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Wilkie Collins Melodrama

THE masterly story-telling and brilliant manipulation of plot and counter-plot which distinguishes the novels of Wilkie Collins are fully displayed in *No Name*, the story of an illegitimate young woman, Magdalen Vanstone, and her vengeance upon the relative who has deprived her of her inheritance. *No Name* is the latest of the BBC's serialised dramatisations of famous novels to be heard in this country, and the first part, "Combe-Raven," will be heard from 1YA, 2YA, 3YA and 4YA at 8.30 p.m. on Saturday, June 6. There are 12 parts in the serial, which was adapted by Howard Agg and produced by David

"NO NAME" WILL BE
BROADCAST BY YA
STATIONS

played in the serial by Felix Felton. Magdalen herself is a strong-willed young woman, brave, resourceful, and single-minded to the point of obsession.

The story opens with a picture of a typical middle-class household in the West Country of England, the Vanstones. All is apparently solid, comfortable, and conventional. Then a series of events occurs which sweeps away the foundations of their happiness and security. The father is killed in a railway accident, the mother dies of grief, and the two daughters learn that their parents were never legally married. Their father's fortune is left to his elder brother, who is unwilling to help them. Magdalen, the younger daughter, fights against the stigma of illegitimacy at the same time as she relentlessly pursues her cousin Noel, who now has the fortune, in an attempt to get back what she considers to be rightfully hers.

The theme was considered daring enough in its day, and brought down upon the head of the author an angry blast from Mrs. Oliphant in the *Quarterly Review*. But among his readers Wilkie Collins stirred up great sympathy for his heroine, and he had been careful enough to provide mitigating circumstances to excuse at least in part the unlawful cohabitation of her parents. Recent researches into Collins's life suggest that *No Name's* discussion of the social problems of illegitimacy was stimulated by incidents in his own life, particularly his clandestine liaison with Martha Rudd, who bore him a son and two daughters who never legally received their father's name.



WILKIE COLLINS
£4600 was "not so bad"

H. Godfrey. The leading role of Magdalen Vanstone is taken by Isabel Dean.

Wilkie Collins is best remembered these days for *The Moonstone*, sometimes described as the first (and best) of modern detective novels, and *The Woman in White*, a sinister masterpiece in the genre which used to be known as the Novel of Sensation. But Collins, as readers of his recently-published biography will be aware, wrote many other novels besides these, and *No Name* is one of the best. It was published by Charles Dickens in his magazine *All the Year Round*, and Dickens took the greatest interest in the novel while it was being written, expressing keen enthusiasm for it, suggesting a suitable title (he listed 27 possibilities) and even offering to finish it for his friend and collaborator when the latter became ill with the rheumatism that eventually drove him to opium-addiction.

The story of *No Name* combines two favourite themes of the Victorian novelist, melodrama and social protest. "Here is a book," the author wrote, "that depicts the struggle of a human creature under those opposing influences, Good and Evil, which we have all felt, which we have all known. The character of Magdalen Vanstone personifies this struggle, a pathetic character even in its perversity and its error." In addition to Magdalen, the plot introduces Collins's outstanding comic character, her accomplice Captain Wragge, an amiable charlatan and petty blackmailer who is

Several dramatised versions of the novel were made, including one by the author himself, but the only one which he officially approved was made by his friend the actor-manager Wybert Reeve. Reeve toured the United States and Australia with his team of players, and the only recorded performances of *No Name* on the stage took place in Melbourne. Wilkie Collins received a total of £4600 for the book in serial and publication rights on both sides of the Atlantic. "Not so bad," he wrote to his mother in triumph, and listeners to the radio version may well agree that the book's popularity was justified.

Maugham Morsel

A RADIO adaptation of Somerset Maugham's short story *The Colonel's Lady* is to be broadcast shortly from 1YZ. Written in Maugham's usual polished style, *The Colonel's Lady* is a witty picture of the reactions of an English landed gentleman, Colonel Peregrin, when he discovers that the author of an immensely popular book of somewhat erotic poetry is his wife. When the colonel finally reads his wife's work (he is not much addicted to reading), he discovers too that it is an apparently first-hand account of an extra-marital love affair. The short story was adapted for broadcasting by Mabel Constanduros and Howard Agg, and produced at the Wellington Production Studios of the NZBS. It will be broadcast in 1YZ's *Variety Theatre* at 7.30 p.m. on Monday, June 8.

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