

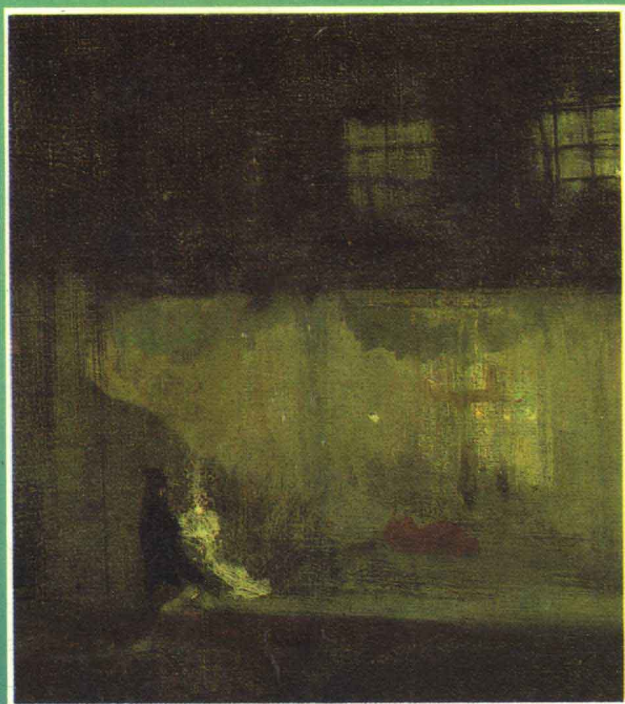
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WILLIAM WILKIE COLLINS

THE WOMAN IN WHITE

白衣女人



牛津大学出版社 外语教学与研究出版社

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W·科林斯 著

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THE WORLD'S CLASSICS



WILLIAM WILKIE COLLINS

The Woman in White



Edited with an Introduction by
HARVEY PETER SUCKSMITH

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白衣女人

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学生英语文库出版说明

中国人学英语的进程,可以说大致有三个境界。第一个境界是要依靠本族语(对大多数人来说是汉语)明的或暗的帮助来学习英语,如依靠汉语讲解、注释,口头、笔头、心头的翻译,英汉词典以及其他用中文编写的参考书等等来领会英语。第二个境界是能够通过英语学习英语,如读英文注释,听英语讲解,使用英英词典,阅读英文原著参考书等等,亦即能借助浅近的英语学习艰深的英语,并进而直接从英文书刊、英语讲话中吸收英语知识,掌握英语规律。第三个境界是能在英汉两种语言系统之间建立联系(不是个别孤立词语的对号),最后达到能在两种语言中间自如地来回转换的境地。

以上三种境界,虽然可能有交叉或平行,但是大体上可以代表由低到高的三个阶段。代表第一个境界的阶段,可以尽量缩短,有人甚至主张跳过或绕开。第三个境界严格说已经属于翻译专业修养的范围。唯有第二个境界是英语学习的中心。尽早达到这一境界,是学习成功的要诀。英语学习者在入门阶段结束之后,就应当逐步学会读原文著作,听原声讲话,使用英英词典,阅读原著参考书,敢看爱看原版书刊。一句话,要日夕涵泳于英语之中,养成通过英语学英语的能力、爱好、信心和习惯。

经验证明,阅读译本看似省力,实际常有雾里看花之憾;钻研原著,起初不免吃力,但是唯有如此,才能识得庐山真面目。文学作品是这样,一般语文参考书也是这样。从研究外国文化的目标着想,必须立志精通外语;从学习外语的方法着眼,应当早读多读原文著

作。

因此,多读精选的英语原著,是精通英语的一个最重要的途径。学生英语文库的出版,就是为了给中级以上的学习者提供一部分这样的基本书籍。

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学生英语文库中的书籍,除一两种教程酌加中文注释和参考译文外,其余都是英语原著的翻版。这些著作,绝大多数都是屡经修订再版,或年复一年地重印,成了各国英语学习者和使用者案头、架上常备之物。所收文学作品,都是名著杰作;在英语国家是家喻户晓,在其他国家是一切英语和文学爱好者所不可不读的。熟读这些作品,既有助于掌握英语的精髓,又可深入了解英语国家的社会历史文化背景。

学生英语文库第一辑和第二辑约 20 种,定于近期陆续和读者见面。以后还将逐步扩充选目。我们希望这个小小文库能成为我国广大英语学习者的良师益友。

本书内容介绍

本书是英国神秘故事小说家科林斯 (William Wilkie Collins 1824—1889) 的第一部主要作品。故事讲的是青年画师沃尔特·哈特莱特, 应聘到费尔利家当家庭教师。临去前, 他月夜从乡下返回伦敦寓所, 途中遇见一个全身白色穿戴的年轻妇女向他问路, 看情形她刚从疯人院逃出来。沃尔特帮助她躲开跟踪追来的人。

沃尔特的学生劳拉, 是主人弗雷德里克的长兄菲利普的女儿, 温柔美貌, 纯洁善良。她的同母异父姐姐玛丽安, 容貌丑陋, 但聪慧能干。沃尔特发现劳拉外貌酷肖他路上所遇的白衣女人。根据玛丽安提供的情况, 他断定那白衣女人就是菲利普·费尔利夫人生前曾经关心照顾过的安·卡塞里克。

沃尔特不久就对劳拉产生了爱情。但是玛丽安告诉他, 劳拉的父亲临终时已将劳拉许给珀西瓦尔·格莱德准男爵, 准男爵即将前来商定婚事。这对沃尔特是极大的打击。这时白衣女人突然出现, 试图阻止劳拉和珀西瓦尔的婚事。沃尔特暗中跟她见面后, 对珀西瓦尔的品德产生怀疑。为了劳拉, 他有心查明真相, 但终于无能为力, 黯然离去。不久经玛丽安的朋友介绍, 他参加了一支去中美洲的考古探险队。

珀西瓦尔来后, 劳拉心情极度矛盾。她对珀西瓦尔毫无感情, 但又不愿违背父亲的遗命。虽然她坦诚告诉珀西瓦尔, 自己心中已另有所爱, 但珀西瓦尔虚伪地表示劳拉的高洁心地更加深了他的爱慕。几个月后, 他们举行了婚礼。玛丽安随劳拉移居珀西瓦尔家。

婚后，珀西瓦尔毫不掩饰他娶劳拉纯然为了占有她继承的巨额财产。他逼迫劳拉交出全部财产的处置权，劳拉拒绝签字。这时白衣女人再次出现。她要告诉劳拉关于珀西瓦尔的一件不可告人的秘密，以帮助劳拉对付他。但是没有说出秘密，就受惊仓皇逃走。珀西瓦尔以为劳拉已经掌握秘密，就凶狠地把她禁闭起来。

劳拉的姑父福斯克伯爵，为人极端狡诈，为了从劳拉的财产中捞得一份，极力为珀西瓦尔出谋划策。两人定计制造劳拉“死亡”的骗局，以便攫取她的财产。玛丽安黑夜冒雨窃听到他们的密谈，但是未来得及采取行动就因受寒病倒。

福斯克找到安，把她骗到家中。安受到惊吓，心脏病突发而死。珀西瓦尔把安当作劳拉埋葬在费尔利夫人墓旁。与此同时，福斯克夫妇把劳拉接到家中，将其麻醉后送进疯人院，冒称就是逃走的安。劳拉的财产落入珀西瓦尔和福斯克之手。

玛丽安病愈后，四处寻访劳拉的下落，终于将她从疯人院中救出。但是冷酷自私的弗雷德里克声称侄女已死，将劳拉拒之门外。劳拉身心受到严重摧残，丧失记忆，无法证明自己的身份。

正在此时，沃尔特回到英国，得知劳拉蒙受奇冤，决心为她申雪。他找到安的母亲，探悉珀西瓦尔的底细。原来珀西瓦尔的父母没有正式结婚，他无权承袭爵位。他曾收买安的母亲，协助他伪造了父母的婚姻登记。后来他以为安知道了他的秘密，怕她泄漏出去，就伙同她母亲把她关进疯人院。沃尔特还了解到，安和劳拉实际是同父异母姐妹。

珀西瓦尔觉察到沃尔特正在追查他的秘密后，黑夜潜入教堂，企图销毁罪证，不料烛火引起大火，自己葬身火窟。

沃尔特转而查访福斯克的底细，弄清此人本是意大利一个秘密革命团体的成员，叛变后当了政府密探。沃尔特找到福斯克，以宣布他的身份相威胁，迫使他写下坦白书，交待他和珀西瓦尔合谋借尸夺产，迫害劳拉的罪行。劳拉终于恢复了合法身份，并和沃尔特结为伉俪。

福斯克最终未能逃脱秘密团体的惩罚，被暗杀在巴黎。

作者小传

科林斯(Wilkie Collins 1824—1889)是英国小说家,著名的神秘故事作家。他出生于伦敦。父亲是著名画家。科林斯自幼就有讲故事的天赋。他青年时期做过茶商,后来毕业于林肯法学院,又当过律师,皆无所成。然而在写小说、画油画方面却很有才能,也曾从事戏剧工作。1850年科林斯开始写小说。先后出版两部小说:《罗马的陷落》(1850)和《巴西尔》(1852)。1850年,他在一次业余演出活动中结识了狄更斯,并成为终生的朋友。他的一些小说就是在狄更斯主编的《家常话》杂志上连载的。在狄更斯的指导下,科林斯在人物刻画、诙谐幽默、通俗易懂等方面都有所长进,而狄更斯在《双城记》和《远大前程》等长篇小说中显然也向他学到了情节紧凑、布局严密的技巧。

1859至1860年,科林斯的第一部主要作品《白衣女人》(1860)在狄更斯主编的《一年到头》杂志上连载,给他带来很高声誉。这部小说描写一件神秘的谋财杀妻案,写作手法十分新颖,为后世侦探小说的写作创造了一种吸引读者的新形式。他的另一部主要小说《月亮宝石》(1868)也获得了同样的成功。

科林斯写过十多部长篇小说和一些短篇小说。其后期作品,如:《没有姓名》(1862)、《丈夫和妻子》(1870)、《新玛格达琳》(1873)着重揭露了平等的社会和虚伪的道德观念。

INTRODUCTION

T. S. ELIOT, in seeking to express his admiration for Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, together with *Armadale* and *The Moonstone*, regretted that there was no aesthetic of melodrama, a genuine art form.¹ There has been some progress since then in anatomizing melodrama,² but the critic at large continues to betray aversion and confusion; indeed, although we have ceased ostensibly to demand an absolute naturalism from even the novel, melodrama in respect of the novel is still censured, as being untrue to life in its emphasis on the physical, its simplification of character and of moral issues, and its pursuit of violent sensation and particularly sensational crime.³

This is perhaps strange in a world which during 1939-45 witnessed an emphasis upon the physical, a simple moral issue, and sensational and violent crime beyond the scope of any novelist: the greatest melodrama ever staged in the history of man. In view of this curious obtuseness and of the real issue, which, as Aristotle saw long ago, is not a naturalistic truth but what is convincing, it seems all the more important to stress that *The Woman in White* is based squarely upon real events and that Collins strives throughout the novel, with remarkable success, for verisimilitude. The source of the plot, for example, as Clyde K. Hyder has convincingly deduced, was the account of the sensational Douhault lawsuit in Maurice Méjan's *Recueil des causes célèbres* which offers a striking parallel to every major incident in Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde's conspiracy and provides a cast who play similar roles to

¹ 'Wilkie Collins and Dickens' [1927], *Selected Essays 1917-1932*, 1945, pp. 42-32.

² See, for example, M. W. Disher, *Blood and Thunder. Mid-Victorian Melodrama and Its Origins*, 1949; James L. Rosenberg, *The Context and Craft of Drama*, ed. R. W. Corrigan and J. L. Rosenberg, 1964, pp. 168-85; Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama*, 1965, pp. 195-218; Frank Rahill, *The World of Melodrama*, 1967; David Grimsted, *Melodrama Unveiled*, 1968; B. Heilman, *Tragedy and Melodrama*, 1968.

³ See, for example, the cases cited in Bentley, pp. 195-6, and cf. Albert J. Guerard, *Conrad the Novelist*, 1966, pp. 272-3.

the characters in Collins's novel.¹ Furthermore, the most thrilling event in the book, the sudden *numinous* appearance of the mysterious woman in white to Walter Hartright on the lonely road from Hampstead to London, which Dickens considered one of the two most dramatic episodes in English Literature,² actually occurred in Collins's life; and we now know that the original of Anne Catherick was Caroline Elizabeth Graves who most probably became one of Collins's two mistresses.³

Wilkie Collins confirms in a letter to a friend⁴ that he found the plot for *The Woman in White* in the book of French crimes, picked up from an old bookstall in Paris, which Hyder has identified as Méjan's *Recueil des causes célèbres*; but, even more fortunately, Collins twice put on record an account of the way he composed the novel. These two accounts, an interview given to Edmund Yates and published in *The World*⁵ and an article entitled 'How I Write My Books' which appeared in *The Globe* (26 November 1887), correspond in many important details and there seems no reason to doubt them. They show once more that Collins's starting-point, 'my first proceeding', was 'my central idea—the pivot on which the story turns . . . the idea of a conspiracy in private life, in which circumstances are so handled as to rob a woman of her identity by confounding her with another woman, sufficiently like her in personal appearance to answer the wicked purpose. The destruction of her identity represents a first division of the story; the recovery of her identity marks a second division.' Collins goes on to make it clear that he proceeded from plot to character:

My central idea also suggests some of my chief characters. A clever devil must conduct the conspiracy. Male devil? or female devil? The sort of wickedness wanted seems to be a man's wickedness. Perhaps a foreign man. Count Fosco faintly shows himself to me before I know his name. I let him wait, and begin to think about the two women. They must both be innocent and both interesting. Lady Glyde dawns on me as one of the

¹ C. K. Hyder, 'Wilkie Collins and *The Woman in White*', *PMLA*, liv (1939), 298-9; Robert Ashley, *Wilkie Collins*, 1952, pp. 67-8.

² *The Recollections of Sir Henry Dickens, K.C.*, 1934, p. 54.

³ Hyder, 297-8; Kenneth Robinson, *Wilkie Collins: A Biography*, 1951, pp. 129-36.

⁴ Wybert Reeve, 'Recollections of Wilkie Collins', *Chamber's Journal*, ix (June 1906), 458.

⁵ Reprinted in Edmund Yates, *Celebrities at Home*, 3rd series, *World Office*, 1879, pp. 145-56.

innocent victims. I try to discover the other—and fail . . . The next morning, before I have been awake in my bed for more than ten minutes, my perverse brains set to work without consulting me. Poor Anne Catherick comes into the room and says, 'Try me.'

This account does not contradict what was said earlier about Collins's source, since what he found in Méjan was the role the characters would play in his story and not their traits. Of the creation of Fosco, Collins said that the Count owed his birth to the 'ingenuity of the crime which required a foreigner and that the 'making of him fat was an afterthought': 'I had begun to write my story, when it struck me that my villain would be commonplace, and I made him fat in opposition to the recognised type of villain. His theories concerning the vulgar clap-trap, that murder will out, are my own.' The canaries and white mice were added after his obesity: 'I thought the mice running about Fosco while he meditated on his schemes would have a fine effect' and 'the most valuable discovery of all, his admiration of Miss Halcombe, took its rise in a conviction that he would not be true to nature unless there was some weak point somewhere in his character'. Sir Percival Glyde was invented as a contrast to Fosco and as his tool, 'a weak shabby villain'. Oddly enough, Collins had much trouble with his title—Charles Dickens almost alone showing faith in 'The Woman in White' which was declared by others to be 'a vile melodramatic title that would ruin the book'. Even more curiously, Collins seems to have had most trouble with deciding on an opening, originally intending to begin at Limmeridge House with Laura, Marian, and Mr. Fairlie awaiting Walter Hartright's arrival. The author then realized he must begin with Anne Catherick but claims that it was only when he read of a lunatic who had escaped from an asylum that the present opening seized his enthusiastic imagination; and from that moment he never looked back. This would not, of course, contradict the autobiographical element in Collins's opening but develop it further. Though he does not at any time say so, it seems obvious that the news item fused with the episode in his own life.¹

It is interesting to see that, in composing the novel, Collins

¹ Perhaps Collins's difficulty was how to objectify a personal experience, and, if this was so, he found the solution in a chance reading of a newspaper as he relates. Naturally, Collins would not refer to one of what were later described as his 'intimacies'.

worked from plot to character, the usual method not only of the mystery-story writer but of all writers who found their tale upon a striking incident or series of incidents. It must not be supposed that such an author necessarily neglects his characterization. Collins, in fact, insisted in his preface of 1861 that he was not guilty of such a neglect. And, indeed, it might be contended that it is more difficult to invent characters to fit a given line of action than to derive a line of action from certain characters, since the limits inevitably placed upon invention and the demands made upon the novelist's range, experience, and insight into character could, in such a case, be extremely severe.

Fortunately, it is becoming less fashionable to decry plot, which (as fable) Aristotle once called the soul of a work, and it has become very fashionable to value structure highly. And in the construction of a mystery plot, and as a master of suspense, Collins is almost certainly unequalled. He undoubtedly learned much from Dickens in the handling of structure and characterization, but that Dickens also learned something from Collins can be seen in the masterly structure of *Great Expectations*, as compared with *A Tale of Two Cities*, and perhaps also in *Edwin Drood* so far as we can judge from a fragment. Collins, like Dickens, faced the twofold problem of producing a narrative of distinction which satisfied the demands made by both serialization and publication as a book. Concerning this, no praise of that time could have been higher than that of Dickens:

I have read this book with great care and attention. There cannot be a doubt that it is a very great advance on all your former writing, and most especially in respect of tenderness. In character it is excellent . . . I know that this is an admirable book, and that it grips the difficulties of the weekly portion and throws them in a masterly style. No one else could do it half so well. I have stopped in every chapter to notice some instance of ingenuity, or some happy turn of writing; and I am absolutely certain that you never did half so well yourself.¹

In his use of the serial 'curtain', Collins is superb. The episode concluding the twenty-sixth number, in which Hartright reads the epitaph to Lady Glyde on the tomb to discover Lady Glyde standing beside him, comes instantly to mind. But there are many others. The conclusion of the eighteenth number, for example:

Towards midnight, the summer silence was broken by the shuddering

¹ Letter to Collins (7 Jan. 1860), *Letters of Charles Dickens 1833-70*, 1903, p. 492.

of a low, melancholy wind among the trees. We all felt the sudden chill in the atmosphere; but the Count was the first to notice the stealthy rising of the wind. He stopped while he was lighting my candle for me, and held up his hand warningly:

'Listen!' he said. 'There will be a change to-morrow.'

Or the conclusion of the twentieth with its blend of sinister suggestiveness and masterly control:

It was dark and quiet. Neither moon nor stars were visible. There was a smell like rain in the still, heavy air; and I put my hand out of window. No. The rain was only threatening; it had not come yet.

Yet we wrong Collins as much as Dickens if we believe that his narrative art is directed towards the manipulation of sensation at all costs. Collins is not entirely incorrect when he claims, in his preface of 1860, that his effort was to 'keep the story always advancing, without paying the smallest attention to the series division in parts, or to the book publication in parts'. In a lesser sensation novelist the temptation would have proved irresistible to conclude a number with the incident in which Marian Halcombe collapses, as she struggles to record in her diary the terrifying threat to Laura hunted at in the interview between Sir Percival and Fosco, whereupon a postscript is added to Marian's increasingly illegible scrawl and is signed by Fosco. Yet Collins—and here, he particularly resembles Dickens—resists the temptation and lodges the Count's sinister power in an even more effective, realistic order of events, being set off by contrast with the humdrum comedy of Mr. Fairlie's narrative.

It is, of course, the thrills and suspense of *The Woman in White* which, at a first reading, compel our attention, together with the skilful structure on which this suspense most obviously depends. Only perhaps at a second reading do we become aware of the completely convincing nature of the events, characters, and world of the novel. A certain degree of verisimilitude is an aim of all serious novelists but it is all the more crucial, as a literary strategy, in works which narrate a series of unusual, extraordinary, or sensational events. We can see this strategy reflected rather crudely in the theatrical melodramas of Collins's day which went in for 'meticulously realistic sets' and in the more sophisticated techniques of science fiction (H. G. Wells, for example), of ghost

¹ Disher, pp. 175-6.

stories (Le Fanu and M. R. James), and of the mystery tale and the tale of terror and sensational crime. Here Collins is invariably a master, for the events and characters of *The Woman in White* are not only based on real occurrences and people, they seem to be real. And for two reasons. First, the author can achieve that 'willing suspension of disbelief' with regard to himself in his creation of an imaginary world, because he can assume a poetic faith in its existence; while he can express this faith with an infectious confidence precisely because he is confident of its similarity to the real world and to his own experience. Secondly, 'the willing suspension of disbelief' on the part of a novel's readers is produced through a steady accumulation of particulars, of circumstantial detail derived from the real world; and this detail is all the more apparent in *The Woman in White* as we become aware of the Victorian background reflected in the novel. This autobiographical and social context is, therefore, carefully recorded in the explanatory notes to this edition.

Collins's claim, in his preface of 1860, that the method of narration he uses in *The Woman in White* is entirely new is not completely accurate. True, Collins's novel antedates Browning's use of a similar method in *The Ring and the Book* (1868-9) by almost a decade yet, just over a decade earlier, a similar narrative method was used by Emily Brontë in *Wuthering Heights* (1847) and, as we shall see, for a reason not unconnected with melodrama.

In the preamble to *The Woman in White*, Collins himself declared:

As the Judge might once have heard it, so the Reader shall hear it now. No circumstance of importance, from the beginning to the end of the disclosure, shall be related on hearsay evidence . . . the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in Court by more than one witness—with the same object, in both cases, to present the truth always in its most direct and most intelligible aspect.

Perhaps this method reflects the inspiration Collins received from his source, the old eighteenth-century court case,¹ but it almost certainly reveals, also, the influence of the sensational trials of mid-Victorian England, all the more dramatic in that they were reported verbatim in the newspapers and frequently illustrated

¹ As Hyder, 301, suggests.