



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

THE POSSIBLE INFLUENCE OF WILKIE COLLINS ON BRAM STOKER BY KATHERINE HAYNES

It is well known that *The Woman in White*, with several narrators telling the story from their own points of view through letters, diaries and other records, was the main influence behind the style of *Dracula*. The names of some of the main characters are also echoed in Stoker's famous novel. Had she lived and married Arthur, Lucy would have become Lady Godalming, just as Laura Fairlie becomes Laura, Lady Glyde. Other similar names are Marian Halcombe/Mina Harker, Walter Hartright/Jonathan Harker and Count Fosco/Count Dracula. Laura Lady Glyde and Lucy Westenra are both seen walking abroad when they are supposed to be resting in their graves, and Walter Hartright meets the 'woman in white' on Hampstead Heath, not far from where some little children are entranced by a 'bloofer lady,' also dressed in white.

Did Stoker's admiration for Collins go deeper than this? Both Wilkie Collins (1824-1889) and Bram Stoker (1847-1912) had a love of the theatre. Collins acted in amateur productions staged by his friend Charles Dickens and several of his works of fiction were adapted for the stage. One, *The Dead Secret*, was even performed at The Lyceum, though this was before Stoker's day. *The Woman in White* (1860) was published in Dickens's journal *All the Year Round*, the offices of which were in Wellington Street, just a few yards away from The Lyceum. Both authors travelled abroad, toured America and would have had friends in common. Wilkie Collins died in 1889, the year that Stoker published his first novel.

Could Stoker have been influenced to visit Whitby and stay at the Royal Hotel because he knew that Collins had stayed there in 1861? Was this hero-worship as displayed for Walt Whitman and Henry Irving?

In 1857 Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins collaborated on 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices' which was published in *Household Words* and came out in book form in 1890. The tour is undertaken by Francis and Thomas, Dickens characteristically adopting the surname Goodchild for his alter ego and Collins the surname Idle for his.

Thomas Idle sprains his ankle - just as Collins did in real life - and Francis Goodchild goes with the doctor to get a lotion for the injury. At the surgery Goodchild is introduced to the doctor's assistant, a strange man who has him 'quite bewildered and mastered.' Doctor Slleddie then goes on to tell him about his assistant. (It is odd that the tale is related to Goodchild - the Dickens character- as it was subsequently taken up by Wilkie Collins who wrote this part of the 'Lazy Tour', later adapting it into his short story, 'The Dead Hand.')

Arthur Holliday (note the similarity to Arthur Holmwood!) goes to Doncaster. It is the middle of race-week and he is unable to find anywhere that can put him up for the night. Eventually he comes to *The Two Robills* where a sly-looking landlord says he can have a room if he doesn't mind sharing. He asks "'What sort of man is it who has got the other bed?... Is he a gentleman? I mean is he a quiet, well-behaved person?'" The landlord replies "'The quietest man I ever came across.'" Arthur then finds out that he has been duped and is expected to share a room with a man who was pronounced dead earlier that day. (The rest of the story, concerning Arthur and the doctor's mysterious assistant, is not relevant here and those interested should read it for themselves if they want to find out what happens!)

Let us compare this to 'The Man from Shorrox' This was published in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in 1894 and Peter Haining - in his collection of stories *Midnight Tales* - believes that it was suggested to Stoker by his brother, Thornley.

A stranger comes to an Irish market town where he hopes to get a bed for the night. There is to be a fair the following day, so the place is crowded. At the hotel run by the Widow Byrne the man demands the best room in the house and is told he can't have it because 'it is engaged already.' The stranger is very insulting to the widow and makes himself unpopular with the locals. He insists that he will share the Queen's Room with whoever is already in there. 'Well prisintly he began agin to ask about his room, an' what kind iv a man it was that was to share it wid him.' He says, 'I hope he's a quite [quiet] man,' and the widow replies 'I'll warrant he's quite enough.' The man then goes to the room and gets into bed with its current occupant. He kicks the other man out during the night because he is "'...the cowldest chap I iver kem anigh iv.'" He is sharing the room, and the bed, with a corpse.

Was there a story circulating in the early nineteenth century, which both Dickens and Thornley Stoker picked up on and passed on to Collins and Bram Stoker respectively? Or did Stoker read the 1890 copy of 'Lazy Tour', absorb it and reproduce aspects of it in his own fiction? Both the stories are totally different in style, Stoker's being written entirely in 'Irish dialect', and they end very differently; but are there enough similarities to suggest the one influenced the other?

In 1870, Wilkie Collins wrote his novel, *Man and Wife*, which was largely concerned with Scottish marriage laws. Can echoes of this be seen in Stoker's *Lady Athlyne* (1908), also concerned with the marriage laws in Scotland?

To return to *Dracula* (1897), this is the scene where Van Helsing first meets Lucy, from Seward's letter to Arthur: "My dear young miss, I have this so great pleasure because you are much beloved. That is much, my dear, even were there that which I do not see. They told me you were in the spirit, and that you were of a ghastly pale. To them I say: 'Pouf!'" And he snapped his fingers at me and went on: "But you and I shall show them how wrong they are. How can he - "

... - "know anything of a young ladies? He has his madmans to play with, and to bring them back to happiness and to those that love them. It is much to do, and, oh, but there are rewards in that we can bestow such happiness. But the young ladies! He has no wife nor daughter, and the young do not tell themselves to the young, but to the old, like me, who have known so many sorrows and the cause of them. So, my dear, we will send him away to smoke the cigarette in the garden, whiles you and I have little talk all to ourselves."

Compare this to a scene from Wilkie Collins' *Poor Miss Finch* (1872). Mr Sebright has just advised against the blind Miss Finch's having an eye operation. Herr Grosse disagrees with him. "Goot! I have now my own word to put in... It shall be one little word - no more. With my best compliments to Mr Sebrights, I set up against what he only thinks, what I - Grosse - with these hands of mine have done. The cataracts of Miss there, is a cataracts that I have cut into before. Now look!" He suddenly wheeled round to Lucilla, [NB Lucy/Lucilla!] tucked up his cuffs, laid a forefinger of each hand on either side of her forehead, and softly turned down her eyelids with his two big thumbs. "I pledge you my word as surgeon optic," he resumed, "my knife shall let the light in here. This lofable -nice girls shall be lofahle - nicer than ever. My pretty Feench must be first in her best goot health. She must next gif me my own ways with her - and then one, two, three - ping! my pretty Feench shall see!" Is the character of Van Helsing based on or inspired by the character of Herr Grosse? Or is it just typical of Victorian writers to make foreign doctors talk in this strange and eccentric way? A further minor point is that the name of Doctor Candy in *The Moonstone* reappears in *Dracula* as the house agents, Mitchell, Sons and Candy.

In 'Miss Jeromette and the Clergyman', Collins's hero is travelling home on a July night, when he feels cold and sees, 'A pillar of white mist - between five and six feet high, as well as I could judge... When I stopped, the white mist stopped. When I went on, the white mist went on.' The mist travels home with the narrator and enters his house. Eventually it takes on the form of the recently murdered Jeromette. 'It lengthened slowly, until it reached to the ceiling. As it lengthened, it grew bright and luminous. A time passed, and a shadowy appearance took the outline of a human form. Soft brown eyes, tender and melancholy, looked at me through the unearthly light in the mist. The head and

the rest of the face broke next slowly on my view. Then the figure gradually revealed itself, moment by moment, downward and downward to the feet.'

Stoker also makes use of a pillar of mist. Mina, like the narrator of 'Miss Jeromette and the Clergyman' feels cold. 'The gas-light which I had left lit for Jonathan, but turned down, came only like a tiny red spark through the fog, which had evidently grown thicker and poured into the room... I could see it like smoke - or with the white energy of boiling water - pouring in... It got thicker and thicker, till it seemed as if it became concentrated into a sort of pillar of cloud in the room, through the top of which I could see the light of the gas shining like a red eye... as I looked, the fire divided, and seemed to shine on me through the fog like two red eyes... Suddenly the horror burst upon me that it was thus that Jonathan had seen those awful women growing into reality through the whirling mist in the moonlight.'

Strange to say, in *Little Novels* (1887) the story, 'Miss Jeromette and the Clergyman,' is followed by one called 'Miss Mina and the Groom.'

Further reading may well bring to light other similarities between the fiction of these two authors. One purpose of this article is to suggest new avenues for possible discussion and research as well as encouraging interest in reading other books by both Wilkie Collins and Bram Stoker.

Books used when compiling this article:

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Tales of Terror & the Supernatural, by Wilkie Collins, edited by Herbert van Thal, Dover, 1972.

The Woman in White, by Wilkie Collins, Penguin, 1980.

A Biography of Dracula, the Life Story of Bram Stoker, by Harry Ludlam, Foulsham, 1962.

The Charles Dickens Encyclopedia, by Michael & Mollie Hardwick, Omega, 1976.

I am indebted to Dr Gail-Nina Anderson for supplying me with a copy of 'The Man from Shorrox' by Bram Stoker.

KH.1997