



Iolani; or, Tahiti as It Was

Wilkie Collins

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Written 150 years ago, never published, and presumed lost for nearly a century, Wilkie Collins's earliest novel now appears in print for the first time. *Ioláni* is a sensational romance--a tale of terror and suspense, bravery and betrayal, set against the lush backdrop of Tahiti. The book's complicated history is worthy of a writer famous for intricate plots hinging on long-kept secrets. Collins wrote the book as a young man in the early 1840s, twenty years before *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White* made his name among Victorian novelists. He failed to find a publisher for the work, shelved the manuscript for years, and eventually gave it to an acquaintance. It disappeared into the hands of private collectors and remained there--acquiring mythical status as a lost novel--from the turn of the century until its sudden appearance on the rare book market in New York in 1991. This first edition appears with the permission of the new owners, who keep the mystery alive by remaining anonymous.

The novel is set in Tahiti prior to European contact. It tells the story of the diabolical high priest, Ioláni , and the heroic young woman, Idüa, who bears his child. Determined to defy the Tahitian custom of killing firstborn children, Idüa and her friend Aimáta flee with the baby and take refuge among Ioláni's enemies. The vengeful priest pursues them, setting into motion a plot that features civil war, sorcery, sacrificial rites, wild madmen, treachery, and love. Collins explores themes that he would return to again and again in his career: oppression by sinister, patriarchal figures; the bravery of forceful, unorthodox women; the psychology of the criminal mind; the hypocrisy of moralists; and Victorian ideas of the exotic. As Ira Nadel shows in his introduction, the novel casts new light on Collins's development as a writer and on the creation of his later masterpieces. A sample page from the manuscript appears as the frontispiece to this edition. The publication of *Ioláni* is a major literary event: a century and half late, Wilkie Collins makes his literary debut.

Originally published in 1999.

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