characters. There are, for example, Miss Clack's complacent remark about her tracts--"the like of which, I firmly believe, are not to be found in the literature of any other country in Europe" (First Nar., Ch. 3)--and Jennings's remark on classic works of literature as "possessing the one great merit of enchaining nobody's interest, and exciting nobody's brain" (Fourth Nar., June 25th). But the ironies in The Moonstone are not invariably comical; a grimmer form of irony appears in the scenes that surround Rosanna's suicide. The dialogue at the Yolland's cottage, when Mrs. Yolland confirms Sergeant Cuff's speculation that the girl is about to leave her place, has an ominous significance that emerges only in retrospect:

" . . . a friend she has got somewhere, I can tell you; and to that friend, you may depend upon it, she will go."

"Soon?" asked the Sergeant.

"As soon as she can," says Mrs. Yolland. (First Period, Ch. 15)

Cuff's later remark that the missing Rosanna has gone to her hiding-place at the Shivering Sand confirms the double-entendre.

As Dorothy Sayers first pointed out, Rosanna's passion for Franklin is distinctly but delicately sensual. Gabriel's description of her first view of Blake has frequently been quoted: "Her complexion turned of a beautiful red, which I had never seen in it before; she brightened all over with a kind of speechless and breathless surprise. 'Who is it?' I asked. Rosanna gave me back my own question. 'Oh! who is it?'

she said, softly, more to herself than to me" (First Period, Ch. 4). To the Victorians, it was of course immodest for a woman to show any passion at all--and ludicrous that a deformed under-housemaid should presume to love a gentleman. But Collins takes Rosanna's side and recruits the reader's sympathy by making her a helpless victim of her passion and keeping its symptoms within bounds. Rosanna is a former thief, but she is not a fallen woman. Her one explicit gesture, aside from her letter, is the daily substitution of her own rose for Rachel's in Franklin's water glass, an act whose sexual symbolism must have eluded readers of the period.<sup>104</sup>

The discretion with which Rosanna's passion is presented is typical of The Moonstone but highly unusual for Collins, whose sexual frankness, as we have seen, was likely to find an outlet in his novels and antagonize Readers in Particular. Collins claimed to have no fear of prudish reviewers, hotly defended his practices, and looked to posterity for vindication;<sup>105</sup> but he was too shrewd a businessman to risk losing his audience for his principles. Two years before The Moonstone, in Armadale, he came as close to the limit as contemporary standards allowed. To write a more explicit novel could have cost him the libraries' patronage (to say nothing of All the Year Round's). Whether his delicacy was a reaction to the fuss over Armadale or the result of other influences (such as his mother's impending death), he shifted his tactics in The Moonstone. There were no scenes in that book to make a young girl blush or to offend a reactionary critic; and yet in many ways, it is sexually the most suggestive of his novels.

Whereas both Thackeray and Dickens are embarrassingly coy about the sexual experience of their heroes, Collins lets the reader know from

the outset that Franklin has been sexually involved with women--"unmentionable" creatures in foreign countries, but women nevertheless. As for the devious Godfrey Ablewhite, Sergeant Cuff exposes his peccadilloes with impeccable understatement:

. . . I may state, at the outset, that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's life had two sides to it.

The side turned up to the public view presented the spectacle of a gentleman, possessed of considerable reputation as a speaker at charitable meetings, and endowed with administrative abilities, which he placed at the disposal of various Benevolent Societies, mostly of the female sort. The side kept hidden from the general notice exhibited this same gentleman in the totally different character of a man of pleasure, with a villa in the suburbs which was not taken in his own name, and with a lady in the villa, who was not taken in his own name either.

(Sixth Nar., Ch. 3)

Perhaps as surprising as the disclosure itself is the statement Cuff makes afterward--not with the embarrassment of a man who has shocked his auditors, but rather with the modest assurance that he has said nothing unusual: "All this is, so far, common enough. The villa and the lady are such familiar objects in London life, that I ought to apologize for introducing them to notice" (ibid.). Whether Victorian readers would have agreed with him is questionable; but at least Collins was able to confront them with the seamier aspects of the sexual code and the existence of the double standard. Cuff's groundless speculations as to Rachel's motives for stealing her own diamond, and Rosanna's first thoughts about Franklin's nocturnal visit to Rachel's room, also suggest the abysses concealed by Victorian propriety.<sup>106</sup>

Then there is Limping Lucy, the fisherman's daughter with a passionate attachment to Rosanna. Geraldine Jewsbury, the Athenaeum reviewer, thought that Lucy's friendship should have been made the means of saving Rosanna: "The cloud that hangs over her horrible death might

have been lifted by a true artist, and she might have been allowed to live and recover her right mind, under the tender influence of her friend, 'Limping Lucy.'"<sup>107</sup> Today, Lucy's inconsolable grief for her "lost darling" and her fanatical hatred of Franklin, the man who has come between them, suggest a homosexual attachment rather than a "tender influence."

Limping Lucy is a pathetic figure even when she rages, whereas Dru-silla Clack is a ludicrous example of sexual frustration. Collins expected his readers to enjoy the joke of her spiteful hatred for Rachel and to laugh at the passion for Godfrey that she disguises as spiritual rapture:

He beamed on us with his beautiful smile; he held out a hand to my aunt, and a hand to me. I was too deeply affected by his noble conduct to speak. I closed my eyes; I put his hand, in a kind of spiritual self-forgetfulness, to my lips. He murmured a soft remonstrance. Oh, the ecstasy, the pure, un-earthly ecstasy of that moment! I sat--I hardly know on what--quite lost in my own exalted feelings. (First Nar., Ch. 2)

Ordinarily, the disappointed characters appeal to the reader's sympathies, but Miss Clack, who combines the attributes of Mrs. Grundy and a Peeping Tom, epitomizes what he saw as a major moral evil of the age, the prude who seeks to impose her own perverted standards on others.<sup>108</sup>

Finally, there are the sexual implications of the central plot itself. When Franklin steals into Rachel's room at night and surreptitiously removes the Moonstone from her cabinet, she loses her most precious possession. Eventually she compensates by marrying him and becoming pregnant, but her jewel is irrevocably lost to her. Recalling the Victorian maxim that a young girl's virginity is her most precious possession, and the statement in the Prologue that the diamond's luster waxes and wanes on a lunar cycle, I feel inclined to agree with Charles Rycroft that the theft is a symbolic defloration. (On the Freudian

implications of the novel, see his persuasive "Analysis of a Detective Story"<sup>109</sup> and Lewis A. Lawson's work on The Moonstone's sexual imagery.<sup>110)</sup>

For all his boldness, Collins could hardly have meant to imply what these modern psychologists discern in his story--nor would his readers have fathomed the sexual implications of the theft, let alone a night-gown stained as its owner passed through his sweetheart's doorway. Still, he was sexually one of the more sophisticated men of his era, and he would have realized that the moon and precious gems have been female symbols since antiquity. On one of the pages that he read in King's book there is a description of a diamond that the Indians had tried to fashion in the shape of a Yoni, the symbol of the female genitalia; it was broken in two in the year of the Sepoy mutiny.<sup>111</sup> We shall never know whether this description affected his plans. But we do know that he originally intended to call his novel The Serpent's Eye and to make the Indian priests worshippers of snakes, and that in the planning stages he altered the title to one more emblematic of his purposes. The theft is perpetrated, traced, and solved by men; but at the heart of the story is a "young girl" who inherits and perpetuates the domestic values dear to the hearts of the Victorians--after she has lost her Moonstone.

#### The Dark Side of "The Moonstone"

Throughout this discussion I have maintained that Collins was concerned with his readers' reactions, that he wanted by and large to please them, and that he shaped his work accordingly, but so far I have avoided assessing the overall effect of his intentions. Did Collins's eagerness to please his readers improve his novels or mar them? The tendency of modern critics is to answer that any author who allows his readers'

tastes to influence his fiction automatically descends in stature and diminishes the literary value of his work. In the case of Victorian novelists, however, this opinion is short-sighted; and in the case of Wilkie Collins and The Moonstone, it is decidedly misleading, for while the desire to be popular had adverse consequences for many of his later novels, it was clearly beneficial to The Moonstone. Not all of the benefits were evident to the readers for whom they were intended; but modern readers with altered perspectives and new tools of critical analysis should be able to appreciate the range of reader influences and their obvious and subtle contributions.

On the other hand, Collins did not always try to gratify the public. I said previously (Chapter IV) that the most productive source of tension in his fiction arose from his ambivalent desire to please and upset the reader, and until now I have concentrated on the first of these tendencies. Yet even in his inferior work he never simply catered to the crowd, for he was cognizant of the intellectual, social, and political currents of his era, saw many of the ills of his society, and unhesitatingly exposed them--although he risked antagonizing substantial portions of his audience.

Paradoxically, he was least effective when he thundered his message. The Fallen Leaves, an attack on Grundyism and a defense of fallen women; The Black Robe, an attack on Catholicism; and Heart and Science, an attack on vivisectionists and the misuse of scientific inquiry, are too flagrantly abusive and biased to be convincing. Even the earlier novels of purpose, such as Man and Wife, fail to persuade the reader to espouse the reforms they insistently promote. His criticism was far more eloquent when it was subtle and suggestive. None of his novels is as profoundly critical

of Victorian values as The Moonstone; and none is more subtle in linking its political, social, and religious censure to its central images and symbols.

The central symbol of The Moonstone is, of course, the Moonstone itself. Here are Gabriel's first impressions:

Lord bless us! it was a Diamond! As large, or nearly, as a plover's egg! The light that streamed from it was like the light of the harvest-moon. When you looked down into the stone, you looked into a yellow deep that drew your eyes into it so that they saw nothing else. It seemed unfathomable; this jewel, that you could hold between your finger and thumb, seemed unfathomable as the heavens themselves. We set it in the sun, and then shut the light out of the room, and it shone awfully out of the depths of its own brightness, with a moony gleam, in the dark. (First Period, Ch. 9)

The reader soon learns that the diamond's brilliance is cruel and delusory, that it enters darkly into the lives of all the English characters who encounter it. It is directly responsible for Godfrey's death, and indirectly for Rosanna's and Lady Verinder's. It separates Rachel and Franklin. It baffles the law and the police. It destroys the peace of the household. In short, the diamond is dark despite its brightness, and is thus a fitting symbol of the novel's central metaphor of light and darkness and its pervasive light-and-darkness imagery.

The plot itself is a journey into and out of the shadows. The story begins on a fine summer's day in an English country house, but the characters' lives are darkened when the diamond is stolen in the night, after Rachel's party. Laboriously, they work their way through the obscurity until, by a process of gradual illumination, they clear away the mystery surrounding the diamond. Images of light and darkness saturate the narrative. "In the dark, I have brought you thus far. In the dark I am compelled to leave you with my best respects," Gabriel says at

the end of the First Period (Ch. 22). "A dark conspiracy was on foot in the midst of us," Drusilla Clack affirms (First Nar., Ch. 1). Rachel says in self-vindication, "I have involved myself in the keeping of a miserable secret--but it will be as clear as the sun at noon-day that I did nothing mean!" (First Nar., Ch. 5). Franklin speaks of his "slow and toilsome journey from the darkness to the light" (Third Nar., Ch. 5), and complains that he has "[n]ot a glimpse of light" to guide him through the "impenetrable darkness" after Rachel has accused him of the theft (Third Nar., Ch. 7). Ezra Jennings, attempting to help him, explains, "I shall feel it like a last gleam of sunshine, falling on the evening of a long and cloudy day" (Third Nar., Ch. 10). The scenic descriptions are also connected with images of light and darkness, as nature typically reinforces the characters' actions and emotions. When Rosanna dies miserably, the clouds grow black and the rain pelts down; when Jennings dies peacefully the morning sunlight touches his face.

In these examples the metaphors are clear and unequivocal. But the metaphoric complexity of the story only begins with its narrative. Who can think long about light and darkness without recalling that these terms are traditionally connected to the great concerns of mankind--to good and evil, knowledge and ignorance, reason and unreason, faith and doubt? Collins certainly could not, and in The Moonstone he touched upon them all.

One of the first articles to discuss the moral and political issues that the novel raises is John R. Reed's "English Imperialism and the Unacknowledged Crime of The Moonstone."<sup>112</sup> Reed feels that in The Moonstone Collins challenged both the assumptions and the practices of his "ostensibly moral society,"<sup>113</sup> exposing respectable behavior as a

cover for greed and self-interest. Godfrey Ablewhite, who masquerades as a pious and respectable citizen, is exposed when he steals the diamond; but his is not the major theft, for the diamond had been plundered long before by Colonel Herncastle, an officer and a gentleman. No character in the novel realizes that the Moonstone is stolen property, the spoils of British imperialism, that the family which legally owns it has no moral right to it, and that "it rightly belongs to the men they view as thieves," the Indian Brahmins.<sup>114</sup> But the Prologue and the Epilogue disclose to us the rightful owners of the diamond. Besides, harmony and order prevail within the story only after the Hindus have removed the gem from England and restored it to its hallowed position in the forehead of the god of the moon.

If Reed is correct (and I think he is), then Collins was challenging his readers' preconceptions of good and evil. For if the society within the novel, which reflected the society beyond its boundaries, approves of the original theft and castigates the Indians, then its ethics are questionable--and those who accepted its judgments blindly also had dubious values. Reed points out that most of the admirable characters are partially estranged from respectable society. Ezra Jennings, the benevolent doctor's assistant, is shunned by the townspeople; Rosanna Spearman, the former thief who dies protecting the man she loves, is disliked by her fellow servants; both regard themselves as outcasts. Even Rachel and Franklin are alienated to some degree, Rachel by the stubborn obstinacy that makes her hold to her own beliefs, Franklin by the cosmopolitan education that makes him in many ways un-English. (Reed omits to mention Lady Verinder, an admirable character who is also eminently respectable; but then Lady Verinder was born in an earlier, and

perhaps a more moral, era.) On the other side, Godfrey Ablewhite, the character whom the respectable Betteredge and Miss Clack admire above all men, turns out to be the villain.

So the characters are seldom what they seem, and their perceptions, like the Moonstone, are deceiving. No character is as frequently mistaken in his opinions as Gabriel Betteredge, who functions as the reader's guide for nearly half the story. "I am (thank God!) constitutionally superior to reason" (First Period, Ch. 20 [21]), he says with an unconscious irony that his judgments fully corroborate. He regards Godfrey as a paragon whom Rachel must prefer to Franklin, he thinks Rosanna's love for Franklin is absurd, and that Mr. Candy is talking nonsense when in fact the doctor's delirious remarks hold the key to the mystery. He is hopelessly inaccurate, yet he prides himself on being a sensible man of more than ordinary acumen. But then, even Sergeant Cuff and Mr. Bruff, the most intelligent figures in the novel, walk around in a haze of misconception. Cuff is sure that Rachel stole her own diamond; Bruff is sure that Jennings's theory is ridiculous. Thus the detective and the lawyer reveal the confusion between knowledge and ignorance that is endemic to the story.

The events themselves are more equivocal than the characters who interpret them. The Colonel bequeaths the Moonstone to his niece-- ostensibly a gesture of reconciliation, actually an act of revenge. The hero of the novel unconsciously doubles as its thief. The heroine, with the highest of motives, makes everybody miserable. Appearances are misleading, and so the "knowledge" they give rise to is only ignorance in disguise. Rachel knows that Godfrey is innocent; Franklin knows himself to be innocent; both of them are mistaken.

Throughout the narrative, reason is double-edged, the source of both confusion and enlightenment. On the one hand, Collins confronts the reader with a mystery that must be solved through logic and deduction. Like Murthwaite the explorer, the narrative attempts "step by step . . . to trace results back, by rational means, to natural causes" (Second Nar., Ch. 3). On the other hand, the reasonable characters are so often fallible, and the implausible interpretation is so frequently the right one, as to undermine our faith in the rational.

We can dismiss the problem, as most critics have, by calling the false leads so many "red herrings" designed to confuse the reader.<sup>115</sup> Or, looking deeper, we can say that Collins is upsetting our parochial view of the rational--that his target is not reason itself, but rather, the unimaginative exercise of reason, in and beyond the story, by those who cannot concede the validity of that which surpasses their experience. The text supplies abundant examples to strengthen this interpretation. Here, for instance, is Blake telling Betteredge why his father originally agreed to be the Colonel's executor:

"I'll tell you what he did. He brought the invaluable faculty called common sense to bear on the Colonel's letter. The whole thing, he declared, was simply absurd. Somewhere in his Indian wanderings the Colonel had picked up with some wretched crystal which he took for a diamond. As for the danger of his being murdered, and the precautions devised to preserve his life and his piece of crystal, this was the nineteenth century, and any man in his senses had only to apply to the police. The Colonel had been a notorious opium-eater for years past; and, if the only way of getting at the valuable papers he possessed was by accepting a matter of opium as a matter of fact, my father was quite willing to take the ridiculous responsibility imposed on him--all the more readily that it involved no trouble to himself. The Diamond and the sealed instructions went into his banker's strong-room, and the Colonel's letters, periodically reporting him [as] a living man, were received and opened by the lawyer [our family lawyer, Mr Bruff], as my father's representative. No sensible person, in a similar position, could have

viewed the matter in any other way. Nothing in this world, Betteredge, is probable unless it appeals to our own trumpery experience; and we only believe in a romance when we see it in a newspaper." (First Period, Ch. 6)

Of course, the sensible Mr. Blake has wholly misjudged the situation. The crystal is a diamond, the Colonel is sane, and the Indians are murderous. Franklin himself does not feel bound to the common-sense view of his father. "But then," he explains, "I am an imaginative man; and the butcher, the baker, and the tax-gatherer, are not the only credible realities in existence to my mind" (ibid.). Collins displays his own imagination in creating a "romance of the actual"--a story that is "wild, and yet domestic," as Dickens so aptly put it.<sup>116</sup> The mystery cannot be solved by ordinary reasoning or by strictly logical analysis; it yields only to inspired deduction and imaginative hypotheses. Yet even imagination has its limits. Franklin fails to fathom the reasons for Rachel's altered behavior, and Jennings, another imaginative man, cannot believe that the diamond is in the possession of Luker's bankers.

On a still deeper level, Collins invites his readers to confront the ambiguous boundaries of reason, and to acknowledge that sometimes good faith and intuition are sounder guides to personal conduct than intelligence. Lady Verinder, supported by her trust in human nature, welcomes Rosanna into her house and staunchly asserts her daughter's innocence, while Sergeant Cuff, with years of practical experience "along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world" (First Period, Ch. 12), suspects them all--and he is wrong. Gabriel, on the right side when he trusts his heart instead of his perceptions, challenges Cuff's fallible reasoning: "If Sergeant Cuff had been Solomon in all his glory, and had told me that my young lady had mixed herself up in a mean and guilty plot,

I should have had but one answer for Solomon, wise as he was: 'You don't know her, and I do'" (First Period, Ch. 16).

But if human wisdom and human reason are not sufficient guides for conduct, and if circumstances can fatally mislead even the most imaginative men, what alternative is left? Traditionally, the answer would have been simple: faith in God and trust in Providence. In the world of The Moonstone, however, the traditional gods have departed; their worshippers kneel at empty shrines.

No one (to my knowledge) has ever asserted that Collins was concerned with matters of faith, much less that he dealt with complex religious issues in The Moonstone. He did not believe in an afterlife; he attended church rarely and only to please others,<sup>117</sup> lived in "sin" with not one but two women, and openly censured Catholics and Dissenters. He is therefore commonly supposed to have been an agnostic and a man who had no use for religion. But there is biographical and fictional evidence to contradict this point of view. Early in the 1850s, at the start of his career, Collins wrote a number of articles for The Leader, a journal then edited and published by his good friend, Edward Smyth Pigott. When Pigott began to include religious articles in his publication, Collins protested vehemently:

I go with you in your judgment in Literature--but, in regard to your mixing up the name of Jesus Christ with the current politics of the day, I am against you--against you with all my heart and soul. I will expose and condemn as heartily as any of you the corruptions and abuses of Church politics, as the inventions of man--but if one of the things you understand by "freedom of religious thought" be the freedom of mingling Our Saviour's name with the politics of the day--I protest against that "freedom", as something irredeemably bad in itself; and utterly useless for any good purpose whatever.<sup>118</sup>

He added later in the letter, "I am neither a Protestant, a Catholic-- or a Dissenter--I do not desire to discuss this or that particular creed; but I believe Jesus Christ to be the son of God; and believing that, I think it a blasphemy to use his name, as it is used in [two recent articles]."

Collins was still in his twenties when he wrote that letter, and his views may well have changed with time; but a later passage in The Fallen Leaves (1879)--a book about which he had strong personal feelings<sup>119</sup>--suggests that as a much older man he retained these early beliefs. Amelius Goldenheart, the hero, has been removed from England by his father because "the Christian religion, as Christ taught it, has long ceased to be the religion of the Christian world. A selfish and cruel Pretense is set up in its place" (First Book, Ch. II). He is raised by the members of an American religious community, whose rules he explains to a British clergyman on the way back to England:

We find our Christianity in the spirit of the New Testament--not in the letter. . . . We find, in the spirit of the book, the most simple and the most perfect system of religion and morality that humanity has ever received--and with that we are content. To reverence God; and to love our neighbor as ourselves: if we had only those two commandments to guide us, we should have enough. The whole collection of Doctrines (as they are called) we reject at once, without even stopping to discuss them. We apply to them the test suggested by Christ himself: by their fruits ye shall know them. The fruits of Doctrines, in the past (to quote three instances only), have been the Spanish Inquisition, the Massacre of St. Bartholomew, and the Thirty Years' War--and the fruits, in the present, are dissension, bigotry, and opposition to useful reforms. Away with Doctrines! In the interests of Christianity, away with them! We are to love our enemies; we are to forgive injuries; we are to help the needy; we are to be pitiful and courteous, slow to judge others, ashamed to exalt ourselves. That teaching doesn't lead to tortures, massacres, and wars; to envy, hatred, and malice--and for that reason it stands revealed to us as the teaching that we can trust. (First Book, Ch. II)

A man's fiction is a notoriously unreliable guide to his biography; but this passage rings with sincerity, and it affirms what we know from other sources about Collins's personal code of ethics. Like the letter, it is consistent with the views he intimates in The Moonstone, despite his distaste for mixing religion with secular forms of writing. But then, perhaps because of his mother's death, or perhaps because his painful illness forced him to confront his own mortality, The Moonstone is exceptional. Again and again, it alludes to the state of religion in mid-nineteenth-century England.

The most obvious and recurrent religious imagery is connected to the Moonstone itself, that "devilish Indian Diamond" (First Period, Ch. 5). It has been left to Rachel by a man of whom "the devil remained in undisturbed possession," despite his apparent conversion (Ch. 5), and within hours it has begun to function as the devil's legacy, casting its spell on the birthday dinner and then disappearing in the darkness. "I wish to God the Diamond had never found its way into this house!" Betteredge says to Sergeant Cuff, who agrees with him (Ch. 16); but because it has, they are all drawn into an "informal network of mysteries and uncertainties" (Ch. 11) and compelled to follow the "devil's dance of the Indian Diamond" to London (Ch. 22 [23]).

The Moonstone is not the only diabolical object in the story. As Rosanna remarks some days before her death, the Shivering Sand is an Inferno: "It looks as if it had hundreds of suffocating people under it--all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and lower in the dreadful deeps!" (First Period, Ch. 4). Franklin, who later remarks on "the awful shiver that crept over its surface--as if some spirit

of terror lived and moved and shuddered in the fathomless deeps beneath" (Third Nar., Ch. 3), wishes "to God" that they had thrown the diamond into the quicksand (First Period, Ch. 14), a move that would have given the devil his own and probably have saved Rosanna. But no one dreams of surrendering the stone to its original dark-skinned inheritors, who are regarded as little better than demons by most of the other characters.

The men in the novel make aimless allusions to the devil with astonishing frequency. Betteredge says that Rachel is "devilish self-willed sometimes" (First Period, Ch. 8), wishes that the devil would take Superintendent Seegrave (Ch. 11), describes the maids who spy on Rosanna as "two devils" (Ch. 14), associates Cuff with "the father of lies" when he questions Mrs. Yolland (Ch. 15), damns him for his "devilish cunning" (Ch. 17), and even mutters "devil take him!" for his suspicions of Rosanna (Ch. 21). Franklin says that he is "going to the devil" when Rachel's conduct drives him from the house (Ch. 23), Cuff wonders "what the devil" Rosanna has hidden in the tin case (Ch. 15), and even the stolid Mr. Bruff invokes Lord Harry when it suits his purposes: "What the devil does it mean!" he exclaims after Gooseberry, his "attendant sprite," has gone off to follow Godfrey (Fifth Nar., Ch. 1).

It is possible that this casual profanity serves other purposes, to reinforce the Gothic aspects of the story and give it more sinister undertones or to approximate the ordinary discourse of men among themselves. But Collins rarely introduced even mild profanity into his earlier novels, and when he did, he wanted his readers to dislike the offending characters. In The Woman in White, for all its Gothic ingredients, there is only one character who swears at all, the evil-tempered Sir Percival.<sup>120</sup> Besides, The Moonstone's chief offender is not a

worldly man to whom such language would be natural, but rather, the respectable family retainer who regards himself as a Protestant and a firm, if not a model, Christian.

In appearance Betteredge resembles a clergyman, as Collins informed his American illustrator. Yet his language is anything but clerical, and his lapses cannot be ascribed to his attacks of that "infernal detective fever," for irreverent theological allusions punctuate his everyday vocabulary. "As I live by bread, here were the jugglers," he says when the Indians return (First Period, Ch. 10), in a casual reversal of the Biblical injunction.<sup>121</sup> He has his moments of reverence. He prays God that Lady Verinder's hand, which "had loaded her old servant with benefits," will take his when his time comes (Ch. 20 [21])--a hope that is doomed to disappointment since she dies shortly afterwards. He prays God, with obvious sincerity, to bless his daughter after Rosanna's death and Franklin as he leaves the house. But even these, the most devout of his references, are sentimental rather than sacred. Gabriel retains the patois of the Protestant tradition, but he has lost most of its substance.

His comments on his fellow servants show that they too are more Christian in the letter than in the spirit. The day after the theft, he says, the women servants "took to their Bibles and hymn-books, and looked as sour as verjuice over their reading--a result which I have observed, in my sphere of life, to follow generally on the performance of acts of piety at unaccustomed periods of the day" (Ch. 11). As for Sunday--the holy sabbath of Victorian tradition--"We ended the day of rest as hundreds of thousands of people end it regularly, once a week, in these islands--that is to say, we all anticipated bed-time, and fell asleep in our

chairs" (Ch. 22 [23]). Ultimately, he reaches beyond his sphere, to impute his kind of faith to his audience: "Nota bene--I am an average good Christian, when you don't push my Christianity too far. And all the rest of you--which is a great comfort--are, in this respect, much the same as I am" (Ch. 20 [21]).

Gabriel Betteredge is clearly a sympathetic character: a faithful servant, an affectionate father, a likeable old gossip. But his name connects him with higher purposes--and Collins was careful in his naming. In Christian theology, Gabriel is the Archangel of the Annunciation. In Paradise Lost, the greatest work of literature produced within the Protestant tradition (and one that Collins often alludes to), Gabriel guards the gates of Paradise and attempts to keep Satan from Adam and Eve. But in this secular, middle-class Victorian novel, Gabriel has been transmogrified into the house-steward of a country mansion. He announces the theft of the diamond, and eventually he heralds the birth of a baby; but for the most part he appears a well-meaning but helpless old man who can only watch while Franklin and Rachel leave the household he supervises--separately. Worst of all, his deepest allegiance is not to God but to Robinson Crusoe. He turns to Crusoe in situations where others might turn to their Bibles, opening it at random and finding in its pages words of comfort, guidance, and prophecy. He consults the book so frequently that he nearly wears out his seventh copy during the course of his narratives. He estimates the worth of other characters by their regard for his favorite text, approving of Franklin, who humors him, and protesting at Jennings, who does not. He warns even the audience to take its message seriously: "You are welcome to be as merry as you

please over everything else I have written. But when I write of Robinson Crusoe, by the Lord it's serious--and I request you to take it accordingly!" (Eighth Nar.).

Are these references to Robinson Crusoe merely a quirk to stamp Betteredge in our memories? Or are we to do as he says and take the allusions seriously? A study of the passages he quotes offers little to confirm their usefulness; on the contrary, Gabriel's faith in his gospel is all too likely to delude him. The night when he comforts himself by reading, "Fear of Danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than Danger itself" (First Period, Ch. 10), the Moonstone is stolen; when he urges Jennings to take Crusoe's advice and "obey the secret Dictate" (Fourth Nar., June 20th)--i.e., abandon the laudanum experiment--Jennings ignores the warning, and Gabriel must later apologize. Yet in a larger sense, the first text does shed light upon the second.

Robinson Crusoe was written in the aftermath of the first great Protestant movement of reform; The Moonstone was written in the aftermath of the Evangelical revival. Defoe's book deals with two subjects that are also of paramount interest to Collins: the white man's fear of the dark-skinned savage (of which I shall say more later), and the workings of Providence compared to the effects of human labor and ingenuity. Crusoe repeatedly reminds the reader that he owes his salvation to Providence, that without God's mercy he would never have survived. But the reader can see what Crusoe cannot: whatever Providence has done in his behalf, he has done infinitely more for himself. As Ian Watt says, "Crusoe lives in the imagination mainly as a triumph of human achievement and enterprise. . . ." <sup>122</sup> He may read his Bible three times a day

and preach Christianity to Friday; but he is a true disciple of the gospel of work and the new religion of capitalism.

In The Moonstone, Providence becomes even more problematic than it was in Robinson Crusoe. Fate is plausibly an agent in the novel, in that the diamond seems to doom its possessors and that "crime brings its own fatality with it," as the narrator says in the Prologue (Ch. 4). But Providence is no longer the mark of divine intervention in men's lives (as it remained to some extent for Dickens). It has either become a vehicle of irony, exposing the absurdities of those who invoke it, or degenerated into coincidence. It may be providential that Murthwaite appears just in time to explain the Indians' behavior, or that Jennings crosses Franklin's path just when his services are needed; but clearly, the hand behind these events is the author's and not the Almighty's.<sup>123</sup> As for the nominal creed of the characters, it is even further divorced from an active faith than that of Robinson Crusoe. The servants sourly resort to their hymn-books after Seegrave has antagonized them; the gentlemen swear by God and the devil in phrases devoid of religious reverence. And these are the "average good Christians," the norm of the novel's society.

The most corrupt of all the characters are the two who make a display of their religion, Miss Clack and Godfrey Ablewhite. Collins's heavy satire forces the dullest reader to see through Miss Clack's professions. She is selfishness, greed, hypocrisy, and spite in the guise of piety. While she is largely ineffectual within the framework of the novel, Collins hints that her real-life counterparts are not so easily contained. For example, the "solemn duty of interfering" (First Nar.,

Ch. 7) that makes her an inveterate meddler takes the more ominous form, in the world outside, of merciless fanaticism:

Once self-supported by conscience, once embarked on a career of manifest usefulness, the true Christian never yields. Neither public nor private influences produce the slightest effect on us, when we have once got our mission. Taxation may be the consequences of a mission; riots may be the consequence of a mission; wars may be the consequence of a mission: we go on with our work, irrespective of every human consideration which moves the world outside us. We are above reason: we are beyond ridicule; we see with nobody's eyes, we hear with nobody's ears, we feel with nobody's hearts but our own. Glorious, glorious privilege! And how is it earned? Ah, my friends, you may spare yourselves the useless inquiry! We are the only people who can earn it--for we are the only people who are always right. (Ch. 4)<sup>124</sup>

Godfrey is her masculine counterpart--a hypocrite, sensualist, liar, swindler, and ultimately, a thief; yet to Miss Clack he is a "Christian hero," the incarnation of all the virtues. The gap between his professions and his practices would have been even more pronounced had Collins kept to his original intention of making Godfrey a clergyman.<sup>125</sup> But, whether in deference to his pious mother or to avoid the howls of the critics, he reconsidered and turned the mercenary Reverend Ablewhite into a philanthropist. Aside from the fact that Godfrey's corruption reaches criminal proportions, the major difference between these two is their degree of self-awareness. Miss Clack lacks the capacity to know herself for what she is--although her illusions are readily apparent to others. But Godfrey is knowingly deceitful. All his efforts are directed at preventing discovery by others, so that when Cuff strips off his disguise at his death, the exposure is both literal and symbolic.

In contrast, the characters who actually live by their faith--Lady Verinder and Ezra Jennings--say next to nothing about it. Jennings, with his dark complexion and parti-colored hair, has affinities with the

Indian priests, as Reed and Ian Ousby suggest.<sup>126</sup> But more importantly, he is a Christlike figure--stigmatized by an unnamed slander, reviled by the townspeople, yet humane and merciful in all his actions ("Ezra" is Hebrew for "help"). Lady Verinder, surely a surrogate for Collins's beloved mother, justifies Gabriel's description of her as "a Christian woman, if ever there was one yet" (First Period, Ch. 4) by her charity, kindness, and forbearance. They are the diametric opposites of Godfrey and Miss Clack, the handsome blond scoundrel whom "everybody" loves and the ugly woman who insists that Christians be formed in her own image; and significantly, both are dead by the end of the story, Jennings in an unmarked grave.

Thus, like knowledge, perception, and reason, faith becomes paradoxical. The professing Christians are un-Christian, the 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.

At this distance in time, it is hard to realize how emancipated Collins's depiction of his Brahmins really was. The Moonstone appeared only eleven years after the Indian Mutiny; and even before that catastrophic event, the very word "Indian" conjured up grim visions in most Victorian minds. "No more abusive epithet existed in the Christian vocabulary than that which labelled a person 'worse even than an Indian.' . . . for the British public India was firmly established as the quintessence of depravity."<sup>127</sup> So writes Francis G. Hutchins in a recent study; and Dickens's opinion certainly gives credence to his statement:

And I wish I were Commander in Chief in India. The first thing I would do to strike that Oriental race with amazement . . . should be to proclaim to them in their language, that I considered my holding that appointment by the leave of God, to mean that I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the

stain of the late cruelties rested; and that I was there for that purpose and no other, and was now proceeding, with all convenient dispatch and merciful swiftness of execution, to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the Earth.<sup>128</sup>

Or, if Dickens seems too emotional a guide to the state of public opinion, here is a description of Hindustan from one of the sources Collins consulted, the Encyclopaedia Britannica: "The Inhabitants of Hindustan rank much lower in the scale of civilization than the nations of Europe. They are far behind them in literature, science, and the arts, and in all the civil institutions of society; and their religion is that of a rude people, consisting of an endless detail of troublesome ceremonies, which are deeply interwoven with the whole system of life."<sup>129</sup>

The stereotype persisted; and Collins did not wholly avoid it, for initially he portrays the three Indians as dangerous and devious exotics. But as the story advances the reader's perspective on the Brahmins slowly alters. Through the imperceptive Gabriel, that "average good Christian," the reader first sees them as dangerous charlatans who move like tigers, bow like snakes, and threaten decent English families--inferiors fit to be thrown in jail without a shred of evidence (First Period, Ch. 11). Later, like the sensible Mr. Bruff, he may view them more ambivalently, with a blend of apprehension and respect:

If the Moonstone had been in my possession, this Oriental gentleman would have murdered me, I am well aware, without a moment's hesitation. At the same time, and barring that slight drawback, I am bound to testify that he was the perfect model of a client. He might not have respected my life. But he did what none of my own countrymen had ever done in all my experience of them--he respected my time. (Third Nar., Ch. 2)

Both Bruff and Murthwaite acknowledge the resourceful intelligence and tenacity of the Brahmins--qualities that the Victorians rarely credited Indians with possessing. But Murthwaite goes even further; he describes

them as romantic and tragic figures, priests who have renounced caste and country in service to a god who will demand of them a lifelong purification.

None of the characters, not even Murthwaite, achieves a rounded view of the Indians. But the Prologue and the Epilogue, which unify balance the novel morally and structurally, give the reader an overall perspective. In the Prologue, after slaughtering three guardian priests, Herncastle plunders the Moonstone; in the Epilogue, the spiritual descendants of those priests suffocate Herncastle's spiritual descendant--the thief who has taken their sacred gem to repay what he stole from a Trust--and return it to their god. Thus these sections reverse and correct the assumptions of the inner story, revealing the Indians as selfless devotees and the Englishmen as devious and criminal.

John Reed, whose reading of the novel is as somber as it is perceptive, sees The Moonstone as "a broad indictment of an entire way of life."<sup>130</sup> I think he goes too far, for we are dealing here with the dark currents of a novel whose temper is essentially sanguine. Collins was not so alienated as to indict all of English society. Rachel and Franklin marry happily and Gabriel continues to serve them, while Bruff and Cuff, society's guardians, lead lives of unquestionable probity. Even Jennings, whom Reed regards as a touchstone of alienation, dies with an "angelic" expression on his face and "Peace" upon his lips (Seventh Nar.). Yet certainly, Collins confronts his perspicacious readers with thoroughly uncomfortable paradoxes and with a fictional society, modelled on their own, whose assumptions about knowledge, reason, and faith--and perhaps most of all, its own righteousness--require radical revisions.

No more potent symbol of paradox can be found than the Moonstone itself. As a secular legacy valued solely in pounds, it darkens the lives of all it touches. Even the English characters who are not venial--Lady Verinder, Rachel, and Franklin--find the diamond a clouded inheritance. But when it is returned to India it becomes a glowing emblem of faith, brightening the darkness to which it belongs. "There," says Murthwaite, "raised high on a throne, seated on his typical antelope, with his four arms stretching toward the four corners of the earth, there soared above us, dark and awful in the mystic light of heaven, the god of the Moon. And there, in the forehead of the deity, gleamed the yellow Diamond, whose splendor had last shone on me, in England, from the bosom of a woman's dress!" (Epilogue, III).

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How much of the darker side of The Moonstone did period readers discern? How much of Collins's message got through to them? On the basis of the extant evidence one would have to say, very little. Aside from marvelling at the false clues and mistaken appearances, censuring the two religious hypocrites (above all, the fraudulent Godfrey), and possibly concluding that the fatal gem belonged with its benighted Indian worshippers,<sup>131</sup> ordinary readers of 1868 would have dismissed the book as one of Collins's better puzzles. But then, the mid-Victorians did not examine fiction for its deeper significance. They expected and relished clear moral instruction, but more recondite meanings offended or escaped them, as the critical reaction to Dickens's later novels abundantly illustrates. Besides, the very genre of The Moonstone, a sensational detective mystery, mitigated against its reception as serious

social commentary. At most, as William Marshall has suggested, it would have shown contemporary readers "that, by the exercise of reason to discover and destroy some form of evil, man might attain good--an implication which is thereafter subject to no very close scrutiny."<sup>132</sup> What is surprising is not that period readers should have failed to take Collins seriously, but that so many modern scholars dismiss The Moonstone as entertainment.

But then, Collins has generally been underrated as a novelist of serious purpose. Literary men of the caliber of Dickens, Swinburne, and Eliot have praised his work; scholars of distinction have been drawn to him;<sup>133</sup> yet to this day, such eminent critics as Bradford Booth and J.I.M. Stewart persist in asserting that, even at his best, he was simply a brilliant weaver of plots, the mastermind who concocted the first (and perhaps the greatest) detective novel.<sup>134</sup> To some extent, Collins himself is responsible for the reputation that has obscured the range of his accomplishments. Throughout his career, he assumed the guise of a genial, popular novelist, insisting that even casual acquaintances call him "Wilkie" and approaching his readers directly as a friend on their own level. When Mary Anderson praised one of his books, he replied, "Ah, I am only an old fellow who has a liking for story-telling, nothing more."<sup>135</sup> To preserve this casual image and to keep the friendly regard of the ordinary reader, he concealed the subtleties of his work behind a facade of uncomplicated prose and complicated plotting. Collins may not have attained the stature of Dickens or George Eliot; nonetheless, it is time to reconsider his achievement.

Throughout The Moonstone one message is clear: appearances are deceiving. Circumstantial evidence misleads Sergeant Cuff, Godfrey's

false front misleads them all, and Blake is misled because he cannot envision his own unconscious behavior. Most of all, the reader is misled by the text, which is a maze of false leads and blind alleys, of narratives that purport to provide a solution but also mask or conceal it. Actually, there are two kinds of textual evidence: the narratives themselves--the open text, the one that is immediately accessible to the reader--and various hidden or buried texts that correct or realign the narratives. Among these hidden texts are Rosanna's letter, buried in the sand; the note that tells the Indians to come to London, intercepted and translated by Murthwaite; the record of Mr. Candy's delirium, which Jennings makes comprehensible; the slip in the empty jewel box, discovered too late at Godfrey's bedside; and--most dramatic of all--the mark of the owner's name in the nightgown.

Like its textual evidence, The Moonstone itself has an obvious and a hidden significance. As a popular novel with an all-engrossing plot and a better than average cast of characters, it requires nothing more of the reader than a disposition for solving mysteries and a desire to be entertained. On a deeper level, as I have tried to indicate, it is a story with considerable social and literary import, and a text that amply rewards the reader's investigation.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Random Recollections of an Old Publisher (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1900), pp. 114-15. And cf. the review of his American publisher: "The weekly numbers of his tales are seized with an eagerness with which an important letter is opened and read, or rather devoured." Harper's Weekly, 12 (22 August 1868), 531; Page, p. 5.

<sup>2</sup> See William Winter, Old Friends (New York: Moffat, Yard, 1909), pp. 112-13, and Mary Anderson de Navarro, A Few Memories (New York: Harper, 1896), pp. 141-42.

<sup>3</sup> The Preface to the Revised Edition originally appeared in The Moonstone, A Romance (London: Smith, Elder, 1871); as it does not appear in the Harper text, I have used the Penguin edition. On the revisions, see also my Preface and p. 25, n. 18.

<sup>4</sup> ALS Fales Collection, 5 October 1865.

<sup>5</sup> ALSs Pierpont Morgan Library, 11 May 1867 and 13 May 1867.

<sup>6</sup> Letters III, 534; Page, p. 169.

<sup>7</sup> I.e., his well-known remark to Wills: "I quite agree with you about the Moonstone. The construction is wearisome beyond endurance, and there is a vein of obstinate conceit in it that makes enemies of readers." Letters III, 660; Page, p. 169. There are, however, extra-literary reasons for Dickens's changing view of the novel. See Robinson, p. 215 and Arthur A. Adrian, "A Note on the Dickens-Collins Friendship," Huntington Library Quarterly, 16 (February, 1953), 211-13.

<sup>8</sup> ALS Pierpont Morgan Library.

<sup>9</sup> ALS Univ. of Texas Collection; Coleman, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> ALS Univ. of Texas Collection; Coleman, p. 114.

<sup>11</sup> ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 12 November 1867.

<sup>12</sup> ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection.

<sup>13</sup> Several histories of the detective story discuss this tradition in detail. See, for example, Howard Haycraft, Murder for Pleasure (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1941); Murch, The Development of the Detective Novel; and Ousby, Bloodhounds of Heaven. Whether Collins had read all the works of his predecessors is, of course, another question. He almost certainly knew Vidocq's Memoirs (1828-29), which his friend Douglas Jerrold had converted into a play (Vidocq, the French Police-Spy). A volume

of Poe's works was in his library, and on the first page he had written, revealingly, "Stories by Poe not included in this 'Complete Collection'" (M. L. Bennett Catalogue).

<sup>14</sup> See Symon's Mortal Consequences (New York: Harper, 1972), pp. 47-48. The Notting Hill Mystery is more sensational than The Moonstone; it involves a diabolical mesmerist, two sisters who have been separated from childhood, and three incredible murders. Like The Moonstone, it is told through a series of eye-witness reports, primarily the letters of an insurance-company investigator who functions as a detective. Nothing is known about its author, Charles Felix (probably a pseudonym), but the novel has recently been reissued by Arno Press (1976).

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Burgess calls him "the prototype of the detectives . . . who graced the great age of British crime fiction" (Introduction to The Moonstone [London: Pan Books, 1967], p. 10).

<sup>16</sup> Haycraft, p. 39.

<sup>17</sup> See de la Mare, pp. 76-77, and Russell, Swallowfields and Its Owners (London: Longmans, Green, 1901), p. 211.

<sup>18</sup> Collins belonged to more than one club, but I have identified the "Club Library" as the Athenaeum's because the paper on which he wrote many of his notes bears an Athenaeum letterhead.

<sup>19</sup> Collins's notes from C. W. King, The Natural History, Ancient and Modern, of Precious Stones and Gems and of the Precious Metals (London: Bell and Daldy, 1865), p. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Collins's notes from the Encyclopaedia Britannica, 8th Edition (1855), VIII, 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Collins's notes from King, p. 36.

<sup>22</sup> King describes the cutting as "a most ill-advised proceeding" (p. 36).

<sup>23</sup> Cf. King, p. 419.

<sup>24</sup> Theodore Hook, The Life of General, The Right Honourable Sir David Baird, Bart., 2 vols. (London: Richard Bentley, 1832), I, 221.

<sup>25</sup> An envelope in the Parrish Collection identifies the sender of the letter as "[?] Wyllie (since deceased) who kindly gave me the information on which I founded the 'Epilogue' at the end of the story." There were several members of the Wyllie family active in India, but J.W.S. Wyllie was the one with experience of Kattiawar, where he was appointed an assistant political agent in 1858. He died in 1870. A copy of The Moonstone inscribed to him from Collins is now in the Houghton Library at Harvard University.

26 ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection. According to notes in the Penguin edition of the novel, Sir Austin Layard, who excavated Nineveh and travelled in Turkey and Persia, also suggested Murthwaite (p. 527).

27 ALS, Morris L. Parrish Collection.

28 Notes, Morris L. Parrish Collection; Nuel Pharr Davis, p. 250.

29 Taylor wrote other Indian historical novels, but none appears to have a direct bearing on The Moonstone. In 1868, the first volume of an eight-volume series done under his auspices was issued: The People of India, a Series of Photographic Illustrations, with Descriptive Letter Press, of the Races and Tributes of Hindustan, ed. J. Forbes Watson and John William Kaye (London: William H. Allan, 1868-75).

30 See Confessions of a Thug, ed. F. Yeats-Brown (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1938), pp. 22 and 35. The first edition was published in London by Richard Bentley with Taylor's own introduction.

31 Collins had written about the Indian Mutiny on two earlier occasions: indirectly, in collaboration with Dickens, in The Perils of Certain English Prisoners (HW, Christmas Number, 1857) and directly, at Dickens's instigation, in "A Sermon for Sepoys" (HW, 27 February 1858).

32 Michael St. John Packe, The Life of John Stuart Mill (London: Secker and Warburg), p. 468.

33 "A Detective Police Party," HW 1 (27 July 1850), 410.

34 On the Road Murder Case see J. B. Atlay, Famous Trials of the Century (London: Stone, 1899), pp. 113-35; George Dilnot, The Story of Scotland Yard (London: G. Bles, 1929), pp. 220-26; John Rhode, "Constance Kent," The Portable Murder Book, ed. Joseph Henry Jackson (New York: Viking, 1945), pp. 318-70; and G. F. McCleary, "A Victorian Classic," Fortnightly, 156 (August, 1946), 137-41.

35 See The Times (London), 15 July 1861, p. 5. The Murray case is cited by Ellis as a source of The Moonstone, p. 38.

36 The Times, 15 July 1861, p. 5.

37 The Times, 16 July 1861, p. 9.

38 On the popularity of The Ingoldsby Legends, see Royal A. Gettman, A Victorian Publisher, A Study of the Bentley Papers (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1960), p. 80. As late as 1904, Edith Nesbit refers to them casually in one of her own books (The Phoenix and the Carpet) as stories that every child knows.

39 The Ingoldsby Legends (Phila.: Porter and Coates, 1848), p. 22.

40 Ellis, p. 39.

41 ALS Morris L. Parrish Collection, 30 January 1868; published in Morris Longstreth Parrish, Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade (London: Constable, 1940).

42 de la Mare, p. 79.

43 The English Common Reader, p. 103.

44 See The English Common Reader, p. 101 for further statistics.

45 Collins's parody seems less exaggerated after a glimpse at one of the Religious Tract Society's annual reports. Here are a few of the tracts it lists:

No. 241--The Rudder--A reminder of the importance of bridling the tongue.

No. 272--What is your Business?--Reminding the reader that the great business of life is religion.

No. 289--Personal Lukewarmness and means for Revival--A faithful admonition to Christians whose first love has grown cold.

No. 312--Nearer Home--Appropriate thoughts on the Christian's daily advance toward the heavenly mansions.

Sixty-eighth Report of the Religious Tract Society (London, 1867), pp. 18-19.

46 Vanity Fair (New York: Harper, 1898), Ch. LXVII.

47 See Nuel Pharr Davis, pp. 205-6. He connects Jennings with the doctor who was called in when Collins sprained his ankle on the trip that they wrote up in The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices (HW, 3-31 October 1857).

48 "Dr. Jennings" appears in entries in Mrs. Collins's diary, now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, for 2 September 1835 and 4 September 1835.

49 Elliotson's book went through five editions from 1835-49, and by the fifth he had expanded his remarks on mesmerism into a long chapter. See Fred Kaplan, Dickens and Mesmerism (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1975), pp. 21-22 et passim. Hutter suggests that (like Murthwaite's remarks) Collins's medical authority is contradictory, since Elliotson "in spite of a number of valuable contributions to physiology, had been regarded by many as a quack," whereas Carpenter "was an eminent biologist and physiologist very much a part of the medical and scientific establishment, and a strong critic of mesmerism and phrenology" (pp. 197-98).

50 Opium and the Romantic Imagination (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1970), p. 259.

51 Le "Detective Novel" et l'Influence de la Pensée Scientifique (Paris: Champion, 1929), p. 591; my translation.

52 Messac, pp. 536-37; my translation.

53 Introduction to The Moonstone, p. xi.

- 54 "Detective Story," Spectator, 23 December 1966, p. 120.
- 55 Haycraft, pp. 41-42.
- 56 An Autobiography, p. 204.
- 57 Cf. p. 27.
- 58 "The robbery of the sacred diamond is in conformity with Herculane's sullen obstinacy and defiance of opinion, combined with his brooding imaginativeness. His sister's somewhat unbending haughtiness predisposed her to find the stigma affecting her daughter's name unbearable. Her daughter's morbid habit of reticence involved her in a maze of doubt and reproach, and postponed a general clearing up of the mystery, to the reader's signal profit, who has thereby gained Miss Clack, but to Rachel's misery, for a whole year. Rosanna's experiences as a thief render her ready to suspect that Franklin Blake is a thief too; her love makes her desire to find him one, that there may not stand between her and him 'the dreadful reproach which honest people are in themselves to a woman like her;' and it makes her, in the resolution to save him from the discovery of his imagined crime, take a course which wonderfully complicates the difficulties of the plot. Finally, Franklin's own manysidedness of character, which leads him through various phases of controversy till he politely informs his antagonist, a surgeon, that medical men are all imposters, puts him up as a mark for a little medical experiment of very serious consequences to himself." The Times, 3 October 1868, p. 4.
- 59 "The Novels of Wilkie Collins," Temple Bar 89 (August, 1890), 528; Page, pp. 273-74.
- 60 Omnibus of Crime, p. 26.
- 61 Peter Wolfe remarks that although her "petulance and restlessness" are later accounted for, "the reader finds it difficult to be sympathetic with her peevish actions in the first half of the novel." "Point of View and Characterization in Wilkie Collins's The Moonstone," Forum (Texas), 4 (Summer, 1965), 28.
- 62 15 July 1868, p. 3.
- 63 41 (25 July 1868), 881; Page, p. 172.
- 64 17 July 1868, p. 10.
- 65 Omnibus of Crime, p. 25.
- 66 Burgess, p. 12.
- 67 The mercenary usurer or pawnbroker, usually a Jew, frequently appears in Victorian novels but is rarely depicted realistically. Dickens exaggerates the type in Fagin and later counteracts the stereotype

with Riah in Our Mutual Friend. Trollope, more typically, presents money-lenders as vulgar, dishonest nuisances, e.g. Mr. Benjamin of The Eustace Diamonds. In contrast, Collins makes Luker human, if not likeable, and avoids any hint of anti-Semitism. As for romanticizing fishing people, compare the Yollands with Reade's Christie Johnstone and her friend Jean Carnie (in the novel Christie Johnstone).

<sup>68</sup> Letters III, 534; Page, p. 169.

<sup>69</sup> The Letters of Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. Sidney Colvin (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1911), I, 20; Page, p. 19.

<sup>70</sup> Swinburne, p. 295; Page, p. 257.

<sup>71</sup> Page says that contemporary critics were "generally enthusiastic" (p. 19), but the evidence he presents indicates that the English reviews were mixed.

<sup>72</sup> Athenaeum, p. 106; Page, pp. 170-71.

<sup>73</sup> Spectator, p. 881; Page, p. 127.

<sup>74</sup> Pall Mall Gazette, p. 10.

<sup>75</sup> Lang, p. 24; Page, p. 267.

<sup>76</sup> Spectator, 63 (28 September 1889), 395; Page, p. 250.

<sup>77</sup> "The Novels of Wilkie Collins," p. 530; Page, p. 275.

<sup>78</sup> Introduction to The Moonstone (Dent), p. viii.

<sup>79</sup> Introduction to The Moonstone (Penguin), p. 8.

<sup>80</sup> Haycraft calls them "two of the finest detective novels of this generation" (p. 39).

<sup>81</sup> See Marshall, p. 127.

<sup>82</sup> Robinson reports (p. 218) that despite Collins's and Harper's precautions four separate pirated editions appeared simultaneously; and other editions followed as a result of The Moonstone's popularity.

<sup>83</sup> "How I Write my Books," Huntington Library MS. But this statement should be qualified, for here Collins was referring to the initial stages of composition, and he may have decided on the serial divisions later.

<sup>84</sup> AYR 19 (1 February 1868), 174.

<sup>85</sup> AYR 19 (8 February 1868), 199.

<sup>86</sup> AYR 19 (9 May 1868), 511; AYR 20 (25 July 1868), 153.

- 87 AYR 19 (16 May 1868), 535.
- 88 AYR 20 (13 June 1868), 8.
- 89 Kendrick indicates that The Woman in White serial divisions were not as smoothly integrated and underwent subsequent modification (p. 25).
- 90 Griest, pp. 104-5.
- 91 Nuel Pharr Davis, p. 211; his source is Louis Dépret, Chez les Anglais (Paris, 1879), p. 250.
- 92 See p. 36.
- 93 Some astute Victorian readers were also aware of the parallels, e.g. Lang, p. 2; Page, p. 265. See also Hutter's comments, p. 196.
- 94 Browning used his famous Yellow Book, which suggested both the case and the method. Collins had been inspired by an actual case when he wrote The Woman in White, but in The Moonstone he used the procedures of a trial rather than any given case.
- 95 A letter of 11 May 1867, now at the Pierpont Morgan Library, gives the original estimate; the (approximate) word-count comes from Phillips, p. 150.
- 96 Spectator, p. 881; Page, p. 127.
- 97 Lang, p. 27; Page, p. 271.
- 98 Daily Telegraph, p. 3.
- 99 Pall Mall Gazette, p. 10.
- 100 The Times, p. 4; Page, p. 177.
- 101 Swinburne, p. 295; Page, p. 257.
- 102 Cruse, p. 322.
- 103 The Moonstone: A Dramatic Story in Three Acts was privately printed in London in 1877 and first produced, at the Olympic Theatre, on 17 September 1877. Collins eliminated many of the novel's most important elements--the opium, the Indians, Yorkshire, Ezra Jennings, and Rosanna Spearman, among others--and lost all the subtlety of the original in his attempt to cut the play down to size. But the Mother's-Small-Clothes remained (pp. 18-19).
- 104 The Times noted the substitution but considered it merely a "pretty touch."
- 105 Aside from the Preface to Armada, his most heated defense appears in the Dedication to Jezebel's Daughter. His previous novel, The

Fallen Leaves, features a young man who marries a girl of the streets whom he has rescued. It was Collins's least successful novel, and the angry author, claiming purity of purpose and demanding freedom of expression, maintained "that the increase of readers and the lapse of time will assuredly do me justice, if I have only written well enough to deserve it" (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, c. 1900). He did not, however, undertake the sequel that he had been planning to write.

106 Collins was not the only novelist to examine these abysses; cf. Barnes Newcome's illegitimate attachment in Thackeray's The Newcomes, and Henleigh Grandcourt's mistress and children in George Eliot's Daniel Deronda.

107 Athenaeum, p. 106; Page, p. 171.

108 Some modern psychoanalysts view her voyeurism in terms of the "primal scene"; see Hutter, pp. 205-6.

109 Imagination and Reality (New York: International Univ. Press, 1968), pp. 114-28.

110 "Wilkie Collins and The Moonstone," American Imago, 20 (Spring, 1963), 61-79.

111 King, p. 36.

112 Clio, 2 (June, 1973), 281-90.

113 Reed, p. 281.

114 Reed, p. 283. At least one contemporary reviewer recognized the problem. The Times wondered that "it should never have occurred to Lady Verinder, who had disowned her brother for stealing the diamond, that a scrupulous conscience might even now make restitution to the State" (p. 4).

115 The phrase comes from Murch, p. 111; the attitude is widespread.

116 Letters III, 534; Page, p. 169.

117 Essentially his mother; see various letters now in the Pierpont Morgan Library.

118 ALS Huntington Library, n.d. (Friday).

119 It is the one book he dedicated "To Caroline"--that is, to Caroline Graves, the woman who is now buried with him. He defended the novel in its Preface (New York: Peter Fenelon Collier, c. 1900), in the Preface to Jezebel's Daughter, and in several letters. Subsequent citations will appear in the text.

120 The Woman in White is by no means devoid of diabolical significance, but there Collins uses imagery and symbolism, rather than profanity; see Caracciolo, pp. 389-98.

- 121 Deut. 8:3 and Matt. 4:4.
- 122 "Robinson Crusoe as a Myth," Eighteenth-Century English Literature: Modern Essays in Criticism, ed. James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1959), p. 159.
- 123 The role of Providence in Dickens's and Collins's novels has interested several modern scholars. For Harland S. Nelson, their differing views of Providence account for their basically different methods of developing a plot:  
 "The effect of Dickens' characteristic method is an impression of an all-pervading design in human affairs, unexpectedly encompassing and harmonizing the profusely various elements of the story; not (as in a novel by Collins) an impression of an unbroken causal chain of events, unobtrusively laid down and given a final shake to bring the whole linked series at once into view" (p. 11).  
 Ian Ousby similarly asserts that Dickens's belief in Providence gives "valid symbolic significance" to his "familiar plot paraphernalia," whereas in minor fiction, like Collins's, "such conviction is lacking, and Providence and Destiny are unmistakably terms which have come adrift from their intellectual moorings" (p. 116). Hutter, however, suggests that Ousby misses the originality in Collins's treatment: "But Collins's novel is important precisely because it undermines a simple split between intellectual and providential solution." He explains that "Collins plays with the ironic implications of the 'accidental' both in fiction and in the world it imitates. . . . The book is built from the ironies of a multiple narration which finally requires us to distrust all points of view, including the author's" ("Reviews," NCF, 32 [June, 1977], 116-17).
- 124 This may be an indirect allusion to the Governor Eyre case (see pp. 183-84. Eyre, who was responsible for the deaths of 586 Jamaicans, was a self-professed Christian who never let anything stand in his way.
- 125 ALS Pierpont Morgan Library, 26 October 1867, to Mrs. Collins.
- 126 Reed, p. 286; Ousby, p. 125.
- 127 The Illusion of Permanence (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967), pp. 84-85.
- 128 Letters II, 889. See also William Oddie, "Dickens and the Indian Mutiny," Dickensian, 68 (January, 1972), 3-15.
- 129 8th Edition (1856), XI, 468.
- 130 Reed, p. 288.
- 131 Geraldine Jewsbury remarked, "Few will read of the final destiny of The Moonstone without feeling the tears rise in their eyes as they catch the last glimpse of the three men, who have sacrificed their cast in the service of their God. . . . The deepest emotion is certainly reserved to the last" (Athenaeum, p. 106; Page, pp. 170-71). But this is the only contemporary reading of its kind that I have seen.

132 Marshall, p. 79. Marshall believes that the novel's philosophical implications, its inquiries into the nature of the self, would have been "ultimately devastating to the belief of a large number of readers," except that they "exist too far below the surface of the narrative itself to be grasped" (p. 78).

133 In his forthcoming chapter on Collins, which I have seen in manuscript, Ashley states that "Collins has always been fortunate in his editors" and cites, in addition to Eliot and Sayers, Alexander Woolcott, Kathleen Tillotson, Julian Symons, Anthony Burgess, and J.I.M. Stewart. *Victorian Fiction, A Second Guide to Research*, ed. George H. Ford (New York: MLA, 1978).

134 See Booth's "Wilkie Collins and the Art of Fiction," *NCF*, 6 (1951), 131-32, and Stewart's review, "From mystery to mission," pp. 953-54.

135 de Navarro, p. 142.

## Appendix A

### The Novels of Wilkie Collins

The following list was compiled from bibliographies by William H. Marshall and R. V. Andrew and supplemented by my own researches. The record of serial publications remains incomplete--a defect I hope to remedy in the course of future investigations.

- Antonina; or, The Fall of Rome. 3 vols. London: Bentley, 1850.
- Basil: A Story of Modern Life. 3 vols. London: Bentley, 1852.
- Hide and Seek. 3 vols. London: Bentley, 1854.
- The Dead Secret. Serialized in Household Words, 3 January--13 June 1857.  
2 vols. London: Bradbury & Evans, 1857.
- The Woman in White. Serialized in All the Year Round, 26 November 1859--  
25 August 1860. 3 vols. London: Sampson Low, 1860.
- No Name. Serialized in All the Year Round, 15 March 1862--17 January  
1863. 3 vols. London: Sampson Low, 1862.
- Armadale. Serialized in The Cornhill Magazine, November, 1864--June, 1866.  
2 vols. London: Smith & Elder, 1866.
- The Moonstone. A Romance. Serialized in All the Year Round, 4 January--  
8 August 1868. 3 vols. London: Tinsley, 1868.
- Man and Wife. Serialized in Cassell's Magazine, January--September, 1870.  
3 vols. London: F. S. Ellis, 1870.
- Poor Miss Finch. Serialized in Cassell's Magazine, October, 1871--March,  
1872. 3 vols. London: Bentley, 1872.
- The New Magdalen. Serialized in Temple Bar, January--December, 1872.  
2 vols. London: Bentley, 1873.
- The Law and the Lady. Serialized in The Graphic, 26 September 1874--  
13 March 1875. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1875.
- The Two Destinies. A Romance. Serialized in Temple Bar, January--  
August, 1876. 2 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1876.
- The Fallen Leaves--First Series. Serialized in The World, 1 January--  
23 July 1879. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1879.
- Jezebel's Daughter. Serialized in The Bolton Weekly Journal and other  
newspapers, 1879. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1880.

The Black Robe. Serialized in The Canadian Monthly, November, 1880--June, 1881. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1881.

Heart and Science. A Story of the Present Time. Serialized in Belgravia Magazine. August, 1882--June, 1883. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1883.

I Say No. Serialized in Harper's Weekly, 22 December 1883--12 July 1884. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1884.

The Evil Genius. A Dramatic Story. Serialized in The Leigh Journal and Times, 11 December 1885--11 May 1886. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1886.

The Legacy of Cain. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1889. [Andrews reports December, 1888.]

Blind Love. Completed by Walter Besant. Serialized in The Illustrated London News, July--December, 1889. 3 vols. London: Chatto & Windus, 1890.

## Appendix B

### Synopsis of The Moonstone

The Moonstone, a fabulous Indian Diamond sacred to Vishnu, the God of the Moon, has been removed from the forehead of its sacred idol, despite the warnings of its deity that disaster will pursue any mortal who lays hands on it. In the last years of the eighteenth century, it has come into the possession of Tippoo Sultan, but during the Battle of Seringapatam it is stolen by Colonel John Herncastle after he murders the three Brahmin priests who secretly guard their lost treasure. Herncastle is subsequently ostracized by friends and relatives, and lives in constant apprehension until his death in 1848. Because he has been slighted by his sister, Lady Verinder, he bequeathes the ill-omened Yellow Diamond to her daughter, Rachel.

The Prologue describes the Diamond's history through the Battle of Seringapatam. The story proper opens a few days before Rachel's eighteenth birthday. Franklin Blake, her cousin and admirer, has just returned from travels abroad. He is entrusted by the family lawyer, Mr. Bruff, with delivering the Diamond to Rachel at her Yorkshire estate on the day she comes of age. Shortly before his arrival, Gabriel Betteredge, the house-steward (who narrates this "First Period" of the story), is informed by his daughter Penelope that three Indian jugglers and a clairvoyant boy are lurking about the house. Franklin, having safely deposited the Moonstone in a local bank, arrives as Betteredge is talking with Rosanna Spearman, an under-housemaid and former thief who falls promptly and hopelessly in love with him.

In the days that precede Rachel's birthday, Franklin devotes himself to courting her. Together they decorate the door to her sitting-room. He even gives up smoking cigars because the smell offends her. Just before the birthday dinner, a second suitor arrives: the handsome philanthropist, Godfrey Ablewhite, whose mother is another Herncastle sister. All the guests at the birthday celebration see the Diamond, which apparently begins its evil work by casting a pall on the party and causing Mr. Candy, the local physician, to quarrel with Franklin. The Diamond is also seen by the Indian jugglers, who are soon identified by Mr. Murthwaite, the explorer, as high-caste Brahmins in disguise. Having no doubts about the ruthlessness with which the Indians will pursue the gem, Murthwaite urges that it be sent to Amsterdam where cutting will destroy its identity. But before it can be sent away, the Moonstone mysteriously vanishes.

On the morning following the party (and a rainy night), Penelope announces that the Diamond is gone from the drawer of Rachel's Indian cabinet. Rachel herself behaves mysteriously, withdrawing to her bedroom and resisting every plea to help with the search. Franklin, refreshed after a sound night's sleep, summons the police from nearby Frizinghall, but the local inspector, Superintendent Seegrave, botches the investigation by antagonizing the servants and fails to discover any clues. The Indians are clearly not to blame, since they passed the night at Frizinghall, but nonetheless they are temporarily imprisoned for safe-keeping.

Franklin telegraphs to London and Sergeant Cuff enters the case. This eminent detective finds the first important clue, a paint-smear on the door of Rachel's sitting-room. He suggests that the garment which made the smear most belong to the thief, but a check of the wash-book fails to reveal any missing apparel. Cuff suspects both Rachel and Rosanna, who is also behaving suspiciously, first purchasing material to make a nightgown and then visiting her friends, the Yollands, where she writes a letter and buys a box and chain. Cuff and Betteredge trace Rosanna's footsteps to the Shivering Sand, but before Cuff can determine what she has hidden there, Rosanna, depressed by Franklin's disdain of her, returns to the quicksand and kills herself. Dismayed by Rosanna's death and by Cuff's unproven suspicions of her daughter, Lady Verinder dismisses him. Before he goes, however, Cuff predicts developments that subsequently occur, among them that Betteredge will hear from the Yollands and that Septimus Luker, a shady London pawnbroker, will figure in the case. Franklin, inexplicably spurned by Rachel, leaves England for the East. Rachel and her mother go to London.

During the "Second Period" the story is related by multiple narrators. Miss Clack, an Evangelical spinster-cousin, reports that Godfrey and Luker have been attacked by mysterious Indian assailants. Godfrey proposes to Rachel, who accepts him despite her attachment to Franklin, whom she seems to love and hate simultaneously. Lady Verinder dies of a heart condition, and when Rachel breaks her engagement to Godfrey (with his full consent), his angry father refuses to act as her guardian. Rachel subsequently lives with the Bruffs and then with a respectable relative. In the meantime, Mr. Bruff has discovered that the motive for Godfrey's proposal was mercenary. He is also visited by one of the Indian priests in disguise and by Septimus Luker. With Murthwaite's help, Bruff surmises that Luker has deposited some valuable, probably the Diamond, in a bank vault to secure a loan. The pledge is redeemable at the end of June, as the Indians have ascertained.

In the Spring of 1849, on the death of his father, Franklin returns to England. He hopes to effect a reconciliation with Rachel, but when she refuses to see him, he goes to Yorkshire, where Betteredge informs him that a letter from Rosanna awaits him at the Yollands. The letter confesses her love, explains how she has shielded him, and provides instructions for retrieving a box that she has hidden in the Shivering Sand. The baffled Franklin retrieves the box, which contains his own paint-stained nightgown--a sure proof that he is the thief. Thoroughly bewildered, Franklin prevails upon Bruff to let him see Rachel, who corroborates Rosanna's suspicions by confessing that she herself saw him take the Diamond. A fortuitous meeting with Ezra Jennings, Mr. Candy's medical assistant, leads to a partial solution: Mr. Candy had given Franklin laudanum after they quarrelled at Rachel's birthday dinner, and was afterwards prevented by illness from revealing what he had done. Jennings reconstructs these events from his transcript of Candy's delirious ravings, and then proves his hypothesis by re-inducing the opium trance, using Betteredge, Bruff, and Rachel as witnesses. When the experiment reveals that Franklin's theft was an unconscious attempt to safeguard the Moonstone, he and Rachel are reunited.

At this point, it is time for Luker's customer to redeem his pledge. Summoned by Franklin, Cuff rejoins the investigation, but arrives too late

to pursue the Diamond after it is taken from the bank vault. Bruff's office-boy has followed the suspect, however, and traced him to a public-house, where he is murdered by the Indians before he can escape on a ship to Amsterdam. Cuff, breaking in, rips off his sailor's disguise and reveals him as Godfrey Ablewhite.

The Epilogue explains that Godfrey has been leading a double life, that he has stolen money from a Trust, and that on the night when the Diamond disappeared he simply pocketed the gem which the drugged Franklin gave him, later taking it to London in his pocket. The novel ends with a letter from Murthwaite, now in the province of Kattiawar, where, disguised as a native, he has followed Hindu pilgrims to the shrine of the Moon-God. There he witnesses the Indian priests being sentenced to a lifetime of wandering, while above them, the Moonstone gleams from its position in the sacred idol's forehead.

## Appendix C

### The Serial Divisions of The Moonstone

The Moonstone ran simultaneously in All the Year Round and Harper's Weekly for the first eight months of 1868. The following table indicates the weekly divisions and the final line of each installment. Discrepancies between the serial and later editions are indicated by an asterisk and explained on page 263.

1. 4 January Prologue through First Period (Loss of the Diamond), Ch. 3: "How seriously, you will understand when I tell you that, in his opinion, 'It' meant the Moonstone."
2. 11 January First Period, Ch. 4 through Ch. 5: "I wanted a whiff of my pipe, and a turn at Robinson Crusoe."
3. 18 January First Period, Ch. 6 through Ch. 7: ". . . I instantly suspected that I had disturbed the three Indians, lurking about the house, and bent, in their heathenish way, on discovering the whereabouts of the Diamond that night."
4. 25 January First Period, Ch. 8 through Ch. 9: "Only the philanthropist's father and mother--Mr. and Mrs. Ablewhite."
5. 1 February First Period, Ch. 10: "The next thing to tell is the story of the night."
6. 8 February First Period, Ch. 11 to "To my unutterable astonishment, just as my hand was on the door, it was suddenly opened from the inside, and out walked Rosanna Spearman!"
7. 15 February First Period, Ch. 11 ("After the library . . .") through Ch. 12: "The pieces of the puzzle are not all put together yet."
8. 22 February First Period, Ch. 13 through Ch. 14: "Side by side, in the grey of the summer evening, Sergeant Cuff and I set forth for the Shivering Sand."
9. 29 February First Period, Ch. 15: "As he said the words, I heard my mistress's voice calling to us to come in."
10. 7 March First Period, Ch. 16 through Ch. 17: "Sergeant Cuff had returned from Frizinghall."
- \*11. 14 March Ch. 18 to Ch. 20: ". . . I knew that Sergeant Cuff would meet his match, when a woman like my mistress was strung up to hear the worst he could say to her."

- \*12. 21 March First Period, Ch. 20 ("The first words . . .) to Ch. 22: "Hot and angry as I was, the infernal confidence with which he gave me that answer closed my lips."
- \*13. 28 March First Period, Ch. 22 ("I walked to the window . . .") through The End of the First Period.
14. 4 April Second Period (Discovery of the Truth), First Nar., Ch. 1: "The servant opened the door, and announced Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite."
15. 11 April Second Period, First Nar., Ch. 2: "My aunt's secret was a secret no longer."
16. 18 April Second Period, First Nar., Ch. 3 to Ch. 4: "'Lady Verinder's servant, to see Miss Clack.'"
17. 25 April Second Period, First Nar., Ch. 4 ("I occupied the parlour floor . . .") through Ch. 5: "I was so shocked at this, that it never occurred to me, until some days afterwards, that she had also died without giving me my little legacy."
- \*18. 2 May Second Period, First Nar., Ch. 6 to Ch. 7: "I can answer for that, if I can answer for nothing more."
- \*19. 9 May Second Period, First Nar., Ch. 7 ("I have lost . . .") through "And when I die--to complete the return on my part of good for evil--she will have the Life, Letters, and Labours of Miss Jane Ann Stamper left her as a legacy by my will."
20. 16 May Second Period, Second Nar., Ch. 1 through Ch. 2: ". . . I went upstairs, in no very genial frame of mind, little suspecting that the way to my dressing-room, and the way to discovery, meant, on this particular occasion, one and the same thing."
21. 23 May Second Period, Second Nar., Ch. 3 through Third Narrative, Ch. 1: "I was obliged to wait for a moment before I could trust myself to speak to him."
22. 30 May Second Period, Third Nar., Ch. 2 through Ch. 3: "And, on the unanswerable evidence of the paint-stain, I had discovered Myself as the Thief."
23. 6 June Second Period, Third Nar., Ch. 4: "'As ugly a name as need be,' Betteredge answered, gruffly, 'Ezra Jennings.'"
24. 13 June Second Period, Third Nar., Ch. 5 through Ch. 6: "After the lapse of a few moments [minute], I roused my manhood, and opened the door."

25. 20 June Second Period, Third Nar., Ch. 7: "I saw her, and heard her, no more."
26. 27 June Second Period, Third Nar., Ch. 8: "I turned round, and found myse to face with Ezra Jennings."
27. 4 July Second Period, Third Nar., Ch. 9: "He hurried away, and left me."
28. 11 July Second Period, Third Nar., Ch. 10: "Let Ezra Jennings tell how the venture with the opium was tried, and how it ended."
29. 18 July Second Period, Fourth Nar. to "June 25th . . . We have just arrived at the house."
30. 25 July Second Period, Fourth Nar. ("The first and foremost question . . .") through "I have seen a little sunshine-- I have had a happy time."
31. 1 August Second Period, Fifth Nar., Ch. 1: "GODFREY ABLEWHITE!"
32. 8 August Second Period, Sixth Nar. to Conclusion: "Who can tell!"

\*At these points there are discrepancies in the chapter divisions of various versions of the novel. The texts of all versions are similar. Only the chapter divisions are altered. In the revised edition of 1871, Collins redistributed several long chapters into shorter units. He re-allocated Chs. 20-22 of Gabriel's Narrative (First Period) into Chs. 20-23 of the revised edition. He divided Ch. 7 of Miss Clack's Narrative into Chs. 7-8. The Harper text differs from the serial version in Chs. 20-21 but retains the old number of chapters: 22 in the First Period, 7 in Miss Clack's Narrative.

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