

seen an offer of a reward of fifty pounds for information as to Magdalen's whereabouts: her friends are seeking her. He approaches Magdalen and comes to an arrangement whereby he will gain more than fifty pounds. With great skill he helps her to escape the lawyer's clerk who is on her trail. Wragge's next task is to locate Michael *Noel* Vanstone, but Michael dies and his son, *Nigel*, becomes the object of their attentions. Magdalen, impersonating her erstwhile governess, gains access to Noel Vanstone but fails to persuade him to treat the Vanstone sisters more generously than his father had proposed to do. Lecount, his housekeeper, suspects that this woman is an imposter, and snips off a piece of her gown.

Magdalen now proposes to effect her purpose by marrying Noel. Wragge arranges that he and his wife and Magdalen will take a house opposite Noel's house in Aldborough. They will live there as the Bygrave's. Lecount is suspicious by nature, but Wragge finds her Achilles' heel: it is her late husband's interest in reptiles. He plays so upon her interests that Magdalen is left free to bring her charms to play on Noel, which she does to good effect. Lecount is suspicious, but Wragge realises this and forestalls her each time. They play the game of cat and mouse until Lecount tires of this and adopts more positive action. She gains access to Magdalen's room and finds the gown from which she had snipped a piece in London. She does not realise that Wragge has anticipated some such action and has persuaded Noel that Lecount's actions are not disinterested. The only way in which he, Noel, will be able to marry Miss Bygrave (Magdalen) will be to get Lecount out of the way. So it is arranged that a forged letter

is to be posted from Zurich, informing Lecount that her brother is critically ill. In the meantime, Noel is to visit his friend, Admiral Bartram: Lecount is sure to support him in this as it will remove him from Miss Bygrave; it will also make her mind easy when she is called to Zurich. Wragge makes the arrangement for the wedding, and Lecount receives her letter. But before she leaves she writes a letter to Noel informing him of her discovery that Miss Bygrave is in reality Magdalen. Wragge is too astute for her, however. He suspects that she will have done this, and by means of a stratagem ascertains that she has posted a letter to Noel. By means of a further trick he intercepts this letter and so Magdalen marries Noel.

Lecount does not surrender. She ascertains that Noel has changed his will in favour of his wife: strangely enough Magdalen will not accept more than eighty thousand pounds. *Lecount* She persuades Noel that his life is in danger and makes him draw up a new will. To ensure that Magdalen cannot benefit, the will provides for his fortune to go to Admiral Bartram, but in a private trust letter; Bartram is instructed to pass on the fortune to his nephew, George Bartram, provided he marries within six months.

The shock of Lecount's revelations proves too much for Noel and he dies.

Magdalen does not contest the will but obtains a position in the admiral's home so that she can discover the contents of the secret trust letter. She fails in this, goes to London and is soon in sore straits. Her health fails and it is only by chance that Captain Kirke who had been attracted by her in Aldborough, finds

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her, nurses her back to health and marries her.

In the meantime the admiral has died and George Bartram has failed to marry within the time stipulated. The trust letter is discovered and so Noel's fortune is divided between George Bartram and his sister, as next-of-kin and Magdalen, as Noel's wife. George Barton marries Norah and so the Vanstone sisters share the Vanstone inheritance after all.

Collins deserves credit for not succumbing to what must have been a great temptation: to keep to the tried formula of The Woman in White and turn out mere variations upon a theme. In No Name he does not employ the multiple narrative technique, though he does use the epistolary method and some extracts from a journal to link up the scenes. His novel comprises eight scenes, each consisting of a number of chapters divided into sub-sections. This does not mean that No Name bears the stamp of being conceived as a play and then cast into the form of a novel. Some of his later works show evidence of this approach, but No Name is a novel first and foremost. Its greatest debt to the theatre lies in the skilful dialogue, Magdalen's initial entrance and the delightfully humorous picture of the birth-pangs of amateur theatrical production. Here is Magdalen's entrance; she is late for breakfast:

".... a clear young voice was heard singing blithely - light rapid footsteps pattered on the upper stairs, descended with a jump to the landing, and pattered again, faster than ever, down the lower flight. In another moment, the youngest of Mr Vanstone's two daughters dashed into view on the dingy old oaken stairs, with the suddenness of a flash of light; and clearing the last three steps into the hall at a jump, presented herself breathless into the breakfast-room, to make the family circle complete." ¹

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1. The First Scene, Chap. 1.

In his preface Collins wrote:

"The only Secret contained in this book, is revealed midway in the first volume. From that point, all the main events of the story are purposely foreshadowed, before they take place - my present design being to arouse the reader's interest in following the train of circumstances by which these foreseen events are brought about."

The matching of Lecount and Wragge as antagonists and their exciting battle of wits is the criterion of Collins's success. Collins goes too far in saying that the main events are foreshadowed: our interest lies in the very fact that the opponents are so well matched that the outcome remains at issue. Lecount and Wragge use the other characters as pawns in a magnificent game of chess. In The Woman in White we saw Collins show his strength in this technique; in No Name we see it expanded into the most satisfying part of the novel and developed with the greatest skill.

We do not find in No Name the same sense of fatality that we found in The Woman in White, and a moment's consideration will show why this is so. In the earlier novel the feeling of fatality is strongest when Laura is helpless and Marian cannot see how to assist her. Fosco is so much in the ascendant, and Glyde in a seemingly impregnable position, that we see no glimmer of light for Laura; even Nature seems to be working against her. This gives The Woman in White great power, and there is great satisfaction for the reader when he sees the tables turned at last. In No Name the opponents are too evenly matched for the creation of similar effects. We do feel it when Magdalen is at first on her own with her plan for vengeance barely formed. Penniless and without support, she pits herself against her uncle, not even knowing where he is

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to be found. But once Wragge comes on to the scene and meets his match in Lecount, Fate plays a minor part: in their hands Fate is little more than a plaything to be used to advantage or to be set at naught, depending upon the circumstances.

In spite of this, Fate provides us with the most powerful scene in the novel. Magdalen has effected her purpose in making Noel Vanstone ask her to be his wife. On the threshold of marriage, she thinks of the implications of such a marriage, and is so filled with revulsion that she purchases a bottle of laudanum and contemplates suicide:

"No words passed her lips. Her cheeks flushed deep; her breath came thick and fast. With the poison still in her hand, with the sense that she might faint in another moment, she made for the window, and threw back the curtain that covered it.

The new day had risen. The broad grey dawn flowed in on her, over the quiet eastern sea.

She saw the waters, heaving large and silent in the misty calm; she felt the fresh breath of the morning flutter cool on her face. Her strength returned; her mind cleared a little. At the sight of the sea, her memory recalled the walk in the garden, overnight, and the picture which her distempered fancy had painted on the black void. In thought, she saw the picture again - the murderer hurling the spud of the plough into the air, and setting the life or death of the woman who had deserted him, on the hazard of the falling point. The infection of that terrible superstition seized on her mind, as suddenly as the new day had burst on her view. The promise of release which she saw in it from the horror of her own hesitation, roused the last energies of her despair. 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 towards the house, all following the same direction with the favouring 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 towards 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, 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 until it melted dimly into shadow - gliding until it was lost in the mist." 1.

We have already seen how Collins used scenic description to create atmosphere and to reflect the mood and thought of a character. We find this again in the passage quoted above, and elsewhere in No Name; but we find something more. This method has been refined into a subtle symbolism. It is no accident that the waters were "heaving large and silent"; that the ships come "gliding silently over a silent sea" and vanish into the oblivion of the mist. Nor is the pervading silence fortuitous: Magdalen is silently standing on the brink of death and may be swallowed by the mists of time as these ships silently steal away from

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their brief and unannounced, yet dramatic, appearance.

Dorothy L. Sayers in her Introduction to Great Short Stories of Mystery, Detection and Horror¹ points out that Collins wastes nothing in the construction of his novels. The bottle of laudanum which Magdalen does not take is more than an effect; it is later discovered in her room, and Lecount seizes upon it as proof to persuade Noel Vanstone that his wife contemplates poisoning him.

In No Name we see Magdalen's experience in amateur theatricals put to good effect. Fosco's mice and canaries do not fill a function as do Mrs Lecount's reptiles. Each point in each will is a kingpost: nothing is irrelevant.

This is not a novel of action in the ordinary sense. There are no duels, no fights on the brink of a cliff; it is all a battle of wits, yet the characters are on the brink of an abyss deeper than the cliffs of Cornwall where Mannion met his death, and face destruction more devastating than the flames which consumed Glyde or the knife which stabbed Fosco. This last was, of course, the essence of the anti-climax in The Woman in White: that Fosco should die at the hands of one who had never even known Marian or Laura. We may deprecate the ending to No Name: but it remains preferable to the ending of The Woman in White.

The theme of the novel possibly arises out of his own experience with Caroline Graves and her daughter, Harriet. Though the protest emerges naturally from the story, Collins puts strong words into the mouth of Pendril, the family solicitor:

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1. Gollancz, London, 1928.

"Let strict morality claim its right, and condemn her early fault. I have read my New Testament to little purpose indeed, if Christian mercy may not soften the hard sentence against her - if Christian charity may not find a plea for her memory in the love and fidelity, the suffering and the sacrifice of her whole life." 1.

And later Pendril says:

"I am far from defending the law of England, as it affects illegitimate offspring. On the contrary, I think it a disgrace to the nation. It visits the sins of the parents on the children; it encourages vice by depriving fathers and mothers of the strongest of all motives for making the atonement of marriage; and it claims to produce these two abominable results in the names of morality and religion." 2.

It will be noticed, however, that this is not a digression or an awkward interpolation. Pendril's words are germane to the situation.

If we remind ourselves that Collins habitually wrote into his novels what he had personally experienced, and if we remember that the passages quoted above were written six years before his association with Martha Rudd, we may surmise that these passages refer to Caroline and her daughter, and may surmise further that Harriet Elizabeth was Collins's own child. If this were fact, Collins's attitude to Caroline and Harriet, Caroline's reaction to his taking up with Martha Rudd, her later return to him, her being buried in his grave and Harriet's very obvious love and respect for Collins - all fit into the queer jigsaw puzzle that was Collins's life.

There is an interesting underlying thought in this novel. While there is no arch villain, evil in the form of heartlessness or greed is punished. Intelligence seems to be at a premium: Magdalen, Wragge, Lecount, and even Norah and George Bartram, come out well. Only Noel Vanstone and his father suffer defeat.

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1. The First Scene, Chap. 13.

2. *ibid.*

Collins has drawn on his own experience to endow No Name with numerous excellences. Take, for example, the picture he gives us of rehearsals for an amateur theatrical production:

"The two characters which open the comedy of The Rivals, 'Fag' and the 'Coachman', appeared on the scene - looked many sizes too tall for their canvas background, which represented a 'Street in Bath' - exhibited the customary inability to manage their own arms, legs and voices - went out severally at the wrong exits - and expressed their perfect approval of the results, so far, by laughing heartily behind the scenes. 'Silence, gentlemen, if you please,' remonstrated the cheerful manager. 'As loud as you like on the stage, but the audience mustn't hear you off it.' Miss Marrable ready? Miss Vanstone ready? Easy there with the 'Street in Bath'; it's going up crooked! Face this way, Miss Marrable, full face if you please. Miss Vanstone -' he checked himself suddenly. 'Curious,' he said, under his breath, - 'she fronts the audience of her own accord!' Lucy opened the scene with these words: 'Indeed ma'am, I traversed half the town in search of it: I don't believe there's a circulating library in Bath I haven't been at.' The manager started in his chair. 'My heart alive! she speaks out without telling!' The dialogue went on. Lucy produced the novels for Miss Lydia Languish's private reading from under her cloak. The manager rose excitedly to his feet. Marvellous! No hurry with the books; no dropping them. She looked at the titles before she announced them to her mistress; she set down 'Humphry Clinker' on 'The Tears of Sensibility' with a smart little smack which pointed the antithesis. One moment - and she announced Julia's visit; another - and she dropped the brisk waiting-maid's curtsy; a third - and she was off the stage on the side set down for her in the book

In No Name there are a number of minor characters who entrance us for a few pages and then, having served their purpose admirably, disappear: Mr Clare, an eccentric, philosophical, cynical bibliophile; Mrs Wragge, large of body but small of intellect, mild and muddled: what a life she must have led as a waitress:

"Boiled pork and greens and peas-pudding for Number One. Stewed beef and carrots and gooseberry tart, for Number Two. Cut of mutton, and quick about it, well done, and plenty of fat, for Number Three. Codfish and parsnips, two chops to follow, hot-and-hot, or I'll be the death of you, for Number Four. Five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Carrots and gooseberry tart - peas-pudding and plenty of fat - pork and beef and mutton,

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cut 'em all and quick about it - stout for one, and ale for t'other - and stale bread here, and new bread there - and this gentleman likes cheese, and that gentleman doesn't - Matilda, Tilda, Tilda, Tilda, fifty times over, till I didn't know my own name again - oh lord! oh lord!"

Few could surpass Collins for capturing character in a line or two. From the following we see Magdalen through Mazey's eyes - Mazey who is over seventy, deaf, devoted to his master, eccentric, a drunkard and endowed with a kind heart - and we feel we know the admiral too:

"You're the new maid eh? And a fine-grown girl too! His honour the admiral, likes a parlour-maid with a clean₂run fore and aft. You'll do my dear - you'll do."

And we feel that the old salt himself is not beyond noticing a trim craft.

We need not linger over Norah Vanstone, conventional and passive, who ironically achieves without effort what Magdalen had striven after in vain. Miss Garth, as governess to the girls, and later their mentor, is well portrayed in a minor key. Frank Clare, a ne'er-do-well whom the youthful Magdalen loves more than he deserves, is of interest mainly because he follows so closely in Collins's youthful footsteps:

"Frank would be received in the office on a very different footing from the footing of an ordinary clerk; he would be 'pushed on' at every available opportunity; and the first 'good thing' the House had to offer either at home or abroad, would be placed at his disposal. If he possessed fair abilities and showed common diligence in exercising them, his fortune was made."₃

We can imagine how these words stuck in Collins's gullet and in his memory: they had been applied to him many years before when he became a clerk with Antrobus & Co. under similar conditions.

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1. The Second Scene, Chap. 1.
2. The Seventh Scene, Chap. 1.
3. The First Scene, Chap. 7.

When we recall the characters of Sherwin, Sharpin, Holliday, Mrs Badgery, Laura Fairlie, Hartright and Wragge, we may expect that Magdalen Vanstone's surname may reveal something of her character; and this is so. In the Magdalen we meet initially, we find a young girl full of the joy of life and the confidence which comes from being loved and secure. But when she loses father, mother, home and her name, when she becomes 'nobody's child', this beautiful, brave, intelligent and resourceful young girl shows a resolution that is almost obstinacy, a streak of ruthlessness which almost amounts to cold-bloodedness, a lack of scruple which cannot be condoned by the justice of her cause.

Collins in his preface states that Magdalen "depicts the struggle of a human creature, under those opposing influences of Good and Evil, which we have all felt, which we have all known." It seems to me that he has succeeded in this aim. In Magdalen's protest against the situation in which she finds herself, and in her sense of isolation, she hardens herself, she 'girds her loins', if such an expression be permissible of a young Victorian gentlewoman; but when she achieves her aim, and Noel is as clay in her hands, we see the forces of 'Good' which make her hesitate and contemplate death rather than pursue her aim to its logical end. After she has married Noel, we learn of her persuading him to alter his will, but she stipulates that she is to inherit only eighty thousand pounds - the sum of which she and Norah had been bereft. We do not hear of any mental cruelty on her part towards Noel, which would have been a simple matter for one of her calibre when dealing with such a weak vessel. When Lecount sees to it that Magdalen is disinherited, there is no bitterness in her and there is

no animosity towards the Bartrams, though she is still rather unscrupulous in the methods which she employs to inform herself of the contents of the trust letter. And then comes resignation, suffering - and ultimate happiness.

In Collins's portrayal of Magdalen there is more than character development: we find also a study of character in depth, a study of the inner conflict which makes us view her more outrageous acts with some sympathy.

Mrs Lecount is one of Collins's best female intriguers. Selfish and astute, she is a woman of few principles; and yet we can understand her wish to receive a just reward after years of faithful service, a reward threatened by Noel's niggardliness. There is something pathetic about her position: that of a woman of calibre who has held a position of honour as the wife of an eminent man, and who has had to come to terms with life as a housekeeper. In some ways her fight for her rights is paralleled by Magdalen's fight, and their approach is somewhat similar; but Magdalen is not as quick or as resourceful as Lecount. Without Wragge to back up Magdalen, Lecount would have made short shrift of her.

She soon sees through Magdalen when she appears disguised as Miss Garth and, with admirable foresight, does not voice her suspicion, but is satisfied to take a snippet of the alpaca gown for future use. She is seen at her best in the exchanges with Wragge against whom she is excellently matched.

With great skill she regains Noel's confidence in her, so cleverly destroyed by Wragge:

"I come here, on what has been, and is still, the business of my life - your service A secret for your private ear! She has no uncle or aunt You acknowledge, sir, that Mr Bygrave deceived me? I am glad to hear that. You will be all the readier to make the next discovery which is waiting for you - the discovery that Mr Bygrave has deceived you Do you know this writing, sir? You shall know what I mean, sir, if you will give me a moment's attention On the day after you went away to St Crux, I obtained permission to Mr Bygrave's house, and I had some talk in private with Mr Bygrave's wife. That talk supplied me with the means to convince you which I had wanted to find for weeks and weeks past. I wrote you a letter to say so - I wrote to tell you, that I would forfeit my place in your service and my expectations from your generosity, if I did not prove to you when I came back from Switzerland, that my own private suspicion of Miss Bygrave was the truth. I directed that letter to you at St Crux, and I posted it myself. Now, Mr Noel, read the paper which I have forced into your hand. It is Admiral Bartram's written affirmation, that my letter came to St Crux, and that he enclosed it to you, under cover to Mr Bygrave, at your own request. Did Mr Bygrave ever give you that letter?"¹.

And so, step by step, she exposes the deception of the two moles on Magdalen's neck, her true identity, the evidence of the alpaca gown with the missing snippet - and then seizes on the fortuitous discovery of the bottle of laudanum in Magdalen's room. It is the work of a moment to convince Noel that Magdalen has designs on his life. Only just in time does Lecount persuade him to change his will, and with great cunning she dictates the terms thereof. The realisation of his dangerous position is too much for him. It is more than he can face; for the last time he adopts evasive action - and dies of heart failure.

To call Captain Wragge a charlatan, a trickster, a petty blackmailer, or Collins's most successful comic character would all be true, but would still give a false picture: he is more than any or all of these things. A trickster he was, but bolstered with a most attractively specious philosophy.

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"'Now observe,' he began. 'Here am I, a needy object. Very good. Without complicating the question by asking how I come to be in that condition, I will merely enquire whether it is, or is not, the duty of a Christian community to help the needy. If you say, No, you simply shock me; and there is an end of it. If you say, Yes - then I beg to ask, Why am I to blame for making a Christian community do its duty? You may say, Is a careful man who has saved money, bound to spend it again on a careless stranger who has saved none? Why of course he is! And on what ground pray? Good heavens! on the ground that he has got the money to be sure. All the world over, the man who has not got the thing, obtains it, on one pretence or another, of the man who has - and in nine cases out of ten the pretence is a false one. What! your pockets are full, and my pockets are empty; and you refuse to help me? Sordid wretch! do you think I will allow you to violate the sacred obligations of charity in my person? I won't allow you - I say distinctly - I won't allow you. Those are my principles as a moral agriculturalist. Principles which admit of trickery? Certainly. Am I to blame if the field of human sympathy can't be cultivated in any other way? Consult my brother agriculturalists in the mere farming line - do they get their crops for the mere asking? No! they must circumvent arid Nature, exactly as I circumvent sordid man. They must plough, and sow, and top-dress, and bottom-dress, and deep-drain, and surface-drain, and all the rest of it. Why am I to be checked in the vast occupation of deep-draining mankind?'" 1.

We know too that he was a blackmailer, for he used his knowledge of the Vanstones' situation as a means of providing himself with a regular source of income; but this description denies him those qualities which later made him think of Magdalen's welfare rather than his own, and certainly ignores the artistry and systematic thoroughness with which he approached his chosen vocation.

Though he has lost much by the death of Mrs Vanstone he is irrepressible.

"'Pardon me, ' replied the Captain (to Magdalen); 'I am a species of relation. I had the pleasure of seeing you in the spring of the present year, I presented myself on that memorable occasion to an honoured preceptress in your late father's family. Permit me, under equally agreeable circumstances to present myself to you. My name is Wragge.'" 2.

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1. The Second Scene, Chap. 2.
2. The Second Scene, Chap. 1.

Collins treats us to Wragge's thoughts as well as his replies to Magdalen:

"'One of two things,' thought Wragge to himself in his logical way. 'She's worth more than fifty pounds to me in her present situation, or she isn't. If she is, her friends may whistle for her. If she isn't, I have only to keep her till the bills are posted.'"¹

To Magdalen he says:

"'I respect independence of character wherever I find it In a young and² lovely relative, I more than respect, I admire it.'"²

Magdalen is let into his cryptic classification of areas: York, Leeds and Scarborough are T.W.K.: Too well known.

Once he and Magdalen come to terms, Wragge shows that he is capable of fulfilling his promises. The plan for evading the lawyer's clerk is soon formed and put into execution. Wragge is a man of many parts and he undertakes the training of Magdalen for her impersonations and also obtains the engagements for her. Nor does he delay in tracing Michael Vanstone and, on learning of his death, the son, Noel. Wragge remains a rascal, however, and offers to supply Noel with proof that he is about to become the victim of a conspiracy. Fortunately for Magdalen, Noel offers only five pounds for the information, and Wragge remains loyal to Magdalen.

He now plans the campaign: As Mr and Miss Bygrave they gain access to Noel's home. He soon finds Lecount's weakness and occupies her time so that she cannot prevent Magdalen from enchanting Noel. He senses Lecount's suspicion and disarmingly prevents Noel from walking next to Magdalen. But Mrs Lecount is not taken in. She sets her trap. The Bygraves are invited to spend

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1. The Second Scene, Chap. 1.
2. *ibid.*

a day driving with Noel Vanstone and Mrs Lecount:

"Magdalen read the letter. 'Hidden enmity yesterday, she said, 'and open friendship today. What does it mean?'

'It means,' said Captain Wragge, 'that Mrs Lecount is even sharper than I thought her. She has found you out.'

From this moment Wragge takes more than a financial interest in the conspiracy:

"'Make your mind easy. The help I have given you already, counts for nothing compared with the help I am going to give you now. My honour is concerned in bowling out Mrs Lecount. This last move of hers has made it a personal matter between us. The woman actually thinks she can take me in!!!!"².

While on the drive, Wragge whispers "'Ware the cat! She will show her claws on the way back.'"³.

He checkmates Lecount by introducing the very subject with which Lecount had intended to trap Magdalen.

There is a delightful touch of irony in Wragge's reply to Lecount when she speaks slightingly of his knowledge of medicine:

"'Your smattering of science, sir, ' she said, with a malicious smile, 'includes, I presume, a smattering of medicine as well?'

'It does, ma'am, ' answered the Captain, without the slightest disturbance of face or manner.⁴ 'I know as much of the one as I do of the other.'

Whenever Lecount makes a move, Wragge anticipates her with a more daring one; and his plans have the virtue of working. His attention to detail, his reading of her actions, are rewarded by her frustration.

After he has made Noel propose a secret marriage and has laid his plan for removing Lecount to Switzerland, Wragge knows that she will write Noel a letter, but he will not act until he has verified this. By means of

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1. The Fourth Scene, Chap. 5.

2. *ibidem*.

3. *ibidem*.

4. The Fourth Scene, Chap. 6.

a stratagem he confirms that she has posted a letter to Noel and Wragge knows that he must intercept it at the admiral's house before Noel receives it. By the time Lecount returns, Noel and Magdalen are married.

Captain Wragge obviously owes a great deal to Dickens, but he is more than a mere imitation of a Dickensian character. He possesses the astuteness of the Artful Dodger but his powers of deduction come from Collins and no one else. Wragge and Lecount imbue No Name with a significance which places it on a par, at least, with The Woman in White. Fosco was the stock villain of the stage, though his intelligence is not to be denied. Lecount acts in the tradition of melodrama at times. But Wragge is a human scoundrel and lives in our memories along with the best of Dickens.

After the publication of No Name, Collins forestalled any who might seek to produce a dramatic version, as had been done for The Woman in White, by registering No Name as a drama in five acts. This play was, however, not produced. His next labour was to collect a number of his contributions to Household Words and All the Year Round and publish them as My Miscellanies. (October, 1863).

Even while writing No Name Collins's health had deteriorated. We hear of his suffering from "rheumatic gout", of his eschewing rich food and alcohol while suffering from an attack, but also of his announcing, once the attack was over, that nothing the palate relished could be harmful. We are told that the gout attacked his eyes, which became "literally enormous bags of blood." ^{1.}

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1. vide Charles Kent, a friend of Collins's, quoted in

It was at this time that he began to take laudanum and we find more and more references to it in his novels, and not always as a poison.

Collins turned his thoughts to a new novel and, while doing so, sought relief from his affliction in travelling from a spa at Aix-la-Chapelle to the waters at Wildbad. He had not been back in England long before he was holidaying on The Isle of Man. Caroline and her daughter travelled with him, and in October, 1863, they began a three month's tour of the Continent which took them to Marseilles, Genoa, Nice, Rome, Pisa and Naples.

He did not publish anything after My Miscellanies until the first instalment of Armadale appeared in The Cornhill Magazine in November, 1864.

iii : Armadale

Opinions on Armadale differ widely. Davis says it is "a weird and undisciplined novel" ^{1.}; Robinson is of the opinion that it is a "failure which comes near to success" ^{2.}; Ellis considers it "in merit of sustained interest and marvellous intricate plot second only to The Woman in White" ^{3.}; T.S. Eliot bestows limited praise: "It has no merit beyond melodrama and it has every merit that melodrama can have." ^{4.} Quilter expresses himself in the most eulogistic terms: " the greatest of Mr Wilkie Collins's novels. It has all the interest and sustained purpose of The Woman in White, while drawn on a much larger scale, and showing a much wider knowledge of character." ^{5.}

Though Quilter is not always unbiassed in his judgement of Collins's work and, as his personal friend, could see no wrong in him, I am inclined to agree with

1. For footnotes, see over. (him

him. To do justice to Armada we must see it against the Victorian background. It was written for serial publication in The Cornhill Magazine, which meant that it would appear in substantial monthly parts. It was written for a public which would savour it, which knew nothing of the rat-race of the Twentieth Century, and which knew the joys of reading a novel aloud while the family gathered round the fire. More often than not, his readers would regret having reached the end of a story of a set of characters with whom they had become familiar.

Armada is a long novel.: it ran from November, 1864 to June, 1866; it consists of a prologue, an epilogue and five books, made up of forty-three chapters. My 1903 edition contains six hundred and sixty-two pages of close print. It is a novel of superlatives: it possesses the most complex plot; it has the most complex double identity theme; it embodies Collins's most ruthless and ingenious femme fatale; it possesses the largest number of carefully drawn characters; it covers the lives of two generations; the theme, which deals with the power of the supernatural, is his most ambitious to date; and in many respects it is Collins's most powerful novel.

Painted on a vast canvas, Armada has something of an epic quality. It is not one story, but a number of stories, each of which could have been developed into a novel.

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1. Davis N.P.: The Life of Wilkie Collins, p.206.
2. Robinson K.: Wilkie Collins: A Biography, p. 191.
3. Ellis S.M.: Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others, p. 35.
4. Eliot T.S.: Selected Essays, 1917-1932, p. 469.
5. Quilter H.: Preferences in Art, Life and Literature, p. 469.

There is the story of the two Armadales and how love made the one murder the other; then we have the strange stories of Midwinter, of Gwilt, of the two younger Armadales and of Gwilt's endeavours to win a fortune. All these are welded into a large unity by Armadale's dream which looks into the past to find the truth and looks forward to warn us of that which no man can prevent.

In spite of its great length, interest never flags and the ending is strong. The construction is well-nigh perfect in that Collins sets himself a most difficult task and succeeds in making the impossible seem credible. And, though he is concerned with the supernatural, all through the novel events are made to come about in such a way that the rational explanation is the one stressed - and yet we cannot escape a sense of fatality in which the causes were laid in the first generation and the sins thereof visited upon the second.

It is not necessary to compare Armadale with The Woman in White or No Name. One of its virtues is that it is so different from anything which Collins had written before. It possesses the qualities of suspense, of good characterisation, of powerful and meaningful scenic description and an ingeniously contrived and intricate plot; but there is no heroine, no clash of opponents in the ordinary sense and the underlying theme lends to the novel a strength and meaning absent from any previous novels. Any criticism of Armadale should be as of a great novel among other great novels.

Collins kept his eyes and ears open when he was taking the cure at Wildbad. His novel opens strongly

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with a vivid picture of the inhabitants of Wildbad who are awaiting the arrival of the diligence, and we share their impatience to add to the meagre scraps of knowledge they have gleaned about the new arrivals.

Mr Armadale, who is dying, makes a confession which is to be handed to his infant son when he comes of age. Born son of Mathew Wrentmore, christened Allan Armadale, after his godfather, Mr Armadale is made heir to his godfather's West Indian property after the godfather's son, also Allan Armadale, had displeased his father. In Barbados Mr Armadale befriends a clerk of the name of Ingleby, to whom he confides his intention of seeking marriage with a Miss Blanchard, the daughter of a former lover of his mother's. He shows Ingleby a portrait of the young woman. Soon after he is taken ill. His old nurse informs him that his life was saved only because she had applied the antidote to a local poison. Upon his recovery he learns that Ingleby has left Barbados. He takes ship for Madeira where Miss Blanchard is staying, only to find that Ingleby has married her in secret under the name of Allan Armadale. Lydia Gwilt, Miss Blanchard's twelve-year-old maid, had assisted in the deception of Mr Blanchard and Allan's mother by intercepting and forging letters. Allan challenges Ingleby to a duel, but Ingleby flees with his wife on an unseaworthy vessel, Le Grâce de Dieu. In the character of a seaman, Allan accompanies Mr ^{Blanchard} Blanchard, in his yacht, when he sets after the timber chip. The ship is wrecked in a storm, but the crew and Miss Blanchard are saved by the timely arrival of the yacht, which then runs before the storm. Ingleby

is found to be missing and the yacht returns in calm weather to seek him. He is found on the wreck, drowned in a cabin into which he had been locked. Mr Armadale confesses that he had locked him in. He kept out of the way of Ingleby's wife and later married in Trinidad. To his dismay, in his absence, his wife had had his son christened after him: Allan Armadale.

Mr Armadale has an obsession that his crime will be visited on the son and begs him :

"Avoid the widow of the man I killed - if the widow still lives. Avoid the maid whose wicked hand smoothed the way to the marriage, if the maid is still in her service. And more than all, avoid the man who bears the same name as your own."

Upon Mr Armadale's death, the Mr Neal who had taken down this confession cares for and later marries Mr Armadale's wife. Both have little time for the son, who runs away and takes up with a ruffianly, drunken gipsy who travels around with a group of performing dogs. The son adopts the gipsy's name of Midwinter and, when the gipsy dies becomes, in turn, servant, cabin-boy, sailor, gaolbird, book-seller's clerk and usher at a small and mean private school. He flees and is found sick and penniless by Allan Armadale, the generous and impulsive son of the the former Miss Blanchard. At this point, a strange set of coincidences seems to indicate that Fate has taken a hand in the destinies of these two young men who have become firm friends. Lydia Gwilt reappears seeking money from Allan's mother. Shortly after a relative rescues from suicide by drowning, a woman who answers to the description of Gwilt. As a result this relative takes a chill and dies. His heirs return to England from Italy and are killed in an

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avalanche while crossing the Alps. Allan Armadale inherits the estate of Thorpe-Ambrose and a great fortune.

Midwinter is traced, inherits twelve hundred pounds a year and is given the document containing his father's dying confession. He is strangely moved by a feeling that Fate has taken a hand in his life by bringing him unwittingly to the second Allan Armadale. Midwinter uses his true name only when drawing his allowance, does not confide in Allan, and determines to protect his friends from any evil that may befall him.

Fate has not yet done with them. Chance takes them to see a wreck: it is Le Grâce de Dieu. Midwinter feels the hand of Fate heavily upon him and this feeling is strengthened when he learns of a strange dream which Allan Armadale has had.

Collins sets himself a difficult task at this point: he sets out the dream in seventeen points and takes upon himself to bring into the lives of Allan and Midwinter the fulfilment of the dream. There are four scenes in the dream. The first harks back to the murder of Allan's father, but Allan cannot, of course, see the significance of this scene. The second scene concerns a lonely pool with a shadow-woman seen against a setting sun. This is followed by a scene in which a shadow-man is standing near a window which looks out upon lawns and a flower-garden. As he stretches out his hand to a small statue, it falls to fragments. In the last scene, the shadow-woman pours liquid into a glass and gives it to the shadow-man who, in turn, passes it to Allan. As he drinks the contents he falls down in a faint. When he awakes, the dream is over.

A medical acquaintance analyses the dream for them and finds a rational explanation for every detail, but Midwinter remains convinced that the dream has a deeper meaning. Collins deals with this section with the greatest of skill.

Allan takes up residence at Thorpe-Ambrose with Midwinter as his steward. He falls in love with Miss Milroy, the daughter of a tenant, Major Milroy. Miss Gwilt has learned that Allan's widow must inherit twelve hundred pounds a year upon his death. Though she is thirty-five years of age, she can pass for twenty-seven. She takes up a position as governess to Miss Milroy, using false references.

A picnic excursion to the Norfolk Broads is arranged, and Collins employs some powerful scenic description to prepare us for fateful events. When they arrive at Hurle Mere,

"one of the strangest and loveliest aspects of Nature the shore lay clear and low in the sunshine so clear and so light was the summer air, that one cloud in the eastern quarter of the heaven was the smoke-cloud left by a passing steamer three miles distant and more on the invisible sea."

But towards the end of the day:

"The shore in these wild regions was not like the shore elsewhere. Firm as it looked, the garden-ground in front of the reed cutter's cottage was floating ground that rose and fell and oozed into puddles under the pressure of the foot."

Later:

"The solitude that had been soothing, the silence that had felt like an enchantment on the other Broad, in the day's vigorous prime, was a solitude that saddened here - a silence that struck cold, in the stillness and melancholy of the day's decline."

Then comes the fulfilment of the first prophecy of the dream:

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"The sun was sinking in the cloudless westward heaven. The waters of the mere lay beneath, tinged red by the dying light. The open country stretched away, darkening drearily already on the right hand and on the left. And on the near margin of the pool, where all had been solitude before, there now stood, fronting the sunset, the figure of a woman."¹

Midwinter points out how this scene corresponds with the scene in Allan's dream, but Allan replies:

"What nonsense have you been talking! And what nonsense have I been listening to! It's the governess at last."

This rational explanation is, we feel, too facile and we have a lurking suspicion that Midwinter may be right after all. This sudden reversion to the commonplace is most effective in heightening the atmosphere of eeriness and a sense of the working of strange forces.

Allan's friend, The Rev. Mr Brock, has seen the woman who had asked Allan's mother for money, and finds out that her name is Gwilt. He is deceived by means of a ruse, into thinking that she is still in London.

It does not take her long to make Allan fall in love with her, and we are prepared for the workings of fate by

Collins's reference to the weather:

"The night was overcast. Since sunset, there had been signs in the sky² from which the popular forecast had predicted rain."

Allan confesses his love for Miss Gwilt to Midwinter, who keeps silent about his love for her. The ending of this chapter provides an excellent example of Collins's skill in creating suspense in a few lines. Allan, upon retiring, stands at the window and looks out upon the cottage where Miss Gwilt is resting:

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1. These quotations are taken from Chapters 8 and 9 of the Second Book.
2. The Second Book, Chap. 12.

"I wonder if she is thinking of me?" he said to himself softly.

She was thinking of him. She had just opened her desk to write to Mrs Oldershaw (her accomplice); and her pen had that moment traced the opening line:-
'Make your mind easy. I have got him!'¹.

Midwinter, because of his love for Allan, decides not to stand in his way and comes to take his leave - and recognises in the room the scene of the second prophetic vision, except that the statue is not broken.

Allan is given reason to investigate the genuineness of Miss Gwilt's references and, with the assistance of the young Pedgift, a solicitor, discovers that these references are forged. Some clever sleuthing on the part of young Pedgift lays bare Miss Gwilt's past and her unsavoury association with Mrs Oldershaw.

At first Allan decides not to return home, but Miss Gwilt resigns her position and succeeds in turning the neighbourhood against him. Allan is forced to return to protect himself from calumny, and here follows one of the cleverest scenes in the novel. Pedgift senior gives Allan some good legal advice:

"You can horsewhip a man, sir; but you can't horsewhip a neighbourhood What a lawyer she would have made, if only she had been a man! Do you think that any statement Miss Gwilt might make to you, if you do see her, would be a statement to be relied on, after what you and my son discovered in London? Might explain it? My dear sir, she is quite certain to explain it! I will do her justice: I believe she would make a case without a single flaw in it from beginning to end If you see that woman again, sir, you will commit the rashest act of folly I ever heard of in all my experience. She can have but one object in coming here - to practise on your weakness for her If you must positively put yourself in a dangerous position, Mr Armadale, there's a wild beast show coming to our town next week. Let in the tigress, sir, - don't let in Miss Gwilt! When you say No to a woman, sir, always say it in one word. If you give her your reasons, she invariably believes that you mean Yes. You think her an object for pity -

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1. The Second Book, Chap. 12.

quite natural at your age. I think her an object for prison - quite natural at mine. I say she will snap her fingers at your letter. I say, she is in all probability waiting her messenger's return in or near your grounds at this moment If Miss Gwilt calls here, either this evening, or at any other time, Mr Armadale is not at home. Wait, if she asks when Mr Armadale will be back, you don't know. Wait! if she proposes coming in and sitting down, you have a general order that nobody is to come in and sit down, unless they have a previous appointment with Mr Armadale. Miss Gwilt was in tears, sir, - becoming tears that didn't make her nose red - and I put my finger suddenly on the weak point in her story. Down dropped her pathetic handkerchief from her beautiful blue eyes, and out came the genuine woman with a neat little lie that exactly suited the circumstances. I felt twenty years younger, Mr Armadale, on the spot."¹

Mr Pedgift is one of the most delightful lawyers of fiction and we must assume that he had a counterpart in real life; but we have no evidence as to who he may be, just as we can only resort to conjecture to determine the source of Collins's deep insight into the ways of Miss Gwilt and women of her sort.

Gwilt uses both Mr Bashwood, a comic figure of a seedy, aged clerk who develops into something deeply pathetic in his hopeless love for Miss Gwilt, and Midwinter, who has returned, to further her schemes. Midwinter and Allan quarrel and the statue falls to the ground in fragments, thus fulfilling the second prophetic vision.

In Miss Gwilt's diary we see revealed the woman who could say to Miss Milroy: "Nobody ever yet injured me without sooner or later bitterly regretting it."² When she learns from Midwinter that his name is really Allan Armadale, she plans to marry him under that name and then "personate the richly-provided widow of Allan Armadale of Thorpe-Ambrose, if I can count on Allan Armadale's death in a given time."³

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1. The Third Book, Chap. 6.

2. *ibid.*

3. The Third Book, Chap. 11.

Her diary makes several interesting references to laudanum. Previously Collins has employed laudanum as a poison. Now Miss Gwilt writes:

"Who was the man who invented laudanum? I thank him from the bottom of my heart. If all the miserable wretches in pain of body and mind, whose comforter he has been, could meet together to sing his praises, what a chorus it would be! Even with my drops, I doubt if my head will be very quiet on my pillow tonight. Why don't I take my sleeping drops and go to bed?"¹

Gwilt foils Allan's plan for eloping with Miss Milroy, marries Midwinter, and plans Allan's death. Her plans fail, but she perseveres and arranges to have him asphyxiated while asleep. Midwinter suspects that Allan is in danger and exchanges rooms with him. When Miss Gwilt realises what has happened, she risks her life to save Midwinter's and then enters the room again, choosing to face death rather than the ignominy of final defeat.

If The Woman in White ends in an anti-climax, and if No Name peters out in the last pages, then this is rectified in Armadale which ends with a power which has kept us following the fortunes of these strange people eagerly to the very end. Throughout Collins has skillfully used the power of suggestion to hint at the workings of Fate in the destinies of the Armadales, and it is with a sense of witnessing a great triumph that we see Midwinter's faithful devotion as the instrument which saves Allan from Gwilt. Allan flips a coin to help him choose between Major Milroy and Mr Darch as his tenant:

" Midwinter's whole attention was strangely concentrated on the half-crown as it lay head uppermost on the table 'I was² wondering whether there is such a thing as chance.'"

Collins's skill in creating suspense is best exemplified by his making the third prophetic vision come true without Allan's falling victim to the fatal dose which Lydia Gwilt has prepared. This is a master stroke

1. The Third Book, Chap. 10.
2. The First Book, Chap. 3.

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which makes possible the mounting suspense which culminates in Gwilt's death. In The Woman in White we met opponents in the flesh, in No Name the clash was one of wits; in Armadale we feel that the struggle is not between persons, not even between "the forces of Good and Evil", as Collins claims in his preface, but between the cold-blooded workings of chance, not random by any means, and the power of the warmth and selflessness of Midwinter's love for Allan.

Armadale occupies a special place among novels in that it has no true hero or heroine, but is dominated by Miss Gwilt, Collins's most ruthless female schemer.

Coincidence plays a great part, but we accept it as Collins has based his whole theme on coincidence; but all too often he introduces coincidences which are not at all necessary: and in this respect he deserves adverse criticism.

Many excellent characters emerge from the pages of Armadale, but Miss Gwilt is a triumph. A sinister, cynical adventuress, resolute, an outcast who will stop not even at murder, she is beautiful, attractive with her graceful figure and voluptuous movements, her red hair and blue eyes; an enigma with her love of good music and her unwilling love for Midwinter.

S.M. Ellis¹ tells us that Mrs Oldershaw was adapted from Madame Rachel, who was proprietress of a beauty parlour where foolish women often found themselves the victims of blackmail. Madame Rachel had been involved in a court case, but two years after the publication of Armadale she found herself in even more serious trouble and was sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

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1. Ellis S.M.: Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others, p. 37.

Not all the characters are a success: and Allan Armadale is the weakest of them. Impetuous, hearty and thoughtless, his single virtue is the ease with which Collins could manipulate him to his requirements. But these pages are peopled with a procession of fascinating characters who justify their existence by their authenticity, their freshness or their eccentricities: Mrs Oldershaw, Bashwood and his callous, cocksure son, Major Milroy with his ambitious clocks which will not behave themselves, Midwinter the gipsy, the Pedgifts, and Dr Le Doux, confederate of Mrs Oldershaw and proprietor of the sanatorium in Hampstead Heath where Lydia Gwilt prepared Armadale's death chamber.

The reviewer of The Spectator wrote:

"The fact that there are such characters as he has drawn, and actions such as he has described, does not warrant his overstepping the limits of decency, and revolting every human sentiment. This is what Armadale does. It gives us for its heroine a woman fouler than the refuse of the streets, who has lived to the ripe age of 35, and through the horrors of forgery, murder, theft, bigamy, gaol and attempted suicide, without any trace being left on her beauty."¹

But Armadale was acclaimed by the public and Ashley² tells us that Armadale saved Harper's Monthly which had gone down seriously as regards circulation while Our Mutual Friend had been running. With the advent of Armadale in its columns it recovered its former popularity.

No Thoroughfare, which appeared as the Christmas Number of All the Year Round for 1867, is of some interest. It is the last Christmas Number in which Collins had a hand and he shared the honours with Dickens and no others.

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1. Robinson: op.cit., p. 195.

2. Ashley R.: Wilkie Collins, p. 87.

In other respects there is little to recommend it. It is compounded from tried recipes: a love-interest, double identity, drugging and robbery, and a narrow escape from death in the tradition of melodrama. Humorous interludes are introduced with a machine-like regularity. This story suffers from the obvious intention of easy adaptation for the stage; and it was actually produced at the Adelphi Theatre concurrently with publication. It was reprinted in 1890 in the volume entitled The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices and Other Stories.

The Overture and Act III are by Dickens. Collins is responsible for Act II, and Acts I and IV are the product of collaboration.¹

Scene i of Act I, The Curtain Rises, is clearly in the Dickens style. Scene ii seems to be the work of Dickens, but it is possible that Collins was responsible for the details of the plot. Scene iii is by Dickens. Scene iv embodies the systematic investigation typical of Collins, and the working out of the details of the will is also what we might expect of him.

Act IV consists of three scenes: The Clock-Lock, Obenreizer's Victory and The Curtain Falls. The last scene is clearly by Dickens. The explanation of the seizing on the salient point that the clock may be set to open the safe after twelve hours instead of twenty-four, indicates Collins as the author. The second scene, Obenreizer's Victory, with its systematic

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1. I am indebted for this information to Miss Dorothy L. Sayers, writing in The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature on Collins (Vol. III, p.480). An examination of the text of No Thoroughfare confirms the information supplied.

unfolding, its melodrama, suspense, and uninspired style, points to Collins.

No Thoroughfare was published a month after Dickens had left for America on a lecture tour, and this is probably an explanation for his falling back on Collins after a lapse of years, and his reason for leaving a major part of the work to him. The scene set in the Simplon Pass seems to have originated from something similar which Dickens, Collins and Egg had experienced on their Grand Tour in 1853. Dickens had written:

"We were a train of four mules and two guides, going along an immense height like a chimney-piece, with sheer precipice below, when there came rolling from above, with fearful velocity, a block of stone about the size of one of the fountains in Trafalgar Square, which Egg, the last of our party, had preceded by not a yard, when it swept over the ledge, breaking away a tree, and rolled and rumbled down into the valley." ^{1.}

No Thoroughfare tells the story of Wilding, who is taken from a foundling hospital by his benefactress in the belief that he is her son abandoned many years before. When he finds that the original babe had been adopted within a few months and that he had been given the name open in the books, Wilding leaves his fortune to this person, if he can be found. Vendale, Wilding's partner, is in love with Marguerite, niece to Obenreizer, a dishonest Swiss agent. Business calls Vendale to Switzerland and Obenreizer accompanies him. Vendale does not suspect that Obenreizer has been responsible for the thefts that are about to be disclosed and does not realise that Obenreizer is desperate to the point of murder. Vendale is drugged, but the plan fails, as Obenreizer does not find the incriminating papers where he expects them to be. Against the advice of the local inhabitants they proceed up the pass until they are overtaken by a

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storm. Vendale is drugged once more and Obenreizer admits that he is the one guilty of falsifying the documents. There is a struggle which takes us all the way back to Mannion and Basil, and Vendale rolls over the edge into the abyss.

Marguerite has followed for fear of Vendale's safety and is instrumental in saving his life at great risk to hers. Obenreizer, in perpetrating a further theft, finds evidence which proves that Vendale is heir to Wilding's fortune. Obenreizer is confronted with Vendale, confesses, and all ends on a cheerful Christmas note.

This story contains some humour, some eccentrics, but not one convincing character or worthwhile scene.

Collins's health had deteriorated sadly and he wrote his next novel, The Moonstone, while suffering great pain. His distress was intensified by the death of his mother in January, 1868, just after the first part of The Moonstone had appeared in All the Year Round. Mrs Collins had played an important part in his life and he felt the loss deeply. In 1871 he added this to his preface to The Moonstone:

"While this work was still in course of periodical publication in England, and in the United States, and when not more than one third of it was completed, the bitterest affliction of my life and the severest illness from which I have ever suffered, fell on me together. At the time when my mother lay dying in her little cottage in the country, I was struck prostrate, in London; crippled in every limb by the torture of rheumatic gout In the intervals of grief, on 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". 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."

iv : The Moonstone

There is nothing new in the constituents of The Moonstone but the skill with which these are blended results in a novel which is new and different. We find in The Moonstone characteristics already recognised in previous work, often more prominently displayed; but some catalyst has been responsible for making of The Moonstone a novel which was to have a greater influence on later writers than any other work of Collins, indeed any other novel of the Nineteenth Century.

The Moonstone is the first detective novel and it remains one of the best. There is hardly a virtue found in earlier work which is not to be found in this novel; but it possesses virtues not to be found in the others. This does not mean that it is superior to the three novels we have just considered: it is different.

This novel does not embody serious social criticism; nor do we find a study of a Jezebel. There is no character development, though many of the characters are portrayed with great insight. We look in vain for melodrama, for a sinister house, for a master criminal or for a dead-alive theme. The construction is not perfect, as some of the narratives, especially that of Miss Clack, contribute little to the unfolding of the plot. Yet it remains his best novel as regards plot. For tautness, complexity, economy and lack of unnecessary fussing, there is nothing in Collins's works to compare with it.

It has been said that Collins was not a writer of genius, and he certainly did not possess Dickens's gift for imbuing situation or character with unexpected and

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delightful values; nor did he have Thackeray's gift of satirical and cynical insight. But he was possessed of a genius peculiarly his own, and one which we may be inclined to underestimate for the very reason that we have encountered Collins's gifts in the pages of so many novels and stories by subsequent writers. There is surely great credit in being the first to think of techniques which other writers see fit to adopt. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, then The Moonstone earns the highest praise.

In The Moonstone we find the first detective novel in the sense of the term as we understand it today. Poe wrote stories of detection which relied only on deductive processes; but in The Moonstone the sleuths are human and fallible. We encounter qualities and techniques which have become the criteria of a good detective novel. First is the fair-play rule: we find nothing in this novel which is withheld from the reader while it is known to those characters concerned in seeking a solution. For the first time in the history of literature we are introduced to that peculiar intellectual game which has fascinated countless readers: the game of sharing information with a detective and matching our wits against his. We follow the unfolding of the story with greater interest and attention lest we miss a vital clue. Indeed Dattler says:

"Not a window is opened, a door shut, or a nose blown, but, depend upon it, the act will have something to do with the end of the book"¹.

From Trollope's The Eustace Diamonds (1873), through countless stories dealing with stolen valuables, to plays such as Lord Dunsany's A Night at an Inn and

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Allan Monkhouse's The Grand Cham's Diamond we have read of and seen Indians furtively and persistently seeking to restore jewels taken from the eye-sockets of their gods. In these and many other detective stories we recognise the technique embodied in The Moonstone: that of shifting suspicion from one character to another, from which has developed the least-likely-person technique. This technique has been used so often that many readers of detective fiction refuse to puzzle their heads with seeking clues. They prefer to look for the character who cannot possibly be suspected, and decide to place the guilt upon him - and they are, all too often, correct. This shifting of suspicion has never been done with greater skill than we find exemplified in The Moonstone.

There is something refreshing about Sergeant Cuff. He is endowed with eccentricities, as are all his successors: he loves roses and he whistles "The Last Rose of Summer" softly when his deductive powers are leading him hot on the trail of some new information. But he is natural and human and fallible. The technique of having a policeman from headquarters showing up the inefficiency of the local authorities is something which modern writers use ad nauseam; but in this novel, there is a crispness to Cuff's curbed impatience with the blundering of Superintendent Seegrave. It is remarkable how many of the ingredients of the modern detective story are to be found in The Moonstone. The amateur detective discovers that which has foiled even Sergeant Cuff; and Cuff returns to the scene after he has retired.

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When Betteredge saw Sergeant Cuff for the first time, he saw the first of many detectives:

" a grizzled elderly man, so miserably lean that he looked as if he had not got an ounce of flesh on his bones in any part of him His face was as sharp as a hatchet, and the skin of it was as yellow and dry and withered as an autumn leaf. His eyes, of a steely light grey, had a very disconcerting trick, when they encountered your eyes, of looking as if they expected something more from you than you were aware of yourself." 1.

The pattern for a detective story in which the detective prevents anyone from leaving the house, insists that nothing be moved, examines the scene of the crime and then interrogates the inmates of the house one after another, sends for several of them repeatedly, and is frustrated because several of them withhold information for all sorts of reasons which have nothing directly to do with the case, is all too familiar to us. And then we have the now familiar trick of the scientific reconstruction of the crime.

Collins lends an air of fatality to unfolding events by introducing the Indians who are fired by their religious fervour to suffer loss of caste, hardship, and even death, to restore the Moonstone to its rightful place. 2.

The virtues of The Moonstone have received much attention, but the most striking point of all seems to have escaped comment. After Sergeant Cuff has arrived, he notices the same smear on the newly painted door which had been observed by Superintendent Seegrave. He does not content himself with checking the clothes of those who may be involved, but also checks the laundry list and follows the clue along devious paths. But he

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1. The First Period, Chap. 12.
2. Conan Doyle's debt to The Moonstone for The Sign of Four and The Blue Carbuncle is obvious.

does more than this!

" he next sent for a magnifying glass, and tried how the smear looked, seen that way. No skin-mark (as of a human hand) printed off on the paint. All the signs visible - signs which told that the paint had been smeared by some loose article of somebody's dress touching it in going by." ¹.

Now, if Collins would have Cuff interested in a hand-print in the way that Cuff was interested in Rosanna Spearman's footprints at the Shivering Sands, would he have employed the magnifying glass so beloved of detectives of later days? It seems likely that he was interested in discovering prints, in the sense of lines and whorls. If we can accept this, Collins has achieved with The Moonstone the greatest of all triumphs possible for the writer of a detective novel: the inclusion in his novel of a technique which is later adopted in real life.

Now we know that the identification of criminals by means of finger-prints is the most important application of science to the detection of crime, and it remains the mainstay of most detective novels. Purkinje, a medical man, classified finger-prints into types in 1819, but they were not used for purposes of identification before 1877 (nine years after the publication of The Moonstone), when Herschel, the real discoverer of finger-print identification, used them for this purpose in Bengal. The discovery was not taken up in England until 1880, when Faulds again drew attention to the matter. Sir Edward Henry and Sir Francis Galton developed the system in its present form.

To the best of my knowledge, this is the first example of an attempt in a novel at establishing identity

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1. The First Period, Chap. 12.

by this particular method.

That the moonstone is not a moonstone at all, but a diamond, does not disconcert Collins in the least. He has an explanation ready:

"Partly from its peculiar colour, partly from a superstition which represented it as feeling the influence of the deity which it adorned, and growing and lessening in lustre with the waxing and waning of the moon, it first gained the name by which it continues to be known in India to this day - the name of THE MOONSTONE." ¹.

The prologue deals with the early history of the diamond and how it came, by violence, into the hands of John Herncastle.

Betteredge takes up the story and relates the circumstances by which Herncastle bequeathed the diamond to Rachel Verinder, daughter of Lady Julia Verinder. A condition of the bequest is that Lady Julia shall still be living, so it is suspected that the gift is made in spite and the hope that the curse will fall on the Verinders, a curse which Herncastle had good reason to credit. Franklin Blake brings the diamond in person (his father is executor to Herncastle's estate), and reports that he has been followed by three Indians. The diamond is given to Rachel on her birthday and is seen by the Indians who have come to the house in the guise of jugglers. Murthwaite, a member of the dinner party, recognises the jugglers as high-caste Brahmins, and cannot understand what has made them lose caste by performing as jugglers and in crossing the sea. When the guests leave, Rachel places the jewel in an Indian cabinet in her sitting-room. The house is locked, the dogs are left to roam the grounds, but in the morning the jewel is found to be missing.

(Superintendent

Superintendent Seegrave is sent for, but his bungling methods get him nowhere. He suspects Betteredge's daughter as he believes that she was the last to see the diamond the night before. Blake believes that Rosanna Spearman, a servant who has a gaol record and has behaved strangely, may be the guilty person. In the meantime we know that Blake himself is in financial difficulties, and both Rachel and Rosanna seem to believe that Blake is guilty.

Sergeant Cuff is sent for and ascertains that, because the diamond was last seen at midnight and the paint on the door would have dried by three in the morning, the diamond must have been stolen in the interval, when the paint was smeared. As no one had entered the house in this period, the thief must have on his clothes a smear of paint. Cuff seeks the article of clothing without success.

Collins has developed great skill in revealing character by means of the indirect impressions of others. From the following passage we learn, with an admirable economy of words, much about Cuff and his methods:

"I sent them in, one by one, as desired. The cook was the first to enter the Court of Justice, otherwise my room. She remained but a short time. Report, on coming out: 'Sergeant Cuff is depressed in his spirits; but Sergeant Cuff is a perfect gentleman.' My Lady's own maid followed. Remained much longer. Report, on coming out: 'If Sergeant Cuff doesn't believe a respectable woman, he might keep his opinion to himself, at any rate!' Penelope went next. Remained only a moment or two. Report, on coming out: 'Sergeant Cuff is much to be pitied. He must have been crossed in love, father, when he was a young man.' The first housemaid followed Penelope. Remained, like My Lady's maid, a long time. Report, on coming out: 'I didn't enter her ladyship's service, Mr Betteredge, to be doubted to my face by a low police-officer!' Rosanna Spearman went next. Remained longer than any of them. No report on coming out - dead silence, and lips as pale as ashes. Samuel, the footman, followed Rosanna. Remained a minute or two. Report, on coming out: 'Whoever blacks Sergeant Cuff's boots ought to be ashamed of himself.'" ¹.

(Cuff

1. The First Period, Chap. 14.

Cuff, because he has learned of strange behaviour on Rosanna's part, and because he is aware of her past, believes that she is the guilty one. After piecing together scraps of evidence, he decides that Rosanna will try to get rid of the incriminating garment by committing it to the Shivering Sands, the treacherous quicksands on the bleak seashore near at hand. He finds her footprints there and discovers that she has tried to hide them by walking in the sea.

Collins's use of scenic description in The Moonstone differs from that in previous novels in respect of length. In this novel he repeatedly uses description of the environment for atmosphere and the creation of a sense of foreboding; but the passages are short, though none the less effective. He approaches the Shivering Sands with Betteredge:

"The last of the evening light was fading away; and over all the desolate place there hung a still and awful calm. The heave of the main ocean on the great sandbank out in the bay, was a heave that made no sound. The inner sea lay lost and dim, without a breath of wind to stir it. Patches of nasty ooze floated, yellow-white, on the dead surface of the water. Scum and slime shone faintly in certain places, where the last of the light still caught them on the two great spits of rock jutting out, north and south, into the sea. It was now the time of the turn of the tide: and even as I stood there waiting, the broad brown face of the quicksand began to dimple and quiver¹ - the only moving thing in all that horrid place."

Cuff has Betteredge lead him to the fisherman's cottage occupied by friends of Rosanna Spearman. From Mrs Yolland he obtains information. Here are his methods, seen through the eyes of Betteredge, the house-steward:

"I sat quiet in a corner, waiting to hear how the Sergeant would find his way to the subject of Rosanna Spearman. His usual roundabout manner of going to work proved, on this occasion, to be more roundabout than ever. How he managed it is more than I could tell at the time,

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1. The First Period, Chap. 15.

and more than I can tell now. But this is certain, he began with the Royal Family, the Primitive Methodists, and the price of fish; and he got from that (in his dismal underground way) to the loss of the Moonstone, the spitefulness of our first housemaid, and the hard behaviour of the women-servants generally towards Rosanna Spearman. Having reached his subject in this fashion, he described himself as making his enquiries about the lost Diamond, partly with a view to find (sic) it, and partly for the purpose of clearing Rosanna from the unjust suspicion of her enemies in the house

The great Cuff showed wonderful patience; trying his luck drearily this way and that way, and firing shot after shot, as it were, at random, on the chance of hitting the mark. Everything to Rosanna's credit, nothing to Rosanna's prejudice - that was how it ended, try as he might; with Mrs Yolland talking nineteen to the dozen, and placing the most entire confidence in him. His last effort was made, when we looked at our watches, and had got on our legs previous to taking leave.

'I shall now wish you good-night, ma'am,' says the Sergeant. 'And I shall only say, at parting, that Rosanna Spearman has a sincere well-wisher in myself, your obedient servant. But, oh dear me! she will never get on in her present place; and my advice to her is - leave it.'"¹

And he learns that Rosanna is leaving; that she has written a long letter to a friend; that she has purchased a japanned tin case and two lengths of dog-chain. On their way home Cuff explains to Betteredge that Rosanna has decided to hide something, but that it cannot be the diamond; also that Rachel will decide to leave home. When they arrive home, they are met with the news that Rachel is to visit an aunt. Cuff, Rachel, Betteredge and Blake at this stage hold different views as to who the guilty party is. Cuff goes over the evidence in a manner which we recognise in many later detective stories. Rosanna eludes the local policeman who has been set to watch her, and Cuff is most curt:

"'I don't think your talents are at all in our line, Mr Joyce. Your present form of employment is a trifle beyond you. Good morning.'"²

Cuff believes that Rosanna has taken herself to the Shivering Sands. The wild scene prepares us for

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1. The First Period, Chap. 15.
2. The First Period, Chap. 18.

what is to come and then they see Rosanna's footprint on the sand. Never has Collins used the power of suggestion to better effect:

"His face frightened me. I saw a look in his eyes which was a look of horror. He snatched the boot out of my hand, and set it in the footmark on the sand, bearing south from us as we stood, and pointing straight to the rocky ledge called the South Spit. The mark was not yet blurred out by the rain - and the girl's boot fitted it to a hair.

The Sergeant pointed to the boot in the footmark, without saying a word.

I caught at his arm, and tried to speak to him, and failed as I had failed when I tried before. He went on, following the footsteps down and down to where the rocks and the sand joined. The South Spit was just awash with the flowing tide; the waters¹ heaved over the hidden face of the Shivering Sand.

Godfrey Ablewhite, a young man who was present at the dinner party when the diamond was stolen, is decoyed away and searched by the Indians. A Mr Luker, a pawn-broker, who had deposited a valuable "of great price" at the bank, is similarly treated. Public opinion holds that Ablewhite has stolen the diamond and pawned in with Luker, but Rachel says that she knows Ablewhite is innocent. She will, however, not explain how she comes to be so sure of this. She accepts Ablewhite's proposal of marriage, but when she learns that he has been unduly interested in the terms of the will by which she is to inherit from her mother who has just died, Rachel breaks off the engagement. Ablewhite places no obstacle in her way, as he has ascertained that she will have a life interest only in her inheritance. The Indians slyly ascertain that the jewel can only be obtained when it is redeemed from the bank after the lapse of twelve months.

A letter to the Indians has been intercepted. This is of interest to us as it is the predecessor to a

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host of cryptic letters in novels of this genre:

"In the name of the Regent of the Night, whose seat is on the Antelope, whose arms embrace the four corners of the earth. Brothers, turn your faces to the south, and come to me in the street of many noises, which leads down to the muddy river. ¹ The reason is this. My own eyes have seen it."

Murthwaite, the expert on affairs Indian explains that

"... the god of the moon is represented, in the Hindoo mythology, as a four-armed deity, seated on an antelope; and one of his titles is the regent of the night
..... the conduct of the Indians themselves will explain the rest." ²

Blake inherits a fortune and wants Rachel to marry him. She refuses to see him and he believes that this has something to do with the missing diamond. He determines to solve the mystery and goes to Betteredge to seek further information. He receives a letter left by Rosanna, written before her death, and learns that she has left instructions for finding the japanned tin case which has been buried in the Shivering Sands. When the case is recovered it is found to contain a nightgown smeared with paint and bearing Blake's own name.

In a strangely moving letter Rosanna explains that she loves Blake and, believing him guilty, has taken the incriminating nightgown and replaced it with a new one made by herself. Because she believes that her love is a hopeless one, she has decided to take her life.

Blake is stunned at this news and sees Rachel to find out if she can add anything to the story. She tells him that she knew he was in debt and that she had, "with her own eyes", seen him take the diamond that night. Blake denies any knowledge of this and says: "You shall know that you have wronged me, yet. Or you

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1. The Second Period, Chap. 3. This letter recalls the letter upon which the whole of Kipling's Kim (1901) is based.

2. *ibid.*

shall never see me again."

Blake now learns from Ezra Jennings, assistant to Dr Candy, who had been present on the night when the jewel had been stolen, that Dr Candy, in his unsettled mental state, had confessed to dosing Blake on that night with laudanum because of some scathing remarks which Blake had made on the power of medicine.¹ Jennings suggests that if the opium is administered under similar conditions, Blake will act in a similar way, and may lead them to the diamond. Blake accepts this suggestion and takes the opium. In a passage pregnant with suspense we are told how he is watched by Betteredge, Bruff, Cuff, Rachel and Jennings; of how he rises, fetches the imitation diamond which has been placed in the Indian cabinet - but then lets it fall and relapses into a coma. It is agreed that the experiment is a success in so far as it has established that Blake did take the diamond, but Bruff, the family lawyer, holds that the diamond is in London.

In London, Luker is watched when he goes to redeem his "valuable of great price". Several false trails are followed, but one leads to the corpse of a dark sailor. Upon examination, this dark sailor is found to be Ablewhite in disguise. Mr Luker now supplies the information that he had been told by Ablewhite (who had lived a double life and was also deeply in debt) that on the night of the taking of the diamond, Blake had given it to Ablewhite to deposit in a London bank, as he feared the Indians would return and do mischief, and Rachel would suffer. In the morning, Ablewhite had

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1. Count Fosco produced arguments similar to those of Dr Candy.

spoken to Blake, but he had denied all knowledge of the matter. Under the circumstances, Ablewhite had decided to use the diamond to help him out of his own difficulties. Blake and Rachel marry, the Indians escape with the diamond and are traced to a boat bound for India. The story ends with a report from Murthwaite who has seen the Moonstone, restored to its rightful place, set in the forehead of the Moongod.

The Moonstone is a detective story; that is to say that it is a special type of novel of action. For this reason we cannot expect studies of character such as are to be found in The Woman in White, No Name and Armada. Yet Collins was possessed of the gift of portrayal of character in a few telling words. Gabriel Betteredge, the aged house-steward, is a most convincing character and, though he writes rather more fluently and expressively than we might expect, gives an account of what happened as it would appear from his point of view. From his pages emerges a picture of a loyal servant, a loving father and an old man whose wits are unimpaired. Collins skilfully brings out the old man's good qualities (always difficult in a first-person narrative) by means of the laudatory remarks uttered by Cuff and recorded by Betteredge. Betteredge's veneration for Robinson Crusoe is far superior to Uncle Joseph's love for his music box in The Dead Secret. Robinson Crusoe is used to good effect. Not only does it enable Betteredge to foreshadow events, but it is in character. Furthermore, taken in conjunction with the study of Miss Clack, it must be taken as cynical comment on the practice, prevalent to this day in certain circles, of flipping open at random the pages of a Bible for oracular guidance in

"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."¹

Miss Clack, as she appears from the pages of her own narrative, is the best drawn character. Her narrative contributes little to the unfolding of the plot, but we gain a clear picture, done not without malice, of this hypocritical distributor of tracts and buttonholer of the privacy of others. There is something tragic in her suppressed or sublimated love for the only real rogue in the novel, Ablewhite:

"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, unearthly ecstasy of that moment! I sat - I hardly knew on what - quite lost in my own exalted feelings. When I opened my eyes again, it was like descending from heaven to earth."²

Robinson tells us that Collins was always repelled by ostentatious piety, and that on one occasion, when he found himself trustee to a lady of this type, he wrote to Charles Ward:

"If it only rests with me to decide the matter, pay this pious bitch the two quarters together that we may be the longer rid of her."³

Collins hints in his preface that he had tried out on himself the experiment ascribed to Blake. The Moonstone hinges on a person acting under the influence of opium, and Jennings gives us this remarkable description of one under the influence of the drug:

"Rose late, after a dreadful night; the vengeance of yesterday's opium, pursuing me through a series of

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1. The First Period, Chap. 4.
2. The Second Period, Chap. 2.
3. Robinson K.: Wilkie Collins, p. 222.

frightful dreams. At one time, I was whirling through empty space, with the phantoms of the dead, friends and enemies together. At another, the one beloved face which I shall never see again, rose at my bedside, hideously phosphorescent in the black darkness, and glared and grinned at me." ¹.

We know that Collins was taking opium at this time, and it seems reasonable to suppose that he is describing one of his own nightmares and that the reference to the "beloved one" concerns his mother, recently deceased. Collins puts other significant words into Jennings's mouth:

"The one effective palliative in my case, is - opium. To that all-potent and all-merciful drug, I am indebted for a respite of many years from my sentence of death. But even the virtues of opium have their limit. The progress of the disease has gradually forced me from the use of opium, to the abuse of it. I am feeling the penalty at last. My nervous system is shattered; my nights are nights of horror." ².

Collins used the multiple-narrative technique with skill, switching over to a new character as soon as one is about to reveal more than suits the writer. The result is a detective story which holds the reader's attention to the last, even though the criminal has been run to earth many pages before the end of the story.

Dickens seems to have been jealous of the immediate success of The Moonstone:

"The construction is beyond endurance, and there is a vein of obstinate conceit about it that makes enemies of its readers." ³.

If we compare this with Dickens's patronising praise of earlier and poorer work, it must be taken as the highest praise of all. S.M. Ellis says:

"Even the porters and boys were interested in the story, and read the new numbers in shy corners" ⁴.

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1. The Fourth Narrative, the Second Extract, dated June, 16th
2. The Third Narrative, Chap. 9.
3. Dexter W.: The Letters of Charles Dickens, Vol. III, p. 660.
4. Ellis S.M.: Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others, p. 42.

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The Woman in White, No Name, Armadale and The Moonstone are four great novels, each making its peculiar contribution to Collins's stature as a writer. It is futile to attempt placing them in order of merit as they are so different in character and each possesses its special excellences. He was not to write a novel better than these, unless it is The Law and the Lady.

P A R T I V

S U P P L E M E N T A R Y E V I D E N C E

i : Man and Wife

Collins had settled down to a regular routine of work, living comfortably with Caroline, enjoying success, financial security, travel and the company of friends. A number of changes now came into his life. He suffered agonies from his rheumatic gout and became increasingly dependent upon larger and larger doses of laudanum, though he never became a drug addict in the accepted sense. The loss of his mother affected him deeply and he passed through a crisis in his domestic affairs which must have left its mark upon him. We know what happened, but we have little information as to the causes of this strange series of events. The little information we have is probably intelligent conjecture, but it has the merit of providing an entertainingly acceptable explanation of what happened.

We are told that Collins in his pain bellowed and groaned so, that his secretaries could not bear it and resigned one after another. Martha Rudd was the only one who could take his dictation under these circumstances, and a liaison developed. Caroline Graves, who had undertaken, in September 1868, the task of finding and moving to their new home at 90 Gloucester Place, was so busy moving and seeing to renovations

(that