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whit...



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How dose Wilkie Collins explore the character of Count Fosco in The Women in White? In your answer you must comment on:\* The writers narrative craft and appeal to the reader\* The writers exploration of language for emotive effect

This essay intends to look at how Victorian novelist Wilkie Collins expresses the character of Count Fosco in The Women in White. This essay will look at firstly Collins background and look at the main themes of the novel and what character Fosco plays. This essay will also look at how Wilkie Collins describes Fosco's Figure and his title paying particular notice to Collins' narrative craft and use of language. Finally this essay will look at Fosco's wealth and power over women and how this compares to that of Henry VIII. Wilkie Collins, of all the novelists of the Victorian time, is probably best described as the craftiest. Born in 1824 his work has only recently come into fashion due to his unconventional lifestyle. His reputation has probably come from his well known addiction to opium and his way with women.

However he was good friends with Charles Dickens. Collins' work is classically Victorian detective fiction and one of his greatest masterpieces, The Woman in White (1860) is no exception. The novel is about the love between a young man and a beautiful young woman, Walter Hartright and Laura Fairline. However Laura is engaged to Sir Percival Glyde who is only interested in her money. Sir Percival's friend Count Fosco plots to steel Laura's money for himself and Percival by disguising Laura as ' the Woman in white' who Walter meets in the beginning. This plot highlights Collins desire for fast action and suspense which has been created unintentionally because the book was published in instalments creating cliff hangers and the public need to buy the next book. This style is very abstract compared to

Dickens intricate plots. Inspiration for *The Woman in White* is said to of come when Collins encountered a beautiful woman dressed all in white called Caroline Grave who he went on to live with for two years.

It is very suspicious how Collins plot mirrored that of French crime writer Maurice Maupassant's story. Collins eccentric lifestyle and his paced plot have reflected the character of Fosco to be appealing to the reader as if the book was not read at all Fosco would not of been worth exploring. Collins ability to create such a remarkable and conniving character such as Count Fosco is extraordinary. Count Fosco plays a clever villain who is very important and without him the novel would be completely different as he is a very memorable character and so without him the novel may have been as unforgettable nor as enjoyable and so because of Count Fosco the novel stands out from others and is more popular and harder to put down. An example of his unusual and outstanding character is that white rats "crawl all over him" which makes Fosco highly original. It could be said that because of Count Fosco this novel stands out from others of the time. Collins has made Fosco a memorable and enjoyable character in many ways. An obvious way is through the way Collins has described Fosco's figure.

Count Fosco is described as "immensely fat" and nearly "sixty years of age". This may conjure images of an old corpulent man and who is perhaps innocent. Fosco's choice of clothes also stands out as he wears "magnificent waistcoats" which gives connotations of Fosco having an expensive and some what extravagant character. In conclusion the description of Fosco's figure and clothes shows perhaps a grand and overpowering however slightly strange and memorable character. Collins craft has created a character that

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can perhaps be felt sorry for and his use of strong emotive effect has furthered the belief that Fosco is not a spiteful villain but a gentle person or perhaps a very crafty villain. His love and interaction with small animals is very unusual. He is described as having “ a cockatoo, two canary-birds, and a whole family of mice.” These are not particular common pets and so perhaps show Fosco’s wealth as well as unusualness.

His interactions with his pets are also strange as he seems to be able to talk to his canaries and they act very “ tame”. This does not suggest that Fosco is an evil person but a kind and gentle person. He is said to “ kiss” his mice which is also seen as very gentle and weird. Fosco’s love of small animals makes the reader feel that Fosco is a tender but bizarre character through emotive effect. On the other hand Fosco’s interaction with the larger dog is very negative. Fosco tames a dog by staring and insulting it showing he is also very powerful. Fosco is compared with Henry VIII on page 114 to describe Fosco’s image so that the reader finds Fosco more recognisable. However, perhaps, this comparison is much deeper.

For example both possess great power and wealth however this paragraph will look at Fosco’s power over women which is another quality both Henry VIII and Fosco possess. Fosco’s appeal to women can surely not be his physical appearance, nevertheless on the contrary he is said to have “ unfathomable grey eyes” which may be the cause of his power. But his power may be the result of his “ excessive good-humour” and friendly nature or perhaps his wealth and power. The use of the word “ excessive” to describe Fosco’s humour gives the reader the impression that Fosco is much focused on being a adorable character. In comparison Fosco’s “  
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unmistakable mental firmness” may be the soul reason he is so seductive. The use of the word “ unmistakable” has connotations of originality and is unbeatable. It is interesting how all villains seem to have an eerie power over women for example villains in James Bond films. This could perhaps be the case in the Women in White which could make some readers feel that Fosco is worse than other qualities make him seem.

In conclusion the character of Count Fosco is explored in many ways. Wilkie Collins has made the book very readable with a fast plot and his unusual life. His craft has been reflected through the character of Fosco and has made him very memorable. The physical appearance of Fosco has convinced the reader that he is not a malicious villain but an innocent obese and old man or maybe a conniving criminal. Fosco’s power is of great appeal to the reader and his encounter with a mad dog shows he is mentally strong. Fosco’s wealth is also appealing to the reader as perhaps it has made Fosco seem more corrupt but in comparison his love of small animals makes him appear temperate. In comparison to Henry VIII’s wealth Fosco use of wealth is also on power and his power over women is also in comparison to Henry VIII. Fosco’s power over women appeals to the reader by making him seem innocent however perhaps it indicates an essence of wickedness.

The use of emotive language to describe Fosco’s unseen beauty is vivid and indicates Collins’ passion to create such a remarkable character